

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918)

Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918)

1915

Giosuè Carducci

Ruth Shepard Phelps
University of Minnesota

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/midwestqtrly>



Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Phelps, Ruth Shepard, "Giosuè Carducci" (1915). *Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918)*. 50.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/midwestqtrly/50>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918) at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI

I

It is a commonplace to say that the nations of the north have seen in Italy from the first the home of romance, the pleasure-place of the imagination. And they have always delighted to heighten her effects. From Chaucer to Walter Pater she has been ever the land of mystery and tragedy, of soft lascivious manners and gorgeous crimes, of a deep magical melancholy which has laid a spell upon the northern mind—a spell, however, which that mind itself and its tastes have largely created. The deep racial differences have fascinated the Teutonic imagination, which in turn has exaggerated them; and they have done for the Italian temperament, in our fancy, what the Tuscan cypress does for the grave Italian landscape, given it that touch of strangeness added to beauty which for Pater's mind constituted the romantic. But to think thus of Italy is to deal in a kind of pathetic fallacy. Italy is not romantic in her own view; in her own view she is classic, wholly and unescapably. Her mystic landscape is the same that Virgil and Horace celebrated without a hint of mysticism; Pliny had a villa on Lake Como, Catullus one at Garda; everywhere the antique world underlies the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Italy was classic before ever romanticism was invented, and classic she remains.

Not that the Italians are the Romans, or think they are. They went through the Middle Ages with the rest of Europe, though with a difference. But their classical heritage is in their memories. Even the greatest mediaeval and Christian poem in the world betrays the classic instinct in its magnificent framework, its structure, and its pattern. Petrarch's sonnets are romantic in their personal note of self-revelation; but his claim to fame, we must remember, he based upon Latin works executed as far as he knew how in the classic spirit, and it would have seemed to him an irony that his *Song-Book*, a mere diary so to speak, should be the thing of his to take the fancy of a romanticizing posterity. With the Renaissance came the complete recovery of Italy's inheritance from antiquity, and a recognition of the

true tradition of native inspiration; and Italian literature—even when dealing with romantic material, as with Ariosto and Tasso—has been classic in method ever since.

So the Romantic Movement was never at home on Italian soil. It was but one more invasion by the barbarians. It came in by the door of political thought, with the ideas of the French Revolution; and when Italy's own conflict was over her brief attack of the romantic fever left her. So when her great nineteenth-century poet came to be born (in the very decade which had begun with the publication of *Hernani!*) he was born a classic; and as we see Carducci discarding the foreign romantic wear in literature at the very moment when Italy was repudiating foreign political domination, we seem to feel that classicism—native and traditional as it is—fits as closely the new idea of unity and integrity, as romanticism had earlier fitted with struggle.

The birth of Giosuè Carducci, which met the need of a robuster spirit in Italian poetry to match the renewal of national hope, occurred in 1835. He witnessed the whole of the struggle for independence, and lived nearly forty years under the free tricolour. When he was born, Silvio Pellico had been five years out of his Austrian prison, and Charles Albert had been on his throne for four; when Carducci was thirteen, came the first Italian army into the field against Austria, its initial successes and its speedy defeat at Custoza; a year later, a boy of fourteen, he sorrowed over the disaster of Novara. He was twenty-five when Victor Emmanuel came to the throne and Cavour to the ministry, and thirty-five when the King at last entered Rome.

His birthplace was a little village named Valdicastello in the garden of Tuscany. His father was a physician, an ardent patriot and anti-clerical, who brought the boy up to love his country and hate the church. Besides the medical library, there was a precious collection of what Lamb would have admitted as *biblia* on the shelves of the bare little house where poetry and poverty dwelt together. This village doctor read and cherished his scanty library, and nourished his son upon Virgil and Horace, Dante and Tasso, and two works of history whose titles are significant—Rollin's *Rome* and Thiers's *History of the French Revolution*. The perusal of Thiers and Rollin, added to conversations overheard in which the father proclaimed his own liberal principles, fired the boy with a passion for republican government, a passion which he translated into action by organizing republic

after little republic with his brothers and their young companions. A republic with archons, with tribunes, with consuls, it mattered little, he says, so long as each was inaugurated by a revolution. The revolutions were conducted by stone-throwing and debate, and after one too-violent Jacobin demonstration his father imprisoned him for some time with Manzoni's *Christian Morals* and Silvio Pellico's *Duties of Man*. One cannot help tracing some of Carducci's later dislike of all moralizing, sentiment, romanticism, and Christianity itself, to this early incarceration in the undesired company of saints. Parental discipline likewise drew the first poetry out of him. He had three cherished pets which he delighted to fondle—an owl, a falcon, and a young wolf; one day the father, out of patience with these singular tastes, slew the birds and gave the beast away. Carducci, like many another broken-hearted lover, assuaged his grief with song, and his first verses were those wrung from him by sorrow. Wordsworth's phrase comes to mind at this picture of a madcap little boy all activity and emotion. The whole future man can be discerned here in him—the revolutionist, the inveterate decrifier of Manzoni, and the poet.

There came an end to the days at Valdicastello; and he was sent first to a clerical school where he was as out of his element as might be expected, and then to the normal school in Pisa, which he felt to be conducted by pedants. In spite of the scorn which he entertained for the methods of education practised upon him, he was an eager and untiring student from the first, as several of his schoolmates, who have grown up to be men of letters, testify. One of them says the boy was as economical of his time as a miser of his purse, and that as the long and frequent religious exercises irked him as so much time lost, he used to carry with him instead of his prayer-book some classic of similar binding and dimensions, and read it voraciously during the service. A poem reminiscent of these days, called *A Recollection of Schooldays*, shows us how little we can guess what is going on in small heads that bend above their school-books. He recalls a day in mid-June, when, the conjugation of *amo* suddenly beginning to dance before his eyes upon the yellow page of his grammar, and the droning voice of the black-frosted priest, his teacher, to grow faint, his thoughts fly out of the window where a cherry-bough red with fruit is beckoning to him. Beyond, he can see a mountain-top and a strip of sky and a patch of the blue

Ligurian sea, and hear the hum of bees and the song of birds. Then suddenly across his mind, thus occupied with growing, live things, strikes the sharp thought of death, the knowledge that he must some day lie insensible to all these outdoor solicitations while the birds go on singing, not for him. And the little boy's heart is shaken with fear.

He received his doctorate from Pisa, at the age of twenty-one, and thus describes the ordeal of his examination in literature in a letter to Giuseppe Chiarini, the friend who was to become his biographer, the "Caro Beppe" to whom many of the letters are addressed:

"Yesterday I had my examination, or rather discussed the theme in Italian literature which I had chosen, and the result was more than gratifying. From the beginning, contrary to custom, I had my audience—famous white-haired men in doctors' gowns—silent and all attention for an hour. (And I was supposed to have spoken a half-hour.) There was one, a little professor of rational philosophy, who pronounced himself awe-struck at my citations from memory!

"I could not complete my discourse, and came off ten minutes short because the Provost said to me at last, seeing there was no end to it, 'I must announce to Dr. Carducci, to my regret, that the time allotted to him by law has already been exceeded by thirty minutes,' and then rang his little bell. . . . Then came congratulations, embraces and kisses, from all the most distinguished and the least distinguished, and the whole roomful pressed around me.

"It all ended in a great lark; for in the evening, on the Lungarno, accompanied by Pelosini, Tribolati, and others, I declaimed extempore an epic poem to Father Arno, an Etruscan deity with sea-green locks, who refused to countenance electric light, gas, or steam. Tarquin, Lars Porsena, the virgin Camilla and Turnus were in it, and went about extinguishing all the gas-jets, and unearthing ancient lamps from the sepulchre of Tarquinia and the Etruscan tombs. The hero of the piece, whose part I half sang and half declaimed, was an Etruscan vase personified, which broke into the shops, smashing cups, tumblers, and such like modern trash. The others laughed tremendously, as I went on chanting, now in blank verse and now in *ottava rima*, while the general public passed by in the distance, intimidated. All this I did in my dress suit, with my best waistcoat on, and an enormous white cravat around my neck."

It is a pity that more of the letters of Carducci's later years do not exhibit him in this vein of extravagant humour; but the first volume of them to be published is largely taken up with business notes to publishers, and the hasty letters to friends are oftenest concerned with questions of literary or textual criticism.

Soon after his examination, with its triumphant issue, there

came a family tragedy. His brother Dante, in a fit of melancholy, killed himself before his parents' horror-stricken eyes. His father's death followed hard upon this disaster, and upon Carducci fell the support of his mother, his young brother, his cousin, and his cousin's wife. They had moved to Florence by this time, and were living in a modest house near the Porta Romana, which to-day wears a tablet. A year or so later, in 1857, appeared the first little book of verses, entitled *Rhymes*, published rather reluctantly in the single hope of eking out expenses, a hope naturally destined to disappointment. At the same time he was engaged with some other ambitious young men in founding a little society to take the field against the romanticists. They called themselves *Gli amici pedanti* ("Pedant Friends") and fought their foe chiefly on patriotic grounds, alleging romanticism to be "an irreverence done our great classical writers."

Meanwhile, in order to live, he was teaching school, first at San Miniato del Tedesco, and then, when newly married in 1859, at Pistoia. His marriage brought him children, a beautiful little son named Dante for the dead brother, who died at the age of three, and three daughters who lived to grow up. His wife seems to have left not the smallest impress on his letters or his poetry, but his little son's death and his daughter's marriage purchased us two beautiful poems. In 1860, when he was but twenty-five, a welcome bolt from the blue, came his appointment to the chair of literature at Bologna, a post he continued to fill until just a few years before his death in 1907. His activities as professor were many. He edited a great many texts, besides teaching, lecturing, and writing poetry and criticism; and his personal influence was inspiring to his students. He had small patience, however, with their premature literary aspirations, and was a stern critic of their first attempts. He used to say that he was going to introduce an Education Bill, of which Article XXXIX should read thus: "Any professor whose students shall be found publishing prose or verse within three years of graduation, shall be deprived of his chair; and any professor whose students shall be found publishing prose or verse while still in college, shall be beaten with rods." William Roscoe Thayer says of Carducci's professorship: "He was a scholar of the best German type, familiar with the apparatus of the philologist, a stickler for perfection in line and word and comma. Yet this was but the beginning. Since Schiller taught at Jena, no such poet had sat

in a professor's chair, while Carducci was what Schiller was not, a profound and careful scholar as well." His capacity for work was enormous. He could put in eight or ten hours on end, with one off for the mental refreshment of proof-reading! During his first year at Bologna he says that he rose at three even in January, to prepare his lectures on Petrarch. Here are some sentences from a letter written that same year:

"I am studying and reading constantly, incessantly; I make no acquaintances, I go nowhere, not even to the café. I write nearly all day, and besides writing, read Latin and study Greek. In the last two weeks I have devoured the *Electra* of Sophocles and six books of Virgil, corrected the *Stanzas* [a work of Politian's that he was editing] and written the commentary on fifty-six of them. You see I am at work. I don't know when I shall get back to poetry, but should like to write a poem on the monument to Leopardi, finish my ode to Liberty, write a song in *terza rima* to Rome, and an ode to the people. But I greatly fear I shall write no more verse."

When these words were penned, the *Nuove rime* and the *Odi barbare* were still unwritten!

It is necessary to touch upon Carducci's political opinions. He had begun, as will be readily guessed, a red Republican, but as he saw the heroes of the Risorgimento pass and leave the stage to lesser men, he came to agree with the wise Cavour that Italy was not ripe for democratic government, and to acquiesce in a kingdom under the house of Savoy. He even served a term as senator under the new régime. His change of front, however, laid him open to misconstruction, and at one time to something like persecution from his hot-headed young students at Bologna. It has been laid, and French critics characteristically accept this view, to his great admiration for the gracious Queen Margherita, whose long friendship for him was published at the time when, a few years before his death, she purchased his library to preserve it from being scattered. But his sincerity and patriotism are as unquestionable as his courage—courage in the face of poverty, grief, misrepresentation. All who write of his character find the same word for it—leonine. In him we are in touch with a personality of power, with some elements of true greatness. Wayward and wilful, to be sure, hot-tempered and quick to tears, proud as Lucifer and un-self-conscious as a child, a mixture of hero and *enfant terrible*, generous, laborious, and brave,—he answers to the sociologist's definition of genius, he is the eternal

adolescent. He suggests, somewhat, Walter Savage Landor, so exquisitely polished an artist, yet a personality so burly, and might almost as well have sat to Dickens for the caricaturing portrait of Boythorn. In friendship he was ardent and self-devoted, but whimsical. The child of village folk, in drawing-rooms he was ever unwieldy. In humour he was somewhat lacking, save in Ben Jonson's sense, and good spirits seem not to have accompanied him very far upon the highway of this life. In an early letter he describes himself as not very well fitted for life upon this globe, not so much by reason of circumstances as because of the temper of his mind. And he writes somewhere to "Caro Beppe": "Write, write—and forget this life, which is a vain thing." Vivacity in his letter-writing is called out only by his dislikes; he says himself, "I was ever more ready to hate evil than to love good," but the truth is rather that he enjoyed himself more in the expression of his antipathies.

Of all the anecdotes and reminiscences which it is tempting to quote, we must content ourselves with one, the chapter of recollection contributed by Annie Vivanti (Mrs. Chartres), the gifted and versatile author of *Lirica* and *The Devourers*.

She made the poet's acquaintance as a blue-eyed girl of fifteen when she went alone with her governess to Bologna to see him and ask him please to write her a preface for the volume of poems which she carried in manuscript under her arm! Won, perhaps, by the very preposterousness of this request, Carducci read the blue-eyed child's verses, and was so impressed with them that he actually wrote the preface; and the book was "the literary sensation of 1890." The preface begins: "In my creed it is written that priests and women cannot write poetry."

From that time she was his great friend and pet, and no one has such characteristic incidents to recount of him. Mrs. Chartres recalls driving over the border from Switzerland into Italy with him once, when two Germans had begged the privilege of riding in his carriage that they might have the experience of seeing Italy first in the company of her greatest poet. As they reached the line, a group of the too-familiar Italian beggars rose up at the side of the road to clamour for *un soldo*, which the Germans, delighted at their picturesqueness, gladly gave them. But Carducci was cut to the heart at this exhibition of his countrymen's weakness; standing up in his carriage, he thunderously commanded the unoffending Germans to descend and leave him,

and forbade Annie Vivanti to speak a word, while he sat brooding in silence over his humiliation.

"This small impersonal incident," she says, "wounded him far more than any personal slight ever could. When in 1895, after he had renounced Republicanism, his students in Bologna turned against him with insults and violence, hissing him, and even in one instance striking him, he was unmoved and calm. When they cried, 'Down with Carducci!' he shook his leonine head gravely and said, 'No, never down with me! God has set me on high.' On the day after these events he came to see us in Genoa, and we were horrified to see his hand, the strong small hand which has penned some of the most beautiful poetry Italy has produced, wounded and bruised. One of his students had struck him with a large key. Carducci smiled indulgently almost tenderly. 'They are good boys, they are noble boys, I love them,' he said. 'They think they are in the right, so they are right.'

"'Why did you leave them?' I asked. 'Why turn back?'

"'My child,' he answered, 'easy it was and a joy to lead a band of eager youths to the ringing words Republic and Freedom. All young Italy followed with shouts and cheers. But should I have been worthy of their trust if, when I saw that we had struck the wrong path, I had not turned round and told them so? Indeed, it takes courage to face the sorrow and mistrust of all those young hearts. I am grieved for their grief. But they will understand one day that Italy is not ready for a republic.'"

On another occasion Carducci took his favourite to see the composer Verdi, then an old man, in his villa by the sea.

"On arrival," she writes, "Carducci went out on the marble terrace overlooking the shimmering Mediterranean, and sat there without speaking a word. Verdi, calling to me, sat down at his piano and, easily as the wind blows, played rambling and beautiful music, as if he were talking to me. Then he rose and stepped through the open window to the terrace, where Carducci still sat motionless staring at the sea. We sat down beside him and nobody spoke for a long time . . . Carducci said suddenly, 'I believe in God,' and Verdi nodded his white head."

Here is an anecdote in different vein. "His hatred of all forms of adulation," Mrs. Chartres says, "was profound. '*Buon giorno! Poeta!*' exclaimed a beautiful young man at Madesimo one day, saluting him with a wide sweep of his hat. Carducci stopped and stared at the stranger. 'Poet,' he said, 'Who, Poet? I am not Poet to you. To you I am Signor Carducci.' And he strode angrily on."

On another occasion they were in the street together when a ragged journalist stopped them, asking help for his sick wife and unluckily adding that it was he who had written an article

in appreciation of Carducci which had appeared the week before. Carducci, in anger that any one should think he could be won with praise, struck the man with his cane. But then sent the wife a hundred-franc note the same evening!

And here is Mrs. Chartres's personal tribute:

"Since the day of our first meeting, he has been a friend to me and mine. Carducci's friendship! No one who does not know him well can understand what that means. . . . To all the world he is a great poet, historian, scholar; and a noble man, stern, rugged, severe, uncompromising, splendid in his austere serenity. But those whose hand he has held in friendship, who have seen him day by day in his simplicity and goodness, his kindliness and strength . . . those fortunate ones to whom the full purity and humility of his great soul have been revealed, speak his name with tender breath, and write of him with halting hand, as I do; with eyes, perhaps, as mine, brimming over with tears."

II

Carducci's poetic work fills a thousand pages, a thousand pages of short poems. Not one above six pages, and those of such length few; not one narrative poem, not one long elegy or meditative work, not a closet drama; a thousand pages of lyric poetry by a poet who hated subjectivity! I can think of no English poet of equal consequence who wrote nothing but lyrics. Shelley left us *Prometheus* and *The Cenci*; Keats, *Endymion* and *Hyperion*; Tennyson, the *Idyls* and the dramas; Herrick is not a figure of like magnitude—when Carducci died, a critic in the *Quarterly Review* wrote that we had lost the greatest poet in Europe. Moreover, Carducci is a lyric poet almost without lyricism. The "lyric cry" we think to recognize in the personal note, and he is seldom personal. When he is, it is not his feelings but his opinions that he usually expresses. Love and *Weltschmerz*, the burden of most lyric poetry, are absent. We might say, to be sure, that to express prejudices and predilections is to strike as intimate a note as to sing of passion and despair; yet even this so much drier and less exuberant kind of personal expression is lacking to his latest, greatest volume.

The first two hundred and fifty pages of the collected poems contain the *Juvenilia*, poems written between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. They are the verses of an angry young man, angry with almost equal heat against the enemies of Italy, bad poetry, his own base and cowardly generation—"Vile little Christianizing century," as he calls it—and Alessandro Manzoni.

This lifelong rage against that gentle and revered poet (already full of years and honours by the time Carducci was grown) has something droll in its exaggeration. Carducci used Manzoni's name to conjure up a whole set of detested associations, very much as the romanticists were accustomed to revile classicism, artificiality, and the eighteenth century under the name of Pope, though it is only fair to say that Carducci the critic did larger justice to Manzoni and the whole Romantic Movement in Italy than did the poet or the letter-writer; but as a French writer aptly puts it: "In his prose he says what he knows, in his poetry what he thinks."

In the verses of this young man under twenty-five, moreover, there are almost no love poems, and he repents of only two or three as heartily as did Petrarch over his whole *Song-Book*. His repentance seems to have been lifelong. There is hardly a love poem in the whole book. We can find one or two to shadowy ladies with classical names—Lidia or Lalage—but only one to a real woman—the lovely *Idyl of the Maremma*. This celebrates *bionda Maria*, strong and beautiful daughter of the fields, beloved in his youth; it is somewhat in the temper of Landor's *Fiesolan Idyl*, and so beautiful that we can only wish there were more. But women are revenged upon Carducci, if they wish to be, for his slighting the feminine element in poetry and in life. He will be the less read outside of Italy.

The next twenty years of professorship at Bologna, during which he wrote so many lectures and volumes of criticism, are yet the most fruitful of poetry. Of the collections known as *Levia Gravia* and *Iambs and Epodes* the poems are largely occasional tributes to friendship or comment upon political events—in Italy, more than elsewhere in Europe, poetry has always been a friend to politics. They include the celebrated *Hymn to Satan*, published in 1865, which called such a storm about his ears; the young secessionists of letters applauded, while the clergy shuddered, and his name immediately became common property from one end to the other of the peninsula.

The *New Rhymes* (*Nuove rime*) are scattered along over these same years between twenty-five and fifty. The only romantic influence Carducci ever underwent was Heine's, and here in the *Nuove rime* is his one small oblation to the romantic spirit of his time. For besides several translations from Heine and other German ballad-writers, there are a precious scant half-

dozen of purely personal lyrics. Here are the heart-breaking songs over the little son so long dead, and a few upon the tedium and heaviness of life; here are the *Idyl of the Maremma* and the *Remembrance of Schooldays*. These poems, with their homelike note of northern melancholy, together with many of the *Barbaric Odes*—descriptive and historical, divorced from his earlier didacticism—these are the ones, I dare be sure, that the English reader will oftenest go back to.

The *Odi barbare* are the greatest work. They are unrhymed, and written in the classic metres of the Latin poets—alcaics, sapphics, hexameters; they are called barbaric, not because their novelty of form owes anything to the northern barbarian, but because they would have sounded so to Virgil and Horace. The Italians are an exceedingly sensitive literary people, all novelty in language or form is speedily punished; so the *Odi Barbare* provoked a tempest which kept their author on the defensive for years. It passed in time, leaving the odes securely placed in Italian literature, which they are now conceded to have greatly enriched. Their unrhymed melody the foreigner probably never fully appreciates, but he can see that in them Carducci has attained his ideal of a pure objective beauty, expressed, as all Italian critics are now prompt to tell us, with a kind of helpless perfection of style.

This volume is full of beauty and full of ideas, but few individual poems can be conceded to contain both. His principal ideas are three: first, patriotism, with a passionate love of liberty and democracy; second, an aversion to romanticism and all its work; third, a dislike of Christianity. He was a pagan, a classicist, and a democrat. It may be objected that these things—patriotism, love, aversion, dislike—are feelings, not ideas. We can only say that in Carducci his feelings were his ideas; and if an idea which is a feeling is best described as a prejudice, it could be no one's intention to exonerate Carducci from that. He was prejudiced; but at any rate, his ideas, feelings, prejudices, whatever we may agree to call them, were compelling in him. They had reality, and coloured all his work. The belief in democracy seems a singular third with the other two; for Christianity is democratic, yet he is anti-Christian, and romanticism is democratic (as Prof. Gummere has pointed out afresh in his recent book), yet Carducci was a classicist. This antagonism was reconciled by his national feeling. It was part of his patriotism

to repulse foreign ideas as well as foreign troops; he longed to see Italy develop and unify from within, intellectually as well as politically. If he had been reminded that democracy was a foreign idea, born of the French Revolution and the English constitution, he would have pointed backward to the Roman republic and the free Italian communes of the Middle Ages. For the sense of continuity was strong in him; the line of tradition in his imagination ran unbroken from Cincinnatus to Garibaldi; that event from which the Western world dates forward and backward, did not divide the stream of history for him.

But Christianity and romanticism were both clearly foreign. And as we have seen him and his young pedant friends combating romanticism as an irreverence done the great Italian classics, so it is perhaps not too fanciful to conceive him as rejecting Christianity partly as an irreverence to the local pagan divinities, whom, if he could not believe in, he loved and understood. "The other divinities perish," he says in a poem entitled *Hellenic Spring*, "the gods of Greece have known no setting." He seems to have been, like John Stuart Mill, naturally non-Christian, without the pain of severing an allegiance he had never sworn. *Anima naturaliter pagana*. "Nature he loved, and next to Nature, Art."

But Carducci's quarrel with Christianity and romanticism was not only because they were foreign; to his mind both were sentimental, sickly. And the morbid *and* the foreign made a combination in the highest degree obnoxious to him. His corrective for them was Nature and Reason, the classic spirit. There are two poems of his which illustrate his attitude towards Christianity better than any discussion can. These are *The Springs of Clitumnus* and the *Hymn to Satan*. *The Springs of Clitumnus* shows his opposition to Christian asceticism and glorification of sorrow, and his sense that Christianity has been an unwelcome interruption from without, an obstacle in the path of man's natural development, while the *Hymn to Satan* provides the corrective. This demoniac canticle, as it seemed to churchly imaginations, celebrates a divinity that has nothing in common either with Milton's disdainful hero or with the Prince of Darkness of Christian theology, but is a kind of compound of Phoebus Apollo and the great god Pan, with a touch of Prometheus.

On the Romantic Movement Carducci looked with vision equally astigmatic. Just as he saw in Christianity not a spiritual

discipline and an attitude toward life, but merely clericalism and asceticism, so he conceived romanticism as just *Weltschmerz* and sentimentality. Of all the definitions which it has vexed the critics to make, Goethe's would have pleased him best: "Classicism is health, romanticism a disease." "After all," to quote his own words, "when all is said, Leopardi sends folk to the hospital, Manzoni to the confessional, and Byron to the galleys." Carducci missed entirely that aspect of romanticism which was inspired by the liberating spirit, the spirit of revolt (the very spirit, in fact, of his Satan), and for this reason: Romanticism he conceived as the cult of the Middle Ages, and the Middle Ages as they affected the North of Europe. Now the two great mediaeval institutions of the North were feudalism and monasticism; the one enslaved men's bodies, the other their minds. No intellectual movement which drew its inspiration from such a period could influence Carducci.

If the pagan world as compared with the Christian seemed to him as sunlight to darkness, classicism beside romanticism was as sunlight to moonlight. There is a poem of his, that, read without its title, would be just a beautiful objective description of the two planets that light our earth by night and by day, but he has ironically named it *Classicismo e romanticismo*, and so given us the clue. We know as we follow his descriptions that *classicismo* is the sun, *romanticismo* the moon. The sun, he says, glistens on the ploughshare in the furrow, smiles upon fertility and man's labour, yellows the grain and reddens the grape, and gladdens the windows of the poor; but the moon, pale, infecund ghost, loves best to embellish ruins and graveyards, and to adorn our melancholy, to waken the poor man at night to remember his griefs, to befriend wastrel poets and lawless lovers—she ripens neither flower nor fruit.

Looking at Carducci's poetry as a whole, we perceive that he and his ideas present a double paradox. In political ideas a modern, in his artistic and intellectual sympathies we find him among the ancients; and his form and content contradict one another, since he is a lyric poetal most devoid of lyricism. It would be as presumptuous as idle to attempt to estimate his ultimate significance, but we can suggest that it will be different for Europe and for Italy. For Italy it is his ideas that count; the austerity of his literary taste, his intolerance of what is facile, and his reverence for form, must act like a tonic upon the litera-

ture of a language so fatally full of rhymes and a people so fatally gifted at improvisation as the Italian; while his idealism, courage, single-mindedness, and belief in the destiny of his country will kindle the Italian heart to finer action.

But outside of Italy it is not for his ideas that he will live and be beloved. They inspired too many local poems, too many merely political, too many merely angry. And save for the belief in democracy, they are not the ideas of his time. He made no attempt, like Tennyson, to make poetry out of scientific discoveries and ideas, nor did he seek, like his compatriot Ada Negri, to show us the beauty of human feeling that underlies the heroisms and tragedies of industry. His prejudices keep him from being an intellectual power, his inability to understand Christianity puts him out of touch with his time; he is a thankless child to the Romantic Movement which helped produce him, and his bright impersonalism too often declines the poet's duty of unbaring his own heart in order to reveal to us our own. In all these ways he fails to be to the Northern peoples *simpatico*. It must be by sheer beauty that he can prevail, but of sheer beauty there is enough.

Something of it, possibly, may show through even in translation, though it is an act of temerity to attempt a version of anything so lovely as the sonnet on the death of the poet's little son Dante. The poem is addressed to Carducci's brother Dante, dead long before in their youth, and by his own hand.

"Funere mersit acerbo"

"O thou among the Tuscan hills asleep,
 Laid with our father in one grassy bed,
 Faintly, through the green sod above thy head,
 Hast thou not heard a plaintive child's voice weep?
 It is my little son; at thy dark keep
 He knocketh, he who bore thy name, thy dread
 And sacred name—he too this life hath fled
 Whose ways, my brother, thou did'st find so steep.

"Among the flower-borders as he played,
 By sunny childish visions smiled upon,
 The Shadow caught him to that world how other,—
 Thy world long since. So now to that chill shade
 Oh, welcome him! as backward toward the sun
 He turns his head to look and call his mother."

RUTH SHEPARD PHELPS.

University of Minnesota.