A Literary Journey to Rome

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From the Sweet Life to the Great Beauty

By

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WHEN THE SIGNORA BACHMANN CAME: A ROMAN REPORTAGE

The Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann lived in Italy in different places: first on the island of Ischia, then in Naples, and finally in Rome, her beloved city. The houses of Bachmann are located in eight different areas of the city, where the writer spent 20 years of Roman life. The exploration of these houses, in a search of Austrian literature in Rome, leads to some intense encounters that make the heart vibrate. "Now we enter a story that is still deeply significant for us," Maria Mantello says earnestly in Campo de' Fiori. The professor's hair is black and she wears an elegant, brightly coloured dress.

Maria Mantello is the President of the National Association of Free Thought, named after Giordano Bruno. "The right to dignity of the person depends on the public protection of the complexity of each individual," says Mantello, turning towards the statue of Bruno behind her. "Bruno's formidable heresy was free choice. Therefore, we need to be heretics." Like Bruno, Bachmann was a heretic: she was devoted to free choice her whole life. Bachmann wrote: "I saw that Giordano Bruno was burnt again on Campo de' Fiori. Every Saturday men sweep the remains of the market together and set a fire to burn them in a pile at the foot of the philosopher's statue. Once again, the smoke rises, and the flames flare up into the air."

Just next to the roaring market of Campo de' Fiori is Piazza Farnese, a quiet and aristocratic place, dominated by the eponymous palace that is the territory of the French state. In Piazza Farnese are the offices of the publishing house Nottetempo, whose manager and founder is Ginevra Bompiani, who recalls that she "met Ingeborg Bachmann at a party organised by Inge Feltrinelli, in a large country house outside Milan." At this party, Italy's most influential intellectuals came together, after which Bompiani and Bachmann met several times in Rome. Bompiani remembers a particularly significant moment of the party: "The journalist Furio Colombo was reading the hands of the guests. It was a joke, of course. He read my hand and that of Ingeborg Bachmann. To me he predicted a future as an intellectual, and to Ingeborg he predicted a future as a housewife." Bompiani's husband, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben,

wrote the preface to the Italian edition of *What I Saw and Heard in Rome* by Ingeborg Bachmann, in which she states, "I heard that there is more time in the world than sense, but our eyes have been given us to see."

Not far from Piazza Farnese is Via Giulia, built during the Renaissance by Pope Julius II as a model of an ideal road, following the geometrical rules of the golden ratio. At 66 Via Giulia is the last apartment in which Bachmann lived. Paul Hlinka, an Austrian priest, from 1971 to 1976 studied at the Collegium Germanicum, the seminary for students from German-speaking countries. When Bachmann moved to Via Giulia she asked the students, including Hlinka, to help her to fix her books.

Via Giulia runs parallel to the Tiber and is located in the aristocratic centre of Rome. Palazzo Sacchetti has a dark and repellent look. Bachmann lived here in a very large apartment, which seemed like a kind of fortress. "She sat down with us and told us where we should put the books," remembers Hlinka. A whole wall was filled with the Suhrkamp pocket editions, in all the colours of the rainbow. Suhrkamp was the editor of *Malina*, the most famous novel by Bachmann. The writer told the students about her travels: "I was very impressed by the way she used to live for three days in Berlin. It was the equivalent of a normal person living for three months," says Hlinka. "Everything had a meaning. Hopping on a tram could be connected to a special experience. She made me understand how she used to live: she lived for three days, then she had to write for three weeks. I really felt the extreme importance of the use of language in her life."

Bachmann’s apartment was on two levels on the upper floor of Palazzo Sacchetti. The living area was on the second level, comprising a living room, a study with a library, a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom. In the entrance area on the lower level there were books on shelves and a table with chairs in the Biedermeier style.

On the piano nobile, the elegant main floor of Palazzo Sacchetti, which is decorated with amazing frescoes, Marchesa Giovanna Sacchetti lives nowadays: "The apartment of Ingeborg Bachmann had a size of about 120, 130 square meters, nothing more," says Sacchetti, the widow of Giulio Sacchetti, who worked for 30 years as Governor in the Vatican and died in 2010. The Sacchetti family is mentioned in the *Divina Commedia* by Dante. "My husband was born here," says Sacchetti. "This house has belonged to the family since the early seventeenth century. The family came from Florence, and Cardinal Giulio Sacchetti bought the entire

palace, which the architect Antonio da Sangallo had built for himself." Giulio Sacchetti, born in 1926, also Bachmann's birth year, rented the apartment to the Austrian writer. "We have no contract, we did not find anything in the archives," says Sacchetti. What about the idea of founding a "Bachmann House" in Rome? What does the Marchesa think? "I think this is an excellent idea. Bachmann raises great interest."

"She was a very strange woman. Sometimes she looked like a girl of twenty, and sometimes she was very bitter. She was very, very shy, very introverted." Pauline Bolzoni worked as a secretary in the Austrian Institute of Culture in Rome, and therefore met Bachmann. At that time, Bachmann was behind with the writing of her novel *Malina*, as she had a fractured collarbone. Consequently, the poet under pressure called Walter Zettl, the legendary director of the Cultural Institute at the time, and asked him if he knew someone who could help her to write the manuscript on a typewriter. This is how Bolzoni came to meet Bachmann, who at that time lived in Via Bocca di Leone 60. "It was a beautiful apartment with a large terrace with palm trees. A housekeeper in a black dress with a white apron opened the door for me."

Bolzoni had to wait for Bachmann in a large sober room adorned with only two red sofas and some dark bookshelves. After nearly two hours, the housekeeper informed her that Signora Bachmann was not available at the moment and that Pauline would have to come back in two hours. "I thought, well I do not know what to do, but since I promised to come and help her, after two hours I came back again, and after that I went to her every day, and she dictated that novel of hers, *Malina*."

On November 2, 1970 the writer Johannes Urzidil, a member of the Circle of Prague, died suddenly at the Austrian Cultural Institute. He had been due to give a reading there the following day. Bachmann met Urzidil, a very sensitive intellectual, on a previous visit of his to Rome. The director of the Cultural Institute, Walter Zettl, asked Bolzoni to bring the news of Urzidil's death to Bachmann: "I sat there, all afternoon long, and I thought, how to tell this to her?" she recalls. "I was only 23. She was always so strange, taciturn, and she could also be very tough. Before going home at about eight in the evening, I told her: 'I'm sorry, I have to tell you very sad news, the poetry reading has been cancelled because Johannes Urzidil has died today at the Institute.' As soon as I had told her this, she was gone. I began to look for her in the apartment. It was November, it was cold, and I found her lying on the terrace like a dead person with open arms, staring into the sky."

Bolzoni wrote *Malina* on Bachmann's small portable typewriter. Bachmann dictated, partly from manuscripts. "She was always very intermittent. She wanted to pay me, and I told her, why do you want to pay me? I have been sitting here for hours and I did not write anything. She wanted to give me a lot more money. Then she dictated a letter to her brother, who, I think, at that time lived in Africa." On the facade of the house in Via Bocca di Leone 60 a travertine plaque recalls that Bachmann worked and lived in that house from 1966 to 1971. Rome is proud of her.

The house where Bachmann lived for the longest period is a colourful building in warm shades of reddish yellow. It is located near Via Condotti, only a short walk from the Spanish Steps. Since December 2011, the haute couture atelier of Mauro Gala has been located in the rooms on the first floor where the writer lived. Mauro Gala ran his couture house for decades in Via Gregoriana, before the house was transformed into a hotel and he moved to Via Bocca di Leone, together with his bridal gowns and evening dresses. Mauro Gala says: "I am a Roman, I was born in Rome, this is my area, and now here is my job. I think this is a very happy home, a cheerful and happy home."

“We sit in front of a Roman realtor who tells us that the apartment is owned by a baroness, and he makes us understand that the baroness might prefer an American diplomat as a tenant. ‘Listen,’ she says, terrified like a princess who has not been recognised, ‘we are writers,’ and so she gets the apartment with a terrace with a superb view across Rome." This episode in the novel *Montauk* by Max Frisch recounts the author's search for a house with Bachmann. The apartment talked about is located in Via de Notaris 1F, about three hundred metres from the Austrian Cultural Institute in the Parioli zone, a medium-to-posh area of the city. The street is close to the Gallery of Modern Art and the luxurious Hotel Byron. "I think that Max Frisch liked this apartment more than Ingeborg Bachmann did," says the architect Massimo Iannucelli. "To me it seems that Bachmann liked the apartment only superficially." Iannucelli collects all the information about Bachmann's apartments in Rome: his declared goal is to find the plans of all the apartments the writer lived in. "Bachmann and Frisch had previously lived together in Via Giulia, in the house with the numbers 101/102. I found the owner of this house, but he was still a child when the poet lived there." In Via de Notaris, in the penthouse with the amazing view over Rome, the couple suffered some disagreements and episodes of violence. Afterwards, the two writers spent some time together in Via Margutta. "The houses of Ingeborg Bachmann are the finest in the centre of Rome," says Iannucelli. "She immediately captured the social environment

into which she had entered. In this environment, it was easy for her to get in touch with very cultured people."

STREET ART FEMINISM:
ALICE PASQUINI SPRAY PAINTS THE WALLS OF ROME

London, Sydney, New York, Barcelona, Moscow, Saigon, and, of course, Rome are vibrant cities that expose colourful and expressive murals painted by Roman artist Alice Pasquini, born in 1980. Pasquini grew up in Rome's Flaminio District in Piazza Mancini, a large square near the River Tiber. Today, the shutters of two kiosks in Piazza Mancini are decorated with Pasquini's spray-painted images. "When I came back to Rome after being in France for a long time, it seemed logical to paint just outside my front door," says Pasquini. Soon after painting the kiosks, she was also asked by the operator of a bicycle workshop near the auditorium to embellished his business, and prestigious commissions followed.

The hip hop scene of the 1990s marked Pasquini's socialisation as an adolescent. She was inspired by the comic heroine Sprayliz, who spray painted political statements on walls in the form of graffiti. Influenced by Sprayliz, Pasquini attended the Art Academy in Rome, studied Animation and Art Criticism in Madrid, and lived in London for a year before she moved to France and then back home to Rome. Illustrations and stage and set designs are also part of the artist's portfolio. "At the Academy, I was warned that painting was dead," says Pasquini, yet she still decided to become a painter. "My professors taught me that this art form died with Duchamp, so I wanted to go out of the studio, out of the academic circles." Pasquini has returned to these circles because street art is now an established art form. Prior to becoming an art student in London, the artist was also influenced by reading what Romans sprayed on the walls of the eternal city. Messages like "Laura, I love you, come back to me" are typical for Italian street decorations, and from those expressions the elaborately designed murals have been developed that are nowadays crafted by artists. In Rome, Pasquini has presented her work in shows at MACRO, the museum of modern art of the City of Rome, and the American Embassy, as well as in a sensational one-woman exposition at Casa dell'Architettura near the central train station Termini.

Her spray-paint work in the Flaminio District on the kiosks was made possible with the permission of their owner. Together with 15 other artists, Pasquini participated in the temporary art show of the Outdoor Festival at the MAXXI Museum located in the Flaminio District during the autumn of 2015. Pasquini's spray cans have passed through Flaminio, Quadraro, Pigneto, and the San Lorenzo District, featuring a large mural in Via dei Sabelli.

With street art that celebrates congenial, dark-haired Italians and "strong and independent women" much like herself, two thousand houses and walls feature Pasquini's female images and signature. The women are thoughtful, self-confident, sensual, soulful, and cheerful. Often, children are also depicted. Considered very physical, the graffiti protagonists are seen on Vespas, rocking, jogging, or lying in the sun. "In April, I'm putting on a show in Dortmund and its theme is imperfection," says Pasquini in her atelier located in the San Lorenzo bohemian neighbourhood. "Rome is a city of artists. Street art follows a thread that runs through the city, where every corner is filled with artist's designs. I grew up with this feeling that I wanted to seize the streets and leave my own imprint on them." On the road, the relationship between artist and viewer is different than in a gallery; the dialogue is direct and immediate. "Messages on the road, which can be very critical at times, have a long tradition in Rome. Just think of Pasquino," says Pasquini. Pasquino is one of the "talking statues" of Rome. As with other sculptures from the ancient world, you could find on Pasquino messages with often harsh criticism of the authorities and, in most cases, even Popes. Pasquini playfully uses the homonym in common with Pasquino as an opportunity to express her reflections on art and society.

"I wanted to bring my own personal language to the street. As a woman, I do not see myself as a sexy comic heroine, nor as a naked advertising medium," says Pasquini. "I want to show real women." It is more difficult to develop specific expressions for women because, from an early age, their personalities are already imprinted. "As children, women are full of energy. When they grow up, they often run into conflict. Suddenly, they are no longer the good girls." The artist scrutinises what she sees on the streets, turning it into pictures on walls. Travelling between Morocco and Russia, she has observed very different images of women. "Often people write me and say: 'That's me! You've painted me there!'" explains Pasquini, who emphasises that, "mine are general representations which are comprised of the individual impressions I get of the women I see."

"I witness a lot of cynicism around me, even in language. Speaking about beauty and humanity is often considered trivial, but that's my mission." Alice Pasquini wants to re-discover humanity in everyday life. "Painting the walls of houses is a great symbol of freedom." Alice paints during the day and signs her works. "Painting walls is my passion. I can beautify walls that have been ruined over time; a white wall does not interest me."

The Mayor of Rome, Ignazio Marino, commissioned five paintings from Pasquini for the capital in the reception rooms for citizens of the eternal city. Contemporarily, a criminal trial in another city against Pasquini is ongoing. "It takes courage to spray. I do not feel like a thief. I'm not evil, but good for the city," says the artist, who is not allowed to talk about the case against her. Although she has sprayed over two thousand works on walls all over the world and is an international street art VIP, the young Roman woman has been prosecuted in Bologna, accused of pollution, Article 639 of the Italian Penal Code, aggravated by Article 81, a continued offence. She faces a fine of up to one thousand euros and up to one year of imprisonment. The process is on appeal.

In Rome, however, you can read on city websites and publications that entire neighbourhoods are being upgraded through street art. The City of Rome has even published a guide to murals. Faceless urban canyons receive an identity. Unlike night and fog spray-painted works, large murals are executed on commission. Pasquini says, "So, now I've returned to the sort of art I fled from in the name of the freedom of the road."

We are now in the post-graffiti era. There is more dialogue between sprayers and viewers; it is no longer only about expressing discomfort. The representations have become figurative—that is the revolution of spraying. The quality of colour is much better. Artists who work in a public space are always faced with the situation that the property being sprayed doesn't belong to them. They are almost always places where they do not live and where they may never return to. Pasquini therefore wants to create something that has artistic or political value. There's no guarantee that the work of art will generate positive feelings in the people who have to live with it every day. "That's the risk that I take with my art form," she says. Sometimes she is also asked if she gets paid for spraying her acrylic paintworks, but she replies that artistic activity does not always have to be followed by payment. "I want people to feel more at home in their city; I want to share their dreams."

EATALY:
THE TEMPLE OF SLOW-FOOD
CLOSE TO THE PYRAMID

Food has a very important role in Italy and especially in Rome. No wonder that next to the Pyramid, a magnificent building located in the district Ostiense and named after the ancient Roman politician Caius Cestius, a temple in honour of the epicurean delights has been created. Mariantoinetta Cappelletti works in the Roman seat of Eataly, a very well-known food distribution chain where you can buy, eat, and learn in a typically Italian way. The Somelìere Cappelletti knows all sorts of wines, and she tells you which wine matches certain types of food. "For the tuna tartare with avocado and pineapple the Grillo is the ideal wine," she says. The seafood menu offers six "Saint Vaast" oysters as an appetiser. The bread from the wood oven is crispy and fragrant, and is served in paper bags. People like Cappelletti, a young Italian girl with a passion for her own country and its culinary delights, form the basis Eataly's success. With its various selling points around the world, Eataly has 2,300 employees serving healthy food for a balanced diet. Cappelletti came from Puglia to Rome with a suitable qualification for working at Eataly—an open–minded attitude towards life and its pleasant sides. Now she is serving the main course of the seafood menu. The raw tuna is dark pink and cut into small cubes together with a bright-yellow pineapple and a splash of green avocado puree. "I love to read and eat," says Cappelletti. "I want to understand life." Food is culture and also philosophy. "Those who eat better, live better" is the motto of Eataly.

Several restaurants are located under the large roof of Eataly, but they are all linked by a common idea. "Beauty will save Italy," says the founder of the eating empire, Oscar Farinetti. Consequently, beauty is also the theme of Eataly-Rome, the headquarters of the largest Italian food giant. "The Portrait of Kiki" by Amedeo Modigliani was chosen for its opening as the masterpiece best reflecting the sense of this postulate. "The Portrait of Kiki" is a metaphor which explains how the art of cooking is interpreted at Eataly. Like Modigliani's masterpiece of Italian figurative art, the kitchen represents an abstraction, and is to be seen as a Cubist work of art. The cooking school "Casa Artusi" on the upper floor of Eataly-Rome is

dedicated to the masterpiece of culinary literature, “Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well" by Pellegrino Artusi, published for the first time in 1891. The focus of Eataly is on providing a wide range of information concerning food. In the eight rooms that make up the seminar-structure, separated only by glass, lectures and conferences are held. One of these rooms is dedicated to the projects developed by schools and groups of children. Here, seasonal cuisine, the importance of fruit and vegetables in the diet, the knowledge of products offered by the market, the various producers, and especially the basic concepts of Italian food and cuisine are discussed.

In the restaurant of the Roman Osterie the traditional cuisine of Latium is proposed. The menu offers as first courses tonnarelli all’amatriciana and Strozzapreti with cheese and pepper. As second courses, Roman tripe with fresh mint, or free-range chicken or pork with grapes, fennel, and coriander are served. For dessert, panna cotta with caramel is recommended.

The most elegant of the 23 restaurants within Eataly Rome is located on the top floor, with a splendid view over the rooftops of the Ostiense quarter and across the tracks of the station, where you can also see the Pyramid. The chef is the 31-year-old Gianluca Esposito. His mission is to create a score of dishes, including five starters, five first courses, five second dishes, and five desserts, one for each region of Italy, and then serve them on the ten tables available in the restaurant covered with cloth napkins as business meals or family gatherings. "Before starting to work in Eataly, I set out to study every evening the dishes of the Italian cuisine with a friend, and in this way I could create my source of inspiration." Esposito pulls out a notebook in which he has written by hand and sorted by region typical recipes and their ingredients. The chef varies these classic dishes with creativity and imagination. "The Roman cuisine, for example, is a poor cuisine," says Esposito. "I cook dumplings stuffed with oxtail if I want to represent a typical Roman dish." And of course, the Roman cuisine also includes some elements of the Jewish culinary tradition, such as lamb and artichokes. "A dish must be delicious and easy to make,” says Esposito. "You shouldn’t ask how the chef has prepared it, but everything should have a very simple and elegant look."

The customer is not always right, but neither is Eataly. Around this wonderful doubt Eataly built its own marketing strategy. Communication is very important, and Eataly provides information on products and their prices, and customers can and should be critical in a simple and direct way, without formal barriers and manipulation of the subconscious.

Without loyalty cards, bonus points, and other promotional measures, but rather by hard facts, telling real stories about food and using irony, you can find the poetry in everyday things. This is why many journalists have become loyal customers of the temple of food next to the Pyramide. Since the idea of Eataly was conceived in 2004, the Oscar Farinetti Group, which had an income of three million euros in 2012, has become a producer of foods always in line with the company philosophy. About 25 percent of all goods sold by Eataly are also produced by the company, such as wine, beer, water, brandy, juices, meat, cold cuts, cheeses, pasta, and baked products.

The building consists of four floors and 170,000 square meters including the old Air Terminal Ostiense, designed by the Spanish architect Julio Lafuente for the 1990 football World Cup. Here, players from every country in the world arrived. At the end of the World Cup, calm returned to the huge postmodern building. Later, there were attempts to open some scattered stores within the wide-open spaces, and parties and even some raves took place, but later homeless people settled in the area surrounding the abandoned train station. For 20 years the building has remained unused commercially. One of the tasks of Eataly was to fill the big empty building, thus adding to the urban development of this part of the city and bringing new life to the district. The area where Eataly-Roma is located is bordered on one side by the Pyramid and on the other by the Via Ostiense and the garden city of Garbatella. It is a densely populated neighbourhood, which since the opening of Eataly on June 21, 2012 has been infused with new life. Meanwhile, the effect of Eataly has transformed the neighbourhood into a destination for the culinary "nightlife" of the city, and many new facilities have sprung up in the area around the former air terminal.

24 HOURS AT PONTE MILVIO: THE LOVERS' BRIDGE

At midnight on Saturday on the banks of the River Tiber directly below the Ponte Milvio people are playing table soccer while soft music comes from a white tent. The water of the Tiber splashes against the piers of the bridge. A light-dark effect similar to Caravaggio's paintings dominates the mood of the evening. The white travertine arches of the old bridge are covered by the darkness of the night. The lanterns on the bridge give out a bright yellow light, while the moon is shining brightly in the starry night. A slim, dark-haired boy is leaning against the wall of the pier, smoking a cigarette and watching what is happening on the Ponte Milvio. Across the bridge, people are coming in both directions. Luigi D'Alessio is from Naples; he works in Rome and often comes to the Ponte Milvio: "This corner of the Ponte Milvio, the Valadier Tower, is a very special place, but the most interesting building here is the small stand of The Chioschetto, the most typical place in this very popular area of Roman nightlife. In The Chioschetto everything is reduced to the essential, with simple wooden benches under a canopy surrounded by plane trees." The continuing noise of the cars driving alongside the river is mixed with the gurgling of the Tiber in the long Roman summer.

1 am: "I have been living near the tomb of Nero since I was born. Coming to Ponte Milvio from our apartment at the tomb of Nero, for my family has the meaning of going to Rome," recalls David Zangari. "I often come here with my friends to drink beer together and this context reminds us of when we were sitting under the trees in the gardens of the beer festival in Munich." Zangari runs a pub and restaurant in Rome. "I love to come here, especially to stay at the Chioschetto, because it is really a very nice place, and it reminds me of my childhood. Everything here has remained the same as it was 40 years ago." At that time the area around the Ponte Milvio was still completely unaffected by the heavy traffic in Rome. Only the restaurant Palotta and the Chioschetto were here, and nothing else. "It was the Roman Summer festival that made Ponte Milvio attractive for young people," says Zangari. First, the Roman Summer festival began with some small tents on the Tiber and stalls selling jewellery, books, and

food at the Foro Italico, which gradually attracted artists to the Ponte Milvio.

2 am: time for an espresso at the legendary Chioschetto located at a place where once there was a food market, as the Ponte Milvio was an important source of tax in the northern part of the city. Rome began here. While the coffee is delivered from a polished silver machine, Alessia Silvi outlines the kiosk's history and indicates some important elements. "On this tree there are pictures and postcards on display showing the kiosk during its existence." The Ponte Milvio was a dark place 17 years ago when the Chioschetto was bought by the current managers, says Silvi. "Nowadays everybody comes here, from 18-year-old students up to my 80-year-old grandmother sipping Campari in the shade of the trees." Silvi has been working at the stand for 10 years, and she proudly mentions that the prices in this period have always remained the same: "It is a simple place. The rest of the bars and restaurants here, however, are all rather chic." On the other side of the Tiber the "Other Chioschetto" is also open to satisfy all the thirsty people coming to Ponte Milvio. From mid-March to mid-November, the Chioschetto is open for breakfast every first and second Sunday of the month, while on other days the opening hours are from 5 pm until late at night.

6 am: the employees of the Roman waste removal company Ama come down from their vans to open small metal locks with thick chains on the Ponte Milvio. "The locks must be removed," declared the Mayor Gianni Alemanno in 2011. "They are a safety problem and they affect the good reputation of the city." The director Federico Moccia, however, said: "This is the end of a dream." Moccia made Ponte Milvio famous with his book and film *Ho voglia di te*. In the film, Moccia shows how lovers used to attach a padlock to the Ponte Milvio and throw the keys into the Tiber. Suddenly, it became a common habit for thousands of couples to have their own padlock on the bridge, and so Ponte Milvio turned into a paradise of locks. The struggle of the mayor against the lock abuse has proved to be a futile crusade according to the writer, who in an interview with the newspaper *Il Messaggero* said: "I realised how foolish politicians are when one day I was asked: 'Are the locks of the Ponte Milvio a phenomenon belonging to the left or to the right?'" The foolishness of politics, however, did not prevent Moccia from competing for the seat of mayor in his wife's hometown in the Abruzzo region. The decision to remove the locks was however taken both by left and right parties in the local council. According to the *Il Messaggero*, when reporting a statement by the council of district XX of Rome: "But for what concerns the locks it

is known that they are often fixed by young couples who stay together less than six months." In September 10, 2012 the staff of Ama finally removed the locks using huge pliers, getting international media coverage.

10 am: a group of pilgrims from Germany are listening carefully to the comments of their tourist guide. He tells them that on October 28, AD 312 the Roman Emperor Constantine fought the Battle of Ponte Milvio, and after his victory declared Christianity as the state religion. Before the battle, the Emperor had dreamed of the cross and the words: "In Hoc Signo Vinces" ["In this sign you will be the conqueror"].

12 pm: from the Chioschetto the sound of a well-known song drifts out: "When you're here with me, this room has no walls but trees, infinite trees." From the speakers comes the charming classic song of Gino Paoli, reinterpreted by the soft voice of the French-Italian singer Carla Bruni. It's a relaxing Sunday for the couples sitting around the silver tables surrounded by comfortable green garden chairs, while sport lovers gather with their mountain bikes in the square in front of the bridge to enjoy their spare time.

2 pm: the cicadas sing. A man with a yellow t-shirt arrives on the Ponte Milvio and asks if locks can be attached. A woman says they can. He first tries to fit a lock, then reconsiders and makes a phone call. Then he gives the padlock with the combination number to the woman. "It did not bring luck to me," he says, "but maybe it will bring luck to you."

3 pm: a Pakistani man is walking around and hoping to sell locks that he carries in a plastic bag. A family rides safely on their mountain bikes over the bridge.

5 pm: Livia, a Roman woman with a determined dark-eyed look and a smiling and intriguing expression responds to the compliments that a tall, dark man gives to her: "I see myself more and more like a gypsy. With this hot weather I go to work—wearing pyjamas!" Actually, she is wearing stylish black cotton strapless suit-pants. She has deep blue-black haircut à la Cleopatra.

6 pm: at the Chioschetto some people are sitting in the shade of the plane trees, while buses and cars run alongside the Tiber. Davide Bigoni, the owner of the Chioschetto, shows a reproduction of a map from 1870 which is kept in the Capitoline Archives. "This is the custom station with the guards. The guards controlled all the goods that were brought onto the deck." The farmers arrived with their carts on the Ponte Milvio. "Here in

front of these stairs there is the scale of the original bridge," Bigoni proudly says. "I restored it and I brought it back on the bridge. The farmers who had their farms along the Via Cassia used to bring their products here and then sell them in Rome. The sultry atmosphere of the city has been the cause of many conflicts that have been tragically solved by stabbing." Another document dated May 31, 1898, kept in the archives of the capital, reports that the citizen Ceferino Murliani applied to the governor to open a barber's shop in this area. The governor told him that it was not possible, but Murliani opened the store anyway. Another document shows how the custom station was demolished and the Chioschetto was built in its place. Initially, the bank of the Tiber remained detached. In a photo showing the flood of 1937 you can only see the roof of the Chioschetto. At the time, the customers of the Chioschetto were mainly the workers who dug the sand from the river and used it as a building material for the Roman houses. The sand workers used to bring their own food with them, and at the Chioschetto they drank the wine. The family of Bigoni has been running the Chioschetto since 1990. He says: "My grandmother acquired it from Palotta, the owner of the Osteria Antica here on the Ponte Milvio." Bigoni renewed the stand and gave it a contemporary and timeless style, with relaxed and friendly hospitality, reasonable prices, and trendy events such as book launches for a bohemian audience. "We started La Movida of Ponte Milvio," says the enthusiastic host. "During some football matches at the nearby Olympic Stadium many people used to pass here, and we were reduced to a state of siege." Once, the Chioschetto ran the risk of giving up its originality when a mayor of Rome issued a decree by which he ordered that all the kiosks of the city had to follow the same project. But the Chioschetto on the Ponte Milvio remained unchanged. "We carried out historical and iconographical research," says Bigoni. "The city government approved of our claim. We are a historical monument in Rome."

8 pm: the light is changing. The sky above Rome is pink. Some artists continue to paint the Ponte Milvio.

9 pm: three women in skimpy evening outfits are relaxing near the Valadier Tower. "According to us, the Ponte Milvio is an ideal place for our evening walk," says Beatrice Bonsignore, with her blonde hair and glossy lips. She lives in Viale Tiziano in the area of Flaminio. "It's very relaxing to be here without having to buy a ticket and use public transport. Aperitif, dinner and a drink until late at night and everything is nearby."

10 pm: a couple are walking across the bridge holding hands. They stop and write their names on a padlock, close the lock on the iron chain, and throw the key into the Tiber.

THE ENGLISH IN ROME: THE KEATS-SHELLEY HOUSE AT THE SPANISH STEPS

The last thought the English poet John Keats put to paper was in Rome in a letter to a friend in England: "It's the hardest thing in the world for me to write a letter. My stomach continues to ache, and it gets worse when I open a book. I always feel that my earthly life is over and that it is directed towards a posthumous existence." Keats was right. On February 23, 1821 he died at the age of only 25. His posthumous fame is overwhelming. Keats is known as one of the most important poets in the English language, and he continues to fascinate readers. The poet's tragic death was at the bottom of the Spanish Steps in number 26 on Piazza di Spagna. "When Keats died, the house was an inn," says Giuseppe Albano, the director of the current museum. "Half of the rooms of the museum were the home of Mrs. Anna Angeletti."

The home of the English poet is owned by the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, which was founded in 1903. At that time the building was in danger of being torn down. Robert Underwood Johnson, Sir Reynold Rodd (who later became British ambassador in Rome), and Harry Nelson Gay, a historian specialising in Italy, were the three founders of the museum. They managed to convince poets, academics, and diplomats of the importance of founding the Keats-Shelley Museum, which in fact had already been a sort of unofficial museum because many travellers had already passed through there, accommodated by Mrs. James Walcott Hazelhurst, then owner of the building, together with her daughter. A lot of travellers uttered the wish to see the rooms where John Keats had died.

Up to today, the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association has been an association concerned with the memory of the two poets, whose names the association maintains. However, only John Keats actually lived in the house at the Spanish Steps—Percy Bysshe Shelley did not. During their stay in Rome, Shelley and his wife lived elsewhere in the vicinity. The area between Piazza del Popolo and Piazza di Spagna was traditionally where most of the international visitors usually stayed. "We do not use public funds for the maintenance of the house," says the director Giuseppe

Albano. "A foundation in the United Kingdom gives support to us when we need to raise funds." One of the patrons of the museum is His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who is present in the house with a video message that is shown periodically. “For the one-hundred-year anniversary of the acquisition of the Keats-Shelley House in 2009 we renovated the terrace and the exhibition halls and we also opened a shop of romantic memorabilia,” says Albano. The biggest success in terms of romantic souvenirs is a black T-shirt with white print bearing the names of the poets: "John & Mary & Percy & George." Each year, the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association awards a poet and an essayist who have written a literary work concerning the romantic age. A scientific journal is also published annually by the museum.

The biggest period of crisis for the house came during World War II. Vera Cacciatore was the curator at the time, and, fearing that the collection could be damaged by the war, she transported the most precious objects to the Abbey of Montecassino. The abbey was subsequently hit by bombs, but the collection remained intact and all the pieces were eventually returned to the house.

In 2009, the number of visitors of the museum increased exponentially when the film *Bright Star* was released. It tells of the life of Keats and his love for Fanny Brawne, the archetypal girl next door. The most faithful visitors to the museum are teachers in Rome, who come each year with their classes when teaching English Romanticism. "What amazes me most about this house," says the Italian-British director of the Keats-Shelley House, "is that the school groups who come visiting this place are initially very noisy, excited, and then when they enter, the rooms have a civilising effect on them, and thus the pupils become at once very calm—not because someone tells them to, but because here you can feel the history."

The core of the collection is made up of pieces that the sons of Joseph Severn, the traveling companion of John Keats, donated to the museum, especially the portrait of Keats which Severn drew as he sat by his bedside. Each year the museum makes new purchases. One of these is the manuscript of the English novelist Stella Gibbons showing how great the influence of Keats is on generations of writers of different languages. For this reason, the collection also contains a manuscript of the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges talking about the English romantic culture. Scholars and writers visit the house in search of material for biographies and historical novels. They can also find first editions of the Romantic poets and richly illustrated editions. Often the house, with its magical

historic charm, is used as a movie set. The American Juliet Gael organises seminars on creative writing and the art of scriptwriting in the historical rooms, all following the philosophy of museum director Albano. "This house does not have to be a sanctuary of John Keats, although it is important to see the bedroom as a place in which to keep a memory of him," says Albano. “It is central, however, that the museum will inspire, educate and spread the knowledge of John Keats and other romantic poets. Also, when people drop in just for curiosity and want to know more, this is the place for them. Rome has always had a deep influence on writers, artists, and creative intellectuals of Northern Europe. The cosy house near the famous staircase is a visible part of this spell.”

“Keats had terrible money problems when he came to Rome," says Albano. "Neither he nor his companion, the painter Joseph Severn, possessed enough money." The trip was paid for by Keats’ publisher, Thomson. When the editor realised that the two were spending too much money he stopped all further transfers. The two men lived modestly in their days at the Spanish Steps. The only luxury was a hired piano, on which Severn used to play Joseph Haydn symphonies for his sick friend.

The carnival mask of Lord Byron is currently the subject of the month in the Keats-Shelley House. It is a disquieting wax mask with long hair and a long beard. Lord Byron wore the mask at a dancing event in Ravenna. A bunch of hair from Percy Bysshe Shelley was donated to the museum by Lord Abinger. One of the treasures of the collection is a valuable edition of the speeches of Tacitus. John Keats wrote his name in the book that he won in school as a recognition of his extraordinary knowledge of Latin. "This is one of the few books that John Keats actually had in his possession. Most of the books he had read were not books of his own," says Albano.

Constance Daggett has been working at the Keats-Shelley House since 2012. She came to Rome after university where she studied Latin and Greek, and she has always had the intention to teach Latin. One day, while reading the English language newspaper *Wanted in Rome*, she saw a job advertisement for reception services at the Keats-Shelley House. She started the job immediately. "I love Latin literature," says Daggett. “The romantic poets took their inspiration from the classic works by Ovid, Cicero, and Virgil. Byron, Keats, and Shelley had read them all."

The comic epic of Byron is written in the tradition of Virgil and Homer. When Daggett looks on the shelves of the library of the museum

she would love to immediately pull out the books and start reading. In addition to her job in the romantic museum, she teaches English and Latin and also wants to write, perhaps historical novels inspired by the house in Piazza di Spagna. Meanwhile, she writes a blog where she talks about Rome offering a modern version of the traditional romantic style. "In Rome I love the ruins. I just like stumbling into them. I love the contrast between the old and the new, the ancient remains that have been installed in the churches or in the contemporary homes that have arisen out of ancient Rome," Daggett says. During the period when the romantic poets arrived in Rome, the ancient sites were not fenced but literally woven into the city. Byron speaks about how the city was overgrown with weeds and flowers, a true desert with animals and wild plants. Daggett's favourite ruins are those of the Palatine. "The Palatine maybe gives the best idea of how this landscape would have been at the time. It is a large area covered with only buildings of the Roman age. The Palatine is the best area to understand ancient Rome—you can even see where the trees and plants were growing."

"The Keats-Shelley House is unique because it is a part of Rome and at the same time it is not," underlines Daggett. "It is not Rome, because there is no heat, no crowds of tourists and no traffic noise: rather, it is a place of contemplation. And yet we are in the centre of the city. If you look out of the window you see the chaos, but inside it is all quiet. This is a wonderful place to unwind. A place where you can relax and reflect."