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THE ITALIAN IDEA

From 1815 to 1823 the Italian influence on English literature was at its zenith. While English tourists flocked to Italy, a pervasive Italianism coloured many facets of London life, including poetry, periodicals, translation, and even the Queen's trial of 1820. In this engaging study Will Bowers considers this radical interaction by pursuing two interrelated analyses. The first examines the Italian literary and political ideas absorbed by Romantic poets, particularly Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The second uncovers the ambassadorial role played in London by Italians, such as Serafino Buonaiuti and Ugo Foscolo, who promoted a revolutionary idea of their homeland and its literature, particularly Dante's *Commedia*. This dual-perspective study reveals that radical poetic engagement with Italy operated alongside the writings of Italian literary exiles in London to form a cosmopolitan challenge to Regency mores.

WILL BOWERS is Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Thought at Queen Mary, University of London. He is the co-editor of *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie 1580–1830* (2016) and has published widely on Leigh Hunt, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, and Lord Byron in journals such as *Essays in Criticism*, *Review of English Studies*, and *Romanticism on Net*.

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Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture, 1815–1823

WILL BOWERS
Queen Mary, University of London

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for Hazel,
Something there is about you that strikes a match in me

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Cosi amor meco insù la lingua snella
Desta il fior novo di strania favella,
Mentre io di te, vezzosamente altera,
Canto, dal mio buon popol non inteso
E'l bel Tamigi cangio col bel Arno.
—John Milton, 'Sonnet III'

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Preface

From 1815 to 1823, the influence of Italy on English literary culture was at its zenith. A pervasive Italianism characterised many facets of London life: poetry, periodicals, translations, the opera, and even the trial of Queen Caroline. Peace in continental Europe enabled tourists to cross the Simplon Pass to a culture they had been deprived of for twenty years. Those who stayed at home but felt 'a languishment / For skies Italian', as Keats put it, had on the banks of the Thames an increasingly Italianate metropolis.[1] There is plently of evidence to suggest that English readers were fascinated with Italian culture: Anne Elliot and Marionetta O'Carroll read and sang opera arias, for instance, and Dante Alighieri and Torquato Tasso were translated into English.[2] In poetic composition, the Italian tradition was put to radical use by poets who experimented with its forms and themes to produce some of the most enduring works of the Romantic period. The production of these texts was excited by the growth of an Italian migrant community in London, which included poets, musicians, and booksellers. The Italianism of the poets and the interest kindled by Italian exiles accumulated over the period, and it produced poetry and criticism that engaged in increasingly complex ways with Italian ideas.

It is my contention that some cosmopolitan Londoners conceived of supporting Italian culture, the British poetry influenced by it, and Italian independence movements, as part of a larger questioning of Britishness after the Battle of Waterloo. At the opening of her landmark study *The German Idea*, Rosemary Ashton writes of examining 'with an equal eye' the ideas English authors formed with reference to Germany and the idea of Germany that existed in England.[3] Like Ashton, I pursue two separate but interrelated objectives in my analysis of English interaction with Italian ideas. The first is to examine the Italian literary and political ideas absorbed by second-generation Romantic authors, particularly Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The second is to reveal the ambassadorial role played by Italian arrivals in London, such as Giuseppe

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Binda and Ugo Foscolo, who promoted a historically informed idea of their homeland and its literature. I argue that we cannot understand the Italianate poetry of the period until we pay attention to the public reception of Italian exiles in Britain: Italianate poetry and Italian immigrants were viewed as part of the same threat. My subtitle refers to 'Radical Literary Culture', using 'radical' in its broadest sense to describe literature 'characterized by independence of or departure from what is usual or traditional; progressive, unorthodox, or innovative in outlook, conception, design', and for its early nineteenth-century associations with political reform.[4] After victory at Waterloo, the British state maintained cultural hegemony at home and abroad by legislating against the threat of revolutions from Europe, the external threat of immigration to Britain, and the internal danger of radical literature. There is a relationship between literary culture and a defence of the 'public mind', and one of my aims is to show how Regency mores were troubled by alien people, ideas, and literature. An idea of Italy as a dangerous place was partly a hangover from anti-Grand Tour discourse that criticised the femininity and rakishness of travellers to Rome, Venice, and Naples. These preconceptions intensified in post-war London, as the existential fear of foreign, and often Jacobin, corruption could be read into things as diverse as the decoration of Leigh Hunt's prison cell, the Italian staff at Holland House, or the digressive quality of Byron's poetry. Although the words 'Italy' and 'Italian' were commonly used in the period, what they meant is the subject of considerable debate.[5] That foreigners thought of Italy as culturally unified before political unification is apparent from the famous travelogues and histories published across Europe in the early nineteenth century, and in this study I use the term 'Italian' to describe the work of authors who were born in the various independent states that made up the Italian peninsula. While many of these Italians did not share a flag, or a legal system, they did share customs, history, and perhaps most importantly a literature and a literary language. Indeed, Giulio Bollati has argued that cultural products were a homogenizing force in the period, and that Italian writers aimed at 'rivendicare la tradizione di grandezza e di primato dell'Italia e di insegnare ai ciechi e distratti visitatori come si possa scorgerne una continuità attuale almeno nell'agone glorioso delle lettere e delle arti'.[6]

The Italian Idea is concerned with mapping and analysing the second of three waves of Anglo–Italianism from 1780 to 1860, which took place between the earlier engagement of the so-called Della Cruscan poets and the later literary engagement in the years leading up to the *Risorgimento*. This study spans what Claude Lévi-Strauss terms a 'hot-chronology',

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which contains many of the most important literary works and social events of the nineteenth century.[7] At Genoa in 1822, Byron wrote in a reflective mood,

> Talk not of seventy years as age! in seven
> I have seen more changes, down from monarchs to
> The humblest individuals under heaven,
> Than might suffice a moderate century through.[8]

He had witnessed from 1815 to 1822, a tenth of the biblical three-score and ten, more changes in kings and peasants than occur in many an 'age'. I argue that it is the reawakening of an Italian influence on English radical poetry, and the increase in Italian immigration, that made these eight years so immoderate. The advent of this influence at the European peace of 1815 makes for an appropriate starting point. For a terminus, 1823 has been chosen because Foscolo's growing seclusion from literary life and Byron's journey to Greece, a year after the death of Shelley, removed the key proponents of radical Italian ideas from literary culture. Internationally, the quelling of European revolution at the Congress of Laibach (1821) changed the role that Italy and Italian culture played in British life. The impossibility of Italian independence in the short term led to fewer calls for liberation in radical pamphlets and parliamentary debates, and literary–political discourse about Italy became increasingly academic, reflected in articles in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* and Antonio Panizzi's studies of Italian romance.

The study has six chapters that proceed chronologically. Chapters 2 to 6 each cover a juncture in Anglo–Italian cultural relations between 1815 and 1823. These chapters chart the short but brilliant transit of radical Italian ideas across Romantic literary culture, a transit that allowed Italy and its culture to move from relative obscurity to the centre of London life, before returning to the periphery eight years later. The Introduction lays out the previous critical approaches that have been brought to bear on the role of Italy in British Romanticism, before establishing the approach of *The Italian Idea*. Chapter 1 considers how Italian people and literature were viewed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and then looks in detail at three Anglo–Italian interactions in London during the two decades before 1815. Chapters 2 and 3 contain a discussion of the rise of Italian literature in London. I argue that Italy and its poetic canon gave a model for the radical romances of Hunt and Byron, and show how English readers increased their knowledge of this literature through the periodical writings of Foscolo and Serafino Buonaiuti. The second half of Chapter 3

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examines the Whigs who befriended Italian exiles at Holland House, and specifically the shared opposition to British foreign policy of Foscolo, John Cam Hobhouse, and Henry Richard Vassall Fox (Lord Holland). Byron and Shelley's opposition to the cant of British culture made them leave England permanently in 1816 and 1818, respectively. In Chapter 4, I discuss the two poets' time in Venice through a reading of 'Lines written among the Euganean Hills' and *Beppo*, to argue that their new environment engendered formal and moral freedom.

The growing dissent of Byron and Shelley is a prelude to the discussion of protest and revolution at London and Naples in Chapter 5. Queen Caroline's trial of 1820 complicated public views of Italy and its literature: to many Britons, Italians were a scurrilous people who were instrumental in the persecution of a much-loved Queen, but there was also a swell of British support for the Neapolitans in their fight against Austrian tyranny. The texts discussed in this chapter include caricatures, poems, and broadsides published by the burgeoning radical press. These works provided a bulwark for the Queen, allowing her to be defended by a radical counter hegemony before she was judged by the state. The situation at London and Naples from 1820 to 1822 was the closest that radicals and liberals in both countries came to successfully challenging state hegemony. The failure of these years of protest and revolution is reflected in the melancholy cast of the Pisan circle discussed in Chapter 6. The greatest product of this literary circle was Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', a poem that I contend is the high point of the radical interaction with Italy and its poetry, but that is thematically concerned with failure and disappointment. In the Coda, I examine the relatively swift decline of the radical idea of Italy. The death of Shelley and the failure of *The Liberal* (a journal founded by Byron, Shelley, and Hunt), alongside the financial problems of Foscolo, and the diminished role of opposition politics in England, caused the importance of Italian culture to be diminished. German literature and philosophy was in the ascendant by the mid-1820s, and the book ends by assessing the brief but potent impact of radical Anglo–Italian interaction on Romantic literary culture.

Not all things Italian between 1815 and 1823 will be considered. There must be some awareness of the difference 'between the task of combining and the luxury of confusing'.[9] The largest literary omission is the influence and reception of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decamerone* (1351), which was read and reread by the poets discussed in this work. Byron called Boccaccio the 'Bard of Prose' and the bucolic potential of Italy was often associated with his work, particularly by Walter Savage Landor and Hunt.[10] I have chosen

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not to discuss Boccaccio in order to restrict my study of Italian literature to poetry and the particular effect it produced on English literature.[11] To confine the study geographically, I will not consider, except in passing, the works of the Liverpudlian Italianist William Roscoe and his circle. London was home to the largest group of Italian writers and Italian language publishers, as well as being the centre of English poetry, fiction, and newspaper publication: those who published, read, discussed, and policed literary culture in the metropolis made up the core of the Romantic reading public. To move my study away from this and look at Anglo–Italian engagement in the northwest of England would detract from my analysis of the opposition I propose between a literary establishment and radical Anglo-Italian literature. I will also not give sustained attention to English or Italian professional translators of the period. These translators are not a central part of my argument: much good work has already been done on translation in the period, and the writers I give extended consideration to were proficient in Italian.[12]

Furthermore, the study attempts to make a distinction between an innovative Anglo-Italian cultural phenomenon across borders, texts, and forms, and English literature about Italy that was popular in the same timeline. C. P. Brand claims Regency Britons would consume 'almost anything Italian' and he does not distinguish between these many forms of expression.[13] My study will look at an influence that grows out of Italy and its literature, kindled by exiles in both countries, which catalysed poetry and criticism that questioned the status quo. I will only consider the concurrent Italian fashion in travel writing, the novel, and poetry, as a counterpoint to a radical idea of Italy. Joseph Luzzi has discussed how this manner of cultural interaction with Italy meant that the 'magnificent cultural residue from antiquity and the Renaissance overwhelmed any signs of cultural activity'.[14] It was an attitude that allowed visitors to engage with Italy without the investment in its contemporary state that preoccupied circles at Holland House and Pisa.

The Italian fashion can be seen in works like Felicia Hemans's *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (1816), Elizabeth Batty's *Italian Scenery* (1820), and Samuel Rogers's *Italy* (1822). Hemans's contemporary anti-Napoleonic poem considers Italy in the past tense; the 'Home of the Arts' has 'given' much, but has little left.[15] The language of decay is everywhere in her description of 'Fallen Italy' which is 'faded', 'mould'r-ing', 'dimm'd', and a 'wreck'.[16] Even the return of its plundered art offers little hope; it is only a chance 'to gaze, / On the rich relics of sublimer days'.[17] Its register is typical of a fashion that viewed Italy as a *temenos* for

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the English writer, and this literature has little interest in Italian forms, preferring instead the Spenserian stanza, blank verse, or the regular couplet. Italy's current state is remarkably absent in works that mediate to English readers the sense of wonder felt by English eyes, and its idea of Italy has none of the 'continuità attuale' that binds past glories with future potential.[18] Some overlap does occur between the Italian fashion in English literature and the radical Anglo-Italianism I intend to analyse. The fourth canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was a touchstone for English travellers in Italy and contains many dirgeful stanzas, but the ruined Italy seen by Harold is what Byron himself railed against in his later poetry.

The modern conception of the Romantic poet in Italy has been formed with much more of *Childe Harold* in mind, than of *Beppo,* 'Euganean Hills', or 'The Triumph of Life'. In the BBC historical comedy *Blackadder the Third,* the protagonist tells the owner of a Regency coffee-house, within earshot of some stereotypically 'Romantic' poets, 'Mrs. Miggins, there's nothing intellectual about wandering around Italy in a big shirt, trying to get laid'.[19] Blackadder is quite right to see nothing inherently intellectual, authentic, or original about those who visited, or dreamed of visiting, Italy. Nor should there necessarily be anything innovative about the travelogues, poems, and prints that this produced. The established stereotype of a lark to the continent should not be confused with the subject of the following chapters: the engaged questioning of poetic and political values which occurred between English and Italian literary culture from 1815 to 1823.

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W. B.

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Beinecke	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
BL	British Library, London.
BLJ	*Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand, London: John Murray, 1973–1994, 13 vols.
Bodleian	The Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford, UK.
ENUF	*Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Ugo Foscolo*, ed. Mario Scotti et al., Firenze: Le Monnier, 1933–1985, 22 vols. to date.
Hansard	*Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates Series 1*, London, 1803–1820, 41 vols.; *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates Series 2*, London, 1820–1830, 25 vols.; *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates Series 3*, London, 1830–1891, 356 vols.
Inferno	Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, volume I, part 1, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.
LBCPW	*Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann with Barry Weller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–1993, 7 vols.
LHSW	*The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Robert Morrison, Michael Eberle-Sinatra, Jeffrey N. Cox et al., London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003, 6 vols.
LJM	*The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. Andrew Nicholson, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.
LMWS	*The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–1988, 3 vols.

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LongmanPS	*The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Kelvin Everest, G. M. Matthews et al., London: Longman, 1989–2014, 4 vols. to date.
LPBS	*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, 2 vols.
Morgante	Luigi Pulci, *Morgante*, ed. Franca Ageno, Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1955.
MSJ	*The Journal of Mary Shelley*, ed. Paula Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, 2 vols.
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
Paradiso	Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy,* volume III, part 1, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.
Pforzheimer	Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, New York Public Library, New York.
PL	John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 2nd ed., Alistair Fowler, London: Longman, 1988.
PoAP	Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, London: Routledge, 1989.
Principe	Vittorio Alfieri, *Del principe e delle lettere*, Kehl, 1795. References are to book, chapter, and page.
Purgatorio	Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, vol. II, part 1, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.
RIME	Francesco Petrarca, *Rime sparse*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.
SC	*Shelley and His Circle, 1773–1822*, ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron, Donald H. Reiman et al., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961–2002, 10 vols. to date.
SPP	*Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat, New York: Norton, 2002.
WWMW	William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

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