Rivista interdisciplinare di studi romantici

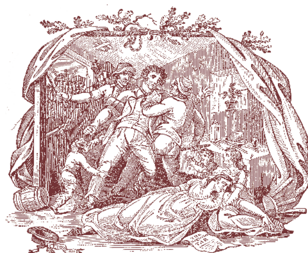
La questione Romantica

NUOVA SERIE

Volume 8, n. 1-2
Gennaio-Dicembre 2016

SPECIAL ISSUE

Edward Rushton's Bicentenary Literature/Culture



WILL CLEWLINE.

By Edward Rushton.

FROM Jamaica's hot clime, and her pestilent dews,
From the toil of a sugar-stowed bark,
From those perilous boatings that oft thin the crews,
And fill the wide maw of the shark ;
From fever, storm, famine, and all the sad store
Of hardships, by seamen endured,
Behold poor Will Clewline escaped ! and once more
With his wife and his children safe moor'd !

View the rapture that beams in his sun-embrowned face
While he folds his lov'd Kate to his breast,
While his little ones trooping to share his embrace,
Contend who shall first be caress'd ;
View them climb his lov'd knee while each tiny heart swells,
As he presses the soft rosy lip,
And of cocoa-nuts, sugar, and tamarinds tells,
That are soon to arrive from the ship.

Then see him reclined in his favorite chair,
With his arm round the neck of his love ;
Who tells how his friends and his relatives fare,
And how their dear younglings improve :
The ev'ning approaches—and round the snug fire,
Their little ones sport on the floor,
When lo ! while each accent, each glance is desire,
Loud thund'rings are heard at the door.

And now like a tempest that sweeps through the sky,
And kills the first buds of the year,
Oh view, 'midst this region of innocent joy,
A gang of fierce ruffians appear :
They seize on their prey, all relentless as fate,
He struggles—is instantly bound,
Wild scream the poor children, and lo ! his lov'd Kate
Sinks pale and convulsed to the ground !

To the hold of a tender, deep, crouded, and foul,
Now view the brave seaman confined ;
And on the bare planks, all indignant of soul,
All unfriended behold him reclined ;
The children's wild screamings still ring in his ear,
He broods on his Kate's poignant pain ;
He hears the cat hauling—his pangs are severe ;
He feels—but he scorns to complain.

Arriv'd now at Plymouth, the poor enslav'd ar
Is to combat for freedom and laws ;
Is to brave the rough surge in a vessel of w r :
He sails, and soon dies in the cause.
Kate hears the sad tidings, and never smil s more,
She falls a meek martyr to grief,
The children, kind friends and relations deplore,
But the parish alone gives relief.

Ye statesmen who manage this cold-blooded land,
And who boast of your seamen's exploits,
Ah ! think how your death-dealing bulwarks are mann'd,
And learn to respect human rights :
Like felons no more, let the sons of the main
Be sever'd from all that is dear ;
If their sufferings and wrongs be a national stain,
Let those sufferings and wrongs disappear.

J. M'CREERY, PRINTER.

Published by Edward Rushton, Liverpool, March 1801.

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Rivista interdisciplinare di studi romantici

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Special Issue
Edward Rushton's Bicentenary

Literature/Culture

Nuova Serie
Vol. 8, n. 1-2 (2016)

Liguori Editore

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Napoli n 4696 del 9-11-1995

«La questione Romantica» is a Peer-Reviewed Journal

Nuova Serie Volume 8 *anno* 2016 *numero* 1-2

ISSN 1125 - 0364 (edizione a stampa)
eISSN 2037 - 691X (edizione digitale)

Periodicità Semestrale.

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Amministrazione e diffusione:
Liguori Editore - Via Posillipo 394 - I 80123 Napoli NA
http://www.liguori.it/
Informazioni per la sottoscrizione di abbonamenti dircomm@liguori.it

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Tutti i diritti sono riservati
Prima edizione italiana Novembre 2017
Stampato in Italia da Global Print, Gorgonzola (MI)

ISBN 978 - 88 - 207 - 6686 - 3 (a stampa)
eISBN 978 - 88 - 207 - 6687 - 0 (eBook)

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Editors’ Introduction/Editoriale

Paul Baines and Lilla Maria Crisafulli

This second special issue of papers from the Rushton Bicentenary Conference witnesses and respects, like the first, the variety of causes to which Rushton committed himself and the range of activity taking place in Liverpool during what those of us who have studied him might be pardoned for referring to as the ‘Rushton era’, though William Roscoe is the more normative centre of attention for such collective endeavours. It is worth remembering that Rushton was a poet who had also been a sailor, and was at various times the keeper of a tavern, the editor of a newspaper, a radical bookseller and agent for several groups and societies promoting freedom of speech and thought, and that his poems themselves reflect not only issues of abolition and the abuse of power generally but also the maritime environment for which he never lost respect, family matters, fellowship of various kinds, music, and the natural world. His work looks back into a national eighteenth-century literary heritage, connects with other like-minded poets heralding a redeemed national and local future, and opens a window onto the efflorescence of Liverpool in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the Introduction to the first issue we pay tribute to what we would now think of as the highly networked nature of Rushton’s literary activity, both in its intellectual scope and its material traces. If the first issue draws more heavily on the historical connections of Rushton’s activities, particularly in relation to slavery and abolition, architecture, industry, and print culture, this second looks at a wide cross-section of the literary and cultural life of Rushton’s Liverpool during the last two decades of his life. Of course, in Rushton’s case any firm distinction between ‘history’ and ‘literature’ could not be maintained for long; Rushton conceived of himself in one respect as a historical agent, fomenting change in social practice by publishing rhetorically-charged poems across the spectrum (rather than hierarchy) of print. As Franca Dellarosa’s densely analytic study (*Talking Revolution: Edward Rushton’s Rebellious Poetics, 1782-1814*; Liverpool University Press, 2014) shows us, Rushton’s work embodies a complex but coherent kind of scrutiny of the world. Slavery was one form of historical atrocity open to the challenge of literature, but it was one among many, from shipboard discipline to sexual abuse and from imperial dominance to unemployment, poverty, and

local disenfranchisement. What happens in Ireland is mirrored by what happens in Poland; the line runs from Liverpool to Chester and Manchester, but also to Belfast and New York. Literature connects these themes and places, and does so through an all-environment textuality, from Poetry Corner in the local newspaper and demotic song endlessly reproducing itself through the provinces, through underground collectivist publications with Liverpudlian radical groups, to poems of elaborate quarto elegance and fine-printed collaborations with civic-minded printer-poets.

At the same time as the papers in this second issue remind us of Rushton's connectedness, they also speak directly or implicitly of his relatively marginal historical position within a self-defining literary-cultural group. Of those that gathered at the mansion of the indefatigably philanthropic Roscoe, Rushton was the least well-off. The others mostly had professions through which their work had some structural agency: doctor (James Currie), merchant (William Rathbone), academic (William Smyth) or clergyman (William Shepherd), while Rushton engaged more readily with democratic groups meeting in taverns and houses. Again, there is no clear line between these cohorts, and Shepherd in particular was always close at hand, but the distinctive character of Rushton's networked individualism depends on a certain kind of exclusion from the mainstream – even what might be called the 'marginal mainstream' of Roscoe's friends. Rushton was not a member of the Athenaeum, even if they bought his books, and he did not collect art as Roscoe did; his visits to the theatre, if any, are not recorded. The plight of women, and their domestic strengths, were clearer to him than their potential civic agency. These papers witness the metropolitan context in which he pursued his ideas and ideals: in a nascent city at once utterly commercial and culturally aspirational, agent of empire and promoter of humane social values, a place where he was both completely at home and permanently aware of one kind of threat or another.

(*Paul Baines*)

Rushton's bicentenary was celebrated in a series of events, publications, conferences, plays, public speeches and exhibitions, and offered a unique opportunity to explore the extraordinary civic and social energy that animated Liverpool between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Undoubtedly, Rushton's public commitment and his engagement with the cultural life of the city contributed to generating a great deal of such vitality. This second issue of *La Questione Romantica* from the Rushton Bicentenary Conference mirrors Rushton's own twofold way of belonging to the city: as a Romantic poet who produced outstanding antislavery writing, but at the same time as a man involved in many of the manufacturing activities that Liverpool

was developing at the time. In this regard, the essays collected here discuss the impressive growth that the city underwent over the period of a few decades, dealing with the dynamic and innovative enterprises that characterized them. They likewise investigate the effects of this remarkable and unprecedented expansion on the environment and on the lives of both newcomers and the established population. The essays collected here, therefore, view Liverpool as the centre of a sparkling intellectual life and yet as the place where the everyday existence of migrants and workers suffered the most severe deprivations. These contradictory aspects of Liverpudlian life are explored here in order to offer readers a wide-ranging and penetrating view of the prosperous but problematic place that Liverpool represented in Rushton's time.

This volume focuses on two main themes: the first regards Liverpool's effervescent cultural life, as in David Brazendale's essay «The Athenaeum and the Intellectual Culture of Liverpool 1790-1800», Cristina Consiglio's «'Bless'd if we please you, whom to please we live!': Managers, actors and actresses in Romantic Liverpool» and Xanthe Brooke's «Pots, prints, poems, plants and publishers in Roscoe's Liverpool». The second theme concerns literature, especially poetry, and the role that this genre played in the transmission of knowledge and in the Liverpudlians' increasing awareness of and engagement with civil and political matters. This second group of essays includes Paul Baines's «Edward Rushton and Alexander Pope: Poets in Opposition?», Elena Spandri's «Can Fancy Add One Horror More?' Radical Sympathy in Hugh Mulligan's Eclogues against the Empire», Lilla Maria Crisafulli's «Women in Liverpool: Gender and Philanthropy» and Serena Baiesi's «Felicia Hemans and the Social Coalition in Liverpool».

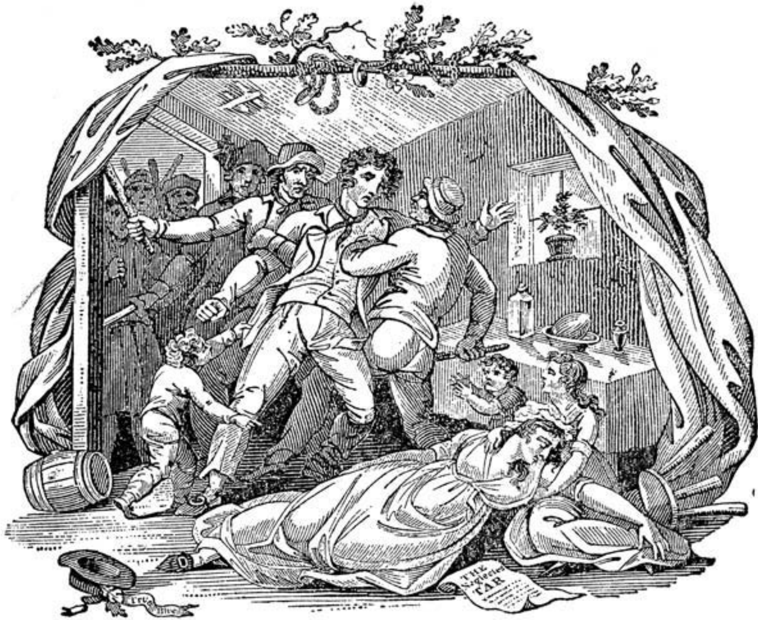
David Brazendale's essay provides a useful introduction to the cultural scenario of Liverpool. He examines the role that The Athenaeum, an institution founded in 1797, played in educating the emergent middle-class reading public, mainly comprising traders. Brazendale lists the wide range of activities that the Athenaeum promoted: from the creation of a reference library, to the publication of pamphlets and newspapers, to the election of this institution as the locus of socialization and entertainment for its members. Cristina Consiglio explores how theatre contributed in turn, not only to making considerable profits for provincial managers, but also to the enriching of urban life, thanks to the building of new theatres and the production of plays which saw the participation of actors and actresses who, in many cases, would go on to become stars of the London stage, such as Sarah Siddons and her brother John Philip Kemble. Xanthe Brooke expands the critical perspective of the volume to include the flourishing industries that benefited from the huge income provided by the slave trade – the main activity of the city's busy port – but that grew thanks also to the creative industries and collecting practices that characterized Liverpool in this period.

The second group of essays addresses the question of how poetry in its various forms and genres contributed to expressing the main concerns of the intellectuals of the time. Poets from all social classes and from the most varied backgrounds – women and men, some of whom are still remembered today, others almost forgotten – were in fact committed to voicing the anxieties and unrest experienced by the Liverpool population in general. They worked in a variety of ways to change the status quo or to provide new readings of the world and society. Paul Baines's essay, for example, shows in what ways Rushton, despite his radical political ideas and anticanonical literary taste, was, somewhat surprisingly, fascinated by Alexander Pope, a fact that opens up a new line of investigation into the relationship between the Romantic movement and earlier neoclassical literature, two phenomena traditionally seen as irreconcilable. Lilla Maria Crisafulli approaches Liverpudlian poetry from a gender viewpoint, enquiring into the role played by those women who – quite successfully – dared to step into public arena and to attempt to join literature and philanthropy, thereby making their own voices clearly audible. The range of women whose commitment to community life is examined includes working-class figures who, while situated outside the literary life of the city, nevertheless left a lasting sign on the history of Liverpool civic life. Poetry as a vehicle for political protest or for social awareness recurs in the essay by Serena Baiesi on Felicia Hemans – whose literary production and aesthetic theory are seen against the larger background of the intellectual vanguard of Liverpool – and in Elena Spandri's discussion of Hugh Mulligan, the working class poet who became a close friend of Edward Rushton. Baiesi's approach to Hemans underlines the poet's early sympathy for liberal views and the reformist attitude that soon attracted her interest towards ideas of social, political and cultural change. Spandri highlights Mulligan's involvement in the publication of a newspaper that was rapidly closed due to the radical ideas it expressed, and goes on to examine the unique and anti-conventional way in which the poet developed his abolitionist stance and attracted further support for the anti-slavery cause. Mulligan's book *Poems, Chiefly on Slavery and Oppression, with Notes and Illustrations*, was published in 1788, and thus at an early stage of Wilberforce's parliamentary efforts to suppress slavery, but, nevertheless became an essential text for future abolitionist writing.

This second issue, in conclusion, complements the first one, thanks to the wide range of contributions and approaches to the cultural life and the geopolitical situation of Liverpool, and not only offers an updated overview of Edward Rushton's literary and artistic environment but also provides an innovative interpretation of the ways in which different social agents stimulated the growth of the city.

(*Lilla Maria Crisafulli*)

Saggi



Edward Rushton and Alexander Pope: Poets in Opposition?

Abstract

On the face of it, Edward Rushton (1756-1814) should have been in the vanguard of a politicised Romanticism, and this should have entailed rejection of the literary forms, values, and diction of the uncrowned poet laureate of the British *ancien regime*, Alexander Pope (1688-1744). In fact, however, Rushton appears to have read Pope more keenly than he read his Romantic contemporaries, and his embedded quotations from the earlier author show not rejection so much as a turn away from irony towards civic urgency. This paper points out some surprising coincidences of idea and feeling between the two poets, and provides a counter-narrative to the Romantic opposition to Pope.

Paul Baines

On 29 August, 1807, the Liverpool poet and bookseller Edward Rushton wrote to his friend John Hancock, editor of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, in response to an enquiry after his sight.

> Early in May I submitted to a fifth operation, it was neither so long nor so acute as some of the former, yet it was attended with considerable inflammation. In a few days the inflammation subsided, and gave me a glimpse of that world from which I have been excluded for more than thirty years. I can now wander in the country for half a dozen miles by myself; I can visit the docks and pier, and perceive the moving scenery around me; nay, with the assistance of a glass, I can read thirty or forty pages in a folio edition of Pope, and what is still more interesting to my feelings, I can distinguish the features of my family. The pleasure arising from all these, particularly the latter, you will more readily imagine than I can describe [Rushton 2014, p. 199].

Rushton is that rare person in the period: someone whose eyesight actually got better, in this case, from blindness to at least a version of actual sight. As well as returning him to the world of the Liverpool marine, in which he had grown up, it returned him to the world of books, which, in the shape of Commodore

Anson's *Voyage round the World* (1748) had inspired his original boyish urge to go to sea in the late 1760s. Blinded by infection caught on a slaving ship, he was not in fact without books: out of his four shillings a week of paternal maintenance, his early biographers tell us, he contrived to spend two or three pence in paying a boy to read to him. His programme of reading in these years (the 1770s), recorded by his friend William Shepherd, indicates something of what was perceived (by a Unitarian clergyman) as a respectable canon at the time: Addison, Steele, Johnson and «the other celebrated English essayists»; voyages, travels and history; «the best poets», whoever you might take these to be; Shakespeare; and Milton, including the political prose [Shepherd 1824, p. xv]. This is the only external testimony to Rushton's self-directed reading history. Rushton seems to have been wedded to a curiously Augustan version of literature, of a kind we might not expect within the normal paradigms of literary history. A man who, returned painfully to sight in 1807, opens a large-print Pope in something like the same way he looks for the first time at his wife and children, is doing something counter to our sense that by that date the phenomenon we call Romanticism was leading the field; Wordsworth's substantial collection of *Poems in Two Volumes* appeared in 1807, and is now regarded as one of the landmark texts of that movement; but Rushton did not apparently rush to view that book with his new visual competence.

Of course, Rushton was not in fact limited to the journalism and poetry of almost a decade earlier. We know he read other relatively contemporary writers, because he wrote about them. In 1787 Rushton published a quotation-rich elegy on Thomas Chatterton, who had absconded from duty in that other West-coast slaving port, Bristol, to pursue his own version of the *Distrest Poet* narrative to its fatal conclusion in London in 1770. In 1796, Rushton's «Elegy» on Burns carefully inhabited the verse-form (and to a more limited extent, the dialect) of Burns's «To a Mountain Daisy», first published in 1786. As, latterly, a bookseller in Liverpool, up to his death in 1814, Rushton must have been aware of many other books, though we have little direct evidence for what he sold (as opposed to what he published, for which we have advertisements).

Few writers have been so acutely aware of the revolutionary history inside the literary phenomena of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the loss of the American colonies, the French revolution, nationalist insurgencies across Europe, the radical agitation of the 1790s, the rise of Napoleon and the military struggle to defeat him, the effect of the wars on sailors, and the desperate struggle for the abolition of slavery. Rushton lived, wrote, published and promoted publications through decades of fierce political crisis. But of Romanticism and its narratives, Rushton appears to have been totally oblivious. Even though he published, at Liverpool, several undeniably lyrical ballads around the same time that Wordsworth and Coleridge were publishing their supposedly landmark collection at Bristol, his

own 1798 moment was the failed Irish rising and the «Mary le More» songs that allegorise it (politically-engaged versions of Wordsworth's «The Mad Mother» or «The Thorn», from *Lyrical Ballads*, perhaps). He never mentions Coleridge or Wordsworth (though Rushton's son, also Edward, a barrister, reformist politician and magistrate, later met and conversed with Wordsworth in 1832).[1] Rushton's poem «Toussaint to his Troops», a vigorously-imagined speech of hortatory militarism voiced through the revolutionary rebel leader, displays no cognisance of Wordsworth's compensatory sonnet to Toussaint Louverture, published in national newspapers in 1803.[2] Though he often writes on exactly the same revolutionary themes as Blake, Rushton appears never to have heard of him. The one Romantic-era poet Rushton definitely knew was Robert Southey, who visited his shop in 1808, acquired a gift copy of the 1806 *Poems* and wrote Rushton a letter offering him a favourable reception in the Lake District, as a fellow radical; Rushton would denounce in bitter terms the ideological treachery of the laureate Southey's *Carmen Triumphale* of 1814 in one of his last poems, «Lines addressed to Robert Southey», so he was definitely reading, and hating, some contemporary poetry [see Dellarosa 2014, Chapter 4].

But Rushton did not (and does not) easily fit the Romantic construction of literary history, which is a form of highly-selective hindsight, operating on a complex and slow-moving sequence. This is not because Rushton was out in the sticks at Liverpool – though it is fair to say that no-one regarded Liverpool as a «Romantic» city. Rushton was provincial, as indeed were the Lake Poets, but not parochial; he was implicated in networks which ran from Belfast to Manchester and Edinburgh as well as London, and with a surprisingly wide reputation in America, where he was on occasion mistaken for Byron [see Rushton 2014, p. 324]. In fact Pope continued to exert a strong canonical force during the revolutionary decades: Joseph Warton might have begun the process of demolishing the monument with his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756-1782), but that did not prevent him from publishing a nine-volume edition of Pope's *Works* in 1797 (the year of Rushton's *Expostulatory Letter to George Washington*) which displays, in fact, considerable admiration alongside elements of critique. Rushton's volume of *Poems* came out in 1806, as did another, ten-volume edition of Pope's *Works*, by the clergyman and sonnet-

[1] *Letters of a Templar*, 1820-50, ed. W. L. Rushton, London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1903, p. 122. For extensive discussion of the formal and ideological links between Rushton and Wordsworth, including connections between Rushton's 'Lucy's Ghost' and 'The Thorn' [see Dellarosa 2014, Chapter 2, esp. pp. 71-4].

[2] Rushton's poem may have been written before Toussaint was captured, as it envisages an approaching battle with the French forces sailing towards St. Domingue, whereas in Wordsworth's sonnet Toussaint is pictured in a prison cell; for further commentary, including links to 'The Thorn' [see Dellarosa 2014, Chapter 6].

revivalist W. L. Bowles. This was hostile enough to Pope's personal and poetic character to provoke, eventually, Byron, whose first poems were published in the same year. In the year of Byron's own death in 1824, a posthumous edition of Rushton's poems and prose was compiled by his friends and family and, by another coincidence which is not really a coincidence so much as a confluence of trends, took its place alongside yet another edition of Pope, this time by a figure very close to Rushton, William Roscoe, whose 10-volume edition and relatively benign biography of Pope reminds us that Romanticism had not actually eclipsed Pope at all.

Rushton's was clearly an engaged body of work, reading and responding to urgent contemporary matters, yet continuing, without regarding it as odd, to engage with poetry from an earlier age. In editing the work for Liverpool University Press, alongside the work of Pope for the Longman Annotated English Poets series, I found myself continually noticing echoes of several earlier poets, and obliged to identify such phrasal coincidences as somewhere on the spectrum between definite allusion and unconscious memorial borrowing. We can tentatively suggest, on this evidence, that Rushton's «best English poets» were probably Milton, Pope, Thomson, and Gray. On the always-equivocal evidence of apparent borrowing and recollection, it is probable that he had read some poems by Tobias Smollett, Robert Anderson, John Langhorne, and many others. One of his most often-quoted sources, or apparently most often-quoted sources, is, in fact, Pope, the only writer amongst Rushton's sources not in practical terms committed to a version of the «sublime» which would eventually constitute a main pillar of Romanticism. Taking a cue from Rushton's own identification of Pope as the dedicated maker of the text to handle and read on the return of his sight, what follows presents an exploration of what the pre-eminent poet of a past Augustanism might have meant to the defiantly outspoken poet of a more revolutionary era.

I

It is at once obvious that the Liverpool-based marine poet had very little in common, biographically, with the self-made literary aristocrat of a Twickenham estate: the Thames was not the Mersey. Rushton «stood like a rampart, and spoke like an oracle», we are told [see Rushton 2014, p. 14]; Pope was something under five feet high, as he drily puts it «not a giant quite» and suffered from curvature of the spine.[3] Pope was a Catholic, staunch in his outsider status if not in particular tenets of faith; Rushton was at the Quaker-Unitarian end of the

[3] *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated* (1737), 50; quotations from Pope's poems are from Pope 2008.

spectrum, like others in the Roscoe circle. Pope was comfortably off to begin with and perhaps the best-paid author of his time; Rushton struggled to make a living until bookselling (a profession Pope loftily regarded as very low) rescued him. Rushton made it once to London; Pope did not «ramble» to Liverpool, nor ever give any sign he was aware of its existence. Rushton had been round the world; Pope never left the country. Rushton was one of the loudest of the abolitionists; in *Windsor-Forest* (1713), Pope celebrated the treaty of Utrecht, which contained the clause relating to the *asiento des negros*, which promoted the trade in slaves which led to Rushton's direct witness of the slave trade (and to his blindness). Pope wrote in heroic couplets, for an audience well versed in classical allusion and suggesting equal social footing with aristocrats; Rushton wrote in ballad metre about sailors called Will or Ben or Edward and their sweethearts, Lucy or Kate or Susan. Pope never married; Rushton was the anxious father of five and promoted a vision of small-scale domestic harmony (though his imagery often appears to channel that version of the ghostly family glimpsed by the childless Thomas Gray).[4] Pope's intellectual circle was that of the Tory wits; Rushton's, that of the radical debating societies; one was thought of as Jacobite; the other as Jacobin. Rushton has some curmudgeonly humour and some lighter, tavern-style pieces, but his irony is a more direct thing, as when he quotes the libertarian slogans of George Washington back to him in his *Expostulatory Letter* of 1797, to chide him for keeping slaves while talking liberty; it is irony, but not as Pope knows it.

At the same time, it is surprisingly easy to undo this apparently unending binary opposition. At a personal level, Pope, while not blind, had significant sight problems, and he has been considered, in modern terms, as in some sense disabled [Nicolson and Rousseau 1968; Deutsch 1996]. If Pope, using his literary success, side-stepped the normal modes of publication and set up his own printer and publisher, Rushton certainly had privileged access to the same world, not only through his bookshop but through his friendship with the poet-printer John M'Creery, who collaborated on several individual poems in the 1790s and printed Rushton's 1806 volume. Rushton might be a «labouring-class» poet to modern editors [e.g. Burke 2003] but his first independent poems were published as quarto pamphlets, exactly in the same way as high-status poems (including Pope's) in the first half of the eighteenth century, and his volume of 1806 appeared without the smear of patronage which attached itself to so many of the earlier exemplars of the phenomenon, from Stephen Duck to Ann Yearsley. If ballads were (at least in theory) demotic, Pope and his Scriberian friends were certainly not above helping themselves to demotic forms, especially when their point was urgent and political, and Gay's «Black-

[4] Compare stanza 6 of his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* with Rushton's «Will Clewline», 11-14.

Ey'd Susan» ballad, on a theme close to Rushton's «Will Clewline», indicates that they could also write something in that popular line relatively unaffected by the caustic soda of irony.

Indeed, at one unexpected node of historical trends, Rushton and Pope actually appear alongside each other, as writers of hymns, on a single sheet printed by M'Creery around 1798 in aid of the Liverpool Blind School which Rushton had a hand in founding in 1791; the six hymns are all anonymous, but one of them turns out to be Pope's «The Dying Christian to his Soul» and at least one of the others is ascribed in pencil to Rushton [see Rushton 2014, pp. 271-2]. The two poems are not in the same mode – Rushton's is a topical fundraiser, Pope's a hymn of joyous resignation – but it is a striking collocation across the expected divisions of history. Both, however, liked to see themselves as oppositional figures, speaking truth to power, enhancing the cause of what they saw as British «liberty», and by and large Rushton put his name to his key pieces, as Pope did. If Rushton was shot at for his views, Pope went about with pistols and dogs. Each used poetry to vent frustration and challenge, risking arrest and prosecution as they did so. Both might be said to have derived poetic energy from outsider status, to have been in some sense happier in opposition. Each used poetry to celebrate civic virtue; each denounced anyone they considered villainous, and each did so by name, including some flamboyant opposition to the Poets Laureate of their respective ages (Cibber and Southey). Like Pope, if for different reasons, Rushton was «Unplaced, unpensioned, no man's heir, or slave». [*The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated*, 116]

From another perspective, we might contradict the earlier formulation and say that in one sense the Thames *was* the Mersey, since London was the third slave port of the country, with Bristol and Liverpool, and Pope's 1713 vision of British commercial expansion actually found fruition in these western ports. Though the extent of Pope's knowledge of and support of the slave trade ushered in by the Treaty that his poem celebrated is still a matter of debate, there's at least some evidence that his poem emphasised the right to freedom in a way which actually helped the abolitionist cause begun and promoted by poets nearly three quarters of a century later [see e.g. Richardson 2004, chapter 5, and Rogers 2005, pp. 237-9].

II

In 1787 Rushton produced something dramatically out of kilter with polite verse of the late eighteenth century in the shape of a set of four *West-Indian Eclogues* explicitly designed to influence opinion against the whole institution of slavery. It was one of a surprising clutch of such endeavours emerging

from the slaving port of Liverpool as indeed from Bristol at more or less the same time. The «Advertisement» to the *Eclogues* concludes «One moral, or a meer well-natur'd deed | Doth all desert in Sciences exceed», a couplet not ascribed, and perhaps not all that well known. It is in fact from one of the dedicatory poems to Pope's *Works* of 1717 (that by John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire). Rushton adopts the motto in attempting to claim that the poetry explicitly does what Pope is supposed by Sheffield (in the course of a more gentlemanly salute to his friend's general moral standing) to do. Rushton had other models for Pastoral, of course, not least the «African» eclogues of Chatterton, and he is clearly engaging also with the colonial Georgic of James Grainger's *Sugar Cane* (1764). These poems evince textual accumulation. Nonetheless, their basic textual signal is fairly clear: even without the oddly recherché quotation from Sheffield, we know that the *Eclogues* are trying to do something with the neoclassical form that might have been held to have reached a sort of perfect terminus with Pope's *Pastorals* of 1709 [on Rushton's use of the literary form see further Dellarosa 2014, chapter 5]. They come as a set of four; they are set at Morning, Noon, Evening and Night (though not quite in that order); they are in heroic couplets, a form which Rushton rarely uses elsewhere; and they are roughly of the same order of magnitude as Pope's. They self-consciously marry a known form with a new landscape (far as Windsor is from Jamaica); they are heavily researched (in Rushton's case in relation to natural and political history in particular). They are made up of dialogues between men except for one (male) soliloquy; they use repeated refrains; and the final one is about death, though in Rushton's case this is not a wintry end-of-year death but a vengeful, rebellious bloodbath – a reason for dropping the whole set from the edition of 1806 and only reprinting the first three in the posthumous edition of 1824 (Pope's set always stands proudly among the early items in his Quarto *Works*).

In effect what we have is the evocation of a potentially paradisal scene of natural history, fatally poisoned in actuality, in which Arcadian shepherds are replaced by the plantation slaves of Jamaica. The effect is the reverse of Scriblerian: this is not a «Newgate Pastoral» endeavour, in which a perverse comedy emerges from the unstable fusion of antipathetic elements, but an attempt to represent the voiceless Africans of the plantations as having the same kind of emotional lives and ties as the conventional lovers of the pastoral world, with the oppressions of love supplanted by the brutal atrocities of the slavery regime. These displaced Africans are every bit as high-minded and articulate as the shepherds of Virgil or Pope; when one of them, Jumba, asks «what now does life supply» [«Eclogue the Second», 63] he is surely responding with a new question to Pope's easeful «Life can little more supply» overture to the *Essay on Man* [I. 3-4]. There is perhaps a further connection to Pope in Rushton's use of the keyword «sable» to describe his black characters.

This is also a favourite word of Pope's, perhaps most relevantly here in *Windsor-Forest*, where in the final ecstatic prophecy of a redeemed future, Pope imagines that

> […] the freed Indians in their native groves
> Reap their own fruits, and woo their sable loves [409-10]

As already indicated, the role of that poem in supporting, decrying, pussyfooting round or being pointedly troubled about the *asiento* clause has been a controversial matter in recent Pope scholarship, particularly in relation to this image. Pope is fond of «sable» because of its double nature – at once a heraldic, epic and valuable version of blackness, as here with the «sable loves», and alternately a superbly ironic way of reminding everyone that the «silver» Thames can also look completely «sable» (with filth) at times [e.g. *The Dunciad*, II. 274]. For Rushton, «sable» is only ever *nobly* black, a means to code dark skin as not a negative aspect of the human but as something inherently high-status. Here in the *Eclogues* are living examples of enslaved Africans nobly attempting to woo and defend their sable loves against the sexual and political rapacity of white slavers. Rushton never uses sable any other way: the potential irony is stripped out by the pressures of history.

In the same year as *West-Indian Eclogues*, Rushton produced *Neglected Genius*, which was often marketed with the *Eclogues*. This was also a protest poem, as the subtitle suggests: «Tributary Stanzas to the Memory of the Unfortunate Chatterton», the protest here being about the failure of everyone, but particularly Horace Walpole, to use their wealth to support the downtrodden writer. This is one of the motley troop of 'Rowley's ghost' poems, though it was, according to an impressed Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the best of them [see Rushton 2014, p. 246]. It now comes across as heavily strident, particularly because its accusations against Walpole (neglect and hypocrisy) came to seem overblown and erroneous quite quickly, and Rushton himself drastically redrafted the verses for his 1806 volume. This is another heavily-researched poem, packed out with prose notes and flamboyantly bedecked with quotations. Amongst those which are not particularly identified are several which appear to be from Pope. When Rushton celebrates Chatterton as «England's shame and boast» [48] he is recalling Pope's approving lines on Erasmus as «The glory of the Priesthood, and the shame!» from the *Essay on Criticism* [694], for example. The poem comes with an epigraph: «T' insult the dead, is cruel and unjust» – ascribed simply to «Odyssey», but *Odyssey* here means Pope's translation (though that particular line is XXII. 450, in a book drafted by Elijah Fenton). We might indeed also pause on the title itself. Though complaints about the neglect of the talented by the rich were endemic in a period in which traditional patronage began to be supplanted

by more straightforward commercial patterns of authorship, the actual phrase «neglected genius» appears to emanate from Pope's *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* [256-8]:

> […] for they left me Gay;
> Left me to see neglected genius bloom,
> Neglected die, and tell it on his tomb…

So far, so consonant, but Pope's poem of course places that tribute amidst a series of sections of satire in which the literary market, and indeed the institutions of patronage and criticism, come to seem a lot less conventional. Rushton keeps his tone of lament and invective constant throughout, purifying Pope's incorrigible friend Savage as a fit fellow genius for Chatterton's ghost to consort with in Bristol, where he had died in gaol: a gesture neither Pope nor Samuel Johnson, both of whom did what they could for Savage, could have contemplated without irony. There are however a few signs of alignment towards the satiric world of Pope, and also of Johnson, who might well have agreed with the vision of a world in which unmonied «Genius often droops, while Dulness lords it round» [108], Dulness being one of Pope's key categories of stigma. Pope could have smiled at Rushton's sarcastic reading of «these enlightened times, | When Bards are known from Men of Rhimes» [33-4], with its echo of the «man of rhyme» in the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, 13. But when Rushton speaks of Bards, he does so in the manner of Gray's 1757 Ode *The Bard*, not of the «supperless» and comically self-designated «Bard» of Pope's *Dunciad* [I. 109], and there is none of Pope's irony about the «man of rhyme» walking leisurely forth from the Mint, on arrest-free Sunday, to cadge a dinner off him. For Rushton, the Bard should be given a dinner by the man who has means.

As in Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* (and to a lesser extent in Pope), penury holds you back, whereas a wealthy author is automatically admired. Rushton writes

> But mark the World, let wealthy Witlings raise
> The decorated Lyre, and all applaud the Lays… [83-4]

He is perhaps recalling Pope's subtly ironic lines from the *Essay on Criticism*:

> What woeful stuff this madrigal would be,
> In some starved hackney sonneteer, or me?
> But let a lord once own the happy lines,
> How the wit brightens! how the style refines!

Before his sacred name flies every fault,
And each exalted stanza teems with thought! [420-5]

But Rushton's poem is *all* about the oppressions of the wealthy, whereas in Pope much of the irony is actually against the «starved hackney sonneteer», who cannot always be aligned with «me», and who is soon to star in *The Dunciad*. Rushton's sympathies lie more often with the starving hack, a neglected genius without access to politically-withheld funds.

III

These two early poems draw on a wide range of Popean recollection, including the *Essay on Man*, on the face of it an unlikely source for Rushton. To reverse the perspective for a moment, however, and look at the fallout from that single poem of Pope, is to see that Pope's theodicy offers Rushton a series of moments of poetic torque across the range of his writing. Rushton's sympathies were loosely Deist, and many of the echoes of Pope one hears derive from the *Essay on Man*, Pope's least «Catholic» and most ecumenical piece of doctrine, though not much of the poem's philosophical optimism survives in Rushton's one indubitable reference to its philosophy: in a letter of 1812, he makes direct allusion to Pope's «Whatever is, is RIGHT», perhaps the most quoted (and controversial) line of the poem [I. 294], in pointing out the uselessness of this kind of advice to one like himself, recently widowed and otherwise bereaved by the loss of a daughter [see RUSHTON 2014, p. 199].[5] Rushton appears to steer clear of the political and religious thematics of the poem, in a way which could be construed as misdirectional: when he writes, in his «Song, Sung at the celebration of the anniversary of the French Revolution, at Liverpool, July 14, 1791», of liberty,

'Cross the huge snowy alps, to a region once dear,
May the soul-lifting influence be hurl'd;
May its radiance the whole human family cheer,
And may tyrants be banish'd the world …

We might be inclined to recall the hurled/world rhyme in *Essay on Man* [I. 89-90], where God views:

Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world …

[5] Johnson had scornfully reviewed the philosophy of Pope's poem in his *Life* of Pope and had written a sober episode quite close to the experience described by Rushton in his *Rasselas* (1759), chapter XVIII.

Or from the same poem [I. 253-4], where threats to a providential system from human aspiration produce a vision of chaos:

> Let ruling Angels from their spheres be hurled,
> Being on being wrecked, and world on world …

Rushton, however, takes out the sense of distortion of scale that Pope has in his vision of the extremes that only God can see «equally» without disturbing a cosmic harmony, accepting that political disorder is the necessary consequence. In fact Pope also uses this rhyme almost as a self-parodic referent in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* [87-8], attacking Codrus's disengaged neutrality: «Pit, box, and gallery in convulsions hurled, | Thou standst unshook amidst a bursting world». Rushton's is a much more straightforward call to arms, without Pope's sense of antithesis, balance and (in certain cases) satiric support for necessary order. Similarly, in the densely allusive tributary «Elegy» to Burns, when Rushton writes of Burns watching the «sly, slow, supple mind» of potential patrons minding their own purses when they should be helping him, he is calling on Pope's satiric vignette about political calculation from *Essay on Man*, IV. 225-6:

> No less alike the politic and wise,
> All sly slow things, with circumspective eyes…

But in Rushton's revamp of the image, Burns exerts a sort of sentimental tax on the reader, quite different from the effect of Pope's sharp and generalised sneer. When Rushton writes of a recently-deceased friend that «Life's poor play is over», he may be recalling Macbeth's «Life's a poor player» speech, but he is probably doing it through the medium of Pope's own allusion to the end of life in *Essay on Man*, II. 282: «Life's poor play is o'er', exactly the same words, but stripped of Pope's satiric hauteur and imbued instead with straightforward human sympathy.

IV

Other connections and comparisons suggest themselves across the oeuvre of both poets. Pope and Rushton were both born in commercial environments, the City of London and the Port of Liverpool, and both were carefully anti-mercantile in the majority of their writing, promoting instead a kind of civic philanthropy which transcends self-interest. Here is Rushton seeking an image for the graspingly commercial context in which he has found an unexpected beauty in the shape of a Robin's song:

Sweet are thy notes, yet minds intent
On life's prime object – cent. per cent.
Heed not thy soft delicious strain… [«To a Redbreast», 31-3]

We are probably hearing a reminiscence of the line, «one abundant shower of cent per cent» which descends, demonically, on Pope's Sir Balaam in the *Epistle to Bathurst* [372], though here used with only the faintest irony to demarcate an entire and locally very prominent class, as opposed to Pope's narrative of headlong self-destruction. Rushton's lyric tale «The Throstle», in which a miser destroys a bird's nest to protect his cherries, centres on a character, Gripus the miser, probably recalled from Pope's use of the name in the *Essay on Man* [IV. 279-80]:

Is yellow dirt the passion of thy life?
Look but on Gripus, or on Gripus' wife.

«Yellow dirt» is another phrase which crops up in Rushton, for example in his denunciation of Washington's keeping of slaves while presenting himself as the apostle of political liberty – he accuses Washington of mere avarice in the end, a devotion to «a few thousand pieces of paltry yellow dirt», in the last sentence of the *Expostulatory Letter*. Rushton also speaks, in *The Dismember'd Empire*, 170, of the European enemies of Britain during the American war as «mean, designing knaves, | To craft, and yellow dirt, eternal slaves» [169-70]. The moral principle here constitutes one direct alignment with Pope, especially given that Pope runs the knave/slave rhyme through the second Dialogue of the *Epilogue to the Satires* [205-7], accepting, with a crucial variation of emphasis, his interlocutor's accusation that he is, for a poet, «strangely proud»:

So proud, I am no Slave:
So impudent, I own myself no Knave:
So odd, my Country's Ruin makes me grave.

The essence of Pope's poetic position is to be *not* the knave-slave combination; explicitly in Pope, implicitly in Rushton. We could compare also *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated*, 115-6, where Pope has the same rhyme in grounding the ethos of poetry on a similar self-presentation; Rushton pushes the rhyme out, as it were, from a personal self-implication to the world that is his primary target.

This is not, of course, to erase the necessary contrasts between writers who, at the extremes of their potential alignments, could be considered as an equivocal divine-right Tory on the one hand and a republican Whig on the other; sometimes

the coincidence of phrasing reveals an opposition of attitude, as in the poems of Rushton known as «The Fire of Liberty» and «The Fire of English Liberty». Here Rushton draws on what looks like Pope's understanding of the myth of the Norman yoke in *Windsor-Forest*; and Liberty is one key term that they certainly share an interest in, though they are hardly exclusive in doing that. But William III, monarch of the Glorious Revolution, does not lurk under the stone of irony in Rushton's poems as he does in Pope's «William» references – he is more straightforwardly a Whiggish superhero of redemptive liberty, something Pope would never have countenanced. Rushton's *party* politics have little correspondence with Pope's: what they have in common is a strong sense of oppositional stance, the idea that the poet is better off outside the system than inside it, and that poetry must speak truth to power – not to mention a certain disgust at the mechanisms for getting into parliament, expressed generally by Pope and particularly by Rushton even when Roscoe is surprisingly elected as a Liverpool member in 1806 [see Rushton 2014, p. 197, and Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*, 393-4].

The two writers might, however, be said to share a patriarchal concern with the position of women, emerging proto-feminism and revolutionary debate notwithstanding. In Rushton's case, this is a more or less unvarying contention that women require protection from the rapacity of other men (usually rich and powerful men, which is how it is aligned with his general theme of oppression). Rushton's poem «The Shrike», an anxious example of this theme, ends with the words «reputation dies! » i.e. when a woman is seduced, which appears to echo Pope's «At ev'ry word a reputation dies», i.e. in the pernicious world of gossip specifically about women, in *Rape of the Lock* [III. 16]. Rushton's general position in such poems has its equivalent in Pope's biographical practice of attempting to intervene in the cases of women from his circle who were in some kind of trouble with men, particular in his early years [Rumbold 1989, chapter 4]. This overt masculinity probably has some compensatory element in each case (Pope's diminished physical state, Rushton's blindness considered in symbolic light).

However, the poetic effects of sympathy are complexly laid out, and more so in Pope's case than Rushton's. Rushton has, as might be expected, several poems which touch on issues of sight, including one straightforwardly called «Blindness», as well as several other oblique mentions of the matter, such as his reference to the «lynx-like beam» of eyesight enjoyed by the predatory Halcyon or Kingfisher in his poem of that name. The lynx was proverbial, of course, but Rushton could be remembering specifically Pope's oppositional image of a spectrum of eye-power, from «The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam», *Essay on Man*, I. 212; or, indeed, Pope's self-presentation, already alluded to, in *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace, Imitated* [49-50]:

> Weak though I am of limb, and short of sight,
> Far from a lynx, and not a giant quite ….

When Rushton recovers enough sight to read these lines of Pope on his own account, and writes a long poem of gratitude to the surgeon (Benjamin Gibson) who carried out the operations, there is a sense in which his concluding lines hand over the business of imagining feeling in a way presaged by a Popean source:

> She who has long her Seaman mourn'd
> As laid beneath the waves at rest,
> Yet now beholds the bark return'd
> And once more folds him to her breast;
> Oh! She who thus has been distress'd,
> And thus the highest bliss has known,
> Oh! She my woes can fancy best,
> And judge my transports by her own.
> [«Stanzas on the Recovery of Sight», 81-8]

This was in fact a situation that Rushton had imagined several times, e.g. in «The Return», one of his more optimistic marine ballads; but it has here, in this unusually personal poem, the flavour of something else as well:

> And sure if fate some future bard shall join
> In sad similitude of griefs to mine,
> Condemned whole years in absence to deplore,
> And image charms he must behold no more;
> Such if there be, who loves so long, so well;
> Let him our sad, our tender story tell;
> The well-sung woes will sooth my pensive ghost;
> He best shall paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most.
> [«Eloisa to Abelard», 359-66]

While Pope buries himself in Eloisa's image only to ventriloquise a metapoetic fast-forward to his own implied signature, Rushton more simply becomes one of his own heroines as a way of imagining the authentic speech of personal emotion – otherwise a surprisingly rare aspect of Rushton's work, and another element which distinguishes what he did from mainstream Romanticism.[6] Again, Rushton takes a complex effect in Pope and finds a more direct way to present it to a new public in a new context.

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[6] Rushton's fondness for pensive female ghosts, in poems such as «Lucy», perhaps owes a little to Eloisa and her proto-Gothic companion of the «Verses to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady» however reinforced by more recent examples in *Lyrical Ballads*. The sense of «deplore», i.e. «lament», that Pope uses here, recurs frequently in Rushton as a standard emotional marker.

V

The echoes of Pope I am discerning in Rushton are not, I think, just random poetic flotsam, part of the circulating library of public-domain poetic diction. It is also not a matter of a sort of Stephen-Duck-like failure to do more than regurgitate the poorly-digested style of a few poetic masters in an effort to sound like a poet should. I am describing here essentially a process of de-ironisation, of taking away the frame in which ambivalent poetic phrasing is interpreted and making it do a more public, accessible sort of work. Rushton splices the phrasing of Pope with the popular street ballad and the result is the opposite of Scriblerian: not an unstable hybrid but a highly directional utterance. Rushton helps himself to what he wants from the available discourses and canonical vocabularies in order to serve an urgent and focused purpose of political reform.

Rushton betrays no sense that Pope has become controversial, or even that one should admire him «no more than is proper», as Marianne and Willoughby do in chapter X of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). He appears not to be reading Warton's *Essay* on Pope, of which the second volume came out in 1782, or Johnson's *Life* of Pope (1781), which defended the poet prophylactically against the emerging Romantic critique. There is no Bloomian anxiety of influence about Rushton of the kind identified by Robert Griffin in the case of Wordsworth: his Oedipal complex is healthily focused on his actual father, a toe-the-line conservative. He is not troping Pope in stealthily subversive ways, consciously or otherwise, in order to claim priority or redirect the flow of influence through inflections of misreading [Griffin 1995]. There were other ways of continuing, in the Romantic era, to engage with Pope, beyond a choice between ever more diluted Scriblerian imitation and a contest for mastery of occupied poetic ground, and Rushton's repositioning of some of his predecessor's images, forms and phrases constitutes a powerful mode of non-appropriation.

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«Can Fancy Add One Horror More?» Radical Sympathy in Hugh Mulligan's Eclogues against the Empire

Abstract

The article explores the ways in which the Irish poet Hugh Mulligan addresses the question of sympathetic imagination in his anti-imperialist eclogues. As a working-class artist coming from an internal colony, Mulligan rejects the paternalistic tone of high-brow abolitionism, as well as the sensationalism of much anti-slavery rhetoric, and embraces sympathy as a middle ground between realism and affect. His eclogues are structured upon a mode of dramatized sympathy whereby the terms of the 18th century humanitarian discourse are radically contested through a proto-environmental ethos of cultural specificity that locates the question of slavery within the larger frame of the history of the British empire.

Elena Spandri

Little is known about Hugh Mulligan, except that he came from Ireland and was a member of Liverpool abolitionist community in the years around the French Revolution. According to the radical printer John McCreery, he co-owned and co-edited a newspaper with his friend Edward Rushton, whose troubled publication didn't last long [see Dellarosa 2014, pp. 9-11]. He was acclaimed «the poet of humanity» by *The Monthly Review* at the time of publication of his 1788 *Poems on Slavery and Oppression, with Notes and Illustrations*, and is cited in a bibliographical dictionary of the Irish poets as «a friend of William Roscoe and one of the first to denounce the slave trade» [O'Donoghue 1912, p. 323]. The circumstance of his death is alluded to in the poem dedicated to his memory by Edward Rushton («On the Death of Hugh Mulligan», 1806), which offers a useful starting point for the topic of the article:

> A Bard from the Mersey is gone,
> Whose carols with energy flow'd,

Whose harp had a wildness of tone,
And a sweetness but rarely bestow'd.
Then say – you dispensers of fame,
Of wreathes that for ages will bloom,
Ah! say, shall poor Mulligan's name,
Go silently down to the tomb?
When the lordly are called from their state,
The marble their virtue imparts,
Yet the marble, ye insolent great,
Is often less cold than your heart.
[Baines 2014, pp. 122-123]

After praising Mulligan for the energy of his verse, Rushton turns the poem into an invective against those callous «dispensers of fame» who let him sink into oblivion. Considering the context of Liverpool abolitionist discourse in which the poem originated, the image of an unspecified group of people endowed with a heart colder than marble, and unwilling to grant artistic value to a poet coming from an internal colony, raises an automatic association between Mulligan's silenced legacy as a «Mersey Bard» and the obscure destiny of his poetic characters. In both cases at stake is a want of recognition that, according to the abolitionist advocate Thomas Clarkson, characterized most of the Liverpool inhabitants' «callous inability […] to be touched by the atrocities of the African trade, whose sombre, material signs were not even concealed, but exhibited to the public gaze in shop windows, where iron shackles, handcuffs and thumb-screws were sold» [Dellarosa 2008, p. 19]. In order to pierce this wall of insensibility, Clarkson explicitly fictionalized the historical account of slavery, and his 1785 *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African* became a landmark document of abolitionist discourse.[1] In its combination of history, polemic and romance, the *Essay* asserted for its factual fiction the humanitarian as well as the historical veracity that the eighteenth century realist novel had attempted to consolidate throughout the century [see Baucom 2005, chap. 8]. As Clarkson

[1] «Having confined ourselves wholly in the second part of this Essay, to the consideration of the *commerce*, we shall now proceed to the consideration of the *slavery* that is founded upon it. As this slavery will be conspicuous in the treatment, which the unfortunate Africans uniformly undergo, when they are put into the hands of the *receivers*, we shall describe the manner in which they are accustomed to be used from this period. To place this in the clearest, and most conspicuous point of view, we shall throw a considerable part of our information on this head into the form of a narrative: we shall suppose ourselves, in short, on the continent of Africa, and relate a scene, which, from its agreement with unquestionable facts, might not unreasonably be presumed to have been presented to our view, had we really been there» [Clarkson 1785, pp. 117-118].

and Liverpool abolitionist poets well knew, the problem with slavery was the problem of invisibility, of blocked vision, which was the consequence of a geopolitical impasse generated, on the one hand, by geographical distance and, on the other hand, by «the constraints of politically organized sightlines on history» [Baucom 2005, p. 218] that made it arduous for all abolition advocates to articulate an adequate language of testimony. Accordingly, their chief commitment became one to making slavery not only visible but also audible, to bear witness to the truth of what had not been, and could not be, witnessed, by adopting effective strategies of representation.

Moving from Thomas Clarkson's considerations on Liverpudlians' obdurate attitudes to slave trade, and building on Tim Burke's and Franca Dellarosa's compelling work on Liverpool abolitionist poetry, as well as on the focus of recent scholarship on the connections between slavery and the culture of sensibility, the article examines the use Hugh Mulligan marks of the question of sympathy in his anti-imperialist eclogues.[2] Despite its popularity, sympathy has always been a highly contested category, wavering between action and passion, participation and spectatorship: from a cosmic force of attraction and emotional contagion to a more complex and sophisticated psychodynamic that mobilizes rational as well as imaginative processes [see Lamb 2009, Csengei 2012, Chandler 2013, Lecaldano 2013, Sklar 2013]. In the latter interpretation, sympathy involves an imaginary role-making based on the assumption that some correspondence of feeling between the sufferer and the spectator of suffering can be taken for granted, regardless of distance or positionality, and can therefore promote intervention and change. The role of sympathy in colonial discourse appears all the more controversial, owing to two main factors. The first is its geographical scope. From its 'modern' inception in the philosophy of Hume, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Smith, sympathy was regarded as a protocol of social interaction restricted to people whose relationship was one of geographical proximity or social affinity. Scottish Enlightenment philosophers were skeptical about the possibility of sympathetic imagination functioning in contexts of great distance and cultural difference. Accordingly, their views encouraged an understanding of sympathy as a corrective to the predominance of the rules of politeness and sociability, whose scope was inevitably limited to the space of the nation [see Raphael 2007, Hanley 2009, Frazer 2010]. Still, Adam Smith and his postcolonial advocates (Michael Igniatieff, Anthony K. Appiah, Amartya Sen, to name only a few) recover the potential for transcultural feeling when sympathy works in tandem with 'negative justice', that is an instinctive, nature-rooted rejection of cruelty, igniting repulsion and indignation in front of the spectacle of violence,

[2] The quantity and relevance of studies that have recently addressed this issue is remarkable. See, in particular, Rai 2002, Baucom 2005, Gikandi 2011, Ahern 2013.

regardless of the connection between the object and the spectator of violence [see Forman-Barzilai 2010]. Since sentiment, rather than reason, inspires a passion for justice, Smith ends up turning the disinterested spectator into an aggrieved witness, thus aligning the work of sympathetic imagination with a deeply historicizing sensibility.

The second controversial issue related to the deployment of sympathy in colonial discourse addresses its alleged universalism. As a point in fact, sympathy was regarded as a natural feeling that had to be validated by a mode of universally ascribable rationality: which, in the context of postcolonial revisions of European thought, raises quite a few ethical and epistemological problems [see Appadurai 1996, Chakrabarty 2000, Gankoar 2001]. Nonetheless, even the scholars most radically committed to projects of alternative modernities endorse the idea that European Enlightenment discourse made a great investment in a mode of sympathy conceived not merely in terms of disinterested spectatorship but in terms of cosmopolitan interestedness. As the space-time of the nation started to appear problematically coextensive with the space-time of the empire, an ethos based on sympathy promoted a universalist belief in a community of feeling endowed with a potential to transcend not only social and gender boundaries but also cultural and ethnic ones. This explains why sympathy operated as the ideological hinge of sentimental literature and, accordingly, why it fared so well in colonial writing, both in the long eighteenth century and in the Romantic age (even though its terms changed significantly over time), embracing all genres: epistolary novels, Oriental romances, imperial travelogues and drama, philosophical treaties, missionary propaganda and, above all, abolitionist poetry. Championed by the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, sympathy grounded a proto-liberal politics of recognition, as it became a way of acknowledging that the very economic process which enabled the bourgeoisie to displace the aristocracy had rendered the middle classes complicit with a system that extracted class privilege from the sufferings of a vast order of non-enfranchised, non-European others [Baucom 2005, p. 232]. Translated into the demand for abolitionist aesthetics, the question for British artists became one of elaborating literary, as well as visual, styles, capable of converting such a recognition of the world system into a knowledge of that world, and of claiming for sympathy not just ethical but epistemological agency. In line with Smith's well-known statement in 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* («It is by changing place in fancy with the sufferer that we come to conceive or to be affected by what he feels», p. 14), and with Thomas Clarkson's fictionalized history, such crucial advancement towards modernity – that, interestingly, appears to have involved European as well as non-European cultures – was enacted by the invention of a 'stereotypical' sufferer that, aided by fancy, fashioned for the mind of the observer a hypothetical retreat from within which panoptically to survey the world – as, for example, in William

Cowper's *The Task*, or in Anna L. Barbauld's «Eighteen Hundred and Eleven» [see Ellison 1999].

Paradoxically, however, it is in the context of abolitionist poetry (more than in other genres) that the device of the stereotypical sufferer most betrays its own structural pitfalls, since it is often embodied in quietist and sentimental observations of scenes of suffering that empty the very scenes of political significance. Consciously or not, abolitionist poets knew that textual sympathy could foster action as well as paralyze it. A case in point is Hannah More's 1788 poem on slavery, where the necessity of abolition stands entirely on these principles: «Natural evils are the same to all», and «Tho' few can reason, all mankind can feel» [l. 150]. Helen Maria Williams lays bare such double bind in her 1788 *Poem on the Bill Which Was Passed in England for Regulating the Slave Trade*, when she interrogates the power of poetry to adequately represent the atrocities of the slave trade, and bridge the gap between the readers' secure circumstances and the unutterable desolation of the slaves:

> Fancy may dress in deeper shade
> The storm that hangs along the glade;
> Spreads o'er the ruffled streams its wing,
> And chills awhile the flowers of Spring:
> But when the wint'ry tempests sweep
> In madness o'er the darken'd deep;
> Where the wild surge the raging wave,
> Point to the hopeless wretch a grave;
> And death surrounds the threatening shore –
> Can Fancy add one horror more?
> [Williams 1788, ll. 341-350]

Although the end of abolitionist poetry must be the end of worldwide suffering, Williams seems aware that textual sympathy entirely grounded on sentimental representation of pain can bring suffering to visibility or rather push it into further invisibility. To produce actual desire for change, antislavery poetry must trigger a crisis in representation and destabilize the relationship between the reader and the victimized objects of his/her gaze which is traditionally based on the combination of distance and pity [see Scarry 1985 and Burke 2001].

II. Given these premises, the impenetrability of Liverpudlians to sympathetic feelings must have appeared to Liverpool abolitionist poets deeply disturbing but also powerfully challenging. Mulligan rejects the paternalistic tone of high-brow abolitionism as well as the sensationalism of much anti-slavery rhetoric, and embraces sympathy as a middle ground between realism and

affect. His response to his fellow-citizens' callousness and to the inadequacy of humanitarian language is a poetic project based on a mode of dramatized sympathy, whereby the terms of 18th century humanitarian discourse are radically contested through an ethos of cultural specificity that locates the question of slavery within the larger frame of the history and physiology of the British empire.

Here I look at the four eclogues as a unified project that appeared in Mulligan's 1788 *Poems, Chiefly on Slavery and Oppression, with Notes and Illustrations*, without considering their intricate editorial history (for which I refer readers to Wood 2003 and Dellarosa 2008, 2014). With their time-cycle spanning from the Virginia morning scene, the Indostan midday scene, down to the evening scene set on a promontory in the West of Ireland, and the midnight scene taking place in Guinea, these eclogues sketch out a totalizing and gloomy image of the British empire in terms of a worldwide system of oppression and terror, whose planetary enforcement appears inescapable, and whose spiralling violence pivots on African slavery. From this perspective the choice of the georgic mode perfectly suits the epistemology of eternal recurrence associated with eighteenth-century imperial discourse, while enabling the geography of rape and murder to work as the dominant trope for the acts of Imperialism.[3] However, Mulligan's treatment of the eclogue is more heterodox than it may appear, as the poet turns the epistemological implications of the genre against themselves by problematizing both the Thomsonian circular temporality connected to the British empire by early 18th century poetry and the disempowered status of its nonenfranchised subjects, graphically conveyed by the sentimental idiom of late 18th century literature [see O'Brien 1999, Kaul 2000, Goodman 2004]. The poet does not dismiss the bourgeois humanitarian idiom *tout court*, by merely replacing it through a rhetoric of anger that is announced in the first eclogue by Adala's invective against the «destroyers of our hapless race» (l. 21) and is eventually acted out in the fourth eclogue by Bura's fiery curse invoking the revenge of gods on the white «Tyrants». For all its revolutionary force, the relocation of anger and resentful eloquence onto the enslaved subjects (a strategy also employed by Edward Rushton in his *West-Indian Eclogues*) is only part of a more ambitious poetic agenda committed to reshaping and, as it were, upgrading the idiom of sympathy in less abstract and depoliticized terms, by assigning it a more historicizing scope through the interplay of three main poetic gestures: the replacement of bourgeois abstract humanitarianism with a

[3] «What immediately strikes the modern reader in Mulligan's poems, dedicated to William Wilberforce as was so much of anti-slavery literature, is the emergent awareness of the global historical processes in progress, which the eclogue form aptly articulates. Time and Scene, the categories defining deixis for the dramatic dialogues acted out in each of the four poems, establish the coordinates of a truly global vision» [Dellarosa 2014, p. 147].

working-class-inflected rhetoric of anger that translates the idiom of bodily pain into a language of memory and affect; the affirmation of the singularity of the slaves, in contrast with the typological approach, aimed to show them as people of feeling engaged in the production of auto-ethnographies; the deployment of sympathetic imagination as a great force of participation to distant and different geopolitical conditions that provides the rational and affective foundations for the recognition of the plurality of cultures, as well as the epistemological grounds for a radical critique of empire. In this sense, Edward Rushton's picture of Mulligan's verse as a harmony of wild and sweet tones beautifully captures the core of his lost friend's poetic bent.

The first eclogue stages a dramatic monologue uttered by a slave named Adala and introduced by a *paysage moralisé* in which Virginia primeval landscape appears «barren, cheerless waste» to «those who ne'er must freedom's blessings taste», whose implication – the violation of America's primal innocence by Europe's brutality and greed – was a time-honoured topos of republican rhetoric.[4] Adala's monologue launches the sequence of slave narratives and is structured upon an oscillation from deixis to recollection that blurs present and past into one iterative temporality, whose referent is deep-rooted suffering – both physical and psychological – that has gained permanence and that is voiced as occurring in a limbo space between the Virginia plantation and his own troubled mind:

> Ye grisly spectres, gather round my seat,
> From caves unblest, that wretches groans repeat!
> Terrific forms from misty lakes arise!
> And bloody meteors threaten thro' the skies!
> Oh! curs'd destroyers of our hapless race,
> Of human-kind the terror and disgrace!
> Lo! hosts of dusky captives, to my view,
> Demand a deep revenge! demand their due!
> [«The Slave. An American Eclogue», ll. 117-124]

Adala's fellow-slaves initially emerge «from misty lakes» as «grisly spectres» and «terrific forms», and only later do they materialize as suffering bodies exposing «limbs benumbed» and «festering wounds». When Adala says: «Lo! hosts of dusky captives, to my view/Demand a deep revenge! demand their due!», the reader is left uncertain as to what the object of «my view» may be, and is led to decode the scene in terms of a gothicized mindscape saturated

[4] Although Virginia was no longer a British colony, its «painful actuality still implicates the British in their historical responsibility, in the living presence of black population, transported from Africa by the British ships to labour on tobacco plantations» [Dellarosa 2014, p. 148].

with the repeated spectacle of the hellish torments inflicted on the slaves that demand retaliation. Clearly, what Adala's speech conjures up is the immediacy of the vision of suffering as emotionally charged and reworked by a narrator meditating on slavery while confronted with its daily horrors. The fragmentation and reconstruction of immediate experience in the form of internalized, self-reflective narrative discourse opens up a distance between the real pain of the sufferers and the vicarious pain of the spectators involved in the dynamics of sympathy which, contrary to expectations, does not soften the brutality of the scene but heightens its impact, since it allows room for the psychic surplus provided by the narrator's feelings and opinions (suggested by the polysemantic term «view»). The authority of the compassionate, but potentially reifying, gaze of the far-off European citizen on the degraded bodies of the Virginian slaves is thus complicated by the internal perspective of the colonial subject who, from the status of dehumanised captive, is refashioned in the guise of sentimental man of feeling, capable of engaging readers on the emotional as well as rational level, by making them pursue the trajectory of both his outward and inward eye and, above all, share in his or her storehouse of cultural memories. To contrast the horrors of the present, the eclogue continues retrospectively bringing the reader to Adala's unspecified native land that is recollected as a site of pastoral beauties and moral innocence brutally violated by the invasion of the Europeans:

Far, far beyond the azure hills to groves
Of ruddy fruit, where beauty fearless roves –
O blissful feats! O self-approving joys!
Nature's plain dictates! Ignorance of vice!
O guiltless hours! Our cares and wants were few,
No arts of luxury, or deceit, we knew:
Our labour sport – to tend our cottage care,
Or form the palm of luscious juice prepare;
To fit, indulging love's delusive dream,
And snare the silver tenants of the stream;
Or (nobler toil) to aim the deadly blow,
With dexterous art, against the spotted foe.
[…]
Can I forget? Ah me! the fatal day,
When half the vale of peace was swept away!
Affrighted maids in vain the gods implore,
And weeping view from far the happy shore;
The frantic dames impatient ruffians seize,
And infants shriek, and clasp their mother's knees;
With galling fetters soon their limbs are bound,
And groans throughout the noisome bark resound.
[«The Slave. An American Eclogue», ll. 39-50, 57-64]

Adala's mind is fixated upon the arrival of the Europeans in Africa and on the devastating experience of the Middle Passage, and associates liberation with return to the homeland, implicitly indicting British imperialism with destroying not only family but also social and political bonds. The trauma idiom disrupts the typological rationale operating on the level of economic discourse on slavery, turning the slave from «a type of nonperson, a type of property, a type of commodity» [Baucom 2005, p. 11] into a fully humanised victim of the trans-Atlantic commerce, while simultaneously refashioning the reader from a disinterested spectator into an aggrieved witness of the system's paramount injustice. Foregrounding Adala's interior monologue, Mulligan's proto Romantic rhetoric depicts slavery as historical factuality inhabiting a nonsynchronous, melancholic, protean space existing between material locality and mind, and shapes the trans-Atlantic circuit of empire as a hub of different temporalities and multiple psycho-geographies.

The textual notes aim at a parallel historicizing and polemical goal, but they pursue it with a higher degree of ambivalence. Drawing their arguments from a multiplicity of sources (William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, Abbé Raynal's *History of the Indies*, John Wesley's *Thoughts on Slavery*, Reverend George Gregory's *Essays Historical and Moral*), interestingly yet not unproblematically, they blend Jacobin idiom and Scottish Enlightenment reformist thought. In ways that are common to much colonial writing, while verse strikes the sentimental chord and is expected to ignite emotions, the notes play a more analytical function. Mulligan's heavy reliance on the pedagogical agency of his rich paratextual apparatus (especially in the lengthy notes attached to the first and fourth eclogue) proves that the poet knew the risks entailed in sentimental discourse, and that he conceived of sympathy in more interventionist terms than those of mere empathic fellow-feeling. Avoiding sensationalism without omitting factual information about the atrocities of the slavery system, the notes engage in a scrupulous analysis of the religious, philosophical and juridical justifications of Africa's inferiority, as well as of Europe's alleged right to enslavement, ambiguously joining together improvement discourse and revolutionary rhetoric. On the one hand, they discuss slavery as an economy of guilty interests in need of reformation – a picture that is clearly inspired by Adam Smith's liberalism. On the other hand, they associate it with a more politicized notion of unrestrained military force and planetary threat, offering a version of slavery that reinforces the apocalyptic conclusion of the African Eclogue, in which the slave prophesizes the collapse of the British world dominion. Similarly, Adala's suicidal thoughts (only occasionally relieved by «fleeting visions» of his former life), explicitly address Abbé Raynal's ameliorist agenda, whose ideological basis revolved around the moral obligation to improve the condition of slaves for the sake of keeping them attached to life and of rendering them useful. This ostensibly contradicts the radicalness of the eclogue's final appeal to the world powers to

consider the reasons of the enslaved people, as well as the threat of human and divine retaliation for their indifference:

> This pallid race, whose hearts are bound in steel,
> By dint of suff'ring teach them how to feel.
> Or to some Despots lawless will betray'd,
> Give them to know what wretches they have made!
> Beneath the lash let them resign their breath,
> Our court, in chains, the clay-cold hand of death.
> Or, worst of ills! within each callous breast
> Cherish, uncurbed, the dark internal pest,
> Bid Av'rice swell with undiminish'd rage,
> While no new worlds th'accursed thirst assuage;
> Then bid the monsters on each other turn,
> The fury passions in disorder burn;
> Bid Discord flourish, civil crimes increase,
> Nor one fond wish arise that pleads for Peace –
> Till their crimes, in wild confusion hurl'd,
> They wake to anguish in a future world.
> [«The Slave. An American Eclogue», ll. 145-160]

III. The dialogic form that characterizes the subsequent eclogues enhances the poet's commitment to accounting for the historical circumstances of his non-enfranchised narrators. Despite the nuanced degree of oppression imposed on them – ranging from chattel slavery of the American and African Eclogues, to rape and conquest of the Asiatic Eclogue, down to socio-economic devastation of the European Eclogue – all the characters function as cultural mediators engaged in performing autoethnographic descriptions, whereby they contrast their heartrending present with their peaceful precolonial past. The notion of autoethnography proves useful in this case, since the dramatized accounts of Mulligan's characters rehearse all the current tropology of cultural difference – from primitivism and stadialism to sheer Orientalism – and, in line with Marie Louise Pratt's use of the term, can be conceptualized in terms of «self-representations involving partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror» [Pratt 1992, p. 7]. Adala's heated monologue lamenting the loss of his «vale of peace» is followed by the anxiety-ridden dialogue between Alvia and Shawna, the destitute Industani «Virgins» of the Asiatic Eclogue who have escaped «the conqueror's sword» across the Ganges during the First Rohilla War. Here again Mulligan stages a dialogue between two victimised speakers, whose melancholic account positions the reader inside the dramas of empire in order to denounce Britain's exploitative oppression of India. Merging present dangers and past enjoyments, the two women, left fatherless and unprotected and eventually raped and killed, evoke

two landmark blots in the history of the Indian colonization – namely, the 1770 Bengali Famine and the massacre of the Rohilla people by the British troops supporting the interests of the East India Company in 1773-1774 –, adopting a self-orientalising rhetoric of disempowerment that feminises and spiritualizes India, bereaving it of moral authority and political agency:

> Haste, Princess, haste! fly yon polluted band,
> That brings destruction to an helpess land.
> O, Shawna! say, my ever gentle friend,
> When shall our sorrows and suff'rings end?
> When shall the thirst for wealth and conquest cease,
> And injur'd India bless her sons with peace?
> Haste, Princess, haste! unhallow'd sounds I hear;
> The clang of arms tumultuous strikes my ear.
> [«The Virgins. An Asiatic Eclogue», ll. 15-22]

Read in parallel with the note, the Asiatic Eclogue replicates the ideologically split pattern of the American Eclogue, for it validates the radical content of the verse, relying – intentionally or not – on the utilitarian and reformist stance of its historical source. The poem denounces the brutal repression of Indian resistance to British rule, by recollecting the murder of a Hindu bramin who, «after having exhibited charges against the Governor General, Mr. Hastings, and preparing to prove them, was seized for a pretended forgery, and thrown into the common prison with felons and debtors, whose company to a Gentoo was pollution» [Mulligan 1788, p. 88]:

> What have these monsters with the Gods to do?
> I trembling think of Nundocomar's fate,
> (No faithful hand his crimes to expiate)
> Who for his country boldly claim'd relief,
> Of hidden crimes accus'd their haughty chief,
> And nobly dar'd, in freedom's glorious cause,
> To mark th' injustice of their partial laws.
> [«The Virgins. An Asiatic Eclogue», ll. 92-98]

The episode bestows on India an aura of devastation, and is illustrated in the note as proof of Warren Hastings's despotic methods and supreme disrespect for Indian religious customs. Interestingly, though, the historical background of the note is entirely supplied by William Makintosh's *Travels in Europe, Africa, and Asia*, a work that criticized Warren Hastings' administration of Bengal, as well as the East India Company's unscrupulous mercantile policies, yet championed Indian colonization as a means «to erect among much-injured people the standards of liberty and justice» [Makinstosh 1782, p. 355],

recommending that the consolidation of British control be enacted through sound agriculture and commercial improvement rather than through further conquest.[5] Mulligan was evidently less concerned with ideological consistency than with stringent topicality, and his *Poems* testify to his unfaltering effort to articulate a poetic language powerful enough to narrate history in action from the perspective of the suffering victims who equally qualify for the double role of native informants and interested witnesses.[6]

IV. In her ground-breaking survey of the shifting function of the georgic mode throughout the eighteenth century, Karen O'Brien argues that, after the American Independence War, for West Indian colonial poets in particular the imperial georgic undergoes a process of transformation, taking what she aptly terms «the pastoral exit» as an aesthetic solution to a moral dilemma. As the connection between labour and peaceful empire becomes untenable under the pressure of abolitionist campaigns, poets «describe[d] instead an abundant, luxuriant, and seasonless landscape with no trace of labouring people» [O'Brien 1999, p. 174]. If this is true, Mulligan's use of the georgic proves all the more unconventional, as his eclogues take the «the pastoral exit» in association with memories of precolonial times and unviolated spaces, thus highlighting, rather than obfuscating, the guilty connections between non-enfranchised labour and empire. Like all colonial poets, Mulligan also must negotiate between the idiom of the nation and the idiom of the empire, and the European Eclogue is the site where such negotiation appears most problematic. The poem is structured upon an animated dialogue between two «Herdsmen», a father and a son, who debate on the present and future prospects of an impoverished Ireland on a promontory facing the Atlantic Ocean. Morar (the father) invites his son to endure poverty and remain attached to the land and to the «social virtues» of his country [l. 40]:

> Why seek a land, whose haughty rulers drove
> The native Indian from his peaceful grove?
> Where horrid war, by wild ambition led,
> Let havock loose, and helpless virtue bled;
> Where now our friends, with doubts and fear opprest,
> Lament their change, and smite the pensive breast;
> Where pois'nous plants o'erspread the sickly place,
> And beasts of prey destroy the helpless race –

[5] «To make the acquisition complete, it is only necessary to make the people happy, by a mild system of government adapted to their manners, customs, and educations» [Makintosh 1782, p. 281].

[6] For a sustained reflection on the figure of the native informant in the different practices of philosophy, literature, history, and culture see Spivak 1999.

Tho' western blasts may vex us half the year,
We no tornadoes, no dire earthquake fear;
No hungry wolves thy harmless herds devour,
No subtle serpents lurk beneath thy bow'r.
[«The Herdsmen. An European Eclogue», ll. 139-150]

Caril (the son) is torn between the paternal legacy of traditional values and patriotic loyalty and the temptation to seek a safety valve outside his cherished waste land:

Must Caril, then, who's proud to call you sire,
Still bear the usage of the churlish squire?
What can his ruddy boys inherit more?
No plenteous crops increase our scanty store;
Our starving herds no forests shelter share,
But the bleak hill of wood and pasture bare.
Our lambs are mangled by the eagle brood,
And famish'd crakes 'mong rushes pine for food –
Unhappy land! what greater curse remains,
Than tyrant rulers, and uncultur'd plains!
[«The Herdsmen. An European Eclogue», ll. 67-76]

By uncovering a lurking tension between older and younger generations that strikes the ever-resonating note of the hard choice between resignation and emigration, the poem restores the idiom of manly resilience after the all-too conventional feminisation of India of the Asiatic Eclogue, and heralds a form of rational hope that is made to depend on the possibility for Ireland – and, metaphorically, for all imperial peripheries – to overcome outmoded social structures and access an unspecified, and supposedly fair, modern network of trade and industry:

Altho' the arms of Commerce now are bound,
Our country's Genius prostrate on the ground,
[…]
A time will come, when Trade, Europa's pride,
Shall in our bays bid lofty vessels ride;
Industry then shall mark each busy face.
And churlish lordlings sink in just disgrace.
[«The Herdsmen. An European Eclogue», ll. 152-153, 157-160]

The dilemma between home and emigration, stability and nomadism, resurfaces at the climax of the last eclogue, where Mulligan once again overturns the readers' expectations concluding his map of suffering on a

gesture of compassion towards those white men who occupy the lowest grade in the great chain of slavery. «The Lovers. An African Eclogue» performs a sorrowful dialogue between two slaves who have escaped the horrors of the Middle Passage fleeing from a British ship moored off the Guinea Coast, and observe the destruction of the ship that has been attacked by the local population with contradictory feelings. On hearing Bura's account of the heavy punishments inflicted on British sailors by British officers, Zelma finds herself sympathising with the miserable destiny awaiting those seamen who give up domestic affections for a debasing and unrewarding prize:

> Pining and pale, I view'd the sickly race;
> Alas, they're men! tho' crimes their souls debase,
> In fev'rous fits they talk of wives and friends;
> The hand of death alone their torture ends.
> Tho' great the meed, why quit your native land?
> The Gods of wrath you forfeit lives demand;
> [«The Lovers. An African Eclogue», ll. 125-131]

Unquestionably, the power of Mulligan's eclogues springs from the challenge they launch the very instant they grant colonial subjects access to self-articulation and to a form of reversed sympathy whereby empire betrays not only its race-inflected but also its class-inflected structure. The poet follows a mode of anti-slavery poetry in which slaves had already been granted a voice, but he radicalizes the convention representing the drama of history as entirely enacted by the victims *qua* victims, deprived of all attributes of humanity but memory and powerful feelings. If, as postcolonial scholarship has increasingly argued, the problem of the modern subject is not only one of its emergence but one of its global reproduction, the radical sympathy on which this obscure Irish poet grounds his counterdiscourse on slavery and empire bears ample testimony to the difficulty encountered in modern Europe to articulate a 'fair' discourse on subjectivity, even when the subject of discourse happened to be the offspring an imperial periphery. With all his ideological inconsistencies, Mulligan's attempt to reverse the terms of humanitarian discourse at the zenith of the trans-Atlantic commercial enterprise, inventing enslaved characters that are fully humanised by the power of memory and affect, radically questions the racial, religious, legal, and historical taxonomies that underpinned Western empires' alleged right to enslave non-European people. In so doing, these eclogues shed light on the deep entanglements between slavery and the culture of sensibility operating at the dawn of the Romantic era. If sympathy, the capacity to document suffering in the interest of eventual social intervention, marks the birth of the modern subject, as well as the advent of a model of interested cosmopolitanism conceived as a way of entering a global world rather than of being damaged by it, the moment an African slave envisions the suffering of the poor British sailor

while rehearsing the trauma of separation from the native land, she undergoes a crucial anthropological mutation. From the object of an economic and statistical logic, she turns into the subject of an affective history experienced as a network of violence and power relations that is accessible to her individual cognition, and to that of her fellow-sufferer, only in the form of a melancholic, nonsynchronous, fragmented time.[7] Joined together by the power of sympathetic narration/listening, the slave and her witness abide in a mode of temporality in which the past persists in the present in spectral and threatening form (as in Adala's «grisly spectres» and «terrific forms»), thus defying all sense of the reasonableness, righteousness, and solidity of such present.[8]

From this perspective, the two polarized and apparently dissonant moods of the eclogues – anger and pity – merge into one coherent rhetoric of dissent, as Mulligan implies that compassion can become a weapon more lethal than rage. In dramatizing their own histories and cultural ethos to the point of including in their narratives the suffering of their tormentors, Mulligan's enslaved characters anchor the readers' sympathy to what they feel to be a natural right to freely inhabit one's own land, rather than to vague notions of a shared humanity, turning into emblems of local resistance to the commodifying and globalising thrust of British imperialism. This proto-environmental sensibility, whereby slavery and imperial rule are reconstructed bottom up as unlawful violations of different ecosystems, is maybe the furthest an 18th century marginal poet, labouring in the minefield of Liverpool abolitionism, could get to disentangle his advanced idiom of transnational solidarity from the blind spots of disembodied humanitarianism. Mulligan's poised blend of invective and complaint, rage and melancholy, as well as his radically inclusive notion of sympathy and compassion, show the extent to which late 18th century abolitionist poetry contributed to a crucial reinvention of the human in terms of a careful and environmentally responsive subject. A subject that is capable of taking responsibility for the pain of others, independently from geographical distance, historical contingencies, and economic interests, and commits to action not out of pity but out of an unquenchable passion for equity and justice. A good reasons to make room for Hugh Mulligan, and his Liverpool fellow-poets, in our sometimes oblivious and restricted Romantic canons.

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[7] The philosophy of history articulated by the Scottish Enlightenment, and exemplified by a text such as John Millar's 1771 *The Origins of the Distinction of Ranks*, identifies at the core of modernity not synchronic experience and homogeneous time but a «contemporaneity noncontemporaneous with itself, an experience of time as fractured, broken, constellated by a heterogeneous array of local regimes of time» [Baucom 2005, p. 281].

[8] «Affect, here, is epistemology; imagination, sentiment, and melancholy, *the* keys to a factual knowledge of an increasingly planetary (and hence increasingly invisible) European ordering of modern history» [Baucom 2005, p. 222].

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Negotiable Forms of Empowerment: Women, Philanthropy and Dissent in the Georgian Era

Abstract

This essay focuses on the city of Liverpool in the decades between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. This period was an age of revolutions and dramatic changes, but also the time when women acquired an unprecedented awareness of the role they could play in the public sphere. As for Liverpool, between 1770 and 1815 the city replaced Bristol as the leading slave trade centre, while becoming a major British cotton port and thereby suffering the most painful forms of social transformation. One result of this suffering was the spread of charity and philanthropy. These were the fields in which middle class Liverpudlian women were most openly engaged. To women charity and philanthropy meant, among other things, a means to fight against social separation and reclaim full citizenship. Therefore, philanthropy, especially in connection with abolitionism and dissent, helped women to become visible and gain a public voice. This essay presents some exemplary profiles of women who came to be valuable agents of improvement and reform, many years before philanthropy became an institutional reality in British society: Kitty Wilkinson, neé Catherine Seaward (1786-1860); Eliza Knipe Cobbold (1767-1824); Mary Birkett Card (1774-1817); Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1825).

Lilla Maria Crisafulli

Despite everything, I still believe that we can learn from history, and that memory, both individual and collective, is a valuable source of instruction and sometimes of admonition. We look at the past to shape the future. This is particularly true when it comes to women's history. Whatever freedom women enjoy today was produced by the agency of the women who came before them, even when they were unaware of acting for the unborn, and had to negotiate their own forms of empowerment. To all the women who tried to improve their own and other people's lives we owe many of our present achievements. Historians, including those who, like myself, work on literary history, encounter all the time extraordinary examples of women: some of them openly resistant to the social constraints of their time, others less so, but to all of them we owe part of our freedom and civil coexistence.

The history of women's social and political commitment, of course, would be too vast a topic to deal with, unless we circumscribe it. There could be no better occasion to reconsider this history than the bicentennial anniversary of the poet and abolitionist Edward Rushton celebrated in the special two issues of *La Questione Romantica*. As Franca Dellarosa argues in her introduction to volume one, namely that to re-appropriate Edward Rushton also means to «engage in the complexity […], in the intricacies of the worlds that were being shaped in the 'there and here' of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Liverpool». There is no doubt, that the period in question was an age of revolutions and dramatic changes, but also the time when women acquired an unprecedented awareness of the role they could play in the public sphere. They were at the forefront of the «complexity» and the «intricacies» of those worlds, making a significant contribution to improving them.

From the second half of the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century the city of Liverpool went through a rapid urban and cultural development. In particular, between 1770 and 1815 the city replaced Bristol as the leading slave trade centre, while becoming a major British cotton port and, therefore, suffering the most painful forms of social transformation. In her *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the 19th Century*, 1951 (reprinted in 1992 as *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Charitable Effort in Nineteenth Century Liverpool*) Margaret Simey points out the extreme social conditions in which people lived in the 19th century, when the city became the place where material poverty went hand in hand with poverty of social relations. The emphasis on the growing individualism produced loneliness and exclusion, and this impoverishment of social life seemed to involve the large majority of the population: it «applied equally to rich and poor» [Simey 1992, p. 6].

The public area in which middle class Liverpudlian women were most openly involved was charity. To women charity meant, among other things, a «refusal to accept their exclusion from the responsibility of full citizenship, a refusal which in the event proved to be a major factor in the drive of social reform» [Simey 1992, p. 6]. In order to understand how women fought against social separation and managed to regain a place within the public sphere, I will concentrate on philanthropy, especially in connection with abolitionism and dissent, these three topics being closely linked to one another. As I have had occasion to underline elsewhere, women took part in the abolitionist movement not only as a moral and emotional duty, but often because they were fully aware of performing a bold political act. Indeed, such involvement also signified the concrete beginning of a process of self-awareness that eventually led women to appeal for full social and legal rights of their own [Crisafulli 2010, pp. 110-124]. If this is true of abolitionism, very much the same can be said, as we shall see in the case of Mary Birkett Card (1774-1817) and Anna Letitia Barbauld, for philanthropy and dissent, since many women dissenters were philanthropists as well as abolitionists. They gave voice to social concerns by

choice as well as by necessity, excluded as they were from civil and political rights.

I will present a few profiles of women who came to be valuable agents of improvement and reform, many years before philanthropy became a significant reality in British society. I have selected these women in an attempt to understand what feelings, ideals and ideas had coalesced to form their irrepressible desire to serve others in a large and demanding community such as Liverpool, and given the limiting conditions in which their sex was constrained.

We should be cautious when speaking of philanthropy since, at an institutional level philanthropy was in some ways questionable from the outset, sometimes giving rise to manipulation and repression, as my two early examples of organized philanthropy will suggest. At an individual level, however, we cannot avoid admiring those women who stood at the vanguard with bravery and genuine generosity to meet social necessities and endeavour to mitigate dramatic human needs.

Between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, Liverpool, together with London and Bristol, had come to be known as one of the busiest slavery trade centers in the world, the very place where the dirty traffic of human beings had flourished to the point of making of the town a large and demanding mercantile city [Kaye 1812, pp. 25-28], with masses of migrants pouring in, looking for any kind of work and somewhere to stay.

Every empty space in every building in the town soon became overcrowded with numberless workers and their families. This economic burst, accompanied by the long-term war against France, radically altered social conditions. In *The Stranger in Liverpool; or, an historical and descriptive view of the Town of Liverpool* by Thomas Kaye, (first published in 1812 but with many other editions to follow), it is stated that between 1774 and 1814 the population of Liverpool tripled, and the number of poor increased dramatically [Kaye 1812, pp. 31-32]. Working class old people, children, and women were those most exposed to disease and starvation. It was at this point that the philanthropic commitment began, due to the humanitarian obligations that some members of the new and wealthy middle class felt towards the underprivileged. At first, this was mainly limited to a few individuals, especially dissenters, who in a more or less organized fashion devolved some of their income to the poor members of the community. As Margaret Simey highlights, if the individuals who were concerned with the welfare of the community were a small group, and their authority and prestige often insignificant, «yet their influence was such as to earn for Liverpool its considerable reputation for the practice of social reform» [Simey 1992, p. vii].

It was not until the mid-19th century that the creation of private foundations gave philanthropy a permanent structure. This is probably why the valuable study *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* by F.K.

Prochaska (1980) pays attention to the Victorian age but not to the earlier decades of the century, the ones I am dealing with. At the beginning of the century, the condition of poor women became a primary philanthropic concern (and would remain so for the rest of the century). This concern was closely connected with the effort of fighting the growing and uncontrollable phenomenon of prostitution and, consequently, the high birthrate of illegitimate children and the spreading of venereal diseases; overall, to public opinion it seemed appropriate that women should be caring for other women.

In January 1796 a «Ladies Charity; or, Institution for the Relief of Poor Married Women in Child-Bed, Liverpool» was founded, with a Mrs Clay as its Lady Patroness. The general rule of its statute says: «That the relief afforded by this Charity shall be confined to the Poor Married Women (and Widows, whose Husbands have died during their pregnancy) resident within the township of Liverpool, […] and that in administering the comforts which it is intended to afford, great attention ought to be paid to the moral character of the object» [cited in Prochaska 1980, p. 259]. The year 1809 saw the founding of the «Liverpool Female School of Industry». The chief aim of the institution was

> promoting the moral and religious education of the female children of the poor, so as to make them useful and industrious members of society. The children shall be instructed in reading, writing, and the common rules of arithmetic, and also in knitting, spinning, and plain work […]. A halfpenny a day out of the earnings of each child in the school shall be subscribed to a general fund, which is to accumulate; the same contribution to be continued out of their wages when they have left school [Kaye 1812, pp. 143-144].

It must be said that the moral and religious education of the «female» remained a social leitmotif for the whole century. The aims of these institutions seemed, however, progressively to distance themselves from the promotion of public good, eventually culminating in the notorious Victorian workhouses, which exploited the unpaid labour of women and children: thus exposing the inconsistencies of a system at variance with the humanitarian principles that extended their influence and significance during this period. If philanthropy, especially in later years, also became a form of social control that helped to preserve order and keep the poor in their place, it is also true that charity, disinterested benevolence, sensibility, sentiment and sympathy were themes widely current among the more liberal members of this early industrial society. These principles were also echoed in the oral speeches and written dissertations that circulated among the members of various dissenting congregations, gaining ground especially with women, who decided to move into the front line and to be seen in action. As Prochaska has underlined, in a review of Dorice Elliot's study of literary representations of female philanthropists, *The Angel Out of*

the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England (2002), «charitable activity was a lever that women used to open the doors closed to them in the spheres of social work, higher education, the paid professions, and elected office» [Prochaska 2003, pp. 133-135]. Therefore, «if in the early 19th century it was virtually unheard of for a woman to make a public speech» [Prochaska 2003, p. 2], addressing a charity meeting became possible even for women, who, consequently, could step into a wider arena of public concerns.

Let me present some examples of these women, without necessarily following a chronological order. I wish to start from the working-class Kitty Wilkinson, last in order of time but first among the women who challenged established notions of philanthropy. I will then go on to two more straightforward examples of middle-class philanthropists, Eliza Knipe Cobbold and Mary Birkett Card, and will end with Anna Letitia Barbauld, thus broadening the notion of what philanthropy might mean.

Kitty Wilkinson, neé Catherine Seaward (1786-1860)

Kitty Wilkinson, known as the «Saint of the slums» or as «a civic myth», was the first person in Britain to open a washhouse in order to fight epidemic diseases such as cholera that spread in Liverpool in 1832 causing a high mortality rate. After this epidemic wave, many children were left orphans in the area and Kitty Wilkinson took care of their material needs and spiritual education, teaching them the Bible and hymns.

One of the stories about her philanthropic commitment narrates that she made every morning sufficient porridge to feed several children of the poorest families of the area in which she lived. But, more than anything else, she contributed sheets and blankets for sick beds, putting her tiny kitchen, which contained a boiler, at the disposal of her neighbours so that they might wash and disinfect their clothes with chloride of lime (bleach powder). It was precisely in her kitchen that the idea of the public washhouse first originated.

Kitty was a working class woman, and, like many other migrants to the economically flourishing Liverpool of the time, she had Irish origins. Born in 1786, since her early life she had experienced destitution, made even more severe by the death of her father and of her infant sister, both of whom drowned sailing to Liverpool from Ireland. When she was twelve, she was sent as an apprentice to Lancashire to work in a cotton mill, and only eight years later, in 1806, returned to her mother in Liverpool.

She married twice, losing her first husband, a French sailor, Emanuel Demontee, in another maritime tragedy. Then she married Tom Wilkinson, eight years younger than her, whom she had probably met in the cotton mill in Lancashire. Together with Wilkinson, Kitty increased her charity efforts, devoting her life and work entirely to the poor of Liverpool, and gaining,

thanks to her social engagement, a tribute from the city: one of the windows in Liverpool Cathedral, dedicated to notable Liverpool women, has a stained glass for Kitty Wilkinson. In 2012, Liverpool also unveiled a marble statue to her memory in St. George's Hall, where other eminent Liverpudlians are remembered, among them William Roscoe, Robert Peel and Gladstone. Kitty's statue is the first in the hall of a female subject. On the back cover of his biography, Michael Kelly well summarizes the activity of this extraordinary health pioneer: «she disregarded her own safety to care for the sick and dying, to take in homeless children and to teach that cleanliness was the main weapon against disease, turning her own home into a wash-house for her neighbours' benefit» [Kelly 2000]. Kitty's generous social commitment became so well known that, as Jonathan Huddleston underlines, «She was involved in the establishment and operation of a public wash house in Upper Frederick Street which was the subject of an appeal for funds written by Mrs. Rathbone in 1837 for the recently created District Provident Society. The appeal described the operation of the washhouse and the need for it as follows: "The 'Labouring Classes' often lived in single rooms, or cellars, with inadequate ventilation. They slept several to a bed, often with two or three beds to a room. Few used sheets, and they wore the same linen night and day through the week. They could not adequately wash and dry their clothes with just a small fire"» [Huddleston 2010, p. 253]. Kitty, campaigning for the opening of public baths in the city to secure access to the poor, was aided by Liverpool councilor and future mayor of the city, William Rathbone. The latter and his wife supported her initiative, ultimately successful, leading to the creation of the Frederick Street baths, of which Kitty and her husband were appointed superintendents, [The Victorianist 2013] since Rathbone «appealed to the Corporation asking whether the origin of the Institution which owed much to her benevolent and self-denying activity, and its prosperity, and the subsequent adoption by the Corporation, to her clever management, does not give her claim over other applicants…» [Huddleston 2010, p. 254].

Kitty Wilkinson, therefore, belongs to the venerable and powerful tradition of British working-class philanthropy, those benefactors who, in the words of Prochaska, have bestowed «the charity of the poor to the poor, which, as the Edwardian cleric William Conybeare put it, stood between «civilization and revolution». The measures taken to address the reality of social distress, which was often more horrific than described in the up-market literature» [Prochaska 1980, p. 134].

Eliza Knipe Cobbold (1767-1824)

Another Liverpudlian whose name is worth remembering is Eliza Knipe Cobbold (1767-1824), a well-off middle-class woman, a well-educated and gifted artist,

with strong interests in theatre and poetry, as well as in natural history. Paula Feldman says of Knipe Cobbold that «She supplied Sir James Smith, president of the Linnaean Society, with information on the habits of many plants for his *Flora Anglica*. The naturalist Sowerby recognized her contributions to mineral conchology by naming a fossil shell after her (*Nucula cobboldiae*)» [Feldman 2000, p. 186]. Knipe Cobbold managed her literary career alongside motherhood (caring for fourteen stepchildren and seven children of her own) together with an active engagement in charities. She was a philanthropist and patron of the theatre, organizing benefit nights for individual artists and institutions such as the local maternity hospital. Among many other actions in favour of people in need, in 1812 she founded «The Society for Clothing the Infant Poor». The society «provided clothing to more than two thousand infants to count only its first dozen years» [Feldman 2000, p. 186]. Furthermore, as a true philanthropist, Knipe was also a fervent abolitionist. She dedicated much of her literary activity to the antislavery campaign, long before the creation of the Ladies' Association in Liverpool in 1827. In one of the lyrical tales, entitled *Atomboka and Omaza; an African Story*, included in her second published collection of poetry, *Six Narrative Poems* (1787), Knipe portrays an African woman warrior fighting for freedom, until her death, alongside her male counterparts. As Frederick Burwick observes, Knipe, like many other abolitionist women, goes through a process of identification with the African heroine Omaza, so that their «collective involvement poignantly calls attention to the many parallels that existed between Abolition and the debate over women's rights», and «Knipe's poem usefully acknowledges this shared interest» [Burwick 2012, pp. 42-43]. Clare Midgley rightly underlines how Knipe's Africans in «Atomboka and Omaza; an African Story» are depicted as noble and heroic and, significantly, as intellectually equals to Europeans [Midgley 1995, p. 41]. Once the two Africans have been taken on board ship, rather than become slaves, they throw themselves into the sea and drown, their bodies entwined. Their tragic death within a framework of romantic love inevitably aroused sympathy. The sentimental representation of the sufferings of black people was generally used as a stratagem to produce support for the abolitionist cause, especially among the female readership [Howman 2007, p. 289].

We might add that despite their controversial topics and positions, and the fact that the poems are strongly gendered, the *Six Narrative Poems* did not receive excessively severe reviews, especially in the case of *Atomboka and Omaza*. A review published in the magazine *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature*, vol. 64, edited by a so called «society of Gentlemen», affirms: «The tales are generally related in an easy and familiar style, but are seldom marked with any great vigour of fancy, or energy of expression. We must, however, except the African poem, entitled Atomboka and Omaza. It is not, always equal, but a savage and appropriate wildness of scenery, a boldness of conception, and force of diction, frequently entitle it to our warm applause»

[Anon. 1785, p. 308]. Various considerations on the 'femininity' of its author follow, starting with a quotation from the apologetic words of the author in the preface to the collection: «The fair author styles herself an "unlettered Muse, who trembles at the severity of criticism, and dares not hope much even from candour". Her apprehensions, we trust, are groundless. Though *severe criticism* would undoubtedly condemn some passages, candour will not only excuse, but approve, the greatest part of these poems» [Anon. 1785, p. 308]. The epithet 'candour' was frequently used to characterize women's literary output. On the one hand, it implied that the women writers in question preserved their 'female' purity despite their attempt to move into a public, and therefore masculine, sphere. On the other hand, it belittled women's artistic and intellectual endeavors, since it suggested a lack of seriousness and of intellectual understanding of what they had produced. Elizabeth Knipe Cobbold's poetry, however, cannot have been so deprived of talent, and her commitment to society and to abolitionism so slight, if even such an eminent abolitionist and true philanthropist such as Rushton was in the list of subscribers to *Six Narrative* Poems (an «Eliza Rushton», possibly Rushton's own sister, also subscribed to the *Six Narrative Poems*). It is significant that Knipe's book appears to be the only one which Rushton supported by subscription. This is all the more relevant, since in 1787 he was apparently still under difficult circumstances, following the demise of his business as tavern keeper [Shepherd 1824, pp. ix-xxviii]. It might also be interesting to note that Knipe's poem was published a few months before Edward Rushton's *West Indian Eclogues*, proving how Knipe's intellectual and ethical horizon was wide and aware, ready to be at the forefront of the abolitionist campaign. A marginal but, nonetheless, thought-provoking episode might be useful to complete this brief profile of Elizabeth Knipe Cobbold. As Paula R. Feldman reports, «Cobbard's biographer, Laetitia Jermyn, recalls that at one gathering a female acquaintance "thought proper, with much tartness and personality," to censure the idea of women as poets and "thanked God she could not write poetry!" in answer to which Cobbold "observed, that it was the first time she had ever heard any one thank God for their *ignorance*"» [Feldman 2000, pp. 186-187].

Mary Birkett Card (1774-1817)

The third woman to mention here is Mary Birkett, abolitionist poet and religious prose writer. She ran charity schools and was particularly active in the Quaker organizations. She is generally remembered as Irish, but although her activist life took place mainly within the Irish community of Quakers, she was actually born in Liverpool in 1774, and moved to Dublin, with her numerous family, when she was ten (in 1784). Josephine Teakle, herself a descendent of Mary Birkett, affirms that until recently not much was known about her

[Teakle 2006]. We owe most of the information to Teakle's edition of Birkett's writings [Teakle 2004]. Her works had been jealously preserved within the Birkett Card household. In 1834, Birkett's son, Nathaniel Card, first collected them without, however, giving the complete edition to the press. The volume *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870,* by the literary historian Clare Midgley, has also helped to throw light on the impressive work of this abolitionist writer who was the first to address specifically the readers of her own sex [Midgley 1995, p. 34]. Birkett's «*Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to her own Sex* appeared in two parts in 1792», urged «other women to boycott slave produced goods such as sugar and rum in protest against slavery» [Teakle 2006].

Josephine Teakle provides us with a full account of the large social network and family connections of Mary Birkett. Her mother's brother George Harrison, a wealthy merchant and banker in London, was an eminent member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers who were among the leading activists in the abolitionist campaign. Harrison's wife, Susannah Cookworthy of Plymouth, was the daughter of William Cookworthy, who established the English porcelain industry. In 1783, Harrison collaborated in setting up the first Quaker abolitionist association in England, while, in 1787, he formed with Thomas Clarkson and others the *London Abolition Committee*, eventually involving William Wilberforce in the campaign. Wilberforce became soon the authoritative parliamentary voice and the leading abolitionist figure of the country. Judith Jennings has discovered that it was Harrison, again in 1787, who took part in the creation of the extremely popular seal used as the template for Josiah Wedgwood's famous medallion, in which an African in chains is seen kneeling down as he exclaims, holding up his hands in supplication, «Am I Not a Man and A Brother?» [Jennings 1997, p. 39]. Mary Birkett's poetry re-processed these influences using her sex to appeal to Irish women, urging them not to remain indifferent or silent in the face of the cruel trade, but to join in large numbers the movement for restoring freedom to the slaves. Birkett's *Poem on the African Slave Trade*, while firmly condemning the slave trade, retains some of the middle class dissenters' main religious beliefs, such as the justification of the colonial design to export Christianity and education, as well as the belief in the economic value of property and free commerce, as the sentimental Stanzas 12 and 13 of the poem show:

> «Must we abandon then, Camillus cries,
> «The wealth abundant which in Afric lies?
> «Shall our fam'd commerce languish and decay,
> «And we no more send fleets for slaves away?»
> No, wise Camillus, search her fertile land,
> Let the mild rays of commerce there expand;
> Her plains abound in ore, in fruits her soil,

And the rich plain scarce needs the ploughman's toil;
Thy vessels crown'd with olive branches send,
And make each injur'd African thy friend:
So tides of wealth by peace and justice got,
Oh, philanthropic heart! will be thy lot.

To Birkett, philanthropy unites peace and justice, with wealth as its reward. Only by accepting the philanthropic way would the Africans cease to be treated as properties that are bought and sold, and turn instead into friends and peers in trade. But, quite remarkably, in Stanzas 13 and 14, Birkett's address to the Irish women becomes more direct and powerful, since she is asking them to boycott the very object of this shameful commerce, «the blood-stain'd lux'ry», that is to say West Indian sugar:

Hibernian fair, who own compassion's sway,
Scorn not a younger sister's artless lay;
To you the Muse would raise her daring song,
For Mercy's softest beams to you belong;
To you the sympathetic sigh is known,
And Charity's sweet lustre – all your own;
To you gall'd Mis'ry seldom pleads in vain,
Oh, let us rise and burst the Negro's chain!
Yes, sisters, yes, to us the task belongs,
'Tis we increase or mitigate their wrongs.
If we the produce of their toils refuse,
If we no more the blood-stain'd lux'ry choose;
If from our lips we push the plant away
For which the liberties of thousands pay,
Of thousands once as blest, and born as free,
And nurs'd with care, (tho' not so soft,) as we;
If in benev'lence firm, we this can dare,
And in our brethrens sufferings hold no share,
In no small part their long-borne pangs will cease,
And we to souls unborn may whisper peace.

Sisters! another theme, did fancy choose,
Far from your view had shrunk my blushing Muse;
And still from you conceal'd my trembling form,
But here – I must, I dare, I will be warm -

Birkett's political sisterhood, or «The call for women to exert their influence», as Midgley put it, underlines familiar ties and affections (through terms such as compassion, softest beams, sympathetic sighs, charity), that

were, as we have seen, traditionally dear to women's abolitionist discourse. Thus, Mary Birkett uses a gender-oriented poetic diction, as was expected of women writers in the late eighteenth century, who had to convey delicacy of feeling and sentimentality rather than overt political positions. Abolitionist writings, however, «demonstrate that women found a way to voice social and political criticism through the acceptably 'feminine' means of poetic sentiment and appeals to the emotions» [Midgley 1995, p. 34], while, in fact, calling for radical action. Likewise, Birkett cannot forget the social and political oppression in which the Irish lived under British rule. She thus creates an analogy between the oppression of African and Irish people, attributing the blame to the same English source [Howman 2007, p. 290].

Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1825)

Let me conclude by mentioning, albeit briefly, a last, perhaps unexpected example: that of Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1825), not a philanthropist in the strictest sense of the term but a philanthropist in her own way. At the outset of the philanthropic movement, through her thinking and her writings, Barbauld provided British women of her generation with a source of invaluable civic and ethical inspiration. Her philanthropy was made up of ideas and principles, rather than of practical charitable initiatives, and was expressed in letters, poems and essays. As Daniel Watkins has well summarized, Barbauld encouraged free thought, spiritual understanding, and worldly engagement [See Watkins 2012]. Her benevolent sphere of action can be defined as global rather than local, unlike most charitable activity, and pertained to all the aspects of the dynamic but precarious society of the Great Britain of the time.

Barbauld was Unitarian and had been brought up in the heart of the rational dissenting community of Warrington Academy (1757-1786). Her niece Lucy Aikin recalls the atmosphere of intellectual vivacity that was experienced in the Warrington Academy, which her daughter defined «the Athens of our country» [Le Breton 1874, p. 25]: «I have often thought with envy of that society. Neither Oxford nor Cambridge could boast of brighter names in literature or science than several of these dissenting tutors – humbly content in an obscure town, and on a scanty pittance, to cultivate in themselves, and communicate to a rising generation, those mental acquirements and moral habits which are their own exceeding great reward» [Le Breton 1874, p. 33].

Consequently, she was trained as much in what was going on specifically in Liverpool as, more generally, in the rest of the country. She witnessed the heated atmosphere of two revolutions and took a firm position in support of those who were fighting for their freedom, and she also became one of the earliest abolitionists. Like her brother John Aikin, Anna Letitia Barbauld admired one of the most prominent abolitionist leaders, William Roscoe, whom she praised

in her verse. She participated, both at a civic and national level, in the political debate, not to be silenced by the anti-Jacobin fervour of the '90s during which dissidence could all too easily be branded as sedition. The day after the refusal by Parliament to repeal the Act that discriminated against dissenters, Barbauld published «An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts» (1790), where she proudly argues:

> You have refused us, and by so doing, you keep us under the eye of the public, in the interesting point of view of men who suffer under a deprivation of their rights. You have set a mark of separation upon us, and it is not in our power to take it off, but it is in our power to determine whether it shall be a disgraceful stigma or an honourable distinction [Barbauld 2002, p. 272].

She protested loudly against any kind of exclusion, be it due to sex, religion, class or ethnicity, but she hated to be classified by any single label. The «double dissent» of Barbauld, as woman and Unitarian, was at the origin of her unique intersectional perspective, able to welcome opposing and unpopular views and sympathize with ostracized people, as poems such as «The Mouse's Petition» or «The Caterpillar» show.[1] Her shifting «positionality» [see Den Otter 2004, p. 210] opens to new and unsuspected viewpoints since, as Alice Den Otter claims in her article on Barbauld's latter poem, she is able to be at the same time conventional and yet potentially subversive. In «The Caterpillar» Barbauld «addresses both the dangers and the values of pests and parasites, adopting and then jarring ethical considerations so that thought is opened toward wider flows of animate relations» [Den otter 2004, p. 209]. Such a comprehensive and fluid views might also be the reason why she kindly declined enticing invitations: in one case, the invitation came from Lady Montague to run a school for girls; in another case from Maria Edgeworth, to set up a Lady's magazine with the Edgeworths and other women intellectuals.[2] Although Barbauld resisted easy

[1] On Barbauld's non-conformist and against the time ideas, Alice G. Den Otter observes: «Responding to *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* by Patrick Colquhoun (1796), Barbauld refuses to condemn the prowling poor who are "forever nibbling at our property", suggesting that such thieves should be seen, albeit in macrocosmic terms, as necessary to a balanced economy rather than as agents of injury or damage. "I would rather wish to consider them", she writes in her "Thoughts on the Inequality of Conditions" (1807), "as usefully employed in lessening the enormous inequality between the miserable beings who engage in them, and the great commercial speculators, in their way equally rapacious, against whom their frauds are exercised"» [Den Otter 2004, p. 210].

[2] To understand how Barbauld might have been perceived by other contemporary women writers, we may quote from the «Observations on Female Literature in General, Including Some Particulars Relating to Mrs. Montagu And Mrs. Barbauld», published in *The Westminster Magazine* (June 1776), pp. 283-285: «With regard to Mrs.

categorial definitions, many of her poems («Inscription for an Ice-House», «Corsica», «Eighteen Hundred and Eleven») do not leave any doubt regarding her acute social awareness and stern political critique.[3] Her prose also provides evidence of serious commitment to the public sphere. To George's III call for a day of public fasting to prepare the British people for the war with France, Barbauld's answer was the anonymous publication of *Sins of the Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793). Barbauld's pamphlet recalls in many ways the internationalism of Thomas Paine, proposing the model of a friendly alliance among nations, instead of the «mutual slaughter» to which those hard times had consigned European international politics. She claims that:

> Thus do we extend our grasping hands from east to west, from pole to pole, and in our selfish monopolizing spirit are almost angry that the sun should ripen any productions but for our markets, or the ocean bear any vessels but our own upon its broad bosom. We are not ashamed to use that solecism in terms *natural enemies*; as if nature, and not our bad passions, made us enemies; as if that relation, from which, in private life, flows confidence, affection, endearing intercourse, were in nations only a signal for mutual slaughter and we were like animals of prey, solitarily ferocious, who look with a jealous eye on every rival that intrudes within their range of devastation—and yet this language is heard in a Christian country, and these detestable maxims veil themselves under the semblance of virtue and public spirit [...]. Every good man owes it to his country and to his own character, to lift his voice against a ruinous war, and unequal tax, or an edict of persecution; and oppose them, temperately, but firmly by all means in his power; and indeed this is the only way reformation can ever be brought about, or that government can enjoy the advantage of general opinion [Barbauld 1793, pp. 23-24, 36-37].

Barbauld's poetical compositions, there is a masculine force in them, which the most vigorous of our poets has not excelled: there is nothing, indeed, feminine belonging to them, but a certain gracefulness of expression (in which dignity and beauty are both included) that marks them for the productions of a Female Hand…» [cited in Aikin 1773].

[3] Interestingly, Barbauld's great nice, Anna Letitia Le Breton publishes a letter by Joseph Priestley where he expresses admiration for the poem «Corsica»: [From Leeds, 13th June 1769] «Dear Miss Aikin, You will be surprised when I tell you I write this on the behalf of Pascal Paoli and the brave Corsicans, but it is strictly true. Mr. Turner of Wakefield, who says he reads your poems not with admiration but astonishment, insists upon my writing to you, to request that a copy of your poem called Corsica may be sent to Mr. Boswell, with permission to publish it for the benefit of those noble islanders. He is confident that it cannot fail greatly to promote their interest now that a subscription is open for them, by raising a generous ardor in the cause of liberty, and admiration of their glorious struggles in its defence» [Le Breton 1874, pp. 34-35].

Here Barbauld deplores British greediness and complains at Britain's «grasping hands from east to west, from pole to pole», while defining the British «monopolizing spirit» as shameful, since it turns human beings into ferocious animals craving for the blood of their neighbours. Then she wonders where the Christian spirit is to be found, that should govern and drive the communities who proclaim their trust in God.

During the Napoleonic Wars, not caring for national borders or loyalist patriotism, she cried out for the thousands of people deprived of life, of security and of well-being. As the most emancipated of women, she imagined a country where arts, nature, and education were harmoniously combined. In 1812, a year after the publication of her dramatically severe and politically committed long poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, in which she dared to criticize the policies of British warmongers, who were bringing poverty and destruction to the country and to the whole of Europe, Barbauld's public voice was violently censured by a review. A vicious article by John Wilson Croker appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, chastising her disobedience towards the canons of her gender role. As William McCarthy highlights, Croker was at the time first secretary at the Admiralty, the office that ran the British Navy. Thus, «as a reviewer he, and indeed the *Quarterly* itself at this time, acted as a voice of the government» [McCarthy 2008, p. 477]:

> But she must excuse us if we think that she has wandered from the course in which she was respectable and useful, and miserably mistaken both her powers and her duty, in exchanging the birchen for the satiric rod, and abandoning her superintendence of the 'ovilia' of the nursery, to wage war on the 'reluctantes dracones', statesmen, and warriors, whose misdoings have aroused her indignant muse.
> We had hoped, indeed, that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady-author […]. Not such, however, is her opinion; an irresistible impulse of public duty — a confident sense of commanding talents — have induced her to dash down her shagreen spectacles and her knitting needles and to sally forth, hand in hand with her renowned compatriot, in the magnanimous resolution of saving a sinking state, by the instrumentality of a pamphlet in prose and a pamphlet in verse [Croker 1812, pp. 309-313].

Given the pessimistic view that the poem conveyed, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* was alleged to be «unpatriotic» and, consequently, produced an animated controversy that involved the Tories as the Liberals. McCarthy and Kraft remark that «even her fellow liberals and friends responded nervously at best [...]. In 1812, however, the press was almost unanimous in finding *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* culpably subversive of national morale. Its excellence as

poetry, when admitted, was treated as an aggravation of the crime» [McCarthy and Kraft 1994, p. 309].

In the poem Barbauld blames Britain for the economic collapse that the war was causing and for the social cost the country was paying:

> And thinkst thou, Britain, still to sit at ease,
> An island Queen amidst thy subject seas,
> While the vext billows, in their distant roar,
> But soothe thy slumbers, and but kiss thy shore?
> To sport in wars, while danger keeps aloof,
> Thy grassy turf unbruised by hostile hoof?
> So sing thy flatterers; but, Britain, know,
> Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe (ll. 39-46).

In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, she also quotes some of the names that in her opinion had made the glory of Britain and who were in many ways in tune with her own political and religious views. Among them, she quotes the leading abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, the poet William Cooper, the philosopher and dissenter Joseph Priestly, the scientist Benjamin Franklin and William Roscoe, an eminent figure in Liverpool, and himself a Unitarian and abolitionist. Roscoe was also one of the few people who remained steady by her side after the publication of the poem, and, in fact, praising it. Not by chance, in his hostile review Croker mockingly cites William Roscoe.[4]

Barbauld – by then sixty-nine years old – after a life dedicated to being the voice of public conscience, went through a period of depression and ceased to engage directly in political polemics although she never stopped writing.

Barbauld inspired two generations of British women and men by her example, opening up new vistas onto civil rights and global sharing, thereby extending the meaning of philanthropic action well beyond the sphere of local charitable commitment. Additionally, as William McCarthy has pointed out, her fame did not remain confined to Britain but crossed the Atlantic. Barbauld's writings circulated widely in the United States, where her dissenting opinions were praised and welcomed, and where a large number of people and intellectuals came to know, cite and remember her name (among them, Thomas Jefferson). Her books dedicated to children (*Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Lessons for Children*) had American editions within thirteen years of their original publication. Her other works also became well-known and in some cases came out in the same year as their British publication (this

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[4] Roscoe had published in 1810 the pamphlet *Brief Observations on the Address to His Majesty Proposed by Earl Grey in The House of Lords* in which he had attacked the reformer Earl Grey who, after having opposed the war since its start, in 1793, in 1810 had publicly announced his support for the prosecution of the conflict [Roscoe 1810].

is the case of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*)¸ while her *Works*, collected by Lucy Aikin in 1825, had two US editions the following year [McCarthy 2012, pp. 52-53].

If philanthropy and gender – to conclude – were seen by the patriarchal establishment as incompatible phenomena, in practice, as I have tried to show, they frequently went together, not least in Liverpool.

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Felicia Hemans and the Social Coalition in Liverpool

Abstract

Critics of her time considered Felicia Hemans a prototype of the female poet who wrote elegant and tender verses on women's feelings and domestic affection. However, even though women were excluded from directly participating in the political sphere, they often challenged and discussed this gendered discourse, primarily in the literary domain. They felt particularly invested in a rapidly-changing reality in which they were, on the one hand, passive observers of an unstable historical panorama, and, on the other, responsible and engaged intellectuals who developed explanatory, though not apologetic, theories for such turbulent times. Felicia Hemans enthusiastically responded to the unfolding national and international political events of her time and was inspired by their dream of founding a modern state in the aftermath of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era. She wrote for a steadily growing, middle-class reading public that was very active in the political arena. Led by Roscoe, this group animated Liverpool's intellectual and social life with their interest in state affairs, and was among those who made Hemans a popular poet, which she remained until the early twentieth century. Hemans inherited Liverpool society's liberal ideas without becoming an explicitly radical writer and conveyed ideas of social, political and cultural reformation, particularly in her early publications. Hemans's involvement in the liberal coalition of Liverpool demonstrates how women writers were deeply entangled in the period's social and political turmoil, and how they became increasingly engaged with key political and economic issues such as slavery and abolition.

Serena Baiesi

Critics of her time considered Felicia Hemans «a fine exemplification of Female Poetry – infinitely sweet, elegant, and tender – touching, perhaps, and contemplative, rather than vehement or overpowering» [The Edinburgh review 1829, pp. 32-47]. Francis Jeffrey, critic of *The Edinburgh Review*, assessed Hemans's poetry according to the traditional principle of the separate spheres, which claimed that women, in both literature and life, should be devoted to the domestic realm and men to the public state. Indeed, although women were excluded from directly participating in the political sphere, they often challenged and discussed this gendered discourse, primarily in the literary domain. As Jonathan Wordsworth remarks in one of the first pioneering studies on women writers of the Romantic age, women poets did not lead easy lives. Even if they enjoyed high social status, he explains, they did not live

in a fair society and, as a consequence speculate in their writings about the condition of so-called inferior beings [Wordsworth 1997, p. i]. While young, they were governed by fathers or brothers, and, if they became wives, surrendered their properties and legal identities to their husbands. Indeed, if women earned income from their writings, it legally belonged to their husbands. Lord George Norton, for example, had the law on his side when, after publicly humiliating his wife, Caroline, and taking away her children, he observed that the money she earned from her writings legally belonged to him. The *Married Women's Property Act*, which reversed this law, was not passed until 1870 [Wordsworth 1997, p. i].

Despite their inferior legal status and lack of educational opportunities, women writers actively participated in social debates between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially as profound changes in the nation's economic and political systems crucially affected their roles in society. They felt particularly invested in a rapidly-changing reality in which they were, on the one hand, passive observers of an unstable historical panorama, and, on the other, responsible and engaged intellectuals who developed explanatory, though not apologetic, theories for such turbulent times.

Felicia Hemans enthusiastically responded to the unfolding national and international political events of her time, including the revolutions that implicated her and her readership [Hemans 2002, p. 15]. Even though she established her literary career after the first abolitionist movement began its campaign to stop the slave trade, she borrowed ideas from both protesters – those who actively fought to abolish the slave trade – and Liverpool's circle of liberal intellectuals. Specifically, Hemans was inspired by their dream of founding a modern state in the aftermath of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, one that might resist the restoration of tyrannical, monarchic regimes and join with emerging working-class political movements. She wrote for a steadily growing, middle-class reading public that was very active in the political arena. This group animated Liverpool's intellectual and social life with their interest in state affairs, and were among those who made Hemans a popular poet, which she remained until the early twentieth century. Yet, before examining how Hemans inherited Liverpool society's liberal ideas without becoming an explicitly radical writer – how she conveyed ideas of social, political and cultural reformation, particularly in her early publications – we might first consider how women writers were deeply entangled in the period's social and political turmoil, and how they became increasingly engaged with key political and economic issues such as slavery and abolition.

Unsurprisingly, eighteenth-century women's participation in the abolitionist movement steadily grew, so much so that at least eighty-five women were registered members of the Abolition Society, not including the substantial number of anonymous women affiliated with several religious societies [Ferguson 1992, p. 5]. Women writers addressed several questions

in their publications, including their roles inside and outside of the family, responding to the unexpected conflicts that took place during their time. In an epoch in which economic interests constantly reshaped social classes, one had a heightened awareness of one's position, which could only be defined in relation to other classes. Gender roles, too, were subject to new social and behavioral codes and consumer rules. As Philippa Levine remarks in her study on the rise and fall of British Empire,

> Women became actively involved in anti-slavery protests, raising funds, writing letters of protest, and becoming increasingly politically aware. For a substantial group of women, anti-slavery activism would open their eyes to the inequalities under which women in Britain lived, prompting them to fight for women's rights as well. Yet despite this diverse and significant activity, economics as much as moral sentiment may have helped the anti-slavery case, as the push for a free trade system grew stronger in early nineteenth-century politics [Levine 2007, pp. 22-23].

In addition to slavery and abolition, women most commonly addressed issues such as family ties, social class, gender discourses, and economic interests in their poems [Baiesi 2008, pp. 33-49]. As a consequence, these same themes significantly influenced the productions of the next generation of Romantic writers, including Felicia Hemans, whose poetry, while not specifically devoted to the abolitionist campaign, nonetheless depicts tension between reform and patriotism.

As Brycchan Carey affirms in his study of slavery literature and the rhetoric of sensibility, the majority of antislavery poets writing at the end of eighteenth century were women. Moreover, it is interesting to note that critics who attacked the antislavery movement attempted to cast abolitionist writers as «feminine, domestic, and emotion-centred» in contrast to those writers who, in support of the slave trade, based their arguments on real facts «understood in the male and public world of commerce» [Carey 2005, p. 92]. Indeed, proslavery supporters often discriminated against antislavery poetry on the basis of gender, considering abolitionist writers sentimental and feminine, and thus inferior.

Reviewing Helen Maria Williams's abolitionist poem, «A Poem on the Bill lately passed for regulating the Slave Trade», a 1789 article from *The New Monthly Review* comments on women's involvement in the campaign:

> The accounts lately given to the Public respecting the Slave Trade, were horrid enough to call into vigorous exercise the amiable sensibility of the female breast. By the ladies, this subject has been contemplated through the pure medium of virtuous pity, unmixed with those political,

commercial, and selfish considerations which operated in steeling the hearts of some men against the pleadings of humanity: to find THEM, therefore, writing on it, by no means excited wonder [The New Monthly Review 1789, pp. 237-238].

The reviewer ironically comments on the «vigorous exercise» of women writers who participate in the antislavery debate and emphasizes how they use traditionally feminine means of communication – the language of sensibility and domestic affection – to voice their protest. Despite the reviewer's paternalistic statements, women took part in the commercial and political debates that characterized the years 1788-1789, a period when British legislation against the slave trade radically changed. Abolitionist campaigns were sustained not only by political and humanitarian concerns, but also by economic interests, which were at the forefront of parliamentary discussions about the issue. In particular, the Liverpool Ladies Society, though limited in means and numbers, was nevertheless an active, organized assembly whose members played a significant part in the propaganda battle [Howman 2007, p. 289]. They supported the campaign to boycott products derived from the exploitation of slaves in the colonies and «were instrumental in the distribution of significant numbers of anti-slavery pamphlet across the country». In addition, prior to the formal foundation of the Ladies' Society, many women advanced the cause of abolition through their individual efforts. This was the case, for example, with Eliza Knipe and Mary Birkett, both of whom claimed Liverpool as either birth town or temporary residence. Knipe's chief contribution to the abolitionist movement was her publication, «Atoboka and Omaza; an African story», printed in London in 1787. In it, she calls attention to the suffering of black people and attempts to engender sympathy for the abolitionist cause, especially from female readers. Similarly Mary Birkett, born to a family with strong anti-slavery sentiments, wrote a *Poem on the African Slave Trade*, which was published in 1792. This work criticizes England's involvement in the slave trade and argues for active resistance on the part of all citizens, and «echoing other women's writer's calls for a boycott of West Indian sugar, referring to it as a 'blood-stain'd luxury'» [Howman 2007, p. 290].

Along with women activists, another marginalized group of intellectuals who enthusiastically joined the antislavery campaign was the Dissenters. They were motivated by both economic and social concerns as they petitioned for social improvement in a broader sense and advocated for personal freedom across the class spectrum. Even though Anglicans comprised the majority of Abolition Society members, the group also included Quakers, Baptists, Unitarians and other denominations, a range that speaks to the protesters' shared beliefs despite gender and religious differences between them. While Hemans was neither a dissenter nor an activist in the abolitionist campaign, we can read her political poetry as participating in the dissenting tradition of Anna Laetitia

Barbauld and Helen Maria Williams. Women actively advocated political change on several fronts, including the literary, supporting general statements about personal liberties in their appeals. Thus, Hemans's predecessors' radical ideas can be found in the later poet's desire to write about liberty and domesticity on a global scale. Moreover, Hemans's political assertions inevitably challenged the assigned social roles of the period [Ferguson 1992, pp. 17-19]. As Marlon B. Ross affirms, «during the early Romantic period, women's political discourse – across the ideological spectrum – occupies a position of dissent. Simply to speak about politics is to place oneself against the political establishment, where women's role is normatively defined solely by silent obeisance» [Ross 1994, p. 92].

From abolitionist writers, especially women, Hemans inherited the rhetoric of sensibility and the domestic sphere as a means of introducing her writing to the public domain. Moreover, she situated her poetry in European and international contexts, expanding her discourse on civil rights and personal freedom beyond English borders. For Hemans, domestic space served as a significant point of departure where cosmopolitan influences could be discussed and situated in a familiar framework. Her works enter into dialogue with other literary traditions and voices, especially those from the Mediterranean region, taking inspiration from Italian art and culture thanks to the intellectual impulse she received from her Liverpool friends [Saglia 2014, pp. 110-127].

According to Brian Howman, Liverpool played a complicated role in the larger panorama of abolitionist politics, making it difficult to record such a role from merely one perspective. Interestingly, Liverpool's anti-slavery movement was more effective during the 1820s to 1834 than it was during the first wave of abolitionist campaigns in the rest of the nation. Especially before 1807, there was little abolitionist activity in the town due to the fact that the majority of the city's inhabitants were linked in some way to the slave trade, a fact corroborated by historical records that claim «almost every man in Liverpool is a merchant» [Howman 2007, p. 277]. As a consequence, many were highly suspect of the abolitionist movement, believing it to be perpetuated by members of Liverpool society who did not engage in open debate, but rather anonymously or in disguise. Nonetheless, the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery was active from 1822 and operated with the London Committee and the Ladies' Association, which was founded in Liverpool in 1827 [Howman 2007, p. 277]. Records indicate very little activity by the Society in the 1780s, even though it listed many important names among its subscribers. Most of them were members of the informal reform group known as the «Roscoe circle». Although involved with the abolitionist group, these reformers remained cautious about adopting a public anti-slavery stance [Howman 2007, p. 279]. In Liverpool especially, abolitionists faced a strong, well-organized, and violent pro-slavery lobby comprised of merchants and traders, all of whom highly profited from the colonies. As a consequence,

abolitionists were cautious in publicly displaying their antislavery ideals, fearful of inciting violent protests or insurrection.

Even though Hemans's Liverpool abolitionist circle perhaps now seems provincial, this liberal, middle-class Dissenting group maintained both regional and international perspectives. The group has been compared to the Coppet circle of Geneva lead by Madame De Staël, since both organizations supported the disestablishment of traditional education and lent nineteenth-century culture an international perspective. Critics also draw parallels between the Liverpool group and the celebrated Pisan Circle of Byron and the Shelleys in Italy thanks to their common dissemination of liberal ideas and formation of transnational identities [Sweet 1998, pp. 244-260]. An article in *The Fraser's Magazine* dedicated to Hemans's work explicitly addressed the city of Liverpool and its social coalition, labeling Hemans a native of the town of Roscoe in the opening line [The Fraser's Magazine 1840, pp. 127-146]. «As well as their disagreement with the Liverpool Corporation and opposition to slavery», Howman remarks, «the Roscoe circle were famed locally for their support of the French Revolution (for which they were dubbed «Liverpool Jacobins»), for the campaign to repel the Test and Corporation Act, and for support of free trade with the East Indies» [Howman 2007, p.280]. As a consequence, Liverpool society helped shape Hemans's intellectual and political background that would find its way into her poetry once she left the city to settle in Wales. Even though her works never openly discuss slavery or the slave trade, the rhetoric through which they discuss liberalism and cosmopolitanism resembles the language employed by the abolitionist movement that began in Liverpool and spread across Britain.

As Gary Kelly explains, «Hemans's social, intellectual, and cultural formation prepared her well for her public literary role» [Hemans 2002, p. 16]. She was born to a family of merchants in Liverpool in 1793, a time when the city was a major world port with international businesses that included the slave trade, factors that made Hemans highly aware of the unfolding international crisis [Hemans 2002, p. 16]. Her mother was of German and Italian descent, a heritage that played a crucial role in Hemans's education in European cultures and languages. These international and cosmopolitan connections strongly influenced her poetry and were reinforced by the social developments and turmoil that took place in Liverpool. The «town-gentry» class of Liverpool was a coalition of professional and commercial middle-class residents that included Dissenters. They formed their own culture by opening dissenting schools that opposed the authority of regional and country gentry, the political and economic power of London, the southern towns of England, and the political and ecclesiastical establishments of the state [Hemans 2002, p. 16]. Hemans's background and education granted her access to that wider culture, one inherited from the European Enlightenment movements and oriented toward cosmopolitan liberalism.

The most influential figure of the Liverpool circle with whom Hemans was acquainted was William Roscoe (1753-1831). He enjoyed a national and international reputation for his political and literary activities and influenced Hemans both in terms of culture and politics. From Liverpool, the nation's chief slave-trading port, he was elected to the 1806 Parliament where he voted against the trade [Sweet 1998, p. 247]. He served as the principal creator of liberal, intellectual Liverpool, a society that emerged between 1760 and 1830 with the principal aim of discussing literature. Called «a small private literary society», in addition to Roscoe it included Unitarian Ministers (William Shepard, John Yeats, and Joseph Smith), physicians (James Currie and John Rutter), the poet and abolitionist Edward Rushton, as well as merchants and philanthropists. The circle, which met fortnightly, ceased its gatherings during the anti-Jacobin fervor of 1792 but was later restored. According to Thomas De Quincey, who was introduced to Roscoe's friends in 1801 while visiting relatives in Liverpool, members of this circle devoted themselves «to the reading of papers or the discussion of literary questions» [Sutton 2014]. Roscoe, with his Athenaeum – a merchant's reading and conversation room that opened in 1799 – gathered together several well-known intellectuals, including everyone from William Hazlitt to Herman Melville.

A friend of radicals such as Joseph Johnson and Mary Wollstonecraft but also acquainted with the Prince of Wales, Roscoe published two cultural histories celebrating an earlier urban renaissance in Italy [Hemans 2002, p. 17]. Meanwhile, the antislavery Committee commissioned him to produce a work in support of abolition. Written in blank verse, Roscoe's *The Wrong of Africa* (1787) raised funds for the cause and promoted the petitions that supporters had collected to present to Parliament. As a lawyer, Roscoe also befriended those who profited from the slave trade, including many of his clients. For this reason, his poem avoids directly confronting slave owners but instead employs the commonly-used rhetoric of sensibility in order to solicit compassion and sympathy for the cause. This was a common tactic employed by several abolitionists of the time, including William Wilberforce in his famous speech to Parliament on May 12th, 1789. In *The Wrong of Africa*, Roscoe invokes his readers' sympathy, commiseration, and emotional involvement towards the issue of slavery, and then addresses political questions such as the abolition of the law and the campaign to boycott sugar. Finally, the author denounces those who ignore the barbarities perpetuated by the trade.

Both Hemans and Roscoe were British citizens and intellectuals oriented towards the Continent and America who worked alongside the circles and academics of Dissent. Nevertheless, as an Anglican, Hemans remained distinct from the Dissenters, avoiding the radical controversies that caused the exile of Thomas Paine and Joseph Priestley, and silenced many other writers such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld. For these free thinkers, Liverpool was not simply a rich province of England, but a semi-independent city-state where liberal ideas could be actively discussed and circulated. It is interesting to note that Melville

portrayed Liverpool as the world's most modern port city, one that resembled New York more than London. Indeed, Liverpool was the setting for profitable commercial and industrial ventures as well as a place for the discussion and circulation of ideas. This is why, for Roscoe, Liverpool had both the resources and the need for intellectual liberal culture [Sweet 1998, p. 250].

After Felicia and her family moved to Wales, it was her ambitious mother who maintained a close relationship with the Liverpool circle in order to promote and consolidate her daughter's literary reputation. As a matter of fact, she corresponded with members of Roscoe's circle, assuring that Felicia could still draw on Liverpool's intellectual and literary resources. As Nanora Sweet explains, this connection was important for Hemans's early career, as it meant that the poetess could have access to Roscoe's books, as well as early printings of Sismondi's histories and criticism – indeed, it was Roscoe who launched Felicia Browne's career [Sweet 1998, p. 252]. Accordingly, Susan Wolfson asserts that «with the devotion of her mother and a large domestic library, she [Felicia Hemans] a voracious reader and a precocious student, and quickly developed into a writer, indeed, a capably publishing poet at fourteen» [Wolfson 1994, p. 133]. Indeed, from the poet's début in literary society prior to her marriage, it was Hemans's mother, Felicity Wagner Browne, who dealt with possible publishers. She wrote to a family friend, Mathew Nicholson, asking for his advice on the matter, and pointing out Roscoe's son, William Stanley, as one of the possible intellectual patron of her daughter's work:

> With regard to the offer of Messers. Cadell & Davies, I am such a novice on the subject, as to be quite incompetent to judge of its liberality; but I would much rather depend upon your judgment, & that of Mr. Roscoe, than upon my own; & whatever you think most advisable, will certainly appear to me the most so – as you act as you would for yourself, you will most oblige Felicia & me, & you have unlimited discretionary powers on the occasion [Hemans 2002, p. 415].

In the same letter, however, we can see just how aware Hemans's mother was of the dynamics of the literary marketplace in terms of remuneration, promotion, and publishing continuity:

> I will, however, remark, that as Messers. C.D have had the publication of the two first works; it appears to me most respectable that any future productions should come out through the same channel; even though more liberal terms might be obtained from others & I am sure C. & D. have it fully as much in their power to promote the sale of a work & thereby make it popular, as any Book-sellers in London (Felicity Wagner Browne to Matthew Nicholson; Bronwhilfa, 7 February 1812) [Hemans 2002, p. 415].

A year after writing this letter – and after her marriage – Felicia Hemans, a married woman in charge of her manuscripts, wrote directly to William Stanley Roscoe, seeking protection and guidance with the publishers. This letter reveals a writer well acquainted with the literary panorama of her time. Hemans displays knowledge of her potential literary business, the best names in the publishing industry, and unabashedly negotiates benefits and copyrights for her works:

> Dear Sir,
> I avail myself of your kind offer to undertake the disposal of my manuscripts for me, persuaded as I am that they cannot be in the hands of one who will make more disinterested exertions for a perfect stranger – I leave it entirely to you to offer them either to Messers. Longman &c, or to Mr Johnston, but I do not wish my name to appear on the occasion – it they should be inclined to purchase the copy-right, you will perhaps have the goodness to fix what you would consider as an adequate compensation – I know not what apology to make for thus troubling you, but that I am so little conversant with subjects of this nature, & that I have no literary friends to interest themselves in bringing me forward – I shall extremely happy if this little work should obtain your approbation […] (Felicia Hemans to William Stanley Roscoe; Daventry, 22 October 1813) [Hemans 2002, p. 415].

By this time, Roscoe had already helped Hemans publish her first work, *Poems* (1808), in Liverpool when she was only fourteen and living in North Wales with her mother and sister. The collection of verse circulated in print by subscription (with 978 subscribers and 1178 copies) and included many people from the city. Hemans's supporters belonged to many different classes, including the aristocracy and the gentry, such as the Prince of Wales to whom the book is dedicated. This first work includes poems about family life, as well as descriptive pieces and religious lyrics. It contains conventional and familiar verses in the tradition of eighteenth-century sentimental poets such as Alexander Pope and William Cowper, as well as sonnets of the kind made fashionable by Charlotte Smith [Hemans 2002, p. 19]. William Roscoe's son managed the publication and keenly promoted its artists beyond the city, aiming to prove that Liverpool, though provincial in size, was rich in intellectual resources. Indeed, the young Roscoe wanted to solidify the city's reputation as devoted to causes of social and cultural progress, just as it had been during the abolitionist campaign. Within this context, it is interesting to note that in her *Poems* Hemans includes patriotic and political verses, justified by the fact that she had two brothers in the army and thus was well acquainted with military life and campaigns. The hymn «Sacred to the Memory of Lord Nelson» exemplifies her exaltation of British patriotism and the spirit of liberty, motifs that perfectly capture her vision of an ideal nation:

While British hearts with noble ardour glow,
Warm with the genuine spirit of the brave;
Ah ! still a grateful tear of joy must flow,
The sacred tribute o'er a hero's grave.
Oh ! yes, a sweet enthusiastic tear
Shall tremble in the generous Briton's eye;
And own with melting energy sincere,
A Nelson's worth, a country's liberty
[Hemans 1808, p. 55, ll. 1-8].

Both «To Patriotism» and «To My Young Brother, on his Entering the Army» can be read as expressions of Hemans's familiar affections and her nationalistic ideals; she exalts the «enterprize, who waves on high / the British flag of victory; / And Fortitude, with awful state, / Who soars above the storm of fate» [Hemans 1808, p. 64]. In this collection, a young Hemans undoubtedly assimilates and adapts the rhetorical strategies employed by abolitionist women writers, combining patriotic and military themes with sentimental culture. As Bainbridge remarks, «fancy breaks down the sense of distance between the home and the scene of war, undermining any simple construction of the private and the public space. The home becomes the space of imagining war's horrors while the scene of war becomes the site for the imagining home» [Bainbridge 2003, p. 151]. Moreover, her discussion of family ties legitimizes and paves the way for Hemans to talk about public and political issues. As for her poetical verse, she exploits those genres inherited by the traditional female romantic lyric such as short poems, inscriptions, hymns, odes, sonnets, and songs.

In her subsequent publication, *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808), Hemans more closely investigates political themes, especially those closer to home. At this time, the great patriotic struggle against Napoleonic France captured the British public's imagination, a conflict Hemans readily explores from a more cosmopolitan dimension. Here, the poet focuses her attention on the peninsular War in Spain, where her two brothers, George and Henry, served in the British army. Consequently, she promotes Britain's engagement with the nation's libertarian traditions – those derived from classical republicanism – and links her ideas to the kind of independent culture of freedom Roscoe celebrated before her. As Saglia observes, «writing from commercial, middle-class Liverpool and in close contact with William Roscoe's Whig circle, Hemans portrays Spain and England through a historical progress culminating in the triumph of self-determination and liberal ideals over tyrannical imposition, and closes on celebration of the return of peace and prosperity» [Saglia 2000, p. 29].

Oppression, tyranny and power are recurring words in Hemans's poetry:

> Too long have Tyranny and Power combin'd,
> To sway, with iron sceptre, o'er mankind;
> Long has Oppression worn th' imperial robe,
> And rapine's sword has wasted half the globe!
> [Hemans 1844, p. 36, ll. 1-5].

Using the heroic couplet, Hemans displays solid poetic craftsmanship in exalting the principle of liberty:

> Rise, Freedom, rise! and breaking from thy trance,
> Wave the dread banner, seize the glitt'ring lance!
> With arm of might assert thy sacred cause,
> And call thy champions to defend thy laws!
> How long shall tyrant power her throne maintain?
> How long shall despots and usurpers reign?
> Is honour's lofty soul for ever fled?
> Is virtue lost? is martial ardour dead? […]
> Yes, Freedom, yes! thy sons, a noble band,
> Around thy banner, firm, exulting stand;
> Once more 'tis thine, invincible, to wield
> The beamy spear, and adamantine shield!
> [Hemans 1844, p. 38, ll. 29-36; 39-42].

Moving from the Spanish context, the poet next turns to England, the «empress of the sea», alternatively referring to it as «Albion», «Rome», and the «land of freedom's birth», «where mercy, justice, dwell / Whose sons in wisdom as in arms excel» [Hemans 1844, p. 39, ll. 69-72]. Here, freedom is the most important principle associated with Britain and Albion:

> Immortal FREEDOM! daughter of the skies!
> To thee shall BRITAIN's grateful incense rise!
> Ne'er, goddess! ne'er forsake thy fav'rite isle,
> Still be thy ALBION brighten'd with thy smile!
> [Hemans 1844, p. 46, ll. 265-258].

This composition's republican and pacifist references attracted the notice of Percy Shelley, who, stirred by the poem, wrote to Hemans to discuss political issues such as freedom and tyranny. However, the young poet's mother's strict supervision prevented any correspondence between them.

Hemans's next publication, *The Domestic Affections* (1812), mixes political themes and patriotism with a renewed middle-class domestic ideology, emphasizing the necessity of national and international peace just as in *England and Spain*. This time, though, Hemans situates these ideas in a

feminine context. Poems such as «War and Peace», «The Statue of the Dying Gladiator», «The Call of Liberty» and «War-Song of the Spanish Patriots» find a confident and determined voice with which to portray historical war scenarios that are closely connected to the domestic sphere. In the last poem, the patriots are identified with those Spaniards who opposed Napoleon's occupation of Spain during the Peninsular War. This conflict – and war in general – occupies a central place in Hemans's poetical imagination and shapes her representations of conflict [Bainbridge 2003]. In this collection, Hemans also reveals an impressive range of perspective on political events, «seeing them through the 'truth-enlighten'd eye'» [Bainbridge 2003, p. 152]. Her poetry intertwines public and political issues within a domestic context, one that displaces both time and place. Hemans does not, however, try to mask her knowledge or personal opinions, but instead emphasizes women's roles in masculine territories regardless of time or place. As Isobel Armstrong observes, «Hemans wrote overtly of politics […], and declared a Byronic response to liberty. But the politics of women's poetry in this century cannot necessary be associated with the uncovering of particular political but rather with a set of strategies or negotiations with conventions and constraints» [Armstrong 1993, p. 332]. Not by chance, Anna Laetitia Barbauld's political poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812) was published the same year as Hemans's *The Domestic Affections*. In both poems we find a prophetic persona who discuss the war. However, Barbauld's reception from the critical reviewers was much harsher than Hemans's, since the former not only adopted a visionary political perspective but also explicitly addressed the dangers and consequences of the war in negative terms.

Hemans was highly attuned to British politics because she lived in a period of transition: the nation alternated between war and peace, the economy produced social distress and conflict, and the demand for radical reforms shaped the everyday political agenda. The poet responded to these issues as a wife, mother, and sister of army veterans, and risked transgressing the period's gendered discursive boundaries. Following Kelley's interpretation of Hemans's poetical strategy of feminizing historical and political events, the poet represented human relationships as centered on feelings, particularly those associated with «domestic affections», which included friendship based on mutuality of feeling and interest [Hemans 2002, p. 29]. As in many slavery poems by women writers published before her time, Hemans's poetry casts history – particularly women's experiences – within a private and domestic sphere, and stresses the importance of private feelings and private lives as well as patriotism and liberal thinking. Her poems invest domestic affections and local realities with human and social meanings that make authentic community possible: «Hemans, like other women writers of her time, suggests that the way to break the cycle of masculine history is to feminize history for the future» [Hemans 2002, p. 29].

In 1819, a year when post-war economic, social, and political conflicts pressed upon Britain in a powerful way, Hemans published *Tales, and Historic Scenes in Verse*, which illustrated historical events and individual stories intertwined and in conflict with one another. «The Wife of Asdrubal», for example, depicts a woman's devastating struggles with both domestic and national establishments. Moving away from the poetics of delicacy and tender sentiments, the poem instead paints the mother as a figure of «wild courage», a radically patriotic character full of self-determination in the face of inevitable defeat. In this passage, domestic affection simultaneously turns fatal, political, and sensational [Wolfson 1999, p. 222]:

> She might be deemed a Pythia in the hour
> Of dread communion and delirious power;
> A being more than earthly, in whose eye
> There dwells a strange and fierce ascendancy.
> The flames are gathering round – intensely bright,
> Full on her features glares their meteor-light;
> But a wild courage sits triumphant there,
> The stormy grandeur of a proud despair;
> A daring spirit, in its woes elate,
> Mightier than death, untameable by fate.
> [Hemans 1819, p. 194, ll. 18-28].

Hemans and many other women poets of her time employed death as a recurrent theme in their works, particularly when addressing political, private, and gendered conflicts. Not by coincidence, this was also a common theme in abolitionist poetry and the depiction of African women's sufferings. Finally, the poem «Elysium» – included in *Miscellaneous Poems* – contains one of the poet's more explicit references to slavery:

> The slave, whose very tears
> Were a forbidden luxury, and whose breast
> Kept the mute woes and burning thoughts of years,
> As embers in a burial-urn compress'd;
> He might not be thy guest!
> No gentle breathings from thy distant sky
> Came o'er his path, and whisper'd «Liberty!»
> [Hemans 2002, p. 390, ll. 71-77].

The frequent invocation of death in dramatic situations might be considered part of the rhetoric of sensibility antislavery writers employed to challenge an otherwise inevitable tragic destiny. This issue reoccurs in all of Hemans's productions, as well as in Romantic poetry at large.

To conclude, we might consider how conservative male critics of the time expected women's writing to be polished, delicate, and feminine, aesthetic ideals that Hemans's poetry supposedly embodied. As previously noted, *The Edinburgh Monthly Review* portrayed her verse as the «spontaneous offspring of intense and noble feeling, governed by a clear understanding, and fashioned into elegance by an exquisite delicacy and precision of taste» [Wordsworth 1997, p. 173]. According to this evaluation, her work adheres to Wordsworth's definition of poetry: the «spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings» in a mind endowed with more than usual sensibility. Hemans's reviewer, however, explains that:

> With more than the force of many of her masculine competitors, she never ceases to be strictly *feminine* in the whole current of her thought and feeling, nor approaches by any chance, the verge of that free and intrepid course of speculation, of which the boldness is more conspicuous than the wisdom, but into which some of the most remarkable among the female literati of our time have freely and fearlessly plunged [Wordsworth 1997, p. 174].

Hemans represented the kind of woman writer that the new period demanded: both a leader of literary trends and styles, and a product of changing values [Wordsworth 1997, p. 174].

From a gendered perspective, reviewers regarded Hemans as a woman writer capable of writing about certain «feminine subjects», as Francis Jeffrey wrote in *The Edinburgh Review*:

> It may not be the imaginable poetry, and may not indicate the very highest or most commanding genius; but it embraces a great deal of that which give the very best poetry its chief power of pleasing; […] harmonized by the most beautiful taste. It is infinitely sweet, elegant, and tender – touching, perhaps, and contemplative, rather than vehement and overpowering [Wu 1997, p. 490].

In the same article, Jeffrey associates female poetry with features such as «exquisite delicacy»; «serenity of execution»; «purity and loftiness of feeling», «sober and humble tone of indulgence and pity», «which must satisfy [he says] all judgments, and allay the apprehensions of those who are most afraid of the passionate exaggerations of poetry» [Wu 1997, p. 490]. Here, Jeffrey tries to contain women's poetry in a delimited sphere of action in order to affirm its limits, while Hemans, together with many other women writers, refused to limit her style and content to what was considered properly feminine and instead disclosed liberal and political points of view. Unsurprisingly, other reviewers found Hemans to be «possessed of a powerful imagination and of

a commanding mind» and were «astonished by her powers», identifying her only rival among women poets as Joanna Baillie. «Even compared with the living masters», one writes, «she is entitled to a place of very high distinction» [Hemans 2002, p. 31].

After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Hemans distanced herself from the Roscoe circle to seek support from a more conservative establishment, corresponding with Sir Walter Scott, replacing her publisher John Murray with William Blackwood, and contributing to *The Quarterly Review*. Nonetheless, for the first part of her literary career she was significantly involved with the liberal coalitions based in Liverpool and influenced by local and national debates on slavery and abolition. Not by chance, Hemans dedicated one of her last works, *National Lyrics, and Songs for Music* (1834), to her Liverpool friend Rose Lawrence D'Aguilar, an author herself. This dedication stands as a testament to her link to Liverpool's intellectual circle and speaks to her works' national, international, and – in Saglia's words – transnational (or global) dimensions [Saglia 2014, p. 111]. Although her connection with the town was tangential, she nevertheless shared the coalition's sympathy for the cause of liberty and social reform. Questioning the reformation of British politics through the language of domestic affections, bodily suffering, and human sympathy, Hemans addressed her early poems to a wide reading public and articulated a new economic and sentimental discourse that powerfully challenged the male-dominated social and political system of her time.

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«Bles'd if we pleased you, whom to please we live!»: Managers, Actors, and Actresses in Liverpool, 1770-1820

Abstract

The pace of theatrical life in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Liverpool was intense and tight, with a schedule that affected both the lives of managers, actors and actresses, and the management of every season. The provincial theatres were places where the players, while experiencing theatrical conditions different from those in the capital, might serve their apprenticeship, practise their skills and test the reaction of the public as well. After tracing the origins of the first theatres in Liverpool in the second half of the eighteenth century, the article focuses on the presence of managers such as Joseph Younger, Philip Mattocks, and Francis Aickin in Liverpool from 1772 until the end of the century, and their relation with actors of Kemble's and Siddons' calibre.

Cristina Consiglio

Liverpool theatrical culture in the Romantic era exemplifies the distinctive combination of culture and business that has often been described as the town's defining trait in that particular historical contingency [Wilson 2008]. James Winston's *Theatric Tourist* (1805), an insider's invaluable inventory of twenty-four provincial playhouses, made the point clear: «Liverpool, from its trade, situation, and other advantages, may generally be considered a successful resort» [Winston 1805, p. 51] – hence he highlighted the important connection between the wealth derived from the trade and the town's remarkable theatrical output. Nevertheless, he did comply with the commonplace assumption regarding the gap between 'opulence' and cultural refinement: «[t]he people of Liverpool, though opulent, having acquired vast sums by trade, are not the most enlightened. They are, as is natural under such circumstances, prejudiced and tenacious, though they are extremely generous wherever they approve» [Winston 1805, p. 53].[1] With a touch of irony, Win-

[1] For an assessment of this vexed issue, see Robinson in this special number of *La Questione Romantica*, vol. I, pp. 55-73.

ston draws attention to the investors' taste and their financial help as the necessary instrument to stage the show. In the critic's view, the quality of the drama on stage did not match the general affluence of rich merchants and investors. Winston was accurate in listing the managers who worked at the Theatre Royal in Liverpool, and his account, read alongside the biographies of the managers, reveals to what extent their characters and their skills combined with their adaptability in trying to assert a degree of independence from London.

The provincial theatres were places where the players experienced theatrical conditions different from those in the capital, served their apprenticeship, practised their skills and tested the reaction of the public. Theatrical life in Liverpool (as in the provinces in general), compared to London, was based on a tight schedule, which affected the lives of managers, actors and actresses. The presence of managers such as Joseph Younger, Philip Mattocks and Francis Aickin in Liverpool, from 1772 until the end of the century, and their relation with actors of Kemble's and Siddons' calibre, helped give the theatre new life and new energies [Broadbent 1908, pp. 69-83].

The first theatres in Liverpool date back to the second half of the eighteenth century. The four decades between 1740 and 1780 saw truly extraordinary developments in theatre design and construction, not only in the provinces but also in Ireland and Scotland [Nicoll 1980, p. 61]. In Liverpool, the exact opening date cannot be stated with any accuracy. Drury Lane, the town's principal theatre, opened c1750 under the joint management of Mr William Gibson and Mr Ridout, both members of the London Covent Garden Theatre Company. Their administration was greatly praised and their acting highly valued by Liverpool spectators [Ackroyd 1996, p. 11]. As to the architecture, the playhouse was remarkable chiefly on account of the positioning of its gallery, which projected out over a pit and was not flanked by the usual row of boxes. The history of the second theatre in Liverpool, the Theatre Royal, built in Williamson Square, is rather more engaging. In 1768 Mr Gibson of the Drury Lane Theatre lobbied for a Theatre Royal in Liverpool. The House of Lords at first refused his request but their lordships later changed their minds – as they began to realise that provincial theatres could preserve, rather than undermine, order and good government[2] – and he was granted Letters patent in 1771 for 21 years.[3]

As Broadbent's *Annals* report, the cost of erecting this theatre, estimated at about £6,000, was raised in shares of £200 each, at 5 per cent interest, entitling the holder to a silver free admission ticket [1908, p. 48]. All the necessary subscription money for the venture was raised in less than one hour after the list had been opened, and on 3rd June 1771 the foundation stone was laid by the

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[2] The composite relations between London metropolitan centre and the provinces in Georgian-era theatrical culture are explored in Moody 2007, pp. 21-41.

[3] On the complex institutional status of theatres, see Emeljanov 2003, pp. 3-231.

Mayor of Liverpool, Mr John Sparling.[4] The new theatre, based on plans by the architect Sir William Chambers, was described as «a large and handsome building, elegantly finished both internally and externally», and with excellent acoustic properties [Broadbent 1908, p. 54]. When he came to design it, there was the same unusual treatment of the gallery as in Drury Lane: it extended towards the stage at the level commonly occupied by the upper boxes.

Gibson died not long afterwards and he bequeathed the patent for the performance of plays in Liverpool to his beloved friend, Elizabeth Bennett. Apparently, though, she did not wish to take an active part in the running of the Theatre Royal since she leased it for a period of 14 years to Joseph Younger and George Mattocks at a yearly rental of £140 in 1772 [Broadbent 1908, p. 53]. Both were actors, but Younger's abilities were not extensive and Mattocks was not very popular, though as a singer he had a certain reputation. However, they were great favourites with Liverpool playgoers: the former had been a prompter at London's Covent Garden Theatre and the latter had made his first Liverpool appearance at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1765.

The opening of the Theatre Royal on the Friday evening of 5th June 1772 was an auspicious occasion, attended by the elite of the town. The opening prologue – written by George Colman the elder, and spoken by the lessee, Joseph Younger, to celebrate the new entitlement – struck the keynote from the beginning: «Wherever Commerce spreads her swelling sail / Letters and arts attend the prosperous gale»; the performance commenced with the tragedy of *Mahomet* which was followed by the farce *The Deuce is in Him* [Broadbent 1908, p. 53-56].

Joseph Younger died on 4th September 1784 and the press gave him a warm tribute, describing him as «a man of the strictest honour and integrity» recalling how he «gave constant proofs not only of an extensive knowledge of the business of the drama, but of the most liberal disposition to serve his distressed brethren» [Highfill 1993, p. 368]. After Younger's death, George Mattocks remained as sole lessee or proprietor of the theatre until 1786, but several accounts suggest that his provincial theatrical speculations ruined him and he was forced to retire from the management.

In December 1786 a new patent for the performances was granted to George Case, one of the trustees of the proprietors, with a licence for fifteen years. There was a further change of lessee on 31st December 1792, when a seven-year lease was granted to Mr Francis Aickin, manager of the Theatre Royal from 1786. In 1787 he took on the management of the summer theatre there, and in 1789 he and John Philip Kemble obtained from the owners a seven-year lease of the house.

[4] This event was a little over two months before the death of the founder, William Gibson, and almost exactly one year prior to its opening.

Francis Aickin was a man who apparently had a precise idea of what a theatre should look like. In his very first years as manager in the city, he proposed and introduced various changes to the theatre's structure, «raising the ceiling of the house to provide a larger space and better acoustics, building a colonnade over the entrances in Williamson Square, acting and directing himself, and attracting the best-known London players (Mrs Siddons, Munden, Lee Lewes, the younger Bannister, Incledon, Farley, Stephen Kemble, and many others)» [Highfill 1993, p. 368]. He was shrewd enough to understand the importance of attracting a larger audience and offering a better product in terms of acoustics and the aesthetics of the building. He clearly had an enlightened vision for Liverpool, as he encouraged well-known actors from London to come and perform. Even so, within a few years, he found himself constantly having to deal with the animosity of rather mixed audiences, who were often unappreciative of what was offered on the stage. The sailors and the women accompanying them, mostly in the upper gallery, would not be content to stay quietly in their seats and «gradually the condition of the house deteriorated to the point at which respectable playgoers refused to buy tickets and the better actors avoided working there» [Highfill 1993, p. 368]. Aickin's reputation began to suffer, and in October 1799, in the pages of *The Monthly Mirror*, he was strongly accused of bad management of the house. The article focused not only on the state of the building, the scenery used in the plays, and the dirty lobbies, but also on the actual quality of the theatrical productions, which were no longer attracting performers from the capital of the same calibre as before, with the result that the quality of the acting was not as good as during Aickin's first years in charge. In an attempt to obtain a renewal, he offered £100 more than the £1500 of his competitors, but his offer was rejected. Eventually William Thomas Lewis and Thomas Knight took over the lease. Both had acted in Liverpool between 1799 and 1802, and they negotiated the lease of the Liverpool theatre for 14 years. Although Aickin's lease did not expire officially until January 1803, the new managers set about having the house extensively renovated while they were playing the winter season at Covent Garden. Apologizing for slightly raised prices, they opened the Liverpool theatre on 6th June 1803 [Highfill 1984, p. 64].

Intrinsically connected to the experiences of the managers were those of the actors. It is well-known that the original arrangements for the booking of performers restricted the opening of the theatres in the provinces to the summer months, commencing when the two London patent theatres, the Drury Lane and Covent Garden, were closed, and concluding when those theatres were about to open for the winter season [Appleton 2015, pp. 32-33]. In Liverpool, the Theatre Royal is a case in point, as it used to be open during the months when the London theatres were closed and the principal performers of the latter were in consequence selected. «Formerly no actor could be permitted to perform here, without a regular engagement for the season; the townsmen having

made a successful resistance to the introduction of provincial performers» [Cf. Gilliland 1808, p. 224].

It is difficult to find accurate information about the actors who played in Liverpool during those years,[5] but there are two names which recur in the documents available regarding Liverpool theatrical life in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century: John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons. The two siblings acted in their father's company when they were small and went on to perform at various provincial theatres in the 1770s. Acting was in their blood. By June 1777 Kemble began to earn esteem in Joseph Younger's company at Liverpool, where he and his sister had gone to perform for the summer. On 26th June 1777 Kemble was added to the Liverpool paylist at £1 per week and he remained there, that winter, between October and November. The year after, he came back to produce and perform his tragedy *Belisarius; or Injured Innocence*.[6] Also at Liverpool during that period he recited his poem, variously said to have been called *The Palace of Misery* or *The Palace of Mercey* [Cf. Highfill 1982]. According to a letter from Liverpool dated June 1778, applying for an opening in Yorkshire, he had a repertoire of 68 roles in tragedies and 58 in comedies. In the two brief years since his debut he had already gained substantial experience. After the earliest training he had received in Liverpool half a decade before, he went to play for Younger and Mattocks in the summer of 1784. In a memorandum from his apprentice years in Liverpool printed in the *Theatrical Inquisitor* we read that he was paid 10s. for each night of the season on which there was a play, whether he acted or not [Highfill 1982, p. 342].

His sister Sarah Siddons began to play for Joseph Younger in Liverpool in 1776 and, together with her brother, she joined Younger's company to go to Worcester and Manchester that winter. In July 1777, she made her first presentation of Gertrude in *Hamlet* and in September, for the first time, she played Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*. She came back to Liverpool in June 1783 and then again in the summer of 1786, playing 16 nights and splitting the net receipt fifty-fifty with the management. At Liverpool, where John Kemble and Francis Aickin had taken over the theatre's lease the previous January, Sarah tried to bolster the venture by playing in November and December 1789. On 26 June 1797, *King Lear* was performed for the benefit – as the advertisement proclaimed – of «the divine Sarah», it being the last night of her employment [Highfill 1991, p. 20].

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[5] The issues of the only periodical referring to Liverpool theatre in the catalogue of the British Library in London – a journal called *the Corrector; or Dramatic Intelligencer* – unfortunately turned out to be 'destroyed'.

[6] Although performed subsequently at Hull and York, the tragedy was never seen in London nor published. It survives, however, in manuscript at the Huntington Library [See Highfill 1982, p. 342].

As these brief examples and the sequences of dates show, playing in the provinces meant being constantly ready to travel – often during the night and in bad conditions – and to adapt one's own life to different places, managements, and audiences. Nevertheless, actors and actresses chose to go and experience provincial theatres because the truth is – or seems to be – that the provinces occasionally provided certain dramatic 'liberties', the chance to flout some of the rules of London theatrical tradition and the conventions of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. A good example of this freedom is Sarah Siddons's provincial Hamlet, performed both during the 1770s and twenty years later in Dublin, as pointed out by Jane Moody [2007, pp. 26-30]. Siddons didn't challenge the London tradition of men playing Hamlet – the part belonged first to Garrick and then to Kemble – but this fact didn't prevent her from presenting provincial audiences with a new interpretation of Shakespeare's hero, highlighting both the character's passionate energy and his desolate grief.

Although the provincial audiences were perhaps less elegant and sophisticated than those in the capital, they did appreciate and encourage theatrical and cultural change, as a result of their disposition. In the case of Liverpool at the end of the eighteenth century, the expanding popularity of theatre should be seen in the wider perspective of the town's increasing cultural vitality, connected to various forms of investment. Liverpool was one of only a handful of open boroughs in England, and historically franchise had come with the freemen's common control of land which included the shore area. From the mid-1600s the town of Liverpool had risen from being little more than a fishing village to becoming, by 1800, Britain's second port, with the country's first enclosed commercial docks [Sutton 2007, p. 447]. The city was dominated by commerce and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing; its most significant example of public architecture in this period was the mid-century Exchange and the warehouses along the docks. Equally there were fine, publicly-funded squares and walks established by the middle of the century.

Sociability was common to all of the cultural pursuits and of vital importance in a community that relied on networks of people and capital. The mercantile elite had an important role in the transformation of Liverpool between 1680 and 1800. Although initially a modest elite in comparison to its London counterpart, a constantly evolving oligarchy was created, that embraced the interests of each successive wave of entrepreneurial newcomers by absorbing its most prominent members into its ranks. It is interesting to see how cultural pursuits were shaped by the working practices of the mercantile community. The Drury Lane playhouse, built by the dock engineer Thomas Steers in the 1740s, might seem a crude affair, comprising only a pit and a gallery, but was appreciated by the mariner-merchants and a large number of rural migrants because it catered for their preference for less refined, outdoor activities.

Alongside conviviality, entertainment and exercise, there appeared a gradual flowering of more intellectual pursuits in the last quarter of the century

with literary, philosophical and debating societies, the establishment of the subscription library (1754), the Athenaeum (1799) and Lyceum (1802) and, in 1814, the Liverpool Royal Institution. These developments were a continuation of the cultural forms most favoured in the early eighteenth-century town. The Athenaeum and the Lyceum were newspaper-reading rooms as well as libraries and were therefore intended to provide the same type of access to news and information as earlier inns and coffee-houses, albeit on a more exclusive basis. The Botanic Gardens were a continuation of the predilection for outdoor pursuits, offering the opportunity to promenade amid the flower beds on warm summer evenings [Belchem 2006, p. 140].

It is also clear that Liverpool's citizens viewed culture as yet another form of investment. Going back, for a moment, to the Theatre Royal built in Williamson Square – one of the most expensive provincial theatres in eighteenth-century Britain – local subscribers were not solely from the world of the arts. By September 1772 the proprietors of the theatre consisted of a considerable number – almost two-thirds – of professional gentlemen, merchants and other tradespeople who were interested in a shrewd investment. As for the Liverpool Library founded in 1754, it was the first subscription library in England, and of the original subscribers, 47 out of 109 were merchants [Belchem 2006, p. 142; see, also, Robinson 2017, p. XXX].

Without doubt, the central figure in Liverpool – himself the embodiment of the conjunction of business and culture – was William Roscoe, both as an individual and as the key figure of that dynamic and distinguished group of intellectuals, scientists, artists, known as the 'Roscoe Circle'. Though the Roscoe circle was commonly regarded as a small literary group or a 'small private literary society' that came together in Liverpool in the late 1780s and 1790s, it included among its members Anglicans, Unitarian ministers and medical men. The Circle was not merely a literary group, it had an important political dimension, its work reflected medical interests, and had wide geographical connections with dissenting groups around the country; its influence extended into the mid-nineteenth century [Sutton 2010, p. 315].

Roscoe's importance to the enterprise of culture in late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century Liverpool can be measured by his involvement in a number of related projects: the Liverpool Society for Promoting Painting and Design (which held exhibitions in 1784 and 1787); the Athenaeum Club; the Literary and Philosophical Society; the Liverpool Library; the Botanic Garden which opened in 1802; and the Liverpool Royal Institution, opened in 1817. The Liverpool Royal Institution best characterized Roscoe's vision of the arts. It represented the culmination and consolidation of his various projects, incorporating within one organization facilities and opportunities for art, literature, science, and education. The *Discourse* he delivered on the opening of the Liverpool Royal Institution in November 1817 entitled *On the Origin and Vicissitudes of Literature, Science and Art, and their Influence on*

the present State of Society perfectly summed up his critical view of the past and his intentions for the future of his own city.

William Roscoe did not have an apparent connection with Liverpool's theatrical life, but it is likely that – even if indirectly – he contributed to its development through his promotion of the arts in general. He had the inspiring perception that commercial enterprise could work in tandem with flourishing arts, especially through an institution that, though funded by private subscription, opened itself up to wider public use. But he was not alone in this. Liverpool Unitarians believed in the arts, both as mediators and as energizers of a society [Sutton 2007, p. 439]. Roscoe's achievement also provided an opportunity to view urban artistic production in the Romantic period in a new light. Behind his impressively wide-ranging cultural activities there was a re-evaluation of the individual's role in the arts and a significant reassessment of the notion of original genius producing high-quality works.

Roscoe's creativity – though not free from contradictions, as shown by Arline Wilson in her in-depth study, published in 2008 – consisted in acts of organization, collection and patronage, as well as more generally accessible forms of public display, education and entertainment. Through these activities he was able to operate successfully as the presiding genius of Liverpool's cultural aspirations at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Because his ideas and activities were secured in viable institutions, his influence has been felt strongly in the city ever since. Liverpool indeed was «a successful resort», as underlined in Winston's account, and the vitality of its theatrical culture and Roscoe's outstanding contribution to his home place still serve as pertinent examples of how the late eighteenth century attempted to provide the basis of enduring cultural creativity.

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The Athenaeum and the Intellectual Culture of Liverpool 1790-1800

Abstract

The Athenaeum, which flourishes today, was founded in 1797 to satisfy the needs and aspirations of a newly emergent, wealthy, mercantile elite, infamous for lack of refinement, which grew up in Liverpool during the Eighteenth Century. The Institution's aims were to provide information – through the provision of newspapers and pamphlets and other materials. It also made available to its Subscribers a reference library for the acquisition of culture and learning, while at the same time the Institution provided a social and recreational opportunity for its members. This paper draws extensively on the catalogue of the library, printed in 1803, and on the first Minute Book of the Athenaeum, which covers the period from 1797 until 1809.

David Brazendale

The Athenaeum was a typical institution of the enlightenment period, combining the thirst for information and education with the Georgian development of a «club» ethos, with the added allure of exclusivity in its purpose-built premises located on one of the busiest central streets of the town. In a prosperous provincial town it was established to provide a source of information, both commercial and economic, through the provision of a «Coffee Room», a name redolent of the tradition of accessibility, freedom of discussion and genial intercourse [Clark 2002]. This room in the Athenaeum was to be well supplied with both British and some foreign newspapers. The Athenaeum's other aspect was the establishment of an extensive library, again intended for information and reference for the small group of 250 subscribers, who had paid the substantial price for a share – 10 guineas [£10.50] and an annual subscription of 2 guineas [£2.10] [Minute Book, pp. i, 3-7]. There was also a social dimension to the Athenaeum as it provided a place where mercantile and commercial rivalries were set aside, where doctrinal differences were disregarded, where political antagonisms were ignored and a standard of genteel behaviour was the norm. The foundation of the Institution in November 1797 was a milestone in the development of Liverpool as a town with an

active, vibrant, cultural life, even if that life was confined to a limited section of the elite society. Its foundation did not begin a process that was already in progress but it did mark a formalisation, a bringing together of disparate elements and an encouragement to further development. I hope to show how the Athenaeum was both catalyst and an important element in the cultural revolution that we can detect in the life of a burgeoning town. In this paper I am using information taken from the Minute Books of the Athenaeum.[1] This series of Minutes starts in 1797 with the planning prior to the opening of the Institution and continues in unbroken sequence until the present day. Additional information is drawn from the first catalogue of the Library, compiled in 1802 by the Rev. Lant Carpenter, a Unitarian Minister and the Joint Librarian. These sources illuminate the cultural landscape, expectations and aspirations of Georgian Liverpool's mercantile, commercial and professional leaders.

During the period, from 1660 to the middle years of the eighteenth century, Liverpool had undergone a remarkable transformation from a small Lancashire market town, albeit with an unsatisfactory harbour [Ascott D., Lewis F., Power M. 2006, pp. 8-32] from which ships traded around the Irish Sea to Wales, the Isle of Man and, especially, to Ireland. However, notwithstanding the dominance of localised distributive trade, Tudor Liverpool could also support longer distance enterprises [Hollinshead 2007, p. 82], with vessels making occasional forays to the Biscay coast of France, the Atlantic coast of Spain and occasional passages through the Straits of Gibraltar to the western Mediterranean. In the vital century between 1660 and 1760 Liverpool was transformed into a major port with extensive links to the Americas, West Africa, the West Indies and the Mediterranean. There were particularly strong links to the port of Livorno or Leghorn, as it was known, where some Liverpool merchants had branches of their family firms established [Earle 2015]. The reasons for this transformation are many and varied but the most significant was the entry into the Transatlantic trade made by the merchants of the town whose ingenuity and enterprise opened new ventures.

It is often supposed that Liverpool's trade in the Eighteenth Century was confined to the euphemistically named Guinea Trade – that is the trade in human cargoes between Africa and the Americas. While it is true that the town held a dominant place in the European participation in this activity, the trade of the port was by no means confined to this appalling enterprise. Even when the slave trade was at its height, 75% of Liverpool shipping played no direct part in it. Perhaps more significant, ultimately, were the links with the American colonies who were largely supplied with necessities and luxuries through the mixed cargoes on Liverpool ships [Schofield 1986, pp. 61-82].

[1] The Minute Book at the present time is only available in manuscript form in the archives of the Athenaeum. A transcript of the first volume is in preparation for publication by the Records Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.

So extensive was this that a category of «Liverpool goods» was created by the Custom Service to cover the wide variety of material exported. This is well-illustrated by the lading of the «Antelope», probably the first Liverpool ship to make a transatlantic voyage, sailing in 1666: «The ship was laden among other things with 3332 yards of linen cloth, 61 pairs of men's superbest French falls, 2 hundredweight of candles, 2 barrels of beef, 120 pounds of butter, 20,000 spikes, etc, etc» [Blundell 1933, p. 119]. William Blundell had invested £40 in the venture and made more than 100% profit. Another venture which occupied many ships and men in the town was Privateering. In many cases the ships, sailing under a Letter of Marque, sought targets of opportunity rather than making a regular activity of preying on enemy shipping. However, a number of Liverpool ships were built and manned as irregular naval units whose specific purpose was directed against the French, Dutch and Spanish enemies [Williams 2004]. Another source of profit for the town was the trade in coal and salt which took place in the upper part of the Mersey estuary where coal from the St Helens and Prescot mines met salt obtained from the Cheshire salt fields. Refineries were established on the north shore of the Mersey at Hale, Dungeon Bank and in Liverpool itself [Barker 1951, pp. 83-101]. Some historians have suggested, probably erroneously, that this triangular trade in the Mersey was as profitable to the town as the African trade.

Liverpool, therefore, had experienced an economic transformation that had resulted in the creation of a wealthy class of merchants and tradesmen, most of whom had sprung from a background that was not conducive to a life of refined sensibility or high culture. Many of these «New Men» had come from a rural, agricultural background and had by industry, apprenticeships and luck achieved wealth but little education in the finer things – or so their critics claimed [Brazendale 2005, p. 197]. In his dyspeptic account of the town in 1795 James Wallace described Liverpool in the eighteenth century as being a place where «Arts and science are inimical to the spot, absorbed in the nautical vortex, the only pursuit of the inhabitants is COMMERCE .... Liverpool is the only town in England of any pre-eminence that has not one single erection or endowment for the advance of science, the cultivation of the arts or promotion of useful knowledge» [Wallace 1795, p. 283]. This view of the intellectual climate of the town is supported by the letters of Ellen Weeton, who in 1809, wrote «When I came to Liverpool I expected to have found it filled with intelligent beings, imagining knowledge to be so generally diffused. I begin to discover that it contains as much proportionate ignorance as any little village in England ... scarce one in ten can boast any greater literary acquirement than that of their grammar ...... their ignorance is astonishing» [Bagley 1969, I. 169].

The men who set about the creation of the Athenaeum were aware of these deficiencies. In the 1797 prospectus, written by Dr Rutter, issued to solicit subscriptions for the proposed «Reading Room and Library», the founders comment that «It has often been a matter of surprise to many of the inhabitants

of this place, and still more so to strangers, that in a town of such commercial and national importance as Liverpool the conveniencies and accommodations for the acquisition of knowledge, both local and general, both ancient and modern, should be so imperfect as they confessedly are» [Minute Book, p. i]. The foundation of the Athenaeum can be seen as a step indicative of the change which overtook the life of an elite section of the population of Liverpool.

This view of the elite of the town as culturally deprived was summed up by later writers who described what they saw as the characteristics of the members of this group as «A mercantilist, a materialist and an empiricist whose first line of self-definition was through material possessions, conspicuous consumption and spatial separation» [Checkland 1952, p. 25]. It is true that many aspects of the life of Liverpool were vulgar and often violent. Fights between rival gangs, riots staged by discontented theatrical audiences, armed attacks by disgruntled sailors on the Town Hall, resistance to the efforts of the press gangs, sometimes with fatal results, were all almost commonplace in the town [Picton 1873, I. 243, 271, 306]. While the lower groups in society sought relaxation in the innumerable drinking dens of the town, their masters also sought relaxation in «the pleasures of the table and communal conviviality» [Muir 1907, p. 186]. There were drinking and social clubs, known as Firesides, aplenty to support the view of the philistine nature of society [Wilson 1896]. We are told that organisations such as the Ugly Face Club (founded 1743), the Unanimous Club (1753), and the Noble Order of Bucks based in the Golden Fleece Inn attracted «Gentlemen of the first families of the town, many of them were members of the Council and several of them afterwards served in the offices of mayor and bailiff of Liverpool» [Brooke 2003, p. 290]. One should not assume that the men who were the founding members of the Athenaeum did not also have associations with less high minded clubs. Bennett has clearly shown that there were major overlaps with the more ribald organisations [Bennett 2010, p. 108].

However, it is apparent that although cultural organisations were lacking, there was a groundswell of opinion, an elite, who sought intellectual pursuits and believed that Liverpool could be a second Renaissance Florence where commercial profits could be utilised for artistic and cultural patronage, leading to a cultural revolution in Britain. This was the ideal propounded by William Roscoe [Chun 2013, Wilson 2008] who went so far as to dream that one of the consequences of the Napoleonic occupation of Italy would be to drive the muses from their classical homelands in the Mediterranean, and that they would having sought refuge in «Albion's ever grateful isle ... [have] rais'd their altars here and fix'd their happier home» [Chandler 1953, p. 325]. Roscoe was able to promulgate this view by his personal life as a noted scholar, collector and connoisseur and by his influence in abolitionist and radical politics. Of cardinal importance was the enthusiasm with which his biographical histories of the world of Florence during the dominance of the Medici family were received. His life of Lorenzo the Magnificent published

in 1796 and his account of the Pontificate of Leo X which appeared in 1805 were widely appreciated and read, both at home and abroad. This was only one aspect of Roscoe's influence in Liverpool where he is to be found at the heart of any attempt to create a cultural life in the town. Picton, after extolling his activities in politics – he served as a Member of Parliament for the Borough 1806–1807, as a liberal, reformer and abolitionist – goes on «When to this we add his activity in the every-day affairs of the society in which he moved, his aid in promoting by every means the departments of art, philosophy, education and philanthropy; the foundation of the Botanic Gardens, the Athenaeum, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Royal Institution [an establishment for higher education and artistic training], the School of Art, enough has been said to show that Roscoe deserves a high place in the memorials of his native town» [Picton 1873, II. 234]; a fine, but possibly exaggerated tribute, to a successful autodidact who came from humble origins [Chandler 1953; Wilson 2008].

Roscoe was not a lone voice in his activities, being closely linked to a group of like-minded individuals whose names are associated with almost every advance made in the cultural development of Liverpool. These included Dr James Currie (1756-1805), a Scot, who, after an adventurous early life in Virginia, trained in medicine at Edinburgh and practised in Liverpool, where he was a well-known polemicist on behalf of the abolition of slavery and other radical causes. Dr John Rutter was not only an instigator of a number of medical service advances but also the founder of the Liverpool Medical Institution and Library. Rutter was also a major participant in the formation of the Athenaeum in whose creation and governance he played a leading role. Though much of the credit for the foundation of the Athenaeum is often attributed to Roscoe, it should more properly be given to John Rutter; Alderman George Case, a merchant, played a significant part in providing a link between the Institution and the governing elite of the town, smoothing the path of the infant organisation of which he was the first President. A notable feature of the avant garde of Liverpool was their connections with the more radical elements of Nonconformity. The philanthropic and wealthy Rathbone family were Quakers, while Currie, Roscoe and Rutter were prominent Unitarians. Additionally, the early Athenaeum had strong links to a number of Unitarian clergy, notably John Yates, William Shepherd, and Theophilus Houlbrooke. This connection probably accounts for the notably sober and ascetic nature of the Athenaeum, where the consumption of alcohol was strictly forbidden until the twentieth century. Infringement of this provision brought severe penalties; the first Librarian, Harry Gearing, was deprived of his residential accommodation and key to the building after he was detected using spirits [Minute Book, p. 104].

The castigation of Liverpool as a town obsessed with making money and devoid of any cultural pursuits ignored the fact that, like many Georgian middle class societies, the inhabitants of the town were much absorbed in music and Liverpool had a long tradition of choral recitals and orchestral performances.

Some of the earliest concerts took place in the churches, notably St Peter's, Church Street. A music festival was organised after 1784 and at this and other performances sacred music and especially the oratorios of Handel were very popular. It may be that the amount of noise was the most important feature at these recitals, a poster of the period assures readers that at the performance of Handel's «Alexander's Feast» the orchestra will be «reinforced by one hundred and thirty performers and the trombones and Double Drums that were introduced in Westminster Abbey have been engaged» [Brooke 2003, p. 271]. The music festivals were occasions of great celebration, often accompanied by fairs, street theatrical performances and balls – in 1799 the Athenaeum provided a venue for the Festival's Ridotto Ball – and a variety of entertainments such as the a balloon ascent by Vincenzo Lunardi in 1785. So popular were musical performances that in 1786 a special concert hall was one of the first buildings erected in the newly built Bold Street [Brooke 2003, pp. 270-272, 385]. The colonnaded rear elevation can still be seen in Wood Street. It may be that one of the attractions of the music festival and of public concerts was that it gave the wealthy the opportunity to make a public parade of their luxurious life style before a proletarian audience and crowds thronging the street entrances.

Another art form that proved popular in the town was the theatre. The early days of the playhouse in Liverpool are obscure. There are hints of an early seventeenth century theatre in the town but confirmation is lacking. We are on safer ground in recording the opening of a playhouse in Drury Lane in about 1759. A collection of play bills from this theatre is held by the Library of the Athenaeum. In 1772 a new theatre was built in Williamson Square and took the title of Theatre Royal. It proved popular and was the location of performances by the most distinguished actors of the day. Such was its success that it was greatly extended and enlarged in 1802. Again, it may be that the theatre allowed a display of wealth and fashion but the performances were also attended by the hoi polloi who were often vocal and violent in their reception of the efforts of the actors. On one notable occasion an actor was provoked to castigate the town as one in which every stone was cemented by black blood [Picton 1873, II. 107, 187-188; Brooke 2003, pp. 273-275].

There is evidence that the more intellectual individuals in the town made efforts to satisfy their aspirations but with indifferent success. In 1758 the Liverpool Library, at first an offshoot from an informal discussion group headed by a mathematical school master, William Everard, was founded as the first subscription library in England. In 1779 a Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society was formed, of which Edward Rushton is reputed to have been a member; it lasted only until 1783 but the following year a Literary Society rose from its ashes. In 1769 a Society of Artists met but soon failed, though a second attempt in 1773 provided the first public art exhibition in provincial England with works by foremost artists on display; a unique catalogue of this event is held in the Athenaeum Library [Wilson 1998, pp. 54- 80].

The later part of the century saw a change in the inclinations of Liverpool society. The obsession of the elite with the world of commerce, noted by Wallace, had declined. This may be attributed to the success of the older generation in creating business, establishing trade and accruing fortunes allowing the second generation of entrepreneurs the leisure to pursue other genteel, cultural occupations. They had also benefitted from the superior education that they had received thanks to the expenditure of parental wealth on their schooling. Baines' Directory of Liverpool for 1825 lists over 30 entries under the heading of «Academies etc» [Ashmore 1968, p. 253, Gore 1766]. Doubtless many of these offered little more than basic skills and «polite education» but evidently these educational establishments were able to flourish despite the paucity of the intellectual fare offered. One Liverpool school gained a national and, indeed, an international reputation. The Reverend Bartholomew Booth, a curate at the parish churches, who seems to have been a man of a kindly nature and broadminded principles, opened his academy in 1765 in a room at the «Old Church», St Nicholas, but moved to Woolton Hall the following year. The school offered a broad curriculum of «English Grammar, the Latin and Greek, French and German languages, Geometry, Perspective, Arithmetic, the Italian method of Bookkeeping [double entry], Drawing, Musick in the Spring, Summer and Autumn quarters.» Instruction in «The Art of Fencing» was available «while Ladies might be taught. ..... Drawing, Writing, Arithmetic and Geography». Such was the success of Booth's school that he recruited scholars from the American Plantations. Later, Booth abandoned Liverpool and moved the school to High Beach in Essex [Wilkinson 1994, pp. 50-54].

The curriculum of Booth's academy had a twofold design; it was intended to endow the pupils with a familiarity with the classic world of Greece and Rome, that Eighteenth Century touchstone of gentility that was reflected in the arts, architecture, literature and ideals of the period. It was this preoccupation that led to the overwhelming decision that the new institution being created in Church Street Liverpool was to be named for the goddess of Athens, wisdom and war rather than the more mundane «Liverpool Library and News Room» – the other suggested name [Minute Book, p. 28]. When the design of the new building was entrusted to John Foster there was no argument that it was to be in the classical style, based on the principals of Grecian design and ornamented with classical motifs. Once the library was established the design of the book plate placed in the new acquisitions was drawn by Mr. Roscoe and illustrated Alexander the Great at the tomb of Homer. Today, in the building which replaced the original in 1928, the walls of the library still carry three large panels, painted by Edward Halliday, illustrating the myths of Athena.

Classical learning did not only reflect the culture of the period but it was very much the mark of the «gentleman». A gentleman in theory was a person who lived within a certain moral and social code, for whom work was an option rather than a necessity. However, it must be recognised that many of those who

claimed to be «Liverpool Gentlemen» of this period were very active in the commercial and mercantile field. One of the most characteristic features of Georgian society was the way in which the old ranks had broken down. No longer could society be divided into aristocracy, gentry, yeomen and others, with fixed and immutable barriers between them. By the Eighteenth Century a new increasingly prosperous and indeterminate middle class, composed of merchants, industrialists, commercial and professional men and women had emerged and was displaying upwardly social ambitions. This process is clearly visible in Liverpool society. Roscoe is a classic example, a man of humble horticultural origins who was able by application to his professional career as a lawyer and his self-acquired cultural pre-eminence to move from a tavern and market garden on Martindale Hill to the gracious elegance of Allerton Hall, from the publican's son and attorney's clerk to become William Roscoe Esquire, a world renowned figure whose sculpted bust adorned Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States. His reputation in America is illustrated by Washington Irving's 1819 essay on Roscoe: «Born in a place apparently uncongenial to the growth of Literary talent; in the very market-place of trade; without fortune, family connection, or patronage; self prompted, self sustained, and almost self taught, he conquered every obstacle, achieved his way to eminence and [became] ... one of the ornaments of the nation» [quoted Chandler 1953, p. xviii]. Another dominant figure in Liverpool was Sarah Clayton, the leading female entrepreneur of the town, with interests in many fields but principally in coal mining and property development. Her superb portrait by Joseph Wright shows an eminently respectable lady, dressed in the height of fashion, with all the trappings of wealth and also hints at her classical learning by the display of a plan of the Propylea on the Acropolis in Athens, thus emphasising, not only her knowledge of the classical world, but her enthusiasm for the style of architecture she was encouraging in John Wood's design of the new Town Hall [Barker and Kidson 2007, pp. 136-137].

A knowledge of the classics may have been socially advantageous but was of little importance for those who might be expected to run the family business. Classical education might be lauded but many of the families of this period needed to be convinced that education brought practical benefits, skills which could be employed in commercial and professional life. «I hope no part of your time will be idly thrown away but that you will in every respect aim at improvement and show your friends on your return that your time has not been spent in vain» [Wilkinson 1994, p. 134]. So wrote Thomas Langton to his son who was attending the celebrated Academy at Woolton run by Mr. Bartholomew Booth. The curriculum at Mr. Booth's Academy and the books bought for the Athenaeum library both indicate a desire for «polite education» but also the necessity for practical skills: modern languages, arithmetic, mercantile accounts, geography and navigation, together with astronomy, surveying and drawing were all taught as skills required by merchants, ship

owners and sailors. There is clear evidence that these subjects were considered important when the stock of the Athenaeum Library was being purchased. There can be no doubt that when the founders of the Athenaeum planned to create the new library and newsroom they were tapping into an increasing demand amongst the middle class members of Liverpool society for some way in which their newly acquired interest in intellectual pursuits could be satisfied but also that they wished their learning to have a practical application hence the number of books on science, agricultural improvement, mathematics, geography and even more practical skills such as navigation and seamanship bought for the Library to cater for these interests [Minute Book, pp. 61 ff.] One can see here a reflection of the curriculum of Booth's and other schools, notably the Dissenting Academies, where the study of Latin and Greek loomed large but were accompanied by an emphasis on practicality, of subjects necessary for the successful conduct of a commercial enterprise, such as modern languages, geography and mathematics.

The proposal to create a Library and News Room, which appealed to the Liverpool merchants by its combination of being both a source of commercial intelligence and a centre for cultural exploration, struck an immediate chord in the town. The founders were overwhelmed with demands for shares and soon doubled the number available, indicating that in Wallace's cultural desert there were sufficient individuals anxious for sophistication. An added impetus was, perhaps, the hint of exclusivity which was carried by this new foundation. The original purpose of the founders was twofold. The Newsroom or Coffee Room was to provide a ready supply of papers, periodicals and journals, both British and foreign to supply news and useful commercial information. It seems that the objective of obtaining foreign news was difficult to achieve, possibly because a state of war obtained with much of Europe [Minute Book, pp. 40, 165,169]. It was also intended that the News Room function as a place of personal contact. In these days when the Athenaeum is important as a social facility it is natural to assume that this has always been the case. Though no doubt Proprietors did use it as a meeting place I would suggest that the implication of the records is that the Newsroom with its bare boards, sanded floor, infested with bugs, wandering dogs and limited availability of refreshment was not, in these early days, a place to linger for friendly intercourse but was seen almost exclusively as an information facility [Minute Book, p. 239].

The second purpose, most strongly emphasised in both the prospectus and the Minutes of the Committee, was to provide a fine library for the benefit of its members. This was to be a reference library where the required books should always be available. A source of complaint about the Liverpool Library mentioned in the Prospectus for the Athenaeum was that required books were not always available, having been loaned to other subscribers. «The Committee considering this as a permanent institution for the purpose of establishing a respectable and valuable depository of books for the use of the subscribers,

which ought always to be at their command». Another cause of comment was that that the Liverpool Library bought popular novels, whereas the Athenaeum's collection was to be of serious purpose. Fiction was not totally excluded from the Athenaeum: the works of Sterne and Richardson were to be found on the shelves, as these were considered «moral» and «improving», not flippant and romantic. It was realised that there would be a demand to borrow books and this should be met by a policy of buying two copies of each work, one of which would be available on loan, though this laudable aim was never achieved [Minute Book, Prospectus, p. i].

Another project, so typical of the period, was the suggestion that the Athenaeum should include a «museum», a cabinet of curiosities which, it was hoped, would be filled with gifts from returning sailors. Cautiously, the founders decreed that no money was to be spent upon it. «It having been suggested that this Town is favourably situated for obtaining a collection of specimens in some particular branches of Natural History, the Committee recommend that the Room adjoining the Library be fitted up for the reception of such specimens in Botany [and] Mineralogy as may be presented to the Institution but that no part of the Annual Subscription shall be employed in the purchase of such Articles» [Minute Book, p. 6]. For whatever reason after the initial meetings no more is heard of this project.

It was resolved that two thirds of the income of the Institution should be devoted to the Library, one third for books in English and the other to be spent on classical and modern European languages. It must be said that after the initial burst of purchases for the library this apportionment was seldom observed and the Newsroom proved a constant drain on finances. Despite this, by April 1809 the contents of the Library were insured for £6,500, estimated today at £20 million. Georgian gentlemen first turned to the classics. It was resolved on September 3 1799 that «a subcommittee be nominated for the purpose of making a list of such of the Greek and Roman classics of the best editions and also a list of such works in modern European languages as may appear eligible for the library» [Minute Book, p. 69]. Those nominated for the first of these tasks were Roscoe, Rutter and Currie. Perhaps this responsibility overwhelmed the nominees as on 17 July 1800 seven sub-committees were set up, each charged with the acquisition of books in one or more particular subject areas. The number of individuals comprising these groups varied from the six clergymen, both Nonconformist and Anglican, who were responsible for the selection of works of theology, morals and ethics, while it was the doctors who were to choose the medical books [Minute Book, p. 117]. Eventually, the content of the library, as evinced by the Catalogue of 1803, was divided into 24 categories.

Nor were the Committee reluctant to draw on outside expertise. Sir Joseph Banks the botanist and President of the Royal Society was consulted on natural history and donated books to the collection. Mr. Richard Heber, certainly

Britain's most celebrated bibliophile, was given £500 to select and purchase books and, on the occasion of the sale of the Grand Pensionary Fagel's library in 1801, acted as agent with £300 to spend [Minute Book, pp. 134, 142, 163, 170]. Books also came by gifts and bequests from Proprietors but sometimes from other individuals and bodies. The Corporation gave a copy of the books of charts of the eastern American seaboard, «The Atlantic Neptune» surveyed in 1766, while Mr John Holt of Walton, the author of the Lancashire report, bequeathed his complete collection of the county reports issued by the Board of Agriculture [Minute Book, pp. 127-128]. Gifts have been an important source of stock and as a result the collection today reflects the interests, taste and fancies of Proprietors, and leads to both strengths and weaknesses in the Library with very adequate collections in some study areas and deficiencies in others, notably science and technology after the mid-nineteenth century.

Work on the creation of a published catalogue of the Library was begun by John Davis, the Assistant Librarian until his dismissal and arrest for stealing material from the collection. The work was continued and completed by his successor, the Rev. Lant Carpenter. The finished work was printed and sold at the price of 2 /6d [12p]. It shows that Class I Theology, Ethics and Metaphysics was the best supplied section with 257 works ranging in publication date from 1596 until the 1790s; ethics does not seem to have been popular, with only 9 volumes including Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* [Catalogue, p. 12]. Surprisingly, given the nature of the Proprietors, the class with the fewest books – a mere 10 – was that dealing with commerce and trade. Among the items were the report and Minutes of the Parliamentary debates on the Slave Trade in 1799. It is impossible to consider Liverpool's history at this period without mention of the «Africa Trade» so it is not surprising to find such documents in the library alongside the reports of the African Association who were promoting the exploration of the continent [Catalogue, pp. 145–146]. In fact Class XV, geography, voyages and travel, was amongst the better supplied sections with 99 titles, an interest in remote people and places being so characteristic of «Enlightenment» thinking [Catalogue, pp. 101-109]. Numbers in this section were only exceeded by Poetry and Drama (Class VI) [Catalogue, pp. 43-51], and Class XII, History of Great Britain, which contained 113 volumes, to which one can add the 97 categorised as History and Chronology and the 48 books of County History and topography. Cumulatively, history is amongst the largest subject areas [Catalogue, pp. 75-91]. However, a more scientific and practical bent on the part of the subscribers is indicated by Classes XVII to XX, Natural History, Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and Medicine, not surprising when one considers the part played by doctors in the establishment of the Institution and the popular enjoyment of scientific sensations [Catalogue, pp. 109-33]. This enthusiasm for science was stimulated by the popularity travelling lecturers enjoyed. For example, we find that the lecture series of James Ferguson FRS

at Liverpool inspired both William Hutchinson and Richard Holden to conduct research into tidal movements which culminated in the publication of the first accurate tide tables. The book in which Hutchinson recorded his observations is held in the Athenaeum Library [Woodworth 2002; Brazendale 2007, p. 69]. Much of the «scientific» research of the period was not devoted to pure research but was driven by the incentive to make practical applications of the findings. For example, much botanical research was driven by a desire to find new medicinal plants or new foodstuffs or specimens that might provide new materials. Because of this inclination in the science of the period we can add to this category books of class XX, Agriculture and Gardening [Catalogue, pp. 133-137]. A number of the Proprietors, including William Roscoe, a friend of Coke of Holkham, the premier «improver» of the period, were involved in agricultural advancement in areas adjacent to Liverpool.

A third numerous group are the works contained in Classes XX1 to XXII. These include the 106 books on economics, politics and the law, including Malthus' *Essay on Population* and those which made up the Trade and Commerce section, a total of 218. It is unfortunate that we have no record of the books actually consulted or the use made of the library though judging by the complaints about the behaviour of young men admitted as visitors for the purpose of study it was not always a place of scholarly repose.

Consequently, one must ask whether the demand for shares was sparked by a thirst for knowledge, a desire to be in the swim of enlightenment thought, an anxiety to be abreast of the latest trends, a willingness to use commercial wealth for the promulgation of culture and an information source or by a demand to have commercial, professional, business information available, a tendency noted by Rebecca Bowd [Bowd 2013] or by a wish to enjoy the limited convivial sociability of the Newsroom with its possibilities for commercial intercourse. It may also be that it was a demand driven by the desire to achieve social exclusivity. Unfortunately we have no records of any who were refused membership whether on social or other grounds. However, amidst the prolonged discussions about the temporary admission of «Strangers» – that is those who lived more than eight miles from Liverpool or were visitors to the town – the alacrity with which distinguished arrivals in the area, such as Prince William, Duke of Gloucester, were welcomed, suggests that selectivity in membership was important.

This paper has been predicated on an assumption that the creation of the Athenaeum and more especially its Library had a widespread influence on the intellectual culture of Liverpool. Transforming in a few years the views of Wallace, Weeton and the founders of the institution to become a place where, allowing for hyperbole, it could be said «There is no town in the Kingdom in which there are so many temples, dedicated to the improvement of mankind as in Liverpool» [Hudson 1851, p. 96]. It seems unlikely that all this stemmed

from the portals of Church Street but I would suggest that until 1797, though there were men of means whose habits were scholarly and whose interests broad, they were people, and the sources refer exclusively to men, who found it difficult to combine with like-minded individuals who shared their interests. The Athenaeum, and especially its library, provided facilities for study and information, a social atmosphere where men of many diverse occupations, professions and trades could come together, free from the distractions of religious, social and political conflict which so bedevilled much of society, to share their passions and combine to form other intellectual and cultural groups . It is noticeable that the artistic and cultural clubs and societies that Hudson had in mind post-date the foundation of the Athenaeum in 1797. In this respect at least we can see the Athenaeum and its extensive Library was a vital component in the intellectual flowering of early nineteenth century Liverpool.

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Pots, Prints, Poems, Plants and Publishers in Roscoe's Liverpool

Abstract

At the beginning of the nineteenth-century William Roscoe (1753-1831) was Liverpool's cultural impresario, the city's leading art collector, and an internationally known biographer of Lorenzo de Medici and Pope Leo X. He had helped establish a succession of Liverpool's exhibiting societies and learned or scientific institutions, culminating in the Liverpool Royal Institution, whose core collections of early Renaissance paintings were provided, ironically, as a result of his forced sale in September 1816, a failed attempt to stave off bankruptcy. I show in this paper how such international fame made Liverpool a destination for cultural tourism in the early 19th century, and how Roscoe's collection attracted worldwide attention from artists, authors, art historians and scientists as well as the general public.

Xanthe Brooke

Roscoe's first brush with art began, quite literally, on Brownlow Hill as a teenager in the 1760s in William Reid's China Works, a ceramics factory close to one of his father's two bowling greens and the market garden on Mount Pleasant [for Roscoe's literary and pictorial illustration of the scene, see Roscoe 1777 and Chandler 1953: plate 26]. It was in the China Works that he was first taught to paint and possibly to decorate the pots with prints. He claimed to have been taught by Hugh Mulligan (1746/7-1802), artist, engraver and author of abolitionist poems – the same Hugh Mulligan whose death Edward Rushton commemorated in a poetic obituary.[1]

[1] In references, the Walker Art Gallery is abbreviated to 'WAG' and National Museums Liverpool to 'NML'. We acknowledge with gratitude the kind permission of the Walker Art Gallery to reproduce the images in this article.

Figure 1: Julius Caesar Ibbetson, *Portrait of Hugh Mulligan*, 1800-1803 (WAG 2529).

This is the small portrait painted from a sketch by Ibbetson about 1800 when Mulligan, wrapped up against the cold in a fur hat and nightcap and smoking his beloved pipe, accompanied Ibbetson on a boat trip from Hull to Leith and Edinburgh to meet the Liverpool art dealer Thomas Vernon, whom Ibbetson characterised in a cartoon of 1803 as a Bear beating a drum (with Mulligan and Ibbetson as Monkeys, and Mrs Vernon taking the money). In 1803 Ibbetson sent the portrait as a gift to Roscoe's wife Jane and as a memorial to the Roscoes' long friendship with Mulligan, who was known to Roscoe not only as painter of ceramics but as an engraver of copper plates, a bookseller, fellow abolitionist poet, and a member of the same Unitarian congregation at Benn's Gardens Chapel. Ibbetson's extensive letter recalled Mulligan as «a little kindhearted worthy man, now no more» who had «imagined that nations might be happy without going to war & that Reason & Philosophy might perhaps succeed the tyranny of Priests» and «who had a sincere and excessive attachment» to Roscoe and his family. It was in the ceramics factory that Roscoe may have been taught to etch, a practice that he later adopted as a gentleman's leisure pursuit once he had given up his legal practice and retired to Allerton Hall in 1799. There he etched copies of prints and drawings by artists like Salvator Rosa (such as one of Rosa's *Figurine*s series of the mid 1650s, now held in the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, inv. no. 1857, 0520).

Roscoe's art collection began (like that of many eighteenth-century gentlemen) with buying and circulating small affordable prints among groups of subscribers [see in general Wilson 2005]. The fact that Liverpool's ceramics

industry had encouraged the trade, manufacture and use of prints would perhaps have given added encouragement to Roscoe's initial interest in them. Such private print collections had a quasi-public function, as their owners would make them available to circles of friends and interested acquaintances. They were also used in the traditional training of artists. As we shall see Roscoe was always keen to open his collection to artists young and old, aspiring or established, British and foreign; following the path of his imagined role model, Lorenzo de' Medici, he made his collection of prints and drawings available to a variety of artists from the Swiss-born painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) to the local sculptor John Gibson (1790-1866).

Roscoe also had familial reasons spurring him to expand his horizons beyond the topographical prints of locality and landscape (the general stock in trade of a gentleman's print collection) and to venture into the history of continental European printmaking. Since about 1782 his brother-in-law had been Daniel Daulby (d.1798?), who became the greatest collector of Rembrandt's etchings in late-eighteenth-century England. Daulby owned a painted portrait of the 1650s and over 2,000 prints and drawings by Rembrandt from which, in 1796, with Roscoe's editorial help, he produced the first catalogue of Rembrandt prints in Britain. Unfortunately when the collection of prints was sold in 1799 after Daulby's death it was bought en-bloc by a cartel of three dealers from London, Manchester and Liverpool (Colnaghi, Ford and Vernon) who divided it up between themselves and partially sold it on in London. Nevertheless, it probably contributed to Roscoe's own growing collection of graphic art, as evidenced by a Rembrandt studio drawing now in the Walker Art Gallery collection.

Figure 2: Rembrandt and Studio, *The Good Samaritan paying the Innkeeper*, late 1640s-early 1650s (WAG 1995.346).

Roscoe's interest in the techniques of print-making had already spurred him to write an introductory essay in 1784 for Joseph Strutt's ground-breaking *Biographical Dictionary of Engravers* (1785-6) and to offer in 1788 an essay on etching and painter-etchers for a third volume, never published. By the early nineteenth century, Roscoe's pioneering interest in German early Renaissance woodcuts and engravings – especially those of Dürer – had been sparked. He owned for example the Dürer *Self-Portrait* drawing known as the «*Sick*» *Self-Portrait* (c. 1519-21; now in Bremen). In the 1816 bankruptcy sale Roscoe sold a total of 271 engravings, 10 etchings and 93 woodcuts (including 36 of the small *Life of Christ*) by or attributed to or after Dürer – compared to the just over 100 Dürer prints owned by Roscoe's contemporary in Germany, the lawyer turned author Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). Roscoe's collection included fine impressions of some of Dürer's most famous prints. by which he became internationally known: *Knight Death and the Devil* (dated 1513); *Melancholia* (1514); and *The Prodigal Son herding Swine* (c. 1496), which Roscoe believed was a self-portrait. His copy of the drypoint etching of 1512, *St Jerome Seated behind a Bench in the Midst of Rocks* (lot 399) was an impression from the collection of the seventeenth-century artist Sir Peter Lely. Roscoe's library contained a copy of Adam Bartsch's volume (in the multi-volume *Le Peintre*

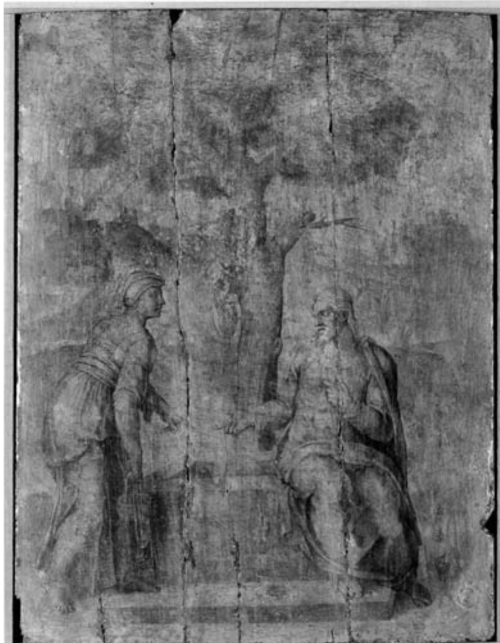

Figure 3: After Michelangelo, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, painted in ink on panel in grisaille, c.1540-43 (WAG 2789).

Graveur, 1803-21) on Dürer, the essential reference guide to the artist's graphic work; there is evidence from the 1816 sale catalogue [Roscoe 1816] that Roscoe used this volume, published in 1808, to help clarify the status of his prints within the confusing variety and quality of «originals» and copies.

Roscoe's knowledge of German prints may have been supported by his friendship with the Zurich-born artist Henry Fuseli, though the influence could have been mutual. Fuseli certainly did encourage Roscoe's interest in the drawings and paintings after Michelangelo. One example is the ink drawing on panel, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* (c. 1540-50), in monochrome grisaille (figure 3) which Roscoe fondly believed might have been the preparatory drawing for the now lost image of this subject presented by the artist to his friend the poet Vittoria Colonna, whose poems Roscoe greatly admired. This biblical subject had been the theme of a series of letters between artist and poet between 1538 and 1542, which ranged over matters of artistic practice, such as the relative importance of *colore* and *disegno* as well as theological and poetical matters.

From his youth Roscoe had been attracted to Renaissance Italian poetry and especially admired that of Lorenzo de Medici, who represented an ideal of patronage of authors and artists. This led to Roscoe's eventual obsession with the Medici as cultural patrons, despite never visiting Italy, and resulted

Figure 4: Martin Archer Shee, *Portrait of William Roscoe*, 1815-1817 (WAG 3130).

in his biographies of Lorenzo the Magnificent [Roscoe 1795] and of his son Giovanni di Lorenzo, elected Pope Leo X in 1513 [Roscoe 1805]. One of the largest paintings in Roscoe's collection resulting from this fascination with the Medici, but not in the Walker, was Giorgio Vasari's same-size painted copy (1537) of Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Leo X with the Cardinals Giulio de'Medici and Luigi de'Rossi*, which was much admired by Roscoe's friend the agricultural and political reformer Thomas William Coke (d.1846) of Holkham, who bought it from the 1816 sale for Holkham Hall in Norfolk, where it still remains. Coke also commissioned from Martin Archer Shee (in 1815) the full-length portrait of Roscoe, by which we now best know him – insisting that Roscoe should be portrayed as if seated in the Library at Holkham, because Roscoe and his protégé the Liverpool book-binder John Jones (who later retired to be Liverpool Athenaeum's Librarian) had done so much to re-organise, re-shelve and re-bind Holkham's historic manuscripts and books.

Roscoe and Jones designed bindings for Holkham's books which incorporated the Coke family motif of a very Liver-bird like ostrich. However, unlike some of his bibliophile contemporaries, Roscoe showed a keen sense of the need to retain or repair, rather than destroy, historic bindings, wherever possible, as examples of ancient material culture and the books' history.

By the start of the nineteenth century, Roscoe's biographies of the Medici led him to begin his own pioneering collection of early Renaissance Italian paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at a time when the taste for pre-Raphael and Michelangelesque art was barely developed. His acquisitions often had what Roscoe considered a Medici connection**.** He believed the Vecchietta studio *St Bernardino Preaching* showed portraits of the Medici men in the foreground to the right, attending a gender-segregated outdoor service in a Florentine piazza. In fact recent research suggests it formed part of a predella at the base of an altarpiece in a Franciscan church in the Umbrian hilltop town of Narni (though the figures in the foreground group have still to be identified).

Figure 5: Vecchietta Studio, *St. Bernardino Preaching*, c.1462-3 (WAG 2758).

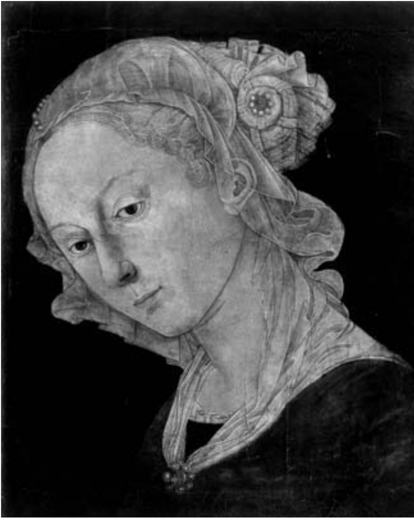

Figure 6: Workshop of 'Pseudo Francesco Pesellino', *Head of a Woman*, between 1445-1478 (WAG 2797).

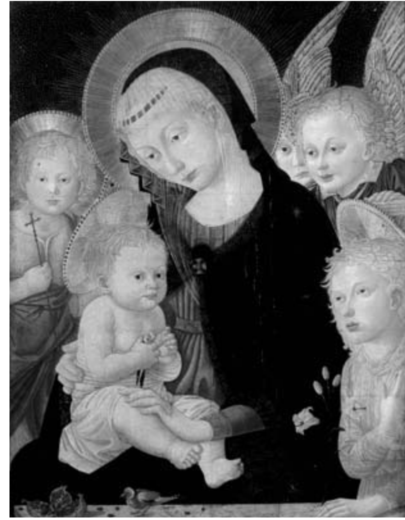

Figure 7: Workshop of 'Pseudo Francesco Pesellino', *Madonna and Child with St John and three Angels*, between 1459-1478 (WAG 2890).

Other paintings, such as the Walker's *Madonna and Child with St John and three angels* and *Head of a Woman* (figures 6 and 7) came from a workshop that re-used cartoons from the studios of Filippo Lippi (c. 1406-64) and Francesco Pesellino (1422-1457) to produce reduced-size versions of paintings that had originally been commissioned by the Medici for their mansions in Florence.

Roscoe believed that the *Head of a Woman* was a portrait cut from the wainscoting of the Medici-Riccardi Palace in Florence, though it is more likely to be a fragment of a religious figure cut from an altarpiece. In 2004 Carl Strehlke suggested that the workshop might be linked to that of Piero di Lorenzo di Pratese [Strehlke 2004: 367-8]. Another version of the *Madonna and Child* was later owned by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Holman Hunt, who as a young man in 1847 – a year before the Brotherhood was born – had shown one of his works at the artist-run Liverpool Academy only a few streets away from the Liverpool Royal Institution, where Roscoe's paintings hung [Morris and Roberts 1998: 340]. Hunt went on to visit and to exhibit at the Liverpool Academy regularly between 1851 and 1864.

Other paintings Roscoe acquired because of their low price or celebrated provenance. Simone Martini's unique *Christ discovered in the Temple*, now one of the Walker's most important paintings (figure 8) was Roscoe's earliest documented purchase of a Gothic painting, bought in 1804.

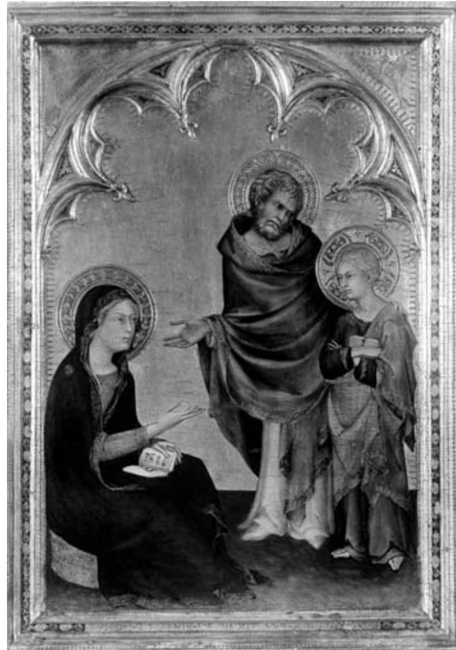

Figure 8: Simone Martini, *Christ discovered in the Temple* (WAG 2787).

It is signed, and, even more rarely, dated (1342). It was almost certainly painted for a member of the papal court in Avignon, possibly Cardinal Napoleone Orsini. The painting had been owned in the late eighteenth century by the Earl-Bishop of Derry, Frederick Augustus Hervey (1730-1803), whose pro-Catholic enfranchisement sympathies met with Roscoe's approval. Roscoe had in 1797 offered advice on the decoration of Hervey's newly-built English seat at Ickworth, Suffolk, suggesting he should adopt the then innovative and didactic scheme of displaying his paintings by national school and chronology rather than decorative aesthetics. Roscoe also bought Perugino's *Birth of the Virgin* (figure 9) from the same sale, 12 May 1804, that of Colonel Matthew Smith, FSA, Governor of the Tower of London.

Though these are the earliest documented purchases of paintings, Roscoe must have had more than these two Italian paintings by 1805 as Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864), visiting Roscoe at Allerton Hall during his tour of Britain and Holland in 1805-6, described it as filled with «statues, busts, and pictures, principally Italian, and in his study, he is surrounded by the figures of the men, who are the subjects of his History of Lorenzo, and of Leo X» [Silliman 1812: 57].

Roscoe's career first as author of abolitionist poetry and political tracts and later Medici biographies led to his association with the radical Everton-born but

Figure 9: Perugino, *The Birth of the Virgin*, c.1470-75 (WAG 2856).

London-based publisher Joseph Johnson (1739-1809). It was at suppers around his table in London that Roscoe probably first met the fiercely abolitionist Fuseli, with whom he also shared an interest in natural history illustration: Fuseli's favourite source of study and amusement until his death in 1825 was his large collection of entomological drawings, while Roscoe cherished his illustrated botanical publications to his dying days. Roscoe also helped found Liverpool's Botanic Gardens in 1802 – though he was disappointed to find that Liverpool society preferred to promenade and show off their finery there than study the economic benefits derived from the plants. Johnson's London supper parties also provided Roscoe with the opportunity to meet the feminist campaigner Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) he promoted among his circle of women friends in Liverpool and whose portrait he commissioned in 1791.

Figure 10: attributed to John Williamson, *Portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 1791-92 (WAG 1541).

They exchanged letters about their respective writings and poems and on 3 January 1792 she commented drily, of Fuseli's Milton paintings: «entre nous I rather doubt whether he will produce an Eve to please me in any of the situations, which he has selected, unless it be after the fall» [Wollstonecraft 2003, p. 194].

In turn Roscoe’s friendship with Fuseli led Roscoe to commission drawings from him (1797-17 March 1798) to promote some of his other ideas, such as a ‘Breast is Best’ campaign supporting a safer and healthier alternative to wet nurses. Typically Roscoe, the eventual father of ten children, had started this by publishing in 1798 an amended translation of the Italian Renaissance poem *La Balia* or *The Nurse,* which had played an equivalent part in an anti-wet nurse campaign in sixteenth-century Florence, and which Roscoe updated with praise of the eighteenth-century Duchess of Devonshire’s support for the policy. Though Fuseli’s drawing was not used to illustrate the preface to the translated poem in any of its three editions, the campaign was taken up by the Liverpool ceramics industry.

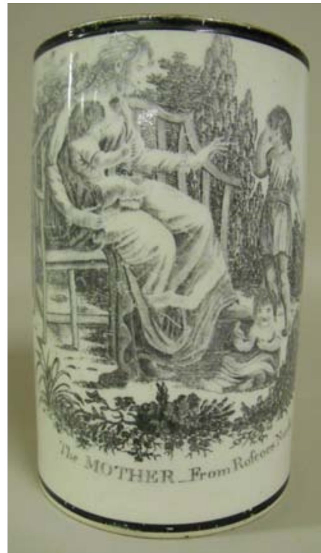

Figure 11: Herculaneum creamware mug (Decorative Arts Department, NML 54.181.320).

In 1785 Roscoe had been successful in persuading the initially reluctant Fuseli to make a visit north to Liverpool. Thereafter Fuseli visited Liverpool and stayed with Roscoe or other patrons on several occasions. In 1789 he sat in Roscoe’s house in Rodney Street for his portrait by the Ripon-born but Liverpool-based John Williamson.

In September 1799 he stayed for several weeks at Roscoe’s recently acquired rural retreat of Allerton Hall, where he copied one of Roscoe’s old master drawings by the sixteenth-century Italian Mannerist artist Luca Cambiaso. Roscoe promoted Fuseli’s work amongst his Liverpool and Lancashire circle — somewhat unsuccessfully – and bought many for himself, becoming one of Fuseli’s greatest English patrons (owning at least eleven) paintings. Roscoe also encouraged other artists, especially local ones, to use his collection for their own education. Sometimes he commissioned work in other media but based on his drawings and prints collection. In 1810 he commissioned from the 20-year-old Welsh-born sculptor John Gibson a terracotta low-relief *Alexander the Great ordering the Works of Homer to be Placed in the Tomb of Achilles*. He could have met Gibson during his apprenticeship as a marble mason in Francey’s workshop on Brownlow Hill. Roscoe asked Gibson to base his sculpture on a rare engraving in Roscoe’s possession by Marc Antonio Raimondi after a Vatican fresco by Raphael. Appropriately for the subject the low-relief (now in Liverpool Central Library) was intended for Roscoe’s library at Allerton Hall.

Figure 12: John Williamson, *Portrait of Henry Fuseli*, 1789 (WAG 1542).

Gibson also became a regular visitor to Allerton Hall, where he copied further old master drawings and engravings, especially after Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, of which Roscoe had a number of prints. Gibson's most ambitious drawing, inspired by the twin masters of the visual and literary sublime, Michelangelo and Milton, both equally admired by Roscoe, was his large 1.5-metre tall pen and wash drawing *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1808-1811), first exhibited at the recently-established Liverpool Academy in 1811

On Roscoe's advice Gibson attended anatomy lectures at the Academy, whose President George Bullock, the sculptor and furniture-maker, was another of Roscoe's protégés. By 1816 Roscoe had introduced Gibson to Fuseli and along with others of Roscoe's circle, who had become Gibson's patrons, and had raised money to send him to study in Rome, where Gibson remained for the majority of his successful career.

The international multi-lingual and multi-edition success of Roscoe's cultural biography of *Lorenzo the Magnificent* began to attract cultural tourists to Roscoe's door. We have already noted the visit of the American chemist and abolitionist Benjamin Silliman in 1805. By April 1813 Roscoe was the cultural celebrity whom the Anglo-Irish novelist and educational writer Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), another of Joseph Johnson's authors, was determined to meet. He showed her around Allerton Hall for the day and she immediately

Figure 13: John Gibson, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels,* pen and wash drawing, 1808-1811 (WAG 2525).

warmed to the «benevolent, cheerful, gentlemanlike old man», despite his broad Lancashire accent – and even more so that of his wife Jane, which Edgeworth later criticised in letters to her aunt back in Ireland (e.g. to Mrs Ruxton, 6 April 1813 [Colvin 1971, pp. 10-15]. She came away impressed by his library and art collection, despite the Fuseli paintings *The Death of Oedipus* and *The Return of Milton's Wife* that decorated the library and dining room, which she described as: «horribly distorted figures ... sprawling their fantastic lengths, like misshapen dreams». She was obviously not yet attuned to the sinister element of Fuseli's Gothic Romantic aesthetic, and indeed assumed that Fuseli must have given them to Roscoe.

Despite the eventual bankruptcy which forced Roscoe to sell up his house and collections at Allerton and to move eventually to a smaller house in Lodge Lane, as Liverpool's internationally-known cultural celebrity Roscoe still remained the focus of attention by visiting authors and academics from across both the English Channel and the Atlantic.

Figure 14: Henry Fuseli, *The Death of Oedipus*, 1783-84 (WAG 1537).

Figure 15: Fuseli, *The Return of Milton's Wife*, 1798-99 (WAG 1539).

Washington Irving (1753-1859) was one who sought him out. When the German art historian Johann David Passavant (1787-1861) visited Roscoe and his daughter at Lodge Lane in 1831, only a few days before Roscoe died, he had hoped to discuss Roscoe's views on Raphael; but he was proudly shown instead a copy of Roscoe's most recent publication, his colour-illustrated discourse

Figure 16: Watercolour after Samuel Austin's *Interior of Roscoe's Study at Lodge Lane* (WAG 2520).

on the Ginger plant [Roscoe 1828], illustrated with botanical watercolours, including the plant named after him: *Roscoea Purpurea*.

Passavant had already studied the core of Roscoe's paintings collection, which was on show at the Liverpool Royal Institution. It was this permanent display, from 1819 onwards in one of the sixteen rooms of the Institution's complex on Colquitt Street that ultimately provided the greatest legacy for Romantic-era Liverpool. Not only was it visited by academics from the developing Germanic science of art history, such as Passavant himself, and Gustav Waagen, but its displays of Roscoe's early Renaissance Italian and north European paintings were attracting visitors to Liverpool before the National Gallery had even been established in London in 1824, and well before that London Gallery acquired its first Netherlandish (Van Eyck) and pre-Raphael Italian (Lorenzo Monaco) paintings 'for the nation' in 1842 and 1848.

That such art attracted the attention and even the admiration of visitors to the Liverpool Royal Institution is evidenced by the journal of a typical middle-class tourist. In 1824 or 25 an inquisitive Dublin-born law student named John Armstrong, on his way to take up a pupillage in one of London's Inns of Court, visited the Liverpool Royal Institution as the key cultural institution that any tourist to Liverpool should visit. He came away particularly impressed by two of the items on display: one of Roscoe's paintings that 'most interested'

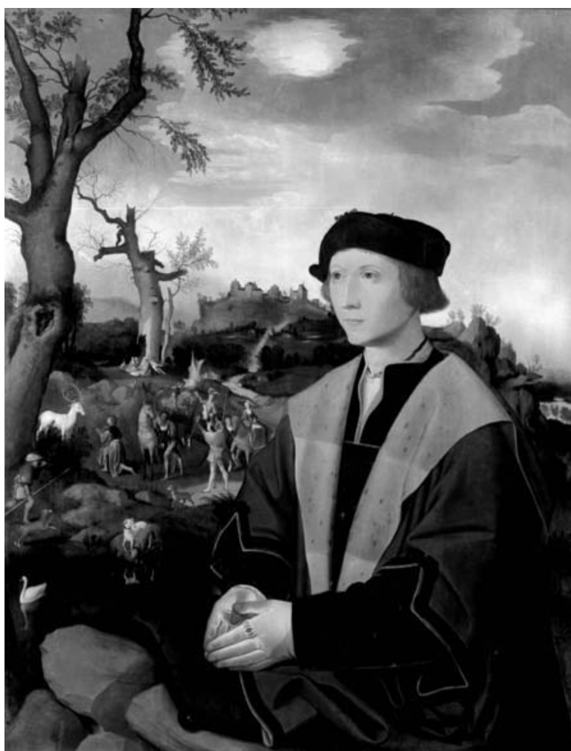

Figure 17: Jan Mostaert, *Portrait of a Young Man*, c.1520 (WAG 1018).

him was «a portrait of Lucas van Leyden, painted by himself, praying in the wilderness and the crucifix appearing to him whilst in prayer», which is still in Liverpool though now attributed to the sixteenth-century Jan Mostaert [Armstrong 1824-5].

Unfortunately there is no longer any evidence of the second object that so impressed Armstrong – a large stuffed hippopotamus!

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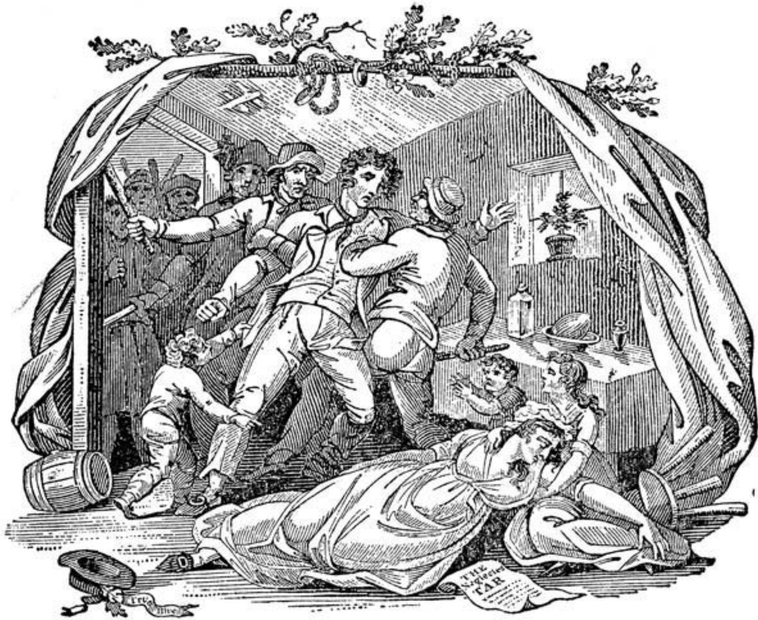
Marginalia



Arte come scienza. Microsaggio sul primo romanticismo tedesco

Abstract

What is the kind of relationship intercurring between art and science during one of the most important periods of modernity, namely early German romanticism? And what is its importance today? The present study tries to answer these questions, providing some theoretical coordinates which prove fundamental in order to understand German romantic idealism. And it does so starting from a tentative interpretation of some suggestive textual clues, generally overlooked by critics, only to conclude in the same tentative way that the romantic conceptual legacy is still more than alive.

Lorenzo Oropallo

> Per quel che concerne, in particolare, il rapporto dell'arte alla scienza, nel loro orientamento sono entrambe talmente contrapposte l'un l'altra che, se la scienza avesse mai risolto ogni suo problema, come l'ha sempre risolto l'arte, dovrebbero coincidere e fondersi in *una sola*, il che è la prova delle direzioni diametralmente contrapposte. Infatti benché la scienza nella sua funzione più alta abbia quell'unico e medesimo compito in comune con l'arte, questo compito tuttavia, in ragione del modo di risolverlo, è per la scienza un compito infinito, sicché si può concludere che l'arte sia il modello della scienza e che dove l'arte è già presente debba sopravvenire la scienza [Schelling 2006, pp. 569-571].

Non è possibile comprendere il *Sistema dell'idealismo trascendentale* senza tener conto di questa e di altre simili dichiarazioni. Più in generale, non è possibile comprendere l'intera stagione del primo romanticismo tedesco senza tenere in debita considerazione un fatto: che l'essenza della *Frühromantik* sta non tanto nella ricerca dell'arte, quanto in quella della scienza. Della scienza intesa, idealmente (e idealisticamente?), come conoscenza. Si evince tutto questo dal passo appena citato? Al contrario, si direbbe che qui Schelling prefiguri Hegel separando attentamente il cammino dell'arte da quello della scienza, attribuendo a ciascuna di esse un destino diverso e

opposto. Ma l'opposto dell'opposto è probabilmente più vicino alla verità: perché se l'arte è il modello della scienza, e se questa è però il fine di quella, allora ritenere che esse debbano fondersi tra loro non è affatto assurdo né insensato, anzi, è quasi la logica conseguenza della loro separazione originaria. Da dove deriva una simile concezione? E in che modo Schelling può essere annoverato come uno dei pensatori che hanno dato il maggior impulso allo sviluppo della questione nel pieno del dibattito sull'eredità kantiana?

Questo rimane forse da appurare, ma una cosa è certa: che, una volta maturatasi la svolta di cui anche Schelling è protagonista, non sarà più possibile tornare indietro. Non sarà più possibile nemmeno guardare avanti senza rendersi conto che il percorso intrapreso culminerà necessariamente nell'ignoto. Quale meraviglia, dunque, se anche oggi a dominare la scena è quello stesso ignoto che si situa alle origini della modernità? Lo stupore del rinvenire la propria origine nel proprio futuro supera di gran lunga qualsiasi immaginazione storica. Ecco: si tratta allora di ripensare il ruolo della storia e dell'immaginazione, esattamente ciò che fanno i romantici. Si tratta di ripensarle a partire non dal ruolo che hanno avuto, ma da quello che dovranno avere. Herder e Kant erano già stati d'altronde molto chiari: se è il primo a rivalutare la storia della cultura come fondamento di ogni idea presente (e di ogni svolta futura), al secondo si deve invece un'analitica dell'immaginazione che permetterà a Fichte di fare appunto di questa il principio primo della riflessione filosofica.

Nessun romanticismo sarebbe stato quindi possibile senza Herder e Fichte: eppure, è da Kant che prendono le mosse prima Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis e poi Schelling. Questo perché il criticismo si presenta come la dottrina definitiva, quella in cui è stata vagliata l'intera storia del pensiero occidentale moderno, e in cui si compendiano e si integrano tra loro i vari filoni della metafisica successiva a Spinoza e a Leibniz. Nella prima *Critica*, in particolare, viene finalmente chiarito che il ruolo della filosofia è quello di servire la scienza, di indicarle il cammino da seguire per giungere alla comprensione dei fenomeni naturali, i quali soli ci è dato di conoscere. Alla filosofia, alla filosofia trascendentale, compete un compito diverso da quello dello studio della natura, oggetto del suo studio è il soggetto umano, la cui conoscenza non può che esprimersi nella forma di un'autoriflessione, che è perciò al contempo una meditazione sui limiti e le possibilità della ragione e una riflessione della filosofia su se stessa.

Che ha a che fare con tutto ciò l'immaginazione, e in che modo questo si ricollega, per Fichte, al discorso sull'arte? Bisogna ricordare che, già per gli empiristi inglesi, l'immaginazione svolge un ruolo fondamentale nell'intero processo conoscitivo. Un ruolo che Kant riprende e contribuisce anzi ad ampliare: perché l'immaginazione non è solo una facoltà passiva, non si limita a rielaborare i dati provenienti dai sensi, ma è anzi produttiva, produce appunto un'immagine del mondo che è direttamente connessa con la conoscenza che possiamo avere di noi stessi (è il tema centrale dell'analitica trascendentale).

È su questa base che allora Fichte si può spingere oltre, decretando che l'immaginazione «creatrice» (*schaffende Einbildungskraft*) è l'autentico principio del pensiero, dal momento che, senza riflessione, senza conoscenza, cioè, di sé stessi, non ci può essere nemmeno conoscenza del mondo. Ma andiamo con ordine. Si è detto che buona parte della prima *Critica* si concentra sull'analitica trascendentale, cioè sulla comprensione dei meccanismi che regolano la conoscenza che il soggetto ha di se stesso, sulla coscienza, insomma. Ma da dove proviene tale coscienza? In quale momento della storia la coscienza prende il sopravvento sull'incoscienza? E in quale modo, in quale forma si manifesta questo fondamentale passaggio? Schelling non ha dubbi: è il sorgere dell'arte a segnare la svolta. Diversamente da Hegel, la cui esaltazione della scienza filosofica destina inevitabilmente l'arte a un ruolo storico di soggezione nei confronti del pensiero e quindi di scomparsa, di estinzione nel pensiero, Schelling ritiene addirittura che l'arte sia il vero «organo» della filosofia. Quella artistica è infatti un'attività conscia, nella quale si esprime al massimo grado il sapere, quel sapere che, in un primo momento, distingue l'artificio dalla natura, il soggetto dall'oggetto. In un secondo momento, però, è lo stesso sapere, lo stesso pensiero a riconfluire nella natura, o, meglio, a mostrare l'identità originaria del tutto incosciente e della singola coscienza: l'arte, in altre parole, è il tramite conscio di un'attività inconscia. In un certo senso, è quanto aveva già affermato ancora Kant nella *Critica del Giudizio*, quando, a proposito del genio artistico, sosteneva che egli fosse guidato dalla natura, che agisse seguendo una regola, naturale, che la ragione non è in grado di spiegare.

Ma allora perché non è Kant stesso a concludere che scienza e arte confluiscano nella medesima attività creativa, che altro non è che un riflesso di quella conoscitiva? Chiariamo una cosa: per Kant non vi è alcuna identità tra il creare e il conoscere. Questo è semmai il portato della riflessione fichtiana. Ed è anche il punto di partenza delle speculazioni dei romantici. Come interpretare d'altronde la nota profezia schlegeliana secondo cui «Così come lo scopo della scienza è di divenire arte; anche l'arte infine diverrà scienza» [Schlegel 1998, *Sezione V. Frammenti sulla poesia e sulla letteratura I 1797-1798*, n. 92]? Come interpretarla se non nel senso che una convergenza dei saperi sembrava allora più prossima di quanto non lo sia oggigiorno?

Eppure, la nostra è forse l'epoca che più di tutte ha conosciuto un netto slittamento dei paradigmi acquisiti, e una profonda trasformazione degli istituti di pensiero tradizionali. Che tale trasformazione sia stata indicata per prima proprio dai romantici? Non sarebbe un caso, ma forse nemmeno un fatto spiegabile razionalmente. E non perché la ragione non abbia nulla a che fare coi romantici, come invece si è professato per lungo tempo, ma, al contrario, perché l'autentica *ratio* del primo romanticismo tedesco sta per l'appunto nella negazione della ragione per come l'aveva intesa Kant. Sta nell'affermazione di una ragione altra, di una ragione storica che non riconosce (né conosce) limiti ontologici, ma che si dispiega in tutto il suo potenziale solo in un senso che tra-

scende la storia stessa. È possibile, allora, comprendere tale senso storicamente? D'altro canto non disponiamo di altro che di questo, del tempo che segna il suo stesso scorrere, dell'interpretazione che deve render conto ogni volta della propria autointerpretazione. Ma non è precisamente quel che aveva messo già in rilievo Friedrich Schlegel nel saggio emblematico *Sull'incomprensibilità*? Forse è opportuno fermarsi un momento a riflettere. A riflettere, di nuovo, sui limiti e le possibilità del pensiero. Stavolta, però, senza pretendere di tracciare confini certi tra le cose, o di individuare una volta per tutte un principio ordinatore universale. Facendo magari anche tutto questo, ma senza dimenticare ciò che abbiamo appreso: *che la fine della storia è l'inizio del pensiero*.

Che altro poteva avere in mente lo stesso Schlegel quando parla di una «nuova mitologia»? La questione è stata ampiamente dibattuta, e non è il caso di approfondirla ulteriormente. È però il caso di ricordare che la necessità di elaborare una nuova visione del mondo, un nuovo ordine dei saperi, in sintesi, un nuovo *modo* di sapere non si origina dal nulla, ma è piuttosto il culmine delle ricerche condotte dall'intero gruppo dei romantici. In un certo senso, però, essa ha davvero origine dal nulla: dal nulla del fondazionalismo filosofico di fine Settecento, dal niente di nuovo che la storia sembrava allora aver portato alle sue estreme conseguenze, seppur decretando la fine del mondo classico e l'avvento di quello moderno. Ecco perché, nelle intenzioni di Schlegel non meno che di Novalis o Schelling, fondare una nuova mitologia equivale a restituire anzitutto un valore alle cose, a rimitizzarle, appunto («reincantarle», dirà Novalis), ma con la piena consapevolezza dell'artificiosità di una simile operazione, e, possiamo aggiungere, nella più totale incoscienza delle possibili conseguenze. Professare e profetizzare il ricongiungimento futuro di arte e scienza non è infatti cosa da poco, ma comporta un sommovimento dell'intero campo speculativo: non potevano averne piena cognizione i romantici, che però, non a caso, cercano di rielaborare la dottrina trascendentale kantiana anche a costo di rovesciarla. Di rovesciarla nel suo opposto, in una «dottrina dell'arte» che fa da contrappunto alla *Dottrina della scienza* fichtiana. Tuttavia, senza alcuna intenzione di legittimare l'autonomia estetica dell'arte (o della scienza), ma prefigurando piuttosto una rivoluzione del pensiero (e della conoscenza) che non potrà non esulare dal campo teoretico. Una visione utopica, o tutt'al più futuribile? In realtà, è quanto ha parzialmente realizzato il Novecento. Ma una buona parte del lavoro resta ancora da fare. È vero, arte e scienza, poesia e filosofia non sono poi così lontane oggi, un ricongiungimento è stato anzi tentato a più riprese, e abbiamo compreso che i limiti del pensiero classico non sono affatto invalicabili: ma che cosa comporta, che cosa comporterà valicarli del tutto? Comporterà forse, di nuovo, la necessità di elaborare una *Neue Mythologie*? E su quali basi? Forse quelle indicate dai romantici? Certo, non è più possibile pensare che la poesia inaugurerà una nuova stagione della civiltà mondiale, né che lo farà una scienza universale. Ma questo solo perché siamo

già andati oltre le forme concettuali del passato. Si può allora tranquillamente sostenere che anche il pensiero si spingerà oltre la storia: d'altronde, se fosse vero il contrario, se sarà la storia ad andare oltre il pensiero, si dovrà ammettere che i romantici hanno avuto più ragione di quanta non ne avrebbero voluta. O di quanta non ne diamo loro oggi.

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Gli zingari di A.S. Puškin: poema byroniano, ma non troppo

Abstract

Written in 1824 and first published in 1827, Pushkin's narrative poem *The Gypsies* is the last of a series of poetical works collectively known as «Southern poems» by analogy with Byron's celebrated cycle of «Eastern tales». At that time, the Russian poet was growing cold about the egotistic solipsism of the prototypical Byronic hero. Thus, he decided to put him to the proof, testing his self-proclaimed striving for freedom. He brings him to a pseudo-Edenic, para-Rousseauian milieu (a Gypsy camp), where he is supposed to find rest for his tormented soul. His love for a genuine child of nature, the charming Zemfira, seems at first the final answer to his quest for redemption. However, as a civilized man, he cannot bear for a long time the burden of the absolute freedom. The murder of his unfaithful spouse unmasks his inveterate egoism, thus decreeing both his banishment from the community and the inanity of his aspirations. This pseudo-Byronic plot functions as a mere pre-text for an ethic and theoretic reflection on the concept of freedom, whose polemical target are both Rousseau's primitivism and Byron's postures and impostures. In doing that, Pushkin foreshadows the future struggles of the Russian man in order to find its own way to freedom.

Jacopo Doti

Puškin iniziò a lavorare al poema *Cygany* [*Gli zingari*] nel gennaio del 1824, quando si trovava ancora in esilio nelle propaggini meridionali dell'Impero, dove lo aveva esiliato lo zar Alessandro I a causa di alcuni versi politici di natura velatamente sovversiva. All'epoca il poeta era di servizio a Odessa, presso la Segreteria del conte Voroncov. Ben presto però sarebbe stato confinato per due anni (dal '24 al '26) nella tenuta materna di Michajlovskoe, vicino a Pskov, con l'accusa di ateismo. Qui nell'ottobre dello stesso anno termina la stesura del poema, che verrà dato alle stampe nella sua interezza solo tre anni dopo, nel 1827. Fra il '25 e il '27 ne appaiono tuttavia alcuni estratti su riviste letterarie di notevole importanza, quali «Poljarnaja zvezda» [«La stella polare»] e «Severnye cvety» [«Fiori del nord»]. Inoltre nel 1825, sul «Moskovskij telegraf» [«Il telegrafo di Mosca»], la canzone di Zemfira – «Staryj muž, groznyj muž» [«Vecchio marito, sposo crudele»] – viene

pubblicata insieme all'intonazione musicale originale che il poeta aveva trascritto di proprio pugno durante un breve soggiorno presso un campo di zingari vicino a Kišinëv, in Bessarabia (moderna Moldavia).[1]

Pare infatti che l'idea di scrivere un poema di ambientazione zingaresca sia venuta a Puškin proprio in concomitanza coi giorni trascorsi insieme ai «poveri figli della natura». Lo testimonierebbero fra l'altro i versi dell'epilogo, in cui l'anonimo narratore del poema prende parola e si esprime direttamente in prima persona:

> Nel paese dove a lungo, a lungo della guerra
> Non tacque l'orrendo fragore,
> [...]
> In mezzo alle steppe incontrai
> Sulle tracce degli antichi campi
> I pacifici carri degli zingari,
> Figli d'umile libertà.
> Dietro alle loro pigre turbe
> Spesso vagai per i deserti,
> Divisi il loro cibo frugale
> E mi assopii davanti ai loro fuochi
> [Puškin 2001, p. 237].

Sebbene si tratti di un abusato artificio retorico-letterario di evidente matrice byroniana (ma non solo), peraltro già riscontrabile nella *Fontana di Bachčisaraj* (1821-23; pubbl. 1824),[2] esso di per sé non inficia il dato

[1] La «dikaja pesnja» [nenia selvaggia] accese sin da subito la fantasia di molti compositori: basti qui citare i nomi di Viel'gorskij, Verstovskij, Aljab'ev, Rubinštejn e Čajkovskij. L'intonazione prevalente che essi ne danno è di natura strofica e si adagia spesso sui cliché del *bytovoj romans* (la declinazione russa della romanza da salotto). Di tutt'altra natura la strada che percorrerà Rachmaninov quando si troverà a intonare i versi all'interno del suo "naturale" contesto drammatico (vale a dire il libretto che Vladimir Nemirovič-Dančenko desunse dal poema di Puškin al fine di ricavarne un'opera in un atto solo da sottoporre come prova finale d'esame agli allievi del Conservatorio di Mosca nel 1892). Il giovane compositore opterà infatti per una soluzione più flessibile, di natura quasi rapsodica, in cui tuttavia l'organicità dell'*intonacija* (ritmo anapestico, uso di intervalli aumentati e, in ispecie, del tritono) riesce a scolpire in maniera plastica la durezza di questo canto «selvaggio».

[2] In quel contesto esso era chiamato a rafforzare lo spunto eziologico del poema: «Lasciato finalmente il nord, / Per lungo tempo scordando i festini, / Ho visitato di Bachčisaraj / Il castello dormente in abbandono. / Per i muti passaggi / Errai dove il flagello delle genti, / Il tartaro furioso, banchettava / E dopo orrori d'incursioni / Annegava in fastosa indolenza» [Puškin 2001, p. 202].

biografico, che viene altresì corroborato da una lirica del 1830[3] e dalla quinta strofa del capitolo ottavo (1829-30) dell'*Evgenij Onegin*:

> E, dimenticati della lontana capitale
> e lo splendore e i fragorosi banchetti,
> nelle profondità selvagge della triste Moldavia
> lei [*scil.* la Musa] ha visitato le povere tende
> delle tribù nomadi,
> e fra di loro è inselvatichita,
> ha dimenticato la favella degli dei
> per lingue povere, strane,
> per i campi della steppa a lei cara... [...]
> [Puškin 2005, p. 375].

Lo spunto autobiografico tuttavia non deve trarci in inganno: la dissimulata tradizione di atavici racconti di gusto esotico è per il poeta solo un *pre-testo* su cui innestare una riflessione etico-teoretica sullo stato di natura e sul concetto di libertà che ha come (in)diretti bersagli polemici da un lato il primitivismo russoviano e dall'altro l'egotismo solipsistico byroniano: le intransitabili utopie del primo vanno infatti di pari passo coi napoleonismi del secondo.

Se è vero che *Gli zingari* vengono comunemente considerati l'ultimo dei cosiddetti poemi meridionali[4] – una serie di narrazioni in versi di ambientazione esotica[5] in cui il poeta russo aveva assimilato la lezione degli *Oriental Tales*

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[3] La poesia *Cygany* [*Gli zingari*] fu scritta a Boldino nel novembre del 1830. Vi si legge nella seconda strofa: «Ti porto il mio saluto, allegra turba! / Riconosco i tuoi fuochi; / In altri tempi io stesso / Percorsi un tratto di strada con quelle tende» [Puškin 1977-79, III, p. 200 (trad. mia)]. Essa fu pubblicata l'anno seguente nella rivista «Dennica» [«L'Aurora»], come traduzione «dall'inglese». La critica si è a lungo dimostrata scettica, pensando che si trattasse di una delle solite mistificazioni puškiniane. L. Trube ha poi identificato in *The Gypsy's Tent* del poeta inglese William Bowles (1762-1850) una delle possibili fonti letterarie della lirica [cfr. Trube 1984, pp. 273-275].

[4] Mi riferisco naturalmente al *Kavkazskij plennik* [*Il prigioniero del Caucaso*, 1820-21], ai *Brat'ja razbojnki* [*I fratelli briganti*, 1821-22 (incompiuto)], al già citato *Bachčisarajksij fontan* [*La fontana di Bachčisaraj*, 1821-23] e agli *Cygany* [*Gli zingari*, 1824].

[5] Nell'immaginario poetico russo dell'epoca l'esotico corrispondeva in buona parte coi confini meridionali dell'Impero (in particolare, Caucaso e Crimea). Le insistenti campagne militari condotte in questi territori catalizzavano naturalmente l'attenzione della stampa. Per i letterati si trattava di vere e proprie terre vergini da esplorare e fecondare con la propria fantasia. Scrive Magarotto: «Puškin dimostra di saper cogliere per primo questa opportunità artistica, nuova e originale, sollecitato, certo, dall'occasione del viaggio nel Caucaso con i Raevskij, ma preparato già a Pietroburgo da un ambiente letterario appassionato, entusiasta, infervorato, alla ricerca costante di insoliti motivi

di Byron – esso tuttavia ne è con ogni evidenza un frutto tardivo e, pur condividendo alcuni tratti con i suoi modelli di riferimento (intensità e concentrazione dell'azione drammatica, intrusioni liriche della voce narrante,[6] apostrofi al lettore,[7] nonché il seppur parco ricorso a immagini metaforiche[8]), si caratterizza già per quell'«austere simplicity» che diverrà la disarmante cifra stilistica del genio puškiniano.[9]

Il poema è articolato in undici brevi sequenze (non numerate) e un epilogo: poco più di 600 versi in tutto. Prevale il tetrametro giambico, sebbene in due casi appaiano una tetrapodia trocaica (l'episodio dell'«uccellino di Dio»: un'intrusione lirica del narratore[10]) e una dipodia anapestica (la canzone di Zemfira: un inserto di poesia per musica[11]). Caratteristica precipua dell'invenzione poetica è la prevalenza del dialogo drammatico, pressoché assente nel modello byroniano. Si dipanano rapidamente sotto i nostri occhi brevi squarci di taglio quasi cinematografico,[12] in cui si avvicendano secondo lo schema classico (introduzione, sviluppo, crisi, catastrofe) protagonista, deuteragonisti e coro. Al primo naturalmente è dato ampio risalto, senza che ciò implichi un'ipertrofia monologica.

D'altronde, già a partire dai primi capitoli dell'*Onegin* Puškin farà un deciso passo indietro rispetto agli eccessi byroniani dei primi poemi meridionali.[13]

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d'ispirazione, di impulsi creativi inconsueti, di autentiche novità per il lavoro letterario. […] A partire, quindi, non è un Puškin culturalmente sprovveduto o ingenuo, e non è ignota e misteriosa la contrada verso cui si dirige, al contrario saranno proprio le nozioni acquisite e le conoscenze possedute che gli permetteranno di filtrare artisticamente le impressioni, le sensazioni, le emozioni che egli proverà una volta a contatto con la realtà del Caucaso» [Magarotto 1992, *passim*].

[6] Si veda, in particolare, il succitato epilogo.

[7] «Perché dunque il cuore del giovane freme? / Da quale affanno egli è oppresso?» [Puškin 2001, p. 218].

[8] «[...] ed in folla rumorosa / Si levò il nomade campo / Dalla valle dell'orrendo ricetto, / E presto tutto nella lontananza della steppa / Scomparve. Un carro solo, / Ricoperto di povero tappeto, / Restava nel funesto campo. / Così talvolta prima dell'inverno, / Sull'ora brumosa del mattino, / Quando si levi dai campi / Un branco di tardive gru / E con gridio remeggi lontano verso il sud, / Trafitta da mortale piombo / Una ne resta tristemente / Lasciando pendere l'ala ferita» [Puškin 2001, p. 236].

[9] Cfr. Brown 1986, p. 33.

[10] Vedi Puškin 2001, pp. 218-219.

[11] *Ivi*, pp. 223-224.

[12] Si pensi, in particolare, al dialogo a mezza voce fra i due giovani amanti [*Ivi*, pp. 231-234].

[13] Pur avendola già letta in traduzione francese a Pietroburgo, Puškin entrò estensivamente in contatto con l'opera di Lord Byron solo nell'estate del 1820, grazie alla provvidenziale intermediazione linguistica dei fratelli Raevskij, e ne venne – come molti prima di lui – letteralmente contagiato: «He had known Nikolai Raevsky before, but it was from his elder brother, Alexander, a Byron enthusiast, that he became infected

Nel 1827 – anno di pubblicazione degli *Zingari* – scrive infatti con esemplare lucidità una breve nota critica sui drammi di Byron («O dramach Bajrona»):

> Byron gettò sul mondo e sulla natura dell'uomo uno sguardo unilaterale, poi distolse da essi il suo interesse per concentrarsi solo sul proprio io. Ci presentò uno spettro di se stesso. Si replicò, talvolta presentandosi col turbante del rinnegato, talaltra nelle vesti di un corsaro, un'altra ancora come un giaurro che esala il suo ultimo respiro nella suprema ascesi monastica, e infine come viaggiatore errante. Ma in fin dei conti egli concepì, creò e descrisse un unico personaggio letterario (vale a dire, il proprio); tutto, all'infuori di alcune sortite satiriche disseminate nelle sue opere, viene da lui ricondotto a questo personaggio ombroso, possente e così misteriosamente affascinante. [Puškin 1977-79, VII, p. 37 (trad. mia)]

Va chiarito tuttavia che se da un lato Aleko non è – per così dire – la brutta copia di Lara o del Giaurro, dall'altro Puškin non sembra avere alcun intento parodistico nel tratteggiare il suo eroe. Il poeta non si propone infatti di mettere alla berlina le pose byroniane di un «automa da salotto», come invece farà apertamente nell'*Onegin*; ciò che più gli preme è dare forma plastica alle contraddizioni di un figlio (letterario) del suo tempo. Il ritratto che ne viene fuori, seppur filtrato dall'incipiente realismo,[14] non si discosta molto dal prototipo dell'(anti-)eroe romantico così efficacemente compendiato da Walter Vickery:

> He is proud, aristocratic, highly individualistic, romantic; he is profoundly disillusioned by life; he feels in conflict with society; he feels superior to society; although his conduct may be antisocial and he inspires awe and fear in others, he possesses a basic underlying nobility of character; he seems to be marked by Fate and has suffered some irreparable misfortune at some time in past… As a result of this misfortune

with "Byronism". The infection was not severe; by 1824 he had overcome most of symptoms, and saw before him a new way of writing, quite radically un-Byronic, which is best evinced in *Eugene Onegin* […]» [Brown 1986, p. 30].

[14] Il poema fu accolto con entusiasmo da poeti decabristi quali Bestužev e Ryleev. Quest'ultimo tuttavia protestava per l'eccesso di realismo e trovava indecoroso che Aleko fosse costretto a far ballare un orso. In una nota del 1830 Puškin scrive piccato: «Il defunto Ryleev era indignato del fatto che Aleko portasse in giro un orso e raccogliesse per giunta denaro dal pubblico accorso a vedere lo spettacolo. Vjazemskij fece la stessa osservazione. (Ryleev mi chiese di fare di Aleko almeno un fabbro, ché sarebbe stato più nobile.) Se è per questo, sarebbe stato ancor meglio farne un funzionario dell'ottava classe o un proprietario terriero, e non uno zingaro. Nel qual caso, certo, non ci sarebbe stato nemmeno il poema, ma tanto meglio» [Puškin 1977-79, VII, p. 127 (trad. mia)].

> his view of life has become warped, his emotions atrophied; he brings tragedy to the woman who loves him; and he is portrayed against some primitive, exotic background [Vickery 1970, p. 35].

«Proscritto migratore», Aleko abbandona la «schiavitù delle soffocanti città» per condividere con un gruppo di zingari l'«errante povertà e libertà». Lo trascina al campo una giovane fanciulla «dall'occhio nero», Zemfira, che lo sottrae al suo solitario peregrinare e lo presenta al padre, il capovillaggio, affinché questi lo accolga e si dica disponibile a spartire con lui «pane e tetto». Aleko porta con sé il peso di una colpa che non viene mai del tutto chiarita al lettore[15] e, pur disprezzando i falsi idoli del «palazzo», rimane sempre un figlio della società, che vede nell'erratica *vie bohémienne* una distorta *enclave* edenica in cui purificarsi e redimersi. Tuttavia – ricorda saggiamente il vecchio padre di Zemfira –, «la libertà non sempre è cara / a colui ch'è aduso alla mollezza». Gli fa eco una prolettica apostrofe del narratore, non lontana nei toni e nei contenuti da quelle del *Giaurro*, del *Corsaro*, della *Sposa d'Abido* o del *Manfred*:

> Sulla solitaria testa
> Sovente anche aveva tonato la folgore;
> Ma incurante egli sotto l'uragano
> Ed al sereno aveva sonnecchiato.
> E aveva vissuto senza riconoscere il potere
> Della sorte perfida e cieca;
> Ma, Dio, come le passioni avevano devastato
> La sua docile anima!
> Con che tumulto avevano ribollito
> Nel suo travagliato petto!
> Da molto, per molto si sono placate?
> Si desteranno: pazienta
> [Puškin 2001, p. 219].

Passano due anni. Aleko è ormai avvezzo alla vita zingaresca e non rimpiange la fatuità delle «gioie cittadine». Di villaggio in villaggio guida col canto l'orso, mentre il Vecchio percuote «pigramente» il tamburello e Zemfira

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[15] Zemfira, presentandolo al padre, si limita a dire che «la legge lo perseguita». Aleko, dal canto suo, è reticente. Il suo rancore nei confronti del mondo civile trapela sostanzialmente in una lunga *tirade* contro la «schiavitù delle soffocanti città» e l'«insensata persecuzione della folla»; in un primo tempo la *tirade* veniva replicata in una breve scena, poi espunta dal poema, in cui il protagonista, stringendo fra le braccia il bimbo concepito con Zemfira, si rallegrava che questi potesse vivere lontano dalla corruzione morale della società.

raccoglie i modesti oboli dei paesani. Frutto del loro amore è un bimbo neonato, a cui la giovane zingara intona presso la culla un atavico canto della steppa:

Vecchio marito, crudele marito,
Scannami, bruciami:
Son forte, non temo
Né coltello né fuoco.

T'odio,
Ti disprezzo;
Amo un altro,
Muoio d'amore.

Scannami, bruciami;
Non dirò nulla;
Vecchio marito, crudele marito,
Non saprai chi è.

È più fresco della primavera,
Più ardente d'un giorno d'estate,
Come è giovane e ardito!
Quanto m'ama!

Come l'ho carezzato
Nella quiete notturna!
Come ci siamo allora fatti giuoco
Della tua canizie!
[Puškin 2001, pp. 223-224]

È questo il nucleo drammatico dell'intero poema, il punto di svolta della parabola tragica: a Zemfira, come ella stessa confesserà poco dopo al padre, Aleko è venuto a noia. Si sente prigioniera dei lacci d'un amore esclusivo e opprimente; teme l'animo insondabile e ombroso dall'antico compagno, ma al contempo non riesce a frenare la sua sete di libertà.

Decide allora, con fare fanciullesco, di stuzzicarlo con un canto di chiara semantica anfibologica e di palesi implicazioni antropologiche. Aleko viene infatti identificato con lo *staryj muž*, vale a dire con un uomo vecchio e infecondo, destinato per legge naturale a essere sostituito da uno giovane, «più fresco della primavera» e «più ardente d'un giorno d'estate».[16] D'altronde,

[16] E questo nonostante la giovane età del protagonista, definito a più riprese dal narratore «junoša» [«giovincello»]!

chioserà saggiamente il Vecchio, «a turno a tutti è data gioia / ciò che è stato non sarà di nuovo».

Il principio storico incarnato da Aleko tenta invano di assimilarsi alla ciclicità del pensiero mitico: ne risulta sostanzialmente estraneo.[17] L'uomo civile infatti non rinuncia ai vantaggi del patto sociale per un vago ideale comunitario in cui la libertà assoluta (sciolta da ogni vincolo) rischia di andare a detrimento del singolo:

> Io non son tale. No, io certamente
> Non vorrei rinunciare ai miei diritti
> [Puškin 2001, p. 229].

Aleko peraltro, pur ritenendo gli zingari e il loro corifeo dei validi interlocutori ideologici, si lascia sfuggire qua e là toni di sintomatica accondiscendenza. Risponde infatti piccato alle strofe intonate con impudenza dalla giovane moglie:

> Taci! Il canto m'ha tediato.
> Non mi piacciono le canzoni selvagge [*dikie pesni*]
> [Puškin 2001, p. 223].

Dietro a quel banale «dikij» [selvaggio] non si nasconde solo la stizza per la smaccata provocazione canora, ma anche l'insanabile estraneità di Aleko rispetto a un mondo *altro*, percepito come culturalmente inferiore. Di esso egli non riesce a condividere il radicale libertarismo. A nulla vale la "parabola" raccontatagli dal Vecchio. Anni addietro questi infatti fu abbandonato dall'amata Marïula, la quale partì nel cuore della notte insieme a una tribù straniera senza curarsi del compagno e della «figlia piccina»; da allora egli, pur accettando sconsolato il volere del destino, non ha più alzato lo sguardo su altre fanciulle.

La nobile e compassata atarassia del "barbaro" *starik* tuttavia viene percepita dall'orgoglioso uomo della società civile come un segno di debolezza, se non addirittura di viltà:

> Io non son tale. No, io certamente
> Non vorrei rinunciare ai miei diritti!
> O gusterei della vendetta almeno;
> Oh no, se sul marino abisso
> Trovassi dormente il nemico,

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[17] «La "naturalità" della condizione degli zingari consiste nel fatto che, uscendo dalla storia, essi ricreano dei modelli di comportamento ritualizzato e dei paradigmi mitologici […]. Ma Aleko […] non può […] cessare di vivere nelle storia» [Krivonos 2005, p. 35].

Lo giuro, neppur qui il mio piede
Risparmierebbe lo scellerato;
Nell'onde senza impallidire,
Lo spingerei pure indifeso;
L'inopinato orrore del risveglio
Maledirei con riso forsennato,
E a lungo della sua caduta a me
Ridevole sarebbe e dolce il tonfo
[Puškin 2001, pp. 229-230].

Il volto di Aleko, che aveva indossato a forza la maschera del «libero abitatore del mondo», si contrae quindi in una smorfia sogghignante che nulla ha da invidiare a Lara, Conrad o al Giaurro. L'empito (auto)distruttivo lo porterà infatti, con tragica e fatale ironia, a uccidere l'amata (salvifica) e il suo drudo. L'odioso delitto di Caino determinerà la sua simbolica Cacciata dall'Eden zigano:

«Lasciaci, uomo orgoglioso!
Noi siamo selvaggi, non abbiamo leggi,
Non torturiamo, non mettiamo a morte,
Non abbiamo bisogno di gemiti e sangue;
Ma vivere con un assassino non vogliamo.
Tu non sei nato per selvaggia sorte,
Vuoi libertà soltanto per te stesso;
Orribile ci sarebbe la tua voce:
Noi timidi e benevoli nell'anima,
Tu malevolo e ardito; – dunque lasciaci,
Addio! la pace sia con te»
[Puškin 2001, p. 235-236].

È quindi evidente la condanna da parte del poeta dell'egotismo romantico e, conseguentemente, dell'aleatoria ricerca da parte del proscritto di un'assoluzione che rifugga il tribunale della coscienza. È vano infatti illudersi di trovare in terre vergini un lavacro per le proprie colpe (collettive o individuali). Al contrario, si corre spesso il rischio di contaminare le sorgenti presso le quali ci si era recati onde trovare un fugace ristoro, intorbidandone di fatto le acque con le macchie del proprio delitto.

La riflessione teoretica di Puškin non si esaurisce però nella scontata parabola edenica. Come sottolinea giustamente William E. Brown, «the theme of the poem may be read as a demonstration of what would happen if such a hero [*scil.* Byronic] were really granted the absolute freedom which is always his ideal. *The Gypsies* is, as it were, a social experiment *in vacuo* to demonstrate that freedom as the romantic hero conceives it is a destructive thing for all concerned» [Brown 1986, p. 39].

Il concetto stesso di libertà viene guardato dall'autore con scetticismo, o meglio ancora, con disincanto. Cercheremmo invano nel poema un'apologia dell'intransitabile utopia russoviana, che risulta alfine incapace di portare la felicità persino a chi ne è il più vicino erede:

> Ma non è felicità neppure tra voi,
> Poveri figli della natura!...
> Anche sotto le lacere tende
> Vivono sogni tormentosi,
> E i vostri nomadi ricetti
> Non sono, nei deserti, salvi dalle sciagure,
> E dovunque son fatali passioni,
> Non v'è difesa dai fati
> [Puškin 2001, pp. 237-238].[18]

La malevolenza del destino, forse non scevra di un dolente autobiografismo, preclude così l'illusione, cullata da certo Romanticismo sentimentale, di un ritorno agli incontaminati primordi della civiltà.[19] L'inquietudine di Aleko e il suo insanabile *déracinement* sembrano quasi aprire la strada al *lišnij čelovek* [lett. «uomo superfluo»], una figura chiave del romanzo realista russo, che prende le mosse proprio da un «ripensamento dell'eroe byroniano».[20]

È pertanto inevitabile concludere questo breve percorso critico con la celebre lettura che del poema dà Dostoevskij nel *Discorso su Puškin*, pronunciato a Mosca l'8 giugno 1880 in occasione dell'inaugurazione di un monumento eretto in onore del sommo poeta. In esso il grande scrittore russo raggiunge le radici più profonde del pensiero puškiniano e, sebbene lo pieghi smaccatamente all'ideologia slavofila, mostra un'ineguagliata capacità d'introspezione psico-sociologica:

> In Aleko Puškin aveva già trovato e genialmente messo in rilievo quel tipo di vagabondo, infelice nella sua stessa patria, quello storico martire russo la cui apparizione era storicamente inevitabile nella nostra società così distaccata dal popolo. E non fu certo in Byron che egli lo trovò. È questo un tipo irrefutabilmente preso dalla vita reale [...]. Aleko, certo, non sa ancora esprimere bene la sua angoscia: [...] egli ha la nostalgia della natura, si lamenta della società mondana, ha delle aspirazioni universali, piange per la verità perduta da qualcuno in qualche luogo, e che

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[18] Prova evidente ne è il Vecchio, che vive con triste rassegnazione l'intera sua esistenza.

[19] Ricordiamo peraltro che lo stesso Rousseau considerava la civilizzazione un processo sostanzialmente irreversibile.

[20] Cfr. Mann 1967.

> egli non può in alcun modo trovare. C'è in lui un po' di Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In che consiste questa verità, dove e in che cosa essa potrebbe apparire e quando precisamente sia stata perduta, egli stesso non ve lo dirà, ma la sua sofferenza è sincera. [...] E mai egli capirà che la verità è prima di tutto dentro di lui; e come lo potrebbe capire? Egli è un estraneo nella sua stessa terra [...]. No, questo geniale poema non è una imitazione! Vi si ha già il presentimento della conclusione russa della questione, della «maledetta questione», della fede e verità popolare: «Diventa umile, uomo orgoglioso, e prima di tutto spezza il tuo orgoglio. [...] La verità non è al di fuori di te, ma in te stesso. [...] Se ti vincerai e ti umilierai, diventerai libero, come non hai mai immaginato che si possa essere, e inizierai la grande opera di dare la libertà agli altri, e conoscerai la felicità [...]» [Dostoevskij 2010, pp. 1264-1267 (*passim*)].

La creazione «fantastica» di Puškin diventa per Dostoevskij un ammonimento profetico; la polemica anti-byroniana e lo scetticismo nei confronti della «felicità naturale» preconizzano il dissidio dell'uomo russo moderno, strappato alle proprie radici e in cerca spasmodica di una verità che gli faccia da guida. Se il Vecchio zingaro – nelle vesti di corifeo ideologico – rimprovera ad Aleko di cercare la libertà solo per se stesso, Dostoevskij punta il dito contro l'individualismo europeo e il vicolo cieco dell'utopia socialista. Solo un ritorno alle profonde radici religiose del popolo, all'ideale comunanza – libera e organica – di tutti i fedeli [*sobornost'*] potrà finalmente condurre alla felicità universale. Non stupiscano pertanto i ferventi toni messianici dello scrittore; d'altronde, già nel 1837 – dieci anni dopo la pubblicazione degli *Zingari* – un convinto occidentalista come Pëtr Čaadaev era stato costretto a ritrattare le sue posizioni filo-europeiste nella celebre *Apologia di un pazzo*, in cui controteorizzava un radioso avvenire per l'uomo russo.[21] Quest'ultimo infatti, a differenza del monolitico e autoreferenziale eroe byroniano, non può che definirsi universale, come aveva genialmente intuito l'indiscusso padre della letteratura russa moderna.

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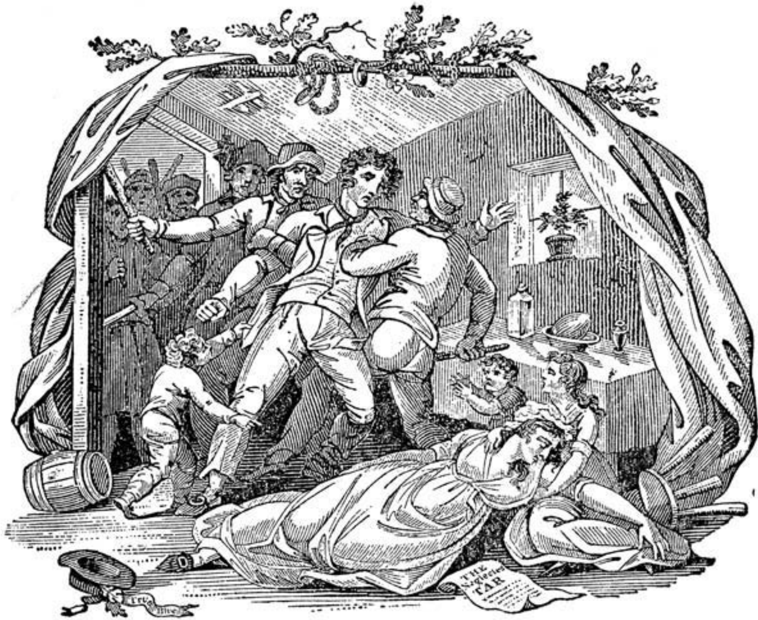
Poet's Corner



Kevin Wren

Kevin Wren was born and bred in Dublin, the stomping ground of his wastrel youth, which he remembers with a lingering nostalgia, though considering himself far better off in Italy far from the parochialism of his native city. Having undergone the miseducation of the Jesuit corps for ten years, an experience which has left an indelible sign on his personality and his writing, he went on to do an undergraduate degree in English and Philosophy at University College Dublin, from which he took his masters by major thesis on the early poetry of W. H. Auden under the stern supervision of the renowned academic Seamus Deane. There followed a period in publishing during which he conceived, produced and edited the first extant biography of Flann O'Brien. Then, for amorous reasons, he transferred to Italy where he has been teaching at the University of Bari for almost thirty years. He has published during the years chiefly on the Romantics, an essay of his on Keats forming part of the post-graduate syllabus in the university where he works. His numerous translations include C. F. Russo's seminal work, *Aristophanes: An Author for the Stage* (Routledge) and Vito Carrassi's definitive, *The Irish Fairy tale: A Narrative Tradition form the Middle Ages to Yeats and Stephens* (John Cabot University Press). He has also Translated and published poems by the exceptional, if little known twentieth century Calabrian poet Lorenzo Calogero, who at present is coming into the public eye.

Having dealt thus far with the hack work, so to speak, let us now turn to his writing. Kevin Wren has been published in Ireland, including 'The Irish Times', Britain and Italy, in the latter cases often with the facing translations of his wife Elena Palazzo. His book *The Long and the Short* came out in 1999. Due to his love-hate relationship with the Jesuits his work moves between two poles of overt paganism, not evident in this selection, and an equivocal religiosity, which he does not consider mutually exclusive, to the degree that the latter is very much born from the former. One need only consider the Easter rituals of Apulia, where he lives, to see to what degree they derive from Pre-Christian realities. At times he separates the two, at times attempts to reconcile them, but always with a sense of the transcendence intrinsic to both, at times pacifically, at times with sanguine energy. In the final analysis he would define himself paradoxically a religious agnostic, open to the appeal of not strictly Christian religion, but likewise to experiences varying from it markedly. Another aspect of his writing, also intrinsic to his personality, is that it frequently opens up dangerous rifts in experience, gaping emotional lacunae, which he also perceives in civilization and most often expounds without attempting to safely close. His writing bears witness to a crisis in contemporary culture. The political element of his work takes the form of simultaneous invocation of peace and detestation of violence and a mature

awareness that when the enemy, such as that we are facing at the moment, is particularly pernicious there is no alternative to corrective warfare. One last dominant element of his writing is the poetry of love, which comes from a long tradition and very much speaks for itself.

August Thunder

And now it is coming to the boil, time's brew, bellowing,
August storms barracking across the bay, throwing out
its leaden arms, dead weight of muggy strands,
to the violet combustion of the godhead, a hooded eye
hanging over the sound, the bay begging some residual mercy
for a season sinning to the glut, from the flame, the hooded eye,
some mercy for this time that seems more and more to be
the catastrophe of time, these storms, these muggy strands,
Love, where we have still found each other in our latter time
as babes in the wood, in the jewelled garden of Arcady,
virgin skin clearing from the burnt pellicle in candid complexions
of pardon, the hooded eye opening, suddenly, and a breeze,
suddenly, spreading gold dust over the strands washed
by cleansing waters of remembered innocence
of our long season's crimes, forgotten like taloned footprints
erased in the baptismal waters of a long season's
forgiveness. What remembrance, like a fountain flowing
with unsullied waters, of the Age of Gold, its gold dust
intimated in a Pentecostal breeze lifting the sand,
intimating a voice he hears in the wind as he stares from stone,
water and wind and the prophet staring from stone
at the voice in the wind blasting a season's surfeit;
what recognition, like a source rising to the surface,
of the word in the breeze patterning the strand
with ciphers of unpronounceable speech heralding
the advent of August thunder, of the word, of the year turning,
of this word returning in the wind, in the waters, in the thunder.

Outdoor Bar

Time was, a century's life ago, when I was liege of the limbs of gold,
vanished from Arcady with the seasons' turn, the decades
turning their eyes upward to the billowing powder clouds of war,
where in the outdoor bar, over my café latte, I dwell

on the fleetingness of life, of a dream we were born wailing to dream
and must weep, with each death, to keening's end.
Yet I am no subaltern of history and time, with these light measures
I take against night sentences coming down and war
unleashed like the tiger on the insouciant flock.
Rather, scribe of infinity, eyes turned to azure in hibernal depth,
I count the beads of illumination, clasped together by love,
no pendant of a dying man, but necklace adorning
a human throat, breathing out the warmth of our lives,
whilst the prophets tone, the executioner leers,
and memory returns to the summer of Arcady, when none of this
had yet become, lolling in nonchalance beneath the rays of a Midas sun
turning our virgin limbs to passionate gold, unforgotten
in this winter of unrelenting sun, Arcady's own,
where fowl come to the hand in the cooing peace
of resurrected time, of time redeemed by footsteps
defiant in the sand, where the dead beach in candidness of bone,
chanting paeans of springs to come when, in their flesh,
they will stalk pubescent down the strands of love,
of love awakening, like the gull wing rising over the sound.
No subaltern of history and time, this speaks
of the enduringness of death and life, the white-clad bride
descending in this hymeneal of my mind and light
in jurisdictions of Arcady, where dogs bark beyond the welded gate,
where wars wage elsewhere in the fanatic's sights, in his time's death.

Paragon

Simulacrum of destiny in the fleeting eyes of a smile,
the fugitive lilt of a voice down the sky waves
from the sun-bathed bed chambers of Arcady
where your lazing hand would deign the receiver
to here where my umbral expectation hangs
on your distant rising, your break of day,
suns imagined down night's sole silence,
darkness where you did not speak, music,
on frequencies beneath hearing, in the darkness,
sang love, spurned, undeclared, in this spectral snow
obscuring sun's elucidation of the explicit flower.
My call is cataclysmic with desire, catastrophic
in the crimson heat of the life-entailing wire
that alone warms this spectral snow, my night's

winter journey, dreaming of meridional dawn
and the catharsis of your voice, broken with the sun,
melting my garden into scarlet tubers' opening lips
feeding on the light, enlightenment
of your lucent tone, the solar image of your scent,
Dam, you who do not exist, but in this call
rising, void-spanning albatross, over the sound
where my bows test the waters in this day's
still another setting-forth, sail fed by your thought,
to where I imagine the paragon has passed
lilies flourishing in the daylight of her path.

Wang Ping

Wang Ping was born in China and came to the U.S. in 1986. Her publications of poetry and prose include *American Visa*, *Foreign Devil*, *Of Flesh and Spirit*, *New Generation: Poetry from China Today, Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China, The Magic Whip, The Dragon Emperor, The Last Communist Virgin, Flashcards: Poems by Yu Jian.* She won the Eugene Kayden Award for the Best Book in Humanities and is the recipient of NEA, the Bush Artist Fellowship for poetry, the McKnight Fellowship for non-fiction, and many others. She received her Distinct Immigrant Award in 2014, and Venezuela International Poet of Honor in 2015. She's also a photographer, installation artist. Her multi-media exhibitions include «Behind the Gate: After the Flood of the Three Gorges», «Kinship of Rivers» at schools, colleges, galleries, museums, lock and dams, and confluences along the Mississippi River. She is professor of English at Macalester College, founder and director of Kinship of Rivers project.

www.wangping.com
www.behindthegateexhibit.wangping.com
www.kinshipofrivers.org

A selection of Ping's sonnets is published here both in the original language and in Italian Translation.

Sonnets VIII, X, XIV have been translated by Margherita Orsi who was born in Castel San Pietro Terme (BO) in July 1993. She obtained a BA *cum laude* from the University of Bologna in Foreign Languages and Literatures. She spent the academic year 2013/2014 in Erasmus at Trinity College, Dublin. She has attended several courses on translation taught by important Italian translators, such as Matteo Colombo, Simone Barillari e Franca Cavagnoli.

At present, she is registered on her second year of an MA in Linguistics and Translation at the University of Pisa.

Sonnets V, IX, XIII have been translated by Vanessa Montesi who was born in 1993 at Pergola, in the Marche Region. In 2015, she obtained a BA *cum laude* in Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Bologna. In January 2017, she completed an MA in Translation at the University of Sheffield, UK. At present she lives in Moscow where she teaches Italian and English.

Sonnet V

Who gave us the hand to feel your sublime?
Which hunter caught the fire in the bird's eye?
My lord, your falcon leads the path of ice and fire
The gate is open for those chosen to climb

The volcano came alive this morning
Glaciers slide into the womb of the earth
How do you stop a heart from trembling
As ice cuts into the fire of new birth

Along the wind path, Knight of thousand hearts
In the East Sea, Maiden of thousand hands
Mist wraps the islands and your boat of glass
The horse calls his master from distant lands

The warrior draws his sword from Arthur's Seat
How do you keep the same, back from the deep?

Sonetto V

Chi ci diede mani per sentire il tuo sublime
Quale cacciatore colse la fiamma nelle pupille del falco?
Mio signore, è il tuo falco a svelare il cammino di gelo e fiamme
Scelti per la scalata, il cancello si spalanca

Il vulcano si è risvegliato questa mattina
Ghiacciai scivolano e scompaiono nel ventre della terra
Come fermi il fremere di un cuore
Mentre ghiaccio si insinua nelle fiamme di vita nuova

Lungo il cammino ventoso, Cavaliere di mille cuori
Nel mare d'oriente, Signora di mille mani
Avvolte nella foschia le isole e la tua barca di cristallo
Da terre remote richiama il cavallo il cavaliere

Il guerriero estrae la spada dal trono di Artù
Come fai a rimanere te stesso, risalendo dalle profondità?

Sonnet VIII

You hold it to this place-- this beat, this truth
Wild turkey for guests, yam in sweet rice stuffing
Peacock dance, flamenco hands, sorghum spirits soothe
Strayed ghosts. In China, there's no Thanksgiving
Good words flow from glass to glass. Ten thousand geese
In the sky, ten thousand whales from north to south
Sounds of flute, a pining soul no one can appease
A lover turned into a stone at the river's mouth
A crazed mother, crying for her burst bubble
Breaths of taichi, circling with phoenix flows
What arrows can silence your fire? A true singer
Soars over the cawing of ten thousand crows

We feed ghosts to kill an inherited shame
Nobody claims rivers at the endgame

Sonetto VIII

Lo ancori in questo luogo: questo battito, questa verità
Tacchino selvatico per gli ospiti, patate dolci ripiene di riso
Danza di pavone, mani di flamenco, spiriti di sorgo acquietano
Fantasmi randagi. In Cina non c'è il Ringraziamento
Le belle parole rimbalzano sui calici. Diecimila oche
Nel cielo, diecimila balene da nord a sud
Note di flauto, un animo straziato che nulla rasserena
Un amante mutato in pietra alla foce del fiume
Una madre impazzita piange l'infrangersi del proprio turgore
Respiri di Tai Chi volteggiano in flutti di fenice
Quali frecce spengono il vostro fuoco? Un vero cantore
Si libra nel gracchiare di diecimila corvi

Nutriamo fantasmi per uccidere una colpa ricevuta in eredità
Nessuno rivendica i fiumi, in realtà

Sonnet IX

No one claims rivers at the end of game
Swans trumpet from Head of the Mississippi
Along the trails—snow, dogs, woodpeckers--same
Difference as children slide with whoopee
Laugh, and rivers rumble like summer nights
On sandstone bluffs, lovers watch crew boats dart
Like insects. Walking on water is not a sleight
Of hands but an instinct, echoes of distant stars
And sturgeons charging without food or sleep
Keep going, says the master, one stroke at a time
Breathe between waves…his voice steep
from tumors, yet he stands, furious and sublime

What arrow points us to grace, here and now?
A swan's touch, neck bending into a bow

Sonetto IX

Nessuno rivendica i fiumi, in realtà
Cigni strombazzano alla Fonte del Mississippi
Gettandosi giù per il tracciato – neve, cani, picchi –
Così i bambini scivolano in cinguettii
E il fiume romba come notti d'estate
Su scogliere d'arena. Come insetti
Guizzano i marinai di fronte agli occhi degli amanti
Non è farsa il camminare sull'acqua
Ma istinto, echi distanti di stelle
E storioni in cerca di cibo o riposo
Non mollare, dice il maestro, un remo alla volta,
Respira tra le onde… la sua voce emerge
Dal dolore, eppure si staglia, furioso e sublime

Quale freccia ci rivelerà alla grazia, adesso?
Il tocco di un cigno, il collo flesso in un inchino

Sonnet X

A swan's touch, neck bending into a bow
A storm without premonition: pines, oaks, alders
Ancient dreams—snapped at the waist, chopped trailers
All the trees that should have been down are down
Said Ranger Bob, his oars dipping like wings of falcon
In the river, mussels lure for hungry fish, shooting eggs
Into their gills—teeth to hang on, and legs
To go home. The St. Croix unfolds a silk ribbon
Our boat cuts—no sound of humans—only turtles bathing
On rocks, and horseflies taking chunks of meat!
Our breath moves with the damselflies—their wings
Of butterfly, neon turquoise & black so sweet

We raise our oars to follow summer flood
The river runs through us—our kin, our blood

Sonetto X

Il tocco di un cigno, un collo flesso in un inchino
Tempesta inaspettata: pini, querce, ontani
Sogni antichi: azzannati alla cintola, viticci spezzati
Tutti gli alberi che dovevano essere abbattuti giacciono a terra
Disse Ranger Bob, i remi calavano come ali di falco
Nel fiume, i mitili sono esche per pesci affamati, sputano uova
Nelle loro branchie – denti per restare aggrappati, e gambe
Per tornare a casa. Il Saint Croix srotola un nastro di seta
Che s'increspa sotto la barca – non suono d'umani – ma tartarughe bagnanti
Sulle rocce, e tafani a mordere le loro carni!
Il nostro respiro danza con le libellule; le loro ali
Di farfalla, azzurro cielo e dolce carbone

Alziamo i remi e seguiamo d'estate la corrente
Il fiume ci scorre attraverso – è il nostro sangue, la nostra gente

Sonnet XIII

For Chen Guangcheng, the Blind Lawyer from China

This is my eye—blindly—in the river wild and fast
Through the steely gaze, towards a promised freedom

Rumors storm, back and forth, between ocean currents
Machines clank to grind a small man's plea for freedom

Not for asylum or paradise, not for money or fame
All I want is a room in this giant country, a freedom

To take children to school, to guide my sisters out
Of the maze, free to be mothers again, free

To raise the young, grow old in peace, a place where
Hunger, prison or death can't blackmail freedom

Where the poor, the blind, the colored, the small
Can live in dignity and joy. Freedom is never free

Must pave with eyes, ears, hands…brick by brick
With a heart willing to bleed till it breaks free

Sonetto XIII

Per Chen Guangcheng, l'avvocato cieco dalla Cina

Questa è il mio sguardo – cieco – nel flusso furioso del fiume
Trapassata da occhi d'acciaio, rivolta ad una libertà promessa

Sussurri in tempesta, avanti e indietro tra correnti oceaniche
macchine sferraglianti squarciano preghiere per la libertà

Non asilo o paradiso, non ricchezza o fama
Io chiedo. Un po' di posto in questo paese – enorme – un po' di libertà

Poter portare i miei figli a scuola e le mie sorelle
Oltre il labirinto, libere di essere ancora madre, libertà

Di crescere bambini e invecchiare in pace, un po' di posto
Dove fame, prigionia e morte non spaventino la libertà

Dove il povero, il cieco, il nero, il piccolo
Possano vivere in dignità e gioia. Non è mai gratuita la libertà

La cementi con occhi, orecchie, mani… mattone dopo mattone
Con un cuore disposto a sanguinare per liberarsi

Sonnet XIV

A heart willing to bleed till it breaks free
The air drags daggers through nose, lungs, spleen
Across Duluth streets—flashflood, raging trees
At Fort Collins, wrathful gods for our deeds
The spill sprayed with dispersants, black turned white
No flies would lay lava, rotten ships, reeds…
"We're eatin their evidence!" shouts Waddle
Thrusting a shrimp with deformed brain, legs, seeds
All the blood wants is flowing to the heart
All the rivers dream is running to the sea
A thousand flags, a thousand hearts and hands
The road ends here, splits into a bird's feet

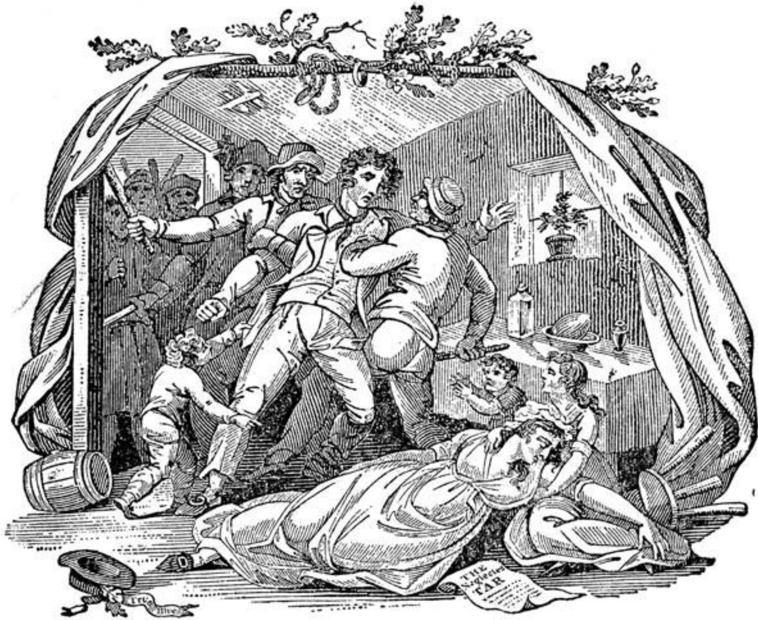
Please forgive what we made with our greed
Let rivers move without our want or need

Sonetto XIV

Un cuore disposto a sanguinare per liberarsi
L'aria striscia sciabole nel naso, nella milza, nei polmoni
Lungo le strade di Duluth – inondazione che infuria sugli alberi
Di Fort Collins, dèi irati per i nostri misfatti
Il liquido si sparse coi disperdenti, il nero mutò in bianco
Quale mosca deporrebbe lava, lame, relitti...
"Stiamo mangiando le prove!" strilla Waddle
E infilza un gambero con zampe, cervello, semi deformi
Il sangue brama soltanto di fluire fino al cuore
I fiumi sognano soltanto di scorrere sino al mare
Mille bandiere, mille cuori e mani
La strada finisce qui, divisa in zampe d'uccello

Ti prego, perdona le colpe della nostra avidità
Lascia che i fiumi si muovano senza il nostro bisogno, la nostra volontà

Recensioni



Desde da Bagni, *Quell'albero di Casumaro…*, Cento, Edizioni Freccia d'oro, 2015, pp. 204, ISBN 9788897877615.

Il libro di memorie autobiografiche *Quell'albero di Casumaro...* di Desde da Bagni [pseudonimo di Beatrice Battaglia] copre un arco temporale che va dai primi del Novecento fino alla fine degli anni '50, offrendo uno spaccato della società dell'epoca prima della sua trasformazione da agricola a industriale. Con uno sguardo ad ampio raggio, con echi ottocenteschi e riflessi nel secolo presente, assume quindi un taglio epico e favoloso, anche se il focus centrale è proiettato sugli anni del dopoguerra, quando l'autrice bambina si affaccia alla vita circondata dall'affetto dei suoi cari.

Quell'albero di Casumaro [un antico paese sul confine tra le province di Ferrara e Modena]: un albero che ha continuato a fruttificare perché le radici erano solide e profonde...

Siamo negli anni dell'immediato secondo dopoguerra, quando la vita di una piccola ma variegata comunità di campagna emerge con splendente nitore dal viaggio a ritroso nella memoria di una donna, Beatrice, che non ha mai dimenticato né disperso le sue preziose, robuste e insostituibili radici casumaresi. Di lì a poco scomparirà tutto un mondo vitale e animato, brulicante di fatiche, di lotte e di passioni, nel gran teatro della natura ancora intatta, non prima però di avere depositato nel cuore dell'autrice la fiamma sempre accesa del ricordo, non prima di avere inoculato in lei il germe acuto della nostalgia.

Ricordare è doloroso ma necessario e vivificante per l'autrice, per dare alla luce se stessa e la sua più autentica identità, per trovare finalmente quella pace e quella leggerezza a cui, da sempre, la sua condizione di esule dolente aspirava [pp. 4, 168, 173]. La nostalgia può essere vertiginoso e straziante dolore, ma può anche essere sguardo sognante addolcito dalla possibilità di ristorarsi alla fonte, alla fonte del tempo che si credeva perduto e che invece viene ritrovato e assaporato, quanto più ci si allontana da ciò che fu. C'è un filo incandescente che collega il passato al presente, il vicino al lontano. La poetica della reminiscenza ne impedisce l'estinzione, coltivando la ricerca della sua insostituibile fragranza [pp. 96-97].

In quel tempo mitico, tutto è circonfuso da un alone poetico, pieno di sapori e di saperi, di profumi e di suoni. Le voci di uomini e animali, le voci delle piante, rimandate dal passato, si levano a comporsi in un'orchestra corale che accende le emozioni, che risveglia antichi affetti, vissuti in solitudine o condivisi. Ma non è quella di Desde da Bagni una visione edulcorata e artificiosa della realtà contadina dell'epoca. Infatti, nell'inseguire il suo sogno nostalgico lungo i sentieri del cuore che sospinge la memoria e la incalza fino a dispiegarsi in tutta la sua potenza evocativa iconica e musicale, affonda la lama della sua lucida e coraggiosa visione anche in quelli che erano i lati penosi, oscuri e inquietanti del mondo contadino: la miseria, la fatica, la violenza, la perversione, l'avidità, l'invidia...

Eppure, che cosa differenzia il Male dell'epoca preindustriale rispetto a quello di oggi, a parte la quantità che è cresciuta in modo esponenziale? Il fatto che allora non si fosse ancora verificata quell'osmosi, quell'omologazione al ribasso che caratterizza e connota, inquinandola, la società odierna. Allora, il Male e il Bene erano entità più distinte e separate. Il primo si produceva come un frutto bacato della Terra, della grande madre che tutti nutriva. Il resto non ne veniva necessariamente contaminato, malgrado la rischiosa contiguità. Oggi invece tutto è confuso, rimescolato, compromesso, reso ambiguo dalla onnivora società del benessere e dell'opulenza che ha contagiato tutto e tutti. Il Male si nasconde sotto mentite spoglie e il Bene ha visto offuscarsi la sua verginità primigenia.

L'autrice ha il grande merito di condurci laddove si può ancora assaporare e gustare la più genuina produzione della Gran Madre Terra, della nutrice che tutti ci ha sfamato e dissetato, con i suoi doni ciclici e generosi, laddove esiste ancora l'anima parlante delle cose, lo "Spirito del luogo", con la sua lingua dialettale umorosa e sapida, prima che tutto venga fagocitato dalla "cacca di Satana", dal dio denaro e dalle sue depravazioni.

Quell'albero di Casumaro ha continuato a prolificare durante lo scorrere del tempo, pur dopo l'abbandono dei luoghi, delle cose, delle persone, della Natura selvaggia e seducente. Ha continuato a produrre linfa e foglie, profumi e suoni; ha tenuto accesa la lampada del cuore, il battito che conta le ore, i giorni, i mesi, gli anni, raccogliendo e radunando gli sparsi ma tenaci ricordi, fino a ricomporli in un quadro impressionista, in un insieme delicato e pulsante che, a un certo punto, non può che sfociare e confluire nel fiume carsico del racconto, nello snodarsi affabulante e febbrile dell'emozionante percorso a ritroso.

Su tutto questo "mondo antico" impreziosito dalla memoria, emerge, come un'ottocentesca eroina, poetica ma concreta, servizievole ma intimamente indipendente, appassionata ma equilibrata, generosa ma anche prudente e conservatrice, fervida amante della Natura, silenziosa e assidua Vestale degli affetti, la zia Dèsde, grande *alter ego* dell'autrice, mèntore della sua giovinezza, protagonista discreta ma indiscussa del piccolo universo familiare entro il quale cresce e si alimenta la sensibilità e l'immaginazione creativa della narratrice, un fiore che sboccerà in tutta la sua limpida grandezza, grazie alle cure costanti e all'esempio umile ma sincero e genuino di questa affascinante figura femminile che ha lasciato un'impronta così durevole e significativa sulla sua personalità, tanto da spingerla ad assumerne il nome come pseudonimo, a voler sottolineare le affinità elettive e la sostanziale comune identità valoriale, ideale, caratteriale e affettiva.

La Dèsde riecheggia, con originali e personalissime varianti di stampo locale, i personaggi vittoriani della letteratura romantica inglese [p. 16, 62], sullo sfondo di una campagna che ha i caratteri universali della bellezza incontaminata, come paradiso perduto e sempre rimpianto e vagheggiato [pp. 94-95]. In un'epoca in cui il femminismo, con le sue rivendicazioni dei diritti delle donne, con il suo anelito al riscatto da una sudditanza al patriarcato e al dispotismo maschile, è ancora imbozzolato e rinchiuso in un intimo

impedimento, la zia Dèsde, zitella per scelta d'amore [p. 31], ma a cui l'amore ha voltato le spalle, che sarebbe stata predestinata a fungere da umile gregaria e stampella delle esigenze del nucleo familiare che la ospita, come avrebbe voluto la cultura dell'epoca, riesce invece a ritagliarsi un ruolo autorevole e dignitosamente indipendente, un ruolo che le consente di essere rispettata senza doversi far temere [p. 101].

Grande ancella operosa e dispensatrice di attenzioni asciutte ma costanti e nutrienti, di gesti semplici ma efficaci, la zia Dèsde, creatura del cielo e della terra, "visadora" [p. 77] sospesa in un personale equilibrio tra mondo pagano e mondo cristiano, "ninfa dei prati e dei campi, incarnazione dello Spirito del luogo" [pp. 17, 69, 74, 94], assurge al ruolo di vera, grande educatrice per tutti, senza mai dare ordini ma sempre e solo con il suo esempio e la sua schietta testimonianza, diventando un ponte sicuro tra le generazioni [p. 64] e lasciando la scia profumata e musicata della sua semplice e poetica vita, come traccia fertile e profonda. Un'icona di garbo e gentilezza, sulla cui immagine non sbiadita dal tempo ma ravvivata dal ricordo, l'autrice tesserà e ricostruirà anche la propria vita, alla riscoperta del suo sé più vero e autentico.

All'ombra dei pioppi e delle robinie profumate, lungo i sentieri verdeggianti e risuonanti di fruscii, schiocchi, stridii, sibili, si realizza e si porta a compimento un'educazione che è, nello stesso tempo, naturale e sentimentale, laddove la Natura fertilizza, con il suo humus profumato e colorato, anche i sentimenti e le emozioni della piccola e sensibile Beatrice, facendo lievitare in lei quelle che saranno le premesse del suo sboccio di donna adulta rievocante e rimembrante con struggente nostalgia il mondo magico e perduto dell'infanzia, l'età dell'oro che ha disseminato le sue pepite nel tempo a segnare un legame luminoso con il passato, l'unico per cui valga la pena di ricordare e di vivere.

New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community. Edited by Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, xii +244 pp. ISBN 9781107031111. £67.00/ $103 hardback.

This collection presents twelve «New Essays on John Clare». The rationale behind the collection is simply that it is «high time for a newly commissioned set of critical essays on the poet» [8], more than two decades since the publication of the first major critical collection to focus on him was published; and following myriad new developments, directions and contexts in Clare scholarship. As editors Kövesi and McEathron write, these developments mean that «critical responses to Clare need no longer be framed by justifications of his work's value» [9] and being freed from this «helps us recognize the striking

variety of topics and issues to which Clare responded» [10]. The spirit of the collection is to look directly at and celebrate them.

Clare said that poetry «came to him whilst walking in the fields – that he kicked it out of the clods» [9] an image which resonates through the first three essays on «Poetry», for they all in some way speak to Clare's established interest in and revelation of what is hidden and secret in the natural world. Fiona Stafford, writing on colour, finds that Clare was drawn to the small «unassuming space […] to walk in and pursue a landscape beyond what was immediately visible»' [31], an aesthetic inspired by landscape art which she shows informs Clare's bird poems, full of suggested meaning and moments of promise to which his innovative use of colour is crucial. Clare's bird and nest poems are also the subject of Sarah M. Zimmerman's essay on «John Clare's Conspiracy», in which Clare's attraction to refuges, hiddenness and obscurity is explored in relation to privacy and endangered privacy within a historical and political context. In Adam Rounce's contribution on Clare and Cowper, it is this need for refuge, shielded by nature that largely connects the two poets, while it also reveals a difference. Clare's «hidden scenes of inspiration» [52] – yielding beauty and the divine in apparent mundanity and ugliness – offer genuine spiritual replenishment.

Space and place have a different significance in the second section «Culture». Clare has [of course] long been the subject of ecocritical readings, and John Burnside's experimental «polemic» urges «re-reading Clare», to move and provoke change in the current era of «novel and insidious enclosures at every level» [93]. An ecocritical context continues to inform Emma Mason's essay, «Ecology with religion: Kinship in John Clare», as she explores the connections between ecology and religion, with an emphasis on Clare's «aural imagining of nature» [99]. The essays then move from a natural to the critical terrain. As the introduction makes clear, this is a collection keenly aware the history of Clare scholarship – and its own place within it – as well as Clare's changing critical fortune. In different ways, the remaining essays explore this. McEathron examines the career of Frederick Martin, the author of the first biography of the poet, to do so, returning to the issues of class which dominate Clare's reception history. Kövesi's contribution then focuses on the importance of death in both Clare's poetry and responses to it to frame Clare's reception.

The third section, «Community», opens with Robert Heyes's manuscript work delineating Clare's natural history project. The clarifications he provides regarding the studies and notes collected by Margaret Grainger in her edition of Clare's natural history work are invaluable to our understanding of Clare as a natural historian. A rather different «community» is the subject Sam Ward's essay, «John Clare, Admiral Lord Radstock and the Queen Caroline affair», Clare's relationship with his patrons and publishers is the focus, used to present a new understanding of Clare in a political context. The final essay by

Richard Cronin considers Clare as an important contributor to the metropolitan *London Magazine*, a position won by his reputation as an artless and authentic peasant poet of the country, yet one which was ultimately to prove detrimental to Clare's long-term status.

This is thus a varied collection of excellent essays, surpassing its intention to chart «some of the breadth of Clare's diversity» [9]. As noted, the collection seeks to look directly at Clare's interests, and «to confront their inevitable remaking and appropriation in still-emerging contexts of reception» [10]. This seems peculiarly apt at a time which can see John Clare trending on Twitter, as the subject of the Radio 4 programme «In Our Time». A tweet advertising the programme asked, however: «John Clare: Great poet, or great peasant poet?», suggesting that some contexts are difficult to shift.

Bethan Roberts

Kate Rumbold, *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Cultures of Quotation from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. xi + 245. ISBN 9781107132405. £64.99/$99.99 hardback.

When David Garrick proclaimed Shakespeare «the god of our idolatry» in his *Ode* written for the 1769 Stratford Jubilee, he was not merely indulging in hyperbole but identifying the status of English literary deity that Shakespeare has continued to occupy. Lines and phrases from Shakespeare's many works are today repeated almost idiomatically, with the user often unaware of the original source; yet scholarly investigation into practices of such quotation remain surprisingly scarce. By exploring the quotation of Shakespearean texts during the late eighteenth century, at a time when the playwright's "divinity" was being established, Kate Rumbold's superb monograph provides an insightful and timely exploration of the ways in which such phrases and quotations became absorbed into the national consciousness. Furthermore, by tracing practices of quotation through the repetition of lines and phrases from the oeuvre of just one major writer, Rumbold's work has much to reveal regarding the way in which cultures of quotation underpinned many of the eighteenth century's most important works of prose fiction.

The subject is introduced with a detailed cataloguing of the ways in which Shakespearean quotations achieve popular currency. This includes both the most obvious means of transmission, such as editions and performances of Shakespeare plays, and less-expected methods such as periodicals and via anthologies of poetry or guides to poetic writing, for example Edward Bysshe's

Art of English Poetry. Through this erudite and exhaustive survey, Rumbold is able to demonstrate the ultimate importance of the novel as a way of reapplying Shakespearean quotations «to the specific situations of fictional characters» (p. 48). In the ensuing chapter, Rumbold proceeds with practical demonstrations of this reapplication in action. Beginning with the novelists Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Sarah Fielding, this section establishes the function of the novel as a space where Shakespeare's words «acquired moral authority» (p. 76). It is the incorporation of quotations that are then tested and proved by the novelist's own narrative, Rumbold argues, that «grant[s] specific phrases the force of moral truths» (p. 52).

This enhanced moral authority is further explored through an examination of the close relationship between the theatre and the novel. Accessing the similarities between the rising vogue for realism on both stage and page, Rumbold presents a nuanced and convincing assessment of the ways in which intertextuality and quotation encouraged audiences of both to regard the Shakespearean text as unrestricted to either medium. Yet this adulation of the great man is not without its eighteenth-century antithesis, as Rumbold proves in a chapter dedicated to an assessment of ways in which novelists of the time also access and exploit «the negative implications» of fashionable and overused quotations (p. 107). Laurence Sterne, Sarah Fielding, and Jane Austen are amongst those whose wry comment on popular practices of quotation come under inspection in this splendid demonstration of the full consequences of Shakespeare's textual popularity.

An entire chapter is similarly allowed for an absorbing and innovative examination of Shakespearean texts in Ann Radcliffe's epigraphic paratexts. Here, the strict focus upon Shakespeare does to some extent inhibit the possibility of making broader claims about the function of Radcliffe's epigraphs. Yet Rumbold is nonetheless able to make a significant contribution here to understanding the function of Radcliffe's epigraphic quotations as a means of «represent[ing] the unspoken thoughts and fears of her characters» (p. 135). This is contrasted with Austen, whose much less frequent use of Shakespearean quotation is the subject for the final chapter. Progressing beyond traditional identifications of Shakespearean parallels in Austen's plots, Rumbold points to Austen's absorption of the broader vogue for Shakespearean vocabulary and theatricality in fiction.

Although the rigid focus upon quotations from the work of one writer does occasionally limit the scope of Rumbold's argument, it is also one of the investigation's greatest strengths, since it provides the empirical framework necessary for the analysis of such a broad subject. Indeed, much of the nuanced brilliance is derived from the frequent incorporation of brief yet insightful glimpses of Shakespearean quotation in less canonical prose works of the period, including texts by writers such as Henry Brooke, Francis Coventry,

Eliza Haywood, Edward Kimber, Charlotte Lennox, and Clara Reeve. This supremely detailed and informative monograph is a pleasure to read, and more than merits its place amongst the foremost works of scholarship investigating Shakespeare in the eighteenth century.

Corrina Readioff

Elisabetta Marino, *La metamorfosi nella mente: i drammi a carattere mitologico di Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley, Mary Shelley*, Napoli, Loffredo, 2016, pp. 191, ISBN 978-88-99306-42-7, € 16,70.

Il crescente interesse nei confronti del teatro romantico inglese sviluppatosi nel corso degli ultimi decenni ha dato vita ad un intenso dibattito critico che ha portato alla riscoperta della produzione drammatica dell'epoca, divenuta oggetto di analisi da parte di numerosi studiosi e specialisti del settore. Tali ricerche hanno condotto ad un'importante rivalutazione delle opere teatrali del periodo romantico, trascurate e sottostimate per più di un secolo, ma anche alla nascita di un consistente corpus di testi critico-teorici che le analizzano e ne propongono nuove interpretazioni. È in questo contesto che si inserisce il bel lavoro di Elisabetta Marino, *La metamorfosi nella mente: i drammi a carattere mitologico di Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley, Mary Shelley* che si pone l'obiettivo di dimostrare come gli autori presi in esame abbiano utilizzato la scrittura teatrale per risvegliare le coscienze del pubblico, inserendo elementi di critica politica e sociale laddove la censura non sarebbe potuta intervenire. Il 'sottogenere' investigato dall'autrice è infatti quello del *mental theatre* – termine Byroniano spesso sinonimo del più noto *closet drama* – definito fin dall'introduzione come «il luogo ideale dal quale promuovere una rigenerazione profonda della società, partendo dalla metamorfosi che si sarebbe realizzata nella mente di ogni lettore» [p. 12].

Il testo parte da una panoramica della situazione socio-culturale e della scena teatrale all'inizio del diciannovesimo secolo, e si sofferma in maniera estremamente dettagliata su autori, opere, date, teatri e messe in scena. Tra i pregi del primo capitolo si annovera dunque l'accuratezza con cui è presentato il quadro generale, ma anche l'ampiezza dei riferimenti bibliografici; la lunga lista di fonti primarie e secondarie utilizzate denota la tendenza del volume all'intertestualità. Inoltre, risulta particolarmente interessante l'excursus sulla vita e la carriera della famosa attrice Sarah Siddons, nel quale si sottolinea, mettendo a frutto una prospettiva di genere, come ella abbia contribuito «a fare della scena a lei contemporanea il luogo in cui mettere in discussione modelli stereotipati di femminilità» [p. 37]. In maniera altrettanto intrigante, questa

breve digressione riporta particolari inediti riguardanti gli abiti indossati da Siddons durante le sue performances, tanto apprezzate da diventare iconiche. L'opposizione tra «stage and page» [p. 55] che da sempre caratterizza la critica del teatro romantico è riproposta e superata a fine capitolo, in cui appare chiara la posizione dell'autrice; «Lontano da qualsiasi tendenza intimistica, aristocratica o escapistica, il *mental theatre* dei romantici si presta ad essere letto come una ulteriore forma ibrida e sperimentale, sagacemente posta al di là del concetto stesso di *legittimo* e *illegittimo*, in cui il destinatario assume un ruolo primario» [p. 55].

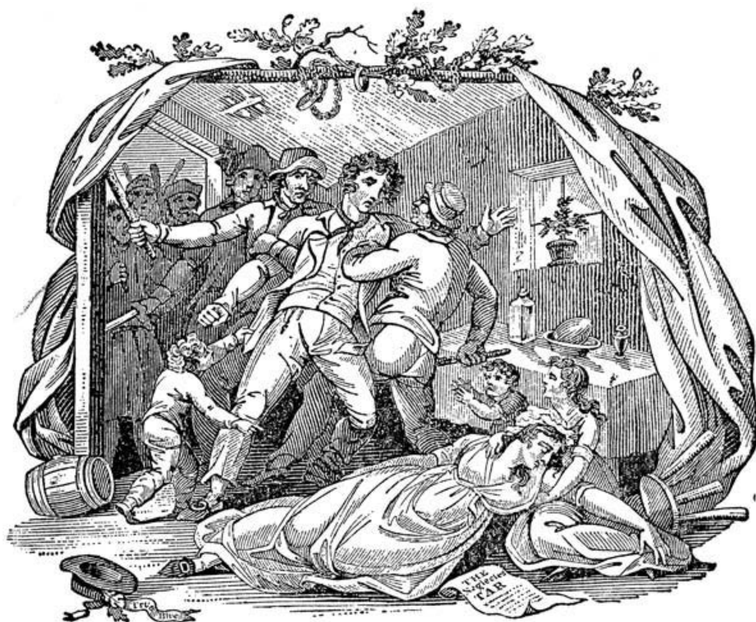
L'analisi dei drammi a carattere mitologico si sviluppa tra il secondo e l'ultimo capitolo, dando spazio a una breve introduzione sul rapporto tra autore e teatro, per poi concentrarsi interamente sulle opere prese in esame. La scelta di trattare alcune tra le pièces più conosciute di quattro fra i più noti scrittori romantici di inizio Ottocento potrebbe risultare rischiosa e ridondante, ma il taglio conferito al volume ne evidenzia invece l'originalità. La tematica che funge da filo conduttore è la mitologia classica, ravvisabile in tutti i titoli analizzati, seppur utilizzata in modalità e misure differenti all'interno dei vari testi. L'uso esplicito del mito, come nel caso di *Prometheus Unbound* e *Midas,* o di elementi caratteristici di esso, come ad esempio accade in *Manfred*, racchiudono intenti molto simili: spronare alla libertà di azione, di pensiero, di scelta, ribellandosi ad ogni tipo di tirannia. I riferimenti alla situazione politica contemporanea appaiono evidenti, seppur celati dietro ambientazioni arcadiche, come nel caso di *The Descent of Liberty,* in cui si allude alla figura di Napoleone, di Giorgio III e del Principe Reggente, o affidati a trasposizioni letterarie di personaggi esistenti, come esemplificato in *Oedipus Tyrannus; or Swellfoot the Tyrant*, nel quale «le corrispondenze tra Swellfoot e Giorgio IV, tra Iona Taurina e Carolina e tra il popolo affamato e i porci sono troppo palesi per passare inosservate» [p. 138]. Il *Leitmotiv* della libertà contro l'oppressione assume ulteriori connotazioni di genere nell'analisi dei due drammi composti da Mary Shelley. Di particolare interesse risulta l'interpretazione di *Proserpine,* in cui «pienamente consapevoli di sé, le donne ritratte dall'autrice non si abbandonano alla disperazione ma si impegnano per tracciare un nuovo destino che le emancipi dalla tragedia» [p. 156].

L'obiettivo che l'autrice si pone fin dall'introduzione al libro è pienamente raggiunto, e non delude. La trattazione comparata di una simile selezione di autori e opere, condotta attraverso la lente della mitologia classica, rappresenta senza dubbio la maggiore novità di questa pubblicazione. La correlazione tra la scena teatrale romantica di inizio Ottocento e la scelta dei drammaturghi analizzati di affidare al *mental theatre* la propria critica politica, e volontà di riforma sociale, è sviluppata e ampiamente giustificata nel corso del volume, così come chiara e comprensibile, nonché persuasiva, risulta l'analisi dei testi drammatici. La struttura del libro appare senza dubbio ben organizzata:

ognuno dei cinque capitoli in cui è diviso affronta una tematica monografica specifica, permettendo una lettura scorrevole ed una consultazione intuitiva e rapida. Inoltre, il linguaggio utilizzato e le molte precisazioni teoriche rendono possibile la comprensione del volume anche da parte di un pubblico non esperto del settore.

Valentina Pramaggiore

Notizie



International Conference

The Gothic Galaxy: Intersections and Metamorphoses
15-16 September 2016, University of Bologna (IT)

The conference explores the development of the Gothic imagination in English literature and other literatures in English between the 18th century and the present. Thanks to a trans-disciplinary perspective, the event aims to underline the connections between literature, theatre, painting, cinema and tv series, also in the light of gender studies. Tracing the development of the Gothic as a literary genre, starting from its originary debt to Shakespeare, panels will focus on the Romantic period, when women writers made a recurrent use of the Gothic to shed light on gender relations and conflicts. Other panels will investigate novels, drama, film and tv series to explore the dissemination of the Gothic in crime fiction, science fiction, utopia and dystopia. The scholars from European and American universities who will participate in this collective reassessment of the nature and impact of Gothic – also within the wider spheres of popular literature and culture – include Gioia Angeletti, Silvia Albertazzi, Maurizio Ascari, Serena Baiesi, Mirella Billi, Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Keir Elam, Carlotta Farese, Laura Falqui, Michael Gamer, Maurice Hindle, Anthony Mandal, Raffaele Milani, Franco Minganti, Rita Monticelli, David Levente Palatinus, Diego Saglia, Gino Scatasta, Maximiliaan van Woudenberg, Angela Wright.

Scientific board: Maurizio Ascari, Serena Baiesi, Francesca Saggini and Diego Saglia.

Doctoral Seminar

Women's Voices and Genealogies in Literary Studies in English
12-13 January 2017, University of Bologna (IT)

EDGES (PhD Curriculum in Women's and Gender Studies), GEMMA (Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies), CISR (Inter-University Centre for the Study of Romanticism) and the Centre for Research on Utopia have organised a Two-Day Doctoral Seminar at the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures to discuss "Women's Voices and Genealogies in Literary Studies in English".

International speakers include: Janet Todd (Emeritus Professor of Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge); Jacqueline Labbe (University of Sheffield) and Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace (Boston College).

Annual Lecture

2017 Mary Wollstonecraft: Life, Work and Legacy Conference
8 March 2017, University of Hull (UK)

As part of the celebrations for Hull as UK City of Culture 2017 the University of Hull is hosting an interdisciplinary celebration of the life, work and legacy of the political theorist and activist *Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797).* Wollstonecraft is most famous for her 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the first feminist political text. She also wrote novels, travel writing and other works of political philosophy. Her life, Virginia Woolf suggested, was ‘an experiment’. She mixed with fellow radicals and was in Paris to witness key events of the French revolution. In the words of the new edition of the *Vindication*, in the Penguin books *Great Ideas* series, she is one of ‘the great thinkers, pioneers, radicals and visionaries whose ideas shook civilisation and helped make us who we are’.

Mary Wollstonecraft spent her formative years in East Yorkshire (from the ages of nine to fifteen), longer than anywhere else in her life**.** It is said to be the only place she remembered with any affection. Initially the family farmed at Walkington*,* outside Beverley, but three years later took a house in the town centre.

Wollstonecraft has been honoured by the University since 2008 by an annual lecture named after her.

Conference Keynote Speakers:

- Professor Janet Todd OBE: distinguished biographer of Wollstonecraft, whose books include: *Mary Wollstonecraft : A Revolutionary Life*, and *The Complete Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*.
- Dr. Sandrine Berges: Wollstonecraft expert and lecturer in philosophy at Bilkent University, whose publications include The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 2013.
- Caroline Criado Perez: OBE**,** prominent campaigner for the memorialisation of women.
- Roberta Wedge: spokesperson for the high profile *Mary on the Green campaign* for the memorialisation of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Mary Wollstonecraft Annual Public Lecture Speaker:

- Professor Michèle Le Doeuff: one of the most important contemporary feminist philosophers. Her works include *The Philosophical Imaginary, Hipparchia’s Choice* and *The Sex of Knowing.*

NAVSA and AVSA Conference

NAVSA/AVSA Conference
17-20 May 2017, NYU's La Pietra campus in Florence (IT)

The event will be run together by NYU and Purdue University and will include a plenary lecture by Garrett Stewart, James O. Freedman Professor of Letters at the University of Iowa, as well as "material culture" workshops led by scholars mostly on aspects of the La Pietra collection, such as: Italian panel paintings, Flemish tapestries, Renaissance sculptures, French dresses, Art Nouveau silver, Chinese ceramics, and Baroque furniture. There will be no specific theme; however, the organizers would be particularly interested on topics such as: the Victorians in Italy, the representation of Italy in the nineteenth century, private collections, tourism, art, and garden design.
Workshop leaders include: Francesca Baldry (NYU, La Pietra), Dorothea Barrett (NYU, La Pietra), Cristina Bellini (NYU, La Pietra), Margherita Ciacci (NYU, La Pietra), Jay Clayton (Vanderbilt), Dino Franco Felluga (Purdue), Hilary Fraser (Birkbeck), Jessamyn Hatcher (NYU), Leah Price (Harvard), Jonah Siegel (Rutgers), and Garrett Stewart (University of Iowa).
In advance of the conference, Dino Franco Felluga and Catherine Robson will run a Professionalization Workshop for graduate students, like the one run successfully at the 2013 NAVSA/BAVS/AVSA conference in Venice, Italy.
The lead organizers of the conference are Dino Franco Felluga (Purdue) and Catherine Robson (NYU).

15th of BARS Biennial Conference

The 15th Biennial Conference of the British Association for Romantic Studies (BARS) will be hosted by the University of York's Centre of Eighteenth Century Studies and Department of English and Related Literature.
Romantic Improvement
27–30 July 2017, University of York, The King's Manor (UK)

The theme of this interdisciplinary conference is 'improvement', which marks a semantic field also encompassing cognate terms such as 'innovation', 'progress', and 'reform', all with implications across a range of discourses. The aim of the conference is to develop a collective investigation of the different but imbricated meanings of improvement in a period alternatively optimistic and pessimistic about its prospects in literary and other fields.

The keynote speakers for Romantic Improvement are Catherine Hall (UCL), Jon Klancher (Carnegie Mellon), Nigel Leask (Glasgow), and Jane Rendall (York).
The conference organisers are Mary Fairclough, Jon Mee, Deborah Russell, Jim Watt and Joanna Wharton.
Conference Website: https://bars2017.org/

International Conference

RA Conference 2017
Supernatural Romanticism
1-3 August 2017, Strasbourg, Alsace (FR)

The Romantic era was haunted by the past, by the spectres of revolution and violence, and even in a sense by the future. It was also beset with a unique set of intellectual problems arising from the clash between the religious past of European culture and an increasingly international understanding of human culture, the clash between scientific and other understandings of the world, and the clash within strains of thought that were at once universalising, and yet focused on the value of the individual.
These pressures in turn often fuel the peculiar nostalgia for sentimentalised medieval or ancient worlds, or rather for the spiritual hierarchies that could be derived from those mythic backgrounds. In at least some cases, the use of these mythic backgrounds leads into an interrogation of Europe's rich and conflicted theological past, as well as its rich and conflicted political past. Arguably, many of the strains of the «Supernatural» in Romantic culture function as explorations of this historical and intellectual background, whether consciously or unconsciously.
Some classic accounts of Romanticism engaged with the intellectual implications of the supernatural, or of depictions of the supernatural (M.H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company* and others). However, this has not been a major approach in recent years, and the older accounts stand in need of reconsideration, and of being placed in their own historical contexts.
Keynote Speakers: Frederick Burwick (UCLA), Susan Wolfson (Princeton)
All information can be found at www.romanticism55.com

International Conference and public participation

Bluecoat 300: Charity, Philanthropy and the Black Atlantic
Liverpool 24-25 November 2017
Conference: 24 November, Dr Martin Luther King Building; Public Participation: 25 November, Bluecoat Arts Centre
Keynote Speaker: Prof. Catherine Hall (UCL)

The weekend is set against the backdrop of two anniversaries in Liverpool: the tercentenary of the Bluecoat building, which was built in 1717 as a charity school for the poor, and has been a centre for the arts since 1907; and it is ten years since the International Slavery Museum opened. As part of the Bluecoat's year-long anniversary programme, one strand aims to reveal and evaluate the presence of slavery and the black Atlantic in the history of Bluecoat.

Like many Liverpool institutions founded in the 18th century, Bluecoat was built to a large degree with funds derived from the expanding port. Initial findings from recent research by Sophie Jones into the founding years of the school suggest that at least 65% of regular subscriptions were derived directly from trading in slaves or from trade in slave produce.

While slavery is often presumed to be opposite to or distant from the 'virtuous realm' of philanthropy, this conference takes Bluecoat as a symbol of a more challenging, apparently contradictory history. It looks to explore how slavery and the black Atlantic filtered through and shaped such areas as charity, philanthropy, religion, education, philosophy, culture, literature and art.

For more info, please contact Michael Morris (LJMU), Alan Rice (UCLAN), and Cindy Hamilton (Hope) on:

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In copertina: *Will Clewline. By Edward Rushton* (Published by Edward Rushton, Liverpool, March 1801, J. McCreery, Printer) - Reproduced from a facsimile edition (West Linton, Peeblesshire: Castlelaw Press, 1970)

ISSN 1125-0364