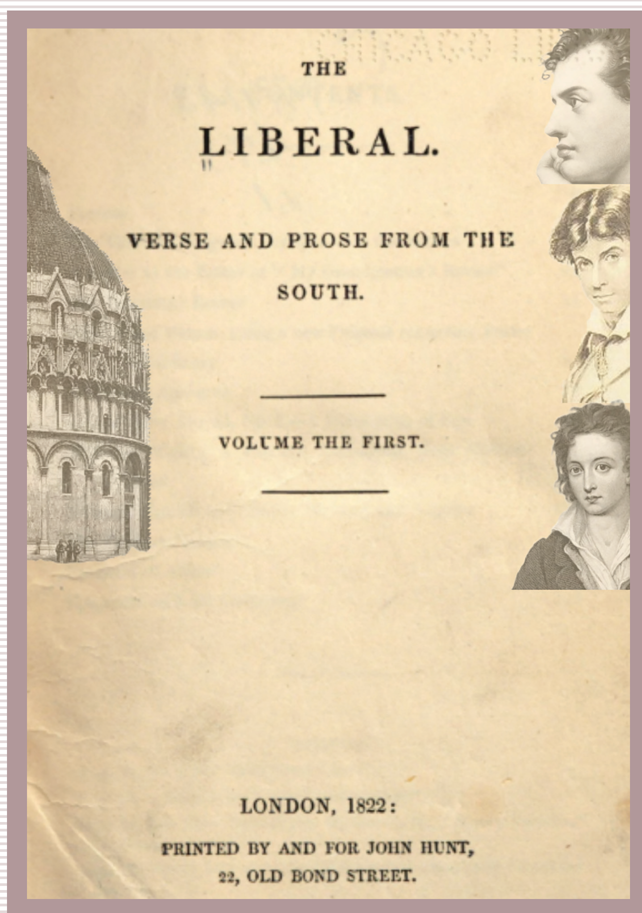
Romantic Studies. Theories and Practices

03

LILLA MARIA CRISAFULLI / SERENA BAIESI / CARLOTTA FARESE (EDS.)

IMPRINTING ANGLO-ITALIAN RELATIONS IN *THE LIBERAL*


THE

LIBERAL.

VERSE AND PROSE FROM THE SOUTH.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

LONDON, 1822:

PRINTED BY AND FOR JOHN HUNT,
22, OLD BOND STREET.

PETER LANG

Romantic Studies. Theories and Practices

03

When the first issue of *The Liberal* was published on 10 October 1822, the periodical was largely dismissed by the British press as a political project conceived by well-known and controversial figures (L. Hunt, P.B. Shelley, Lord Byron, W. Hazlitt, and Mary Shelley). They were all members of the so-called "Pisan circle", an Anglo-Italian community of liberal writers aspiring to cultural and social reform. Even though *The Liberal* was addressed to an English public, it was entirely conceived in Italy, a country which had become a symbolic as well as a geographical space, playing a crucial role in defining the journal's aims and themes. This collection of essays examines the short and difficult life of the periodical, reassessing its cultural politics, its relationship to Italy, the controversial British reception, and its relevance to Romantic (and indeed contemporary) debates on Liberalism.

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Imprinting Anglo-Italian Relations in *The Liberal*

ROMANTIC STUDIES

Theories and Practices

Edited by Serena Baiesi and Lilla Maria Crisafulli

VOLUME 3

PETER LANG

Lausanne - Berlin - Bruxelles - Chennai - New York - Oxford

Lilla Maria Crisafulli / Serena Baiesi /
Carlotta Farese (eds.)

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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

This book was published with the financial assistance of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the University of Bologna.

The cover illustration was designed by the interns of CISR, Inter-University Centre for the Study of Romanticism (https://site.unibo.it/cisr/it):
Giulia Manenti, Elisa Rosolani, Francesca Zanellato.

ISSN 2504-1924 • ISBN 978-3-0343-4669-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-0343-4866-9 (E-PDF) • ISBN 978-3-0343-4867-6 (EPUB)
DOI 10.3726/b21636

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Elena Spandri / Fabio Liberto / Franca Dellarosa / Gioia Angeletti /
Maria Schoina / Timothy Webb 2023.
Published by Peter Lang Group AG, Lausanne, Suisse

info@peterlang.comhttp:// www.peterlang.com/

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Serena Baiesi and Carlotta Farese

Preface: Imprinting Anglo-Italian Relations in *The Liberal*

When the first issue of *The Liberal* was published on 10 October 1822, the periodical faced a very hostile reception and became the overnight foe of the conservative British press, which foresaw – and indeed wished for – the imminent cessation of its circulation. The publication was mainly considered by its critics as a suspicious political project, especially because the three founders of the journal, namely Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt, were all well-known and controversial figures, members of the so-called 'Pisan circle', a community of liberal writers who advocated cultural and social reform. Even though *The Liberal* was addressed to a British readership, it was conceived entirely in Italy, a country that played a crucial role in the definition of the journal's aims and themes, thus becoming a symbolic as well as a geographical space where a new vision of society and a new understanding of the role of literature within society could be born and developed.

The journal was indeed short lived: the last issue appeared in July 1823, just nine months after the first. This unfortunate outcome was largely perceived as the result of both the unwarranted hostility of its adversaries and the inherent weakness of the project. The judgement of a sympathetic reader such as John Galt, Lord Byron's biographer, might be considered exemplary in this respect: "The Liberal […] disappointed not merely literary men in general, but even the most special admirers of the talents of the contributors. […] But the main cause of the failure was the antipathy formed and fostered against it before it appeared. It was cried down, and it must be acknowledged that it did not much deserve a better fate".[1] The uproar caused by its publication was followed by a

1 John Galt, *The Life of Lord Byron* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 270–271.

long period of semi-oblivion in which the journal was hastily dismissed by many scholars as an ambitious but experimental literary project that was doomed to fail from the outset for political and cultural reasons. In 1960, William H. Marshall published a ground-breaking monograph dedicated entirely to *The Liberal*: its history, context and contributors. In his seminal study, Marshall insisted that the journal's literary achievement, despite some undeniable shortcomings, was not to be dismissed as a literary failure but, on the contrary, he argued that more scrutiny was due in order to better understand the cultural project conceived by its authors.[2] Marshall's pioneering work has been followed in more recent years by other scholars, who have engaged with *The Liberal* consistently and far from dismissively, providing insightful discussions of its most significant literary and political features.[3]

The specially commissioned essays featured in this volume pursue the same line of enquiry and investigate *The Liberal* from several critical and contextual perspectives: from the problematic conception of such a periodical and its short and difficult life to its relationship with the Italian environment, and its reception by the British public then and now. They will also offer analyses of some of the main contributions

2 William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 212–213.

3 Caroline Franklin, "Cosmopolitanism and Catholic Culture: Byron, Italian Poetry, and *The Liberal*", in *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, ed. Laura Bandiera and Diego Saglia (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2005), 255–268; Jonathan Gross, "Byron and *The Liberal*: Periodical as Political Posture", *Philological Quarterly, Fall*, 72, no. 4 (1993), 471–485; Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment", *European Romantic Review*, 19, no. 4 (2008), 307–320; Nikki Hessell, "Elegiac Wonder and Intertextuality in the *Liberal*", *Romanticism*, 18, no. 3 (2012), 239–249; Maria Schoina, "Byron and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment", *Literaria Pragensia* 23, no. 46 (Dec. 2013), 23–37; Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians': Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23", in *Branch: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (Web: https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal); Lisa Vargo, "Writing for The Liberal", in *Mary Shelley: Her Circle and Her Contemporaries*, ed. L. Adam Mekler and Lucy Morrison (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 131–149.

to the journal and the role of Italian culture and art in relation to the English politics of the time. The contentious nineteenth century reception of the periodical will be taken as the starting point for a broader discussion on the Romantic understanding of Liberalism and how it might be relevant to contemporary political journalism.

The volume opens with an introduction by Lilla Maria Crisafulli providing a detailed survey of the Italian context that framed the publication of *The Liberal*. Italian history, its political tensions, its literature of the present and of the past greatly influenced the vision and the content of the periodical, conceived in Italy but printed and circulated in Britain. Crisafulli carries out a comprehensive exploration of the debate surrounding the Italian political unrest and the dense cultural exchange of English and European travellers with Italian intellectuals and academics testified by the important translations of Italian classics, such as Vittorio Alfieri's poetry and Luigi Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*. The famous Pisan Circle, formed by the Shelleys, Byron and Hunt, belonged to a transnational entourage gathering Italian and European intellectuals. Within this circle, the role played by the likes of Francesco Pacchiani, Giovanni Rosini, Andrea Vaccà, and the literary salons animated by Sophie Caudeiron, M.me Beaucler and Elena Mastiani cannot be overlooked and must be considered an essential aspect of the lively cultural environment with which the English Romantics associated in Pisa during the 1820s. The fruitful exchange between English and European culture thus developed inspired and stimulated the literary and political ideals transfused in *The Liberal*.

After Crisafulli's introduction to the volume with its wide-ranging contextual reconstruction, Franca Della Rosa's essay opens a series of contributions dedicated to specific themes and features of the journal. It provides an analysis of the ways in which its adversaries weaponised the perceived "Cockney" imprint of the journal in their reaction to the first issue in 1822. Relying on recent scholarship that has highlighted the ambitious radical political agenda underlying the Hunt-Byron-Shelley editorial enterprise, Della Rosa focuses on the changing semantics of the notions of *liberal/liberalism* in relation to an expanding international debate. She questions the inflections in the use of the term both in the periodical – particularly in Leigh Hunt's 'Preface' – and in related literature, including a group of pamphlets produced in 1822 in response

to its appearance: *A Critique on* The Liberal, *The Illiberal! Verse and Prose from the North* and *The London Liberal*. While *The Illiberal!* published an acrid review of the journal in the form of a short dramatic piece attributed to William Gifford epitomizing the hostility *The Liberal* had to face in its short lifespan, the *Blackwood's Magazine* (12: 1822) launched a most vicious attack on Hunt's story "The Florentine Lovers", providing an ideal case study of the virulence of the criticism levelled against Hunt and his friends. Such a scathing assault targeted Hunt's jovial celebration of love as a new, alleged abuse of the Italian literary tradition on the part of the author of *The Story of Rimini*, who on this occasion had reworked an Italian source, from Marco Lastri's *L'osservatore fiorentino*. The article's conclusion, in a crescendo of bigotry and class prejudice, questions the right of the "Cockney" author to treat the theme of love and passion that should be the preserve of noblemen and chastises him as "an unauthorized, uncredentialed, and unwarranted intruder" who had the presumption of putting his "Cockney feet" upon a "ground" – the ground of high culture and love literature – that he is not entitled to access due to its lowly social extraction.

In the following contribution, Lilla Maria Crisafulli explores the political and philosophical features of a transnational publication such as *The Liberal* and the special role played by Shelley in shaping such a challenging initiative. Discussing the reception of the journal in the hostile English press and the implications of its title, Crisafulli focuses on *The Liberal*'s relationship with the Italian political and cultural background, discussing the journal's significance as an instrument of transcultural dialogue and the ideological (as well as symbolical) dichotomy between the 'South' and the 'North', as outlined in the periodical's subtitle: *Verse and Prose from the South*. An in-depth analysis of the inner dynamics of the activity of the "Triumvirate" formed by the three co-founders follows, where Crisafulli offers innovative insights into the individual contributions of Shelley, Byron and Hunt, and the ways in which the journal reflects the different principles, ideals and personalities of each of them. The final section of this dense essay is dedicated to Shelley's leading role in steering and shaping the project until his death, just before the publication of the first issue in 1822.

The role played by Leigh Hunt in the genesis of *The Liberal* is investigated by Serena Baiesi, who tracks Hunt's preceding and

subsequent editorial activity. In fact, well before embarking on his travels throughout Italy, the radical editor and writer had become extremely competent in navigating the publishing market, thanks to his successful editorship of *The Examiner*, *The Reflector* and *The Indicator* – amongst the most renowned periodicals of the time. After providing a comprehensive overview of Hunt's long-lasting editorial career – with specific reference to each of the periodicals that he edited and to which he contributed – Baiesi's chapter discusses his role in *The Liberal*, his contribution to it, and his responsibility for its brief success – as well as its cessation.

Leigh Hunt's role is also at the centre of Timothy Webb's essay, which draws attention to the "Letters from Abroad" included in each volume of the journal. Together, the four letters amount to 80 pages and constitute a significant contribution to our understanding of the attitude of Protestant English travellers in Northern Italy in the 1820s. Certain features of the letters, Webb argues, are worth observing in some detail especially because Hunt's writing here seems to move across the boundaries between different genres and produce texts that are difficult to classify under a single generic label. Although we can understand the "Letters" as belonging to travel writing, they are indeed heavily based on Hunt's own personal correspondence, and Webb successfully argues that they can also be read as a selective guidebook for English travellers in Italy.

Fabio Liberto discusses the ways in which the representation of Italian society and culture in *The Liberal* becomes a means to indirectly promote the ideals of political reform that the editors and contributors advocated for their own country. Although the lack of planning that characterised the short life of the periodical is perhaps undeniable, the interest for the Italian reality could be legitimately considered, in Liberto's view, the unifying feature of *The Liberal* as a coherent cultural project that critics have often failed to acknowledge. Such a project was based on the construction of Italy as a symbolical dimension of potential change and otherness, a real and metaphorical space from which the founders could pursue their strategy aimed at securing "new friends to the cause of liberty" and progress. The two articles of Italian subject that Mary Shelley contributed to the journal ("A Tale of the Passions" and "Giovanni Villani") provide an exemplary case study in

this respect. Thematically concerned with questions of partisanship and political unity, death and immortality, predestined love and nostalgic and elegiac feelings, they appear particularly relevant to the consolidation of the Italian and cosmopolitan leitmotif within *The Liberal*.

Turning the attention to Byron's contribution to the journal, Maria Schoina dedicates her essay to the poet's translation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*. She efficaciously re-assesses the dynamic of Pulci's appearance in *The Liberal* (original and translated) by investigating the complex ways in which Byron's literary sensibility and political thinking feed into one of his key contributions to the journal, namely, his translation of the first canto of *Morgante Maggiore*. Byron's re-discovery of Pulci in 1820 coincides with his own revisionist project in poetry, one which commanded experimentation, cross-cultural mediation, compositional license and a freedom of style. As Schoina argues, a careful reading of Byron's translation in the light of its original reveals several important facts about the poet's stylistic interventions and innovations, as well as his attitude towards the Italian literary tradition.

Still focusing on Byron, Gioia Angeletti investigates his political motives for publishing *The Liberal* and his links with the movement for Italian independence and the Carbonari. Angeletti's essay offers an innovative evaluation of the relationship between the editorial enterprise, the poet's involvement in Italian politics and his desire to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the British public. Byron's literary contributions – especially the epigrams on Lord Castlereagh, "Letter to the Editor of 'My grandmother's Review'", "Southeogony" and a few minor pieces attributed to him – are here considered in the light of Byron's initial enthusiasm and later disenchantment with the periodical, as it emerges from the letters and journals he wrote between 1821 and 1823. Byron's gradual disaffection with the journal – Angeletti argues – cannot be dissociated from his parallel progressive estrangement from the Italian political situation.

Elena Spandri turns her attention to the treatment of the Italian arts and politics in William Hazlitt's contribution to *The Liberal*. William Hazlitt was asked to contribute by the London-based editor John Hunt after Shelley's death, and he accepted on the grounds of his deep-rooted ideal of a republic of letters, in which shared literary interests and principles were expected to transcend class divisions and political

affiliations. Spandri analyses Hazlitt's most significant contributions to the journal – the two essays "On the Spirit of Monarchy" and "My First Acquaintance with Poets" – which seem to articulate a controversial and somewhat anti-Shelleyan discourse on the 'Liberalism' of the creative imagination, and on the possibility for contemporary poets to work as the "unacknowledged legislators of the world" the way they had done in the post-revolutionary radical years.

The last contribution of the volume features an interview by Carlotta Farese with the British journalist Benjamin Ramm who was the protagonist of an attempt to re-launch *The Liberal* (2004–2012) as a new magazine advocating "a renaissance in liberal politics and the liberal arts" and openly aiming to "rehabilitate Romantic Liberalism". The interview articulates a reflection on the continuing relevance to contemporary society and politics of crucial aspects of the original *Liberal*, on the relationship between the contemporary periodical and its nineteenth-century predecessor and the reasons for the eventual failure of both enterprises.

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to all the colleagues who have contributed to this volume with their generous help and insightful comments: Antonella Braida, Carmen Casaleggi, Jeffrey Cox, Michael Gamer, Nick Halmi, Nick Havely, David George Lyons, Gary Kelly, Michael Rossington, Richard Sha.

Lilla Maria Crisafulli

Introduction: Historical and Social Environment of *The Liberal*

This collection of essays aims to celebrate the bicentenary of the extraordinary enterprise founded by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt in Pisa in the Fall of 1822, namely, *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South*. As the subtitle of the journal suggests, the group of young English intellectuals meant to "mediterraneanise literature … to a culture which was historically innovative and republican,"[1] namely Italian culture. Additionally, as Will Bowers claims,

> The revitalising power of past English and Italian authors was promoted in the literature published by recent Italian immigrants. In the introductions to their publications, these exiles often reminded readers that Italy – its language, literature, and people – played an integral part in the two great ages of English literature, those of Shakespeare and Chaucer. This promotion also suited these authors politically…[2]

To Shelley, Byron and Hunt, publishing in English, and printing in England a journal that was entirely conceived in Italy meant to challenge the British post-Napoleonic ideology, and to announce a transnational approach to literature that strategically overturned the sense of nationhood, patriotism and Britishness that the prolonged conflict with France had consigned to the early nineteenth-century country.[3] The editors of *The Liberal*, viewing England from the South in a time of popular upheavals and fierce Restoration, represented – at least symbolically – a threat to the Northern powers. Not by chance, as we shall see in the essays collected in this volume, *The Liberal w*as attacked and ostracized since the very announcement of its founding.

1 Will Bowers, *The Italian Idea, Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 3.

2 Bowers, 3.

3 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 18, 53, 322, 364–368, 370–371.

Why Italy?

Italy appeared to the early-nineteenth-century British, and in particular after 1815, as a 'counter-space', whose extraordinary historical and artistic past clashed with the decline of the present time. The group of young Romantic intellectuals who had chosen Italy as their home exploited such oppositional complexity, but they also felt obliged to respond to the social and political demands that the Pre-Risorgimento or Pre-Resurgence Italy (the Italian word meaning 'resurrection' at that time) posed them. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Italy was a dismembered political body, divided in 12 small states of various sizes, which also varied considerably in terms of their history. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a significant normative and institutional homogenization took place as a result of the reforms introduced during the Napoleonic era (excepting Sardinia, which remained under the Savoy dynasty, and Sicily, under the Bourbons). The first two 'free republics' were the Cispadane (1796–1797), that introduced the first Italian flag, and the Cisalpine, then came the others, down to the Parthenopean Republic in Naples. The State first acquired the name of Italian Republic (1802–1805), and then of Italian Kingdom (1805–1814). And although this experience was brief, as the peninsula was only entirely under Napoleonic rule between 1809 and 1814, it lasted long enough to provide the Italians with a sense of nationhood. With the Restoration the peninsula was again divided, this time into nine states, that differed from each other in traditions, customs and dialects. Thus, the 1820s offered to northern travelers a very distant image of a country compared to that of nation-states such as Britain or France. However, to foreign visitors who had lived long enough among the Italians, the divided country was still perceived as 'Italy', a *madre-patria*, a mother-fatherland, that, as Alberto Mario Banti brilliantly underlines, was deeply rooted in the rich Italian historical and cultural past and conveyed by a number of shared myths.[4] It follows that Italy existed prior

4 Alberto Mario Banti, *The Nation of the Risorgimento. Kinship, Sanctity, and Honour in the Origins of Unified Italy* (London: Routledge, 2020). Banti,

to its political unification that took place in 1861. It existed, to quote Benedict Anderson, as an imagined community,[5] based on a genealogical descent and created by deep symbolic images that succeeded in holding together the Italians as one people.

Significantly, Medwin recalls in his *Life of Shelley* that they read together "the greater part of the *Betrothed Lovers*", Manzoni's historical novel in the Italian language.[6] Manzoni's novel was, in many

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describing the rationale of the subtitle given to his book, says that he has identified 'kinship', 'sanctity', and 'honour' as the three fundamental 'deep images' on which the Italian nation was founded. According to Banti, 'sanctity' is "closely connected to the theme of 'sacrifice', which transformed national ideology into a quasi-religious discursive system within which the sacrifice of the patriots turns them into 'patriotic martyrs'", p. vii. As for 'honour', since Italy was traditionally femininized, seen as a woman in danger (raped or abused and subjugated), Italian patriots were described as heroic saviors. Finally, 'kinship' to Banti: "Imagining the nation as a kinship system – a web of relationships that stretches back towards past generations, operates in the present for members of the community, and reaches forward to the generations of the future – has two essential implications. First, it means that the nation is imagined as a community by descent, endowed with its own specific historical past. Second, it means that great emphasis is placed on the importance of biological ties as the cement of the national community; this explains the frequent recourse to terms such as 'razza', 'stirpe', and 'sangue' ('race', 'stock', and 'blood') to illustrate the type of relationship that connects members of the same national community to each other. With this in mind, we can also see why the national discourse was expressed through the systematic use of vocabulary that referred to the sphere of the family: national territory was the 'madre-patria' ('mother-fatherland'); the movement's leaders were the 'padri della patria' ('fathers of the fatherland'); and the national community consisted of 'fratelli' and 'sorelle' ('brothers' and 'sisters')," p. vi.

5 Benedict Anderson's volume, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd edn. (London: Verso, 1991), is also cited in Banti, who underlines the importance of carefully considering the relevance of symbolic elements in the invention of the nation, p. xi. Banti, referring to the reasons for the choice of the title of his book says: "It is precisely because of this 'subjectivist' orientation that the book's title refers to 'the nation of the Risorgimento' ('la nazione del Risorgimento'): this means that its concern is not the idea of the nation during the historical period that ran from 1796 to 1861, but rather the idea of the nation as it was understood by the protagonists of the Risorgimento movement."

6 Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, with an Introduction and Commentary by H. Buxton Forman (London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1913), 255–256.

ways, a revolutionary text, because it modernized the Italian language and opened up Italian fiction to the historical novel so fashionable in North Europe. It also unveiled the powers that traditionally dominated the Italian social and political institutions, leaving the mass of people voiceless and defenseless. Although Medwin's anecdote raises some doubts, since the first printed edition of Manzoni's novel was published years later, between 1825 and 1827, it is also true that the first draft of the novel took place between 1821 and 1822 (bearing the title *Fermo e Lucia* [Fermo and Lucia]). This might mean that either Medwin's memory betrayed him, or, the manuscript circulated before its official printing, as often was the case (interestingly, in 1827 Manzoni stayed in Florence exactly in order to revise the Italian of his story). Medwin also reports that Shelley liked very much to read Petrarch's political song, "Italia mia, benché 'l parlar sia indarno" (from the first verse: "Italia mia, benché 'l parlar sia indarno a le piaghe mortali,"[7]) and that "Shelley preferred Petrarch to any Italian poet, he had his works constantly in his hand."[8] It might be useful to point out that Petrarch's ode was probably inspired by a conflict that took place between 1344 and 1345, between the Este and Gonzaga in Parma. But, what is more relevant to us, it contains a warning and peroration to Italian princes to give up their own individual interests, which caused so many internal struggles, plaguing the country and its people, and to serve, instead, the country as a whole. The song is also a celebration of the peninsula's glorious past.

Amid the symbolic images which Banti refers to as the foundational symbols of the country are recurring words such as 'blood', stock, brotherhood and sisterhood, sanctity, honour, faith, fatherland, sacrifice, as well as a powerful and moving image of a woman that embodied Italy, i.e. the motherland, raped by barbarian hordes.[9] According to Banti these deep images were disseminated and recalled across the entire country via literature and the arts: "The national discourse took them, transferred them from their original semantic field, and relocated them

7 English Translation: "My Italy, though words cannot heal the mortal wounds". From Petrarch: *The Canzoniere*. Translated by A. S. Kline https://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=128. accessed 22 January 2023.

8 Medwin, *The Life of Shelley*, 262.

9 See in this regard footnote n. 5.

in a new one, through cultural media (historical novels, poetry, plays, paintings, and operas) that transmitted engaging narratives, steeped in patriotic values, with the capacity to arouse profound emotions."[10] In other words, the idea of nationhood was conveyed by literary texts, plays, paintings and operas that endorsed national values and favoured a nation-building process. In literature, the idea of the Italian nation was conveyed eloquently, although in an oblique way because of the severe censorship, by the celebration of Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Tasso, Ariosto, Machiavelli, Alfieri, Monti, Manzoni, and so on. The works of these authors were obsessively read and learnt by heart in liberal circles and salons. In the opening chapter, entitled, not by chance, 'Resurgam' of Countess Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco's *The Liberation of Italy, 1815–1870*, the author notes that, while all the statesmen of Europe had always regarded the unity of Italy as a utopia, "the two greatest intellects produced by the Italian race",[11] Dante and Machiavelli, foresaw the unity of the country long before it actually took place:

> Dante conceived an Italy united under the Empire […] If the Emperor brought the talisman of his authority to the banks of the Tiber, Italy would overcome the factions which rent her, and would not only rule herself, but lead mankind. Vast as the vision was, Dante cannot be called presumptuous for having entertained it. […] The great Florentine poet had the right to dream that his country was invested with a providential mission, that his people was a chosen people, which, by its own fault and by the fault of others, had lost its way, but would find it again. Such was Dante's so-called Ghibelline programme-less Ghibelline than intensely and magnificently Italian. […]. The same may be said of Machiavelli. He also imagined, or rather discerned in the future, a regenerate Italy under a single head, and this, not the advancement of any particular man, was the grand event he endeavoured to hasten. […] The concluding passage in the Principe was meant as an exhortation; it reads as a prophecy. 'We ought not therefore,' writes Machiavelli, 'to let this occasion pass whereby, after so long waiting, Italy may behold the coming of a saviour. Nor can I express with what love he would be received in all those provinces which have suffered from the foreign inundations; with what thirst of vengeance, with what obstinate faith, with what worship, with what tears! What doors would be closed against him? What people would deny him obedience?

10 Banti, *The Nation of the Risorgimento,* viii.

11 Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco, *The Liberation of Italy 1815–1870* (London: Seeley and Co. Limited, 38 Great Russell Street, 1895), 1.

> What jealousy would oppose him? What Italian would not do him honour? The barbarous dominion of the stranger stinks in the nostrils of all.'

One of the main value the Italian authors conveyed was their determination to use the Italian language in a time when Italian as a language was very little spoken. Indeed, at the time of the unification of the new Kingdom of Italy in 1861 – that is many years later than *The Liberal* – those who spoke the Italian language for everyday communication accounted for only between 2.5–9.5 % of the total population.[12] The distance between the middle and upper classes and the working class, mainly made of peasants, might be one of the reasons why the Pre-Risorgimento patriots belonged chiefly to the middle and upper social classes. Additionally, the people who could read in the mid-nineteenth century amounted to about 22 %, a low percentage that left a large mass of people in the hands of their landowners and of the fiery reactionary and loyalist discourse of the clergy. A case in point were the uprisings of 1799 against the newly formed Neapolitan republic suffocated in blood by thousands of pro-Bourbon peasants and brigands who, under the command of Cardinal Ruffo, and supported by the Austrian troops, attacked and defeated the Neapolitan republican army (see, in this regard, Guglielmo Pepe's complaint[13]). In that occasion, as in other ones that took place later on – as bitterly recorded by the memoir of Guglielmo Pepe – the British Navy led by Admiral Nelson openly supported the Bourbons against the Neapolitan patriots, to the point of making their fleet a floating prison for the Neapolitans.[14] However, things progressively changed, and influential historians such as Banti and Ginsborg have argued that historical events leading up to the unification of Italy happened thanks to a sense of collective identification,

12 See Mirella Agorni, *Translating Italy for the Nineteenth Century: Translators and an Imagined Nation in the Early Romantic Period 1816–1830s* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2021), 30.

13 Guglielmo Pepe, *Memorie del Generale Guglielmo Pepe Intorno alla Sua Vita e ai Recenti Casi d'Italia Scritte da Lui Medesimo* (Parigi: Baudry Libreria Europea, 1847, Vol. I, Capo III–VII: 1797–1800), https://books.google.it/books?id=wE8IAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, accessed 16 January 2023.

14 Pepe, *Memorie del Generale Guglielmo Pepe*.

powerfully channeled through discourses that circulated not only among the educated population but also, at least to some extent, among the less literate mass readers, who took an active part in the mid-century revolutionary waves.[15]

Keeping in mind this historical and political framework of post-Napoleonic Italy, and coming back to *The Liberal*, the founders of the journal – Shelley and Byron in particular, and to some degree Hunt – undoubtedly understood what it meant for the Italian patriots to use their national language and literary tradition, and to this understanding we probably owe the relevant presence of Italian works, alongside their English translations, in the published issues of *The Liberal*. Three of the four issues of *The Liberal* contain, among other works, translations of Alfieri's poetry and the translated poems consistently emphasise Alfieri's love for Italy and its national language. Three of the four issues of *The Liberal* contain, among other works, references to and translations from Alfieri's texts that highlight Alfieri's love for Italy and its language. Thus for Pulci's "Morgante Maggiore" (no. 4), of which Byron translates the first canto with an opening praise of the beauty of the Italian language, as he had already done in the 4th canto of *Childe Harold* and in *Beppo*. The same is true of Hunt's translations of various minor pieces, from Alfieri, and Ariosto. As for Mary Shelley's contribution on Giovanni Villani (no. 4), which ends with a translation of a passage from Villani devoted precisely to the life, thought and death of Dante, a contemporary and friend of Giovanni Villani [Book IX. 'Of the Poet Dante, and how he died'], we might recall that Villani was one of the main historical sources of her novel *Valperga*. Villani drafted the *Nuova cronica* (post. 1537), which is one of the most significant documents of fourteenth-century Italian culture, a historical age dear to the liberals (see, among others, Sismondi's influential study, *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age*, 1809–1818).

15 See Banti's *The Nation of the Risorgimento*; see also, Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg, "Per una nuova storia del Risorgimento", in *Storia d'Italia. Annali, vol. 22, Il Risorgimento*, ed. Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg (Torino: Einaudi, 2007).

Pisa in Context: New Acquaintances

It is useful to focus also on the Pisan circles, attended by the Shelleys and Byron, in order to understand what kind of cultural exchanges and social climate attracted the young English intellectuals and convinced them to choose the city for the birth of their journal.[16] One well-known acquaintance was Francesco Pacchiani, nicknamed in Pisan society 'il diavolo Pacchiani' (the devil Pacchiani).[17] He was one of the frequent visitors to the Shelleys' home and, because of his countless social connections, he was the main conduit through which the Shelleys and Byron came to know acquaintances such as the Greek Prince Alexandros Mavrocordatos, an exile from Turkish rule in Greece who was to play a relevant role in the struggle for Greek independence and in the decision of Byron and Pietro Gamba to join the fight for it. In the same way they met the young Teresa Viviani ('Emilia' in the dedication of 'Epipsychidion'), daughter of the Marquis Niccolò Viviani della Robbia, governor of Pisa. Pacchiani also introduced them to the *improvvisatore* Sgricci, that Mary Shelley believed to be a Carbonaro. In a letter, originally written in Italian, to Leigh Hunt from Pisa on 3 December 1820, mentioning Sgricci, Mary Shelley notes: "He improvises with admirable fervour and justice. His subject was the future destiny of Italy; he recalled to mind that Petrarch said that neither the highest Alps nor the sea were sufficient to defend this vacillating and ancient country from foreign masters; but he said, 'I see the Alps growing higher and even the sea rising and becoming troubled so as to keep off its enemies.'"[18] About Francesco Pacchiani, Mary, in the same letter sent to Leigh Hunt, underlines some of the reasons of their interest for him, at least at the beginning of their friendship: "He is really the

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16 On the Shelleys, Byron and *The Liberal* in Pisa it is still very useful reading C. L. Cline's *Byron. Shelley and Their Pisan Circle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

17 Medwin, *Life of Shelley,* 274.

18 Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols., (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–1988), vol. 1, 165.

only Italian that has a heart and a soul. He has the highest mind, a profound genius and an eloquence that transports. […] He speaks the most beautiful Italian tongue, completely different from today's idiom, which makes one believe that we might be hearing Boccaccio or Machiavelli speaking as they wrote. […] The poor Pisans believe him to be mad; … He comes to our house every evening and always delights us with his original ideas."[19]

Interestingly, Andrea Addobati, describing Professor Pacchiani's scientific profile, claims that abbot Pacchiani was a good physicist who, however, had made a severe misstep in his academic career. Pacchiani "had made himself known to the international scientific community in 1805 by announcing that he had discovered the chemical composition of muriatic acid and oxymuriatic acid (i.e., hydrochloric acid and chlorine). Based on the new theoretical foundations outlined by Lavoisier, and making use of the electrolysis recently pioneered by Nicholson and Carlslile, Pacchiani argued that these substances were in fact compounds of the same genus as water, and that they differed from it by having less oxygen. The announcement caused a sensation. The leading scientists of the time, beginning with Alessandro Volta, set

19 Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, 165: Mary Shelley's letter was to the Hunts and originally in Italian, here the editor's translation. In Italian the letter that includes both the references to Pacchiani and Sgricci, goes as follows: "Bisogna che vi parlerei, amico mio, d'una conoscenza che abiamo fatto con un Professore a Pisa. Lui e davero il solo Italiano che ha cuore ed anima. Ha un spirito altissimo, un ingegno profondo, e un' elequanza che trasporta. I poveri Pisani lo credono matto; e racontano tante storiette di lui che ci fa credere che davero è un poco stravagante, o per parlare in Inglese—*eccentric*. Ma lui dice—Mi credano matto e mi fa piacere che si sbaglierebbero cosi; ma forse il tempo verrà quando vedrano che sia la pazzia di Bruto. Ogni sera viene ala nostra casa e sempre fa le nostre delizie colle di sue idee originale. Parla una bellissima lingua Italiana, tutto differente della idioma di oggi, che ci fa credere d' udire il Boccaccio o il Machiavelli parlando come scrissono. Poi abiamo fatto conoscenza con un' Improvisatore—un' uomo di gran' talento—e molto forte nel Greco, e con un genio poetico incomparabile. Improvise con un fuoco e justezza ammirabile. Il suo sujetto era il desti no futuro d' Italia. Rammentò che Petrarca disse che ni le alpe altissime ni il mare bastava a difendere questo paese vaccinante e vecchio dai Padroni forestieri—Ma disse lui—vedo crescere le alpe—e alzare e turbare il mare stesso per impedire 1 di noi nemici. …."

out to repeat the experiment, soon realizing that Pacchiani had made a solemn blunder."[20] For Pacchiani, who eventually also lost his position at the University of Pisa, the disappointment was such that it drove him to drown his displeasure in the most frantic worldly life.[21] Being a brilliant conversationalist, he was regularly invited to the city's best social gatherings where, to dissimulate his sorrow he affected cynicism. Percy Shelley admired his eloquence, as he admitted in a letter to John Gisborne saying that he was "in love with Pacchiani".[22] According to Thomas Medwin, "Shelley, when Pacchiani first became an *habitué* at his house, was charmed with him, and listened with rapt attention to his eloquence, which he compared to that of Coleridge".[23]

Another academic who visited the Shelleys with some regularity was Giovanni Rosini. He was a philologist, a University professor of Italian eloquence but also a publisher. In his classes, Giovanni Rosini eventually abandoned the reading and commentary of Dante and Petrarch to deal mainly with Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.[24] He was the first to publish Shelley's *Adonais*, in July 1821, commissioning the printer Niccolò Capurro to print it.[25] Proud of his knowledge of Italian culture, Rosini was a devotee of Canova and a member of the well-known "Società Letteraria",[26] entertaining his British friends with long discussions on Dante and Tasso. Great cultural mediator,

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20 Andrea Addobbati, "La Contessa Mastiani Brunacci e il Suo Salotto", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, ed. Romano Paolo Coppini, Alessandro Tosi and Alessandro Volpi (Pisa: Edizioni Plus Università di Pisa, 2004), 71–80, 76. My translation.

21 On Francesco Pacchiani see also S. Nicastro, "Insigni pratesi dimenticati: Francesco Pacchiani", in *Archivio Storico Pratese*, III (1920), vol. IV, 184.

22 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), II, 250.

23 Medwin, *Life of Shelley,* 275.

24 On Giovanni Rosini, see Romano Paolo Coppini, "L'Università", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, 11–22, in particular, 16–20. See also the essays by R. Pertici, M. Nuzzo, S. Romagnoli, R. Turchi in *Leopardi a Pisa*, ed. Fiorenza Ceragioli (Milano: Electa, 1997), 176–209.

25 Roberto Pertici, "Editori a Pisa nel primo Ottocento", in *Leopardi a Pisa*, 176–181, 176.

26 Carlo Sisi, "Giovanni Rosini e il 'Cuore' di Antonio Canova", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, 129–138.

Rosini had invested much of his capital in various cultural and editorial enterprises: he founded a publishing house, opened a bookstore in Pisa, printing or buying Italian and French books of which he assiduously followed the circulation in the city and the university.[27] Rosini also reprinted in beautiful plates the Pisan Monumental Cemetery, that played an important role regarding the power of symbols of the national past.[28] He was deeply engaged on the spread of the Italian language in the Tuscan Grand Duchy, that had no equal in other states. In point of fact, as argued by Edgardo Donati, the question of the Italian language was strongly in the care of Pisan and, more generally, Tuscan intellectuals, so much so that the issue had been posed to Napoleon since the annexation of Tuscany to the Napoleonic empire: "The demands made in Tuscany at the time of annexation, in the name of 'Italianness', especially in defense of the language, had, moreover, been welcomed by Napoleon, who with the decree of April 9, 1809 had authorized the use of Italian, along with French, in public acts and the resumption of activities of the Accademia della Crusca".[29] Between 1818 and 1820, Rosini intervened in the debate on the renewal of the Italian language, approaching the positions of the enlightened wing of the Crusca, that is, of Giovanni Battista Niccolini, Urbano Lampredi, and Gino Capponi, that proposed, as national tongue, the language spoken by the educated Tuscan bourgeoisie.[30] With his love for the Italian language, he accompanied a sincere commitment to democracy. It is no coincidence that during 1832, when Giuseppe Mazzini's "Young Italy" had begun to gather followers in Pisa, among the first names included were those

27 Alessandro Volpi, "Editori, Librai e Biblioteche a Pisa negli Anni Napoleonici", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, 59–70, in particular. 61–63, 66.

28 Alessandro Tosi, "Pisa Napoleonica: Immagini di una città, una città e le immagini", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, 125–128.

29 Edgardo Donati, *La Toscana nell'Impero napoleonico. L'imposizione del modello e il processo di integrazione (1807–1809)* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2008), n. 22, 17.

30 Concerning the internal Tuscan debate on Italian language see also *Ricordi della vita e delle opere di G. B. Niccolini*, raccolti da Atto Vannucci, vol. 1 (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1866). https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_8BZAzzATXuIC/page/113/mode/1up?q=Lampredi

of a number of professors: Carlo Pigli, Ippolito Rosellini, Silvestro Centofanti, as well as Giovanni Rosini.[31] However, in the last years of his life the verbosity of Rosini's eloquence often made his interlocutors impatient.

Another acquaintance of the Shelleys was Andrea Vaccà, who enjoyed extraordinary popularity on account of his skill in the medical profession. He was the son of Francesco Vaccà Belinghieri, a medical scholar of a Pisan academic family, also a cosmopolitan and leading figure during the uprisings of the 1798–1799 and the Napoleonic republican triennium in Pisa. Francesco's eldest son, Leopoldo, went to study in Paris and later became a Napoleonic officer, dying on his return home in 1809. Francesco's younger son, Andrea, a surgeon and a medical academic himself, was, like his father, probably committed to Freemasonry and equally liberal.[32]

The Salons and the University

If it has been assessed by modern historiography that Tuscany was the region in which the union between despotism and enlightenment was most fruitful and in which contrasts were least felt in the collaboration between intellectuals and power – since the Lorraine dynasty had implemented a policy of reforms and more than elsewhere had initiated a profound modernization of the state – it is also true that the influence of clergy was deeply felt, particularly in the Academia. It was the Napoleonic era that allowed secularism to enter into the University.[33]

31 Romano Paolo Coppini, *Breve Storia dell'Università di Pisa* (Pisa: Edizioni Plus Pisa University, 2009), 44.

32 Mario Montorzi, "I Vaccà Berlinghieri: una laica famiglia della borghesia accademica pisana tra scienza, politica e cultura nell'Europa della Restaurazione", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, 81–92.

33 On the history of the University of Pisa from Cosimo I to the 1970s, with good chapters on the Napoleonic years, the Lorraine age and the Risorgimento, see Coppini, *Breve storia dell'Università di Pisa*.

On the other hand, with the Restauration, the Grand Duke Ferdinand – brother of Francis, Emperor of Austria – had oscillated during his exile between loyalist and Napoleonic alliances, so that, once he was restored to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, he conducted a policy that alternated between permissiveness and authoritarianism, forgiveness and repression, reintroducing the power of the clergy within the institutions of the state, the University included.

Andrea Vaccà was at the centre of a dense web of social and political relationships, supervised with sullen distrust by the Grand Ducal police. He always remained openly loyal to the Napoleonic party even in times of Restoration, and was personally committed to the advancement and education of the working classes. Andrea died on 6 September 1826, after also serving as physician to the Grand Duke and previously to Elisa Baciocchi, Napoleon's younger sister and, before the Restoration, Grand Duchess of Lucca.[34]

Thanks also to the literary salon in his house at Palazzo Lanfranchi, animated by his wife Sophie Caudeiron, widow of his bother Leopoldo, Andrea Vaccà met Shelley and Byron, and before them Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein (Madame de Staël).[35] However, Andrea Vaccà Berlinghieri was an internationally distinguished physician, humanitarian, and politically liberal. It was Margaret Mason who urged the Shelleys to come to Pisa to consult with Vaccà about Percy Bysshe Shelley's poor health.[36] Sophie also hosted in her salon well-known

34 Montorzi, "I Vaccà Berlinghieri: una laica famiglia della borghesia accademica pisana tra scienza, politica e cultura nell'Europa della Restaurazione", 86.

35 Interestingly, Vaccà leased part of the Palazzo Lanfranchi to Byron during the latter's stay in Pisa. Since 2009, Palazzo Lanfranchi has housed the museum of graphic design https://bonespirit.provincia.lucca.it/it/divulgativa/569/il-salotto-di-sophie-caudeiron-in-palazzo-lanfranchi-a-pisa.html, accessed 31 August 2023. In 2004, the family's descendants have transformed the Vaccàs' country residence, located in Montefoscoli near Palaja, into a museum dedicated to collecting the memories and testimonies of the illustrious family of physicians, https://bonespirit.provincia.lucca.it/it/default/570/una-famiglia-napoleonica-a-pisa-i-vacc-berlinghieri.html, accessed 31 August 2023.

36 Betty T. Bennett, "'The Science of Letters': Six Unpublished Mary Shelley Letters", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 2001, Vol. 50 (2001), Keats-Shelley Association of America, n. 21, 27–34, 30.

Italian liberal intellectuals, such as Gino Capponi and Pietro Giordani, Giampietro Vieusseux and Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, Giuseppe Giusti and Giambattista Niccolini, Gaetano d'Azeglio and Enrico Mayer, to say nothing of Giacomo Leopardi himself, who called Sophie "the beautiful Vaccà",[37] at the time of his stay in Pisa. Leopardi was introduced to the Vaccà Berlinghieri house by Giovanni Rosini.[38] It is worth adding that Medwin, in his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, writing about the relationship between Shelley and Vaccà, notes: "Vacca, whose medical celebrity was the least of his merits, for he was an ardent lover of his country, and enthusiastical for the emancipation of Italy, was also Shelley's particular friend".[39]

The other literary salon, mentioned only tangentially by Mary Shelley and Thomas Medwin, was held in Pisa by Emily Charlotte Beauclerk, a great admirer of Shelley. Mrs. Beauclerk, was the daughter of Emily FitzGerald, Duchess of Leinster,[40] and her second husband William Ogilvie as well as half-sister of Lord Edward FitzGerald, who became among Ireland's most charismatic revolutionary leaders. A cosmopolitan military man, radical, abolitionist, and republican, by 1792 FitzGerald had befriended in Paris with Thomas Paine, and, as a member of the Society of United Irishmen, in 1796 he was one of the leading and ill-fated supporters of the French-backed Irish insurrection. He

37 Giacomo Leopardi, letter to Giampietro Vieusseux from Pisa, dated 31 December 1827 in Giacomo Leopardi, *Tutte le opere* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1969, vol. I, 1305b), quoted in Montorzi, "I Vaccà Berlinghieri: una laica famiglia della borghesia accademica pisana tra scienza, politica e cultura nell'Europa della Restaurazione", 84. On Sophie Caudeiron an interesting reference source is Caterina Del Vivo, *La «Bella Vaccà» Leopoldo e Andrea. Sophie Caudeiron e i Vaccà Berlinghieri* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2009).

38 Montorzi, "I Vaccà Berlinghieri: una laica famiglia della borghesia accademica pisana tra scienza, politica e cultura nell'Europa della Restaurazione", 84.

39 Medwin, *Life of Shelley*, 45.

40 Emily Charlotte "Mimie" Ogilvie (May 1778 – 22 January 1832) married Charles George Beauclerk (son of Topham Beauclerk and his wife, Lady Diana Spencer) on 29 April 1799. They had thirteen children. Lady Emily had married James FitzGerald, 20th Earl of Kildare, after his death she married her children's tutor, William Ogilvie, on 26 August 1774. Despite her remarriage, she continued to be known as The Dowager Duchess of Leinster. Ogilvie was nine years her junior.

died in British prisons in 1798 in the course of the Irish revolt. Mrs. Beauclerk was no less liberal than her half-brother, though not as radical. A close friend of Elizabeth Fox, Baroness Holland, she had been associated in London with the more liberal Whigs of Holland House where she met her first husband Charles George Beauclerk. Later, in the 1820s, she travelled the continent with her husband and their many children. While her husband stopped in Switzerland with their three sons, M.me Beauclerk with her six daughters continued on to Pisa where she stayed for a certain time opening a lively salon, the only private salon, according to Medwin, where dance parties were also held. The latter were not particularly enjoyed by Shelley. The salon was frequented by, among others, the Shelleys, Claire Clairemont and Thomas Medwin, who introduced her to Lord Byron at their mutual request. According to Miranda Seymour, Mrs. Beauclerk was one of the liveliest hostesses in Pisa and, having known Shelley as a Sussex neighbour, since her arrival in Pisa had expressed a wish to see him.[41] It should also be pointed out that Mary, by then widowed and returned to London, had stayed in more than one occasion with the Beauclerks. Additionally, between the Beauclerk's eldest son, Aubrey Beauclerk, who became a radical-minded MP involved in the reform movement, and Mary Shelley a sentimental bond was established for some time.[42]

Mrs. Beauclerk's salon was also visited by Reverend George Frederick Nott, to whom Stefano Villani has devoted a fine essay.[43] Nott was an Anglican pastor, art historian and man of letters. He lived many years in Italy, visiting Vincenzo Monti, Giovan Battista Niccolini and Giacomo Leopardi, among others. He translated the *Book of Common Prayer* into Italian, and published editions of Dante's works. Nott lived on the Lungarno in the same building as the Shelleys, who had moved to the apartment above Nott's on 25 October 1821. Reverend Nott

41 Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 286–287, 504.

42 Ibid., 412, 414–415, 419, 456, 460, 477, 504, 626.

43 Stefano Villani, "George Frederick Nott (1768–1841) Un Ecclesiastico Anglicano Tra Teologia, Letteratura, Arte, Archeologia, Bibliofilia e Collezionismo", *Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Series IX, Volume XXVII/2, Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2012.

held religious services at home that Mary sometimes attended.[44] Still, according to Thomas Medwin, one day he preached against atheism looking specifically towards Mary.[45] His severe sermon upset Mary so deeply that she later complained about it in her correspondence.[46]

Another Pisan salon that was well known to liberal circles and of which the Pisan chronicles annotate, as Andrea Addobbati reports, the Shelleys among the visitors, was Elena Mastiani's house.[47] Elena Amati Mastiani Brunacci was the wife of Giovan Francesco Mastiani who, during the Kingdom of Etruria became Sub-Prefect of the District of

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44 Mary Shelley attended Dr. Nott's religious services and sermons at least on 9 December 1821, 3 March 1822, and, possibly, on 30 December 1821, 16 December 1821 and 24 February 1822; Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, eds., *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 386, 400; Letter to Maria Gisborne, 18 January 1822, in Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley,* vol. I, 214, 216, 223. See also Villani, "George Frederick Nott (1768–1841) Un Ecclesiastico Anglicano Tra Teologia, Letteratura, Arte, Archeologia, Bibliofilia e Collezionismo", 823.

45 This episode is also cited by Teresa Guiccioli in *Lord Byron's Life in Italy* (title of the original manuscript: La *vie de Lord Byron en Italie*), translated by Michael Rees; edited by Peter Cochran (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 415–416.

46 However, as Stefano Villani points out, in a letter from Mary Shelly to Hobhouse dated 10 November 1824, regarding the episode recalls how Nott, as soon as he learned that he had been accused of preaching against Shelley, immediately went to their home to deny it. Villani, "George Frederick Nott (1768–1841) Un Ecclesiastico Anglicano Tra Teologia, Letteratura, Arte, Archeologia, Bibliofilia e Collezionismo", 822. In point of fact, there was also another episode that concerned Percy Bysshe Shelley and Nott. Andrea Vaccà Berlinghieri reported to John Taaffe, the Irish literary resident in the city, friend of the Shelleys and Byron, that Nott had said that Shelley was a "scelerato". The expression had been reported in the Pisa salon of Mrs. Beauclerk. When Nott learned that this comment of his was now the talk of the town, he told Shelley's cousin, Thomas Medwin, who arrived in Pisa on 14 November 1821, that he had never said such a thing. In his *Life of Shelley*, with reference to this circumstance, Medwin writes: "These discourses came to Byron's ears, and though Shelley laughed at the malice of the Doctor, the noble bard was indignant at the prostitution of his pulpit, and still more so when he heard that the divine had at Mrs. Beauclerc's called Shelley a "Scelerato," which no doubt was deemed very witty" (Medwin, *Life of Shelley,* 222–223).

47 Addobbati, "La Contessa Mastiani Brunacci e il Suo Salotto", 78.

Pisa.[48] In 1809–1810, Giovan Francesco resided permanently in Paris as a Tuscan deputy. In his role as a mediator between centre and periphery, in 1811 he received from Napoleon the title of Count of the Empire. After the end of the empire the Mastianis, still wealthy, came back to Pisa, but were looked upon with a suspicious eye by the Grand Duke. In 1815, Elena, because of her liberal ideas, was even sentenced to house arrest.[49] However, her salon once again became a fashionable place among the local elite, attended by travellers and literati, including Madame de Stael – who found Mastiani's house "plus agréable que toutes celles de Florence" – and Giacomo Leopardi.[50] A report of Luigi Torelli, one of the many spies employed by the Tuscan Buon Governo, on the daily life of the Mastiani couple and, especially, on the social and political conduct of Elena reports as follows:

> These were introduced into the Casa Mastiani, where all the Sectarians and malcontents, and enemies of the Sovereigns, used to gather, because the Count (by inclination fond of Baciocchi, who had taken refuge for eight days in his house when the English landed at Livorno and Viareggio) did not love the Grand Duke, although by duty he showed himself subordinate to him; […] Signora Countess … opened her usual Scandalous Conversation, and on her little table, where she used to have the Minerva, La Voce del Secolo, together with other Newspapers of the self-proclaimed Neapolitan Parliament, succeeded Lady Morgan's Opera as the reading of the day. At this were being made by her, and by all the guests, hearty laughs on the diatribes spewed against all the Sovereigns, and Ministers of Europe. This book was forbidden, but who was to forbid it to a Woman, like Mastiani, who outside of Fossombroni disposed of all the Ministers? In this epoch it was precisely her Conversation, which gave the news, (commending her heroic action) that many Piedmontese rebels at the head of whom was the Count of S. Priè, hanged in Turin in effigy, had taken themselves to a Frontier Village to

48 On the Mastianis see Alessandro Panajia, *Ascesa e decadenza di una famiglia dell'aristocrazia pisana*: *i Mastiani Brunacci (1402–1951)* (Roma: Athena, 1991), 33–65; A. Panajia, *Il Casino dei Nobili. Famiglie illustri, viaggiatori, mondanità a Pisa tra Sette e Ottocento*, in collaboration with Giovanni Benvenuti (Pisa: ETS, 1996, 28, 90–91). See also A. Addobbati, "La contessa Mastiani Brunacci e il suo salotto", 71–80.

49 Alessandro Panajia, "Nobili, 'Dame' e Ussari a Pisa in periodo napoleonico", in *L'Università di Napoleone: la riforma del sapere a Pisa*, ed. Romano Paolo Coppini, Alessandro Tosi and Alessandro Volpi, 95.

50 Addobbati, "La contessa Mastiani Brunacci e il suo salotto", 78.

> have a hearty meal, and had drank, and vowed the extirpation of the House of Savoy, and of all the Sovereigns of Italy.[51]

Francesco Mastiani died in 1839, and Elena a few years later. Francesco had established as universal heir the Bohemian nobleman Teodoro Tausch, Ottoman Consul in Livorno, that I believe was known to the Shelleys and Byron. As Addobbati points out, "among the testamentary conditions Giovan Francesco Mastiani placed on Tausch, in addition to taking the surname and the family arms, there was the obligation to keep the house 'open: maintaining the […] domicile in Pisa and also preserving the generous hospitality and welcome as I living was in the habit of doing.'"[52]

One last point needs to be discussed within the Pisan context. It concerns an unpublished letter, probably dated 12 January 1821, found in Casa Dazzi's family archives at San Marcello Pistoiese, Italy. The letter was discovered by Cristina Dazzi and published by Betty Bennet in the *Keats and Shelley Journal*. Cristina Dazzi also identified the Pisan professors listed in the letter. Betty Bennet recalls that the letter was held together with Mary Shelley's previously unlocated short story, *Maurice*, *or the Fisher's Cot* (London: Viking, in association with the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, 1998). The professors' titles derive from the records of the University of Pisa. The letter is written by Mary and addressed to George Tighe, Mrs. Mason's companion, who had asked for Mary's opinion on some eminent professors at the University of Pisa. Mary answers with a long list of names of academics: 17, that she must have known since, alongside the list of their names she also provides often unflattering opinions. Among the listed professors there the names of Rosini, Vaccà, Pacchiani, as well as Bergamino Sproni, Rector of the University of Pisa that Mary defines: "a clever, acute Italian Gentleman-without any particular acquirement." Sproni had passed, almost unharmed, from the Napoleonic era to the restoration of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Sproni is also listed among the visitors of the salons of Elena Mastiani and Sophie Caudeiron. As for

51 Alessandro Panajia, "Nobili, 'Dame' e Ussaria Pisa in periodo napoleonico", 94–95.

52 Addobbati, "La contessa Mastiani Brunacci e il suo salotto", 78.

Pacchiani (spelt by Mary, Pachiani), he is quoted together with the astronomer Giuseppe Piazzini (spelt Piazini by Mary):

> […]
>
> Piazini--P.[Professore] of Astronomy – An Infidel & a
> Republican very clever & very idle – a correct
> exact head – agreable but reserved. fearful
> of trouble, cold, ~~trouble~~ enemies & ill health
> Pachiani P.[Professore] of Fisi[c]a Teorica – l'uomo di spirito
> in un ospedale dei pazzi:[53] These two
> latter are the only ones in the University
> that have any ideas – Pachiani has the
> most genius – Piazini the best head
> – this latter is a great scandal-monger.
> […] [54]

To Vaccà Mary gives a short, impersonal sentence: "Vaccà. P.[Professore] of Clinica & Operative Surgery".

But when she mentions Rosini she is again quite critical:

> Rosini – P. [Professore] of Bellelettres. great pretentions
> horridly disagreeable – Eloquent in
> the modern Italian style.[55]

Betty Bennett astutely claims that this letter demonstrates "that the Shelleys knew many more members of the Pisan Italian intellectual community that records have so far demonstrated."[56]

To conclude, Pisa brought together exiles such as Mavracordato, the Gambas, Byron, Taaffe and the Shelleys. However, the Pisan liberal intellectuals themselves were also exiles from an Italy that was not there yet, but to whom they all aspired and that they imagined through the past glory of the Italian peninsula and the golden works of their writers.

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53 "a man of spirit in an insane asylum"

54 Betty T. Bennett, "'The Science of Letters': Six Unpublished Mary Shelley Letters", 27–34, 29.

55 Ibid., 30.

56 Ibid., 27.

What has been discussed so far may partly explain why the Triumvirate of editors of *The Liberal* chose Pisa, the 'Paradise of Exiles',[57] as the birth place of their journal. This journal, as the spy Luigi Torelli wrote to Metternich, promised to become something far worse than Lady Morgan's *Italy*, the book of praise for Italian struggle of independence that the Austrian hated and severely censured. In fact, according to Torelli:

> Byron no longer talks of leaving. On the contrary, he is expecting another English poet, a certain Smith, [Hunt] and they intend to start a newspaper against the Italian Government, which is to be printed in England, and bring them in much money. This will be something far worse than Lady Morgan's book – a weekly satire directed chiefly against Austria, whom they call the usurper of Italian freedom.[58]

Torelli's views were undoubtedly shared by many of *The Liberal*'s British detractors, if we are to credit their judgements of severe censorship. They decreed the premature end of a journal that, instead, could have helped to convey a better and quicker understanding of the English intellectuals and politicians regarding the issue of Italian freedom.

57 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Thou Paradise of Exiles, Italy!", from "Julian and Maddalo", l. 57 (1818).

58 Quoted in Maria Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*". In *Romanticism*, vol. 12 Issue 2, 115–125. Available Online Jan 2008, accessed 31 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.3366/rom.2006.12.2.115, 117.5

Franca Dellarosa

1. Cockney Imprint: *The Liberal* and Its Reception, 1822

On 6 October 1822, an advertisement announcing the launch of "The New Periodical Work from Italy" appeared in *The Examiner* – John Hunt being the publisher of both the newspaper and the new journal. In the same number, a note explicitly foregrounded the choice of a "title" – *The Liberal* – "which conveys in the most comprehensive manner the *spirit* in which the work is written, and falls in happily with the general progress of opinion (we do not mean in a political so much as in a general sense) throughout Europe."[1] This incidental paratextual reference signals the expanding range of connotations that the appellation 'liberal', indicating a *general progress of opinion*, had been assuming "throughout Europe" – i.e., across a wide international context.

The ongoing transformation in the semantics of the qualifier /*liberal*/ is the object of the editor's pointed discussion in the "Preface" to the inaugural number, which piercingly debunks the hypocritical advocation of the term in conservative discourse, and for this reason poses itself as a key programmatic document, intended to define not only the journal's politics but also its poetics, as this paper intends to show. To this purpose, I first discuss the anxiety of definition inscribed both in Leigh Hunt's "Preface" to the opening number of the periodical, and in some contemporary critical responses – taking up the recent critical debate on the journal's role and relevance at that specific historical contingency. In the final part of the essay, I consider the case study of "The Florentine Lovers," one of Leigh Hunt's eight contributions to the first number, which received an especially acrid commentary in the *Blackwood's Magazine*, 12 (1822), in the form of a new item in the infamous long-standing series "On the Cockney School," and for this reason

1 *The Examiner*, 6 October 1822, p. 633.

stands out as a significant exemplification of the journal's orientation, and the resulting acrimony on the part of its critics. I contend that the typically extreme – not to say hysterical – terms of the *Maga*'s review obliquely shed light on the *politics* of an assumedly non-political story, such as "The Florentine Lovers" is, which corroborates Jeffrey Cox's warning to "resist […] the attempt to divide the political from [Hunt's and his] circle's social, cultural, and literary concerns."[2] This seamlessness of poetics and politics is ultimately sanctioned in the insolently *non*-political self-definition of the journal, as offered in the "Preface."[3]

Recent scholarship has widely debated the crucial ideological import in the changing semantics of the words *liberal* and its derivative *liberalism*, within the space-time coordinates of early nineteenth-century Europe. In his discussion of the "European variations" of the adjective/noun *liberal* between 1800 and 1830, Jörn Leonhard advocates the need for a "comparative" historical approach that bring together the synchronic and diachronic dimensions in explaining the semantic transformations of a given concept, intended as a transfer of meaning both *within* a national language community and *between* different national languages.[4] Such an approach allows for a fine-tuned understanding of the "distinct contemporary meanings" of the concept in question, "in different historical contexts."[5]

With this methodological awareness in mind, and approaching the topic from the stance of literary scholarship, one aspect that immediately stands out, in both the *Liberal*'s paratext[6] and the reviews the

2 Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31.

3 See Greg Kucich, "Keats, Shelley, Byron, and the Hunt Circle," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and John Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 274–275.

4 Jörn Leonhard, "Translation as Cultural Transfer and Semantic Interaction: European Variations of *Liberal* between 1800 and 1830," in *Why Concepts Matter: Translating Social and Political Thought*, ed. Martin J. Burke and Melvin Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 93–94.

5 Leonhard, "Translation," 94.

6 See Gérard Genette's definition of *paratext*, in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987), tr. Jane E. Lewin and Richard Macksey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–15, as an "edge", a zone "of transition but also of *transaction*" – a "fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole

journal received, is the emergence of a rhetorical space of manifestly political sensitiveness, prompted by the choice itself for the title of an already overdetermined word. "We wish the title of our work to be taken in its largest acceptation, old as well new," it is declared in the "Preface:"

> All that we mean is, that we are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge, and that, by a natural consequence in these times, we go the full length in matters of opinion with large bodies of men who are called LIBERALS. At the same time, when we say the full length, we mean something very different from what certain pretended Liberals, and all the Illiberals will take it to be; for it is by the very reason of going to that length, in its most liberal extreme – "Ay, ay," interrupts some old club-house Gentleman, in a buff waistcoat and red-face, – "Now you talk sense. Extremes meet. *Verbum sat*. […]"[7]

The point at stake here is the acknowledgement and authentication of the semantic transition in the range of meanings of the word – "old as well new." The "new" political meaning had been circulating in Britain for some years, thanks to a process of "cultural transfer," with Leonhard. Its international contours – i.e., its connection with the experience of the Spanish 'Liberales' no less than its assumed 'Jacobinical' quality in the eyes of the conservative intelligentsia – have been debated in relation to the specific contribution of the journal by scholars, including Jonathan Gross and, notably, Daisy Hay.[8]

In the passage, the phrase "in these times" calls attention to the word's newly extended polysemy, even as it advances an explicitly *non*-political meaning. The latter is broadly associated with the *general* notion ("every species") of "liberal knowledge," and is paradoxically made to overlap with the (new) political one. This manoeuvre is carried

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reading of the text" (2). The latter definition is from Philippe Lejeune's *Pact Autobiographique* (1975), which includes "the ambiguous game of prefaces" in what amounts to all paratextual material (Cf. Genette, *Paratexts*, 2 n. 5).

7 Leigh Hunt, "Preface" to *The Liberal*, 1 (1822), ix. Further references are given parenthetically in the text. See *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 3: *Periodical Essays*, edited by Robert Morrison (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), 1–20.

8 Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 151–170; Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment," *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 4 (October 2008): 307–320.

out by way of a naturalized, metonymic cause-effect relationship, which reverses the ratio between general and *particular*, thus endorsing the right of the *political* "Liberals" to appropriate the set of values accompanying the idea itself of *liberality*. Symmetrically, the playful conjuring of the mainstream, as it were, self-appointed *liberal* – "the old club-house Gentleman" – allows the laying bare of the logical, ethical and political flaws in the conservative annexation of the notion, as the immediate follow-up clarifies:

> I am a liberal myself, if you come to that, and a devilish liberal I am. I gave for instance five guineas out of the receipts of my sinecure to the Irish sufferers; but that is between ourselves. […] Good, – good. I'll take in your journal myself; – here's to the success of it; – only don't make it too violent, you rogues; – don't spoil the balance. (God! I've spilt my bumper!) Cut up Southey as much as you please. […] But spare the King and the Ministers and all that, particularly Lord Castlereagh and the Duke of Wellington. D----d gentlemanly fellow, Castlereagh, as you know; and besides he's dead. Shocking thing – shocking. It was all nonsense about his being so cold-hearted, and doing Ireland so much harm. He was the most gentlemanly of men. Wars must be carried on; Malthus has proved that millions must be slaughtered from time to time. The nonsense about that is as stupid as the cry about the game-laws and those infernal villains the poachers, who ought all to be strung up like hares. ("Preface," ix)

The "old club-house Gentleman" thus embodies a dominant class for whom being *liberal*, in the *OED* first acceptation of "generous, magnanimous," entails the coarse allotting of "five guineas out of the receipts of my sinecure to the Irish sufferers" – while callously endorsing, *post mortem*, the ruthless policy in Ireland of Lord Castlereagh, whose shadow hovers across the "Preface" – and the *Liberal* altogether – as the quintessential expression of "the most illiberal and vindictive of statesmen" ("Preface," xi).[9] In his rough, uncontainable prattling, the talkative,

9 Robert Stewart, Viscount of Castlereagh, had been Chief Secretary for Ireland between 1798 and 1801 during the Irish Rebellion and through the Act of Union; as British Foreign Secretary, from 1812 to his death by suicide in 1822, he was a key actor, first in the crucial phase of the Napoleonic Wars and later, in the making of the new world order at the Congress of Vienna. He had long been a target for the Hunt circle. In 1819, in the immediate follow-up of the Peterloo massacre, P. B. Shelley sent Leigh Hunt his *Mask of Anarchy* from Italy. In the poem, in a provocative reversal of the traditional masque, governmental figures personify

self-assumedly *liberal*, and grotesquely uncouth Gentleman – a "red-face" bumper-spiller – significantly pairs the Malthusian theory of population with a class-sensitive issue such as the current game laws – a deadly satirical combination, conveying a contemptuous, cynical outlook in matters of social hierarchy. As argued by an early 20th-century historian, "[n]o other form of amusement was so ardently pursued or so jealously defended by the privileged classes of the Georgian era" as "field sports" – a leisure pursuit for the rich that reproduced and reinforced class inequalities and counted statesmen among its votaries, including the Duke of Wellington, who appears alongside Castlereagh and the King himself in Hunt's circuitous indictment.[10] And indeed, while Murder, under the Mask of Castlereagh, appears to be followed by "[s]even blood-hounds" in stanza 2 of Percy Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*,[11] Wellington's "Hounds" are conjured up in the excerpt from an 1819 war document 'from below', which stands as epigraph to the

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abstract concepts, and Castlereagh appears as the mask for Murder, one of the sombre figures accompanying the baleful horseman Anarchy. Cf. Kir Kuiken, "Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy* and the Problem of Modern Sovereignty," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 2 (2011), 98. Within the first number of the *Liberal*, Castlereagh is conjured up in both Byron's *Vision of Judgment* (Stanza XCIII) and his "Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh," where again the politician's suicide act is corrosively commented upon: "So CASTLEREAGH has cut his throat!—The worst/Of this is,—that his own was not the first." Cf. *The Liberal*, I, 164. Indictments of Castlereagh in the theatre of post-Waterloo international politics include Thomas Moore's verse satires *The Fudge Family in Paris* (1818) and *Tom Crib's Memorial to Congress* (1819). Cf. Frederik Van Dam, "Waterloo Remembered: Thomas Moore and the Diplomatic Legacy of the Battle of Waterloo in the Nineteenth Century," *Studies in Romanticism*, 56 (Fall, 2017), 379–398. On Moore and Hunt, see Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, 234, n. 18.

10 See Chester Kirby, "The English Game Law System," *The American Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (January 1933), 243. On the legislation strictures between 1816 and 1817 that made it possible to be sentenced to a seven-year transportation for the offence, see P. B. Munsche's comprehensive study of the subject, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws, 1671–1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 102–104, 176.

11 "I met Murder on the way—/He had a mask like Castlereagh—/Very smooth he looked, yet grim;/Seven blood-hounds followed him […]." P. B. Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy: A Poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley: Now First Published with a Preface by Leigh Hunt* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 2.

class-embittered parable of Hunt's satirical ballad "The Dogs," which was included in the second number of *The Liberal*:

> I at this time got a post, being for fatigue, with other four. We were sent to break biscuit, and make a mess for Lord Wellington's Hounds. I was very hungry, and thought it a good job at the time; as we got our own fill, while we broke the biscuit – a thing I had not got for some days. When thus engaged, the Prodigal Son was never once out of my mind; and I sighed, as I fed the Dogs, over my humble situations and my ruined hopes.[12]

The poor's hunger speaks for itself, conveyed via an indignation that stands out, without comment. Still, the soldier's voice in the epigraph finds its outraged poetic correlative throughout the poem, with the sustained metaphorical thread of the 'dogs' as the sour leitmotif of an incensed, class-defined denunciation:

> Then come the soldiers […]
> […] they look just as soldiers should;
> They've had no dinners for this week or so;
> Just to insinuate, by their want of blood,
> The heroic privilege they have to go
> Without their food, and if required, be starved,
> Till all the puppies in the land are served. ("The Dogs", stanza 32, 256)

Hunt's fierce political satire – whose manuscript title reads "The Pack of Hounds"[13] – provides an allegory of national politics and military hierarchy, and is addressed "To the Abusers of the *Liberal*," in a dedicatory paragraph that is an indictment and a declaration of hostility, prompted by the repeated and childish ("boy's play and cutting of knuckles") attacks of those who deny their fellow human beings "the right and the tranquillity of speech" (245). In stanza 23 of the poem, hunting appears as a surrogate for war, and thus a "*minor* slaughtering fit" for the powerful:

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12 Thomas Pococke, *Journal of a Soldier of the 71st, or Glasgow Regiment, Highland Light Infantry, from 1806 to 1815*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: W. & C. Tait, 1819), 164. Quoted in Leigh Hunt, "The Dogs," *The Liberal* II: 245–263 (246). See *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 6: *Poetical Works, 1822–1859*, edited by John Strachan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), 1–16.

13 British Library, Add MS 38108, f. 204.

> My dogs! Yes, mine – every one's dogs – the nation's,
> For were they not of extreme use to it?
> Did they not give the Great Lord relaxations,
> When taken with his minor slaughtering fit? (stanza 23, 253)[14]

Hunt was again to take up the issue in an article that appeared, years later, in his *London Journal* for December 1834. The article reported edited extracts from a volume advocating *The Necessity of Popular Education as a National Object*, by Scotsman James Simpson – where the game laws, and the related "cruel rural sports" for the upper classes in the first place, appear among a list of disreputable practices – "remnants of barbarism" alongside "national jealousies, national antipathies, commercial restrictions and often offensive war."[15]

Going back to the "Preface," the authorial point comes full circle in the final part, where the semantic irreducibility of the diverse "notions of liberality" is declared, as endorsed from ethically and politically aloof stances:

> […] we need not say that he [the old Gentleman] misinterprets our notions of liberality, which certainly does not consist either in making the sort of confusion, or keeping the sort of peace, which he speaks of. […] [T]o confound all parties themselves with one another, which is the real end of those pretended liberalities, and assume that none of them are a jot better or worse than the other, and may contain just as good and generous people, – this is to confound liberality with illiberality, narrow view with large, the instincts of a selfish choice with those of a generous one, and […] the mere amenities and ordinary virtues of private life […] with the noblest and boldest sympathies in behalf of the human race. ["Preface," x]

In the passage, the radical differences in worldview underlying the very semantic territory that the word (this time inflected as the noun

14 The endnote attached renders the reference unquestionably clear: "Hunting, they say, is the image of war, and therefore the favourite pastime of kings, and other great personages, when they cannot be hunting men: just as an ogre might keep a picture of a man to gloat over, when he could not get the original to eat" (265).

15 *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, 3 December 1834: 282–284 (283). See *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. Morrison, 285–288. Hunt's conflicting views on war, peace, and national character are discussed in Philip Shaw, "Leigh Hunt and the Aesthetics of Post-War Liberalism," in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1789–1823*, ed. Philip Shaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 185–207.

liberality) designates are boldly vindicated. The borders of such a territory are debatable, unsettled, and therefore subject to revision and manipulation. The "narrow view," personified in the mask of the old Gentleman, restricts the sphere of liberality to the generic and, above all, purely *private* exercise of "ordinary virtue" in the individual interchange, which ends up flattening out more substantial political differences. Conversely, the "new," comprehensive notion of liberality, as embraced by the journal, is invested with a mandate that is much wider than the merely individual domain, to encompass a collective and, *therefore*, political realm, "in behalf of the human race." It thus contributes to redeeming "all monstrous sacrifices of the many to the few," as the final words of the document read, in a passionately visionary construal that appears to pay homage, again, to Shelley's great Peterloo poem which Hunt had received from the poet in the aftermath of the massacre, in September 1819, and which he would not bring to light before 1832.[16]

Unsurprisingly, the reviews of the first number of the *Liberal* repeatedly took up the challenge of its "Preface", and vitriolic comments on the journal's impudence in appropriating the qualifier enflamed the pages of periodicals, as well as a small bunch of dedicated pamphlets.[17] The archenemy of the "Cockney School of Poetry," *Blackwood's*, had reviled Hunt's narrative "The Florentine Lovers" in number 12 (1822) – as we shall see shortly. In number 13, for January 1823, an article, under the heading "The Candid. No. 1" targets again, by alliteration, at the "Paltry Periodical of Pisa," engaging in the terminological dispute initiated in the "Preface." Every "common word," once it is "applied to party purposes," according to "The Candid," "at once acquires a new signification; and although it does not lose the old one, the *party* and the *ordinary* significations are sometimes the very reverse of each other."[18]

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16 John Worthen, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Critical Biography* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 248. Cf. Hunt's "Preface," *The Masque of Anarchy. A Poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley: Now First Published with a Preface by Leigh Hunt* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), v–xxx.

17 In this chapter I will consider the case of the *Blackwood's Magazine* only, with passing references to some other exemplifications, which are the object of further, ongoing study.

18 R.S., "The Candid" No. 1, *Blackwood's Magazine* 13 (1823), 109, emphasis in the original. Attribution of the "R.S." signature is J. Gillon or John Wilson, in

In other words, in the face of a semantic transformation that invests the political sphere, the assumed original meaning risks being altered beyond recognition: this has been the case, the *Magazine* argues, with other politically sensitive keywords – all endowed with an original *positive* meaning, such as “independent”, “enlightened,” or “reform” – which have come to designate, in the journal’s rather crude political Manichaeism, opposite attitudes; this is especially the case with the arrogant appropriation of the qualifier *liberal*, endorsed by the Pisan journal: “[…] there is something palpably *illiberal* in a person’s appropriating the name of the Liberal, exclusively, […] to himself or his own party” (110). The *Magazine* singles out the transnational mediation for the “new” altered meaning, and blames the assumed French ideological ancestry of the politically modified acceptation of the word: “anything so excessively illiberal could not have had its conception in an English brain” (110). French in origin, Liberalism (always with capital L as the scarlet letter branding the *illiberal* exploiters of the politically distorted meaning of the word) – Liberalism “is exactly the reverse of liberality,” where the latter notion includes a set of individual qualities, which perfectly mirror Hunt’s dismissive wording of conservative liberality as “mere amenities and ordinary virtues of private life:”

> Formerly, a man who made pretensions to common candour, which is but the lowest degree of liberality, thought it incumbent upon him to do justice to the merits of all men, especially a rival or an adversary; and where the conduct was proper, to suppose the motives and intentions were good; to applaud sincerely and heartily where applause was due; to put a favourable construction on doubtful actions; to overlook small faults where there were great merit and apparent good intention; to make due allowances for great difficulties; and where it was proper or necessary to blame, carefully to abstain from exaggeration and misrepresentation. (110)

Alan Lang Strout, *A Bibliography of Articles in Blackwood’s Magazine, Volumes I Through XVIII, 1817–1825* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Technological College, 1959), 104, cited in David Higgins, “From Gluttony to Justified Sinning: Confessional Writing in *Blackwood’s* and the *London Magazine*,” in *Romanticism and* Blackwood’s Magazine: *‘An Unprecedented Phenomenon’*, ed. Robert Morrison and Daniel S. Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 56n. Further references are given parenthetically in the text.

Such qualities, of course, for the reviewer, are to be found nowhere in the "Italian" journal or in its inspirers, including the "Emperor of Cockenzie" (115). In fact, one step only is left for Liberalism to be identified as a virtual synonym for *Jacobinism* – the most conceivably pernicious word, carrying the sheer burden of the most pernicious semantic association: but this passage is adumbrated rather than effectively accomplished, as a rather convoluted footnote reluctantly admits:

> The proper word here [instead of Liberalism] would be Jacobinism, but Jacobin is a mere party nickname, a word that had not a meaning till it became the name of a party; and having received its meaning from the character and conduct of a party who were everything that is infamous, unrelieved by anything that is tolerable, it is a name not to be written or uttered by the Candid where there is a possibility of its being misapplied. It was the more than implied, the strongly expressed regrets at the triumph of Liberty and Old England at Waterloo […] that led me to use it at all. (119n)

Significantly, the ideological short-circuit and conflation of the two via the Spanish component, as it were, is ascribed to Lord Castlereagh himself, who is recorded, in an often-quoted extract from the Parliamentary Debates for 1816, to have pointed out that the Spanish 'Liberales', "though in a military point of view an anti-French party, were politically a French party of the worst description. […] The 'Liberales' were a perfectly Jacobinical party, in point of principle" – in other words, *tout se tient*.[19]

In the course of the following months, new voices added to the debate, mostly attuned to the conservative semantic option considering liberality/liberalism as expressions of values related to the (gentlemanly) private sphere of behaviour. These included the conservative periodical *The Council of Ten*, as well as a number of short pamphlets

19 *Parl. Deb.*, vol. xxxvii, p. 602, cited in Elie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century: The Liberal Awakening, 1815–1830*, Tr. by E. I. Watkin (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), 84. Cf. Jonathan Gross, "Byron and *The Liberal*: Periodical as Political Posture," *Philological Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (Fall 1993), 474; Leonhard, "From European Liberalism to the Language of Liberalisms: The Semantics of Liberalism in European Comparison," in *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* 8 (2004), 23; Hay, "Liberals," 309.

that appeared in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the first number, including an anonymous *Critique on* The Liberal, published in 1822, which especially blamed its assumed abuse of religion and patriotism: "And this is they call *Liberalism*, the essential of which are candour and moderation!"[20] Still in 1822, a fierce satirical pamphlet in the form of a theatrical interlude appeared, which is controversially attributed to William Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly Review* and Hunt's antagonist over the course of a long-standing belligerence.[21] Once again, it is the 'Italian' journal's title that is targeted in the first place – via the construction of a reversed mirror image of the Hunt-Byron-Shelley enterprise. The title page of *The Illiberal! Verse and Prose from the North!!*, both ideologically and geopolitically, highlights the chasm gaping open between the two acceptations of the adjective/ noun /liberal/, which in turn, ultimately, point to two diametrically opposed worldviews. The pamphlet relies on the most trite abuse of Cockney paraphernalia, embodied in the flock of Hunt's children, who are listed in the dramatis personae – alongside "Magnus Apollo" Lord Byron, Versifier Mr. Hunt, and the Ghost of Percy B. Shelly [*sic*] – as "The Little Aitches, Imported from the Land of Cockney, as Assistant Scribblers to the Liberal."[22] Apparently, as Kim Wheatley has suggested, the *Blackwood's* campaign against Hunt and his circle significantly influenced the reception of the *Liberal* – all the more so, following the resurgence of the infamous series "On the Cockney School," with No. VII, "Hunt's Art of Love," appearing three years after the review of Hunt's *Foliage* in October 1819.[23]

In the *Blackwood's* article, Hunt's story "The Florentine Lovers" is vilified as a new exercise in Cockney arrogance. The virulence of the

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20 Anon., *A Critique on The Liberal* (London: Printed for the Author, by William Day, 1822),14.

21 William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 120–121.

22 William Gifford?, *The Illiberal! Verse and Prose form the North!!* (London: Printed by G. Morgan, 1822), 4.

23 Kim Wheatley, "Conceiving Disgust: Leigh Hunt, William Gifford and the *Quarterly Review*," in *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Nicholas Roe (London - New York: Routledge, 2003), 189.

attacks on "Hunt and his friends" was based "on social, sexual, stylistic, and ideological grounds," as Jeffrey Cox has pointed out.[24] The presence and incendiary combination of each and every one of these different levels makes this piece of writing an appropriate litmus test for appreciating the politics of "The Florentine Lovers."

Styled a "knight-errant erotic" in the very opening sentence, Hunt is the object of repeated slurs of sexual nature, apparently warranted by his treatment of the erotic topic in the story. A coarse rhetoric, obsessively focused on sexual potency, is established, whose aim is clearly to refute its target's *writing* power, which is in fact made to coincide with male vigour. Thus, "The Florentine Lovers" is described as a "more impotent attempt" than the outrageous *Story of Rimini* – Hunt's 1816 experimental rewriting of the Paolo and Francesca episode in Dante's *Inferno*, which had sparked off the *Blackwood's* campaign on the Cockney School. The point is reinforced and made even more blatantly clear: "[…] we now consider Leigh Hunt the most contemptible little capon of the bantam breed, that ever vainly dropped a wing, or sidled up to a partlet."[25] Again, later on, commenting on Hunt's powerfully sensuous description of the young male lover: "But is there not something effeminate, Cockneyish, and Sporus-like, in a male writer speaking so of male lips?" (775).[26] Finally, and even more explicitly, "the odious Cockney […] finishes his picture, which seems painted by an eunuch […]" (779). Such an obsessive focalization on the sexual cannot be separated from the other "grounds" for the *Blackwood's* attack – social, stylistic, and ideological, and its in-depth motivations emerge in the final part of the article. Apparently, no Cockney has a right to *culture*, of which Italy is routinely seen as the quintessential embodiment: "The essence of his sin is in presuming to put his 'Cockney feet' […] upon classic ground" (790) – he is "an unauthorized, uncredentialed, and unwarranted intruder" (790). The citadel of culture must not

24 Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, 22. See also Cox, *Romanticism and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 160–216.

25 "On the Cockney School. No. VII: Hunt's Art of Love," *Blackwood's Magazine*, 12 (1823), 775. Further references are given parenthetically in the text.

26 Sporus is chronicled as a young boy whom Roman Emperor Nero favoured, had castrated, and married.

be accessed by those who, by definition, are not entitled to enter – the truism is perfect, ferocious and definitive. *In the same way*, no Cockney has a right to "write about – love" – "any Cockney who writes about love deserves to be kicked" (790–791) – for the good reason that no Cockney has a notion of what love is: "a tender affair between a lady and a gentleman" rather than "a congress between a male and a female" (790) – Hunt "supposes he can make love; – not he – any more than he can *write grammar*" (790): *vide supra* – same as above. The grand finale is a crude, class-focused insult levelled at the Hunt-Byron association, which is seen as degrading the nobleman, as an outrage he has "committed on manners, and morals, and intellectuals" – while establishing the Cockney "in his proper situation – the menial of a lord" (791).

The imbrication of class and sexual bigotry shaping the *Blackwood*'s attack conveys by implication its target's jovial subversiveness. "The Florentine Lovers" is a divertissement, a celebration of youth and passion inspired by the five-page slender narrative of "Ippolito e Dianora, segreti Amanti e Sposi," included in Marco Lastri's collection of cultural annotations on the Florence architecture, *L'Osservatore Fiorentino*.[27] Hunt expands it into a fully-fledged story, set in medieval Italy and interspersed with captivating metanarrative notations – which again were the object of the *Blackwood's* sneers. It is in the metanarrative space of authorial meditation, no less than in the glory of the love narrative, that the politics of "The Florentine Lovers" lies, whereby the "horrible spectacles of lust, tyranny, and revenge" – then as now – can only be countered and transfigured by the universal – intellectual and spiritual, *because* sensuous and physical – and very Shelleyan, power of love.[28]

"The object of our work is not political," the "Preface" had stated,

> except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect, the connection between politics and all other subjects of interest to mankind having been discovered, never again to be done away (vii).

27 Marco Lastri, *L'Osservatore Fiorentino sugli Edifizi della sua Patria*, Terza Edizione, Tomo Ottavo (Firenze: Gasparo Ricci, 1821), 27–33.

28 See Hay, "Liberals," 314–315.

The passage is crucial to the understanding of the poetics and politics – the poetics which is politics, in fact – underlying the entire project of the *Liberal* – its expansive, wide-ranging, full-embracing notion of liberality and Liberalism, as well as the import of its disturbing quality in the eyes of conservative criticism. *Nomina sunt consequentia rerum* – which are in turn, at times, *'consequentia nominum.'*

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Lilla Maria Crisafulli

2. What's in a Name? Shelley, the South, and *The Liberal*

When the first issue of *The Liberal*[1] was published on 10 October 1822, the periodical was largely dismissed by the British press, being judged an editorial failure and a mismatched intellectual and political adventure. This essay aims to reassess the supposed failure of the journal, by way of an investigation into the intentions of its founders, the process of its genesis and gestation, and the political and cultural motives that lay behind its hostile reception in Britain. Setting out from considerations regarding the choice and implications of the journal's title, I will go on to discuss the role played by each of its founders, with particular reference to the aesthetic and political aspirations of Shelley, the *primum mobile* of *The Liberal* project.

1 Although in the first edition of the journal the title appears as *The Liberal*, Leigh Hunt in his *Autobiography* and in *Byron and his Contemporaries* refers to the periodical as *Liberal* rather than *The Liberal*. Also Jeffrey Cox argues convincingly that the correct title of the journal is *Liberal*: Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20, 38–81. In this regard, Jane Stabler, quoting Medwin's *Conversations*, states: "The title of the journal appears to have been in flux for some time, and 'half a dozen' possibilities were rejected before it became the *Liberal*": Thomas Medwin, *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 254, quoted in Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, January 2015, https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal [accessed 31 August 2023].

The Press's Hostility and the Choice of a Provocative Title

Acrimony towards the journal had begun on the eve of the actual publication, namely when it was publicized in *The Examiner* on 6 October 1822. The advertisement announcing "The New Periodical Work from Italy", includes the interpretation of the journal's title by Leigh Hunt's brother, John:

> 'The Liberal', – a title which conveys in the most comprehensive manner the *spirit* in which the work is written, and falls in happily with the general progress of opinion (we do not mean in a political so much as in a general sense) throughout Europe.[2]

The announcement caused outrage in the British press, which John Hunt's explanation did little to mitigate, underlining, as it does, the radical European dimension of the journal at the very time in which the country was becoming increasingly nationalistic and insular. The European vocation of the journal went hand in hand – in Hunt's words – with "the general progress of opinion", where "progress" implies a "development towards an improved or more advanced condition."[3] Hunt's claim that *The Liberal* "conveys in the most comprehensive manner the *spirit* in which the work is written" stakes out a strategic and provocative distance from the reactionary climate in which Europe had been plunged after the fall of Napoleon, and implies opposition to the arbitrary powers to which the Southern European countries were subject.

However, the bad reputation that the still unpublished periodical had already gained was mainly due to its founders and contributors (Leigh Hunt, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron), all of whom were controversial figures, members of the so-called 'Pisan circle'[4] (alternatively

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2 *The Examiner*, no. 767 (6 October 1822): 633, quoted in William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 71.

3 For this definition see the *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed 31 August 2023, https://www.lexico.com/?search_filter=en_dictionary

4 This definition was coined by Thomas Medwin, P. B. Shelley's cousin, in his 1847 *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, the first full-length biography of Shelley to appear. The definition was then reused by C. L. Cline, *Byron, Shelley and Their*

called by the British press 'Cockney School', with reference to the leading figure of Leigh Hunt, or 'Satanic School', with reference to Byron's gothic vein and Shelley's reputation as an atheist). In any case, the founders were regarded as a community of radical writers who aspired to cultural and social reforms. Even though *The Liberal* was printed in England and addressed to an English public, it was entirely conceived in Italy, a country that had become a sort of litmus paper by which to measure one's own anxieties and ambitions. The periodical's final thought-provoking title, *The Liberal*, was reinforced by an equally evocative subtitle, *Verse and Prose from the South*, suggesting a cultural and political affiliation with the South of Europe, especially Italy. Such a connection was almost inevitably perceived as a challenge that – as William H. Marshall points out – was soon to be lampooned in 1822 by an anonymous and ferocious satire, in the form of a theatrical interlude (possibly by William Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, long-lasting antagonist of Leigh Hunt) called *The Illiberal! Verse and Prose from the North!!*.[5]

In the opening of his preface to the first issue of *The Liberal*, Leigh Hunt refers to the animosity that the announcement of the journal had produced in British press:

> But we are forced to be prefatory, whether we would or no: for others, it seems, have been so anxious to furnish us with something of this sort, that they have blown the trumpet for us; and done us the honour of announcing, that nothing less is to ensue than a dilapidation of all the outworks of civilized society. Such at least, they say, is our intention; and such would be the consequences, if they, the trumpeters, did not take care, by counterblasts, to puff the said outworks up again. We should be more blasts, to puff the said outworks up again. We should be more sensible of this honour, if it did not arise from a confusion of ideas. They say that we are to cut up religion, morals, and everything that is legitimate; – a pretty carving. It only shews what they really think of their own opinions on those subjects.[6]

Pisan Circle (London: John Murray, 1952), and, more recently, by Maria Schoina, *Romantic "Anglo-Italians": Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (2009; repr., Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

5 Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 120–121, 217.

6 Leigh Hunt, "Preface," *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* 1, no. 1 (1822): v.

The title of the journal, together with eloquent passages from Leigh Hunt's preface to its first issue, not only announces a transnational approach to literature that strategically overturns the sense of nationhood, patriotism and Britishness, that – as Linda Colley suggests – the prolonged conflict with France had consigned to early nineteenth-century Britain.[7] More particularly, it makes Italy the oppositional vantage point from which to look towards home. Paul Stock claims that "Traditionally, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been associated with emerging ideas of nationalism […] This configures Europe as a place where hostile states are in perpetual competition, and where peoples and communities increasingly define themselves by their distinctive 'nationality.'"[8] As a consequence of its association with British intellectual reformers such as the Shelleys, the Hunts and Byron, the mere fact of planning and announcing a new transnational journal, openly addressed to liberal minds, constituted a provocation towards this nationalistic and conservative historical context. According to Eberle-Sinatra this "level of partisanship against Hunt, *The Liberal*, and the potentially subversive politics that the journal represented readily serve to explain attacks of this kind".[9]

Not by chance, as late as 24 February 1823, Byron, writing to Mary Shelley, still complains about the virulence of the attacks on the journal:

> I have no other news – but on business – and continual declamation against the Liberal from all parties – literary – amicable – and political – I never heard so persevering an outcry against any work – nor do I know the reason for not even dullness or demerit could authorize the extraordinary tone of reprobation.[10]

7 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 18, 53, 322, 364–368, 370–371.

8 Paul Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe*, Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

9 Michael Eberle-Sinatra, *Leigh Hunt and the London Literary Scene: A Reception History of His Major Works, 1805–1828* (New York; London: Routledge, 2005), 99.

10 George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974–1982), 10:108.

Liberals, Liberalism, Italy and Italian Freedom

In addition, the journal, being conceived and mainly produced in Italy, a country that was seen at once as a mythical and a real place which, because of its multilayered cultural background and political history, served as a powerful vehicle for contestation. The group of young intellectuals who had chosen Italy as their home exploited such cultural complexity by giving voice to what living there, and making their opinions audible from there, implied. As Peter Vassallo reminds us, Byron admits in a letter to Murray that his long poem *A Prophecy of Dante* was inspired by a deep feeling for Italy:

> […] for I shall think it by far the most interesting spectacle and moment in existence – to see the Italians send the Barbarians of all nations back to their own dens – I lived long enough among them – to feel more for them as a nation than for any other people in existence.[11]

Again, in January 1821, Byron notes in his journal that "the Liberals are arming," adding the following day that the "opponents of the Carbonari or Liberals" had not yet attacked.[12]

As for Leigh Hunt – new to the actual experience of life in the Mediterranean country, although a great admirer of classical culture and of Italian language and literature at home – he inevitably projected onto Italy and the Italians a preconceived paradigm on his arrival in the country. In point of fact, on 9 February 1820, long before Hunt's sojourn in Italy, Maria Gisborne, referring to his potential but still not definitively planned journey – writes to Mary Shelley emphasizing Hunt's 'mental' expectations in relation to the Southern country: "Hunt is prepared to like Italy; he is well acquainted with the style of the country in theory; but yet it will be a new world to him".[13]

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11 Quoted in Peter Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 39.

12 Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 1974–1982, 7:250; 8:16–17.

13 Maria Gisborne in *Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams, Shelley's Friends: Their Journals and Letters*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 76.

Undoubtedly, Hunt imagined Italy as a sort of spectacle performed in a large natural, historical and artistic amphitheater. Hence, Hunt's Italian "imaginative geography", to use Edward Said's definition, creates "a universe of representative discourse".[14] On 2 July 1822, from Pisa, the day after his landing in Leghorn, Hunt writes ecstatically to his sister in law, Elizabeth Kent (Bessy):

> Dearest Bessy, I thought of you many times yesterday during my half-an-hour's ride to Lord B.'s country-house. You remember how we used to look at the poor little vignettes in the *Parnaso Italiano*, and fancy Italy. You cannot conceive – yes, you can, – how delightful it was to find a number of features exactly the same, though greatly heightened in beauty.[15]

A few days later, on 8 July, Hunt writes again to Elizabeth describing the Italian women he had met:

> The general aspect of the women in Italy is striking, but not handsome; that is to say, stronger-marked and more decided, than pleasing. But when you do see fine faces, they are fine indeed; and they have all an intelligence and absence of affectation, very different from that idea of foreigners which the French are apt to give people. But you know the difference without having seen them. They are very like what you think. They have your own cast of figure; and the veils they wear give them such an air of the *picturesque* [my the italics] as you might expect in a painting and sculpturing in action.[16]

Hunt evokes here the language of the picturesque, dear to the Northern travellers, in order to express the emotions his sight conveys. Likewise, when he approaches Genoa from the sea, he describes the magnificence of the landscape, resorting to the language of the 'beautiful' in order to communicate his delight:

> Imagine a glorious amphitheatre of white houses, with mountains on each side and at the back. […] This is Genoa […] The lucid Mediterranean Sea washed against our vessel, like amber: a sky, blue indeed, was above our heads: inconveniences and dangers were behind us; health, hope, and Italy were before us. With

14 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 272–273.

15 Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Thornton Leigh Hunt (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862), 2:187.

16 Hunt, 2:188.

> what contented anxiety did we not ask the names of the towns and villages, as we saw them one after the other, seated on the shore like ladies, to prepare for the approach of voyagers to the great Queen! […] Her marble pomp opens upon us! We fancy we see the palace of her great son Doria! How truly does she realise our expectations, poetical as they were![17]

However, once his first 'physical' meeting with Italians takes place, he loses much of his enthusiasm. In point of fact, to Hunt the physical features of the Italian people were shaped by the enslaved condition that they were experiencing. It follows that if Italian women were beautiful, due to their 'consciousness of beauty', Italian men, on the contrary, were ugly especially due to the 'carelessness' created by the political environment in which they were obliged to live:

> What is the cause then of this extraordinary degeneracy? Is it, after all, an honourable one to the Italians? Is it that the men, thinking of the moral and political situation of their country, and so long habituated to feel themselves degraded, acquire a certain instinctive carelessness and contempt of appearance ; while the women, on the other hand, more taken up with their own affairs, with the consciousness of beauty, and the flattery which is more or less always paid them, have retained a greater portion of their self-possession and esteem ? […][18]

What Hunt attempts here is to establish a direct relationship between the physical appearance of the Italian males and the degree of freedom they were allowed: a physiognomical reading not very different from the interpretation that Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, gave of the gestural language of Viganò's choral drama in her famous, well-documented, and ultra-censured travel book, *Italy*.[19] Undoubtedly, Italy itself was a

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17 Leigh Hunt, " 'Letters from Abroad'. Letter II – Genoa," *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* 1, no. 2 (1822): 269.

18 Leigh Hunt, " 'Letters from Abroad': Letter Three – Italy," *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* 2, no. 3 (1823): 53.

19 In *Italy*, Lady Morgan, back from experiencing Viganò's choral drama *Otello* at La Scala Theatre, writes: "The Italian ballet always differed from every other, and seems to have been the origin of the modern melo-drame. It borrows its perfection from causes which may be said to be not only physical, but political. The mobility of the Italian muscle is well adapted to the language of gesture, which breaks through even their ordinary discourse; while a habit of distrust, impressed upon the people by a fearful system of espionage, impels them to trust their thoughts rather to a look or an action, than to a word or a phrase." See

complex and contradictory country that, while seducing the Northern travellers on account of its beauty and past history, was also the privileged target of discourse, attitudes and images that, even when sympathetic, as Hunt was towards a people in need of freedom, retained old xenophobic stereotypes.

Interestingly, Hunt, adds a post-scriptum to the closing of his "Letter Three – Italy" in which he justifies the harshness of some of his judgements on the Italians:

> P. S. Nothing which has here been said upon the faults of the Italians, can of course prejudice those finer characters among them, who, by the very excess of the corruptions and foreign oppression they see on all sides, are daily excited more and more to a patriotic wish to get rid of them. You may rest satisfied, that the multitude of these characters is daily increasing.[20]

If Hunt's imaginative lenses were always at work in his perception of Italy, what seems to surface above all is the political condition of Italy he had in mind, fed by the epistolary exchange he had had with the Shelleys over the years, and animated by the publishing ambition that had brought him and his family to the peninsula. This is the case, for example, with his reading of the Italians' love for Rossini at the expense of Mozart:

> Mozart is nothing in Italy, and Rossini every thing. Nobody even says any thing of Mozart, since Figaro (tell it not in Gothland!) was hissed at Florence. His name appears to be suppressed by agreement; while Rossini is talked of, written of, copied, sung, hummed, whistled, and demi-semi-quavered from morning to night. […] and I think I can now explain to you, in one word, how it is that they [the Italians] contrive to render themselves deaf to the rest of his merits, and to the

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"Lombardy", Chapters V–VI, in Lady Morgan, *Italy* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1821), 1:140–159. Hunt recalls Lady Morgan in another passage of his writing. In his "Letters from Abroad" published in the first issue of the *Liberal*, he quotes Lady Morgan in relation to Italian children and, once again, physiognomy is taken as measure: "Lady Morgan has justly remarked the promising countenances of Italian children, compared with what they turn out to be as they grow older; and adds with equal justice, that it is an evident affair of government and education." *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* (London: John Hunt, 1822–1823), 1, no. 1 (1822): 117–118.

20 Hunt, "'Letters from Abroad'. Letter Three – Italy," 64.

> inspiration which he himself drank at an Italian source. Mozart was a *German*. I do not mean simply that he was a German in music; but he was a German by birth. The Germans in Italy, the lorders over Italian freedom and the Italian soil, trumpet his superiority over Italian composers; and however right they may be, at all events with regard to modern ones, this is enough to make the Italians hate him.[21]

Thus, the preference of the Italians for Rossini, rather than Mozart, was entirely due – claims Hunt – to political reasons, Mozart being a 'German', a citizen of that Northern region, especially Austria, that oppressed a large part of Italy, the rest of which was under the despotic power of the Austrians' allies.

Additionally, Italy was a country still far from the nation-building process that characterized the rest of Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Britain or France. It was divided into several small states under the domination of foreign powers and torn between opposing factions. But the Italians' thirst for liberty was nonetheless real, having been re-awakened by short-lived Napoleonic republican ideals, that had encouraged the Italians' hope for independence. The seed of Bonaparte's 'liberalism', especially with regard to Italian public institutions and the reform of civil laws, had been planted and would resurface sooner or later.[22]

As I mentioned above, even the title of the journal, *The Liberal*, was a threatening sign for the British establishment, suggesting an ideological view that went against the tide in relation to the political restauration that had been established in Europe with the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815). Likewise, regarding Italy, it was precisely the Congress of Vienna that not only remade Europe after the downfall of Emperor Napoleon I, but it also reconsigned the North of Italy to Austria, and the rest of the country to an even greater degree of administrative fragmentation and to a condition of intellectual and physical servitude. Thus, a discourse from the South, and from Italy in particular, had

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21 Hunt, 48–50.

22 See *The Examiner* 20 August 1815 on Bonaparte's liberalism in establishing "liberal institutions" in Italy (537). Quoted in Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23," 12, footnote 13.

multilayered implications that were difficult to disentangle and impossible to disregard.

The political contradictions and the international complexity that lay behind the founding of *The Liberal* certainly contributed to its premature failure, even though, at the same time, they made the journal a unique undertaking, open, even today, to lively academic discussions and fruitful scholarly research.

The Liberal, given the personal and political reputation of the three founders, posed what was defined, in the years of Italian post-unification, as the 'Southern Question', interconnecting the so-called meridionalist discourse with physiognomy, imperialism and liberty. As a result, the journal somehow promises both to confront the reactionary politics recently established in Europe, as well as to address the Pre-Risorgimento expectations of the Italian people. Also, *The Liberal*, besides the political allusions that its title and subtitle suggested – for example to the Italian patriots often defined as the 'Liberals', or Bonaparte's earlier liberalism – also evoked the liberal arts (which Hunt refers to as 'liberalities').[23]

There may have been other motives for the choice of title: as Peter Thorslev underlines, one source might be "the title from a Brussels periodical of 1816–17 named *Le Libéral* (later *Le Vrai Libéral*), the publisher of which was imprisoned for sedition in 1821 […]".[24] Alternatively, Byron may have had in mind "a Spanish connection […] he was of course aware that the constitutionalists in Spain were called the *liberales*, in opposition to the royalists or *serviles*, and that the *liberales* had forced the restitution of the democratic constitution of 1812 (a by-product of the French incursions in the Peninsular War)."[25]

23 In his Preface to the first Issue of the journal Hunt writes: "We wish to do our work quietly, if people will let us,—to contribute our liberalities in the shape of Poetry, Essays, Tales, Translations, and other amenities, … Italian Literature, in particular, will be a favourite subject with us; and so was German and Spanish to have been, till we lost the accomplished Scholar and Friend who was to share our task -, but perhaps we may be able to get a supply of the scholarship, though not of the friendship." Hunt, "Preface," vii.

24 Peter L. Thorslev, "Post-Waterloo Liberalism: The Second Generation," *Studies in Romanticism* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 444.

25 Thorslev, 444. Interestingly, Thorslev underlines the pioneering use by the Pisan circle of the word liberal, at least in Britain, given the fact that in Spain and France

Likewise, Jonathan Cross refers to the "Spanish connection" underlining the influence that Lord Holland, "perhaps the most significant Whig of his day", had on Byron. According to Gross, "Long before Byron's journal appeared, Lord Holland, had already educated a small coterie of English politicians about Spanish liberalism during the Peninsular War [...]. Holland had a demonstrable impact on Byron's politics, his poetry, and his social connections. Though it would be impossible to measure the influence of Henry Holland on Byron's attitude towards the Spanish *liberales*, it would be safe to assume that the importance of the Spanish cause was brought to his attention."[26] Or again, the title might have been chosen by Byron and Hunt as a homage to Shelley's 'liberal' ideas after his premature death.[27] Alternatively, it might be one of the various titles selected during the endless hours Byron and Shelley had spent in conversation while planning the creation of the journal. Charles Robinson emphasizes the close friendship that Shelley and Byron had developed over the years, and that, as we will see, were to become particularly

the word was already widely used. In Britain, the Pisan circle was soon followed by "the 'advanced' Whigs who adopted the term as their own." Thorslev, 445.

26 Jonathan Gross, "Byron and *The Liberal*: Periodical as Political Posture," *Philological Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (1993): 473.

27 It might be useful to point out that according to Leigh Hunt the titles suggested for the journal were initially quite a few. Among them was one that Hunt mentions in a letter to his sister in law, Elizabeth Kent (Bessy), *Hesperides*.
"The title, I believe, will be the Hesperides; – but you will have the first number shortly. You may announce the title at once, for I think it certain." See Hunt's letter from Pisa dated 8 July 1822, in Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, 1:189. The name *Hesperides* originates from *Hesperos*, or *Vesper* in Latin. It stands also for the evening star (*Venus*) but the reference also implies the English word West. To Byron the West meant America, especially because during the year 1821–1822 he cherished the dream of going to live there because he saw it as the country of liberty. See Medwin, *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, in particuar, 2:123; 165: Byron:"Since you left us,' said he, 'I have had serious thoughts of visiting America; and when the Gambas were ordered out of Tuscany, was on the point of embarkation for the only country which is a sanctuary for liberty" (123); and, again, "Once landed in that country, (America,) perhaps I should not have soon left it;—I might have settled there, for I shall never revisit England." (165). See also P. B. Shelley's Letter to Mary Shelley quoted here and dated 4 July 1822. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2:443–444.

close at the time of the creation of the journal: "they were personally acquainted for six years, spent in excess of two hundred and fifty days together during that time, read and reacted to all of each other's major works, and exchanged fifty letters."[28]

The political connotations of the word 'liberal', with reference to Italian patriotism, are also picked up by Byron's best friend, John Cam Hobhouse, when he mentions the warm welcome he had received in Milan in 1816 from the group of young Italian Romantic writers who gathered round the aristocratic patriot Ludovico di Breme, precisely because Hobhouse, very much like Byron – with whom he was travelling – was considered politically 'liberal':

> A persuasion that I am of the liberal English, and more than all here, a hater of the Congress Castlereagh system, gives me a willing audience in this place, which is not elsewhere found, at least I have not found it.[29]

In this regard, remarkably, Will Bowers claims that Hobhouse's radicalism decidedly increased after his Italian experience, to the point that he considered a political career in the opposition, with the support of Sir Francis Burdett.[30]

Unfortunately, the Italian liberals who had so generously welcomed and entertained Hobhouse and Byron in Milan soon met the most severe Austrian repression. When Hobhouse returned to Milan on his second visit, on 31 August 1822, he sadly discovered that none of the group of those young patriots was any longer there. The revolutionary uprisings of 1821 had swept them away: a few had escaped, while others – such as Confalonieri, Corsieri, De Tracey and Pellico – were in prison; still others, like Di Breme, were dead. Hobhouse also discovered that Byron's works had been put on the index, while Lady Morgan's *Italy* was censored and subject to the wrath of the authorities, who had persecuted all the Italians who had hosted or exchanged views with the Irish traveller,

28 Quoted in Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, 47.

29 John Cam Hobhouse Baron, *The Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, ed. Peter Cochrane, Cochrane's Website, 1822, 115–116, https://petercochran.wordpress.com/hobhouses-diary/ (accessed 5 September 2020).

30 Will Bowers, *The Italian Idea: Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture, 1815–1823* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 79–80.

or had had anything to do with her. As far as the circulation of foreign texts was concerned, few traces remained because, as Hobhouse affirms in the pages of the diary of his second visit, no foreign book was admitted to Italy without the prior scrutiny of the Habsburg police, which required at least three months of inspection.[31]

Transculturation and the South/North Political Dichotomy

The picture that Hobhouse draws of the political situation in Italy at the time of the foundation of *The Liberal* is particularly grim, and this makes the Pisan circle's enterprise even more daring. Maria Schoina claims that the group of the British expatriates who decided to embark on this challenging publishing adventure were "positioning" themselves "in the Italian scene of their day by means of a rhetoric of biculturality".[32] They were appropriating Italy's cultural and political system as "an opportunity for new definitions, as well as a challenge to their own position as participants/observers in a culture other than their own."[33] Likewise, if

31 The quotation from Hobhouse' *Diary* is as follows: "Saturday August 31st 1822: … Went to a bookseller's shop – heard something about the present state of the Milanese – heard that all the society in which I used to live in Milan was now dispersed – some fled – some in prison. The bookseller said di Breme was happy in being dead – he would have been compromised. The Abbate's elder brother was drowned last year passing the Ticino – Borsieri is in prison – de Tracey is in prison – Confalonieri is in prison or dead. The nobles are completely down – the clergy are equally discouraged. I find that the great part of Lord Byron's works are prohibited, and so are Tom Moore's – and yet, both Moore and Byron are found in English. Lady Morgan's Italy is under peculiar odium. It is true that she compromised many liberals here, who received her in their houses and gave her information, which she published. There is scarcely any trade in books, for no foreign books are admitted without the Vienna censor looking at them – this requires three months delay, and this brings out a new book when it is old." See Hobhouse, *The Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 86–87.

32 Maria Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*," *Romanticism* 12, no. 2 (January 2006): 116.

33 Schoina, 116.

we take into consideration this picture of Italy at the time of the foundation of *The Liberal*, we can reasonably affirm that the Romantics, in positioning their journal project within the Italian scenery of their day, were performing an action of particular audacity. They were attempting to decolonize British hegemonic culture, and undermine the conservative ethos of their home country through a rethinking of the relations between North and South. With reference to Paul Stock's interpretation of Mary Louise Pratt's notion of 'transculturation',[34] for instance, we may add that:

> Such 'transcultural' interplay challenges the straightforward construction of nationhood in direct opposition to an enemy. Texts too can be understood in terms of transcultural circulation: literary works often travel beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language. […] Understanding these exchanges can therefore reconfigure texts and identity politics outside the language of nationality […].[35]

Marilyn Butler, in her groundbreaking volume *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*, focuses on the process of a romanticization of Southern Countries' landscape and culture in relation to Shelley, Hunt and their circle. In the chapter "The Cult of the South: the Shelley circle, its creed and its influence," Butler argues that "[t]he battle in defence of the classical and Mediterranean South was stoutly fought for a decade from 1812 by a generation of liberal English writers who believed they were fighting for their political principles".[36] Hence, according to Butler, 'the Cult of the South' became prominent at the beginning of the nineteenth century not only affecting representations of Italy, Greece and Spain in English literature, but also establishing associations between the classical past of the South and its liberal and nationalist struggles.

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34 I used Paul Stock's interpretation of Mary Louise Pratt's notion of 'transculturation' since it seems to me to be more appropriate in this context. As is well known, to Pratt 'transculturation' is a phenomenon of a 'contact zone' which implies modes of representation as well as of transformation in the relationship between metropolis and periphery, empire and colony. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992).

35 Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe*, 5.

36 Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1796–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 121.

What the three founders were putting into effect was a very ambitious plan: the reshaping of the British and Northern European hegemonic cultures from the enslaved South. The Italian environment had indeed changed the young British liberals who experienced a process of cultural transformation. In such a process Byron and Shelley especially, and to some extent Hunt, once he settled in the country, were 'transculturators' who had acquired cultural rules through transfer by coming into contact with the peninsula. These rules had to be negotiated not only with their own cultural tradition, as we have seen in Hunt's reactions to the country on his arrival, but also through their reciprocal interactions and those with the Italians. Mary Shelley herself proudly avowed her membership of the 'Anglo-Italian sect', recognizing that such an experience had to be shared with those left back home, in order "to disseminate among them a portion of that taste and knowledge acquired in the Peninsula".[37]

Kenneth Churchill underlines the central interest that the Pisan journal and its contributors demonstrate towards Italy: "much of the material is related to Italy: for example, a translation of Ariosto, an article on Casti, stories of medieval Italy, and Hunt's Letters from Abroad".[38] Daisy Hay also draws on the South/North political dichotomy in claiming that the journal's contributors manifested a warm sympathy towards the Italian cause of freedom. Their interest seems further supported by the relevant presence of Alfieri's work in the published issues:

37 Mary Shelley in her article "The English in Italy" elicits her personal experience as an English resident in Italy and, therefore, as a fortunate member of that select sect of Anglo-Italians: "[…] Upon the whole, the Anglo-Italians may be pronounced a well-informed, clever, and active race; they pity greatly those of their un-Italianized country-men, who are endowed with Spurzheim's bump, denominated stayathomeativeness; and in compassion of their narrow experience have erected a literature calculated to disseminate among them a portion of that taste and knowledge acquired in the Peninsula". From the *Westminster Review* (VI October 1826: 325–341), in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley. Matilda, Dramas, Reviews & Essays, Prefaces & Notes*, ed. Pamela Clemit, vol. 2 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), 149.

38 Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature: 1764–1930* (London: MacMillan, 1980), 55.

> It is clear from *The Liberal* that Alfieri occupied an equally important place in the ideas of English sympathisers with the Italian cause. Three of the four issues of *The Liberal* contain translations of Alfieri's poetry, most of them undertaken by Hunt. The translated poems consistently emphasise Alfieri's love for Italy, his language, and his distress at the state in which his country has been left by foreign oppressors. […] In short, Alfieri is everything that Southey is not: the two stand in *The Liberal* as hero and villain. Southey, representative of the North, is a disgrace to poetry; Alfieri, representative of the South, is a model of the ideal poet. […] This alternative model rejects the North in favor of the South, and focuses, not on Italy's failures, but on the possibilities offered by a country whose history demonstrates her ability to withstand civil discord and to produce a dream of political idealism from oppression and internal strife.[39]

A similar perspective is also adopted by Jane Stabler, who notes that in writing from the South, "the *Liberal* project was inviting its readers to abandon a secure Anglo-centric perspective […]".[40] Additionally, Stabler maintains that such a project shaped "a new composite editorial persona – a daringly pan-European identity that challenged the hegemonic condemnation, lofty disapproval and rapscallion vituperation of the *Tory Courier*, *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's*, respectively."[41]

The 'Liberal' and the Triumvirate

It cannot come as a surprise, then, if the contemporary conservative press gave vent to a hysterical reaction from the very beginning of the Pisan enterprise, namely from the announcement made by John Hunt in *The Examiner* of the forthcoming journal. Equally strong was the reaction produced by the publication of the first issue, with Byron's poems and Hunt's 'radical' preface, that made clear the 'committed' intentions of the Pisan circle. Maria Schoina offers a useful overview: "Thus, Shelley,

39 Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment," *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 4 (October 2008): 315–316.

40 Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23," 6.

41 Stabler, 3.

Byron and Hunt were identified as 'The Pisan Triumvirate'," 'the grand Pisan conspiracy'," 'the Unholy Alliance of Pisa', while *The Liberal* was labelled the 'Italianized Cockney Magazine', 'The Manifesto of the Pisan Conspirators'," and the work of 'translated cockneys'."[42]

However, as had happened in Ravenna, it likewise transpired in Tuscany that the Gambas, father and brother of Byron's lover, Teresa Guiccioli, were eventually exiled, and Byron and his circle were constantly spied on.[43] The Pisan secret police, corresponding with the Austrian authorities, was awaiting the forthcoming journal with no less suspicion than the conservative press in England. As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, Luigi Torelli, a police spy, sent Metternich the following remarks:

> Byron no longer talks of leaving. On the contrary, he is expecting another English poet, a certain Smith, [i.e. Hunt] and they intend to start a newspaper against the Italian Government, which is to be printed in England, and bring them in much money. This will be something far worse than Lady Morgan's book – a weekly satire directed chiefly against Austria, whom they call the usurper of Italian freedom.[44]

The mention of Lady Morgan's Italy in Torelli's report was enough to alarm the authorities. The Italian secret police did well to panic, since the idea behind *The Liberal*, if not its outcome, was indeed to openly challenge the contemporary political structure and cultural ethos of post-Napoleonic Europe.

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42 Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*," 118.

43 The Gambas were ordered out of Tuscany following a dispute that broke out in Montenero where Byron had rented Villa Dupouy for a few months, from the banker Francesco Dupouy. The fight took place on 28 June 1822, around 5 pm, between the people in the service of Byron and those in the service of Countess Guiccioli. "The Gambas were also involved, knives and guns were held, Pietro Gamba was wounded. This accident gave the Tuscan police the opportunity to evict the hated Gamba counts, under the pretext of clamor and excesses that disturbed the quiet village of Montenero". This account is reported in Italian by the historian Pietro Vigo in his guide of Montenero (my translation). Pietro Vigo, *Montenero; guida storico-artistico-descrittiva* (Livorno: Tip. G. Fabreschi, 1902).

44 Quoted in Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*," 118.

To Byron, Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley, whose experience of living in Italy was seminal to the point of shaping much of their mature literary production, the presence of Leigh Hunt added a "central training ground," as Greg Kucich claims. On the coalition, and more in general on Hunt's ability to become a solid point of reference for the Romantics of the second generation, Kucich writes: "Scholars of second-generation Romanticism have focused on many of these discrete scenes of collective literary experience […]. Within the last several years, however, Hunt has attracted growing critical interest for his magnetic ability to bring together such a disparate array of personalities and talents. It has been persuasively argued, in fact, that Hunt's circle, in its various print forms and social locations, provided one of the most important cultural environments, if not a kind of central training ground, for the artistic development of second-generation Romantic collective literary experience".[45]

Yet, if Hunt's 'magnetic ability' was significant, it was Shelley who was the one to figure out the coalition and to call for the added value that Hunt would guarantee to the editorial initiative. And it was Shelley who kept the flame of the enterprise high until the premature end of his life. He played a pivotal role in making such a difficult adventure not only conceivable but also realizable.

The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South appeared in four issues between October 1822 and July 1823, before quietly coming to an end. It was almost certainly planned in Ravenna in 1821 by Byron and P. B. Shelley, and founded in Pisa in 1822 by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt. The other member directly involved in this international, transcultural and border-crossing periodical, was, as has been pointed out earlier, Leigh's brother, John Hunt, whose role was mainly to collect the material sent to him from Italy and print it in England. Other eminent literary figures contributed to the three issues that followed the first one: Mary Shelley, William Hazlitt, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Charles Brown and Horace Smith.

45 Greg Kucich, "Keats, Shelley, Byron, and the Hunt Circle," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830*, ed. Jon Mee and Thomas Keymer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 264.

As Maria Schoina helpfully summarizes, "Out of the four issues, the best remembered items are probably Byron's satire 'The Vision of Judgement' and Hazlitt's essay 'My First Acquaintance with Poets'." Hunt's 'Preface' to the first issue announced that Italian, German, and Spanish literatures were among the 'favourite subjects' of the contributors, even if, he adds, the sudden and tragic death of Shelley has made it more difficult for the contributors to deal with Spanish or German translations. Nevertheless, writes Schoina, there were "a considerable number of translations (such as the original Shelley's 'May-day Night' from Goethe's *Faust*, Byron's translation of the first canto of Pulci's 'Morgante Maggiore', and Hunt's translations of various minor pieces, mainly by Alfieri and Ariosto) or short stories with an Italian theme (Mary Shelley's 'A Tale of the Passions' and 'Giovanni Villani') […]. In the spirit of literary freethinking and thematic open-mindedness". Then, Schoina concludes, "The Liberal vaunted an extraordinary miscellany of genres and styles –poetry, essays, short stories, travelogues, epigrams."[46]

The three founders, or, in Leigh Hunt's words, the 'Triumvirate', or 'Three Gentlemen at once',[47] had embarked on this challenging overseas initiative with a certain degree of apprehension but also with high personal expectations. Hunt had left England for Italy to join Byron and Shelley, the latter having proposed this adventure to him. He departed with a sick wife and six children to take care of, but in the hope of overcoming his everlasting financial difficulties and cooperating with those whom he believed to be the most outstanding intellectuals of the time. Such a trust in the two younger poets was due both to Shelley's assurances on behalf of Byron, and to the fact that Hunt had previously received their generous moral and economic support in London, between 1813 and 1815, while he was in jail for having written and printed, as editor of *The Examiner*, several anti-establishment texts.

46 Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*," 117.

47 See, respectively, Hunt's Letter to Shelley (21 September 1821), 345, quoted in Frederick L. Jones, *Shelley's Letters*, and Hunt's introduction to his *Letters from Abroad* in the first number of *The Liberal*.

Hence, since 1817, he had become the object of violent assaults by the Tory monthly review, *Blackwood's Magazine*.[48]

Byron, after much hesitation and reluctance,[49] had finally accepted to be part of the 'Triumvirate'. He also agreed to finance the journal, and may have coined its title, though this matter is still undecided.[50] In fact, to return briefly again to the question of the choice of the title, with particular reference to Byron, we might note that besides Byron's initial sympathy for Bonapartism, he was also involved, through the Gambas, in the Italian Carbonari movement, recognized as 'Liberali'. Likewise, the revolutionary revolts of 1820–1821 that he supported were defined 'liberals'.[51] And, as a further incentive for the choice of this title, Byron was as eager as Shelley and Hunt to use *The Liberal* as a powerful weapon to answer his reactionary British detractors, and to dodge his Tory publisher, John Murray, who balked at publishing texts considered politically questionable, such as more cantos of *Don Juan* and, in particular, his long poem, *The Vision of Judgment*. Not by chance, *The Vision of Judgment* appeared in the very first issue of *The Liberal*, but regrettably without its 'Preface', that would have somehow softened the tone of harsh political critique of the dead King George, as it came to be interpreted.[52] Instead, Byron's primary intent was to direct his barbs against

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48 See D. M. Craig, "The Origins of 'Liberalism' in Britain: The Case of *The Liberal*," *Historical Research* 85, no. 229 (August 2012): 472.

49 Byron's reluctance was also due to the many warnings not to undertake such an enterprise that came from his closest friends. See, for instance, Thomas Moore's reaction as reporting to Byron the rumour "that you and Shelley and [Hunt] are to conspire together […] [Y]ou could not give your enemies […] a greater triumph than by forming such an unequal and unholy alliance". Quoted in Nikki Hessell, "Elegiac Wonder and Intertextuality in the *Liberal*," *Romanticism* 18, no. 3 (October 2012): 232.

50 Marshall affirms that "The question of the exact authorship of the proposal has been constantly troublesome". Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 22.

51 See Hobhouse's journal as pointed above. Hobhouse, *The Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 115–116.

52 In the 'Advertisement' to the Second Volume, third issue of the journal, Hunt tries to defend the editorial board from the severe reviews received on the publication of Byron's satirical poem. Hunt explains the role played by John Murray in refusing to give Byron's complete manuscripts to the Hunts. Thus, he writes: "Had the Preface also, entrusted to Mr. Murray, been sent, as it ought to have been, to

the poet laureate Robert Southey, whom the three founders saw as a renegade, and who had caused Byron and Shelley bitterness and anger through his censorious judgements. Such an intention was made explicit in the 'Preface' to the poem, that never reached the printed pages of *The Liberal*. The other work by Byron to be published in the first issue was his confrontational "Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh", where he satirizes the recent news of Castlereagh's suicide (Lord Castlereagh having been foreign minister in the darkest years of the Restoration, and promoter of the Holy Alliance).[53]

Percy Bysshe Shelley: Constructing the Alliance

When we turn out attention to P. B. Shelley's motivations in setting up the Pisan undertaking, the picture becomes more multifaceted, and involves a detailed chronology and a few suppositions. What Shelley probably had in mind was to create the space for an unprecedented encounter between intellectuals able to stimulate a renewed literature, liberal thought and reformist policy. He wished to offer to British and cosmopolitan readers a mixture of ingredients that could help to disperse the thick mist of authoritarianism and censorship of which he, like his partners, was the target in his country, and that had been generated in the post-Napoleonic era. In reality, Byron's and Shelley's meeting in Ravenna, and Shelley's desire to invite Leigh Hunt to Italy, might

the new publisher, much of the unintended part of the effect produced upon weak minds would have been explained away at once;—that effect, which the hypocritical enemies of the Liberal at once delighted to assist in producing, and most pretended to deprecate" *Liberal*, 2, no. 3 (1823): vi–vii.

53 The lines underline Byron's deep scorn towards Castlereagh: 'Epigrams on Castlereagh': "Oh, Castlereagh! thou art a patriot now;/Cato died for his country, so did'st thou;/He perish'd rather than see Rome enslav'd/Thou cut'st thy throat/ that Britain may be saved/.So CASTLEREAGH has cut his throat! – the worst/Of this is – that his was not the first./So *He* has cut his throat at last! – He! Who?/The man who cut his country's long ago!". *Liberal*, 1, no. 1 (1822): 164.

have been the turning point in a long decisional process.[54] Undeniably, Shelley invested great energy in this cooperative plan, acting with speed and determination. Things, however, were far from easy, and the foundation of the journal might have remained only a project, had it not been for Shelley's firm determination to make it come about. To exemplify some of the difficulties the three founders of *The Liberal* had to deal with, it would be sufficient to quote the views of the British writers and intellectuals who resented the Romantic expatriates' reformist opinions, and in particular William Wordsworth's reaction on hearing about the journalistic enterprise that involved Byron, Shelley and Hunt:

> It is reported here that Byron, Shelley, Moore, Leigh Hunt […] are to lay their heads together in some Town of Italy, for the purpose of conducting a Journal to be directed against everything in religion, in morals and probably government and literature, which our Forefathers have been accustomed to reverence.[55]

Such disapproval was far from new to the three main players in the game, since Percy Bysshe Shelley himself drew a similar picture, although from a quite different perspective. During Shelley's stay with Byron in Ravenna,[56] where the plan for *The Liberal* was almost certainly

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54 Both Marshall and Schoina mention how Byron and Shelley had had, individually, previous intentions of producing a periodical. As for the British press's attacks against Shelley in particular, but not only, it might be useful to recall one of the most violent reviews that appeared on *The Literary Gazette*, which, as Jones claims, "was consistently the most violent of contemporary periodicals in its denunciation of Shelley". 'Letter To Mary Shelley from Ravenna' (8 August 1821), Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:320, note 2. The reviews were published at the time when a recent gossip had provoked a scandal that involved Shelley and Clare, accused of having a secret sexual relationship out of which a baby was said to have been born and left in Naples. The scandal produced, nevertheless, anguish and bitterness in Shelley and, even more so, in Mary Shelley.

55 'William Wordsworth to Walter Savage Landor' (20 April 1822) in William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth; the Later Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, vol. 1 (London: Clarendon Press, 1939), 69. Quoted also in Schoina, 118 and in Thorslev, "Post-Waterloo Liberalism," 444–445.

56 At least from 6th to 16th or 17th of August 1821.

formed, Shelley – in the attempt to convince Countess Teresa Guiccioli, who was to follow her brother and father exiled from Ravenna, to go to Tuscany with Byron, rather than to Switzerland as she seemed to have preferred at the time – sends her a letter in which he describes what he and his companions had to suffer in Geneva in 1816. During their stay there they had become the object of malevolent and bigoted remarks:

> At the request of my friend Lord Byron, I feel it a duty to present to you some thoughts relative to the proposed journey to Geneva, in order to give you an idea of the inconveniences which might result from it. […] Your circumstances present some analogy with those in which my family and Lord Byron found themselves, in the summer 1816. […]; one could not imagine a simpler life than ours, or one less calculated to attract the calumnies that were aimed at us. These calumnies were monstrous, and really too infamous to leave us, their victims, even the refuge of contempt. The natives of Geneva and the English people who were living there […] said that we had formed a pact to outrage all that is regarded as most sacred in human society, atheism, incest, and many other things –sometimes ridiculous and sometimes terrible – were imputed to us. The English papers did not delay to spread the scandal, and the people believed it… Hardly any affliction was spared us. The inhabitants on the banks of the lake opposite Lord Byron's house used *telescopes* to spy upon his movements. […] The most outrageous caricatures of him and his friends were daily spread about.[…] Accustomed as you are Madam, to the gentler manners of Italy, you can hardly conceive what an intensity this social hatred has reached in less happy climes.[…][57]

Shelley's plea was successful: Teresa Guiccioli dropped her original idea to go to Switzerland and moved to Pisa instead.[58] So did Byron, who, loving living in Ravenna and hating all kinds of moving, after many hesitations, finally accepted to go to the quiet university town located in the relatively tolerant Grand Duchy of Tuscany. By 1 November 1821 Byron had joined the Gambas, forming again that circle of reformers that in Ravenna had aroused so much alarm. Despite this initial success,

57 Shelley's letter to Guiccioli was originally written in French. The English version quoted here is partly a translation printed in *The Last Attachment: The Story of Byron and Teresa Guiccioli* by Countess Iris Origo, and partly by Jones in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Ravenna, 9 August 1821), 2:327–329, fn. 652.

58 On the 22nd of August, Shelley was already reassuring Guiccioli that Byron too was ready to join them in Pisa. He also tells her that he was looking for a suitable house for Byron. Shelley, 2:340.

it took Shelley more effort, and many daily conversations, not only to organize Byron's luxury residence in Pisa, but, above all, to obtain Byron's permission to involve Leigh Hunt in their joint venture. In this regard, it might be useful to examine the actions Shelley further undertook in order to reach his final goal.

Towards the end of his visit to Ravenna, on 15 August 1821, Shelley writes a long letter to Mary in which he hints at his forthcoming plan, but presents it as a way out in order to overcome the personal difficulties they were experiencing at the time.

What he suggests to Mary is a change in their style of life that could no longer be deferred. It was a plan designed to respond to the hostile reviews he still received from England, and, at the same time, disperse the poisonous gossip that their former servants, Elisa and Paolo Foggi, now married, were spreading against Percy among the Shelleys' acquaintances. They accused Shelley of having had a sexual relationship with Claire Clairmont, Mary's step-sister, from which, supposedly, a baby girl was born in Naples.[59] Shelley vehemently denied the allegation, but the bitterness aroused by the accusation stayed with him and Mary for a long time. So Shelley, significantly, suggests to Mary to live in Pisa, and, as we shall see, in partnership with Byron and Hunt.[60] In his letter, he ably introduces this possibility in the form of a choice between two opposite options. The first option was to escape with Mary and their child Percy Florence to a solitary retreat: "I would retire with you & our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, & shut

59 This is conveyed as follows: "We must do one thing or the other: for yourself for our child, for our existence – These calumnies – the sources of which are probably deeper than we perceive – have ultimately, for object, the depriving us of the means of security & subsistence. You will easily perceive the gradations by which calumny proceeds to pretext, pretext to persecution, & persecution to the ban of fire & water. – It is for this, & not because this or that fool or the whole court of fools curse & rail, that calumny is worth refuting or chastising [the manuscript ends here]." Shelley, 2:333–336.

60 One of the reasons given was to improve his health. Shelley describes the advantages of the Pisan water since he suffered from kidney pain: "At Pisa I need not distill my water … Last winter I suffered less for my painful disorder than the winter I spent in Florence" Shelley, 2:339.

upon my retreat the floodgates of the world. – I would read no reviews & talk with no authors."

The second option was a much more challenging one: it meant to step forward and stand, bravely, before public opinion rather than retreat from it. But it also foreshadows the daring creation of the 'Triumvirate':

> The other side of the alternative (for a medium ought not to be adopted) – is to form for ourselves a society of our own class, as much as possible, in intellect, or in feelings; & to connect ourselves with the interests of that society. – Our roots were never struck so deeply as at Pisa & the transplanted tree flourishes not. – People who lead the lives which we led until last winter, are like a family of Wahabee Arabs pitching their tent in the midst of London. – We must do one thing or the other: for yourself for our child, for our existence…[61]

In reality, posing Mary a choice between two styles of life was merely rhetorical, since the creation of the 'Triumvirate' – namely the founding of *The Liberal* – was already underway. It was just a matter of time.

Writing to Leigh Hunt from Pisa, on 26 August, Shelley mentions his visit to Ravenna and his stay with Byron. He also credits Byron with inviting Hunt to Pisa:

> He proposes that you should come and go shares with him and me, in a periodical work, to be conducted here; in which each of the contracting parties should publish all their original compositions, and share the profits. He proposed it to Moore, but for some reason it was never brought to bear … As for myself, I am, for the present, only a sort of link between you and him, until you can know each other, and effectuate the arrangements; since (to entrust you with a secret which, for your sake, I withhold from Lord Byron), nothing would induce me to share in the profits, and still less in the borrowed splendor, of such a partnership. You and him, in different manner, would be equal, and would bring, in a different manner, but in the same proportion, equal stocks of reputation and success.[62]

Placing himself merely as "a sort of link between you and him" was a gesture of modesty that inevitably elicited Hunt's encouraging and affectionate response:

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61 Shelley, 2:339. Wahhabism is the doctrine and religious reform movement founded by and named after the eighteenth century Islamic scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Shelley here refers to the nomadic style of life attributed to "Wahabee Arabs".

62 Shelley, 2:344.

> I agree to his proposal with the less scruple because I have had a good deal of experience in periodical writing, and know what the getting up of the machine requires, as well as the soul of it. You see I am not so modest as you are by a great deal, and I do not mean to let you be so either. What? are there not three of us? And ought we not to have as much strength and variety as possible? We will divide the world between us, like the Triumvirate, and you shall be the sleeping partner, if you will; only it shall be with a Cleopatra, and your dreams shall be worth the giving of kingdoms.[63]

In his reply Hunt, in citing Cleopatra, alludes to Shakespeare's Antony, who gives up his political power in the Roman empire in order to be with Cleopatra: not by chance, *Antony and Cleopatra* is the play in which Shakespeare directly depicts the Roman triumvirate. Is Hunt, therefore, accepting Shelley's role as sleeping partner on the understanding that Shelley would go to any length to fulfil his ambitious project?

On the other hand, Shelley was right in expressing a certain degree of anxiety in arranging the association between Hunt and Byron, as events would prove before long. Even after Hunt's arrival in Pisa, that is to say almost a year after Shelley's period of residence in Ravenna with Byron, and shortly before his death, he had to manage concerns of all sorts. On the last journey that will eventually cost his life, Shelley, by then on holidays in San Terenzo, near Lerici, went to Leghorn to welcome Leigh Hunt and his family, who, after three attempts to cross the channel, and after a long and troubled sea journey, had finally arrived.[64] Then he went with Hunt to Pisa to meet Byron. Shelley endeavoured to finalize arrangements with Byron, who was now reluctant to involve himself with the Hunts.[65] To make things even more difficult, Teresa

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63 Shelley, 2:345.

64 On their third attempt, the Hunts sail from Plymouth on 13 May 1822 and arrive in Genoa on 15 June, when Hunt tells Shelley of his arrival. However, their ship reached Leghorn only at the end of June.

65 In Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron* (120), Byron openly discusses his alliance with Hunt. First of all he recalls his gratitude towards Hunt at the time of his divorce and the scandal that it created, Hunt having been the only journalist who stood on his side: "I will tell you how I became acquainted with him. One of the first visits I paid to Hunt was in prison. I remember Lady Byron was with me in the carriage, and I made her wait longer than I intended at the gate of the King's Bench. When party feeling ran highest against (121) me, Hunt was the only editor of a paper, the only literary man, who dared say a word in my justification.

Guiccioli was obliged to leave Pisa to follow, once again, her family in exile, and Byron wished to go with them. Such unresolved questions worried Shelley to the point of keeping him away much longer that he had expected, as he explained in a letter from Pisa to an anxious Mary, who was waiting for him in San Terenzo. On 4 July 1822, Shelley writes:

> MY DEAREST MARY – […] I have no moment of time to spare from Hunt's affairs; I am detained unwillingly here; … Things are in the worst possible situation with respect to poor Hunt. I find Marianne in a desperate state of health, and on our arrival at Pisa sent for Vaccà – He decides that her case is hopeless, & that although it will be lingering, must inevitably to end fatally. […] This intelligence has extinguished the last spark of poor Hunt's spirits, low enough before – The children are well and much improved. – Lord Byron is at this moment on the point of leaving Tuscany. The Gambas have been exiled, & he declares his intention of following their fortunes. His first idea was to sail to America, which was changed to Switzerland, then to Genoa, & at last to Lucca. Everybody is in despair, and everything in confusion. […] But it is the worse for poor Hunt, unless the present storm should blow over. He places his whole dependence upon this scheme of a Journal, for which every arrangement had been mad(e) […]. Lord Byron must, of course, furnish the requisite funds at present, as I cannot; but he seems inclined to depart without the necessary explanations & arrangements due to such a situation as Hunt's. These, in spite of delicacy, I must procure; he offers him the copy-right of the Vision of Judgment for the first number. This offer, if sincere, is more than enough to set up the Journal, and, if sincere, will set everything right.[66]

I shall always be grateful to him for the part he took on that occasion. It was manly in him to brave the obloquy of standing alone." (120) Then, he mentions to Medwin their plan of founding the journal – whose title was not decided yet – and finally he reports his own and his friends perplexities about the collaboration with Hunt: "Shelley and myself furnished some time ago a suite of apartments in my house for him, which he now occupies. I believe I told you of a plan we had in agitation for his benefit. His principal object in coming out was to establish a literary journal, whose name is not yet fixed. I have promised to contribute, and shall probably make it a vehicle for some occasional poems; – for instance, I mean to translate Ariosto. I was strongly advised by Tom Moore, long ago, not to have any connection with such a company as Hunt, Shelley, and Co.; but I have (122) pledged myself, and besides could not now, if I had ever so great a disinclination for the scheme, disappoint all Hunt's hopes."

66 Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:443–444. It should be pointed out that Leigh Hunt will not easily forget Vaccà's ominous prognosis concerning

The letter shows how much the initiative still weighed on Shelley's shoulders, but also the extent to which his determination to make it work was undiminished. Florence Marshall underlines the complications Shelley met at the time: "On the 1st of July, Shelley and Williams, with Charles Vivian, the sailor-lad who looked after their boat, started in the Ariel for Leghorn, where they arrived safely. Thence Shelley, with Leigh Hunt, proceeded to Pisa. It had not been their intention to stay long, but Shelley found much to detain him. Matters with respect to Byron and the projected magazine wore a most unsatisfactory appearance; Byron's eagerness had cooled, and his reception of the Hunts was chilling in the extreme."[67]

The *"trumpet of a prophecy"* or *"advocating every species of liberal knowledge"*

Despite everything, Shelley succeeded in constructing the alliance, but one may wonder why he was so keen to make *The Liberal* a reality. Although Shelley never saw the actual birth of the journal, since he died three months before the publication of the first issue, *The Liberal* was most likely designed to put in practice what the British poet had theorized in 1819, in 'Ode to the West Wind', or in 1821, in his essay "A Defence of Poetry". In these works, Shelley establishes a close relationship between poetry and the improvement of civil society, between the products of the most enlightened minds and the progress of the community at large. To Shelley, as he wrote in "A Defence", "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination", since, Shelley adds, in order to awake the dormant consciousness of the British readership, "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want

Marianne Hunt's health. Years later he ironically commented that Marianne was still alive whereas Vaccà was by then dead. Marianne Hunt died in 1857.

67 Julian Marshall, ed., *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (London: Bentley & Son, 1889), 1:364.

the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life".[68] Likewise, since the authors' standpoint was from an enslaved country, Italy, not distant from other southern countries in need of freedom (Greece and Spain), the journal symbolically suggested to Shelley 'The trumpet of a prophecy' (to quote from 'Ode to the West Wind'), meant to form a transnational audience. Likewise for Hunt the connection between politics and 'the liberal arts' was quite manifest, and at the heart of the journal's aim, as he admits in the 'Preface' to the first issue of *The Liberal*:

> The object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect, the connexion between politics and all other subjects of interest to mankind having been discovered, never again to be done away [...]. All that we mean is, that we are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge, and that, by a natural consequence in these times, we go the full length in matters of opinion with large bodies of men who are called LIBERALS.[69]

As Jane Stabler points out, both Byron and Shelley had been thinking about the launch of a new journal for years. Stabler mentions several efforts made by Byron between 1820 and 1821 to convince Thomas Moore to establish some sort of newspaper to "give the age some new lights upon policy, poesy, biography, criticism, morality, theology, and all other ism, ality, and ology whatsoever."[70] Byron's attempts went on from late 1820 to the eve of Shelley's arrival in Ravenna, in August 1821:

> Is there no chance of your return to England, and of our Journal? I would have published the two plays [Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari] in it – two or three scenes per number – and indeed all of mine in it. If you went to England, I would do so still ... If we were together, I should publish both my plays (periodically) in our joint journal. It should be our plan to publish all our best things in that way[71]

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68 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald Henry Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 517, 530.

69 Hunt, "Preface," vii, ix.

70 George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1973–1994), 7:254, quoted in Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23," 2.

71 Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 1973–1994, 8:147, 166, quoted in Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23," 2.

On the other hand, Shelley's interest in founding a 'liberal' journal in opposition to British conservativism dates back long before the Pisan periodical. Jane Stabler and Maria Schoina refer to Shelley's attempt to launch a philosophical journal with the freethinker George Cannon during 1814–1815; and again, in 1819, he tried to persuade Thomas Love Peacock that a new periodical could succeed.[72] Shelley's letter to Thomas Love Peacock is a long and detailed one. In the letter, written from Naples on 25 February 1819, Shelley mentions the latest harsh review of which he has been the target. The review appeared in the September issue of the *Quarterly Review*, and Shelley affirms the necessity of a reformist journal to counteract the influence of the (Tory) *Quarterly*. Thus, he sketches his proposal for the creation of a coalition of 'reformers': "If a band of staunch reformers, resolute yet skilful infidels, were united in so close & constant a league as that in which interests & fanaticism have joined the members of that literary coalition! (PBS, *Letters* 2. 81)."[73]

Once the idea of the journal enterprise was accepted by Byron and Hunt, however, Shelley – with his characteristically unassertive attitude – pretended to be a go-between rather than a major player. Was this statement real or was Shelley imagining to give up the pivotal role for himself as a way of keeping the two cohorts closer and the project going? Writing to his friend Horace Smith, in a letter from Lerici on 29 June 1822, he says that he still feared that the 'alliance' between Byron and Hunt 'will not succeed':

> I greatly fear that this alliance will not succeed, for I, who could never have been regarded as more than the link of the two thunderbolts, cannot now consent to be even that, – & how long the alliance between the wren & the eagle may continue I will not prophesy. Pray do not hint my doubts on the subject to any one as they might alarm Hunt, & *they may* be groundless.[74]

72 Quoted in Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal.'", 6. Maria Schoina in "Anglo-Italians": Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle. ch. 4, fn. 25.

73 Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:81.

74 Shelley, 2:442.

It must have been rather worrying for Shelley to realize that after almost a year from the original conception of the project, the details regarding its realization were still confused and the overall plan quite unsettled, making the 'alliance between the wren and the eagle' an extremely problematic one. In the letter, Shelley uses this aviary metaphor, taken from a fable of Irish folklore, in reference, respectively, to Hunt, 'the wren', and Byron, 'the eagle'. He does so both as a way to provide their future plan with metaphorical wings, but also – referring to them as 'two thunderbolts' – to underline the exceptionality of the enterprise. The match between co-founders who could not be more different, and yet were similarly explosive, was, in many ways, like a contest between flashes of lightning.

I believe that had *The Liberal* succeeded and survived the vicissitudes of its originators, and had it retained Shelley's theoretical premises, it might have represented a major breakthrough for the British reading public, if only because of the remarkable personalities and brilliant minds that had forged such an 'unholy' alliance. But the question remains: could *The Liberal* really have survived, even if its founders were armed with the best intentions and all the support that Shelley gave to it?

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the repression of the press in England was so strict and punitive as to leave very little space for any publishing initiative that might represent even a slight offence to the establishment; and Leigh Hunt's preface had clearly stated that the young group of expatriates did not intend to be silenced. Paul Stock provides a convincing account of what these young Romantics had to face: "The worry among supporters of the establishment was that liberty led to license, and that a cheap press was being used not just to promote parliamentary reform, but to assault the Christian religion. The laws against seditious and blasphemous libel were often employed – with varying degrees of success – to try to control the authors and publishers of this material. The most infamous cases were those of William Hone, who was acquitted after trial in 1817, and Richard Carlile, who was found guilty and imprisoned for six years in 1819. After Peterloo, the government passed the Six Acts which, among other things, increased the duties on radical newspapers and tightened the libel laws …."[75]

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75 Paul Stock, "The Shelleys and the Idea of 'Europe,'" *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 4 (October 2008): 335–349.

But Shelley would not be able to experience in person the restricted freedom their editorial enterprise was to enjoy. And, albeit Shelley, as Jeffrey Cox,[76] Nikki Hessell and others have suggested, was the original inspirer of the journal, he would no longer be there to keep alive its original design. According to Hessell, "*The Liberal* became Hunt's elegy to Shelley's memory, constructed out of a sense of wonder at his death" .[77] Hessell then concludes: "And although it was Hunt and Byron who lived to see the Liberal into print, it was Shelley, drowned, and buried in Rome, whose presence can be said to be felt most clearly in the periodical."[78]

Yet Shelley's enthusiasm for the creation of the journal and the grief at his loss were not enough to keep his original project alive. One might mention Mary Shelley's repeated and failed attempts to publish – in the second and, afterwards, in the third issue of *The Liberal* – "A Defence of Poetry", the work that best embodied Shelley's ideological and aesthetic principles and that might have inspired the birth of the periodical itself. It is worth quoting William H. Marshall's seminal work that offers a detailed description of what happened to Shelley's essay, and why it did not reach the printers of *The Liberal*. This failure was incomprehensible, beginning with the fact that Shelley's usual publisher, Ollier, to whom he had originally sent the essay a year before, decided not to print it. As a consequence, Mary Shelley wanted the 'Defence of Poetry' to appear in *The Liberal*. Mary probably had an earlier draft, and so she requested the final version that was in the possession of Peacock in London. John Hunt proceeded to ask Peacock for this copy, and at the same time, Mary asked Maria Gisborne to obtain the copy from Peacock and send it to John Hunt in order to be edited and printed. William Marshall adds: "by November 22 Mary received word that Peacock had given the manuscript to the Hunts. At Albaro, it was fully expected as late as January that the second number of *The Liberal* would contain Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry,' but the article did not appear. […] John Hunt was again prepared to publish the article in the third number of *The Liberal*,

76 Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*.

77 Hessell, "Elegiac Wonder and Intertextuality in the *Liberal*," 240.

78 Hessell, 238.

but somehow this plan also miscarried, and the 'Defence of Poetry' did not appear until 1840, when it was published from the manuscript which John Hunt had edited according to instructions." Thus, Marshall concludes, "Had the 'Defence of Poetry' appeared in *The Liberal*, it would probably have done little to increase sales, but its omission was unfortunate, for the article would have heightened the general literary attainment of *The Liberal*."[79] I agree with Marshall's argument: it is possible that if Shelley's aesthetic manifesto had been published, it could have brought about the political as well as aesthetic achievement the three co-founders had initially hoped for.

A question that still remains to be answered is what kept together such a cluster of different and powerful individuals? According to Peter Thorslev it was "Their politics, certainly: a hearty contempt for the establishment of church and state, and especially for the chief ministers, Wellington and Castlereagh (as well as for the Whig apostate, the Prince Regent); an equivocal attitude toward Napoleon and the Napoleonic wars; a respect for the principles at least of the Revolution".[80] Paul Stock provides a further clue regarding the main role played by Shelley. Stock usefully examines Hunt's reception of Shelley's poem *Laon and Cythna*, composed in 1817, and later called *The Revolt of Islam*. Hunt read the poem as a revolutionary social message, and reviewing it in *The Examiner*, caught the utopian purpose to the poem: "Mr. Shelley is of opinion […] that the world is a very beautiful one externally, but wants a good deal of mending with respect to it's [sic] mind and habits."[81] To Stock, Hunt turns *Laon and Cythna* into a kind of manifesto according to which writing and printing can affect the future of Europe, emphasizing the close relationship between radical words and revolutionary events that Shelley had maintained in various forms and genres.[82] And, although Greg Kucich underlines the "magnetic ability" of Leigh Hunt "to bring together", over the years, "a disparate array of personality and talents", it is nevertheless a fact that as long as Shelley was alive, the

79 Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 65.
80 Thorslev, "Post-Waterloo Liberalism," 446.
81 *The Examiner*, 22 Feb. and 1 Mar. 1818, 121–122, 139–141.
82 Stock, "The Shelleys and the Idea of 'Europe,'" 339.

collective literary experience seemed to have some hope of surviving, whereas once Shelley died the periodical soon faded away.

In conclusion, I believe that *The Liberal*, assessed for a long time rather negatively by a large majority of scholars – with some exceptions, such as Paul Stock,[83] or Daisy Hay, who calls for a critical reappraisal of the journal[84] – was instead a bold and avant-garde attempt to change the order of things. I would argue that *The Liberal*, at least in the intention of the "three gentlemen at once", was meant as a powerful cultural instrument of transformation in which North and South, centre and periphery could meet and be reciprocally changed, as the Triumvirate itself had been changed by exile, censorship or, even, imprisonment, and, not least, by their very encounter with the South. The three founders were somehow trying to decolonize knowledge and de-centre the canonical perspective of their readership, even if the time for the success of such an enterprise was not yet ripe.

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83 Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe*.

84 Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*."

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Serena Baiesi

3. Politics, Literature, and Leigh Hunt's Editorial Spirit in *The Liberal*

Leigh Hunt was an established literary figure during the Romantic period, through to the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria. He found fame at the beginning of the nineteenth century as, in the first instance, the editor and director – together with his brother – of the radical magazine *The Examiner*. The journalist was then imprisoned in 1813, following the publication of an article in which he had openly suggested that Prince George was a greedy spendthrift; remarkably, though, this only served to expand Hunt's friendship circle.[1] Indeed, many literary figures and intellectuals who shared Hunt's radical ideas visited him in jail; they sympathised with the audacious and inspiring writer. After he left Surrey Gaol, Hunt's new friendship group evolved into the so-called "Cockney School", including poets as John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron. The writer worked (collaboratively) as an editor and journalist for many magazines as well as publishing collections of poems, reaching the peak of his notoriety during the Romantic period.

Later in his life, Leigh Hunt was still well known to the Victorians as an editor, translator and poet – but he had also, at this stage, become acknowledged as a dramatist. *A Legend of Florence*, dated 1840, was one of Queen Victoria's favourite plays. Moreover, Dickens based his character Harold Skimpole – a heartless sponger in *Bleak House* (1852–1853) – on Hunt. Nowadays, following a period of having received inadequate levels of critical attention, Leigh Hunt is considered to be not

1 See Serena Baiesi, "Leigh Hunt's Parlour at Surrey Gaol", in *European Romanticism in Association: Virtual Exhibition.* Available online at: http://www.euromanticism.org/leigh-hunts-parlour-at-surrey-gaol/, accessed on 29/10/2020.

only a leading writer but also a pioneering editor of his age.[2] Heralded as one of the major and most influential radical journalists and reviewers, he is also regarded as being an *avant-garde* poet in relation to what he saw as a new school of poetry. In addition, he is lauded as a master of the familiar essay, competing directly, in this regard, with Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt whom he both influenced and challenged.[3]

In this essay, I will firstly discuss Leigh Hunt's editorial role in a number of literary magazines that were published in London during the 1820s before focusing on one of the most peculiar and controversial – but influential – journals of his time: *The Liberal*. This brilliant but ill-fated quarterly was jointly established by Hunt, Shelley and Byron in Italy and was published in London by Hunt's brother, John, in 1822 and 1823. However, the enthusiasm of its founders – that had driven the initiative before and during the initial stages of the publication – gradually faded away after the sudden death of Shelley; as a consequence, the periodical lasted for only four issues. Even though it may sound like a singular literary experiment, I will be framing this Italian literary enterprise in the broader context of Hunt's editorial activities – those from both before and after his sojourn in Italy. Even though Hunt changed the names, content, locations and editorial strategies of his various journals over the years, a particular desire was constantly discernible: a will to popularise collective literary practices and liberal ideals so as change society for the better, fostering and strengthening community spirit. Throughout his various periodicals, Hunt foregrounded the important political and ethical roles of literature.

Hunt stepped out into what was already a very active journalistic field with *The Examiner*; many periodicals were being published in

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2 As for Hunt's critical reception in modern times, see Nicholas Roe's edition *Leigh Hunt. Life: Poetics, Politics* (Abingdon: Palgrave 2003). For a modern edition of Hunt's major works, see *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, edited by Robert Morrison and Michael Eberle-Sinatra (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003). However, a complete and updated critical edition of Hunt's extensive literary production has not been collected to date; critical assessment of his works remains fragmentary and discontinuous today.

3 Nicholas Roe has scrupulously retraced Hunt's critical reception over the centuries in "Leigh Hunt's Track of Radiance", in *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Nicholas Roe, (Abingdon: Palgrave 2003), 1–18.

London at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[4] Despite the government's attempt to control the press – with the introduction of taxes on stamped paper dating back to 1712 – new magazines populated a florid journalistic market with antagonistic and dissenting political views and opinions.[5] Hunt edited *The Examiner* from 1808 to 1821 – until he left for Italy. On becoming involved with the periodical, he was already employed as a clerk at the War Office; thus, "when *The Examiner* was fully established," he happily "quitted the office".[6]

The Examiner was a widely-sold newspaper that offered political and cultural commentaries and, as such, rapidly became a key point of reference for its day. The periodical was divided into several sections – all of which were edited by Hunt: the "Political Examiner", the "Theatrical Examiner" and the "Literary and Philosophical Examiner". The repetition of the word "Examiner" in each constituent part of the journal was intentional, as Hunt explains in his piece entitled "On Periodical Essay": "I regard the various departments of this paper as children of the same family, and therefore though of different professions they all have the same surname".[7]

In his periodical writing, Hunt intended to establish a sympathetic and friendly connection with his readers: "I look upon a periodical essayist as a writer who claims a peculiar intimacy with the public".[8] Hunt's journalistic style, with the subject matter being either political or literary, actually gave rise to a new genre of prose writing: that of the familiar essay.[9] Hunt remarked that, if he were to succeed in entertaining his readers with his originality of thought and elucidation, "I shall

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4 For an extensive survey on the circulating newspapers at the time, see *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, ed. Andrew King, Alexis Easley, and John Morton (London: Routledge, 2016).

5 See Serena Baiesi, "Le riviste letterarie e la critica alla scrittura femminile", in *Le Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi: Tra Identità e Genere*, ed. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli (Roma: Carocci, 2002), 202–221.

6 Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, Vol. II, 13.

7 Leigh Hunt, "On Periodical Essay" in *The Examiner*, I, 10 January 1808, 26.

8 Ibid., 26.

9 See Simon Peter Hull, *The Familiar Essay, Romantic Affect and Metropolitan Culture: The Sweet Security of Streets* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).

think myself deserving". In terms of his goals, as well as providing amusement, he suggested that the moral benefit of his work made him – as well as his readers – most happy.[10]

As Kenneth Kendall has noted, Hunt's "editorship of the Examiner made him an influential public figure, one whose independence brought him the respect of the public and the animosity of politicians, theatre managers, and some of the actors".[11] One may go as far as to assert that *The Examiner*'s success was contingent on Hunt's political, literary and theatrical essays; their content was erudite and aesthetic, satirical and filled with political rage.[12] As Hunt wrote in the "Prospectus" of the 1808 edition: "The newspaper proves to be like the generality of it's [sic] species, very mean in it's [sic] subserviency to the follies of the day, very miserable merry in it's [sic] puns and stories, extremely furious in politics, and quite as feeble in criticism".[13]

This periodical advocated for parliamentary reforms in every field of society, ranging from religious to social rights. Together with politics, Hunt stressed the importance of power and the strong link between literature and the fine arts. Although it was a political newspaper, in his articles for *The Examiner*, Hunt did not separate his liberal ideals from his interest in *belles lettres*. As he lamented the lack of attention afforded to art by the majority of contemporary periodicals, he decided that – through his journal – he would undertake original enquiries into English artists and the exhibitions of his day. He believed that his political fights against corruption and in favour of personal and religious freedom were not unrelated to his aesthetic views. Politics and literature were interlinked for him, inextricably bound together, as they both promoted the advancement of a free society. Literature and art were the instruments with which Hunt sought to convey his aesthetics principles and political indignation at what he regarded as the degeneration of

10 Leigh Hunt, "On Periodical Essay", 26.

11 Kenneth E. Kendall, *Leigh Hunt's Reflector* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 18.

12 Greg Kucich and Jeffrey N. Cox, eds., "Periodical Essays, 1815–21", in *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, Robert Morrison and Michael Eberle-Sinatra (gen. ed.) (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), Vol. 1, xxxvii.

13 *The Examiner*, I, 3 January 1808, 6–8.

society. Due to Hunt's reformist opinions, especially those in favour of Irish independence and Catholic emancipation, *The Examiner* was prosecuted by the government.[14]

In 1810, while still working on *The Examiner*, Hunt started editing another periodical: *The Reflector*. It was a short-lived quarterly magazine that was published and co-owned by his brother John and included contributions from writers like Charles Lamb. It lasted for only four issues over the course of fifteen months between 1811 and 1812.[15] As the subtitle details, the periodical commented on "Subjects of Philosophy, Politics, and The Liberal Arts, conducted by the Editor of the Examiner" and included essays on political and theatrical criticism, translations, poetry and satire, as well as instances of personal essays.[16]

As for its title, Kendall explains: "Hunt chose the Reflector [which is] appropriate because of its double meaning of a mirror and a thinker". The essays covered a variety of subjects, from politics to history and literature. The phrases "thinking man" and "thinking nation" were recurrent ones in *The Examiner* as well as *The Reflector*.[17] The Hunt brothers aimed to rejuvenate the category of the magazine with *The Reflector* and to, in so doing, replicate the success that *The Examiner* had enjoyed as a newspaper. So, once again, Hunt decided to combine the subjects of politics and literature in his periodicals as a form of journalistic entertainment. As Kucich and Cox stress in their introduction to Hunt's periodical writing between 1815 and 1821, *The Reflector* "has been, perhaps, more appreciated for the literary contributions of Lamb and Hunt, but it remained strongly political", constantly advocating social reform.[18]

In *The Reflector*, Hunt published various interesting articles and even poetry. In the first issue, we find "Politics and Poetry" – an

14 See Nicholas Roe, "Hunt, (James Henry) Leigh (1784–1859), Poet, Journalist, and Literary Critic", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004): online edn., October 2009, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14195, accessed 1 Dec 2016.

15 Greg Kucich and Jeffrey N. Cox, eds., "Periodical Essays, 1815–21", Vol. 1, 134.

16 Kenneth E. Kendall, *Leigh Hunt's Reflector* (Paris: Mouton, 1971).

17 Kendall, *Leigh Hunt's Reflector*, 21.

18 Greg Kucich and Jeffrey N. Cox, eds., "Periodical Essays, 1815–21", 135.

autobiographical satirical meditation on Hunt's work as a poet as well as a political commentator:

> Again I stop; – again the toil refuse!
> Away, for pity's sake, distracting Muse;
> Nor thus come smiling with thy bridal tricks
> Between my studious face, and politics.
> Is it for thee to mock the frowns of fate? [ll. 1–5][19]

In the last issue, Hunt included the widely acclaimed poem entitled "The Feast of the Poets". A satirical commentary on contemporary poetry, Hunt re-edited the work many times over the course of his life, including several notes and amendments. It was this publication that attracted Lord Byron's admiration, prompting him to ask Thomas Moore for a personal introduction to the talented Hunt while the latter was in jail in 1813.[20]

Though successful for its duration, *The Reflector* was only in print for a relatively short time. This was probably due to a lack of financial means, despite the fact that it sold well. Its audience counted a large number of radical reformers and each contributor was well-compensated for their writing.[21] However, such editorial success was, unfortunately, insufficient to justify the continuation of the periodical in the longer term. Moreover, in 1812, financial issues arose as a result of the notorious article about the Prince Regent entitled "The Prince on St Patrick's Day" that caused Hunt legal as well as financial troubles. Following prosecution for libel, the Hunt brothers had incurred many expenses for their defence during the legal proceedings. This is not to mention, of course, the fact that – as a result of the final sentence – they faced two years in jail, to be served from 3rd February 1813 to 3rd February 1815.

Hunt still continued to contribute to *The Examiner* while he was in prison, remaining committed to his principles and his belief that literature had a central role to play in facilitating cultural and political

19 Leigh Hunt, "Politics and Poetics", in *The Reflector*, I, no. 2, 1811, 361–365.

20 Anthony Holden, *The Wit in the Dungeon: A Life of Leigh Hunt* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 79.

21 Kenneth E. Kendall, "Leigh Hunt and *The Reflector*", in *Leigh Hunt's Reflector* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 28.

advancement. It was in his essay entitled "Young Poets" (1816) that Hunt publicly recognised the poetic power of innovative poets such as Shelley and Keats. Moreover, together with essay writing, Hunt experimented with new poetical aesthetics by creating innovative poetry himself. His successful narrative poem *The Story of Rimini*, published in 1816, granted him a reputation as a ground-breaking writer for a younger generation of poets – and, notably, as the leader of the Cockney School. In this poem, Hunt uses free verse to frame his new interpretation of Dante's narrative from a liberal point of view.[22] Hunt's cultural and intellectual influence can never be considered in isolation from his political commitment, which had increased after his years of imprisonment.

After Hunt left prison, some of his contemporaries noted a change in his style of periodical writing. Marking a departure from the strictly political essays that he had previously written for *The Examiner*, Hunt started to dedicate more attention to aesthetic matters in a new editorial enterprise called *The Indicator*. However, Hunt was not simply seeking to avoid censorship in dedicating space and time in his essays to literary debates; he genuinely believed that it would be more effective, politically, to incorporate politics into poetical discussions as with *The Reflector*. This style of advocating for reform and freedom by harnessing the power of literature, developed by Hunt in his periodicals, went on to have a significant influence on the broad discourse of Romantic ideology.

Hunt's decision to avoid direct confrontation regarding political issues after the post-Waterloo period coincided with the launch of *The Indicator*: a weekly journal that was regularly published, in 76 issues, between October 1819 and March 1821. Hunt's newfound engagement with literary criticism in the pages of this journal once again attested to his active role in promoting political change by means of cultural discussion. The same commitment would soon be discernible from abroad in the pages of *The Liberal*; Hunt made use of foreign literature as a tool for articulating political dissent.

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22 See Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

The Indicator was first published in 1819: a very important year for English history, politics and literature.[23] As Hunt remarked in his article dedicated to the "State of the World" and published in *The Examiner* the same year:

> This is the commencement, if we are not much mistaken, of one of the most important years that have been seen for a long while. It is quiet; it seems peaceable to us here in Europe; it may even continue so, as far as any great warfare is concerned; but a spirit is abroad, stronger than kings, or armies, or all the most predominant shapes of prejudice and force […] This spirit is knowledge.[24]

The year 1819 became, as Hunt predicted, the *annus mirabilis* for many English writers – but also a disastrous historical moment in political terms.[25] In a sonnet entitled "England 1819", Shelley articulates political views that closely resemble Hunt's, condemning the English government of the period that had adopted repressive policies both at home and abroad. Restrictive rules of this kind led to a surge in protests and radical movements in London as well as in northern industrial towns; numerous demonstrations took place. In response to the unrest and rebellion of the period, the government censured radical papers, banned seditious meetings and imprisoned dissident leaders under the Six Acts. Responding to the social upheaval of the moment, many writers penned both poetry and prose. Though Hunt ultimately decided against publishing Shelley's provocative verses, he wholeheartedly shared in Shelley's utopian ideal of a better future and belief in the power of the press to effect political transformation by shaping the minds and hearts of its readers.[26]

The Indicator was founded for economic reasons. At the time of John Hunt's retirement as a collaborator, *The Examiner* was experiencing

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23 See James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

24 Greg Kucich and Jeffrey N. Cox, eds., "Periodical Essays, 1815–21", Vol. 2, 175.

25 Ibid., 173.

26 Shelley wrote *The Mask of Anarchy* in 1819 while he was in Italy, outraged by the political events that were occurring in his motherland. After receiving news of the massacre at St Peter's Fields in Manchester – where a peaceful crowd of 80,000 people had assembled to hear speakers demand parliamentary reform – he penned this long poem and sent it to Leigh Hunt for publication in *The Examiner*. However, Hunt did not publish Shelley's work as he was fearful of being charged

financial difficulties. In launching *The Indicator,* Leigh Hunt intended for the publication to provide cultural reviews on multiple topics, including poems, short stories, translations, reviews, occasional essays and original verses – the majority of which had been composed by him. However, Keats, Shelley, and Lamb also contributed some articles. In terms of its content as well as its collaborative spirit, *The Indicator* could readily be regarded as a follow-up publication to *The Reflector* and a precursor to *The Liberal*.

As for its reception, however, we cannot make such comparisons. It is fair to say that *The Indicator*, like *The Reflector*, was well-received by critics and readers alike, generating good profits. *The Indicator* was published in four editions after the very first issue – in a very short space of time. All of the contributors were enthusiastic about Hunt's editorship and were paid well for their work. However, the same commitment was not discernible in *The Liberal* or among its contributors.

Charles Lamb, for instance, paid tribute to Hunt's *Indicator* in a sonnet entitled "To My Friend, the Indicator":

> Your Essays indicate a flow,
> Dear Friend, of brain, which we may elsewhere seek;
> And to their pages I, and hundred, owe,
> That Wednesday is the sweetest of the week […]
> Wit, poet, prose-man, party man, translator –
> H --, your best title is INDICATOR.[27]

This periodical was designed to "charm" its readers by means of graceful and familiar topics; it was intended to provide a lively and innovative form of entertainment that would lighten the spirits of its readers – those who were already engaged in the more serious, straightforward and challenging content of *The Examiner*. Whereas Hunt compared *The Examiner* to a "public tavern room", *The Indicator* was a "private room – a retreat from public cares".[28] Later on, *The Liberal* seemed to

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with seditious libel. The first edition of the poem is dated 1832: well after the events in Manchester and Shelley's death.

27 Kucich and Cox, eds., "Periodical Essays, 1815–21", 222–223.

28 Kucich and Cox, eds., "Periodical Essays, 1815–21", 223.

draw on the spirits of both of the preceding journals, displaying a radical and graceless approach to politics while affording close attention to literature with an all-encompassing, inclusive issue remit. Unfortunately, *The Liberal* did not enjoy the same positive reception as its periodical predecessors.

Moreover, *The Indicator* also had a social function. In its pages, young poets found a welcoming space for their experimental poetry; Keats, for example, published his original version of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" there. It was also a place that hosted literary confrontations, exchanges of opinion, and mutual expressions of admiration and friendship among writers. Still committed to *The Examiner*, Hunt worked for both journals as an editor and contributor, finding both of these editorial spaces to be most inspiring in their own ways. Yet, in March 1821, due to his illness and the pressure of sustaining two periodicals at once, Hunt was forced to give up *The Indicator*.

In his final article of farewell to *The Indicator,* Leigh Hunt's tone is both melancholic and cheerful, addressing his readers in a spirit of both regret and joviality: "And now, returning to his own shape again, though retaining his birdly propensities, he shakes hand at parting with all his readers male, and give a kiss on the cheek, – nonsense! – on the mouth, to all his fair readers, who have ever had faith in the good intentions of LEIGH HUNT".[29]

In the 1820s, Hunt's personal fortunes were at their lowest and he was constantly plagued by illness. He had to show great strength in enduring the hardship and degradation of his personal situation, exacerbated by the growth of his family. His finances were in a state of constant crisis, despite his persistent work as an editor and a writer. He borrowed several sums of money from friends – but all of his editorial ventures were precarious and he found himself having to move house many times. As a man who was unable to manage his means, Hunt's friends described him as being dejected. Mary Shelley also noted that Hunt "is the same as ever, a person all must love and regret".[30]

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29 Ibid., 327.

30 Robert Morrison, "Periodical Essays, 1822–38", Vol. 3, xiii.

In these years, the sadness of Hunt's personal life drove him toward a style of literary production that foregrounded sentimentalism and reflected various subjects that would sell well, no matter the political orientations of its readers. As Robert Morrison has observed: "Neither his health nor his finances could any longer withstand the humiliation and disrepute of substantial public abuse such as he had known in the 1810s. He needed to write what the public would buy; he needed to feed his large family; he needed to preserve his strength".[31]

This is one of the reasons why Hunt eventually left England; Shelley had encouraged him to do so for a long time. His primary motivations were, in fact, to restore his health – and for his wife to be able to do likewise – and to start a new editorial project with Shelley and Byron: a "liberal periodical publication in conjunction with them both."[32] This was a very appealing venture that Hunt embraced in high spirits and with a strong desire "to secure new aid to our prospects, and new friends to the cause of liberty".[33]

Though it is still a topic of debate among critics, the original idea to establish a new periodical in Italy had been Byron's, as Shelley asserts in a letter to Hunt dated August 1828:[34]

> My dearest Friend, – Since I last wrote to you, I have been on a visit to Lord Byron at Ravenna. The result of this visit was a determination, on his part, to come and live at Pisa; and I have taken the finest palace on the Lung'Arno for him. But the material part of my visit consists in a message which he desires me to give you, and which, I think, ought to add to your determination – for such a one I hope you have formed – of restoring your shattered health and spirits by a migration of these "region mild of calm and serene air". He proposes that you should come out and go share with him and me, in a periodical work, to be conducted here; in which each of the contracting parties should publish all their original composition and share the profits.[35]

31 Ibid., xiv.

32 Hunt, *Autobiography*, Vol. II, 231.

33 Ibid., 231.

34 See William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960).

35 Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Thornton Hunt, 2 vols. (London: Smith; Elder, & Co., 1862), Vol. 1, 170.

The receipt of such an appealing invitation could not, of course, leave Hunt indifferent to the content, especially as Shelley asserted in the same letter: “the profits of any scheme in which you and Lord Byron engage, must, from various, yet cooperating reasons, be very great.” Again, Shelley is keen to remark that his own role would be that of a “silent partner” in the enterprise that, from the very start, was intended to be both literary and business-like in focus and spirit: “nothing would induce me to share in the profits, and still less, in the borrowed splendour of such a partnership”.[36]

From the very conception of the new periodical, Hunt excitedly imagined the potential of such an extraordinary collaboration: an opportunity to exhibit his expert competence as an editor. In a letter to Percy and Mary Shelley, dated September 1821 – before Hunt travelled to Italy – he enthusiastically outlined the project that, as Shelley had previously suggested, could improve his precarious finances:

> With regard to the proposed publication of Lord B., about which you talk so modestly, he has it in his power, I believe, to set up not only myself and family in our finances again, but one of the best-hearted men in the world, my brother and his. I allude, of course, to the work in which he proposes me to join him. I feel with you, quite, on the other point, as I always have. I agree to his proposal with the less scruple because I have had a good deal of experience in periodical writing, and known what the getting up of the *machine* requires, as well as the soul of it. You see I am not so modest as you are by a great deal, and do not mean to let you be so either. What? Are there not the three of us? And ought we not to have as much strength and variety as possible? We will divide the world between us, like the Triumvirate.[37]

After some delay, Hunt found a way – and the financial means – to join his expatriate friends abroad. Hunt’s large family embarked on a long and difficult journey by boat; having left Hampstead in November 1821, they did not arrive in Genova until June 1822. Shelley enthusiastically welcomed Hunt to Italy. The two friends spent a day talking and walking around Pisa where the Hunt family were to occupy the rooms that were situated on the ground floor of Byron’s palace.

36 Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, Vol. 1, 170.
37 Ibid., 172–173.

The three writers immediately began to undertake their collaborative activities on the periodical, as described in a letter that Hunt wrote to his sister-in-law, Bessy, on 8th July 1822:

> I shall get over for our new work, especially since Lord B. enters into it with great ardour. He has given directions to Murray to put a variety of MS. into the hands of my brother John for it, and Shelley has some excellent MS. ready also. The title, I believe, will be the *Hesperides*; – but you will have the first number shortly. You may announce the title at once, for I think it certain.[38]

All of the major contributors already had manuscripts at the ready for the journal – except for Hunt, who composed his original pieces, like his famous "Letters from Abroad", during his time in Italy.[39] As we now know, the title soon changed from *Hesperides* to *The Liberal*, as determined by Byron.

Byron's editor John Murray was not enthusiastic about this editorial collaboration. However, Byron's contributions to *The Liberal* would not have been accommodated in Murray's publications anyway; their content would have been deemed to be far too explicitly radical.[40] Thomas Moore, in particular – together with John Cam Hobhouse and Douglas Kinnaird – repeatedly wrote to Byron in order to try to discourage his collaboration with Hunt on such an innovative and risky editorial enterprise in Italy; *The Liberal* was perceived as being a bad business venture even before it came to life.[41] However, Byron persisted in his partnership with Hunt – at least until the publication of the third issue in April 1823.

Unfortunately, just one week after Hunt had arrived in Italy, Shelley drowned on the Bay of Lerici on 8th July 1822. Thus, his fundamental

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38 Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Thornton Hunt (London: Smith; Elder, & Co., 1862), Vol. 1, 189.

39 Lord Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* and Shelley's translation of "May-day Night" from Goëthe's *Faust* were included in the first issue of *The Liberal* (October 1882).

40 Lord Byron's anonymous publication, *The Vision of Judgment*, was deemed libellous; John Hunt faced court once again. See William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 126–134.

41 See William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal*.

role as a mediator between "the wren and the eagle" – as he had termed the Byron-Hunt friendship from the time that they had first met during Hunt's imprisonment – came to an abrupt end.[42] In September 1822, following Shelley's death, the Hunt family, Byron and Mary Shelley left Pisa for Albaro, near Genova, where the Hunts went on to live with Mary Shelley. Four issues of *The Liberal* were published in London by John Hunt between 1822 and 1823 and were sent to the two surviving editors in Italy. The first issue was a success – despite the harsh attacks that it endured from the conservative press.[43]

What made *The Liberal* so unique in the context of Hunt's vast editorial experience was the spirit of collaborative creativity in which it was produced: it saw Hunt sharing his traditional role of principal editor with Byron. Moreover, it was markedly different from the other periodicals on which Hunt had worked. It had been founded abroad, in Italy – and foregrounded literature as the main focus of the journal. The strong associations between the articles, translations, poems, short stories, and other forms of writing that were published in *The Liberal* with Italian culture, literature and politics also made this periodical exceptional in terms of its conception and output. In fact, the subtitle of the periodical nicely encapsulated this combination of literature, political commentary and the southern location of its composition – as well as the general political ideology to be found therein: *The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South*.[44]

Such an experimental and radical periodical could not have been published in England. The geographical distance from Italy enabled experimentation with content and form that greatly intrigued the editors. The contributors – whose details were deliberately kept anonymous – addressed their articles and poems to a specifically British

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42 Michael Steier, *Byron, Hunt, and the Politics of Literary Engagement* (Abington: Routledge, 2020), 1.

43 See William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal*.

44 For a discussion of the meaning of "south" in this periodical, see Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23", in *Branch: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Web, (https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal) accessed on 01/09/2020.

audience. It is interesting to note, though, that many of the translations were preceded by the original poems in order to highlight the quality of the translation while embracing and displaying an appreciation of the language and literature of Italy. An example of this can be found in the case of Byron's translation of the first canto of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* which was published in the fourth issue of the periodical (July 1823). Several prefatory materials were included in each issue to introduce the works as well as to provide an overview of the general aim of the editors.

Leigh Hunt produced several pieces – including translations as well as original poetry – for each issue of *The Liberal.* As a result, he was not only the main editor but also the major contributor. Far from constituting a somewhat random literary experiment, the journal was in fact part of a more complex editorial "journey" that had been skilfully coordinated by Hunt in a very special and specific location – and under difficult personal and economic circumstances.

The role that Hunt played as editor of *The Liberal* seemed fitting in that it was a natural continuation of sorts of the work that he had already mastered as a major editor and owner of *The Examiner*. Moreover, in terms of its content, there is a clear continuity between *The Liberal*, *The Reflector* and *The Indicator*, given the focus on literature and politics in the former publications. Neither Shelley nor Byron possessed the same ability to draw people together to work toward a common intellectual and political aim. Together, though, Leigh and John Hunt – with Shelley and Byron – could recruit several contributors for the issues who would be highly suitable for the periodical in terms of both the proposed content and political orientation. As a matter of fact, important writers such as Mary Shelley, William Hazlitt, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Charles Armitage Brown and Horace Smith sent their essays, short stories, and other original minor pieces to the miscellany.

Leigh Hunt had considerable experience as a literary editor, inspired by a clear liberal agenda. In the pages of his periodicals, he had always promoted new talented individuals and poetical innovation – as demonstrated with the earlier examples of contributions from Shelley and Keats that appeared in *The Examiner* – and circulated important prose writings such as those by Lamb and Hazlitt. As aforementioned, Hunt

also used his journals as suitable publications through which he could share his own poetical works. However, while the periodical enjoyed a large, supportive readership, Hunt's liberal ideas and innovative poetics faced strong opposition from conservative readers and critics. Tory writers and publishers openly expressed their disapproval of Hunt's literary school – especially those who contributed to the *Blackwood's Magazine*, in which numerous articles from 1817 to 1819 expressed opposition to Hunt's ideas and poetics.

On a personal level, Hunt was attacked by intellectuals who reproached his insolence in criticising aristocratic ethics as well as his constant requests for financial help from his titled friends. Hunt's moral integrity was under scrutiny – especially because, as well as not belonging to high society, he had taken it upon himself to establish a liberal and heterogeneous circle of writers and artists. Consequently, in order to sustain his affinity with his readers, Hunt wrote "Letters to the Readers of the Examiner" in the winter of 1822 by way of promising that, after his arrival in Italy, his work on a new periodical would not disappoint their expectations – despite all of the "idle misrepresentations" that were already circulating in the British press.[45] In spite of Hunt's quarrels with Byron about personal and literary issues, *The Liberal* was an experimental project in which its leaders kept their promises in terms of content and political orientation up to the fourth and final issue.[46]

As with his previous periodical, in *The Liberal*, Hunt presented a combination of poetry and politics. This is the reason why, from the point of view of the Tory press, the circle of liberal intellectuals in Pisa aroused suspicion and apprehension. Conversely, from the perspective of the radical press, *The Liberal* was considered to be a primarily literary periodical – not a journal that openly or effectively engaged with political issues. *The Liberal* was meant to be a collaborative journal. As such, the associated partnership – including Byron, Shelley and the

45 *The Examiner*, no. 748 (26 May 1822), 329–330.

46 To gain an accurate critical understanding of Hunt's and Byron's relationship – and their partnership, working on *The Liberal* – see Michael Steier, *Byron, Hunt, and the Politics of Literary Engagement* (Abington: Routledge, 2020).

Hunt brothers – and the ostensible failure of their project have been key points of focus for many critical investigations.[47] In particular, the majority of Romantic scholars have narrated the vicissitudes of fortune that both preceded and followed the publication of the journal, as documented in Byron's letters.[48] However, if we position Byron's writing and correspondence in dialogue with Hunt's and we analyse their respective works in parallel, we can read *The Liberal* from a fresh critical perspective. As Michael Steier has remarked in a recent study on the literary friendship between Hunt and Byron:

> Contrary to the long-standing critical view that *The Liberal* was a collaborative "failure", new evidence, combined with a fresh look at the contents of the early numbers of the miscellany, suggests that the Byron-Hunt collaboration in Italy, despite a series of mounting domestic and private tensions, was more durable and creatively meaningful than has been generally perceived.[49]

As a matter of fact, from the "Preface" of the first issue, it is easy to detect the overall aim of the editors: to collaboratively embark on an endeavour to publish a new English journal abroad that promotes reform. Written by Hunt, the opening remarks of the first issue reiterate his remarks in other editorials – but in a more straightforward way and using the collective "we" subject pronoun. Hunt's ambition is to contribute, together with his fellow writers, to investigations of liberal ideals by means of both prose and poetry, enlisting Italian literature as a (if not the) major source of inspiration:

> The object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect, the connexion between politics and all other subjects of interest to mankind having been discovered, never again to be done

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47 Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment", *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 4 (2008): 307–320; Michael Eberle-Sinatra, *Leigh Hunt and the London Literary Scene: A Reception History of his Major Works, 1805–1828* (London: Routledge, 2005).

48 See Eleanor M. Gate, "Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, and Mary Shelley: The Long Goodbye", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, no. 35 (1986): 149–167; William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal*.

49 Michael Steier, *Byron, Hunt, and the Politics of Literary Engagement* (Abington: Routledge, 2020), 165.

> away. We wish to do our work quietly, if people will let us, – to contribute our liberalities in the shape of Poetry, Essays, Tales, Translations, and other amenities […]. Italian literature, in particular, will be a favourite subject with us; and so was German and Spanish to have been, till we lost the accomplished Scholar and Friend who was to share our task; but perhaps we may be able to get a supply of the scholarship, though not of the friendship. It may be our good fortune to have more than one foreign correspondent, who will be an acquisition to the reader.[50]

Here, Hunt pays tribute to his lost friend, Shelley, whose contribution can only be seen explicitly in the first issue. The inclusive spirit of the miscellany with regard to other European literature as well as foreign correspondents meant that Hunt had a wide editorial perspective that was not limited to works or writers of a strictly British literary background. When compared with his previous periodicals, in which Hunt had already promoted interconnections between political and social issues and literary works, in *The Liberal*, Hunt presents the reading public with a larger scope, encompassing a new kind of liberalism and a European rather than a British perspective.[51]

Moreover, *The Liberal* boasted an extraordinary variety of genres and styles: a formula that had already been employed by Hunt in his earlier publications. As previously referenced, the original aim of the project was to convey – through literature and satire – the British spirit of liberalism from Italy. In the pages of *The Liberal*, one may discern the geographical displacement of its contributors, who had inevitably reinvented their identities by means of appropriating the Italian cultural system. As Maria Schoina asserts, "the Romantics' positioning in the Italian scene of their day by means of a rhetoric of biculturality,

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50 *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, 2 vols. (London: John Hunt, 1822–23), Vol. 1, viii.

51 For a discussion on the meanings of "Liberal" and "Liberalism" in this context, see Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment", *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 4 (2008): 307–320; Jonathan Gross, "Byron and *The Liberal*: Periodical as Political Posture", *Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 471–485; Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23", *Branch: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Web.; and Franca Dellarosa's essay entitled "Cockney Imprint: *The Liberal* and its Reception, 1822" in this publication.

distinction and insider knowledge figures identity as the product of a sophisticated cultural interrelation and connection".[52]

Therefore, Leigh Hunt's editorial work and his literary outputs afford insights into a bicultural sensibility, demonstrating a deep understanding of Italian culture and literature. In his contributions to *The Liberal*, Hunt asserts his aesthetic ideals and his enduring interest in the social as well as the natural environment by means of various genres. Notably, in his "Letters from Abroad" – published as a series across issues – Hunt is attentive to the interactions between people and their surroundings; it is a bond, he contends, that ought to be based on sympathy and responsibility.[53] The exploration of the urban landscape becomes a journey into memory, culture, achievement, progress and beauty; for this reason, Morrison defines Hunt as one of environmentalism's unacknowledged legislators.[54]

For Hunt, Italian places and people represented an attractive and alternative spatiality that could be imagined and reinvented for the British audience in accordance with his personal sensibility. In his "Letters from Abroad", for example, Hunt registers the power of space and place which is infused by Italian culture and art and transformed by his poetical imagination into something special and unique. In "Letter I. – Pisa", Hunt narrates his impressions while he approaches the city as an aesthetic traveller in accordance with the rules of the picturesque, but also from the point of view of an "enthusiastic admirer of Italy, who

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52 Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians': Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Farnham: Ashgate 2009), 153.

53 Published respectively from the first issue of *The Liberal* to the fourth and last: "Letter I – Pisa"; "Letter II – Genoa"; "Letter III – Italy" (addressed to Hunt's friend, Novello); "Letter IV – To C." (unknown addressee). Some of the content of these letters can also be found in later works such as *Byron and his Contemporaries* (1828) and Hunt's *Autobiography* (1850). For a discussion of these essays, see Maria Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*", *Romanticism* 12, no. 2 (2006): 115–125; Tim Webb's essay entitled " 'Letters from Abroad': Leigh Hunt and the Traveller's Epistle" in this publication.

54 Morrison is here rephrasing P. B. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) and his definition of the role of the romantic poet. See Robert Morrison and Michael Eberle-Sinatra (gen. ed.), cit. Vol. 3, xiv.

is in Tuscany for the first time", and who shares with his reader a truly sensorial experience:

> What renders Pisa interesting now, and will continue to render it so as long as it exists, is its being left to a comparative solitude, and its containing one of the most singular, and many of the most ancient specimens of the arts, in Italy. […] Let the reader imagine a small white city, with a tower also white, leaning very distinctly in the distance at one end of it, trees on either side, and blue mountains for the back-ground. Such is the first sight of Pisa, as the traveller sees it in coming from Leghorn.[55]

Hunt was a keen observer of Italian manners, language and colours. He displayed a comparative disposition that inevitably suggested English omniscience and superiority while reaffirming his liberalism. Hunt refused to despair or to surrender to any despotic power and continued to fight for intellectual and political freedom from outside England. Italy enabled him to displace his geographical location and employ Italian literary and cultural references so as to discuss domestic affairs and the state of art in Britain. Commenting on classical music to his friend Novello in "Letter III – Italy", Hunt infuses an artistic conversation with some powerful political observations, deploring the political subjugation of the Italian people to a foreign power:

> I mean to shew you how it was that they [Italians] were prepared to undervalue Mozart; and I think I can now explain to you, in one word, how it is that they contrive to render themselves deaf to the rest of his merits, and the inspiration which he himself drank at an Italian source. Mozart was German. I do not mean simply that he was a German in music; but he was a German by birth. The Germans in Italy, the lorders over Italian freedom and the Italian soil, trumpet his superiority over Italian composers; and however right may be, at all events with regard to modern ones, this is enough to make the Italians hate him. It mortifies them the more, because they know that he is an exception to the general dullness of their conquerors.[56]

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55 Leigh Hunt, "Letter I. – Pisa." from "Letters from abroad" in *The Liberal*, Vol. I, 1822, 99.

56 Leigh Hunt, "Letter III. – Italy." from "Letters from abroad" in *The Liberal*, Vol. II, 1823, 49–50.

It is true that, in his writings on foreign art and literature, Hunt included political messages against despotic power or tyranny, referring to his domestic situation, in order to promote a process of cultural as well as political education in general terms. As Kucich and Cox convincingly assert, Hunt believed that: "one might not be able to change the government in the next election but one could educate the next generation to have a broader, more liberal view". Despite the fact that Wordsworth and Southey in particular supported a conservative government, Hunt and his circle of literary friends believed that "a counter poetics dedicated to imaginative empathy, social freedom, and political progress could accelerate the march of reform".[57]

Hunt was reconsidering the principles of his predecessors and, in particular, those writers and intellectuals who had fought against oppression – such as John Milton in the early modern period. Meanwhile, he also dedicated much attention to his contemporaries who, like Robert Southey, were poet laureates and represented the literary establishment. Through the pages of *The Liberal*, during the years that he spent abroad, Hunt promoted Italian writers such as Alfieri, Ariosto and Tasso who, in their writings, exalted principles of liberty and freedom. In fact, in *The Liberal*, Hunt includes passages from Italian literature, like Alfieri's verses or other minor writers, in their original forms before providing his own translations. His intent appears to have been to share, with an English audience, a true "taste" of Italian culture that could be new to a general public, embedded in his descriptions of a cultural, sensorial and political journey. In adopting this approach, Hunt united the interests of Britain with those of Europe: a will to universal progress in the cause of liberty. Influencing public opinion was the only means of overthrowing despotism and promoting the need for a progressive future.

Following the last issue of *The Liberal*, Hunt reassessed and revised his perceptions of his Italian experiences in other publications. His new essays were inspired by his initial writings as well as by the latest episodes in his life abroad. Following the mixed – often controversial – overall reception of *The Liberal* and its failure to make a profit, the relationship between Hunt and Byron became strained. When financial

57 Morrison and Eberle-Sinatra, lii.

difficulties arose, they decided to part ways. Byron concisely described Hunt's circumstances at the time as follows:

> I have done all I can for Leigh Hunt – since he came here – but it is almost useless – his wife is ill – his six children not very tractable and in the affairs of this world he himself is a child. The death of Shelley left them totally aground – and I could not see them in such a state without using the common feelings of humanity – & what means were in my power to set them afloat again.[58]

In July 1823, Byron left Italy for Greece, Mary Shelley set off for England and, in September, the Hunts relocated to Florence where they remained, "living in [a] primitive manner", until their return to England two years later.[59] Hunt was still struggling financially. This time, his friend Charles Armitage Brown – who was himself living in Florence – helped Hunt with his economic difficulties. Hunt's literary output from this period included poetical works and essays such as "The Wishing Cup" papers that were published in *The Examiner* between 1824 and 1825. The Hunts left Italy in September 1825.

The proposal for another publication came during the summer of 1823 while the fourth and final issue of *The Liberal* was in the process of being published (30th July 1823). While Byron was planning his escape to Greece, Hunt, still based in Italy, turned his energies toward *The Literary Examiner*: a new journal that had been established by his brother in order to offset the low, limited income generated by *The Liberal*. The rationale for offering a new periodical was to try to regain popularity by means of the well-established tradition of issuing a weekly publication: one that had brought the Hunts success in the past. *The Literary Examiner* would accompany *The Examiner* in the form of a review of books, following the structure of the preceding *Indicator*.

Hunt was now writing from Florence and, off to a promising start, he provided *The Literary Examiner* with additional material. Italy, as a geographical space, was central to Hunt's articles – as it had previously been

58 Citation from Nicholas Roe, "Hunt, (James Henry) Leigh (1784–1859)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Available online at: http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14195, accessed on 01/09/2020.

59 *Ibid.*

in *The Liberal* – as was Italian poetry. The review was successful, though many critics read the journal without real interest (Mary Shelly included). When Hunt's illness worsened in mid-September, *The Literary Examiner* rapidly declined; the final issue appeared in December of that year.

In conclusion, Hunt's role as editor of and contributor to *The Liberal* reflects his literary corpus as a whole, even when considering the fact that it was a collaborative venture with co-editors as well as its specifically Italian context. Accordingly, we should avoid regarding Hunt's role as the editor of *The Liberal* in isolation from his previous and subsequent literary activities. On the contrary, this miscellany reaffirms Hunt's unwavering commitment to the promotion of literature as a means of reforming society – in Britain as well as in Europe. We should not, as such, consider *The Liberal* to be a failure as it has been labelled for decades. Instead, we ought to acknowledge it as a powerful instrument that, infused with English liberalism and Italian culture, disseminated ideas of reform and social equality: ones that were shared by many writers of the Romantic period – Leigh Hunt *in primis*.

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Periodicals

The Examiner.
The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South.
The Literary Examiner.
The Reflector.

Timothy Webb

4. 'Letters from Abroad': Leigh Hunt and the Traveller's Epistle

I

Each of the four numbers of *The Liberal* included a 'Letter from Abroad'; in these essays Hunt made his contribution to the tradition of travel-writing indicated by his title, while charting his own responses to an eye-witness experience of living in several celebrated cities in the north of Italy. The general title indicates that Hunt was aware of the tradition of publishing reports from abroad under a name which suggested they had originated in epistolary form, though usually concealing their fictionality or their true origins and not scrupling to make changes to real letters where these seemed necessary. At least one of Hunt's articles (No. III) is certainly based on a real letter to Vincent Novello, even though the printed version is edited and shortened; one of the others owes a large debt to a contemporary journal, a third letter is addressed to 'C' [Charles Cowden Clarke] and through him his father-in-law Novello. Although exact connections are difficult to trace, the links with personal correspondence are evident and the last two letters in particular are deliberately explicit about their foundations in identifiable friendships. In addition, none of these accounts could have been entirely innocent or recorded a cultural encounter for which Hunt was completely unprepared since, although he was encountering the geographical reality of Italy for the first time, any genuine sense of discovery must first be related to his reading, whether of books, essays or prints, and to that investigative procedure which marked the works of writers such as John Chetwode Eustace, or even PBS,[1] who approached contemporary Italy as a recognizable extension of the classical past.

1 Readers should note that throughout this piece the letters PBS stand for Percy Bysshe Shelley and MWS for Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. All the relevant letters

Each 'Letter from Abroad' was characteristically marked by personal experiences; but the individual 'Letter' and the growing momentum of the sequence were also, inescapably, comparative. Here, too, Hunt might have learnt from predecessors, such as Robert Southey whose *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*, published anonymously in 1807, and purportedly *Translated from the Spanish*, was popular with many readers, including Jane Austen's family, and was listed by MWS as one of the books read by herself and PBS in 1815. Southey was working in the tradition of writers such as Goldsmith, who employed the supposedly innocent or uninformed perspective of a foreign visitor and the alienating mechanism of the alleged letter for the purposes of commenting on and frequently satirizing their own society. Hunt's focus is necessarily different since it is primarily trained on Italian scenes and Italian practices; yet, as in so much travel writing, there are times in these four essays when he might be writing about England, either directly or by implication.

Even before the title of *The Liberal* was finalized, Hunt had set out in a letter to Byron some plans for the early numbers of the proposed periodical. Thanking his friend and prospective collaborator for his "more than acceptable offer […] to write some things in common with you", he suggested that the new periodical could begin "with your account of a land journey to Italy, which I might follow in the next number with that of a sea-one".[2] This promising plan shows that Hunt was eager to make use of journals as well as letters, perhaps in order to institute a sense of immediacy; unfortunately, the project never materialized. Though Byron's 'Alpine Journal' shows that he was more than capable of describing with vivid force and engaging humour the episodes and changing scenes of travel, he never contributed an account of his own

by PBS can be found in the second volume of his correspondence; all the letters from MWS can be found in the first. *The Liberal* was originally published in four numbers. The second edition, on which the current text is based, was published in only two volumes and is numbered accordingly.

2 Eleanor M. Gates, ed., *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters: Together with Some Correspondence of William Hazlitt* (Essex, CT: Falls River Publications, 1998), 113.

journey to Italy, which by that time was several eventful years in the past; in contrast, Hunt himself made use of the record he had kept in his own much more recent journal when he drew on it for the description of his own arrival at Genoa which forms a central portion of the second 'Letter from Abroad'. A few years later, this record also provided the core of a chapter in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828) and eventually, and much more economically, contributed to Chapter 17 of *Autobiography* (1850 and 1860). Even before he arrived, he had planned to make use of his own experiences, as a letter to Novello made clear: "You shall have an account of that [the 'winter part' of his voyage] as well as the rest when I get to Italy and write it for the new work".[3] Another letter to the Novellos (even the fact that it was directed to more than one reader is suggestive of his intentions) shows that in his correspondence Hunt was writing not so much for specific and privileged individuals as for the sort of reading community which PBS seems to have envisaged in his letters to Peacock, or for a group who were in the habit of inter-reading each other: "Be good enough [...] to show this letter to the Gliddons, the Lambs, Mr. Coulson, and Mr. Hogg, whom I also request to show you theirs, or such parts, of them as contain news of Italy and nothing private".[4]

This kind of reading, and this kind of writing, was by definition public and shared and participatory rather than intimate, and it might be seen as a model for much of what Hunt was to undertake in his 'Letter[s] from Abroad'. It had obvious advantages for the writer and often for the reader. For one thing, it followed a structure which found room for the seemingly trivial or the anecdotal. For another, it supposed the existence of a specific addressee. For yet another, it did not need to pay attention to the normal demands of conventional literary organization; it could even be, what William H. Marshall identifies as 'rambling' when writing critically of Hunt's first 'Letter' (it is interesting, perhaps indicative, to see the connections between travel-writing and literature and especially to observe how a word which can be used to suggest a structural

3 Charles Cowden Clarke and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (1878; repr., Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1969), 209.

4 Cowden Clarke and Cowden Clarke, 214.

deficiency can also be employed in a positive sense to describe a certain mode of travelling). Another advantage of this kind of literary procedure is that it sometimes (if not always) evaded "repeating information already in the public domain". In this dispensation, writers no longer needed to "include what correspondents might not want to know".[5]

II

At least one contemporary reader suspected that the very title of his first essay revealed more about Hunt's cultural inadequacies than the writer intended; this sceptical but anonymous critic claimed to detect "a self-complacency in the writer at finding himself really and truly out of London, and actually beyond the sea".[6] *The London Liberal* printed a parody which is written around a number of quotations taken directly from Hunt's letter on Pisa. Based on the premise that Hunt's 'Letter from Abroad' constitutes the publication of a personal letter which is mundane but genuine, this parody concludes with the triumphant exclamations of 'Ethelinda Wiggins' (a version of Hunt, who is pointedly both Cockney and female): "O my dear friend [the addressee of this 'letter from abroad' being in this case, an unidentified but presumably comical 'Miss Mortimer'], only think of MY BEING ABROAD!!!".[7] In his carefully researched book on *The Liberal* (to which I am greatly indebted) William H. Marshall, describes this parodic letter as "in the fashion that the critics might have supposed that one of Leigh Hunt's washerwomen would have written to another"[8] (one of Hunt's essays in *The Round Table* had been provocatively focused on the subject of washerwomen). In *The Literary Register* another contemporary critic claimed that 'every line' of Hunt's description of Pisa could have been

5 William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 88.

6 Marshall, 157.

7 Marshall, 237.

8 Marshall, 124–125.

written "as well at Hampstead as in Italy".[9] Such facile and unjustified interpretation is in keeping with other snobbish readings of so-called 'Cockney' writing. Yet, Hunt's evocation of noon at Pisa, or his description of the frescoes in the Campo Santo, or his engagement with a religious service in the Cathedral, or his account of the characteristic walk of Italian women, could hardly have been written so effectively at home. Even the most cursory reading of the Pisan essay makes it clear that Hunt's responsiveness to the atmosphere of place and to the details of the scene could hardly be the product of fabrication or the most imaginative visit to an English writing-desk.

By the time he visited Italy, Hunt had become close to PBS and MWS, with whose works he would have been familiar. A particularly relevant publication was their shared travel-book *History of a Six-Weeks' Tour* which concluded with four '*Letters*'; but which, as its editors have demonstrated, is less than uncomplicatedly authentic both in its attribution of authorship and in its treatment of primary materials. After their departure for Italy in March 1818, PBS and MWS supplied the Hunts with a regular flow of letters, which may have reached them through more than one source. Although Thomas Love Peacock was the primary recipient of many of PBS's letters from Italy, most of which were detailed engagements with a country which combined the modern with a powerful and sometimes overwhelming sense of the classical past, the Hunts may well have had access to at least some of these letters, since PBS once wrote to Hunt: "he [Peacock] will tell you about what we do or see, & as I write him an account of these things, I do not like writing twice over the same things"[10] (the duplication of 'things' here enacting performatively that repetition which PBS wished to avoid); or, as he put it in a later letter, immediately after expressing regrets that he had "seen too little of Italy & of Pictures", "Perhaps Peacock has shown you some of my letters to him".[11] The same practice was taken for granted in a letter of 6 April 1819 in which MWS writes to Hunt from Rome: "I suppose that Peacock shows you Shelley's letters so I need not describe

9 Marshall, 101.

10 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 66–67.

11 Shelley, 2:112.

these objects which delight us so much here".[12] A journal entry from 1820 shows that this sort of communication was quite common in the Shelley circle and sometimes involved special strategies. According to her journal, Maria Gisborne and her husband even planned to follow an injunction from PBS and to read parts of the verse-letter now known as 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' to Hunt (who for seventeen lines formed one of its subjects); although these plans were obstructed by unforeseen difficulties, on the following day the Gisbornes "amused the H[unt]s by reading parts of their letters to them".[13]

The record of direct correspondence from the Shelleys to the Hunts over these years suggests that they were also in the habit of writing, whether singly or together, to Leigh Hunt or to his wife Marianne, or to both Hunts, accounts of the country where they now lived and which they were constantly encouraging their friends to visit. Hunt's version of Italy was at least partly a product of these letters and their personal but arresting impressions. One passage in a letter from PBS in Pisa indicates what in his view might have attracted Hunt but modulates to a mode, or mood, which is conditional rather than straight-forwardly hopeful:

> We hear that there is no chance of seeing you in Italy – and yet how much you would enjoy it – and how much we should enjoy your society! For you should come to Rome, which is the metropolis of taste and memory still [compare stanzas 49 and 50 of *Adonais*], – and we would see the fine pictures and statues together, and the ruins, things greater than I can give you a conception of.[14]

Yet, for the most part, PBS seems to have reserved his descriptive writing for the letters he despatched to Peacock (including detailed accounts of the glories of Rome and Roman sculpture and architecture) but which

12 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, vol. 1 (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 90.

13 Timothy Webb, "Scratching at the Door of Absence: Reading and Writing 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'," in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 127, 132–133.

14 Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:181.

Hunt may have had the opportunity to read for himself before he left England. In contrast, the letters he wrote directly to Hunt are mostly concerned with literary matters, including (among many subjects) his own poetry and that of Hunt; the troubling characters of his publisher Charles Ollier (who, embarrassingly, was also one of Hunt's closest friends) and of Robert Southey (whom PBS had mistakenly accused of calling him 'the *blackest of villains*'); his awkward and demanding father-in-law William Godwin; the birth of his son (Percy Florence) in Florence; the defence of incest as an acceptable topic for writers; the deficiencies of Michelangelo; and the literary achievements of Tasso and especially of Boccaccio (on which Hunt was an acknowledged and influential expert).

PBS never entirely escapes from the political and moral concerns which shape so many of his judgements. In a letter to Peacock[15] he describes the discordant effect ("a conflict of sensations allied to madness") created by the presence of fettered convicts hoeing weeds in the beautiful surroundings of St Peter's Square and against an azure sky: "It is the emblem of Italy: moral degradation contrasted with the glory of nature & the arts." It was to Hunt that he wrote from the perspective of Naples his famous diagnosis of the Italian condition: "There are two Italies; one composed of the green earth & transparent sea and the mighty ruins of antient times, and aerial mountains, & the warm & radiant atmosphere which is interfused through all things. The other consists of the Italians of the present day, their works & ways."[16] As these two examples indicate, a recurrent undertone is provided by the discomfort of PBS with his Italian contemporaries and an admiration for the unattainable past. Italian politics are never far away; but, although PBS is concerned with the slumbering volcanos of Europe and Italy, he never forgets the urgencies and emergencies of his own country. His

15 Shelley, 2:93–94. Compare Hunt's concerns in his report from Pisa (1:117): "A great murderer on the English stage used formerly to have a regular suit of brick-dust. In Tuscany, or at least in Pisa, robbers are dressed in a red livery, and murderers in a yellow. A stranger looks with a feeling more grave than curiosity at these saffron-coloured mysreries, quietly doing their duty in the open streets, and not seeming to avoid observation. But they look just like other men."

16 Shelley, 2:67.

most extended letter to Hunt is written to him in the public character of the Editor of *The Examiner*, where it was intended that it should be published, and presents a detailed and passionate examination of the trial of the bookseller Richard Carlile and the absurdities involved in the impanelling of an appropriate jury.[17]

Much of this must have left its mark on Hunt and helped to shape his views of contemporary Italy. Yet it is arguable that MWS, who sometimes addressed her letters specifically to Leigh Hunt himself, sometimes to Leigh and Marianne, and sometimes specifically to Marianne (although it seems likely that Leigh would have been intended to 'inter-read' these letters), may have influenced even more significantly the flavour and the intimacy of 'Letter[s] from Abroad'. The complex dynamics of such epistolary relationships have already been sketched in some detail in the account of the various ways in which PBS arranged to communicate with Hunt. Perhaps we need to establish a more elastic model for certain kinds of correspondence, especially that which involves communication from a distance, and a more appropriate terminology, as a letter of 21–22 September 1819 from Keats to Richard Woodhouse seems to suggest by implication: "Now for all this you must write me a letter apiece – for as I know you will inter-read one another – I am still writing to Reynolds as well as yourself – As I say to George [his brother who was living in America] I am writing *to* you but *at* your Wife – ."[18]

Hunt's own readiness to summarize the ethos of places may well owe a debt to the chattily opinionated style of MWS whose very first letter from Italy, directed to both Hunts, contains such unqualified judgements as "Italy appears a far more civilized place than France" and "The inns are infinitely better and the bread which is uneatable in France is here the finest and whitest in the world".[19] Yet, however much he was influenced, Hunt also retained his intellectual independence. For instance, the reactions of MWS to Pisa and the Pisans in her letter of 24 March 1820 to Marianne Hunt[20] and in her letter to Leigh Hunt

17 Shelley, 2:136–148.

18 John Keats, *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 296–297.

19 Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 1:64.

20 Shelley, 1:136–137.

beginning 29 December 1820[21] make an instructive comparison to the first of Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad', which is also devoted to Pisa and as impressionistic and apparently unstructured as a private letter, but is noticeably more benign and less obviously judgemental.

There is also the question of the Italian language. Even at an early stage, MWS assumed that some knowledge of the language would enable the Hunts to appreciate an anecdote about the difficulty of making oneself understood by Italians.[22] As she knew, Leigh Hunt had never set foot on Italian soil but had a special intimacy with Italian literature and music and a knowledge of the Italian language on the page which had still to be tested in practice. On at least one occasion, she wrote to him in Italian, partly because she knew that he was familiar with the written language and partly to encourage the strength of his feelings for Italy and for that Italian nationalism which she had detected in the improvisations of Tommaso Sgricci in Pisa, and which she linked to attributes of fertile Italian nature.[23] On another slightly later occasion, she sent Hunt for possible publication in *The Indicator* a story she had read in *L'Osservatore Fiorentino* (which also provided a source for PBS's unfinished 'Ginevra'); the text was in Italian but she must have expected him to understand and provide some kind of translation or paraphrase for his readers since she encouraged him by claiming that it "would be a moving tale under your pen". She also informed Hunt that she had "another Itali[a]n story for you of the present day; which I will relate to you as I heard it if you like";[24] this story has been tentatively identified by Nora Crook as 'A Tale of the Passions' in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*.[25] Unfortunately, by this point, *The Indicator* had been discontinued, so the story still remains tantalizingly unidentified; but the letter indicates the imaginative closeness of MWS and Hunt and the importance which they both accorded to Italian subjects.

21 Shelley, 1:171–173.
22 Shelley, 1:66–68.
23 Shelley, 1:162–166.
24 Shelley, 1:189–197.
25 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, ed. Nora Crook, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), lxxvii.

Given these shared concerns and given the fact that MWS and her small son passed nearly ten months in the same house as the Hunt family at Albaro outside Genoa, it is no surprise that during her return to England in the summer of 1823 she sent a number of detailed accounts of her travels either to both Hunts or separately to Leigh. In due course, these letters exercised a direct influence on certain passages in *Autobiography*, although the debt was never explicitly admitted. Here, too, Hunt allowed his writing to incorporate something of the freshness and immediacy transmitted by the personal letter.

III

Hunt's reports on contemporary Italy are informed by journals and letters as well as by keen, though often seemingly effortless, observation. Yet, for all their apparent immediacy, these 'Letters' are compromised or limited in an important way. Although he lived in Italy, from the end of June 1822 till October 1825, and although he could be classed as in many respects an Italophile (perhaps even an *Inglese Italianato*), and in spite of his learned and passionate appreciation of the language and of Italian writing, Hunt never travelled further south than Florence (and his move to Florence only took place after he had written his final 'Letter'); consequently he had no direct experience, either then or later, of the southern part of the country. This geographical limitation means that his generalizations must necessarily be interpreted as engaging not so much with Italy as with 'Italy' (that is, his own imaginative construction based on limited personal experience of a territory, which was large and diverse, politically, culturally, geographically and linguistically). Even his eagerness to absorb and to analyse those dialects which he did encounter has been blunted by most later editions so that his version of Italy seems more narrowly focused than was originally the case.

For example, two of the original 'Letter[s] from Abroad' show that, unlike many travellers, he was concerned to acknowledge the idiolect of different parts of Italy. As demonstrated by his detailed reactions to the

contexts of Italian opera, he was unusually responsive to the behaviour of the language and to the ways in which it was sung or spoken.[26] Yet, unlike many of his Italian observations, even his endeavours to characterize and to give examples of Pisan and Genoese dialect were not retained in the second version of *Autobiography* by which, ever since it was first published in 1860, he has continued to be known. While these omissions make sense in terms of publishing pragmatism, they also remove from his text important (even if slightly pedantic) traces which at least indicate his awareness of the linguistic complexity of the country in which he lived for over three years and wrote about for many years afterwards. Both in his four 'Letters' and in his personal correspondence, in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828), in various other writings and, much later, in both versions of *Autobiography* (1850 and 1860), Hunt presents and analyses his own Italian experience in ways which show he was alert to the history and atmosphere of individual places; in view of such responsiveness, we can only regret that, for a variety of reasons, his personal and direct knowledge of Italy was ultimately so narrow. Unlike his friends the Shelleys, who had often described their impressions of place to Peacock or to Hunt himself, he did not travel even as far as Venice or Milan in the north, or to those more southern parts of the country where in Rome or Naples or especially Sicily he would have found richness of dialect and local tradition, as well as compelling political and religious configurations.

Suggestively and provocatively, the subtitle of *The Liberal* was *Verse and Prose from the South*, a geographical and specifically a cultural and political affiliation immediately noticed and parodied by his right-wing critics (*The Illiberal* was printed with the pointed subtitle *Verse and Prose from the North!!*).[27] As Marilyn Butler pointed out some years ago (though not with direct reference to Hunt), an allegiance to the south was often regarded as potentially alarming, especially by Hunt's older contemporaries who had lived through the terrors of the French

26 Timothy Webb, "Breathing Passion and Syllabic Particularity: Leigh Hunt and the Italian Voice," in *Refractions: Romanticism, Modernism, Comparatism. Essays in Honour of Peter Vassallo*, ed. Ivan Callus, James Corby, and Maria Frendo (Msida, Malta: Midsea Books, 2022), 167–195.

27 Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 120–121, 217.

Revolution.[28] The anxiety of Thomas Moore, William Wordsworth and others, may have been misplaced and excessive, but it was inspired by a recognizable point of view. Yet, in spite of such negative reactions, or even partly because of them, Hunt had not (at least at this point) abandoned his enthusiasm for 'the progress of philosophy and Liberal Opinion' (a formulation which concludes the first of his 'Letters from Abroad' and is mocked by 'Ethelinda Wiggins' in *The London Liberal*).[29] In his view, liberal thinking was more than abstract and could even make things happen. Writing about Genoa in his second 'Letter', he offers a striking example of how this could work: "Somebody has said, that in the South all the monks look like soldiers, and all the soldiers like monks. I dare say this might have been the case before the late spread of liberal opinions; but it is so no longer." (1:280) The first essay also pointedly records that lectures at the university are free and that "men [women were still excluded] of any sect or religion can take all the degrees […], except those in divinity or canonical law" (1:98); a contrast with the more theologically exclusive practices of Oxford and Cambridge is surely intended by this example of 'liberality' but it is never explicitly formulated.

Liberal opinions did not prevent him from acknowledging that he was still an outsider but it helped him to identify similarities which might have been less than comfortable to some of his readers. His reports on Italy are those, not only of a man of 'liberal' tendencies, but of one who recognized himself as an Englishman and a Protestant, though of unorthodox views, or what he calls "a foreigner from a Protestant country" (1:278). A consciousness of these two identities certainly informs his accounts of Italian life, his curiosity about Mediterranean religious practices and, more specifically, the detailed description in his second essay of a religious procession (1:278–80) in Genoa and of Genoese churches, which he visited "every day, when I was on shore." (1:280) Hunt explained at least some of their attraction (1:280): "I liked their

28 Marilyn Butler, "The Cult of the South: The Shelley Circle, Its Creed and Its Influence," in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760–1830*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 113–137.

29 Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 237.

quiet, their coolness, and their richness." Like many visitors, he recognized that the form of Catholicism practised in Genoa had older roots which should be acknowledged. For instance, "as the Jupiter of the Capitol sits there under his new name of St. Peter, so there is no doubt that the ancients, under other names, had these identical processions. The Cupids remain unaltered." (1:279) Perhaps, though, the gentle unorthodoxy of his views and the tolerance generated by his attitudes also allowed him to recognize, beyond any doctrinal differences, a surprising similarity of belief: "I find my own religion in some part or other of all imaginative religions." (1:280)

Hunt also seems to have entertained strong views concerning what properly constituted 'the South' which, whether explicitly or by implication, provided an unflattering perspective on his own country. His unshaken philosophy can be traced in the pages of *The Liberal* itself. On the 1st of January 1823 he reports that when he set foot in Genoa, it constituted a double first: it was "the first city [presumably, in Italy] that he beheld" and it "was the first time I had been in the South" (1:270, 277); these realizations suggest that, at least at this point, he was driven not so much by geographical ignorance as by the force of comparative considerations. By the time the fourth number appeared at the end of July, there had been opportunities to reconsider, but Hunt was still not prepared to adjust his own perspective or to allow for correctives from his critics or "My northern faculties" (1:283). He was still committed to what he interpreted as the values of the south. As he put it to his correspondent near the beginning of his fourth and final 'Letter' (2:252): "You know all that I am at present acquainted with, respecting the city of Genoa; but as a scholar and a lover of the country, especially one who has never been in the South, there are some other points which will not be without their importance in your eyes."

This declaration shows some awareness of his own geographical limitations but it does not seem to allow sufficiently for the fact that, although Hunt himself had spent some time in Italy, he was completely unacquainted with what a geographer or a historian would identify as its southern reaches. For all his alertness, he devoted this last 'Letter', written when he was at Albaro, to an account of 'Italy in General' (as he later chose to call it in the heading to Chapter XXI in *Autobiography*, although these pages are untitled in *The Liberal*, where the 'Letters

from Abroad' carry a status which is still experimental rather than authoritative). This account is based not on his direct knowledge of the country as a whole but on his own experience of Pisa and especially of Genoa and the Genoese. In this short but capacious essay he engages with a diversity of Italian subjects, mostly the elusive and the intangible, which he sometimes discovers in precisely those things which travellers often find 'disappointing': the olive tree ("A wood of them looks like a huge hazy bush, more light than dark, and glimmering with innumerable specks […]. My wife says, that olive trees look as if they only grew by moonlight" [2:253]); the cypress ("Two or three cypress trees by the side of a white or yellow cottage, roofed and windowed like our new cottage-houses near London, the windows often without glass, form alone an Italian picture; and constantly remind you that you are at a distance from home" [2:253]); olive oil ("We have a difficulty in keeping the servants from disputing its food with our lamplight" [2:254]); chestnut trees ("the spiky–looking branches of leaves, long, and of a noble green, show gloriously, as you look up against the intense blue of the sky" [ibid.]); the lizard (ibid.); flies, gnats and other insects; and the beautiful but mysterious fire-fly, which Hunt recurrently writes about with particular and admiring attention ("At night, the flashing is that of the purest and most lucid fire, spangling the vineyards and olive-trees, and their dark avenues, with innumerable stars […]. In a dark room, a single one is sufficient to flash a light against the wall […]. A few of them are generally in our rooms all night, going about like little sparkling elves. It is impossible not to think of something spiritual, in seeing the progress of one of them through a dark room." [2:256])

This view of Italy has been somewhat obscured, or qualified, by the fact that *Autobiography*, which largely follows the much earlier text in *The Liberal*, also introduces at this point a wide range of topics which do not feature in the original essay. In addition to the original subjects, the final version includes the following subjects: gesticulation; the walk of Italian women; the Italian face (a favourite Hunt subject); the lack of gentility in Italian men; the concentration on money-making (especially of the Pisans and the Genoese, whom he had observed in person); the unfortunate effects on Italian character of the "chicanery, sensuality, falsehood, worldliness, and petty feeling of all sorts, exhibited by

the Court of Rome";[30] the Italian propensity for cheating; the attitude of Italian women towards dress and ornamentation; cicisbeism (a popular topic with travellers and with Byron); "political uneasiness and *minestra*";[31] there are also passing references to Bentham, PBS and Mazzini. None of these subjects is addressed in *The Liberal* version. Undoubtedly, the final text is more responsibly comprehensive; in particular, it balances any tendencies towards the narrowly poetic by a discourse which is much more opinionated and judgemental; and it shows that its author is sensitive not only to religion, the developing pattern of Italian politics and the national character. Yet it might be argued that the introduction of these new topics in some way damages the more delicate and apparently spontaneous character of the original 'Letter' and provides the reader with an account which is certainly more balanced but lacking in infectious immediacy.

IV

In spite of these obvious limitations, not of his capacity to notice or to analyse but in the scope and variety of the perspectives allowed him by his experience, Hunt was a shrewd observer and could often write compellingly. His first letter, from Pisa, was convincing enough to tickle the appetite of his close Italian friend Vincent Novello, son of a pastry-cook from Piedmont and an influential musician, who lived in England, and was anxious to hear more before, possibly, experiencing Italy for himself. Frustratingly perhaps, and in spite of his obvious gifts, and his genuine qualifications to write about Italy, Hunt was not in a position to take full advantage of the opportunity. Most followers of the Grand Tour had been and still were, much more prosperous than the impoverished Hunt and, because significantly younger, usually free

30 Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1850), 3:150.

31 Hunt, 3:158.

from the demands of wife and children, not to mention editorial duties; by strong contrast, the relatively short time in which Hunt provided four 'Letter[s] from Abroad' did not allow him to explore a completer range of what Italy had to offer or to expand his horizons as widely as he might have done. His *Autobiography* shows that he read the work of women travellers (Germaine de Staël, Lady Morgan and probably others) who partly served to balance the views of Forsyth (much admired by Byron and Percy Shelley), Millin on Genoa, *The Diary of an Invalid* by Henry Matthews, and the *Gazzetta di Genova*. Hunt does pay some attention to political issues and to the presence and influence of religion and sometimes, especially in Pisa, takes particular note of architecture and what PBS called "shew-knowledge",[32] setting his own observations against those of Joseph Forsyth whose guide-book he seems to be consulting as he writes. Yet his central concerns are often rather different and sometimes seem closer to those of the women who kept journals or wrote letters to their friends at home. There is a suggestive similarity between some of his detailed letters to his sister-in-law Bessy Kent in England and the typical accounts of women writers. What is often compulsive about his responses is precisely that personal element which caused some readers to dismiss his writing as too impressionistic or as the predictably self-congratulating responses of a simple-minded cockney abroad.

Even the generally sympathetic William H. Marshall expresses reservations about this element in Hunt's 'Letter[s]': "In some instances, such as certain passages in 'Letters from Abroad,' the writing was too personal for general interest."[33] Certainly, his account of visiting the Leaning Tower in the company of PBS, only two days before his drowning, intrudes embarrassingly into the text and the texture of his first 'Letter':

> Good God! What a day that was, compared with all that have followed it! I had my friend with me, arm-in-arm, after a separation of years: he was looking better than I had ever seen him – we talked of a thousand things – we anticipated a thousand

32 Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:89.

33 Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 212.

> pleasures – – – I must plunge again into my writing, that I may try to forget it. (1:103)

The arm-in-arm progress of true friendship did not escape the cruel eye of satire, which was always quick to identify any signs of potential weakness or vanity. Hunt could not have defended the emotionalism of this passage, not least its self-indulgent collapse into the unprecedented support of three double dashes. At this point, however briefly, his prose hovers close to the excesses of the Spasmodics. The final 'Letter from Abroad' also begins on a note which is highly personal. Like its predecessor, it is addressed to Novello, although technically it is directed to 'C—' and introduces Novello, thinly disguised as 'N.', in the role of 'your father', whose longing for Italy had been stimulated by Hunt at their last meeting. The third sentence makes it clear that the whole succeeding essay is posited on a genial friendship from which the reader is necessarily excluded, even though he/she is expected to register and enjoy Hunt's expressions of closeness; "and I should be glad to know what all three of you could do before then to come arm-in-arm, joking and to joke, and see one who hungers and thirsts after his old friends." (2:251) Once again, Hunt's choice of 'arm-in-arm' is telling: it suggests not just what we might recognize as a period gesture but also an affirmation of a shared relationship satisfied by the intimacy of its own boundaries. These passages, Hunt's account of his friendships at Christ's Hospital, and his insistence on the embracing qualities of the harbour at Genoa, seem to suggest that, for whatever reason, he was emotionally needy, if not even greedy ("one who hungers and thirsts"), and that he placed exceptional weight on personal relations.

There are further intrusions of emotions which are essentially personal and do not fit very comfortably into a letter which has become a 'Letter' and has exchanged the cosy limits of the private for the more open spaces of the public. After an enumeration of seven attractions which should delight Novello and his party on the way to Albaro, Hunt admits as further enticement that there are "certain 'Signori Inglesi,' large and small, who will shout for joy at the sight of you." (2:251–252) These images of family rejoicing soon modulate into a more detailed invitation which delights in the imagined visit and celebrates

the attractions of Genoa (rather as Hunt's coaxing letter from PBS listed some of the pleasures of Rome available for sharing with like-minded friends):

> During the evening and early morning, I will shew you about. The rest of the time we will eat, sleep, lounge, read and converse. It will be hard if we do not have some music. There are pictures by Raphael and Guido in the palaces [at this time, Hunt and his family were living just outside Genoa, which had been described in some detail in the second 'Letter from Abroad']. The fruits are fine: the colours of things exquisite; every object about you new. You cannot help being pleased: and I myself catch a new inspiration from your coming, and will at least warrant my being merry for as long a time as you stay. (2:252)

Among other things, this is a prose example of the *invitatio* which has its origins in Roman poetry. Examples can be found, for instance, in English poems by Ben Jonson and much more recently by PBS in his 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' which, at the time of Hunt's writing his original letter, had been received but not yet published (here, too, a letter which was originally private was transformed into a published poem).

In a less direct way, it might even be claimed that much writing from abroad is informed by the imperatives of invitation, whether direct or indirect. In this case, most of the details mentioned by Hunt had already been celebrated in his detailed account of Genoa in his second 'Letter from Abroad'. For example, this 'Letter' (which has no designated addressee) describes the impressive but slightly bewildering conjunction in La Superba of great streets and palaces:

> These three streets [fit for a congress of kings or perhaps of great men, depending on the perspective of the writer] are literally a succession of great palaces on each side the way; and these palaces are of costly architecture, and are adorned inside with the works of the Italian masters. Marble is lavished everywhere. It is like a street raised by Aladdin, to astonish his father-in-law the Sultan. (1:276)

Like Dickens, the elegant excesses of Genoa sometimes put Hunt in mind of the *Arabian Nights*. The same 'Letter' records an almost embarrassing feature of Genoese life which Hunt celebrated more than once: "In Italy, we also looked for our heaps of fruit; and we had them – in all the luxury of baskets and vine-leaves, and a cheapness that made us laugh. Grapes were not in season; but there were figs, apricots, fresh

almonds, oranges, pears, and gigantic cherries, as fine as they were large." (1:273–274) Not long afterwards, Hunt encounters more "southern luxuriance of leaves and fruit" and the cherries make another gigantic appearance: "I walked among heaps of vines, olives, cherry, orange and almond trees, and had the pleasure of plucking fresh lemons from the bough […]. The cherries were Brobdignagian, and bursting with juice." (1:283)

On 24 June 1822 Hunt turned his attention to Genoese colour:

> You learn for the first time in this climate, what colours really are. No wonder it produces painters. An English artist of any enthusiasm might shed tears of vexation, to think of the dull medium through which blue and red come to him in his own atmosphere, compared with this. To-day we saw a boat pass us, which instantly reminded us of Titian, and accounted for him: and yet it contained Nothing but an old boatman in a red cap, and some women with him in other colours, one of them in a bright yellow petticoat. But a red cap in Italy goes by you, not like a mere cap, much less any thing vulgar or butcher-like, but like what it is, an intense specimen of the colour of red. It is like a scarlet bud in the blue atmosphere. The old boatman with his brown hue, his white shirt, and his red cap, made a complete picture; and so did the women and the yellow petticoat. I have seen pieces of orange-coloured silk hanging out against a wall at a dyer's, which gave the eye a pleasure truly sensual. (1:284)

This example may serve to show how closely the personal is often woven into a more complex pattern and how what at first glance might seem simply private or personal can be related to a wider context or can modulate into something which commands a different kind of interest. Hunt's acknowledgement of the uncomplicated purity of Italian colour ("an intense specimen of the colour of red" [1:284]) and the creative possibilities of the Italian atmosphere may find its confirmation in the observations of Samuel Rogers and other travellers, who were captivated by the almost ubiquitous force of everyday beauty; but here it is expressed in compelling terms which are easily apprehended, asserts the importance of the aesthetic, and connects with a wider critique of the joylessness of English society. Hunt also suggests that in this context conventional British class values are no longer valid since even an old boatman in a red cap can remind him of Titian and an ordinary red cap can be seen as aesthetically satisfying in itself not as "vulgar or butcher-like" or as carrying any threatening political implications. That

celebration of the 'mundane' which irritated some of Hunt's critics is undoubtedly based on an appreciation of the picturesque (the colourful old boatman and the women both "made a complete picture"); but the transformation of the apparently ordinary through a recognition of the transfiguring properties of colour is precisely the point of Hunt's description.

This could not be defined as a personal piece of writing in the negative sense in which that term is intended; but it might show how closely the apparently 'personal' can be related to other considerations which are, perhaps, more profound. A third passage which is highly personal, but strikingly different in tone from the others, appears suddenly in a long passage on the phenomenon of the fire-fly, which Hunt approaches more than once, both in terms of literary tradition and etymologically or entomologically ("The Italian name is Lucciola, Little-light, – in Genoa, Caee-belle (Chiare-belle) – Clear and fine" [2:256]). Among many other details, he adds what is in effect a personal reminiscence:

> To me, who pass more of my time even than usual, in the ideal world, these spiritual-looking little creatures [fire-flies] are more than commonly interesting. S. used to watch them for hours. I look at them, and wonder whether any of the particles he left upon earth help to animate their loving and lovely light. The last fragment he wrote, which was a welcome to me on my arrival, began with a simile taken from their dusk look and the fire underneath it, in which he found a likeness to his friend. (2:257)

Readers of *The Liberal* were probably warned off by the apparently excluding 'S.' (another sign of an original letter) and yet invited to share this touching, and otherwise unrecorded, recollection and suggestive contribution to literary history. Presumably, most or perhaps even all of those readers could translate this code without too much difficulty. Hunt's speculations on life after death take on a slightly different colouring if one knows what happened at Shelley's cremation; yet these lines are surely informed by a knowledge of *Adonais* which Hunt seems to have discussed with Shelley only a couple of days before his drowning and which features prominently in his memorial essay.[34]

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34 Timothy Webb, "Religion of the Heart: Leigh Hunt's Unpublished Tribute to Shelley," *The Keats-Shelley Review* 7, no. 1 (1992): 49–50.

It is clear that Hunt's equilibrium was severely shaken by the sudden loss of Shelley which haunts two of the three personal passages. Certainly, the first of these passages is embarrassingly personal about Shelley's drowning and the second is unfortunate in tone; both examples show how difficult it is to tread an unemotional path between the personal and the public, or between the letter and the 'Letter'. The final passage is quite different in tone from what has come before. It is, of course, highly personal too and even, one might claim, intrusive, but it is protected from crude emotionalism by the passing of time and perhaps by its nostalgic tone and its spiritual speculations.

Yet, as this examination shows, and in spite of a few embarrassing examples, the criticisms made by Marshall and by some of Hunt's contemporaries are often unsympathetic and fail to recognize that, in spite or perhaps because of these obvious failures, Hunt took steps to remove from his public letters passages or details which might appear too obviously personal or private. For instance, although the 'Letter' on Pisa mentions Casa Lanfranchi and although it also refers almost immediately afterwards to the standard arrangement by which separate families were allocated their own floor in the larger buildings, Hunt never refers in this letter to the fact that for some months he lived in Byron's *palazzo* as his guest or that, less successfully, Byron and Hunt's own family were assigned different parts of the house. He mentions Vaccà ("with an intelligent and pleasing countenance" [1:98]) but does not tell the reader that PBS arranged for the distinguished doctor to diagnose Marianne Hunt's condition. Again, by Hunt's own instructions, the third letter in the sequence was made suitable for publication through the loss of those intimacies which once marked its beginning and its end, described by Hunt as "this private, pleasantest bit of all".

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Critics have also failed to acknowledge the characteristic texture of much of the writing or to recognize that not to attempt to convey the

excitement of living and travelling in a foreign country is to betray a common human experience. Examples of Hunt's analytical enthusiasm are everywhere; for example, his description of music in the streets of Pisa ("It is not an uncommon thing for gentlemen to play their guitars as they go along to a party" [1:115], or "I heard one evening a voice singing past a window, that would not have disgraced an opera" [1:119]); or his account of the pleasures of sailing into the impressive harbour at Genoa ("Imagine a glorious amphitheatre of white houses, with mountains on each side and at the back" [2:269]); or his response to a blind beggar ("Imagine a sturdy-looking fellow in rags, laying his hot face against his fiddle, rolling his blind eyeballs against the sunshine, and vociferating with all the true open-mouth and syllabical particularity of the Italians, a part of one of the duets of that lively master" (Rossini) [2:51–52]); or his encounter with local fauna ("But what is that very loud cricket? The noise ceases; and with a whirr almost as strong as that of a little bird, the creature comes spinning across the lane […]. When I first saw it, I almost felt as if Anacreon were alive, and all the South was his country" [2:254–255]).

This delighted reaction is informed not only by curiosity but by Hunt's capacity to animate the commonplaces of classical literature through another unforgettable connection which is equally direct but not, unfortunately, retained in later versions: "A gentleman tells me, that when he was at school, he and a set of his fellows caught a great number, and suddenly opened their music at the schoolmaster who could not be heard." (2:255) More elaborate because more detailed and more challengingly thoughtful is the long description of the frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa which Hunt like Coleridge and Keats greatly admired and which he celebrates as the work of impressive but still largely forgotten contemporaries of Durer and Chaucer:

> They are like a succession of quaint dreams of humanity during the twilight of creation…. There is the same want of proper costume – the same intense feeling of the human being, both in body and soul – the same bookish, romantic, and retired character – the same evidences, in short, of antiquity and commencement, weak (where it is weak) for want of a settled art and language, but strong for that very reason in first impulses, and in putting down all that is felt. (1:112-13)

As these passages, chosen almost at random, suggest to most readers, an important element is Hunt's own experience, which is a great deal more than 'self-complacency' and is usually allied to that kind of 'particularity' which he identifies in the operatic singing of the blind beggar.[35] It is suggestive, also, that two of these passages make use of the word 'Imagine'. Hunt, it seems, can recognize that what he is describing goes beyond the everyday experience of his English readers; but he is happy to involve them imaginatively through his descriptive evocations. His descriptions often succeed in familiarizing the apparently strange or unfamiliar while still acknowledging its otherness. As PBS had once written to him about his much-admired Boccaccio: "What descriptions of life are those in his little introductions to every new day. It is the morning of life stript of that mist of familiarity which makes it obscure to us."[36] The foreignness of those Italian cities and their peoples he has engaged with is captured as foreign and by definition un-English; but Hunt is also captivated by the nature and the detail of their otherness. The obscuring mist of apparent familiarity is dispelled. From time to time, his delight in Italy and its landscapes and his curiosity about Italian practices is qualified or sobered by a sense of that responsibility appropriate to a recent editor of *The Examiner*, who was often identified with the ideals of his own paper; sometimes he gets tired of Italian trees and Italian sunshine and cannot help thinking comparatively and nostalgically of the oaks and elms of Hampstead. Even so, his accounts of life in Italy are characteristically fresh, animated and, in the best sense, strikingly personal. At their most compelling, 'Letter[s] from Abroad' achieve something of that freshness and immediacy of response, even of that apparent innocence and curiosity, which is associated with the most unassuming of letters.

35 Webb, "Breathing Passion and Syllabic Particularity: Leigh Hunt and the Italian Voice," 117.

36 Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2:122.

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Gioia Angeletti

5. *Domestica facta* Recollected in Italy: Byron and *The Liberal*

Lord Byron's involvement in setting up the short-lived yet momentous project of *The Liberal* still leaves some questions open and conundrums unresolved: why did he join the venture in 1822? What caused him to abandon it less than a year later? Was it just an unsuccessful experiment in his literary career, or should it be reassessed in relation to his liberal politics and transcultural poetics? The present chapter will attempt to answer these questions by showing why Byron's contribution to *The Liberal*, contrary to well-established critical consensus, deserves reassessment in relation to the poet's political, ideological, and cultural discourse in the early 1820s. The underlying premise of this statement is that, as highlighted by those scholars[1] who have finally opened a breach in what has long appeared as a consensual orthodoxy, Shelley, Byron and Hunt's joint venture cannot be simply seen as a "meteoric production", a "critical and financial disaster", or a "transient [phenomenon] in the history of Italy in English literature", as some critics have maintained.[2]

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1 See, for instance, Daisy Hay, *Young Romantics. The Shelleys, Byron and Other Tangled Lives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 263–264; and Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal,' 1822–23", accessed 30 September 2021, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal.

2 "A meteoric production" is how *The Monthly Magazine* defined the periodical in 1823. Cf. William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 117. Leslie P. Pickering deployed the same adjective and reinforced the negative judgement in his study *Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and the "Liberal"* (New York: Haskell House, 1966), 7–8: "In as meteoric a manner as it lived, so did the journal die, bearing with it to its untimely grave the ruined hopes of its progenitors, until now its name conveys but little to the minds of the many". In her biography of Byron, Fiona MacCarthy writes that *The Liberal* was a "critical and financial disaster" and, after Byron's

Seen from Leigh Hunt's point of view, it may very well be that the project, as Jeffrey Cox and Greg Kucich have elucidated,[3] can be deemed as an unsuccessful attempt to create an Italian outgrowth of the Hampstead circle. However, as far as Byron is concerned, it is my contention that the critical focus should shift from what *The Liberal* signified as a form of collaborative work for individuals sharing the same political ideas to what, instead, it meant to Byron, personally, in the last years of his Italian sojourn. Therefore, what is mainly in question is the peculiar predicament that, in 1823, led him to repudiate the hybrid Anglo-Italian discourse which essentially defines *The Liberal*,[4] and look for an alternative outlet for his political, as well as temperamental, restlessness elsewhere – that is, in Greece, where he joined the war of independence against Ottoman rule, and, possibly, as Mary

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final contribution, it simply "folded". See *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: John Murray, 2002), 456. Finally, according to Kenneth Churchill, "Had the Pisan circle continued to flourish, and *The Liberal* got properly off the ground, the subsequent story of this study might have been very different; as it is, Hunt and *The Liberal* are merely transient phenomena in the history of Italy in English Literature". See Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764–1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), 55.

3 Jeffrey Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). The Pisan circle may actually be regarded as another version of the "Cockney School of Poetry", the phrase used by conservative reviewers (the first was John Gibson Lockhart in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817) to refer to the coterie of writers and intellectuals revolving around *The Examiner*, such as Keats, Hazlitt, Horace Smith, John Hamilton Reynolds, Cornelius Webb and Benjamin Robert Haydon. Kucich has observed that "the Pisa setting where the group eventually reconvened to produce the *Liberal*" was an "offshoot" of Hunt's group in London Hampstead. See Kucich's essay "Keats, Shelley, Byron, and the Hunt Circle", in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740–1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 266.

4 In Schoina's words, a discourse which "constructs and performs identity as a hybrid structure which inhabits a '*passage* between fixed identifications'". See Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'. Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 16. The internal quote is from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

Shelley wrote, "to get a new name as a man of action",[5] which he partly achieved, before dying in 1824.

In other words, Byron's participation in the project of *The Liberal* acquires a particular relevance if one sees it as part of a two-faced process that he was going through in the years when the periodical was conceived and published. On the one hand, from 1819 onwards, Byron's letters, journals, and verse include innumerable signs of what appears to be an act of rapprochement with his home country, which reveals a desire, whether conscious or unconscious is hard to say, to be rehabilitated in the eyes at least of a part of his contemporary audiences and to unburden himself from the scandalous celebrity concerning his name. On the other hand, while attempting to be rehabilitated by his fellow countrymen, in Italy Byron continued experiencing a process of acculturation that started in 1816, when he moved to the country, and that in 1820 and 1821, the years preceding the first issue of *The Liberal*, also included his direct involvement in local politics, that is, the Carbonari revolts against Austrian rule. Contrary to how it may seem, these two processes, rapprochement with England and acculturation in Italy, are not in opposition. In his biography of Byron, John Galt wrote that "the main cause of the failure was the antipathy formed and fostered against [the Liberal] before it appeared,"[6] yet it is my contention that Byron's engagement with the Italian independence movement (as with the Greek one later) can be seen as part of his personal attempt to reacquire some kind of heroic status at home, at least among liberals, who, in Hunt's words, are "advocates of every species of liberal knowledge"[7] against all forms of intellectual coercion, as well as against repressive and oppressive measures curbing individual and national freedom.

In the light of this Janus-faced attitude, marked by a simultaneous leaning towards the domestic and the foreign, *The Liberal* must be analysed in relation not only to Byron's involvement in Italian politics

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5 Letter to John Murray, 8 June 1832, in Frederick L. Jones, ed., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 2 vols. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), vol. II, 61.

6 *The Life of Lord Byron* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 270–271.

7 Leigh Hunt, "Preface", in *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, 2 vols. (London: John Hunt, 1822), I, No. 1, ix.

but also to his ironic plan of reconciliation with England – both operations ending up in disenchantment and failure. The momentum and propulsive force driving this double process of rapprochement and acculturation was Byron's defence of liberty both through action and writing, as one of his masks, the narrator of *Don Juan*, declares: "I will war, at least in words (and – should/My chance so happen – deeds), with all who war/With Thought; – and of Thought's foes by far most rude,/Tyrants and sycophants have been and are".[8] Byron's participation in *The Liberal* cannot be dismissed as a marginal experiment, not least because it is animated by that emancipatory poetics which not only pervades his political action in Italy but also lies beneath his major works, especially those composed from 1819 onwards, including his contributions to the four issues of *The Liberal*: *The Vision of Judgment*, "Letter to the editor of 'My Grandmother's Review'" and "Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh" (first issue); *Heaven and Earth* (second issue); *The Blues, A Literary Eclogue* (third issue); and the translation of the first canto of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* (fourth issue). In each of them, Byron appeals to the principle of liberty both in its historical and transhistorical meanings: by evoking (as in *The Blues*) the Regency period, by denouncing national "tyrants and sycophants" (in particular in *The Vision of Judgment* and "Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh"), or by celebrating the emancipatory poetics of the comic style both in *The Vision of Judgment* and in his translation of Pulci's burlesque poem, which attempts to reproduce the mixing tones and generic hybridity of the original – that misruled form of writing which Francis Jeffrey deprecated in the *Edinburgh Review*.

Thus, like the English Cantos of *Don Juan*, *The Liberal* is one of Byron's complex responses to the society from which he felt he had been unjustly ostracised. Informed by the wind of liberty blowing in Italy at the time, the subtext underlying all his contributions is a critique, mostly by means of a witty, Swift-like satire, of conservative English culture, society and politics, but, ironically, it also reveals touches of a

8 George G. Byron, "Don Juan", in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. J. McGann, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–1993), vol. V (1986), p. 416, Canto IX, stanza 24.

nostalgia for the early Regency period and a latent desire for personal rehabilitation. Looking both at Italy and England at the same time, *The Liberal* was for Byron a bicultural project, just as bicultural as his own identity in Italy, ready as he was to embark on new political, social and literary routes, but never able, perhaps never willing, to abandon his original roots definitely. In Maria Schoina's definition, Byron's identity is "as an atlas of intertwining itineraries rather than one of bounded sites."[9]

Before detailing about how *The Liberal* expresses Byron's "hyphenated" (Anglo-Italian) identity and the intertwining of *domestic affairs* with Italian otherness, it is perhaps necessary to recapitulate what first prompted Byron to join the editorial venture in October 1822, and later, in July 1823, after less than one year, to abandon it.[10] As is well known, Byron's idea of counterattacking the most scathing reviewers of the time, not only through poetic *flyting* (as he had done in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*), but also by founding a periodical which could rival the contemporary vitriolic Tory papers, preceded the project of *The Liberal*. As early as 1811 Byron had already launched the idea to his friend Hobhouse proposing as a title the eloquent *Lillabulero,* a Glorious Revolution Protestant song as well as anthem of the Whig party. Then, personal vicissitudes and the success of *Childe Harold* deferred the project, but, in 1820, Byron made two attempts to resume it, though with no success either.

9 Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'*, 110. Several letters testify to Byron's wavering condition of the insider and outsider in Italy. For instance, on 30 April 1820 he wrote to Kinnaird from Ravenna: "I sometimes think of going to England after the Coronation, and sometimes not, […] but I am very undecided & uncertain, & have quite lost all local feeling for England, without having acquired any local attachment for any other spot, except in the occasional admiration of fine landscapes". See *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand, 13 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973–1994), VII (1977), 86.

10 On the genesis of *The Liberal* see William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1960), and Leslie P. Pickering, *Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and the "Liberal"* (New York: Haskell House 1966). On the concept of otherness applied to Byron's works in relation to Italian figurations see my book *Lord Byron and Discourses of Otherness: Scotland, Italy, and Femininity* (The Roan, Kilkerran, Scotland: Zeticula-Humming Earth, 2012).

First, he tried to get his bank manager Douglas Kinnaird involved in the setting up of a radical newspaper provocatively entitled *The Bergami*, after the name of Queen Caroline's alleged lover Bartolomeo Bergami or Pergami, an Italian valet.[11] Secondly, on 25 December 1820, he wrote to Thomas Moore, in order to convince him of the need "to give the age some new lights upon policy, poesy, biography, criticism, morality, theology, and all other *ism*, *ality*, and *ology* whatsoever".[12] Interestingly enough, for the title, Byron glanced at the Italian historical and political context:

> I have been thinking of a project for you and me, in case we both get to London again, which (if a Neapolitan war don't suscitate) may be calculated as possible for one of us about the spring of 1821. […] The project, then, is for you and me to set up jointly a *newspaper* – nothing more or less – weekly, or so, with some improvement or modifications upon the plan of the present scoundrels, who degrade that department, – but a *newspaper*, which we will edit in due form, and, nevertheless, with some attention. […] P. S. We will call it the 'Tenda Rossa', the name Tassoni gave an answer of his in a controversy, in allusion to the delicate hint of Timour the Lame, to his enemies, by a 'Tenda' of that colour, before he gave battle. Or we will call it 'Gli' or 'I Carbonari', if it so please you – or any other name full of 'pastime and prodigality', which you may prefer.[13]

Although eventually these names were abandoned in favour of *The Liberal*, Byron's first-hand experience with the Italian rebels in Ravenna and Pisa strongly impacted on the ideological design underpinning the periodical – "This is a liberal age, and thoughts are free", Byron writes in *Don Juan* (p. 205, Canto IV, stanza 7). As Jonathan Gross argues,[14] perhaps Byron was not aware that in England "liberal" and "radical" had become interchangeable synonyms. After all, his liberalism lies on a republican ideal, on principles of individual and national sovereignty, against all despotic power. About reformers and radicals Byron wrote to Hobhouse on 22 April 1820:

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11 See Byron's letter to Kinnaird dated 26 October 1820. In *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand, VII, 214.

12 *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand, VII, 254.

13 Ibid., VII, 253–255. The controversy refers to a literary polemics on Petrarch and Petrarchism that Tassoni had with Giuseppe degli Aromatari.

14 See Jonathan Gross, "Byron and *The Liberal*: Periodical as Political Posture", *Philological Quarterly*, 72, no. 4 (Fall 1993), 471–486.

> Upon reform you have long known my opinion – but radical is a new word since my time – it was not in the political vocabulary in 1816 – when I left England – and I don't know what it means – is it uprooting? – I protest, not against reform – but most thorough contempt and abhorrence – of all that I have seen, heard, or heard of the persons calling themselves reformers, radicals, and such other names, – I should look upon being free with such men, as much the same as being in bonds with felons.[15]

Since the adjective "liberal" was connected with the Spanish Liberales which opposed King Ferdinand VII's rule, after 1814 it was used by Tories to refer to the more radical members of the Whig opposition.

In this respect, *The New European Magazine* caught the implicit subversive thrust of *The Liberal* when it described the periodical as the "newly arrived Manifesto of the Pisan Conspirators",[16] which, after all, was also the Tuscan government's censoring judgement of both Byron and his coterie in a period in which any threat of liberal movements was kept under strict surveillance on the part of the police force throughout the peninsula. As has been reported,[17] the police spy Luigi Torelli wrote to Chancellor Metternich that *The Liberal* was against the Italian government and against Austria, like or even more than Lady Morgan's *Italy* (1821), which, as is well known, was explicitly in favour of the country's liberation from Habsburg monarchy.

A common passion for liberal thought and Italian literature was what initially fostered Leigh Hunt's friendship with Byron, who visited him in Surrey Gaol in 1813, where he was serving a two-year sentence on charges of libel against the Prince Regent in *The Examiner*.[18]

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15 *Byron's Letters and Journals*, VII, 81.

16 See Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 108.

17 Janet Ross, "Byron at Pisa", *The 19th Century,* 30 (1891), 763.

18 See Byron's Journal entry dated 1 December 1813: "Hunt is an extraordinary character, and not exactly of the present age. He reminds me more of the Pym and Hampden times—much talent, great independence of spirit, and an austere, yet not repulsive, aspect. If he goes on *qualis ab incepto*, I know few men who will deserve more praise or obtain it. I must go and see him again; —the rapid succession of adventure, since last summer, added to some serious uneasiness and business, have interrupted our acquaintance; but he is a man worth knowing; and though, for his own sake, I wish him out of prison, I like to study character in such situations. he has been unshaken, and will continue so. I don't think him deeply versed in life;—he is the bigot of virtue (not religion), and enamoured of the

So, nine years later, encouraged by Shelley, Byron thought of calling Hunt to Italy for a joint editorial venture, welcoming him in the "little nest of singing birds", as Mary Shelley called the Pisan circle of English expatriates in a letter addressed to Maria Gisborne.[19] However, a series of factors led Byron to become gradually disenchanted with the project; one of them was the deterioration of his relationship with the Hunts, which showed signs of fragility from the start and culminated in a mutual acrimony sharpened by Hunt's financial dependence on Byron.[20] From Pisa, on 12 July 1822, he expressed to Thomas Moore

beauty of that 'empty name', as the last breath of Brutus pronounced, and every day proves it. He is, perhaps, a little opinionated, as all men who are the *centre* of *circles*, wide or narrow—the Sir Oracles, in whose name two or three are gathered together—must be, and as even Johnson was; but, withal, a valuable man, and less vain than success and even the consciousness of preferring 'the right to the expedient' might excuse". *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, 228.

19 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), I, 209.

20 Leigh Hunt's cohabitation with Byron and Teresa Guiccioli at Casa Lanfranchi in Pisa became very difficult, owing to increasing personal misunderstandings and conflicts. Murray, possibly motivated by self-interest, played an important part in ruining the relationship. His very low opinion of the Hunts is well known. He deliberately handed over to John Hunt the wrong version of *The Vision of Judgment*, without the Preface in which it was clear that the target of Byron's banter was not George III but Robert Southey. *Bona fide*, Hunt published the outdated and incomplete version of the text – which caused a libel against him because the poem was read as an attack on the king. Moreover, Murray spread rumours that Byron regretted his alliance with Hunt, and that he could not stand Marianne Hunt and her children. There is no denying the fact, though, that Byron had several doubts about Hunt's literary talents even before starting the project with him. He admired Hunt's *The Story of Rimini*, as proved by his words to Moore in 1818: "When I saw 'Rimini' in MSS., I told [Hunt] that I deemed it good poetry at bottom, disfigured only by a strange style. His answer was, that his style was a system, or *upon system*, or some such cant; and, when a man talks of system, his case is hopeless: so I said no more to him, and very little to any one else". Yet, in the same letter he adds: "*He* (Leigh H.) is an honest Charlatan, who has persuaded himself into a belief of his on impostures. […] Did you look at the translations of his own which he prefers to Pope and Cowper, and says so? […] He is the only one of us (but of us he is not) whose coronation I would oppose. […] But Leigh Hunt is a good man, and a good father […] a good husband […] a good friend […] and a great coxcomb and a very vulgar person in every thing about him". See

his scepticism and ambivalence about the project: "Can you give us any thing? He seems sanguine about the matter but (entre nous) I am not"; and, a year later, on 20 February, he told Moore that the project was a "cursed business" but one which he could not leave because the Hunts were in serious financial troubles.[21] Also Teresa Guiccioli, in her *Life of Byron*, would later underline Byron's altruism in setting up a business with Hunt: "It was […] pure bounty and generosity which kept him in the partnership."[22] In fact, on 9 October 1822, Byron had already alluded to the Hunts' hardships in a letter to Murray:

> I am afraid the Journal is a bad business, and won't do – but in it I am sacrificing myself for others – I can have no advantage in it. – I believe the brothers H[unt] to be honest men – I am sure they are poor ones. – They have not a rap – they pressed me to engage in this work – and in an evil hour I consented – still I shall not repent if I can do them the least service.[23]

The truth is that here Byron's melodramatic tone and philanthropic attitude are dubious: he knew he could have "advantage in it", if the project were successful, not least in publishing his works independently, such as *The Age of Bronze*, *The Island*, *An Italian Carnival* but especially *Don Juan*, which Murray was more and more reluctant to bring out. In

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Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. L. A. Marchand, VI, 46–47. On his part, Hunt, too, did not hide his acrimony towards Byron. In his *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (1828), he accused him of being indolent, capricious, glutton and a miser, especially towards people in need like himself. Almost twenty years later, however, in his *Autobiography*, he tried to make amends to Byron, imputing the previous vitriolic tone to the unhappy circumstances in which the book was written.

21 The two letters are from *Byron's Letters and Journals*, respectively IX, 183 and X, 105.

22 Teresa Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, ed. Peter Cochran (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 495.

23 *Byron's Letters and Journals,* X, 13. Even P. B. Shelley, who strongly encouraged the joint venture, once admitted: "I greatly fear that this alliance will not succeed, for I, who could never have been regarded as more than the link of the two thunderbolts, cannot now consent to be even that,—& how long the alliance between the wren & the eagle may continue, I will not prophesy". *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F. L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), II, 442.

particular, the first two poems were written for the periodical, but he eventually withdrew them, or, as has been suggested, Leigh Hunt himself possibly objected to their publication in the miscellany.[24] Anyway, the reasons for his gradual disinterest and final egression must be searched elsewhere.

It can be no coincidence that the nadir of the project coincides with the ruinous end of the aforesaid double process of rapprochement with England and acculturation in Italy, which essentially consisted in Byron's attempt to reforge his identity in an Anglo-Italian discourse allowing him to renegotiate his Englishness through the encounter with Italian otherness.[25] With the exception of the translation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, his most noteworthy contributions to *The Liberal* are examples of "verse and prose from the South", as suggested by the subtitle of the journal. However, they are also concerned with *domestica facta*, to adapt the Horatian phrase from the original epigraph of *Don Juan*, partly in the sense that Byron intended to give it, of " '*Common life'*—& not one's own adventures,"[26] partly as synonymous with domestic or internal affairs concerning English history and society in the present or the recent past.

The Vision of Judgement looks back at the Napoleonic wars, George III's reign and the inadequacy of Whigs and Tories alike. *Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh* is a satirical attack on the man who proposed the Six Acts, joined the Holy Alliance against Napoleon, acquiesced in

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24 See Michael Steier, *Byron, Hunt, and the Politics of Literary Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 8, 188–196. Steier provides evidence of the fact that it was Hunt to encourage Byron to pull out of the periodical, both because he had been offended by remarks about him that Byron had made to Murray, and because he disagreed with Byron's portrait of Napoleon in *The Age of Bronze* as well as with the "tame" politics underpinning *The Island* in relation to the central mutiny theme (a historical reference to the Bounty mutiny in 1789). According to Cheeke, Byron's prose fragment entitled *An Italian Carnival* was possibly intended for publication in *The Liberal*, too; interestingly enough, its opening concerns the presence of English intellectuals in Italy. See Stephen Cheeke, *Byron & Place – History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 6.

25 Cfr. Gioia Angeletti, *Lord Byron and Discourses of Otherness: Scotland, Italy, and Femininity* (The Roan, Kilkerran, Scotland: Zeticula-Humming Earth, 2012).

26 *Byron's Letters and Journals*, XI, 171.

the restoration of post-Waterloo regimes and warned Metternich that Byron should be put under strict control since he was involved in the independence movement against Austria. "Letter to the editor of 'My Grandmother's Review'" is a spoof addressed to William Roberts, the editor of the Tory *British Review* from 1811 to 1822, and *The Blues* is a dramatic squib based on his recollections of the Regency literary and social scene,[27]ridiculing, as in *Beppo*, the smug coteries of dandies, Bluestockings and other intellectual types. Even the universal deluge in *Heaven and Earth,* a sort of Miracle play with Dantesque echoes, might be read as a veiled allegory of the disappearance of the *grand monde* with which Byron was so closely enmeshed before his Italian exile.[28] I agree with Malcolm Kelsall that Byron's verse after his exile

27 Written in 1821 but published in 1823, *The Blues* is the subject of Byron's letter to John Murray on 7 August 1821: "[…] I send you a thing—which I scratched off lately—a mere buffoonery—to quiz "the Blues" in two literary eclogues.—If published it must be *anonymously*—but it is too short for a separate publication—and you have no miscellany that I know of—for the reception of such things.—[…] don't let *my* name out—for the present—or I shall have all the old women in London about my ears—since it sneers at the solace of their antient Spinsterstry." *Byron's Letters and Journals*, VIII, 172. In another letter to Murray, he writes that the piece was "never meant for publication" (20 September 1821, VIII, 216). Byron provided part of the context of this work in a journal entry dated 17 November 1813 (III, 214), in which he refers to the Bluestocking Ladies hiding behind the masks of the *dramatis personae* of his poem. The eclogue hides intertextual references, among which: Christopher Anstey's *New Bath Guide* (1766), Peacock's novels *Headlong Hall* (1816) and *Melincourt* (1817), and Moore's operetta *M.P., or The Bluestocking* (1811). See *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. L. A. Marchand, VIII, 145. The main characters in the eclogue are masks or real people of course: Inkel is Byron, Tracy recalls Moore, Miss Lilac is Annabella Milbanke, Scamp is either Coleridge or Hazlitt, Miss Diddle is Lydia White, Botherby is Sotheby, the Bluebottles are Lord and Lady Holland, and Lady Bluemount is Lady Beaumont.

28 The poem *Southegony*, contrary to what the title may suggest, has not been attributed to Byron but to Hunt, otherwise it could be added to this list of, as it were, "anachronistic" works. Marshall states why the satire *Southeogony*, *or the Birth of the Laureat* was not Byron's: "internal evidence supports Hunt's authorship. […] In Ultra-Crepidarius, Hunt used a similar method for an attack on William Gifford, who was here described as developing from one of Mercury's shoes". See Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 172n.

"repeatedly revisits the topics and the problems of his years in the House of Lords", and that, in many respects, it "is a continuation of the original adversarial stance he had taken in the House of Lords".[29] Physically removed from Britain, and faithful to his aesthetics of the experiential, Byron wrote about what he lived and knew most intimately. Thus, like the *ubi sunt* stanzas in Canto XI of *Don Juan*, Byron's main contributions to *The Liberal* confirm McGann's contention that, from 1818 onwards, Byron embarked on a "large recollective writing project".[30] More specifically, as noted by Stephen Cheeke, particularly the years 1821–1823, were "marked by an increasing number of memorial projects of a distinctly nostalgic cast which also take a critically dispassionate, sometimes ironised view of 'nostalgia' as a subject".[31] For example, by casting the eclogue *The Blues* back to the early Regency, and his own Years of Fame, Byron seems to confront the irreducible discrepancy between memory and reality, here and there, private and public, in an attempt to approach England again through an imaginative return, mixing nostalgia and irony, to what was most familiar to him.

From such ironic geographical distance, Byron continues to commit himself to the Whig principle of "liberty", which, like Leigh Hunt, he associates with the causes of liberalism and the independence movements in southern Europe. In this way, what at first may appear as historical anachronism or a commemorative operation reveals Byron's intent to assert the transhistorical and transnational value of liberty, which is in line with his cosmopolitan *Weltanschauung*, envisaging an imaginary geography or community, beyond and across national boundaries, and into which certain English, Italian and European liberal codes could be translated. The project of *The Liberal*, with its many contributions consisting of textual translations,[32] its verse or prose challenging

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29 Malcolm Kelsall, "Byron's Politics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 52–53.

30 See McGann's Commentary to *The Blues*, in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. J. McGann, VI, 665.

31 Cheeke, *Byron & Place*, 157.

32 Because of the presence in the periodical of a considerable number of translations, not only by Byron (Shelley translates from Goethe, Hunt from Alfieri and Ariosto), Schoina regards it as a "cosmopolitan magazine". See *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'*, 155.

Anglocentrism, consistently exemplifies, to adapt Jane Stabler's words, "mobile and culturally pluralistic viewpoints."[33] Unfortunately, though, many among Byron's fellow countrymen had a very different opinion of the periodical.[34]

Wordsworth was disturbed when he heard of Byron, Shelley, Moore, and Hunt's plan of setting up a "Journal to be directed against everything in religion, in morals and probably in government and literature which our Forefathers have been accustomed to reverence."[35] Indeed, most of Byron's London friends were horrified at his affiliation with radical thinkers, and many contemporary reviews decried the project in rather acrimonious tones. For instance, *Blackwood's Magazine*, which, for political reasons, had attacked Hunt in a series of articles on the Cockney School of Poetry from 1817 to 1825, addressed Byron these words: "A Bear at College was all very well; – but, my lord, think on it, a Cockney at Pisa! – Fie, my lord! This is by far the greatest outrage you have ever yet committed on manners, and morals, and intellectuals."[36] By the same token, *The Gentleman's Magazine* took it out on Byron: "We are still at a loss to account for Lord Byron's becoming so dull. […] He has become the associate of the cockney bluestockings and the panegyric Lady Morgan; […] he has sunk from the station of an English nobleman and the highest place in English Literature to be the colleague of Mr. Leigh Hunt, the author of 'Don Juan' and a contributor to the 'Liberal.'"[37]

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33 Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal,' 1822–23", accessed 30 September 2021, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal.

34 On the contemporary reception of *The Liberal*, see Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*; James Hogg, "Contemporary Reception of *The Liberal*", *The Byron Journal* 7 (1979), 61–75; and D. M. Craig, "The Origins of Liberalism in Britain: The Case of *The Liberal*", *Historical Research* 85, no. 229 (August 2012), 469–487.

35 Wordsworth's letter to Walter Savage Landor, dated 20 April 1822, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Later Years*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), I, 69.

36 Quoted in Hay, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and Other Tangled Lives*, 262.

37 Quoted in Pickering, *Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and the "Liberal"*, 18.

Byron was surprised (or did he feign to be?) by all the derogatory responses that the periodical aroused. On 24 February 1823, he wrote to Mary Shelley: "I never heard so persevering an outcry against any work – nor do I know the reason for not even dullness or demerit could authorize the extraordinary tone of reprobation."[38] One may therefore presume that, when he realised that *The Liberal*, as well as his commitment to direct-action politics, instead of a rehabilitation in the eyes of his fellow countrymen, produced the exact opposite, Byron interrupted both the project and his militant involvement, and prepared himself to embark on other attempts at regaining a reputation as a man of action, for instance by joining the Greeks' War of Independence. Apparently, instead of weathering the critical storm or even taking advantage of it, Byron was overwhelmed by it; therefore, he dropped out, and withdrew both *The Age of Bronze* and *The Island* from it, which were then published separately by John Hunt.[39]

It may be worth wondering, moreover, whether the great uproar about *The Liberal*, whipped up by the contemporary press, exacerbated and made it more difficult for Byron to cope with his political eccentricities. Both in verse and in real life, for instance through his Parliament speeches,[40] Byron declared that he was "born for

38 *Byron's Letters and Journals,* X, 108.

39 Byron thought that *The Island* was "too long for 'the Liberal'" (*Byron's Letters and Journals*, X, 117), but clearly it was an excuse. By the same token, of *The Age of Bronze* he wrote that it "was intended for a third number of H[unt]'s publication – but as that will not be published – […] perhaps it had better be published now alone" (*Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand, X, 94). However, Byron's assertion that the third number would not come out is based on no evidence. Ultimately, he admitted that the whole business had been a foolish design, so what a drag it must have been for him when or if he found himself in agreement with what *The Blackwood's Magazine* wrote in 1823: "The last Number contains *not one line* of Byron's—Thank God! He has seen his error, and kicked them out". Quoted in Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 183.

40 For a thorough treatment of Byron's political allegiances see Malcolm Kelsall, "Byron's Politics", 44–55. Byron's Parliament speeches are renowned, particularly his maiden speech on 27 February 1812 on the Framebreakers Bill (that is, the "Luddite" riots in Nottinghamshire). Byron did not condemn the rioters, which led members of Parliament to accuse him of Jacobinism. Actually, in one of his letters, he even defined himself as "half a framebreaker myself". See *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. L. A. Marchand, II, 165–166. Another notorious speech

opposition,"[41] even literally so, considering that, from 1783 to 1830, the Tory party was in government and the Whigs, traditionally close to the Byrons, were in opposition. However, due to his lineage, he occupied a seat in the House of Lords. On the other hand, despite having radical friends such as Francis Burdett and John Horne Tooke, he never convincingly sided with the populism and Jacobinism of radical supporters, nor with extremist reform movements (for instance led by Arthur Thistlewood and Henry Hunt). Walter Scott interestingly commented on Byron's liberalism suggesting that it provided him with one of his many postures and masks:

> On politics, he used sometimes to express a high strain of what is now called Liberalism; but it appeared to me that the pleasure it afforded him as a vehicle of displaying his wit and satire against individuals in office was at the bottom of this habit of thinking, rather than any real conviction of the political principles on which he talked. He was certainly proud of his rank and ancient family, and, in that respect, as much an aristocrat as was consistent with good sense and good breeding.[42]

However sensible and perceptive Scott's thesis may be, there is no denying the fact that Byron knew that *The Liberal* had been conceived as a counter-offensive riposte to such Tory journals as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *The Quarterly Review*, even though the latter was the journal of his own publisher, John Murray, who regularly corresponded with Tory wits such as John Hookham Frere and George Canning. Byron and Hunt were clearly separated by their difference in status – a peer of England allied in business to the son of a poor clergyman –, but I agree with Timothy Webb that "their shared concerns and the coincidence of their interests at this point suggest […] there was a significant coming together of the disaffected aristocrat and the

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is that he made in favour of Catholic emancipation on 21 April 1812. The following year, on 1 June, he supported Major Cartwright's petition about changes to be introduced in parliamentary representation.

41 Byron, *Don Juan*, in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. J. McGann, V, 595, Canto XV, stanza 22.

42 Cfr. Norman Page, ed., *Byron: Interviews and Recollections* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1985), 38.

reforming newspaper editor."[43] Arguably, the Italian Carbonari movement gave Byron a chance to solve the apparent contradiction between liberalism and noble lineage, considering that some of its leaders were aristocrats embracing liberal, if not radical, ideas.[44] From Italy the Janus-faced Byron always kept an eye on Britain and on how his writing about and acting for liberty were received there, especially by Whigs sharing his radical sympathies. Thus, I agree with Maria Schoina that he was totally aware of the fact that the journal could turn into "a testing ground for new ideas, a laboratory for new words which might inspire the minds of readers."[45] Nonetheless, across the Channel, he found little in the way of alliance or support. The result was the failure of the cosmopolitan idea embedded in Byron's Anglo-Italian discourse of literary and political liberty, which *The Liberal*, like other works of the period, was meant to set forth.

Referring in particular to the intertextual nature of *The Liberal* determined by the inclusion of translations from the Italian and pervasive echoes of Italian literature, Caroline Franklin has commented that for Byron and Hunt, "in their campaign for political independence for Italy and religious toleration and reform at home, disseminating Italian literature would show the British how narrow-minded their view of both poetry and religion was, if it could not include the laughter, sensuality and liberty 'natural' to the South."[46] This figuration of the

43 Timothy Webb, "Arrival of Don Juan at Shooter's Hill: The Politics of Romance", in *Lord Byron 'Correspondence(s)'*, ed. Christiane Vigouroux (Paris: Francois-Xavier de Guibert, 2008), 206.

44 On this aspect see Donald H. Reiman, "Byron in Italy: The Return of Augustus", in *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (London: Macmillan, 1990), 181–198.

45 Maria Schoina, "Byron and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment", *Litteraria Pragensia* 23, no. 46 (2013), 29.

46 Caroline Franklin, "Cosmopolitanism and Catholic Culture: Byron, Italian Poetry, and *The Liberal*", in *British Romanticism in Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, ed. Laura Bandiera and Diego Saglia (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 268. Between 1819 and 1821 precipitous events exacerbated Byron's distance from England, especially under Lord Liverpool's government: the periodical suspension of Habeas Corpus; repressive bills against free speech; the Peterloo Massacre; the Six Acts against the circulation of political literature; The Cato Street Conspiracy.

South underpinning the ideological construct of Mediterraneanism does not undermine the significance of comparative approaches meant to encourage transcultural and transnational exchanges, which Byron saw as the bedrock of literary and political cosmopolitanism. In this light, Byron's wish "to present in an English dress a part at least" of Pulci's poem, "never yet rendered into a northern language,"[47] can be regarded as a project of cultural – not just interlingual – translation that intends to pursue this ideal, as is confirmed by his self-glorifying statements: "It is the best thing I ever did in my life", he wrote to Murray from on 28 September 1820; "my grand performance" is how he defines the translation in another letter to his editor on 19 January 1821; and to Moore on 4 March 1822, he prides himself considering it "the best translation that ever was or will be made."[48]

However, in 1823, Byron saw this ideal gradually fading, at least in Italy. According to Daisy Hay

> [*The Liberal*] was the final statement from a group of writers who had known and influenced each other for ten years. […] but it was also its elegy: a monument to both the exiles and the paradise Shelley envisaged in 'Julian and Maddalo'. The shattered group who united to piece *The Liberal* together – Hunt, Byron and Mary in Genoa; Charles Brown in Pisa; Hogg, Hazlitt and John Hunt in London – was held together only by fragile and unstable allegiances, and by memories of a shared past.[49]

As regards Byron, to the group's deluded expectations must be added a setback which he experienced in entirely personal terms. The failure of *The Liberal* as a cosmopolitan project must be associated with his previous disaffection with the Carbonari movement and generally with Italy as a "paradise of exiles". Roderick Beaton has interpreted his alignment with *The Liberal* as another attempt, "after the failure of the Carbonari […] to convert 'words' into 'things' and to contribute directly

47 Byron, "Morgante Maggiore di Messer Luigi Pulci. Advertisment", in *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, 2 vols. (London: John Hunt, 1823), II, No. 4, 195.

48 See *Byron's Letters and Journals,* VII, 182; VIII, 65; and IX, 118.

49 Hay, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and Other Tangled Lives*, 263–264.

to political life in England."[50] Byron's championing of the Italian independence cause should be assessed in relation to the impact he hoped it would have on his British readership. However, after becoming disenchanted both with what he defined as "the poetry of politics"[51] in Italy and with the expectations created by *The Liberal*, he felt he needed to look for new forms of heroism and personal rehabilitation, possibly still pursuing his process of rapprochement with England. He searched for them in action rather than writing, and elsewhere, in another South, but this time eastwards.

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50 Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 84.

51 In his Ravenna journal of 18 February 1821, he wrote: "My lower apartments are full of their bayonets, fusils, cartridges and what-not. I suppose that they consider me as a depot to be sacrificed in case of accidents. It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a grand object – the very poetry of politics. Only think – a free Italy!!! Why, there has been nothing like it since the days of Augustus". *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. L. A. Marchand, VIII, p. 47.

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Maria Schoina

6. "With flowing rhymes, a pleasant style and free": Byron's Translation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*

The fourth issue of *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* featured one of Byron's key contributions to the periodical, and at the same time one of the poet's favourite works: his translation of the first canto of Luigi Pulci's epic *tour de force Morgante Maggiore* (1483). In his commentary to the poem in the *Complete Poetical Works*, Jerome McGann points out that Byron's "original masterpieces in *ottava rima* have so overshadowed his translation of the *Morgante* that the importance of this work – and its excellence – has not generally been noticed".[1] Over the last twenty years, apropos of an attempt to engage more systematically with the poet's re-writing of the Italian "half-serious rhyme", this critical neglect has been amended, and Byronic scholarship has offered a variety of readings of the Pulci translation which seek to pinpoint the latter's centrality in Byron's oeuvre, not only as a skillful rendering of the Italian poem but as a creative re-making of the original, abounding in stylistic interventions and innovations.[2] Another important dimension

1 Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), IV, 509.

2 See Peter Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984); Lindsay Waters, "The 'Desultory Rhyme' of *Don Juan*: Byron, Pulci, and the Improvisatory Style," *ELH* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 429–442; Lindsay Waters, "Pulci and the Poetry of Byron: 'Domestiche Muse'," *Annali d'Italianistica*, 1 (1983): 34–48; Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-Epic Poetry: From Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 10; Alan Rawes, "'From the Italian': Byron's Translation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*," *Litteraria Pragensia* 23, no. 46 (Dec. 2013): 6–22; Maria Schoina "Byron and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment," *Litteraria Pragensia* 23, no. 46 (Dec. 2013): 23–37; Irena Kurzová, "Byron, Pulci, and Ariosto: Technique of Romantic Irony", *Neophilologus* 99 (2015): 1–13.

of the *Morgante* translation is revealed from its association and intertextual relationship with the writing of *Don Juan*, and specifically cantos III and IV, which Byron was composing while translating Pulci. All these approaches are valuable, yet tend to overlook a critical aspect of the history of Byron's Italian translation, namely that it originally appeared in the pages of a southern European cosmopolitan journal which by that time had been cast as deeply divisive and heretical, and had received unprecedented slander and attack. So, in order to arrive at a more satisfactory understanding of the function and impact of Byron's translation from Pulci – unique in the poet's oeuvre – I think that one should also keep in mind a number of considerations that arise from its placement in *The Liberal*: first, the translation's complex publication history; second, its association with the new aesthetic paradigm that was gestating in the journal's pages; third, the alignment of Byron's defence of Pulci's "irreligion" in the translation's advertisement with the journal's serious challenge to the authority of the established church; and, last but not least, the translation's preliminary notices in the *Examiner* and reception in the press. In view of recent reappraisals of *The Liberal,*[3] which look at the periodical as a politically and intellectually coherent and forward-looking project rather than as a fruitless intervention, I argue that Byron's *Morgante* exemplifies powerfully the journal's ideals and justifies *The Liberal*'s reformist programme for freedom and tolerance on an aesthetic, intellectual, political, and religious level. Subsequently, Pulci's place in *The Liberal*, original and translated, constitutes a resonant rejoinder against the charges of immorality, irreligion and profligacy that had been launched against the journal's first three issues and galvanized the fierce accusations of a personal nature targeting Byron.

Byron came to know Pulci indirectly, through the several attempts by British literati of his time to imitate and adapt the Italian serio-comic mode to English usage. Thus, his interest in the 15th-century Florentine

3 Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment," *European Romantic Review*, 19, no. 4 (October, 2008); Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal,'" in *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, *Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal

poet can be traced as far back as 1814, when he read John Herman Merivale's adaptation of the *Morgante, Orlando in Roncesvalles*; but critics agree that it was John Hookham Frere's *Whistlecraft* (1817), a mock-heroic imitation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* that "showed Byron the rewards of transposing into English the ottava rima with which he was already familiar from the Italian originals. And one effect of 'Whistlecraft' was to set Byron on a further exploration of Italian poetry."[4] This took him to Pulci's epic masterpiece, *Morgante*, which Byron set out to translate in 1819–1820, keeping the original metre. The poet's faith in his role as translator is recorded vividly in the letters of that time, showing Byron's fascination with Pulci and tenacity over what the English poet thought was his "grand performance".[5] Predictably, in September 1821, and with the end of their relationship already in sight, Byron in a series of letters would reproach Murray for withholding the translation from publication: "Why don't you publish my *Pulci*? – the very best thing I ever wrote – with the Italian to it" or "Pulci is my favourite – that is my translation – I think it is the *acme* of putting one language into another".[6] Byron's pride in his achievement and expressed desire to publish the translation in a volume with the rest of his Italianised poetry at a critical moment of his literary career (1820–1821) intimate his vested interest and faith in Pulci's art and in the dynamic of his own translation.[7] To Byron's frustration, "his" Pulci didn't make it into print and the translation did not see the light until 30 July 1823, when it was printed by John Hunt, "with the Italian to it", in the fourth and final number of *The Liberal*.[8] By that time, Byron

4 Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-Epic Poetry: From Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34.

5 Lord Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, VIII, 65. Henceforth quoted as *BLJ*.

6 *BLJ*, VIII, 206; VII, 150.

7 While in Ravenna, Byron sent to John Murray his translation of the Francesca episode in Dante's *Inferno*, V, 97–142, with the following instructions: "If this is published – publish it *with the original* – and *together* with the *Pulci* translation – *or* the *Dante Imitation*" (20 March 1820, *BLJ* VII, 58).

8 See McGann 508. The first canto has 86 stanzas (688 lines); the Italian original is printed right after the text of Byron's translation but there is a printing error in the Latin numbering of the stanzas which results in its ending on stanza 85 instead of 86. Together, the two texts occupy almost one third of the journal issue.

had set sail for Greece after quitting the joint project and breaking with Leigh Hunt, dispirited by the critics's ferocious attacks.

Jane Stabler's astute remark about *The Liberal* reflecting to an extent the current state of print culture becomes even more productive if applied in the case of the *Morgante* translation. The battle with John Murray's delays, anxieties and prevarications regarding the author's "indecency", Byron's limited monitoring of the editorial production of his poetry, and John Hunt's own procrastinations "provide a metacommentary on the difficulties of going to press in the face of political hostility and chicanery from other publishing empires".[9] Following the fate of the fourth issue, the translation received little notice in the press, reflecting the Tory bias against the journal and its contributors.[10] Thus, *The Literary Museum* of 2 August 1823 gives a basic plot summary of Canto I and long quotations from the advertisement and the translation (stanzas 39–55, which include the key episode of the giant Morgante's conversion to Christianity). Yet the reviewer avoids making any comment whatsoever on the quality of the translation or on Pulci's style. The appearance of the original Italian doesn't seem to attract any particular interest except as far as the length of the poem is concerned: "A slight specimen of bookmaking is exhibited in the printing of the Italian text of Pulci, which amounts to about seven hundred lines".[11] Instead the reviewer shifts the reader's attention to *The Liberal*'s extraordinary state and segregation, its being out of the "corps" of contemporary periodical publications, and finds the journal "disfigured with all the affectation and bad taste of cockneyism, and all the equivocal morality, which so strikingly characterizes the writings of one or two of its principal contributors".[12]

The Liberal's "equivocal morality" was deemed, in part, the result of continental influences: Italian, French, German, Spanish and other

9 Stabler, "Religious Liberty," 9.

10 For the reception of the fourth issue see William Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and the Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 198–199.

11 *The Literary Museum*, 2 August 1823, "The Liberal, No. IV", 486–488 in *The Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Donald Reiman (New York: Routledge, 2016; first published by Garland, 1972), Part B: Vol. IV, 1508.

12 *The Literary Museum*, 1507.

European texts, traditions, styles, motifs and plots which the journal's contributors were keen to study and translate or rework and integrate in their works. The same kind of "equivocal morality" was believed to have "disfigured" Byron's poetry after *Beppo*, discouraging John Murray from publishing *Morgante,* or from adding his firm's or Byron's name on *Don Juan*'s title page in 1819. In view of the protests and objections that the first canto of *Don Juan* raised in London, Byron urged his friend John Cam Hobhouse, in a letter sent from Venice in November 1818, to seek another publisher, if the poem's "free" style would "make Murray pause" and scandalize his circle. Byron suggested that *Don Juan*'s making at the cross-influence of continental and English traditions accounted, in great part, for the nature of its "freedom":

> – when I say free – I mean that *freedom* – which Ariosto Boiardo and Voltaire – Pulci – Berni – all the best Italian & French – as well as Pope & Prior amongst the English permitted themselves; –but no improper words nor phrases – merely some situations – which are taken from life.[13]

Byron thought that English writers should see themselves as members of a nation whose destiny was "intimately bound up with those of the rest of the world."[14] It is interesting though that out of the pantheon of European men of letters he mentions, Byron points out and humbly acknowledges Pulci as the ultimate source of *Don Juan*'s free mode: "… the first Canto of Don Juan – [is] in the style of Beppo – and Pulci – forgive me for putting Pulci second it is a slip – 'Ego et Rex meus'".[15] The use of the Latin phrase reveals Byron's wish to be associated with the Italian poet, in so far as Pulci, inspired by his famous "domestiche muse,"[16] advocated a natural, unaffected, worldly style, "simple, direct and not 'poetic'",[17] manifested in stanzas from the *Morgante* like the following:

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13 *BLJ*, VI, 77.

14 Evan Gottlieb, *Romantic Globalism: British Literature and Modern World Order 1750–1830* (Columbus: Ohio State University 2014), 148.

15 *BLJ*, VI, 76.

16 From a letter Pulci wrote to Lorenzo de'Medici. Luigi Pulci, *Morgante e Opere Minori*, a cura di Aulo Greco (UTET 2004), volume secondo, 1233.

17 Waters, "Pulci and the Poetry of Byron," 34.

> Ma perché e' c'è d'una ragion cicale
> ch'io l'ho proprio agguagliate all' indiane,
> che cantan d'ogni tempo e dicon male,
> voi che leggete queste cose strane,
> andate drieto al senso litterale,
> e troverretel per le strade piane:
> ch'io non m'intendo di vostro anagogico
> o morale o le more o tropologico.[18]

Pulci's extensive influence on the composition and material worldview of *Don Juan* has been generally documented by critics. But Byron's liberal recognition of the Italian poet's superiority and authority goes beyond his satiric mock-epic and expresses his enthusiasm over the discovery of an alternative poetic method that would help him break away from the "Romantic mannerist style" of his early works.[19] The point is that in contrast to the Italianists of the Murray circle, Byron wanted to present this voice as pristine and uncensored as possible. The growing interest of the English literati in Pulci was largely the result of an eighteenth-century critical turn to the early Italian Renaissance narrative poets such as Ariosto, Boiardo, and Berni. Pulci, who had been censured in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries due to his abrasive style and subject and was labelled a burlesque poet, was re-appraised, meeting the current search for a loose, flexible and improvisatory manner in literature, a reaction to a specific Italian situation. P. L. Ginguené in his history of the Italian literature (*Histoire de la littérature d'Italie*, Milan, 1820) offered a study of the manner of Pulci, one which reflected its critical re-evaluation and re-interpreted *Morgante* as a mixed poem.[20]

18 Canto XXVII, 41, in *Morgante e Opere minori,* 1083. "But since there are cicadas of first class,/which I'm comparing to the Indian ones,/singing in every season noisily, you who are reading things that sound so strange,/look for a literal meaning all the time,/and you will find it on an easy road: I do not understand your anagogical/or moral sense, or trope so tropological." English translation by Joseph Tusiani in Luigi Pulci, *Morgante: The Epic Adventures of Orlando and His Giant Friend Morgante*, trans. Joseph Tusiani, introd. and notes by Edoardo A. Lèbano (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 681.

19 Jerome McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (London: John Murray, 1976), 51.

20 Waters, "The 'Desultory Rhyme' of *Don Juan*," 435.

Pulci was introduced to the British reading public through John Herman Merivale's articles in *The Monthly Magazine* (May 1806 – June 1807). Following the recent example of European critics, Merivale set out to contradict the commonly held view of *Morgante* as a burlesque poem and claimed that it rightfully deserves a place "among the romances of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries."[21] Merivale even answers the charge against Pulci's "frequent use of quotations from Scripture" by arguing that "the manners of the times are his apology" and that "the poem of Pulci deserves to be judged of from itself."[22] Ugo Foscolo's "Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians", translated by Francis Cohen and published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1819 takes a more conservative stance against Pulci's stylistic libertinism.[23] More specifically, Foscolo welcomes English adaptations of Italian models, such as William Stewart Rose's *Court and Parliament of Beasts* (1816), a verse adaptation of Casti's political satire *Animali Parlanti* (1802), and Frere's *Whistlecraft* (1817), but urges the English poets to soften the abrupt tonal contrasts and improprieties of the originals. In this spirit, Frere's *Whistlecraft* – a primary catalyst for Byron's own Italianist project – is highly praised for "chastening and correcting the extravagant fancies of Pulci", that is, for offering Pulci's "rude genious" to the English public in a smooth and bowdlerized form.[24]

In contrast to Frere and Merivale, Byron had no intention to sanitize the Italian poet but chose to "convey as a totality Pulci's combination of levity and seriousness".[25] Thus, parallel to his creative experimentation with Pulci's "irregular" style in *Don Juan*, Byron set out to translate the first canto of *Morgante* itself: not freely, but "stanza for stanza, and line

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21 "Account of the Morgante of Luigi Pulci", *Monthly Magazine* 142 (May 1806), 308.

22 "Account," 308.

23 On Foscolo's essay see Maria Schoina, "Revisiting Byron's Italian Style," *The Byron Journal* 36, no. 1 (2008): 19–27, and Diego Saglia, "Ottavas and Spenserians in 1820s Britain," *The Wordsworth Circle* 44, no. 1 (2013): 51–56.

24 Ugo Foscolo, "Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians," trans. Francis Cohen, *Quarterly Review* 21 (1819): 519.

25 Nicholas Halmi, "The Literature of Italy in Byron's Poems of 1817–20", in *Byron and Italy*, ed. Alan Rawes and Diego Saglia (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 39.

for line,"[26] thus presenting "as directly as his translating skills permitted Pulci's 'half-serious rhyme.'"[27] The seeming paradox, namely that he undertook an almost verbatim translation of the original to illustrate poetic "freedom", can be explained if we take into consideration Byron's "revisionist project" in poetry.[28] Byron's insistence on reproducing faithfully the Italian metre and manner must have been driven by his desire to reform English poetry by introducing a different paradigm in terms of style, and the first step towards this end would be to acquaint the English reader with the distinctive traits of the proposed paradigm and its creative, liberating possibilities. This idea could have inspired Byron's translation of lines 6–7 in stanza II of *Morgante*, which in the original contains Pulci's invocation to the Virgin in lieu of the typical appeal to the Muse: "Con dolce rime e stil grato e soave/Ajuta i versi miei benignamente."[29] The poet renders line 6 in a way that matches the rhyme, "With flowing rhymes, a pleasant style and free" but alters its meaning through his use of the word "free", placed strategically at the end of the line. Byron's choice of word tones down the feeling of pleasantness, musicality and gratification suggested by Pulci's "dolce," "grato," and "soave," and punctuates another quality of poetic style, freedom, one which is important to the poet and is close to his current poetic and political concerns.

The *Morgante* translation also reveals Byron's efforts at creating an engaged, open-minded public, "a cosmopolitan citizenry"[30] in the context of his revisionary project for poetry. His aim was to give the reader the experience of comparison, of judgement more normally served for the scholar ("publish it with the original"). Caroline Franklin is right

26 *BLJ,* VII, 39.

27 Halmi, "The Literature of Italy," 39.

28 Lord Byron, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), IV, 509.

29 *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* (London: John Hunt, 1822–23; rpt. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur Universität Salzburg, 1978), II, 225. All quotations from *The Liberal* come from the 1978 edition. Byron's translation is on 195–224. Pulci's text follows Byron's translation on 225–249.

30 Lisa Vargo, "Writing for *The Liberal*", in *Mary Shelley: Her Circle and Her Contemporaries*, ed. L. Adam Mekler and Lucy Morrison (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars 2010), 132.

to point out that "fear over the popularity of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* was generated by the fact that Byron had transplanted *ottava rima* burlesque out of the elitist preserve of antiquarians and scholars who could bowdlerize the humour or render it harmlessly quaint, into contemporary popular culture."[31] In Pulci's case, what would help the popularization of the "new style of poetry very lately sprung up in England"[32] was literal translation instead of imitation or adaptation. Translation, therefore, becomes the mechanism through which knowledge of the new paradigm is transmitted and mediated to a large reading audience. One could even argue that translation itself becomes a kind of paradigm; the act of moving or carrying across from one language/culture to another involves the free mobility of ideas and the "decenter[ing] of a nationalized cultural capital",[33] of extended contact with or immersion in the foreign culture(s).

Byron exploited the conventions of the prologue, advertisement or prefatory note of his works to explain his methods and address the problems of the translator. Thus in his Advertisement to the translation of the first canto of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* Byron moves beyond the specifics of method and technique to present the serious challenges a translator faces when mediating a foreign poet to his own language/ culture.

> …the version is faithful to the best of the translator's ability in combining his interpretation of the one language with the not very easy task of reducing it to the same versification in the other. The reader, on comparing it with the original, is requested to remember that the antiquated language of Pulci, however pure, is not easy to the generality of Italians themselves; […]and he may therefore be more indulgent to the present attempt. […] The translator wished also to present in an English dress a part at least of a poem never yet rendered into a northern language.[34]

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31 Caroline Franklin, "Cosmopolitanism and Catholic Culture: Byron, Italian Poetry, and *The Liberal*", in *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, ed. Laura Bandiera and Diego Saglia (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 259.

32 *The Liberal*, II, 193.

33 Jeffrey N. Cox, "Cockney Cosmopolitanism," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 32, no. 3. (September 2010): 252.

34 *The Liberal*, II, 194–195.

Being aware of the debate over the Anglicization of the ottava rima at the time – in effect, a debate about cultural identity and freedom of thought and expression – Byron adopts what we would call today a foreignizing approach, namely, he sets out to bring his English readers as close to the linguistic and cultural world of the Italian poet as possible, retaining the distinct values expressed in the original: the free and irregular style, the creative use of the ottava rima, the sudden shifts in mood and theme, the blend of the comic and the serious, the parodic treatment of religion.

Pulci's "pleasant style and free" seemed to fit perfectly the objectives of *The Liberal*. The journal promoted within its pages the internationalist tendencies of its writers, advancing cosmopolitanism, multi-lingualism, intellectual community, sociability, a dialectical relationship with continental sources, and translation as the new international aesthetic:

> If we are great admirers of VOLTAIRE, we are great admirers also of GOETHE and SCHILLER. If we pay our homage to DANTE and MILTON, we have tribute also for the brilliant sovereignties of ARIOSTO and BOCCACCIO.[35]

In his Preface to *The Liberal* Hunt pronounced Italian literature to be a "favourite subject". In the four issues, translations from the Italian always come with the original and are resonant with political meaning. Daisy Hay has rightly claimed that Alfieri, being "representative of the South, is a model of the ideal poet" and "is everything that Southey is not."[36] But the appearance of original Renaissance Italian and the sympathetic portrait of the controversial figure of Pulci in the Advertisement propel the journal's liberal character and connection with European writing. Pulci's continental origins and the Morgante's *genus mixtum* authorize the journal's new agenda, which its detractors saw as deviatory.

Byron was aware of the fact that his Pulci would be more readily accepted at home as a political text, rather than judged for its lexical

35 *The Liberal*, I, xii.

36 Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal,*" 316.

accuracy and fidelity. But which elements of *Morgante*'s satire and burlesque could provoke the Tory press and cause an outcry? Critics agree that Pulci's first canto is not so interesting for its plot but for its style. It introduces an age-old topic, the celebration of Emperor Charlemagne and his court. Orlando, chief paladin of Charlemagne, leaves the court in a sullen mood and reaches a remote monastery situated under a mountain from which three Saracen giants continually hurl rocks onto it. After the abbot appeals to him for help, Orlando sets off for the mountain to confront the aggressors and kills two of the giants. The third, Morgante, instantly professes conversion to Christianity, accepting with level-headedness the death of his two brothers "as the just reward for their aggression" and cutting off their hands to take back to the abbot as evidence that they are dead. After some hesitation on the part of the abbot and his monks, Morgante is welcomed to the Christian community, and becomes Orlando's comrade-in-arms and the protagonist of a long series of comic adventures.

The first canto must have appealed to Byron for the arresting mixing of elevated and colloquial tone, the self-aware narrator, the anticlerical skepticism and satiric spirit towards Christianity, and the mordant allusions to renegades. Political turncoats were the obvious target of *The Liberal* too: "God defend us from the morality of slaves and turncoats […] be present, not ye miserable tyrants, slaves, bigots or turncoats of any party […] but ye […] who have made [man] a thing of hope and freedom, instead of despair and slavery; a being progressive, instead of a creeping creature retrograde."[37] Interestingly, Hunt's preliminary review of the Pulci translation in the *Literary Examiner* (26 July 1823) openly links Morgante's facile acceptance of Christianity and forswearing of his brothers (whom Orlando had slain earlier) to Robert Southey's political volatility:

> [A]fter having been favoured by the Paladin upon the proper bounds of Christian sympathy, the docile giant assures Orlando that the fact of his two slain brothers being in hell, which as in duty bound he now piously believes, does not abate his satisfaction in the least. Nay, in the genuine renegado spirit, our convert acts as like Mr. Southey as possible, for he gratuitously offers to cut off the hands of his dead

37 *The Liberal*, I, vi, viii.

> brothers and associates, and to bear them as trophies to the monks, in proof of his pious sincerity. […] The religious duty is performed, without a pun, – *off hand*; and after such an undeniable evidence of a Christian spirit, the giant is received very graciously by the holy brotherhood, and immediately (the Laureate again) employed in the dirty work of the convent.[38]

The conversion scene Hunt refers to is one that heavily parodies religious instruction; in stanza XLV (45), Orlando urges his apprentice Christian companion: "Aresti gia Macon tuo rinnegato/E la sua fede iniqua ingiusta e fella" which Byron translates as "Abjure bad Macon's false and felon test,/Your renegado God, and worship mine, –". Byron's apt use of the word "renegado" (rinnegato) seems a deliberate allusion to a common political symptom of his age, to Robert Southey, and to the other contemporary poets attacked in *Don Juan* who, like Morgante, have undergone a "conversion" and are now enjoying favour under the Regency. Morgante's "proof of his pious sincerity", as Hunt ironically puts it, namely, the giant's decision to sever the hands of his brothers and "bear them as trophies to the monks" is grotesquely described in stanza LIII (53), which offers one of the most striking instances of tonal contrast and disjunction we encounter in the whole Canto, rendered expertly by Byron in the following lines:

> 'A word unto the wise,' Morgante said,
> 'Is wont to be enough, and you shall see
> How much I grieve about my brethren dead;
> And if the will of God seem good to me,
> Just, as you tell me, 'tis in heaven obey'd –
> Ashes to ashes, – merry let us be!
> I will cut off the hands from both their trunks,
> And carry them unto the holy monks.[39]

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38 *The Literary Examiner*, IV (Saturday, 26 July 1823) 51 in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. Donald H. Reiman (New York: Routledge, 2016; first published by Garland, 1972), Part B: Vol. III, 1366.

39 "– Al savio suol bastar poche parole – / disse Morgante: – tu il potrai vedere/de' miei fratelli, Orlando, se mi duole/e s'io m'accorderò di Dio al volere/come ti di' che in Ciel server si suole./Morti co'morti; or pensian di godere;/io vo' tagliar le mani a tutti quanti/a porterolle a que' monaci santi" (*The Liberal*, II, 240).

To Byron, the Shelleys and the Hunts, Southey "was part of the self-interested legal and religious monopoly that obstructed reform by keeping a corrupt ministry in place."[40] Along with George III, Southey featured unfavourably in several of the contributions to *The Liberal*. Byron's translation of Pulci amplifies the journal's attack on Southey, following Hunt's *The Dogs* and "The Blues", a satire "designed to make specific reference to the betrayal of his early radical credentials."[41]

Stabler pointedly argues that despite *The Liberal*'s support of revolution and reform, the journal's real "challenge [was] to the dogmatic authority of the established church."[42] Hunt answers the charge that the circle is planning "to cut up religion, morals, and everything that is legitimate" in a provocative passage in the Preface:

> When we know [...] that there is not a greater set of hypocrites in the world than these pretended teachers of the honest and inexperienced part of our countrymen; – when we know that their religion [...] means the most ridiculous and untenable notions of the DIVINE BEING, and in all other cases means nothing but the Bench of Bishops; [...] then indeed we are willing to accept the title enemies to religion, morals and legitimacy, and hope to do our duty with all becoming profaneness accordingly.[43]

In Canto I, Pulci's mockery of the monastic life and conventional religiosity can be seen in Morgante's facile conversion to Christianity discussed earlier, in Orlando's ensuing lecture about the "theology of damnation,"[44] and in the greed shown by the monks devouring the wild pig that Morgante brings back (stanza LXVI).

> The monks, who saw the water fresh and good,
> Rejoiced, but much more to perceive the pork;
> All animals are glad at sight of food:
> They lay their breviaries to sleep, and work
> With greedy pleasure, and in such a mood,
> That the flesh needs no salt beneath their fork.

40 Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal,'" 9.
41 Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal,*" 312.
42 Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal,'" 9.
43 *The Liberal*, I, v, vi.
44 Franklin, "Cosmopolitanism and Catholic Culture," 267.

> Of rankness and of rot there is no fear,
> For all the fasts are now left in arrear.[45]

According to Franklin, "the Pulcian burlesque tradition allowed serious and grotesquely comic points of view to co-exist, so that quaint iconography or naïve religious beliefs could be mocked but without relapsing into outright cynicism or the sacrilegious."[46] In other words, even though the poem is a parodic and burlesque one, the comic treatment of a social or religious ideal within the popular culture of Pulci's Florence does not mean that these ideals were "held to be superfluous."[47] It is in this spirit that Byron defended Pulci in the "Advertisement" from charges of impiety and irreligion, showing up at the same time the insularity of Anglican bigotry.

> That [Pulci] intended to ridicule the monastic life, and suffered his imagination to play with the simple dulness of his converted giant, seems evident enough; but surely it were as unjust to accuse him of irreligion on this account, as to denounce Fielding for his Parson Adams, Barnabas, Thwackum, Supple, and the Ordinary in Jonathan Wild, or Scott, for the exquisite use of his Covenanters in the "Tales of my Landlord".[48]

In less polished language, and in response to Murray's request for refinement of Pulci's style, Byron rebutted that Pulci "is not an indecent writer"[49] and "sought to make plain [...] that his work stood in an alternative Catholic tradition [...] in which such practice was sanctioned by precedent."[50]

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45 *The Liberal*, II, 217. "I monaci veggendo I'acqua fresca/Si rallegrorno, ma più de' cingiali;/Ch'ogni animal si rallegra de l'esca;/E posano a dormire i breviali;/ Ognun s'affanna, e non par che gl'incresca,/Acciò che questa carne non s'insali,/ E che poi secca sapesse di vieto:/ e le digiune si restorno a drieto" (II, 243–244).

46 Franklin, "Cosmopolitanism and Catholic Culture," 266.

47 Constance Jordan, *Pulci's Morgante: Poetry and History in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (London: Folger, 1986), 11.

48 *The Liberal*, II, 194.

49 *BLJ*, VII, 61.

50 Gavin Hopps, "Gaiety and Grace: Byron and the Tone of Catholicism," *The Byron Journal* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 5.

> I think my creation of Pulci will make you stare – it must be put by the original stanza for stanza and verse for verse – and you will see what was permitted in a Catholic country and a bigotted age to a Churchman on the score of religion; – and so tell those buffoons who accuse me of attacking the liturgy.[51]

By speaking in Pulci's favour and placing great faith in his own translation of *Morgante,* Byron rejects those traditions and contemporary systems that impose constraints and rigid doctrines on people's minds and imagination, preferring to align himself with a "European Renaissance epic tradition" which allows "a poet [to] be facetious about religious matters and still not incur the charge of blasphemy."[52] In defending Pulci, Byron was in fact defending himself and *The Liberal* from charges of impiety and immorality. The following stanza from *Don Juan* Canto III, a sophisticated and sarcastic retort to his detractors, is a further expression of Byron's championing of religious liberty.

> Some kinder casuists are pleased to say,
> In nameless print – that I have no devotion;
> But set those persons down with me to pray,
> And you shall see who has the properest notion
> Of getting into Heaven the shortest way;
> My altars are the mountains and the ocean,
> Earth, air, stars – all that springs from the great Whole
> Who hath produced, and will receive the soul.[53] (*DJ* III, 104)

This stanza follows the Ave Maria stanzas (101–103), a sustained prayer to Virgin Mary (possibly inspired by Pulci's invocation to Virgin Mary in the beginning of *Morgante*), which, according to Gavin Hopps, exhibits how "levity and reverence may coexist, without the former subverting the latter".[54] This is a lesson that Byron learned from Pulci.

As pointed out earlier, Byron's faith in the power of translation as a means of literary cosmopolitanism and progressive politics was

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51 *BLJ*, VII, 35.
52 Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence*, 153.
53 Lord Byron, *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), *Don Juan* III, 104.
54 Hopps, "Gaiety and Grace," 1.

demonstrated by his commitment to the Pulci project. The poet's openly declared deployment of Pulci's half-serious style, of his themes, techniques, and narrative strategies, as well as the creative recasting of all these elements into the fashioning of his new satirical mode, exemplify an unusually high degree of felt familiarity and self-confidence in the ways Byron engaged with the "sire" of the foreign country. Speaking of the Italian writers Tasso and Dante, Halmi claims that Byron employs their figures to fashion his supra-national poetic identity. Thus, a poem such as *The Prophecy of Dante* allows us to see how the poet invents and reinvents himself as alternately Italian and English in his efforts to interpret or mediate Italy's contemporary political aspirations.[55]

Byron's interaction with Pulci reveals, perhaps, a richer interface: The translation of the *Morgante* was interwoven with Byron's artistic and political concerns but knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding Pulci's writing career suggest that Byron may have projected autobiographically on this Italian poet too. As we know, the *Morgante* was one of a number of works commissioned by the Medici that were intended to further relations between France and Florence. Morgante's "problematic form, especially evident in the different styles and themes between Parts 1 and 2, and its powerful […] development of an authorial voice, reflect the actual political pressures its poet confronted in the course of its composition".[56] In its discontinuities, irregular style and tonal shifts, *Morgante* reflects not only the writer's changing sources but the changing circumstances and processes by which the poem was composed and the evolution of Pulci's authorial awareness.[57] In this respect, *Morgante* is a self-reflective work "characterized by the presence in the text of a self-aware narrator able to exploit the relationship with his material and with his audience, resulting in a high level of topicality, verbal humour and parody."[58]

With *Don Juan* Byron finds himself at a similar crossroads artistically, if only three centuries later: being attended not by the pressures

55 Halmi, "The Literature of Italy," 38, 39.

56 Jordan, *Pulci's Morgante,* 10.

57 Ibid., 45.

58 Mark Davie, *Half-Serious Rhymes: The Narrative Poetry of Luigi Pulci* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 27.

of patronage but by oppressive networks of production and reception, Byron attacks literary convention and dismantles binary thinking ("us" vs. "them"), looking for creative, political and religious independence in the liberal and liberating spaces of European cultures. This move beyond an English tradition is forcefully and determinedly taken through his translation of Pulci and its ensuing publication in *The Liberal*.

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Elena Spandri

7. William Hazlitt and the Ironies of Liberalism

> The authentic romantic ironist is as filled with enthusiasm as with skepticism. He is as much a romantic as an ironist. Having ironically acknowledged the fictiveness of his own patternings of human experience, he romantically engages in the creative process of life by eagerly constructing new forms, new myths.
>
> (Anne Mellor)

William Hazlitt wrote five essays for *The Liberal*: "On the Spirit of Monarchy" and "On the Scotch Character", published in the second number, "My First Acquaintance with Poets", published in the third number, "Arguing in a Circle" and "Pulpit Oratory. Dr Chalmers and Mr Irving", published in the fourth number. Despite his substantial presence, Hazlitt's role in *The Liberal* is not easy to assess since he was not part of the original editorial collective and the writings he contributed appear to interrogate, and somewhat undermine, the principles that inspired Hunt's journal. Yet, Hazlitt's resistance to subscribe to an uncomplicated liberal agenda is what makes his contribution all the more significant. The critic was invited to join *The Liberal* by London-based editor John Hunt after Shelley's death, and only in September 1822 did Leigh Hunt and Byron seem to have been informed of his involvement. Despite his relevance in the group of radical writers revolving around the *Examiner* in the 1820s, Hazlitt had not been included among the founding fathers of the magazine supposedly on two grounds: his British location and his distrust of Byron's "double aristocracy of ranks and letters", which risked to further exacerbate the class divisions of its members.[1] Nonetheless, having been the object of violent attacks from

1 In Hazlitt's recent biography Duncan Wu emphasizes Byron's aversion to Hazlitt and maintains that "Hunt thought the invitation to contribute to *The Liberal* could succeed only were Hazlitt persuaded of Byron's good opinion and the opportunity to cultivate it", *William Hazlitt. The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 332.

the Tory press, and having embraced the idea of an indelible collusion between periodical press and political power in Britain, Hazlitt turned to *The Liberal* with the hope of finding a meritocracy of letters in which shared literary interests would transcend class divisions and individual genius would assert its autonomy from political power. Although the *The Liberal* did not have a detailed political agenda, in Hazlitt's mind its support for European liberalism would be promoted through its distance from British literary culture, its independence from government influence, as well as the mixed class composition of the Pisan circle.[2] Paradoxically, Hazlitt's commitment to a transnational culture of liberalism was not expressed by celebrating its cosmopolitan beauties but by denouncing its domestic pitfalls. As a matter of fact, his most structured contributions to the journal – the two essays "On the Spirit of Monarchy" and "My First Acquaintance with Poets" – articulate a controversial and anti-Shelleyan discourse about the freedom of imagination and the possibility for poets to contest the Tory dominance of literary culture by acting as the "unacknowledged legislators of the world."[3]

The critical trajectory of this essay addresses the rationale of this contradiction. I read Hazlitt's two major *Liberal* essays as explorations of the dark side of liberalism and simultaneously as exercises in Romantic irony, that is sceptical interventions on the viability of liberalism in the 1820s which could only be articulated in a truly liberal and independent journal – thus somewhat short-circuiting the grounds of their very scepticism. Accordingly, the essay reflects on the underestimated role of the Italian location of the journal in the critic's broad cultural agenda of the Regency period. Did Hazlitt use the critical arena of *The Liberal* to affirm his belief in the historic possibility of liberalism or to take issues with Romantic ideology? What role (if any) did the Pisan circle play in Hazlitt's approach to liberalism in the post-Peterloo years?

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2 David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine. Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 114–115.

3 Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, written only one year before "On the Spirit of Monarchy", was supposed to appear in the second number of *The Liberal* and would have been the perfect counterpart to Hazlitt's essay.

To explore the critical cruxes raised by Hazlitt's *Liberal* writings two points require consideration: his obsession with "Legitimacy", that is to say his fear of "the oppressive reinstitution of divine-right monarchy and eradication of political dissent in the aftermath of the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte;"[4] his preoccupation with a literary culture corrupted by government influence and class prejudice and with the violence of the Tory press, from which he suffered repeated attacks as his popularity increased. His contribution to *The Liberal* must in the first place be situated in the context of his disillusionment with the emancipatory role of literary culture and periodical press in post-revolutionary Britain. David Higgins (one of the few critics to have engaged with this subject-matter to date) has made the contention that Hazlitt's association with the magazine served for a short time to modify his embittered view of culture and of the role of creative imagination and to give him the feeling that to contrast the reactionary and subaltern role of periodical press in England was possible at least from an external position. This may be true as regards Hazlitt's personal feeling.[5] However, in rehearsing the narrative of the apostasy of the Lake poets and the deep-seated connection between imagination and power – a connection that had concerned the critic for a couple of decades, at least since his 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* – "On the Spirit of Monarchy" and "My First Acquaintance with Poets" recount a different story. They tell a story in which the controversial pairing of genius and power is once again tackled and significantly revised but not dispelled, and the "bicultural agenda" of the magazine,[6] advocated by Shelley and Hunt, features more as an unpremeditated consequence of the critic's involvement in the magazine than as its ideological premise. Hazlitt's engagement with contemporary Italy followed the failure of *The*

4 Kevin Gilmartin, "Hazlitt's Visionary London", in *Repossessing the Romantic Past*, ed. Heather Glen and Paul Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59.

5 David Higgins reads "On the Spirit of Monarchy" primarily as a test of Byron's commitment to the progressive agenda of the journal: a test the aristocratic poet failed when he decided to withdraw from the project, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine. Biography, Celebrity, Politics*.

6 See Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'. Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (London: Ashgate, 2009).

Liberal and was voiced in *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy*, a travelogue published in 1826 that describes a journey completed the year before. The 1825 journey brought Hazlitt across the traditional locations of the Grand Tour and inspired an interest in the oppressed condition of the Italian people and in the cultural implications of despotism in continental Europe.[7] By contrast, in 1822–1824 what seems more likely is that Hazlitt's participation in the *The Liberal* provided him with the opportunity to reassess a time-honoured discourse about the relation between sympathy, poetry, and power in Britain, a discourse whose wide applicability the Italian location rendered at once less resentful and more explicit.

Monarchy and Imagination

In a wide-ranging essay included in a miscellaneous volume dedicated to Marilyn Butler, Kevin Gilmartin maintains that Hazlitt's political writings have remained a more fragmentary field of study with respect to his philosophical writings that have been privileged by philosophically oriented critics like David Bromwich and Uttara Natarajan.[8] Gilmartin ascribes to Butler the merit of setting

> the terms for Hazlitt's resurgent reputation by decisively recontextualizing the politics of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary in her 1981 study *Romantics,*

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7 Cristina Consiglio mentions a significant episode recounted in *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy*, in which a gentleman who had arrived in Milan carrying Greek and Latin versions of Homer was advised by the inspector to also bring an edition of the Lives of the Popes: "To Hazlitt the episode is evidence that there was 'a learned conspiracy for the suppression of light and letters, of which we are sleeping partners and honorary associates.' To support this idea, he asserts that the Austrians 'have lately attempted to strike the name of Italy out of the maps, that the country may neither have a name, a body or a soul left to it,'" "Hazlitt's Journey to Italy", 58.

8 David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense. Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

> *Rebels, and Reactionaries*, in which Hazlitt appears as engaged radical journalist, persistent sectarian, and keeper of revolutionary faith and as an emerging 'new professional type, the star journalist.'[9]

Gilmartin joins sixty years of Hazlitt's scholarship under the rubric of "healthy critical pluralism" and considers the common denominator of such pluralism to be a sense of Hazlitt's "literary achievement animated by paradox and contradiction" and "an improvisational prose style that accommodated competing perspectives within an ideological frame more firmly secured by what it refuses than what if affirms."[10] Thus, on one level stands Hazlitt's contradictory ideology, wavering between Dissenting radicalism and middle-class mistrust of populism, an ideology expressed in his famed sententious and highly allusive style.[11] On another level, a critical tradition that has made the best of Hazlitt's inconsistencies runs the risk of obscuring "a more synthetic and even utopian strain" at work in his political writing.[12] It is beyond question

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9 Kevin Gilmartin, "Hazlitt's Visionary London", in *Repossessing the Romantic Past*, ed. Heather Glen and Paul Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40.

10 Gilmartin, "Hazlitt's Visionary London", 42.

11 For a detailed account of Hazlitt's Dissenting background see Wu, *William Hazlitt. The First Modern Man*.

12 Gilmartin, "Hazlitt's Visionary London", 42. Gilmartin's catalogue of the various political 'Hazlitts' is at once synthetic and exact, and includes: E. P. Thomson's "elitist radical whose Jacobin voice was refracted and somewhat compromised by the 'polite culture' of the periodical essayist" (*The Making of the English Working-Class*, 1963); John Kinnaird's "steady constitutional Whig" (*William Hazlitt: Critic of Power*, 1978); David Bromwich's "critic converging toward the theory of imaginative disinterestedness who possessed the faculty of 'holding two opposed ideas in his in mind at the same time' and who distinguished himself from Coleridge by refusing to reconcile opposites in experience and aesthetic expression" (*Hazlitt: The Mind of the Critic*, 1983); Seamus Deane's "Jacobin profiler of Jacobin disillusionment" (*The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832*, 1988); Simon Bainbridge' "ambiguous Bonapartist" (*Napoleon and English Romanticism*, 1995); Philip Harling's "pragmatic journalist working within the convention of late-Georgian radicalism (an updated version of Thomson's assessment) in its attacks on the hypocrisy and repressiveness of established powers" ("William Hazlitt and Radical Journalism", 1997); Tom Paulin's "Irish-accented adherent of a Dissenting counter-culture" (*The Day-Star of Liberty*, 1998).

that, after the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, this crux had become generational as much as it was personal, and *The Liberal* enterprise was part of a reinvestment of the poetic and intellectual energies of the 'Cockney School' of poetry in a "cult of the South"[13] that was meant to elude Britain's gloomy atmosphere and regressive politics. Still, the role of Hazlitt's essays in the multicultural and chiefly anti-Protestant context of *The Liberal* does not appear in perfect keeping with its agenda, and this explains why it is still to be fully assessed. The reasons are various and to some extent echo the critical neglect of the journal. First, the 1820s were years of intense journalistic activity and, while being coopted by John Hunt after Shelley's death, Hazlitt was also collaborating with the most important progressive journals of the time. Second, "My First Acquaintance with Poets" reads as the ultimate and most literary sophisticated version of a narrative about the Lake poets' betrayal of revolutionary creed that might look inappropriate to isolate from the rest of the writings dealing with the same topic. Third, "On the Spirit of Monarchy" is so apparently at odds with the principles grounding *The Liberal*, so indulging in those counterrevolutionary dispositions that Hunt and Shelley wished to challenge, that to engage with its original context of publication might entail an uncomfortable exercise in deconstruction.

Hazlitt's dissonance from the assumptions of *The Liberal* is certainly part of a provocative rhetoric that thrives in paradox and sarcasm, yet it is genuine as regards a lifelong discourse on sympathetic imagination, whose terms shifted over time and appeared literally subverted in "On the Spirit of Monarchy". In the 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, in line with an eighteenth-century understanding of sympathy, Hazlitt advocated the principle of the disinterestedness of human nature and described sympathetic imagination as a levelling principle and the foundation of intersubjectivity:

> The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future

13 Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

> being, and interested in it. I could not love myself, if I were not capable of loving others. Self-love, used in this sense, is in its fundamental principle the same as disinterested benevolence.[14]

The *Essay* articulates a polemic against all attempts to ground morality in self-interest. In discussing the work, Deborah Elise White maintains that, against the traditional Romantic separation of imagination and interest, Hazlitt claims that it is imagination what determines the meaning and value of interests. "Imagination temporalizes the self into the future and in doing so it pluralizes the interests of identity. One never acts for oneself but always and only for the other" (2000: 74). To position imagination in cooperation with history, not as an alternative to it, entails a critique of the escapist drives of romantic ideology meant as a tendency to sublimate historical circumstances and circumvent the responsibility of agency.[15] Eighteen years later, Hazlitt declares that human beings naturally sympathize with the show of power – namely, monarchy and tyranny – owing to a mechanism of projected narcissistic desires which is wholly independent of the intrinsic value of the person in power and renders them impervious to constitutional government.[16] The adamant incipit of the essay is worth quoting at length:

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14 William Hazlitt, *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. vii: *The Plain Speaker*. *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, ed. A. R. Waller with an Introduction by William Ernest Henley (London: J.M. Dent & CO.; New York: McClure, Phillips & CO., 1903), 385–386.

15 For the concept of Romantic ideology, I rely on Jerome McGann's groundbreaking study *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990) and *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

16 The complicity of imagination, specifically poetical imagination, with political power is also explored in a remarkable review of *Coriolanus* published in the *Examiner* on 15 December 1815, in which Hazlitt declares that "The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle" and that "Poetry is right-royal. It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right," *The Fight and Other Essays*, ed. Tom Paulin and David Chandler (London: Penguin, 2000), 52.

> The spirit of Monarchy, then, is nothing but the craving in the human mind after the Sensible and the One. It is not a matter of state-necessity or policy, as a natural infirmity, a disease, a false appetite in the popular feeling that must be gratified. Man is an individual animal with narrow faculties, but infinite desires which he is anxious to concentrate in some one object within the grasp of his imagination, and where, if he cannot be all that he wishes himself, he may at least contemplate his own pride, vanity, and passions, displayed in their most extravagant dimensions in a being no bigger and no better than himself. Each individual would (were it in his power) be a king, a God: but as he cannot, the next best thing is to see this reflex image of his self-love, the darling passion of his breast, realized, embodied out of himself in the first object he can lay his hands on for the purpose. The slave admires the tyrant because the last *is*, what the first *would* be. He surveys himself all over in the glass of royalty.[17]

Monarchical feelings do not stem from a rational choice but from an instinctive response to a self-aggrandizing desire of the people who are more prone to engage in an idolatrous identification with hereditary privilege than to see themselves reflected in a meritorious leader who has deserved both his title and power (like, for example, Napoleon Bonaparte). Royalism involves a form of reverse sympathy[18] that prompts the subjects to sympathize with the monarch because they unconsciously project themselves into his undeserved condition of privilege, receiving vicarious gratification. Such gratifying feelings rely on infantilization: "The little girl knows as well as you do that her doll is a cheat; but she shuts her eyes to it, for she finds her account in keeping up the deception."[19] On parallel grounds, instead of developing a sense of responsibility towards people's feelings, the sovereign turns his subjects' sympathy into an instrument of oppression:

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17 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, ed. Tom Paulin and David Chandler (London: Penguin, 2000), 339–340.

18 I use the phrase "reverse sympathy" in contrast to eighteenth-century accounts (especially Smith's), in which sympathy is conceived as a fellow-feeling engendered by an imaginative projection into the painful condition of others that is based on a stable social hierarchy according to which the subjects of sympathy (those who can afford to sympathize) occupy a higher position with respect to the objects of sympathy. On this see Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

19 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 342.

> An arbitrary monarch set over the head of his fellows does not identify himself with them, or learn to comprehend their rights or sympathize with their interests, but looks down upon them as of a different species from himself, as insects crawling on the face of the earth.[20]

As it is often the case with Hazlitt's style, here an abstract discourse envelops a core of political topicality: the critic "makes clear his loathing for people who revere the Hanoverians and accuses these apparently loyal subjects of using the figure of the hapless monarch to aggrandize themselves by proxy."[21] Still the overt reference to the British monarchy does not in the least diminish the philosophical and 'sociological' import of the argument, which develops along two mutually constitutive lines. First of all, the idea that imagination carries narcissistic drives which, if unrestrained, can render it a deeply regressive force, a stabilizer of authority, and a strong ally of Legitimacy. Then, the related idea that monarchical state is quintessentially performative and depends on the complicity of people's sympathetic imagination to secure its own enduring permanence.[22] Thus, it comes as no surprise that the "highest state of exaltation" of the spirit of monarchy is the Coronation-day, in which all amounts to "a show – a theatrical spectacle [...] whose greatness consists in finery [...] a form, a ceremony [...] that debauches the understanding of the people, and makes the slaves of sense and show."[23] Portrayed as pernicious combinations of a narcissistic imagination and a fashionable theatricality, royalism and Legitimacy acquire the status of physiological determinations, apparently losing the nature of political systems that can be validated or overturned by historical processes. The logical consequence of this shift in perspective is that if liberalism is conceived as a political principle rooted in public feeling and public opinion, as well as

20 Ibid., 349.

21 Amanda Louise Johnson, "William Hazlitt, *Liber Amoris*, and the Imagination", *European Romantic Review* 25, no. 6 (2014): 752.

22 Hazlitt perceptively addresses the question of people's slowness in recognizing and reacting to the abuses of power and of their apparently spontaneous, but in fact induced, inclination to accept the *status quo* in the essay "What is the People?", published in the *Champion* and *The Yellow Dwarf* in October 1817, and later included in *Political Essays, With Sketches of Public Characters* (1819).

23 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 350.

in the acknowledgement of people's collective interests, sympathy with power is bound to systematically destabilize the very possibility of its advent and to act as its most obstinate enemy. Hazlitt rehearses an argument already upheld in the essay "What is the People", in which he had argued that "the love of liberty is less strong than the love of power; and it's guided by a less sure instinct in attaining its object."[24] However, while the latter essay offers a sympathetic anatomy of the people as "the mighty heart of the nation" – endowed "with hearts beating in their bosom, with thoughts stirring in their minds […], with busy purposes and affections for others and a respect for themselves, and a desire for happiness, and a right to freedom, and a will to be free"[25] –, the "Monarchy" essay caustically expands on the people's self-degrading tendency to buy into the "detestable fiction" of Legitimacy, thus unconsciously concurring to their own material and mental enslavement.

To deny that the change in tone marks a pessimistic turn in Hazlitt's late political views would be implausible. But 'pessimistic' does not necessarily mean 'regressive', and in this case acrimony plays a less defeatist role than it may appear. Indeed, the focus of the essay is arguably less political than psychological and is well expressed by the word "spirit" of the title, which hints at the structures of feeling attached to monarchy and power. Hazlitt uses the transnational space of *The Liberal* to reflect on the consensual and affective bases of monarchy and to articulate a profoundly modern view of power as an ideological construct that renders citizens involuntary complicit with their own oppressors.[26] Sympathy with

24 Ibid., 383. Differently from "On the Spirit of Monarchy", that can be read as its negative image, "What is the People" maintains that absolute monarchy is a device geared to trample people's identity and that the welfare and interests of people are the engines of modern nations.

25 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 364.

26 In his monumental critical biography, Duncan Wu makes much of the critic's insights into human psychology ahead of time, that anticipate the major tenets of psychoanalysis: "Hazlitt's modernity depends partly on his grasp of psychology. It is second nature for a twenty-first century reader to look at writers and their work with insights drawn from Freud, Jung, and their ilk; in 1818, prior to our science of the mind, such an approach was shockingly new. In that sense, Hazlitt

the sovereign may look like an automatic reflex from below inhering in people's unenlightened condition, but is actually the effect of a modern power based on spectacularization and on a sophisticated capacity to inspire emulation and arouse 'consumeristic' desires – which, incidentally, accounts for the enduring popularity of the British crown and its incessant on-screen fictionalizations.[27] Merging drama and might, and overriding right, monarchy secures its survival not only as a political system but as an ideological construct that enables people to identify with the dominant power and imaginatively – and not antagonistically – engage with the social reality which is the product of that power. Hazlitt connects sympathy with power to superstition and idol-worship and launches into a grim anthropology of fashionable court-life unaffected by ethics and responsibility:

> The sympathy of mankind is that on which all strong feelings and opinions floats; and this sets in full in every absolute monarchy to the side of tinsel show and iron-handed power, in contempt and defiance of right and wrong. The right and wrong are of little consequence compared to the *in* and *out*. [28]

Court-life is the site that most dangerously obstructs the shift from sympathy meant as bottom-up emulation to sympathy conceived as a mode of circular communication between the monarch and the people. It is a veil cast over the sovereign that entitles him to stand on his own prerogatives while shielding him from the real life and the righteous claims of the people. Hazlitt's lexicon is imprecise and erratic, and freely shifts from "monarchy" to "court" to "power", using the three terms as if they were synonyms. Yet, at each logical turn, the essay betrays a strong preoccupation with the unconscious identification of the people with a

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is the father of modern literary criticism", Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 238.

27 On the relation of Romantic culture and modern consumer society see Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1987).

28 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 346.

self-contained and indulging monarchical system that is untouched by issues of value and merit. Even so, Hazlitt does not go as far as to deny people the capacity to move forward and to embrace a mode of collective sympathy that, instead of offering vicarious gratifications which reinforce dominant powers (the monarch, the court, the fawning royalists), opens for them the possibility of defending their own interests while pursuing the common good:

> There is nothing truly *liberal* but that which postpones its own claims to those of propriety – or great, but that which looks out of itself to others. All power is an unabated nuisance, a barbarous assumption, an aggravated injustice, that is not directed to the common good.[29] (Emphasis mine).

Significantly, the term "liberal" appears only once in the second part of the essay, in conjunction with a mode of disinterested sympathy which recaptures Hazlitt's previous formulations of sympathetic imagination and softens the essay's bitter tone. Hazlitt's concerns with the historical possibility of liberalism are reiterated in his subsequent essays from different angles.[30] Altogether, his *Liberal* writings articulate a discourse on Romantic modernity that calls for liberalism's inevitability while simultaneously – and ironically – denouncing its blind spots. Hazlitt provides the ideal conclusion of the "Monarchy" essay in the final paragraph of Coleridge's portrait in *The Spirit of the Age*:

> It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century. Genius stopped the way to Legitimacy, and therefore it was to be abated, crushed, or set aside as a nuisance. The spirit of the monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age (Hazlitt, 1991: 66).

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29 Ibid., 351.

30 "On the Scotch Character", Hazlitt's second contribution to *The Liberal*, reads as a humorous and deeply orientalising portrait of Scottishness but is also a reflection on how individualism relates to citizenship in post-revolutionary political systems. In this sense, the essay sheds additional light on the "Monarchy" article's indictment of people's affective investment in the shallow glamour of royalism.

Sympathy and the Press

Romantic scholarship has widely investigated the crucial function played by the press as a provisional alternative to Parliamentary representation during the Napoleonic era,[31] and Hazlitt's unremitting publishing activity (spanning more than two decades) bears testimony to his deep commitment to a print culture conceived as an arena of political debate and a repository of public opinion.[32] His political views were nourished by a culture of rational Dissent he never discarded, by a lifelong 'Jacobin' belief in the lawfulness of revolutions, and by a middle-class preference for reform. The latter surfaces in his oscillations between an idea of the people as a body politic endowed with sense, intellect, aspirations, and agency (which accommodates both a pragmatic vision and a utopian strain, as Gilmartin maintains), and an antithetic Burkean impulse to depict them as "individual animal[s] with narrow faculties, but infinite desires", as he writes in "On the Spirit of Monarchy."[33] Despite incongruities, Hazlitt's relentless attacks on the hypocrisy and repressiveness of established powers unquestionably qualify him as one the most authoritative radical journalist of the 1820s.

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31 See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionarie;* Philip Harling, "William Hazlitt and Radical Journalism," *Romanticism* 3, no. 1 (April 1997): 53–65, Robert Keith Lapp, *Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the Distresses of the Regency* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine. Biography, Celebrity, Politics*; Kevin Gilmartin. "Hazlitt's Visionary London"; Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

32 In *Life of Napoleon* (1828) Hazlitt draws a direct connection between print culture and revolution: "The French Revolution might be described as a remote but inevitable result of the invention of the art of printing. The gift of speech, or the communication of thoughts by words, is that which distinguishes man from other animals. But this faculty is limited and imperfect without the intervention of books, which render the knowledge possessed by every one in the community accessible to all. There is no doubt, then, that the press (as it has existed in modern times) is the great organ of intellectual improvement and civilization" (Hazlitt, 2009), 84.

33 Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 339.

As we have seen, nowhere was Hazlitt's intellectual consistency more challenged than in his treatment of sympathetic imagination (and its cognate concept of 'genius'), whose nature and implications the critic elaborated in different and even contradictory ways over the years. Such instability was individual as much as it was generational and is partly amenable to a major change in the conception and use of sympathy that occurred in the Romantic period.[34] Rooted in the Scottish moral philosophy, in the post-revolutionary years sympathy underwent two main changes: it acquired overt political connotations and became a means of communication through which print culture interpreted crowd behaviour and negotiated viable political scenarios for it. Romantic sympathy was a complex discursive formation that merged physiology, psychology, morality, and social science; it designated no specific philosophical or political content but rather operated as a means of communication. Two were the models of sympathy that were appropriated by Romantic print culture: the Humean physiologic model of 'contagion', or electric communication, and the Smithian psychological model of emotional participation. While the former explained collective behaviours and conveyed anxieties about unrest and political turmoil, the latter accounted for communication through the nation and was coupled by radical writers to enlightenment and progress, but also to a Burkean defense of social cohesion.[35] The association between sympathy and collectivity became

34 "For Hazlitt sympathy with someone or something other than oneself is not only the touchstone of imagination, but the wellspring of communication and the community that communication makes possible," Elise Deborah White, *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 75.

35 For this discussion I rely on Mary Fairclough's sweeping study on the connections between sympathy, political controversy, and print culture: "Sympathy, for Romantic writers, was not merely an individualized imaginative connection. Rather, it both embodied and unsettled the mysterious connections between self, crowd, and nation" (2013), 229. Fairclough argues that in the radical press of the 1820s sympathetic communication stops being considered as a collective instinctive force and comes to represent an individual choice that joins together sentimental projection and rational reflection, feeling and understanding. In this new version of sympathy, the crowd is entitled to be both the object of a reformist agenda and the subject of political action, and loses the connotation of irrational, uninformed, and atavistic pre-political body. The most important outcome

a clear but highly contested Zeitgeist mark, as it could be made to serve radical as well as Tory agendas. The British press of the Romantic era was split between Tory periodicals (like *The Courier* and the *Quarterly Review*), that condemned sympathy as the medium of disorder and riot, and cheap radical journals (like Cobbett's *Political Register* or Carlile's *Republican*) that made "unprecedented claims for the significance of the collective action, asserting that physical gatherings of the populace constitute a material representation of the political will of the nation at large."[36]

The association of collective sympathy and political will somewhat complicated Hazlitt's rational reformism: first of all, it ran counter to his distrust of instinctive sympathy inherited from radical writers such as Thelwall, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft; then, it posed serious threats to the agency of people and to the autonomy of selfhood he powerfully advocated. Hazlitt was well aware that sympathetic communication involved multiple and potentially conflicting vectors of meaning and was suspicious of attempts to include sympathy among the intellectual and political equipment of liberalism without qualifying it.[37] Thus, he turned Hunt's offer to contribute to his bicultural enterprise as an opportunity to explore sympathy's viability in a socially and politically mixed context that promoted cooperative work and a horizontal republic of letters. In this light, "On the Spirit of Monarchy" must be considered a test of the authenticity of Byron's allegiance to Hunt's project, as Higgins rightly maintains, as much as an incursion into the political unconscious of collective imaginaries and of people's propensity to fall prey to idol-worship and traditional symbols of authority. Despite his belated involvement, Hazlitt's presence was crucial to *The Liberal*

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of repositioning sympathy within radical discourse circulated by the press is the restoration of people's agency.

36 Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 126.

37 In the familiar essays of the 1820s such as "Pope, Lord Byron and Mr Bowles" (1821) and "The Fight" (1822), Hazlitt rehabilitates the political implications of collective sympathy by aligning it with the democratic communication among citizens enabled by the mail (Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd. Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture*).

project because it reminded readers that the path to a truly free and liberal society relied on new and more democratic political arrangements as much as on first-hand attunement to people's sensibilities and unacknowledged desires.

Apostasy and the Romantic Ideology

Perhaps the most distinctively liberal aspect of "On the Spirit of Monarchy" is its reiterated defense of a meritocratic social order, that Hazlitt opposes to the hereditary rule of monarchy as well as to the levelling principle championed in the revolutionary years. The shift in perspective has been read as a compromise with the conversational tendencies of the periodical press of the 1820s, on which Hazlitt still depended for his living, but does not necessarily imply the renunciation of his youthful equalitarian ideology. Rather, the focus on merit, talent, and value establishes a strong thematic link with "My First Acquaintance with Poets" that interrogates the Lake Poets' alleged 'apostasy' by balancing their mainstream Tory present against an idealised Jacobin rural past. The essay was published in the third number of *The Liberal* and is one of the most anthologized among Hazlitt's literary pieces, according to Michael Foot "the greatest essay in the English language" ever written.[38] Significantly, it was not included in Hazlitt's subsequent collections (*Table-Talk*, 1825 and *The Plain Speaker*, 1826), which means that the critic never stopped considering it as an integral part of the liberal agenda of Hunt's short-lived periodical, and therefore refused to separate it from its original context. It is thus surprising that the context of "My First Acquaintance with Poets" has drawn limited critical attention, since the only scholars to have analysed the essay in relation to *The Liberal* are Robert K. Lapp and David Higgins. The former highlights a parallel between the generic compromise required

38 Michael Foot, "Hazlitt's Revenge on the Lakers", *The Wordsworth Circle* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 138.

by contemporary periodical press, which promoted a shift from "satiric banter" to "gregarious table-talk", and the "internalization of radical energies" that engendered a "myth of maturity" according to which "the narrative of apostasy is registered as an indispensable feature of the spirit of the age."[39] On a similar line, Higgins compares the extolling tone of the essay with Hazlitt's previous writings on Coleridge's betrayal of the "*good cause,*"[40] holding that at that point of his career Hazlitt had started to view the Lake poets' *volte-face* as a symptom of a literary marketplace that demanded a mercenary pact with political power. Hazlitt's dawning consciousness of the "rules of art" draws the picture of a modern intellectual who employs his cultural capital to assert his independence from politics and explains the unresolved association of imagination with both monarchical and republican power. It also sheds retrospective light on the "Monarchy" essay, which no longer (or not exclusively) reads as an indictment of the regressive drives of the British people in the Regency era, but rather figures as a forward-looking reflection on how a liberal worldview must realistically take into consideration that collective sympathy can operate as a mode of democratic communication as much as a modern form of tribalism. As Higgins argues building on Lucy Newlyn's study of the rich Miltonic intertext of the essay, the ideological core of the essay is the question of "free-will" of the poetic imagination in relation to power:

> Is there something inherently bad in the poetic imagination, or has it been the victim of bad circumstances? Did the apostates fall, or were they pushed? Like *PL*, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' gives a highly equivocal answer. In Milton's poem, the Fall of Man, like the failure of the Commonwealth, is something that is both pre-ordained and freely chosen: at his stage in his career, Hazlitt understands the 'degradation' of genius in similar terms.[41]

Hazlitt's treatment of the apostasy theme has a complex history which is mainly articulated in his writings on Coleridge and follows two

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39 Robert Keith Lapp, *Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the Distresses of the Regency* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 177.

40 Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 248.

41 David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics*, 122.

interdependent discursive lines: one political and one literary.[42] The first line tackles the Lake poets' conversion from radicalism to reaction on factual grounds (Wordsworth's acceptance of a Government position, Coleridge's increasing support of a union between church and state), with tones ranging from incendiary to nostalgic.[43] The second line addresses the rationale of this conversion in relation to an understanding of artistic genius as a natural ally of power, owing to the "monopolizing" nature of imagination[44] and to poets' unquenchable desire for celebrity and marketability. Hazlitt's complex notion of genius as aporetically suspended between egotistical sublime and universal sympathies is the aesthetic as well as the ethical ground on which the critic encounters Milton at the time of his most intense involvement with the "Satanic School" of poetry. In this sense, a clear continuity emerges from two supposedly different essays such as "On the Spirit of Monarchy" and "My First Acquaintance with Poets", in as much as the people's narcissistic urges to sympathize with whatever monarch is entitled to wear the British crown are mirrored in the poets' right-royal tendency to "put the individual for the species, the one above the infinity many, might before right", as Hazlitt had written in the *Coriolanus* review. Here again at stake is the culturally heterogenous and uncategorizable nature of sympathy, that "My First Acquaintance with Poets" illustrates both as a horizontal vector of disinterested feeling and action – for example in the episode of the drowned boy the fishermen tried to save "at the risk of their own lives"[45] – and as a mode of oral communication between the

42 The climax of Hazlitt's polemic is a letter to the *Examine*r published on 12 January 1817 in which he contrasts the recently published conservative *Lays Sermons* with his youthful thrilling experience of hearing Coleridge speak against war and in favor of the separation of church and state in 1798.

43 For the development of Hazlitt's discourse on Coleridge see Robert Keith Lapp, *Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the Distresses of the Regency* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

44 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 51.

45 "A fisherman gave Coleridge an account of a boy that had been drowned the day before, and that they had tried to save him at the risk of their own lives. He said 'he did not know how it was that they ventured, but, Sir, we have a nature towards one another'. This expression, Coleridge remarked to me, was a fine illustration of that theory of disinterestedness which I (in common with Butler) had adopted" William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 263.

poets and their audiences that inspires reverence and awe and, like the dazzling royal pageantry, saturates the senses, obfuscates the mind, and neutralizes the hearer's agency:

> There is a chaunt in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer, and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use if this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained and internal. The one might be terms more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*.[46]

The embodiment of the individual mesmerized by the powers of speech of the Lake poets is John Chester, "a native […] attracted to Coleridge's discourse as flies are to honey,"[47] in whose subtly ironized idolatry Hazlitt recognizes an image of his own original and later frustrated enthusiasm. The essay recalls a memorable walk from Nether Stowey to the Bristol-Channel during which Chester told Hazlitt "his private opinion, that Coleridge was a wonderful man" and comments that "when he sat down at table with his idol, John's felicity was complete."[48] The key term in the passage quoted above is "ambiguous": it signals a touch of moral opacity in Wordsworth's and Coleridge' enthralling eloquence of the 1790s, thus firmly grounding the elegiac celebration of their former poetic genius on Hazlitt's present disenchantment. Although the narrative is largely retrospective and eccentric, it is from a vivid consciousness of the present that the essay interrogates the aesthetic of Romanticism, turning the interrogation into a sympathetic critique of the Romantic ideology of transcendence epitomized by Coleridge's and Wordsworth's abandonment of republican values and adoption of conservative poetics.[49] The essential ingredient of this new version of the theme is its autobiographical and transparently Wordsworthian

46 Ibid., 260.
47 Ibid., 260.
48 Ibid., 261.
49 "One of the basic illusions of Romantic Ideology is that only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation by 'the world' of politics and money. Romantic poetry 'argues' this (and other) illusions repeatedly, and in the process it 'suffers' the contradictions of its own illusions and the arguments it makes for them", Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology. A Critical Investigation*, 13.

grasp, that rewrites the apostasy of the Lake poets as the first and foremost source of the "growth of critic's mind" (Robinson, 2000), implicitly associating it with the progenitors' fall from paradise to a painful post-lapsarian consciousness. Hazlitt compares his former inability to explain his philosophical views to Coleridge and his failed attempts to "pump up any words, images, notions, apprehensions, facts, or observations, from that gulf of abstraction in which I had plunged myself for four or five years preceding"[50] (Hazlitt, 2000: 254) to his current mastery of argumentative discourse that is tainted by the humbug of professional journalism:

> I can write fast enough now. Am I better than I was then? Oh no! One truth discovered, one pang of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all the fluency and flippancy of the world. Would that I could go back to what I then was! Why can we not revive past times as we can revisit old places! (Hazlitt, 2000: 255)

Mingling nostalgia and irony, Hazlitt replaces the register of recrimination previously adopted with a sustained recollection in tranquillity that acknowledges the significance of the Lake poets in the discovery of his own critical voice and distinguishes the consolidated market value of that voice from its earlier self-conscious inexpressiveness. At the same time, the essay redistributes the legacy of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's visionary poetics in the form of a symbolic capital shared by a whole generation of Romantics who were fortunate enough to live in the golden age of literature and philosophy (Cowper, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Southey, Burke). The paratactic and appositional spatial prose – which skips linear description and accumulates sensory and episodic memories of the warm interactions with Coleridge and Wordsworth in 1798 – beautifully translates the sense of connectedness and mutual recognition of an artistic community that privileges thought-provoking conversations over partisan polemic, inclusion over exclusion, as Jeffrey Robertson rightly argues. It is the sense of horizontal connectedness, of sympathetic communication among poets and between artists and public that is commemorated in "My First Acquaintance with Poets."

50 William Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Essays*, 261.

That is why *The Liberal* setting of the essay is all but irrelevant. In 1823 the romanticized portrait of the first Romantic generation is played against a myth of maturity that positions apostasy no longer as a private failure but as the inevitable outcome of the age's compromise with the deadly alliance of reactionary politics and periodical press in Britain. In this light, the essay reads as a nostalgic recollection of an irretrievable poetic arcadia as much as a cautionary tale directed to the editorial collective of *The Liberal* that envisages the present and future challenges awaiting liberal poets and intellectuals in Britain and elsewhere. Indeed, two are the apostacies referred to in the essay, one explicit and one embedded. The former concerns Coleridge and Wordsworth, who turned Tory out of domestic and monetary contingencies and who, if not absolved, are to some extent justifiable. The latter is the impending apostasy of Byron, of whose genuine commitment to *The Liberal* project Hazlitt always suspected. Compared with Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, Hazlitt's discourse on liberalism sounds both sceptical and Anglocentric, but certainly non resigned. His angle of vision is firmly rooted in Britain's cultural milieu and exhibits an obsessive preoccupation with the legacy of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era in a nation increasingly torn between conservative and democratizing drives. Nonetheless, his reflections reach well beyond national borders and address the present and future of liberal politics and liberal culture in the wide and diverse world of Europe that was bound to cope with the same legacy. Both essays are concerned with the plastic and creative role of memory and imagination and with the authority of the past over the present. Both essays seek to negotiate an idea of the future large enough to encompass the past's most precious inheritance. One can use for Hazlitt the same formula employed for Heinrich Heine by Jerome McGann: he "*situates* Romanticism in the past, it does not *dismiss* it to the past."[51] As the quintessence of the Romantic ironist,[52] Hazlitt observes Romanticism from the critical distance symbolically offered

51 Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, 11.

52 See Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

by the Italian location of the periodical and, as if "arguing in a circle",[53] invites both friends and readers to develop a historical consciousness that is the only valuable means to resist the concurrent mythologising temptations of cultural regression and hero-worship.

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53 "Arguing in a Circle" is the title of Hazlitt's last contribution to *The Liberal*. It is a miscellaneous essay that joins politics and moral philosophy, reviews the apostasy theme, and sketches out a highly unsympathetic portrait of Burke. The piece provides another specimen of ideological ambivalence, since on the one hand it attacks the English people for having become indifferent "to the name of liberty", and on the other hand highlights the contrast between the English traditional liberties and the absence of freedom which taints the legitimate governments of Europe.

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Fabio Liberto

8. The 'united voice of Italy': *The Liberal* and Mary Shelley's 'A Tale of the Passions'

The Liberal has been assessed by a vast array of heterogeneous and at times antithetical perspectives both in recent scholarship and in the press of the day. Jane Stabler has sharply synthesised the controversial reputation of the journal by observing that "[t]o think about the *Liberal* as an important event is to enter contentious territory."[1] One of the reasons the periodical fosters mixed feelings lies in its intrinsic lack of a cohesive scheme: Maria Schoina has remarked that the periodical "cannot be considered a complete, consistent project either on the basis of its political direction, or in terms of its contributions";[2] Barnette Miller similarly maintained that the literary enterprise was "lacking in coordination and common sense";[3] and Michael Eberle-Sinatra, while still admitting some thematic unity, has highlighted the "uneven quality of the writing published in its four issues", which also echoes Phyllis Grosskurth's remarks that the "*Liberal* was a miscellany of disconnected writings without any coordinating tone to unify them in some way."[4] A number of contributions to *The Liberal* nonetheless

1 Jane Stabler, "Religious Liberty in the 'Liberal', 1822–23," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, January 2015, https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=jane-stabler-religious-liberty-in-the-liberal.

2 See Maria Schoina, *Romantic "Anglo-Italians": Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 154; and Maria Schoina, "Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the 'Anglo-Italian' Discourse of *The Liberal*," *Romanticism* 12, no. 2 (November 2006): 117.

3 Barnette Miller, *Leigh Hunt's Relations with Byron, Shelley and Keats* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1910), 113.

4 Michael Eberle-Sinatra, *Leigh Hunt and the London Literary Scene: A Reception History of His Major Works, 1805–1828* (New York; London: Routledge, 2005), 99. Eberle Sinatra also observes that what "emerges as the defining focus of the Liberal is the Italian theme, which is sustained throughout the four issues", 99;

demonstrate a remarkable thematic cohesion, even intense engagement with what can be regarded as authentic dialogical, intertextual, and interdiscursive relationships. As Daisy Hay has maintained, despite the occasional uneven quality of its content, the journal was designed to "provide a platform from which its contributors could highlight the iniquities of the British political establishment", ultimately revealing "a surprisingly coherent political philosophy."[5]

Even before *The Liberal* first appeared (15 October 1822),[6] the periodical was widely criticised in the contemporary press as a strictly political project aimed at jeopardising the prominence of other magazines, such as the *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly Review*, the same Tory and conservative press that had sustainedly criticised the works of the writers participating in *The Liberal* project. It is no wonder that in 1830 John Galt was alreayd pointing out that "the main cause of the failure was the antipathy formed and fostered against it before it appeared".[7] On 9 October 1822, shortly before the first issue was published, even Byron, one of the founders of the periodical, got cold feet and prophetically

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Phyllis Grosskurth, *Byron: The Flawed Angel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 417.

5 Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment," *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 4 (October 2008): 307–308.

6 The periodical was issued in four numbers between October 1822 and July 1823.

7 John Galt, *The Life of Lord Byron* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1830), 270–271. Galt also partly attributed the failure of the project to the publication in the first issue of the periodical of Byron's 'The Vision of Judgment': "Much good could not be anticipated from a work which outraged the loyal and decorous sentiments of the nation towards the memory of George III", Galt, 270. Byron's preface – in which he made clear that the object of satire in his poem was Robert Southey and not George III – was only published in the second issue, since John Murray failed to give it to John Hunt in time for publication. John Hunt was later prosecuted and fined for publishing the poem. See in this regard William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 53–54; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: "A Part of the Elect,"* ed. Betty T. Bennett, vol. 1 (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 285; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 382 n. 3.

labelled the journal as "*a bad* business".[8] The contributors to *The Liberal*, especially the main proponents, had a clear understanding of the warlike atmosphere surrounding print and periodical culture in Britain and of the "intellectual war" that Byron mentions in his *Don Juan*.[9] Several scholars have illustrated the importance of periodicals in shaping the cultural politics of the time and their pivotal role as repositories of public opinion.[10] Mark Schoenfield points out that the war Byron refers to "was fought over economics and information, over political and aesthetic norms, over the control of public opinion and the boundary between public and private" and, one might add, over questions of hegemonic representations of national character and identity.[11] While *The Liberal* takes shape within this very context and participates in the belligerent discourse swirling around the periodical culture of the day, its overall conception was aimed at distancing the magazine from the "literary lower empire" of the periodical press,[12] from those "professedly literary" periodical works that "three-fourths of English readers are led to purchase".[13] This was done

8 Letter to John Murray, 9 October 1822. George Gordon Byron, *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, ed. Thomas Moore (London: John Murray, 1860), 596.

9 George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan, and Willis Winslow Pratt (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1996), 412.

10 Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Finkelstein, ed., *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Jonathan Burke Cutmore, ed., *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: A Critical Analysis* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007); Mark Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: The "Literary Lower Empire"* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); William Christie, *The Edinburgh Review in the Literary Culture of Romantic Britain: Mammoth and Megalonyx* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016); Peter Denney, William Christie, and Jock Macleod, eds., *Politics and Emotions in Romantic Periodicals* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

11 Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity*, 2.

12 Byron, *Don Juan*, 412.

13 As S. T. Coleridge remarked in a letter to Daniel Stuart, 17 December 1808. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Robert Southey, *Letters from the Lake Poets: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, to*

by lining up as contributors some of the most renowned and controversial names in literary circles. P. B. Shelley was already using martial imagery when, in a letter to his friend Peacock written in 1819, he anticipated his desire to gather a "band of staunch reformers, resolute yet skilful infidels" to defy the "literary coalition" of the *Quarterly Review* and its "preponderance against the cause of improvement".[14] British reviewers did not tolerate this figurative offensive and immediately counterattacked with a series of harsh reviews of *The Liberal*. *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, for instance, criticised the articles in the periodical for being "of a very commonplace character, and are evidently the production of regular hackney writers, who are paid so much per sheet for their contributions",[15] and later labelled the final number of *The Liberal* as "insufferably dull."[16] *The Gentleman's Magazine* attacked the periodical even more harshly by judging its compositions as having "little merit of their own, and we begin to suspect that the whole story is a fiction, invented to remove from the shelf some of the veriest trash that ever polluted paper. The flippancy of the verse, and the vulgarity of the prose, are its leading features at present, with the lowest imbecility of remark."[17]

In this figurative war that *The Liberal* was meant to invigorate, Italy represented the geographical space from which the founders of the magazine would conceive their cosmopolitan undertaking. More specifically, Italy came to be considered as a metonymic literary outpost, a site from which to defend the cause of liberty, as well as the Hunts' own personal stance on liberalism within a wider European

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Daniel Stuart (London: Printed by West, Newman and Co., 1889), 106; See also Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity*, 14.

14 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2:81; On P. B. Shelley and Tory reviewers, see also Kim Wheatley, *Shelley and His Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 40–57.

15 "The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South. No. II," *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 11 January 1823, 26.

16 "The Liberal, No. IV," *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 2 August 1823, 481.

17 "The Liberal. No. II. 8vo. p. 134. Hunt.," *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1823, 158.

context. In chapter XVII of his autobiography, dedicated to his voyage to Italy, Leigh Hunt defines the pan-European urgency driving their undertaking, as well as the distinctive political teleology of the periodical: "I proceed to hasten over the declining fortunes of the *Examiner*. Politics different from ours were triumphing all over Europe".[18] In the same chapter, Hunt also reports his brother's urge for action: "while a struggle was made in England to reanimate the *Examiner*, a simultaneous endeavour should be made in Italy to secure new aid to our prospects and new friends to the cause of liberty".[19] While John Hunt was seemingly discussing plans for literary endeavours, his peculiar selection of words, his strategic choice of a geographical outpost, and the emphasis on securing new alliances all resonate with the threatening tones of a literal call to arms.

Despite Hunt's claims in the preface that the "object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect",[20] the political ambition of the periodical is evident in several of its contributions, the ideological nature of which is often explicit, as is the use of Italy as a metaphorical land of potentiality. *The Liberal* was without a doubt cosmopolitan and international in scope, with articles on Spanish, German, and French subjects. However, as Hunt himself remarked, "Italian literature, in particular, will be a favourite subject".[21] Indeed, the journal's sustained interest in Italian literature, art, history and politics, or more broadly in the "Italian idea", as Will Bowers has recently defined it,[22] reverberates throughout the four issues, and arguably provides the most unifying and coherent element to its overall structure.[23] The Italian *topos*

18 Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1850), 2:230.

19 Hunt, 2:231; See also Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 27.

20 Leigh Hunt, "Preface," *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* 1, no. 1 (1822): vii.

21 Hunt, vii.

22 Will Bowers, *The Italian Idea: Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture, 1815–1823* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

23 Significantly, Marshall identifies one of the reasons for the failure of the periodical in the "problem arising from the geographical situation [which] was probably insurmountable", Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 211.

in *The Liberal* may be regarded as one of the major elements in the journal's wider pan-European project of literary, political, and social comparison, assimilation and appropriation. Cosmopolitism and even polyglossia became fundamental to informing the counter-hegemonic discourse that the proponents of the periodical so ardently needed to "question state-promoted forms, genres, themes, and even the nation itself", as Bowers has more broadly observed about English poets in Italy.[24] The Italian theme provided fertile ground to contrast the conservative mindset widespread in the contributors' homeland through a set of specific and at times radically alternative ideological, geographical and historical demarcations. While Hunt's contributions play a pivotal role in the construction of the Italian idea within *The Liberal*, by offering a leitmotif throughout the four issues of the journal, they cannot be regarded, as some scholars have suggested, as the only sizeable contributions dealing with the presentation of this "geographical other",[25] nor they should be considered as a solitary attempt to educate his fellow countrymen about Italy.

Besides Hunt's, a number of articles in the periodical explore and represent Italian culture, literature and history.[26] Mary Shelley's contributions, which are thematically concerned with questions of partisanship and political unity, death and immortality, predestined love and nostalgic and elegiac feelings, appear particularly relevant to the consolidation of the Italian and cosmopolitan leitmotif of the journal. Mary

24 Bowers, *The Italian Idea*, 31.

25 As Maria Schoina has remarked, "[e]ven though *The Liberal* contains a number of mediocre translations from Italian poets such as Alfieri and Ariosto, as well as two short stories with Italian themes, Hunt's travelogue on Italy is the only sizeable effort on this publication to acquaint its British audience with the adopted land, and therefore, to educate his 'un-Italianized countrymen' at home". Schoina, *Romantic "Anglo-Italians,"* 154.

26 In the first issue: 'Ariosto's Episode of Cloridan, Medoro and Angelica', 'The Country Maiden' (a translation from Poliziano's 'La pastorella si leva per tempo'), 'Epigram of Alfieri'; in the second issue: 'The Giuli Tre', 'A Tale of the Passions', 'Virgil's Hostess', 'The Suliotes', 'Alfieri's Benediction', 'An Ultra License', 'Portrait of Himself'; in the third issue: 'Apuleius', 'Talari Innamorati'; in the fourth issue: the first canto of Pulci's 'Morgante Maggiore', together with its English translation, and 'Giovanni Villani'.

Shelley wrote for the periodical two articles of Italian subject ('A Tale of the Passions', No. II, 289–325, and 'Giovanni Villani', No. IV, 281–97) and one article related to French literature ('Madame D'Houtetot', No. III, 67–83). The short story written for the second issue is indicative of her strong and long-lasting engagement with Italian culture and history, but it more interestingly proves that her contributions were written with clear cohesive ambition, as she situated them within the overall thematic, ideological, cosmopolitan, and even intertextual scope of the periodical.

In the aftermath of Percy's death on 8 July 1822, about two months before the publication of the first number of the periodical, Mary Shelley did not write much, but she soon began to feel the urge to resume literary work. As Julian Marshall observed, she resolved "to give all the help she could to *The Liberal*"[27] and set out to write a piece for the periodical. 'A Tale of the Passions' appeared anonymously in the second issue of *The Liberal* on 1 January 1823.[28] Like most of the articles in the periodical, it was mostly received by the English press without much praise: the reviewer of *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* bitterly pointed out that "[w]e pass over, without notice, a 'Tale of the Passions,' which, had we known its worthlessness, we should have passed over without reading";[29] and *The Gentleman's Magazine* remarked that "the 'Tale of the Passions' has nothing wherewith to move those of its readers".[30]

'A Tale of the Passions' was Mary Shelley's first attempt at historical short-fiction, as well as the first of her works published after her husband's death. Scholars have remarked that the short story may have been written before that time, even if there is some debate as to

27 Julian Marshall, ed., *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (London: Bentley & Son, 1889), 2:23.

28 'A Tale of the Passions' was later serialised in 1823 in *The Weekly Entertainer; and West of England Miscellany*, n.s. 7 (see Martin Garrett, ed., *Mary Shelley: A Chronology* [Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002], 61) and subsequently included in *The Romancist and Novelist's Library* (1839), in which it was renamed as 'A Tale of the Passions: Or the Death of Despina' and published for the first time under the author's name.

29 "The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South. No. II," 27.

30 "The Liberal. No. II. 8vo. Pp. 134. Hunt.," 158.

whether a manuscript really exists bearing an endorsement by Percy.[31] It seems more plausible, however, that the short story was written between October and November 1822.[32] Based on Mary Shelley's writings, we know that on 2 October 1822 she recommenced writing literature, as she refers to her "[l]iterary labours" as one of the occupations elevating her from lethargy.[33] Mary Shelley explicitly mentions the completion of 'A Tale of the Passions' in a letter to Jane Williams, 5 December 1822, in which she specifically considers writing as a means to alleviate her grief: "it is only in books and literary occupation that I shall ever find alleviation. […] After having written an Article (a Tale) for the ensuing number of the Liberal I am employed in copying my Shelley Mss."[34] There are a few other scattered references to 'A Tale of the Passions' in Mary Shelley's writings. An entry in her journal on 10 November 1822 very possibly refers to 'A Tale of the Passions', since the second issue of *The Liberal* was in preparation between October and November of the same year: "I have made my first probation in writing & it has done me much good, & I get more calm. The stream begins to take to its new channel".[35] We cannot be certain of the extent to which the letter that William Godwin sends to Mary Shelley, dated only a few days later

31 As maintained by Elizabeth Nitchie (*Mary Shelley, Author of "Frankenstein"* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 156). According to Garret, Mary Shelley began working on the story at some point before Percy's death (Garrett, *Mary Shelley*, 60). Also the editors of *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844* maintain that Mary had substantially written the story before Percy's death (Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, 431 n. 2). See also Mary Shelley, *Collected Tales and Stories*, ed. Charles E. Robinson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 374; Lisa Vargo, "Writing for *The Liberal*," in *Mary Shelley Her Circle and Her Contemporaries*, ed. Lucy Morrison and L. Adam Mekler (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 134.

32 In November 1822, Hunt very possibly had in his possession a copy of 'A Tale of the Passions'. In a letter to his nephew Henry L. Hunt, Leigh Hunt writes: "I send you, in this letter, *an Italian story* of M[rs] Shelley's (a very good one)". However, despite his initial claim, he adds at the end of the letter that "[M][rs] Shelley's story is detained by an accident for the next letter." Payson G. Gates, "A Leigh Hunt-Byron Letter," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 2 (1953): 16, 17.

33 Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, 431.

34 Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: "A Part of the Elect,"* 1:296.

35 Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, 442.

(15 November), may suggest that he was aware of his daughter's plans to write a story about the aftermath of Manfred's death, as the shadow of the Italian king also hovers throughout Shelley's second novel *Valperga* (written 1817–1821): "You ask my opinion of your literary plans. If you expect any price, you must think of something new: *Manfred* is a subject that nobody interests himself about; the interest, therefore, must be made, and no bookseller understands anything about that contingency."[36] Godwin, who was at the time negotiating the publication of *Valperga* with Longman, before finally turning to Whittaker in 1823,[37] continues his letter in a quite patronizing manner, by observing that "a book about Italy as it is, written with any talent, would be sure to sell; but I am afraid you know very little about the present race of Italians."[38]

While Mary Shelley's knowledge of the "present race" of Italians may have appeared questionable to Godwin,[39] she was certainly well informed about the history of Italy.[40] 'A Tale of the Passions' was

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36 Marshall, *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 2:51. While Sunstein maintains that Mary Shelley used her research on Manfred for "A Tale of the Passions" after Godwin had advised that a book on the subject would not have interested the public, the chronology of the correspondence suggests that Mary had planned the short story before Godwin's advice. Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 232.

37 See in this regard: Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, 442 n. 2; Mary Shelley, *Valperga, or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Tilottama Rajan (Peterborough, ON; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1998), 14; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley. Valperga or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Nora Crook, vol. 3 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), xii–xiv.

38 Marshall, *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 2:51–52.

39 In a letter written to Leigh Hunt in Italian on 3 December 1820, Mary Shelley had actually expressed her satisfaction with her growing knowledge of the Italians: "intanto conoscemo ogni giorno un poco piu dei Italiani" (trans. "we get to know a little more every day of the Italians"). Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), 1:116–118.

40 Mary Shelley does not always praise contemporary Italians. Like her husband, she had some difficulty in reconciling the idea of Italy she had assembled from books with the direct experience of the country. In a letter she wrote to her friend Maria Gisborne, on 22 January 1819, she made it clear that she was far more fascinated

conceived after P. B. Shelley's attentive study of Italian history and literature, as well as Mary Shelley's own meticulous and extensive research on the Italian glorious past, which she tried to portray with painstaking accuracy in her historical works.[41] The conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines, which provides the historical and narrative frame to the short story, was also used in *Valperga*, in which the districts of Italy "were torn to pieces by domestic faction, and [...] [t]he antient quarrels of the Guelphs and the Ghibelines were started with renovated zeal".[42] For 'A Tale of the Passions' Mary Shelley draws from the same sources that she used for her novel, primarily Giovanni Villani's *Croniche* (1537), the second edition of Sismondi's *L'Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen-Age* (1818), and Ludovico Antonio Muratori's *Dissertazioni sopra le antichità Italiane* (in the 1765–1766 edition).[43] *Valperga* and 'A Tale of the Passions' also share the use of historical displacement as a means both to draw a parallel with the contemporary situation in Italy[44] and to provide a wider commentary on the political debates taking place in her homeland.

Mary Shelley's tale begins with a historical account of prior events. The fabula is set in Florence during the Italian civil war in the year 1268. The Guelphs are celebrating May Day and their reclamation of the city of Florence two years after the death of Manfred, former king

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with the Italians' glorious past: "The Italians are so very disagreeable. [...] They seem to act as if they had all died fifty years ago, and now went about their work like the ghostly sailors of Coleridge's enchanted ship". Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: "A Part of the Elect,"* 1:85. On Mary Shelley's ambivalent attitude towards the Italians, see also Elisabetta Marino, *Mary Shelley e l'Italia: il viaggio, il Risorgimento, la questione femminile* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2011), 26–78.

41 William D. Brewer, "Mary Shelley's *Valperga*: The Triumph of Euthanasia's Mind," *European Romantic Review European Romantic Review* 5, no. 2 (1995): 133–148.

42 Shelley, *Valperga, or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, 57.

43 Martin Garrett, *The Palgrave Literary Dictionary of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 298–299.

44 See in this regard Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Mary Shelley's *Valperga* and Women's Historical Revisionism," in *Italomania(s): Italy and the English Speaking World from Chaucer to Seamus Heaney*, ed. Giuseppe Galigani (Firenze: M. Pagliai, 2007), 99–110.

of Naples, who had been supported by the Ghibellines. The Guelphs resumed their dominion over the kingdom, while the Ghibellines, who had lost Florence and were "receding from castle to castle",[45] took refuge in Lucca in the hope that Corradino, Manfred's nephew and rightful heir to the throne, would come back from Germany to reclaim his birthright.[46] The reader is soon made aware that the historical details presented at the beginning of the story are not strictly pivotal to the plot. Nonetheless, the historical contextualisation remains functional to the overall narratological effect and to Mary Shelley's meta-literary purpose to use history as a hermeneutic means to understand the present. As soon as the third paragraph begins, the tone of the narrative abruptly changes. The reader's initial expectations of a macrohistorical account are not met, as the focus of the story rapidly shifts towards a private and microhistorical dimension.

The third paragraph introduces Mona Gegia and Cincolo de' Becari's household, which is portrayed as a place of division rather than as the typical hearth of domestic love and communion: in their house, even the fire lighting up the room and warming the *minestra* is endangered by external interferences, and becomes "extinguished" (291) by the sunlight coming from outside. Mona Gegia is a representative of "the decrepid and sick" Guelphs who stay at home despite the celebrations taking place in the streets of Florence, while her husband is among the "discontented" Ghibellines (290). The description of Gegia and Cincolo's domestic milieu is presented with a certain degree of ambiguity. The distinction between their private house and the public *piazza* is often hazy and, as the narrative progresses, it becomes more and more evident that their household provides a specular projection of the ongoing political tension outside the house, artfully mimicked by the opposing partisanship of husband and wife. Gegia and Cincolo's

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45 Mary Shelley, "A Tale of the Passions," *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South* 1, no. 2 (1823): 289. The page numbers of subsequent quotations are given in the text.

46 The narration in *Valperga* is introduced by a similar historical contextualization and brief explanation of the conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. At the beginning of the novel, the Ghibellines are also similarly banished from their native town.

relationship, rather than depending on love and affection, is mainly characterised by their ideological choices: even in their primary necessity to denote each other, Gegia refers to Cincolo not simply as her husband, but as her "Ghibelline husband" (291). Their happiness being mainly dependent on political reasons can thus never coincide: "tell me what happy tidings make thee so woe-begone" (293), Gegia asks her husband, wittily insinuating that the happiness of the one would inevitably be the misery of the other. The intrusion of politics within their household is detrimental to the couple, and their factionalism will eventually bring catastrophe in their lives.

The problem of division, which defines Gegia and Cincolo's relationship, is a central *topos* in 'A Tale of the Passions', since the story presents and questions a number of contrasts based on ideological demarcations, gender roles, and conflicting passions. If on the one hand 'A Tale of the Passions' can be read as an illustration of Mary Shelley's support for a still embryonic ideal of Italian national unity, it more universally epitomises her clear disapproval of political factionalism and its harmful invasion into the private, domestic, and sentimental sphere, which resonates throughout the plot as the main cause of human suffering. Mary Shelley extends her critique of divisive conducts by providing other remarkable examples of conflict in her portrayal of male and female characters. While men are described as active agents in political decision-making, women, despite showing strong and uncompromised partisan ideals, remain inert subjects within the pre-established political superstructure represented in the story. Gegia is initially described as a clever and canny woman: "[t]he quickness of her eye spoke the activity of her mind, and the slight irritability that lingered about the corners of her lips might be occasioned by the continual war maintained between her bodily and mental faculties." (291). In spite of her quickness of mind, Gegia, whose solid political preference is voiced throughout the story, never leaves her house, apparently because of a "bad leg": a physical hindrance which metonymically takes on ideological connotation as Gegia also defines it as her "Ghibelline leg" (290). Because of this physical impairment, Gegia's political ideals remain confined to domesticity and the dominion of private utterances – often imprecations – which are at times even deprived of a dialectic and dialogical dimension and befittingly defined in the text as "soliloquies" (291).

The other female character in the story, as well as the real protagonist and to some extent Mary Shelley's autonarrative fictional equivalent,[47] is Despina dei Elisei, Gegia and Cincolo's foster-daughter. Like Euthanasia in *Valperga*, Despina is moved by "the hope of freedom for Italy, of revived learning and the reign of peace for all the world".[48] Despina's fascination with and involvement in politics is so undivided as to affect even her most private choices: her unconditional love for Manfred had compelled her to decline the marriage proposal made by Guielmo Lostendardo, the current Guelph leader. As an act of revenge, Lostendardo had changed his political loyalties and decided to support the restoration of the Guelph supremacy in Florence. Since he turned from "the bosom friend of Manfred" to "a traitor", Despina uses her oratory – which is often permeated by elegiac tones for the deceased king – to remind Lostendardo of both his despicable betrayal and "the united voice of Italy" (307) that she is meant to represent.[49] Despina's loyalty remains blindly stable, as her martyrdom-infused claims and support

47 'A Tale of the Passions' may be regarded as one of Mary Shelley's 'autonarrations', to use the definition coined by Tilottama Rajan to characterise Mary Shelley's other works. According to Rajan, in autonarrations "characters and episodes from the author's life are reworked into fictional form", allowing Mary Shelley "to think through the cultural and emotional configurations in which she was inscribed by transposing them onto the mirror-stage of a virtual reality projected into the past, the future, or the fantastic. Mary Shelley's texts can thus be seen as an autometaphoric record of her relationship to a Romanticism that she displaces between fictional equivalents of Byron, Godwin, P. B. Shelley, and herself," Tilottama Rajan, "Between Romance and History: Possibility and Contingency in Godwin, Leibniz, and Mary Shelley's *Valperga*," in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 88. In 'A Tale of the Passions', Mary Shelley's autonarrative impulse can be identified in several biographical and ideological similitudes to Despina, including the protagonist's lack of her mother; her loss and elegiac commemoration of the man she loved; her resolve to take part in the political discourse in a world ruled and solely discussed by men (Mary Shelley was the only female writer contributing to *The Liberal*); her need to hide her own gender and identity to fulfil that aspiration ('A Tale of the Passions' was published anonymously); and her overall vision of political unity.

48 Shelley, *Valperga, or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, 70.

49 Similarly in *Valperga*, Euthanasia tries to persuade Castruccio to relinquish his ruthless plans of revenge, "to throw aside this hard-heartedness". Shelley, 337.

for the deceased king Manfred suggest: "The nephew of Manfred must sit upon the throne of his ancestors; and to achieve that I will endure what I am about to endure" (304). In spite of Despina's undaunted passion for righteousness, her gender thwarts her from having immediate active agency in politics. To overcome this limitation, she resolves to disguise herself as Ricciardo, a role that she very credibly maintains until the end of the story. Even Despina's foster-parents fail to recognise her, although, on first seeing their daughter cross-dressed as Ricciardo, Gegia exclaims "Gesu Maria" without apparent awareness of its implications. As a matter of fact, Gegia's interjection craftily indicates gender duality – deprived as it is from the correlative conjunction 'e' which is conventionally used in the Italian expression – and thus anticipates her future reaction to the revelation of Ricciardo's real identity. While Despina's male attire remains credible, her agency in the story stays unquestioned, as her ease in reaching the tyrant's palace suggests. But the moment Despina's real identity – and gender – is unveiled, her body is instantly exposed to visual scrutiny, forceful control and physical domination. After Lostendardo "seizes her hand with a giant's grasp", he menacingly remarks: "I have prayed for this night and day, and thou art now here! Nay, do not struggle; you are mine; for by my salvation I swear that thou shalt never again escape me" (305). Despina's words become equally subjected to her new and gender-aware relationship with Lostendardo and lose their performative force. Despina's passionate monologues at Lostendardo's palace, though persuasive and full of ethos, are not immediately effective nor perlocutionary in J. L. Austin's sense of the word,[50] since they seem to "not either advance or injure the object for which she came" (306). Instead, Lostendardo openly reasserts his male agency and dominance by persisting in gazing "on her with triumph and malignant pride" (306).

In Mary Shelley's masterful enunciation of diverging ideological and gender realities, the Italian characterisation surfaces as a distinct leitmotif and provides further historical, geographical, and linguistic levels of differentiation. Mary Shelley's ability in storytelling is

50 On perlocutionary acts, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 108–119.

noticeable from the incipit of the story, in which the narrator artfully recreates the long-lost world of medieval Italy. To obtain an effect of displacement and cultural alterity, Mary Shelley relies on conspicuous, even if at times improper, Italian terminology and expressions,[51] as well as on some topographical references to situate the action in a distant space of alterity. Examples include: the celebration in the streets of Florence, which is nuanced by folkloric and linguistic connotations, with people setting up a "festa" and the "Carroccio" (289) being led through the main streets; Guelphs assembled in the Piazza del Duomo; a very typical "pot of *minestra*" (291) hanging on the fireplace in Cincolo and Gegia's house (291); and characters, including Gegia, emphatically exclaiming "Gesu Maria!" (296) for no apparent reason. Even when Mary Shelley uses words that are certainly not Italian, but that she probably thought were, such as the Spanish-sounding "fazioles" (290), the anglicised "canzonets" (289), the Latin-sounding "calrasio" (291) – translated in the 1839 edition published in *The Romancist and Novelist's Library* with the improbable term "stuff"[52] – English readers might still have experienced the illusion of a genuine Italian context. The term "fazioles", in particular, must have sounded distinctly Italian to Mary Shelley, since she later used it also in her 'Recollections of Italy' (1824) to characterise her representation of Venetian women: "the dark eyes and finely-shaped brows of the women peeping from beneath their fazioles"[53] were among the peculiarities one could admire in the city of Venice. The use of inaccurate terms and expressions – which possibly results from Mary Shelley's imperfect command of the Italian language – combined with the more general inclusion of polyglossia within the short story may also indicate Mary Shelley's reticence in establishing a discourse revolving strictly around a realistic depiction

51 In the 1839 edition, most of these expressions are accompanied by English translation under brackets.

52 The term was later changed by Charles E. Robinson to "coloratio", a post-classical Latin term which refers to the action of bronzing or tanning (the face). Shelley, *Collected Tales and Stories*, 2. See also "Coloration, n.," in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed 11 September 2020, http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/36565.

53 Mary Shelley, "Recollections of Italy", in Shelley, *Collected Tales and Stories*, 27.

of Italy. On the contrary, it seems that through her masterful portrayal of otherness, Mary Shelley was aiming to construct a fictionalised and hyperreal,[54] rather than real, representation of the country. The polyglossic reality represented in 'A Tale of the Passions' may also serve another purpose: while it more broadly allows readers to approach otherness from a linguistic standpoint, it also reinforces the cosmopolitan scope of the periodical by emphasising cultural diversity within the text and by questioning the cultural and linguistic hegemony of the English language typical of the contemporary British press.

The descriptions of the characters are also evocative of geographical otherness. If Gegia is mostly described in terms of her attire and personal appearance – with her "dress of green calrasio", her head "covered by a red kerchief", and her grey hair "combed back from her high and wrinkled brow" (291) –, her husband is portrayed in more specific and geocentric physical details:

> […] a short, stunted man, more than sixty years of age; his shoulders were broad and high; [his legs short;] his lank hair [, though it grew now only on the back of his head,] was still coal-black; his brows were overhanging and bushy; his eyes black and quick; [his complexion dark and weather-beaten:] his lips as it were contradicted the sternness of the upper part of his face, for their gentle curve betokened even delicacy of sentiment, and his smile was inexpressibly sweet [, although a short, bushy grey beard somewhat spoiled the expression of his countenance].[55]

Cincolo is physically and physiognomically presented in a very detailed way as a short and stunted man, with short legs, coal-black hair, overhanging and bushy brows, black and quick eyes, and dark and weather-beaten complexion. Several of these epithets, included in the first three editions of the story, were later removed by the editor of the

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54 Borrowing Jean Baudrillard's postmodern conceptualisation in *Simulacra et Simulation* (1981), the term hyperreality is used here in Baudrillard's basic definition as a simulation of a reality based on "models of a real without origin or reality". Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

55 Shelley, "A Tale of the Passions," 1823, 292. The phrases and expressions that were later removed by Richard Garnett are indicated in square brackets. Mary Shelley, *Tales and Stories by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Richard Garnett (London: W. Paterson & Co., 1891), 115.

first collected edition of the *Tales and Stories by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* in 1891,[56] probably because of the exacerbated caricaturing and geocentric connotation they evoked. Cincolo's description is not particularly flattering, as his dark and shadowy features, vaguely reminiscent of Italian gothic villains, stand in stark contrast with Ricciardo's delicate and fair appearance: "His figure though not tall was slight; and his countenance though of wonderful beauty and regularity of feature, was pale as monumental marble; the thick and curling locks of his chestnut hair clustered over his brow and round his fair throat" (295).[57] If Ricciardo's beautiful and regular figure is a reflection of his moral rectitude – besides signalling his real identity – Lostendardo's physical features all indicate his "terrible egotism", and his forehead, with its several contradictory lines, serves as a physical memento of his moral disloyalty to the former King.[58] In 'A Tale of the Passions', physical and physiognomic depictions are hence artfully employed both to define geographical difference and to function as an ostensive vehicle to indicate moral value, as well as diverging ideological sympathies.

The Italian characterization of Mary Shelley's short story may be regarded as emblematic of the sustained Italian discourse uniting many of the articles in *The Liberal*. While a certain exegetical difficulty persists in considering each and every contribution as part of a cohesive design, this should probably be regarded as an implicit heterogeneity typical of most miscellaneous works. This notwithstanding, 'A Tale of the Passions' successfully proves the author's clear awareness of the

56 Shelley, *Tales and Stories by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 115.

57 Also compare with the description in Garnett's edited version: "His figure was slight, and his countenance, though beautiful, was pale as monumental marble; the thick and curling locks of his chestnut hair clustered over his brow and round his fair throat". Shelley, *Tales and Stories by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 118.

58 "Every feature of his countenance spoke of the struggle of passions, and the terrible egotism of one who would sacrifice even himself to the establishment of his will: his black eyebrows were scattered, his grey eyes deep set and scowling, his look at once stern and haggard. A smile seemed never to have disturbed the settled scorn which his lips expressed; his high forehead, already becoming bald, was marked by a thousand contradictory lines." Shelley, "A Tale of the Passions," 1823, 305.

purported thematic unity of the periodical, as well as of the ideological implications behind *The Liberal* as a political project. Mary Shelley also demonstrates her familiarity with the articles that had been published in the first issue of the periodical, which 'A Tale of the Passions' closely relates to by means of dialogical and intertextual relationship. The existence of an intertextual discourse within the periodical has been partially identified by Nikki Hessell in her study of Leigh Hunt's conception of *The Liberal* as his elegy to P. B. Shelley's memory. The periodical, in Hessell's words, was designed "to fulfil what he believed to have been Shelley's wishes", and some of Hunt's contributions "can in fact be read as his 'Adonais'"[59] to P. B. Shelley. Besides Hunt's, other articles in *The Liberal* participate in the intertextual network of the periodical, and Mary Shelley's provides an elaborate example. In 'A Tale of the Passions', the citational and referential networks are incorporated within a tripartite scheme connecting different but interrelated sources, the first being her husband's elegiac poem 'Adonais' (1821).

Like Hunt's contributions, 'A Tale of the Passions' resonates with P. B. Shelley's elegy to Keats[60] and, as a consequence, it echoes Hunt's own commemorative references to 'Adonais' in *The Liberal*. Thematically, the persistent political discourse in a 'A Tale of the Passions' is constantly interwoven with a nostalgic and elegiac tone, emerging both from Despina's idealization of death and of the deceased Manfred, and from the short story's hopeful finale, wherein Despina's tragic demise allows her longed-for agency to finally be fulfiled. Lexically and semantically, Despina's own remarks on Manfred's death provide the first level of intertextuality, by establishing a direct connection to P. B. Shelley's 'Adonais'. Just like Adonais's "fate and fame shall be /An echo and a light unto eternity!",[61] so are Manfred's. The deceased king is celebrated throughout the short story as a perpetual

59 Nikki Hessell, "Elegiac Wonder and Intertextuality in the *Liberal*," *Romanticism* 18, no. 3 (October 2012): 242, 240.

60 As Charles E. Robinson remarks, Despina's idealization of death and the dead Manfred in "A Tale of the Passions" recalls stanzas from P. B. Shelley's "Adonais", Shelley, *Collected Tales and Stories*, 374.

61 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald Henry Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (London; New York: Norton, 1977), 392, ll. 8–9.

presence and an immortal spirit: "How can he die who is immortalized in my thoughts – my thoughts, that comprehend the universe, and contain eternity in their graspings?" (306). In addition to the numerous lexical references in 'A Tale of the Passions', Mary Shelley also engages with some of the theoretical conundrums that Percy ponders upon in his elegy. In particular, in its idealization of Manfred's death, 'A Tale of the Passions' attempts to overcome some of P. B. Shelley's perceived obstacles: while Percy turns to his own heart and blames it for lingering in false hopes – since life is fleeting and separates the dead from the living –[62] Mary Shelley seems to counter both Percy's and her own despondence by positing that after death the spirit remains and permeates all things: "now, he is a part of all things; his spirit surrounds me, interpenetrates; and divided from him during his life, his death has united me to him for ever" (306).

The citational and intertextual elements that Mary Shelley skilfully deploys in 'A Tale of the Passions' are not only external to *The Liberal*, such as those to P. B. Shelley's poem, but are also internal, and they closely relate to other contributions within the periodical. In order to move from an external to an internal level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, Mary Shelley relies on a threshold figure, a character in Percy's poem who is also one of the main contributors to *The Liberal*, namely Leigh Hunt himself. Hunt appears in P. B. Shelley's elegiac poem as one of Keats's mourners and, in Percy's characterization, he is described as silent and still, paralysed by grief, "hushed" and with a "heavy heart heaving without a moan", his form leaning "sadly o'er the white death-bed,/In mockery of monumental stone".[63] The image of the stone typically used on funeral monuments, with its inherent silence and stillness, establishes itself as a recurrent and pivotal *topos* in 'A Tale of the Passions'. Despina's first appearance as Ricciardo introduces the first direct association in the story, and anticipates her ominous fate once she is proleptically described

62 "Die,/If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!"; "Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here/They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!"; "No more let Life divide what Death can join together", Shelley, 405, ll. 464–65; 470–71; l. 477.

63 Shelley, 400, l. 307; l. 311; ll. 309–310.

as "pale as monumental marble" (295). References to marble are also used elsewhere in the story with a similar anticipatory and pre-significatory function: when Cincolo and Ricciardo reach Lostendardo's palace, they are welcomed by "the marble of the floor" (305) which reflects the glare of the numerous torches and foreshadows once again Despina's dire destiny. Once in front of Lostendardo, Despina finally takes on the ominous semblance of a corpse, with "pale cheek and glazed eye" (306) and, despite her noble design lifted her "above mortal dread", she remains "as impassive as the marble she resembled" (306). This second level of referentiality has a key role in the final transition in Mary Shelley's intertextual strategy: she conducts the reader by means of her craftily woven Ariadne-thread from the first external level – through which she links her tale both to Percy's elegiac text and her own expression of loss – to the second internal level – through which 'A Tale of the Passions' connects to one of the main contributors to *The Liberal*, in his specific role of character in Percy's elegy.

Hunt's liminality becomes crucial in the third level of intertextual referentiality, in which he is no longer considered as a literary persona but in his role as writer for *The Liberal*. In this final stage, Mary Shelley intensifies the textual and discursive relation between 'A Tale of the Passions' and Hunt's contributions, and establishes an interdiscursive network that helps her to invigorate the Italian theme within the periodical. Mary Shelley's choice of the Italian theme and her attempt to recreate a realistic, and at times hyperrealistic, medieval Italian setting are certainly consistent with Hunt's attempt at representing Italy in his *Letters from Abroad*. However, it is Hunt's 'The Florentine Lovers', published in the first issue of *The Liberal*, that provides Mary Shelley with fertile intertextual ground. Hunt's story is based on Marco Lastri's 'The Florentine Observer' – which Mary Shelley probably recommended to him – and shares several similarities with 'A Tale of the Passions',[64] including the Italian setting and characterization, the dwelling on Italian terms and names ("How delicious it is to repeat these beautiful Italian

64 In this regard, see also Vargo, "Writing for *The Liberal*," 134–137; Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, 76.

names […] for the pleasure of lingering upon the sound.");[65] the intestine conflict between the two political parties (Hunt's story is similarly set "[a]t the time when Florence was divided into the two fierce parties of Guelfs and Ghibelines"[66]); and the way in which political hostility and factionalism is depicted as a way to disturb private affections. Political hostility poisoning private relationships, as in the case of Gegia and Cincolo, is also at the core of Hunt's story. The feud between the two families in 'The Florentine Lovers', which stemmed from their opposed partisanship, is the main obstacle in the love relationship between the two protagonists, Dianora and Ippolito:

> It was seldom that love took place between individuals of homes so divided; but, when it did, it was proportionately vehement, either because the individuals themselves were vehement in all their passions, or because love, falling upon two gentle hearts, made them the more pity and love one another, to find themselves in so unnatural a situation.[67]

The leitmotif of division is clearly also central to Hunt's story and intimately intermingled with the adverse political sympathies of the two families. The love story between individuals belonging to such diverse families, in Hunt's analysis, can either make them exasperated at their passionate attitudes or intensify their loving and sympathetic feelings for one another. If Hunt's story, which is also connoted from the beginning as *a tale of the passions*, sets to illustrate the relationship between two individuals of "this latter kind", for the second issue of *The Liberal* Mary Shelley conceives a complementary analysis, illustrating the former kind of love, the now worn-out relationship between two individuals who are vehement in all their passions, especially political. Unlike Gegia and Cincolo, who throughout the story demonstrate the woeful effects that political division has had on their relationship and life, the protagonists in Hunt's story are much more aware of the detrimental outcomes of factionalism, especially Ippolito, who had experienced "the worst feelings attendant on political hostility; and they now

65 Leigh Hunt, "The Florentine Lovers," *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South*, no. 1 (1822): 53.

66 Hunt, 51.

67 Hunt, 51.

appeared to him odious".[68] At one point in Mary Shelley's tale, though, Gegia abandons her strong loquacity in support of her political party and nostalgically remarks "those were happy times when there was neither Guelph nor Ghibelline" (294).[69]

The panoply of representations of diversity, division and conflict within 'A Tale of the Passions', fuelled by other similar representations in the periodical, all contribute to build up Mary Shelley's ideological enunciation of her utopian (and Dantean) ideal of political unity. The binary opposition in the story between the two political factions provides the macrostructure through which all other dichotomies take shape and pervade the narrative: Italian *vs.* English imagery; men *vs.* women; fair *vs.* dark beauty; edifying *vs.* disruptive passions; public *vs.* private; unconditional love *vs.* revengeful hate; loyalty *vs.* treachery; liberty *vs.* despotism. Even though Mary Shelley sets these oppositions in fourteenth-century Italy, the historical, as well as the geographical, linguistic, and physiognomic displacement is not sufficient to conceal the writer's actual concern, which was contemporary and urgent. Between the sixteenth and the early nineteenth century, Italy had been ruled by diverse foreign governments, and throughout the Napoleonic era (1796–1815) the peninsula became a battlefield for the ambitions of two European powers, France and Austria.[70] Many romantics had voiced their discontent about the fragmentation of the Italian peninsula, about its "dismembered state" as William Wordsworth anthropomorphically called it in 1811.[71] During this time, pro-Italian sentiments had been generally widespread among British liberals. William Bentinck, with his constitutional ideals, had been among the most ardent supporters of Italian liberty. Bentinck, who was at the time the chief commander of

68 Hunt, 54.

69 Gegia's remarks are later rephrased by the narrator, who similarly reminisces of "those happy days when there was neither Guelph nor Ghibelline", 316.

70 See Roderick Cavaliero, *Italia Romantica: English Romantics and Italian Freedom* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 2–10. On the Napoleonic Period (1796–1815) in Italy, see also Denis Mack Smith, *The Making of Italy, 1796–1866* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992), 13–18.

71 Letter to Captain Pasley, 28 March 1811, in William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 1:438.

the British forces in Italy, at first promoted a constitutional government in the territories of the Two Sicilies in 1811–1812, in the hope that the island would emancipate from Bourbons and their aims of establishing a modernised form of absolutism,[72] and then extended his endorsement of libertarian ideals both in Tuscany and Liguria in 1814. Bentinck's fear that the "Italians only will fight against Italians; to support a tyrant, and to enslave their country",[73] as he expressed in the proclamation he signed in Livorno on 14 March 1814, is very similar to the one Mary Shelley presents in her short story. After 1815, Italy had become an even more fragmented nation, especially after the restoration of the old Austrian rulers. Between 1820 and 1821, many nationalistic movements ('moti') for the independence of Italy, including the Carbonari movement in Naples,[74] failed in their attempt to topple the regimes, leaving a profound sense of bewilderment and despondence in the supporters of liberty and Italian unification. Among those were the writers of the Pisan Circle, who deeply felt this incommensurable sense of loss: "The voice of liberty was silent. The Italians hated and despised their masters, but

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72 See Lucy Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30–61; C. P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics, the Italianate Fashion in Early 19th Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), chap. 14:196–214.

73 "Will Italy then remain under the yoke? – The Italians only will fight against Italians; to support a tyrant, and to enslave their country. Italians! hesitate no longer. – You are Italians, and thou more especially, Italian army, reflect that the great cause of thy country is in thy hand! Warriors of Italy, you are not asked to come to us, but you are asked to assert your rights and your liberty." "Proclamation of Lord W. Bentinck," *The Pamphleteer: Respectfully Dedicated to Both Houses of Parliament* 8 (1816): 265.

74 On the Shelleys' "grandissimo interesso" (trans. "lively interest") in the Neapolitan revolution of 1820–1821, see Percy's famous 'Odes to Naples' (1820), and Mary's letter to Leigh Hunt written in Pisa on 3 December 1820, in which she remarked in Italian: "Quanti e tanti Italiani sospirono per la libertà, ma come in ogni paese i poveri non hanno potere, e i ricchi mai vogliono rischiare i di loro denari" (trans. "All the Italians, without exception, sigh for liberty; but, as in every country, the poor have no power and the wealthy ones do not wish to risk their money."). Shelley, *The Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, 1:116–118.

never dreamed of rebelling against them", Mary Shelley would write some years later.[75]

Mary Shelley's implicit parallel between old and new Italy, her "reading history as a tragedy in which the fallen hero or heroine is the 'type' of the ideal republic",[76] may be regarded as an attempt to admonish her contemporaries by showing them what political factionalism is able to produce. In doing so, Shelley enters the medieval Italian debate, by favouring Dante's political perspective over Giovanni Villani's more convenient posture. She expresses such political endorsement more explicitly in another article she published in *The Liberal* ('Giovanni Villani', *The Liberal*, No. IV, 281–297), thus invigorating once again interdiscursivity withing the periodical. In the article, Shelley maintains that Villani said to be a Guelph chiefly "to reinstate him in the good graces of the Florentines [...]. Dante, as a reasonable man, endavoured to reconcile the absurd differences of all parties".[77] This befittingly situates Mary Shelley's contribution within the wider scope of the periodical. Many of the contributors to *The Liberal* had wished for the Italians to return to the passion of their past, and ultimately unite and rebel against foreign oppression. As Daisy Hay has observed, "[t]he urgency with which *The Liberal* circle viewed the need for Italian unification is central to the formation of the journal's political philosophy".[78] This aspiration becomes a primary concern in 'A Tale of the Passions', in which Mary Shelley metonymically portrays this unconditional political

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75 Mary Shelley, *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1835), 249.

76 As Michael Rossington has remarked in his study of the Shelleys' literary approach to history. Michael Rossington, "The Republican Tradition and Its Destiny in *Valperga*," in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 103.

77 Mary Shelley, "Giovanni Villani," *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South* 2, no. 4 (1823): 295. For the same reasons, Shelley endorses Dante's ideological appreciation of Manfred, over Giovanni Villani's more blatant condemnation of the ruler: "Dante sweetly and pathetically dwells on the wrongs and virtues of Manfred, and places him on the high road to heaven. Villani vituperates him, and consigns him as a *scomunicato* to the devil." Shelley, 295.

78 "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*," 313.

ardour through Despina, whose political project, just like the Italian movements, eventually fails. In Mary Shelley's account, however, such failure remains partial. Whereas in *Valperga*, in Anne Mellor's words, Mary Shelley "emphasizes the inability of women, whether as adoring worshippers (like Beatrice) or active leaders (like Euthanasia), to influence political events or to translate an ethic of care […] into historical reality",[79] in 'A Tale of the Passions' Despina's apparent failure and tragic death do not impede her potential agency, which in death becomes incorporeal and disentangled from gender-specific restraints. Although Mary Shelley describes for most of the story women who are unable to change the course of history, even incapable of escaping their own private milieu, at the end of 'A Tale of the Passions' Despina's agency is finally, even if tragically, recognised. Despina's inability to elicit change within the time-frame of the narrative is in fact limited to her agency as a living woman. Once she disposes of her visible and gender-defined body by succumbing to death, she finally succeeds in achieving real agency and becoming a 'performer'. Despina's female body, that throughout most of the story is regarded as a burden and an obstacle to her goal, remains controversial even after her demise. At the end of the story, Lostendardo publicly displays Despina's corpse not as a woman, but still in disguise: "perhaps her tormentor thought that her appearance as a youth would attract less compassion than if a lovely woman were thus dragged to so unnatural a scene", the narrator remarks towards the end of the story (324). Despina's intense ethereal force and influence is acknowledged in the final paragraph of the tale, wherein the narrator informs the reader that Despina's noble sacrifice, her own suicidal decision to go to Lostendardo's palace, eventually fostered a deep ideological and moral change in the ruthless tyrant, who would in the end withdraw from the world and spend the rest of his life in a convent in Calabria, "having gained the character of a saint" (325). So the story ends with this abrupt transformation and an overall sense of redemption, moral righteousness and fulfiled aspiration.

79 Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), 210.

While this might be regarded as the least successful point in the plot, it nonetheless reveals that the story's intrinsic ideological purpose was for Mary Shelley stronger than any aesthetic ambition. The finale of 'A Tale of the Passions' also reiterates the author's dialogical and interdiscursive desire to integrate her story with other texts published in *The Liberal*. The closing lines in Mary Shelley's short story call once more for narratological and exegetical support elsewhere in *The Liberal*, with Hunt arguably providing the best complementary analysis of Lostendardo's final and hastily described transformation into a saint-like figure:

> In the age we are writing of, there was as much refinement in love matters with some, as there was outrage and brutality with others. All the faculties of humanity, good and bad, may be said to have been making their way at this period, and trying for the mastery; and if on the one hand we are presented with horrible spectacles of lust, tyranny, and revenge, on the other we find philosophy and even divinity refining upon the passion of love, and emulating the most beautiful subtleties of Plato in rendering it a thing angelical.[80]

Hunt's enumeration of diverging and even antonymic qualities (refinement *vs.* brutality; love *vs.* outrage; good *vs.* bad) perfectly synthesises Mary Shelley's discourse on division. Yet, his analysis more significantly provides an extended conclusion and explanation of Lostendardo's final change: in spite of his disloyalty, his horrible spectacles, his tyrannous behaviour, and his thirst for revenge, Despina's passion for love succeeds in transforming the tyrant into a thing angelical.

In 'A Tale of the Passions', Despina's final and narratologically sudden success also suggests Mary Shelley's reticence to admit, not even in fiction, the actual failure of Italian patriots, as well as of her own republican vision and libertarian ideals. As a result of the story's seemingly awkward finale, Italy acquires an aura of potentiality, in an overall vision of ideological and political possibility.[81] The representation of Italy as the land of potential change, even transformation, allows Mary Shelley to overcome and reconcile even the starkest contradictions she identified between the Italian past and present, and between Italy as the land of noble virtues and unitarian aspirations, of heroic and passionate

80 Hunt, "The Florentine Lovers," 67–68.

81 See on this regard also Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*," 314.

women defying patriarchal values, and Italy as the land of vengeful resentment, treachery, and intestine, even domestic, conflicts. A similar reconciliation, explained in more intimately lyrical and autobiographical terms, is at the core of the love-epistle Mary Shelley composed for her husband and that she significantly entitled 'The Choice' (1823). The title was both an allusion to the 'Choice' poems in the Horatian tradition and a further intertextual reference to *The Liberal* – again to Hunt and the same-titled poem published in the fourth issue of the periodical, which Mary Shelley saw before its publication.[82] In Mary Shelley's poem, Italy is once more described in contradictory terms as the land wherein her misfortunes reached their apex ("The sky a vault, and Italy a tomb"[83]), but also as the repository of beautiful memories: "'Tis thus the past – on which my spirit leans, / Makes dearest to my soul Italian scenes".[84] In her heartfelt poem, just like in her autonarrative tale, Mary Shelley succeeds in overcoming the incongruities she perceived about Italy by strongly asserting the prospect of reconciling her contradictory feelings and finally embracing that controversial space of alterity as her own land: "[…] here let me live & die, / In my adopted land – my country – Italy", she poignantly writes in her poem.[85] In 'A Tale of the Passions' Mary Shelley is able to reclaim through Despina – her fictional equivalent – her envisioned "united voice of Italy", which is eventually heard by means of the protagonist's own martyrdom. 'A Tale of the Passions' ultimately proves to be Mary Shelley's relentless attempt to adhere to the overall political project of *The Liberal*, as well as to voice her own ideological, cosmopolitan, libertarian, and unitarian vision, wherein Italy assumes the central role of metonymic land of potentiality.

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82 As stated by Markley in Mary Shelley, *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, ed. Pamela Clemit and A. A. Markley, vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002), xxix–xxx; on "The Choice", see also Graham Allen, "Mary Shelley as Elegiac Poet: The Return and 'The Choice,'" *Romanticism* 13, no. 3 (1 October 2007): 219–232.

83 Mary Shelley, "The Choice" (Hunt/Forman Version), in Shelley, *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, 4:117, l. 66.

84 Shelley, 4:121, ll. 122–123.

85 Shelley, 4:118, ll. 59–60.

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Carlotta Farese

9. Back to the Future: *The Liberal* from Romanticism to Postmodernism: An Interview with Benjamin Ramm

As widely discussed in the essays collected in this volume, *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South*, founded in 1822 by P. B. Shelley, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt, was saluted by its many opponents with harsh criticism from the outset, and indeed even before its publication. Twentieth-century readers have been less hostile, or at least less "widely partisan"[1] in expressing their dislike than contemporary political adversaries; nevertheless, their judgement has remained for a long time remarkably negative. William Marshall, one of the first scholars to devote serious attention to the journal, affirmed that "the real question does not concern the causes of the failure of *The Liberal* but the reason that any of the participants thought that it could succeed."[2] Marshall also underlined that after Shelley's premature death "there was no real conception as to the direction that the periodical was to follow", that it didn't have "an appeal to any single group" and that for example in some of Hazlitt's essays, the content would "antagonize more in one group than it would attract from another."[3] In 1979 James Hogg deplored the scarcity of critical material existing on the topic, probably because of the premature failure of the journal,[4] and admitted that "an impartial reading of the periodical as a whole leaves the impression that it

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1 Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.

2 William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 212.

3 Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal*, 212.

4 James Hogg, "Contemporary Reception of *'The Liberal'*", *The Byron Journal*, January 1 (1979): 61.

scarcely rose above the standard of mediocre journalism."[5] More recent critical analysis has often focused on the catastrophic financial outcome of the enterprise, presented as the inevitable result of a seriously flawed literary and political project. Maria Schoina, for instance, claims that *The Liberal* "cannot be considered a complete, consistent project either on the basis of its political direction, or in terms of its contributions"[6] and that Shelley's premature death didn't only mark "the end of the Pisan circle"[7] but it certainly affected the journal's already slim chances of success highlighting the existing conflicts between Byron and Hunt.

The essays in this collection provide a thorough and refreshing analysis of the historical and political relevance of the 1822 *Liberal* from different perspectives: from the history of its conception (Crisafulli) to the various inputs provided by its founders and contributors – Byron (Angeletti and Schoina), Hunt (Baiesi), Hazlitt (Spandri), Shelley (Liberto). My aim here is to analyse the journal from the vantage point of the present, focusing in particular on the most significant episode of its afterlife: the 2004 endeavour to relaunch *The Liberal* by the young journalist and political commentator Benjamin Ramm (at the time only twenty-one years old),[8] who has accepted to discuss his version of *The Liberal* and the relationship to its Romantic archetype in the interview that follows.

If one considers the favour currently enjoyed by the critical subgenre of the 'afterlife' (the study of sequels, re-writings, adaptations, re-contextualisations etc.), it might be surprising that little critical attention has been paid so far to Ramm's attempt to "regenerate" *The Liberal*. In fact, Ramm founded a periodical that explicitly vowed to take on the legacy of its Romantic antecedent as stated in the "About

5 Hogg, "Contemporary Reception", 61.

6 Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'. Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 154.

7 Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo*-Italians', 154.

8 Benjamin Ramm (1982), former editor of the refounded *Liberal*, is a writer and journalist for the BBC (Radio 4 and BBC Culture) and editor at large of openDemocracy (https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/). He is the founder of a new spiritual community, Honeydew, based in Maiolo, Romagna (https://www.honeydew.community/maiolo-italy). His most recent book is the forthcoming *High Definition: A Vision of Our Psychedelic Future* (2024).

Us" page: "*The Liberal* magazine is dedicated to a renaissance in liberal politics and the liberal arts. First founded in 1822 by the Romantic poets Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt, *The Liberal* seeks to regenerate liberalism and reinvigorate the public sphere. Alongside reportage, political and economic analysis, we publish essays, poetry, music scores, photography and short fiction from around the world."[9] Contributors to the twelve issues (the journal came out in print from 2004 to 2009 and online until 2012) included, among others, prestigious names such as Robert Reich, Harold Bloom, Hélène Cixous, Ariel Dorfman, Al Alvarez, Elaine Showalter, Liu Xiaboo, Germaine Greer, Wole Soyinka, Julia Kristeva, Christopher Hitchens, Marina Warner.

The relationship between the new periodical and its nineteenth-century predecessor was definitely not limited to the title and should not be understood as an accidental or superficial allusion. The *new Liberal* was deliberately inspired by its Romantic namesake and declared the intention to update and readapt the project of Shelley, Byron, and Hunt to the contemporary cultural context. In the editorial to the first issue, after a brief summary of the "short history" of the 1822 venture, Benjamin Ramm also asserts that "the re-founded *Liberal* hopes to reinvigorate this literary tradition, and to act as an organ for the political and cultural debates within modern liberalism". Additionally, Ramm affirmed that the aim of 'this' *Liberal* will be "to provoke, entertain, stimulate and challenge, and to foster independent-mindedness, non-conformity and a concern for liberal justice". Ramm's intention was also to "rehabilitate the term 'liberal', sullied after a century which deemed liberalism at best unfashionable, at worst criminal". Finally, he concluded the first editorial by reaffirming his predecessors' wish – through a direct quote of Leigh Hunt's *Preface* to the first issue of *The Liberal* – to see "the mind of man exhibiting powers of its own, and at the same time helping to carry on the best interests of human nature."[10]

9 "About us." In *The Liberal,* http://www.theliberal.co.uk/about_us/, accessed 22 June 2022. The magazine's website is no longer available, but it can be accessed through the internet archive: https://web.archive.org/web/20230114222259/http://www.theliberal.co.uk/about_us/

10 Benjamin Ramm, "Editorial", *The Liberal: Poetry Politics Culture*, no. 1 (October 2004): 1.

Leafing through the first issue (published in October 2004), the reader realises the extent to which Byron, Shelley, and Hunt's *Liberal* functions as a pervasive model alluded to through recurrent references, extracts and quotes; even the structure of the new magazine is clearly inspired by the old. The 2004 *Liberal* was mainly addressed to a liberal-democratic readership and, as confirmed in the interview, in its first issues tended to target both the Conservatives and Blair's new Labour as much as its predecessor targeted the nineteenth-century Tories. The first number, for example, opens with a satirical column in which Byron's *Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh* (that closed the first issue of the original *Liberal*) is used to support the journal's anti-Blairian satire. The column is entitled: "If you think we're harsh on Blair…"[11] and reprints the two famous couplets from the *Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh* in which Byron rejoices in Castlereagh's recent suicide:

> So Castlereagh has cut his throat! – The worst
> of this is, – that his own was not the first.
> So He has cut his throat at last! – *He*! Who?
> The man who cut his country's long ago.[12]

The column also includes further critical comments like Byron's *Epitaph to Castlereagh* and Shelley's own polemical judgements on the British Foreign Secretary, all these quotes are recontextualised and actualised as barbs against the contemporary political system, providing a false alternative between two parties – Blair's New Labour and the Conservatives led by Michael Howard – which are in fact pursuing the same anti-liberal agenda: " 'Two vipers tangled into one'. Blair and Howard, anyone?"[13]

It is interesting to notice that the equivalence between Castlereagh and Blair/Howard, past and present, Romantic and contemporary politics, is based on *The Liberal*'s focus on the relationship between "the work of the politician and the artist."[14] As Benjamin Ramm explains in

11 *The Liberal: Poetry Politics Culture*, 4.

12 Lord Byron, "Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh", in *The Liberal Verse and Prose from the South*, Volume the First (London: Printed by and for John Hunt, 1822), 164.

13 Ramm, "Editorial", 4.

14 Ibid., 1.

our interview, it was his intention to take issue with a utilitarian understanding of culture and politics, and in the first editorial of *The Liberal* he underlined that: "culture is less a means than an end in itself, and must be fought for and prized as such; for the measure of a civilised society is not the number of entrepreneurs it produces, but the creative space and individual freedoms that it bestows upon its citizens."[15] This polemical attitude towards the utilitarian approach to culture is reinforced in the interview, where Ramm targets the prevailing "Benthamite" attitude that understands the arts in terms of "use value" and "has penetrated the world of higher education, where academics are constantly tasked with justifying their own existence" (9).[16] According to Ramm, one of the reasons why Remainers lost the argument against Brexit was precisely that they "failed to offer any poetry whatsoever" and shared the "dismal utilitarian approach" (10) thus underestimating the emotional significance of the debate.

The presence of poetry was one of the defining features of the twenty-first century version of *The Liberal*, which hosted contributions of poets such as Simon Armitage, Ariel Dorfman, Fiona Sampson, Robert Conquest, and Kathryn Simmonds. It was a choice largely criticised by political adversaries and used to delegitimate the journal's political significance. Alongside contemporary poetry, to highlight once again the cultural and ideological connection to the original *Liberal*, the first number of the journal hosted poems by Shelley, Byron and Leigh Hunt such as Shelley's *Political Greatness*, Byron's *Thoughts on Freedom*, and Hunt's *Politics and Poetics or The Desperate Situation of a Journalist Unhappily Smitten with The Love of a Rhyme*. An abridged selection of passages from P. B. Shelley's *In Defence of Poetry* concludes the first issue of the re-founded Liberal; a text that, as the editor Benjamin Ramm reminds his readers, was expected to be included, following Mary Shelley's will, in *The Liberal,* but the plan miscarried and the *Defence* did not appear until 1840, long after the journal had been discontinued. The whole of the editorial plan is, one might say, conceived to reflect the features of the original periodical; this is also

15 Ibid., 1.

16 Page references to the interview are provided in brackets.

shown, to add a further example, by the "Letters from abroad": a section on international issues inspired by Leigh Hunt's column with the same title:[17] published in the four issues of *The Liberal* in which the writer recounted his Italian experience to British readers.

Furthermore, the new periodical incurred the same fate as its model, and by 2012 it ceased to exist, either in print or online. Yet, the twenty-first century revival of *The Liberal* allows us to assess which aspects of the original project contribute to its ongoing significance as a viable model for progressive political and cultural action within the contemporary context. The first of these aspects concerns the relationship between literature and politics that was at the heart of the 1820s *Liberal* and that is constantly evoked in its contemporary version, where the rejection of the 'utilitarian' approach to culture and the arts is strictly connected to the rejection of any form of 'economic' liberalism or neo-liberalism. The harsh critique of Blair (especially in the first issues), the Tories, and eventually the Lib Dem-Tory coalition (which was regarded by some liberal democrats as a political betrayal and resulted in Ramm's being defined by *The New Statesman* as "the last left-wing Lib Dem") reflected the strong belief in a radical and progressive brand of Liberalism, as clearly shown in Simon Kovar's 2010 editorial where 'social liberalism' is vindicated as the "creed of the Liberal Party from its inception" while "economic liberalism" and neo-liberalism are decried as "a C20th phenomenon of the New Right" based on "the creed of market fundamentalism."[18] Both these ideals and the stress on the quintessential relationship between literature and politics, clearly the defining elements of the new periodical, were targeted by its critics. *The Liberal* was often accused of being "a literary magazine" that used its name and its supposed political affiliation to the Liberal Democrats to undermine the very party it alleged to support pursuing a leftist agenda.

The other crucial aspect of the original *Liberal*, often overlooked by critics according to Daisy Hay[19] and central to the re-founded 2004

17 See Timothy Webb's article on Hunt's *Letters from Abroad* in this volume.

18 Simon Kovar, "The Neo-Liberal Democrats", *The Liberal,* August 2010 https://web.archive.org/web/20210413214949/http://theliberal.co.uk/libdems/neo-liberal-democrats.html, accessed 22 May 2023.

19 Daisy Hay, "Liberals, *Liberales* and *The Liberal*: A Reassessment", *European Romantic Review*, 19, no. 4 (2008): 307–320.

periodical, is its international and cosmopolitan perspective. The nineteenth-century *Liberal* was a unique Anglo-Italian project,[20] deeply permeated by a pan-European character. Lord Byron and P. B. Shelley were living in Italy, as we all know, and Leigh Hunt left England for Pisa with his large family to work on the project right on the spot. "Italian literature, in particular, will be a favourite subject with us", wrote Leigh Hunt in the *Preface* to *The Liberal*, also adding that: "it may be our good fortune to have more than one foreign correspondent, who will be an acquisition to the reader."[21] The idea that English culture needed to open up to the literatures and cultures of other countries was one of *The Liberal*'s ground-breaking novelties, and established an explicit connection between progressive politics and the rejection of any kind of nationalism and "chauvinist insularity"(10). For the second Romantic generation to be "on the liberal side of the question"[22] meant to advocate openness to the other, cosmopolitanism, cultural dialogue and the sense of a shared pan-European cultural tradition. Many of the articles published in the four issues of the periodical had an international appeal: Shelley's translation from Goethe's *Faust*, translations from Ariosto and Alfieri, Hogg's Greek essays, Charles Brown's *Les Charmette and Rousseau*, to mention only a few. Vittorio Alfieri in particular, as Daisy Hay has pointed out, is constantly presented as the ideal poet, "as representative of the South, a key figure in the struggle for the Italian independence, who demonstrates the ability to argue for independence in his poetry as well as in his political activities."[23] For many Tories, the term *liberal* was a negative and un-English term connected to subversive continental political entities, either French, Spanish, Italian or Greek. After the Napoleonic Wars, any European sympathy was still regarded with suspicion as potentially dangerous and dissident. It is therefore undeniable that the title itself anticipated

20 See Will Bowers, *The Italian Idea: Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture 1815–1823* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 145–168.

21 Leigh Hunt, *Preface,* in *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, 1822, VII.

22 John Keats, "Letter to Charles Brown, 23 September 1819", in *The Letters of John Keats*, vol. II, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 430.

23 Hay, "Liberals", 316.

the program of a periodical that was going to be felt as a political and ideological threat: the south of Europe with the many radical movements for political reform and national independence (such as those of Greece and Italy) constituted the background while the many translations and foreign authors discussed throughout the four issues made up a large part of the contents.

The Liberal re-founded by Benjamin Ramm in 2004, was as "passionately internationalist" (10) as its predecessor and also "driven partly by frustration at the 'Little Englander' outlook." (10) Of course, at a time of globalisation, 'internationalism' "often meant looking beyond Europe's borders" (10) and the role of the "European question" and of intra-European cultural exchange was perhaps less central for the new magazine than it was in the 1820s. As its editor recognises in the interview, this was also due to commercial considerations and "the monolingualism of Anglo-American audiences" (11), which limited the appeal of the articles contributed by prominent European intellectuals such as Hélène Cixous. Although the pro-European credentials of the new magazine are testified by the publication of George Steiner's magisterial essay *The Idea of Europe*, one might argue that Brexit has demonstrated that, within British culture, the relationship to Europe is as critical and decisive today as it was in the first half of the nineteenth century, and that perhaps this awareness was not so strong in the first decade of the millennium as it is today. Byron, Shelley and Leigh Hunt's *Liberal* pursued a pan-European project based on the idea of a shared cultural heritage and political destiny. The British writers and intellectuals who lived in Italy during the 1820s looked at Britain from a southern perspective in which "the South" represented a source of hope and a model for political reform while "the North" was a symbol of reactionary provincialism, as exemplified by Hazlitt's essay "On the Scotch Character" published in the last issue of *The Liberal*.[24] Despite its limits and contradictions, the journal testifies the long-standing centrality of the debate on the "European question" within British culture and remains

24 Hazlitt's sarcastic description of the Scots as quintessentially provincial has of course been ironically overturned by the passionate pro-European stance of the majority of the Scottish people who notoriously voted against leaving the EU in 2016.

a powerful expression of an embattled internationalist tradition and its ongoing struggle against nationalism and insularity. Benjamin Ramm's new *Liberal* certainly belongs to this tradition and must be regarded as an attempt to update and reinvigorate the case for internationalism at the beginning of a new millennium. In light of Brexit, the relevance of this debate to contemporary British culture and society needs not to be demonstrated and would indeed be difficult to overstate.

The Liberal, *Then and Now: An Interview with Benjamin Ramm*[25]

C.F.: In your own twenty-first century version of the *The Liberal* (in particular in the first issue) references to and quotations from the Romantic archetype are ubiquitous. What are the aspects of the original *Liberal* that you found inspirational? What kind of relationship did you want to establish with it?

B.R.: I learned of *The Liberal* from Christopher Hitchens' *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (2000). Christopher wrote for the magazine. We disagreed about a lot (e.g. Iraq and the New Atheism) but we would have very engaged lunches in which he would quote Shelley and Auden from memory. I was interested in the relationship between poetry and politics, in the Romantic emphasis on human dignity, and particularly in their critique of utilitarianism, which was associated with certain aspects of the British liberalism. The Romantic liberal tradition in England offers a helpful counterpoint: Byron, Shelley and their contemporaries conceived of liberty in abundantly imaginative terms, rather than as an empirical calculation. Their publication, *The Liberal*, was subtitled *Verse and Prose from the South*, not only because it found inspiration in the Mediterranean, but also because the 'North' represented a puritan coldheartedness – the culture that had hounded out the Romantics. It was

25 The interview was given via Zoom in June 2021.

Blackwood's Magazine of Edinburgh that damned Keats so relentlessly, and (according to his peers) led him to an early grave. The intention of the re-launched *Liberal* was not to mimic the style or focus of its predecessor, but to take inspiration from its aesthetic and cultural sensibility. We shared their internationalism, their rejection of intellectual insularity, and their determination to be – as Keats put it – "on the liberal side of the question."[26]

C.F.: Were you in contact with any of the academics who worked in the field of Romantic studies and in particular worked on the original *Liberal*?

B.R.: From 2004 to 2008, we ran a literary event company called *The Literary Circle* alongside *The Liberal*. One of our events was a joint book launch for two biographies of Leigh Hunt: one by Anthony Holden, and the other by Nicholas Roe. Nicholas in particular was very supportive of the magazine. And because the original journal played a more important role in the life and career of Hunt than either for Shelley (who drowned shortly before the first issue) or Byron (who soon regretted his involvement), it was Hunt specialists that were more intrigued by our project. By the third issue, I think, certainly by the fourth, Hunt was writing – in various guises, with various personas – probably 75 % of the journal. As an editor, Hunt interested me, because of his ability to bring together a range of talent: he was admired by many of his contemporaries, and helped develop their writing and ideas. He nurtured what Montaigne called 'other men's flowers'.

C.F.: You have read English at Cambridge and the relationship between literature/poetry and politics was, from the outset, explicitly at the heart of your attempt to revive *The Liberal*. Indeed, it was also a favourite target with those who wanted to criticize your project and often attacked the literary aspect of the magazine as a means to decry it. How do you understand the relationship between the liberal arts and liberal politics? Why is poetry so relevant to politics? Could we say that poetry is inherently liberal and liberalism inherently poetical?

26 John Keats, "Letter to Charles Brown", 430.

B.R.: In promotional material, we frequently stated that the magazine was dedicated to "liberal politics and the liberal arts" – and it begs the question, what makes these arts 'liberal', and how do they relate to liberalism? One meaning relates to 'breadth': of treating philosophy, politics, and the arts not as silos or isolated disciplines but as interconnecting threads, which illuminate one another. That is rather unfashionable in our age; now the liberalism that is taught in schools and colleges has a rather arid, bloodless quality, like a form of fair-minded accountancy. The richer ideas that drove the liberal revolutions – the dream of human flourishing – are lost, as the terms 'freedom', 'liberty' and even 'reform' have been co-opted by libertarians to advance ruggedly individualistic agendas, hollowing out their original civic meaning.

As to the 'relevance' of poetry to politics: I think we need to be wary of what I've called 'the tyranny of relevance', in which creativity is justified in relation to its social or political use rather than to its imaginative achievement or expression of human experience. The temptation to read everything politically is also self-defeating: if everything is about politics, then (paradoxically) nothing is – it becomes totalizing and suffocating, even if the original impulse was to be liberating, and we lose all sense of proportion.

In truth, it is not poets or visual artists who lack engagement in politics – neither now, nor among the Romantics. But for too long the political class has been clueless about the value of culture, seeking to measure or 'justify' it in crude, utilitarian terms. In the UK, unlike on the continent (particularly in France), the Minister for Culture is regarded as the most junior post in cabinet, and is rarely given to someone with either interest or particular knowledge about the arts. For all the criticism of Corbyn, he was the first English politician in decades to have a coherent arts policy, and to understand the assault made on the arts by instrumentalist government policy. I wrote about this in an essay, 'Art, Socialism, and the Political Imagination'.

In form and function, I'm not sure that poetry is inherently liberal, although Shelley and Byron might argue that – in its universalism – it has a republican quality, and I'm inclined to agree. It's not so much that poetry is relevant to politics as it is a counterpoint, an antidote to politics. In one of the early editorials of *The Liberal*, I quoted JFK:

"When power leads men towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses. For art establishes the basic human truth which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment."[27]

To answer the final part of your question: Liberalism, alas, is not inherently poetical, although there is a war for its soul, which still persists, between the Romantic and the Utilitarian sensibility. The latter, in its purest Benthamite form, is an explicit attack on the Romantic worldview. Bentham regarded poetry as a kind of nefarious 'mischief', as he wrote in this infamous passage:

"Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either. Everybody can play at push-pin: poetry and music are relished only by a few. The game of push-pin is always innocent: it were well could the same be always asserted of poetry. Indeed, between poetry and truth there is natural opposition: false morals and fictitious nature. The poet always stands in need of something false. When he pretends to lay has foundations in truth, the ornaments of his superstructure are fictions; his business consist in stimulating our passions, and exciting our prejudices. Truth, exactitude of every kind is fatal to poetry. The poet must see everything through coloured media, and strive to make every one else do the same. It is true, there have been noble spirits, to whom poetry and philosophy have been equally indebted; but these exceptions do not counteract the mischiefs which have resulted from this magic art."[28]

It is for this reason that Karl Marx – an admirer of English poetry and particularly of the Romantics – correctly called Bentham "that insipid, pedantic, *leather-tongued oracle* of the ordinary bourgeois intelligence."[29] It is difficult to convey how deeply the utilitarian outlook

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27 John Fitzgerald Kennedy "Poetry and Power.*" The Atlantic*, February 1964, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1964/02/poetry-and-power/306325/, accessed 22 May 2023.

28 Jeremy Bentham, *The Rationale of Reward. Book III, Chapter I* (London: John and H.L. Hunt, 1825), 206–207.

29 Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Friedrich Engels (Chicago; London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 301.

has penetrated the world of higher education, where academics are constantly tasked with justifying their own existence. In my special editorial for the supplement in *The Independent* newspaper (issue IV), and in numerous commissioned articles, we critiqued the slow creep of the utilitarian mentality, which judges value solely according to use. What began as a thread of liberal thought was soon adopted by Thatcher (as neoliberalism; 'why should we fund public art?'), and then became the template for New Labour's approach ('we should fund public art, but we have to justify it in relation to the economy'). Now, even some on the Left use this framework as a means of promoting social justice: 'Does this art serve our cause? If it doesn't, it is complicit with white supremacy, etc.' For all these people, art is solely a means to an end. Nothing coarsens our aesthetic sensitivity, or our ability to think independently and imaginatively, than having to justify art in terms of financial gain, social utility, or public self-promotion. It robs people of the ability to connect deeply work that is capable of shaping their souls – and such clumsy formulations were anathema to the Romantics. In this sense, the re-launched *Liberal* was far-sighted, in pointing out the spectre of utilitarianism.

When publishing poetry, usually in close proximity to prose, we aspired for mutual illumination (the poems can shed light, but should not be prescriptive or didactic; no crude sloganeering). To celebrate the 90th anniversary of human rights icon Helen Suzman – one of the magazine's advisory board members – I commissioned two poets to write, indirectly, about her legacy. One of the poems, 'Song' by George Szirtes, is now on the A-Level syllabus, while the other – 'The Republic of Glassblowing' by David Broadbridge – is among the finest poems we published. And providing a space for young poets, often previously unpublished, was one of my key motivations, and echoed our Romantic heritage. I asked these writers to think deeply about the relationship between poetry and politics, and commissioned one – Christopher Simons – to write an essay on this subject (in issue V) called 'Prometheus Unbound'.

The magazine was addressed to a liberal and social democratic readership, but many of the critiques by the Lib Dems were along the lines of: "Why are you publishing poetry? What is the point of this?" I remember being at a Lib Dem conference, where I was interviewed

for the BBC and Sky, and one fairly prominent in the Party came up to me and said, "there's a lot of interesting political commentary, but why are there all these poems?". But we could never be so narrow. Helen Suzman was fond of quoting Alan Paton, who summarized our philosophy:

"By liberalism I don't mean the creed of any party or any century. I mean a generosity of spirit, a tolerance of others, an attempt to comprehend otherness, a commitment to the rule of law, a high ideal for the worth and dignity of man, a repugnance of authoritarianism and a love of freedom."[30]

C.F.: Your judgement on New Labour and on Tony Blair was very harsh: have you changed your mind retrospectively?

B.R.: Yes, in the early issues we were, but we always kept our strongest criticism for the Tories, particularly when the Lib Dems joined them in coalition – we regarded this as a terrible betrayal, particularly as there had been an opportunity to create a 'progressive alliance' with Labour. (One of our editorials critiquing the Clegg-Cameron coalition called the party 'The Neo-Liberal Democrats'). Although we were critical of Blair & Brown's conservatism in government, we recognized that New Labour represented part of the social democratic tradition, and admired post-war New Liberalism.

Each edition of *The Liberal* varied by theme: the fourth issue was about the 2005 General Election, while the previous one focused on Latin America ('The Forgotten Continent') and the fifth issue explored the 'Two Cultures' ('Physics and Metaphysics'). The sixth issue, which was distributed at Lib Dem conference, had a more domestic focus, while the seventh issue was devoted to China, the eighth issue explored European matters, the ninth issue commemorated the Spanish civil war, the tenth issue looked at the situation in Russia, the eleventh focused on Islam in Africa, etc.

But it soon became clear that a lot of activists would buy the magazine to comment on the two or three pieces about the Lib Dems, and

30 Benjamin Ramm, "Remembering Helen Suzman" *The Liberal*, 1st January 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20210506195817/http://www.theliberal.co.uk/Remembering_Helen_Suzman.html, accessed 22 May 2023.

they would completely ignore an article by, for example, Liu Xiaobo, who wrote for *The Liberal* in 2007, before he was recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet the Lib Dems were meant to be an internationalist party. There were a few globally-minded Lib Dem contributors, such as Jonathan Fryer (who died last month), who exemplified our kind of Romantic liberal literary-cultural-political worldview. This breadth appealed to our general readers, too. But most Lib Dem activists only wanted to know what we were saying about Charles Kennedy or party policy on land tax valuation. As Byron and Shelley might say, this seemed pretty parochial…

C.F.: **In the period when you published *The Liberal* the European issue was not perceived as a major concern in Britain. The idea that English culture needed to open up to the literatures and cultures of other European countries was one of the original *Liberal'*s essential features and the issue of Britain's relationship to Europe was indeed one of its central concerns. How would you describe the role of Europe within your own project?**

B.R.: Like its predecessor, the re-launched *Liberal* was passionately internationalist, driven partly by frustration at the 'Little Englander' outlook. Internationalism for us – at a time of globalisation – often meant looking beyond Europe's borders, and reflected my interest in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, etc. But we retained an interest in European aesthetics & politics, and published a range of articles, from reflections by Ivan Krastev and Hélène Cixous to George Steiner's seminal essay-lecture 'The Idea of Europe'.

On a personal level, I grew up in a conservative household, but at seventeen/eighteen I began to move to the Left, and after leaving school, I spent a year in Latin America. When I returned to the UK, the mainstream landscape was split between the Tories, New Labour, and the Lib Dems, who were the most progressive and – crucially – pro-European party. Not just in policy terms but as a worldview, and it was partly for this reason that the magazine identified with the party, especially as anti-Europeanism was becoming an ever-more prominent current in British politics.

The irony is the Lib Dems were actually more focused on local politics: the party didn't feel very cosmopolitan (and indeed, in

composition, it was probably the least cosmopolitan of the three). In theory, the engagement in local politics was meant to express a liberal approach to federalism, but in practice it often bred a kind of chauvinist insularity (‘our candidate is more local than yours’).

Similarly, *The Liberal* was limited by the monolingualism of Anglo-American audiences: when we put prominent European writers on the front cover, there was less media engagement. Cixous’s article about Ségolène Royale (published in between the first and second round of France’s 2007 presidential election), garnered interest from academics but received little notice beyond. Commercially, if not intellectually, American names were a bigger draw for our readers than influential European writers.

Mario Cuomo once remarked that “you campaign in poetry; you govern in prose”. During the Brexit referendum, the Remain campaign failed to offer any poetry whatsoever. They took a dismal utilitarian approach: “you’ll be £200 worse off per year if you vote for Brexit”. To credit the English public, not even they were moved by that. Remainers, including Lib Dems, failed to grasp the emotional significance of a call to take back control. They failed to communicate the significance of what George Steiner called ‘The Idea of Europe’: of Europe as a civilization, a shared achievement, and an ongoing challenge – at once intoxicating and anxiety-inducing. But instead the Remain campaign offered economic prose, and poorly-written prose at that.

C.F.: **Only four issues were published of the original *Liberal*, while your own version survived much longer (2004–2008 in print, until 2012 online, is this correct?). What are the circumstances which caused you to discontinue publication? Was this mainly due to commercial or cultural/political reasons?**

B.R.: In early 2008, we secured distribution to the United States. The magazine actually had international distribution from the early issues, but to limited territories: select parts of Europe, and Australia & New Zealand. It was only from issue IX that we added the cover price in US dollars, Australian dollars, and NZ dollars. To celebrate, we held a big launch at the Groucho Club in Soho in London, and sales from that issue were very encouraging – it far surpassed our expectation. We had tailored that edition to a US audience (Christopher Hitchens’ name was

prominently on the front cover) but were still surprised that it exceeded UK sales. In California, where the word 'liberal' has diverse cultural meanings, it sold out in Barnes & Noble despite being restocked on three occasions. By contrast, English audiences were nowhere near as enthusiastic; in hindsight, I regret having focused on the UK for as long as we did.

In 2011, things became more difficult financially: the crash of 2008 had seriously hurt some of our donors, and because we saw our future as an international title, we began to invest in developing our presence in the US. (Just before the crash, in early 2008, we opened a small 'office' in New York, and I would go every few months – I followed Obama's campaign around, and wrote a series of essays for the magazine). At just the moment when it became clear that the magazine had a future in the States, our donors were tightening their belts. So, from 2011, we decided to focus online, to see if we could gain more traction using the web model, before returning to the same print schedule as previously. Nowadays, magazines don't die – they just go online…

On a personal level, it had taken a huge personal toll on me: from 2004, I had been working 15 hours per day for six/seven days each week, and I was doing a lot of media commentary, too. Ironically, just as the print edition began to wind down, I was called upon by the BBC/Sky more frequently, because the Lib Dems were now in government and many in the party were anxious about the direction of the coalition with the Tories. A writer at the *New Statesman* had described me as "the last left-wing Lib Dem", so I was called upon to critique the role of the Lib Dems in assenting to right-wing reforms (to the NHS and the welfare state). By that point, *The Liberal* had a public profile, and I became associated with the dissidents in the party, so increasingly came under attack from those who were loyalists to the leadership. But because so many prominent party figures had written for the magazine – from Chris Huhne to Vince Cable to Shirley Williams to Jeremy Thorpe, while others (like Ed Davey) had repeatedly pitched to us – it wasn't so easy for the Lib Dems to disassociate themselves.

C.F.: **Your project implies an idea of the literary and cultural tradition as a progressive force for the present. In this respect, what do you think of the so-called "cancel-culture" which seems to**

undermine the idea of the ongoing progressive value of the liberal tradition? Do you regard this radical revision of the western cultural tradition as a positive or negative development?

B.R.: It's interesting to reflect on what the Romantics would have made of 'cancel culture'. On the one hand, they were not averse to iconoclasm, and would likely have cheered the toppling of statues to tyrants, especially figures like Leopold II, a mass-murderer and mutilator. But the 'cancel culture' has – in a very American way – diverted our critique away from institutional and systemic modes of oppression and focused instead on human fault.

Not only does this not address the primary forces of injustice, but it also judges us – and especially artists – by an unreasonably high standard. Shelley, ever passionate about virtue, and Byron, ever intrigued by vice, would have both been wary of this rather Christian notion of damnation, and of course both of them (beastly to women, in their own different ways) would have been cancelled.

The notion that creators, who are often in some ways beautifully broken individuals, should be morally impeachable is, when you think about it, very odd. A much more sensible notion was held by Byron: that artists are imperfect beings who are gifted moments of divine inspiration; they are vessels for creativity, not embodiments of virtue. This creative energy isn't what Shelley called 'the white radiance of eternity' (happiness writes white, goes the saying) but a messy, often tortured form of expression. Perhaps artists are, as Blake wrote, really "of the Devil's party."[31]

Still, Shelley might have been called 'woke' by his critics. One thinks of his vegetarianism, and his ethical attitude to food more generally. He had a very sweet tooth, yet when he was invited over for tea at country houses, ladies would offer him white sugar – from slave plantations – and he would politely refuse. So, it became fashionable to invite Shelley over and give him what would now be called 'fair-trade' sugar. Shelley was 'awoke' to this kind of injustice.

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31 William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Michael Mason (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75.

Both he and Byron readily acknowledged the ghosts of the past. What's interesting about reading Byron's poem 'Darkness', or Shelley's neo-platonic works, is that there really is a sense of a haunted legacy, of a long shadow – both metaphysically and historically. They lived through revolutions that became terrors, through the fervent desire to impose moral purity. Of course, these liberals were enthusiastic supporters of 1789 – "bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,"[32] as Wordsworth wrote – but by 1793, it became a little more complicated… one could be cancelled for the slightest 'error'…

C.F.: **Both the Shelley-Byron-Hunt magazine and your own have been met with criticism focusing on the alleged lack of contact between an out-of-touch, cosmopolitan intellectual élite and the 'people'. How do you understand the role of the intellectuals in a contemporary liberal society? Do you think that right-wing populism poses a real existential threat to Liberalism? How are Liberals supposed to react to it?**

B.R.: I become very uncomfortable any time 'the people' are discussed in the context of populism: remember how, on the evening of the Brexit vote, Farage declared that it was "a victory for real people" – as if hard-working Europeans (and indeed half of the UK) was unreal, ethereal, insufficiently *volk*ish. Coffee culture had flourished in Shelley's time, yet suddenly cosmopolitans in 2016 were described as being 'latte-drinking' elites, expressions of a foreign culture that had invaded the soul of England. This term 'intellectuals' became similarly loaded with contempt and associated with foreignness. I wrote then, and feel strongly now, that it is up to liberals to push back against this, especially the grain of anti-intellectualism that has so overwhelmingly infected American politics.

Shortly before the vote, I wrote about how the shadow of Empire had cast a pall over the referendum. Both Shelley and Byron were critical of Britain's desire for domination, its meddling, and its pillaging (such as the Parthenon Marbles). They understood how deeply the imperial impulse lay in the British psyche, and that the nature of an island was

32 William Wordsworth, "The Prelude", in *The Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 550.

to be tempted by cultural insularity, even as it ruled the waves. Then, too, there were two opposing visions of England, even among their Romantic contemporaries – between Coleridge's cosmopolitanism, and Southey's reactionary nationalism.

Byron and Shelley, like Keats and Hunt, never left their spiritual home, which was in the English poetic imagination. The notion that, by leaving an embittered island, they became 'citizens of nowhere', as Theresa May put it, is absurd and lamentable. It is said that 'rootedness' is essential to human identity, but this is more tribal than geographical – our hunter-gatherer ancestors made the most of freedom of movement! Here, George Steiner (a great admirer of the Romantics, at a time when it was unfashionable) was correct: "Trees have roots; men have legs, and are each other's guests."[33]

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33 George Steiner, "A Kind of Survivor"[1965], in *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 152.

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