Introduction
Continental Literatures in Romantic-Period Britain

> MY DEAR F. – You ask me to direct you generally in your choice of German authors; secondly, and especially, among those authors to name my favourite. In such an ocean as German literature, your first request is of too wide a compass for a letter . . . Come, therefore, dear F., bring thy ugly countenance to the lakes; and I will engraft such German youth and vigour on thy English trunk, that henceforwards thou shalt bear excellent fruit. I suppose, F., you know that the Golden Pippin is now almost, if not quite, extinct in England: and why? Clearly from want of some exotic, but congenial, inoculation. So it is with literatures of whatsoever land; unless crossed by some other of different breed, they all tend to superannuation.[1]

In this passage from the opening of his essay 'John Paul Frederick Richter' of December 1821, Thomas De Quincey invites his friend and his *London Magazine* readers to discover the potentially unpromising terrain of German literature. With conversational panache and a genial tone, he asks them to join him in the Lakes and come away filled with rewarding knowledge about a foreign literary tradition that was still unfamiliar to the majority of British readers in the early 1820s.

Undeniably, De Quincey's language presents some disturbing overtones. As it projects us into the realm of metaphorical botanical experiments, it echoes with the fear of miscegenation and hybridization that permeates his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, published in the *London Magazine* in the same year.[2] Such troubling reverberations aside, however, his organicist terminology casts the acquisition and effects of knowledge of foreign literatures as inevitable facts in the unfolding of literary and cultural traditions. His imagery both justifies and emphasizes the need for borrowings and 'engraftings', and defines these operations as vital within a wider European context. Far from being self-enclosed and jealously guarded preserves, national literatures are indebted to other traditions for their very subsistence. Seen from the vantage point of the

Lakes, that laboratory of literary localism and national cultural identity, the 'English trunk' of the national literature can only prosper if exposed to external influences and contacts, that is, in this specific instance, the treasures of German letters.

As Ian Jack noted in his overview of English literature between 1815 and 1832, here De Quincey throws into relief a literary milieu characterized, among other things, by the acquisition and assimilation of foreign voices and traditions, rather than isolation and insularity.[3] Extolling German literature ('by much the best in Europe') and damning the French as plagued with 'dotage – palsy, or . . . imbecillity' (pp. 20, 18), the essayist places England and its letters within a developmental curve that goes from exhaustion to reinvigoration. In the process, he tellingly transforms Jean Paul's name to an English 'John Paul' and repeatedly compares him with Shakespeare, for instance by pointing out their shared 'interpenetration of the humorous and the pathetic' (p. 22). In other words, De Quincey aligns the foreign with the national and ties them together indissolubly, though without annulling their peculiarities. Even as he acclimatizes the foreign author, he emphasizes and celebrates his cultural specificity as an element of novelty and a harbinger of regeneration for the 'English mind' (which he also terms the 'national mind') and the 'national tone of thought' (p. 19).

On the one hand, De Quincey's essay is essentially about Richter. It introduces British readers to an author whose eccentric works mix fiction and philosophy, and whose trenchant irony routinely undercuts his cultural pronouncements and existential insights. In many ways, Richter was one of De Quincey's kindred souls. Yet, on the other hand, this essay is also about the meeting and clashing of literary systems, and raises one central question: how and to what extent do our dealings with foreign works impinge on our national tradition? De Quincey's opening remarks illuminate the complications attendant on those processes whereby cultures imagine their own relations with other, neighbouring or more distant, traditions. Indeed, for all his gesturing towards a cohesive Englishness, De Quincey posits the national literature as both tied to its local and insular moorings and in a state of cross-cultural flux.

These ambivalences constitute the focus of *European Literatures in Britain, 1815–1832: Romantic Translations*. They are the central concern of its explorations of the presence and impact of foreign and particularly Continental European literatures and cultures – their works, forms, ideas, and practitioners – in Romantic-period Britain between the end of the Napoleonic emergency and the mid-1830s, that is, from the return to peacetime economic and cultural connections with the Continent to

roughly the great political and cultural watershed of the 1832 Reform Act, when the transformations introduced by Romantic-era literature, culture, and politics had taken root and the 'scene', as Ian Jack called it, started to mutate into a recognizably pre-Victorian milieu.[4]

Engaging the Foreign

In the post-Napoleonic period, while Britain assumed a leading role in international geopolitical and economic contexts, so its literature and culture became increasingly involved in an intense and productive conversation with Continental traditions. It is of course true that foreign influences had infiltrated and permeated English (and then British) literature in successive waves since the Middle Ages. It is impossible to discuss Renaissance theatre and poetry, Restoration drama or the eighteenth century novel without referring to the Italian sonnet, French and Spanish drama, Cervantes and picaresque fiction. Nonetheless, as this book contends, Romantic-period engagements with Continental literary and cultural traditions – and especially the intensification of these engagements near and after the end of hostilities with France in 1814–15 – present distinctive traits that set them apart as a significant turning point in the history of the international connections of English and British literature.

A possible objection to this premise could be that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the most unprecedented and deeply transformative literary imports came from beyond Europe. On the strength of Enlightenment curiosity about exotic civilizations, Romantic-period scholars started to explore the literary outputs of distant lands and particularly those of the East. Sir William Jones and scores of orientalists studied and translated Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Chinese texts, suggesting that Asian literatures could provide British poets with new images and themes and thus instigate a literary renaissance.[5] Yet, in spite of this innovative turn, contacts with other European literatures were still the most frequent, quantitatively significant, and intensely debated, and they rapidly multiplied in the geopolitical and economic climate of the Napoleonic aftermath. After 1815, the reopening of commercial and travel routes, new advances in the production and circulation of printed materials, and evolving diplomatic and military developments brought about a remarkable expansion in British contacts with Continental literatures. At the same time, the impact of these foreign traditions became more and more significant, so that they came to exert considerable influence on critical discourse and original literary production alike.

In investigating these questions, my work draws upon a rich scholarly background, since attention to comparative and international relations has always been a constitutive feature of Romantic-period studies. A wealth of classic scholarship confirms the international, as well as transnational, vocation of Romantic-period British literature, among them Mario Praz's foundational *The Romantic Agony* (1933), Charles Peter Brand's work on Italy and 'English Romanticism', and Rosemary Ashton's study of the reception of German literature and philosophy in nineteenth century Britain.[6] In the 1990s, a number of important studies – such as Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh's edited *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (1996), *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830*, edited by Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson (1998), and Saree Makdisi's *Romantic Imperialism* (1998) – privileged contacts between British literature and non-European cultures and geographies, redefining Romantic-period literary discourse as a point of collision of global forces. By the same token, intra-European cultural concerns became part of, and were mostly subordinated to, a wider map of colonial contact zones and imperial geographies.[7] However, over the last ten to fifteen years, Romantic-period scholarship and criticism in the Anglo-American tradition has seen a significant multiplication of studies about trans-Channel literary exchanges, cosmopolitanism, and Transatlantic cultural traffic, as well as, in a pedagogic perspective, a growing output of companions and anthologies dedicated to European Romanticisms.[8] Continental perspectives are once again at the centre of critical attention. As literary studies in general become increasingly global in scope, older notions of Romanticism as a pan-European, transnational manifestation have been gaining new currency, and growing numbers of critics have started to reconsider the networks of influences and exchanges linking British Romantic-era writings to other European literatures from a variety of innovative points of view.[9]

Among the most recent, and in many ways groundbreaking, contributions on this transcontinental conversation are Jane Stabler's *The Artistry of Exile* and Paul Hamilton's *Realpoetik*, both published in 2013, and Jeffrey N. Cox's *Romanticism in the Shadow of War* (2014). In her study of exiled Romantic and Victorian writers in Italy, Stabler makes a compelling case for literary hybridization as she examines how 'foreign cadences intermix with the English poetic tradition, creating a distinctive poetics of exile'.[10] Hamilton's book, instead, focuses on post-Napoleonic Continental Romanticisms from philosophical, historical, and aesthetic perspectives to demonstrate how, during the Restoration, the political imagination

effectively shaped political reality. By the same token, his study opens up critical insights into the possibility that 'second-generation English imaginings might not only satirize but also construct alternatives to the political imagining emerging from the Congress [of Vienna]'.[11] In *Romanticism in the Shadow of War*, then, Cox provides a crucial antecedent to my study by examining the interconnections between literary culture (approximately between the Peace of Amiens and the 1820s) and the state of warfare promoted by global empires, as well as the development of a global culture through countless forms of 'cultural border raiding'.[12] From a related standpoint, in the introduction to their collection of essays *British Romanticism in European Perspective* (2015) Steve Clark and Tristanne Connolly have explicitly called for a re-engagement with 'what British Romanticism looks like when its own international connections and circulations are taken into account'.[13] Also in order to identify 'resources in the Romantic tradition for defining a newer sense of European identity', their volume considers such phenomena as 'migration of individuals, texts and philosophies, actual translation or the concept of translation as a paradigm for international relations, difference within British Romanticism that has connections to continental trends and ideas, or British Romanticism as an early and influential manifestation of a spreading Romantic spirit'.[14] Through their various concerns, aims, and approaches, these studies bear witness to the plurality characterizing the current resurgence of critical interest in the forms of exchange, mirroring, contact, and contrast between literatures and cultures on either side of the English Channel.

Expanding this scholarly and critical conversation, *European Literatures in Britain, 1815–1832* tests the still influential notion of an intrinsically insular British cultural sphere by looking at how foreign works and ideas made their way into Britain, how they were discussed, circulated, recycled, and reworked, and in which material and ideological contexts these forms of reception developed. It offers an original contribution by concentrating on British-Continental literary relations between the end of the Napoleonic emergency and the mid-1830s. A possible starting point for this exploration is Ian Jack's suggestion that the 'variety and vigour' of Britain's *belles lettres* between 1815 and 1832 owed much to 'the exceptional amount of cross-fertilization at that time between our literature and the literatures of other countries'.[15] More recently, Richard Cronin has summarized the distinctive features of 'the writing of the post-war decade' up to the early 1830s as including the predominance of Byron and Scott on the literary market, the emergence of the magazine as its distinctive literary

form, an antagonistic atmosphere punctuated by frequent literary feuds, and the transformation of literature from 'a gentlemanly vocation' to 'a professional occupation'.[16] Bringing the international perspective to bear on Cronin's selection of features, I demonstrate how this literary phase was also distinguished by an extended and intensified engagement with foreign literatures. My analyses of what Jack called the considerable 'amount' of international literary intersections between 1815 and 1832 aim to investigate the 'exceptional' nature of these intersections and their significance in the development of Romantic-period literary culture.

With these priorities in mind, *European Literatures in Britain, 1815–1832* addresses such questions as: how and why did foreign presences pervade Romantic-period literature at this temporal juncture, and how did writers and commentators from different ideological backgrounds respond in turn? What kind of relationships did British writers form, and what investments did they make, across the Continent? How did this reception of foreign materials bear on contemporary debates on national (especially English and British) cultural identity and literary canons? And how did it materially affect genres and forms – from poetry, drama, and the novel to reviewing and literary historiography?

In order to identify the overarching mechanisms that characterized the presence and impact of Continental European literatures in post-Waterloo literature and culture, I reconsider the material aspects of this phenomenon especially in relation to those forms, such as periodicals and anthologies, which gained prominence in this period. However, an exploration of the quantitative increase in connections and exchanges with Continental literatures offers a merely partial explanation. For this reason, this book also evaluates the political and ideological conditions attendant on this increase in foreign presences within British literature as sources of enrichment and causes for concern. In the chapters that follow I employ the dual lens of translation and appropriation to examine the material and imaginary, as well as aesthetic and ideological, implications and consequences of the importing and acclimatizing of Continental literatures in Romantic-period Britain.

Translation as a process of interlinguistic transposition has a central place in this book. In his *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1790) Alexander Fraser Tytler defined it as a primary vehicle for cross-cultural exchanges, one which could make available 'all the stores of ancient knowledge, and creating a free intercourse of science and of literature between all modern nations'.[17] Throughout the period, moreover, translation interacted with literary creation (think, for instance, of its importance for

authors such as Elizabeth Inchbald, Walter Scott, Percy Shelley, or Felicia Hemans); and, as David Simpson argues, it informed the tendency of Romantic-era literature to circumvent any 'clear distinction between what is English and what is foreign' in order to reach a semiotically inexhaustible 'impasse of blocked communication'.[18] Finding translation at the heart of what he calls the 'geohistorical epic' (Robert Southey's long poems, for instance) or the linguistic otherness of the poetry of Robert Burns and John Clare, Simpson draws attention to the unfinished and fragmented forms of cross-cultural linkage made possible by translation.[19] As his perspective clarifies, then, any aspiration to a complete rendition of a foreign original in our own language inevitably clashes with the historical, geographical, political, and class- and gender-bound conditions that bear on the relations between the works involved in the translational exchange.

In turn, moving beyond an idea of translation as mere interlinguistic conversion enables us to envisage it as a comprehensive process for the cross-cultural transposition of texts, cultural forms and contents, objects, and people into another linguistic and cultural domain. In this notion of translation, as Lieven D'Hulst remarks, '"cultural" items supersede the tropes of interlingual or intertextual equivalence, for a long time held to be the core feature of the translation concept'.[20] Similarly, Peter Burke has insisted on the nature of 'cultural translation' as a transcultural processing of cultural features, broadly defining it as 'the work that needs to be done by individuals and groups to domesticate the alien, and the strategies and the tactics that they employ'.[21] In this context, interlinguistic and intertextual translation becomes a component in a wider-ranging 'cultural translation' that constitutes a set of operations involving not only the transference of texts across linguistic boundaries, but also other forms of cultural mediation involving individuals, identities, technologies, and artefacts.

These concerns have surfaced repeatedly in Romantic-period studies, though usually without any explicit reference to the concept or theory of cultural translation. In *Byron and Place* (2003), Stephen Cheeke discusses translation not merely as an interlinguistic shift, but also as a 'realignment . . . from one place to another', which, 'when travel ceases to be travel and becomes acculturation, radically alters Byron's relation to geo-history, reconstituting the notion of *being there* in terms of being *in-between*'.[22] More recently, in *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger* (2013), David Simpson has emphasized further the relevance of this knot of issues for Romantic-period studies by discussing translation as a way of problematizing 'the image of the foreigner or the stranger' and debating

whether 'the stranger can be managed, accommodated enough by being transposed (if not quite translated) into the textual household' of the receiving language and culture.[23] Though differently pitched, both studies throw light on Romantic-period translation as a fraught process of confrontation with, and incorporation of, another linguistic and cultural system in ways that are consonant with what recent translation theory identifies as cultural translation.

In a comprehensively interlinguistic and cultural perspective, translation is one of the principal means by which cultures appropriate ideas and artefacts, and subsequently rework and redeploy them. Thus, it is intimately related to the other main structuring category in this book, that of appropriation, which in Peter Burke's definition comprises a vast range of operations of 'cultural borrowing' and the (not necessarily aggressive) importation of another cultural item, which the receiving culture proceeds to adapt, reinvent, and reuse.[24] From a more analytical perspective, James O. Young has formulated a taxonomy of forms of appropriation – in terms of object, content, style, motif, and subject – that highlights their contribution to the expansion of the receiving culture by the introduction of new and unfamiliar ideas or artefacts.[25] Yet, since borrowing is a generally ambiguous activity, discussions of appropriation also tend to describe a hostile operation responding to an imperative of self-aggrandizement rather than a vision of reciprocal enrichment. If it sets up a dialogue between different cultural groups and across linguistic and national boundaries, appropriation also aims, as Michel Foucault suggests, at a 'form of [discursive] ownership'.[26] Further insights into this more confrontational notion of appropriation emerge in Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979, English translation 1984), where 'every appropriation [of a work of art]' is defined as 'the embodiment of a relation of distinction' and serves to identify 'cultural capital which only exists and subsists in and through the struggles' permeating the relevant 'fields of cultural production'.[27] Casting appropriation as a staple of his theory of cultural production and consumption, Bourdieu positions it within the conflicted flows of competition and distinction that course through cultural and literary traditions, both blurring and reinforcing lines of national and linguistic separation.

Cultural translation and the tensions and ambivalences of appropriation are of vital importance to this book's reconstruction of the international relations of British literature and culture between the end of the French wars and the mid-1830s. With these premises in mind, it examines translation with an eye to the agency of cultural mediators in these relations, their social, political, and ideological contexts, and their material conditions.

In the process, it explores appropriation as a collective conceptual container for the ways in which British writers and commentators discussed and reused texts, forms, and ideas from the Continent through ideologically specific acts of reception.

As it focuses on the importation of literatures from beyond the Channel, *European Literatures in Britain, 1815–1832* investigates the combination of national imperatives and international and transnational connections at the heart of Romantic-period writings. In particular, it analyses the many ways in which literature engaged with Continental traditions in ambivalent, often contradictory, fashion. Finally, as it considers the 'borrowings' and 'engraftings' promoted by translation and appropriation between Napoleon's downfall and the post-Reform, early to mid-1830s, this book delineates the later phase of Romantic-period literature and culture as distinguished by a complex, transformative conversation with the literatures and cultures of Continental Europe.

Continental Literatures in Britain from the 1780s to the Post-Napoleonic Era

In spite of the widespread notion of an egalitarian European 'republic of letters', eighteenth century attitudes towards, and reception of, foreign literatures responded to diplomatic, economic, and military relations that determined how and when foreign works, figures, or fashions were imported and assimilated.[28] From the middle to the end of the century, literary connections with the Continent depended on the oscillations in Britain's relations with other European powers and, especially, such global collisions as the Seven Years' War (1754–63), famously described by Winston Churchill as the first 'world war'; the War of American Independence (1775–83), which also involved France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic; and, from 1793 onwards, the wars with revolutionary and imperial France and their subsidiary conflicts such as the Anglo-Spanish War of 1796–1808.

In her study of the links between British Gothic fiction and French literature in the second half of the eighteenth century, Angela Wright has argued that the 1780s constituted a period of 'literary paranoia, suspicion and open hostility' owing to protracted international warfare.[29] At the same time, however, this decade also saw the flourishing and reinforcement of forms of importation of foreign literatures. Translated prose fiction from the Continent, mostly French and German, represented 10% of the overall output and reached 15% in the 1790s.[30] Moreover, as James Raven

observes, the popularity of foreign products among novel readers was such that even home-grown works were sometimes strategically labelled as 'translations' to increase their appeal.[31] Equally relevant was the contribution of the new reviews launched in the 1780s in the wake of the *Monthly Review* (1749) and the *Critical Review* (1756), both of which occasionally covered foreign works. By late century, foreign literatures had gained a foothold in the structure of these periodicals. The significantly titled *European Review* first appeared in 1782 and continued publication until 1826. First issued in 1783, the *English Review* bore the explicit subtitle of 'An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature', its preface announcing that its readers could expect 'occasional accounts of literature in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain'.[32] In actual fact, even though its early issues were characterized by a tone of fashionable cosmopolitanism, from the 1790s to the 1820s it became increasingly concerned with historical and antiquarian subjects. Similarly, the coverage of European titles in the *European Review* proved to be fitful at best.

The literary production of this decade presents a similar kind of ambivalence. In the drama, a significant number of texts were foreign adaptations, especially from French, such as Thomas Holcroft's version of Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* as *The Follies of a Day* (1784), Elizabeth Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* (1788), *The Child of Nature* (1788), and *Next-Door Neighbours* (1791), or Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* (1791). Widespread antagonism towards France did not hinder the Francophilia of dramatists and audiences. The 1780s thus contributed to what Frederick Burwick describes as a wave of 'continued popularity' of French drama in eighteenth century Britain, one which, as Allardyce Nicoll noted, began slightly to abate only towards the end of century 'owing to the anti-Gallic sentiments aroused by the Revolution'.[33] Foreign influences and contacts played a comparable role in late eighteenth century prose fiction and especially the novel, a fact that has led Mary Helen McMurran to argue convincingly for 'fiction's extranationality' in this period.[34] From the same perspective, in their reconstruction of the novel's thick web of cross-Channel connections in the 1780s and 90s, Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever suggest a hyphenated point of inception for a 'modern novel' which 'developed through intersections and interactions among texts, readers, writers, and publishing and critical institutions that linked together Britain and France'.[35] As with plays, foreign novels in translation were both phenomenally successful and problematic, since they were often accused of adding to the immoral influence of nationally produced fiction over British readers. One of the