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# Introduction

## Romantic Redirections: New Arenas in Romantic Studies in Italy

*Diego Saglia, Michael Gamer*

The importance of Romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world [...] There is the Industrial Revolution, there is the great French political revolution under classical auspices, and there is the Romantic revolution.

(Berlin 1999: 1, 7)

Opening his 1965 Mellon Lectures, Isaiah Berlin's remarks celebrate the pivotal role of Romanticism in the recent cultural and historical development of the Western world. The tone is definitive: there is no room for doubt. That Romanticism is a recent fact is stated with similar decisiveness, as if to reassure and motivate those who study the history and legacy of this crucial movement.

At the same time, the pronouncement also carries a sense of burden. Among Romanticism's legacies, Berlin lists some of the most nefarious aspects of twentieth-century history, including ideas foundational to fascism. Fully acknowledging Romanticism's revolutionary power in shaping modernity, he suggests, brings with it added responsibilities for scholars – at the very least, of describing dispassionately both the traditions we value and those we regret.

Berlin's lectures, of course, address their own intricate set of contexts. Delivered in 1965 at the National Gallery in Washington DC, they engaged a public discourse riven by a host of contending critical urges. These ranged from the Modernist resistance to Romanticism (still widespread in the 1960s), to

longstanding debates over the nature of Romanticism (embodied in, yet extending far beyond, the exchanges of René Wellek and A.O. Lovejoy), to the newly canonizing, formalist arguments of M. H. Abrams (which presented Romanticism as an aesthetically and philosophically coherent movement at once responding to, and transcending, the Enlightenment). Attempting to confirm its centrality by laying to rest the question of its importance, Berlin links Romanticism to a host of constitutive revolutions – economic, political and aesthetic – impossible to encompass through a single principle, event, interpretive lens, or tradition. Amidst his claims for Romanticism as a movement, we discover not coherence but rather ideas in transformation, beset by clashing and even partisan notions crossing intellectual fields and national boundaries. And this innate interdisciplinarity is what Romanticists since Berlin – with increasing creativity and intensity – have sought to address at an international level. Starting with the term Romanticism itself, we have explored alternatives to naming an entire period by way of an aesthetic, and a not clearly delineated or circumscribed one at that. Behind its veneer of coherence, we have found a heterogeneous and turbulent period rife with diverging phenomena: global war, opportunistic nationalisms, changing climates, and exploding rates of literacy feeding what the Multigraph Collective has called the Age of Print Saturation (Multigraph 2018).

This issue of *Textus* originates from a desire to assess the current state of British Romantic studies in Italy – a tradition that has long been at the forefront of innovative scholarly and theoretical developments within literary criticism. Italian Romanticists have helped not just to shape the newest historicisms and formalisms, but also to bring adjacent arenas of study – text and media, body and affect, ecology and anthropology, identity and geography – into dialogue with literary studies and with one another. Their arguments, moreover, have been sustained by a frequently comparatist, insistently internationalist, vision. For more than a century, the questions raised by what Berlin calls the ‘importance of Romanticism’ have proven especially pertinent to the Italian scholarly context, both its current twenty-first-century condition and its early twentieth-century roots.

It is a truism, yet one worth rehearsing for the purposes of this issue, that two of the foundational figures of English studies in Italy



– Emilio Cecchi and Mario Praz – dedicated significant attention to Romantic writing. Cecchi’s translation of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry* in 1903 paved the way for his *Storia della letteratura inglese del XIX secolo* (1915). (His study was later republished, in an enlarged and revised version, as *I grandi romantici inglesi* [1961].) Cecchi’s sustained engagement with English Romantic poetry fundamentally shaped his later work as a critic and intellectual. His activities as a translator and commentator reinforced his cultivation of what has been called his *lato abissale* – a commitment to exploring the shadowy margins of aesthetic and philosophical questions and concerns, which contributed to the delineation of his cultural and writerly identity (Cecchi 1981: II, n.p.). Praz – perhaps even more famously – also plumbed aesthetic and psychological depths in *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (1930). Known in English as *The Romantic Agony* via the Angus Davidson translation of 1933, the study casts the Romantic period as a fundamental turning point in the histories of eroticism, sado-masochism, diabolism and fatal beauty. Firmly intercultural and comparative, its critical outlook is reflected in Praz’s methodology, which painstakingly maps key thematic clusters across two centuries of European writing. That it remains foundational to Italian Romantic studies today is testified by the opening essay of this issue, Paolo Bugliani’s “Romanticism Approximated: Mario Praz’s Idea and Practice of Romantic Studies.”

Bugliani argues for the importance of not just *The Romantic Agony* but also the *Storia della letteratura inglese*, not to mention Praz’s abundant output of related essays and translations (all of which Bugliani usefully lists in an Appendix). It is in the *Storia* that Praz first envisaged Romanticism “as a properly defined and productive area of study”. His lasting contributions to Romantic studies, Bugliani suggests, were crucially related to contemporary debates about the nature and discrimination of Romanticisms, which, like the Romanticism Praz championed, possessed a life far beyond their 1930s milieu. Elements of Praz’s vision and opposition to the Modernists’ anti-Romanticism resonate particularly, in the late 1950s and 1960s, in what Bugliani calls the “Romantic resistance promoted by exponents such as Frank Kermode, Northrop Frye, M. H. Abrams, Walter Jackson Bate, Harold Bloom, and George Hartman, among others”.

As this list of Anglophone scholars and critics intimates, English studies in post-war Italy developed in ways that mirrored theoretical and methodological developments abroad. Studies in Romantic writing mostly focused on the major male poets; principles such as those expounded by Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) became increasingly influential; genres such as the novel, the essay and drama remained peripheral; and structuralist approaches slowly began to gain traction. As in other national scholarly contexts, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of poststructuralist trends, and especially of materialist and neo-materialist critical theories foregrounding historical context and identity. On such premises, the theoretical impulses of the 1990s and 2000s opened up new avenues of research, which – thanks to a prevailing and crucial shift from ‘Romanticism’ to ‘the Romantic period’ – aimed at recovering marginalized experiences and lost voices.

The new developments from the late 1980s onwards created the conditions for a scholarly field now characterized by productivity, liveliness, and diversity. In 1993 the Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere Moderne at the University of Bologna created a Centro per lo Studio del Romanticismo, under the guidance of Lilla Maria Crisafulli, with a marked interdisciplinary and transnational vocation including British, European, and World literatures. (In 2010, it became the Centro Interuniversitario per lo Studio del Romanticismo [CISR]).<sup>1</sup> Since its inception, scholars associated with the Centre have re-explored a host of questions fundamental to the period. Their abiding concerns have included neglected media such as theatre and performance; modes of identity and otherness including race, class, gender, and sexuality; the long history of ideas of human and non-human, and of nation, planet, and cosmos; the centrality of print phenomena and popular publishing, particularly Gothic; and periodical writing as central to the Romantic period’s public sphere.

In the area of English-language Romantic-era literature, the Centre has organized conferences (on some occasions in conjunction with AIA and international associations such as BARS and NASSR), promoted publications, and developed a number of national and

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://site.unibo.it/cisr/en> (last accessed: November 21, 2022).

international research projects. Launched in 1995, the journal *La Questione Romantica*, currently directed by Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Annalisa Goldoni, showcases the work of scholars of Romanticism from the national and global research communities; in parallel, the catalogue of its publisher, Liguori, features a series entitled “Romanticismo e dintorni”. Another important Romantic-related centre to have emerged within Italian academia is the University of Verona’s CRIER – Centro di Ricerca Interdipartimentale sull’Europa Romantica –, dedicated to comparative approaches also through numerous connections with centres abroad, especially in France<sup>2</sup>. The networks of scholars fostered by such university-based research centres have arisen alongside thriving literary societies like the Jane Austen Society of Italy (JASIT, founded in 2013) and institutions such as the Keats-Shelley House in Rome (formally inaugurated in 1909) and the Museo Byron at Palazzo Guiccioli in Ravenna (scheduled to open in the autumn of 2023, at the time of writing).

This quick roundup reveals Romantic-period studies in Italy as an inexhaustibly fertile nexus of local, national, and international interest. The field is home to a lively conversation covering the full range of scholarly and popular perspectives<sup>3</sup>. Of equal interest

<sup>2</sup> See <http://crier.univr.it/> (last accessed: September 10, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> The sustained critical and editorial investment by scholars has bolstered, and been bolstered by, popular cultural phenomena like global Austenmania and Regencymania, fuelled by successful adaptations not just of Austen’s fiction but also of novels by Susanna Clarke, Seth Grahame-Smith, P.D. James, and Julia Quinn, to name but a few. Recent years have also seen Romantic bicentenary celebrations in Italy, such as those commemorating Keats’s death in Rome in 1821 and Shelley’s off the Northern coast of Tuscany in 1822. The latter event has proven especially generative, sparking academic, poetic, musical and other events across the country, including: “Imagining Poetry Today: Responses to P.B. Shelley’s Defence of Poetry (1821)” (May 2022, sponsored by the University of Rome Sapienza and the Keats-Shelley House); the city of Lerici’s festival of contemporary poetry in Italian and English and performances of musical pieces inspired by Shelley (June 2022); Viareggio’s hosting of two talks dedicated to Shelley on the significant dates of 6 and 8 July as part of the city’s commemorative celebrations; “Transnational Shelley(s): Metamorphoses and Reconfiguration” (October 2022, held at Frascati and co-organized by the University of Rome Tor Vergata and the University of Pisa); and “Shelley’s Contemporaneities” (October 2022, co-organized by the University of Bologna, the Centro Interuniversitario per lo Studio del Romanticismo (CISR) and the Museo Byron in Ravenna). This thick cluster of events testifies to the degree to which the interests of scholars, the general public, heritage, and local

is its abiding interdisciplinarity, one harking back to Berlin's need to associate Romanticism and the Romantic period not just with literary innovation but also with a range of socio-economic, political, and aesthetic sea changes. Seeing literature and culture as inseparable from context and cross-disciplinary contamination, scholars have explored the mediating, even problem-solving, power of form and genre, tracking how aesthetic innovations can mirror or even shape broader cultural shifts. And within Romantic period writing, they have sought to find earlier versions of debates raging today concerning the boundaries of human and non-human, and body and self; the nature of historicity and temporality, ecosystem and environment; the long histories of movement and displacement, exchange, and imperialism; and the intersections between the material, the numinous, and the transcendental.

The essays gathered in this issue of *Textus* extend and expand on this tradition of local and global critical interests, as well as the attendant modes of cross-disciplinary inquiry. Their different approaches to textual, cultural, and historical manifestations bear out the forms of critical eclecticism instigated by the multifaceted make-up of Romantic-period Britain. They also confirm more generally that 'theory' can be understood both as a reflective and a creative pursuit: at once an examination of fundamental terms within one's discipline, and an act of looking beyond its traditional boundaries to gain fresh perspectives on basic tenets and ways of seeing. Romantic writers (and by extension Romantic studies) have traditionally embraced this speculative and experimental turn, thriving in the face of new perspectival challenges, whether they be the ideological earthquakes of the French revolution or the transformational ways of seeing the world posited by figures such as Humphry Davy, Caroline and William Herschel, James Hutton, David Ricardo, or Mary Wollstonecraft.

Following the essay of Paolo Bugliani, Carlotta Farese's contribution discovers in Jane Austen's writings and biography an acute ambivalence over disability and illness. This tension, she

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communities tend to coalesce around Romanticism. The celebrations also show a markedly international bent, connecting themselves with global organizations like the International Association of Byron Societies and the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association.

shows, reaches its climax in Austen's final works just as her own fatal illness began to take hold. In *Persuasion* (1818) and *Sanditon* (1925) especially, Farese finds Austen's characteristic satire and irony taking on a new edge, seeming "to function as [...] an extreme attempt to ridicule her fatal disease and affirm her agency against it". Addressing questions of medical knowledge and practice as well as their relation to ethical principles, her essay provides new interpretive lenses for understanding both Austen and her characters. Looking outside literary studies, she provides a more stratified view of Austen's attitude towards illness and disability, and in the process sets into relief some specific manifestations of the Regency body.

Anna Anselmo also mines a cross-disciplinary cluster, in this case one including literary and cultural studies and political discourse and emphasizing methodological and linguistic issues. Entitled "The Discourse of Lawfulness in Representations of the Peterloo Massacre", her essay takes up the tools of discourse analysis to analyse journalistic commentary on the August 1819 Peterloo Massacre. Seeking to describe the range of ideological responses to that event through the examination of keywords, Anselmo surveys accounts published in *The Times*, *The Morning Chronicle*, *The Courier*, *Sherwin's Political Register*, and *The Examiner* soon after the event. What emerges is a common preoccupation with lawfulness but wielded in radically divergent ways to aid representations of Peterloo as either a government conspiracy or a legitimate act of self-defence. By turns arresting and illuminating, her study testifies to the productive opportunities offered by a methodological fusion of linguistics and cultural-literary studies.

Franca Dellarosa's "Between Stereotype and Sedition: Romantic-Era Geo-Histories of the Italian South on the London Stage" takes up a different sort of fusion – in this case, early nineteenth-century efforts to reimagine Italy's position and identity in post-Waterloo Europe. Dellarosa's primary interpretive lenses are theatre history and reception studies, which she harnesses to explore stage representations of southern Italy as a discrete cultural space that can help us map shifting ideas of European identity. In particular, she concentrates her attention on Felicia Hemans's *The Vespers of Palermo* and a cluster of plays on Masaniello. These dramatic productions, she argues, "provide a picture of the Italian South [...

as a] backward ‘barbarian’ and orientalised ‘debatable land’ [...] and] as the repository of subversive imagery that lends itself to [...] a variety of political investments”. Imagined as at once part of Europe and resistant to cultural assimilation, the Italian South becomes for British dramatists of the 1820s and 1830s a site of revolutionary potential and possible violence, encapsulated in the presence of the volcanoes Vesuvius and Etna. In introducing theatre history and reception studies to longstanding conversations about the history of Italian identity, her essay stands at once as a contribution to studies of British Romantic constructions of Italy and an expansion of their scope.

Aligned with current developments in the Environmental Humanities, the last three essays in this special issue – by Elisabetta Marino, Serena Baiesi, and Gioia Angeletti – discover environmental concerns within Romantic-period discourses of travel, disease, and displacement. Each presents a sustained engagement with early nineteenth-century texts that imagine the environment as comprised of human and non-human elements. Marino’s essay on Selina Martin’s *Narrative of a Three Years’ Residence in Italy*, for example, focuses on Martin’s attempt to correct celebratory representations of Italy’s countryside, culture, and inhabitants. Especially fascinating is her analysis of Martin’s use of popular genre, that is, her willingness to deploy the stereotypes of Gothic fiction and drama as textual vehicles for lived experience. Seeking to reverse the positive reputation of its countryside, culture, and inhabitants, Martin presents Italy as a toxic and debilitating environment, painstakingly describing to her “fellow nationals [...] the numerous dangers they would be exposed to”, both in body and in soul. In this traveller’s critical account, environmental questions emerge through a focus on Italian geography, weather, and landscape, a nexus that is presented as a constitutive force and an expression of Italian decadence.

In her contribution, Serena Baiesi finds in the travel writing of Leigh Hunt some of Romanticism’s most suggestive environmental engagements. Hunt’s fondness for writing about place is well known; Baiesi’s critical innovation arises from her shrewd juxtaposition of country and city through Hunt’s accounts of life in Tuscany and in London. Examining his explorations of the interconnections between urban and rural spaces, she traces his interweaving of direct perception of the environment with its literary inscriptions.

Both approaches contribute to directing his ‘green footsteps’, a resonant phrase Baiesi borrows from Hunt himself. As she follows the variations and transformations of the author’s experience between England and Italy, and his expanding conception of the interrelation between the human and non-human, Baiesi outlines how Hunt opened up “new insights into processes of personal and collective growth”.

Concentrating on Lady Morgan’s travel-book *Italy* (1821), Angeletti’s essay closes this issue by also engaging disciplines outside literary studies to consider the history of ideas of the human and the non-human. But here the picture is even more multifaceted, reminiscent of Morgan’s own synthesizing and cosmopolitan intellect. In *Italy* Morgan presents the Italian landscape and its inhabitants as mutually constitutive; in each dimension she consistently finds the shaping forces of the other. “Italian geography is everywhere enmeshed with its multi-layered cultural and political context”, Angeletti notes – so much so that considerations of environment and place become essential “vehicles for [Morgan’s] socio-political critique, which distinguishes Italy from other Romantic-period women’s travel books on the Bel Paese”. Angeletti delves into this complexity to set into relief how Morgan depicts Italy as made up of inextricably entwined human and other-than-human components. Combining ecocritical and geo-critical methodologies, her analysis suggests that Romantic-period representations of Italy – in their combinations of *topos*, geography, and environment – offer important arenas for pursuing a “green Romanticism”.

Even if this issue cannot include all the lines of investigation currently active in Italian Romantic studies, our hope is that this selection of essays will provide a sense of its richness and possible futures – of work recently published and studies still to be conceived. The interdisciplinary bent of the essays suggests possible directions for further work. They do so, moreover, not just through their choice of subject, but also through their desire to organize knowledge in ways not always reflected in the structures of university departments and programmes. There is also, we believe, some of the Romantic period’s own spirit of synthesis, experimentation, and play: its willingness to combine lyric and other poetic modes, the narrative and the performative, nature and philosophy, politics and language, human and geological time, and so on. Considering

Berlin's question of the importance of Romanticism here, we find the period's relevance most urgently in its irrepressible fecundity: in the sheer diversity of its writings, in the constant critical rethinking, translation, adaptation, and remediation of these writings, and in the enduring popular appeal of its figures, myths, and legacies.

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# Romanticism Approximated: Mario Praz's Idea and Practice of Romantic Studies\*

*Paolo Bugliani*

## *Abstract*

This essay deals with an idea of Romanticism that the Italian critic and essayist Mario Praz formulated in the introduction to his *The Romantic Agony*. By means of a felicitously labelled “approximation” later ‘systematised’ in his *Storia della letteratura inglese*, Praz conceived of Romanticism as an all-encompassing literary phenomenon, spanning from Ossian’s verses to E. M. Forster’s novels, and not just as a brief phase that eventually died out after the untimely deaths of the second-generation Romantics. I contend that Praz’s contribution, although often overshadowed by the sheer mass of his body of work, should be reappraised in the broader context of the mid-twentieth-century Anglo-American debate on the discrimination of Romanticisms. To this end, this essay also includes a bibliographic list of Praz’s most notable Romantic-themed contributions as a useful premise for future explorations.

*Key-words:* Romantic studies in Italy, Mario Praz, British Romantic literature.

The romantic exists in precision as well as  
imprecision.

Wallace Stevens, “Adagia”

## **1. An “Imperfect Romantic Aristocrat”**

Mario Praz’s contribution to Romantic studies can be assessed in many ways. First of all, we might be tempted to turn to *Voce dietro la scena*, his last collection of essays. There, in the “Preface”, Praz claims that his body of writings should be assessed not as an organic

\* I am deeply grateful to Franco Buffoni for his generous encouragement and intelligent suggestions, and to Laura Coltelli for lending me significant portions of her private Praz collection.

whole but as a mass of essayistic investigations on subjects that were congenitally attuned to his own soul, thus almost encouraging us to accept his body of work as primarily of a literary kind. Although essentially true, this might be a perspective that ends up erasing his substantial contribution to the field of Italian English Studies. In addition to being a highly idiosyncratic critic, Praz surely had a clear vision of literature, which although perhaps unsystematic was organised like an immense and immensely fascinating *Wunderkammer*, much like the vision of a Romantic essayist catapulted into the twentieth century.

Such a comparison is not fortuitous. As a matter of fact, to describe his own work, Praz made direct reference to one of the most famous among Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, originally published in *The London Magazine* in August 1821 under the title of "Imperfect Sympathies". By aligning himself with Lamb's image of the essayist as a "bundle of prejudices" (Lamb 1903: 134) – one gifted with "minds rather suggestive than comprehensive" (p. 135) and perfectly at ease with "fragments and scattered pieces of Truth" (p. 135) – Praz effectively established his reputation as a literary critic situated between the domain of academic writing and the more traditional figure of the 'man of letters'<sup>1</sup>. According to his many Anglophone reviewers and admirers, Praz's originality resided in such an "unacademic" approach; his ability to transcend "the rhapsodies of Italian rhetoric" (Wilson 1984: 171) placed his work alongside milestones in literary criticisms by Lukàcs and Auerbach (Kermode 1970: v). Yet, Praz's allegiance with Lambian essay-writing is important not only to underscore his generic aversion to theory<sup>2</sup>, but also to detect a sort of marked partiality for the field of British Romanticism.

Even though he did not mention his interest in Romanticism in the "Preface" to *Voce dietro la scena*, it is true that his last book

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, Praz takes part in the process of evolution, described by Josephine M. Guy and I. Small (2002), that gradually shifted the discourse of literary criticism from the amateurish realm of the public sphere to the more secluded halls of Academia.

<sup>2</sup> A distinction about the use of this term is necessary. Besides possessing a general meaning, literary theory, in Praz's case, should be considered from a historical point of view. For example, when Praz wrote the "Preface", theory in a historical sense also bore quite markedly strong (post)structural features.

contains some outstanding essays devoted to Romanticism, notably “Nota sul colore locale, sulla Londra del Lamb e sulle rovine irreparabili”. These were chosen as an afterword to his 1923 Italian translation of Lamb’s *Essays of Elia* – and “La bellezza medusea” was the first chapter of his ground-breaking *The Romantic Agony*<sup>3</sup>.

Before tackling this milestone of a book directly, it is interesting to remark how Praz’s claim of adopting an unsystematic approach to the literary artefact is clearly linked to the tradition of the literary essay. As his place in this tradition has often been the subject of monographic studies (Cane 1983; Dalmas 2012; Manica 2019), it is worth evaluating how Romanticism at large, and not only one of its genres, shaped Praz’s critical journey.

A crucial starting point in this respect is the effort Praz made to reclaim a specialised and precise historical meaning for the term “Romanticism”. At the beginning of his career, the Anti-Romantic campaign put forward by Modernist high priest T. S. Eliot had already reached its peak (Levenson 1984: 82-83). Imbued with Irving Babbitt’s precepts at Harvard and impressed by T. E. Hulme’s famous dismissal of Romanticism as “spilt religion” (Hulme 1936: 128), Eliot’s *The Sacred Wood* was instrumental in popularising a generalised mistrust for, and a rather fierce opposition to anything relating to, the early nineteenth-century literary sphere. Eliot’s suspicion extended also to critical figures such as George Wyndham, branding him as a “romantic aristocrat”, which clearly shows the shortcomings of a Romantic mindset also in the context of literary studies. Thus, Eliot is unambiguous in his use of ‘romantic’ as a mere synonym for ‘enthusiast’ and ‘chivalric imperialist’ (Eliot 1997: 22-23).

Praz envisaged Romanticism as a properly defined and productive area of study, whose thematic milestones, as far as his interests were concerned, were the peculiar interconnections between the beautiful and the horrific, between pleasure and pain, and the

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<sup>3</sup> The titles of *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* and that of *La crisi dell’eroe nel romanzo vittoriano* will be quoted in the English translations by Angus Davidson. This is mainly to highlight Praz’s success abroad, but also to underline how Davidson – an influential translator of, among others, Alberto Moravia’s fiction – succeeded in coining two phrases, “romantic agony” and “the hero in eclipse”, which interestingly rival Praz’s own linguistic adroitness.

delicate balance linking thorny themes such as incest, sadism, and decadence (Valentini 2003: 131-32). Claiming and fostering such a commitment in the 1930s was indeed timely, and it anticipated the resurgence of interest in the study of Romanticism, and of its echoes, in the later twentieth century. If critics such as I. A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks were adamant in pursuing Eliot's *Anti-Romantic Diktat* – for example in works such as *Revaluation: Tradition and Development of English Poetry* (1936) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) –, Praz's contribution seems to open the way for the 'Romanticist resistance' promoted by exponents such as Frank Kermode, Northrop Frye, M. H. Abrams, Walter Jackson Bate, Harold Bloom, and George Hartman, among others<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Approximation as an approach

*The Romantic Agony* was the first critical study of British Romanticism by an Italian scholar to reach an international audience. Though Praz would later become famous for his multifarious interests, Romanticism remained one of the most frequent topics in his critical output. As a matter of fact, even before *The Romantic Agony* Praz had already made his debut in British Romantic Studies with *Unromantic Spain*, and would later secure his place among the acutest interpreters of the 19th century with *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*.

In *The Romantic Agony* Praz did not aim to present a general description of the Romantic movement as a whole. As he states in the "Note to the Second Edition", his original idea was that of studying Romantic literature according to one of its most typical

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<sup>4</sup> To quote a representative text for each of them, see Kermode's, Frye's and Abrams's contributions in *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1963). Harold Bloom's *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (1971), Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1972) and George Hartman's "The Sacred Jungle" chapter in *Criticism in the Wilderness* (1980) are some of the most outstanding critical pronouncements against Eliot's, and perhaps more accurately, New-Critical attempts to portray the literary transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a neat and irrecoverable break. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find a comparison between Romanticism and the Baroque as conceptual entities in Frye's contribution to *Romanticism Reconsidered* ("The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism").

features, that is, its erotic sensibility. Although Praz acknowledges that such a trait is central to the whole of nineteenth-century literature (Praz 2008: 3), he overtly asserts that he never aimed at a general and universal account of Romanticism, thus rebutting Benedetto Croce's critique of his work as concentrating on merely a partial aspect of it.

Notwithstanding Croce's philosophical dislike for his *modus operandi*, ambiguity was not the aim of Praz's analysis. The fact that he never claimed to be presenting a universal or global view of the historical and aesthetic significance of Romanticism is clear from his choice of the term "approximation" for his introductory remarks to *The Romantic Agony*. This prefatory address to his readers serves the purpose not only of justifying the partiality inherent to any thematic excursion, but also of providing a frame of reference in which the idea of "Romantic" acquires wider-ranging implications yet without losing its specificity. As with other approximations such as "Baroque", Praz continues, these terms can possess a clear value and can be crucial for interpreting literary history despite widespread resistance to their actual theoretical accuracy. In other terms, Praz claimed that epithets such as "Romanticism" have great empirical value in the practice of literary criticism although many intellectuals had labelled them as unprofitable by virtue of their slippery nature:

Ora l'uso di formule quali romantico, barocco, eccetera, è appunto di dare il la all'interpretazione d'un'opera d'arte o, in altre parole, di segnare i limiti entro i quali il problema critico va impostato, e oltre i quali è l'arbitrio, l'anacronismo. Quelle formule vogliono soltanto tener presente il carattere dell'epoca in cui l'opera fu prodotta, sì da evitare che un accordo di parole, o di suoni, o di colori, o di forme, venga surrettiziamente riempito con intenzioni che son suscitate nella mente dell'interprete, ma che certo non esistevano nella mente dell'artista. (Praz 2008: 15)

[Now the use of formulas such as 'romantic', 'baroque', &c., serves to give some guidance to the interpretation of a work of art, or, in other words, to define the limits within which the activity of the critic is to be confirmed and beyond which lie mere arbitrary and anachronistic judgements. The sole object of these formulas is to keep in mind the character of the period in which the work was produced, in such a way as to avoid the danger of a combination of words, sounds, colours or forms becoming surreptitiously invested with ideas which are aroused in the

mind of the interpreter, but which certainly did not exist in the mind of the artist (Praz 1951: 3)]

It is thus a desire for clarity and precision that drives Praz's approach to Romanticism. He clearly proposes the Romantic as a distinctive trait of the nineteenth century as a whole, thus avoiding the somewhat perilous debate on the Classical-Romantic opposition that was taking place in his time<sup>5</sup>. In actual fact, Praz dismisses this traditional opposition, even as he suggests using the term "romantic" in its "primitive" meaning of a sensibility peculiar to a specific historical period (2008: 19). He then proceeds to an etymological exegesis of the term, which is particularly interesting for its intersection with the concept of the picturesque, which seems to represent his own proposal for supplanting the opposition of Classical vs. Romantic. This move also signals how the visual arts will become increasingly central to Praz's own critical practice, a feature that will be most obvious in such works as *Mnemosyne* (1967) and *Perseus and the Medusa* (1979), where Romanticism is effortlessly integrated into Praz's multidisciplinary approach to Art.

Though it may seem oxymoronic to claim approximation as a way of making a clear point, the apparent paradox must have pleased Praz immensely. He re-employed the concept when he turned to exploring late nineteenth-century British literature in his monograph *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction* (1952):

In sede estetica è facile sostenere, come già osservai a proposito di 'romantico', l'inadeguatezza, e magari la inconsistenza di quegli 'equivoci concetti storici' che abbiám chiamato approssimazioni. [...] quelle approssimazioni [...] acquistano il loro senso soltanto nell'ambito di determinati periodi storici. È così che certe caratteristiche, apparse sporadicamente prima, si trovano in tal copia nell'Ottocento, da colorarne tutta l'epoca. (Praz 2002: 488-89)

[From the point of view of aesthetics it is easy to maintain – as I have already remarked in connexion with the word 'romantic' – the inadequacy,

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<sup>5</sup> Praz refers explicitly to the approach proposed in 1925 by the influential critic John Clifford Grierson, who saw "classical" as synonymous with "balance" and "romantic" as equivalent to "interruption of balance". Praz overtly denounces the risks of such uncontrolled expansions of the semantics of the two terms (2008: 18-19).

the positive inconsistency, even, of these ‘ambiguous historical concepts’ that we have called approximations [...] these approximations [...] acquire their meaning only within the compass of specified historical periods. It is thus that certain characteristics, sporadically visible earlier, appear so plentifully during the nineteenth century as to colour the whole epoch (Praz 1956: 38)]

Here, Praz is even clearer about his intentions, and his definition of approximation as an “equivocal historical concept” aptly summarises his own approach to abstract concepts. In a sort of reaction against idealistic frames of mind such as Croce’s (Furst 1973), Praz appears to embrace the quintessential empiricism of the British tradition in order to adapt it to the study of literature. In a sense, we might envisage Praz’s decision to label his attempt – his essay in a Lambian sense – to grasp the concept of Romanticism in order to begin his discussion not as an objective and definitive statement on the matter, but rather as a working definition useful for an analysis without universalistic pretensions. In this respect, it may be appropriate to quote the position adopted by the literary critic and Cambridge professor Sir Arthur Quiller Couch when faced with the Classical-Romantic dichotomy, in his essay “On the Terms Classical and Romantic” (1918), a study deeply rooted in intuitive apprehension:

They [the terms ‘classical’ and ‘romantic’] are adjective, epithets, assigning to this and that work of art either this or that of two qualities which (I shall not be wrong in saying) [...] handbooks suggest to you as opposed to one another, if not mutually exclusive. (Quiller Couch 1924: 72)

Perhaps more irreverently than Praz, Quiller Couch is reacting against doctrinal views (the ‘handbooks’ that also the idealist Italian philosopher might have been producing). And, perhaps less thoroughly than his Italian colleague, he was aiming not at a banalisation of the problem, but at a simplification that could allow the critic to get on with his job without encumbering his work with tedious and unnecessary methodological premises.

### 3. A “Long Romanticism” framework

Given Praz’s investment in the theoretical dimension of Romanticism, once he embarked on a larger scale historical survey

of English literature, he would predictably resort to the umbrella term ‘Romanticism’ to identify the often heterogeneous facets of nineteenth-century literature. A quick glance at the index of *La letteratura inglese dai Romantici al Novecento* (1975) clearly reveals a sort of theoretical equation between the nineteenth century and Romanticism<sup>6</sup>. The first chapter deals with Pre-Romanticism – Ossian, Austen and Blake ranking among its most notable names – and describes it as a sort of Enlightenment metamorphosed by the intervening forces of primitivism and exoticism, two of the most notable features of what Praz goes on to define as the core of Romanticism’s “ethical period” (1992: 33). He then reprises some of the cautionary remarks about historiographic subdivisions he had already outlined in *The Romantic Agony*, with the reinforcement offered by a direct quotation of C. S. Lewis’s Cambridge prologue *De Descriptione Temporum* (1955). Literary and historical complexities notwithstanding, Romantic sensibility and taste (1992: 32) have been such a momentous incident in the history of literature that a uniform reading of the years 1770-1913 seems to Praz the most rational choice, even though he awards the conventional label of “Victorian compromise” to the years 1832-1875 and that of “transition period” to 1875-1914<sup>7</sup>. In adopting this all-embracing attitude, Praz followed well-established accounts such as Holbrook Jackson’s *The Eighteen Nineties* (1930), where Decadence is decidedly envisaged as a later development of Romanticism (Jackson 1950: 55), and for this he has been recently celebrated as a pioneer in the field (Boyiopoulos and Sandy 2015: 8-10). The crucial feature of the later phases of Romanticism is their “intimately disharmonic” nature (Praz 1992: 93), a fact that enables Praz to include many seemingly disparate authors and works into a coherent and convincing treatment. To quote just one instance of his perceptiveness in retracing romantic traits in

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<sup>6</sup> This is another of the aspects of *The Romantic Agony* to which Benedetto Croce was most decidedly hostile in his 1931 review of Praz’s work. For Praz’s rebuttal, see the “Avvertenza alla seconda edizione” (2008: 9-10).

<sup>7</sup> In the last chapter, entitled “The Age of Anxiety”, Praz does not provide chronological extremes, yet refers to D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* as the earliest work marking the turning point of a new literary climate (1992: 234). Praz is also very clear that the effects of “the revolution in gusto and sensibility” ignited during the last decades of the eighteenth century is still “ongoing” (1992: 31) in present times.



authors or texts, we may recall his final remarks on Joseph Conrad, who, according to Praz, is a romantic by virtue of his “exasperated isolation [...] pessimism [...] sense of guilt and atonement [...] musings about the meaning of human existence” (p. 212).

Though to readers conversant with Praz’s manual such a segmentation might seem familiar and unproblematic enough, yet it presents some interesting implications if we read it alongside more recent advancements in the study of historiography. Works such as those of Cemil Aydin, who aims to redefine world history from a de-colonial viewpoint, refer to a new chronological era labelled the “long nineteenth century”, which spans from the mid eighteenth-century Atlantic revolutions to the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I (Aydin 2018). In addition to Aydin’s historical perspective, the idea that the nineteenth century should be considered as cutting across the watershed of the year 1900 and include the first two decades of the twentieth century has been foundational in renowned scholarly journals such as *English Literature in Transition* and, more recently, of studies aimed at a re-orientation of the chronological borders of Modernism ((Finn 2006, Purdon 2022)<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4. Praz the Romanticist in context

However, historiography is clearly not the context in which Praz’s contribution should be placed. Rather, his approach to Romanticism as a whole constitutes a serious intellectual endeavour that can be more appropriately associated with philosophy, even though Praz was criticised in contemporary philosophical milieus, to which, in fact, he clearly did not want to appeal. In this sense, in the English-speaking world in particular, a figure such as Isaiah Berlin bears several similarities to Praz in terms of his approach to Romanticism. In this manner, we could reappraise his contribution as a theoretically open paradigm, structurally adaptable to many different critical situations and more specifically resulting in a very flexible framework within which to carry out literary criticism of

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<sup>8</sup> Franco Marucci’s multi-volume *History of English Literature* (2003-2011) seems to agree with Praz’s periodisation, although with a significant inversion: what for Praz was due to Romanticism, for Marucci is to be attributed to Victorianism.

authors and works from such a newly re-defined long nineteenth-century.

Berlin addressed repeatedly the question of the *Sources of Romantic Thought* starting from 1965, when he delivered the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Art Gallery in Washington<sup>9</sup>. As the editor of the volume collecting these lectures (*The Roots of Romanticism*, 1999) explains, Berlin had long envisaged publishing a book on Romanticism, but was deterred by the impossibility of finding an appropriate way of tackling such a phenomenon in the format of a treatise. Such an impasse is essentially the same that motivated Praz's choice of an un-methodical method based on 'approximation' to deal with the literature of a long Romantic nineteenth century. Berlin's own field of specialisation, the history of ideas, had already made a significant contribution to the question of the essence of Romanticism as an artistic phenomenon. A. O. Lovejoy's well-known "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" (1924) was a study that had, at the height of the rupture introduced by High Modernism, asserted the necessity to conceive of Romanticism as a multifarious phenomenon, thus surreptitiously undermining the very premises of its rejection on the part of Anti-Romantic ideologues. Leaving aside the excessively numerous manifestations that Romanticism can assume and which he brilliantly enumerates (Berlin 1999), Berlin's own view is that the lure of the infinite possibilities to define this phenomenon are a trap that a serious critic should carefully avoid. After Lovejoy, René Wellek attempted to provide a historiographically panoramic view of the question in his "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History (1949); and Lovejoy's and Wellek's positions were to be yoked together, more or less successfully, by George Peckham in "Toward a Theory of Romanticism" (1951), to be later integrated by Jerome McGann in the opening of his groundbreaking study *The Romantic Ideology* (1983).

Considering these attempts as doomed from the start, Berlin pursued a more essayistically discursive approach, quoting a passage from one of Lovejoy's pupils, George Boas, who claimed that

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<sup>9</sup> In what we may interpret as a telling coincidence, two years later, in 1967, Praz was invited by the same institution in Washington, where he delivered his lectures "On the Parallel of Literature and the Visual Arts", later published as *Mnemosyne* (1970).

Romanticism had been “a variety of aesthetic doctrines, some of which were logically related to others and some of which were not, all called by the same name” (Boas 1953: 5). All things considered, we might think that Praz, though not directly involved with the History of Ideas as a discipline, might have been satisfied by the non-definitive nature of such a condensed view. After all, both Berlin’s and Praz’s Romanticism are inherently essayistic, at least as far as their approach to the issue is concerned. Indeed, they both assume the stance of the essayist that, as described by Theodor Adorno, implies pursuing one’s musings about a concept by following a discursive path that proceeds “methodically unmethodically” (Adorno 1984: 161).

Ultimately, Praz’s legacy to contemporary Romantic Studies lies in the promotion of an open approach, averse to any doctrinally philosophical or theoretical delimitations, which might restrain analysis and direct it to preconceived categories. As with Berlin after him, Praz resisted such temptations, thus ensuring that *The Romantic Agony* – as well as his numerous and dispersed pronouncements on Romantic authors and texts (here listed in the Appendix) – would continue to enjoy the status of timeless contributions, immune to the passing of time and the succession of ‘isms’ that incessantly emerge within the practice of literary criticism.

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## Appendix<sup>10</sup>

### A. Essays or books on Romanticism and/or Romantic authors

#### 1920S-1930S

- 1925, *La fortuna di Byron in Inghilterra*, La Voce, Firenze<sup>11</sup>.
- 1930, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, Milano-Roma<sup>12</sup>.  
[Eng. Trans by Angus Davidson, *The Romantic Agony*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1933; also New York, Meridian Books, 1956].
- 1930, “Lord Byron 1930”, *La Cultura*, July, pp. 542-554.
- 1930, “Recent Byron Literature”, *English Studies*, August, pp. 129-38.
- 1930, “Keats e la bellezza”, *La stampa*, September 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- 1930, “William Hazlitt”, *La stampa*, December 3<sup>rd</sup>.  
[Eng. trans. “Is Hazlitt a Great Essayist?”, *English Studies*, February 1931, pp. 1-6].
- 1936, “Giosuè Carducci as a Romantic”, *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, January, pp. 176-96.

<sup>10</sup> This list of Mario Praz’s Romantic-themed contributions is drawn from the “Meridiano” *Bellezza e bizzarria: saggi scelti*. The selection has been made bearing in mind his distinctive re-use of his published materials in different venues. The present list has also been compared with Vittorio and Mariuma Gabrieli’s definitive 1977 list in *Bibliografia degli scritti di Mario Praz* comprising 2677 entries. Some of these entries are double, and in this appendix they have been considered in their specific contexts of publication. Articles and essays later incorporated by Praz in volumes such as *Cronache letterarie anglosassoni* have been listed singularly only if they appear to be significantly different or if they present some kind of peculiarity, such as having appeared both in Italian and in English.

<sup>11</sup> International reviews: [Rev. F.S.F, *Criterion*, Vol. III, n. 12, July 1925] and [Rev. Anon, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 April 1926].

<sup>12</sup> The introduction had appeared four years before in *La Cultura* (March 15<sup>th</sup> 1926, pp. 193-203) with the slightly different title “Approssimazioni: ‘Romantico’” International reviews: [Rev. Anon, *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February 1931]; [Rev. R. Wellek, *Casopis pro moderni filologii*, 21, 1935]; [Rev. C. Connolly, *Sunday Times*, 15 July 1951]. [Rev. E. Wilson, “The Genie of the via Giulia”, *The New Yorker*, 20 February 1965]; [Rev. F. Kermode, *Encounter*, May 1962] and [Rev. B. Hardy, *The Spectator*, 20 February 1971].

[It. trans. “Il Romanticismo di Giosuè Carducci”, *Quadri-*no**, 6 settembre 1936].

– 1936, “The Letters of Charles Lamb, or *Religio Burgensis*”, *English Studies*, February, pp. 17-23.

– 1936, “Charles Lamb e il dramma elisabettiano”, *Bollettino degli studi inglesi in Italia*, October, pp. 57-64.

– 1936, “Il mangiatore d’oppio”, *La stampa*, October 24<sup>th</sup>.

– 1937, *Studi e svaghi inglesi*, Sansoni, Firenze<sup>13</sup>.

(Vol. 1)

“Walter Scott”

“Su Charles Lamb, cento anni dopo la morte”

“Lettere di John Keats”

“Poe davanti alla psicanalisi”

*Motivi preromantici nella letteratura inglese*

“Il Sublime”

“Blake occultista”

“The Blessington Circus”

(Vol. 2)

“Jane Austen”

“La lezione delle rovine”

“Coleridge a Malta”

“Un diario marittimo di Coleridge”

“Keats visto da Burgess”

“L’ultima fatica di Walter Scott”

“Walter Scott in Italia”

“Charles Lamb”

“L’assassinio come una delle belle arti”

“Walter Savage Landor”

“Macaulay”

## 1940s

– 1945, *Motivi e figure*, Einaudi, Torino.

“Prolegomeni alla narrativa dell’Ottocento”

“Mary Shelley”

“La sorella di Keats”

<sup>13</sup> The items listed below are comprised in the second edition in two volumes (Milano, 1983), so some of the papers were written at later stages.

- “Un’amica di Mazzini: Margaret Fuller Ossoli”  
 – 1946, “Jane Austen”, *Rivista di Letterature Moderne*, December, pp. 353-70.

### 1950s

- 1950, *Cronache letterarie anglosassoni*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, Voll. 1 and 2<sup>14</sup>.  
 (Vol. 1)  
 “Wordsworth”  
 “Coleridge”  
 “Vite di poeti”  
 “Melbourne e Byron”  
 “Le ceneri di una rosa”  
 “Foscolo e Byron ovvero la forza del costume”  
 “Vite duplici”  
 “L’urna greca”  
 “Rivalutazione dei Romantici”  
 (Vol. 2)  
 “Hawthorne”; “La lettera scarlatta”  
 “Fortuna di E. A. Poe nel primo centenario della morte”  
 – 1950, “E. A. Poe: il dramma di un’anima eccezionalmente condizionata”, *La Fiera Letteraria*, January 29<sup>th</sup>.  
 – 1951, “Whitman e Proust”, *Il Mondo*, March 24<sup>th</sup>.  
 – 1951, “Shelley oggi”, *Il Tempo*, December 19<sup>th</sup>.  
 – 1952, *La casa della Fama. Saggi di Letteratura e d’Arte*, Adelphi, Milano.  
 “Il costume dell’Ottocento”  
 “La presa della Bastiglia o Plutarco?”  
 “Dai romantici a Hitler”  
 “Napoli romantica”  
 – 1952, *La crisi dell’eroe nel romanzo vittoriano*, Sansoni, Firenze<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> International reviews: [Rev. Anon, *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 August 1951].

<sup>15</sup> International reviews: [Rev. R. Mortimer, *Sunday Times*, 25 March 1956]; [Rev. H. Nicholson, *Observer*, 1 April 1956]; [Rev. D. Cecil, *Spectator*, 20 April 1956]; [Rev. A. Wilson, *New Statesman and Nation*, 21 April 1956]; [Rev. A. Powell, *Punch*, 25 April 1956]; [Rev. Anon, *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 June 1956]; [Rev. M. Price, *Yale Review*, 46, Winter 1957] and [Rev. E. Wilson, *New Yorker*, 16 March 1957].

[Eng. Trans. by Angus Davidson, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, Oxford, 1956].

(Parte 1): *L'imborghesimento del romanticismo*

“Coleridge e Wordsworth”

“Walter Scott”

“Charles Lamb”

“Thomas De Quincey”

“Thomas Love Peacock”

“Macaulay”

- 1952, “Il Risorgimento e gli inglesi”, *Il Tempo*, April 19<sup>th</sup>.
- 1953, “Foscolo in Inghilterra”, *Scuola e Vita*, June 30<sup>th</sup>.
- 1954, “Il poeta Keats e lo stile Regency”, *Il Tempo*, February 17<sup>th</sup>.
- 1954, “Da Addison al *Punch*: umorismo inglese”, *Epoca*, March 14<sup>th</sup>.
- 1955, “Shelley, Lamartine, Hawthorne, Dostojevskij a Firenze”, *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate* 8(1), pp. 5-20.
- 1956, “Levante ottocentesco”, *Il Tempo*, August 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- 1957, “Dante e l’Ariosto nella poesia di Keats”, *Il Tempo*, March 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- 1957, “Turisti anglosassoni nell’Italia dell’800”, *Le Vie dell’Italia*, October, pp. 5-8.
- 1958, “Impressioni italiane di americani nell’Ottocento”, *Studi Americani* 4, pp. 85-108.
- 1959, “I poeti matti”, *Il Tempo*, September 4<sup>th</sup>.

### 1960s

- 1960, “Conrad: un romantico”, *Il Tempo*, April 14<sup>th</sup>.
- 1960, “Goticismo americano”, *Il Tempo*, July 26<sup>th</sup>.
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# “Sickness is a Dangerous Indulgence”: Disease and Disability in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*

Carlotta Farese

## *Abstract*

Starting from biographical evidence about the role of disability within the Austen family, this article investigates how Jane Austen’s narrative is pervaded by an ongoing tension between the healthy and active body and the ill and sick one. Specifically, it studies how this tension reaches its climax in her last works, *Persuasion* (1818) and *Sanditon* (1817, published in 1925), and results in a polemical rejection of hypochondria. In these two novels, Austen is extremely critical of imaginary patients who use their illness or disability as a justification for their own indolence, while also exalting the authentically sick and fragile who face their illness with pride and dignity. This attitude is particularly explicit in *Sanditon*, the highly satirical unfinished novel written during the last months of her life, in which satire and irony seem to function as a reaction against the illness that is killing the author, an extreme attempt to ridicule her fatal disease and affirm her agency against it. The binary opposition between the “self-indulgent” and the “genteel” invalid seems to exclude the representation of those who, like Austen’s own brother George, are affected by a condition that makes them dependent upon the care of others.

*Key-words:* disability, irony, illness, sensibility, hypochondria, *Persuasion*, *Sanditon*.

## **1. Jane Austen and disability: a family affair**

Recent critical work has successfully linked disability studies and Romanticism, demonstrating how relevant illness and disability were in the lives and *oeuvres* of the most prominent figures of British Romanticism (Bradshaw 2016; Joshua 2020). If the long eighteenth century is a crucial period for investigating racial, physical and gendered otherness, as this is the historical moment when disabled authors and characters gain an unprecedented cultural significance

(Nussbaum 2003), it is during the Romantic era that physical disability acquires a relevant and ‘modern’ role in a number of literary texts (Joshua 2020). Jane Austen’s life and work are emblematic in this respect. Not only is her fiction – from her *Juvenilia* to her last unfinished fragment *Sanditon* – permeated with illnesses, invalids, and discussions about health, but the issue of disability also plays a significant role in Austen’s own biography and family relations. Indeed, the very existence of Jane’s older disabled brother, George, was not mentioned in her first biographies: neither in Caroline Austen’s 1867 *Memoir*, nor in Edward Austen-Leigh’s 1869 ground-breaking *Memoir*. It was Douglas Bush (Ard 2013) who made reference to him for the first time more than a century later: “The second son George (1766-1838), who is not mentioned in Jane’s letters, had some disability which apparently allowed him no place in family life” (Bush 1975: 17). And Park Honan’s 1987 biography revealed that George was not the only disabled member of the Austen family: Cassandra Austen’s brother, Thomas Leigh, also suffered from some kind of infirmity, and he was sent along with George to live under the care of a parish family, the Culhams, at Monk Sherborne near Basingstoke, where he stayed until his death (Honan 1987: 24). “George will always be an enigma”, writes George Holbert Tucker (1983: 115), and indeed from the few remaining letters that Reverend Austen and his wife Cassandra exchanged with relatives during the first years of their son’s life, it emerges that he was probably epileptic and deaf<sup>1</sup>. Recent biographers have found it particularly difficult to come to terms with the disconcerting silence that surrounded Jane’s disabled brother who was, in Nokes’s words, “excluded and forgotten” by the family (1997: 525). He was never mentioned in any of Jane’s letters. When her mother died in 1827, she left him out of her will, and it was Edward Austen (Knight) who, after his father’s death, met the costs for the lifelong care of his disabled brother.

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<sup>1</sup> As evidence of George’s deafness, biographers like Tucker and Honan have pointed to a reference in a letter written in December 1808 by Jane to Cassandra, in which she declares she has resorted to some form of finger spelling to communicate with a certain Mr. Fitzhugh: “[...] poor Man is so totally deaf, that they say he c<sup>d</sup> not hear a Cannon, were it fired close to him; having no cannon at hand to make the experiment, I took it for granted, & talked to him a little with my fingers, which was funny enough” (Austen [1995] 1997: 160).

George’s erasure from family discourse and memory seems even more striking when compared to the story of Hastings de Feuillide, the son of Jane’s cousin and later sister-in-law Eliza and her first husband, Jean Capot de Feuillide, who was guillotined during the French Revolution. Also disabled (he had developmental delays in talking and walking and suffered from epileptic fits), Hastings always lived with his caring and devoted mother until his death in 1801 at the age of fifteen (Ard 2013). Among Jane Austen’s biographers, Nokes has probably been the most critical towards the family’s heartless behaviour, as he remarks that George, “excluded and forgotten” for the whole of his life, died alone. He was “laid to rest in an unnamed grave in the churchyard of All Saints church, Monk Sherborne. In death, as in life, he was forgotten, his remains unmarked by any stone” (Nokes 1997: 526). Other biographers, like Claire Tomalin and Paula Byrne, have sought to be more understanding and have analysed the Austen family’s behaviour within the wider context of the social position of disabled individuals in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Tomalin [1997] 1998: 7-8; Byrne 2013: 18-19). As Bridget McAdam notes, people with intellectual disabilities could lead very hard lives, sometimes undergoing legal confinement in workhouses, poorhouses and prisons. Therefore, if weighed against the standards of the period, the choice to entrust George to the care of the Culham family “may have been one of the kinder options available to the Austens” (McAdam 2015).

However, I agree with Patricia Ard’s interpretation that it was probably “the Austen family’s particular focus on intelligence and class status” that “weighed against George Austen’s remaining with or entwined with his family” (Ard 2013). Even considering the unquestionable differences between the cultural context of the Georgian era and our own in respect of disability, it is very hard for contemporary readers to sympathise with the family’s pitiless attitude and their almost conspiratorial silence. One could even argue that this silence is not very different from the (in)famous “silence of the Bertrams” about slavery as discussed by Brian Southam in his ground-breaking essay on *Mansfield Park* (Southam 1995) insofar as it signals a taboo – the suppression of an anxiety-provoking reality that must remain unspoken.

Although critics and biographers might have different opinions on the issue, it should be recognised that the Austens’ questionable

decision regarding George's disability is part of the biographical background of Jane's *oeuvre* and, as such, it "should be directly acknowledged, however briefly, and not glossed over" (Ard 2013). We will probably never find out what the novelist thought about her unfortunate brother and his segregation from his family; if she agreed or not with her parents' decision to send him away from home; if she ever visited him or if she wrote about him in letters that were later destroyed by her sister. I would not go so far as to say that George's presence "haunts Austen's writing" (James-Cavan 2021) in the figures of the many invalids that populate her fiction, but it is reasonable to argue that the reflection of her family history and her own biographical experience on the treatment of disability and physical/intellectual diversity in her work deserves to be explored and discussed.

## 2. Imaginary invalids in Austen's fiction

John Mullan persuasively argues that "a diligent reader of Jane Austen's letters would be hard put to find one which did not mention illnesses among family and friends. More than muslin or money, illness is her consistent concern" (Mullan [2012] 2013: 244). Indeed, her private correspondence is filled with descriptions of colds, bile attacks, gout, fever, headaches, and indigestion. Affecting her family members and close friends, these health issues are a constant leitmotif, if not almost an obsession, in her letters. What a "diligent reader" of her correspondence would also notice is that she was undoubtedly more interested in the narration of the *maladies* – real or invented – of others rather than her own, which are very rarely described. This interest in health issues, as well as ill and disabled characters, permeates Austen's *oeuvre* from her *Juvenilia* to her last unfinished novel *Sanditon*.

On these premises, I will discuss how Austen's writing is pervaded by an ongoing tension between the healthy and active body and the ill and sick one, either authentic or fictitious. Moving from John Wiltshire's wide-ranging account of the body and invalidism in Austen's work, where he demonstrates that in the novels of the period beginning with *Mansfield Park* "the question of health is brought to the fore and becomes a crucial dynamic of Austen's plots" (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 9), I will analyse how such tension reaches its climax



in her last works, *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*, revealing a negative and satirical attitude towards all forms of hypochondria. In these two novels, Austen is extremely critical of imaginary patients who use their illness or disability as an excuse or a justification for their own ineptitude; at the same time, she exalts the authentically sick and fragile individuals who face their illness with pride and dignity. In *Sanditon*, a highly satirical fragment written in the last months of her life, the derisive description of the witty group of hypochondriacs at the centre of the plot can be interpreted as Jane’s creative statement against the real-life illness that is killing her, a powerful (though eventually defeated) attempt to prevail over the fatal disease through wit and irony, and affirm her agency through writing.

Health is a constant matter of discussion in Austen’s novels, as well as a central aspect in the development of their plots. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Jane Bennet’s illness is a consequence of her mother’s decision to send her to Netherfield on horseback rather than by carriage, knowing that it is going to rain. In *Mansfield Park*, Tom Bertram’s illness caused by a fall from a horse (worsened by his heavy drinking) is the final turning point in the novel, which will eventually bring Fanny back from Portsmouth and reveal Mary Crawford’s selfish scheming to Edmund. In *Persuasion*, Louisa Musgrove’s incident at Lyme Regis uncovers Ann’s cold blood and ability to react, rekindling the spark between her and Captain Wentworth. Thus, Austen uses illness and incidents causing invalidity as crucial plot devices, but also often as means of manipulation, as Wiltshire and Gross have very convincingly highlighted<sup>2</sup>. Wiltshire makes clear that, in Austen’s novels, “illness can be seen both as the result of lack of power, and as (sometimes compensatively) conferring power”, becoming thus a “plausible instrument for the exercise of domestic tyranny (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 19). Similarly, Gross remarks that, in Austen, illness and temporary forms of disability may be linked to the idea of deception and motivated by selfishness and personal ambition. Indeed, Gross wonders: “Who but Marianne Dashwood, Jane Bennet, Jane Fairfax, Fanny Price and Louisa Musgrove, young ladies of distinctive *ton* and lofty breeding, can take refuge in sickness, not altogether blamelessly, for egotistical goals?” (Gross 1993: 190). Thus, many of the countless

<sup>2</sup> See also Steele 1982: 152-60.

cases of ‘pretended’ illness and disability in Austen’s novels are often “motivated by personal ambition and sanctified likewise by social convention” (Gross 1993: 195).

Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is the clear example of a domineering valetudinarian who uses her “poor nerves” as an instrument of emotional blackmail. Of course, no one believes her when she complains to her husband: “Ah! You do not know what I suffer” (Austen [1813] 2006: 5). Her supposed malady is constantly and ironically underlined by the narrator’s wit, for example after Lizzie’s rejection of Mr. Collins: “People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer! – But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied” (Austen [1813] 2006: 127).

Mrs. Bennet’s nervous fragility, and the performance of disability resulting from it, are directly related to the idea of a fine sensibility. As Wiltshire makes clear, “the institution of invalidism is seen as the culmination of the culture of sensibility” (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 23; Steele 1982: 154-55). From the earliest stages in her narrative production, Austen was highly suspicious of the dangers of sensibility as “the affective arena of an ideology oppressive to women” (Johnson 1989: 173). Her juvenile stories feature various fainting heroines who are regularly ridiculed and never taken seriously, as is demonstrated by Sophia’s exceptional recommendation to Laura in *Love and Freindship*: “Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint –” (Austen [1790]: 2006: 133). In her mature fiction, then, an iconic case of temporary invalidism that denounces the typical dangers of sensibility and female fragility is Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. Her almost bovaristic hysteria epitomises how, in Claudia Johnson’s words, “the operations of sensibility require the suppression of women’s health and resilience” (Johnson 1989: 164). A more complex example is represented by Fanny Price, who, at least in the first volume of *Mansfield Park*, embodies another instance of the manipulating invalid, since she uses her headaches, blushes, and chronic fatigue to gain attention. This condition changes at the beginning of volume II with Sir Thomas’s return from Antigua, as he immediately notices Fanny’s improved look and health<sup>3</sup>, which

<sup>3</sup> “He led her nearer the light and looked at her again – inquired particularly after her health, and then correcting himself, observed, that he need *not*

coincide with her progressively appropriating Mary Crawford’s role at the centre of the narrative.

In Austen’s output, however, the presence of hypochondriacs who use illness as a form of manipulation is not merely a female prerogative. In *Emma*, Mr. Woodhouse, the master of Hartfield and the emblem of a hierarchical and patriarchal society, is “a nervous man, easily depressed”, who has been “a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body” (Austen [1815] 2005: 6, 5). On the basis of his supposed fragility, he imposes his will and authority over his daughter, who, in the end, will not leave Hartfield, whereas Mr. Knightley will leave Donwell Abbey. As James-Cavan usefully highlights, “*Emma* ends with social and marital arrangements concluded for the satisfaction of the invalid, overturning the usual order of things” (James-Cavan 2021).

### 3. *Persuasion* and the paradigm of disability

On 8 August 1815, according to Deirdre Le Faye’s invaluable chronology, Jane Austen starts *Persuasion* at Chawton Cottage. She will finish it in the same place a year later, on 6 August (Le Faye 2006: 512, 544). Already at the beginning of 1816, “Jane began to feel unwell in some unspecified way. Neither she nor anyone else took much notice” (Tomalin 1997] 1998: 256). In all her private letters, she invariably seems to pay little attention to her own health, in direct contrast to her mother’s obsessive hypochondriac attitude (Cassandra Austen seemed to suffer from all sorts of illnesses but in the end she died at eighty-seven years of age...), from which Jane most probably wanted to distance herself (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 201). Nevertheless, while writing *Persuasion*, she was already suffering from the earliest symptoms of the illness from which she would eventually die in July 1817<sup>4</sup>.

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inquire, for her appearance spoke sufficiently on that point” (Austen [1814] 2005: 208).

<sup>4</sup> There is no lack of speculation on the nature of Jane Austen’s medical condition: tuberculosis, lymphoma, and Addison disease are some of the proposed diagnoses. Recent studies have suggested that she died of systemic lupus erythematosus (Sanders and Graham 2021).

*Persuasion* is not only Austen's most mature novel, opening with the end of an engagement and portraying the most grown up and emotionally solid of her heroines, but it is also the text in which sick and invalid people gain unprecedented attention. While her strength was starting to fail, Austen gave life to a narrative in which the tension between the healthy and active body and the ill and sick one permeates the plot. Indeed, *Persuasion* represents a sort of compendium of all the possible forms of invalidity featuring in Austen's fiction: the manipulative hypochondriac (Mary Musgrove), the temporarily disabled (Louisa Musgrove), the genuine invalids (Mrs. Smith and Captain Harville), and the emotionally disabled (Captain Benwick). In a "novel of trauma: of broken bones, broken heads and broken hearts" (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 165), the protagonist is the altruistic and generous Anne Elliot, the only character truly capable of caring for others: nursing her nephew, educating Mary's children, helping the injured Louisa, looking after her crippled friend Mrs. Smith, as well as listening to the mournful Captain Benwick. In addition, locations and their "cultural geographies" are highly relevant. Mainly set in Bath, the most popular and fashionable English spa of the time, the narrative is connected to an idea of "showiness" and highly deceptive "human façades" (Saglia 2004: 155).

The reason why *Persuasion* is so crucial in the study of Austen's attitude towards illness lies, I believe, in its evident juxtaposition between sick and healthy characters on the one hand, and between authentic sufferings and unscrupulously pretended ones, on the other. A clear example of a hypochondriac who uses her supposed illness to dominate, impose her will or, alternatively, avoid doing something (for example nursing her son with a broken collarbone) is Anne's sister, Mary Musgrove. Her constant complaints about her sufferings and the usual pattern of using illness as an excuse for neglecting one's own duties remind us of Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, where the ironic narrative voice also unveils the character's manipulative performance:

"I am sorry to find you unwell," replied Anne. "You sent me such a good account of yourself on Thursday!" "Yes, I made the best of it; I always do; but I was very far from well at the time; and I do not think I ever was so ill in my life as I have been all this morning – very unfit to be left alone, I am

sure. Suppose I were to be seized of a sudden in some dreadful way, and not able to ring the bell!” (Austen [1818] 2006: 40).

One of the clues that betray Mary’s disingenuousness is the rapid fluctuation between well-being and illness. And indeed, as in Mrs. Bennet’s case, no one believes her, not even her husband Charles, who seems rather annoyed by his wife’s *mise en scène*:

“I wish you could persuade Mary not to be always fancying herself ill,” was Charles’s language; and, in an unhappy mood, thus spoke Mary; – “I do believe if Charles were to see me dying, he would not think there was any thing the matter with me. I am sure, Anne, if you would, you might persuade him that I really am very ill – a great deal worse than I ever own” (Austen [1818] 2006: 47-48).

It is not only physical sickness that is analysed in *Persuasion*, but also mental and psychological conditions, as the story of the melancholic Captain Benwick demonstrates. At first, his mourning for Fanny Harville’s death appears authentic, but his unbalanced, almost bovaristic (as in Marianne’s case) reading of Romantic poetry once again discloses an artificiality that is regularly exposed by the ironic narrator: “He considered his disposition as of the sort which must suffer heavily, uniting very strong feelings with quiet, serious, and retiring manners, and a decided taste for reading, and sedentary pursuits” (Austen [1818] 2006: 104). As in Mary’s case, Captain Benwick’s ostentatious grief is marked by dissimulation and performance: his unutterable misery for Fanny’s loss will be easily forgotten and quickly overcome thanks to his hasty engagement to Louisa Musgrove.

But in *Persuasion* we can also find some rare examples of true invalids, like the “sensible” and “benevolent” Captain Harville, who is lame as the result of a severe injury. In contrast to the many valetudinarians in Austen’s fiction, his invalidity is never used as an excuse. Quite the contrary: he is depicted as a proactive and positive individual, who wants to keep himself busy and useful, despite his disability:

His lameness prevented him from taking much exercise; but a mind of usefulness and ingenuity seemed to furnish him with constant employment within. He drew, he varnished, he carpentered, he glued; he made toys for

the children, he fashioned new netting-needles and pins with improvements; and if every thing else was done, sat down to his large fishing-net at one corner of the room (Austen [1818] 2006: 106).

Unlike Captain Benwick's superficial romantic self-indulgence, Harville's disability and the dignified, courageous way he reacts to it define him as a morally and psychologically solid character. As he confesses to Anne near the end of the novel, he cannot come to terms with Benwick's unexpected turnaround: "[...] with a quivering lip he wound up the whole by adding, 'Poor Fanny! she would not have forgotten him so soon!'" (Austen [1818] 2006: 252). Thus, his feelings and emotions appear stronger and more earnest than those of the sentimental Captain Benwick: Harville's "quivering lip" testifies to the intensity of his suffering for his sister's death, whose fine character and moral rectitude have been so easily forgotten by her former fiancée. In a narrative world inhabited by many valetudinarians who use their supposed illness or disability as a manipulative weapon or as an excuse to give up their moral responsibilities, Harville represents the opposite model of an authentic invalid whose "mind of usefulness and ingenuity" allows him to react positively and creatively to his condition through "constant employment" and altruism.

The comparison between the two captains (Benwick and Harville) aptly illustrates the antitheses typically informing the representation of illness within Austen's fictional world, as well as the author's moral judgement on it: imaginary vs real, selfish vs altruistic, sedentary vs creative, querulous vs stoic. But these seemingly rigid binaries are complicated by the presence in the novel of another disabled character, Mrs. Smith, whose behaviour requires a more nuanced discussion, since it escapes such clear-cut categories and highlights the relationship between disability and social marginalisation to the point that the former almost becomes a projection of the latter.

Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot's old school friend, has in fact become a "poor, infirm, helpless widow", a "pitiable object" who suffers "under severe and constant pain" (Austen [1818] 2006: 166, 168). She is excluded from society not only because of her disability, but also because of her severe financial problems:

She had had difficulties of every sort to contend with, and in addition to these distresses, had been afflicted with a severe rheumatic fever, which finally settling in her legs, had made her for the present a cripple. She had come to Bath on that account, and was now in lodgings near the hot-baths, living in a very humble way, unable even to afford herself the comfort of a servant, and of course almost excluded from society (Austen [1818]: 2006: 165-66).

Her role has often appeared to readers as somewhat ambiguous and controversial (Collins 1975: 838-97) since, despite her destitute and frail position, or rather because of it, she tries to persuade Anne to accept Mr. William Elliot (her cousin and heir of Kellynch Hall) as future husband only for her private and economic advantage. She hopes that he will help her regain her husband's properties in the West Indies and improve her dire economic situation. Critics such as Gross have thus identified Mrs. Smith with the manipulative invalid typical of Austen's fiction; others, instead, like Wiltshire, believe that she embodies “a refutation of the notion that one can retain one's independence within patriarchal society only through the ethic of self-discipline, through patience and resolution and the cultivation of the self” (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 183). I agree with the latter interpretation: unlike Austen's many disingenuous valetudinarians Mrs. Smith does not use her imaginary or overstated illness to reinforce a position of social or relational advantage; instead, very much like Captain Harville, she reacts both to her real disability and disadvantaged status by trying to defend her own rights as a destitute and “crippled” woman. Indeed, she will eventually reveal Mr. Elliot's true nature to Anne, once she has realised that her friend is in love with someone else; she will be gratified by Anne and Captain Wentworth's loyal friendship, and the latter will eventually help her secure her inheritance. By the end of the novel, Mrs. Smith will be rewarded by the sincere affection of her friends and by the improvement of her health. In this sense, the narrative arc of this character may be seen to hinge on her reaction against her condition, that is, her transformation of disability into a form of positive agency, as Austen makes clear in the conclusion: “Her spring of felicity was in the glow of her spirits, as her friend Anne's was in the warmth of her heart” (Austen [1818] 2006: 274).

#### 4. Jane's illness and the climax of hypochondria: *Sanditon*

On 27 January 1817, Jane Austen began writing *Sanditon* at Chawton Cottage, but less than two months later, on 18 March, too weak to work, she ceased composition halfway through chapter twelve (Le Faye 2006: 555, 561). "All that seems to have interrupted its progress were preparations for death", notes Kathryn Sutherland ([2005] 2007: 168). Jane died, aged 41 at Winchester on 18 July.

If we examine her letters from this last period, for example the one addressed to her niece Fanny Knight five days after she stopped writing *Sanditon*, we find evidence of Jane's attitude towards her own illness:

Many thanks for your kind care for my health; I certainly have not been well for many weeks, & about a week ago I was very poorly, I have had a good deal of fever at times & indifferent nights, but am considerably better now, & recovering my Looks a little, which have been bad enough, black & white & every wrong colour. I must not depend upon being ever very blooming again. Sickness is a dangerous Indulgence at my time of Life (Austen [1817] 1995: 335-36).

The letter testifies to a proud and dignified approach to her own sufferings, as well as a tendency never to complain and to underline the signs of a possible recovery ("am considerably better now"). The idea of sickness "as a dangerous indulgence" betrays Jane Austen's brave attitude towards the disease that will eventually kill her. This almost stoic stance is evident in another of her last letters dated 27 May 1817 and addressed to her nephew James Edward Austen:

I know no better way my dearest Edward, of thanking you for your most affectionate concern for me during my illness, than by telling you myself as soon as possible that I continue to get better. – I will not boast of my handwriting; neither that, nor my face have yet recovered their proper beauty, but in other respects I am gaining strength very fast (Austen [1995] 1997: 342).

In these poignant lines, written less than two months before dying, she reassures her nephew about her improving health and expresses her resolute determination to recover. As already suggested, Austen's resilience and declared aversion to the habit of complaining about



one's health, could be interpreted as a reaction to her hypochondriac mother's behaviour. A detail recorded in Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* reinforces this interpretation, as not even during the final days of her illness did Jane dare to sit on her mother's sofa:

The sitting-room contained only one sofa, which was frequently occupied by her mother, who was more than seventy years old. Jane would never use it, even in her mother's absence; but she contrived a sort of couch for herself with two or three chairs, and was pleased to say that this arrangement was more comfortable to her than a real sofa. Her reasons for this might have been left to be guessed, but for the importunities of a little niece, which obliged her to explain that if she herself had shown any inclination to use the sofa, her mother might have scrupled being on it so much as was good for her (Austen-Leigh [1814] 2005: 124).

I concur with Wiltshire's view that possibly Austen did not want “to identify with her mother” and that “the brusqueness and impatience with which mentions of ill health, inevitable in family letters, are often handled, comes from the same source” (Wiltshire [1992] 2006: 202). The persistent presence of manipulative and deceptively sick characters throughout her fiction, could be read as a reaction against the maternal/familiar inclination to a disempowering valetudinarianism. The ironic definition, and rejection, of sickness as a “dangerous indulgence” is revelatory and seems to condense the complexities and paradoxes of Jane's understanding of disease: the pages of her novels and her own life are crowded with individuals whose imaginary or overstated sickness is a projection or a somatisation of their morally questionable self-indulgence and indolence. In contrast, other characters (usually those who are truly ill or real invalids) do not yield to ostentatious self-pity or the temptation of weaponising their suffering to advance their interests, but react virtuously to sickness, showing their moral resilience and reasserting their ability to benefit their neighbours. Thus Austen seems to suggest that, while we cannot avoid being ill, we still have a choice as to how we face illness, invalidity, and pain – a choice by which the moral character of the individual is tested and defined.

*Sanditon*, the unfinished novel Austen worked on in the last months of her life while she was slowly losing strength and vitality, is a rather unique text, quite unlike anything she had written before.

Its humorous cheerfulness seems hardly compatible with the distressing biographical circumstances in which it was produced: while suffering from the symptoms of her condition, Austen created a light satirical comedy, ironic, quick and direct, which has sickness and therapy (understood as forms of disingenuous social performance) as its targets. In other words, in her life, she appears to follow the pattern of behaviour that, as an author, she had offered to her readers as a positive model: having sarcastically rejected the option of self-indulgent complaint, she rises to the challenge of upholding her authorial agency and uses writing to ridicule and belittle sickness, while she was cruelly suffering from it.

The novel focuses on a group of hypochondriacs led by Mr. Parker, a landowner determined to transform the (fictional) village of Sanditon on the Sussex coast into a fashionable seaside resort like Brighton, Eastbourne or Worthing. Mr. Parker and his family are not only health-obsessed, but they also speculate on the industry and commerce that depends on invalids and disabled individuals, whether real or invented. Their business plans express most clearly the moral ambiguity of Austen's many valetudinarians: while complaining about their condition, they are ready to profit from it and transform sickness itself into an occasion for advancing their own interests.

In comparison with Austen's previous works, and *Persuasion* in particular, this unfinished text seems devoid of any melancholy feelings, as the reader perceives the author's amusement in describing the surprising (and indeed suspicious) variety of symptoms affecting characters such as Susan Parker, one of Mr. Parker's sisters:

She has been suffering much from the headache and six leeches a day for ten days together relieved her so little that we thought it right to change our measures – and being convinced on examination that much of the evil lay in her gum, I persuaded her to attack the disorder there. She has accordingly had three teeth drawn, and is decidedly better, but her nerves are a good deal deranged. She can only speak in a whisper – and fainted away twice this morning on poor Arthur's trying to suppress a cough (Austen [1817] 2008: 164).

The symptoms are too many and too varied to be true, and this endless list seems nothing else than the product of fancy and imagination. In actual fact, the narrative voice underlines more

than once that the sufferings presented at Sanditon are not real, but the result of fantasies and unfulfilled ambition: “the rest of their sufferings was from fancy, the love of distinction and the love of the wonderful” (Austen [1817] 2008: 192).

The tension between health, sickness, and illness (either authentic or fictitious), which, as we have seen, runs through Austen’s fiction, reaches a climax in *Sanditon*, where most of the story is told from the perspective of the young heroine Charlotte Haywood, who has been invited by Mr. and Mrs. Parker to experience life by the seaside. In contrast with most denizens of Sanditon, Charlotte, who is introduced as being “in excellent health” (Austen [1817] 2008:150) and seems to enjoy her vacation without the necessity for any treatment, represents the paradigm of health and good sense in the novel. As Jason Farr notes, the novelty represented by Charlotte is that, unlike previous Austen heroines, she “appears far less in want, or need, of a husband” (Farr 2019: 165), at least as far as we can gather from the first twelve chapters of the novel. Despite her young age, she is a mature, independent female figure, and an acute observer who easily discerns the artificiality and moral indolence underlying the ‘sickness’ of the Parker siblings: “there was vanity in all they did, as well as in all they endured” (Austen [1817] 2008: 192).

Charlotte Haywood is thus the opposite of a figure like *Northanger Abbey*’s Catherine Morland, to whom, nonetheless, she is often compared, as they both leave their homes to embark on a journey as guests of family acquaintances. She is a skilled reader both of books and real life, perfectly able to see through the pretentious behaviour of the people she meets. For instance, she swiftly unmasks the superficial and morally dubious Richardsonian rascal Edward Denham, as well as the idle triviality in Arthur Parker’s “enjoyments in Invalidism”:

Certainly, Mr. Arthur Parker’s enjoyments in invalidism were very different from his sisters’ – by no means so spiritualized. – A good deal of earthy dross hung about him. Charlotte could not but suspect him of adopting that line of life, principally for the indulgence of an indolent temper – and to be determined on having no disorders but such as called for warm rooms and good nourishment (Austen [1817] 2008: 198).

*Sanditon* constitutes a scourging finale to Austen’s iterated indictments of imaginary illness and sickness as self-indulgence.

Almost the only healthy character in the novel, the heroine is surrounded by hypochondriacs exploiting their own conditions for selfish gain. As far as we can infer from the unfinished draft, the novel stages a contrast between the protagonist and a society of privileged exploitative invalids, whose mediocrity she exposes and chastises. Her health is thus both physical and moral, functioning – if we might judge from Austen’s correspondence – as an authorial projection within the text. “Divided between amusement and indignation” (Austen [1817] 2008: 180), Charlotte echoes not only Austen’s penchant for satire, but also her fantasy of perfect health. The paradox of this last interrupted novel lies in this play of subject and context: that, while seriously ill, Austen wrote an ironic comedy of manners about a place created for invalids in which no one is ill and almost everyone seems intent on playing a part or performing a role.

Some weeks after interrupting *Sanditon*, a tale of valetudinarians travelling to the seaside and fashionable spas in search of health, Austen embarked on the final journey that would take her from Chawton Cottage to Winchester, as she mockingly anticipates in a letter to Anna Sharpe of 22 May 1817:

Our nearest *very good*, is at Winchester, where there is a Hospital & capital Surgeons, & one of them attended me, & *bis* applications gradually removed the Evil. – The consequence is, that instead of going to Town to put myself into the hands of some Physician as I sh<sup>d</sup> otherwise have done, I am going to Winchester instead, for some weeks to see what M<sup>r</sup> Lyford can do farther towards re-establishing me in tolerable health. – On Sat<sup>y</sup> next, I am actually going thither – My dearest Cassandra with me I need hardly say – and as this is only two days off you will be convinced that I am now really a very genteel, portable sort of an Invalid (Austen [1817] 1995: 340).

Apart from the usual optimistic and positive attitude towards her illness, the sardonic comment about herself becoming “a very genteel, portable sort of an Invalid” is particularly striking. It intimates that, until the end, in her fiction and correspondence, Austen employs irony to scorn and deride her disease and assert her own resistance and agency against it.

Although Charlotte Haywood’s good health might be considered the textual projection of this attitude, in real life, while writing *Sanditon*, Austen was far from being ‘healthy’. Indeed,

as we have argued, her role in the act of writing was closer to that attributed elsewhere to the “genteel invalid” who reacts proudly and energetically to sickness, and the novel itself is the result of her vigorous but eventually defeated rebellion against the disempowerment of disease. These roles and positions – the “self-doctoring” valetudinarian, the healthy ironist, and the enterprising invalid – provide a tentative inventory of the possible attitudes towards illness represented in Austen’s output. Such an inventory, however, highlights a binary opposition between those who overstate their plight and those who are able to overcome their difficulties: Austen’s writing does not seem to contemplate situations in which those who suffer from a real condition are dependent upon the care of others. Situations, that is, that are similar to those of George Austen or Hastings de Feuillide, and appear to have been the object of repression in the Austen family’s discourse, as well as in Jane’s letters and novels, where, as we have seen, the representation of ‘invalids’ is far from being marginal or uncommon. Not even Jane’s wit and irony could finally overcome the ‘silence of the Austens’.

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# The Discourse of Lawfulness in Representations of the Peterloo Massacre: A Lexical and Critical Discourse Analysis

*Anna Anselmo*

## *Abstract*

The article employs critical discourse analysis to shed light on the linguistic construction of political discourse in the Romantic Period. The aim is to fill a gap in the literature by integrating the critical tools of applied linguistics with Romantic media texts. Such hermeneutic effort is intended to complement the cultural turn in Romantic Studies thanks to an unprecedented focus on the lexical and syntactical construction of both political debate and the dynamics of political struggle in England in 1819. The corpus consists of five texts published in three daily papers, *The Times*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and *The Courier*, and two weeklies, *Sherwin's Political Register* and *The Examiner* in the immediate aftermath of the Peterloo massacre. These were selected as representative of a range of competing political stances and ideologies. The first part of the article presents the sociocultural discourse of lawfulness at the turn of the nineteenth century, and contains reflections on language, politics, and the law. The second part introduces the corpus and the methodology employed for its analysis (van Leeuwen's social actor theory), as well as presenting the #Lancsbox software and its use in the analysis of the corpus. The third part analyses the corpus using social actor theory to demonstrate that media representations of Peterloo are acts of cultural appropriation that construe it either as a conspiracy or as a legitimate act of self-defence. In this fashion, the article wishes to complement work on Peterloo-inspired literature (poetry in particular), by offering an alternative perspective on the event and its diverse textual representations.

*Key-words:* Peterloo, critical discourse analysis, social actor theory, corpus-based analysis, Romantic periodicals.

## **Introduction**

The present article is intended as a companion piece to “Reading Peterloo as Social Practice: The Lexical Representation of Social Actors in Three London-Based Papers” (Anselmo 2021). It uses the

tools of critical discourse analysis to shed light on political discourse in the Romantic Period. The aim is to fill a gap in the literature: although Romantic studies have taken a linguistic turn (Cox 1997; Roe 1997), their focus has been mainly terminological-conceptual (Keach 2004) and philosophical-historical (Manly 2007; Tomalin 2009), stopping short of integrating the methodology of applied linguistics with Romantic media texts.

The linguistic turn has shown how epistemology and language policing played a key role in the construction of literary debate and in the undermining of political radicalism. By focusing on syntax, lexicon, and sociosemantic categories that account for the representation of political reality beyond mere grammar, this article stresses the importance of delving into the world of words in order to unpack the linguistic strategies and devices that served to construct political debate and sociopolitical reality in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre. The article further advocates the critical analysis of Romantic discourses as the key to unpacking the construction of argumentation and of spaces for public political debate.

Romantic periodicals and newspapers have been the focus of scholarly attention for the past twenty years: the primacy of print culture in the early 1800s, the creation and shaping of the reading public, and the intense reflection of socio-political changes and cultural fractures make periodicals fertile ground for the continued exploration of Romantic texts and culture. Consequently, the present article focuses on media texts (three newspapers and two periodicals). The gap between the established cultural-historicist approach and applied linguistics is here bridged by focussing on the Peterloo Massacre. Peterloo was a staple of second-generation Romantic literature that “met and shaped the historical moment” (Gardner 2011: 2) of “the bloodiest political event of the nineteenth century on English soil” (Poole 2019: 1); it was also disruptive of political debate, which is why media representations in its immediate aftermath show both political polarisation and ideologically-informed representations of the social actors involved in Peterloo (Anselmo 2021). The focus here is no longer on social actors, but on social action (van Leeuwen 2008), more specifically on the right of assembly and on the sociosemantic and linguistic devices employed in a select

corpus of media texts to represent Peterloo as either lawful or unlawful, as either the exercise of a constitutional right or the seditious abuse of the same.

The first part of this article presents the sociocultural discourse of lawfulness at the turn of the nineteenth century, and offers reflections on language, politics, and the law. The second part introduces the corpus and the methodology employed for its analysis (van Leeuwen's social actor theory), as well as illustrating the #Lancsbox software and its use in the analysis of the corpus. The third part explores the corpus in the light of social actor theory to demonstrate that media representations of Peterloo are acts of cultural appropriation that construe it either as a conspiracy or as a legitimate act of self-defence.

### **1. Language, politics, and the law at the turn of the nineteenth century**

The Peterloo Massacre left an estimated 18 dead and a couple hundred wounded (Poole 2019). Its ideological and political aftershocks were heatedly discussed in the press, giving rise to a debate hinging on the appropriation and representation of the event, on sensationalism and gory first-hand accounts, but ultimately pivoting around legal argumentation, as the papers struggled to establish whether the meeting was lawful and the reaction of the Manchester authorities legally justifiable. Two cultural elements informed the ideological positions in the press: first, the eighteenth-century debate regarding the language of the law; secondly, the contemporary redefinition of political crime and changes in the legislation concerning unlawful assembly (Lobban 1990: 310).

As for the first point, the debate surrounding the language of the law burgeoned after the Treason Trials of 1794, when legislation was passed which severely curtailed freedom of speech and opinion (the Gagging Acts) and legal action was undertaken to "outlaw the voice of the nation" (Manly 2007: 5). More specifically, since politics and the law were increasingly identified as matters of linguistic representation, language became a major concern for conservatives and radicals alike. The struggle for linguistic representation intensified, as radicalism and early attempts at grassroots politics gained traction.

Locke's philosophy of language (Dawson 2007; Anselmo 2016) inspired John Horne Tooke, both a radical and a linguist, who produced theory that pointed to a very real issue in the political misuse of legal language: "For mankind in general," he writes, "are not sufficiently aware that words without meaning, or of equivocal meaning, are the everlasting engines of fraud and injustice" (Tooke 1805: II, 121). Imprisoned for seditious libel in 1778, Tooke wrote a journal in which he glossed "the judicial language of the Act under which he [...] [was] being detained in the Tower" (Manly 2007: 13). There, Tooke claims that the Pitt government relies on an arbitrary and ambiguous use of semantics to curtail individual freedoms, and that the "imprecise use of words and the refusal of those with power to say what they mean" (Manly 2007: 13) amounts to imposture. Tooke elaborates a political etymology that aims to disambiguate the meaning of political keywords and offer a basis for an assertion of political rights. In the same vein, the second part of his *Diversions of Purley* (1805) features a dialogic exchange that exemplifies the ambiguity and misuse of words and phrases for political reasons; the phrase "rights of man", for instance, is identified both as the "sweetest music" and as "some desolating doctrine", "productive of some wide spreading ruin, some vast desolation" (II. 2). As with Locke before him, Tooke shows that words trigger different associations and acquire different meanings in the minds of different speakers according to their political allegiance: while, for reformers, the word 'rights' is associated with "legitimate claims to popular sovereignty and progress towards greater social stability", for conservatives and loyalists, the word signifies the "destruction of civil society" (Manly 2007: 14).

Tooke's line of reasoning feeds into a growingly distinctive radical idiom: before Tooke's second volume of *The Diversions of Purley*, Paine's 1791 *Rights of Man* had advocated egalitarian plain speaking (Furniss 1990); after Tooke, Cobbett's *Political Register* showed a characteristic effort "to find an unambiguous and incontrovertible language for radical parliamentary reform" and a material rhetoric aimed to express "nothing more nor less than what it meant" (Gilmartin 1995: 82; Smith, 1986; Butler, 1984). The Lockean basis of such pronouncements lies in *The Two Treatises of Government* (1690) and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690): in the former text, Locke recognises that unjust power calls for legitimate

resistance; in the latter, he offers a theory of language that not only stresses the dangers lying in its figurative and arbitrary features, but also emphasises the communitarian quality of language, which “should function to unite minds” and “integrate knowledge for the common good” (Manly 2007: 23). More than that, language is “No Man’s private possession, but the common measure of Commerce and Communication” (Locke 1975: III.xi.11, 514).

As for the second point, the post-Napoleonic process of redefining political crime and the drafting of a law regarding public order and unlawful assembly was met by the increase of mass political protest. The authorities were faced with a new challenge: “the problem [...] was not merely how to police the crowds and to prevent disturbance [...] but how to react to the new form of protest as a form of sedition.” (Lobban 1990: 308-9). In the fourth volume of *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, William Blackstone had defined the freedom of the press as follows: it “consists in laying no previous restraints upon publications, and not in freedom from censure for criminal matter when published” (1769: IV. 151). In other words, criticism of government and its officials was possible, but so were the legal repercussions after publication (Bird 2020: 1). In the eighteenth century, “the dispute over seditious libel was at base one over whether the crime was to be seen as being *seditious* – in which case it was a question of the libel’s effect on society and was therefore a matter of fact for the jury – or whether it was to be seen as a *libel* – which was perceived as a matter of law on the record for the judge” (Lobban 1990: 311). Libels were further interpreted as causing harm to people’s reputation and breach of the peace, should people seek revenge. Libel trials highlighted the importance of language as laid out by Locke and, subsequently, by Paine and Tooke: the correct presentation of the cases before the judge and jury was of paramount importance for the prosecution’s success, as was the question of context of situation – that is, “extralinguistic circumstances of use that influence the linguistic form of an utterance: not only the social and physical setting, but also such factors as social relationships, the nature of the medium, the task, and the topic” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 47)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The definition is available at [www.oxfordreference.com](http://www.oxfordreference.com) (last accessed: May 28, 2022).

By 1819, prosecution for libelling the constitution had become more difficult, as “the development of opinion and debate made it harder to prosecute simple words unless they could be shown to have a seditious tendency” (Lobban 1990: 326). In practice, the radicals could demand constitutional reform publicly, but their mass participation in public meetings posed the problem of a new kind of sedition, one that had not yet been regulated and connected with social action. More than that, this new type of sedition posed the problem of representation inside and outside the courtroom. The end of the Napoleonic Wars meant that the context had drastically changed and that political speculation could no longer easily be interpreted as sedition: the language used had to “be strong enough to be seen [...] [as] well beyond the bounds of fair discussion” (Lobban 1990: 329).

Thus, when Peterloo happened, the concept of political crime was still mostly based on the content and context of spoken words. Public meetings were monitored by sending informers to obtain proof that the words spoken were seditious. Already in July 1819, a Manchester magistrate named Norris wrote to the Home Office for guidance as to upcoming gatherings in Blackburn and Oldham. He received the following answer: “the mere Circumstance of calling together a very extended Population, does not render unlawful a Meeting of which the purpose is legal, though it cannot be denied that the more numerous is the Assemblage, the greater is the danger of Riot” (Hobhouse to Norris, qtd. in Lobban 1990: 335). Based on such observations, the magistrates and the Home Office could not declare the meeting in St. Peter’s Field illegal *a priori*, as no illegal purpose for the meeting could be discerned, and its peaceable nature made establishing its seditious intent more difficult.

A further issue regarding mass protest was highlighted by Thomas Horton in a communication to the Home Office (qtd. in Lobban 1998: 338), an issue that regarded Peterloo and its representation in public consciousness:

It has always seemed to me that tho’ the People have a Right to assemble for certain political Purposes that they have not a Right to assemble as they have done in London, Manchester, Leeds, &c with Bands of Musick and flags of various kinds offensive to the highest degree marching like Soldiers in Divisions or Sections and dispersing themselves through the streets to the Terror of the Inhabitants.

The issues of drilling and of the seemingly military array of rallies were instrumental in the prosecution's case against Hunt and his fellow radicals after Peterloo. In fact, the Peterloo trials contributed to the creation of a new doctrine of unlawful assembly in the Seditious Meetings Act of 1819. Furthermore, the trials (re)presented events in a light favourable to the Home Office and the Manchester magistrates. Here, the battle for public opinion was of paramount importance: Lord Sidmouth wrote to Wodehouse (the MP for Norfolk) that he was convinced the public meetings in the aftermath of Peterloo were aimed to "create such a prejudice in the minds of the people as may operate upon the proceedings of Courts of Law and even upon the deliberation of Parliament" (Pelley 1847: III. 277).

The trials helped further to strengthen the connection between unlawful assembly and riot, whose definition was based on acts of violence being carried out. The link was created through the notion of terror: unlawful assembly could easily be interpreted as riot in court, if terror could be proved to have been struck among the general population; and while the people of England had a right to meet and discuss grievances (this notion and its wording can be seen in the corpus texts below), no individual (i.e. Henry Hunt) had the right to call a meeting and gather a crowd to discuss a grievance. The evidence produced against Hunt in court contributed to defining Peterloo as not only unlawful, but riotous: first, there was the argument *in terrorem populi*, so the idea that the numbers meeting in Manchester struck terror in the city's inhabitants; secondly, the presence of flags and banners containing potentially seditious inscriptions and alleged to be conspiratorial; thirdly, the drilling. The protesters had marched unarmed and in an orderly manner, but their marching in groups and their seemingly rehearsed movements were reminiscent of military manoeuvres, and therefore seen as threatening. During the Hunt and Bamford trials, the defendants were accused of having caused sixty thousand people "unlawfully maliciously and seditiously to meet [...] in a formidable and menacing manner and in military procession and array with Clubs, Sticks and other offensive Weapons and instruments and with diverse Seditious and inflammatory inscriptions and devices to the great alarm and terror of the peaceably disposed subjects of... the King" ("The King against Henry Hunt and Others, for a Misdemeanor", qtd. in Poole 2006: 110).

The progressive delineation of the connection between law, language, and politics forms the sociocultural background to the debate in the press and the relative responsibilities of the protesters and the authorities. In the analysis of the corpus, there emerge arguments mirroring those of radical linguists on the abuse of language, and of radical politicians on the abuse of the law of the country; conversely, the conservative press presents arguments regarding the disruption of public order, the military array “sinister and contrived” (Poole 2006: 110), and the terror struck in the locals. In this sense, it is of paramount importance to see how the press reflected political concerns, and how its language was adapted to specific political agendas. This can also afford further insights into Lord Sidmouth’s concern, mentioned above, regarding the sway of public opinion and the extent to which the public’s perception of the Manchester events would affect future legislation and the future of the country. In Alison Morgan’s apt words, “the battle for the representation of Peterloo in the public consciousness began before the blood had dried on St. Peter’s Field” (2018: 10).

## 2. Corpus and methodology

### 2.1. The corpus

The corpus for this study consists of five authentic media texts published in the immediate aftermath of the Peterloo massacre. They were published in three daily papers – *The Times*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and *The Courier* – and two weeklies – *Sherwin’s Political Register* and *The Examiner*. The corpus is designed to offer an overview of different ideological-political perspectives on the Manchester meeting. Its small size is justified by the comparison of like with like (Chilton 2017: 586): the texts are all editorials, a hybrid genre in the Romantic period and one containing opinion as well as fact. According to McEnery et al. “A corpus is a collection of (1) machine-readable (2) authentic texts (including transcripts of spoken data) which is (3) sampled to be (4) representative of a particular language or language variety” (2006: 5). For the purposes of the present analysis, the corpus is not intended to represent a particular language or language variety, but is taken



as representative of a plethora of ideological-political perspectives on the (un)lawfulness of the Manchester meeting: *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle* (a historically Whig paper) represent a more moderate position; *The Courier* represents conservatism and loyalism; *Sherwin's Political Register* is expressive of radicalism; and *The Examiner* is critical of the establishment, while not openly aligned with radical politics.

The detailed composition of the corpus is as follows: *The Times* editorial of August 19, 1819, which “was to be a historic one” (Walmsley 1969: 241), presents a leading article, extracts from other papers’ reports, and an eye-witness account by John Tyas, “the only journalist employed by a national paper present that day” in Manchester (Morgan 2018: 10). *The Morning Chronicle*, a Whig newspaper established in 1769 and pioneering comprehensive Parliament session reports due to the formidable memory of its first editor, William Woodfall (Fox Bourne 1887), introduces several accounts on Peterloo (mostly letters). *The Courier* had been a government mouthpiece since the late 1790s, when debate over freedom of speech and freedom of the press connected to the Treason Trials was raging (Fox Bourne 1887; Manly 2007). It offers a miscellany of Peterloo reports and a criticism of *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle*. An example of the dialogic and cooperative nature of Romantic-period intellectual endeavours, it showcases the fundamental transauthorial quality of Romantic press discourse, the commodification of intellectual work, market share competition, and personal and political animosity (Klancher 1987; Cox 1997; Schoenfield 2009; Wheatley 2016). *Sherwin's Political Register* for August 21, 1819 offered a short editorial and a longer opinion piece/letter to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, written by the weekly’s owner and editor, Richard Carlile. Carlile was scheduled to speak at Peterloo, so his eye-witness testimony is both cogent and inflammatory. Leigh Hunt’s *Political Examiner* of August 29, 1819 features a belated commentary on the Manchester transactions<sup>2</sup>, its relevance lying in its dialogic nature, legal analysis of events, and open accusation of *The Courier*’s stance on Peterloo.

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<sup>2</sup> An analytical discussion of Hunt’s editorial of August 22, 1819 is found in Anselmo 2021.

## 2.2. Methodology: #LancsBox, KWIC Analysis, and Social Actor Theory

The analysis of the corpus does not focus on the entirety of the texts, but on key passages openly addressing the (un)lawfulness of the Manchester meeting. These have been identified thanks to the #LancsBox software<sup>3</sup>. #Lancsbox is Lancaster University's corpus toolbox, developed to facilitate corpus analysis. It allows for wordlist (or frequency list) search, used to carry out quantitative analysis; it has a concordance or KWIC ("key word in context") search function, which, conversely, is used to carry out qualitative analysis; it also allows for the creation of collocation lists. Following Brezina and Gablasova (2018), the topic of interest (lawfulness) has been operationalised according to the following steps: a list of lawfulness-related target words has been drawn up and their quantitative incidence measured using the KWIC search in #Lancsbox. These words are: *legal, illegal, lawful, unlawful, right, law, constitution, constitutional, justification, and justified*. Based on quantitative lexical evidence, a selection of lawfulness-related passages was made, and these were subsequently read in the light of some of Theo van Leeuwen's categories for classifying and analysing social action, in particular action and reaction, material and semiotic action, and objectivation.

Theo van Leeuwen's *Discourse and Practice* (2008) offers the theoretical framework that best facilitates uncovering the connections between language and power and the interplay of hegemonic and minority discourses. Van Leeuwen presents discourse as recontextualised social practice (van Leeuwen 2008: 3). Taking his cue from Bernstein's concept of recontextualisation (1986), he argues that "all discourses recontextualize social practices, and that all knowledge is, therefore, ultimately grounded in practice [...]" (van Leeuwen 2008: vi). In addition, he connects Bernstein's concept to the term 'discourse' intended in the Foucauldian sense of "a socially constructed knowledge of some social practice" (van Leeuwen 2008: 6). Since discourses are social tools for understanding social practices, they are "used as resources for representing social

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<sup>3</sup> #LancsBox is Lancaster University Corpus Toolbox, freely downloadable from <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox/download.php>.

practices in text” (van Leeuwen 2008: 6). On the one hand, van Leeuwen claims that “all texts, all representations of the world and what is going on in it, however abstract, should be interpreted as representations of social practices” (2008: 5); on the other, he analyses “texts for the way they draw on, and transform, social practices” (2008: 5).

Two of his foci are the representation of social actors and social action, respectively. Social actors are defined as the participants in social practices (van Leeuwen 2008: 23), and the goal is understanding how they are represented in English by drawing not only on grammatical categories, but on a sociosemantic inventory of analytical categories. In other words, van Leeuwen is interested in how sociological categories (i.e. agency) are lexicalised in English, and to that end mere grammatical realisations (i.e. nominalisation or passive agent deletion) prove to be insufficient. Secondly, and more to the point for the present article, van Leeuwen discusses the representation of social action by using sociosemantic categories as they relate to specific rhetorical and grammatical realisations, with the aim of “sketching an outline of a sociological ‘grammar’ of the representation of social action” (van Leeuwen 2008: 56). His analytical categories of social action draw on Halliday and Matthiessen’s functional grammar (2014) and their discussion of processes (i.e. material, verbal, existential, mental, etc).

Thus, the analysis of the corpus below provides both an inventory of words related to the discourse of lawfulness and the analytical application of some of van Leeuwen’s categories for the representation of social action: reaction, material and semiotic action, and objectivation. These categories have been selected for the present analysis for the following reasons. First, social actors in the corpus are involved in both actions and reactions – “the question of who is represented as reacting how to whom, or what, can be a revealing diagnostic for critical discourse analysis” (van Leeuwen 2008: 56); in particular, one of the texts in the corpus (*Sherwin’s Political Register*) is built around the violent action of the authorities and the (justified) reaction of the people. Second, the distinction between material and semiotic action is based on the interpretation of actions as “‘doing’ or as ‘meaning’: as action which has, at least potentially, a material purpose or effect or as action which does not” (van Leeuwen 2008: 59). To ascertain which Peterloo actors

‘do’ and which actors only ‘mean’ is a key perspective in establishing positions of power and hegemony. Moreover, the distinction between transactive and nontransactive material and semiotic actions provides a further level of interpretation. These categories are defined as follows: transactive actions – either material or semiotic – involve an “actor” and a “goal” – “the one to which the process is extended” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 226); conversely, nontransactive actions – either material or semiotic – only involve one participant, the “actor”. This is relevant in representations of Peterloo because it is not a merely grammatical distinction: “It distinguishes also between actions which have an effect on others, or on the world, and actions which do not” (van Leeuwen 2008: 60). Moreover, transactive actions – either material or semiotic – can be interactive – if the goal is “people” – or instrumental – if the goal is “a thing” or represented as one. In particular, semiotic actions are relevant as they involve a further dimension, that of meaning, often manifest in the form of a quote, which is a predominant element in Leigh Hunt’s *Political Examiner*, as analysed below. Finally, the dimension of objectivation is fundamental to the analysis of the corpus: it happens when a process or action are expressed through, among other things, nominalisation. Though this is a downgraded representation of an action, in some cases objectivation serves to legitimise or add purpose to the representation. The latter case emerges in one of the texts in the corpus.

### 3. Peterloo, the lexicon of lawfulness and Social Actor Theory

#### 3.1. *The Times*

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TEXT 1. EXCERPT FROM *THE TIMES*, AUGUST 19, 1819

Such are the facts: we do not absolutely affirm that they cannot be defended, but we are still to seek their justification, not indeed in the newspaper descriptions of certain mottos inscribed on flags, (however foolish and inflammatory) – nor in the display of a cap of liberty, the model of which is borne before the sovereign of Great Britain, when he meets His Parliament – No, the advocate of the measures resorted to at Manchester, by the assembled

magistrates and the armed force, must rest their defence on some legal principle; for if the justification should fail in law, we suppose it will not be attempted on grounds of good feeling or humanity. [...]

But we revert to the more solemn question, of the legal and constitutional basis on which this seizure of persons and spilling of blood is to be justified by those who directed them. We speak not of the moral, but of the legal justification, and desire at present to be considered as referring to the latter alone. The Riot Act, and the act against seditious meetings, both limit the magistrate's right of interference, to "unlawful assemblies," and no other. Was that at Manchester an "unlawful assembly?" Was the notice of it unlawful? We believe not. Was the subject proposed, for discussion (a reform in the House of Commons) an unlawful subject? Assuredly not. Was anything done at this meeting before the cavalry rode in upon it, either contrary to law or in breach of the peace? No such circumstance is recorded in any of the statements which have yet reached our hands. *The Courier*, indeed, labours hard to prove, that this was an adjourned, and therefore, by the Act of 1817, an unlawful meeting. But the fallacy of such an argument is clear from this, that the former meeting was wholly given up, because it had been summoned for an illegal purpose; namely, for a usurpation of the elective franchise, and of the right of representation: whereas this meeting was called for a professedly lawful purpose; and could not, therefore, be identified by those who administer the laws, with one which set those laws at defiance. [...] and happy shall we be to find, that while one party is charged with violating the laws of England, the opposite party may be able to prove that they have respected them.

Four social actors appear to be predominant in this excerpt: the writer ("we" at the very beginning of the editorial), the competing press (*The Courier*), the Manchester authorities, and the participants in the meeting. "We" is the protagonist of preponderantly semiotic actions: "we do not absolutely affirm that [...]", "we are still to seek", "we suppose...", "we revert to...", "we speak not of..."

“we believe...”, “happy shall we be to find...”. In Hallidayan terms (2014), these processes are, in turn, verbal (those containing verbs that lexicalise the act of language use, such as “speak” or “affirm”) and mental (those containing verbs connected to mental operations, such as “suppose”, “find”, “believe”). The predominance of “we” as a doer of semiotic action is connected, first, to the genre and text type in question – an editorial, an argumentative text type – and, secondly, to the matter in hand, a mainly intellectual exercise in considering whether the crowd meeting in Manchester was acting according or contrary to the law.

The competition is represented as follows: “*The Courier*, indeed, labours hard to prove, that this was an adjourned, and therefore, by the Act of 1817, an unlawful meeting”. *The Courier* performs a material action, that of labouring, of making an effort in order to make a point. This is a nontransactive action, one that does not require a grammatical goal (van Leeuwen 2008: 60).

The Manchester authorities are variously lexicalised in the editorial, but in the excerpt they find two grammatical realisations. For example, “the advocate of the measures resorted to at Manchester, by the assembled magistrates and the armed force, must rest their defense [...]”: the magistrates and the armed forces are the grammatical agents of “measures” that were resorted to; the violence in Manchester is, first, euphemised by the use of the non-descript term “measures”, and, secondly, mitigated by the semantics of “resort”, which indicates both the necessity of the measures and an implied modicum of unwillingness on the social actors’ part. The authorities are further referred to as “those who directed” “the seizing of persons and the spilling of blood”. Here is the full sentence: “[...] the legal and constitutional basis on which this seizure of persons and spilling of blood is to be justified by those who directed them”. Once again, the authorities are grammatically represented as agents of a deontic present passive – “is to be justified”; they are lexicalised through the deictic “those” and are the subject of the transactive material action expressed by the relative clause “who directed them”.

As for the Manchester protesters, they are only lexicalised once as the goal of the material action of “seizing” (“the seizing of persons”); now, the action of seizing is here deactivated – represented statically, as an entity or quality rather than a dynamic process (van Leeuwen 2008: 63) – and objectivated – realized through a nominalisation (i.e.

a noun phrase acting as the subject of the clause). In the excerpt, therefore, the protesters are backgrounded, whereas the action of meeting and assembling is foregrounded: this is grammatically achieved through nominalisation and premodification.

The quantitative incidence of lawfulness-related lexis in *The Times* editorial is shown in table 1 below. Brezina, McEnery and Wattam (2015) discuss collocation in the light of #Lancsbox's GraphColl function, which visually represents collocation networks. They address the notion of "collocation window" as the "distance of the collocate from the node" (Brezina, McEnery, and Wattam 2015: 140), which can vary from one word, as is the case with an adjective premodifying a noun, to a span of four or five words on each side of the node. In what follows, collocation is intended as the combination of node and collocate, the latter being the word immediately preceding or following the node. In this sense, the use of the adjectives lawful/unlawful and legal/illegal in *The Times* editorial is of special interest: "lawful" collocates with "purpose", and is employed with reference to the aim of the Manchester meeting ("[...]whereas this [meeting] was called for a professedly lawful purpose"); "unlawful" collocates with "assembly" (twice) and "meeting", thus referring to the very nature of the meeting and to the right of assembly itself ("Was that at Manchester an unlawful assembly? Was the notice of it unlawful? [...] Was the subject proposed [...] an unlawful subject?"); "illegal" also collocates with "purpose"; "legal", instead, collocates with "principle", "basis", "justification", and "sense", and is therefore not related to the conduct of specific social actors or to the act of assembling, but to the legal basis for the meeting. Furthermore, the emphasis on justification (i.e. "justification", "justified") highlights the preoccupation with the existence of a legal basis for ordering the violent dispersal of the meeting, for example: "Such are the facts: we do not absolutely affirm that they cannot be defended, but we are still to seek their justification"; or "[...]for if the justification should fail in law, we suppose it will not be attempted on grounds of good feeling or humanity"; and again "We speak not of the moral, but of the legal justification". It is the facts that must find justification, one which must rest "in law", one which must be "legal". It follows that it is the Manchester authorities who have the responsibility to present a legal basis for their intervention. The editorialist's insistence on legal/illegal, lawful/unlawful, and justified/justification is aimed at

ascertaining just cause for the authorities' decision: it is not a matter of ethics or politics ("We speak not of the moral, but of the legal justification, and desire at present to be considered as referring to the latter alone"), but rather a constitutional matter ("[...]the legal and constitutional basis on which the seizure of persons and spilling of blood is to be justified by those who directed them").

TABLE 1. KWIC ANALYSIS OF THE EDITORIAL IN *THE TIMES*, AUGUST 19, 1819

Lexical Item	Number of Occurrences
Legal	4
Illegal	1
Lawful	1
Unlawful	5
Law(s)	5
Right	2
Constitution	-
Constitutional	1
Justification	3
Justified	2
Riot	3

### 3.2. *The Morning Chronicle*

TEXT 2. EXCERPT FROM *THE MORNING CHRONICLE*, AUGUST 19, 1819

The transactions of Manchester constitute a new feature in our history. On the Continent of Europe, men read with amazement that bodies of 30, 40, 50, and 60 thousand people, suffering under the severest privations, could assemble together without proceeding to acts of violence. They were still more astonished to learn that a few unarmed constables could proceed through a large multitude of 70,000 men, and in the face of that multitude lay hold of an orator to whom they had been listening, and consign him to prison; yet all this was done without even the slightest attempt at resistance! But the cause of this proud distinction, of this aversion to the effusion of blood, this uniform deference to



the laws, was well known to all reflecting persons here. It arose, in a great measure, out of this very privilege so long enjoyed by our people, of meeting when they chose for the purpose of giving free vent to their complaints. In a despotic country where a man dare not proclaim his real or imagined wrongs, he broods over them in silence, till he is almost inflamed to madness, and when the force is removed which constrained him, he plunges headlong into the wildest excesses. But in this country the angry feelings were not inflamed by compression, and for the most part evaporated in the ebullitions of a public discourse. The sort of triumph in which the people could in this manner indulge, left little room for vindictive feelings; and hence our public meetings were not only peaceable and orderly in themselves, but one of the great causes of peace and order throughout the country.

It is for this reason, among others, that the right of the people to meet and petition has always been held in such high regard by the wisest and best of our politicians. In the case of the Meetings for Reform throughout the country, we can see nothing which should except them from the rule which we have laid down. The object of those who assembled at these Meetings was one of which we cannot approve. But the question is, can we, by preventing these Meetings, eradicate the feelings which give rise to them? And if we cannot, is it not then better that the people should give free vent to these feelings than that they should be obliged to suppress them? Now, with respect to the Meeting at Manchester, all the accounts which we have yet seen concur in stating the conduct of the immense multitude assembled together to have been marked by no outrage whatever. We are quite at a loss then to conceive on what grounds cavalry could be ordered to charge people conducting themselves in a peaceful manner. We are always supposing that no acts of violence had taken place, for on this, in our opinion, the whole will hinge. It is said, that previous to the Meeting several inhabitants deposed that they were apprehensive acts of riot and tumult might take place, and that in consequence of these depositions the Riot Act was read, but no overt act of riot did take place. It was quite clear that the Magistrates did not act on information against any particular individuals, for among others, a Gentleman who was taking notes

for the Times Newspaper was arrested and conveyed to prison. It does not appear that the persons assembled had the slightest notice of the Riot Act having been read, for it was read before the meeting commenced, and the previous tranquillity could lead no one to expect the scene that ensued. We are unwilling to prejudge the cause of any class of men, and till we hear the statement which the Magistrates will put forth, we shall abstain from any positive opinion. We must, however, observe in the mean time, that if any reliance is to be placed in the accounts hitherto received, there does appear to us, in this business, a singular indifference on the part of the Magistrates of Manchester to the safety of the people placed under their charge. Good Heavens! To order regiments of cavalry to charge an unarmed and peaceable multitude, to hew down and trample on all who stood before them! Can this be possible? The whole country must be filled with horror at the very idea. The Magistrates of Manchester have indeed a serious account to render to their countrymen. We wait with impatience for their defence.

The excerpt from *The Morning Chronicle* relies less on nominalisations and lawfulness-related vocabulary, and more on the representations of social action performed by specific social actors: the writer (“we”), the people of England, the protesters, the authorities, “men” on the “Continent of Europe”. The latter are a rhetorical device, typical of the “Letters from Abroad” genre in Romantic periodicals (Schoina 2006), used to posit the external (foreign) gaze on British matters, and, therefore, enact a mechanism of both guiltless self-criticism and self-congratulation. These “men” engage in both material action (they “read” of the right of assembly in Britain) and semiotic action (they are “astonished”). Also, these “men” are imagined as living in a despotic country, performing a Hallidayan mental process: they do not “dare [...] proclaim” the wrongs received and they “brood” over them. They are further described as the “goals” of the transactive material action of constraining (“[...] when the force is removed which constrained [them]”) and, ultimately, as performers of material actions themselves – they are “inflamed to madness” and plunge “headlong into the wildest excesses”.

These hypothetical foreigners (in Europe and in a despotic country) are placed in opposition to the privileged men of England (a hypernym, under which the category of the Manchester protesters is classed), who live in a democratic country, and whose conduct – represented grammatically as nontransactive material action – is exemplary: “bodies of 30, 40, 50, and 60 thousand people [...] assemble together without proceeding to acts of violence” – assembling is nontransactive. In addition, the protesters’ behaviour is described both through nominalisation (“the conduct of the immense multitude”) and nontransactive material action (“people conducting themselves in a peaceful manner”). The people of England are mentioned as social actors once the general right of assembly is discussed: the people should “give free vent” to their feelings, rather than being “obliged to suppress them”. Nontransactive action appears to be a *fil rouge* in *The Morning Chronicle*’s representation of the protesters’ and the people’s social action. As noted by van Leeuwen, the “ability to ‘transact’ requires a certain power, and the greater that power, the greater the range of ‘goals’ that may be affected by an actor’s actions” (2008: 60). The right of assembly and its lawfulness therefore appear to be defended against the backdrop of their nontransactive material nature, whereby the very exercise of the right contributes to the peacefulness of the social action *per se*.

The authorities are represented as engaging in transactive material action, as doers of deeds having repercussions on the people (the grammatical “goal”): “a few unarmed constables” consign Henry Hunt to prison; the cavalry was ordered “to charge people” conducting themselves peacefully, and, with a very similar wording, “To order regiments of cavalry to charge an unarmed and peaceable multitude, to hew down and trample on all who stood before them!”. In the latter case, the “cavalry” is the object of the verb “order”, the action the “cavalry” is ordered to carry out is expressed through an infinitive clause and is grammatically realised as a transactive material action: to charge a multitude, to hew them down and trample on them.

Table 2 shows that the incidence of lawfulness-related vocabulary in the full editorial is slim. In the excerpt, the only noteworthy occurrence is that of the noun “riot”: of the four occurrences recorded, two collocate with “act” and are therefore a reference to the Riot Act in connection with the people’s right of assembly;

the two remaining occurrences are part of the phrase “act(s) of riot” and are therefore related to possibility of riotous behaviour. Interestingly, the latter are not in any way grammatically and syntactically attributed to specific social actors: “[...] previous to the Meeting several inhabitants deposed that they were apprehensive acts of riot and tumult might take place”, and again, “no overt act of riot did take place”. In both cases, the syntax does without social actors themselves and privileges the material action, the possibility of “happening” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 224) through the use of the epistemic “might”, and the denial of the riot actually happening through the use of a negative subject “no overt act of riot”.

*The Morning Chronicle* lexicalises the discourse of lawfulness through action rather than actors, and through syntax rather than lexicon. The rhetorical device of the hypothetical foreign gaze helps construe the celebration of the exercise of the right of assembly as a manifestation of British exceptionalism. Assembling is represented as nontransactive and, therefore, non-threatening, whereas the actions of the authorities are represented in their transactive material nature, thereby implying their inherent violence.

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TABLE 2. KWIC ANALYSIS OF THE EDITORIAL IN *THE MORNING CHRONICLE*, AUGUST 19, 1819

Lexical Item	Number of Occurrences
Legal	1
Illegal	2
Lawful	-
Unlawful	-
Law(s)	1
Right	1
Constitution	-
Constitutional	-
Justification	-
Justified	-
Riot	4

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### 3.3. *The Courier*

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TEXT 3. EXCERPT FROM *THE COURIER*, AUGUST 19, 1819

The rule here alluded to as having been laid down, one from which we shall certainly never be found to dissent. It is that the people of England have a right to meet and deliberate upon their grievances, whether real or imaginary. We admit it. They have this right and we fervently hope they will never lose it. But the nation, collectively, has its rights also: the Throne has its rights, the Constitution has its rights; and as no man has a right to do anything which may prejudice the rights of other men, when the *Chronicle* shews us that the proceedings of the Radical Reformers do not affect or compromise the rights of the people at large, the rights of the Throne, and the rights of the Constitution, then we will say, they have a right to meet, and continue to do what they have been doing for some months past. But not until then. It is not to be endured for an instant that a set of vagabonds, under the pretence of meeting to exercise a constitutional right, shall have the power, at their own good will and pleasure, to assemble thousands of orderly persons, keep large towns, and whole districts in a state of agitation and alarm, interrupt trade, check the course of daily occupation, and by drawing the labouring classes from honest industry to sedition prepare the way for revolution? Suppose Hunt and his crew had chosen to announce a meeting once a week at Manchester, and the cobbler Preston, or some such worthy, announced similar proceedings in London, and other apostles of sedition adopt the same course in other parts of the country. Are these things not to be checked? Is this the practice of the British Constitution? Could any Government on the face of the earth subsist under such a system? Yet for all these consequences the writer in the *Chronicle* is prepared, if he understands his own meaning, which we doubt, when he says “it is better the people should give free vent to their feelings, than that they should be obliged to suppress them.” It is a great pity, truly, that such feelings as Hunt and his associates have been in the habit of giving vent to, should be suppressed.

*The Courier's* editorial actively engages in a dialogical counteroffensive with *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle*. *The Courier* objects to their more nuanced argumentation, and approaches the issue of the right of assembly in response to *The Chronicle* in particular.

Table 3 below shows the quantitative incidence of the lexical item “right” (in both singular and plural form): twelve occurrences in the selected excerpt alone. The lexical framing of the lawfulness of the Manchester meeting does not hinge on adjectives (legal/illegal), nor does it appear to pivot on assembling as a nontransactive material action. Instead, it hinges on the notion of “right” itself. A convenient generality, the right of assembly is taken for granted by the writer (“we”): “The people of England have a right to meet and deliberate upon their grievances, whether real or imagined”. Here, the syntax expresses a Hallidayan relational process, whereby “have a right” is understood as identifying the people of England as a specific category endowed with a right to meet and deliberate upon grievances. Such right, the writer states, is not up for discussion. The question is therefore presented as relative, and many other social actors (all metonymical displacements) are listed: the nation, the Throne, the Constitution. At first, their rights are presented as relational processes (“the nation, collectively, has its rights”, “the Constitution has its rights”, “the Throne has its rights”); subsequently, they are presented as noun phrases (“the rights of the nation”, “the rights of the Constitution”, “the rights of the Throne”). The right of assembly is relativised as follows: “no man has a right to do anything which may prejudice the rights of other men”. As a practical example of such a statement, the editorialist claims: “when *the Chronicle* shews us that the proceedings of the Radical Reformers do not affect or compromise the rights of the people at large, the rights of the Throne, and the rights of the Constitution, then we will say, they have a right to meet, and continue to do what they have been doing for some months past.” The Manchester protesters are here represented as engaging in two instrumental transactive material actions: they affect and compromise the rights of the people at large.

Interestingly, the semantics of the word “right” are never specified; on the contrary, the right of assembly is implicitly defined when several actions taken by the Manchester reformers are listed as having happened “under the pretence of meeting to exercise a constitutional right”: the key figures among the reformers – Henry

Hunt among them – are dubbed “a set of vagabonds” and are responsible for several transactive material actions, all in breach of the peace. They “assemble thousands of orderly persons”, they “keep entire districts [...] in a state of agitation and alarm”, they “interrupt trade”, they “check the course of daily occupation”, they draw “the labouring classes from honest industry to sedition.” If the ability to ‘transact’ belongs to powerful people (van Leeuwen 2008: 60), then the implication is that Hunt and his fellow reformers have the power to “prepare the way for revolution”, and their actions are to be rightfully feared. Furthermore, these material actions are far-reaching, in that they affect both human and non-human goals, that is, they are both interactive and instrumental.

The use of the adjective “orderly” referred to the protesters in Manchester is noteworthy, as mentioned above. Discussing the Bamford trial, Robert Poole reviews some of the arguments used by the defence and the prosecution. In particular, the prosecution represented the progress to St. Peter’s Field as a march of an orderly nature that was “sinister and imposed – a sign of conspiracy”; the “rally was held to be threatening precisely because it was orderly and controlled – and where there was control without legitimate authority there had to be a conspiracy” (2006: 146). *The Courier’s* use of the word is an early sign of discomfort with the order and peacefulness of the protest.

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TABLE 3. KWIC ANALYSIS OF THE EDITORIAL IN *THE COURIER*, AUGUST 19, 1819

Lexical Item	Number of Occurrences
Legal	-
Illegal	-
Lawful	-
Lawfully	1
Unlawful	-
Law	-
Right(s)	12
Constitution	4
Constitutional	1
Justification	1
Justified	-
Riot	-

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### 3.4. *Sherwin's Political Register*

TEXT 4. EXCERPT FROM *SHERWIN'S POLITICAL REGISTER*, AUGUST 21, 1819

My Lord,

As a spectator of the horrid proceedings of Monday last at Manchester, I feel it my duty to give the public a narrative of those proceedings, through the medium of a letter addressed to you, who ought to be the conservator of the public peace. My motives for doing this are two-fold; the first is to call on you, as Secretary of State for the Home Department, to cause the Magistrates of Manchester, and Yeomanry Cavalry acting under their direction, to be brought to the bar of public justice, for the unprovoked slaughter of the peaceable and distressed inhabitants of that place and neighbourhood, whilst legally exercising their rights in public meeting assembled. For, unless the administration of affairs in the governmental department of the country feel it their duty, immediately to take this step, the People have no alternative but to identify the Ministers in the metropolis, with the Magistrates of Manchester, as having conjointly violated and subverted that known and admitted law of the country, which countenances the meeting of popular assemblies for a discussion of the best means to obtain a redress of their grievances. And secondly, in case of the default of the existing government to give satisfaction, to the full extent of their means and power, to the mangled and suffering, and to the friends of the MURDERED INHABITANTS of Manchester; the people, not only of Manchester, but of the whole country are in duty bound and by the laws of nature imperatively called upon to provide themselves with arms and hold their public meetings with arms in their hands, to defend themselves against the attacks of similar assassins, acting in the true Castlereaghan character. The safety of the People is not now the supreme law; the security of the corrupt borough-mongers and their dependants can only be perceived to be the object of the existing administration. Where my Lord Sidmouth – where are now to be found the assassins, with their daggers? Let us hear no more of the assassinal intentions of the advocates for reforming your corrupt system of government; you have used every means within your reach to urge the Reformers



to the use of the dagger; they have been too prudent, and you, no longer able to resist their reasonable demands by reasonable argument, have thrown off your mask and set the first example of shedding blood. The people have no alternative but immediately to prepare for a retaliation.

Richard Carlile opened the issue of *Sherwin's Political Register* for August 21, 1819 with a short editorial, followed by a letter to Lord Sidmouth, an excerpt of which is reproduced above. The predominant social actors in the excerpt are the authorities and the people (including both the people of Britain and the people of Manchester<sup>4</sup>). Both actors are represented as engaging in material action, though with a difference: the authorities are represented as aggressors and the people as reacting to the aggression. The magistrates' aggression is syntactically represented as transactive material action, both interactive and instrumental: first, they have "violated and subverted" the law sanctioning the right of assembly (interactive); secondly, they must be brought to justice "for the unprovoked slaughter of the peaceable and distressed inhabitants" of Manchester (instrumental). The latter action – the "unprovoked slaughter" – is objectivated through nominalisation; objectivating the slaughter of Manchester protesters serves to "add purposes and/or legitimations to the representation" (van Leeuwen 2008: 64). In other words, Carlile uses nominalisation as part of a syntactical order proper of the law: the magistrates should be brought to the bar of public justice on the count of slaughter. This provides the legal backdrop against which the people's actions are described.

For their part, the people engage in instrumental transactive material actions: for example, they are represented as "legally exercising their rights in public meeting assembled", which indicates that, while the act of assembling may be nontransactive, it is a way of exercising one's rights and is thus transfigured into a transactive material action. Moreover, the people are represented as engaging in reactions: they "have no alternative", they are "in duty bound and by the laws of nature imperatively called upon to provide themselves with arms and hold their public meetings with arms in their hands, to defend themselves against

<sup>4</sup> On Carlile's use of the lexical item "people" in the letter see Anselmo 2021.

the attacks of similar assassins”. One of these reactions is semiotised (the people are “called upon” to arm themselves); the other reactions are material (“hold their meetings”, “defend themselves”). Thus, Carlile construes the people’s actions as unavoidable reactions to the aggression of the authorities. He attributes people a role and, in so doing, does not merely construe “a regulatory pattern for externally visible actions”, but rather constructs “the emotions and attitudes that belong to these actions” (Berger, 1966: 113): the people are the victims of a corrupt system and they “have no alternative but immediately to prepare for a retaliation”.

Carlile’s insistence on the *fil rouge* of lawfulness is lexicalised further through the use of the term “law” (in table 3 below). The item occurs three times in the excerpt, with three distinct acceptations: first, “the known and admitted law of the country”, the syntactical instrumental goal of the authorities’ act of violation; secondly, the “laws of nature”, the grammatical agent calling upon the people to arm and defend themselves, and also one of the key tenets of legal literature between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. The law of nature was identified with “certain general principles of justice” believed to be “common to all men everywhere”, immutable and providing the foundation of all human law (Helmholz 2007: 401). The third occurrence sees the people themselves as the foundation of the law of the country: “The safety of the People is not now the supreme law”.

TABLE 4. KWIC ANALYSIS OF THE EDITORIAL IN *SHERWIN’S POLITICAL REGISTER*, AUGUST 21, 1819

Lexical Item	Number of Occurrences
Legal	-
Illegal	-
Lawful	-
Unlawful	-
Law(s)	14
Right(s)	5
Constitution	-
Constitutional	-
Justification	-
Justified	2
Riot	-

### 3.5. *The Political Examiner*

TEXT 5. EXCERPT FROM *THE EXAMINER*, AUGUST 29, 1819

[T]he *Courier*, not dreaming that anything which the boroughmongers did or sanctioned could possibly be called to account, began putting on an air of smiling and genteel remonstrance, asking whether it would not be proper to “throw a veil over the excesses of loyalty?” *The Courier* now finds, that if anything could add to the indignation of the public, it is such phrases as these.

Perceiving the gross mistake he had made in his tamest at a sentiment, and that the people were crying out for the law, the unlucky Ministerialist bethinks himself that there are such things as law-books; and in a learned and evil hour he makes the following quotations:

“A riot is a tumultuous disturbance of the peace by three persons or more assembling together of their own authority with an intent mutually to assist one another against anyone who shall oppose them in the execution of some enterprise of a private nature, and afterwards executing the same in a violent or turbulent manner, to the terror of the people, whether the act intended were of itself lawful or unlawful” – *Hawkins’ Pleas of the Crown*, c. 68. 1 – *Russell on Crime*, c. 26 1

Therefore, because the object of the Reformers was of a public nature, and they executed nothing, and did not assist one another against the Yeomanry, there was not. “It is not only lawful but commendable for a Justice of the peace, who has a just cause to fear a violent resistance, to raise the Posse in order to execute King’s writs.” – *Ibid.*

Therefore, because it is commendable for a Justice to raise the posse comitatus, or civil power of the county, it was right in the Magistrates to employ the military power at once.

“Also, it is the duty of a Sheriff, or other Officer having the execution of the King’s writs and being resisted in endeavouring to execute them, to cause such a power as may effectively enable them to overpower any such resistance.” *Hawk. and Russ. Ibid. Viv. Ab.*

Therefore, because there was no resistance, it was right to behave

violently as if there were the greatest. “In every riot there must be some circumstances of actual force or violence, or at best an apparent tendency thereto as are naturally apt to strike a terror into the People; such as the show of armour, threatening speeches, or turbulent gestures. But it is not necessary to complete this crime that personal violence should have been committed.” – 1 *Hawk. ibid.*, *Russ. ibid.* 2, *Campb.* 369.

Therefore, because the conduct of the Reformers at Manchester was a great deal short of personal violence, and because it was the authorities and their hirelings, and not the people, into whom the terror was struck, (the infinite majority of the people clearly shewing their approbation of what was passing) the military had a right to act as they did, and the posse comitatus not to act at all. “To this description of the offence committed by Hunt’s mob,” continues *the Courier*, “and of the conduct of the Magistrates, drawn by the prophetic pen the law, there is indeed one legal objection which can read; but it is one which hardly expect that either *the Times* or *the Chronicle* will advance – namely, that the offence was not a mere riot, but High Treason: for, hear what the law says further:

“It is agreed that riot relates to such assemblies as have been described, when collected for some private quarrel only; for the proceedings of a riotous assembly on a public or general account, as to redress grievances, &c. &c. may amount to High Treason.” – 4 *Blackstone’s Commentaries*, 147 – *Hawkins, ibid.* – *Russell, ibid.*

Oh most stout-legged and potent conclusion! Therefore, because all that he has been saying about these public meetings applies only to private quarrels, – and because the proceedings of a riotous assembly for a public purpose may amount to High Treason. – the Manchester Meeting has nothing to do with all he has advanced, – save and except that it did amount to High Treason! – This beggars all the riches of the composing box! It defies an army of notes of admiration! We should have to array our paper with them down to the last page, like a housewife full of needles.

[...]

*The Courier* quotes Blackstone. We will quote Blackstone too; and we will quote him through the medium of De Lolme, a writer who has been much cried up, and whose work is dedicated to the King: “Without entering here,” says De Lolme in his chapter on the Right

of Resistance “into the discussion of doctrine which would lead us to inquire into the first principle of civil government, consequently engage us in a long disquisition, and with regard which, besides, persons free from prejudices agree pretty much in their opinions, I shall only observe here (and it will be sufficient for my purpose) that the question has been decided in favour of this doctrine by the laws England, and that resistance is looked upon by them as the ultimate and lawful resource against the violences of power.

“It was resistance that gave birth to the Great Charter, that lasting foundation of English liberty, and the excesses of power established by force were also restrained by force. It has been by the same means that, at different times, the people have procured the confirmation of the same charter. Lastly, it has also been the resistance to a king who made no account of his own engagements, that has, in the issue, placed on the throne the family which is now in possession of it.”

“This is not all; this resource, which till then had only been an act of force opposed to other acts of force, was, at that era, expressly recognised by the law itself. The lords and commons, solemnly assembled, declared that “King James the Second, having endeavoured to subvert the constitution of the kingdom, by breaking the original contract between king and people, and having violated the fundamental laws, and withdrawn himself, had abdicated the government; and that the throne was thereby vacant\*”

“And lest those principles, to which the revolution thus gave a sanction, should, in process of time, become mere arcana of state, exclusively appropriated, and only known to a certain class of subjects; the same act, we have just mentioned, expressly ensured to individuals the right of publicly preferring complaints against the abuses of government, and, moreover, of being provided with arms for their own defence. Judge Blackstone expresses himself in the following terms, in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*: “To vindicate these rights, when actually violated or attacked, the subjects of England are entitled, in the first place, to the regular administration and free course of justice in the courts of law; next to the right of petitioning the king and parliament for redress of grievances; and, lastly the right of having and using for self

preservation and defence.” After this specimen of the mode in which references to legal right may be followed up, *the Courier* will probably think it as advisable to leave off suggesting quotations from law-books, as texts from scripture.

\* The Bill of Rights has since given a new sanction to all these principles – Auth.

Leigh Hunt’s editorial of August 29, 1819 is reproduced here because of its eminently legal framework. Of all the texts in the corpus, it is the most argumentative in dealing with the legal basis for considering the Manchester meeting either a seditious riot or a legal assembly. In line with the dialogic quality of most writing in the early nineteenth-century British press, Hunt converses with *The Courier* to contest its interpretation of the Manchester events and to question the legal evidence offered. Thus, Hunt’s editorial becomes a learned dissertation on the right of assembly and the conditions of its rightful exercise.

*The Courier* is understandably one of the predominant social actors in the excerpt, performing mostly semiotic action (e.g. asking, finding, quoting, saying) in the shape of quotations. *The Courier*’s aim is to prove that the meeting in Manchester is not only classifiable as a riot, but it may also amount to High Treason. Fragments and definitions from law books are provided to prove the point. Hunt quotes *the Courier*’s own quotations from Hawkins’s *Pleas of the Crown* and from *Russell on Crime*: the former was a classic of criminal law literature, a so called “book of authority”, first published in 1716; the latter was a general treatise on criminal law first published in 1819. *The Courier*’s editorialist quotes another classic: William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*.

After reporting and commenting on *The Courier*’s selection of quotations, Hunt provides his own. Representing himself as the social actor “we” in the text, he performs his own semiotic action of quoting. The legal *querelle* is an eminently semiotic exercise of competing quotations and glosses, and is, therefore, lexicalised through the illocutionary verb “quote” (Proost 2009). The *querelle* is also epistemological, since it concerns the very grounds of legal knowledge and the origin and validity of the people’s rights. Hunt quotes Blackstone, too, but quotes him through the medium of

Jean-Louis de Lolme, whose work on the English Constitution was dedicated to the king. By mentioning this, Hunt validates his source by means of persuasion by authority and selects a quotation that completely reframes the question *The Courier* had laid out: while *The Courier* strings together a detailed definition of riot and its potential inflection as High Treason, Hunt first counters each claim by evidencing how the definitions do not fit the Manchester meeting and, secondly, asserts the people's right to rebellion in De Lolme's words. In a move similar to Carlile's, albeit a more nuanced one, through the words of a legal scholar dedicating his work to the king, Hunt asserts that the people have a right to rebel against an unjust government and sovereign: "[...] the excesses of power established by force were also restrained by force". Discussing the righteousness of resistance against corrupt and despotic power, De Lolme performs his own semiotic actions: "observing" and "mentioning", for example. Some of his semiotic actions are objectivated, therefore nominalised, such as "a discussion of doctrine" and "a long disquisition".

In line with radical discourse, Hunt offers a vision of the law of the country and the rights of its people (the items "law" and "rights" occur twelve and fourteen times, respectively) that qualifies as distinctly bottom-up.

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TABLE 5. KWIC ANALYSIS OF THE EDITORIAL IN *THE EXAMINER*, AUGUST 29, 1819

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Lexical Item	Number of Occurrences
Legal	3
Illegal	1
Lawful	3
Lawfully	-
Unlawful	1
Law(s)	12
Law-books	2
Right(s)	14
Constitution	2
Constitutional	-
Justification	-
Justified	1
Riot	7

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## Conclusion

“The Peterloo Massacre [...] has left historians with a wealth of textual and visual evidence,” Katrina Navickas writes (2019: 1). She also notes that “[n]ewspaper reports, printed accounts of the trials of the radical leaders and autobiographical recollections such as those of Samuel Bamford, and vivid caricatures drawn by George Cruikshank have formed the basis of scholarly and public analysis of the causes and impact of the events of 16 August 1819” (Navickas 2019: 1). This wealth of multimodal texts calls for close reading, to be intended quite literally as an interpretation of texts as words, as systems of signs – signifiers and signifieds – that acquire political and ideological relevance and call for specific hermeneutic tools. The focus of the present article has been on written verbal communication concerning the Peterloo Massacre. A corpus of five media texts has been selected as representative of the range of political approaches to the Manchester events. Within the corpus, the *fil rouge* of (un)lawfulness has been identified thanks to a keyword in context search for (un)lawfulness-related vocabulary. The quantitative incidence of such vocabulary has been briefly discussed and the quantitative analysis supplemented by the critical discourse analytical framework elaborated by Theo van Leeuwen. Starting from his work, some of the sociosemantic and grammatical categories for the representation of social action were identified in the corpus, with special emphasis on reactions, material and semiotic actions, and objectivation. In this fashion, critical discourse analytical tools may be brought to bear on, and complement, other cultural-literary approaches in present-day Romantic Studies. In particular, foregrounding the linguistic construal of social practices, social actors, and social action facilitates a deeper understanding of the Romantic-period obsession with language, its control through standardisation, and its hegemonic wielding in courtrooms, Parliament, and the press. Ultimately, this application of critical discourse analysis to select representations of Peterloo can contribute to identifying new tools for the study of the Romantic-period press, and periodicals in particular, and to gain deeper insights into both Romantic literary texts and the wealth of political-ideological positions circulating in this period’s highly conflictive cultural context.



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# Between Stereotype and Sediton: Romantic-Era Geo-Histories of the Italian South on the London Stage

*Franca Dellarosa*

## *Abstract*

This essay aims to explore the extent to which representations of the Italian Southern territories in British Romantic-era theatrical culture can be coherently read within the discursive flow underlying the formation of European identity, as delineated in recent scholarship. In Roberto Dainotto's challenging construal, the "genealogy of the concept of Europe" and "Eurocentrism" took coherent shape during the Romantic era and had wide circulation throughout the period's European cultures. In this respect, Britain *did* prove to belong to a (North) European identity that was taking shape against the stereotypical construction of an internal *other*, i.e., its own South. In this essay, this specifically (North) European cultural dynamics is tested against a number of case studies that include both trans-historical representations of revolutionary Southern subjects – such as the multifarious stage history of Neapolitan revolutionary villain-hero Masaniello – and, specifically, the figuration/conflagration of the ebullient geography of Southern Italy. Etna and Vesuvius, the two most active and dangerous volcanoes in Europe, provided a formidable and theatrically spectacular objective correlative for the revolutionary undercurrents in post-Vienna Europe.

*Key-words:* romantic theatre, romantic drama, genre, history, eurocentrism, revolution, subversion.

1. "How [can] the south, at the same time, be Europe and non-Europe?", ironically wonders Roberto Maria Dainotto in the opening pages of his *Europe (in Theory)* (2007: 4). In his analytical proposal of a "genealogy of Eurocentrism" (p. 4), he reconsiders and problematises the historical processes presiding over the formation of European identity, which took shape in late eighteenth-century and Romantic-era European cultures – Britain included. In that period, as Nelson Moe reminds us in *The View from Vesuvius*, north and south "became charged moral categories in the cultural imagination

of Europe”, laying the foundation for a “geopolitical and conceptual framework” of which Italy was predictably acknowledged as the (morally objectionable) southern core (Moe 2002: 13). Both Moe and Dainotto recognise the centrality of Montesquieu’s climatological *and* moral identification of Europe’s north-south fissure, which defined an alternative construct in the formation of European identity to the long-standing Europe-Asia and west-east antithesis, handed down from Aristotle via the medieval academia (Dainotto 2007: 30-32). His “empire of climate” (Moe 2002: 22 ff.) taking shape through his *Voyages* (publ. 1894-1896) and *De l’Esprit des Loïs* (1748), Montesquieu established what appears less a theoretical-political than a *rhetorical* construct, whereby, in Dainotto’s words, “modern European identity [...] begins when the non-Europe is internalized – when the south, indeed, becomes the sufficient and indispensable *internal* Other: Europe, but also the negative part of it” (2007: 4-7 [4])<sup>1</sup>. To the eyes of the (North)-European traveller, for instance, Naples exemplified a location where climate and environment – the “malsain” air at Pozzuoli as intensified by the excruciating heat (Montesquieu 1949, I: 725) – set the background for a deterministic identification of the people as most “*crédule, superstitieux, desireux de nouvelles. Le peuple de Naples, où tant de gens n’ont rien, est plus peuple qu’un autre.*” (Montesquieu 1949, I: 715-34 [730]; see Dainotto 2007: 70-71; Moe 2002: 23-27). The stereotypical “and overall negative” construction of the Southern (Neapolitan) type, Giuseppe Galasso confirms, took full shape and became current in “both Italian and European public opinion” during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries<sup>2</sup>.

In this essay, I examine the extent to which traces of this process of construction can be uncovered in British theatrical representations of the Italian South<sup>3</sup>. These appear in a substantial

<sup>1</sup> In this respect Dainotto’s study, which acknowledges its debt to the subaltern historiography and epistemology of scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, follows in the footsteps of Edward Said’s foundational *Orientalism*, while also recognising its own differing, though not incompatible, conceptualisation of the “Other”. Cf. Dainotto 2007: 53-55.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Galasso 1982: 143-90 (151, my translation). Galasso cites George Berkeley’s early eighteenth-century travel journals among relevant European sources (pp. 148-49).

<sup>3</sup> Unless I quote from other sources, in this essay I use the capital *S* for the *South* intended as a (perceived) single territory.

corpus of dramatic texts, within the wider body of the Italianate dramas staged in several theatrical venues in London between the early decades and the mid-nineteenth century, with varying degrees of success (cf. Saglia 2003: 365-67). Taken as a whole, they provide a picture of the Italian South – indeed, not so much a structured *representation* as a network of resonances, conjuring up consistently recurring traits – where *il Mezzogiorno* acts as the familiar cultural stereotype of the backward ‘barbarian’ and *orientalised* “debatable land” – the border territory between civilised Europe and the unfamiliar (non)-European Mediterranean<sup>4</sup>. Importantly though, the South also appears as the repository of subversive imagery that lends itself to metaphorical usage in a variety of cultural contexts and with a variety of political investments. Marking the fittingly exotic landscapes of Naples and Sicily with all the eruptive power of revolutionary forces heralding historical change, the *topos* and trope of the volcano featured in a wide range of dramatic entertainments, which at the same time capitalised on the amazingly spectacular potentialities of such a wondrous display of nature’s power. So did the thriving forms of a “polymodal commodity-experience”, such as the volcano spectacles and entertainments that popularised the developing sciences of the earth for an eager public in London’s expanding urban context<sup>5</sup>.

This enquiry moves across a theatrical geography of the South extending between Palermo and Naples, the two great capital cities of the newly appointed Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which provide the stage background for a current of popular restlessness that found a fitting objective correlative in the uncontrollable operations of nature. During the age of Revolution, these were experienced as the insurgence of the “volcanic sublime” – an aesthetic and

<sup>4</sup> For a reading of Walter Scott’s notion of *debatable land* as applied to the figurations of the Italian South on the British stage, see Sportelli 2011, which builds on the use of this concept as a productive critical category in Lamont and Rossington 2007. Abundant evidence for this is provided in Nelson Moe’s study of 2002, as well as in Cian Duffy’s close reading of a number of testimonies of travellers (2013: 68-101).

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Daly proposes the definition of volcano entertainment as a “polymodal ‘commodity-experience’”, i.e., “a form of goods aimed at the imagination through the senses, from three-dimensional models to three-decker novels” (Daly 2015: 19). On Scottish polymath Hugh Miller’s use of geological diorama in his lecturing activities, see O’Connor 2007: 391 ff.

philosophical cognate of the emerging sciences of the earth (Duffy 2013: 68-101). Two episodes of Southern Italian history– the uprising of the Sicilian Vesper in 1282, and the rebellion led by Tommaso Aniello in Naples in 1647 – spawned two copious clusters of dramas and spectacles which, between the early 1820s and the late 1850s, often competed with one another on the London stages, in both patent theatres and minor houses<sup>6</sup>. The range of genres to which these plays belong is multifarious, suggesting how this group of dramas may be read as an epitome of Romantic-era experimental attitudes to dramaturgy. Accordingly, I will examine two plays in particular, which exemplify this variety of modes and related forms of characterisation and setting. Proud rebellious and/or pacifist Sicilian heroes, such as John of Procida and his son Raimond feature in Felicia Hemans’s tragedy *The Vespers of Palermo*, which was published while “in Rehearsal at Covent Garden Theatre” (Hemans 1823: 117). However, the play turned out to be a failure and was dismissed soon after the premiere on December 12, 1823. On the other hand, tragi-comic heroes and situations, as befits Romantic melodrama, appear in plays such as Henry Milner’s Royal Coburg melodrama *Masaniello, or, the Dumb Girl of Portici*, which premiered on May 4, 1829, in competition with James Kenney’s own operatic version *Masaniello: The Fisherman of Naples*. Both plays were part of the abundant progeny generated by the sensational, transnational hit *La muette de Portici* by Auber and Scribe, staged on February 29, 1828 at the Académie Royale de Musique in Paris. Though different in so many respects, all of these dramas variously rely on the destructive power of the volcano, whether conjured up and mentioned, as in Hemans’s tragedy, or fully exploited for spectacular potential in the later plays.

Historical displacement is one strategic mode the playwright, no less than the novelist, had at their disposal to interrogate the present, and some of the plays under consideration conveyed political

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<sup>6</sup> As far as representations of volcano eruptions and related natural phenomena are concerned, one should also remember the plays that capitalised on the success of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s best-selling novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. These ranged from William Buckstone’s successful homonymous melodrama (Covent Garden, 1835) to Robert Reece’s late burlesque counter-adaptation *The Very Last Days of Pompeii!!!* (Vaudeville Theatre, 1872). See Daly 2011, 2015; Dellarosa 2013.



resonances that did not go unnoticed by the Examiner of Plays, who was ready to draw a line across even the faintest shadow of sedition<sup>7</sup>. Genre appears a central element in defining these plays' politics. The Masaniello uprising was to breed both tragedies and comic (as well as tragi-comic) illegitimate dramas; conversely, the hero of the Vesper is invariably the protagonist of tragic plays. In what follows, I will suggest an explanation for these different modulations in relation to the plays selected for close analysis: Hemans's *Vespers* and Milner's 1829 *Masaniello*<sup>8</sup>. In both cases, I will carry out a brief, preliminary discussion of the coterminous historiography on the episodes in question, which would have been familiar subjects for cultivated readers in the intellectual milieu of (Northern) European countries, including France, Switzerland, and England<sup>9</sup>.

2. The presence of a remarkable number of dramatic adaptations of the distant, yet peculiarly *close*, episode of the Sicilian Vesper on nineteenth-century stages signals the topicality of that historical incident in the restless context of post-Vienna Europe. At least in its mainstream formulation as the conspiracy of a small number of heroic individuals against a foreign invader, the story of the Vespers was evidently endowed with compelling theatrical potential. It also had the power to act as a catalyst for reflections on the extent to which "the future is for us reflected in the mirror of the past". This quotation offers an apt commentary on historical drama in general, and particularly on the *Vespers* plays that succeeded one another in the space of a few years, starting with Hemans's tragedy in 1823. Indeed, in the case of John Sheridan Knowles's *John of Procida; or, The Bridals of Messina* and James Kenney's *The Sicilian Vespers*, the intervening time was a mere few days, since the two

<sup>7</sup> This is what happened to George Soane's tragedy *Masaniello, The Fisherman of Naples*, unsuccessfully performed at Drury Lane on February 25, 1825. Cf. Moody 2000: 115; Burwick 2005:166-68; Dellarosa 2013: 229-30.

<sup>8</sup> Milner was also the author of *Masaniello, the Fisherman of Naples and Deliverer of his Country* which, as Jane Moody reports (2000: 114), an existing Surrey playbill dates back to 1822. In contrast, Fred Burwick dates the premiere for what appears to be the same play to February 17, 1825, at the Royal Coburg. See Burwick 2005:168-71.

<sup>9</sup> "Every reader is of course acquainted with the history of the Sicilian Vespers", as the *Monthly Review* anonymous reviewer of Hemans's tragedy put it (1823: 425).

tragedies premiered respectively on 19 and 21 September 1840, at the competing venues of Covent Garden and the Surrey respectively (Nicoll 1963, IV: 338-39). In actual fact, the quotation is from the 1851 *Dublin University Magazine* review (p. 484) of a work that was to bring about an important revision in the historiography of the thirteenth-century Sicilian rebellion against the French domination of Charles of Anjou, that is, the English edition of Michele Amari's *History of the War of the Sicilian Vespers*.

British and European historiography between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, from Edward Gibbon to J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi and Henry Hallam's account in his 1818 *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, had provided versions of the episode, which variously dealt with the uncertain balance between the contrasting theses of a conspiracy and a spontaneous popular rebellion. This issue would be at the heart of Amari's argument. In Hallam's words,

It is difficult [...] at this time to distinguish the effects of preconcerted conspiracy from those of casual resentment. Before the intrigues so skilfully conducted had taken effect, yet after they were ripe for development, an outrage committed upon a lady at Palermo during a procession on the vigil of Easter, provoked the people to that terrible massacre of all the French in their island, which has obtained the name of Sicilian Vespers. Unpremeditated as such an ebullition of popular fury must appear, it fell in, by the happiest coincidence, with the previous conspiracy. (1856, I: 482)<sup>10</sup>

In his reconstruction, Hallam mentions the element that has proved to constitute the permanent crux in the historiography of the Vesper, which, as Salvatore Tramontana observes, "has long chased after the meaning of the Vesper without being able to grasp it" (1989: 85, my translation). In contrast, less accurate re-elaborations popularising the episode for a wider public helped corroborate what Amari would refer to as the fable, *la fola*, of the conspiracy.

The emphasis on the deeds of a lone hero features as a recognisable line in the historiography of the Vesper, which

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<sup>10</sup> Conversely, Edward Gibbon's discussion of the episode already cast doubts on the nature of the uprising: "The mine was prepared with deep and dangerous artifice; but it may be questioned, whether the instant explosion of Palermo were the effect of accident or design" (Gibbon 1839: vol. XI, chapter LXII: 330-31).

enjoyed wide circulation and was to furnish material for a rich vein of dramatic re-elaborations across Europe. The list begins with Casimir Delavigne's 1819 tragedy *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, which premiered in Paris at Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe on October 23, 1819 and includes the trio of English dramas by Hemans and Knowles and Kenney, with Kenney adapting the French source, as did Eugène Scribe in his 1855 libretto for Verdi's grand opera *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (cf. Saglia 2003: 328). Giovanni da Procida was also, importantly, the eponymous protagonist of an 1830 tragedy in Italian by Giovan Battista Niccolini, which Michele Amari was to cite in his preface to the 1851 Italian edition of his foundational *History* as having inspired him to write his account<sup>11</sup>. However, Amari's work gained prominence as a turning point in the Vespers historiography only *after* the wave of plays inspired by that remote episode, whose transnational political resonance in the years of the early southern uprisings at the beginning of the 1820s is widely recognised, to the extent that historian Alberto Banti has described it as "one of the key events within Risorgimento mythography" (Banti 2000: 84; 2020: 71)<sup>12</sup>.

Conceived and released in the aftermath of the 1820-21 insurrections, Felicia Hemans's ambitious experiment in legitimate dramaturgy engages in a complex mirror game with current political issues and within the ongoing ideological conflict on the notion of liberalism and the cost entailed by the fulfilment of its principles. The lens of historical dislocation and a recognisably feminine modulation of human agency in history combine to

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<sup>11</sup> "[...] that noble tragedy by Niccolini, the perusal of which made me shrink to my very bones, and I kept crying out of anger, while repeating 'Perchè tanto sorriso di cielo/sulla terra di vile dolor?'" (Amari 1851: Preface). Amari's work was first published in Palermo in 1842 with the disguised title of *Un periodo delle istorie siciliane del secol XIII*, which only temporarily deceived Bourbon censorship. The study was extended and revised for the second edition in Paris by the by-then exiled author, and published as *La Guerra del Vespro siciliano* in 1843. This edition was translated into English by Anne Barbara-Isabel Percy as *History of the War of the Sicilian Vespers* (1850). Its editor was Francis Egerton, Earl of Ellesmere, a well-known liberal-conservative politician, poet, and patron of the arts, who added a substantial preface.

<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Naples uprising did not achieve the same status, given its potentially more seditious nature.



the play the connection becomes an underlying motif in the words of the oppressed, conjuring up and defining their response to that same sheer brutality. In other words, the trope of the natural phenomenon – whether the volcano’s eruption or the related portent, the earthquake – takes on a diametrically opposed political connotation.

Consider Vittoria, Prince Conradin’s still mourning betrothed, who chooses to become the instrument of revolt in the play, as she contests her oppressor’s threatening words, as soon as he retires:

VIT.

[...] – *Thou* should’st be now at work,  
 In wrath, my native Etna! who dost lift  
 Thy spiry pillar of dark smoke so high,  
 Thr’ the red heaven of sunset! – sleep’st thou still,  
 With all thy founts of fire, while spoilers tread  
 The glowing vales beneath?  
 (I.ii, 8)

Vittoria’s animistic identification of the mountain as the spirit of the place, alongside her appropriation of it by birthright (“my *native* Etna”), account for its recruitment on the rebels’ side, while the conjuring up of its tremendously spectacular power – which is *not* at work in the play – is modulated both as a reproach and a prayer, a fact that implicitly extends to the *sleeping* people of Sicily, who had been called to arms in the opening scene as Procida warned: “Th’ avenger will not sleep” (I.i, p. 4).

In addition, the agnition scene between John of Procida and his son Raimond becomes the occasion for a harsh political confrontation on freedom, oppression and the strategies of “disguise”: “Put on a mask”, is Procida’s suggestion to his son (I.iii, p. 19). In this sense, it prefigures the ethical and political crux that the play develops fully, that is, the extent to which the struggle against oppression can push ethics and loyalty to the limits. In this context, the earthquake trope, which is again conjured up *in absentia* in the exchange between the still reciprocally unrecognised father and son, appears again in the image of the calm preceding a blast, whether occasioned by human force or unfathomed subterranean workings:



bare natural scenery – the “entrance of a cave, surrounded by rocks and forests” with only a “rude cross” barely visible “amongst the rocks” – young Raimond replies to his father’s bitter remark on the uncouth setting for Sicily’s highest political assembly by asserting the primacy of the vital, *primeval* relationship between people and land. In Raimond’s view, this primordial connection is stronger and, perhaps, even more sacred than that established by human history itself, to the extent that the “pillar’d halls, wherein / Statesmen hold weary vigils” appear fragile human structures, unable to inspire *deep thoughts* in the statesmen in council. To the limits of human *material* institutions Raimond opposes the energising and inspiring *spectacle* of nature’s power (“such scenes [...] *beheld* [...] will inspire”), the operations of which appear to preside over human destinies to the extent that Etna itself is personified as the force driving all kinds of “tyrants” away.

Leaving aside the geographical inaccuracy in Hemans’s seemingly literal, rather than metaphorical, positioning of Etna as *overshadowing* Palermo so that its “moans” are audible from the city, what appears clear, here as elsewhere in the play, is the mutable but constant political modulation of the natural imagery of the volcanic sublime. The same “deep moan” fails to announce the coming earthquake in Raimond’s explicit association between the uprising about to explode and the sudden blast of the quake in the exchange with his beloved Constance<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, the blind violence of nature features ironically as the fitting measure for the human treatment of other human beings, as dark Montalba grimly remarks in his anticipation of the massacre to come:

[...] – The earthquake whelms  
 Its undistinguish’d thousands, making graves  
 Of peopled cities in its path – and this  
 Is Heaven’s dread justice – ay, and it is well!  
 Why then should *we* be tender, when the skies  
 Deal thus with man? – (II. iii: 36-37)

<sup>14</sup> “RAI. [...] It was a day / Of festival, like this; the city sent / Up thro’ her sunny firmament a voice / Joyous as now; when, scarcely heralded / By one deep moan, forth from his cavernous depths / The earthquake burst: and the wide splendid scene // Became one of chaos of all fearful things, / Till the brain whirl’d, partaking the sick motion / Of rocking palaces” (III. iii, p. 53).

It appears clear then, that, in consonance with the tragedy's investment in voice as "a primary identity-making device" (Saglia 2003: 357), the recurrent volcano and earthquake imagery plays a central role in defining the perceived (self)-identity of the Sicilian people. Alternatively, and coherently, in terms of the play's politics, it is appropriated by the usurper. However, tragedy as a genre customarily did not require special effects, and Hemans's *Vespers* was no exception. The volcano element is never exploited for its spectacular potentialities, which are discussed *in absentia*, as the object of fluctuating re-elaborations at various moments in the play. Whether it is evoked to magnify the winners' power, as in the image of the "earthquake path" ploughed by the "car of triumph" in Eriber's aggressive construct in I.i; or invoked to do justice on behalf of the people to whom it belongs, as in Vittoria's direct address in the immediate follow up in I.i; or depicted as the ultimate scenario for the performance of national politics, as in Raimond's rallying in the form of word-painting in II.iv – the volcano's dark quintessence of the natural sublime, which exposes the earth's depths to the inquiring human gaze (Duffy 2013: 69-70), reveals its power as a shaping force and a mighty political metaphor in *The Vespers of Palermo* and its representation – however stylised – of the people of that distant island in the Mediterranean.

3. A Neapolitan fisherman who was the protagonist of a short-lived uprising in 1647, Tommaso Aniello had a long life on the London stage. Theatre scholarship over the last twenty years has done intensive work towards retrieving this significant chapter of theatre history, which, however, remains extremely intricate and still in need of a full reconstruction<sup>15</sup>. Two dramatic texts dating back to the early reception of the Neapolitan fisherman's revolution appeared in the seventeenth century. In the immediate aftermath of the event, the publication of Alessandro Giraffi's *Le rivoluzioni di Napoli* (1647) prompted its translation into English by James Howell (1650), and the drama *The Rebellion of Naples, or the Tragedy of Massenello*, by an anonymous author identified as "T.B." in the dedicatory epistle of the text, and claiming to have been an eyewitness of the events,

<sup>15</sup> See Moody 2000; Burwick 2005; Sportelli 2011; Sportelli 2012; Daly 2015.



appeared as early as 1649. And, at the turn of the eighteenth-century, Thomas D'Urfey wrote the two-part tragedy *The Famous History of the Rise and Fall of Massaniello* (Cf. Genest 1832: II, 158-64; Burwick 2005: 165-66; Sportelli 2012: 149-57<sup>16</sup>. The appearance of the English translation of Francis Midon's *The Remarkable History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello* in 1729, alongside the two dramatic versions, was also instrumental in the later dissemination of the Masaniello narrative, which was to have a prolific life across Europe<sup>17</sup>.

As Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh observe, listing Masaniello as a precursor of the "motley crew" of rebels threatening established order on this side of the Atlantic in the formative years of modern Western society, the Neapolitan uprising begun in July 1647 "marked the first time that the proletariat of any European city seized power and governed alone" (Rediker and Linebaugh 2000: 112). In turn, Rosario Villari firmly contests what he describes as a "long-standing tradition" in the historiography of the 1647 rebellion (Villari 1993: 153), which relies on a mythologisation of the hero based on "widely held beliefs concerning the anthropological characteristics of a people" (p. 153). Highlighting the contemporary Europe-wide reverberation of the Neapolitan uprising and also its connection with a process of "glorification of Masaniello", Villari notes that, in the historical elaboration of that event, this did not prevent the development of an awareness that, "beyond the image of the bare-footed and illiterate fisherman there were political processes and conflicts of ideas, that various important strata of the population had been involved, and that the revolt had created significant problems of a political, military, and diplomatic nature" (p. 154). Only later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, did the revolt come to be interpreted as "a protest without political significance or as a plebeian upheaval" (p. 154), while historiography continued

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<sup>16</sup> The political context in which the two seventeenth-century plays appeared, and the relevance of key events such as the Puritan and the Glorious Revolution, are explored in Sportelli 2012 and fully dealt with in Mario Melchionda's dedicated study and edition of the two plays (1988).

<sup>17</sup> Together with the crucial French source of *La Muette de Portici*, Burwick highlights the relevance of a German line of development represented by David Fassmann's imaginary dialogue *Wilhelm Tell und Masaniello* (1732) and Reinhard Keiser's opera *Masagnello Furioso* (1706), with a libretto by Barthold Feind. Cf. Burwick 2005: 165-66.

to feature trends designed to perpetuate “a highly reductive view of the revolt and to take for granted [...] the commonplaces and stereotypes concerning the lack of structures, urban organisation and common dignity in the Naples of the seventeenth century” (p. 158). The parable of the Fisherman of Naples was thus reworked in different European contexts in different written forms to diverse ends over the course of the almost two centuries separating the historical event of the 1640s from its spectacular materialisation on the London and European stages in the 1820s – that is, at a crucial historical turning point, marked by a multiplication of revolutionary trouble spots across Europe. Indeed, the copious presence of Italian exiles in London may actually have prompted the interest of theatre managers in the history of the Italian rebel (Burwick 2005: 169).

The cluster of plays under the heading of *Masaniello* on the 1820s London stage should be also seen in relation to the permanent warfare between legitimate and illegitimate venues. It was the illegitimate Royal Coburg that emerged as the victor over Drury Lane in two topical moments – February 1825 and May 1829, with Henry Milner as the champion of illegitimacy in both battles, respectively against George Soane in the former, and John Kenney in the latter. Staged a few days apart (February 7 and 17, 1825), and on the very same day (May 4, 1829), the four plays variously modulate the story of Naples’ revolutionary fisherman and its potentially seditious undertones<sup>18</sup>. Between 1825 and 1829, the sensationally successful Auber-Scribe/Delavigne opera of 1828 established the divide that was to bring about a literal sea-change in Europe’s Masaniello imaginary (cf. Burwick 2005: 171-2; Fuhmann 2015: 148-53) and became the model for the later plays by Kenney and Milner, a ballet staged by André-Jean-Jacques Deshayes (King’s Theatre, March 1829), and the equestrian spectacle *Masaniello: or, the Revolt at Naples* at Astley’s Royal Amphitheatre (Daly 2011: 270), not to mention a much later spin-off, a “*Masaniello, Travestie*,” in the form of Robert Brough’s “Fish Tale in One Act” *Masaniello; or, The Fish’oman of Naples*, performed at the Royal Olympic Theatre on July 2, 1857 (Brough n.d.: unpaginated paratext). Auber’s opera took the French, British,

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<sup>18</sup> For critical commentary on these plays’ fluctuating politics, see Moody 2000, 114-16; Burwick 2005: 173-74; Dellarosa 2013: 228-34; Daly 2015: 34-37; Fuhmann 2015: 149-51.

and Italian audiences by storm, and, most importantly, conflated the Masaniello and the volcano narratives in a spectacular finale in which Masaniello's sister Fenella, the dumb girl of Portici from the title, throws herself ("se précipite") from the terrace into an "abime" which may (or may not) be already brimming with boiling volcanic material (Auber-Scribe 1843: 24).

Unsurprisingly, the dramatic relevance of the mute(d) character of Fenella has been the object of intense critical debate. As Frederick Burwick notes, the "melodramatic appeal" of the added subplot (2005: 171-2), with the violated young woman as the victim of the oppressor's lust (a thematic thread that is also present in Hemans's *Vespers*, incidentally), did not hinder the recognition of its politics on the part of contemporary audiences, since Fenella's tragic fate adds to the burden of violence exerted against the people of Naples, while her muted voice, which is made to 'speak' through pantomimical moves<sup>19</sup>, may stand for the many who are indeed denied a voice. It is also true, however, that the character's melodramatic features and their complicating function in the plot move the focus away from the directly political and onto the private sphere – and the figure of Alphonso appears to be less culpable as an agent of brutal imperial power than as the seducer of an innocent young woman<sup>20</sup>.

The hybridism of Henry Milner's "musical drama"<sup>21</sup> is fully visible in his introduction of a comic counterpart to the figure of Masaniello – that of his cousin Giuseppe Aniello:

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<sup>19</sup> Dumb characters are recurrent in Romantic-era drama, a fact that lends itself to critical investigation from the perspective of disability studies. This is the focus of an ongoing project on "Disability and the Romantic Theatre" presented by Essaka Joshua (University of Notre Dame) at the online seminar on "Romantic Theatre Studies: state-of-the field and new ways forward", organised by Francesca Saggini and held on April 20, 2022 within the BARS Digital Events Series. The event recording is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpMQkZp-NP8> (last accessed: June 2, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> That the exercise of male sexual power or downright violence against women may take on an explicitly political import is exemplified by the fate of Vittoria in Hemans's *Vespers*. It may well be argued that the representation of violence against women is invariably a political act – whether deliberate or not.

<sup>21</sup> As defined in the frontispiece to the Cumberland edition, although the editor George Daniel identifies the play as a "historical drama" in his opening "Remarks", opposing it to James Kenney's competing "grand opera." This fluctuation itself testifies to hybridity being a defining trait of illegitimate theatre (Milner [1829?]: 6).

GIU. Oh dear! oh dear! [...] I can't find her high nor low, pretty, tender, interesting, delicate creature! and I've searched all the fish-markets, liquor-shops, and macaroni-stalls in Naples; poor dear little cousin Fenella, that I hoped one day to make my own wife! Many people in our parts thought meanly of her because she was dumb, poor soul; for my part, I considered it no trifling recommendation; [...] (Milner [1829?]: I. iii:14).

Giuseppe's monologue presents some southern Italian stock elements, including the "macaroni stalls", and sets itself in comic contrast with Fenella's highly (melo)dramatic revelation – in the form of pantomimical communication aptly introduced by directions such as "[*Fenella*] *emphatically conveys* [...]", or "*Fenella expresses her gratitude*" – which has just wreaked havoc during the festivities for the upcoming marriage of the Viceroy's son and noble Elvira (incidentally, Hemans's *Vespers* exploits the device of the interrupted marriage in a very different way and to different dramatic ends).

In Milner's drama the juxtaposition of contrasting modes is a recurring strategy, and Giuseppe plays a key role in modulating the comic. The "macaroni" motif is taken up in II.iii (pp. 22-26), in a long scene set during the revolt, in which Giuseppe first boasts of his connection "with a great man" (pp. 22-23), then, in an increasing state of alcoholic intoxication, proclaims the people's right to plunder in the name of the redistribution of wealth, then cheers Masaniello and declares himself his cousin before a Sergeant and viceregal soldiers; then, having been arrested, he pretends to betray the people's cause to survive and, in the short sc. iv, manages to imprison the Spanish sergeant and soldiers in a cave, having gulled them into giving him the prize for his betrayal. The frankly comic interlude provided by Giuseppe acts as a foil to the melodramatic development and climax of the play, in which the preparation and then explosion of Vesuvius' "exterminating wrath" (p. 33) plays a crucial role. Conjured up in the first place as the sign of "Heaven[']s stern disapprobation" by one of Masaniello's men, the eruption is turned by the leader into a sign and symbol of a power that is even stronger than that of the people: "[...] avenging flames shall out-glow great Vesuvius! stern desolation shall stalk forth, unthralled! And all that breathes of Spain or tyranny shall be hurled down the steep abyss of its own yawning native hell! [...]" (p. 35). The

“abyss” of tyranny’s “yawning hell” is explicitly associated with the depths of the flaming mountain, whose spectacular appearance is announced with surprising geographical accuracy in the stage direction accompanying the closing scene:

*An Open View of the Bay, bordering upon Portici and Torre del Greco, at the Foot of Vesuvius – a grand View of the Volcano, emitting smoke and Fire – the Lava beginning to flow into the Sea – a very elevated Terrace, ascended by a staircase.* (III.iii: 39)

The staging of the leader’s death is cast as a catastrophe in which natural and man-induced violence mirror one another, the former also functioning as a counterpoint of, and commentary on, the latter. Significantly, through Masaniello’s dying words – which seal his rehabilitation as the rightful hero in the play, sacrificing his life to save his enemy’s wife – the drama’s ideological trajectory comes full circle:

[...] he was mad enough to think that liberty could take into her ranks those whose very abject soul stamps them eternally base slaves. Your freedom is debauchery, plunder, and murder; your justice, petty and remorseless vengeance; your very vital air is crime; your portion, menial drudgery [...]. (III.iii: 40)

The voice of the former hero of the people, who interestingly speaks of himself in the third person, as if to attest his own self-alienation, makes clear that the populace, the mob, have no right to access liberty, because they are deterministically bound to remain *slaves* forever. And, incidentally, this was a familiar argument and a logical loop typical of the pro-slavery lobby at a time in which emancipation in the colonies was becoming inevitable because of recurring slave rebellions<sup>22</sup>.

The spectacular, atrocious, and melodramatic death of the blind girl of Portici, who commits suicide after receiving the final blow of her brother’s death, appears as a sort of horrible human sacrifice on the altar of the established order, even as the stagey volcanic eruption offers the audience full satisfaction for their money:

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<sup>22</sup> Slave insurrections in Barbados (1816), British Guiana (1823) and later on in Jamaica, in 1831-32, played a crucial role in precipitating the emancipation process. See Blackburn 2011, pp. 278-81.

*The eruption has made rapid progress – the crater of the volcano emits torrents of flame and smoke – forked lightnings rend the sky in every direction – Fenella contemplates the awful spectacle for a moment, then plunges into the sea. – A terrific explosion ensues from the mountain, the lava impetuously flows down its side, and extends itself into the sea. – The people, awe-struck, bend in submission to the will of heaven, and the curtain slowly descends.* (III.iii: 40)

To conclude, genre provides a helpful tool for discussing the many ways in which Romantic-era theatrical culture approached the southern Italian subject and discourse. Ultimately, as this essay demonstrates, representing the Italian South entailed very differing strategies and achieved very different outcomes, in relation to the generic affiliation of the dramas in question. On the one hand, Hemans's five-act tragedy carries out an abstract and highly intellectualised elaboration of the landscape, and especially of the volcano and earthquake imagery, in relation to the crucial themes of nation and narration, power and identity. On the other, the illegitimate drama aims to produce quite a different kind of pleasurable viewing experience, and one in which elements such as ethnic stereotypes and the staging of the volcano as spectacle contribute to conveying a conservative ethos, whereby the eruption of nature's violence appears as a frightening and rightful act of retribution in the name of the established order, and the seditious agency of the revolutionary mob is literally reduced to ashes.

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# Deconstructing Anglo-Italianness: Selina Martin's *Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Italy, 1819-22*

*Elisabetta Marino*

## *Abstract*

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Italy resumed its role as one of the most attractive destinations for tourists, travellers, and exiles. A pervasive Italianism characterised the output of writers who, for various reasons, spent prolonged periods in the Peninsula: Lord Byron, the Shelleys, and Leigh Hunt may be listed among the most passionate Anglo-Italians. Italian expats in London also played an important part in consolidating Italophile feelings in Britain. Nonetheless, some travellers observed with growing anxiety widespread celebrations of cultural and intellectual hybridity as threatening forms of contamination. This essay sets out to analyse the epistolary travelogue penned by Selina Martin – better known for her later children's books – entitled *Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Italy, 1819-22* (1828), which may be read as a cautionary tale aimed at discouraging her compatriots from venturing into such a degenerate country.

*Key-words:* Anglo-Italianness, Italianism, identity, travel writing, Protestantism.

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Italy resumed its role as one of the foremost and most fashionable destinations for both British travellers and émigrés. As C.P. Brand noted, it was not just its picturesque scenery and awe-inspiring ruins that attracted the British, “but almost anything Italian: the language, literature, art, music, history, even the political aspirations of the Italians” (Brand 1957: ix). At a time when the Grand Tour tradition was “rapidly convert[ing] itself into ordinary tourism” (Cavaliere 2005: 34), short- and long-term visitors poured into the country. Consequently, handbooks suggesting popular itineraries and travelogues documenting one's extraordinary experiences multiplied and were eagerly consumed both by would-be tourists and by armchair travellers back home.

A large number of expats settled in major cities such as Florence, Pisa, and Rome, prompted by the milder climate, the affordable living conditions, and cultural opportunities; furthermore, the exhilarating freedom from socio-political constraints, behavioural restrictions, and traditional gender limitations also acted as potent motivating factors (Crisafulli 2002: 14). A pervasive Italianism characterised the output of writers who, for various reasons, spent prolonged periods in the Peninsula, a true “Paradise of Exiles” as P.B. Shelley depicted it (*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation*, l. 57). Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt, and the Shelleys may be listed among the most passionate Romantic Anglo-Italians, borrowing the expression from the title of Maria Schoina’s 2009 seminal volume that, in turn, draws on Mary Shelley’s “The English in Italy”, published in the *Westminster Review* in 1826. In this provocative piece, besides equating the teeming masses of English tourists to “Norwegian rats, who always [went] right on” (Shelley 1826: 326), Shelley distinguished the “mere traveller, or true John Bull” (p. 343), who flew to Italy to “eat the lotus” (p. 327), from the “new race or sect” (p. 327) of Anglo-Italians<sup>1</sup>. Perfectly conversant with the Italian language, the Anglo-Italian was unprejudiced in approaching difference (actually perceived as an added value), eager to gain first-hand knowledge of Italian culture and traditions, and immune from the disabling disease affecting most of her “un-Italianized countrymen” (p. 327), namely the “Spurzheim’s bump, denominated stayathomeativeness” (p. 327)<sup>2</sup>. Shelley considered Lord Byron as the father of this novel, sophisticated, hybrid, and liberated lineage, endowed with “a distinct standard of taste, a unified sensibility, a discrete sense of place-attachment, and a shared vision for cultural reform” (Schoina 2009: 22). As Shelley reiterated in many of her narratives, a modern, rejuvenated British identity could be shaped through the fruitful contact with Italianness<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In 1826, Shelley herself wrote two letters to the editor of *The Examiner* under the pen-name of “Anglo-Italicus”. In both, she strenuously defended the much-criticised performances of the Italian castrato Giovanni Battista Velluti (Morrison and Stone 2003: 111).

<sup>2</sup> The tourists described by Mary Shelley may be categorised as sedentary travellers, according to Syed Manzurul Islam’s definition, that is, individuals who, even when they move physically, “never manage to travel at all” (Islam 1996: 5), being mentally trapped within the boundaries of “petrified thresholds” (p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, “Recollections of Italy”, the narrative essays she published

A key role in strengthening Italophile feelings in Britain was also played by Italian political exiles and economic migrants, such as Ugo Foscolo, Giuseppe Binda, and Serafino Buonaiuti<sup>4</sup>. Active in London in the initial decades of the nineteenth century, they acted as crucial cultural mediators (Bowers 2020: 61-84). Through their literary and historical publications and unofficial diplomatic efforts, they strived to dispel stereotypical perceptions of their country and its inhabitants, while also building public support for the Italian political cause.

Yet, despite what has been argued so far, Italophobia was still lurking behind the façade of seemingly generalised enthusiasm and consent<sup>5</sup>. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, for instance, censured Byron's adulterated (not to say bastardised) language in *Don Juan*, which it contemptuously attributed to his exposure to foreign influences: "it is indeed *luce clarius* that Lord B's residence in Italy has been much too long protracted. He has positively lost his ear" (1823: 90)<sup>6</sup>. Samuel Sharp, the eminent surgeon who authored a travelogue entitled *Letters from Italy, Describing the Manners and*

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in the *London Magazine* in 1824, where the protagonist's Italophile feelings and enlightened line of reasoning finally prevail over his opponent's narrow and dull nationalism.

<sup>4</sup> Both Binda and Buonaiuti were closely connected with Lord Holland. The latter had started his career in London as an opera librettist, a teacher of Italian, and a translator. Together with Leonardo Nardini, he had published a six-volume anthology of Italian literature: *Saggi di prose e poesie de più celebri scrittori di ogni secolo* (1796-98). Binda was a protégé of the Hollands. Eric Reginald Vincent credits him with introducing Foscolo to Lord Holland, "the chief living representative of the Whig tradition" (Vincent 1953: 32).

<sup>5</sup> As Manfred Beller has elucidated, while Italy was universally acknowledged as the cradle of Western civilisation, the Italians were often associated with irrationality, Machiavellianism, moral corruption, deceitfulness, indolence, and Popish plots (Beller 2007, 195-197). Starting from the Elizabethan period, in fact, leading intellectuals such as Roger Ascham (1515-1568) had severely criticised the side effects of a prolonged stay in Italy, resulting in the irreparable ethical degradation of the traveller. In his *The Scholemaster* (published posthumously in 1570), he quoted the well-known saying "Englese Italianato e [*sic*] un diavolo incarnato" (Ascham 1870: 78), as well as underlying that in the nine days he spent in Italy, he «saw in that lit[t]le tyme, in one Citie, more libertie to sinne than euer [he] he[a]rd tell of [their] noble Citie of London in ix yeare» (p. 83).

<sup>6</sup> As Jane Stabler has pointed out, "Landor and the Brownings were also condemned for abrasive misuse of the English Language" (Stabler 2013: 10).

*Customs of that Country in the Years 1765 and 1766* (1766), had already offered quite a grim portrayal of the Italian people, thus arousing the venomous reaction of Giuseppe (Joseph) Baretti, a long-term resident in England. In his *An Account of the Manners of Italy: With Observations on the Mistakes of Some Travellers, with Regard to That Country* (1768), in fact, Baretti had struggled to contest the biased remarks included in Sharp's work<sup>7</sup> which, nevertheless, would prove hard to dismiss. Later on, in fact, some other travellers such as Selina Martin (1780-1859) observed with growing anxiety celebrations of cultural and intellectual hybridity as menacing forms of contamination. On these premisses, this essay sets out to analyse the epistolary travelogue she penned upon her return from the Peninsula: *Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Italy, 1819-1822*, published in 1828 by John Murray (whose most notable author, incidentally, was precisely Lord Byron). Far from praising the educational significance of travelling and the invigorating Italian weather, Martin delved into the stifling and corrupting atmosphere that, as a staunch Protestant, she breathed in the Eternal City. In doing so, she concocted a counter-narrative to many contemporary accounts, while also attempting to debunk contemporary Anglo-Italian mythologisations. By focusing on Catholicism and its debasing influence, by lingering on the description of the ignorant and superstitious Italian population, Martin produced a cautionary tale aimed at discouraging her compatriots from venturing into such a degenerate and unwholesome country.

Little is known about Selina Martin, nor has her output been the object of a thorough investigation<sup>8</sup>. After recovering from a long and

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<sup>7</sup> Baretti highlighted the reasons why, in his opinion, Sharp was "totally unfit for the task he ha[d] voluntarily undertaken" (Baretti 1768: 4): the surgeon "was ignorant of the Italian language; was of no high rank" (p. 4) and, therefore, he could never be admitted into the very circles of the highest aristocracy he pretended to describe. Lastly, he was "in a bad state of health [which] is very unfit to make observations on nations" (p. 12).

<sup>8</sup> Born in Ireland into a Protestant family, Martin primarily owed her short-lived popularity to the religious children's fiction she composed after her travelogue. For further information, see the record for Selina Martin in Benjamin Colbert, *Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database*, designer Movable Type Ltd. Online: <https://www.british-travel-writing.org/> (last accessed 1 May 2022). Only cursory references to her life and literary endeavours can be found

debilitating illness, she decided to join her sister's family in Rome; during her stay, she also visited Naples and its surrounding areas, which constitute the background of part of her correspondence. Jane Robinson has grouped Martin with other "reluctant travellers" – "tragic heroines" with miserable stories of exile abroad (Robinson 1990: 274)<sup>9</sup>. In truth, none of the exploratory spirit and sense of discovery which had fired many other British adventurers may be detected in her account, nor is travelling itself regarded as "a culturally meaningful gesture [...] an emancipating experience" (Melman 1992: 8). Quite the opposite, her first encounter with Italy is marked by the destabilising feeling of being "with foreigners alone" (Martin 1828: 35).

The peritextual features of Martin's volume prove particularly insightful. In her "Preface", the author seems at pains to emphasise her conformity to gender-normative expectations, which cause her to "remain within the boundaries of the 'domestic' sphere" (Walchester 2007: 29) even when physically removed from a familiar setting. Clearly highlighting her adherence to the rigid rules of propriety are her adoption of the epistolary form – a vehicle for intimate confessions, since her letters "were certainly never meant for the eye of strangers" (Martin 1828: vi)<sup>10</sup> –, and the explicit reference to her "every-day life, while domesticated in Italy" as the subject of her narrative (p. v). Furthermore, she openly manifests her reluctance to enter the literary arena as a professional writer, being "well aware that the world is overstocked with Diaries and Tours in Italy" (p. v). In actual fact, she does not intend to furnish her readers with the usual depictions of monuments and sites, which are scant throughout the travelogue<sup>11</sup>. Martin's main purpose

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in scholarly works: Barbara Tetti, for example, mentions Martin as one among the "British women travelling the Papal States" (Tetti 2020: 56).

<sup>9</sup> Robinson has expanded her analysis in a later essay: "something about travelling to Italy seems with surprising frequency to evoke an air of loneliness, isolation even, in the breast of the British woman abroad" (Robinson 1996: 489).

<sup>10</sup> Each letter is addressed to a vaguely identified "dear friend".

<sup>11</sup> The reader is regularly offered explicit disclaimers. When recording her visit to the Capitol, for instance, Martin adds the following comment: "Of many things which I see, I give you only a very cursory account, because they have all been described by persons of so much greater ability" (Martin 1828: 131). A few paragraphs later, she reiterates: "it would be tedious to describe to you the different palaces which I

is to expose the dangers, both bodily and spiritual, with which parents would be confronted, when “leaving their native land for the sake of educating their children abroad” (p. vi). Accordingly, the first page of the account serves as a warning, since it carries the ominous engraving of her young niece’s grave: thirteen-year-old Anny had fallen ill, while in Rome, and never recovered. Two additional elements of the peritext can help shed light on the travelogue and its intentions: the subtitle, “with Illustrations of the Present State of Religion in that Country”, focuses the readership’s attention on Roman Catholicism. Besides, the volume is inscribed to “Sir Robert Harry Inglis, Bart”, a Tory politician who strongly opposed any measure that could weaken the Anglican Church<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, despite her protestations of modesty and decency, Selina Martin’s *Narrative* bears a transgressive potential, as it subtly deals with an *un-feminine* topic. Indeed, it conveys a powerful political message, when we contextualise it within contemporary debates on Catholic emancipation in the United Kingdom, culminating in the much-disputed Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, the year following the publication of Martin’s account<sup>13</sup>. Hence, while Anglo-Italian intellectuals extolled the fruitful intersection of British and Italian cultures as a mutually enriching exchange, Martin somehow felt entrusted with the mission of protecting Britishness (and Protestantism) against the onslaught of Italian (and Roman Catholic) influences. As Raphaël Ingelbien has argued, her fragile medical condition “only strengthened the travelogue’s sense of menace” (Ingelbien 2016: 168).

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have seen; besides, you will find in other tours, already published, a more accurate account than any which I could give you” (p. 132). It is also important to bear in mind that the volume was published anonymously.

<sup>12</sup> G.F. Russell Barker views him as “an old-fashioned Tory, a strong churchman, with many prejudices and no great ability. He, however, accurately represented the feelings and opinions of the country gentleman of the time” (Barker 1892: 6-7).

<sup>13</sup> The act was aimed at averting the danger of civil strife in Ireland, the country where the author was born. It eventually allowed members of the Roman Catholic Church to sit in the Parliament at Westminster. In the past, travel writing had already been used by women writers to serve political or private purposes. For instance, as Katrina O’Loughlin has demonstrated, in the eighteenth century, Lady Craven had used her travel letters to develop a new literary persona, “to counteract other public images circulating about her life and conduct” (O’Loughlin 2018: 69).

To reach her goal, she first endeavours to strip Italy of its allure by downplaying its charms while accentuating its faults. In Rome, monuments and ancient buildings are irreparably damaged; sepulchres and inscriptions have crumbled to dust; the “proud city” that used to be “the mistress of the world” (p. 110) has turned into a mere memento of human transience: “so man passes away, with all his works!” (p. 110). The picturesque *Campagna Romana*, highly praised by the Shelleys, looks “desolate” (p. 49) to her; Albano, one of P.B. Shelley’s favourite villages, appears “insignificant” (p. 50); Velletri is a “mean and dirty town” (p. 52); Itri is “a miserable mass of ruins” (p. 55); Capua is, once again, “dirty and miserable” (p. 56). She even belies the exquisite portrayals of the landscape surrounding the Grotto of Pausilipo provided by John Chetwode Eustace (not just a travel writer, but also a Roman Catholic priest) in his commended volumes on Italy<sup>14</sup>: “we drove briskly through and emerged into an open country, not at once so strikingly beautiful as Eustace describes. We were disappointed at finding the road on each side lined at first with dirty tottering habitations” (pp. 97-98).

Besides criticising the scenery, she does not spare words of disdain for the Italians, as a debauched and wicked race with which none of her compatriots should even attempt to mingle. The people she scrutinises in Campania are exceedingly greedy and lazy, the so-called *lazaroni* (p. 95), whose manifestations of civility depend on the amount of money one is willing to pay for their services: “without payment they have no idea of doing the smallest thing” (p. 75). Dishonesty is one of the staple features of every Neapolitan – “even the Neapolitan noblemen are thieves” (p. 81) – and a regular school has been long established “for teaching the art of picking pockets” (p. 81). During Carnival, Martin witnesses “one foolery more absurd than another” (p. 147), performed by people of all ranks and ages. As for the women, they are dull, capricious, and depraved: “eagerness about trifles is a strong characteristic of the Italian women; and they have not an idea, in common with us, of what decency and propriety require” (pp. 320-21).

To widen the gap between Englishwomen and their Italian counterparts, she mentions the inveterate custom of having a

<sup>14</sup> *A Classical Tour through Italy* (1815), in four volumes, consecrated his fame as an expert on Italian matters.

*cavalier servente*, as a disgraceful compensation for the burden of an equally disgraceful arranged marriage. With a tinge of humour, she relates a curious incident occurred to a fellow-countryman, Mr. —; requested by a Roman lady to become her *cavalier servente*, he had “decline[d] the honour”, adding that the “employments” implied by such a position “would never suit an Englishman” (p. 153). In Martin’s travelogue, Italian mothers breed and bury children at a fast rate, without any apparent emotion, as when their babies die, they will surely ascend to heaven<sup>15</sup>. When they survive, infants are crippled in body and soul. Tightly bound in bandages (a standard practice)<sup>16</sup>, they frequently grow deformed; robbed of their health and dignity, most of them are soon sent out to beg, to scrape a meagre living. Young boys below ten years of age, from prominent and respectable families, are often doomed to priesthood: “it is both absurd and melancholy to see such little creatures devoted to they know not what” (p. 320).

However, the majority of Italians are vicious and arch-Catholic *banditti*<sup>17</sup>, who attack defenceless travellers and kidnap them for ransom; when money cannot be easily obtained, “the prisoners are butchered in cold blood” (p. 54). Such passages of Martin’s *Narrative* are strikingly reminiscent of the tradition of Gothic fiction. The gloomy prisons of the Inquisition are hinted at while she sets out on an excursion to see the mosaic manufacture in one of the buildings attached to the Vatican (p. 148). The Colosseum she first sees by moonlight<sup>18</sup> initially triggers the memory of Lord Byron’s stanzas from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, which are actually quoted in the text (pp. 111-12)<sup>19</sup>. Nonetheless, the feeling of sublime grandeur evoked in the poet’s lines is instantly replaced with horror and

<sup>15</sup> “[...] with the most perfect indifference [the mother] exclaims, ‘Sono andati in Paradiso!’” (p. 152).

<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in the travelogue, a new-born child is compared to “a misshapen clumsy doll” (Martin 1828: 42).

<sup>17</sup> They are renowned for their brutality, yet they appear to “worship the Madonna” (p. 259).

<sup>18</sup> A night-time visit to the Colosseum was a typical tourist experience: “*Manfred* and *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* helped transform it from a romantic fancy to a touristic practice” (Rovee 2017: 189).

<sup>19</sup> Martin quotes the following stanzas from Canto IV: cxxviii, cxxix, cxliii, and the first five lines of cxliv.



disgust at the cruelty of the villainous ancient Romans, eventually rescued from savagery by Christianity:

How degrading when we think of the purpose for which the enormous pile was reared! When we reflect that human creatures could look with pleasure on their fellow-beings, writhing under the grasp of ferocious beasts, or inhumanly mangling each other! [...] What brought about the marvellous change? The Son of God descended from the mansions of glory, from the throne of his brightness, to dwell among this degenerate race, to make the light shine in darkness. (p. 114)

As Will Bowers has remarked, journal articles published in the early decades of the nineteenth century employed “the language of disease [...] to describe Italian ideas that needed to be eradicated from the British ‘public mind’”<sup>20</sup> (Bowers 2020: 173). Selina Martin adopts a similar strategy, conceiving the threat posed by Italian contamination through recurring references to malaria and other endemic illnesses, which loom large over the traveller, her relatives, and all the English people she happens to meet in the Peninsula. Before reaching her sister in Rome, at the very onset of her Italian adventure, Martin encounters an Irish family, anxious to leave the country, as every sickly member of their small group had suffered from “mal-aria” during the previous winter (Martin 1828: 44). Interestingly, the prudent and wise decision of returning to one’s cherished motherland (which sounds like a warning to newcomers or prospective tourists) contrasts with the author’s resolution to proceed on her trip for the sake of reuniting with her loved ones. This seemingly inconsequential episode actually foreshadows the conclusion of the account, which ends with the hasty relocation of the writer and (what is left of) her kin back to Ireland.

*Narrative of a Three Years’ Residence in Italy, 1819-1822* is interspersed with detailed records of friends’ and family’s ailments and deaths. Dr. Slaney, Anny’s physician, for example, dies of “mal-aria fever” (p. 61); having contracted tuberculosis, Mrs. O —’s lovely daughter “looks like a shadow which is departing” (p. 189); due to his precarious health, Mr. Owen is suspended “between time

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<sup>20</sup> The scandalous trial of Queen Caroline and her alleged adulterous intercourse with Bartolomeo Bergami provide the context for Bowers’s statement.

and eternity” (p. 190)<sup>21</sup>. The latter is given the chance to survive, by distancing himself from the poisonous and pernicious Italian influence; nevertheless, in one of the few footnotes to the text, the writer informs readers that his second sojourn in the Peninsula had proved fatal to him: “Mr. William Owen recovered sufficiently to go back to his family in Ireland, but went back to Italy, and died at Leghorn” (p. 315). Mr. Owen is spared any overtly disapproving comment on his relapse into error. Conversely, Martin’s criticism is addressed to a “robust young man lately arrived from London” (p. 242), whose foolish craving for entertainment at Carnival – a “time of madness” (p. 145) and moral corruption – had resulted in his untimely demise:

O my friend, what a lesson does this give us. This young man eager in the pursuit of pleasure, probably thought not that his soul should so soon be required of him; in the morning he went forth green like the grass growing up and flourishing; in the evening he was cut down, dried up and withered. O may the living lay these things to heart, while yet there is time given to prepare to meet their God! (p. 343)

The traveller’s lengthy chronicle of Anny’s disease and death (over twenty pages), followed by the passing of Anny’s father, and the illness of both her mother and her two siblings<sup>22</sup>, bear far greater resonance in the narrative if connected with the pressure to convert to Roman Catholicism Martin and her relatives strenuously tried to resist. In several passages, their souls (not just their bodies) are visibly in jeopardy: “there is some idea among these people that we may be converted; for which purpose we have had visits from a number of priests as well as from the bishop” (p. 208). Given her tender age, Anny turns into a supposedly easier target for manipulation: “the Canonico [...] sometimes addresses to our dear little Anny, thinking that her youthful mind might be more easily influenced” (p. 208). Hence, Anny’s strange and lethal disorder (which, however, does not prevent her from reading the Bible and reciting her prayers) is cast as her ultimate attempt to release her soul from vanities and

<sup>21</sup> Several pages in the travelogue are devoted to Mr. Owen’s serious health conditions (pp. 190-95).

<sup>22</sup> Martin reports that, according to Dr. Clarke, her “sister’s life almost depend[ed] upon her leaving Rome, with as much expedition as possible” (p. 286).

corruption, thus marking a definitive victory over temptation and sin. Even on this occasion, therefore, the author aims at discrediting and undermining the formation of an Anglo-Italian identity by depicting her family and British acquaintances as besieged and endangered, tormented in spirit and flesh, just like the first Christian martyrs sacrificed in the Colosseum.

To strengthen this concept further, Martin embarks on a process of *othering* Roman Catholicism by displacing its very origins, which she locates in Roman Paganism and in the superstitious cult of idols and sacred images. In her text, Italy ceases to be the “Parent of our religion!” (IV.xlvii.50), as Byron had defined the country in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. In point of fact, as Devon R. Fisher observes, “to alleviate the pressures caused by a shared history with Rome, the English frequently attribute[d] to the Italians memories of the past that merely extend[ed] the polytheistic thought of ancient Rome” (Fisher 2005: 42). This strategy appears all the more valuable at a time when, as we have seen, Roman Catholics in Britain were battling to participate fully in public life. According to a publication of the Church of England Tract Society (instituted in Bristol in 1811) entitled *The Difference between Protestantism and Popery Briefly Stated*, the first two among the most divisive issues between Protestants and Roman Catholics are the belief in the Pope “as the *supreme head* of Christ's church on earth” (1827: 2) and the worship of the Virgin Mary and the saints. In her travelogue Martin emphasises both discrepancies to consolidate her British (and Protestant) identity against a cultural and religious *Other*. The traveller is offended by the “pomp and show” displayed before her eyes during a mass at the Vatican, as it is “very inconsistent with the religion of the meek and lowly Saviour” (Martin 1828: 126). The Easter Sunday celebration at St. Peter's is a “very splendid” performance, “more like a theatrical representation than an acceptable service in honour of that glorious Being who inhabiteth eternity” (p. 174). In her portrayal of the scene, there is no room for spirituality and authentic faith. Sitting on his magnificently ornamented chair, the Pope is carried in triumph through the aisles of the basilica, as if he were a Roman emperor or the statue of a heathen deity: the elderly man is grotesquely “shaded by weaving peacock's feathers, attended by his guardia nobile, in princely uniform, glittering with gold, their helmets adorned with plumes or feathers” (pp. 174-75).

The remarkable continuity between Paganism and Roman Catholicism is also suggested by the transformation of temples into churches, and the parallel metamorphoses of gods and goddesses into a multiplicity of saints and Our Lady. As Martin meticulously specifies, Ara Coeli used to be the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (p. 117), while the Temple of Vesta, “built in honour of the Sabine women” (p. 116), was later turned into a church dedicated to Mary. Finally, the Pantheon, “the finest and most perfect of the ancient heathen temples” (p. 133), is now consecrated to the Virgin and all saints. The cult of the Madonna del Lauro in Sorrento overlaps with the worship of Diana of the Ephesians, as both are said “to have dropped miraculously from the clouds” (p. 64); and the bronze statue of Jupiter Capitolinus was converted into the venerated effigy of St. Peter, “having undergone no other change than that of the keys, instead of the thunderbolt, in the right hand” (p. 141).

Miracles, too, are contested and reduced to hoaxes previously used by the Romans and still employed in the traveller’s times to manipulate the gullible Italian population. To liquefy St. Januarius’s blood, priests possibly resort to an old trick: “nobody seems to know how the deception is managed, but a liberal Roman Catholic told me that it had been a very ancient one, practised by idolatrous worshippers” (p. 91). The statue of a miraculous Madonna at the Chiesa di Sant’Agostino, in Rome, is covered with votive offerings and precious jewels. What Martin beholds there is like a scene from a traditional Roman festival or ritual, such as the Bacchanalia, oddly translated into the present with the goal of gaining control over credulous believers. Fake miracles, therefore, are implicitly equated to the spectacular shows at the Colosseum, as both serve specific political agendas:

The spacious temple crowded with prostrate worshippers, screaming with agonizing cries and groans before the senseless stone! Never did I see, or hear, any thing which so thrilled through me. We could not bear to remain a moment longer. [...] These practices, we have been told are, for reasons of policy, connived at by government, whenever the minds of the people are disaffected, to give their thoughts a different current. (pp. 256-57)

Martin draws the reader’s attention to the different forms of oppression, closely bordering on persecution, which she and her

compatriots had to endure in order to be faithful to their religious convictions. Even though the expat community had legally rented spacious apartments near the Colonna Trajana to gather believers for a church service, “the Roman government had taken umbrage at the conduct of the English, in so openly having a fixed place of worship” (p. 125). Consequently, they were compelled to meet almost secretly in private habitations (the association with the first Christians in the catacombs is absolutely clear). In the second, slightly enlarged edition of her account, published in Ireland in 1831, *after* the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Act<sup>23</sup>, she bitterly blames “the English and Irish Roman Catholics” residing in Rome<sup>24</sup>, who “did all in their power to have our church service put a stop to” (Martin 1831: 128). The “burying-place for Protestant foreigners” (Martin 1828: 122) near the pyramid of Caius Cestius, where both her niece and brother-in law would eventually find their lasting resting place, is also a major concern to her. Lacking any kind of enclosure to shield “this sacred repository of the dead” (p. 123) from profanation<sup>25</sup>, the cemetery is frequently vandalised. To intensify the reader’s feelings of repulsion and indignation, Martin once more resorts to a Pagan, almost orgiastic imagery to describe the blind fury of the Roman Catholic mob during their festival at Monte Testaccio, “a remnant of the ancient Saturnalia” (p. 123):

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<sup>23</sup> As well as including a new letter (xxxiv) entirely devoted to the portrayal of the beauties of Rome, the second edition of *Narrative* provides the reader with further, more explicit, and harsher examples of “Roman Catholic superstition” (Martin 1831: 290). The following is one of the most provocative and revealing additions: “The ancient gates of Rome were each guarded by the statue of some protecting deity, the right hand of which was worn away by the kisses of every one who passed through. Here again we may remark and compare the Pagan and Papal worshippers. St. Peter’s toe is half gone, and the statues of saints, and madonnas, evince the same impression. In building their churches the Roman Catholics have adhered as much as possible to the forms, and Porticos of the Pagan temples; and in many instances, have adopted their altars and images” (p. 289).

<sup>24</sup> As C.P. Brand pointed out, there was “a remarkable revival of Catholicism [...] in the 1830s and 1840s, when large numbers of Protestants were received into the Roman Church” (Brand 1957: 215).

<sup>25</sup> The very last lines of the travelogue are devoted to this issue, finally solved: “The Author has learnt, since the last sheet was in the press, that the Protestant burying-ground in Rome is now enclosed” (p. 356).

Many of [the tombs] have been broken and defaced with mallets by an unrestrained rabble, who claim merit to themselves in thus evincing their detestation of *heretics*. During the time of their saturnalian festival, elated with wine, they pour down from Monte Testaccio, and conclude the revelry of the day by this sacrilege. (p. 123)

Later in the travelogue, Martin relates another blasphemous attempt at defiling that “sacred spot” (p. 283): Cardinal Consalvi had ordered the removal of all cypress trees, previously planted to provide visitors with solace and shade from the scorching sun. Fortunately, as the traveller informs us, the threatened outrage had been averted.

The final section of Martin’s *Narrative* chronicles the author’s and her family’s return to their country of origin, passing through the cities whose charms had bewitched many Anglo-Italians: Florence, Pisa, Leghorn, Lucca, Ferrara, Venice, Padua, Verona, Milan, to name just a few. In Pisa, she lingers on the existence of a large Protestant community that habitually gathers in the house of a clergyman and known as “Casa Chiesa” or “the Church of the English” (p. 306). Martin takes this opportunity once again to distinguish her right and proper fellow countrymen and women from the degenerate, perverted, and *italianato* Pisan circle. As she clarifies, all British are invited to attend service “and all do very regularly, except Lord Byron and some of his associates” (p. 306). Moreover, she somehow subverts Shelley’s definition of Italy as a “Paradise”, since earthly perfection will be attained once the Italians have abandoned idolatry and converted to the only true faith: “Reformation, with all its train of illumination and blessings, would indeed render this place a terrestrial paradise” (p. 318).

In the final pages, Martin describes her elation at approaching her native island. She also summarises the main reasons that would prompt her compatriots to travel to Italy, only to refute them one by one. To those for whom “economy is the object” (p. 328), she replies by pointing to the huge relocation expenses they would incur; “the advantage which [parents] may give their children by a foreign finish to their education” (p. 328) cannot compensate for the “degradation [...] to become aliens” (p. 329); and those who are affected by chronic ailments will surely find that the benefit of the Italian climate “seldom answers their

expectations" (p. 330). Two direct questions are also posed to the reader: "is it possible to dwell among [the Italians] without catching some contamination?" (p. 329) and, again, "in all the countries which I have seen, where is there one like England? So favoured, so blessed! Why does any one ever wish to leave it?" (p. 355). As already observed, Martin's account seeks to provide some answers to these questions.

Reviewed by *The Christian Guardian and Church of England Magazine* immediately after its publication, *Narrative* was deemed to be "a very interesting and instructive volume" (1828: 152). The anonymous commentator also remarked on its pivotal importance "at the present juncture" (p. 152), thus acknowledging the historical relevance of a text that, at a time of heated religious-political debates, "exhibit[ed] also many instances of the folly, superstition, and idolatry, prevailing at Rome, Naples, &c" (p. 152). Similar comments were also voiced by *The National Magazine and Dublin Literary Gazette* after the publication of the second edition. Though Martin's style was patronisingly labelled "almost childish" (1831: 479), the reviewer favourably emphasised the existing gulf between her work and the output of all the other authors who had (probably too enthusiastically) dealt with Italy: "She is just the traveller, through such a land (*and there are very few others*) whom we would confidently venture to introduce to the notice of our sons and our daughters" (p. 479, emphasis added). An Italophobe and a fervent supporter of political Protestantism, Martin offered quite a different version of the story narrated by liberal Anglo-Italians in those very years. Instead of celebrating the vitalising environment and the cultural openings British tourists could enjoy in the Peninsula, she followed in the steps of those travel authors that, well before the nineteenth century, had warned their fellow nationals against the numerous dangers they would be exposed to, in the land of Catholicism and immorality. As this essay has shown, despite its relative obscurity, her travelogue may cast new light on the relationship between Italy and Britain in the Romantic period, inviting readers and scholars to problematise and re-appraise the question of Italophilia in the first decades of the nineteenth century and, by the same token, to reconsider ideas of an unchallenged fascination for the Italian Peninsula as an intrinsic component of British Romantic-period culture.

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# Leigh Hunt's Green Footsteps from London to Tuscany

*Serena Baiesi*

## *Abstract*

My article aims to initiate a discussion about the benefits to be derived from an intersection of the methods and approaches of geocriticism and ecocriticism in Romantic Studies. Exploring the possibilities of combining these critical methodologies, I aim to discuss the potential advantages of this critical standpoint by throwing new light on Romantic-period representations of Italy as a particularly complex and unstable crucible of issues of nature and nurture, ecosystems and political systems. To this end, this study addresses a lesser-known aspect of Leigh Hunt's aesthetics, one that represents how Romantic-era writers engaged with discourses of the ecosystem, assigning crucial importance to the geographical specificities of the place where they lived. Starting from Hunt's interest in the city of London and the role of the natural world in it, I turn to Hunt's relation with the geo-politics and geo-culture of Italy, and particularly his personal and poetical focus on the Italian surroundings. In his writings, Italy's highly diversified and challenging natural world is enmeshed with the country's complicated cultural, political, and economic contexts. They also typify how ecocritical and geocritical approaches can be made to interact in order to identify new ways of capturing the multifaceted complexity of human-environmental interrelations.

*Key-words:* ecocriticism, geocriticism, Leigh Hunt, green footsteps, Hampstead, Tuscany.

Leigh Hunt was one of the most prolific writers of the Romantic period, best known at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the editor and director of *The Examiner*. After his imprisonment in 1813 following the publication of a seditious article against the Prince Regent, he became widely acclaimed as a radical writer. After he left Surrey Gaol, his literary acquaintances developed into the so-called "Cockney School", which included poets such as John Keats, Percy B. Shelley, and Lord Byron. From 1822 to 1825, he resided in

Italy and was a member of what we have come to call the “Pisan Circle” together with Byron and Shelley. During his long career, Hunt published collections of literary, political, and theatrical essays, was a committed periodical editor, and established fruitful collaborations with several magazines. Nowadays, he is considered not only a leading figure in essay writing, but also an experimental poet, an original dramatist, and a creative translator.

In this article I address a lesser-known aspect of Hunt’s aesthetic, which is representative of how Romantic-era writers engaged with discourses of the ecosystem, assigning crucial importance to the geographical specificities of the place where they lived. After some preliminary remarks on this critical approach, I follow Hunt’s “green” literary footsteps. My focus is on Hunt’s interest in the city of London, and especially the suburb of Hampstead<sup>1</sup>, as I examine how his poems dedicated to this specific area challenge an anthropocentric perspective by highlighting the active role of the natural world in the growth and development of urban spaces. I then turn my attention to the writer’s relationship with the geo-politics and geo-culture of Italy in order to explore how his descriptions of Tuscany (when he lived in the small town of Maiano near Florence) blend his interest in Italian art and culture with his attention to the natural environment. Indeed, it was in Italy that Hunt further developed his green steps, re-affirming from an ecological perspective his consideration of the relations between the external, animated world and the human dimension.

In recent times Romantic scholars have been increasingly interested in the intersection of the methods and approaches offered by geocriticism and ecocriticism<sup>2</sup>. Specifically, following Kate Rigby’s methodology, it has become more and more important

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt moved to Hampstead with his family in October 1812. He found this place “idyllic, comforting, rejuvenating” (Sarkar 2010: 177).

<sup>2</sup> There is abundant scholarly work dedicated to British Romanticism from an ecocritical perspective. Beginning from his analysis of Wordsworth’s naturalism, Jonathan Bate was one of the earliest critics to open up a discussion about Romantic ecology and its relationship to the history of ecological thought back in the 1990s. As for geocriticism, one major reference is Bertrand Westphal, whose pivotal theoretical studies have been recently translated into English. On the intersection between ecocriticism and geocriticism, see Prieto 2011, who outlines several interconnections and areas of overlapping between these critical approaches.

to reconsider how the Romantics approached nature better to comprehend contemporary ecological criticism:

Some aspects of contemporary ecological understanding and sensibility have their roots in this romantic rethinking of nature. On one hand, to return to romanticism from an ecological perspective might thus contribute to an archaeology of contemporary green thought and feeling. On the other hand, to the extent that romantic understandings of nature were suppressed or marginalized for much of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries in favour of a view more conducive to the unlimited economic exploitation and technological transformation of the earth, the ecocritical reevaluation of romanticism might represent a return to the path not taken. (Rigby 2004: 1)

Applying this perspective to early nineteenth-century texts enables us to reconsider how Romantic literature envisages the natural world as a dynamic, active dimension, rather than as a passive object of contemplation:

The shift to an ecocritical perspective entails the recognition that the natural world is not simply a passive object of knowledge and control, a mere resource to be bought and sold or an indifferent screen upon which we project culturally specific and socially overdetermined images of nature. Rather, the natural world is the dynamic enabling condition of all cultural production, which in turn bears the trace of its more than-human genesis. (Rigby 2004: 4)

These theoretical considerations can be complemented by the insights offered by geocriticism (as developed by Bertrand Westphal and others) and its stress on the geographical specificities of engagements with ecosystems, and, more particularly, how such engagements are inextricably tied to notions of geo-politics and geo-culture (the nation, borders and boundaries, economic geographies, north vs south, or the national character):

Drawing on interdisciplinary methods and a diverse range of sources, geocriticism attempts to understand the real and fictional spaces that we inhabit, cross through, imagine, survey, modify, celebrate, disparage, and on and on in an infinite variety. Geocriticism allows us to emphasize the ways that literature interacts with the world, but also to explore how all ways of dealing with the world are somewhat literary. (Tally 2007: x)

As Bryan Moor remarks in *Ecological Literature and the Critique of Anthropocentrism*, the ‘English’ Romantics were “at once focused on external nature but also concerned centrally with human consciousness and individuality” and saw “the natural world and the human relationship to and membership in it” as resulting in an expression of kinship and sympathy for nonhuman nature (Moore 2017: 84-85). In addition, a geocritical reading of Romantic-era texts enables us to reappraise how literature can translate the experience of places into a critique of predominant modes of construction of reality still valid today. If we start from the assumption that the notions of *space* and *place* are constantly shifting (the former encompassing conceptual *space* and the latter factual *place*), then we can rediscover how authors such as William Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith, Lord Byron, Percy B. Shelley, Mary Shelley and Leigh Hunt among many others, represented environments as interconnections of human and non-human spaces, and as combinations of objects as well as feelings, in ways that were inseparable from the political, economic, and cultural forces bearing upon and conditioning such spaces. Also, reprising Henri Lefebvre’s terminology, these spaces may be viewed as intersections of perceived, conceived, and lived spatialities<sup>3</sup>.

Merging ecocritical and geocritical approaches may disclose new features of Romantic-period treatments of the connections between the environment and humans, their identities, activities, and institutions (Yi-fu 2001). This methodology can help us emphasise Romantic representations of the environment as critical narratives (and counter-narratives) about the overlapping and interacting of individuals, human communities and polities, and the environment. In particular, this mixed approach throws new light on Romantic-period representations of Italy as a particularly rich and unstable crucible of issues of nature and nurture, ecosystems and political systems, environment and polities, cultural heritage, and anthropocentric issues.

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Production of Space* (1974), his classic study about the social and historical significance of human spatiality and the powers of the spatial imagination, Henri Lefebvre identifies three types of space and modalities of spatial representation: perceived space, conceived space, and lived space.

More precisely, in Romantic-period literature, the diverse and challenging natural world of Italy is enmeshed with the country's intricate cultural, political, and economic contexts. An ecocritical and geocritical point of view can identify new ways of capturing the multifaceted complexity of Romantic-period representations of human-environmental interrelations, specifically affording new insights into the Romantic writers' engagements with Italian surroundings.

Leigh Hunt reveals his deep involvement and passionate relationship with the external world in several poems and prose writings, especially during the 1820s, when he gave special attention to the natural as well as the urban milieus he inhabited. In the middle of his career Hunt developed what we may call a "botanic" eye for the environment. But, unlike some of his contemporaries such as Robert Bloomfield and John Clare, who based their poems on the privileged interrelation between the human imagination and rural contexts, Hunt was interested in the interconnection between the city and natural life, that is, in what he called "a due easy mixture of country and town" (Hunt 1818: xci).

His delight in London led him to formulate, in Robert Morrison's phrase, "a kind a Wordsworthian urbanism", through which he promoted an ecocritical view of rocks, stones, and trees, and revealed the city as a place richly endowed with unnoticed beauty and the memory of past events (Morrison 2003: xii). Aptly, in his 1818 Epistle "To William Hazlitt", Hunt remarks: "That streets are about us, arts, people, and so on; / In t'other, to value the stillness, the breeze, / And love to see farms, and to get among trees" (Hunt 1818: xci-xcii).

The city of London for Hunt is not merely an urban setting, devastated and polluted by industrialisation, but a vibrant living space enabling fruitful intersections between the human and non-human dimensions. He also praises the advent of technology in the city, which improved human life and increased mobility. In this light, Hunt's poems dedicated to Hampstead and dated 1813-15 have been read from the critical perspective of "New Urbanism", a high-profile, ecologically driven movement in urban planning and design (D'Arcy 2011). Written at precisely the moment when modern suburban development expanded on a significant scale, these texts offer both an illuminating portrait of the origins of suburbia and

pioneering descriptions of the newly created ‘urban village’ which fit in with the agenda promoted by the New Urbanists (D’Arcy 2011: 528)<sup>4</sup>.

Cherishing the conviviality of coffee houses and bookshops in town as well as the open fields of the uptown village, Hunt’s verses pay tribute to both urban and suburban city life, while also privileging the dimension of the countryside. Hunt describes his ideal kind of day in lines addressed to his friend William Hazlitt, where he narrates how he enjoys both spending time in the city looking for books, and his retirement in the suburb to relish in the delights of the evening:

To tell you the truth, I could spend very well  
 Whole mornings in this way ‘twixt here and Pall Mall,  
 And make my gloves’ fingers as black as my hat,  
 In pulling the books up from this stall and that: –  
 Then turning home gently through field and o’er style.  
 Partly reading a purchase, or rhyming the while,  
 Take my dinner (to make a long evening) at two.  
 With a few droppers-in, like my Cousin and you.  
 (Hunt 1818: xcii-xciii)

After spending the evening in happy companionship with family and friends, reading books, playing music, and walking in the valley, Hunt rejoices in the combination of the two elements he most cherishes in life – human company and nature: “Now this I call passing a few devout hours / Becoming a world that has friendships and flowers” (Hunt 1818: xciv).

In his five Hampstead sonnets, Hunt is fascinated by the valuable contribution of trees and animals, such as insects, to human existence in terms of personal health and spiritual peace: “whenever I got in a field, felt my soul in it” (Hunt 1818: xcii). The poet recognises that trees possess the wonderful power to bestow upon human beings tranquillity and happiness. Such natural elements make the suburbs a suitable place for personal and collective improvement, and Hunt depicts the advantages of suburban living with charming simplicity in these lines:

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<sup>4</sup> On the centrality of urban and metropolitan environments in Romantic writing, including Leigh Hunt’s forms of urban explorations, see Gurr 2017.



I would have the most rural of nooks  
 Just near enough town to make use of it's books,  
 And to walk there, whenever I chose to make calls,  
 To look at the ladies, and lounge at the stalls.  
 (Hunt 1818: xcii-xciii)

Hunt experienced and wrote about the suburbs as a location mixing pleasure and leisure, a fact that resonates with D'Arcy's apt definition of the Regency suburban dimension as "the semi-rural home and retreat for the part-time, neighbourhood *flâneur*" (D'Arcy 2011: 540).

Hunt particularly appreciated the quality of life in his "rural nooks" after the two years he spent in Surrey Gaol (1813-15). It was there that he started writing a sequence of sonnets dedicated to his beloved Hampstead, recalling his former life and imagining his future in that idyllic suburban village. From his prison cell, he envisaged it as a place whose healthy air had a healing power capable of neutralising the effects of the polluted city beset with smoke and squalor. It is no random fact, therefore, that the word "health" recurs frequently in his Hampstead poems as a condition of balance dependent on the place in which one lives; and the term is often employed in relation to a suburban ecological context, as in the following example:

Tis true, I do live in a vale, at my will,  
 With sward to my gateway, and trees on the hill:  
 My health too gets on; and now autumn is nigh,  
 The sun has come back, and there's really blue sky,  
 (Hunt 1818: cxi)

From an ecological perspective, the sonnets Hunt wrote from jail are framed by his outdoor memories of his direct experience of Hampstead's natural spaces. Therefore, Hunt's poetry throws into relief the interdependence of the human self and the natural world, as in these lines from "To Hampstead. Written during the Author's Imprisonment" (August 1813):

Sweet upland, to whose walks, with fond repair,  
 Out of thy western slope I took my rise  
 Day after day, and on these feverish eyes  
 Met the moist fingers of the bathing air; –

If health, unearn'd of thee, I may not share,  
 Keep it, I pray thee, where my memory lies,  
 In thy green lanes, brown dells, and breezy skies,  
 Till I return, and find thee doubly fair.  
 Wait then my coming, on that lightsome land,  
 Health, and the joy that out of nature springs,  
 And Freedom's air-blown locks; – but stay with me,  
 Friendship, frank entering with the cordial hand,  
 And Honour, and the Muse with growing wings,  
 And Love Domestic, smiling equably.  
 (Hunt 1860: 232-33)

This description matches the definition of “organic environment” that refers to the conception of a living context, perceived and poetically framed to include a complementary relationship between the social and cultural dimensions. The poem reveals the deep-lying connection between space and place – what Westphal defines as “meaningful space in the constitution of the place” (Westphal 2007: 5) – containing the human habitat and natural world. Hampstead's structures such as roads and houses are here perceived as inseparable from the green spaces, the ecological benefits of which can improve the physiological health of the inhabitants and the entire social body of the village.

The organic features of the place emerge also in Hunt's sonnet “Description of Hampstead”, where his green footsteps are mingled with nature and its various manifestations:

A steeple issuing from a leafy rise,  
 With farmy fields in front, and sloping green,  
 Dear Hampstead, is thy southern face serene,  
 Silently smiling on approaching eyes.  
 Within, thine ever-shifting looks surprise,  
 Streets, hills, and dells, trees overhead now seen,  
 Now down below, with smoking roofs between,  
 A village, revelling in varieties.  
 Then northward what a range, with heath and pond,  
 Nature's own ground; woods that let mansions through,  
 And cottag'd vales with pillowy fields beyond,  
 And clump of darkening pines, and prospects blue,  
 And that clear path through all, where daily meet  
 Cool cheeks, and brilliant eyes, and morn-elastic feet.  
 (Hunt 1818: cxv-cxvi)

Hunt's interest in the variety of natural life in connection to suburbia conjures up a sort of "urban leisure" to be cherished as the cultural memory of a village community (D'Arcy 2011: 543); while the "urban ecopoetic" of these lines captures the sense of ease the writer experiences in moving between his country cottage at Hampstead and city life in London. Crucially, this perception and construction of place appears to be reinforced in the works Hunt produced after he moved from Hampstead to Tuscany. The new Italian setting, both rural and urban, became the focus of his attention, so that a new set of geo-political and geo-cultural issues became entwined with his green footsteps.

Hunt and his large family arrived in Genoa on June 15, 1822, moving to Leghorn on July 1. Immediately fascinated by the beauty of the Italian landscape and language, he started tracing in his journal a geo-cultural map of his new country, one that reveals interesting implications from an ecological perspective. After the death of his close friend Percy B. Shelley on July 8, 1822, Hunt left Pisa for Albaro, near Genoa, where Byron and Mary Shelley also resided. Four issues of the periodical *The Liberal*, which Hunt had planned together with Shelley and Byron, were published during these years. However, in July 1823, Byron left Italy for Greece, Mary Shelley set off for England and, in September, the Hunts relocated to Maiano, near Florence, where they remained until their return to England two years later, in September 1825.

Despite the initial enthusiasm, these years of residence in Italy were difficult for Hunt. Even so, they resulted in some of his best writings. During his stay in Tuscany, he completed several essays, translated Francesco Redi's *Bacchus in Tuscany*, and wrote intimate recollections of his Italian life in letters and diaries<sup>5</sup>. Years later he reworked these experiences into his *Autobiography* (1850). As a result, we can draw on several descriptions of Hunt's green experience abroad. These writings can feel conflicted and even contradictory owing to the mixture of elation and astonishment that the sunny country of art and literature inspired. The cultural and artistic background of the Italian scene is constantly present in Hunt's narration, thus marking a new development in his green

<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of Hunt's relations to Italy and Italian culture, see Baiesi 2021.

aesthetic influenced by the new geo-cultural and geo-political surroundings. Most importantly, Italian geography is perceived and mediated in Hunt's writings through a constant parallel with the English landscape.

In his *Autobiography* Hunt relates his daily life abroad with a matter-of-fact tone, and combines his many complaints about adjusting to his new life in Italy with longer comments on Italian politics, society, culture, and art. But the natural world is the first element he employs to gauge his feelings about the country: "To me, Italy had a certain hard taste in the mouth", he said on his arrival in Tuscany, where "its mountains were too bare, its outlines too sharp, its lanes too stony, its voices too loud, its long summer too dusty" (Hunt 1850: III, 120). Hunt's homesickness is exemplified by the comparison between the hard Italian soil and the flourishing land of England: "I longed to bathe myself in the grassy balm of my native fields" (p. 120). Especially, as a lover of nature, he laments the lack of variety in trees on Italian land missing the possibility to walk freely in open fields:

I missed my old trees – oaks and elms. Tuscany, in point of wood, is nothing but olive-ground and vineyard [...] Then there are no meadows, no proper green lanes (at least, I saw none), no paths leading over field and style, no hay-fields in June, nothing of that luxurious combination of green and russet, of grass, wild flowers, and woods, over which a lover of Nature can stroll for hours with a foot as fresh as the stag's; unvexed with chalk, dust, and an eternal public path; and able to lie down, if he will, and sleep in clover. (p. 120).

Nonetheless, Hunt acknowledges that his personal feelings, financial troubles, and health problems ("I was ill, unhappy, in a perpetual low fever", p. 121) are affecting his perspective and relation to his new natural setting. Indeed, Hunt's negative attitude towards the Italian landscape changes gradually during his frequent walks from Maiano to Florence, when he reproduces his erstwhile daily routine of rambling from Hampstead to the city of London. But, in Italy, during his excursions into the green, his perception of the natural background is inextricable from reflections on the country's outstanding literary tradition, producing a unique experience that is invigorating and inspiring for his body and soul alike.

In Maiano, everything reminds Hunt of Dante and Boccaccio, and the area around Fiesole and Florence inspires him to write the essay entitled “The Valley of Ladies” and published in the *Wishing-Cap Papers* (1824-25), where the tone of his treatment of Tuscan nature differs visibly from the bitterness and dissatisfaction in his *Autobiography*. Inspired by Boccaccio, who set some of his stories for *Decameron* there, this enchanting vale surrounded by luxuriant nature acquires a double meaning. It is simultaneously a geographical location Hunt visits during his residence in Maiano and a literary place he has already visited through Boccaccio. Thus, in the essay dedicated to this dreamlike valley in the hills between Fiesole and Florence, Hunt describes the exceptional relationship between the human and non-human inhabitants inspired by first-hand as well as literary experience.

In “The Valley of Ladies” nature is enveloped in a magical atmosphere of green and blue colours, which Hunt consistently associated with Italy in his writings. Having overcome a period of struggles and difficulties, the writer confesses that it is now time to enjoy the beauties offered by the Tuscan countryside:

As the spring advanced here in Tuscany, and the leaves all came out, and the vines rose like magic, and day after day the green below was contrasted with a blue southern sky overhead, I began, modestly speaking, to be reconciled to the beauties of Italy. I was wrong when I said there were no trees in this neighborhood except olives. (Hunt 1873: 97-98)

Everything seems “like so much fairy-work”, marvellously exuberant. The place is unique because of its trees and fields, and yet Hunt compares it with familiar scenes of English greenery: “The beautiful grass, which remains all the year round in England, gives a sort of perpetual summer to the earth” and “the very green of the vines had in it something of England” (p. 98).

As in Hampstead years before, in Maiano Hunt enjoys walking in the company of a book: “I put vigor in my steps, and my Orlando Innamorato in my pocket” (p. 98). With good health and classic literature, Hunt is ready to live the magic of his natural and literary experience, fancying himself “at once abroad and at home in the sunny-bowered Valley of Ladies” (p. 98). The Tuscan valley is both an enchanted literary place (“a spot celebrated in the sixth

and seventh books of the Decameron” p. 98) and a geographical location that Hunt maps with cartographic precision: “It lies at the foot of one of the Fiesolan hills, about two miles from Florence, commencing at the path leading up to Maiano, and terminating under the Convent of the Doccia” (pp. 98-99).

Hunt’s description of the valley shifts between what he knows from Bocaccio, and what he sees at the present time. His green footpath is thus based on the re-discovery of a literary past “in the time of Bocaccio” through the experience of an actual geography of rivers, trees, and meadows, one of which stands out as a “positive English meadow, – with the hay cut, and adorned with English trees” (p. 100). On the one hand, this is a land modified through time and by human intervention, where a river, a lane, a lake, or a building can appear and disappear like magic: “as if it were a fairy thing, of which a money-getting age was unworthy” (p. 100). On the other, though, human beings have altered the landscape for economic reasons, and paths have been “closed up from the passenger by private grounds”, as in Britain after the passing of the 1773 Enclosure Act. Everywhere in the essay Hunt enmeshes natural elements of the present with features from the past, as well as personal and literary recollections, creating a multifaceted aesthetic/ecological experience exemplified by the following description: “A white convent, a woody valley, chestnuts trees intensely green, a sky intensely blue, a stream which it is a pleasure to stop and drink, – behold a subject fit for a day in August!” (p. 100).

To be sure, Hunt recognises that his idealised portrait of the valley is a literary invention – something between a realistic natural account and the evocation of a dream-like past. He conjures up the intensely ‘romantic’ atmosphere conveyed by walking across the “Valley of the Ladies” thus: “Being somewhat of a knight-errant myself, I rest in another part of the shade, looking down upon him of the red cross, and, with the help of my book, conjuring up a thousand visions” (p. 102). In doing so, he invites the reader to join him and share his natural vision, which is also a profoundly ecological experience:

I wish to England in my Wishing-Cap, and fetch the reader to enjoy the place with me. How do you like this? Is it not a glen most glenicular? A confronting of the two leafy banks, with a rivulet between? Shouldn’t you

like to live in the house over the way, where the doves are? If you walk a little way to the left, through the chestnut trees, you see Florence. (pp. 102-3)

In the conclusion, Hunt renews his invitation to the reader to join him on his exploration of the green lanes of Tuscany:

Come, let us whisk ourselves back again. There is nothing like it. I pitch myself into one of those old green lanes of which I am so fond, and invite any bachelor that pleases to come and see me. I think there is a cottage in the neighbourhood that will suit him. (p. 105)

In the same collection, the following essay is entitled “Love and the Country” and the narrator is recalling an imaginary journey from Tuscany to England. In the opening sentence, Hunt encourages the reader to explore “a large, low cottage, smoking among the trees, with its back to a couple of green hills that shelter it from the north and east” (p. 106). Thus, once again, he delineates a topography associated with the healing powers of the countryside, where human beings and nature exist in a condition of harmony and mutual respect and benefit: “Everything is neat: Everything is quiet. Listen to the bees! What meadows go down there to the plain! What rich trees are about us, – elms, oaks, and beeches [...] By heavens! This is better than Tuscany” (p. 106).

As we have seen, Hunt's eco-poetics of Tuscany can take widely different directions. In the *Autobiography*, he voices his dislike for the monotony of Italian hills, whereas, in “The Valley of Ladies” he draws inspiration from the Italian literary tradition to conjure up the enchantingly oneiric atmosphere of that Florentine location. A mid-way approach between these two examples can be found in the letters he wrote during his years in Tuscany and addressed to his beloved sister-in-law Betsy back in London. In these epistles, he portrays his Tuscan surroundings from a new, and almost reconciled, viewpoint. He points out the luxuriant features of the land and confirms his enjoyment in walking as a way of immersing himself completely in nature: “The corn is as high as my chin, as I walk through it. The poppies and other wild-flowers are in excessive condition: and the vines and fig-trees all robust and insolent” (Hunt 1862: I, 220). Hunt also writes to her about the “The Valley of

Ladies”, since he admits that he has moved away from his earliest impressions, and that he has “been modest enough to become more reconciled to the beauties of Tuscany” (p. 220).

The bitterness conveyed by his autobiographical account is replaced by a peaceful revaluation of the Tuscan countryside. Such reconciliation has been made possible by his direct contact with nature during his long and frequent walks. Even so, and perhaps inevitably, Hunt’s visions of Tuscany repeatedly hark back to his beloved home in Hampstead, where he feels he truly belongs: “To say the truth, the neighbourhood became more leafy and English than I had looked for. At the foot of our hill, there is even a meadow, – a meadow of real grass, with the hay newly cut, and a clump of trees on one side, that reminded me of the beautiful meadows near Shepherd’s Field at Hampstead” (Hunt 1862: I, 220).

Such numerous and divergent responses to the natural world in London and Tuscany rely upon the power of his imagination in accordance with a distinctly Romantic-period poetics and aesthetics of place. In addition, however, Hunt offers a geopolitically and geoculturally contextualised representation of the environment by mixing descriptions of landscapes ‘out there’ with personal and intimate experiences, which may be read in light of Robert Tally’s reflections on place:

After all, a *place* is only a place because of the ways in which we, individually and collectively, organize space in such a way as to mark the topos as special, to set it apart from the spaces surrounding and infusing it. Our understanding of a particular place is determined by our personal experiences with it, but also by our reading about others’ experiences, by our point of view, including our biases and our wishful thinking. (Tally 2007: x)

Hunt’s relationship with Italy and its environment emerges repeatedly in his works as a sometimes puzzling and conflicting but also crucial connection – a bond based on mutual respect and shared improvement between human and non-human components. And especially his prose writings on the Italian landscape constitute what Bryan Moore terms “an aesthetic statement for simplicity”, which at the same time functions “ethically and as a counter to anthropocentrism” (Moore 2017: 86).



To return to Hunt's green footsteps and the traces he left on the landscapes of Italy and England, we may cast one final glance at trees, which, as seen above, play a central role in his narratives. In a review of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Hunt extols them as crucial points of connection between humankind, the environment of which it is a part, and the spiritual dimension of human beings:

Every one should plant a tree. It is one of the cheapest, as well as easiest, of all tasks: and if a man cannot reckon upon enjoying the shade much himself (which is the reason why trees are not planted everywhere), it is surely worth while to bequeath so pleasant and useful a memorial of himself to others. They are the green footsteps of our existence, which show that we have not lived in vain. "Dig a well, plant a tree, write a book, and go to heaven", says the Arabian proverb. We cannot exactly dig a well. The parish authorities would not employ us. Besides, wells are not so much wanted in England as in Arabia, nor books either; otherwise we should be two-thirds on our road to heaven already. But trees are wanted, and ought to be wished for, almost everywhere; especially amidst the hard brick and mortar of towns; so that we may claim at least one-third of the way, having planted more than one tree in our time. (Hunt 1840: II, 33-34)

As, during his life, Hunt's ecological perspective moved from England to Italy and back, this complex process expanded his conception of the interrelation between the human and non-human, opening up new insights into processes of personal and collective growth and reinforcing his awareness of the need to cultivate and treasure that vitally important connection.

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# “Nature never disappoints”: Conversations between the Human and the Other-than-Human in Lady Morgan’s *Italy*

*Gioia Angeletti*

## *Abstract*

The article proposes a reading of the composite travel book *Italy* (1821) by Lady Morgan (*née* Sydney Owenson), from a theoretical perspective intersecting the methods of environmental studies, ecocriticism, and geocriticism. After presenting the travelogue as a text characterised by a place-oriented aesthetics showing how Italian geography is everywhere enmeshed with its multi-layered cultural and political context, the article highlights the ways in which *Italy* challenges anthropocentrism by depicting the material world as an agent in its own right. Throughout *Italy*, the author’s interiority relates to exteriority in ways that suggest her full awareness of a world that is independent of her imagination. At the same time, however, by representing an Italian natural environment as a geo-cultural ecosystem inscribed with signs of human history, Morgan acknowledges the multiple impact that culture can have on nature. Sometimes, compromises are reached between the laws of nature and the interests of humankind; on other occasions, the exploitative actions of humankind on the environment produce so-called “wastecenic” scenarios, which call for what ecological thinkers would nowadays define as environmental justice. In this case, Morgan’s assemblage of the human and nonhuman becomes a vehicle for her socio-political critique, which distinguishes *Italy* from other Romantic-period women’s travel books on the *Bel Paese*.

*Key-words:* Lady Morgan, *Italy*, ecocriticism, geocriticism, travel, nature, environment.

## **Introduction: palimpsestic spaces and places in *Italy***

In their edited collection *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism*, Robert Tally and Christine M. Battista argue that geocritical and ecocritical methodologies and approaches share a “concern for the manner in which spaces and places are perceived, represented, and ultimately used” (Tally and Battista 2016: 2). Thus they “can be brought into

productive relation, offering new ways of seeing literature, ecology, and geography, as well as the world that necessarily subsumes and contains them” (p. 4). Reading Lady Morgan’s *Italy* through such an intertwining of the theoretical tools offered by environmental studies, ecocriticism, and geocriticism requires first an appraisal of the peculiar place-oriented aesthetics characterising this generically composite work<sup>1</sup>. Its underpinning structural principle is a complex dynamic combining the material history of Italy with the author’s subjective experience of Italian spaces and places, or the country’s commonly accepted cultural geography with the visitor’s own mental apprehension of its human and natural components.

My use of “place” and “space” is indebted to Yi-Fun Tuan’s conceptualisations, according to which the former is “security”, rootedness, situatedness, and closure, whereas the latter is “freedom”, expansiveness, possibility, and openness (Tuan 1977: 3). However, these terms are only apparent opposites, because both refer to the human experience of being in and interacting with the environment, and “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value”: thus, “the ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition” (p. 6). They are constantly shifting according to the subject’s experiential perspective, combined with the historical and cultural significance of places and spaces, or with so-called *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989): that is, sites and objects in a community’s memorial heritage composing its “actual” as well as “symbolic” landscape (Bainbridge 2020: 23).

In *Italy* a sense of local specificity intersects with the writer’s transcultural outlook<sup>2</sup> and political ideology, so that, contrary to more conventional figurations concerning the *Bel Paese* in previous or contemporary travelogues<sup>3</sup>, Morgan’s vision is never typically

<sup>1</sup> On the generic variety of *Italy* see Abbate Badin 2006.

<sup>2</sup> By “transcultural” I mean the ways in which, in Morgan’s vision, Italy is often a mirror image of Ireland, owing to the two countries’ rising nationalism and aspirations to independence from foreign rule. Thus, Italy for her becomes a locus onto which she can project her own ideas and desires, or into which she can displace her nationalist and progressive ideas about Ireland. See Abbate Badin and Fantaccini 2011.

<sup>3</sup> From the earliest accounts of the Grand Tour (e.g. Richard Lassels’ *An Italian Voyage*, 1670), through the eighteenth-century prototypical travelogue *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* by Joseph Addison (1705), to Joseph Forsyth’s *Remarks on*

museological or purely picturesque. Instead, it constitutes a space in which, to borrow Jonathan Bate’s words, “culture and environment are held together in a complex and delicate web” (Bate 2000: 23). As my examples will illustrate, Morgan enables her readers to encounter the stratified geography of Italy, where *topos*, *locus*, and the environment intersect in a way that sees as suspicious the utter confidence in the superiority of the human mind over the nonhuman (or other-than-human)<sup>4</sup>, thus recognising the agency of the latter.

Writing about travel writing between 1768 and 1840, Paul Smethurst observes

In romantic travel writing, topographical description is extended into subjective relations between landscape and the mind. This brings the space of nature into the realm of psychic space, where it is connected with the traveller’s mental fabrication of the natural world. The emphasis on interiority, especially in encounters with the natural sublime, contrasts with the empiricism of museum order and the distancing and framing of the picturesque. [...] A subjective and highly metaphorical nature is certainly a turn away from empiricism, yet it is more anthropocentric in the sense that nature becomes the mirror of the human mind. (Smethurst 2012: 153)

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*Antiquities, Arts, and Letters, during an Excursion in Italy in the Years 1802 and 1803* (1813) and John Chetwode Eustace’s *A Classical Tour through Italy* (1813), travellers’ interest in Italy is mainly archaeological, literary and artistic, with a focus on its classical or Renaissance past, rather than on the present history and politics of the country (see also my later references to Mariana Starke and Hester Lynch Piozzi). There were exceptions, of course, such as Tobias Smollett’s scathing remarks on Italian manners and customs in *Tour through France and Italy* (1766), and Dr John Moore’s *A View of Society and Manners in Italy* (1781), which marks a “phase of aesthetic revision in which an emotionally charged style was developed alongside former, more detached approaches” (Saglia 2002: 17). Morgan testifies to this transition in her idiosyncratic way, by combining objective data with subjective and sentimental responses to natural beauty, and, above all, by passionately engaging with the historical and political realities of Italy.

<sup>4</sup> Though I am aware of the slightly different semantic nuances between them, in this article I use the two phrases as interchangeable to refer to all components of the natural or urban environment except for humankind. In ecological and ecocritical discourses, a third expression is often used to encompass the other two, one that was first used by American ecologist and philosopher David Abram in his work *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (1996). The coinage of “more-than-human” responds to an attempt to overcome the hierarchical order underlying the human *vs* non-human dichotomy and to emphasise the entwining of all species within any ecosystem.

Without denying that Morgan's Italian locodescriptions may represent her interiority, it is my contention that the nature or, more broadly, the environment she depicts cannot be reduced to mirrors of her mental processes, let alone some geo-cultural difference onto which she may project her own thoughts, emotions, and fabrications. Throughout *Italy*, the author's interior world relates to the outer one in ways which suggest her full awareness of the difference between them: the awareness, that is, that her lived experience of the physical and material realm exists beyond any attempt she might make to internalise it. Be that experience natural, urban or an interweaving of the two, *Italy* registers Morgan's recognition of the interconnectedness, or interdependency, between the human and the other-than-human.

Morgan's acknowledgement of the natural world as an agentic dynamic dimension is clearly stated in the following remarks:

Whoever has wandered far and seen much, has learned to distrust the promises of books; and (in respect of the most splendid efforts of human labour) must have often felt how far the unworn expectation starts beyond its possible accomplishment. But *nature never disappoints. Neither the memory nor the imagination of authorship can go beyond the fact she dictates, or the image she presents.* If general feelings can be measured by individual impressions, Italy, with all her treasures of art and associations of history, has nothing to exhibit, that strikes the traveller like the Alps which meet his view on his ascent to the summit of Mount Genis, or of the Simplon. (Morgan 1821: I, 38, emphasis added)

In Morgan's view, nature in all its physicality and materiality dictates "the fact" or presents "the image" to the imagination, in contrast to the philosophical idea that our mind creates the world we perceive by way of a selection and re-elaboration of the outer reality based on our convictions and *visio mundi*. Almost echoing Friedrich Schlegel who, in *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800)<sup>5</sup>, states that human *poiesis* is an outgrowth of "earth's poesy", she reappraises the prerogatives of man's creative power in shaping

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<sup>5</sup> On Schlegel as a forerunner of biosemiotics, see Rigby 2016. Given the influence of the German critic and philosopher on British Romantic aesthetics and thought, one may assume Morgan was familiar with his treatise, even though I have not found any clear evidence of this in her writings.



the material world through words and sees that world as endowed with self-agency.

In *Italy* this earth's poesy is heterogeneous and changeable. Sometimes, it reveals the possibility of a balanced conversation between the human and the other-than-human, projecting the image of a well-functioning ecosystem in which nature and culture are dialectical rather than dichotomous. At other times, however, the poesy of non-human nature is negatively affected by its imbrications with the human, producing a clash that usually becomes a vehicle for the author's social and political critique. The diversity characterising Lady Morgan's representation of human-nonhuman conversations also depends on the fact that she wrote *Italy* to accomplish several purposes, apart from satisfying the taste of contemporary audiences for picturesque travel accounts, Grand-Tour routes, or sublime topographies. In general, as Jonathan Raban has argued, travelogues have “an omnivorous appetite for writing of all kinds” (Raban 1988: 253), so they are marked by a generic heterogeneity that responds both to the author's intentions and the readers' expectations. *Italy* is paradigmatic in this respect, since it interweaves the different discourses of literature, history, journalism, documentary evidence, geo-politics, ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and aesthetics – all of which convey the complexity of Morgan's engagement with the palimpsestic places and spaces she visits in Italy, as their layers of material and cultural history combine with her actual experience and contingent perception.

Morgan travelled across Italy with her husband between 1819 and 1820, during a period of great turmoil in Italy – just after the re-opening of frontiers following the fall of Napoleon and just before the breaking out of the 1820-21 uprisings of the early Risorgimento. They visited the Kingdom of Sardinia, Lombardy and Veneto under Habsburg rule, the Vatican states, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. They stayed for long periods in Milan, Como, Rome, Naples, and Venice. As is well known, she did not go to Italy as a Grand Tourist, subsequently writing about her experience; instead, she was commissioned by the publisher Henry Colburn to write a book on Italy in the wake of the popularity – albeit controversial – she had obtained with the publication of *France* (1817). As a professional writer, she was fully aware that she was going to contribute to one of the most widely read genres of

the time, and that she could not overlook the requirements of its literary market. At the same time, though, she made no secret of the specifically political agenda she had in mind, which she made plain in *Passages from my Autobiography*, where she admits that her aim was “aiding the great cause, the regeneration of Italy” (Morgan 1859: I, 131).

Following in the footsteps of Mary Wollstonecraft’s pioneering *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), Morgan trod on slippery ground for a woman of her time, when political and social issues were the preserve of male authors. That said, because of its “explorative and liminal nature”, Romantic-period travel writing allowed women “to consider topics political in nature (such as national manners or governments) while simultaneously drawing on traditionally feminine modes and genres of writing” (Casaliggi and Fermanis 2016: 63). Less preoccupied with propriety than Hester Lynch Piozzi in *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) or Mariana Starke in *Letters from Italy* (1800), in *Italy* Morgan often oversteps the boundaries of her sex by shifting the focus from the beauties of Italian art, landscape, and culture to the country’s past and present fragmented history and politics, without concealing her republican ideals, as well as the radical ideology she shared with the liberal intellectual coteries of the time, including the Pisan circle of British expatriates. As with the Shelleys, Byron, and Leigh Hunt, she was kept under strict surveillance, and elicited vitriolic judgements in the contemporary press, so much so that, despite its success all around Europe, *Italy* was banned in the Papal states and the Austrian Empire.

Moreover, if we read the text through an eco/geo-critical approach – one that foregrounds how Morgan’s natural geography of Italy is inextricable from its magmatic and fragmented cultural and political context –, we realise that, contrary to many travel writers of the time, she avoids “the overtly autobiographical forms of journals, diaries, or letters” (Bohls and Duncan 2008: xxiv). More than her personal reports on what she visits and sees, it is the Italian spaces and places themselves, as palimpsests of nature and culture, that provide her with the basic organising principle of her narrative. This is clearly reflected in the chapters’ titles, almost all of them bearing the names of regions or cities, except for the “Historic Sketches” in the opening chapter of

volume I and III. Of those spaces and places – human, natural, urban, cultural, material, and folkloric – she especially highlights the vibrant life, as the following passage shows:

[...] to describe *indescribable* things, is not the business of the present volume. Catalogues abound in the Italian tours, where the number of national objects is so great, as to make selection a necessary, but a difficult effort. In this department little remains for the future traveller to glean; but living, moving, breathing, Italy, offers the richest harvest to the moralist and the politician, that Europe can afford. (Morgan 1821: I, 214, italics in the original)

Throughout *Italy*, Morgan not only “[sees] in landscape a historical *drapeau*” (O’Brien 2002: 178), but also distances herself from conventional travelogues or guidebooks by conveying a sense of place based on her empirical approach to the country’s multi-layered geo-cultural, political, and natural contexts. *Italy*, as it were, demonstrates “the situated nature of experience” (Gilroy 2000: 4), that is, the chronotopic coordinates with which one should engage when reading travel literature.

### **The vibrant matter of Italy: anti-anthropocentric visions**

Less a museum of classical monuments and natural sublimities than a “[l]iving, moving, breathing entity”, Italy in Morgan’s account stands as a vibrant assemblage of human and nonhuman elements. Its vitality is at once attuned to the Romantic holistic vision of life and open to contemporary ecological theories, such as Jane Bennett’s notion of “vitality” as “the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only [to] impede or block the will and designs of humans but also [to act] as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennett 2010: viii). In other words, human and non-human entities take part in the material as well as cultural evolutionary processes of the environment, in which the former have no absolute priority or hegemonic power. This is a challenge to anthropocentric visions and Cartesian mind-matter essentialist dualism – a challenge, I argue, that Morgan takes up in some sections of *Italy*.

An example of this kind of “human and nonhuman webs of interrelation” (Buell 2005: 138) and anti-anthropocentrism can be

found in the passage describing Morgan's ascent and descent by carriage of the pass of Mont Cenis, the standard route for travelling from Lyon in France to Turin. She regards this Alpine landscape as the most striking view that Italy, "with all her treasures of art, and associations of history", can offer a traveller (Morgan 1821: I, 38). She notes as well that, although this mountainous area had been described by previous travellers as awful and terrifying, her ascent has been smoother than expected thanks to the presence of a new Napoleonic road built in 1802, a fact that exemplifies human ability, under certain circumstances, to control an apparently inaccessible nature. But the descent is less pleasant, and that same road becomes winding, precipitous, and "suspended for fathoms down, terrace beneath terrace" (p. 43). Faced with this difficulty, she comments,

That is a moment in which the imagination feels the real poverty of its resources, the narrow limits of its range. An aspect of the material world then presents itself, which genius, even in its highest exaltation, must leave to original creation, as unimitated and inimitable. There, [...] where all is so safe, conscious security is no proof against "horrible imaginings"; and those splendid evidences of the science and industry of man, which rise at every step, recede before the terrible possibilities with which they mingle, and which may render the utmost precaution of talent and philanthropy unavailable. (pp. 38-39)

This is the passage in which Morgan asserts that "nature never disappoints", almost echoing these lines in "Tintern Abbey": "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (ll. 122-23). Yet, the implication of her statement differs from that of Wordsworth's, since she claims that nature exceeds human capability of expressing and reproducing those "horrible imaginings". This quotation from *Macbeth* (I.iii.138) provides a literary context to the inexpressible terror of the natural sublime, "unimitated and inimitable" in the sense that human language cannot grasp it. For Morgan, imagination and creative genius, however powerful they may be, reveal the "poverty of [their] resources" in the face of an ineffable material world that overwhelms them. There is no denying that the powerful force exerted by natural objects on the observing subject, combined with their capacity to provoke in the perceiver physical *and* emotional reactions proportionate to their immensity, is a defining component of the aesthetics of the Romantic sublime, at least according to

Edmund Burke’s theorisation. However, Morgan’s emphasis on the agency of the “material world” independently of any kind of human intervention (whether intellectual or practical) acquires particular relevance in relation to anti-anthropocentric discourse. Indeed, just as the human imagination cannot contain the uncontrollable power of nature, so, she suggests, human enterprises (“the science and industry of man”) appear ineffectual and are humbled by the superiority of the other-than-human dimension.

In addition, if we consider how, in *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant shifted the focus of the conceptualisation of the sublime from the object to the subject, by defining the sublime as a theory of the mind itself in the process of perception and registering a rational as well as emotional experience, Morgan’s insistence on the material essence of natural phenomena – and how they may annihilate human prerogatives and faculties – becomes even more relevant from an ecological perspective. “For Kant”, writes Louise Wrestling, “the Sublime was a response to the vast powers of the natural world that elevated the imagination to a rational understanding of infinity, which dwarfs nature” (Wrestling 2014: 3). Kant’s sublime “connotes human autonomy with reference to nature”, even a “superiority of nature” which is at the basis of the subject’s self-determination (Kitson 2019: 5, 7). For Morgan, instead, in a place such as Mont Cenis,

[...] experience teaches the falsity of the trite maxim, that the mind becomes elevated by the contemplation of nature and engenders thoughts “that wander through eternity”. The mind in such scenes is not raised. It is stricken back upon its own insignificance. Masses like these sublime deformities, starting out of the ordinary proportions of nature, in their contemplation reduce man to what he is – an atom. (p. 39)

Interestingly, after appropriating another authoritative literary source to serve her own purpose (*Paradise Lost* II.148), Morgan calls attention to the fact that, far from being always a motherly agent, sacred, pure, and a refuge of spiritual salvation against the corruption of the man-made modern world, nature can be inimical, dangerous, and an immense power that one would rather flee than immerse oneself in. Her implied argument seems to defy the eco-fundamentalist thought that the natural environment becomes

hostile only because of human beings' violent impact on it. In this light, Morgan points to a mode of appraising the relationship between the human and nonhuman, which is alternative to what Timothy Morton sees as a weakness of much environmental criticism: the fact that it too often endorses modes of regressive fantasy in "putting something called Nature on a pedestal" (Morton 2007: 5), and regarding it as a transcendental principle rather than physical and material reality. A more genuinely ecological insight should resist such essentialist ideas and acknowledge nature as an agent, capricious, dark, capable of destruction, and outside human control or calculation. Such recognition is a turn away from Enlightenment humanism, and involves both the decentring of the human and a reconsideration of the nonhuman elements of the world. In the passage quoted above, Morgan's anti-anthropocentric posture is confirmed by her acknowledging the "insignificance" of the human mind in the contemplation of the oxymoronic "sublime deformities" that reduce the human to an atom – ultimately, the same substance as matter.

In scenes such as those described by Morgan, human beings should show modesty, as Arne Næss, the Norwegian philosopher who coined the term "deep ecology", would allege. For Næss modesty meant "a way of understanding ourselves as part of nature in a wide sense of the term", so that "the smaller we come to feel ourselves compared to the mountain, the nearer we come to participating its greatness" (Næss 1979: 13-16). Yet modesty also helps to develop a healthy sense of awe allowing humans to acknowledge that "science and industry" – such as the roads, bridges, and tunnels in mountainous regions – cannot always conquer nature, whose "elementary convulsions", Morgan writes, "sweep away whatever lives and breathes, in the general wreck of inanimate matter" (Morgan 1821: I, 39). Mountain areas can be "[e]ngines and agents of the destructive elements that rage around them"; they are vibrant matter "fitted only to raise the storm, and to launch the avalanche, to cherish the whirlwind, and attract the bolt [...]; at once the wreck and the monument of changes, which scoff at human record, and trace in characters that admit no controversy the fallacy of calculations and the vanity of systems (pp. 39-40). The "flood of ruin" in P.B. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (l. 107) or the destructive principle personified by Arimanes in Byron's *Manfred*

may resonate with these images, but a distinctive and particularly striking aspect of Morgan’s description is her downscaling of humankind’s centrality in the universe, and thus her underlying critique of human presumption and self-aggrandising attitudes.

*Italy* provides several instances of biocentric as opposed to anthropocentric points of view, which evoke an environmental ethics encouraging an anti-hierarchical rethinking of the human/nonhuman relationship. Another remarkable instance occurs in volume III, in the passage dedicated to the ascent of Vesuvius at night. Comparing the fires of the volcano to the moon, Morgan comments: “like herself a splendid mystery of creation – a part of some eternal law, some inscrutable necessity, which man – the atom! – dreams were made for him!” (Morgan 1821: III, 151). At the same time, though, Naples and its environs offer a unique picture of conversations between the human and other-than-human, a “mesh” of nature and culture (Morton 2010), whose epitome is the image of the city that “[takes] her perilous position on the brink of destruction, reposing her luxurious villas on the edge of a crater, and raising her proud towers on the shifting surface of an eternally active volcano” (p. 153). Apparently “Nature performs her greatest operations with all her rude materials round [Naples], within the view of man”; but, despite its powerful vibrancy, its “vigour and activity [...], a feverish vitality that consumes while it brightens” (pp. 153-54), it has allowed space for the human presence. “The products of old eruptions [...] pass, like dark and turbid torrents, through the vineyards” (p. 166) and

Every where the ruins of time and man are mingled with the fragments of an over-wrought creation [...]; the amphitheatres of Augustus and Pompey, the villa of Cicero, and the altars of Caligula, identified by prostrated masses of sculptured marbles, lie scattered amidst the extinct volcanoes of Pozzuoli. In the environs of Naples there lies subject matter for the antiquary, the painter, the naturalist, and the philosopher! (pp. 154-55)

In Romantic-period writing, the geography of Italy, with its multilayering of historical, literary, artistic, and natural materials, often provides what geocritical analyses define as a multiple focalisation of gazes on a given referential space (Collot 2014: 188). Morgan’s own representation of Italy is just such a diverse assemblage,

characterised now by a convergence and now a divergence of human and nonhuman elements. Sometimes, as in the case of Naples and its surroundings, the concurrence of the two suggests the possibility of a productive, albeit precarious, cooperation.

### **Human-nonhuman eco-friendly conversations**

After realising that the power of the Alps and their sublimity are imponderable, Morgan leaves their distressing effect behind and decides instead to concentrate on the efforts of those “bold spirits” who managed to brave them and

whose unaccommodated natures, [...] braved dangers in countless forms [...]; who climbing where the eagle had not soared, nor the chamois dared to spring, raised the shout of national independence amidst echoes which had never reverberated, save to the howl of the wolf, or the thunder of the avalanche. Gratitude as eternal as the snows of Mount Blanc to them or him, who [...] pierced the granite and spanned the torrent, disputing with nature in all her potency her right to separate man from man, and “made straight in the desert an highway” for progressive civilization! (Morgan 1821: I, 40)

Unlike the previous passage concerning the Alpine landscape, these words shift our attention from natural to human energies, both to fight “invading enemies” – possibly a reference to Napoleon’s attack on Austrian hegemony in Italy or to Swiss victories over similar oppressors – and to “[dispute] with nature in all her potency” and challenge those impenetrable regions. Indeed, later in her account, she refers to “the art of road-making” as “[ranking] high in the means of civilization” (p. 41). This extract seemingly clashes with Morgan’s earlier emphasis on the insuperable power of nature and man’s limited abilities, but the fact is that *Italy* is, among other things, a political text in which the author never misses a chance to defend the contemporary rise of nationalism and libertarian ideals in Europe, thus reprising her support of the 1798 independence movement in Ireland. By associating the mastery of humankind over nature with anti-despotic heroism, she points to two crucially interlaced themes in her travelogue: on the one hand, the spirit of liberty that Italy, like her own Ireland, “can breathe [...] beneath the lash of despotism” (Morgan 1807: 48); on the other, the inscription of Italy’s



human history in its natural environment, forming a polymorphous geo-cultural ecosystem where landscape is shaped by human action and, conversely, nonhuman agents have an impact on the anthropic dimension.

Appropriating a line from Isaiah 40:3, Morgan’s reference to “progressive civilization” in the passage quoted above prompts further ecocritical reflections. At times, Morgan regards the achievements of humanity as a sort of humanised sublime that can be integrated in the natural sublime. Donatella Abbate Badin goes so far as to affirm that “the real sublime in the awful and terrific scenery of the Alps is, to her, the challenge represented by the road Napoleon had built to cross them” (Badin 2007: 204), and, one may add, by the post-houses and “maisons de refuge” (Morgan 1821: I, 37) built to offer shelter against blizzards or avalanches. Interestingly, Badin notes that “Morgan’s social consciousness [...] is often in contrast with her romantic sensibility” and when “the interests of the community prevail”, she proves that “they give aesthetic value to what is useful” (Badin 2007: 209). One could rephrase this statement and say that her “ecological sensibility” does not prevent her from envisaging the possibility of a pact, or a “natural contract”, to adapt French philosopher Michel Serres’s concept (*Le Contrat naturel* 1990), between humanity and nature – what nowadays would be defined as eco-sustainable<sup>6</sup> compromises between the laws of nature and humankind’s economic pursuits, against an inappropriate and uncontrolled use of natural resources destroying the harmony and reciprocity in our relationship with the earth.

Morgan adumbrates the possibility of such ecological negotiations between the human and nonhuman in other parts of *Italy*, too. For instance, in Chapter XIV of the second volume, she describes the countryside near Bologna as an urbanised pastoral environment where culture and nature are enmeshed in ways that produce both aesthetic and ethical balance. Accordingly, she regards the Bolognese State as one characterised by a “perpetual prosperity”,

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<sup>6</sup> The scholar B. A. Lenart has used the expression “wholesome” or “enlightened anthropocentrism” to refer to the concrete and productive compromising between the needs of human beings and the respect of the environment, an approach that “grants objective value to ecosystems while grounding the conditions of such value in the human desire to survive, human love of nature, etc.” (Lenart 2020: 116).

as is clearly conveyed in the following ekphrastic reproduction of an imaginary painting:

As we approached Bologna, the vintage was in all its splendid activity; every step was a picture – the sky was Claude’s – the foliage was Poussin’s – the groupings were Teniers’. Those gloomy and ruinous buildings in which the peasantry herd in Italy, even in the beautiful Milanese, were here replaced by cottages of English neatness, environed by more than English abundance; and gardens of natural fertility, vineyards dressed like flower-knots, and a population the most joyous and active, gave assurances of that *equal distribution* of the gifts of Providence, which best “Justifies the ways of God to Man” (Pope.) (Morgan 1821: II, 3, emphasis added)

Picturesque aesthetics is here deployed to represent what appears as a balanced ecosystem, where the well-being of the community is ensured by an “equal distribution” of resources; and, in order to enhance the social repercussion of such forms of environmental justice, Morgan characteristically resorts to the authority of literary examples.

A further visually striking passage testifying to the achievability of a harmonious conversation between the human and the other-than-human occurs when Morgan describes her descent of the Bocchetta pass in the Apennines to reach Genoa:

We descended the heights of the Bocchetta in one of those golden showers of sunshine so peculiar to the autumnal mid-day of Italy. “GENOA THE SUPERB”, surrounding the semicircular sweep of its beautiful port, appeared in full relief; palaces rising in amphitheatres against those abrupt dark cliffs, which seem to spring from the shore, and are crowned on their extreme summits by forts and towers, mingled with high-poised casinos and pending villas. In the front of these home features of ports and palaces, spreads, blue and boundless, the Mediterranean. (Morgan 1821: I, 386)

Similarly, when she approaches Florence, she describes a “Podere”, a Tuscan villa nestled amidst vineyards in the Arno valley, which “bursts full upon the gaze in all its loveliness and luxury of scene”; and she is struck by the “picturesque chimnies of Florence, peering through woods and vales [...] and filling the imagination with endless anticipation” (I, 66). Notwithstanding Badin’s observation that “Morgan is an urban animal” (Badin 2007: 201), feeling more

at home in cities than in rural or natural spaces, a striking feature of her pictures of Italy is how she often mixes different discourses – aesthetic, historical, cultural, mythical, social, and political –, making conscious or unconscious use of a multifaceted language that proves the inextricable bond of the natural environment with the country’s complicated geo-cultural and geo-political contexts.

### ***Wasteocene* visions and environmental justice**

Morgan’s narrative of such imbrications of the life of human communities, historical memory, and material locality sometimes assumes a different tone from that of the examples seen so far. The fertility and harmony in human/nonhuman conversations that she recognises in some parts of Italy are countered by images of waste and desolation mostly associated with eco-unfriendly human interventions. Since her commentary in such cases is never separated from social and political critique, in this section I will make use of the evocative term “Wasteocene”, coined by the environmental historian Marco Armiero as one of “the creative alternatives to the Anthropocene” to refer to “a narrative linking waste, justice, and the making of our present world” (Armiero 2021: 1). As Armiero explains

The Wasteocene assumes that waste can be considered the planetary mark of our new epoch. However, this is not solely because of its ubiquitous presence – [...] – rather, I argue that what makes the Wasteocene are the wasting relationships, those really planetary in their scope, which produce wasted people and places. (p. 2)

Parts of Morgan’s narrative in *Italy* singularly foreshadow contemporary socio-ecological debates on wasted ecosystems and the wasting exploitation of subaltern human and more-than-human communities, in opposition to “commoning relationships” that “produce wellbeing through care and inclusion” (p. 3).

The *incipit* of *Italy* provides an illustrative example. The volume opens with a section of “Historic Sketches”, where Morgan combines documentary evidence with her own observations to highlight the productive links between the past and present state of the country. Indeed, she begins from a telling contrast between

a lost idyllic past and the current situation: “The fables of antiquity have assigned to the Peninsula of Italy a golden age; and history [...] has peopled its Eden plains with confederated tribes; and has covered regions with numerous flocks and plenteous harvests, where desolation now reigns over pestilential marshes” (Morgan 1821: I, 1). Interestingly, in order to give a technical explanation of this desolation, she adds a footnote referencing the historian Giuseppe Micali’s *L’Italia avanti il dominio dei Romani* (*Italy before Roman Rule*, 1810): “In un clima caldo l’irrigazione è la naturale nutrice dell’agricoltura: ma questo prezioso dono non può ottenersi senza permanenti lavori e continue difese, la cui negligenza produce oggidì in quelle medesime provincie, in cambio di felicità, l’insalubrità e la miseria” (p. 2)<sup>7</sup>. Later in the volume, it becomes clear that the “pestilential marshes” affect the dreary Northern plains, the Lombard plain, and the Po Valley, and that Morgan’s concern is for the poor who cannot benefit from modern agricultural methods, which in fact produce long-term devastating effects. In the language of contemporary ecological thought and sustainable development, such counterbalancing of the risks and benefits from the exploitation of natural resources, especially as regards marginalised and disadvantaged communities, is at the basis of the concept of environmental justice and the related issue of the (in)equitable distribution of wealth (Schlosberg 2007).

*Italy* prefigures this aspect of environmentalist politics where Morgan describes her journey on the road from Susa to Turin:

The road from Susa to Turin, [...], lies through a fertile plain, bathed by La Piccola Dora, and occasionally undulated with abrupt hills and high perpendicular rocks. [...] Vines draped round sturdy oaks, groves of mulberries, and fields of young, rich, ripening corn, every where contrast the resources of natural and national prosperity, with exhibitions of moral suffering and human infirmity. It is in these laughing vales that beggary assumes its most disgusting form, and that want and penury are not the least evils the wretched have to contend with. (I, 57-58)

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<sup>7</sup> “In a hot climate, irrigation is the natural nourisher of agriculture: but this precious gift cannot be obtained without constant labour and continuous defence, the neglect of which today produces, in those same provinces, unhealthiness and misery instead of happiness” (my translation).

This time Morgan deploys picturesque discourse to denounce the environmental injustice visible in those beautiful “laughing vales” atrociously clashing with the monstrous image of beggary and the penury affecting the wretched of the earth. Similar sociological observations are triggered by the sight of a group of women peasants in Umbria, while she is travelling from Tuscany to Rome. Morgan remarks that nature is “still the same, bountiful and beautiful!”, but notices “a visible change in the physiognomy of the people”, compared to “the Tuscan freshness, as well as the Tuscan competency” (II, 293). This is one of those occasions in which Italian foreignness is domesticated and affinities between the Italians and the Irish are spotlighted, so as to articulate her nationalist politics and passionate denunciation of class inequality:

A few haggard looking women were performing the field-labours of men; – the men (and there were but few visible) were loitering listlessly, muffled to their chins in dark and ragged mantles; – and both so closely resembled the Irish peasantry, in form, expression, and all the exterior of poverty and wretchedness, that Irish eyes might well weep in gazing on them; and Irish hearts might feel, that human misery, seen where it may, has a constant type in the home of their affections. (II, 293)

Morgan is appalled by the irreconcilable contrast between the aesthetic and the ethic, between the beauty and fertility of nature and the misery of some people. Similarly, when she discovers the environmental neglect in certain urban areas, she reacts with a disgust that reveals her ecological awareness, conjuring up a different wasteogenic scenario, which however also implies a harsh judgement against the carelessness of human beings towards their own *oikos*<sup>8</sup>. Thus, in the following passage she emphatically condemns the Romans’ lack of respect for the city’s natural and cultural environment:

A Roman palace, of the first order, is a vast and massive edifice [...]. [P]onderous portals, with a *porte-cocker*, open into the square *cortile*, round which the palace rises [...]. The *cortile* is frequently the repository of accumulated filth; and even the vast, open, and marble stairs [...] are,

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<sup>8</sup> “House” in Greek and root of the term ecology, or *Ökologie*, coined by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel in 1866.

with a few exceptions, never-faillingly as disgusting to the eye, as they are offensive to the smell – all is *immondezzaio*! and from the anti-room to the attic, the term is equally applicable. (II, 408-09)

In actual fact, the image of the rubbish dump recurs three times in Chapter XIX, dedicated to Rome. The first occurrence is when, describing the Pantheon, Morgan contrasts an ancient inscription (“M. Agrippa L. F. Cos. Tertium fecit”) with the modern one which says “*Immondezzaio*” and “appears at the corners and by-places of the Roman streets, and signifies a spot where dirt may lawfully be left till called for” (p. 345). As usual, Morgan complements this factual detail with her own commentary: “Rome herself seems now the *immondezzaio* of that world, of which she was once the mistress” (p. 354). This caustic statement means more than it says, conveying Morgan’s republican antagonism to any form of despotism, be it the Austrian, Bourbon or Papal rule<sup>9</sup>, all of which she regards as regressive and tyrannical if compared to the Napoleonic rule over Italy. Indeed, the third time she makes use of the term, this political innuendo turns into an explicit remonstrance.

The author presents the Teatro Argentina as exemplary of “the nastiness of the Roman habits and manners more forcibly than volumes could describe”, and adds

It is in this *immondezzaio* that one is taught to feel how closely purity in externals is connected with virtue in morals, and to know that slaves, surrounded by all that the Arts can bestow, are not more removed from mere brutal animality than when crouching under the rudest and most barbarous despotism. Cleanliness and accommodation have not only gained ground in France since the Revolution, but have spread their influence in some degree over the countries where the French have remained stationary; but these effects are less visible in Rome, than in any other state that has submitted to their arms. (II, 444)

In these and countless other ways, Morgan’s *Italy* shows how the human and more-than-human form complex assemblages, in which

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<sup>9</sup> Sydney Owenson’s father was a former Catholic but raised by an anti-Popist mother and educated in a Huguenot school. Though supporting Catholic emancipation, she was a non-believer and fiercely critical of Catholicism both in Ireland and in Italy.

the picturesqueness and sublimity of Italian arts and nature are sometimes intermixed with what she defines as the “picturesque of dreariness” (II, 281) or the “picturesque of desolation and discomfort” (II, 318).

### Final Remarks

In *Nature’s Economy* (1977), Donald Worster pointed to a prefiguring aspect of Romanticism that would be later acknowledged as a crucial feature by critics of Romantic-period literature and culture, as well as by ecologists and naturalists:

[A]t the very core of [the] Romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is, a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth. (Worster 1994: 82)

Since then, from Jonathan Bate’s ground-breaking *Romantic Ecology* (1991) to Kate Rigby’s *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization* (2020), a large number of articles, essays, and volumes have contributed to delineating an area of research variously defined as Romantic ecocriticism, green Romanticism or, more inventively, Enviromanticism<sup>10</sup>. In other words, the field of study inaugurated by Bate is hugely fertile and irrepressibly burgeoning.

However, an investigation of Romantic-period engagements with ecosystems from a critical perspective that intersects the methods and approaches of geo-criticism and eco-criticism still offers opportunities for the exploration of the intermeshing of physical, material, and cultural geographies as represented in British literature of the long eighteenth century. In particular,

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<sup>10</sup> Considerable work in the field has been carried out by, among others, Karl Kroeber, James C. McKusick, Dewey W. Hall, Kevin Hutchings, Onno Oerlemans, Greg Garrard, Dana Phillips, Timothy Morton, David Higgins, Fiona Stafford, Susan Oliver, and Ashton Nichols. Moreover, special issues devoted to the topic have been published by *The Wordsworth Circle*, *Studies in Romanticism*, and *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*. On “enviromanticism” see Pinkerton 1997.

this combined approach is especially fruitful when applied to British writers' complex figurations of Italy in the turbulent years following the French Revolution and Waterloo and leading to the early Risorgimento. It is my contention that Lady Morgan's *Italy* is a paradigmatic work in this context, since it presents a country that was beginning to develop a sense of national community despite its fractured history and geography, and the socio-political degradation of some regional areas. As I have shown in this essay, Morgan's travelogue recurrently calls attention not only to how culture is always embedded in material reality, or human history is inextricably interlaced with natural history, but also to how national identity is determined by the complex ways in which nature and culture are inextricably bound up with each other.

Thanks to Morgan's sustained promotion of an ecological viewpoint, *Italy* challenges anthropocentric assumptions about the world, recognises the agency of the more-than-human, and invites readers to recognise their own ability, and duty, to create a better ecosystem through specific choices and actions that are essentially political. As has been stated, the earth is a "political body" (Iovino 2018: 9), a collective of human and nonhuman agents and processes resulting from cooperative dynamics of which Morgan shows awareness in her work. Indeed, she endows *Italy* with a pervasive political subtext that she specifically locates in the local features of landscape and urban spaces, where a variety of intersections and conversations between the human and the more-than-human significantly foreshadow our contemporary environmental concerns.

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*Please submit:*

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- an abstract (12-14 lines), which should come before the main text.

2. *Style*

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- use font 11;
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- use footnotes, not endnotes; they should be used only when strictly necessary for explanatory purposes and be as brief as possible;
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- use font size 9;
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c) *Quotations in the text*

Short quotations (2-3 lines) should run on in the main text; use rounded double quotation marks (“ ”).

Longer quotations should have a line space before and after the quotation; do not use quotation marks; use font size 10; quotations should be full line with no indenting left or right. E.g.:

said of English speakers:

we are more apt to make a grasping gesture when we speak of grasping an elusive idea than when we speak of grasping a door knob. (Whorf 1956: 157)

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quoted passages. E.g.: “the so-called ‘campus novel’”.

d) *Citation in the main text*

The sequence should be author’s surname, space, year, colon, space, page number; use ‘f’ or ‘ff’ to indicate subsequent pages, as follows:

- one author: (Buxton 1967: 59ff) or .... Buxton (1967: 59ff);
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- Says Murphie, “magic had always been [...] as well” (Murphy 2006: 114). [...] He goes on to argue [...] (p. 114).

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IMPORTANT! graphs should be black and white and submit in Word, RTF or Excel.

Graphs, line drawings, photographs and the like should be labelled as “Figures” and numbered consecutively. A brief description of the figure is to be added above it. Information presented in rows and columns should be labelled as “Tables” and numbered consecutively, with text ranged left and numbers ranged on the last figure as follows:

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TABLE 1

This is the caption for Table 1

<i>Verb types</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>
Auxiliary verbs	131
Modal verbs	25
Other verbs	3

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*f) Examples and lists*

All examples should be numbered progressively. Items in lists should be numbered or be introduced by a), b), c) etc. or i), ii), iii).

*g) Acknowledgements and appendices*

Permission acknowledgements should go in a footnote at the beginning of the article.

Other acknowledgements and appendices should go at the end of the main text before the References section.

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Check that all citations in the main text have a reference.

List references alphabetically at the end of the article.

Format references in accordance with the examples below; please pay attention to the following:

- single author or editor: surname followed by a comma followed by full first name;
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- use (ed.) for singular, (eds) for plural; vol. for singular and vols for plural;
- when referencing online publications, please include the most recent access date as follows: <http://...>, last accessed May 12, 2011.
- when you are quoting publications by University Presses please use U.P. (Manchester U.P., but for ex. the abbreviation of Oxford University Press usually used is O.U.P.)
- if there are two towns (as in John Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia) please unite them with a hyphen, not with “and” or other solutions.

#### *i) Books*

VAN DIJK, TEUN A., 1993, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park (CA).

CHOULIARAKI, LILIE and FAIRCLOUGH, NORMAN, 1999, *Discourse in Late Modernity*, Edinburgh U.P., Edinburgh.

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HOLDSWORTH, ROGER V., [1990] 1991, *Three Jacobean Revenge Tragedies*, Macmillan, London.

#### *ii) Articles in books*

SCHLEIERMACHER, FRIEDRICH, “Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens”, 1813, Italian trans. “Sui diversi modi del tradurre”, by G. Moretto, in G. Moretto (ed.), *Etica ed ermeneutica*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1985, pp. 85-120, and in S. Nergard (ed.), *La teoria della traduzione nella storia*, Bompiani, Milano, 1993, pp. 143-79.

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iii) *Articles in journals*

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iv) *Films, video, TV series, movies*

Information and data to be provided and order: *film title* (in italics), Dir. (followed by a full stop), production and distribution company, country, year. For TV series or series in general, "episode title/season" in rounded letters between double quotation marks, *series title* in italics; episode writer/screenwriter should be listed as well as the director.

Examples:

- (L')*Auberge Rouge*, Dir. Jean Epstein. Pathé-Consortium-Cinéma, France, 1923.
- Borderline*, Dir. Kenneth Macpherson. The Pool Group, Great Britain, 1930.
- Thaïs*, Dir. Anton Giulio Bragaglia. Novissima Film, Italy, 1917.
- Voyage dans la lune*, Dir. Georges Méliès. Star Film, France, 1905.
- Scooby-Doo and the Witch's Ghost*. Dir. Jim Stenstrum. Warner Brothers Animation, USA, 1999.
- Scooby-Doo! Legend of the Phantosaur*. Dir. Etan Spaulding. Warner Brothers Animation, USA, 2011.
- "Asylum". *Supernatural*. Dir. Guy Bee. Writer Richard Hatem. Season 1, Episode 10, 2005.
- "The French Mistake". *Supernatural*. Dir. Charles Beeson. Writer Ben Edlund. Season 6, Episode 15, 2011.





