

A painting of Thomas Jefferson in Italy, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a white coat over a red waistcoat. He is looking off to the side. In the background, there are ancient ruins and a landscape with mountains. A group of classical figures is visible behind a stone wall.

# JOURNEY TO ITALY: Nationhood and Freedom

October 23, 2020

# Giacomo Leopardi

- 1798-1837, He is considered the greatest Italian poet of the nineteenth century and one of the most important figures in the literature of the world, as well as one of the principals of literary romanticism
- Best known for his sonnet 'The Infinite' and his poem 'The Broom'
- He was born into a noble family, his father a count and his mother a marchioness, in a region in Italy that was still officially a Papal State.
- He was physically disabled and lived all of his youth secluded in a remote region of Italy, where he was tutored and self-taught
- Despite his isolation, he had access to a great library and eventually transformed into a radical thinker who challenged the 19<sup>th</sup>-century status quo, like other Romantic poets



# Felicia Hemans

- 1793-1835, was a renowned Irish-English Romantic poet
- “The pre-eminence of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron and Shelley was largely the invention of the twentieth century and is now superseded by a growing consensus that Charlotte Smith, Hannah More, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Helen Maria Williams, Felicia Dorothea Hemans and Letitia Landon [who were highly regarded at their time] be read alongside them.” (*Cambridge Companion to Romanticism*, xxxiii)
- Hemans, like LEL, was part of a literary movement amongst women that romanticized and idealized Italy, writing extensively about it without ever having been able to visit.



## Discussion Questions

- ALL TOGETHER
  - What is happening in Leopardi's sonnet?
  - What is happening in Heman's poem?

## Discussion Questions

- Last week's lesson was dedicated to the Sublime, the Beautiful, and the Picturesque. Which of these aesthetic traits do you think Leopardi is meditating on in his 'The Infinite'? Why and to what end?
- The ruins of Pompeii were discovered in the early 1700s and Vesuvius was active across the century. According to your reading of the Goethe excerpt, what educational experience might Grand Tourists and later travelers have sought to attain through a visit to the active volcano and its ancient ruins?
- How is Felicia Hemans' poetic description of Vesuvius and Pompeii similar to / different from Goethe's?
- How is Angelica Kauffmann's depiction of Vesuvius (Pliny the Younger and His Mother) and Pompeii similar to / different from Michael Wutky's (The Summit of Vesuvius Erupting)?





# Representing Vesuvius

# Nationhood and Freedom

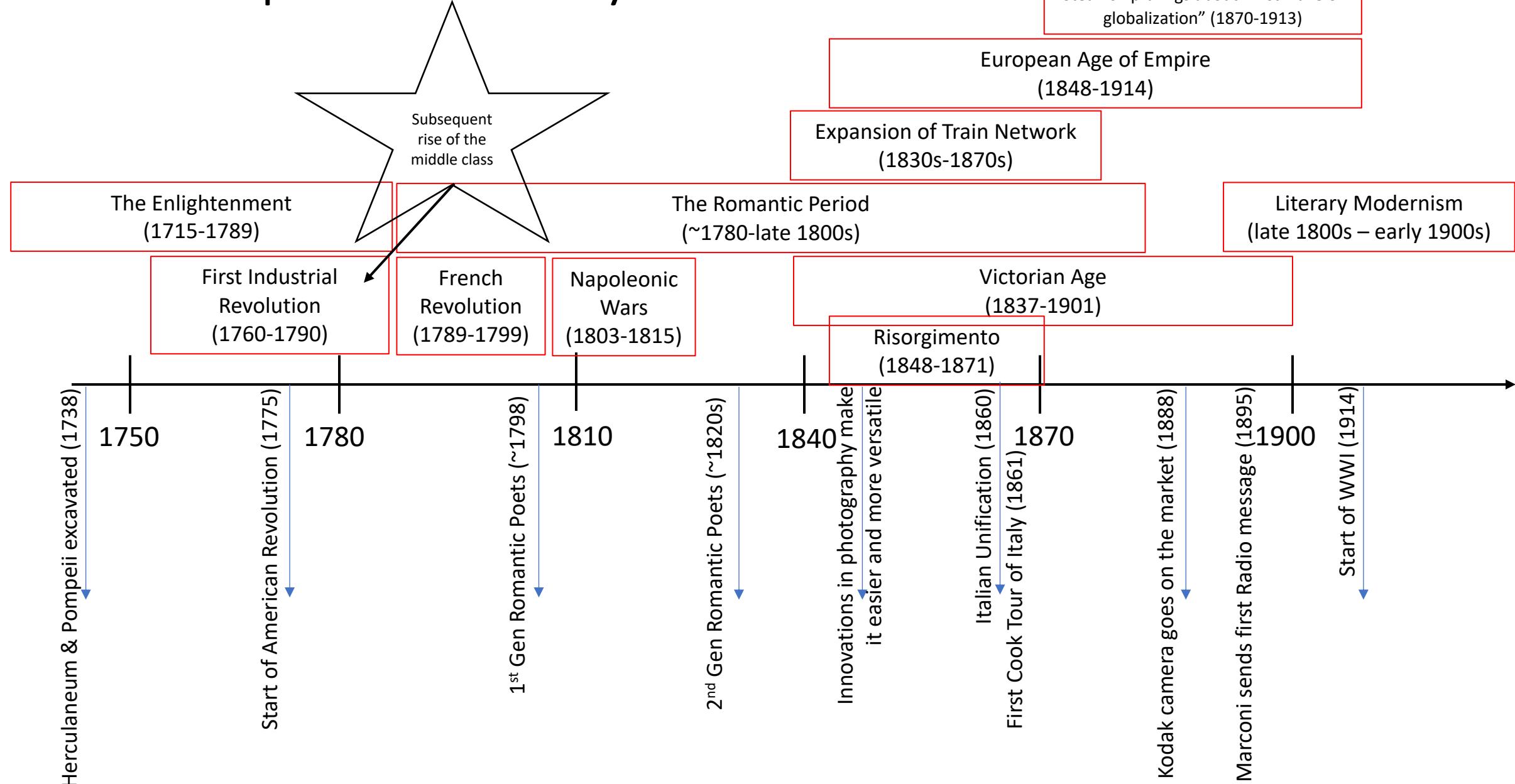


# Petrarch, Canzone 128 “Italy”

- Canzone (or "Song") 128 comes from a collection of Petrarchan poems known as the *Canzoniere* ("Songbook") or the *Rime Sparse* ("Scattered Rhymes")
- He's writing from Parma
- Critical of Italian nobility
- His disgust with constant warfare and foreign rulers
- Who is he speaking to?
- What/who does he cite to incite a desire for freedom?



# European History Timeline



# Byron, Shelley, Leopardi and Barrett Browning's Italy

- After Petrarch's time, Italy continued to suffer various wars by (mainly foreign) powers for control of its land
- By the time of Napoleon, it was divided much as it had been for centuries: foreign control from Naples down, Papal States in the center, a few autonomous states, protectorates of the Papal States, in the center and in Venice, and the House of Savoy ruling in the Northwest.
- Map of Italy in 1796 ->



# Byron, Shelley, Leopardi and Barrett Browning's Italy

- Republic of Venice
  - The Papal States and the Republic of Venice were the only parts of Italy to remain, legally and practically, independent from foreign European rule from the 1500s.
  - It lasted from 697 AD until 1797 AD.
- Napoleon was waging war on non-democratic states in Europe, and he was creating alliances with non-democratic rulers in order to get that done.
- The Republic of Venice (ruled for 1,100 years by a non-heir-based Doge, not a king) was officially neutral in the Napoleonic wars.
- However, in April 1797 Napoleon threatened to declare war on Venice should it not democratize.
- Why? He had secretly made a treaty with Austria to exchange their lands in the Netherlands for Venice. So Venice was handed over to Austrian rule.
- It moved to French control in 1805.
- It returned to Austrian control in 1815 and remained there until 1866, the last piece of land to cede to Italy after its war for independence and declaration of nationhood in 1860.



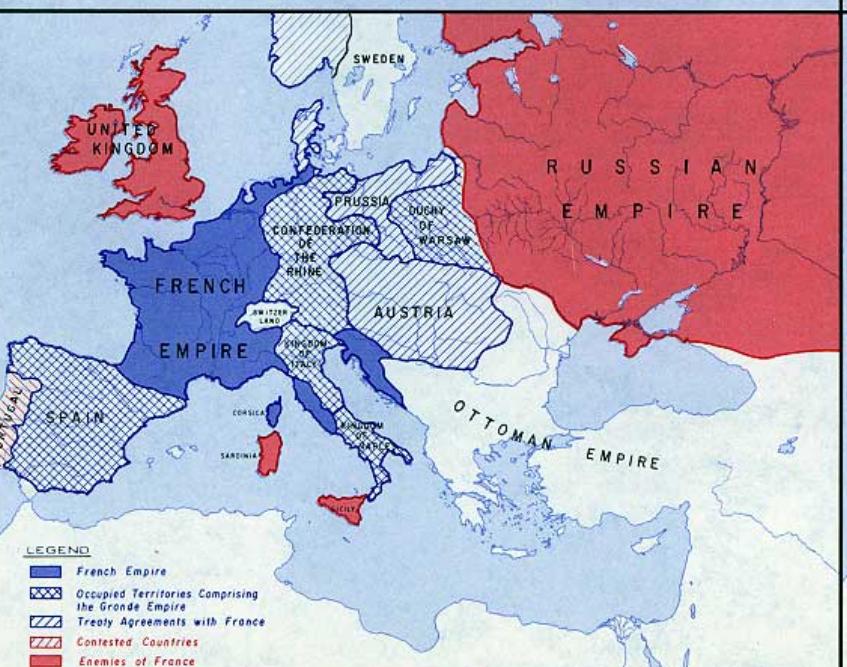
# Byron, Shelley, Leopardi and Barrett Browning's Italy

- Kingdom of Sicily, established in 1282, ruled by a variety of foreign rulers, from the originating Normans, to the Holy Roman Emperor (Hohenstaufen), the Habsburgs, the Spanish Bourbons
  - When Napoleon arrived it was ruled by the son of the King of Spain (King Ferdinand the IV of Naples and III of Sicily), who was married to an Austrian princess, Maria Carolina (sister of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France)
- Spain was supported by England in the war against Napoleon. However, in 1799 Napoleon conquered Naples and the court fled to their second capital in Palermo, Sicily.
- Ferdinand was restored to power in 1815 and the regime remained in power until the uprising that began the Italian Risorgimento, in Sicily, against the Bourbons on 11 May 1860.
- Giuseppe Garibaldi with his 1,000 Redshirts marched from Sicily up the peninsula, fighting and declaring Italy independent from foreign powers.



# EUROPE

*UNDER NAPOLEON*  
**1810**



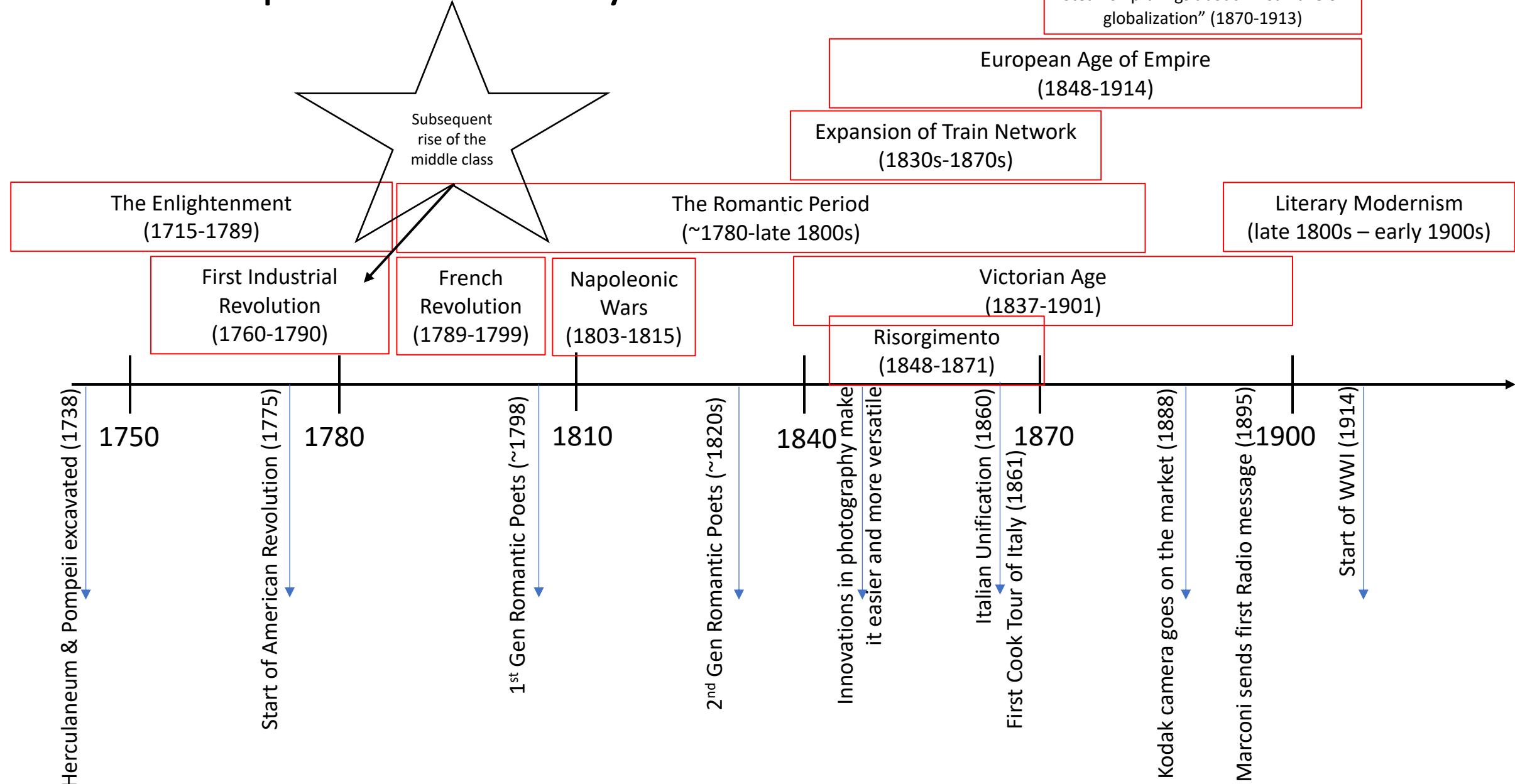
*UNDER THE MONARCHS*  
**1815**



"Italian States" is used to simplify the complex situation.  
Map below is a simplified version of Italy in 1815 after the Restoration.



# European History Timeline



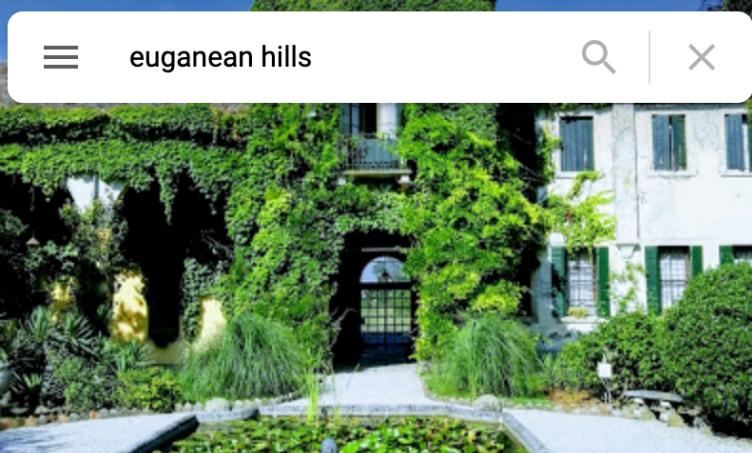
# Lord Byron, “Ode to Venice”, 1818

- An Ode was a very popular style of poetry for Romantic poets.
- The Poetry Foundation defines it as "A formal, often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and often celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea."
- Of Romantic odes, the Poetry Foundation says: "The odes of the English Romantic poets vary in stanza form. They often address an intense emotion at the onset of a personal crisis (see Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "[“Dejection: An Ode,”](#)) or celebrate an object or image that leads to revelation (see John Keats's [“Ode on a Grecian Urn,”](#) [“Ode to a Nightingale,”](#) and [“To Autumn”](#))."

# Lord Byron, “Ode to Venice”, 1818

- ALL TOGETHER
  - What is happening in Byron’s ode?
  - What does it celebrate? Is there an intense emotion? A revelation?
- IN GROUPS
  - What is the threat to the nation, or specifically, the individual within the nation, according to Byron?
  - Where does Byron look for a promise for the future and answer to the tyranny he sees in Europe?
  - Is Byron doing anything we have seen before? (Symbolism we have seen? Themes we have seen? Etc.)

# Shelley, “Lines Written among the Euganean Hills”, 1819



euganean hills



X

## Euganean Hills

Colli Euganei

4.5 ★★★★★ (115)

Mountain peak



Directions



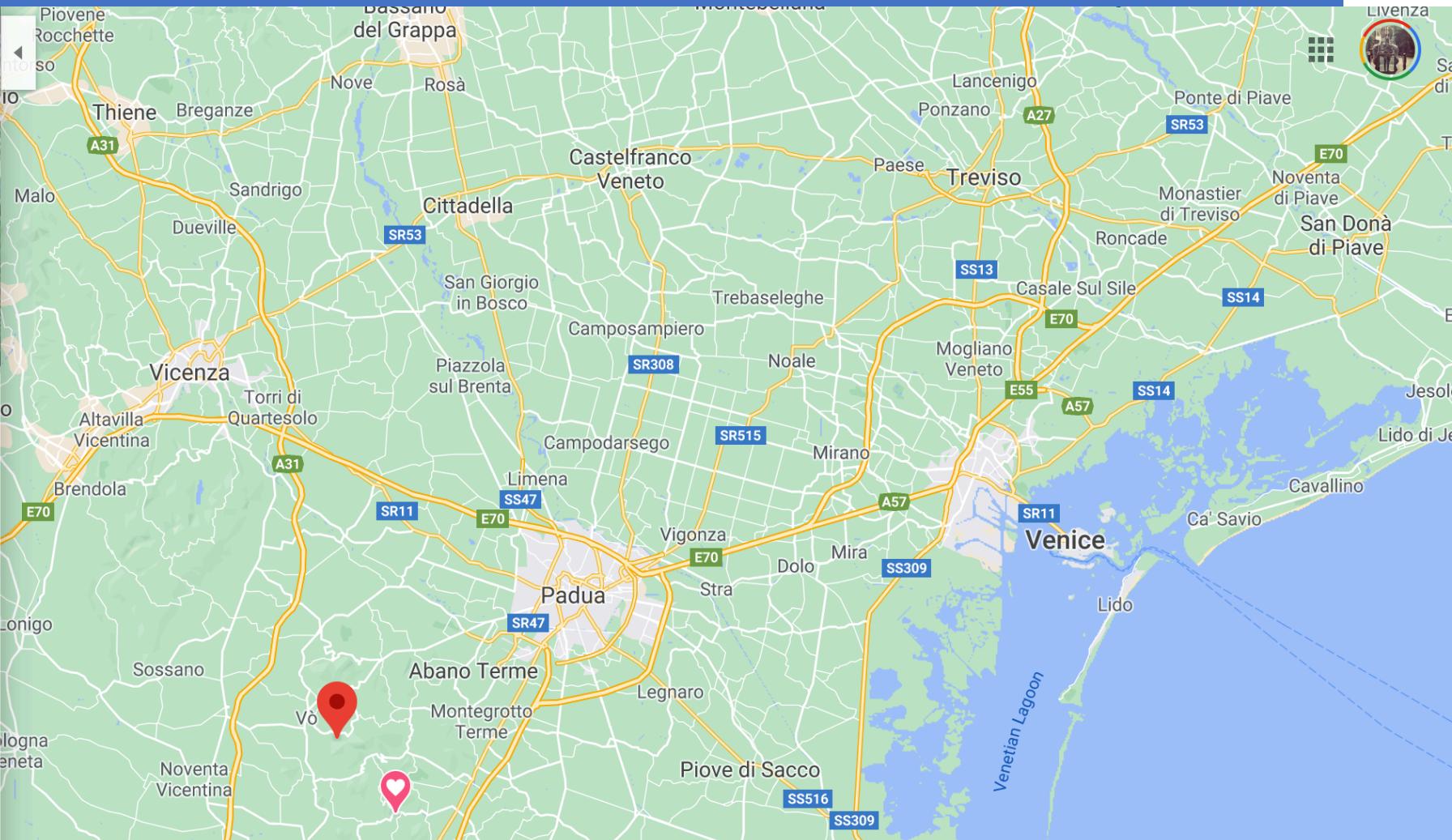
Save



Nearby  
Send to your phone



Share



Hot springs, hiking trails, dining & more offered in lush surrounds dotted by volcanic peaks.

# Shelley, “Lines Written among the Euganean Hills”, 1819

- ALL TOGETHER
  - What is happening in this poem?
  - What is the central metaphor that is developed in the first stanza and returned to afterwards?
- IN GROUPS
  - How does Shelley’s poem engage with both Petrarch medieval concerns for Italy and Byron’s concerns for the nation and contemporary conceptions of ‘freedom’?
  - Shelley mentions Petrarch in the poem but he is not the great poet of whom Shelley alludes in that section. To whom does Shelley speak when he says “So thou art / Mighty spirit: so shall be / The City that did refuge thee.” (P. 3, ll. 5-6).
  - What role does the past (the past of Italy, of Venice) play in these poems?
  - Is Shelley doing anything we have seen before? (Symbolism we have seen? Themes we have seen? Etc.)

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

- ALL TOGETHER
  - What is happening in this poem?
- IN GROUPS
  - 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 GROUPS
  - 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?

## Reading 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?
- Why did I include the frontmatter to Goethe's *Italian Journey*?
- 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?
- 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.
  - 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?
- 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 was an Italian born in exile in England. How does her treatment of Italy differ from those who seek exile there?