ITALY
TRAVEL QUOTES

ITALY

Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello,
Nave senze nocchiere in gran tempesta,
Non donna di provincia, ma bordello!

Ah, slavish Italy! thou inn of grief!
Vessel without a pilot in loud storm!
Lady no longer of fair provinces,
But brothel-house impure!

Dante, *Purgatorio*, *c.* 1310–21
(H.F. Cary's translation, 1814)

Sixteenth Century

Suffer not your sonnes to passe the Alpes: for they shall exchange for their forraine travell . . . but others vices for their own virtues, Pride, Blasphemy and Atheisme for Humilitie Reverence and Religion.

William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, *Precepts or Directions for the Well-Ordering . . . of a Man's Life . . . to his Sonne*, 1637 – written before 1598

A paradise inhabited with devils.

Sir Henry Wotton, Letter to Lord Zouche,
25 June 1592

Italy, the Paradice of the earth, and the Epicures heaven, how doth it forme our yong master? It makes him to kis his hand like an ape, cringe his necke like a starveling, and play at hey passe repasse come aloft when he salutes a man. From thence he brings the art of atheisme, the art of epicurising, the art of whoring, the art of poysoning, the art of Sodomitrie. The onely probable good thing they have to keepe us from utterly condemning it, is that it maketh a man an excellent Courtier, a curious carpet knight: which is by interpretation, a fine close leacher, a glorious hipocrite. It is nowe a privie note amongst the better sort of men, when they would set a singular marke or brand on a notorious villaine, to say, he hath beene in *Italy*.

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, 1594

Italy worthily called the Queene of Nations, can never be sufficiently praised, being most happy in the sweete Ayre, the most fruitfull and pleasant fields, warme sunny hils, hurtlesse thickets, shaddowing groves, Havens of the Sea, watering brookes, baths, wine, and oyle for delight, and most safe forts or defences as well of the sea as of the Alpes. Neither is any part of Europe so inhabited, more adorned with Cities and Castles, or to be compared thereunto for tillage and husbandry.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

And being now in *Italy, that great limbique of working braines*, he must be very circumspect in his cariage, for she is able to turne a *Saint* into a *Devill* and deprave the best natures, if one will abandon himselfe to pleasure, and become a prey to dissolut courses & wantonnes, the *Italian*, being the *greatest embracer of pleasures*, and the greatest *Courtier of Ladies* of any other. Here he shall find vertue and vice, love and hatred, Atheisme and Religion in their extremes; being a witty contemplative people; and *Corruptio optimi est pessima. Of your best wines you make your tartest vinegar. . . .*

She is the prime climat of Complement, which oftentimes puts such a large distance, twixt the tongue and the heart, that they are seldome relatives, but they often give the lye one to another; some will offer to kisse the hands which they wish were cut off, and would be content to light a candle to the Devill, so they may compasse their owne ends: Hee is not accounted essentially wise, who openeth all the hopes of his breast to any.

The *Italians* are for the most part of a speculative complexion . . . *and he is accounted little lesse than a foole who is not melancholy once a day; they are only bountifull to theire betters, from whom they may expect a greater benefit; To others the purse is closest shut, when the mouth openeth widest, nor are you like to get a cup of wine there unlesse your grapes be knowne to be in the wine-presse.*

James Howell, *Instructions for Forren Travell*, 1650

Travellers do nothing else but run up & downe to see sights, that come into *Italy*.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, June 1645

Nature's darling.

Richard Lassels, *An Italian Voyage, or a Compleat Journey through Italy*, 1679

That Nation, which hath civilized the whole world and taught Mankind what it is to be a Man.

Richard Lassels, *An Italian Voyage*, 1679

Eighteenth Century

Lust chose the Torrid Zone of *Italy*,
Where Blood ferments in Rapes and Sodomy:
Where swelling Veins o'erflow with livid Streams,
With Heat impregnate from *Vesuvian* Flames:
Whose flowing Sulphur forms Infernal Lakes,
And humane Body of the Soil partakes.
There Nature ever burns with hot Desires,
Fann'd with Luxuriant Air from Subterranean Fires:
Here undisturb'd in Floods of Scalding Lust,
Th'Infernal King reigns with Infernal Gust.

Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman*, 1701

For wheresoe'er I turn my ravished eyes,
Gay gilded scenes and shining prospects rise,
Poetic fields encompass me around,
And still I seem to tread on classic ground;
For here the muse so oft her harp has strung
That not a mountain rears its head unsung,
Renowined in verse each stately thicket grows,
And every stream in heavenly numbers flows.

Joseph Addison, *Letter from Italy to the Right Honourable Lord Halifax*, 1701

How has kind Heaven adorned the happy land,
And scattered blessings with a wasteful hand!
But what avail her unexhausted stores,
Her blooming mountains and her sunny shores,
With all the gifts that heaven and earth impart,
The smiles of nature and the charms of art,
While proud oppression in her valleys reigns,
And tyranny usurps her happy plains?
The poor inhabitant beholds in vain
The reddening orange and the swelling grain:
Joyless he sees the growing oils and wines,
And in the myrtle's fragrant shade repines:
Starves in the midst of nature's bounty curst
And in the loaden vineyard dies for thirst.

Ibid.

One seldom finds in Italy a spot of ground more agreeable than ordinary, that is not covered with a convent.

Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 1705

Ah, poor Italia! what a bitter cup
Of vengence hast thou drain'd! Goths, Vandals, Huns,
Lombards, barbarians, broke from every land, –

How many a ruffian form hast thou beheld!
What horrid jargons heard, where rage alone
Was all thy frighted ear could comprehend!
How frequent by the red inhuman hand,
Yet warm with brother's, husband's, father's blood,
Hast thou thy matrons and thy virgins seen
To violation dragg'd, and mingled death!
What conflagrations, earthquakes, ravage, floods,
Have turn'd thy cities into stony wilds;
And succourless and bare, the poor remains
Of wretches forth to Nature's common cast!
Added to these, the still continued waste
Of inbred foes, that on thy vitals prey,
And, double tyrants, seize the very soul.

James Thomson, *Liberty*, 1734–6

In Italy they seem to have found out how hot their climate is, but not how cold; for there are scarce any chimneys, and most of the apartments painted in fresco; so that one has the additional horror of freezing with imaginary marble.

Horace Walpole, Letter to Richard West, 22 March 1740

Mr Walpole says, our memory sees more than our eyes in this country.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Richard West, May 1740

Italia, nurse of every softer art,
Who, feigning to refine, unmans the heart;
Who lays the realms of Sense and Virtue waste;
Who mars while she pretends to mend our taste;
Italia, to complete and crown our shame,
Sends us a fiend, and Legion is his name.
The farce of greatness without being great,
Pride without power, titles without estate,
Souls without vigour, bodies without force,
Hate without cause, revenge without remorse,
Dark, mean revenge, murder without defence,
Jealousy without love, sound without sense,
Mirth without humour, without wit grimace,
Faith without reason, Gospel without grace,
Zeal without knowledge, without nature art. . . .

Charles Churchill, *The Times*, 1764

Could Nature's beauties satisfy the breast,
The sons of Italy were surely blest.

Oliver Goldsmith, *The Traveller*, 1765

I do assure you the climate of Italy affects me much. It inflamed my hot desires, and now it keeps my blood so warm, that I have all day long such spirits as a man has after having taken a cheerful glass.

James Boswell, Letter to John Johnston of Grange, 19 July 1765

Give what scope you please to your fancy, you will never imagine half the disagreeableness that *Italian* beds, *Italian* cooks, *Italian* post-horses, *Italian* postilions, and *Italian* nastiness offer to an *Englishman*, in an autumnal journey; much more to an *English* woman.

Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 1767

A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see. The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean.

Samuel Johnson, in Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 11 April 1776

*Travelling is the ruin of all happiness! There's no looking at a building here after seeing Italy.

Fanny Burney (Mme D'Arblay), *Cecilia*, 1782

Nothing is so little animated by the sight of living creatures as an Italian prospect.

Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

It is a sort of Native land to us all; as our earliest ideas are from the antient Italy, and some of our pleasantest amusements from the modern.

Edmund Burke, Letter to Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer, after 8 May 1791

For all those circumstances that render that classical country illustrious, the seat of great men – the theatre of the most distinguished actions – the exclusive field in which the elegant and agreeable arts have loved to range – what country can be compared with Italy? to please the eye, to charm the ear, to gratify the enquiries of a laudable curiosity, whither would you travel? In every bosom whatever, Italy is the second country in the world – of all others, the surest proof that it is the first.

Arthur Young, *Travels . . . [in] . . . France* (27 December 1789), 1792

Nineteenth Century

Italy is well deserving the character it has acquired of being the Garden of Europe – and of being likewise the abode of poverty, villainy – filth and extortion. A Traveller pays dearly for the intellectual pleasures it furnishes, by suffering from bad accomodations in dirty inns – from the impositions of innkeepers servants &c – from wretched carriages, roguish drivers, corrupt custom house officers in short a combination of rogues of every class.

Washington Irving, *Journal*, 22 April 1805

in fair Italia's bowers,
Where, ling'ring yet, the ghost of ancient wit
Midst modern monks profanely dares to flit,

And pagan spirits, by the pope unlaid,
Haunt every stream and sing through every shade.
Thomas Moore, 'To the Honourable W.R. Spencer, from Buffalo, upon Lake Erie', *Poems relating to America*, 1806

Italy is my Magnet.
Lord Byron, Letter to Annabella Milbanke, 20 April 1814

Italia, Italia, O tu cui feo la sorte,
Dono infelice di bellezza, ond' hai
Funesta dote d'infiniti guai
Che in fronte scritti per gran doglia porte.
Vicenzo da Filicaja, *Italia*, *c.* 1707

Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast
The fatal gift of beauty, which became,
A funeral dower of present woes and past,
On thy sweet brow is sorrow plough'd by shame,
And annals graved in characters of flame.
Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth, 1816

Italy! Italy! thou who'rt doomed to wear
The fatal gift of beauty and possess
The dower funest of infinite wretchedness
Written upon thy forehead by despair.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'To Italy', *Poetical Works* 1851

There are *two* Italies – one composed of the green earth and transparent sea, and the mighty ruins of ancient time, and aerial mountains, and the warm and radiant atmosphere which is interfused through all things. The other consists of the Italians of the present day, their works and ways. The one is the most sublime and lovely contemplation that can be conceived by the imagination of man; the other is the most degraded, disgusting and odious. What do you think? Young women of rank actually eat – you will never guess what – *garlick!*
Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Leigh Hunt, 22 December 1818

Thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!
Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Julian and Maddolo*, 1819

Italy is the place for you, the very place – the Paradise of exiles, the retreat of Pariahs.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Medwin, 17 January 1820

The features of an Italian landscape are very peculiar. The bold and the grand are constantly blended with the soft and the beautiful.
Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

If ever there was one region blessed beyond all others, and made by nature for the special enjoyment of the most favoured of her creatures, that region is Italy! Let her fortresses and her cells, her despots and her monks tell her sad story, and explain how suns may shine, and soils may teem – in vain!
Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

Kennst du das Land, wo die Citronen blühn
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht.
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.
J. W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister* (Mignon's Song), 1821

Knowst thou the land where the lemon-trees bloom,
Where the gold orange glows in the deep thicket's gloom,
Where a wind ever soft from the blue heaven blows,
And the groves are of laurel and myrtle and rose?
Thomas Carlyle's translation, 1824

O Italy, how beautiful thou art:
Yet I could weep – for thou are lying alas,
Low in the dust; and we admire thee now
As we admire the beautiful in death.
Thine was a dangerous gift, when thou wert born,
The gift of beauty. Would thou hadst it not;
Or wert as once, among the caitiffs vile
That now beset thee, making thee their slave!
Would they had loved thee less, or feared thee more!
– But why despair? Twice hast thou lived already;
Twice shone among the nations of the world,
As the sun shines among the lesser lights of heaven.
Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822–34

There is a technical description of the chief towns in Italy, which those who learn the Italian grammar are told to get by heart – *Genoa la superba, Bologna la dotta, Ravenna l'antica, Firenze la bella, Roma la santa.* Some of these I have seen, and others not; and those that I have not seen seem to me the finest. Does not this list convey as good an idea of these places as one can well have? It selects some one distinct feature of them, and that the best. Words may be said, after all, to be the finest things in the world. Things themselves are but a lower species of words, exhibiting the grossness and details of matter. Yet, if there be any country answering to the description or idea of it, it is Italy; and to this theory I must add, the Alps are also a proud exception.
William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

The popular superstition of Italy is the offspring of the climate, the old associations, the manners, and the very names of the places. It is pure paganism, undisturbed by any anxiety about orthodoxy, or animosity against heretics. Hence, it is much more good-natured, and

pleasing to a traveller's feelings, and certainly not a whit less like the true religion of our dear Lord than the gloomy idolatry of the Spaniards.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, 25 July 1831

I never was in such a country as this – one can count upon nothing neither upon expenses time nor means of conveyance and as for the people – goodness take me out from amongst them and trust me for ever again troubling them with my presence unless I have time and money in abundance and even then an urgent motive only would tempt me to re-enter the country – To travel in or through Italy several things are necessary, your pockets should be full of money, your mind full of patience, and time no object without these requisites no one should travel in Italy, otherwise he is sure to be disgusted with the people and their continual exactions. Their exactions are in proportion as they see you pressed for time.

John Webster, *Notes of a Journey from London to Constantinople . . .*, 1836

Fair Land! Thee all men greet with joy; how few
Whose souls take pride in freedom, virtue, fame,
Part from thee without pity dyed in shame:
I could not – while from Venice we withdrew,
Led on till an Alpine strait confined our view
Within its depths, and to the shore we came
Of Lago Morto, dreary sight and name,
Which o'er sad thoughts a sadder colouring threw.
Italia! on the surface of thy spirit,
(Too aptly emblemed by that torpid lake)
Shall a few partial breezes only creep? –
Be its depths quickened; what thou dost inherit
Of the world's hopes, dare to fulfil; awake,
Mother of Heroes, from thy death-like sleep!

William Wordsworth, *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*, 1842

Italien ist ein geographischer Begriff.
(Italy is a geographical expression.)

Prince Metternich, Letter, 19 November 1849

If Italy is famous at present for any two things, it is for political uneasiness and *minestra*.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

You learn for the first time in this climate, what colours really are. No wonder it produces painters. An English artist of any enthusiasm might shed tears of vexation, to think of the dull medium through which blue and red come to him in his own atmosphere, compared with this. . . . A red cap in Italy goes by you, not like a mere cap, much less anything vulgar or butcher-like, but like what it is, an intense specimen of the colour of red.

Ibid.

To the American, especially if he be of an imaginative temper, Italy has a deeper charm. She gives him cheaply what gold cannot buy for him at home, a Past at once legendary and authentic, and in which he has an equal claim with every other foreigner. In England he is a poor relation, whose right in the entail of home traditions has been docked by revolution; . . . but Rome is the mother country of every boy who has devoured Plutarch or taken his daily doses of Florus. Italy gives us antiquity with good roads, cheap living, and above all, a sense of freedom from responsibility.

James Russell Lowell, *Leaves from My Journal in Italy and Elsewhere*, 1854

Is not one chief charm of the land, that it is changeless without being Chinese?

Ibid.

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

Robert Browning, 'By the Fireside', *Men and Women*, 1855

Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me –
(When fortune's malice
Lost her – Calais) –
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, 'Italy.'

Robert Browning, *De Gustibus*, 1855

And now, my Italy.
Alas, if we could ride with naked souls
And make no noise, and pay no price at all,
I would have seen thee sooner, Italy, –
For still I have heard thee crying through my life,
Thou piercing silence of extatic graves,
Men call that name!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1856

*'In Italy is she really?' said Flora, 'with the grapes and figs growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry burning mountains, picturesque beyond belief though if the organ-boys come away from the neighbourhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederas though Mr F himself did not believe for his objection when in spirits was that the images could not be true there being no medium between expensive quantities of linen badly got up and all in creases and none whatever, which certainly does not seem probable though perhaps in consequence of the extremes of rich and poor which may account for it. . . .

'Venice Preserved too,' said she, 'I think you have been there is it well or ill preserved for people differ so

and Macaroni if they really eat it like the conjurors why not cut it shorter, you are acquainted . . . acquainted I believe with Mantua what *has* it got to do with Mantua-making for I never have been able to conceive?'

Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 1857–8

How I feel Goethe's greatness in this place! Here in Italy one feels that all time spent out of Italy by tourists in France, Germany, Switzerland, etc., etc., is – human life being so short – time misspent. Greece and parts of the East are the only other places to go to.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to his mother, 5 June 1865

Lump the whole thing! say that the Creator made Italy from designs by Michael Angelo!

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869

Italian dirt, though unpleasant, . . . is the product not of a brutal revolt against decency, but of an easy-going indolence. It is, as Heine somewhere says, 'grossartiger Schmutz.' The squalor of an Italian town surrounds monuments of incomparable beauty, and somehow does not seem altogether out of harmony with them.

Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe*, 1871

The great aggregation of beautiful works of art in the Italian cities strikes the visitor nowadays (so far as present Italy is concerned) as the mere stock-in-trade of an impecunious but thrifty people.

Henry James, 'Italy Revisited,' 1877, in *Portraits of Places*, 1883

Land of us all that have loved thee dearliest
Mother of men that were lords of man
Whose name in the world's heart works as a spell
My last song's light, and the star of mine earliest.

A.C. Swinburne, 'Spring in Tuscany', *Poems and Ballads*, Second Series, 1878

I can honestly say that if I was told at this moment that I was dying, not my first, not my second, but certainly my third thought would be that I should never see Italy again.

Mrs Henry Fawcett, *Orient Line Guide*, 1885

Henry James would always remember & remark on the hideous things. 'I always think of Italy & see the waiters flopping among the flies.'

Logan Pearsall Smith, *Diary*, July 1896

Twentieth Century

'What do people do here?' I once asked at a little town between Rome and Naples; and the man with whom I talked, shrugging his shoulders, answered curtly, '*C'è miseria*' – there's nothing but poverty. The same reply could be given in towns and villages without number throughout the length of Italy.

George Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, 1901

entered from the St Gotthard

To young Adams this first plunge into Italy passed Beethoven as a piece of accidental education. Like music it differed from other education in being, not a means of pursuing life, but one of the ends attained. Further, on these lines, one could not go. It had but one defect – that of attainment. Life had no richer impression to give; it offers barely half-a-dozen such, and the intervals seem long.

Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1906

The past of Italy belongs to all lands which have felt the reverberations of that gorgeous procession. An Englishman in Italy stands upon soil that for century after century has bequeathed to him, among so many thousand others, his own share of its richness, and if he carries with him a single grain of golden dust, it may well be to Italy that he owes it.

Percy Lubbock, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning in her Letters*, 1906

Italy against the outlay of ¼ of her revenue has an impoverished illiterate population, medieval sanitation, a terrible accumulation of taxes, and an army and navy which would probably fetch a few hundred pounds in a lottery.

James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 6 November 1906

How incomparably the old coquine of an Italy is the most beautiful country in the world – of a beauty (and an interest and complexity of beauty) so far beyond any other that none other is worth talking about.

Henry James, Letter to Mrs Wharton, 11 August 1907

One doesn't (any longer) so much want to live in that unspeakable country as to feel, whenever one will, well on the way to it.

Henry James, Letter to Madame Wagniere, 22 December 1909

One must love Italy if one has lived there. It is so non-moral. It leaves the soul so free. Over these countries, Germany and England, lies the gloom of the dark moral judgement and condemnation and reservation of the people. Italy does not judge.

D.H. Lawrence, Letter to A.W. McLeod, 26 April 1913

One begins to realise how old the real Italy is, how man-gripped and how withered. England is far more wild and savage and lonely, in her country parts. Here since endless centuries man has tamed the impossible mountain side into terraces, he has quarried the rock, he has fed his sheep among the thin woods, he has cut his boughs and burnt his charcoal, he has been half domesticated even among the wildest fastnesses. This is

what is so attractive about the remote places, the Abruzzi, for example. Life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half-savage. And yet it is human life. And the wildest country is half humanised, half brought under. It is all conscious. Wherever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the mediaeval 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 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 tissued consciousness bear the results 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 in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness.

And then – and then – there is a final feeling of complete sterility. It is all worked out. It is all known: *connu, connu!*

Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria*, 1915

It is essentially a land of blue and its derivatives – cool, intellectual tints. The azure sea follows you far inland with its gleams. Look landwards from the water – purple Apennines are ever in sight. And up yonder, among the hills, you will rarely escape from the celestial hues.

Speaking of these mountains in a general way, they are bare masses whose coloration trembles between misty blue and mauve according to distance, light, and hour of day. As building-stone, the rock imparts a grey-blue tint to the walls. The very flowers are blue; it is a peculiarity of limestone formation, hitherto unexplained, to foster blooms of this colour. Those olive coloured slopes are of a glaucous tone.

Norman Douglas, *Alone*, 1921

I can never make a poem about Italy. About Italy you do, you address, bless and say adieu. Adieu Italy beautiful Italy adieu.

Gertrude Stein, 'Land of Nations', *Geography and Plays*, 1922

Italy is so tender – like cooked macaroni – yards and yards of soft tenderness, ravelled round everything.

D.H. Lawrence, *Sea And Sardinia*, 1923

Talk of the hanging gardens of Babylon, all Italy, apart from the plains, is a hanging garden. For centuries upon centuries, man has been patiently modelling the surface of the Mediterranean countries, gently rounding the hills and graduating the big slopes into the almost invisible levels of terraces. Thousands of square miles of Italy have been lifted in human hands, piled and laid back in tiny little flats, held up by drystone walls, whose stones came from the lifted earth. It is the work of many, many centuries. . . . Man, feeling his way sensitively to the fruitfulness of the earth, has moulded the earth to his necessity without violating it.

D.H. Lawrence, *Flowery Tuscany*, 1927, in *Phoenix*, 1936

Italy is now the Sick Land of Europe, a fever patient, flushed with a hectic resemblance to health, and still capable of convulsive, but not of sustained violence. She declines. She has fallen out of the general circle of European development; she is no longer a factor in progressive civilisation. . . . She has murdered or exiled all her Europeans.

H.G. Wells, 'What is Fascism?', 9 February 1927, in *The Way the World is Going*, 1928

Democracy in the French or English sense has never existed in Italy. If there was no outstanding figure the power fell into the hands of the secret societies, who after their fashion, again, represented the principle of minority rule. In Italy the democratic façade was never anything more than a façade; if it ever became anything more, anarchy inevitably followed. The great Italian individual's qualities issue forth in a marvellous earth-bound realism of the spirit. He finds the necessities of political life just as natural as the mother finds the needs of her little children.

Count Keyserling, *Europe*, 1928

An immense quantity of the earth's surface in Italy is wasted by nature, serves no useful purpose save to impress the unaccustomed eye. . . . The eye can discover in the distance naught but a dreamy, hazy, ideal beauty conceived on a terrifying scale. If beauty and terror are the desiderata of the artist, here he has them, incredibly combined.

Arnold Bennett, *Journal* (1929), 1930

Italy today is far more Etruscan in its pulse than Roman: and will always be so. The Etruscan element is like the grass of the field and the sprouting of corn, in Italy: it will always be so. Why try to revert to the Latin-Roman mechanism and suppression?

D.H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places*, 1932

Of all the Italian people that ever lived, the Etruscans were surely the least Roman. Just as, of all the people that ever rose up in Italy, the Romans of ancient Rome were surely the most un-Italian, judging from the natives of to-day.

Ibid.

Mussolini . . . has muscled into all the guidebooks in Rome. . . . At the end of every guidebook in English

one expects to see the famous lines of Browning slightly changed by official order, 'Open my heart and you will see graven inside it, "Il Duce."'

James Thurber, *My World and Welcome to It*, 1942

I am bound to say, if the House will forgive the metaphor, that the Allied High Command have approached the Italian mainland like an old man approaching a young bride, fascinated, sluggish, and apprehensive.

Aneurin Bevan, Speech, House of Commons, December 1943

We shall continue to operate on the Italian donkey at both ends – with a carrot and with a stick.

Sir Winston Churchill, Reply at Press Conference in USA, May 1943, when asked how Italy would be treated

What one feels always in Italy is an extraordinary and direct mingling of freshness and repose, as though all life were sunset and sunrise, winter and spring.

Charles Morgan, *Reflections in a Mirror*, 1944

This country has made an *art* of being vanquished.

Anon. exasperated American, Remark to Freya Stark, 1945, in *Dust in the Lion's Paw*, 1961

Since the year 476 the history of Italy has been one long chronicle of dishonour. Down to 1860 the country was almost constantly under foreign rule, and all its local governments were grounded upon oppression tempered by assassination. In World War I it ratted on its allies, and in World War II it ratted again. Such is the heir and assign of the Rome of Caesar and Augustus.

H.L. Mencken, 'Minority Report', *H.L. Mencken's Notebooks*, 1956

The Italian way of life down the centuries attracted people who wanted to take a holiday from their national virtues. In the heart of every man, whenever he is born, whatever his education and tastes, there is one small corner which is Italian, that part that finds regimentation irksome, the dangers of war frightening, strict morality stifling, that part which loves frivolous and entertaining art, admires larger-than-lifesize solitary heroes, and dreams of an impossible liberation from the strictures of a tidy existence.

Luigi Barzini, *The Italians*, 1964

Foreign diplomats in Rome disconsolately say, 'Italy is the opposite of Russia. In Moscow nothing is known, yet everything is clear. In Rome everything is public, there are no secrets, everybody talks, things are at times flamboyantly enacted, yet one understands nothing.'

Ibid.

The virtues necessary to become the head of anything, in Italy, head of a convent, a municipal kennel, a vegetable market Mafia, a secondary railway station, or the mayor of a mountain village, are such that could, in most other countries, easily make a man foreign minister, the alcove favourite of the queen, the chief of staff, or the president of the republic.

Ibid.

Very little counts for less in Italy than the state.

Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

Can it be that from the waist down Italy is a different creature? Is the famous boot shape really an elegantly shod hoof, and the top a normal Western country?

Ibid.

All dwellers in the Teutonic north, looking out at the winter sky, are subject to spasms of a nearly irresistible pull, when the entire Italian peninsula from Trieste to Agrigento begins to function like a lodestone. The magnetism is backed by an unseen choir, there are roulades of mandolin strings in the air; ghostly whiffs of lemon blossom beckon the victims south and across the Alpine passes. It is Goethe's Law and is ineluctable as Newton's or Boyle's.

Patrick Leigh Fermor, *A Time of Gifts*, 1977

You've heard the one about the Italian tanks. They've even got reversing lights on them.

David Frost, quoted by Thomson Prentice in *Daily Mail*, 21 May 1979

Political parties in Italy repeat themselves like broken gramophone records.

Professor Pedarotti, in Interview on BBC *Newsnight*, 4 August 1980

Italians

Early

Who is ignorant of the vanity and arrogance of the Romans? a nation nursed in sedition, cruel, untractable, and scorning to obey, unless they are too feeble to resist. When they promise to serve, they aspire to reign; if they swear allegiance, they watch the opportunity of revolt; yet they vent their discontent in loud clamours, if your doors or your counsels are shut against them. Dexterous in mischief, they have never learned the science of doing good. Odious to earth and heaven, impious to God, seditious among themselves, jealous of their neighbours, inhuman to strangers, they love no one, by no one are they beloved; and, while they wish to inspire fear, they live in base and continual apprehension. They will not submit; they know not how to govern; faithless to their superiors, intolerable to their equals, ungrateful to their benefactors, and

alike impudent in their demands and their refusals. Lofty in promise, poor in execution: adulation and calumny, perfidy and treason, are the familiar acts of their policy.

St Bernard of Clairvaux, translated by Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776–88

. . . for the men you shall have there, although some in deede be excellentlie lerned, yett are they all given to soe counterfeit lerning, as a man shall learne of them more false groundes of thinges, then in anie place ells that I doe knowe for from a tapster upwardes they are all discoursers. In fine, certaine quallities, as Horsemanshipp, Weapons, Vauting, and such like, are better there then in those other countries, for others more sounde they doe little excell neerer places.

Sir Philip Sidney, Letter to Robert Sidney, *c.* 1578

The Italians make little difference between children and nephews or near kinsfoks; but so they be of the lump, they care not though they pass not through their own body.

Francis Bacon, *Essays*, 1598–1625

Seventeenth Century

I will ever magnifie and extoll the Italian for as courteous a man to a stranger as any man whatsoever in Christendome. For I have had a little experience in my travels of some of every principall nation of Christendome.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

The soil is generally abundant in all things necessary for human life, and the people for the most part are both grave and ingenious, but wondrous deceitful in their actions; so unappeaseable in anger, that they cowardly murder their enemies rather than seek an honourable revenge, and so inclined to unnatural vices, that for bestiality they surpass the Infidels. The women of the better sort are slavishly infringed from honest and lawful liberty; they of the middle rank somewhat modest in carriage, witty in speech, and bountiful in affection; they of the vulgar kind are both ignorant, sluttish, and greedy; and, lastly, the worser dregs, their impudent courtesans, the most lascivious harlots in the world.

William Lithgow, *Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations*, 1614/32

The Italians are so ravished with the beauty of their owne Countrey, as having by the sharpenesse of wit more then the true value of things, magnified and propounded to strangers admiration, each Brooke for a River, each vice for the neighbour vertue, and each poore thing, as if it were to be extolled above the Moone, they have thereby more wronged themselves then us. For we passing through Italy, though we find ourselves deceived in the fame of things, yet still we heare and see many things worthy to be observed; but of the Italians, holding Italy for a Paradice, very few sharpen their wits with any long voyage, and great part of them have not seene the Villages and Cities within ten miles of their dwellings. Hence it is that great part of the Italians have nothing to boast of but their naturall wit.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Why are Italians at this day generally so good poets and painters? Because every man of any fashion amongst them hath his mistress.

Robert Burton, *Anatomie of Melancholie*, 1621

Germany hath not so many drunkards, *England* Tobacconists, *France* dancers, *Holland* Mariners, as *Italy* alone hath jealous husbands.

Ibid.

They are generally indulgent of themselves, and great Embracers of Pleasure, which may proceed from the luscious rich Wines, and luxurious Food, Fruits, and Roots, where with the Country abounds; insomuch that in some Places, Nature may be said to be, *Lena sui, A Bawd to herself*. The Cardinal de Medici's Rule is of much Authority among them, *That there is no Religion under the Navel*. And some of them are of the Opinion of the Asians, who hold, that touching those natural Passions, Desires and Motions, which run up and down in the Blood, God Almighty, and his Handmaid Nature, did not intend they should be a Torment to us, but be used with Comfort and Delight.

James Howell, 'Letter to Capt. Francis Bacon, from Turin, 30 November 1621,' *Familiar Letters*, 1645

Some say, *The* Italian *loves no favour, but what's future.*

James Howell, 'Letter to Lord Viscount Rocksavage, Westminster, 22 March 1630', *Familiar Letters*, 1645

Eighteenth Century

Sallads, and Eggs, and lighter Fare
Tune the ITALIAN Spark's Guitar.

Matthew Prior, *Alma*, Canto iii, 1715–18

How tedious it is to deal with Italians. I never knew people so ready to promise and so slow to perform.

George Berkeley, Letter to Lord Percival, July 1720

The only thing the Italians shine in, is their reception of strangers.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Philip Gray, 9 October 1740

Could Nature's bounty satisfy the breast,
The sons of Italy were surely blest. . . .

But small the bliss that sense alone bestows,
And sensual bliss is all the nation knows.
In florid beauty groves and fields appear,
Man seems the only growth that dwindles here.
Contrasted faults through all his manners reign,
Though poor luxurious, though submissive, vain,
Though grave, yet trifling, zealous, yet untrue,
And even in penance planning sins anew.
All evils here contaminate the mind,
That opulence departed leaves behind.

Oliver Goldsmith, *The Traveller*, 1764

Italy is certainly the native country of this art: and yet, I do not find the people in general either more musically inclined, or better provided with ears than their neighbours.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, 1766

Of all the people I ever knew, the Italians are the most villainously rapacious.

Ibid.

Familiarities between man and wife are still connived at in this country however, provided they are carried on in private; but for a man to be seen hand in hand with his wife, in public, would not be tolerated.

John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy*, 1781

My idea of the Italians is, that they are an ingenious, sober people, with quick feelings, and therefore irritable; but when unprovoked, of a mild and obliging disposition, and less subject to avarice, envy, or repining at the narrowness of their own circumstances, and the comparative wealth of others, than most other nations.

Ibid.

Religion, in Italy, being nearly reduced to a shell, the fruit of which has long been given up to nations better disposed to taste its value, and consequently having little or nothing left but exterior, demands no particular consideration apart from the Italian manners; and to them it certainly gives a very strong tincture; their ceremonious practice of it throwing a deep shade of decency and solemnity over their ordinary conduct, and serving, in the eye of the world, as a useful contrast to their natural vivacity, and to irregularities springing from their warmth of temperament. Of their civil morality, if I may so express it, as professedly distinguished from religion, one may judge with tolerable certainty, if we admit this general principle, that to be, and to appear, are two things absolutely different; and that it is seldom men of the world are not obliged, for their own advantage, to show themselves different from what they really are. . . . It is observable . . . that when the Italians have to deal with each other, they know pretty well how far their own assurances and pretences will go; and what credit to give those they mutually receive. Now, it will be easily imagined, that the practice of dissembling their sentiments, and of continually holding a language that has little to do with their thoughts, must reduce those who, nevertheless, wish to display their wit and parts in conversation, to the necessity of talking much, without saying any thing, and of exhausting the chapter of indifferent trifles, and general observations. This every foreigner must have remarked, particularly at Rome; and cannot but have attributed to it the pompous insipidity of their conversations. Any one, the least used to them, foresees nearly what every man will say, that enters the room. This poverty of conversation, amidst a great deal of talking, is the most striking in those who have rank to support it, and who have their constant assemblies on certain fixed days. What makes all this the more provoking to a stranger, is that these persons are so far from wanting wit, or talents, that they fall into these habits from having too much of them.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

Were the Inhabitants of Italy charming as their Country, all other Regions would be depopulated I think.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Thraliana*, 1786

Whoever seeks to convince instead of persuade an Italian, will find he has been employed in a Sisyphean labour; the stone may roll to the top, but is sure to return and rest at his feet who had courage to try the experiment. Logic is a science they love not, and, I think, steadily refuse to cultivate; nor is argument a style of conversation they naturally affect.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

Nineteenth Century

Gli Italiani tutti ladroni.
(The Italians are all robbers.)

Napoleon Bonaparte, Remark, in a loud voice, in public, to which a lady replied, 'Non tutti, ma buona parte,' ['Not all, but the most part'] in S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817

The modern Italians seem a miserable people, without sensibility, or imagination, or understanding. Their outside is polished, and an intercourse with them seems to proceed with much facility, though it ends in nothing, and produces nothing. The women are particularly empty, and though possessed of the same kind of superficial grace, are devoid of every cultivation and refinement.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to William Godwin, 25 July 1818

Lord D.[illon] . . . praises the Italians for their intelligence, but says they have a total want of heart; no cordiality, no hospitality; a grave and reserved people; their dislike of *suggezione* or restraint, which shows itself even in their consideration for others, and in their phrase *Si leva l'incommodo,* when they are taking their leave of any one.

Thomas Moore, *Journal*, 19 October 1819

Their moral is not your moral – their life is not your life – you would not understand it – it is not English nor French – nor German – which you would all understand – the Conventual education – the Cavalier Servitude – the habits of thought and living are so entirely different – and the difference becomes so much more striking the more you live intimately with them – that I know now how to make you comprehend a people – who are at once temperate and profligate – serious in their character and buffoons in their amusements – capable of impressions and passions which are at once *sudden* and *durable* (what you find in no other nation) and who *actually* have *no society* (what we would call so) as you may see by their Comedies – they have no real comedy not even in Goldoni – and that is because they have no society to draw it from.

Lord Byron, Letter to John Murray, 21 February 1820

I wonder what figure these Italians will make in a regular row. I sometimes think that, like the Irishman's gun (somebody had sold him a crooked one), they will only do for 'shooting round a corner;' at least, this sort of shooting has been the late tenor of their exploits. And yet, there are materials in this people, and a noble energy, if well directed. But who is to direct them? No matter. Out of such times heroes spring. Difficulties are the hot-beds of high spirits, and Freedom the mother of the few virtues incident to human nature.

Lord Byron, *Ravenna Journal*, 8 January 18?1

Subtle, discerning, eloquent, the slave
Of Love or Hate, for ever in extremes;
Gentle when unprovoked, easily won,
But quick in quarrel – through many a thousand shades
His spirit flits chameleon-like, and mocks
The eye of the observer.

Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822–34

The genius of the Italians . . . is acute, profound, and sensual, but not subtle; hence what they think to be humorous is merely witty.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, 23 April 1832

Talk of your Italians! why, they are extinguished by the Austrians because they don't blaze enough of themselves to burn the extinguisher. Only people who deserve despotism are forced to suffer it.

Edward Fitzgerald, Letter to F. Tennyson, October 1841

. . . a people, naturally well-disposed, and patient, and sweet-tempered. Years of neglect, oppression and misrule, have been at work, to change their nature and reduce their spirit; miserable jealousies, fomented by petty Princes to whom union was destruction, and division strength, have been a canker at their root of nationality, and have barbarized their language; but the good that was in them ever, is in them yet, and a noble people may be, one day, raised up from these ashes. Let us entertain that hope!

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

An Italian annoys you neither with his pride like an Englishman, nor with his vanity like a Frenchman. He is quiet and natural, self-possessed without wrapping himself up in a corner, and ready for cheerfulness without grimace. His frankness sometimes takes the air of a simplicity, at once misplaced and touching.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

In Italy, gentlemen do not look so much like gentlemen as in England, but there are greater numbers of women who look like ladies.

Ibid.

The air and life of Italy
Comes sharp into me and carves clear
My northern nature perfectly.

O what frank animals are here!
With beauty they have lived and had
Great offspring who make rich our sphere.

And Beauty was their mistress glad
She cannot die: but now she wears
The look that makes a people mad.

George Meredith, *Italy*, 1861

Through all Europe the movement is now towards science, and the Italian people is distinguished amongst all others by its scientific intellect – this is undoubtedly true; so that with the movement there now is among them there is no saying where they may go. They imitate the French too much, however; it is good for us to attend to the French, they are so unlike us, but not good for the Italians, who are a sister nation.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to his mother, 24 May 1865

I cannot but think this a mere fair-weather kingdom, 80,000 French, English, or Germans might, I am perfectly convinced, enter this country to-morrow, overrun it in three months, and hold it for ever against

all opposition they would meet from within. The Piedmontese is the only virile element – he is like a country Frenchman – but he is a small leaven to leaven the whole lump. And the whole lump want back-bone, serious energy, and power of honest work to a degree that makes one impatient. I am tempted to take the professors I see in the schools by the collar, and hold them down to their work for five or six hours a day – so angry do I get at their shirking and inefficiency. They have all a certain refinement which they call civilisation, but a nation is really civilised by acquiring the qualities it by nature is wanting in; and the Italians are no more civilised by virtue of their refinement alone than we are civilised by virtue of our energy alone.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to his sister, 21 June 1865

We have the notion in our country that Italians never do heavy work at all, but confine themselves to the lighter arts, like organ-grinding, operatic singing, and assassination. We have blundered, that is plain.

Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad*, 1880

The more I see of them the more struck I am with their having no sense of the ridiculous.

Henry James, Letter to Mrs Fanny Kemble, 24 March 1881

I was very unfavourably impressed with the Italian tone in regard to international matters where the rights of non-European nationalities were at stake. The Italians, like the French and all the Latin races, seemed to me incapable of grasping the idea, which we in England at any rate admit in theory, if seldom in practice, that the nations outside the community of Christian civilization have any rights at all.

Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Diary, 1891, *My Diaries*, 1919

He talked the matter over with his nose. There are 5000 ways of looking at an egg and at least as many of tapping an Italian's nose.

Samuel Butler, *Further Extracts from Note-Books*, 1934 – before 1902

Twentieth Century

The Italian imagination is like a cinematograph.

James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 7 December 1906

The men and women are faithful in marriage on the whole – but they have tribes of children. The butcher said to his wife one night 'You *were* going to have an infant, weren't you?' 'Yes you dolt,' she said. 'I had it this morning. There it is in the cradle.' And she went out to fetch some coal in. They are a spunky lot and of no soul or intellect. Its an awful relief to live among them.

D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Will Holbrook, January 1913

The men and women in Italy are natural enemies – it is very queer.

D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Mitchell Kennerly, 5 October 1913

The Italian people are called 'Children of the Sun.' They might better be called 'Children of the Shadow.' Their souls are dark and nocturnal.

D.H. Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy*, 1916

It is not a melancholy thing being one of them. It is not an interesting thing being one of them. It is not an exciting thing being one of them, it is not an important thing being all of them. It is an important enough thing being all of them. It is a pleasant thing being with them. It is not a pleasant thing expecting anything from them. It is not a disconcerting thing expecting anything from them. It is an agreeable thing knowing about them. It is an exciting thing first hearing about them. It is a delightful thing coming among them although it is a frightening thing the first seeing of them. It is a very pleasant thing living where they are living. It is a completely pleasant thing living where they are living. It is a troublesome thing waiting for any one of them. It is a troublesome thing waiting for them to go on finishing anything. It is not an exasperating, not a disconcerting thing waiting for any one of them.

They are certainly ones deciding something. They are certainly ones expecting anything. They are certainly ones not despairing in being ones being living. They are certainly ones not certain that they will be expecting anything. . . .

Gertrude Stein, 'Italians', *Geography and Plays*, 1922

It is not impossible to govern Italians. It is merely useless.

Benito Mussolini, attrib.

in Asmara, Ethiopia

When taxed with filth of town Italians say, 'We are in Africa.' Bad omen if they regard tropics as excuse for inferior hygiene. Reminded that they are race who have inhabited and created the slums of the world.

Evelyn Waugh, *Diary*, 31 August 1936

The trouble with Italy is that we have never allowed its inhabitants to leave the stage. Italian has to be the language of rhetorical superlatives – a language full of exaggerated gestures. Italy taught Europe how to act and how to sing in opera. Consequently, every Italian is a *primo tenore* who advances to the footlights and tickles the ears of the groundlings by his florid voice; or else he is always some poor devil of a Harlequin playing for ever the part of the clown.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

Is there any other country in Europe where the

character of the people seems to have been so little affected by political and technological change?

W.H. Auden, Introduction to Goethe's *Italian Journey*, 1962

The Italian social structure can be compared to the olive tree, that most Italian of all trees, which looks entirely different when seen from above from what it looks when seen from below. The leaves are glossy dark-green on top and powdery grey underneath. The faces of the Italians look flattering, smiling and kindly from above, but overbearing, insolent, pitiless from below. Foreigners are automatically promoted to be honorary members of the ruling class. They occupy a position of vantage. Theirs is the bird's-eye view of the olive tree.

Luigi Barzini, *The Italians*, 1964

Italian virtuosi have been famous for having produced floods of *trompe l'oeil*, *trompe* the mind, and *trompe* the heart.

Ibid.

There is an Italian saying that once people are born registered and baptised, they enjoy provisional liberty.

Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

Their smiles and laughter are due to their habit of thinking pleasurably aloud about the pleasures of life. They have humanity rather than humour, and the real significance of the distinction is seldom understood.

Ibid.

By 1948 the Italians had begun to pull themselves together, demonstrating once more their astonishing ability to cope with disaster which is so perfectly balanced by their absolute inability to deal with success.

Gore Vidal, *Matters of Fact and Fiction*, 1977

Then one of the French ladies remarked on a clear note, '*Pour moi les Italiens du nord sont des hommes décafeinés.*'

Lawrence Durrell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

Women

In generall it is said of Italian weomen: Son gazza a le porte, Sante in Chiesa, capre n'i giardini, Diavoli in casa, Angeli in strada, Sirene all fenestra. They are Magpyes at the doore, Saints in the Church, Goates in the garden, Divels in the house, Angels in the streete, and Syrens at the window.

Fynes Moryson, *Itinerary*, 1617

My desire to know the world made me resolve to intrigue a little while in Italy, where the women are so debauched that they are hardly to be considered as moral agents, but as inferior beings.

James Boswell, *Journal*, 10 January 1765

The women in Italy (so far as I have seen hitherto) are detestably ugly. They are not even dark and swarthy, but a mixture of brown and red, coarse, marked with the small pox, with pug-features, awkward, ill-made, fierce, dirty, lazy, neither attempting nor hoping to please.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

Men run the country, but women run men. Italy is, in reality, a crypto-matriarchy.

Luigi Barzini, *The Italians*, 1964

Italian Language

If one were to be worded to death, *Italian* is the fittest Language, in regard of the Fluency and Softness of it: for thro'out the whole Body of it, you have not a Word ends with a Consonant, except some few monosyllable Conjunctions and Prepositions, and this renders the Speech more smooth; which made one say, *That when the Confusion of Tongues happen'd at the Building of the Tower of* Babel, *if the* Italian *had been there,* Nimrod *had made him a Plaisterer.*

James Howell, 'Letter to Captain Francis Bacon; . . . 30 November 1621', in *Familiar Letters*, 1645

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth.
And sounds as if it had been writ on satin,
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South.

Lord Byron, *Beppo*, 1818

The Tuscan's siren tongue,
That music in itself, whose sounds are song,
The poetry of speech.

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 1812–18

Rhyme o'erflows
Italian, which hath scarcely prose.

W.S. Landor, *Collection of 1846*, No. CCLXVII

I am very witty in Italian, though a little violent; and I need space.

Dylan Thomas, Letter to John Davenport, 29 May 1947

I love Italian, it's the most beautiful language to write in, but terribly hard for writers because you can't tell when you've written nonsense. In English you know right away.

W.H. Auden, Remark, 1953, quoted in Robin Maugham, *Escape from the Shadows*, 1972

There is no Italian word for privacy.

Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

The Abruzzi

These impressive Abruzzi ridges that combined in so special a way hard temper with soft color – as if there were steel underneath blue silver, yet a blue so ethereálized that one peak, with its pencilled veins of snow, seemed to merge into the slate-blue heavens.

Edmund Wilson, *Europe without Baedeker*, 1947

Agrigento (formerly Girgenti)

Plato, when he visited Sicily, was so much struck with the luxury of Agrigentum, both in their houses and their tables, that a saying of his is still recorded: that they built as if they were never to die, and eat as if they had not an hour to live.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

Girgenti as a landscape is Athens with improvements. Two thousand, or twenty-five hundred years ago, it must have been immensely charming, like Japan in its prime, but now it is a landscape with hardly ten lines of history, and no art.

Henry Adams, Letter to Elizabeth Cameron, 23 April 1899

When we were there we came across an American lady, seated on the steps of one [temple], in an attitude of despair. She complained, 'I'm tired of it, temple after temple, and all exactly alike.'

M. and C.H.B. Quennell, *Everyday Things in Archaic Greece*, 1931

It came in sight slowly, the famous city; at first as a series of suggestive shapes against the evening sky, then as half dissolved forms which wobbled in the heat haze to settle at last firmly into the cubist boxes of a modern city. . . . It became obvious that what was being unfolded before us and below us was a most remarkable site. Successive roundels led in a low spiral up to the top of the steep hillock upon which an Acropolis had perched, and where now two parvenu skyscrapers and an ignoble huddle of unwarranted housing did duty for the old city's centre. We had reached by now the commercial nexus of the new town, which lies a bit below the city, makeshift, and ugly. But the light was of pure opalescent honey, and the setting (I am sorry to labour the point) was Hymettus at evening with the violet city of Athens sinking into the cocoon of night. I tremble also to insist upon the fact that from the point of view of natural beauty and elegance of site Agrigento is easily a match for Athens on its hills. Just as the ocean throws up roundels of sand to form pools, so the successive ages of geological time had thrown up successive rounds of limestone, rising in tiers like a wedding-cake to the Acropolis. From the top one looks down as if into a pie-dish with two levels, inner and outer ridges. It is down there at the entrance to the city, that all the Temples are situated, like a protective screen, tricked out with fruit orchards, with sweeps of silver olives, and with ubiquitous almond trees, whose spring flowering has become as famous as the legendary town itself.

Lawrence Durrell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

Albano

The young women . . . from Gensano and Albano, and that are known by their scarlet boddices and white head-dresses and handsome good-humoured faces, are the finest specimens I have ever seen of human nature. They are like creatures that have breathed the air of Heaven, till the sun has ripened them into perfect beauty, health and goodness.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

I have talked of the picturesque all my life: now at last, by way of a change, I see it.

Henry James, Letter to Alice James, 25 April 1873

Amalfi

The cathedral is in the least agreeable of those styles of architecture that were invented or adopted in the barbarous ages, when Grecian rules and proportions were forgotten. The steeple is one of the ugliest of its kind, and the portico has not even Gothic lightness. Two grand antique columns of red Egyptian granite placed at the entrance of the chancel make the deformity of the surrounding objects more visible.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Sweet the memory is to me
Of the land beyond the sea,
Where the waves and mountains meet;
Where amid her mulberry-trees
Sits Amalfi in the heat,
Bathing ever her white feet
In the tideless, summer seas. . . .
Vanished like a fleet of cloud,
Like a passing trumpet-blast
Are those splendours of the past
And the commerce of the crowd!
Fathoms deep beneath the seas
Lie the ancient wharves and quays,
Swallowed by the engulfing waves;
Silent streets, and vacant halls,
Ruined roofs, and towers and walls;
Hidden from all mortal eyes

Deep the sunken city lies:
Even cities have their graves.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Amalfi*, 1875

Ancona

They have a proverb, one Peter in Rome, one Tower in Cremona, and one Haven in Ancona (for the excellency of them).
Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

I said, that the Popes territory extendeth this way as high as Ancona, and these inhabiters of Marca are accounted a wicked generation, the greatest part of the cut-throtes and murtherers dispersed through Italy, being borne in this Country.
Ibid.

Ancona . . . stands on a promontory, and looks more beautiful at a distance than when you are in it.
Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 1705

The town seemed full of *trade stench and filth*.
Washington Irving, *Journal*, 19 April 1805

Filthy hole: like rotten cabbage. Thrice swindled.
James Joyce, Postcard to Stanislaus Joyce, 31 July 1906

As for Ancona I cannot think of it without repugnance. There is something Irish in its bleak gaunt beggarly ugliness.
James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 7 August 1906

Anzio (formerly Antium)

Coriolanus: A goodly City is this *Antium*.
William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, *c.* 1607–8

Valle d'Aosta

The great ones, the giants of Alps, stood about us here and there in a cloudless sky, a burning serenity. Their immobility never seems to me static; it has a vitality that seems to us repose, like that of a humming top at rest on its axis, spinning along its orbit in space.
Freya Stark, *Traveller's Prelude*, 1950

Apennines

The Mount Appenine derived from the Alpes, runnes all the length of Italy, in the forme of a fishes backe bone, and almost in the midst devides it into two tracts.
Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

The Appenines are not near so high, nor so horrible, as the Alps.
John Wilkes, Letter to his daughter, 1 February 1765

Listen, listen, Mary mine
To the whisper of the Apennine,
It bursts on the roof like the thunder's roar,
Or like the sea on a northern shore,
Heard in its raging ebb and flow
By the captives pent in the cave below.
The Apennine in the light of day
Is a mighty mountain, dim and grey
Which between the earth and sky doth lay;
But when night comes, a chaos dread
On the dim starlight then is spread,
And the Apennine walks abroad in the storm.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Passage of the Apennines*, 4 May 1818

We left Milan on the 1st of May, and travelled across the Apennines to Pisa. This part of the Apennine is far less beautiful than the Alps; the mountains are wide and wild, and the whole scenery broad and undetermined – the imagination cannot find a home in it.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 5 June 1818

Their character is of the least interesting sort of any mountains, being neither distinct nor wooded; but undulating, barren, and coarse; without any grandeur but what arises from an excess of that appearance. They lie in a succession of great doughy billows, like so much enormous pudding, or petrified mud.
Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Appian Way

The Appian way . . . was more used by the noble Romans than any other in Italy, as it led to Naples, Baia, and the most delightful parts of the nation. It is indeed very disagreeable to be carried in haste over this pavement.
Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 1705

Aquila

The town looked as if it were constructed of hard panes of light and shade that made the most violent contrasts. Above white blinding sidewalkless streets stood façades built of local stone that had a richness despite their

austerity, with their juxtaposed orange and sepia, burnt sienna and café au lait, neutral liver and greenish grey, that made a double scale of colors, one darkened and cold, one glowing. The tall doorways were impressively hooded with heavy ornamental architraves, and the windows, well-proportioned and brown-shuttered, were capped with a variety of pediments that resembled now triangular crests, now crowns with twin peaks, now coronets, and contributed to a standard of dignity that . . . attained something akin to grandeur. . . . Aquila had a unity and harmony which made it seem all to have been built in one piece like those wasps'-nests in the hills that had given her the creeps, but which here imposed themselves upon her and compelled her to respect and admire. This, she saw, was what architecture could do – not merely lay out a plan as at Washington, but dominate a whole city and actually provide the medium in which human beings lived.

Edmund Wilson, *Europe without Baedeker*, 1947

Arezzo

Arezzo is the first considerable town which succeeds to Florence. Its subtile air has been asserted to be peculiarly favourable to genius; and in fact, under many moral disadvantages, it has produced men of eminent talent from Maecenas to Petrarch.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

Augusta (Sicily)

It was of extraordinary beauty this little oil port. A thousand tulips of light and coloured smoke played about its derricks and towers and drums – a forest of refineries whose beauty was made quite sinister by the fact that the whole was deserted. There was not a soul in the whole place, not a dog or a cat; there wasn't even a guard-post. Yet the light played about in it, the smoke gushed and spat, as if it were the very forge of the Titans, and a thousand invisible trolls were hard at work in it. Its beauty was quite breath-taking. I watched its diminishing perspective, reflected in the windows of the bus, and it seemed like a thousand wax-lights afloat on the waters of chaos. Two days later we were to pass it in daylight, and to have our ardour quenched by its hideous ugliness, its ungainly spider-like instruments.

Lawrence Durrell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

Bagni di Lucca

When at Lucca we visited the springs at the Baths 14 miles distant, it is a sort of Matlock upon a large scale.

E.H. (Edward Hakewill, ? 1812–72), Letter to J.M.W. Turner, 24 August 1840

We had both of us, but he chiefly, the strongest prejudice against the Baths of Lucca, taking them for a sort of wasp's nest of scandal and gaming, and expecting to find everything trodden flat by the Continental English; yet I wanted to see the place, because it is a place to see after all. So we came, and were so charmed by the exquisite beauty of the scenery, by the coolness of the climate and the absence of our countrymen, political troubles serving admirably our private requirements, that we made an offer for rooms on the spot. . . . The air of this place seems to penetrate the heart, and not the lungs only; it draws you, raises you, excites you. Mountain air, without its keenness, sheathed in Italian sunshine, think what *that* must be! . . . What is peculiarly beautiful and wonderful is the variety of the shapes of the mountains. They are a multitude, and yet there is no likeness. None, except where the golden mist comes and transfigures them into one glory. For the rest, the mountain there wrapt in the chestnut forest is not like that bare peak which tilts against the sky, nor like that serpent twine of another which seems to move and coil in the moving coiling shadow.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Miss Mitford, 1849

Bari (and Francavilla)

At Bari and Francavilla, horse-flesh is said to be publicly sold in the market; and the tail left on, to shew the wretched purchasers what beast the meat belonged to. The wits among the populace nickname these shamble horses *Caprio ferrato*, i.e. a shod deer.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Bergamo

What a black, dirty, stinking, dismal place! I stared at some well dressed people I met, wondering what they had to do there; thanking my stars that I was not an inhabitant of Bergamo; foolishly enough, as if it were the brick and mortar of a place that give felicity, and not the connexion formed from infancy and matured by habit.

Arthur Young, *Travels . . . [in] . . . France* (17 October 1789), 1792

Bitonto

It is next to impossible to sketch at Bitonto, from the violence of the half-savage crowd in every lowest stage of beggary or filth.

A.J.C. Hare, *Cities of Southern Italy*, 1883

Bologna

not far from hens iz Bononi, wher students yuz to kum, but il for us and therfor termd, Sepulcrum Anglorum.
Thomas Whythorne, *Autobiography, c.* 1576

Bologna . . . is built like a ship, whereof the *Torre d'Asinello* may go for the Main-Mast.
John Evelyn, *Diary,* May 1645

You know 'tis the third city in Italy for pictures: knowing that, you know all.
Horace Walpole, Letter to Richard West, 1739–40

Those who are not pleased with the entertainment they meet with at the inns in this city, it will be a difficult matter to please; they must be possessed of a degree of such nicety, both in their palates and temper, as will render them exceedingly troublesome to themselves and others, not only in their travels through Italy, but in the whole course of their journey through life.
John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy,* 1781

*On his arrival at this town, the first object which strikes the eye of a stranger, is a noble marble fountain, in the area before the Palazzo Publico. The principal figure is a statue of Neptune, eleven feet in height; one of his hands is stretched out before him, in the other he holds the Trident. The body and limbs are finely proportioned, the anatomy perfect, the character of the countenance severe and majestic. . . . The whole is the workmanship of Giovanni di Bologna, and is highly esteemed; yet there seems to be an impropriety in making water flow in streams from the breasts of the sea nymphs, or syrens.

Over the entrance of the Legate's palace, is a bronze statue of a Pope. The tiara, and other parts of the Papal uniform, are not so favourable to the sculptor's genius, as the naked simplicity in which Neptune appears. A female traveller, however, not extravagantly fond of the fine arts, would rather be observed admiring the sculptor's skill in imitating the folds of the sacerdotal robes, than his anatomical accuracy in forming the majestic proportions of the Sea Divinity.
Ibid.

The celebrated mart of lap-dogs and sausages.
William Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents,* 1783

The fronts of the houses are built upon arcades. . . . In a country such as Italy it may be doubted whether such a mode of building is advisable – Among a revengeful people who seek satisfaction with the stilletto – these dark arcades afford the best of opportunities at night to lie in wait and wreak their vengeance on an unsuspecting adversary.
Washington Irving, *Journal,* 24 April 1805

Bologna you know – or do not know – is celebrated for the production of Popes – Cardinals – painters – & sausages – besides a female professor of anatomy – who has left there many models of the art in waxwork – some of them not the most decent.
Lord Byron, Letter to Augusta Leigh, 4 June 1817

I have just returned from a moonlight walk through Bologna. It is a city of colonnades, and the effect of the moonlight is strikingly picturesque. There are two towers here – one 400 feet high – ugly things, built of brick, which lean both different ways; and with the delusion of moonlight shadows, you might almost fancy that the city is rocked by an earthquake.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 9 November 1818

Bologna is to the middle ages, what Pompeii has been to antiquity – a monument of the manner of their domestic existence.
Lady Morgan, *Italy,* 1820

The leaning lump of brick at Bologna . . . looks like the chimney of a steam engine blown a little out of the perpendicular.
Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid,* 1820

Wordsworth . . . has been all day very uncomfortable – annoyed by the length of the streets.
Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary,* 7 June 1837

First thing at Bologna tried Bologna sausage on the principle that at Rome you go first to St Peter's.
Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant,* 30 March 1857

The medieval nobles built towers just for pure swank, to see who should have the tallest, till a town like Bologna must have bristled like a porcupine in a rage, or like Pittsburgh with chimney-stacks – but square ones.
D.H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places,* 1932

the Square of San Petronio
The square of San Petronio with its colour as if sunset were built into the walls.
Freya Stark, *Traveller's Prelude,*1950

Una Città a misura dell'uomo.
(A city to the measure of man.)
Municipio slogan, quoted by John Ardagh, *The Tale of Five Cities,* 1979

Bolzano (formerly Bozen)

I got unwell at Botzen – Bellzebubbotzenhofe, as I called it on account of its horrid row of bells and bustle.
Edward Lear, Letter to Chichester Fortescue, 13 September 1871

takes most of one side, the rose and green colour-washes and cafe blinds filling the others, and in the lamplight all of it as chalky and cheeseclothy as floodlit scenery. There are other stage-sets – the Place de la Contrescarpe in Paris and the Plaza in little Andorra – but none so perfectly miniature, so prettily perfect as this life-size Caprese fabrication. No one can enter and cross it without an appearance of entrance and exit. And in any case the walk-ons and bit players of a Capri night, all dressed up in island summer-wear, are theatrical in themselves.

William Sansom, *Blue Skies, Brown Studies*, 1961

The Blue Grotto

*Passion was stilled here; love was silenced; the chastened solemnity, the purity of its mysterious divinity had no affinity with the fevered dreams and sensuous sweetness of mortal desires. . . . The boat paused in the midst of the still violet lake-like water. Where he lay at her feet he looked upwards at her through the ethereal light that floated round them, and seemed to sever them from earth. . . . Would to God I could die now!

Ouida, *Idalia*, 1867

Capua

This City is newly built, but if you goe out of the Gates to St Maries Church towards Naples upon the South-West side of the Towne, there you shall see a Colossus, and a Cave, and many Monuments of old Capua among the Orchards: the delicacies of which Citie were of old so famous, as we reade, that the Army of Hanibal grew effeminate thereby.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Rose at 6; & standing at the door of a Macaroni-shop saw it in every stage of the process. Every shop being lighted by the door, all are laid open as by the Diable Boitu. First came a lawyer's, a man in a broad hat & black habit among many writings in close conversation, with him. – Then a lottery office numbers crouding to hear their fate, a country-man coming out with a handful of copper-money, & joy in his eyes – then a cook-shop, fish & sallad displayed, & a little officer at breakfast with a silver fork – then the macaroni shop, where it was selling by the weight, then the next, where it was making, & hanging from the ceiling, like sheets in a printer's warehouse, then a coffee-house where two men muffled in their cloaks were drinking off rapidly their coffee, all this in the little town of Capua.

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 19 March 1815

At Capua . . . we found none of those seducing luxuries, which enervated the soldiers of Hannibal.

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

Carrara

This Towne . . . is famous for the marble, which is much preferred before other, as well for the exceeding whiteness of some stones, as for the length of pillars and tables digged thence. . . . When I beheld the beauty of Men and Weomen in these parts, which seemed to me greater than in any other part of Italy, I remembered the Patriark Jacob, who laid party coloured rods in the watering troughes, when the Ewes were in heat, to make them bring party coloured lambs: and I thought by the same reason and force of nature, that they who digged these white marbles, might have a more beautifull race.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Tell that fat fellow Chantrey that I did think of him, *then* (but not for the first nor the last time) of the thousands he had made out of those marble craigs which only afforded me a sour bottle of wine and a sketch; but he deserves everything which is good, though he did give me a fit of the spleen at Carrara.

J.M.W. Turner, Letter to George Jones, 13 October 1828

Catania

The bishop's revenues are considerable, and arise principally from the sale of snow, the snow on mount Ætna. One small portion of which, lying on the north of the mountain, is said to bring him in upwards of 1000*l.* a year; for Ætna furnishes snow and ice, not only to the whole island of Sicily, but likewise to Malta, and a great part of Italy, and makes a very considerable branch of commerce; for even the peasants in these hot countries regale themselves with ices during the summer heats; and there is no entertainment given by the nobility, of which these do not always make a principal part: a famine of snow, they themselves say, would be more grievous, than a famine of either corn or wine. It is a common observation amongst them, that without the snows of mount Ætna, their island could not be inhabited; so essential has this article of luxury become to them.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

The immediate environs of the town are extremely pleasant, but notwithstanding the lively appearance of the fruit-trees in blossom, which made the country look as if it were powdered, the number and extent of the beds of lava are so great, that I soon found the landscape excessively gloomy and disagreeable.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

The cathedral . . . is dedicated to St Agatha the Saint

who has Catania under her peculiar protection. . . . I was mentioning to a Sicilian servant at the Inn my opinion that St Agatha was rather careless of her charge when in 1693 she suffered a torrent of Lava to overwhelm the largest and finest part of Catania. He shook his head and said the saint was not to blame. The people of Catania had been very wicked and inattentive to their devotions when St Agatha determined to give them a lesson she therefor permitted the Lava to run over *a part* of Catania, that the other part might see from what miseries she had preserved them and take warning accordingly.

Washington Irving, *Journal*, 12 February 1805

Catanzaro (and Marina di Catanzaro)

The sun was setting when I alighted at the Marina, and as I waited for the branch train my eyes feasted upon a glory of colour which made me forget aching weariness. All around lay orchards of orange trees, the finest I had ever seen, and over their solid masses of dark foliage, thick hung with ripening fruit, poured the splendour of the western sky. It was a picture unsurpassable in richness of tone; the dense leafage of deepest, warmest green glowed and flashed, its magnificence heightened by the blaze of the countless golden spheres adorning it. Beyond, the magic sea, purple and crimson as the sun descended upon the vanishing horizon. Eastward, above the slopes of Sila, stood a moon almost at its full, the yellow of an autumn leaf, on a sky soft-flushed with rose.

In my geography it is written that between Catanzaro and the sea lie the gardens of the Hesperides.

George Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, 1901

One of the citizens in describing the past, said to me: 'In those days it was *la città dei tre V – Venti, Velluti, e nostro protettore, San Vitaliano*' (the city of the three V's – wind, velvet, and our patron-saint, Vitaliano).

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

Chaos

We saw to our left a small cottage perched on a headland with two wind-bent pines outside it – the whole hanging there over the sea, as if outside the whole of the rest of nature. There was no other sign of human habitation, save this desolate and memorable little cottage. With the black sunlight, it looked deeply, tragically significant, as if it were the backdrop for a play. Hardly anybody paid attention to the scene, but Roberto, with an air of sadness, announced over the speaker: 'The birthplace of Pirandello. A little hamlet called Chaos!'

Lawrence Durrell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

Cività Vecchia

This Civita Vecchia is the finest nest of dirt, vermin, and ignorance we have found yet, except that African perdition they call Tangier, which is just like it. The people here live in alleys two yards wide which have a smell about them which is peculiar, but not entertaining. It is well the alleys are not wider, because they hold as much smell now as a person can stand, and of course, if they were wider they would hold more, and then the people would die. These alleys are paved with stone, and carpeted with deceased cats, and decayed rags, and decomposed vegetable-tops, and remnants of old boots, all soaked with dish-water, and the people sit around on stools and enjoy it. . . . This is the first Italian town I have seen which does not appear to have a patron saint. I suppose no saint but the one that went up in the chariot of fire could stand the climate.

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869

between Cività Vecchia and Rome

I cannot fancy what these people think as to honesty or whether they have a dispensation from the Pope to rob Travellers?

John Webster, *Notes of a Journey from London to Constantinople . . .*, 1836

Como

More pleased, my foot the hidden margin roves
Of Como, bosomed deep in chestnut groves.

William Wordsworth, *Descriptive Sketches*, 1791–2, pub. 1793

And Como! thou, a treasure whom the earth
Keeps to herself, confined as in a depth
Of Abyssinian privacy. I spake of thee
Of thee, thy chestnut woods, and garden plots
Of Indian corn tended by dark-eyed maids;
Thy lofty steeps, and pathways roofed with vines,
Winding from house to house, from town to town,
Sole link that binds them to each other; walks,
League after league, and cloistral avenues,
Where silence dwells if music be not there: . . .
ye have left
Your beauty with me, a serene accord
Of forms and colours, passive, yet endowed
In their submissiveness with power as sweet
And gracious almost, might I dare to say,
As virtue is, or goodness; sweet as love.

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1805 (text of 1850)

This lake exceeds any thing I ever beheld in beauty, with the exception of the arbutus islands of Killarney. It is long and narrow, and has the appearance of a

mighty river, winding among the mountains and the forests. . . .

This shore of the lake is one continued village, and the Milanese nobility have their villas here. The union of culture and the untameable profusion and loveliness of nature is here so close, that the line where they are divided can hardly be discovered.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 20 April 1818

This Eden of Lombardy.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

The defect of the Lake of Como is, that it is out-built, and that whatever is false in taste or grotesque in selection, is to be found, choaking up spots of the most exquisite natural beauty, and disfiguring buildings of the handsomest architecture. Upon the heights which overhang the Garuo, or Villa d'este, stands the city of Saragossa (I believe), executed in cut and painted deal, and erected by a former proprietor in honor of the triumphs of the Army of Italy; although, seen from the Lake, it is readily mistaken for a baby-house.

Ibid.

The day has been spent on the lake, and so much exquisite pleasure I never had on water. The tour or rather excursion we have been making surpasses certainly all I have ever seen, and Wordsworth asserts the same. . . . But the pleasure can hardly be recorded, it consisting in the contemplation of scenes absolutely indescribable by words, and in sensations for which no words have ever been invented.

Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, 29 August 1820

Como dry must be interesting enough; Como flooded is a marvel. What else is Venice? And here is a Venice at the foot of high mountains, and *all* in the water, no streets or squares; a fine even depth of three feet and a half or so for navigators.

Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*, 1902

Cosenza

. . . if one can disregard the evil smells which everywhere catch one's breath – Cosenza has wonders and delights which tempt to day-long rambling. To call the town picturesque is to use an inadequate word; at every step, from the opening of the main street at the hill-foot up to the stern mediaeval castle crowning its height, one marvels and admires. So narrow are the ways that a cart drives the pedestrian into shop or alley; two vehicles (but perhaps the thing never happened) would with difficulty pass each other. As in all towns of Southern Italy, the number of hair-dressers is astonishing, and they hang out the barber's basin – the very basin (of shining brass and with a semicircle cut out of the rim) which the Knight of La Mancha took as substitute for his damaged helmet.

George Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, 1901

Cotrone

The common type of face at Cotrone is coarse and bumpkinish; ruder, it seemed to me, than faces seen at any point of my journey hitherto. A photographer had hung out a lot of portraits, and it was a hideous exhibition; some of the visages attained an incredible degree of vulgar ugliness. This in the town which still bears the name of Croton. The people are all more or less unhealthy; one meets peasants horribly disfigured with life-long malaria. There is an agreeable cordiality in the middle classes; business men from whom I sought casual information, even if we only exchanged a few words in the street, shook hands with me at parting. I found no one who had much good to say of his native place.

Ibid.

I was surprised to discover as sunny and smiling a town as I had seen in South Italy. I . . . came to the conclusion that Gissing's mind was prejudiced against the place because he had been stricken down there by malaria.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

Cremona

The town is thinly peopled; but exquisitely clean, perhaps for that very reason.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

Dolomites

The Dolomites . . . recall quaint Eastern architecture, whose daring pinnacles derive their charm from a studied defiance of the sober principles of stability. The Chamonix aiguilles, as I have said, inevitably remind one of Gothic cathedrals; but in their most daring moments they appear to be massive, immovable, and eternal. The Dolomites are strange adventurous experiments, which one can scarcely believe to be formed of ordinary rock. They would have been fit background for the garden of Kubla Khan.

Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe*, 1871

In a letter . . . I describe the Dolomites as 'finicky', which seems a peculiar adjective . . . but there is a lot of detail about them which makes them look, beside the Alps, as a Japanese garden might look beside the old trees of an English park. To me, the great and simple

lines of the granite are ever the most satisfying: yet the Dolomites have a domestic loveliness; old age can walk about in their meadows, where no distance is too unmanageable. . . . few countries in the world look more happy or more beautiful.

Freya Stark, *The Coasts of Incense*, 1953

Elba

Lucky Napoleon!

Dylan Thomas, Letter to Bill and Helen McAlpine, 26 July 1947

The heat! Old Elbanites on their flayed and blistered backs whimper about the heat. Sunblack webfooted waterboys, diving from cranes, bleed from the heat. Old scorched mineral-miners, fifty years in the fire, snarl at the heat as they drag the rusty trolleys naked over the skeleton piers. . . . Oh, oh, oh, the heat! It comes round corners at you like an animal with windmill arms.

Dylan Thomas, Letter to Margaret Taylor, 3 August 1947

Mount Etna

To conclude of Aetna, the gross Papists hold it to be their purgatory.

William Lithgow, *Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations*, 1614/32

the shatter'd side
Of thundering *Aetna*, whose combustible
And fewel'd entrals thence conceiving Fire,
Sublim'd with Mineral fury, aid the Winds
And leave a singed bottom all involv'd
With stench and smoak. . . .

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667

Aetna and all the burning Mountains find
Their kindled Stores with inbred Storms of Wind
Blown up to Rage, and roaring out complain
As torn with inward Gripes and torturing Pain.
Lab'ring they cast their dreadful Vomit round,
And with their melted Bowels spread the Ground;
Down their scorcht Sides destructive Torrents flow,
And form a Red Metallick Sea below.
And while the Deluge in its lawless Course
Frightful advances with resistless Force,
Fragments of Rocks, Trees, once the Mountain's Pride,
And Heaps of Oar roll down th'incumber'd Tyde:
Till in the Main it disembogues its Waves,
Outroars the Deep, and fills its hollow Caves.

Sir Richard Blackmore, *Prince Arthur*, 4th edn, revised 1714

Many parts of this region are surely the most heavenly spots upon earth; and if Aetna resembles hell within, it may with equal justice be said to resemble paradise without. It is indeed a curious consideration, that this mountain should reunite every beauty and every horrour; and, in short, all the most opposite and dissimilar objects in nature.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

The most beautiful part of the scene is certainly the mountain itself; the island of Sicily, and the numerous islands lying round it. All these, by a kind of magic in vision, that I am at a loss to account for, seem as if they were brought close round the skirts of Ætna; the distances appearing reduced to nothing.

Ibid.

Alone! –
On this charr'd, blacken'd melancholy waste,
Crown'd by the awful peak, Etna's great mouth.

Matthew Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna*, 1852

from the air
It looked like a toy – but a rather dangerous one.

Lawrence Durrell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

Etna . . . spat out a mouthful of hot coals, and then dribbled a small string of blazing diamonds down her chin.

Ibid.

Ferrara

Tis in a word a durty Towne, & though the Streetes be large they remaine illpav'd.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, May 1645

The Soil is abandoned and uncultivated, nor were there hands enough so much as to mow their Grass, which we saw withering in their Meadows, to our no small Wonder. We were amazed to see so rich a Soil thus forsaken of its Inhabitants; and much more when we passed through that vast Town, which, by its Extent, shews what it was about an Age ago, and is now so much deserted, that there are whole Sides of Streets without Inhabitants; and the Poverty of the Place appears signally in the Churches, which are mean, and poorly adorned: for the Superstition of Italy is so ravenous, and makes such a Progress in this Age, that one may justly take the Measures of the Wealth of any Place from the Churches. . . . But to return to *Ferrara:* I could not but ask all I saw, how it came, that so rich a Soil was so strangely abandoned? Some said, the Air was become so unhealthy, that those who stay in it were very short-lived: But it is well known, that fourscore years ago it was well peopled, and the ill Air

is occasioned by the want of Inhabitants; for there not being People to drain the Ground, and to keep the Ditches clean, this makes that there is a great deal of Water that lies on the Ground and rots, which infects the Air in the same Manner, as is observed in that vast and rich, but uninhabited Champaign of *Rome*. So that the ill Air is the Effect, rather than the Cause, of the dispeopling of the Pope's Dominions. The true Cause is the Severity of the Government, and the heavy Taxes and frequent Confiscations.

Gilbert Burnet, *Some Letters Containing an Account of what seemed Remarkable in Travelling . . .*, 1687

My pen was just upon the point of praising its cleanliness . . . till I reflected there was nobody to dirty it.

Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

Of all the places I have seen in Italy, it is the one by far I should most covet to live in. It is the *ideal* of an Italian city, once great, now a shadow of itself. Whichever way you turn, you are struck with picturesque beauty and faded splendours, but with nothing squalid, mean, or vulgar. The grass grows in the well-paved streets. You look down long avenues of buildings, or of garden walls, with summer-houses or fruit-trees projecting over them, and airy palaces with dark portraits gleaming through the grated windows – you turn, and a chapel bounds your view one way, a broken arch another, at the end of the vacant, glimmering, fairy perspective. You are in a dream, in the heart of a romance; you enjoy the most perfect solitude, that of a city which was once filled with 'the busy hum of men,' and of which the tremulous fragments at every step strike the sense, and call up reflection. In short, nothing is to be seen of Ferrara, but the remains, graceful and romantic, of what it was – no sordid object intercepts or sullies the retrospect of the past.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

More solitary, more depopulated, more deserted, old Ferrara than any city of the solemn brotherhood! The grass so grows up in the silent streets, that any one might make hay there, literally, while the sun shines. But the sun shines with diminished cheerfulness in grim Ferrara; and the people are so few who pass and repass through the places, that the flesh of the inhabitants might be grass indeed, and growing in the squares.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

Florence

Ma quell'ingrato popolo maligno,
che discese di Fiesole ab antico
e tiene ancor del monte e del macigno . . .,
Vecchia fama nel mondo li chiama orbi,
gente avara, invidiosa e superba:
da' lor costumi fa che tu ti forbi.
(But that ungrateful, malignant people, who of old came down from Fiesole, and still savours of the mountain and the rock, . . . Old report on earth proclaims them blind, a people avaricious, envious and proud: Look that you cleanse yourself of their customs.)

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto xv, *c.* 1300

Of the Florentines, though most courteous, yet sparing, other Italians jeast, saying, that when they meete a man about dinner time, they aske Vos' Signoria ha desinato, Sir, have you dined? and if he answer, I, they replie, as if they would have invited him to dinner: but if he answere no, they reply Andate Signor, ch' e otta, Goe Sir, for it is high time to dine. They thinke it best to cherish and increase friendship by metings in Market places and Gardens, but hold the table and bed unfit for conversation, where men should come to eate quickly, and sleepe soundly.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

A City so beautiful that the great Emperor Charles V. said, *That she was fitting to be shown and seen only upon Holidays*.

James Howell, 'Letter to Sir J.C., from Florence, 1 November 1621', *Familiar Letters*, 1645

Here is the prime Dialect of the *Italian* spoken, tho' the Pronuncuation be a little more guttural than that of *Sienna*, and that of the Court of *Rome*, which occasions the Proverb:

Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana.
The Tuscan Tongue sounds best in a Roman Mouth.

The people here generally seem to be more generous and of a higher comportment than elsewhere, very cautious and circumspect in the Negotiation; whence ariseth the Proverb:

Chi ha da far con Tosco
Non bisogna che sia Losco.
Who dealeth with a Florentine,
Must have the use of both his Ey'n.

Ibid.

As, by the absence of the great duke, Florence is become in a manner a country town I believe there never were a set of people so peaceable, and such strangers to scandal. 'Tis the family of love, where everybody is paired, and go as constantly together as parroquets. Here nobody hangs or drowns themselves; they are not ready to cut one another's throats about elections or parties; don't think that wit consists in saying bold truths, or humour in getting drunk. But I shall give you no more of their characters, because I am so unfortunate as to think that their encomium consists

in being the reverse of the English, who in general are either mad, or enough to make other people so.

Horace Walpole, Letter to the Hon. H.S. Conway, 25 September 1740

The diversions of a Florentine Lent are composed of a sermon in the morning, full of hell and the devil; a dinner at noon, full of fish and meager diet; and, in the evening, what is called a Conversazione, a sort of assembly at the principal people's houses, full of I cannot tell what.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Mrs Gray, his mother, 19 March 1740

Yesterday, with violent rains, there came flouncing down from the mountains such a flood, that it floated the whole city. The jewellers on the Old Bridge removed their commodities, and in two hours after the bridge was cracked. The torrent broke down the quays, and drowned several coach horses, which are kept here in stables underground. We were moated into our house all day, which is near the Arno, and had the miserable spectacles of the ruins that were washed along with the hurricane. There was a cart with two oxen not quite dead, and four men in it drowned: but what was ridiculous, there came tiding along a fat hay-cock, with a hen and her eggs, and a cat.

Horace Walpole, Letter to Richard West, November 1740

I am astonish'd at the profusion of fine things We meet with in Every part of this City, & at the poverty of the inhabitants; they are a new Set of beings to Me, & quite a new Study.

David Garrick, Letter to the Duke of Devonshire, 30 November 1763

We had need of inspiration, I think, since nothing else would have tempted us over such dreary, uninteresting hillocks as rise from the banks of the Arno. The hoary olive is their principal vegetation; so that Nature, in this country, seems in a withering decrepit state, and may not unaptly be compared to 'an old woman clothed in grey.'

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

Merciful powers! what a set harbour within its walls!

Ibid.

The circumstance that strikes one at Florence, is the antiquity of the principal buildings; every thing one sees considerable, is of three or four hundred years standing: of new buildings there are next to none; all here remind one of the Medicis: there is hardly a street that has not some monument, some decoration, that bears the stamp of that splended and magnificent family. How commerce could enrich it sufficiently to leave such prodigious remains, is a question not a little curious; for I may venture, without apprehension, to assert, that all the collected magnificence of the House of Bourbon, governing for eight hundred years twenty millions of people, is trivial, when compared with what the Medicis family have left, for the admiration of succeeding ages, sovereigns only of the little mountainous region of Tuscany, and with not more than a million of subjects.

Arthur Young, *Travels . . . [in] . . . France* (1 December 1789), 1792

But Arno wins us to the fair white walls,
Where the Etrurian Athens claims and keeps
A softer feeling for her fairy halls:
Girt by her theatre of hills, she reaps
Her corn, and wine, and oil – and Plenty leaps
To laughing life, with her redundant Horn.
Along the banks where smiling Arno sweeps
Was modern Luxury of Commerce born,
And buried Learning rose, redeemed to a new Morn.

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth, 1818

Of all the fairest Cities of the Earth
None is so fair as Florence. 'Tis a gem
Of purest ray; and what a light broke forth,
When it emerged from darkness! Search within
Without; all is enchantment! 'Tis the Past
Contending with the Present; and in turn
Each has the mastery.

Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822–34

Many of the narrower streets are like lofty paved courts, cut through a solid quarry of stone. . . . Florence is like a town that has survived itself. It is distinguished by the remains of early and rude grandeur; it is left where it was three hundred years ago. Its history does not seem brought down to the present period.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

There is no such thing as justly describing the fine things that we have seen today. . . . Art has here brought fiction so near upon the verge of reality, that the line between them is too nice to be drawn by words.

J.P. Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour in Italy*, 1830

In Florence itself the common people are well to do. They are, perhaps, the least agreeable people to deal with in Italy; self-opinionated, independent, and lazy, they can often scarcely be brought to work at all; and, when they do, it is in their own way, and at their own time. They love their ease, and they enjoy it: they are full of humour and intelligence, though their conceit often acts as a drawback on the latter.

Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, 1844

and Pisa

I leave with unreverted eye the towers
  Of Pisa pining o'er her desert stream.
Pleasure (they say) yet lingers in thy bowers
  Florence, thou patriot's sigh, thou poet's dream!
O could I find thee as thou once wert known
  Thoughtful and lofty, liberal and free!
But the pure spirit from thy wreck hath flown,
  And only Pleasure's phantom dwells with thee.

W.S. Landor, *Collection of 1846*, no. CCI

Magnificently stern and sombre are the streets of beautiful Florence; and the strong old piles of building make such heaps of shadow, on the ground and in the river, that there is another and different city of rich forms and fancies, always lying at our feet.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

Brute-force shall not rule Florence! Intellect
May rule her, bad or good, as chance supplies, –
But intellect it shall be!

Robert Browning, *Luria*, 1846

Florence is beautiful, as I have said before, and must say again and again, most beautiful. The river rushes through the midst of its palaces like a crystal arrow, and it is hard to tell, when you see all by the clear sunset, whether those churches, and houses, and windows, and bridges, and people walking, in the water or out of the water, are the real walls and windows, and bridges, and people, and churches.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Mr Boyd, 1847

Of course it *is* very dead in comparison [with Paris] but it's a beautiful death, and what with the lovely climate, and the lovely associations, and the sense of repose, I could turn myself on my pillow, and sleep on here till the end of my life; only be sure that *I shall do no such thing*.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter, 1852

It was for this country I was predestined, for I found everything just as I expected.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to his wife, 23 May 1865

and the Arno

It is popular to admire the Arno. It is a great historical creek with four feet in the channel and some scows floating around. It would be a very plausible river if they could pump some water into it. They all call it a river, and they honestly think it *is* a river do these dark and bloody Florentines. They even help out the delusion by building bridges over it. I do not see why they are too good to wade.

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869

Everything about Florence seems to be coloured with a mild violet, like diluted wine.

Henry James, Letter to Henry James Sr, 26 October 1869

She sat in the sunshine beside her yellow river like the little treasure-city that she has always seemed, without commerce, without other industry than the manufacture of mosaic paper-weights and alabaster Cupids, without actuality, or energy, or earnestness, or any of those rugged virtues which in most cases are deemed indispensable for civic robustness; with nothing but the little unaugmented stock of her mediaeval memories, her tender-coloured mountains, her churches and palaces, pictures and statues.

Henry James, 'Italy Revisited,' 1877, in *Portraits of Places*, 1883

At Florence, then, this time, the Newgate-like palaces were rightly hateful to me; the old shop and market-streets rightly pleasant; the inside of the Duomo a horror, the outside a Chinese puzzle. All sacred art, – frescoes, tempera, what not, mere zero, as they were to the Italians themselves; the country round, dead wall and dusty olive; the whole, a provocation and weariness, except for one master, M. Angelo.

John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1885–9

In the distant plain lay Florence, pink and gray and brown, with the rusty huge dome of the cathedral dominating its center like a captive balloon, and flanked on the right by the smaller bulb of the Medici chapel and on the left by the airy tower of the Palazzo Vecchio; all around the horizon was a billowy rim of lofty blue hills, snowed white with innumerable villas. After nine months of familiarity with this panorama, I still think, as I thought in the beginning, that this is the fairest picture on our planet, the most enchanting to look upon, the most satisfying to the eye and the spirit. To see the sun sink down, drowned in his pink and purple and golden floods, and overwhelm Florence with tides of color that make all the sharp lines dim and faint and turn the solid city to a city of dreams, is a sight to stir the coldest nature, and make a sympathetic one drunk with ecstasy.

Mark Twain, *Autobiography* (1892), 1924

Florence is the home of those who cultivate with an equal ardour Mah-jongg and a passion for Fra Angelico. Over tea and crumpets they talk, if they are too old for love themselves, of their lascivious juniors; but they also make sketches in water colour and read the Little Flowers of St Francis.

Aldous Huxley, *Along the Road*, 1925

When I first went to Florence, I had only a confused impression that this Italian city was full of English ladies; and that they were all Theosophists.

G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 1937

Firenze the most damned of Italian cities, wherein is place neither to sit, stand, nor walk. . . . Truly this town cast out its greatest writer, and a curse of discomfort has descended and lasted six hundred years.
Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 1938

It still has sparks of the old Renaissance genius but no longer the material around them to burst into flames.
Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

Districts and details

Mosciano/Scandicci, near Florence
I am awfully sick of it here, on the beautiful hills above Florence, drinking chianti in our marble shanty, sick of vini and contadini and bambini, and sicker still when I go, bumbly with mosquito bites, to Florence itself, which is a gruelling museum.
Dylan Thomas, Letter to T.W. Earp, 11 July 1947

Michelangelo's David
The David is as if a large mass of solid marble fell upon one's head, to crush one's faith in great names. It looks like an awkward overgrown actor at one of our minor theatres, without his clothes: the head is too big for the body, and it has a helpless expression of distress.
William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

Michelangelo's David is the presiding genius of Florence. Not a shadow of doubt about it. Once and for all, Florence. So young: sixteen, they say. So big: and stark naked. Revealed. Too big, too naked, too exposed. Livid, under today's sky. The Florentine! The Tuscan pose – half self-conscious all the time. Adolescent. Waiting. The tense look. No escape. The Lily. Lily or iris, what does it matter? Whitman's Calamus, too.
D.H. Lawrence, 'David', *Phoenix*, 1936

Giotto's Tower

Giotto's tower,
The lily of Florence blossoming in stone.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'Giotto's Tower', *Sonnets*, 1866

The Duomo
In my way home, I looked into the cathedral, an enormous fabric, inlaid with the richest marbles, and covered with stars and chequered work, like an old-fashioned cabinet. The architect seems to have turned his building inside out; nothing in art being more ornamented than the exterior, and few churches so simple within.
William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

Under the shadow of a stately Pile,
The dome of Florence, pensive and alone,
Nor giving heed to aught that passed the while,
I stood, and gazed upon a marble stone,
The laurelled Dante's favourite seat. A throne,
In just esteem, it rivals; though no style
Be there of decoration to beguile
The mind, depressed by thought of greatness flown.
As a true man, who long had served the lyre,
I gazed with earnestness, and dared no more.
But in his breast the mighty Poet bore
A Patriot's heart, warm with undying fire.
Bold with the thought, in reverence I sate down
And, for a moment, filled that empty throne.
William Wordsworth, *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*, 1840–1, pub. 1842

At Pisa we say, 'How Beautiful!' here we say nothing; it is enough if we can breathe. The mountainous marble masses overcome us as we look up – we feel the weight of them on the soul.
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Mr Boyd, 1847

Florence is the most enchanting place I know in the world. . . . The Cathedral outside (not inside) is to my feeling the most beautiful church in the world, and it always looks to me like a hen gathering its chickens under its wings, it stands in such a soft, lovely way, with Florence round it.
Matthew Arnold, Letter to his sister, 13 October 1879

The Ponte-Vecchio

Taddeo Gaddi built me. I am old;
Five centuries old. I plant my foot of stone
Upon the Arno, as St. Michael's own
Was planted on the dragon. Fold by fold
Beneath me as it struggles, I behold
Its glistening scales. Twice hath it overthrown
My kindred and companions. Me alone
It moveth not, but is by me controlled.
I can remember when the Medici
Were driven from Florence; longer still ago
The final wars of Ghibelline and Guelf.
Florence adorns me with her jewelry;
And when I think that Michael Angelo
Hath leaned on me, I glory in myself.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Old Bridge at Florence*, 1874

Uffizi Palace
'It's as bad as too much pain: it gets to be pain at last.' Heard this broken latter part of sentence from wearied lady coming from Uffizi Palace. – She was talking no doubt about excess of pleasure in these galleries.
Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 24 March 1857

Fondi

Take note of Fondi, in the name of all that is wretched and beggarly. . . . How the gaunt dogs that sneak about the miserable streets, come to be alive, and undevoured by the people, is one of the enigmas of the world.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

Frascati

Frascati, as one turns in and out of its streets, opening suddenly on vague glimpses, as if cut by the sides of a frame, is like a seaside village; and one cannot help imagining the wash of waves, instead of the grassy plain of the Campagna, at the end of those coiling streets.

Arthur Symons, *Cities*, 1903

Genoa

It is proverbially said of this City; Montagne senza legni, Mar senza pesci, huomini senza fede, donne senza vergogna, Mori bianchi, Genoa superba: That is, Mountaines without wood, Sea without fish, Men without faith, Weomen without shame, white Moores, Genoa the proud.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

The proudest for Buildings of any I met withal; yet the People go the plainest of any other, and are also most parsimonious in their Diet: they are the subtillest, I will not say the most subdolous Dealers: they are wonderful wealthy, specially in Money. . . .

In the time of Louis XI of France . . . when she would have given herself up to him for Protection, K. *Lewis* being told that *Genoa* was content to be his, he answer'd, *She should not be his long, for he would give her up to the Devil, and rid his hands of her.*

Indeed the Genowaies have not the Fortune to be so well belov'd as other People in *Italy;* which proceeds, I believe, from their Cunningness and Overreachings in bargaining, wherein they have something of the Jew.

James Howell, 'Letter to Sir J.C., from Florence, 1 November 1621', *Familiar Letters*, 1645

The Citty is built in the hollow or bossome of a Mountaine, whose ascent is very steepe, high & rocky; so as from the Lanterne, & Mole, to the hill it represents the Shape of a Theater; the Streetes & buildings so ranged one above the other; as our seates are in Playhouses: but by reason of their incomparable materials, beauty and structure: never was any artificial sceane more beautifull to the eye of the beholder; nor is any place certainely in the World, so full for the bignesse of well designed and stately Palaces; . . . indeeds this beautifull Citty is more stayn'd with such horrid acts of revenge and murthers, than any one place in Europ, or haply the World besides where there is a political government; which renders it very unsafe to strangers: This makes it a gally matter to carry a knife about one whose poynt is not broken off.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, 17 October 1644

I never beheld any thing more amiable. Only figure to yourself a vast semicircular bason, full of fine blue sea, and vessels of all sorts and sizes, some sailing out, some coming in, and others at anchor; and all round it palaces and churches, peeping over one another's heads, gardens and marble terrases full of orange and cypress trees, fountains, and trellisworks covered with vines, which altogether compose the grandest of theatres. This is the first coup d'oeil.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Richard West, 21 November 1739

It has the face of business.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, 1766

It is not without reason that Genoa is called *La superba.* The city itself is very stately; and the nobles are very proud. Some few of them may be proud of their wealth: but, in general, their fortunes are very small. . . . If a Genoese nobleman gives an entertainment once a quarter, he is said to live upon the fragments all the rest of the year.

Ibid.

The Genoese were anciently renowned for their craftiness and want of faith – and the present generation prove that they have inherited in these respects the qualities of their ancestors. It is a saying in Italy that 'It takes six Christians to cheat a Jew and six Jews to cheat a genoese but a genoese Jew is a match for the devil himself.'

Washington Irving, *Journal*, 23 December 1804

A grand but gloomy disagreeable city, owing to the houses being very high, and the streets so narrow you might almost shake hands across them out of the window.

Eliza Fay, *Original Letters from India* (17 June 1779), 1817

The gardens are everywhere in the same style, all neat and trim, like a desert island in a pastry cook's shop, with garnish and frippery enough to please a Dutchman.

Eliza Fay, *Original Letters from India* (28 June 1779), 1817

As a capital, the great defect of Genoa is the deficiency of outlets or suburbs. Venice only has fewer facilities than Genoa, for the citizens to partake of the benefits of air and exercise. Built against rocky acclivities on the

edge of the bay; shut in by mountains, and almost inaccessible by land, it appears to strangers a sort of prison.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

Proud city, that by the Ligurian sea
  Sittest as at a mirror, lofty and fair;
And towering from thy curving banks in air,
Scornest the mountains that attend on thee;
Why, with such structures, to which Italy
  Has nothing else, though glorious, to compare,
  Hast thou not souls with something like a share,
Of look, heart, spirit, and ingenuity?
Better to bury at once ('twould cost thee less)
  Thy golden sweating heaps, where cramped from light
They and their pinch'd fasts ply their old distress
  Thy rotting wealth, unspent, like a thick blight,
Clouds the close eyes of these: dark hands oppress
  With superstition those: – and all is night.

Leigh Hunt, *To Genoa*, 1823

This is by no means a city that would strike an Englishman as being agreeable to *dwell* in. We cannot help acknowledging the grandeur for which it has been so reputed; but, at the same time, there are, mingled in the display of magnificence by which we are surrounded, some circumstances which render the general effect of the city far more dismal than delightful. . . . The houses in every street are immensely high, and the streets are, excepting only a few of them, so very narow that there is not sufficient room for a carriage to pass. They are not what we should call *streets* at all, but rather long *alleys*. In these alleys you may sometimes fancy yourself shut out from day-light in the day-time; so lofty are the houses around, and so far back have you to throw your head to get a peep at the sky. The influence of habit, prejudice out of the question, is such, that it is impossible for an Englishman not to prefer his LONDON to such a place as GENOA.

J.P. Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour in Italy, etc.*, 1830

The Genoese manner . . . is exceedingly animated and pantomimic; so that two friends of the lower class conversing pleasantly in the street, always seem on the eve of stabbing each other forthwith. And a stranger is immensely astonished at their not doing it.

Charles Dickens, Letter to John Forster, 20 July 1844

What a sad place Italy is! a country gone to sleep, and without a prospect of waking again! I never shall forget, as long as I live, my first impressions of it, as I drove through the streets of Genoa . . . I thought that of all the mouldy, dreary, sleepy, dirty, lagging, halting, God-forgotten towns in the wide world, it surely must be the very uttermost superlative. It seemed as if one had reached the end of all things – as if there were no more progress, motion, advancement, or improvement of any kind beyond; but here the whole scheme had stopped centuries ago, never to move on any more, but just lying down in the sun to bask there, 'till the Day of Judgement.

I have a great interest in it now; and walk about, or ride about, the town, when I go there, in a dreamy sort of way which is very comfortable. I seem to be thinking, but I don't know what about – I haven't the least idea. I can sit down in a church, or stand at the end of a narrow Vico, zig-zagging uphill like a dirty snake: and not feel the least desire for any further entertainment.

Charles Dickens, Letter to Count D'Orsay, 7 August 1844

I jumped up, hurried on my clothes, and went on deck; a clear moonlight revealed enough of the scene to show its admirable beauty; and I remained gazing from the silver sea to the mountains, and the white masses of buildings shining at their feet, till I got pinched with cold, and retired, remembering that probably I, and certainly Genoa, would be in that place tomorrow.

Fanny Kemble (Mrs Butler), *A Year of Consolation*, 1847

On becoming intimate with Genoa, I found that it possesses multitudes of handsome women; and what surprised me, many of them with beautiful northern complexions. But an English lady told me, that for this latter discovery I was indebted to my short sight.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Took omnibus (2 sous) to end of harbor. Light house (300 feet high) Ascended. Superb view. Sea coast to south. Promontory. All Genoa & her forts before you. The heigtth & distances of these forts, their outlying loneliness. The bleackness, the savageness of glens between, seem to make Genoa rather the capital and fortified camp of Satan: fortified against the Archangels.

Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 12 April 1857

The people here live in the heaviest, highest, broadest, darkest, solidest houses one can imagine. Each one might 'laugh a siege to scorn.' A hundred feet front and a hundred high is about the style, and you go up three flights of stairs before you begin to come upon signs of occupancy. Everything is stone, and stone of the heaviest – floors, stairways, mantels, benches, everything. The walls are four to five feet thick. The streets generally are four to five to eight feet wide, and as crooked as a corkscrew. You go along one of these gloomy cracks and look up and behold the sky like a mere ribbon of light, far above your head, where the tops of the tall houses on either side of the street bend almost together. You feel as if you were at the bottom of some tremendous abyss, with all the world far above

you. You wind in and out, and here and there, in the most mysterious way, and have no more idea of the points of the compass than if you were a blind man. You can never persuade yourself that these are actually streets, and the frowning, dingy, monstrous houses dwellings, till you see one of these beautiful, prettily dressed women emerge from them – see her emerge from a dark, dreary looking den that looks dungeon all over, from the ground away halfway up to heaven. And then you wonder that such a charming moth could come from such a forbidding shell as that. The streets are wisely made narrow, and the houses heavy, and thick, and stony, in order that the people may be cool in this roasting climate. And they are cool and stay so.

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad,* 1869

There may be prettier women in Europe, but I doubt it.

Ibid.

Genoa is the queerest place in the world, and even a second visit helps you little to straighten it out. In the wonderful, crooked, twisting, climbing, soaring, burrowing Genoese alleys, the traveller is really up to his neck in the old Italian sketchability. . . . Genoa is the crookedest and most incoherent of cities; tossed about on the sides and crests of a dozen hills, it is seamed with gullies and ravines that bristle with those innumerable palaces for which we have heard from our earliest years that the place is celebrated. These great edifices, with their mottled and faded complexions, lift their big ornamental cornices to a tremendous height in the air, where, in a certain indescribably forlorn and desolate fashion, overtopping each other, they seem to reflect the twinkle and glitter of the warm Mediterranean. Down about the basements, in the little, dim, close alleys, the people are for every moving to and fro, or standing in their cavernous doorways or their dusky, crowded shops, calling, chattering, laughing, scrambling, living their lives in the conversational Italian fashion. For a long time I had not received such an impression of human agglomeration. I had not for a long time seen people elbowing each other so closely, or swarming so thickly out of populous hives.

Henry James, 'Italy Revisited', 1877, in *Portraits of Places,* 1883

La Superba is worthy of her name, but not shining today. Rain since yesterday afternoon, and she looks like Portsmouth with the storm-signal flying.

George Meredith, Letter to Mrs Marie Meredith, 15 September 1882

O epic-famed, god-haunted Central Sea,
Heave careless of the deep wrong done to thee
When from Torino's track I saw thy face first flash on me.

And multimarbled Genova the Proud,
Gleam all unconscious how, wide-lipped up-browed,
I first beheld thee clad – not as the Beauty but the Dowd.

Out from a deep-delved way my vision lit
On housebacks pink, green ochreous – where a slit
Shoreward 'twixt row and row revealed the classic blue through it.

And there across waved fishwives' high-hung smocks,
Chrome kerchiefs, scarlet hose, darned underfrocks;
Often since when my dreams of thee, O Queen, that frippery mocks:

Whereat I grieve, Superba! . . . Afterhours
Within Palazzo Doria's orange bowers
Went far to mend these marrings of thy soul-subliming powers.

But, Queen, such squalid undress none should see,
Those dream-endangering eyewounds no more be
Where lovers first behold thy form in pilgrimage to thee.

Thomas Hardy, *Genoa and the Mediterranean,* March 1887

The untidiest port in the world.

Robert Byron, *First Russia then Tibet,* 1933

Genoa initiated me into Italian life. Now that I have known it for twenty years, it has been associated in my mind with all the different phases of Italian history. Genoa gives me what Goethe called 'a sense of the past and present as being one: a conception which infuses a spectral element into the present.' Whenever in my mind I try to conjure up in a flash the exquisite loveliness of Italy, I see before me the vision of Genoa from the sea. It is a sunny morning and we are moored outside the harbour. In the clear air the city rises like a gigantic jewel glittering in its rugged Alpine setting. In the distance the bright-hued buildings soaring tier by tier give the impression of having been honeycombed out of the Ligurian mountains. From the boat it looks like a fantastic city of the Genii, created by magic power – a dream city evoked by the caprice of a wizard who might with a sudden Satanic impulse cast it hurtling into the calm waters at its feet.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain,* 1938

The dock-front of Genoa is marvellous. Such heat and colours and dirt & noise and loud wicked alleys with all the washing of the world hanging from the high windows.

Dylan Thomas, Letter to his parents, 5 May 1947

Mount Grivola

One shouldn't be frivolous
On places like Grivolas.

W.P. Ker, Quip, 1913, quoted by Freya Stark, *Traveller's Prelude,* 1950

Herculaneum

We saw the theatre at Herculaneum, which had been buried sixteen centuries; and passed under vaults to view it by torch-light; – while wandering about the galleries, I was of course obliged to express surprise and pleasure; but in truth I wished myself away, for there were neither singers nor dancers, nor pretty women there, and I never had any taste for antiques.

Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences,* 1826

Ischia

The island Inarime is an epitome of the whole earth containing within the compass of eighteen miles, a wonderful variety of hills, vales, ragged rocks, fruitful plains, and barren mountains, all thrown together in a most romantic confusion. The air is, in the hottest season, constantly refreshed by cool breezes from the sea. The vales produce excellent wheat and Indian corn, but are mostly covered with vineyards intermixed with fruit-trees. Besides the common kinds, as cherries, apricots, peaches, &c., they produce oranges, limes, almonds, pomegranates, figs, water-melons, and many other fruits unknown to our climates, which lie every where open to the passenger. The hills are the greater part covered to the top with vines, some with chestnut groves, and others with thickets of myrtle and lentiscus. The fields in the northern side are divided by hedge-rows of myrtle. Several fountains and rivulets add to the beauty of this landscape, which is likewise set off by the variety of some barren spots and naked rocks. But that which crowns the scene is a large mountain rising out of the middle of the island, (once a terrible volcano, by the ancients called Mons Epomeus). Its lower parts are adorned with vines and other fruits; the middle affords pasture to flocks of goats and sheep; and the top is a sandy pointed rock, from which you have the finest prospect in the world, surveying at one view, besides several pleasant islands, lying at your feet, a tract of Italy about three hundred miles in length, from the promontory of Antium to the Cape of Palinarus: the greater part of which hath been sung by Homer and Virgil, as making a considerable part of the travels and adventures of their two heroes. . . . The inhabitants of this delicious isle, as they are without riches and honours, so they are without the vices and follies that attend them; and were they but as much strangers to revenge as they are to avarice and ambition, they might in fact answer the poetical notions of the golden age. But they have got, as an alloy to their happiness, an ill habit of murdering one another, on slight offences. . . . By the sole secret of minding our own business, we found a means of living securely among those dangerous people.

George Berkeley, Letter to Alexander Pope, 22 October 1717

The girls in the northern villages of Ischia . . . are mostly plain, but here in the Nitroli region you may see many of rare beauty – nymph-like creatures, flower-loving, soft-voiced, with flashing Maenad eyes. Their good looks have been attributed to the fact that they wash their *household linen* in warm mineral water.

Norman Douglas, *Summer Islands, Ischia and Ponza,* 1931

I thought I saw a man-o'war
Making from Naples Bay;
I looked again and saw it was
The Isle of Ischia.
Poor thing, I said, poor silly thing,
It can't get under way.
That is how Lewis Carroll might have put it if he had seen Ischia and Procida from our plane when he was writing Sylvie and Bruno.

Arnold Toynbee, *Between Niger and Nile,* 1965

Itri

The old town of Itri, like a device in pastry. . . .

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy,* 1846

Italian Lakes

So I went on till I got to the lake, and there I found a little port about as big as a dining room (for the Italian lakes play at being little seas. They have little ports, little lighthouses, little fleets for war, and little custom-houses, and little storms and little lines of steamers. Indeed, if one wanted to give a rich child a perfect model or toy, one could not give him anything better than an Italian lake).

Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome,* 18902

Maggiore

The Italian lakes have that in them and their air which removes them from common living. Their beauty is not the beauty which each of us sees for himself in the world; it is rather the beauty of a special creation; the expression of some mind. To eyes innocent, and freshly noting our great temporal inheritance – I mean to the eyes of a boy and girl just entered upon the estate of this glorious earth, and thinking themselves immortal, this shrine of Europe might remain for ever in the memory; an enchanted experience, in which the single sense of sight had almost touched the boundary of music. They would remember these lakes as the central emotion of their youth. To mean men also, who, in spite of years and of a full foreknowledge of death, yet attempt nothing but the satisfaction of sense, and pride themselves upon the taste and fineness with which they achieve this satisfaction, the Italian lakes would seem a place for habitation, and there such a man might build his house contentedly. But to ordinary Christians I am sure there is something unnatural in this beauty of

theirs, and they find it in either a paradise only to be won by a much longer road or a bait and veil of sorcery, behind which lies great peril. Now, for all we know, beauty beyond the world may not wear this double aspect; but to us on earth – if we are ordinary men – beauty of this kind has something evil. Have you not read in books how men when they see even divine visions are terrified? So as I looked at Lake Major in its halo I also was afraid, and I was glad to cross the ridge and crest of the hill and to shut out that picture framed all round with glory.

Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*, 1902

Lecce

Lecce seems as large as Florence in extent but houses lower not a spout or supporter to the balustrade, or balcony but wrought in the grotesque figure of some animal or otherwise carved horses men griffins bears &c supporting the Balcony of the Benedictines church with a round window somewhat Gothic stone handsome and well coloured. In no part of Italy such a general gusto of Architecture. . . . They seem to show some remains of the spirit & elegant genius of the Greeks formerly inhabited these parts.

George Berkeley, *Journal*, 27 May 1717

Lecce . . . has the reputation of being, to the rest of the kingdom, what Thebes was to Greece, and a native of Lecce is said to be distinguishable from his fellow-subjects, by the heaviness of his manner, and the dulness of his apprehension. I dare not be so rash as to pronounce upon this point . . . but I cannot suspect a city to be the sea of stupidity, that has an academy of Belles Lettres, and where some of the Muses at least met with very sincere and successful admirers.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels through the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Lerici

Lerici is wild and retired, with a bay and rocky eminences; the people suited to it, something between the inhabitants of sea and land.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Leghorn/Livorno

The Duke [of Florence] made this place as it were a sanctuary to offenders, upon whom he used to impose for punishment, either to dwell there for ever, or at least for some yeeres, and to adde one or more houses to the building: so as the City was not faire and populous, but it was filled with Citizens guilty of crimes, and of no civill conversation. My self hearing that they were such men, perhaps out of a prejudicate opinion, did thinke their lookes barbarous, which made me looke more warily to my selfe, and to those things I had with me.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Leghorne is the neatest, cleanest and pleasantest place that I have seene, their houses painted without side in Stories, Landskipps, etc., with various Coulors, makeing a verie delightfull shewe.

Peter Mundy (before 1620), *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, 1907

Here is in Ligorne . . . such a concourse of Slaves, consisting of Turkes, Mores and other Nations, as the number and confusion is prodigious; some buying, others selling; some drinking, others playing, some working, others sleeping, fighting, singing, weeping & a thousand other postures and Passions; yet all of them naked, & miserably Chayn'd, with a Canvas onely to hide their shame: Here was now a Tent erected, where any idle fellow, weary of that trifle, might stake his liberty against a few Crownes; which if lost (at Dice or other hazard) he was immediately chaynd, & lead away to the Gallys, where he was to serve a tearme of Yeares, but whence they seldome returned; and many sottish persons would in a drunken bravado trye their fortune. The houses of this neate Towne are very uniforme, and excellently paynted a fresca on the out wales, being the representation of many of their Victories against the Turkes.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, 21 October 1644

Perhaps the most interesting sight in Leghorn is the English burying-ground.

Henry Matthews, *The Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

A thriving, business-like, matter-of-fact place, where idleness is shouldered out of the way by commerce.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

Leghorn is a polite Wapping, with a square and a theatre.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Locarno

for fair Locarno smiles
Embowered in walnut slopes and citron isles.

William Wordsworth, *Descriptive Sketches*, 1791–2, pub. 1793

Lombardy

Lucentio: fruitfull *Lumbardie*,
The pleasant garden of great *Italy*.

William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *c.* 1593–4

Surely such is the fertility of this country, that I thinke

no Region or Province under the Sunne may compare with it. For it is passing plentifully furnished with all things, tending both to pleasure and profit, being the very Paradise, and Canaan of Christendome. For an Italy is the garden of the world, so is Lombardy the garden of Italy, and Venice the garden of Lombardy. It is wholly plaine, and beautified with such abundance of goodly rivers, pleasant meadowes, fruitfull vineyardes, fat pastures, delectable gardens, orchards, woodes, and what not, that the first view thereof did even refocillate my spirits, and tickle my senses with inward joy. To conclude this introduction to Lombardy, it is so fertile a territory, that . . . the butter thereof is oyle, the dew hony, and the milk nectar.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

When I pass'd through some parts of *Lombardy*, among other things, I observ'd the Physiognomies and Complexions of the People, Men and Women; and I thought I was in *Wales*, for divers of them have a cast of countenance and a nearer resemblance with our Nation than any I ever saw yet: And the reason is obvious; for the *Romans* having been near upon three hundred years among us, where they had four Legions (before the *English* Nation or Language had any being) by so long a coalition and tract of time, the two Nations must needs copulate and mix: insomuch that I believe there is yet remaining in *Wales* many of the *Roman* Race, and divers in *Italy* of the *British*. Among other resemblances one was in their Prosody, and vein of Versifying or Rhyming, which is like or *Bards*, who hold Agnominations, and enforcing of consonant Words or Syllables one upon the other, to be the greatest Elegance.

James Howell, 'Letter to Christopher Jones, Esq., . . . Naples, 8 October 1621', *Familiar Letters*, 1645

Tis astonishing how like these Lombards are to our Welch People! the low ones in particular: I saw a Signor Curato the other day at the Country Seat of an agreeable Family near Milan – I could not keep from looking at the Man, & expecting him to speak Welch: his long straight Hair, ruddy Colour, & coarse Manners all contributed to make one stare at the striking Resemblance; but 'tis amazing that the slyness of Shopkeepers, & the quiet tho' cutting Replies of the ordinary People, should be so very similar in Nations who never proposed each other as Patterns of Imitation – It comes in my head while I write, that Howell too was struck with the Likeness and mentions it in his Letters.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Thraliana*, 1784

Beneath is spread like a green sea
The waveless plain of Lombardy
Bounded by the vaporous air
Islanded by cities fair.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Lines Written among the Euganian Hills*, October 1818

The cities of Lombardy are all like large country houses: walking out of their gates you seem to be stepping from a door or window that opens on a trim and beautiful garden, where mulberry-tree is married to mulberry by festoons of vines, and where the maize and sunflower stand together in rows between patches of flax and hemp.

J.A. Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece*, 1874

Loretto

It is of little circuit, and lieth in length from East to the West, so narrow; ass it hath almost but one street in the bredth, and all the houses of this streete are Innes, or Shops of them that sell Beades to number prayers. . . . Upon the dores of this Church, famous for mens superstitious worship, these verses are written:

Illotus timeat quincunque intrara, Sacellum,
In terris nullum sanctius orbis habet.
Enter not here unwashed of any spot,
For a more holy Church the world hath not.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

The Holy Chapel of Loretto, all the world knows, was originally a small house in Nazareth, inhabited by the Virgin Mary, in which she was saluted by the Angel, and where she bred our Saviour. After their deaths, it was held in great veneration by all believers in Jesus, and at length consecrated into a chapel, and dedicated to the Virgin. . . . This sanctified edifice was allowed to sojourn in Galilee as long as that district was inhabited by Christians; but when infidels got possession of the country, a band of angels, to save it from pollution, took it in their arms, and conveyed it from Nazareth to a castle in Dalmatia. This fact might have been called in question by incredulous people, had it been performed in a secret manner; but, that it might be manifest to the most short-sighted spectator, and evident to all who were not perfectly deaf as well as blind, a blaze of celestial light, and a concert of divine music, accompanied it during the whole journey; besides, when the angels, to rest themselves, set it down in a little wood near the road, all the trees of the forest bowed their heads to the ground, and continued in that respectful posture as long as the Sacred Chapel remained among them. But, not having been entertained with suitable respect at the castle above mentioned, the same indefatigable angels carried it over the sea, and placed it in a field belonging to a noble lady, called Lauretta, from whom the Chapel takes its name. This field happened unfortunately to be frequented at that time by highwaymen and murderers; a circumstance with which the angels undoubtedly were not acquainted when they placed it there. After they were better informed, they removed it to the top of a hill belonging to two brothers, where they imagined it

would be perfectly secure from the dangers of robbery or assassination; but the two brothers, the proprietors of the ground, being equally enamoured of their new visitor, became jealous of each other, quarrelled, fought, and fell by mutual wounds. After this final catastrophe, the angels in waiting finally removed the holy Chapel to the eminence where it now stands, and has stood these four hundred years, having lost all relish for travelling.

John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy*, 1781

Lucca

There is a notable little active Republic towards the midst of *Tuscany*, call'd *Lucca*, which in regard she is under the Emperor's Protection, he dares not meddle withal, tho' she lie as a Partridge under a Faulcon's Wings, in relation to the Grand Duke. . . . There is no State that winds the Penny more nimbly and makes quicker Returns.

James Howell, 'Letter to Sir J.C., from Florence, 1 November 1621', *Familiar Letters*, 1645

Happy for me that the environs of Lucca were so beautiful; since I defy almost any city to contain more ugliness within its walls. Narrow streets and dismal alleys; wide gutters and cracked pavements; everybody in black, according with the gloom of their habitations, which however are large and lofty enough of conscience; but having all grated windows, they convey none but dark and dungeon-like ideas. My spirits fell many degrees upon entering this sable capital.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

This is the Ilam gardens of Europe; and whoever has seen that singular spot in Derbyshire belonging to Mr Port, has seen little Lucca in a convex mirror.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

The common people of Lucca have the reputation of being great tricksters. They have a saying, 'Sono un Luchese, ma vi sono de' buoni e cattivi al mio paese.' – 'I am a Luchese, but there are good, as well as bad, in my country.' Aretin the satirist, 'yclept 'the Bitter Tuscan,' and who hated Lucca for some slight shewn to him, said, that when their best actress was acting with energy, she always threw one, or both of her arms, out of the republic; meaning it was so contemptibly small.

Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826

Hitherto, all architecture, except fairy-finished Milan, had depended with me for its delight on being partly in decay. . . .

Here in Lucca I found myself suddenly in the presence of twelfth century buildings, originally set in such balance of masonry that they could all stand without mortar; and in material so incorruptible, that after six hundred years of sunshine and rain, a lancet could not now be put between their joints.

Absolutely for the first time I now saw what mediaeval builders were, and what they meant. I took the simplest of façades for analysis, that of Santa Maria Foris-Portam, and thereon literally *began* the study of architecture.

John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1885–9

At Lucca, an enthusiastic sightseer once asked Mr Ruskin, 'What is the finest thing to see in Lucca?' The answer was: – 'Oh, the clouds, you know.'

Mrs Henry Fawcett, *Orient Line Guide*, 1885

The town of Lucca . . . is the neatest, the regularest, the exactest, the most fly-in-amber little town in the world, with its uncrowded streets, its absurd fortifications, and its contented silent houses – all like a family at ease and at rest under its high sun. It is as sharp and trim as its own map, and that map is as clear as a geometrical problem. Everything in Lucca is good.

Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*, 1902

Mantua

This Citie is marveilous strong, and walled round with faire bricke wals, wherein there are eight gates, and is thought to be foure miles in compasse: the buildings both publique and private and very sumptuous and magnificent: their streets straite and very spacious. Also I saw many stately Pallaces of a goodly height: it is most sweetly seated in respect of the marvailous sweete ayre thereof, the abundance of goodly meadows, pastures, vineyards, orchards, and gardens about it. For they have such store of gardens about the Citie, that I thinke London which both for frequencie of people, and multitude of howses doth thrise exceed it, is not better furnished with gardens.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

and the way there from Verona

The country between this beautiful town and Mantua, presents one continued grove of dwarfish mulberries, among which start up innumerable barren hills. Now and then a knot of poplars diversify their craggy summits, and sometimes a miserable shed. Mantua itself rises out of a morass formed by the Mincio, whose course, in most places is so choked up with reeds, as to be scarcely discernible. It requires a creative imagination to discover any charms in such a prospect, and a strong prepossession not to be disgusted with the scene where Virgil was born. . . . I abandoned poetry and entered the city in despair.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

It is a *lady's* town.

Hester Lynch Thrale/ Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

Retrospect of Mantua, with its dome, & spires & towers; the first spires I have seen in Italy – a long line just above the waters of its lake – more like a dutch town than any other.

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 8 April 1815

If ever a man were suited to his place of residence, and his place of residence to him, the lean apothecary and Mantua came together in a perfect fitness of things. It may have been more stirring then, perhaps. If so, the Apothecary was a man in advance of his time, and knew what Mantua would be, in eighteen hundred and forty-four. He fasted much, and that assisted him in his foreknowledge.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

I have seen many ruins and of every period. . . . I have seen great cities dead or in decay. . . . But over none, it seemed to me, did there brood so profound a melancholy as over Mantua; none seemed so dead or so utterly bereft of glory; now here was desolation more pregnant with the memory of splendour, the silence nowhere so musically rich with echoes. . . . It is through Mallarmé's *creux néant musicien* that one walks in Mantua.

And not in Mantua alone. For wherever the Gonzaga lived, they left behind them the same pathetic emptiness, the same pregnant desolation, the same echoes, the same ghosts of splendour.

Aldous Huxley, *Along the Road*, 1925

Marguzzo (and the Alps)

We ariv'd at night to *Marguzzo*, an obscure village at the end of the Lake, & very foote of the Alpes which now rise as it were suddainly, after some hundred of miles of the most even Country in the World, & where there is hardly a stone to be found, as if nature had here swept up the rubbish of the Earth in the Alpes, to forme and cleare the Plaines of *Lumbardy*.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, May 1646

Merano

The country is wonderful. Mountains, holding up cups of snow to the fiery sun, who glares on them in vain. The peasantry are a noble race: pious, and with a strong smell. Priests abound and soap flies before them. . . . Nothing can be grander than the colossal mountains of porphyry and dolomite shining purple and rosy, snow-capped here and there, with some tumultuous river noising below, and that eternal stillness overhead, save when some great peak gathers the thunders and bellows for a time.

George Meredith, Letter to Frederick A. Maxse, 26 July 1861

Menaggio (the view across the lake)

As I sit writing in the garden under a magnolia I look across to Varenna in the sun, and the 'Sourmilk Gill' coming into the lake close by it; and the grand jagged line of mountains that bound the lake towards Colico, almost snowless in August, stand glittering now like the Oberland range. You never saw anything so calculated to make you drunk.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to Walter Arnold, 5 May 1873

Messina

This place is vastly dirty. Dirtyissimo.

Edward Lear, Letter to Lady Waldegrave, 13 April 1866

The countless shacks made me think of a mushroom town which had sprung up in the night during a gold-rush. The sight of Messina was an index to the mentality of the people. When I compare the Sicilian with the South Italian, I find that the latter expresses the thoughts and impulses that bubble up within him in a wealth of gestures and gesticulations. The Sicilian, on the other hand, is more of a fatalist, and there is in him a certain gravity of demeanour which we associate with the Arabs. How can the Sicilian help being a fatalist when he sees around him the debris of such a disaster as the earthquake of 1908? Nature, the Steward of God, gave him a paradise to dwell in, but in compensation, to convince him of the vanity of all that beauty, God, with one fell blow, laid it in ruins about him.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

Straits of Messina (the 'Fata Morgana' seen from Reggio)

Sometimes, but rarely, it exhibits a very curious phaenomenon, vulgarly called *La Fata Morgana*. . . . To produce this pleasing deception, many circumstances must concur, which are not known to exist in any other situation. The spectator must stand with his back to the east, in some elevated place behind the city, that he may command a view of the whole bay; beyond which the mountains of Messina rise like a wall, and darken the background of the picture. The winds must be hushed; the surface quite smoothed; the tide at its height; and the waters pressed up by currents to a great

elevation in the middle of the channel. All these events coinciding, as soon as the sun surmounts the eastern hills behind Reggio, and rises high enough to form an angle of forty-five degrees on the water before the city, – every object existing or moving at Reggio will be repeated a thousand-fold upon this marine looking-glass; which, by its tremulous motion, is, as it were, cut into facets. Each image will pass rapidly off in succession, as the day advances, and the stream carries down the wave on which it appeared.

Thus the parts of this moving picture will vanish in the twinkling of an eye. Sometimes the air is at that moment so impregnated with vapours, and undisturbed by winds, as to reflect objects in a kind of aerial screen, rising about thirty feet above the level of the sea. In cloudy, heavy weather, they are drawn on the surface of the water, bordered with fine prismatical colours.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Milan

and Lombardy from the roof of Milan Cathedral

There I observed the huge suburbs, which are as bigge as many a faire towne, and compassed about with ditches of water: there also I beheld a great part of Italy, together with the lofty Apennines. . . . The Territory of Lombardy which I contemplated round about from this Tower, was so pleasant an object to mine eyes, being replenished with such unspeakable variety of all things, both for profit and pleasure, that it seemeth to me to be the very Elysian fields, so much decantated and celebrated by the verses of Poets, or the Temple or Paradise of the world. For it is the fairest plain, extended about some two hundred miles in length that ever I saw, or ever shall if I should travell over the whole habitable world: insomuch that I said to myself that this country was fitter to be an habitation for the immortal Gods then for, mortall men.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

Milan is striking – the Cathedral superb – the city altogether reminds me of Seville – but a little inferior.

Lord Byron, Letter to John Murray, 15 October 1816

Milanese . . . a vagrant tribe, whose industry and enterprise carry them from the *Lake of Como* to the remotest regions of the earth. They are seen in all countries; even in *Lapland*.

E.D. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries*, 4th edn, 1816

The people here, though inoffensive enough, seem both in body and soul a miserable race. The men are hardly men; they look like a tribe of stupid and shrivelled slaves, and I do not think that I have seen a gleam of intelligence in the countenance of man since I passed the Alps. The women in enslaved countries are always better than the men; but they have tight-laced figures, and figures and mien which express (O how unlike the French!) a mixture of the coquette and prude which reminds me of the worst characteristics of the English. Everything but humanity is in much greater perfection here than in France.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 20 April 1818

Milan was entered by us with anticipations the most gracious; which, contrary to ordinary experience, were surpassed by the events. The very name of this city, as I write it, awakens feelings which the impartiality of veracious narrative should distrust.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

and Antwerp

Milan always affected my imagination as representing the splendour and wealth of the middle age – the noble, grandiose splendour and wealth, as Antwerp represents the bourgeois splendour and wealth.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to his wife, 25 June 1865

Milan . . . has seemed prosaic and winterish as if it were on the wrong side of the Alps.

Henry James, Letter to Mrs Fanny Kemble, 24 March 1881

Beastly Milano, with its imitation hedgehog of a Cathedral, and its hateful town Italians, all socks and purple cravats and hats over the ear, did for me.

D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, 23 October 1913

When I first saw Milan, at the beginning of May [1945], it looked like a slice of Hell. Some of the shabby green trams were running and some of the inhabitants were going about their routines, but the whole place seemed stunned and stopped, and the bloodless undernourished people, wrapped in any old cloth that could protect their skins, seemed to have been reduced, in the course of the German oppression, the bombings by the allies, and the embittered civil war, to a condition of permanent strain. The children, especially, were appalling: they had acquired, as they were growing up, expressions of indignation and apprehension which were now as much a part of their faces as malnutrition was of their bones.

Edmund Wilson, *Europe without Baedeker*, 1947

Milan is a giant, nightmare city. The snow & rain had just ceased before we arrived – a day or two before. The immensely long, wide streets, which run the entire length of the city, or seem to, were bakingly hot &

dusty, clanking with great, packed, racing trams, buzzing with little toy motor bikes; there were stop-me-&-buy-one bicycle boys selling, not ice-cream, but bottles of Chianti, & set-faced sinister armed policemen.

Dylan Thomas, Letter to his parents, 11 April 1947

When you observe things more closely, in Milan, even the things which want to appear foreign, extremely efficient and modern, the powerful businessmen, the aerial skyscrapers reflecting the passing clouds in their hundreds of windows, the elevated autostrade running along on concrete crutches, the complex industrial plants apparently invented by mad engineers or science-fiction writers, you begin to notice that many things are a little too much and too emphatically what they are supposed to be. In fact, Milan, in its newer quarters, is a little more like Zürich, Dusseldorf, and Madison Avenue than Zürich, Dusseldorf, or Madison Avenue themselves. You are in Italy after all.

Luigi Barzini, *The Italians,* 1964

Italy's answer to Birmingham.

Anon.

The Cathedral

How glorious that Cathedral is! worthy almost of standing face to face with the snow Alps; and itself a sort of snow dream by an artist architect, taken asleep in a glacier!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter, 1851

The Cathedral is an awful failure. Outside the design is monstrous and inartistic. The over-elaborated details stuck high up where no one can see them; everything is vile in it; it is, however, imposing and gigantic as a failure, through its great size and elaborate execution.

Oscar Wilde, Letter to his mother, 25 June 1875

. . . the beautiful city with its dominant frost-crystalline Duomo. . . .

John Ruskin, *Praeterita,* 1885–9

Modena

An ill-built, melancholy place, all of brick. . . .

Thomas Gray, Letter to Mrs Gray, his mother, 9 December 1739

At one short post from Parma, the little village of Saint Ilario places the traveller beyond the Parmesan confines, and within the frontier of the sovereign of Modena, or, as the Italians contemptuously call his Highness, *'Il Duchino,' the little Duke.* This event is notified by an unusual display of military force; besides the ordinary civil administration of power and impediment. His Imperial Highness Francesco the Fourth is a very warlike Prince: and though, by rising early, he might quit his own States to breakfast with the Duchess of Parma, and return in good time for dinner at Modena; yet he keeps up a military armament so formidable, that his Ducato is known by no other name at present, in Italy, than that of *'Il Regno de' Dragoni.'*

Lady Morgan, *Italy,* 1820

Naples

See Naples and die.

Italian proverb

The *Neapolitane* carrieth the bloodiest mind, and is the most fleering murderer: whereupon it is growen to a common proverbe, *Ile give him the Neapolitan shrug,* when one intends to play the villaine, and make no boast of it.

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller,* 1594

Naples, the Paradise of Italy,
As that is of earth.

John Fletcher (and Philip Massinger?), *The Double Marriage, c.* 1621

A City swelling with all Delight, Gallantry and Wealth; and truly, . . . This is a delicate luxurious City, fuller of true-bred Cavaliers than any place I saw yet. The Clime is hot, and the Constitutions of the Inhabitants more hot.

The Neapolitan is accounted the best Courtier of Ladies and the greatest embracer of Pleasure of any other People; . . . a Proverb they have in *Italy* for this People

Napolitano
Largo di bocca, stretto di mano.
The Neapolitans
Have wide Mouths, but narrow Hands.

They make strong masculine Promises, but female Performances (*for deeds are Men but words are Women*), and if in a whole *flood* of Compliments one find a *drop* of *Reality,* 'tis well. The first acceptance of a Courtesy is accounted the greatest Incivility that can be amongst them, and a ground for a Quarrel; as I heard of a *German* Gentleman that was baffled for accepting only one Invitation to a Dinner.

James Howell, 'Letter to Sir T.H. Knight, from Naples, 1 October 1621', *Familiar Letters,* 1645

The very winter here is a summer, ever fruitefull, & continually pregnant, so as in the midst of February we had Melons, Cheries, Abricots and many other sorts of fruite: The building of the Citty is for the quantity the most magnificent of Europe, the streetes exceeding large, well paved, having many Vaults, and conveyances under them for the sullage which renders them very sweete and cleane even in the midst of winter: . . . The Women are generally well featur'd but

excessively libidinous; the Country people so jovial and addicted to Musick, that the very husbandmen almost universally play upon the guitarr, singing and composing songs in prayse of their Sweetehearts, & will go to the field commonly with their fiddle; they are merry, Witty, and genial; all which I much attribute to the excellent quality of the ayre.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, 8 February 1645

Prospects are the natural ornaments of this kingdom.

George Berkeley, Letter to Lord Percival, 6 April 1717

My wonder still increased on entering the city, which I think, for number of people, outdoes both Paris and London. The streets are one continued market, and thronged with populace so much that a coach can hardly pass. The common sort are a jolly lively kind of animals, more industrious than Italians usually are; they work till evening; then take their lute or guitar (for they all play) and walk about the city, or upon the sea-shore with it, to enjoy the fresco. One sees their little brown children jumping about stark naked, and the bigger ones dancing with castanets, while others play on the cymbal to them. Your maps will show you the situation of Naples; it is on the most lovely bay in the world, and one of the calmest seas: It has many other beauties besides those of nature.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Mrs Gray, his mother, 14 June 1740

I went little into company at Naples, and remember solely that the Neapolitan ladies resembled country chamber-maids. I was there during Lent when there are no public entertainments. During my stay at Naples I was truly libertine. I ran after girls without restraint. My blood was inflamed by the burning climate, and my passions were violent. I indulged them; my mind had almost nothing to do with it. I found some very pretty girls. I escaped all danger.

James Boswell, Letter to J-J Rousseau, Lucca, 3 October 1765 (original in French)

It is hard to say, whether the view is more pleasing from the singularity of many of the objects, or from the incredible variety of the whole. You see an amazing mixture of the antient and modern; some rising to fame, and some sinking to ruin. Palaces reared over the tops of other palaces, and antient magnificence trampled under foot – by modern folly. – Mountains and islands that were celebrated for their fertility, changed into barren wastes, and barren wastes into fertile fields and rich vineyards. Mountains sunk into plains, and plains swelled into mountains. Lakes drunk up by volcanos, and extinguished volcanos turned into lakes. The earth still smoking in many places; and in others throwing out flame. – In short, Nature seems to have formed this coast in her most capricious mood; for every object is a *lusus naturae*. She never seems to have gone seriously to work; but to have devoted this spot to the most unlimited indulgence of caprice and frolic.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

Provisions are here plentiful and cheap, therefore the lower class of people work but little; their delight is to bask in the sun and to do nothing. Persons of a middle rank pass too much of their time in coffee-houses, and places of public resort; few pursue their callings with the zeal and activity we are wont to meet with in the professional men of colder countries. Gluttony is a much more predominant vice than ebriety, of which instances are extremely rare. In the female sex, the passion for finery is almost superior to all others, and notwithstanding any effect the genial warmth of the climate may have on the constitution of a Neapolitan woman, I doubt whether she would not nine times out of ten prefer a present to a lover.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Nothing, I will venture to affirm, is less true than that the Neapolitans are soft and effeminate; nor are they even voluptuous, in the more elegant sense in which that word is usually understood. They are fiery, and sensual, in a high degree, and during the prevalence of the siroc wind, extremely relaxed and indolent. But, their general tone of character is rough, harsh, and impetuous, even, in higher life; in the lower, gross, barbarous, and violent; choleric and vindictive in both. What undiscerning eyes may have mistaken for politeness, is nothing but the habitual cringe of adulation to the iron rod of arbitrary power. But let me do the Neapolitans justice: they want not feeling or generosity; and would but the church and the state emancipate them from that superstition and ignorance; which one hath been no less fond than the other, of converting into an engine of power; the Neapolitans, with a genius and sensibility which no person can deny them, would soon become a gallant and respectable nation.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

Which town at last is not a large one, but full as an egg.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

The most populous of cities relative to its size, whose luxurious inhabitants seem to dwell on the confines of paradise and hell-fire.

Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of his Life*, 1796

It is a country of fiddlers and poets, whores and scoundrels.

Horatio Lord Nelson, Dispatch to Lord St Vincent, 20 September 1798

I sha'nt go to Naples. It is but the second best sea-view, and I have seen the first and third, viz. Constantinople and Lisbon (by the way, the last is but a river-view; however, they reckon it after Stamboul and Naples, and before Genoa), and Vesuvius is silent, and I have passed by Ætna.

Lord Byron, Letter to Thomas Moore, 11 April 1817

On entering Naples, the first circumstance that engaged my attention was an assassination. A youth ran out of a shop, pursued by a woman with a bludgeon, and a man armed with a knife. The man overtook him, and with one blow in the neck, laid him dead in the road. On my expressing the emotions of horror and indignation which I felt, a Calabrian priest, who travelled with me, laughed heartily, and attempted to quiz me, as what the English call a flat.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 22 December 1818

The first impression given of the Neapolitan population, on a general and rapid view of all classes, as they are seen in the streets and the vineyards . . . is that of a people created out of the elements of their own brilliant and fervid region, for whom the word *genius* was invented, a people whose character is as volcanic as their soil! The fires of Vesuvius seem to circulate in their veins; the brilliancy of their skies is reflected in their imagination. Their organs are more acute and their impressions more vivid than those of other nations; and their over-abundant vitality, uncalled on by their torpid institutes, bursts forth as it can, and wastes itself in shrill sounds, rapid movements, and vivacious gestures that render the language superfluous which they are called upon to second or assist.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

Naples! thou heart of man which ever pantest
  Naked beneath the lidless eye of heaven!
Elysian City which to calm enchantest
  The mutinous air and sea: they round thee, even
  As sleep round Love, are driven!
  Metropolis of a ruined Paradise
    Long lost, late won, and yet but half regained!
  Bright altar of the bloodless sacrifice
    Which armed Victory offers up unstained
    To Love, the flower-enchained!
Thou which wert once, and then did cease to be,
Now art, and henceforth ever shall be, free,
  If Hope, and Truth, and justice can avail,
    Hail, hail, all hail!

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Ode to Naples, 1820

This region surely is not of the earth.
Was it not dropt from Heaven?

Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822–34

As we came through the suburbs of this city, and coming into the city itself, the people were swarming; I never saw such multitudes; the place seemed to be fairly *leaping alive;* twas enough to make a Malthusian fall down with affright.

J.P. Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour in Italy, etc.*, 1830

And what if it is Naples . . . I won't be imposed upon by a name.

R.W. Emerson, *Journal*, 12 March 1833

A little incident occurred to me which gave a pretty good idea of the people I was amongst. In the widest street, 'Strada di Toledo' at 1 o'clock p.m. a youth of about 16 years attempted to deprive me of my pkt Handkerchief, which he had already extracted from my pocket and thrown to another party. I turned round in time to get my Handkerchief but not to catch the thief who run to the other side of the street and there stood. Now in London they will pick your pocket but scarcely under the same circumstances. Here the people behind me of whom there were many did not attempt to stop him. I was apprised at Rome of the propensity of the people of Naples for their neighbours Hfs. but I was not prepared for such tricks in broad day and in the sight of hundreds of well dressed people. I complained to a countryman here of the apathy of the bystanders. His reply was 'It is a rule here that nobody interferes with his neighbours calling.'

John Webster, *Notes of a Journey from London to Constantinople . . .*, 1836

compared with Rome, Pisa and Florence

A poet might introduce Naples as Martha, and Rome as Mary. A Catholic may think Mary's the better employment; but even a Catholic, much more a protestant, would prefer the table of Martha. . . . It is the only place in Italy that has seemed to me to have the same sort of vitality which you find in all the great English ports and cities. Rome and Pisa are dead and gone; Florence is not dead but sleepeth; while Naples overflows with life.

T.B. Macaulay, *Journal*, 3 January 1839

What would I give that you should see the lazzaroni as they really are – mere squalid, abject, miserable animals for vermin to batten on; slouching, slinking, ugly, shabby, scavenging scarecrows! And oh the raffish counts and more than doubtful countesses, the noodles and the blacklegs, the good society! And oh the miles of miserable streets, and wretched occupants.

Charles Dickens, Letter, 1845, in Forster, *Life of Dickens*, 1872–3

This is the negation of God erected into a system of government.

W.E. Gladstone, Letter to the Earl of Aberdeen on the state of Naples, 1851

That is the view, of all the views of the world, that will stay longest with me. For the same reason that I prefer driving through the country to seeing sights in the towns I prefer, infinitely prefer as a matter of *pleasure*, Naples to Rome; . . . Capri in front, and the Sorrento peninsula girdling the bay: never can anything give one, of itself, without any trouble on one's own part, such delectation as that.

Matthew Arnold, Letter to his mother, 5 June 1865

'See Naples and die.' Well, I do not know that one would necessarily die after merely seeing it, but to attempt to live there might turn out a little differently.

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869

I conceived at Naples a tenfold deeper loathing than ever of the hideous heritage of the past – and felt for a moment as if I should like to devote my life to laying rail-roads and erecting blocks of stores on the most classic and romantic sites. The age has a long row to hoe.

Henry James, Letter to William James, 27 December 1869

and Etna
When Etna basks and purrs
Naples is more afraid
Than when she shows her Garnet Tooth –
Security is loud.

Emily Dickinson, *c.* 1869
(who must have meant Vesuvius)

The treatment of the dead shows the character of this idolatrous and self-seeking people in its saddest aspect. When the funeral of a friend passes, a Neapolitan will exclaim with characteristic selfishness, 'Salute a noi' – 'Health to ourselves' – without thought of the departed.

A.J.C. Hare, *Cities of Southern Italy*, 1883

How horrible civilized man is. All day the spectacle of these Neapolitans in their modern slop clothes has been to me a nightmare; all nature is defiled by them. What countenance of filthy passions! What abominations to the senses! what foul rubbish heaps! what stenches!

Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Diary, 23 April 1891, *My Diaries*, 1919

The museum is full as you know, of lovely Greek bronzes. The only bother is that they all walk about the town at night.

Oscar Wilde, Letter to Ernest Dowson, 11 October 1897

In Naples the insolence of the mercenary fraternity has attained to such an unexampled pitch that the traveller is often tempted to doubt whether such a thing as honesty is known.

Karl Baedeker, *Guide to Southern Italy*, 1890

I have rarely entered a strange city without a certain apprehension;, but no city ever filled me with such terror as Naples. Those long streets of tall, mean houses, from which narrow alleys climbed the hill, and descended to the harbour, in row after row of meaner and not less tall houses, all with their little iron balconies, over which clothes and linen draggled, all with their crowded, squalid, patched, and coloured throngs of restless life; the cracking of whips, the clatter of wheels and of horses' hoofs on the uneven stones; the thud of the cow-bell, the sharper tinkle of the goat-bell, as the creatures wander about the streets or wait at the doors of houses; the rattling of boot-blacks' brushes, the petulant whine of beggars, the whole buzz of that humming, half-obliterated Neapolitan, with its punctuation of gestures; the rush and bustling of those side-walks, after the courteous and ample leisure of Rome; something sordid in the very trees on the sea-front, second-rate in the aspect of the carriages that passed, and of the people who sat in them; the bare feet, rags, rainbow-coloured dirt, sprawling and spawning poverty of Santa Lucia, and not of Santa Lucia alone; the odour of the city; and then the indiscoverable length and extent of it, the ways that seemed to lead in whatever direction I wanted to go, and then ended suddenly, or turned aside in another direction; the darkness up the hill, and the uncertainty of all those new, as yet unknown, roads: that, as I turned away from the sea, when night began to come down upon it, mounted to my head like some horrible fume, enveloping me with disgust, possessing me with terror. I have got a little accustomed to it now, I know my way through those streets, which are, after all, simple enough in their arrangement; I have come to see certain advantages, even, in the turning of all this dirt and poverty out into the sun; I find it a touching tribute to cleanliness that every other poor person whom you see is hunting for his own or his neighbour's vermin; but, all the same, I think my first impression is likely to last.

I do not think that the Neapolitans are more vivacious or intend to be more objectionable than other people, but they are poor, naturally untidy; they live in the street because there is sun and air in the street, and it does not occur to them that there is anything in human nature to hide. They have an absolute, an almost ingenuous lack of civilisation, and after seeing the Neapolitans I have more respect for civilisation.

Arthur Symons, *Cities*, 1903

He said that the progress of sanitation in Naples (where up to a few years ago there were no privies at all) was very much hindered by the fact that a company paid the corporation 300000 francs a year for the right to remove human excrement. Another company pay 100,000 for right to remove dog excrement. (Same thing in Constantinople, Aleppo, etc.) Dog excrement

sent to U.S.A. for preparing kid gloves, etc. Nothing like it for that.

Arnold Bennett, *Journal*, 10 October 1911

The head of a hospital at Naples tells me that stomach diseases are more prevalent there than in any other part of Europe, and the stomach, whatever sentimentalists may say to the contrary, being the true seat of the emotions, it follows that a judicious system of dieting might work wonders upon their development. Nearly all Mediterranean races have been misfed from early days; that is why they are so small. I would undertake to raise the Italian standard of height by several inches, if I had control of their nutrition for a few centuries. I would undertake to alter their whole outlook upon life, to convert them from utilitarians into romantics – were such a change desirable. For if utilitarianism be the shadow of starvation, romance is nothing but the vapour of repletion.

Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria*, 1915

Beware of the fat Neapolitan. He is fat from prosperity, from dining off his leaner brothers.

Ibid.

Whoever it was who said (I believe it was Nelson), 'See Naples and die,' perpetrated one of the greatest hoaxes in history. Or perhaps I am unlucky when I go there.

Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Abyssinian Adventure*, 1935

And everybody who has passed the age of puberty seems to be busy making more children: the town is full of pregnant women and of women with wretched little babies that have sores all over their faces or are covered with the pink mottlings of disease. The Neapolitans seem to me sometimes to have as little relation to people as small octopi crabs and molluscs brought in by the marine tide. . . . But the life here is rank and flamboyant, and even in death it exults in the flesh. I have never seen a city in which funerals seem to figure in so important a way. Where so many human beings are begotten many must be constantly dying, and they like to make a fete of death.

Edmund Wilson, *Europe without Baedeker*, 1947

Neapolitans still reproduce what must be the nearest equivalent to life in classical times. Naples is one of the great tests. Some people hate it and some people love it. I think that people who do not like Naples are afraid of something.

Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

and Capri and Vesuvius

I liked Capri best, – going up Vesuvius it was a bit dusty and that, and it spoilt your shoes.

Schoolboy, returned from school trip to Naples, interviewed on radio, 12 July 1980

I think it was Gore Vidal who said that he lived in a beautiful house to the south of Naples because it was the best place to observe the end of the world.

Peter Nichols, 'Italy – a Special Report', *The Times*, 27 October 1981

Lake Nemi

The lake of Nemi lies in a very deep bottom, so surrounded on all sides with mountains and groves, that the surface of it is never ruffled with the least breath of wind, which, perhaps, together with the clearness of its waters, gave it formerly the name of Diana's looking-glass.

Speculumque Dianae. Virgil.

Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 1705

Nicolosi (slopes of Etna)

We found a degree of wildness and ferocity in the inhabitants of this mountain that I have not observed any where else. It put me in mind of an observation the Padre della Torre (the historiographer of mount Vesuvius) told me he had often made in the confines of Naples; that in the places where the air is most impregnated with sulphur and hot exhalations, the people are always most wicked and vicious. Whatever truth there may be in the observation, the people about Nicolosi at least seem to confirm it. The whole village flocked round us, and the women in particular abused us exceedingly.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

Orvieto

Sudden view of Orvieto in midst of amphitheatre of hills. Unsurpassed. Like a show mushroom grown there.

Arnold Bennett, *Journal*, 21 April 1914

Otranto

I did not even know that there was a castle of Otranto. When the story was finished, I looked into the map of the kingdom of Naples for a well-sounding name, and that of Otranto was very sonorous.

Horace Walpole, Letter to the Right Hon. Elizabeth Lady Craven, 27 November 1786

Padua

and Pisa

Lucentio: for I have *Pisa* left,

And am to *Padua* come, as he that leaves
A shallow plash, to plunge him in the deepe,
And with sacietie seekes to quench his thirst.
Willam Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *c.* 1595–6

Faire *Padua*, nurserie of Arts.
Ibid. (Lucentio)

A fertile nursery, and sweete emporium and mart town of learning.
Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

Padua is the most melancholy city of Europe, the cause only arising of the narrow passage of the open streets, and of the long galleries, and dark ranges of pillars, that go all where on every hand of you through the whole streets of the town. The scholars here in the night commit many murders against their private adversaries, and too often executed upon the strangers and innocent, and all with gun-shot or else with stilettoes. For beastly sodomy, it is as rife here as in Rome, Naples, Florence, Bullogna, Venice, Ferrara, Genoa, Parma not being exempted, nor yet the smallest village of Italy: A monstrous filthiness, and yet to them a pleasant pastime, making songs, and singing sonnets of the beauty and pleasure of their *bardassi*, or buggered boys.
William Lithgow, *Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations*, 1614/32

Here one sees the Decays of a vast City, which was once one of the biggest of all *Italy:* the Compass is the same that it was, but there is much uninhabited Ground in it, and Houses there go almost for nothing. The Air is extreme good; and there is so great a Plenty of all things except Money, that a little Money goes a great way. The University here, tho' so much supported by the *Venetians*, that they pay fifty Professors, yet sinks extremely: There are no Men of any great Fame now in it; and the Quarrels among the Students have driven away most of the Strangers that used to come and study here; for it is not safe to stir abroad here after Sun-set. The Number of Palaces here is incredible; and tho' the Nobility of *Padua* is almost quite ruined, yet the Beauty of their ancient Palaces shews what they once were. The *Venetians* have been willing to let the ancient Quarrels, that were in all those conquer'd Cities, continue still among them; for while one kills another, and the Children of the other take their Revenges afterwards, both come under the *Bando* by this means, and the Confiscation goes to the Senate.
Gilbert Burnet, *Some Letters Containing an Account of what Seemed Remarkable in Travelling . . .*, 1687

I am at Padua like a Mouse in a Parmasan cheese.
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Letter to Wilhelmina Tichborne, 15 June 1759

The Franciscan church, dedicated to St. Antonio, the great patron of this city, was the place we were first led to by the Cicerone of our inn. The body of this holy person is inclosed in a sarcophagus, under an altar in the middle of the chapel, and is said to emit a very agreeable and refreshing flavour. Pious Catholics believe this to be the natural effluvia of the saint's body; while heretics assert, that the perfume (for a perfume there certainly is) proceeds from certain balsams rubbed on the marble every morning, before the votaries come to pay their devotions. I never presume to give an opinion on contested points of this kind; but I may be allowed to say, that if this sweet odour really proceeds from the holy Franciscan, he emits a very different smell from any of the brethren of that order whom I ever had an opportunity of approaching.
John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy*, 1781

The University of Padua is a dying taper.
Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of his Life*, 1796

In thine halls the lamp of learning
Padua, now no more is burning;
Like a meteor, whose wild way
Is lost over the grave of day,
It gleams betrayed, and to betray.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Lines Written among the Euganian Hills*, October 1818

Palermo

catacombs of the Capuchins
This morning we went to see a celebrated convent of Capuchins, about a mile without the city; it contains nothing very remarkable but the burial-place, which indeed is a great curiosity. This is a vast subterraneous apartment, divided into large commodious galleries, the walls on each side of which are hollowed into a variety of niches, as if intended for a great collection of statues; these niches, instead of statues, are all filled with dead bodies, set upright upon their legs, and fixed by the back to the inside of the nich: their number is about three hundred: they are all dressed in the clothes they usually wore, and form a most respectable and venerable assembly. The skin and muscles, by a certain preparation, become as dry and hard as a piece of stock-fish; and although many of them have been here upwards of two hundred and fifty years, yet none are reduced to skeletons; the muscles, indeed, in some appear to be a good deal more shrunk than in others; probably because these persons had been more extenuated at the time of their death.

Here the people of Palermo pay daily visits to their deceased friends, and recal with pleasure and regret the scenes of their past life: here they familiarize themselves with their future state, and chuse the company they

would wish to keep in the other world. It is a common thing to make choice of their nich, and to try if their body fits it, that no alterations may be necessary after they are dead; and sometimes, by way of a voluntary penance, they accustom themselves to stand for hours in these niches. . . .

I am not sure if this is not a better method of disposing of the dead than ours. These visits must prove admirable lessons of humility; and I assure you, they are not such objects of horror as you would imagine: they are said, even for ages after death, to retain a strong likeness to what they were when alive; so that, as soon as you have conquered the first feeling excited by these venerable figures, you only consider this as a vast gallery of original portraits, drawn after the life, by the justest and most unprejudiced hand. It must be owned that the colours are rather faded; and the pencil does not appear to have been the most flattering in the world; but no matter, it is the pencil of truth, and not of a mercenary, who only wants to please.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

and the sirocco

I found the climate of Sicily warmer and more oppressive than that of Naples; indeed, when the sirocco blows, it is almost insupportable. . . . Such is the opinion which the natives have of its baleful influence, that I once heard a Palermatan dilettante say, when obliged to allow that some music composed by his favourite Pigniotti was bad – 'Well, I suppose I must admit it bad; but perhaps he composed it during the sirocco!'

Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826

Piacenza

The Cathedral is among the rudest . . . in Italy.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

A brown, decayed, old town, Piacenza is. A deserted, solitary, grass-grown place, with ruined ramparts; half-filled-up trenches, which afford a frowzy pasturage to the lean kine which wander about them: and streets of stern houses, moodily frowning at the other houses over the way. The sleepiest and shabbiest of soldiery go wandering about, with the double curse of laziness and poverty, uncouthly wrinkling their misfitting regimentals; the dirtiest of children play with their impromptu toys (pigs and mud) in the feeblest of gutters; and the gauntest of dogs trot in and out of the dullest of archways, in perpetual search of something to eat which they never seem to find.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

Piedmont

I observed that many of their women and children goe onely in their smocks and shirts in divers places of the countrey without any other apparrell at all by reason of the extreme heat of the clymate: and many of their children which doe weare breeches, have them so made, that all the hinder parts of their bodies are naked, for the more coolenesse of the ayre.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

This country of Piemont is a marvellous fruitful and plain country, and wonderfully populous, like to the river-sides of Arno round about Florence; insomuch, that a Venetian demanding a Piemont cavalier, What Piemont was? replied, It was a town of three hundred miles in circuit; meaning of the habitations and populosity of the soil.

William Lithgow, *Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations*, 1614/32

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old
When all our Fathers worshipt Stocks and Stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groanes
Who were thy Sheep, and in their antient Fold
Slayn by the bloody Piemontese that roll'd
Mother with Infant down the Rocks. . . .

John Milton, *Sonnet – On the Late Massacher in Piedmont*, May 1655, *Poems*, 1673

A lady of a great house in Piedmont, having four sons, makes no scruple to declare, that the first shall represent the family, the second enter into the army, the third into the church, and that she will breed the fourth a gamester.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, 1766

The Piedmontese are really charming people, so simple and kindly. Only I wish they weren't all counts.

Edward Lear, Letter to Chichester Fortescue, 31 July 1870

Pisa

Pisa renowned for grave Citizens.

William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *c.* 1595–6

Pisa is a fine old city, that strikes you with the same veneration you would feel at sight of an ancient temple, which bears the marks of decay, without being absolutely dilapidated.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, 1766

A large, disagreeable city, almost without inhabitants.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 5 June 1818

I was very much stricken at Pisa with the resemblance which the quays of that city bear to those of Dublin . . . yet, of all places in Italy, I left Pisa with least regret; its sombre appearance, and want of amusement, did not at all suit my mercurial spirits.

Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826

Pisa has a look of elegant tranquillity, which is not exactly *dullness*, and pleases me particularly.

Anna Jameson, *Diary of an Ennuyée*, 1826

Oh, it is so beautiful and so full of repose, yet not *desolate;* it is rather the repose of sleep than of death. . . . The worst of Pisa is, or would be to some persons, that, socially speaking, it has its dullnesses; it is not lively like Florence, not in that way.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Mrs Martin, 1846

Let the reader imagine a small white city, with a tower leaning at one end of it, trees on either side, and blue mountains for background; and he may fancy he sees Pisa, as the traveller sees it in coming from Leghorn. Add to this, in summer-time, fields of corn on all sides, bordered with hedgerow trees, and the festoons of vines, of which he has so often read, hanging from tree to tree; and he may judge of the impression made upon an admirer of Italy, who is in Tuscany for the first time.

In entering the city, the impression is not injured. What looked white in the distance remains as pure and fair on closer acquaintance. . . .

The first novelty that strikes you, after your dreams and matter-of-fact have recovered from the surprise of their introduction to one another, is the singular fairness and new look of houses that have been standing hundreds of years. This is owing to the dryness of the Italian atmosphere. Antiquity refuses to look ancient in Italy. It insists upon retaining its youthfulness of aspect. The consequence at first is a mixed feeling of admiration and disappointment; for we miss the venerable. The houses seem as if they ought to have sympathized more with humanity, and were as cold and as hard-hearted as their materials. But you discover that Italy is the land, not of the venerable, but the beautiful; and cease to look for old age in the chosen country of Apollo and the Venus.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850 – of 1822

Pisa, *vituperio delle genti*, in point of laxativeness and deadly weariness.

Richard Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa*, 1863

and the Arno

In the hour of evening, under a wintry sky amid whose darkly massed vapours a young moon is peering down upon this maddened world, I wander alone through deserted roadways towards that old solitary brick-tower. Here I stand and watch the Arno rolling its sullen waves. In Pisa, at such an hour, the Arno is the emblem of Despair. Swollen with melted snow from the mountains, it has gnawed its miserable clay banks and now creeps along, leaden and inert, half solid, like a torrent of liquid mud – irresolute whether to be earth or water; whether to stagnate here for ever at my feet, or crawl onward yet another sluggish league into the sea. So may Lethe look or Styx: the nightmare of a flood.

Norman Douglas, *Alone*, 1921

The Leaning Tower

The Campanile . . . stands alone on the right side of the Domo or Cathedrall, strangely remarkable for this, that the beholder would expect every moment when it should fall; being built exceedingly declining by a rare adresse of the imortal Architect: and really I take it to be one of the most singular pieces of workmanship in the World; how it is supported from immediately falling would puzzle a good Geometrician.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, 20 October 1644

The Cathedral, – a venerable pile of party-coloured marble. The first impression of this style of building is unfavourable; but this may be the mere effect of novelty. One seldom likes what one is not accustomed to.

The leaning tower at first sight is quite terrific, and exceeds expectation. . . . Upon the whole it is a very elegant structure; and the general effect is so pleasing, that, – like Alexander's wry neck, – it might well bring leaning into fashion amongst all the towers in Christendom.

Henry Matthews, *The Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

Like most things connected in their first associations with school-books and school-time, it was too small. I felt it keenly.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

The group of buildings, clustered on and about this verdant carpet: comprising the Tower, the Baptistery, the Cathedral, and the Church of the Campo Santo: is perhaps the most remarkable and beautiful in the whole world; and from being clustered there, together, away from the ordinary transactions and details of the town, they have a singularly venerable and impressive character. It is the architectural essence of a rich old city, with all its common life and common habitations pressed out, and filtered away.

Ibid.

I know not whether my first sensation at the sight of the Leaning Tower, was admiration of its extreme beauty, or astonishment at its posture.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Walked at once to the Duomo. . . . One end of it looks like coral grottoes in sea, – pearl diver. pillars in

tiers. . . . Baptistery like dome set on ground. Wonderful pulpit of marble. – Campanile like pine poised just ere snapping. You wait to hear crash.

Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 23 March 1857

Pompeii

A brilliant day – Went to Pompeii, winding along the shore & round Vesuvius, thro' Villages, one half desolated & rebuilt, (Torre del Grece) one (Portici) built unknowingly over a town swallowed up & lost in liquid lava that has hardened into stone. Passed thro' fields of indurated lava & among the richest gardens, the mountain, like a gloomy tyrant above, sending forth his displeasure, & seeming only to withhold destruction from those who lived beneath him – We had no intimation of what was coming – when, alighting at a small door, we descended a few paces, & found ourselves in the forum, the columns of its portico standing, & on some of them scrawled by the people names, a horse galloping in red chalk – then came the theatres, the basilica, the temples, the streets – after passing the Apothecary's, who can stand at the fountain – Ganimede – where the three ways meet paved with lava – & look up & down near the oil-merchant's door & the miller's, & not feel a strange & not unpleasing sadness. Who can walk thro' the better houses – one of these is bounded by Vesuvius itself – particularly those in the borgo, their baths, & courts & gardens unmoved? or stand near the gateway & look down the street of tombs, one by one, so vast, & of marble so white, so ornamented, so entire – What an idea do they give us of the Via Appia?

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 20 February 1815

I stood within the city disinterred
  And heard the autumnal leaves like light footfalls
Of spirits passing through the streets; and heard
  The mountain's slumberous voice at intervals
  Thrill through those roofless halls. . . .
  Around me gleamed many a bright sepulchre
Of whose pure beauty, Time, as if his pleasure
  Were to spare Death, had never made erasure.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Ode to Naples*, 1820

The walls of these little cabinets are frequently painted in frescoes, the birds, beasts, and flowers sometimes well executed; the pavement in the better and larger houses is of many-coloured mosaics; but, except in one superior mansion, called the house of Sallust, we did not observe one room long enough to contain an English bed.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

Nothing is wanting but the inhabitants. Still, a morning's walk through the solemn silent streets of Pompeii, will give you a livelier idea of their modes of life, than all the books in the world. They seem, like the French of the present day, to have existed only *in public*.

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

Others even regret that the houses are not repaired and inhabited – but this would very soon destroy the identity and antiquity of the place.

John Webster, *Notes of a Journey from London to Constantinople . . .*, 1836

On the 9th of February, Sir Walter went to Pompeii. . . . I was sometimes enabled to call his attention to such objects as were the most worthy of remark. To these observations, however, he seemed generally nearly insensible, viewing the whole and not the parts, with the eye, not of an antiquary, but a poet, and exclaiming frequently – 'The City of the Dead,' without any other remark.

Sir William Gell, quoted by J.G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 1838 – of 1832

Pompeii like any other town. Same old humanity. All the same whether one be dead or alive. Pompeii comfortable sermon. Like Pompeii better than Paris.

Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 18 February 1857

The ghastly suburb of Pompeii repeats, like a remote echo, the very note of Naples. Pompeii, though you will find it large enough when you follow all the intersections of its abrupt, crossing ways, remains in the memory like a toy city, or a cabinet in a museum.

Arthur Symons, *Cities*, 1903

and Messina

It was Goethe who, speaking of Pompeii, said that of the many catastrophes which have afflicted mankind, few have given greater pleasure to posterity. The same will never be said of Messina.

Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria*, 1915

Pompeii that was at one time the Beverly Hills of Italy. . . . Philadelphia comes nearer approaching it than any big city I know of.

Will Rogers, *Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to his President*, 1927

It is true that much of the town was crowded and rectilinear, the small plain windowless houses lining the streets monotonous and unornamental; to live in them must have been like living in one of a row of bathing huts.

Rose Macaulay, *Pleasures of Ruins*, 1953

Pontine Marshes (near Rome)

The short, but pathetic reply, made to an inquiring

traveller, is well known. – 'How do you manage to live here?' said he, to a group of these animated spectres – 'We die!'

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

Radicofani

I began to despair of magical adventures, since none happened at Radicofani, which nature seems wholly to have abandoned. Not a tree, not an acre of soil, has she bestowed upon its inhabitants, who would have more excuse for practising the gloomy art than the rest of mankind. I was very glad to leave their black hills and stony wilderness behind.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

Bleak Radicofani! escaped with joy –

William Wordsworth, *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*, 1840–1, pub. 1842

Ravenna

Ravenna itself preserves perhaps more of the old Italian manners than any City in Italy – it is out of the way of travellers and armies – and thus they have retained more of their originality. – They make love a good deal, – and assassinate a little.

Lord Byron, Letter to Lady Byron, 20 July 1819

Inhabitants somewhat savage – rather treacherous and highly inflamed by politics. Fine fellows, though, – good materials for a nation. Out of chaos God made a world, and out of high passions comes a people.

Lord Byron, *Ravenna Journal*, 5 January 1821

Ravenna, where Robert positively wanted to go to live once, has itself put an end to all those yearnings. The churches are wonderful: holding an atmosphere of purple glory, and if one could just live in them, or in Dante's tomb – well, otherwise, keep me from Ravenna. The very antiquity of the houses is white-washed, and the marshes on all sides send up stenches new and old, till the hot air is sick with them.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter, 1848

Ravenna was my personal circus. It was what I came for. . . . The Ravenna churches with their mosaics . . . are a revelation of what can be done by an old civilisation when the gold-bug breaks down, and empires expire.

Henry Adams, Letter to Elizabeth Cameron, 15 July 1896

We ended in Ravenna and felt the splendour of Rome dying among barbarians in a way that I never felt again until I reached the ruins of the Levant.

Freya Stark, *Traveller's Prelude*, 1950

Reggio Calabria

I could have desired no happier incident for the close of my journey; by lucky chance this visit to the museum had been postponed till the last morning, and, as I idled through the afternoon about the Via Plutino, my farewell mood was in full harmony with that in which I had landed from Naples upon the Calabrian shore. So hard a thing to catch and to retain, the mood corresponding perfectly to an intellectual bias – hard, at all events, for him who cannot shape his life as he will, and whom circumstance ever menaces with dreary harassment. Alone and quiet, I heard the washing of the waves; I saw the evening fall on cloud-wreathed Etna, the twinkling lights come forth upon Scylla and Charybdis; and, as I looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten.

George Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, 1901

Rome

Ancient

Civis Romanus Sum.
(I am a Roman citizen.)

Marcus Tullius Cicero, *In Verrem*, v, lvii, 147

Augustus Caesar when he had many diverse waies both beautified and strengthened or fensed the citie of Rome, and had also for many yeres to come, as moche as in hym laie, made the same suer and safe from all daungiers, being proude thereof not without cause, he would often saie: I found Rome made but of Bricke, and I will leave it of Marble.

Nicholas Udall (trans.), *The Apothegmes of Erasmus*, 1564

Rome onely might to Rome compared bee,
And onely Rome could make great Rome to tremble.

Edmund Spenser, *The Ruines of Rome by Bellay*, Complaints, 1591

The queen of nations, absolutely great.

William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, *Doomsday*, The Sixth Hour, St. 77, *c.* 1614, pub. 1637

A people, who, while they were poor, robbed mankind; and as soon as they became rich, robbed one another.

Samuel Johnson, in James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 1756

I have already found such a fund of entertainment for a mind somewhat prepared for it by an acquaintance with the Romans, that I am really almost in a dream. Whatever ideas books may have given us of the greatness of that people, their accounts of the most flourishing state of Rome fall infinitely short of the picture of its ruins. I am convinced there never existed such a nation, and I hope for the happiness of mankind that there never will again.

Edward Gibbon, Letter to Edward Gibbon Sr, 9 October 1764

It appears to me that nothing romantic or poetical can coexist with what is Roman. . . . The Romans were a blunt, flat people.

Walter Savage Landor, Letter to Southey, 30 November 1809

Vile in its origin, barbarous in its institutions, a casual association of robbers and of outcasts became the destiny of mankind.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

The Romans would never have had time to conquer the world if they had been obliged to learn Latin first of all.

Heinrich Heine, *Das Buch le Grand*, in *Reisebilder*, 1826–31

If the Romans had been better acquainted with the laws of hydraulics they would not have constructed all the aqueducts that surround the ruins of their cities; they would have made a better use of their power and their wealth. If they had invented the steam-engine, perhaps they would not have extended to the extremities of their empire those long artificial ways which are called Roman roads. These things are the splendid memorials at the same time of their ignorance and of their greatness.

A people that left no other vestige than a few leaden pipes in the earth and a few iron rods on its surface might have been more the master of nature than the Romans.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, the second part, 1840

The barbarians who broke up the Roman empire did not arrive a day too soon.

R.W. Emerson, 'Considerations by the Way', *Conduct of Life*, 1860

The mere names in Roman history make my blood warm.

George Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, 1901

It is easy to speak of the Empire and to say that it established its order from the Tyne to the Euphrates; but when one has travelled alone and on foot up and down the world, and seen its vastness and its complexity, and yet everywhere the unity even of bricks in their courses, then one begins to understand the name of Rome.

Hilaire Belloc, *Hills and the Sea*, 1906

The Roman people were military. They had no love for ships. The sea terrified them: their expansion was by land and their horror of the sea explains much of their history.

Hilaire Belloc, *Esto Perpetua*, 1906

Everybody knows that the ancient world ran down into the completed Roman Empire as into a reservoir, and everybody knows that the modern world has flowed outwards from that reservoir by various channels.

Ibid.

Proverbs

Neque protinus uno est Condita Roma die.
(Rome was not built in a day.)

Pietro Angelo Manzolli (Palingenius, pseud.), *Zodiacus Vitae*, xii, 460

Chi Asino va a Roma, Asino se ne torna.
(If an Asse at Rome doe sojourne,
As Asse he shall from thence returne.)

Fynes Moryson, 'Of Travelling in General', *An Itinerary*, 1617

All roads lead to Rome.

Traditional

At Florence you think; at Rome, you pray; at Venice, you love; at Naples, you look.

Italian proverb, quoted Maurice Baring, *Round the World in any Number of Days*, 1913

Dove è il Papa, ivi è Roma.
(Where the Pope is, there is Rome.)

Italian proverb

When at Rome, do as the Romans do.

Traditional

Sixteenth Century

Thou stranger, which for *Rome* in *Rome* here seekest,
And nought of *Rome* in *Rome* perceiv'st at all,
These same olde walls, olde arches which thou seest,
Olde Palaces, is that which *Rome* men call.
Behold what wreake, what ruine, and what wast,
And how that she, which with her mightie powre
Tam'd all the world, hath tam'd herselfe at last,
The pray of time, which all things doth devowre.
Rome now of *Rome* is th'onely funerall,
And onely *Rome* of *Rome* hath victorie;
Ne ought save *Tyber* hastning to his fall
Remaines of all: O worlds inconstancie.

That which is firme doth flit and fall away,
And that is flitting, doth abide and stay. . . .

All that which *Aegypt* whilome did devise,
All that which *Greece* their temples to embrave,
After th'Ionicke, Atticke, Doricke guise,
Or *Corinth* skil'd in curious workes to grave:
All that *Lysippus* practike art could forme,
Apelles wit, or *Phidias* his skill,
Was wont this auncient Citie to adorne,
And the heaven it selfe with her wide wonders fill;
All that which *Athens* ever brought forth wise,
All that which *Afrike* ever brought forth strange,
All that which *Asie* ever had of prise,
Was here to see. O mervelous great change:
Rome living was the worlds sole ornament,
And dead, is now the worlds sole moniment.

Edmund Spenser, *The Ruines of Rome by Bellay*, Complaints, 1591

Note by the waye that it is the use in *Rome*, for all men whatsoever to weare their haire short: which they doe not so much for conscience sake, or any religion they place in it, but because the extremitie of the heate is such there, that if they should not doe so, they should not have a haire left on their heads to stand upright when they were scared with sprights.

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, 1594

If thou doost but lend half a looke to a *Romans* or *Italians* wife, thy porredge shall be prepared for thee, and cost thee nothing but thy lyfe. Chance some of them break a bitter iest on thee, and thou retortst it severely, or seemest discontented: goe to thy chamber, and provide a great blanket, for thou shall be sure to be visited with guests in a mask the next night, when in kindnes and courtship thy throat shall be cut, and the doers returne undiscovered. Nothing so long of memorie as a dog, these *Italians* are old dogs, & will carrie an iniurie a whole age in memorie: I have heard of a boxe on the eare that hath been revenged thirtie yeare after.

Ibid.

Hate and debate Rome through the world hath spread
Yet Roma, *amor* is if backward read;
Then is it strange Rome hate should foster? No!
For out of backward love all hate doth flow.

Sir John Harington, *Epigram*, late sixteenth century

Of Rome, in short, this is my opinion, or rather indeed my most assured knowledge, that her delights on earth are sweet, and her judgements in heaven heavy.

Sir Henry Wotton, Letter to Lord Zouche, 8 May 1592

Eighteenth Century

Our days at present like those in the first chapter of Genesis consist only of the evening and the morning; for the Roman noons are as silent as the midnights of other countries.

Joseph Addison, Letter to Mr Wortley Montagu, 7 August 1701

Here domes and temples rise in distant views
And opening palaces invite my muse.

Joseph Addison, Letter from Italy to the Right Honourable Lord Halifax, 1701

By the remains one sees of Roman grandeur in their structures, 'tis evident that there must have been more pains taken to destroy those piles than to raise them. They are more demolished than any time or chance could have effected. I am persuaded that in an hundred years Rome will not be worth seeing; tis less so now than one would believe.

Horace Walpole, Letter to Richard West, 7 May 1740

There is a horrid Thing called the mal'aria that comes to Rome every summer, and kills one, and I did not care for being killed so far from Christian burial.

Horace Walpole, Letter to the Hon. Henry Seymour Conway, 5 July 1740

What is more curious than all the Antiquitys . . . is that there is litterally no money in the whole Town, where they follow Mr Law's System and live wholly upon Paper. . . . They go to market with paper, pay the Lodgings with paper, and, in short, there is no Specie to be seen, which raises the prices of every thing to the utmost extravagance, no body knowing what to ask for their goods.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Letter to her husband, 23 November 1740

I hardly slept the night before I arriv'd there with the thoughts of seeing it – my heart beat high, my imagination expanded itself, and my Eyes flash'd again, as I drew near the *Porta del Popolo;* but the moment I enter'd it, I fell at once from my Airy Vision & Utopian Ideas into a very dirty ill looking *place*, (as they call it) with three crooked streets in front, terminated inded at this End with two tolerable Churches – what a disappointment! my Spirits sunk & it was with reluctance that I was drag'd in the afternoon to see the Pantheon – but my God, what was my Pleasure and Surprize! – I never felt so much in my life as when I entered that glorious Structure: I gap'd, but could not speak for 5 Minutes – It is so very noble, that it has not been in the Power of Modern Frippery, or Popery (for it is a Church you know) to extinguish Its grandeur and Elegance – Here I began to think myself in *Old* Rome, & when I saw the ruins of the famous amphitheatre – . . . then I felt my own littleness – & was convinced that the Romans were as much superiour to the Moderns in Every thing, as

Vespasian's Amphitheatre was to Broughton's – it is impossible, my dear Colman, to have any Idea of these things from any Prints that have been made of 'em, – all modern performances look better upon paper, but these Ruins are not to be conceiv'd, but *by the sensible and true Avouch of your own Eyes*. Tho I am pleas'd, much pleas'd with Naples, I have such a thirst to return to Rome, as cannot possibly be slak'd till I have drank up half the Tiber, which, in it's present state, is but a scurvy draught neither. It is very strange that so much good poetry should be thrown away upon such a pitiful River; it is no more comparable to our Thames, than our modern Poets are to their Virgils and Horaces.

David Garrick, Letter to George Colman, 24 December 1763

As I was walking along the streets of Rome, which are very little different from those of any other city, I said to myself, 'Was the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans written to the inhabitants of this city? And did I use to be so terrified by it?'

James Boswell, Letter to J.-J. Rousseau, 3 October 1765

It was at Rome, on the 15 of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed fryars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started in my mind.

Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of his Life*, 1796

Nineteenth Century

As we approach Rome, Antient Italy rushes on the Imagination. Italy has had two lives! Can it be said of any other Country?

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 22 November 1814

The capital of the vanished world.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 20 November 1818

Oh, Rome! my Country! City of the Soul!
The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,
Lone Mother of dead Empires! and control
In their shut breasts their petty misery.
What are our woes and sufferance? Come and see
The cypress – hear the owl – and plod your way
O'er steps of broken thrones and temples – Ye!
Whose agonies are evils of a day –
A world is at our feet as fragile as our clay.

The Niobe of nations! there she stands,
Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe;
An empty urn within her withered hands,
Whose holy dust was scattered long ago;
The Scipios' tomb contains no ashes now;
The very sepulchres lie tenantless
Of their heroic dwellers: dost thou flow,
Old Tiber! through a marble wilderness?
Rise, with thy yellow waves, and mantle her distress. . . .
Alas, for Earth, for never shall we see
That brightness in her eye she bore when Rome was free!

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth, 1818

I've stood upon Achilles' tomb
And hear Troy doubted; time will doubt of Rome.

Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, 1819–24

You pass over miles of a barren common, much like Hounslow Heath; and when, at last, you arrive at the gate of the Eternal City, the first impression is, I think, a feeling of disappointment. . . . We were soon in the *Piazza di Spagna*, – the focus of fashion, and the general resort of the English. Some travellers have compared it to Grosvenor-Square; – but the Piazza di Spagna is little more than an irregular open space, a little less nasty than the other piazzas in Rome, because the habits of the people are in some measure restrained by the presence of the English. Still, there is quite enough left to make me believe the Romans the nastiest people in Christendom, – if I had not seen the Portuguese. The English swarm everywhere. We found all the inns full. It seemed like a country town in England at an assizes.

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

Go thou to Rome, – at once the Paradise,
The grave, the city, and the wilderness.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, 1821

I am in Rome! Oft as the morning-ray
Visits these eyes, waking at once I cry,
Whence this excess of joy? What has befallen me?
And from within a thrilling voice replies
Thou art in Rome! A thousand busy thoughts
Rush on my mind, a thousand images;
And I spring up as girt to run a race!

Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822–34

In Rome, around it nothing strikes the eye, nothing rivets the attention but ruins, the fragments of what has been; the past is like a *halo* forever surrounding and obscuring the present!

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

This *Terra Pictura*.

J.M.W. Turner, Letter to George Jones, 13 October 1828

The effect of every part is so vast and overpowering – there is such an air of greatness and repose cast over the whole, and, independent of what one knows from

history, there are such traces of long sorrow and humiliation, suffering, punishment and decay, that one has a mixture of feelings, partly such as those with which one would approach a corpse, and partly those which would be excited by the sight of the spirit which had left it.

John Henry Newman, Letter to Frederic Rogers, 5 March 1833

We began, in a perfect fever, to strain our eyes for Rome; and when, after another mile or two, the Eternal City appeared, at length, in the distance; it looked like – I am half afraid to write the word – like LONDON!!! There it lay, under a thick cloud, with innumerable towers, and steeples, and roofs of houses, rising up into the sky, and high above them all, one Dome. I swear, that keenly as I felt the seeming absurdity of the comparison, it was so like London, at that distance, that if you could have shown it me, in a glass, I should have taken it for nothing else.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

Oh! Rome, tremendous, who, beholding thee,
Shall not forget the bitterest private grief
That e'er made havoc of one single life?

Fanny Kemble (Mrs Butler), *A Year of Consolation*, 1847

Rome disappoints me much; I hardly as yet
understand, but
Rubbishy seems the word that most exactly would suit it.
All the foolish destructions, and all the sillier savings,
All the incongrous things of past incompatible ages,
Seem to be treasured up here to make fools of present
and future.
Would to Heaven the old Goths had made a cleaner
sweep of it!
Would to Heaven some new ones would come and
destroy these churches!
However, one can live in Rome, as also in London.
Rome is better than London, because it is other than
London. . . .
Rome disappoints me still; but I shrink and adapt
myself to it.
Somehow a tyrannous sense of a superincumbent
oppression
Still, wherever I go, accompanies ever, and makes me
Feel like a tree (shall I say?) buried under a ruin of
brickwork.
Rome, believe me my friend, is like its own Monte
Testaceo,
Merely a marvellous mass of broken and castaway
wine-pots.
Ye gods! what do I want with this rubbish of ages
departed,
Things that nature abhors, the experiments that she
has failed in?
What do I find in the Forum? An Archway and two or
three pillars.
Well, but St Peter's? Alas, Bernini has filled it with
sculpture!
No one can cavil, I grant, at the size of the great
Coliseum.
Doubtless the notion of grand and capacious and
massive amusement,
This the old Romans had; but tell me, is this an idea?
Yet of solidity much, but of splendour little is extant:
'Brickwork I found thee, and marble I left thee!' their
Emperor vaunted;
'Marble I thought thee, and brickwork I find thee!' the
Tourist may answer.

Arthur Hugh Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, 1849

O Land of Empire, art and love!
What is it that you show me?
A sky for Gods to tread above,
A soil for pigs below me!
O in all place and shape and kind
Beyond all thought and thinking,
The graceful with the gross combined,
The stately with the stinking! . . .
O richly soiled and richly sunned,
Exuberant, fervid, and fecund!
Are these the fixed condition
On which may Northern pilgrim come
To imbibe thine ether-air, and sum
Thy store of old tradition?
Must we be chill, if clean, and stand
Foot-deep in dirt in classic land?

Arthur Hugh Clough, 'Oh Land of Empire, Art and Love', *c.* 1849

At Rome may everything be bought
But honesty, there vainly sought:
For other kinds of costly ware
The pontif opens a bazaar.
If you have lost your soul you may
Procure a better . . . only pay.
If you have any favourite sin,
The price is ticketed . . . walk in.
For a few thousand golden pieces
Uncles may marry here their nieces;
The pontif slips the maiden sash
And winks, and walks away the cash.
Naples, so scant of blushes sees
And blushes at such tricks as these
Until a ghostly father saith,
Behold my sons! the ancient faith!
This ancient faith brought faithful Gauls
In guise of friends to scale the walls
Of manfull Rome; and Louis' word
Unsheath'd Christina's tarnisht sword.

W.S. Landor, *Last Fruit*, No. CXLV, 1853

*Of course our first pilgrimage was to St Peter's. What

a walk! Under what noble shadows does one pass; how great and liberal the houses are, with generous casements and courts, and great grey portals which giants might get through and keep their turbans on. Why, the houses are twice as tall as Lamb Court itself; and over them hangs a noble dinge, a venerable mouldy splendour. Over the solemn portals are ancient mystic escutcheons – vast shields of princes and cardinals, such as Ariosto's knights might take down; and every figure about them is a picture by himself. At every turn there is a temple; in every court a brawling fountain. Besides the people of the streets and houses, and the army of priests black and brown, there's a great silent population of marble. There are battered gods tumbled out of Olympus and broken in the fall, and set up under niches and over fountains; there are senators namelessly, noselessly, noiselessly seated under archways, or lurking in courts and gardens. And then, besides these defunct ones, of whom these old figures may be said to be the corpses, there is the reigning family, a countless carved hierarchy of angels, saints, confessors of the latter dynasty which has conquered the court of Jove. . . .

I think I have lost sight of St Peter's haven't I? Yet it is big enough. How it makes your heart beat when you first see it! Ours did as we came in at night from Cività Vecchia, and saw a great, ghostly, darkling dome rising solemnly up into the grey night, and keeping us company ever so long as we drove, as if it had been an orb fallen out of heaven with its light put out. As you look at it from the Pincio, and the sun sets behind it, surely that aspect of earth and sky is one of the grandest in the world. I don't like to say that the façade of the church is ugly and obtrusive. As long as the dome overawes, that façade is supportable. You advance towards it – through, oh, such a noble court! with fountains flashing up to meet the sunbeams; and right and left of you two sweeping half-crescents of great columns; but you pass by the courtiers and up to the steps of the throne, and the dome seems to disappear behind it. It is as if the throne was upset, and the king had toppled over.

W.M. Thackeray, *The Newcomes*, 1853–5

To leave Rome will fill me with a barbarian complacency. I don't pretend to have a rag of sentiment about Rome. It is a palimpsest Rome – a watering-place written over the antique – and I haven't taken it as a poet should, I suppose; only let us speak the truth, above all things. I am strongly a creature of association, and the associations of the place have not been favourable to me.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Miss Mitford, 10 May 1854

Any one who has remarked how grandly the Romans do nothing will be slow to believe them an effete race. Their style is as the colossal to all other, and the name of Eternal City fits Rome also, because time is of no account in it. The Roman always waits as if he could afford it amply, and the slow centuries move quite fast enough for him. Time is to other races the field of a taskmaster, which they must painfully till; but to the Roman it is an entailed estate, which he enjoys and will transmit. The Neapolitan's laziness is that of a loafer; the Roman's is that of a noble.

James Russell Lowell, *Leaves from my Journal in Italy and Elsewhere*, 1854

*Here, it seemed to Little Dorrit that a change came over the Marshalsea spirit of their society, and that Prunes and Prism got the upper hand. Everybody was walking about St. Peter's and the Vatican on somebody else's cork legs, and straining every visible object through somebody else's sieve. Nobody said what anything was, but everybody said what the Mrs Generals, Mr Eustace, or somebody else said it was. The whole body of travellers seemed to be a collection of voluntary human sacrifices, bound hand and foot, and delivered over to Mr Eustace and his attendants, to have the entrails of their intellects arranged according to the taste of that sacred priesthood. Through the rugged remains of temples and tombs and palaces and sēnate halls and theatres and amphitheatres of ancient days, hosts of tongue-tied and blindfolded moderns were carefully feeling their way, incessantly repeating Prunes and Prism, in the endeavour to set their lips according to the received form. Mrs General was in her pure element. Nobody had an opinion. There was a formation of surface going on around her on an amazing scale, and it had not a flaw of courage or honest free speech in it.

Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 1857–8

More imagination wanted *at* Rome than at home to appreciate the place.

Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 1857

*When we have once known Rome, and left her where she lies, like a long-decaying corpse, retaining a trace of the noble shape it was, but with accumulated dust and fungous growth overspreading all its more admirable features; – left her in utter weariness, no doubt of her narrow, crooked, intricate streets, so uncomfortably paved with little squares of lava that to tread over them is a penitential pilgrimage, so indescribably ugly, moreover, so cold, so alley-like, into which the sun never falls, and where a chill wind forces its deadly breath into our lungs; – left her, tired of the sight of those immense, seven-storied, yellow-washed hovels, or call them palaces, where all that is dreary in domestic life seems magnified and multiplied, and weary of climbing those staircases, which ascend from a ground floor of cook-shops, cobblers' stalls, stables, and regiments of cavalry, to a middle region of princes, cardinals, and ambassadors, and an upper tier of

artists, just beneath the unattainable sky; – left her, worn out and shivering at the cheerless and smoky fireside, by day, and feasting with our own substance the ravenous little populus of a Roman bed, at night; – left her, sick at heart of Italian trickery, which has uprooted whatever faith in man's integrity had endured till now, and sick at stomach of sour bread, sour wine, rancid butter, and bad cookery, needlessly bestowed on evil meats; – left her, disgusted with the pretence of Holiness and the reality of Nastiness, each equally omnipresent; – left her, half lifeless from the languid atmosphere, the vital principle of which has been used up long ago, or corrupted by myriads of slaughters; left her, crushed down in spirit with the desolation of her ruin, and the hopelessness of her future; – left her, in short, hating her with all our might, and adding our individual curse to the Infinite Anathema which her old crimes have unmistakeably brought down; – when we have left Rome in such mood as this, we are astonished by the discovery, by and by, that our heartstrings have mysteriously attached themselves to the Eternal City, and are drawing us thitherward again, as if it were more familiar, more intimately our home, than even the spot where we were born!

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Transformation, The Marble Faun*, 1860

Everyone soon or late comes round by Rome.

Robert Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, v. 296, 1868–9

At last, for the first time – I live! It beats everything: it leaves the Rome of your fancy – your education – nowhere. It makes Venice, Florence – Oxford – London – seem like little cities of pasteboard. I went reeling and moaning through the streets in a fever of enjoyment. In the course of four or five hours I traversed almost the whole of Rome and got a glimpse of everything – the Forum, the Coliseum (stupendissimo)! the Pantheon, the Capitol, St Peter's, the Column of Trajan, the Castle of St Angelo – all the Piazza's and ruins and monuments. The effect is something indescribable. For the first time I know what the picturesque is. In St Peter's I stayed some time. It's even beyond its reputation. It was filled with foreign ecclesiastics – great armies encamped in prayer on the marble plains of its pavement – an inexhaustible physiognomical study. To crown my day, on my way home, I met his Holiness in person – driving in prodigious purple state – sitting dim within the shadows of his coach with two uplifted benedictory fingers – like some dusky hindoo idol in the depths of its shrine. Even if I should leave Rome tonight I should feel that I have caught the keynote of its operation on the senses. I have looked along the grassy vista of the Appian Way and seen the topmost stonework of the Coliseum sitting shrouded in the light of heaven, like the edge of an Alpine chain. I've trod the Forum and I have scaled the Capitol. I've seen the Tiber hurrying along, as swift and dirty as history! From the high tribune of a great chapel of St Peter's I have heard in the papal choir a strange old man sing in a high shrill unpleasant soprano. I've seen troops of little tonsured neophytes clad in scarlet, marching and countermarching and ducking and flopping, like poor little raw recruits for the heavenly host. In fine, I've seen Rome, and I shall go to bed a wiser man than I last rose – yesterday morning.

Henry James, Letter to William James, Rome, 30 October 1869

Nothing can be more depressing to those who really value Rome than to meet Englishmen hunting in couples through the Vatican galleries, one looking for the number of the statue in the guide-book, the other *not* finding it; than to hear Americans describe the Forum as the dustiest heap of old ruins they had ever looked upon; or say, when asked their opinion of the Venus de Medici, that they 'guess they are not particular gone on stone gals;' or, of the Coliseum, that 'it will be a handsome building when it is *finished;*' . . .

A.J.C. Hare, *Walks in Rome*, 1871

'And what,' cries Cupid, 'will save us?'
Says Apollo: '*Modernise Rome!*'
What inns! Your streets, too, how narrow!
Too much of palace and dome!

Matthew Arnold, *New Rome*, 1873

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.

John Addington Symonds, 'Southward Bound', *Many Many Moods*, 1878

Time's central city, Rome.

Thomas Hardy, *Rome: Building a New Street in the Ancient Quarter*, April 1887

Twentieth Century

Rome is a sea in which many worlds have gone down, and its very pavement is all in waves; so that to drive through these narrow streets, and across these broad squares, in which there is no footway over which a wheel may not drive, is like rocking in a boat on slightly uneasy water.

Arthur Symons, *Cities*, 1903

Every road does not lead to Rome, but every road in Rome leads to eternity.

Ibid.

For the rest, Italy was mostly an emotion, and the emotion naturally centred in Rome. . . . Rome was the

worst spot on earth to teach nineteenth-century youth what to do with a twentieth-century world . . . for no one, priest or politician, could honestly read in the ruins of Rome any other certain lesson than that they were evidence of the just judgements of an outraged God against all the doings of man. This moral unfitted Rome for every sort of useful activity; it made Rome a gospel of anarchy and vice; the last place under the sun for educating the young; yet it was, by common consent, the only spot that the young – of either sex and every race – passionately, perversely, wickedly loved. . . . Two great experiments of Western civilization had left there the chief monuments of their failure, and nothing proved that the city might not still survive to express the failure of a third. . . . The tourist . . . went on repeating to himself the eternal question: – Why! Why!! Why!!! – . . . No one had ever answered the question to the satisfaction of any one else; yet every one who had either head or heart, felt that sooner or later he must make up his mind what answer to accept. Substitute the word America for the word Rome, and the question became personal.

Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1906

Rome reminds me of a man who lives by exhibiting to travellers his grandmother's corpse.

James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 25 September 1906

There was once upon a time an Englishwoman who came out to Rome to live there. She was the wife of a scholar who had rooms in the Vatican itself, and she herself lived in a neighbouring Palazzo. She was asked by one of her compatriots whether she liked Rome. She said it was a great come-down after what she had been used to.

'And where,' asked the second Englishwoman, 'used you to live in England?'

'Surbiton,' she answered.

Maurice Baring, *Round the World in Any Number of Days*, 1913

It rains persistently in soft, warm showers. Rome is mirthless.

There arises, before my mind's eye, the vision of a sweet old lady friend who said to me, in years gone by:

'When next you go to Rome, please let me know if it is still raining there.'

Norman Douglas, *Alone*, 1921

In Rome you have to do as the Romans do, or get arrested.

Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Abyssinian Adventure*, 1935

Competition for the inspiration of literary works has always been keen among Roman ruins.

Rose Macaulay, *Pleasures of Ruins*, 1953

*Rome's just a city like anywhere else. A vastly overrated city, I'd say. It trades on belief just as Stratford trades on Shakespeare.

Anthony Burgess, *Inside Mr Enderby*, 1963

Rome, Italy, is an example of what happens when the buildings in a city last too long.

Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, 1975

Rome is the only European capital which each year must spend millions of pounds restoring ruins – restoring them at least to their state of ruin of 100 years ago.

George Armstrong, in *Guardian*, 9 August 1979

Districts and Details

The Colosseum

While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;
When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall;
And when Rome falls – the World.

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth, 1818

and the Baths of Caracalla

The Coliseum is a thing about which it's useless to talk: it must be seen and felt. But as a piece of the picturesque – a province of it – it is thoroughly and simply delightful. . . . I betook myself to the almost equal ruins of the Baths of Caracalla. It was the hour of sunset and I had them all to myself. They are a collection of perfectly mountainous masses of brick-work, to the right of the Appian Way. Even more than the Coliseum I think they give you a notion of the Roman *scale*. Imagine a good second class mountain in reduced circumstances – perforated and honeycombed by some terrestrial cataclysm – and you'll have an idea of these terrific ruins.

Henry James, Letter to Alice James, 7 November 1869

The neighbourhood of the Colisseum is like an old cemetery with broken columns of temples and slabs. You know the Colisseum from Pictures. While we were in the middle of it, looking at it all round gravely from a sense of duty, I heard a voice from London on one of the lowest gallery say: – The Colisseum –

Almost at once two young men in serge suits and straw hats appeared in an embrasure. They leaned on the parapet and then a second voice from the same city clove the calm evening, saying:

– Whowail stands the Colisseum Rawhm shall stand
When falls the Colisseum Rawhm sh'll fall
And when Rawhm falls the world sh'll fall –
but adding cheerfully:
– Kemlong, 'ere's the way aht –

James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 7 August 1906

The Coliseum is surely one of the most famous structures in the world. Even they who have never been to the spot would recognise it from those myriad reproductions – especially, one would think, an Italian. Nevertheless, while thus discoursing, a man came up to us, a well-dressed man, who politely inquired:

'Could you tell me the name of this *castello?*'

I am glad to think that some account of the rich and singular flora of the Coliseum has been preserved by Deakin and Sebastiani, and possibly by others. I could round off their efforts by describing the fauna of the Coliseum. The fauna of the Coliseum – especially after 11 p.m. – would make a readable book; readable but hardly printable.

Norman Douglas, *Alone*, 1921

I walked around the old Madison Square Garden, which, so unlike the American building, embodied, in its grimness and grandeur, a human attitude that made it an official mask.

Edmund Wilson, *Europe without Baedeker*, 1947

Tarpeian Rock

The Tarpeian Rock is now of so small a fall that a man would think it no great matter for his diversion to leap over it.

Gilbert Burnet, *Letters Containing an Account of What seemed most remarkable in travelling through Switzerland, Italy, . . .*, 3rd edn, 1708

The Tarpeian rock we all agreed was high and steep enough to break either the late Bp. Burnet's or any man else's neck who should try the experiment by leaping down.

George Berkeley, *Journal*, 15 January 1717

Trevi Fountain

* . . . where some sculptor of Bernini's school had gone absolutely mad in marble.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Transformation, The Marble Faun*, 1860

Pilate's House

I was at *Pontius Pilates* house and pissed against it.

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, 1594

Vatican City

Today, on coming out of the Vatican Gallery, Greek Gods and the Roman middle-classes in my brain, all marble to make the contrast worse, I found that the Vatican Gardens were open to the Bohemian and Portuguese pilgrims. I at once spoke both languages fluently, explained that my English dress was a form of penance, and entered that waste desolate park, with its faded Louis XIV gardens, its sombre avenues, its sad woodland. The peacocks screamed, and I understood why tragedy dogged the gilt feet of each pontiff. But I wandered in exquisite melancholy for an hour. One Philippo, a student, whom I culled in the Borgia room, was with me: not for many years has love walked in the Pope's pleasaunce.

Oscar Wilde, Letter to Robert Ross, 27 April 1900

A Baroque State the size of Hyde Park.

Patrick O'Donovan, *Observer*, 13 August 1978

St Peter's

St. Peter's seldom answers expectation at first entering it, but enlarges itself on all sides insensibly, and mends upon the eye every moment.

Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 1705

St Peters is in its proportions much to be admired, but the Popish arrangements must be shunned off.

Mrs Bousquet, *Diary*, 1765

The church would have produced a still greater effect, had it been detached entirely from the buildings of the Vatican. It would then have been a masterpiece of architecture, complete in all its parts, entire and perfect; whereas at present, it is no more than a beautiful member attached to a vast undigested and irregular pile of building.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, 1766

In the sqare of St Peter's there are about three hundred fettered criminals at work, hoeing out the weeds that grow between the stones of the pavement. Their legs are heavily ironed, and some are chained two by two. They sit in long rows, hoeing out the weeds, dressed in parti-coloured cloths. Near them sit or saunter, groups of soldiers, armed with loaded muskets. The iron discord of those innumerable chains clanks up into the sonorous air, and produces, contrasted with the musical dashing of the fountains, and the deep azure beauty of the sky, and the magnificence of the architecture around, a conflict of sensations allied to madness. It is the emblem of Italy – moral degradation contrasted with the glory of nature and the arts.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 6 April 1819

As a whole St Peter's is fit for nothing but a ballroom, and it is a little too gaudy even for that.

John Ruskin, Letter to the Rev. Thomas Dale, 31 December 1840

and Niagara Falls

It is very common for people to say that they are disappointed in the first sight of St. Peter's; and one hears much the same about Niagara. I cannot help thinking that the fault is in themselves; and that if the church and the cataract were in the habit of giving away their thoughts with that rash generosity which characterizes tourists, they might perhaps say of their

visitors, 'Well, if *you* are those Men of whom we have heard so much, we are a little disappointed, to tell the truth!' The refined tourist expects somewhat too much when he takes it for granted that St. Peter's will at once decorate him with the order of imagination, just as Victoria knights an alderman when he presents an address. . . . It would be wiser, perhaps, for him to consider whether, if Michael Angelo had had the building of *him*, his own personal style would not have been more impressive.

James Russell Lowell, *Leaves from My Journal in Italy and Elsewhere*, 1854

That is a grand and solemn place, the gigantic arms inviting the concourse of all the children of men; but it is an impious work – architecture, swagger, human prowess, human greatness. . . . The face of Christ has been more defiled by our praise than by spittle – for we have not praised him but ourselves.

Eric Gill, *Autobiography*, 1940

It seems to be the only architectural work of Man which has exactly fulfilled its object. . . . It must receive, as its natural furniture, such myriads that the crowd of them shall be a symbol of the Church itself – and this with plenitude and without strain. It must have about it the note of complete success, although it deals with a spiritual and social fact beyond the power of human measurement.

Hilaire Belloc, *Places*, 1942

The vastness struck me as so uniform, so remorseless, as to be self-annihilating, like the vastness of stellar statistics, whose zeros our tiny minds accept so lightly, like necklaces of nothings. What is marvellous about a sky-high ceiling when the walls are remote as horizons? The inflation was insufficiently selective. Gigantic marble popes like vertical gray clouds jutted from niches as high overhead as housetops; church-size chapels, one after another, slowly rotated into view around the colossal piers; living men walked and talked together as if on the open street. Reverence was not in the air. The ghostly presences of so many commemorated ecclesiastical princes melted together into a faceless, sumptuous ambience that seemed to invite, urbanely, by way of devotion, if any was desired – a kind of secondary pantheism. The most majestic and most vast basilica in Christendom so successfully aped the scale of Creation that it seemed to me to deliver, like certain dreadful natural landscapes, a crushing comment on human insignificance. *Vanity, vanity* each overweening vault declared, in polished syllables of porphyry and gilt. If I found space for any holy emotion in this maelstrom of artificial immensity, it was pity for the dizzy workmen who had risked their lives in its construction.

John Updike, 'Mea Culpa', in *Assorted Prose*, 1965

Ronciglione

A little town like a large pig-sty.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

River Rubicone

This river that makes so great a figure in history is nothing more than a muddy stream that we would hardly dignify with the name of a brook in America. Indeed I have been exceedingly disappointd in the classic streams of Italy that have been so often sung by the poets; I have found them generally yellow dirty & turbid and the nymphs must surely have been mere drabs that inhabited them.

Washington Irving, *Journal* 21 April 1805

San Lorenzo

San Lorenzo is a town built on the summit of a hill, in consequence of the ravages of the *malaria* in the old town, situated in the valley below. It looks like a large alms-house, or else like a town that has run away from the plague and itself, and stops suddenly on the brow of a hill to see if the Devil is following it.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

San Remo

At San Remo, as the Italian coast draws to a close it gathers up on its lovely bosom the scattered elements of its beauty and heart-broken at ceasing to be that land of lands, it exhales towards the blind insensate heavens a rapturous smile, more poignant than any reproach. There is something hideous in having at such a place to get back into one's carriage.

Henry James, Letter to Henry James Sr, 18 January 1870

Sardinia

One of the most neglected spots in Europe.

Arthur Young, *Travels . . . [in] . . . France*, 1792

To be in central Sardinia is to live among people who have rejected every element of what is proudly called European civilisation: the Phoenicians were there and the Romans and the Byzantines, and the Genoese and the Spaniards and the Piedmontese and now the Italians, and it is as though they had never been. They have all been rejected.

Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

The real fugitive from justice in Sardinia in the words of a communist deputy from the island, Ignazio Pirastu, was the state.

Ibid.

Scylla and Charybdis

Between Scylla and Charybdis.

Greek proverb

'Hello, doctor, what are you doing up here at this time of night? – What do you want to see this place for?'

'What do *I* want to see this place for? Young man, little do you know me or you wouldn't ask such a question. I wish to see *all* the places that's mentioned in the Bible.'

'Stuff – this place isn't mentioned in the Bible.'

'It ain't mentioned in the Bible! – *this* place ain't – well now, what place *is* this, since you know so much about it?'

'Why, it's Scylla and Charybdis.'

'Scylla and Cha – confound it, I thought it was Sodom and Gomorrah!'

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad,* 1869

Siena

Siena
Di tre cose e piena:
Torri, campane,
E figli di putane.
(Siena has plenty of three things: towers, bells, and sons of whores.)

Florentine saying, quoted by Norman Douglas, *Alone,* 1921

The situation of Sienna is most pleasant, upon a high hill, and the forme not unlike to an earthen vessell, broad in the bottom, and narrow at the mouth, which narrow part lies towards the West. . . . In the center of the City lies a most faire Marketplace, in the forme of an Oyster.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary,* 1617

This famous Citty stands on several rocky Hills, which makes it uneven, has an old ruin'd Wall about it, over-grown with *Caper* shrubbs: but the Air is incomparable, whence divers passe the heates of Summer there; Provisions cheape, the Inhabitants Courteous and the Italian purely spoken. The Citty at a little distance presents the Traveller with an incomparable Prospect, occasion'd by the many playne brick Towers, which (whilst it was a Free state) were erected for defence. . . .

The Piazza, . . . being made with descending steps much resembles the figure of an Escalop-shell, with the white ranges of Paving intermix'd with the incomparable brick . . . & with which generally the towne is well paved, which renders it marvailously cleane.

John Evelyn, *Diary,* 31 October 1644

There is nothing in this city so extraordinary as the cathedral, which a man may view with pleasure after he has seen St. Peter's, though it is quite of another make, and can only be looked upon as one of the master-pieces of Gothic architecture. When a man sees the prodigious pains and expence that our forefathers have been at in these barbarous buildings, one cannot but fancy to himself what miracles of architecture they would have left us, had they only been instructed in the right way.

Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703,* 1705

'tis old, and very smug, with very few inhabitants.

Horace Walpole, Letter to Richard West, 22 March 1740

Of Sienna I can say nothing from my own observation, but that we were indifferently lodged in a house that stunk like a privy, and fared wretchedly at supper.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy,* 1766

Here my duty of course was to see the cathedral, and I got up much earlier than I wished, in order to perform it. I wonder that our holy ancestors did not choose a mountain at once, scrape it into tabernacles, and chisel it into scripture stories. It would have cost them almost as little trouble as the building in question, which may certainly be esteemed a masterpiece of ridiculous taste and elaborate absurdity. The front, encrusted with alabaster, is worked into a million of fretted arches and puzzling ornaments. There are statues without number, and relievos without end or meaning. The church within is all of black and white marble alternately; the roof blue and gold, with a profusion of silken banners hanging from it; and a cornice running above the principal arcade, composed entirely of bustos representing the whole series of sovereign pontiffs, from the first bishop of Rome to Adrian the fourth. . . . I hardly knew which was the nave, or which the cross aisle, of this singular edifice so perfect is the confusion of its parts. The pavement demands attention, being inlaid so curiously as to represent a variety of histories taken from holy writ, and designed somewhat in the style of that hobgoblin tapestry which used to bestare the walls of our ancestors. Near the high altar stands the strangest of pulpits, supported by polished pillars of granite, rising from lions' backs, which serve as pedestals. In every corner of the place some chapel or other offends or astonishes you.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents,* 1783

Sienna is a fine old town, but more like a receptacle of the dead than the residence of the living. 'IT WAS,' might be written over the entrance to this, as to most of the towns in Italy. The magnificence of the buildings corresponds but ill with the squalidness of the inhabitants; there seems no reason for crowding the streets so close together when there are so few people in them.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

It is like a bit of Venice, without the water.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

There was what they called a Carnival in progress; but, as its secret lay in a score or two of melancholy people walking up and down the principal street in common toy-shop masks, and being more melancholy, if possible, than the same sort of people in England, I say no more of it.

Ibid.

The air is as fresh as English air, without English dampness and transition; yes, and we have English lanes with bowery tops of trees, and brambles and blackberries, and not a wall anywhere, except the walls of our villa.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Miss Isa Blagden, 1850

The lovely city of my love
Bathes deep in the sun-satiate air
That flows round no fair thing more fair
Her beauty bare . . .
O gracious city well-beloved,
Italian, and a maiden crowned,
Siena, my feet are no more moved
Towards thy strange-shapen-mountain-bound:
But my heart in me turns and moves,
O lady loveliest of my loves
Toward thee to lie before thy feet.

A.C. Swinburne, 'Siena', *Songs Before Sunrise*, 1871

I had a bad weary headache at Siena; and the cathedral seemed to me every way absurd – over-cut, over-striped, over-crocketed, over-gabled, a piece of costly confectionery, and faithless vanity.

John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1885–9

The land in the world, I suppose, least like New South Wales.

Henry James, Letter to the Countess of Jersey, Siena, 11 June 1892

Sicily

The sun is the father of the ragged.

Sicilian proverb

In some circumstances these banditti are the most respectable of the island; and have by much the highest and most romantic notions of what they call their point of honour. That, however criminal they may be with regard to safety in general; yet, with respect to one another, and to every person to whom they have once professed it, they have ever maintained the most unshaken fidelity. The magistrates have often been obliged to protect them, and even pay them court, as they are known to be perfectly determined and desperate; and so extremely vindictive, that they will certainly put any person to death who has ever given them just cause of provocation. On the other hand, it never was known that any person who had put himself under their protection, and shewed that he had confidence in them, had cause to repent of it, or was injured by any of them, in the most minute trifle; but on the contrary, they will protect him from impositions of every kind. For these reasons, most travellers chuse to hire a couple of them from town to town; and may thus travel over the whole island in safety.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

The lower class of Sicilians generally seem to take it for granted, that a stranger thinks them both silly and knavish. In numberless instances they have begun their conversations with me by defending themselves against suspicions which I had not given the least hint of my entertaining; I am assured that at first a Sicilian is easily duped, but when once he has learnt experience at this cost, grows quickly a master in the art, able to retaliate with interest upon those that had over-reached him. . . . The Sicilian . . . has no interval of humanity, when once he has abandoned himself to wickedness.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

The fatigue of ascending Etna is the only thing that has not been exaggerated in it – & of Sicily in generall all is exaggerated grossly except the abominableness of the Government, & the vice & abject wretchedness of the people.

S.T. Coleridge, Letter to Mrs S.T. Coleridge, 12 December 1804

In England we have no idea what a Sicilian flea is.

John Henry Newman, Letter to Harriet Newman, 25 April 1833

Coleridge . . . [said] . . . that Sicily was an excellent school of political economy; for, in any town there, it only needed to ask what the government enacted, and reverse that, to know what ought to be done; it was the most felicitously opposite legislation to anything good and wise. There were only three things which the government had brought into that garden of delights, namely, itch, pox, and famine.

R.W. Emerson, *English Traits*, 1856 – of 1833

Like Sicily extremely – a good on-the-brink feeling – one hop and you're out of Europe: nice, that.

D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, Taormina, 25 March 1920

There is in the Sicilian, as in the Andalusian, a great deal of Arab solemnity as a background to Italian vivacity.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

'Surely,' said I, 'it would be easy to put down the Mafia here if the Government placed power in the hands of one efficient man.'

'If you lived in Sicily,' replied the custodian, 'you would not say that. Only a Sicilian knows the ramifications, the never-ending subtleties of the Mafia which follows every Sicilian as closely as the shadow does the body.'

Ibid.

Sicily is the schoolroom model of Italy for beginners, with every Italian quality and defect magnified, exasperated and brightly coloured.

Luigi Barzini, *The Italians*, 1964

Thrown down almost in mid-channel like a concert grand, it had a sort of minatory, defensive air. From so high one could see the lateral tug of the main deep furling and unfurling its waters along those indomitable flanks of the island. . . . It looked huge, and sad, and slightly frustrated, like a Minoan bull – and at once the thought clicked home. Crete, Cyprus! It was like them, an island of the mid-channel – the front line of defence against the huge seas combing up from Africa. Perhaps even the vegetation echoed this as it does in Crete? I felt at once reassured; as if I had managed to situate the island more clearly in my mind. Magna Graecia!

Lawrence Durell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

In a sense all our thinking about the Mediterranean crystallised around the images planted here by the Greeks – in this Greater Greece, so aptly named. In Sicily one sees that the Mediterranean evolved at the same rhythm as man, they both evolved together. One interpreted itself to the other, and out of the interaction, Greek culture was first born.

Ibid.

I have heard it said that Sicilians can't use the telephone because they need both hands to talk with.

Anon.

Spezzia

Spezzia wheels the blue sea into the arms of the wooded mountains.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Miss Mitford, 1849

Since it has become prosperous Spezia has grown ugly. The place is filled with long, dull stretches of dead wall and great raw expanses of artificial land. It wears that look of monstrous, of more than Occidental, newness, which distinguishes all the creations of the young Italian state.

Henry James, 'Italy Revisited', 1877, in *Portraits of Places*, 1883

Spoleto

Of the wine, Martiall thus writes;
De Spoletanis quae sunt curiosa lagenis.
Malveris, quam si musta Falerna hibas.
If with Spoleto bottels once you meet,
Say that Falerno must is not so sweet.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Spoleto, I think the most romantic city I ever saw. There is here an aqueduct of astonishing elevation, which unites two rocky mountains, – there is the path of a torrent below, whitening the green dell with its broad and barren track of stones, and above there is a castle, apparently of great strength and of tremendous magnitude, which overhangs the city, and whose marble bastions are perpendicular with the precipice. I never saw a more impressive picture; in which the shapes of nature are of the grandest order, but over which the creations of man, sublime from their antiquity and greatness seem to predominate.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 20 November 1818

Spoleto is a handsome town, delightfully situated, and has an appearance (somewhat startling in Italy) as if life were not quite extinct in it.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

Stromboli

Stromboli is ever at work, and for ages past has been looked upon as the great light-house of these seas.

Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1773

Taormina

Were I to name a place that possesses every grand and beauteous qualification for the forming of a picture; a place in which I should wish to employ the powers of a Salvator or a Poussin, Taormina should be the object of my choice. – Every thing belonging to it is drawn in a large sublime style; the mountains tower to the very clouds, the castles and ruins rise on mighty masses of

perpendicular rock, and seem to defy the attacks of mortal enemies; Etna with all its snowy and woody sweeps fills half the horizon; the sea is stretched out upon an immense scale and occupies the remainder of the prospect.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Taormina in itself is one of the most beautiful spots in the world. I've seen most of the great landscapes, including the slopes of Fujiyama and Kilauea and Orizaba and Popocatapetl and Turquino. They are all divine, but the Greek is the only man who ever lived that could get the whole value out of his landscape, and add to it a big value of his own. His share counts for almost as much as the share of nature. The wretch was so complete an artist that big or little was equally easy for him to handle, and he took hold of Etna just as easily as he did of the smallest lump of gold or silver to make a perfect coin.

Henry Adams, Letter to Elizabeth Cameron, 23 April 1899

Here one feels as if one had lived for a hundred thousand years. What it is that is so familiar I don't know. You remember Stopford said Sicily had been waiting for me for about 2000 years: must be the sense of that long wait. Not that Sicily waited for me alone –

She waits for each and other,
She waits for all men born.

– What for? To rook them, overcharge them, to diddle them and do them down. Capri is an unhatched egg compared to this serpent of Trinacria.

D.H. Lawrence, Letter, 31 March 1920, quoted in Norman Douglas, *Looking Back*, 1934

I have seen many different kinds of traveller arrive in Taormina – idle travellers, lying travellers, proud, vain, and splenetic travellers – but no sooner do they mount to the Greek theatre in face of Ætna than all their eccentricities disappear, and they become nothing but Lotos-eating travellers. Taormina should be let out by the Italian Government, as an open-air asylum for Anglo-Saxons who live their lives according to the adage 'Time is money.' It would soon cure their restless efficiency. Nobody ever looks at a clock in Taormina.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

How pleasant . . . to dawdle the length of that main street, – like walking the bridge of a Zeppelin . . . the whole thing has been anchored in mid-heaven, at a thousand feet, and up here the air is still and calm. The white curtains in my hotel-room breathed softly in and out, like the lungs of the universe itself.

Lawrence Durrell, *Sicilian Carousel*, 1977

Taranto

In Taranto it is always afternoon. 'The Tarentines,' says Strabo, 'have more holidays than workdays in the year.'

Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria*, 1915

Taranto today gallantly proclaims to the world its greatness as a seaport, but its blocks of modern apartments, its big harbour full of ships, seemed pathetically unreal to the lonely traveller dreaming of Greater Greece. The proud fishermen and patient husbandmen looked on these modern buildings with as much stupefaction as though they had been set there in the night by the genie of Aladdin's lamp.

Walter Starkie, *The Waveless Plain*, 1938

Falls of Terni

No description can give a more lively idea of the impression which the first sight of it makes upon the spectator, than the exclamation of Wilson the painter, overheard by Sir Joshua Reynolds, who happened to be on the spot. Wilson stood for a moment in speechless admiration, and then broke out, with, – '*Well done*, Water, by G—!'

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

If this noble and interesting object have a fault, it is that it is too slender, straight, and accompanied with too few wild or grotesque ornaments. It is the Doric, or at any rate the Ionic, among waterfalls.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

Terracina (near, between Rome and Naples)

The man, who had no money in his pocket, might formerly dismiss all fear of robbers; – but in these days, an empty purse is no longer a security. These modern desperadoes carry men away even from their homes, for the sake of the ransom, which they think they may extort for their liberation. We are told that two men were lately kidnapped from this neighbourhood, and taken up into the mountains. The friends of one sent up nearly the sum that was demanded; – the other had no friends to redeem him. The robbers settled the affair, in the true spirit of that cold-blooded savage disposition, that has leisure to be sportive in its cruelty. They sent the first man back without his ears; detaining these, as a set-off against the deficiency in the ransom; – and the other poor fellow was returned in *eight pieces!* – So much for Italian government. An edict has lately been issued against ransoms, as operating to encourage kidnapping.

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

River Tiber

Sometimes to gentle Tiber I retire,

And the famed river's empty shores admire,
That, destitute of strength, derives its course
From thrifty urns and an unfruitful source,
Yet sung so often in poetic lays
With scorn the Danube and the Nile surveys.

Joseph Addison, *Letter from Italy to the Right Honourable Lord Halifax*, 1701

A river that ancient Rome made more considerable than any merit of its own could have done: However, it is not contemptibly small, but a good handsome stream; very deep, yet somewhat of a muddy complexion.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Mrs Gray, his mother, 2 April 1740

The Tiber frightens me.

James Joyce, Postcard to Stanislaus Joyce, 31 July 1906

Tivoli

Altogether Tivoli has left an agreeable impression. . . . By the bye, Wordsworth called the Cascadelles 'nature's waterworks.'

Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, 13 May 1837

I shall not say anything about Tivoli. A waterfall in type is likly to be a trifle stiffish.

James Russell Lowell, *Leaves from My Journal in Italy and Elsewhere*, 1854

Lake Trasimene

It struck me as not unlike Windermere in character and scenery, but I have seen other lakes since, which have driven it out of my head.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

Tre Fontane

After siesta we took a taxi and drove along dusty and dull and very bad roads to Tre Fontane – the place where Paul's head jumped three times after being cut off, at each place producing a fountain. There are three churches, and if they locate the fountains, Paul's head must have very considerably bounded.

Arnold Bennett, *Journal*, 5 February 1926

Trento

to Trenta then I kam,
which iz the first of Italy, az thar doth go the fam.
in which sitty the langwages indiffrent ar to all,
Both Alman and Italien, eevn az on toong doth fall.

Thomas Whythorne, *Autobiography*, *c.* 1576

Trieste

Trieste is the rudest place I have ever been in. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the incivility of the people.

James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 12 July 1905

*And trieste, ah trieste ate I my liver.

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 1939

'We are the furthest limit of Latinity,' the Mayor of Trieste exclaimed to me one day, 'the southern extremity of Germanness.' Triestini love this sort of hyperbole.

Jan Morris, *Destinations*, 1980

Turin

The prospect of Turin is a company of dirty red flat howses, few or no steeples onely four towres coverd with Tin of the dukes palace.

Richard Symonds, *Notebooks*, 1649, quoted in *Travels of Peter Mundy*, 1907

'Tis really by far one of the prettiest cities I have seen – not one of your large straggling ones, that can afford to have twenty dirty suburbs, but clean and compact, very new and very regular. The king's palace is not of the proudest without, but of the richest within; painted, gilt, looking-glassed, very costly, but very tawdry; in short, a very popular palace.

Horace Walpole, Letter to Richard West, 11 November 1739

After eight days journey through Greenland, we arrived at Turin. . . . The city is not large, as being a place of strength and consequently confined within its fortifications; it has many beauties and some faults; among the first are streets all laid out by the line, regular uniform buildings, fine walks that surround the whole, and in general a good lively, clean appearance: but the houses are of brick plaistered, which is apt to want repairing; the windows of oiled paper, which is apt to be torn; and every thing very slight, which is apt to tumble down. There is an excellent Opera, but it is only in the Carnival: Balls every night, but only in the Carnival: Masquerades too, but only in the Carnival. This Carnival lasts only from Christmas to Lent; one half of the remaining part of the year is passed in remembering the last, the other in expecting the future Carnival.

Thomas Gray, Letter to Richard West, 16 November 1739

There was here many fine women. The counts and other pretty gentlemen told me whenever I admired a lady, 'Sir, you can have her. It would not be difficult.' I thought at first they were joking, and waggishly amusing themselves with a stranger. But I at last discovered that they were really in earnest and that the manners here were so openly debauched that adultery was carried on without the least disguise. I asked them, 'But why then do you marry?' 'Oh, it's the custom; it perpetuates families.'

James Boswell, *Journal*, 8 January 1765

This being the first Italian city for beauty that I have seen, I have been all eyes today. Some travellers have represented it as the prettiest town in Europe, and the → Strada di Po the finest street. I hurried to it with eagerness. I was in the middle of it, asking for it. *Questa, questa!* replied an officer, holding up his hands, as if to point out an object of great beauty which I did not see, and in truth I saw it not. It is strait and broad, and nearly regular. Two rows of brick barns might be so equally. The houses are of ugly obfuscated brick; a few have stucco, and that old and dirty; the scaffold holes in the walls of all the rest are left unfilled; some of them enlarged by time, and several courses of bricks between those holes, not pointed, which has as bad an effect; the windows are narrow and poor; some with iron balconies – some without; the arcades, for there is a row on each side of the street, would be destructive of beauty, if it was here: the arches are plaistered, which patches the line with white: and through them are exhibited nothing but poor shops that incumber their spans with all sorts of lumber; the lamps are fifty or sixty yards asunder. In a word, there are fifty streets at London to which this cannot be compared. If those who have travelled in Italy think this street fine, what am I to meet with in other towns.

Arthur Young, *Travels . . . [in] . . . France* (26 September 1789), 1792

It is built in the form of a star, with a large stone in its centre, on which you are desired to stand, and see the streets all branch regularly from it, each street terminating with a beautiful view of the surrounding country, like spots of ground seen in many of the old-fashioned parks in England, where the etoile and vista were the mode. . . . Model of elegance, exact Turin! . . . This charming town is the *salon* of Italy.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

Notwithstanding the undeniable beauty of this little city of palaces, the sin of incompleteness is every where conspicuous.

Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

My arrival at Turin was the first and only moment of intoxication I have found in Italy. It is a city of palaces.

William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

Turin is a noble city, like a set of Regent streets made twice as tall.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Turin is more regular than Philadelphia. Houses all one cut, one color, one height. City seems all built by one contractor.

Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 10 April 1857

This is a remarkably agreeable place. A beautiful town, prosperous, thriving, growing prodigiously, as Genoa is; crowded with busy inhabitants; full of noble streets and squares. The Alps, now covered deep with snow, are close upon it, and here and there seem almost ready to tumble into the houses. The contrast this part of Italy presents to the rest is amazing. Beautifully made railroads admirably managed; cheerful, active people; spirit, energy, life, progress.

Charles Dickens, Letter, 1853, in Forster, *Life of Dickens*, 1872–3

In the matter of roominess it transcends anything that was ever dreamed of before, I fancy. It sits in the middle of a vast dead-level, and one is obliged to imagine that land may be had for the asking, and no taxes to pay, so lavishly do they use it.

Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad*, 1880

Turin is not a city to make, in vulgar parlance, a fuss about, and I pay an extravagant tribute to subjective emotion in speaking of it as ancient. . . . Relatively speaking, Turin is diverting; but there is, after all, no reason in a large collection of shabbily stuccoed houses, disposed in a rigidly rectangular manner, for passing a day of deep, still gaiety. The only reason, I am afraid, is the old superstition of Italy – that property in the very look of the written word, the evocation of a myriad images, that makes any lover of the arts take Italian satisfactions upon easier terms than any other. Italy is an idea to conjure with, and we play tricks upon our credulity even with such inferior apparatus as is offered to our hand at Turin.

Henry James, 'Italy Revisited', 1877, in *Portraits of Places*, 1883

Turin is a very large city, rectangular in form and spirit.

Arnold Bennett, *Journal 1929*, 1930

Tuscany

I knew a young English-woman, who, having grown up

in Tuscany, thought the landscapes of her native country insipid, and could not imagine how people could live without walks in vineyards. To me, Italy had a certain hard taste in the mouth. Its mountains were too bare, its outlines too sharp, its lanes too stony, its voices too loud, its long summer too dusty. I longed to bathe myself in the grassy balm of my native fields.

Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, 1850

Wherein lies that particular salt of Tuscan speech? In its emphasis, its air of finality. They are emphatic rather than profound. Their deepest utterances, if you look below the surface, are generally found to be variants of one of those ancestral saws or proverbs wherewith the country is saturated. Theirs is a crusted charm. A hard and glittering sanity, a kind of ageless enamel, is what confronts us in their temperament. There are not many deviations from this Tuscan standard.

Norman Douglas, *Alone*, 1921

Vallombrosa

he stood and call'd
His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans't
Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
In *Vallombrosa*, where th'*Etrurian* shades
High overarch't imbowr; or scatterd sedge
Afloat, when with fierce Winds *Orion* arm'd
Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
Busiris and his *Memphian* Chivalry.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667

How we enjoyed that great, silent, ink-black pine wood!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter, 1847

Venice

Pria Veneziani, poi Christiani.
(A Venetian first, and then a Christian.)

Old Proverb

Seventeenth Century

A Clock going with many wheels, and making small motions, sometimes out of order, but soon mended, and all without change or variety.

Sir Dudley Carleton, Letter to Sir William Fleetwood, early seventeenth century

The best flesh-shambles in *Italie*.

John Day, *Humour Out of Breath*, 1608

That most glorious, renowned, and Virgin Citie of Venice, the Queene of the Christian world, that Diamond set in the ring of the Adriatique gulfe, and the most resplendent mirrour of Europe.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, Epistle Dedicatorie, 1611

This incomparable city, this most beautifull Queene, this untainted virgine, this Paradise, this Tempe, this rich Diademe and most flourishing garland of Christendome: of which the inhabitants may as proudly vaunt, as I have read the Persians have done of their Ormus, who say that if the world were a ring, then should Ormus be the gemme thereof; the same (I say) may the Venetians speake of their citie and much more truely. The sight whereof hath yeelded unto me such infinite contentment (I must needes confesse) . . . that had there bin an offer made unto me before I took my iourney to Venice, eyther that foure of the richest mannors of Somersetshire (wherein I was borne) should be *gratis* bestowed upon me if I never saw Venice, or neither of them if I should see it; although certainly those mannors would do me much more good in respect of a state of livelyhood to live in the world, then the sight of Venice: yet notwithstanding I will ever say while I live, that the sight of Venice and her resplendent beauty, antiquities and monuments hath, by many degrees more contented my minde, and satisfied my desires, then those four Lordshippes could possibly have done.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

For you must consider that neither the Venetian Gentlemen nor any others can ride horses in the streets of Venice as in other Cities and Townes, because their streets being both very narrow and slippery, in regard they are all paved with smooth brick, and joyning to the water, the horse would quickly fall into the river, and so drowne both himselfe and his rider. Therefore the Venetians do use Gondolaes in their streets, that is, in their pleasant channels. So that I now finde by mine owne experience that the speeches of a certaine English Gentleman (with whom I once discoursed before my travels) a man that much vaunted of his observations in Italy are utterly false. For when I asked him what principall things he observed in Venice, he answered me that he noted but little of the city. Because he rode through it in post. A fiction as grosse and palpable as ever was coyned.

Ibid.

This incomparable mansion is the only paragon of all the cities in the world.

William Lithgow, *Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations*, 1614/32

The Venetians are of a variable disposition, very jealous, and some of them giving the use of their bodies freely without reward (but I think there be few such,) for they pleasantly scoff at our English women, that they give the fruit of love to their lovers for charity.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Though the flood or ebbe of the salt water be small, yet with that motion it carrieth away the filth of the City,

besides that, by the multitude of fiers, and the situation open to all windes, the ayre is made very wholsome, whereof the Venetians bragge, that it agrees with all strangers complexions, by a secret vertue, whether they be brought up in a good or ill ayre, and preserveth them in their former health. And though I dare not say that the Venetians live long, yet except they sooner grow old, and rather seeme then truly be aged: I never in any place observed more old men, or so many Senators venerable for their grey haires and aged gravity.

Ibid.

Theis baits drawe many hither, some for Curiositie, others for Luxurie, there being wayes to gett, but many more to spend.

Peter Mundy, *Sundry Relations of Certaine Voyages*, July 1620

A common Saying that is used of this dainty City of *Venice:*

Venetia, Venetia, chi non te vede non te Pregia,
M chi t'ha troppo veduto *te Dispreggia.*

English'd and rhym'd thus . . .

Venice, Venice, *None* Thee *unseen can prize;*
Who hath seen too much will Thee *despise.*

James Howell, 'Letter to Robert Brown Esq, . . . from Venice, 12 August 1621', *Familiar Letters*, 1645

The best and most of their authors ascribe their first beginnings rather to chance or necessity, than counsel; which yet in my opinion will amount to no more than a pretty conjecture intenebrated by antiquity, for thus they deliver it: they say that among the tumults of the middle age, when the nations went about swarming like bees, Atylas, that great captain of the Hunnes, and scourge of the world (as he was styled) lying along with a numerous army at the siege of Aquileia, it struck a mighty affrightment and confusion into the nearer parts. Whereupon the best sort of the bordering people out of divers towns, agreed either suddenly, or by little and little (as fear will sometimes collect as well as distract) to convey themselves and their substance into the uttermost bosom of the Adriatick Gulf, and there possessed certain desolate islets, by tradition about seventy in number, which afterwards, (necessity being the mother of art) were tacked together with bridges, and so the city took a rude form, which grew civilized with time, and became a great example of what the smallest things well formented may prove.

They glory in this their beginning two ways. First, that surely their progenitors were not of the meanest and basest quality (for such having little to lose had as little cause to remove). Next, that they were timely instructed with temperance and penury (the nurses of moderation). And true it is, that as all things savour of their first principles, so doth the said Republic (as I shall afterwards show) even at this day; for the rule will hold as well in civil as in natural causes.

Sir Henry Wotton, Letter to the Marquis of Buckingham (?), 12 December 1622

Esto perpetua!
(Be thou perpetual!)

Pietro Sarpi, Dying apostrophe to Venice, 15 January 1623

You are now in a place where you may feed all your senses very cheap; I allow you the pleasing of your Eye, your Ear, your Smell and Taste; but take heed of being too indulgent of the fifth Sense. The Poets feign, that *Venus* the Goddess of Pleasure, and therefore call'd *Aphrodite*, was ingendred of the froth of the Sea (which makes Fish more salacious commonly than Flesh); it is not improbable that she was got and coagulated of that Foam which *Neptune* useth to disgorge upon those pretty Islands whereon that City stands.

James Howell, 'Letter to Mr. T. Lucy, . . . 15 January 1635', *New Volume of Familiar Letters*, 1647

. . . add the perfumers & Apothecaries, and the innumberable cages of Nightingals, which they keepe, that entertaines you with their melody from shop to shop, so as shutting your Eyes, you would imagine your selfe in the Country, when indeede you are in the middle of the Sea: besides there being neither rattling of Coaches nor trampling of horses, tis almost as silent as the field.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, June 1645

The *Venetians* apprehend so much from the active Spirits of a necessitous Nobility, that, to lay those asleep, they encourage them in all those things that may blunt and depress their Minds. . . .

Yet I must add one thing, that tho' *Venice* is the Place in the whole World, where Pleasure is most studied, and where the Youth have both the greatest Wealth, and the most Leisure to pursue it; yet it is the Place that I ever saw, where true and innocent Pleasure is the least understood: . . . As for the Pleasures of Friendship or Marriage, they are Strangers to them; for the horrible Distrust, in which they all live, of one another, makes that it is very rare to find a Friend in *Italy*, but most of all in *Venice:* And tho' we have been told of several Stories of celebrated Friendships there, yet these are now very rare. As for their Wives, they are bred to so much Ignorance, and they converse so little, that they know nothing but the dull Superstition on Holydays, in which they stay in the Churches as long as they can, and so prolong the little Liberty they have of going abroad on those Days, as Children do their Hours of Play. They are not employed in their domestick Affairs, and generally they understand no sort of Work; so that I was told, they were the insipidest Creatures imaginable. They are perhaps as vicious as

in other Places, but it is among them downright Lewdness; for they are not drawn into it by the Entanglements of Amour, that inveigle and lead many Persons much farther than they imagined or intended at first; but in them the first Step, without any Preamble or Preparative is downright Beastliness.

Gilbert Burnet, *Some Letters Containing an Account of what seemed Remarkable in Travelling*, 1687

Eighteenth Century

It looks, at a distance, like a great town half floated by a deluge.

Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the Years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 1705

Our voyage-writers will needs have this city in great danger of being left, within an age or two, on the *terra firma;* and represent it in such a manner, as if the sea were sensibly shrinking from it, and retiring into its channel. I asked several, and among the rest, Father Coronelli, the state's geographer, of the truth of this particular; and they all assure me, that the sea rises as high as ever, though, the great heaps of dirt it brings along with it are apt to choke up the shallows, but that they are in no danger of losing the benefit of their situation, so long as they are at the charge of removing these banks of mud and sand. One may see abundance of them above the surface of the water, scattered up and down, like so many little islands, when the tide is low; and they are these that make the entrance for ships difficult to such as are not used to them, for the deep canals run between them, which the Venetians are at a great expence to keep free and open.

Ibid.

O happy streets! to rumbling wheels unknown,
No carts, no coaches shake the floating town!

John Gay, *Trivia*, 1716

The seeming god-built city! which my hand
Deep in the bosom fixed of wondering seas.
Astonished mortals sailed with pleasing awe
Around the sea-girt walls, by Neptune fenced,
And down the briny street, where on each hand,
Amazing seen amid unstable waves,
The splendid palace shines, and rising tides,
The green steps marking, murmur at the door.
To this fair queen of Adria's stormy gulf,
The mart of nations! long obedient seas
Rolled all the treasure of the radiant East.
But now no more. . . .

James Thomson, *Liberty*, Part IV, 1736

It is so much the established fashion for every body to live their own way, that nothing is more ridiculous than censuring the actions of another. This would be terrible in London, where we have little other diversion; but for me, who never found my pleasure in malice I bless my destiny that has conducted me to a part where people are better employed than in talking of the affairs of their acquaintance.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Letter to Lady Pomfret, 6 November 1739

There is no great City so proper for the retreat of Old Age as Venice.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Letter to Lady Bute, 5 December 1758

This Venice is the most particular Place in the whole world – it glares upon you at first, & inchants You, but living a Month here (like the honey moon) brings you to a temperate consideration of things, & you long for your terra firma liberty again! – I am tired to death; tho I have seen here such sights I had no conception of but in Fairy land, & have seen the Visions of the Arabian Night realiz'd by the Venetian *Regate*; . . . which plainly shew'd, that the Contrivers were as little formidable in war and Politicks, as they were superiour to all the World as Managers of a Puppet-Shew.

David Garrick, Letter to George Colman, Venice, 12 June 1764

Of all the towns in Italy, I am the least satisfied with Venice; Objects which are only singular without being pleasing, produce a momentary surprize which soon gives way to satiety and disgust. Old and in general ill built houses, ruined pictures, and stinking ditches dignified with the pompous denomination of Canals; a fine bridge, spoilt by two Rows of houses upon it, and a large square decorated with the worst Architecture I ever yet saw, such are the colours I should employ in my portrait of Venice; a portrait certainly true in general, tho' perhaps you should attribute the very great darkness of the shades to my being out of humour with the place.

Edward Gibbon, Letter to Dorothea Gibbon, 22 April 1765

In the midst of the waters, free, indigent, laborious, and inccessible, they gradually coalesced into a republic.

Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776–88

In the evening there generally is, on St Mark's Place, such a mixed multitude of Jews, Turks, and Christians; lawyers, knaves, and pick-pockets; mountebanks, old women, and physicians; women of quality, with masks; strumpets barefaceed; and, in short, such a jumble of senators, citizens, gondoleers, and people of every character and condition, that your ideas are broken, bruised, and dislocated in the crowd, in such a manner, that you can think, or reflect, on nothing; yet this being a state of mind which many people are fond of, the place never fails to be well attended, and, in fine weather, numbers pass a great part of the night there.

When the piazza is illuminated, and the shops, in the adjacent streets, are lighted up, the whole has a brilliant effect; and as it is the custom for the ladies, as well as the gentlemen, to frequent the cassinos and coffee-houses around, the Place of St Mark answers all the purposes of either Vauxhall or Ranelagh.

John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy*, 1781

No city in the world has less affinity with the country than Venice.

Ibid.

I had been so often forewarned of the amazement with which I should be struck at first sight of this city, that when I actually did see it, I felt little or no amazement at all. You will behold, said those anticipators, a magnificent town . . . standing in the middle of the sea. Well; this, unquestionably is an uncommon scene; and there is no matter of doubt that a town, surrounded by water, is a very fine sight; but all the travellers that have existed since the days of Cain will not convince me, that a town, surrounded by land, is not a much finer. Can there be any comparison, in point of beauty, between the dull monotony of a watery surface, and the delightful variety of gardens, meadows, hills, and woods?

If the situation of Venice renders it less agreeable than another city, to behold at a distance, it must render it, in a much stronger degree, less agreeable to inhabit. For you will please to recollect, that, instead of walking or riding in the fields, and enjoying the fragrance of herbs, and the melody of birds; when you wish to take the air here, you must submit to be paddled about, from morning to night, in a narrow boat, along dirty canals; or, if you don't like this, you have one resource more, which is, that of walking in St. Mark's Place.

These are the disadvantages which Venice labours under with regard to situation; but it has other peculiarities, which, in the opinion of many, overbalance them, and render it, on the wole, an agreeable town.

Ibid.

I have been told that the Venetians are remarkably spirited; and so eager in the pursuit of amusement as hardly to allow themselves any sleep. . . . This may be very true, and yet I will never cite the Venetians as examples of vivacity. Their nerves unstrung by disease and the consequence of early debaucheries, allow no natural flow of lively spirits, and at best but a few moments of false and feverish activity. The approaches of rest, forced back by an immoderate use of coffee, render them weak and listless to like any active amusement, and the facility of being wafted from place to place in a gondola, adds not a little to their indolence. In short, I can scarcely regard their Eastern neighbours in a more lazy light; and am apt to imagine, that instead of slumbering less than any other people, they pass their lives in one perpetual doze.

William Beckford, *Dreams Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, 1783

'Tis certain my beloved town of Venice ever recalls a series of eastern ideas and adventures. I cannot help thinking St. Mark's a mosque, and the neighbouring palace some vast seraglio, full of arabesque saloons, embroidered sofas, and voluptuous Circassians.

Ibid.

Never was locality so subservient to the purposes of pleasure as in this city; where pleasure has set up her airy standard.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

This town cannot be a wholesome one, for there is scarcely a possibility of taking exercise.

Ibid.

Expected to see a gay clean-looking town, with quays on either side of the canals, but was extremely disappointed; the houses are in the water, and look dirty and uncomfortable on the outside; the innumerable quantity of gondolas, too, that look like swimming coffins, added to the dismal scene, and,. I confess, Venice on my arrival struck me with horror rather than pleasure.

Elizabeth Lady Craven, *A Journey thrugh the Crimea to Constantinople*, 1789

Luxury here takes a turn much more towards enjoyment than consumption; the sobriety of the people does much, the nature of their food more. . . . If cheapness of living, *spectacles*, and pretty women, are a man's objects in fixing his residence, let him live at Venice; for myself, I think I would not be an inhabitant to be Doge, with the power of the Grand Turk. Brick and stone, and sky and water, and not a field nor a bush even for fancy to pluck a rose from! My heart cannot expand in such a place: an admirable monument of human industry, but not a theatre for the feelings of a farmer!

Arthur Young, *Travels . . . [in] . . . France* (1 November 1789), 1792

Nineteenth Century

Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee;
And was the safeguard of the West: the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty.
She was a maiden City, bright and free;
No guile seduced, no force could violate;
And, when she took unto herself a mate,
She must espouse the everlasting Sea.

And what if she had seen those glories fade,
Those titles vanish, and that strength decay;
Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid
When her long life hath reach'd its final day:
Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade
Of that which once was great is pass'd away.
William Wordsworth, *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*, 1802

It has always been (next to the East) the greenest island of my imagination.
Lord Byron, Letter to Thomas Moore, 17 November 1816

Venice . . . is my head, or rather my *heart*-quarters.
Lord Byron, Letter to Thomas Moore, 11 April 1817

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying Glory smiles
O'er the far times, when many a subject land
Look'd to the winged Lion's marble piles,
Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles!
She looks a sea Cybele, fresh from ocean,
Rising with her tiara of proud towers
At airy distance, with majestic motion,
A ruler of the waters and their powers:
And such she was; – her daughters had their dowers
From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East
Pour'd in her lap all gems in sparkling showers.
In purple was she robed, and of her feast
Monarchs partook, and deem'd their dignity increased.

In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,
And silent rows the songless gondolier;
Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,
And music meets not always now the ear:
Those days are gone – but Beauty still is here.
States fall, arts fade – but Nature doth not die,
Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear,
The pleasant place of all festivity,
The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy! . . .

Before St Mark still glow his steeds of brass,
Their gilded collars glittering in the sun;
But is not Doria's menace come to pass?
Are they not *bridled?* – Venice, lost and won,
Her thirteen hundred years of freedom done,
Sinks like a seaweed into whence she rose!
Better be whelm'd beneath the waves, and shun,
Even in destruction's depth, her foreign foes,
From whom submission wrings an infamous repose.
Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth, 1816

Underneath day's azure eyes
Ocean's nursling, Venice lies
A peopled labyrinth of walls,
Amphitrite's destined halls,
Which her hoary sire now paves
With his blue and beaming waves . . .
Sun-girt city, thou hast been
Ocean's child, and then his queen
Now is come a darker day
And thou soon must be his prey,
If the power that raised thee here
Hallow so thy watery bier.
A less drear ruin then than now,
With thy conquest-branded brow
Stooping to the slave of slaves
From thy throne among the waves
Wilt thou be when the seamew
Flies, as once before it flew,
O'er thine isles depopulate,
And all is in its ancient state,
Save where many a palace gate
With green sea-flowers overgrown
Like a rock of ocean's own,
Topples o'er the abandoned sea
As the tides change sullenly. . . .
Those who alone thy towers behold
Quivering through aerial gold,
As I now behold them here,
Would imagine not they were
Sepulchres, where human forms,
Like pollution-nourished worms
To the corpse of greatness cling,
Murdered, and now mouldering.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Lines Written among the Euganian Hills*, October 1818

I swam from Lido right to the end of the Grand Canal – including its whole length – besides that space from Lido the Canal's entrance (or exit) by the statue of Fortune – near the Palace and coming out finally at the end opposite Fusina and Maestre – staying in half an hour & – I know not what distance more than the other two – & swimming easy – the whole distance computed by the Venetians at four and a half of Italian miles. – I was in the sea from half past 4 – till a quarter past 8 – without touching or resting. – I could not be much fatigued having had a *piece* in the forenoon – & taking another in the evening at ten of the clock.
Lord Byron, Letter to John Cam Hobhouse, 25 June 1818

Mourn not for Venice; though her fall
Be awful, as if Ocean's wave
Swept o'er her, she deserves it all,
And Justice triumphs o'er her grave.
Thus perish ev'ry King and State,
That run the guilty race she ran,

Strong but in ill, and only great
By outrage against God and man!
Thomas Moore, *Rhymes of the Road*, 1819

The Piazzetta of St. Mark, with its extraordinry Ducal Palace, and the fantastical church, and the gaudy clock opposite, altogether makes a most barbaric appearance. . . . The disenchantment one meets with at Venice, – the Rialto so mean – the canals so stinking!
Thomas Moore, *Journal*, 8 October 1819

As a city, even when seen, it still appears rather a phantom than a fact.
Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 1820

There is a glorious City in the Sea,
The Sea is in the broad, the narrow streets
Ebbing and flowing; and the salt sea-weed
Clings to the marble of her palaces.
No track of men, no footsteps to and fro
Lead to her gates. The path lies o'er the Sea
Invisible; and from the land we went,
As to a floating City – steering in,
And gliding up her streets as in a dream,
So smoothly, silently – by many a dome,
Mosque-like and many a stately portico,
The statues ranged along an azure sky;
By many a pile in more than Eastern pride,
Of old the residence of merchant-kings;
The fronts of some, though Time had shattered them
Still glowing with the richest hues of art,
As though the wealth within them had run o'er.
Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822–34

Dangerous and sweet-tongued Venice.
Ibid.

For an hour and a half, that it takes you to cross from the last point of land to this Spouse of the Adriatic, its long line of spires, towers, churches, wharfs, is stretched along the water's edge, and you view it with a mixture of awe and incredulity. A city built in the air would be something still more wonderful; but any other must yield the palm to this for singularity and imposing effect. If it were on the firm land it would rank as one of the first cities in Europe for magnificence, size, and beauty; as it is, it is without a rival. . . . If a parallel must be found for it, it is . . . like Genoa shoved into the sea. Genoa stands *on* the sea, this *in* it. The effect is certainly magical, dazzling, perplexing. You feel at first a little giddy: you are not quite sure of your footing on the deck of a vessel. You enter its narrow, cheerful canals, and find that instead of their being scooped out of the earth, you are gliding amidst rows of palaces and under broad arched bridges, piled on the sea-green wave. You begin to think that you must cut your liquid way in this manner through the whole city, and use oars instead of feet. You land, and visit quays, squares, market-places, theatres, churches, halls, palaces; ascend tall towers, and stroll through shady gardens, without being once reminded that you are not on *terra firma*. . . . Venice is loaded with ornament, like a rich city-heiress with jewels. It seems the natural order of things. Her origin was a wonder: her end is to surprise. The strong, implanted tendency of her genius must be to the showy, the singular, the fantastic. Herself an anomaly, she reconciles contradictions, liberty with aristocracy, commerce with nobility, the want of titles with the pride of birth and heraldry. A violent birth in nature, she lays greedy, perhaps ill-advised, hands on all the artificial advantages that can supply her original defects. Use turns to gaudy beauty; extreme hardship to intemperance in pleasure. From the level uniform expanse that forever encircles her, she would obviously affect the aspiring in forms, the quaint, the complicated, relief and projection. The richness and foppery of her architecture arise from this: its stability and excellence probably from another circumstance counter-acting this tendency to the buoyant and the fluttering, *viz.*, the necessity of raising solid edifices on such slippery foundations, and of not playing tricks with stone-walls upon the water. Her eye for colours and costume she would bring with conquest from the East. The spirit, intelligence, and activity of her men, she would derive from their ancestors: the grace, the glowing animation and bounding step of her women, from the sun and mountain-breeze! The want of simplicity and severity in Venetian taste seems owing to this, that all here is factitious and the work of art: redundancy again is an attribute of commerce, whose eye is gross and large, and does not admit of the *too much;* and as to irregularity and want of fixed principles, we may account by analogy at least for these, from that element of which Venice is the nominal bride, to which she owes her all, and the very essence of which is caprice, uncertainty, and vicissitude!
William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*, 1826

It seems like being both *in town* and *at sea*, at one and the same time.
J.P. Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour in Italy*, 1830

A city for beavers.
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journal*, June 1833

Nothing in the world that you have ever heard of Venice, is equal to the magnificent and stupendous reality. The wildest visions of the Arabian Nights are nothing to the piazza of St Mark, and the first impression of the inside of the church. The gorgeous and wonderful reality of Venice is beyond the fancy of the wildest dreamer. Opium couldn't build such a place, and enchantment couldn't shadow it forth in a vision. . . . It has never been rated high enough. It is a thing you would shed tears to see. When I came *on board*

here last night (after a five miles' row in a gondola; which somehow or other I wasn't at all prepared for); when, from seeing the city lying, one light, upon the distant water, like a ship, I came plashing through the silent and deserted streets; I felt as if the houses were reality – the water, fever-madness. But when, in the bright, cold, bracing day, I stood upon the piazza this morning, by Heaven the glory of the place was insupportable! And diving down from that into its wickedness and gloom – its awful prisons, deep below the water; its judgement chambers, secret doors, deadly nooks, where the torches you carry with you blink as if they couldn't bear the air in which the frightful scenes were acted; and coming out again into the radiant, unsubstantial Magic of the town; and diving in again, into vast churches and old tombs, – a new sensation, a new memory, a new mind came upon me. Venice is a bit of my brain from this time.

Charles Dickens, Letter, 1844, in Forster, *Life of Dickens*, 1872–3

But close about the quays and churches, palaces and prisons: sucking at their walls, and welling up into the secret places of the town: crept the water always. Noiseless and watchful: coiled round and round it, in its many folds, like an old serpent: waiting for the time, I thought, when people should look down into its depths for any stone of the old city that had claimed to be its mistress.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

How light we go, how soft we skim,
And all in open moonlight swim!
Bright clouds against, reclined I mark
The white dome now projected dark,
And, by o'er-brilliant lamps displayed,
The Doge's columns and arcade;
Over still waters mildly come
The distant laughter and the hum.
How light we go, how softly! Ah,
Life should be as the Gondola!

Arthur Hugh Clough, *Dipsychus*, *c.* 1850

I have been between heaven and earth since our arrival at Venice. The heaven of it is ineffable. Never had I touched the skirts of so celestial a place. The beauty of the architecture, the silver trails of water up between all that gorgeous colour and carving, the enchanting silence, the moonlight, the music, the gondolas – I mix it all up together, and maintain that nothing is like it, nothing to equal it, not a second Venice in the world. Do you know when I came first I felt as if I could never go away. But now comes the earth side. Robert, after sharing the ecstasy, grows uncomfortable, and nervous, and unable to eat or sleep. . . . Alas for these mortal Venices – so exquisite and so bilious!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Miss Mitford, 4 June 1851

Well might it seem that such a city had owed its existence rather to the rod of the enchanter, than the fear of the fugitive; that the water which encircled her had been chosen for the mirror of her state, rather than the shelter of her nakedness; and that all which in nature was wild or merciless – Time and Decay, as well as the waves and tempests, had been won to adorn her instead of to destroy, and might still spare, for ages to come, that beauty which seemed to have fixed for its throne the sands of the hour-glass as well as those of the sea.

John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 1851–3

The fact is, with reverence be it spoken, that whereas Rogers says 'There is a glorious city in the Sea,' a truthful person must say 'There is a glorious city in the Mud.' It is startling at first to say so, but it goes well enough with marble, 'Oh Queen of Marble and of Mud.'

John Ruskin, Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, May 1859

What a funny old city this Queen of the Adriatic is! Narrow streets, vast, gloomy marble palaces, black with the corroding damp of centuries and all partly submerged; no dry land visible anywhere, and no side-walks worth mentioning; if you want to go to church, to the theatre, or to a restaurant, you must call a gondola. It must be a paradise for cripples, for verily a man has no use for legs here.

For a day or two the place looked so like an overflowed Arkansas town because of its currentless waters laving the very doorsteps of all the houses, and the cluster of boats made fast under the windows, or skimming in and out of the alleys and by-ways, that I could not get rid of the impression that there was nothing the matter here but a spring freshet, and that the river would fall in a few weeks, and leave a dirty high-water mark on the houses, and the streets full of mud and rubbish.

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869

White swan of cities, slumbering in thy nest
  So wonderfully built among the reeds
  Of the lagoon, that fences thee and feeds,
  As sayest thy old historian and thy guest!
White water-lily, cradled and caressed
  By ocean streams, and from the silt and weeds
  Lifting thy golden filaments and seeds,
Thy sun-illumined spires, thy crown and crest!
White phantom city, whose untrodden streets
  Are rivers, and whose pavements are the shifting
  Shadows of the palaces and strips of sky;
I wait to see thee vanish like the fleets
  Seen in mirage, or towers of cloud uplifting
  In air their unsubstantial masonry.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Venice*, 1876

The back streets of Venice would be all the better for a little diluted carbolic acid.

G.A. Sala, *Paris Herself Again*, 1879

It is a great pleasure to write the word; but I am not sure there is not a certain impudence in pretending to add anything to it. Venice has been painted and described many thousands of times, and of all the cities in the world it is the easiest to visit without going there.

Henry James, 'Venice', 1882, in *Portraits of Places*, 1883

If we were asked what is the leading colour at Venice we should say pink, and yet, after all, we cannot remember that this elegant tint occurs very often. It is a faint, shimmering, airy, watery pink; the bright sea-light seems to flush with it, and the pale whitish-green of lagoon and canal to drink it in. There is, indeed in Venice a great deal of very evident brickwork, which is never fresh or loud in colour, but always burnt out, as it were, always exquisitely mild. There are certain little mental pictures that rise before the sentimental tourist at the simple mention, written or spoken, of the places he has loved. When I hear, when I see, the magical name I have written above these pages, it is not of the great Square that I think, with its strange basilica, and its high arcades, nor of the wide mouth of the Grand Canal, with the stately steps and the well-poised dome of the Salute; it is not of the low lagoon, nor the sweet Piazzetta, nor the dark chambers of St Mark's. I simply see a narrow canal in the heart of the city – a patch of green water and a surface of pink wall. The gondola moves slowly; it gives a great, smooth swerve, passes under a bridge, and the gondolier's cry, carried over the quiet water, makes a kind of splash in the stillness. A girl is passing over the little bridge, which has an arch like a camel's back, with an old shawl on her head, which makes her look charming; you see her against the sky as you float beneath. The pink of the old wall seems to fill the whole place; it sinks even into the opaque water. Beneath the wall is a garden, out of which the long arm of a white June rose – the roses of Venice are splendid – has flung itself by way of spontaneous ornament. On the other side of this small water-way is a great shabby facade of Gothic windows and balconies – balconies on which dirty clothes are hung and under which a cavernous-looking doorway opens from under a low flight of slimy water-steps. It is very hot and still, the canal has a queer smell, and the whole place is enchanting.

Ibid.

My Venice, like Turner's, had been chiefly created for us by Byron; but for me there was also the pure childish passion of seeing boats float in clear water. The beginning of everything was in seeing the gondola-beak come actually inside the door at Daniele's, when the tide was up, and the water two feet deep at the foot of the stairs; and then, all along the canal sides, actual marble walls, rising out of the salt sea, with hosts of little brown crabs on them, and Titians inside.

John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1885–9

Hare and Murray for common sense, and Mr Ruskin for uncommon sense will be the best guides here.

Mrs Henry Fawcett, *Orient Line Guide*, 1885

Those who are very energetic in the way of walking exercise, will . . . probably prefer to take Venice after having undergone a good deal of fatigue in other places.

Ibid.

The charm of Venice grows on me strangely; at first I had no real personal impression: and then one rainy day, when the wind, with the sound of bells in it, blew up the Grand Canal, and everything was half blotted in a veil of rain, I suddenly felt all the melancholy charm – the charm of silence and beauty and decay. The strangest thing is to go at night, as we often do in our little boat, up the Grand Canal, & then turn in anywhere, and lose ourselves in the blackness and silence. The great palaces are so high that these little canals seem almost like subterranean rivers, save for the strip of sky and the vague stars above. Sometimes we come suddenly, round a corner, on a square with yellow lights & footsteps & music. Then we glide away into the darkness till at last we come out by the Grand Canal again.

In the afternoons we go out on the lagoon – that is almost the most wonderful of all. A great stretch of grey, windless, waveless water, so still that the boats are either mirrored in it, or when they move, trail long diverging furrows across its surface. To the North you can see the wintry Alps, to the South is the Adriatic, and you hear the sound of the surf beating on the Lido shores, but within the lagoon there is a grey enchanted quiet, with the domes and towers of Venice & the faint sound of its bells.

Logan Pearsall Smith, Letter to his mother, 15 November 1895 in John Russell, *Portrait of Logan Pearsall Smith*, 1950

Twentieth Century

When I went to Venice – my dream became my address.

Marcel Proust, Letter to Madame Strauss, *c.* May 1906 – of 1900

It has become a phrase, almost as meaningless as Arcadia. And indeed it is difficult to think of Venice as being quite a real place, its streets of water as being exactly real streets, its gondolas as being no more than the equivalent of hansoms, its union of those elsewhere opposed sentiments of the sea, the canal, the island, walled and towered land, as being quite in the natural order of things. I had had my dreams of Venice, but

nothing I had dreamed was quite as impossible as what I found. . . . The Doge's palace looked exactly like beautifully painted canvas, as if it were stretched on frames, and ready to be shunted into the wings for a fresh 'set' to come forward. Yes, it is difficult to believe in Venice, most of all when one is in Venice.

I do not understand why anyone paints Venice, and yet everyone who paints, paints Venice. But to do so is to forget that it is itself a picture, a finished, conscious work of art. You cannot improve the picture as it is, you can add nothing, you need arrange nothing. Everything has been done, awaits you, enchants you, paralyses you; the artistic effect of things as they are is already complete: it leaves, or should leave you, if you have artistic intentions upon it, helpless. Mere existence, at Venice, becomes at once romantic and spectacular: it is like living in a room without a blind, in the full sunlight. A realist, in Venice, would become a romantic, by mere faithfulness to what he saw before him.

Arthur Symons, *Cities*, 1903

The great *genre* picture which is Venice.

Ibid.

Venice now lies like a sea-shell on the shores of the Adriatic, deserted by the wonderful organism that once inhabited it.

Logan Pearsall Smith, *Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, 1907

I'm glad to find that you dislike Venice because I thought it detestable when we were there, both times – once it might be due to insanity but not twice, so I thought it must be my fault.

Virginia Woolf, Letter to Vanessa Bell, 25 April 1913

and USA

Let the beauty of Venice be a sort of zenith to us, beyond which there is no seeing. Let Lincoln Cathedral fan her wings in our highest heaven, like an eagle at our pitch of flight. We can do no more. We have reached our limits of beauty. But these are not the limits of all beauty. They are not the limit of all things: only of *us*. Therefore St Mark's need be no reproach to an American. It isn't *his* St Mark's. It is ours. And we like crabs ramble in the slack waters and gape at the excess of our own glory. Behold our Venice, our Lincoln Cathedral like a dark bird in the sky at twilight. And think of our yesterdays! What would you not give, O America, for our yesterdays? Far more than they are worth, I assure you. What would not *I* give for your tomorrows.

D.H. Lawrence, 'America Listen to Your Own', *New Republic*, 15 December 1920

. . . abhorrent, green, slippery city. . . .

D.H. Lawrence, 'Pomegranate', 1920, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, 1923

I was surprised to find what pleasure it gave me to be in Venice again. It was like coming home, when sounds and smells which one had forgotten stole upon one's senses; and certainly there is no place like it in the world: everything there is better in reality than in memory. I first saw it on a romantic evening after sunset in 1900, and I left it on a sunshiny morning, and I shall not go there again.

A.E. Housman, Letter to his sister, Mrs E.W. Symons, 23 June 1926

The whole of Venice . . . was one vast explosion of cut-throat competition in luxury and swagger; that was why Ruskin had gone about it cursing and lamenting, and inventing strange theories to excuse himself for yielding to its charm.

Desmond MacCarthy, *Experience*, 1935

The bathing, on a calm day, must be the worst in Europe: water like hot saliva, cigar-ends floating into one's mouth, and shoals of jelly-fish.

Robert Byron, *The Road to Oxiana*, 1937

Venice . . . is at once so stately and so materialist, like a proud ghost that has come back to remind men that he failed for a million.

Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 1942

Wonderful city, streets full of water, please advise.

Robert Benchley, Telegram/Cable, attributed, *c.* 1947

Venice never loses that magic of appearing as if for the first time.

Freya Stark, *Traveller's Prelude*, 1950

Really, Venice is excessively ugly in the rain: it looks like King's Cross.

Sir John Gielgud, Remark, 1953, quoted in Cecil Beaton, *The Strenuous Years*, 1973

Venice at dawn . . . wobbling in a thousand fresh-water reflections, cool as a jelly. It was as if some great master, stricken by dementia, had burst his whole colour-box against the sky, to deafen the inner eye of the world. Cloud and water mixed into each other, dripping with colours, merging, overlapping, liquefying, with steeples and balconies and roofs floating in space, like the fragments of history touched with the colours of wine, tar, ochre, blood, fire-opal, and ripening grain. The whole at the same time being rinsed softly back at the edges into a dawn sky as softly as circumspectly blue as a pigeon's egg.

Lawrence Durrell, *Bitter Lemons*, 1957

Near the celebrated Lido where the breeze is fresh and free
Stands the ancient port of Venice called the City of the Sea.

All its streets are made of water, all its homes are brick and stone,
Yet it has a picturesqueness which is justly all its own.

Here for centuries have artists come to see the vistas quaint,
Here Bellini set his easel, here he taught his School to paint.

Here the youthful Giorgione gazed upon the domes and towers,
And interpreted his era in a way which pleases ours.

A later artist, Tintoretto, also did his paintings here,
Massive works which generations have continued to revere.

Still to-day come modern artists to portray the buildings fair
And their pictures may be purchased on San Marco's famous Square.

When the bell notes from the belfries and the campaniles chime
Still today we find Venetians elegantly killing time

In their gilded old palazzos, while the music in our ears
Is the distant band at Florians mixed with songs of gondoliers.

Thus the New World meets the Old World and the sentiments expressed
Are melodiously mingled in my warm New England breast.

John Betjeman, 'Longfellow's Visit to Venice', in *Collected Poems*, 1958

She was never loved. She was always the outsider, always envied, always suspected, always feared. She fitted into no convenient category of nations. She was the lion who walked by herself.

James Morris, *Venice*, 1960

A wholly materialist city is nothing but a dream incarnate. Venice is the world's unconscious.

Mary McCarthy, *Venice Observed*, 1961

Venice is like eating an entire box of chocolate liqueurs at one go.

Truman Capote, *Observer*, 'Sayings of the Week', 26 November 1961

At the best of times there is something precarious about the city.

Richard Mayne, 'Italian Notebook', *Encounter*, October 1964

Venice was created by logic as little as it excited logic in its admirers; if anything it made them impatient with everything they had known before; they began to think it absurd to build cities on land. We must never forget the illogical sea that was always present under the window, at the side of the *calle*, shining in the distance, separating the islands, rising and falling in a rhythm that made little of men and logic; and the reviving air that seeped through the closed windows, quickly mending the effect of a dissipated night. While this strange city invited dissipation it also stirred health, which is why the historians can never decide whether she was really debauched in the eighteenth century or a happy, well-functioning little state to her last day. What would be a debauched life in a land-city is a different affair in Venice.

Maurice Rowdon, *The Fall of Venice*, 1970

The whole course of Venetian art can be seen as a blissful attempt to define Venetian light, until with Tiepolo in the eighteenth century there is only the light left. There is no subject any longer, not even much of a feeling: just the fullness of the light, glittering, searching, flooding everything.

Ibid.

Nothing of its original purpose survives today, it's all tourists and tankers. . . . it remains a freak city, the only one in Europe to have remained basically unchanged for five hundred years; besides the unchanged eighteenth century decor there is the unique water-life which makes a profound appeal to every castaway from amniotic fluid. . . . The effects of light alone are an earthly paradise.

Cyril Connolly, *The Evening Colonnade*, 1973

Venice is the supreme example of how men correct and exploit nature and nature cooperates or submits. (And, like Naples, Venice is a test; those who claim to dislike it usually blame the tourists but what they really mean is that they cannot stomach a dream come true.)

Peter Nichols, *Italia, Italia*, 1973

Venice, like a drawing room in a gas station, is approached through a vast apron of infertile industrial flatlands, criss-crossed with black sewer troughs and stinking of oil, the gigantic sinks and stoves of refineries and factories, all intimidating the delicate dwarfed city beyond. . . . The lagoon with its luminous patches of oil slick, as if hopelessly retouched by Canaletto, has a yard-wide tidewrack of rubble, plastic bottles, broken toilet seats, raw sewage, and that bone white factory froth the wind beats into drifts of foam. The edges of the city have succumbed to industry's erosion, and what shows are the cracked back windows and derelict posterns of water-logged villas, a few brittle Venetian steeples, and farther in, but low and almost visibly sinking, walls of spaghetti-colored stucco and red roofs

over which flocks of soaring swallows are teaching pigeons to fly.

Paul Theroux, *The Great Railway Bazaar*, 1975

Who wants a Renaissance Disneyland, anyway, with entrance fees only the very rich can afford?

Private Eye, No. 440, 27 October 1978

Venetians . . . know all too well that they are 'picturesque;' in Venice one never loses the sense that life is being staged for the onlooker.

Jonathan Raban, *Arabia through the Looking Glass*, 1979

For six days last week Venice looked like a blocked sink.

Caption to photograph in *Sunday Times*, 25 December 1979

Districts and details

The Arsenal

I went with a freind to see the famous Arsenall, a place of about two myles in compasse, walled round, haveinge but one entrance for a Gally to goe in or out, there being within water for two or three hundred to ride afloate. Here is alsoe about one hundred great roomes open att both ends for building new Gallyes, where were some on the Stocks; from thence to the place where they cast Ordnance: Then to great Store howses, of which there are many full of the said Ordinance, ready mounted on Carriages. In others were Gunns dismounted, others full of Carriages ready made, others with bullets piled in seemely order. Wee were likewise shewed where they made Anchors, Cables and ropes, Rudders, Oares, Masts, yards, all sort of Iron for gallies, ground saltpeter, Planck, Sawyers, etts., with ware howses where every one of the aforementioned lay ready made. Then went Wee upp staires, where were very faire halls, hung on both sides with Armour from the head to the Knees, others with swords, Musketts Pikes and Targetts to a very great number; other halls with munition for fifty Gallies; in each Hall their being fifty pertitions, and in every of them soe many Guns with match, swords, Pikes, etts. sufficient for one Gallie. In other halls were sailes ready made for soe many gallies, and as some spend, there are others made new in their roomes, which are sowen by weomen, of whome there were att present greate Companies att worke. Divers other things there were worth notice which to perticularize would require much tyme, As sondry sorts of auncient Armes, also compleat Armours of certen famous men, reserved there for a Monument; All theis, with the aforesaid kept cleane and in Excellent good Order. Then were wee brought to the Bucentero, a vessell like a Gallye, but shorter, thicker and higher, whereon is shewed the uttermost of Art for carved Worke, that being over layed with Gold, soe that when shee is in the Water, shee appeares to be all of pure gold. . . . In this vessell goeth the Duke and Nobillitie of Venice to marrie the Sea, an auncient Custome observed every yeare on Assention Day. . . .

Peter Mundy, *Sundry Relations of Certaine Voyages*, 27 July 1620

Palace of the Doges

There is near unto the Dukes Palace a very faire prison, the fairest absolutely that ever I saw. . . . I think there is not a fairer prison in all Christendome. . . .

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

The nobleness of the Staircases, the Riches of the Halls, and the Beauty of the whole Building, are much prejudiced by the Beastliness of those that walk along, and that leave their Marks behind them, as if this were rather a common House of Office, than so noble a Palace.

Gilbert Burnet, *Some Letters Containing an Account of what seemed Remarkable in Travelling . . .*, 1687

Thunder and rain! O dear, O dear!
But see, a noble shelter here,
This grand arcade where our Venetian
Has formed of Gothic and of Grecian
A combination strange, but striking,
And singularly to my liking.

Arthur Hugh Clough, *Dipsychus*, Scene VII, 'The Interior Arcade of the Doge's Palace', *c.* 1850

If Venice is no longer Venice, as every body says, one can however see what was not seen before – at least in the way one would like.

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 17 October 1814

Gondolas

The gondolas themselves are things of a most romantic and picturesque appearance; I can only compare them to moths of which a coffin might have been the chrysalis.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 8 October 1818

The Lido

What now? the Lido shall it be?
That none may say we didn't see
The ground which Byron used to ride on,
And do I don't know what beside on.

Arthur Hugh Clough, *Dipsychus*, *c.* 1850

Rialto

It is almost time to talk of the Rialto, said to be the finest single arch in Europe, and I suppose it is so; very beautiful too, when looked on from the water, but so dirtily kept, and deformed with mean shops, that passing over it, disgust gets the better of every other

sensation. The truth is, our dear Venetians are nothing less than cleanly; St. Mark's Place is all covered over in a morning with chicken-coops, which stink one to death; as nobody I believe thinks of changing their baskets: and all about the Ducal palace is made so very offensive by the resort of human creatures for every purpose most unworthy of so charming a place, that all enjoyment of its beauties is rendered difficult to a person of any delicacy; and poisoned so provokingly that I do never cease to wonder that so little police and proper regulation are established in a city so particularly lovely, to render her sweet and wholesome.

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

St Mark's

And above this gallery, and over the great doore of the Church, be foure horses of brasse, guilded over, very notable for antiquity and beauty; and they are so set, as if at the first step they would leape into the market place. . . . And all the parts of these horses being most like the one to the other, yet by strange art, both in posture of motion, and otherwise, they are most unlike one to the other.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

O beautiful, beneath the magic moon,
To walk the watery way of palaces!
O beautiful, o'ervaulted with gemmed blue,
This spacious court; with colour and with gold,
With cupolas, and pinnacles, and points,
And crosses multiplex, and tips and balls
(Wherewith the bright stars unreproving mix,
Nor scorn by hasty eyes to be confused);
Fantastically perfect this low pile
Of oriental glory; these long ranges
Of classic chiselling, this gay flickering crowd,
And the calm Campanile. Beautiful!

Arthur Hugh Clough, *Dipsychus*, *c.* 1850

On these still summer days the fair Venetians float about in full bloom like pond lilies. . . . On the canals of Venice all vehicles are represented. Omnibus, private coach, light gig, or sulky, pedler's cart, hearse. – You at first think it a freshet, it will subside, not permanent – only a temporary condition of things. – St Mark's at sunset. gilt mosaics, pinnacles, looks like a holyday affair. As if the Grand Turk had pitched his pavilion here for a summer's day. 800 years! Inside the precious marbles, from extreme age, look like a mural of rare old soaps. – have an unctuous look. Fairly steamed with old devotions as refectories with old dinners. – In Venice nothing to see for the Venetian. – Rather be in Venice on rainy day than in other capital on fine one.

Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, 5 April 1857

I do not think it, nobody can think it, beautiful, and yet I never was more entertained by any building.

T.B. Macaulay, Letter, 1856, in Sir G.O. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, 1876

One lingers about the Cathedral a good deal, in Venice. There is a strong fascination about it – partly because it is so old, and partly because it is so ugly. Too many of the world's famous buildings fail of one chief virtue – harmony; they are made up of a methodless mixture of the ugly and the beautiful; this is bad; it is confusing, it is unrestful. One has a sense of uneasiness, of distress, without knowing why. But one is calm before St Mark, one is calm within it, one would be calm on top of it, calm in the cellar; for its details are masterfully ugly, no misplaced and impertinent beauties are intruded anywhere; and the consequent result is a grand harmonious whole, of soothing, entrancing, tranquillising, soul-satisfying ugliness. One's admiration of a perfect thing always grows, never declines; and this is the surest evidence to him that it *is* perfect. St Mark is perfect. To me it soon grew to be so nobly, so augustly ugly, that it was difficult to stay away from it, even for a little while. Every time its squat domes disappeared from my view, I had a despondent feeling; whenever they reappeared, I felt an honest rapture – I have not known any happier hours than those I daily spent in front of Florian's, looking across the Great Square at it. Propped on its long row of low thick-legged columns, its back knobbed with domes, it seemed like a vast warty bug taking a meditative walk.

Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad*, 1880

If Venice, as I say has become a great bazaar, this exquisite edifice is now the biggest booth.

Henry James, 'Venice', 1882, in *Portraits of Places*, 1883

Women of
Iago: In Venice, they do let Heaven see the prankes
They dare not shew their Husbands.
Their best Conscience,
Is not to leav't undone, but kept unknowne.

William Shakespeare, *Othello*, 1604–5

The Venetians say 'The first handsome woman that ever was made, was made of Venice glasse.'

James Howell, *Familiar Letters* (1 June 1621), 1645

The women *kiss* better than those of any other nation – which is notorious – and is attributed to the worship of images and the early habit of osculation induced thereby.

Lord Byron, Letter to John Murray, 25 March 1817

It is a very good place for women – I have a few like every one else. . . . The City however is decaying daily and does not gain in population.

Lord Byron, Letter to Samuel Rogers, 3 March 1818

She was, in truth, the wonder of her sex,
At least in Venice – where with eyes of brown,
Tenderly languid, ladies seldom vex
An amorous gentle with a needless frown;
Where gondolas convey guitars by packs,
And Love at casements climbeth up and down,
Whom for his tricks and custom in that kind,
Some have considered a Venetian blind.

Thomas Hood, *Bianca's Dream*, 1827

Verona

Romeo:
There is no world without *Verona* walles,
But Purgatorie, Torture, hell it selfe:
Hence banished, is banisht from the world,
And worlds exile in death.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, *c.* 1594–5

This most faire City is built in the forme of a Lute. . . . It hath a pure aire, and is ennobled by the civility and auncient Nobility of the Citizens, who are indued with a chearfull countenance, magnificent mindes, and much inclined to all good literature.

Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617

Certainly this Citty deserv'd all those Elogies Scaliger has honour'd it with, for in my opinion, tis situated in one of the most delightfullst places that ever I came in, so sweetly mixed with risings, & Vallies, so Elegantly planted with Trees, on which *Bacchus* seems riding as it were in Triumph every *Autumn*, for the Vines reach from tree to tree; & here of all places I have travell'd in *Italy* would I fix preferable to any other, so as well has that learned Man given it the name of the very Eye of the World.

John Evelyn, *Diary*, May 1646

The Veronese Nobillity . . . say, God has reserv'd Glory to himselfe and permitted Pleasure to the persuit of Man.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Letter to Lady Bute, 24 July 1755

Love no child's play in this town. The day before yesterday a man in a fit of jealousy stilotted his wife & her lover, his friend. . . .

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 14 October 1814

Juliet's Tomb
I have been over Verona. . . . Of the truth of Juliet's story, they seem tenacious to a degree, insisting on the fact – giving a date (1303), and showing a tomb. It is a plain, open, and partly decayed sarcophagus, with withered leaves in it, in a wild and desolate conventual garden, once a cemetery, now ruined to the very graves. The situation struck me as being very appropriate to the legend, being blighted as their love. I have brought away a few pieces of the granite, to give to my daughter and my nieces.

Lord Byron, Letter to Augusta Leigh, 7 November 1816

The House of the Capulets
It was natural enough to go straight from the Market-place, to the House of the Capulets, now degenerated into a most miserable little inn. Noisy vetturini and muddy market-carts were disputing possession of the yard, which was ankle-deep in dirt, with a brook of splashed and bespattered geese; and there was a grim-visaged dog, viciously panting in a doorway, who would certainly have had Romeo by the leg, the moment he put it over the wall, if he had existed, and been at large in these times. . . . The house is a distrustful jealous-looking house as one would desire to see, though of a very moderate size.

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, 1846

I must not yet say more of Verona, than that, though truly Rouen, Geneva and Pisa have been the centres of thought and teaching to me, Verona has given the colouring to all they taught. She has virtually represented the fate and beauty of Italy to me; and whatever concerning Italy I have felt, or been able with any charm or force to say, has been dealt with more deeply, and said more earnestly for her sake.

John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1885–9

Juliet's home-town, I suppose some would call it. The phrase takes the edge off romance, and I designed it to do so, determined as I am somehow to vent my rage at being shown Juliet's house, a picturesque and untidy tenement, with balconies certainly too high for love, unless Juliet was a trapeze acrobat, accustomed to hanging downwards by her toes.

This was not Juliet's house, for the sufficient reason that so far as authentic history knows, there never was any Juliet.

Arnold Bennett, *Journal 1929*, 1930

At Verona, an American in Auden's compartment said to his companion, 'Hey, didn't Shakespeare live here?' at which Auden observed loudly, 'Surely it was Bacon.'

Charles Osborne, *W.H. Auden*, 1980 – of 5 September 1951

Vesuvius

With much difficulty I reached to the top of Mount Vesuvius, in which I saw a vast aperture full of smoak,

which hindered the seeing its depth and figure. I heard within that horrid gulf certain odd sounds, which seemed to proceed from the belly of the mountain; a sort of murmuring, sighing, throbbing, churning, dashing (as it were) of waves, and between whiles, a noise, like that of thunder or cannon, which was constantly attended with a clattering, like that of tiles falling from the tops of houses on the streets.

George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, 'Extract of a Letter from Naples', *Philosophical Transactions*, 1717

Then on foot to Vesuvius. Monstrous mounting. Smoke; saw hardly anything.

James Boswell, *Journal*, 14 March 1765

If I had not been ashamed to have gone away from Naples without going up, I should certainly not have given myself the trouble.

Charles Howard Earl of Carlisle, *c.* 1768
quoted in Geoffrey Trease, *The Grand Tour*, 1967

I had a peep very far into the crater. The sides seemed all lava and scoria, with very little variety in the flints, closed at bottom by an impenetrable screen of smoke. I have seen old ruined coalpits, that afford a tolerable idea of this volcanic kettle.

Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777–1780*, 1785

Vesuvius, vomitting fire, and pouring torrents of red hot lava down its sides, was the only object visible; and *that* we saw plainly in the afternoon thirty miles off, where I asked a Franciscan friar, If it was the famous volcano? 'Yes,' replied he, 'that's our mountain, which throws up money for us, by calling foreigners to see the extraordinary effects of so surprising a phaenomenon.'

Hester Lynch Thrale/Piozzi, *Observations . . . in the Course of a Journey*, 1789

Went up Mount Vesuvius – its furrowed & channelled sides – channelled by floods of lava – Sunshine. A hazy morning. No cloud. Wind North East. Mounted a small horse at Portici. A mountain road, rough & stony. A church. A vineyard wall – a cottage – a cross – Lizards sunning themselves among the stones. . . . Descended into a valley of cinders, & now what stood before us but a black Mountain, a Mountain of Cinders – travellers ascending & descending like small white spots – Atrio dei Cavalli – Left our horses at the foot of it & gained the summit; & as you drew near it, sulphur-stains appeared on every side, & smoke rose here & there; & the ashes felt warm to the feet. – Proceeded to the crater; nor heard nor saw any thing till we had gained the utmost height that intercepted all sight & sound; then we looked down a small but dismal hollow, an inclined plane beyond which appeared the gulph, the opposite side of which, black & sulphurous, rose precipitately, & considerably above the nearer side. Then it was that we heard & saw – & we descended to the edge of the gulph – The noise was not continual, but by fits – The silence that came continually, rendering it still more awful – a noise now deep & hollow, like the rolling & dashing of waters, or of a metallic fluid, much heavier & harder than water – now sharp & clattering like that of a Forge such as Virgil places in Etna – Volcani Domus – & now like the explosion of great Ordnance, or of thunder among mountains – the noise instantly followed by a discharge of large substances, most of them red hot, many of which fell back into the abyss, & many against the sides with a violent crash – & some at our feet & behind us. In the air they appeared like shells thrown by an enemy, & the danger was not small my two guides continually pulling me by the arm, & crying, 'Andiamo, Signor.' – Those that fell near us were lighted cinders, near a foot square, & red as when dropping or shot out from a fire. The sound increasing, & a greater explosion having taken place, & the wind shifting against us, we retired to our first position, above a hundred yards from the crater, when another still greater succeeded, throwing vast cinders even to the place we had reached. From the extreme edge it was indeed most horrid, the substances continually thrown half-way up resembling in the darkness lumps or masses of red flesh, like so many drops or 'gouts of blood,' & now & then a flame lighting up, as it were, the darkness. Stood awhile on the brow of the mountain, now looking down on Herculaneum & Pompei & Stabia & now on the horrid gulph. It was an awful & an interesting thing to connect them in one's mind, the Sun shining on the Sea & the shore, on Portici, Resina, Torre del Greco, Castello del Mare – Annonciata – all so lovely & smiling so near the mouth that may devour them all.

Samuel Rogers, *Italian Journal*, 23 February 1815

Vesuvius is, after the glaciers, the most impressive exhibition of the energies of nature I ever saw. It has not the immeasurable greatness, the overpowering magnificence, nor, above all, the radiant beauty of the glaciers; but it has all their character of tremendous and irresistible strength. From Resina to the hermitage you wind up the mountain, and cross a vast stream of hardened lava, which is an actual image of the waves of the sea, changed into hard black stone by inchantment. The lines of the boiling flood seem to hang in the air, and it is difficult to believe that the billows which seem hurrying down upon you are not actually in motion. This plain was once a sea of liquid fire. . . . On the summit is a kind of irregular plain, the most horrible chaos that can be imagined; riven into ghastly chasms, and heaped up with tumuli of great stones and cinders, and enormous rocks blackened and calcined, which had been thrown from the volcano upon one another in terrible confusion. In the midst stands the conical hill

from which volumes of smoke, and the fountains of liquid fire, are rolled forth for ever. The mountain is at present in a slight state of eruption; and a thick, heavy white smoke is perpetually rolled out, interrupted by enormous columns of an impenetrable black bituminous vapour, which is hurled up, fold after fold, into the sky, with a deep hollow sound, and fiery stones are rained down from its darkness, and a black shower of ashes fell even where we sat. The lava, like a glacier, creeps on perpetually, with a crackling sound as of suppressed fire. There are several springs of lava; and in one place it gushes precipitously over a high crag, rolling down the half-molten rocks and its own overhanging waves; a cataract of quivering fire. We approached the extremity of one of the rivers of lava; it is about twenty feet in breadth and ten in height; and as the inclined plane was not rapid, its motion was very slow. We saw the masses of its dark exterior surface detach themselves as it moved, and betray the depth of the liquid flame. In the day the fire is but slightly seen; you only observe a tremulous motion in the air, and streams and fountains of white sulphurous smoke.

At length we saw the sun sink between Capreae and Inarime, and, as the darkness increased, the effect of the fire became more beautiful. We were, as it were, surrounded by streams and cataracts of the red and radiant fire; and in the midst, from the column of bituminous smoke shot up into the air, fell the vast masses of rock, white with the light of their intense heat, leaving behind them through the dark vapour trains of splendour. We descended by torch-light, and I should have enjoyed the scenery on my return, but they conducted me, I know not how, to the hermitage in a state of intense bodily suffering.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 22 December 1818

Excursion to Vesuvius. – My surgeon warned me against this ascent, but I was resolved to go. To leave Naples, without seeing Vesuvius, would be worse, than to die at Naples, after seeing Vesuvius.

Henry Matthews, *Diary of an Invalid*, 1820

We had some conversation with the hermit who lived on the mountain; he was a Frenchman, and said to have been formerly a hairdresser in London; whether this be fact or not, I cannot say; the subject was much too delicate to touch upon with a recluse in such a situation. The mountain seemed in a most villainous humour, emitting flames and large bodies of lava. I soon had enough of it, and was right glad to find myself once more at Portici, with a supper of red mullet, &c. before me.

Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826

The Neapolitans call the crater, '*La cucina del diavolo*' (The devil's kitchen). I asked our guide what he supposed was doing underneath. 'No doubt,' said he, 'it is the devils cooking macaroni.'

J.P. Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour in Italy, etc.*, 1830

The red hot ashes were falling in showers; and the noise and fire, and smoke, and sulphur, made me feel as if I were dead drunk. To which effect, the trembling crust of ground beneath my feet, contributed, no doubt.

It is a tremendous sight. Awful and terrible indeed. Between the stately moon, and the fire, and the black smoke, and the white Snow, and the red going-down of the Sun, there was a combination of Lights and Shadows upon it, such as I could never have imagined. It is more terrible than Niagara: the effect of which (to me at least) is peacefully and gently solemn, as the happy deaths of ten thousand people, without pain or blood, might be. But the two things are as different in the impressions they produce as – in short as fire and water are, which I suppose is the long and the short of it.

Charles Dickens, Letter to Emile de la Rue, 23 and 25 February 1845

The first sight of the Alps had been to me as a direct revelation of the beneficent will in creation. Long since in the volcanic powers of destruction, I had been taught by Homer, and further forced by my own reason to see, if not the personality of an Evil Spirit, at all events the permitted symbol of evil, unredeemed; wholly distinct from the conditions of storm, or heat, or frost, on which the healthy courses of organic life depended. In the same literal way in which the snows and Alpine roses of Lauterbrunnen were visible Paradise, here, in the valley of ashes and throat of lava, were visible Hell. If thus in the natural, how else should it be in the spiritual world? . . . The common English Traveller, if he can gather a black bunch of grapes with his own fingers, and have his bottle of Falernian brought to him by a girl with black eyes, asks no more of this world, or the next; and declares Naples a Paradise. But I knew from the first moment when my foot furrowed volcanic ashes, that no mountain form or colour could exist in perfection, when everything was made of scoria, and that blue sea was to be little boasted of, if it broke on black sand.

John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1885–9

Vesuvius don't talk – Aetna don't. One of them said a syllable, a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it and hid forever. She couldn't look the world in the face afterward, I suppose. Bashful Pompeii! . . .

Emily Dickinson, Letter to Mr Theodore Holland, 1885

If Vesuvius does not frighten those who live under it, is it likely that Hell-fire should frighten any reasonable person?

Samuel Butler, *Note-Books*, 1912

Viareggio

Viareggio, dead at this season, is a rowdy place in summer; not rowdy, however, after the fashion of Margate. There is a suggestive difference between the two. . . . Set Viareggio down at the very gate of Rome and fill it with the scum of Trastevere: the difference would still be there. It might be more noisy than Margate. It would certainly be less blatant.

As for myself, I hate Viareggio at all seasons, and nothing would have brought me here but the prospect of visiting the neighbouring Carrara mines. . . .

For this is a modern town built on a plain of mud and sand, a town of heartrending monotony, the least picturesque of all cities in the peninsula, the least Italian. It has not even a central piazza! You may conjure up visions of Holland and detect something of an old-world aroma, if you stroll about the canal and harbour where sails are now flapping furiously in the north wind; you may look up to the snow-covered peaks, and imagine yourself in Switzerland, and then thank God you are not there; of Italy I perceive little or nothing. The people are birds of prey; a shallow and rapacious brood who fleece visitors during those summer weeks and live on the proceeds for the rest of the year.

Norman Douglas, *Alone*, 1921

Vicenza

On the left hand of the bridge which leadeth into the citie from Padua, I told sixteene pretty water-mils, which are very commodious to the citie: it is thought to be about some foure miles in compasse with the suburbes, being seated in a plaine at the foot of the hill Bericus, and built in that manner that it representeth the figure of a Scorpion. For it extendeth itselfe much more in length than breadth. And about the West end it is so slender and narrow, that it resembleth the taile of a Scorpion.

Thomas Coryate, *Crudities*, 1611

Viterbo

The *Black Eagle* inn at VITERBO is the best house we have met with on this road: and that is not saying *much* for it. In a dining-room, which resembles (not in *cleanliness*) one of the largest English farm-house kitchens, the walls are covered by the scribblings of travellers. This is the case in many of the inns. It is amusing to read what some have left behind them. There is not consolation enough at the *Black Eagle* to have prevented our comfort-hunting countrymen from being very querulous here.

'Wm. Arnold, John Righton, Henry Colbrook:
'three fools for leaving English comfort for the
'sake of seeing greater fools than themselves.'

J.P. Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour in Italy, etc.*, 1830

A somnolent mountain hamlet out of a Schubert operetta.

S.J. Perelman, *Westward Ha!*, 1948

Volterra

Volterra, a sort of inland island, still curiously isolated and grim.

D.H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places*, 1932