

Introduction

On 1 August 1814, thousands watched the St. James's Park display in which John Nash turned the 'Castle of Discord' into the 'Temple of Concord'. People also lined the streets for the formal Triumphs to celebrate victory in the Napoleonic Wars. These events formed the centrepiece of the Regent's Grand Jubilee to mark victory in Europe and a century of Hanoverian rule.¹ Events at Waterloo were cause for further celebration: church bells rang out on 18 June 1815. In August of the same year, Wordsworth climbed to the top of Skiddaw where he ate plum pudding, drank rum punch, sang the national anthem, and toasted British victory.² But despite the widespread jubilation at the end of twenty-two years of war, 1815 saw a renewed fervour in the radical voice against the state. That year has been chosen as the starting point of this study because it marks a new phase of public discontent with British hegemony, a discontent which informs and is informed by the second generation of Romantic poets. The riots over The Importation Act which greeted Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh, on his return from the Congress of Vienna, heralded a period in which a largely patriotic wartime populace changed to a reform-seeking, internationally aware public. In a *Quarterly Review* article of October 1816, the poet laureate Robert Southey, who had celebrated atop Skiddaw with Wordsworth, sensed the strengthening of a radical current, and observed that those writers who 'deceive the feelings of the multitude, have now laboured more wickedly and more successfully in corrupting them'.³ A month after Southey's article appeared, one of its direct targets, William Cobbett, published a two-pence version of the *Political Register* to appeal to a wider readership, and in the next month the Spa Field riots brought the radical cause to the street. Dividing lines were marked more clearly in October 1817 when William Blackwood changed the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and took editorial control over the periodical that would become the primary conservative voice against radical poetry. A war of ideas not seen since the 1790s meant

the return of anti-radical legislation. By April 1817, ‘the disturbed state of the country’ required the suspension of habeas corpus and the return of the Seditious Meetings Act, and in 1819 the Six Acts increased newspaper duties and reduced the time of libel trials.⁴ The international situation was equally fraught. The question of who would govern in the Italian peninsula after French withdrawal occupied the mind of the victors at Vienna, and in London it inspired liberals and radicals who were in favour of Italian independence.

The range of texts, authors, and locations outlined above are illustrative of the shift in Romantic literary criticism in the past thirty years. Critical attention has moved from a small ‘visionary company’ to the manifold productions of Regency culture, and has sought to prioritise the political resonances of literature in the period.⁵ The second wave of Romantic literature has proved fertile ground for such work. What Nicholas Roe has called ‘the new contextualism’, which he associates with Cultural Materialist and New Historical approaches, has become critical orthodoxy.⁶ Critics of this stripe aim to provide a contextual background to elaborate the cultural situation of literary production. This study seeks to analyse Anglo-Italian literature and culture in the context of the particular political situation in Italy and London, but it will not prioritize the political context over the literary work. The chapters that follow consider a number of relationships in a number of locales across multiple forms. It is hoped that the concentrated rather than extended chronological focus allows for both detailed contextualisation and close readings of texts. The narrow timeline also permits extended engagement with manuscripts, both of well-known poets such as Hunt and Shelley, and those of the numerous travellers who visited Italy after Waterloo. The blend of traditionally disparate approaches – close reading, historical writing, literary theory (of many stripes), manuscript study – paints a suitably complex picture of Regency literary culture.

A brief *tour d’horizon* of the criticism that has celebrated the European, and specifically Italian, dimension of British Romanticism is necessary before outlining what I intend to consider in *The Italian Idea*, and how I intend to consider it. Gregory Dart has traced the influence of Rousseau and Robespierre on British discourse; the impact of contemporary German thought on writers such as Coleridge and Carlyle has been explored by Nicholas Halmi and Rosemary Ashton; and recent transeuropean studies by Paul Hamilton and Diego Saglia have shown the importance of figures such as de Staël, Schlegel, and Leopardi to the political character of Romanticism, and considered how periodical journalism and professional

translation brought European literature to Britain.⁷ German and French culture were the two dominant European spheres of influence on British Romanticism, but Italian culture enjoyed a privileged position after the Battle of Waterloo. The appeal of Italy lay in the revival of an ignored source. Italian literature was disregarded in the main current of eighteenth-century letters and was not a formative influence on the poetry of the Lake School. The Italian reading of Byron, Hazlitt, Hunt, Shelley, and others moved against this dominant tradition and propagated an idea of Italy that brought with it thematic and formal license. Furthermore, the literature of Italy provided a link back to Milton, who had found inspiration there for his poetry and his republicanism. 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.⁸ This promotion also suited these authors politically: English and Italian writers felt the need to mediterraneanise literature, against the Gallomania of mid- and late eighteenth-century European culture, and away from the melodrama and mysticism of German thought, to a culture which was historically innovative and republican, but free from the stains of 1790s France.⁹

Criticism of the Anglo-Italian literary relationship in the eighteenth and nineteenth century has two foundational texts. Arturo Graf's *l'anglomania e l'influsso inglese in Italia nel secolo xviii* is a remarkable and dense study that ranges across the eighteenth century. Graf regularly switches his analysis between Italian authors who were influenced by, and who attempted to influence, British literary culture, and those Italians who attempted to use English literature to change Italian literature.¹⁰ The classic work in English is C. P. Brand's *Italy and the English Romantics*. Brand is one of the few critics who considers the work of exiles in England and Italy in tandem, and the work's greatest strength is its scope. More recent work can be split into two areas: considerations of English writers and travellers in Italy, and single-author studies of a writer's influence on, or relationship with, Anglo-Italian Romanticism. In the first group, the political idea of Italy and its past for English visitors has been discussed by Maura O'Connor and Roderick Cavaliero, and in an essay collection edited by Lilla Maria Crisafulli.¹¹ Jane Stabler, in *The Artistry of Exile*, closely examines the formal and thematic expressions of exile by Romantic and Victorian writers, and Maria Schoina's *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'* pays particular attention to the dynamics of the Pisan circle.¹² Byron and

Shelley were the leading poets of this circle, and their relationship with Italian literature is dealt with in single-author studies by Peter Vassallo and Alan Weinberg.¹³ Of all the English Romantic interactions with Italian literature, it is the interest in Dante that has received the most attention, with a number of works covering Romantic poets' readings and borrowings from the *Commedia*, notably Ralph Pite's *The Circle of Our Vision*.¹⁴

The international relations mapped in recent criticism show the influence of foreign writers on British Romanticism. A study of Anglo-Italian interaction can usefully go beyond these examinations of a one-way influence, and beyond Crisafulli's claim that Italy provided travellers with '[l]ibertà e liberazione dai rigidi codici comportamentali e sociali'.¹⁵ Travellers, as Crisafulli acknowledges, enjoyed a liberty outside social codes: at carnival in Venice, mingling with expatriates at the Gabinetto Vieusseux in Florence, and gazing at the sights of Rome. But this liberty was not materially different from that which Thomas Gray, Horace Walpole, or William Beckford, enjoyed on their Grand Tours; it was not a phenomenon exclusive to the Romantic period. These travellers were usually making their sole journey abroad and intended to return home in a year or less. I use the manuscript diaries of 1820s travellers to show the differences between their experience of Italy and that shared by long-term residents such as Byron and John Taaffe. The radical authors in question were domiciled in foreign lands and saw themselves, in Shelley's famous line, as exiles.¹⁶ They sought refuge in Italy from the reprimand of the establishment for their political beliefs and from the attacks on their experimental verse in the periodical press.

As Edward Said and Jane Stabler have discussed, the condition of being in exile is not easy to define, and the degree to which one person feels the ostracising pressure to leave "home" varies.¹⁷ That Foscolo and Augustus Bozzi were exiles, in the sense of being in danger should they return to their native country, seems beyond doubt, but questions could be raised over whether the Shelleys or Margaret Mason were truly exiled from Britain. A possible alternative term would be 'émigré', but this is a Romantic period neologism for French royalists escaping the Revolution; calling these Britons 'émigrés' would be politically and geographically misleading. To identify as an exile in Italy is to place one's self alongside Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Foscolo, and this hinterland is part of what makes it a paradise. Their opponents also appreciated their condition: in its attack on the blasphemy and immorality of *The Liberal* (a journal founded by Byron, Shelley, and Hunt), the *John Bull* noted that 'other things than poverty can exile men'.¹⁸ Shelley was

conscious of being cast out of Britain and makes an apposite comparison, discussed in Chapter 6, with the exiled angels in Milton's *Pandemonium*: like Mammon, they prefer 'Hard liberty before the easy yoke / Of servile pomp', but by placing themselves in opposition to their home they must deal with the emotional rupture of displacement.¹⁹ As the book's epigraph shows, those who leave home hope for 'il fior novo di strania favella'.²⁰ But exiles who felt themselves forced to remain in Italy longer than Milton's brief exchange of the Thames for the Arno suffered from homesickness, a suffering that was liable to increase upon realising the inherent difficulties of trying to change British culture from afar. The paradisaical quality of this exile came in an escape from a hegemonic culture policed, in the case of English writers by conservative elements of the press, and in the case of the Italian writers by repressive and censorious foreign regimes. A less well-known expression of Shelley's casts Italy as 'the retreat of Pariahs', an expression which engages with the hardships of the exilic condition, and the triangle that it creates between the exile, their native land, and their reader.²¹ The English exiles were not passing through; Italy was their home, and its literature informed their letters, poems, translations, and critical works. The Italian exiles who went to England were also there on a long-term basis. They went, like Dante's pilgrim, seeking liberty, and found it in predominantly Radical and Whig circles.

It is my contention, following the classic works of Graf and Brand, that a study trying to map interactions in this period can be most illuminating by considering multiple authors and locations. Where some periods have been restricted through nomenclature – the Age of Dryden, Pope, Johnson, and even Wordsworth – any attempt to do so in the 'hot-chronology' of 1815–1823 is an obstacle to analysis.²² Said has noted that one of the few benefits for an exiled writer is that, 'Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions'.²³ The critic should attempt to map the dual perspective of two groups living in foreign lands who are also looking back and engaging with, the situation they left behind. The single-author perspectives of Weinberg, Vassallo, and Pite allow the deep examination of a single interaction, but cannot give an account of the complexity of the many Anglo–Italian currents active over the period. The opening of perspective I propose is extended to location. Previous works by Schoina and Cavaliero look at an English idea of Italy, without discussing Italian exiles' promotion of their culture and cause in London. The various exchanges between England and Italy were not taken in isolation; as Jeffrey Cox has

suggested, we should '(re-)place Second Generation Romanticism' to look at groups, and coteries, and the extra dimensions of influence that they facilitate.²⁴

A broad analysis must consider what role a radical current in literature played in the movement against the existing social order. Since the 'return to history', critics have offered a number of ways of describing the boundaries enforced by official culture, and the challenges which literature makes upon them. Jerome McGann writes of 'conventions and enabling limits', Francis Mulhern examines 'injunctive social practices', and Alan Liu opts for the succinct 'regulated state'.²⁵ As Terry Eagleton has noted in the context of British control of Ireland in the long nineteenth century, 'the peculiar resilience of bourgeois rule' in this period is predicated on a control 'which operates more through the consensual life of civil society than through the coercive instruments of the state'.²⁶ With this in mind, I have chosen to approach the constrictions the modern state places on literature by seeing them as hegemonic, taking inspiration from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, and my way of tracing these constrictions and the radical challenges to them is informed by the work of J. G. A. Pocock. Gramsci's approach derives from Marx's statement that 'popular persuasion is often as strong as material force', and claims that non-violent 'persuasion' is the foundation of the state.²⁷ Vittorio Alfieri expressed a version of this long before Gramsci's birth, 'L'opinione è la innegabile signora del mondo. L'opinione è sempre figlia in origine di una tal qual persuasione, e non mai della forza'.²⁸ Alfieri grasps the two central tenets of hegemonic power: that it is the most powerful tool in society, and that it can only be implemented by persuasion and not by force. It is the consensual basis of an existing system, which along with the occasional use of domination (the means of violence provided by a standing army), upholds the status quo.

How did a historical bloc gain hegemonic control over the British 'public mind'?²⁹ As Pocock has argued, the ability of a growing middle class to control culture is a product of the shift in eighteenth-century political philosophy from a 'law-centered paradigm and into the paradigm of virtue and corruption'.³⁰ The consequence of this transformation was the ability to govern not just through Parliament but also through manners and convention. Dissidents and radicals, who were not necessarily breaking any laws, could still be controlled through criticism of their vice, effeminacy, and corruption. A movement into a politics of hegemonic, rather than legislative, control was helped by the advent of nationalism and nationalist literature. In Oliver Goldsmith's *The Traveller or a Prospect of*

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Society (1764), characteristics are demarcated that were to be upheld as 'English', and later 'British', and readers are warned against the faults and dangers of other nations. Goldsmith's traveller is fulsome in his praise of European nations but he is firm in his belief in 'the patriot's boast, where'er we roam, / His first, best country ever is at home'.³¹ 'Home' is not simply the land mass of the British isles but also a place free of the 'opulence' and 'sensual bliss' of Italy, and Goldsmith ends his poem warning that too many Britons follow 'pleasure's lordly call' in their love of travel.³² The availability of travel to people beyond certain professions (merchants, soldiers, diplomats etc.) allowed Britons to feel they belonged to a national consciousness, and the ability of national traits to create common attitudes towards things as diverse as commerce, morality, and literature was heightened by the use of stereotypical figures of Britishness. John Bull is important not just for the stout, masculine, and proud Briton that he represents, and which he asks other Britons to identify with, but also for what he is not. His stature is a reminder that he is not the effeminate, lazy, and flamboyantly dressed Italian that he is often set against. If Britons, by virtue of their place of birth and their shared language, culture, and history, can see themselves as British, so too can they project unified stereotypes on to the states in the Mediterranean peninsula that they called Italy. Hegemonic control was exerted over manners, personal appearance, and cultural production to constitute a positive 'Britishness'; so by extension non-British forms of expression such as Italian music and poetry were castigated for their difference from these standards. It is this struggle, produced by what Pocock calls the inherent difficulty for foreign ideas to 'become domiciled in an environment', that underpins the reaction against radical Anglo-Italianism.³³

Romantic-period attempts to control culture can be explored through the early nineteenth-century usage of the phrase 'the public mind'. Since the 1750s, the phrase referred to how a politician was judged by the populace, or a politician's sensitivity to the needs of the public, but later it was used to define the collective opinion of the United Kingdom.³⁴ Such articulations still exist: in the parlance of today's press, the 'British Taxpayer' is the animated and attacking public voice against external and internal threats. Although the 'public mind' and the 'British taxpayer' share a collective function, and often focus on the foreign, the former has none of the force of the latter. The British 'public mind' in the Romantic period rarely attacks and is often characterised by its vulnerability. During the war with France, the 'public mind' was increasingly invoked as a single moral force guided by the state and its supporters to

maintain order, which negatively reacted to new and unorthodox media. The hegemonic appropriation of this term at a time of acute danger is a neat example of the state's constant adaptation, and chimes with Raymond Williams's claim that a 'lived hegemony is always a process [...] It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified'.³⁵ The term is used by Pitt, during the proposal of the Unlawful Societies Act 1799, when he claims that the 'most important' effect of the legislation will be to 'prevent the press from becoming an engine of corruption and innovation [...] to circulate cheap publications, adapted to inflame and pervert the public mind'.³⁶ The quotation is typical of Romantic usage, as a public whole reacts against threats to hegemony. The threat often came from the continent, and the rhetoric used to stop these radical ideas has a marked similarity to that used against European immigrants. Advocates of the status quo told their reader of the dangers posed to the 'public mind': Arthur Young claimed, 'The public mind had been corrupted by France'; the *Monthly Meteor* chastised British radicals for 'deluding and inflaming the public mind', and for Coleridge an audience's lack of disgust during a production of Charles Maturin's *Bertram* (1816) showed 'the depravation of the public mind', and proved that the 'shocking spirit of jacobinism [*sic*] seemed no longer confined to politics'.³⁷

In 1819, Shelley claimed in a letter to Hunt that 'every word a man has to say is valuable to the public now', and he was acutely aware that the style and form of these words was integral to their potential to 'awaken the minds of the people'.³⁸ Despite arguing for an approach that shows conservative culture defending its hegemonic control, I do not intend to reduce literature and contemporary criticism, in all its complexity, to an expression of national politics. Pocock has argued that a "history of ideas" [...] gives way before a history of languages, vocabularies, ideologies, paradigms', and I extend this expansion to explore history of poetic forms.³⁹ Conservative periodicals promoted valued literary forms and genres; these had to be defended, and innovative works that were deemed subversive, likewise had to be attacked. As James Sacks has illustrated, the vigilance of these journalists goes far beyond twentieth-century suspicion of a biased or partisan press: the state was often funding these maintainers of hegemony, as it did when it gave £1500 to J. W. Croker to set up the *Guardian*.⁴⁰ The diction, themes, and forms of Italian-influenced poetry represented a threat to the 'public mind', and the literary establishment attempted to negatively portray this literature. This occurred principally through periodicals, particularly *Blackwood's* and to an extent in the *Quarterly*: if the pamphlet was the medium of anti-revolutionary literature

of the 1790s, then reviews and periodicals were frequently that which ‘conducted conservative political expression’ after Waterloo.⁴¹ The anonymity and regularity of this journalism, which was read by more than one hundred thousand Britons, meant they could claim to speak as organs of a public voice, not just as a subjective single author.⁴² The maintainers of a conservative order did not applaud foreign ingenuity: the maintenance of hegemony occurred through a sense of collective authority that fell back on the twin pillars of tradition and present taste, which meant guarding strictness in form, and upholding suitable generic themes and locations. Conservative journals had their favourites; as is shown throughout this study, the works of Alexander Pope and Walter Scott were upheld as standards that much poetry was judged against.

From 1815–1823, radicals were not, except possibly for a few months during the trial of Queen Caroline, in a position to take control of British culture. They were instead concerned with how to challenge the values and strictures of the historical bloc through innovation and dissent. James Epstein has examined how post-Waterloo radicals offered counter-definitions for the meanings of concepts such as ‘Liberty’ and the ‘Constitution’.⁴³ This also occurred in usage of the ‘public mind’, a phrase that had principally maintained hegemony began to be used to question and erode it. In 1815, Cobbett wrote,

The mayor refuses to call a meeting, on account, as he says, of ‘the unsettled state of the public mind’. Why, what is that to the purpose? The people’s meeting, discussing the great subject of peace or war, and proposing a petition, is, one would suppose the best possible way of settling the public mind.⁴⁴

Cobbett retorts that a ‘people’s meeting’ is in itself a part of the public mind and exposes the inconsistency of an accepted term. Cobbett began a trend: Thomas Wooler could open an article titled ‘March of the Public Mind’ by writing, ‘The progress of public opinion is now unimpeded’ and claiming ‘the death warrant of both whiggism and toryism is nearly signed in this borough’, and Shelley could talk of princes ‘who flow / Through public scorn’ in ‘England in 1819’.⁴⁵ These writers had the privilege of being second to a formulation; as Jon Klancher argues, ‘the radical writer always claims the last word, laying bare the rhetorical stance which his middle-class interlocutors find intolerably fixed’.⁴⁶ To lay bare the meanings of terms like ‘public mind’ requires an awareness of the polyvalence of terms and their history. The ‘public mind’ was a complicated case in this process: it had earlier classical roots in terms such as *res publica*, which in

conservative opinion mitigated its corruption by the French public revolt. Yet, for radicals like Cobbett and Wooler, the ‘public mind’ has a history before 1789, in the English commonwealth and its intellectual engagement with the republicanism of the Italian city states.⁴⁷

Just as journalists challenged terms of authority, so literary critics began to question how periodicals maintained state hegemony. Hazlitt, an admirer of Cobbett, whom he described as a ‘*fourth estate* in the politics of this country’, began to find counter-definitions for the ‘public mind’.⁴⁸ He attacked the editor of the *Quarterly*, William Gifford, as a ‘government spy’, and went on, ‘You “keep a corner in the public mind, for foul prejudice and corrupt power to knot and gender in.”’⁴⁹ Hazlitt revises Othello’s image of his heart as a fountain turned into ‘a cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in’.⁵⁰ As Othello hopes to show Desdemona’s falsehood, so Hazlitt sought to expose Gifford’s role in forming the ‘public mind’. He replaces the original lines with the same diction of bodily disease that conservatives such as Gifford had used to attack radicals. Hazlitt’s choice of diction is a reclamation of older republican discourse: talk of corruption was widespread in the writings of the English Revolution, especially in the work of James Harrington who took his inspiration from Machiavelli and Guiccardini; here Hazlitt is instigating a revolution in the sense of moving the usage back to an earlier starting point.⁵¹ As Pocock has shown, the movement of ideas in language from Florentine thinkers, via the English Revolution, to the centre of Georgian cultural debate affected the opposition of ‘Court’ and ‘Country’, the castigation of a ministerial class, and the framing of patronage as ‘corruption’.⁵² Hazlitt’s discussion of ‘corrupt power’ reminds his readers that this was an earlier term for panderers to a ‘court party’ in Medici Florence and Caroline England, people who ‘overstepped the proper limits of royal favor and entered the sphere of bribery and venality’.⁵³ In a review of the *Christabel* volume, three years before his attack on Gifford, Hazlitt had used the idea of a corrupt court to criticise Coleridge as an author ‘whose daily prose is understood to be dedicated to the support of all that courtiers think should be supported’.⁵⁴ Here Hazlitt appropriates the Florentine critique of hegemonic power, a critique that was the philosophical foundation for the brief English Commonwealth. It is fitting that Hazlitt goes to Italian discourse for his terms: after the 1790s and the failure of the French Revolution, Italy represented an earlier land, and landscape, of liberty and republicanism which were not sullied by the guillotine or Bonaparte. In post-Waterloo London, what it was to be a citizen, and how much control the government had over what you thought, read, and wrote, was

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the subject of fertile debate; Italian history – better known since the work of Pierre-Louis Ginguené, William Roscoe, and Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi – provided historical ideas, and therefore historical vocabularies and forms, with which to have this debate.

The undercutting of privileged concepts, such as the ‘public mind’ and ‘corruption’, is an intrinsic feature of radical Anglo-Italian literature. Gramsci claims those who realise the existence of the hegemonic system can create a new ideological terrain; radical ideas of and from Italy were used to prompt this realisation.⁵⁵ The proponents of these ideas instigated a taking-up of foreign forms, and altered accepted genres such as the Romance and the Epic. As Stuart Curran has claimed, this innovation did not temper attitudes towards compositional rules; on the contrary, it reinforced them, ‘reminding us sharply of the very aesthetic distances they subvert’.⁵⁶ So, when a poem in couplets appears which constantly enjambes and pauses unexpectedly, or a protagonist called ‘Don Juan’ is not the seducer but the seduced, writers are advertising their affronts to hegemony by clothing verse in forms they then abuse. Cox has examined this reversal in the context of Hunt’s *The Descent of Liberty* (1815), claiming that in order to challenge their sentiments, Hunt ‘echoed’ the nationalist marches that celebrated British victory in Europe.⁵⁷ Shelley’s Italian verse is committed in its effrontery to hegemonic control and offers illuminating examples of it at the level of the individual word or phrase. Kelvin Everest has argued that, in talking of ‘legioned rooks’ that ‘hail the sun’s uprise majestic’, or appealing ‘To the eternal years enthroned before us’, Shelley calls into ‘radical service the vocabulary of the very social structure that obstructs the realization of his ideals’.⁵⁸ The poetic interactions analysed in *The Italian Idea* share this refusal to be fenced in, and the writers considered herein were staging a deliberate challenge to hegemony by flouting those literary conventions and customs that were so often seen in national terms.