

From Coppet to Milan: Romantic Circles at *La Scala*

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When Percy Shelley left England and settled with Mary Godwin and Claire Clairmont at Maison Chapuis close to Villa Diodati in May 1816, his thoughts naturally turned to the people who were part of the coterie of European writers and artists visiting Switzerland during that Summer. As he wrote in a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg dated July 18, 1816: “Lord Byron, whom I have seen at this place, is about to publish a new canto of Childe Harold [...] Mad. de Stael [*sic*] is here & a number of literary people whom I have not seen, & indeed have no great curiosity to see” (493). Despite their strident disagreement over the merits of Byron’s entourage, Shelley’s words are suggestive of the significance of Switzerland as a centre of creativity and inspiration; it also becomes an important site to test authentic forms of sociability. John William Polidori’s diary entry for May 25, 1816 – written only few days after he arrived in Switzerland as Byron’s personal physician - retraces the footsteps of writers and philosophers interested in Swiss destinations: “It is a classic ground we go over. Buonaparte, Joseph, Bonnet, Necker, Staël, Voltaire, Rousseau, all have their villas (except Rousseau). Genthoud, Ferney, Coppet are close to the road” (96). This distinctive association of the biographical, the historical, and the geographical indicates the extent to which the Swiss experience can be seen as one of the first Romantic examples of influence and collaboration between British and European Romantic writers.

Byron rented Villa Diodati on June 10, 1816 and lived there with Polidori before receiving visits from Matthew ‘Monk’ Lewis on 14 August and from John Cam Hobhouse and Scrope B. Davies on 26 August, as recorded in Mary Shelley’s journals (107-31). During that Summer, Madame de Staël’s chateau of Coppet already housed a thriving literary circle honoured with visits from, among others, Ludovico Di Breme, Benjamin Constant, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and

Charles Victor de De Bonstetten. Polidori, Hobhouse, Scrope Davies and Byron himself were also assiduous visitors despite Byron's irreverent depiction of De Staël's salon as "overwhelming – an avalanche that buries one in glittering nonsense – all snow and sophistry", a world full "with a strange sprinkling – orators, dandies, and all kinds of *Blue*" whose behaviour while "sitting together, at dinner, always reminds me of the grave" (Moore 227; 211).<sup>1</sup> Thus, while the *heimlichian* experience of Villa Diodati can be interpreted as a model of Habermasian sociability as well as mutual collaboration and creativity that inspired a stream of writing, including Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III, *The Dream*, *Darkness*, *The Prisoner of Chillon* and *Manfred*, Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, its 'British' localism and insularity - reminiscent of the Lake School's domestic ideology - makes such a coterie national in its orientation when compared to the more diverse and cosmopolitan understanding of themes of democracy and liberty evinced by the distinctive Europeanness of the artists and intellectuals surrounding Madame de Staël's Enlightenment centre at Coppet.

Madame de Staël's notoriety, together with the popularity of Switzerland as a travel destination of the Grand Tour, meant that Coppet quickly became a popular site for both artists and writers, as during the Summer of 1816 when the British expatriates visited it. Germaine De Staël, whose exile started in Coppet as early as 1802, made of her salon a centre for liberal opposition where new ideas about literature, art, history, and politics were discussed, attracting the attention of Napoleon's secret police who scrutinised anyone who paid her a visit (Ellis 72-73). De Staël's salon was thus a breeding ground for progressive ideas, and the works that generated from her entourage appear to imaginatively colonise a landscape that is not only British and insular (as in the experience of Villa Diodati) but multicultural and European, as in the experience of Milan.

Because of the ongoing ideological and personal differences between himself and Byron, on October 1, 1816 Polidori left Switzerland for Milan, where he soon renewed friendship with Di Breme - whom he had met briefly at Coppet that Summer - and became acquainted with the expatriate French novelist Marie-Henri Beyle (Stendhal), as well as the Italian Romantics Vincenzo

Monti and Silvio Pellico. Byron and Hobhouse eventually moved to Milan that Autumn at a moment when the city acquired the role of a significant centre of European scholarly exchange, with intellectuals gathering around the boxes of *La Scala* theatre talking chiefly of literature, politics, and the current state of Italy. As much as Switzerland was divided in different states and under the French influence so was Italy under the Austrian regime. Italy's invasion by Napoleon's army up until 1814 had resulted in networks of improvements on every front (civic architecture, urban planning, intellectual and cultural life, and public transports) with Milan as capital. The strength of the Austrian control in Italy meant that the process of unification of the dismembered states was far in sight thus attracting the sympathies of rebel and liberal Romantic writers who yearned for its re-unification.

Milan's Opera House was not only a hub of radical sentiments and nationalistic sympathies for Romantic European intellectuals, but also a locus of literary and political friendships which can be interpreted as the result of a continuous allegiance to the Romantic sociability model, which develops rather than rejects eighteenth-century models of sympathetic identification and engagement in the public sphere. Furthermore, the *litterati* gathering in Milan exist not merely as distinct or solitary voices but rather as a self-consciously defined group, whose aim is to propose the usefulness of a mode of international Romantic sociability. The dynamic and shifting mediations between, within, and outside these associations and the ways in which the radical questions raised by the salon around Ludovico Di Breme in Milan - from the Classic-Romantic controversy to the Romantics' *émigré* experience as part of a complex and qualitative attempt to explain the significance of cosmopolitanism - found new answers in the work of Romantic European writers as in *The Diary of Dr John William Polidori 1816 – Relating to Byron, Shelley, etc.* (1816), Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV* (1818), Stendhal's *Rome, Naples and Florence* (1817) and "Reminiscences of Lord Byron in Italy" (1830). These works are read as legacies of the nature of creative experience originated during the Summer of 1816.

Despite having lost its title of capital of the Italian state, Milan in 1816 was still intellectually exciting and vibrantly stimulating. Its Opera House has been described by Stendhal in his travelogue *Rome, Naples, and Florence* as “the focal point of the entire city; ... the universal *salon*, the hub of society, which is here, and here *only*. [...] *Rendez-vous at La Scala* – such is the accepted convention for all manner of business” (7). These lines seamlessly encapsulate Jürgen Habermas’s dichotomy between the public and the private - what he has called “the sphere of private people coming together as public” (35) - and suggest that the theatre’s revolutionary gatherings were most strongly tested and put to the proof in the work of second-generation Romantics including Byron, Hobhouse, and Polidori. Andrew McConnell Stott in *Summer in The Shadow of Byron* (2015) considers in some detail the role of Polidori in the city and argues for his significance in the general climate of European Romanticism by calling him “The Hero of Milan” (186-207). Crucially, Polidori’s first diary entry for October 1, 1816 is representative of both his role as a tourist - “The streets are clean but narrow – fine houses – [...] Many palaces – [...]” - and also of what appears to be the centrality of the Opera House to Milanese life: “Afterwards put my things into a little order, dressed, and went strolling towards Teatro della Scala. [...] Immense theatre [...] *La Testa di Bronzo*, a ballet, and a comic ballet: the ballet the most magnificent thing I ever saw – splendid indeed” (168-9). With its Burkean magnitude and sublime architecture, *La Scala*’s “greatness of dimension” (Burke 69) is conveyed by its imposing structure as in this etching by eighteenth-century Milanese artist Domenico Aspari dated 1790, whose artistic grace captures the tranquil but industrious atmosphere of the theatre and of its surroundings (see Fig. 1). Like Aspari’s image, Polidori’s journal effectively exposes the majestic character of the theatre; it is also preoccupied with the vital, festive aspect of theatre-going in Italy, and concentrates on impressions of visual performance and representation.

Furthermore, Polidori’s reunion with Di Breme in Milan stresses the importance of friendship, and in particular of friendship dynamics within collaborative circles: “[De [*sic*] Breme] received me with two kisses and great apparent joy. About to learn English: I promised to help.

Walked with me and invited me to his box” (170). Yet, Polidori’s journal also depicts the public implications of friendship and the collaborative nature of social life in Milan; as Byron himself suggests “all society in Milan is carried on at the opera: they have private boxes, where they play at cards, or talk, or any thing else” (*BLJ* V, 125). In a post-Habermasian guise, this pattern of association of the boxes in the Opera Theatre as a private, small, domestic, and typically enclosed space contrasts the much wider public dimension of the theatre itself.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between the private and the public – between the protected and unprotected – which is most prominently and consistently felt in *La Scala* can also be read along gendered lines: the private realm of the boxes as a female sphere, the public as a male one.<sup>3</sup> *La Scala* becomes a liminal space between binaries such as public and private, high and low, here and there, male and female. As a place, it is also known for its music, or rather the relation between music, ethical community, and historical consciousness. The Opera Theatre and the experience of the exiles gathering there is dominated by material signs of exclusion and separation such as the curtains of the boxes, and accompanying images of being shut out from the rest of the theatre and the music around.

The boxes at *La Scala* were a favourable place from where to listen to the music, whose abstract form had the unique ability to reach the masses. The immense popularity (it was shown at *La Scala* 47 times in 1816) of Carlo Evasio Soliva’s heroic-comic melodrama *La Testa di Bronzo* – mistakenly believed by Polidori, in the diary entry above, to be a ballet – alludes to the historical and political climate of the time despite its light-hearted undertones. Set in Presburg (where the homonymous treaty was signed on December 26, 1805 between Napoleon and Francis II as a consequence of the French victories over the Austrians at Ulm and Austerlitz), the opera narrates the story of the wedding between the Prince of Presburg Adolfo with the Polish countess Floresca, thus indicating both the union of the two countries through the marriage of their rulers (see Portinari 41-42). Felice Romani managed to inject oblique political references into his libretto for *La Testa di Bronzo*. In this way, words and music provided rhythms for political and subversive discourses in

Mr Di Breme's box, where the audience would have understood the familiar historical references of the opera's content and their association to the Austrian occupation of Italy.

According to John Rosselli, it was opera that towards the end of the eighteenth-century "was Italy's best-known product. It was also the centre of social life for the educated classes, even in troubled times, unless fighting was actually going on in the streets" (160). Liberals and conservatives in attendance believed in the capacity of music to affect its listeners and to bind participants together in celebrations of community, nationhood, and identity. Music is also, however, the emblem of an emerging sense of European-ness. While concerned with the defence of national interests, the elite around *La Scala* was receptive towards the foreign visitors devotionally involved in the Italian cause. In his explanation of the concept of "transgression" of music in *Musical Elaborations* (1991), Edward Said has astutely pointed out that transgression is a "faculty" designed "to travel, cross over, drift from place to place in a society" (xv), thus problematizing the constitutive relationship between music and society, which takes account of the aesthetic and political undertones of the work of art itself and of the active value that transcends the act of listening. Notwithstanding the potential for political discussion and unrest, these networks of 'educated classes' gathering in the boxes remain safe from the suspicion of the police and from censorship even though their behaviour has much in common with groups of *Carbonari* acting secretly rather than genuine music lovers.

Polidori and Di Breme were preoccupied with the politics of a post-napoleonic Italy and they yearned to see it made up of free, independent nations: "De Breme is violently for the independence of Italy" (Polidori 176). Yet, the set of ideas and concerns emerging from those gatherings were more cosmopolitan in tone, and mainly related to the aftermath of the French and American Revolutions and the Napoleonic wars. Even Di Breme's Casa Roma - which I see as an example of public rather than private sphere engagement, in that individuals were coming together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action - was a place where people were talking chiefly about their growing anxiety for the destiny

of Europe rather than solely about Italian politics, as when a dinner was given in honour of Byron: “the dinner was very elegant, and we were very merry, talking chiefly of literature, Castlereagh, Burghersh,<sup>4</sup> etc. we got up immediately after dinner, and went to coffee; thence most to the theatre” (Polidori 174). These disparate and vivid discussions about the culture, politics, and music of the time relate to the cosmopolitan ethos involved in debates about both British and Italian culture and politics. Like Leigh Hunt’s letter to Byron written from Hampstead on February 1, 1816 - “what you say about politics is quite worthy of your spirit & cosmopolitanism” (Webb 250) – the transnational atmosphere surrounding *La Scala* results in a communal, inter-European acceptance of public and social commitments, and befits a larger act of political and cultural self-definition: cosmopolitanism postulates a universal interest in rights and justice that is necessary to the pursuit of national interests.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, although for Polidori the experience of Milan was “most happy and pleasant ..., Monsignor de [*sic*] Breme taking great friendship for me”, its main significance lies in the European potential of political forms of sociability and creativity: “My friends and acquaintances were de Breme, Beyle [later known as Stendhal], Byron, Hobhouse, Lord Cowper, Lord Jersey, etc.” (173). With reference to all these peoples and their cultures, some critics have purposefully suggested the way in which the radical culture and national politics rotating around the Di Breme’s liberal *Società Romantica* had a much wider European and cosmopolitan appeal because of its association with the leading Italian nationalist-in-exile Ugo Foscolo (McConnell Stott 189), who, in order to escape Austrian persecutions, fled to England on self-imposed exile in 1816 to become an affiliate of the Whig salon of Holland House among personalities such as Moore, Rogers, Campbell, Crabb, Wordsworth and Scott. Italian political exiles seeking refuge in England from the reactionary government restored in Italy by the Congress of Vienna could not but attract attention and Foscolo’s flattering welcome at Holland House reflected English sympathy for Italy’s political situation.<sup>6</sup>

While culture and leisure activities are characteristic of the identity of the city, Milan also embodies the difficulties of an unstable political situation. As a city, it becomes a site of tyranny, oppressiveness, and dictatorship. The stark discrepancy between the seemingly carefree life in the boxes and the scrutinised world outside of them is reflected in the subdivision of the theatre into pit, stalls, circle, upper circle, and gallery, thus suggesting that key differences in the hierarchical nature of society were a common practice. This is shown by the celebrated quarrel in the pit of *La Scala* of October 27, 1816 when, while watching the ballet *Il Duca di Alcantado* with Hobhouse and Pietro Borsieri, Polidori began to complain loudly about the presence of so many Austrian soldiers in the theatre, a sign of political restriction in what was otherwise a natural form of entertainment. Polidori (as well as Byron and Stendhal) records in his diary his exchange of opinions with one of the soldiers: “would you do me the favour of taking off your hat, so that I may see?” (186n).<sup>7</sup> Despite their irreverent tone, Polidori’s words are not only indicative of his anti-Austrian feelings but they also advocate an uneasy tension between their apparent association with the domains of music, literature, and creativity with the young physician’s apparent desire to indirectly revise and reformulate European history and politics. John Rosselli has reminded us that “it was common for members of the public to be arrested for obstreperous whistling”. This demonstrates how much “the paternal authority of government” and its “regulatory powers affected musicians in all sorts of ways” (182). Polidori’s actions, which costed him his expulsion from the region, are dramatically suspended in time and place: like the music in the Opera House which accompanies divisions and struggles inside the tormented order of a community, the audience’s entertainment becomes Polidori’s call for revolution, and for some both at once.

The destiny of Italy and its subjugation to Austrian forces is also the focus of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* Canto IV – which, born from Byron’s Italian experience, represents a crucial instance for the current history of Europe, because it made Italy’s subjugation to the foreign troops imaginatively available to a large audience: “and now the Austrian reigns - / An Emperor tramples where an Emperor knelt; / Kingdoms are shrunk to provinces, and chains / Clank over sceptred

cities; Nations melt / From power's high pinnacle" (IV.12.100-104). It also indicates the influential role and enthusiasm that Byron had in the Italian 'cause' and its liberation from Austria when Italy had lost the gloss of both its liberty and integrity: "Yet, Freedom ! yet thy banner, torn, but flying, / Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind" (IV.98.874-76). Jane Stabler has recently queried the relationship between Byron's Italian exile and the poetry born out of this experience (1-40). In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto IV Byron, as an exile in Italy, reacts quickly and effectively to Italian subjugation, silencing the Austrians with counter-battery poetry. Northern Italy's invasion by the Austrians had resulted in a real shock to liberal-minded European writers, and Byron's invocation of "The commonwealth of kings" (IV.26.226) whose "Fall'n states and buried greatness, o'er a land / Which *was* the mightiest in its old command, / And *is* the loveliest, and must ever be" (IV.25.220-2) validates his desire for a restoration of the liberties and natural rights associated with the uprisings in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia which had disappeared, thus linking his fascination with the past and its ruins with his democratic ideals. In this way, *Childe Harold* IV represents more than a political critique; it is the cry of a poet extolling his country of adoption to avenge the usurpation of its freedom by an imposter.

Milan and its Opera House, moreover, were much more than simply English and Italian relations and *vice versa*. In a way that recalls Coppet's transnational sociability model, the city was open to broader inter European encounters. In 1816, Stendhal and De Musset had travelled from France to Milan, where they met Byron when Polidori was arrested and were immediately adopted by the Italian *literati*. As seen above, Stendhal's views represent a nostalgic lament for the atmosphere surrounding what he calls in *Rome, Naples and Florence* "the finest opera-house in the world, because no other on earth can conjure up so much pure pleasure through the medium of music" (7-8). Stendhal's attitude towards Milanese life can be interpreted as a model of European intellectual and literary sociability which emphasises the value not only of French-Italian relations but also of a transnational and more global Romanticism as when he suggests that: "against the background of this lying and hypocritical generation ('this age of cant\*', says Lord Byron), such

wild displays of primitive and unsophisticated behaviour in the midst of the wealthiest and most aristocratic *élite* of Milanese society left so undeniably an impression on my mind, that I conceived the notion of coming to settle in Italy for good” (33-34). It was in Italy with Di Breme that Stendhal welcomed the opportunity to enjoy life in Milan and, with Byron already in mind, he found the Opera House attractive primarily because of its function as a social centre.

On October 17, 1816 Stendhal attended a dinner party at Di Breme’s Casa Roma, where Lord Byron was a guest of honour. Apparently, they were not introduced, but six days later, at Stendhal’s request, they met formally in the marquis’s box at *La Scala* during a performance of the opera *Elena* by the Italian opera composer of German origin Johann Simon Mayr. Stendhal recalls that “I was listening to the music when M. de Breme [*sic*] said to me, indicating my neighbour, ‘Monsieur Beyle, this is Lord Byron’” (*HVSV* 196). Mayr’s opera *Elena* – whose libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola is overall couched in military terms – presents a tale of passions, intrigues, and persecution as a result of Prince Costantino’s unmerited exile for the false accusation that he had murdered his father, while his wife Elena finds refuge with their son, until the usurper to the throne, Romualdo, is killed and Costantino restored to his rightful power (Bellotto 61). The libretto, whose words were then set to music by the composer, contains military descriptions closely comparable to the historical and political conditions of present Italy, which having lost its popularity, became increasingly dependent on Austrian reinforcement.

Moreover, although not well-received by Stendhal (with the exception of the sestet at the end of the second act), Elena’s and Costantino’s story of love, refuge, and exile bears much in common with the British Romantics’ émigré experience in Italy. Both because of the music, but even more because of the personal expectation of the encounter, Stendhal was overwhelmed by Byron’s presence: “I was filled with timidity and affection: if I had dared, I would have burst into tears and kissed Lord Byron’s hand” (*HVSV* 196). As in the adventures of the expatriates in the opera, Stendhal’s meeting with the exile-Byron not only represents the first significant Romantic Italian-English-French literary connection in Milan but it also epitomises a landmark in terms of

European cross-cultural sensitivity. In her recent biography *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (2014), Clara Tuite rightly argues that the meeting between the two men “sheds light on a moment of cosmopolitan sociability animated by social, political, and affective cross-channel flows” (46). It is not what Tuite calls the ‘affection’ between Byron and Stendhal that interests me, but rather the conviction that their encounter plays a crucial role in helping form ideas of sociability and transnational links between a plurality of Romanticisms in the city of Milan.

Byron’s powerful character seems to have made a long-lasting impression on Stendhal, who in “Reminiscences of Lord Byron in Italy” (1830) assertively recalls: “Byron was exactly the reverse of an academician; his thoughts flowed with greater rapidity than his words, and his expressions were free from all affectation or studied grace. Towards midnight, particularly when the music of the opera had produced an impression on his feelings, instead of describing them with a view to effect, he yielded naturally to his emotions, as though he had all his life been an inhabitant of the south” (268). Byron’s powerful image of “his blood / is all meridian, ... / My heart is all meridian” (ll. 42-5) in “To the Po. June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1819” is effectively a commentary on his European encounters and marks him as a champion of Anglo-Italian Romantic relations. Stephen Cheeke has noted that Byron’s worries about his Englishness and the Italianness of the woman he loves leave him with the “resolution ... to imagine his blood as belonging not to the country of his nativity, but elsewhere”: the ardent impetuosity of the South (123). Stendhal loved Italy and with Byron shared “a cosmopolitan space, and a specifically Italian form of cosmopolitanism”, leading Tuite to suggest rightly that Milan becomes a “congenial setting” where both authors entertain “a dialogue of transnational camaraderie, enabled by the informality of M. de Breme’s theatre box, which welcomes exiles” (56). The boxes at *La Scala* are open towards intercultural encounters: the growing importance and development of the public and private spheres did not diminish as the nineteenth century progressed, but rather became additionally politicised and polarised, as reactions to the Austrian occupation radicalised writers and thinkers on all sides of the political spectrum. The meeting between Byron and Stendhal can therefore be read as figurative of “the poignant liminality

of this historical moment in 1816” (Tuite 59). The Summer and Autumn of 1816 witnessed patterns of transnational sociability models for creative development, and the historical ‘turmoil’ I have been discussing, situates the works in question within a wider set of ideas and debates concerning the historical and political development of European culture and society.

In *French Romantic Travel Writing* (2012), C. W. Thompson refers to Stendhal’s travelogue *Rome, Naples and Florence* (1817) as a book which towards its end “increasingly stresses, along with promising memories of Bonaparte in Milan and the Cisalpine Republic, the poverty and strains in England” and which associates the fervent climate of Milan with the sociability model represented by “the gatherings in 1816 at Staël’s Coppet of ‘Les Etats généraux de l’opinion européenne’” (55). Whatever Stendhal’s beliefs, the organisation of his work was informed by careful and systematic observations about the secret plans and national turmoil associated with his knowledge of the history of Milan in the 1790s, its role in the European context and his current Milanese experience. Furthermore, Thompson’s study is noteworthy in its attempt to determine “how central Staël is to the political climax – a vision of the role of liberal Romanticism in Europe inspired by Byron, the Edinburgh review and the Coppet circle”. It also points out how “Stendhal refers respectfully to Staël’s books and recent polemics in Milan” in his work (49-50). Stendhal suggestively notes in his diary of November 12, 1816 that he is “now ... a daily visitor to signor di Breme’s box at *La Scala*. The company there assembled consists entirely of men of letters. No woman ever passes the threshold. Signor di Breme is a man of great education and intelligence, well acquainted with the ways of society”. Stendhal appears oblivious to any international tension, and uses his writing to portray the nostalgic touch of Di Breme’s feelings towards De Staël. In his travelogue he thus refers to his Italian friend: “He is a passionate devotee of madame de Staël, and a great patron of literature. A certain coldness has fallen between us, since the occasion when I ventured to remark that all the works of madame de Staël might be summarised as *one* work: *L’Esprit des Lois de la Société*. In any case, all she ever did was to write up, in a glittering and flamboyant style, ideas which she had heard other people formulate in her own *salon*” (64-5). In a

Byron-like fashion, Stendhal's exaggerated attack against De Staël expresses reservations about her critical abilities: but if the male *literati* were at times harsh towards her, overall the Milanese experience was by contrast very enthusiastically on her side.

Despite the overtly masculine eighteenth-century model of sociability adopted by the *literati* gathering around the Opera House, the fact that Madame de Staël was at the centre of conversation in Milanese salons challenges *La Scala's* gendered nature of sociability discussed above. Furthermore, as suggested by Marvin Carlson in "The Italian Romantic Drama in its European Context" (233-247), De Staël had travelled to Italy in late 1815 and early 1816 (before going to Coppet in the Summer of the same year), and in Milan she met with Vincenzo Monti who urged her to write for the opening number of the Milanese liberal periodical *La Biblioteca Italiana* an article stressing the usefulness to Italians of the study of German literature. In this way she becomes a central figure in the 'public sphere' of Italian Romanticism. The result was *Sulla Maniera e l'Utilità delle Traduzioni* ("On the Usefulness of Translation"), which is generally considered the starting date of Romanticism in Italy. In this article, De Staël invited the Italians to abandon their 'classical' taste in favour of more 'contemporary' – Romantic - foreign writers. The article, which had strong political undertones, was a suggestion to consider the new Romantic tendency in patriotic terms; to be 'classical' meant instead to be on the side of the Austrians. The wider civil and political polemic generated by the classicists and the Romantics also featured in the work on Giovanni Berchet and Silvio Pellico, two Milanese writers, whose literature strongly focused on anti-Austrian and nationalistic themes.<sup>8</sup> By implication, this polemic in Milan between the classicists and the Romantics can be read, as Pietro Garofalo has eloquently done, as "a symbiotic relationship with the Risorgimento which uniquely characterises Italian Romanticism" (238). Just as Milan has largely been viewed through the lens of the Austrian occupation, then, Romantic writings generating in the city, investigate the concept of trans-nationalism, and its significance in and for Italian and European literature and culture.

The experience of the gatherings surrounding *La Scala* Opera House offers a trans-European example of Romanticism and challenges the assumptions which underlie an understanding of the atmosphere surrounding Villa Diodati as the central core of creativity in 1816. That transnationalism is one of the big features of Romanticism is also witnessed by further links made in this essay between British, Italian and French Romanticism as models of nineteenth-century sociability. Yet while recognising the links that *La Scala* has with a rising nationalism at the height of *Risorgimento*, I also offer a reassessment of its literary climate and focus on the coterie of *litterati* as a “manifestation of evolving sensibilities while acknowledging both its intellectual debt and its aesthetic innovations with respect to European culture” (Garofalo 238). Both British and French Romantics’ émigré experiences in Italy, as in the case of Byron’s and Stendhal’s Milanese sojourn, explain bicultural identities and transnational encounters. By focusing on the ways in which Romantic writers thought of themselves as citizens of the world as much as Byron did - “I am a Citizen of the World – content where I am now – but able to find a country elsewhere” (*BLJ* IX, 78) - the extent of their interest in developments outside of their own national context becomes stronger. Cosmopolitanism and the transnational links between nations were just as important to Romantic writers as emergent nationalist tendencies (Wohlgemut 2009).

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> On Byron’s and De Staël’s two different ideological voices see, e.g., Joanne Wilkes, *Lord Byron and Madame De Staël: Born for Opposition* (Ashgate, 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of the boxes as private properties of their owners see: Thomas Forrest Kelly, *First Nights at the Opera* (Yale University Press, 2006), p. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> On the social shaping of the public-private distinction see also, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1958/1998); Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (HarperCollins, 1962/2008); Michel Foucault, “Different Spaces” in *Aesthetics, Methods, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, 2 vols., ed. James D. Faubion (New Press), pp. 171-4; and, more recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Lord Burghersh was a British composer and founder member of the Royal Academy of Music, London.

<sup>5</sup> On this I disagree with Clara Tuite who in *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* argues that cosmopolitanism is “often associated with detachment and the absence of feeling or interest” (56).

<sup>6</sup> On the Italian exiles and their contacts with the English aristocracy see M. Wicks, *The Italian Exiles in London 1816-1848* (Manchester University Press, 1937); C.P. Brand, *Ugo Foscolo: An Italian in Regency England* (Cambridge University Press, 1953) and C. P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1957). For further research work on the affinities between the European literati gathering in Milan with the Holland House circle see, Carmen Casaliggi, “Radical Culture and Transnational Networks in ‘The House of All Europe’”, Conference Paper, British Association of Romantic Studies International Conference 2017, “Romantic Improvement”.

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<sup>7</sup> On this point, see Byron's letter of November 2, 1816 to Augusta Leigh (*BLJ* V, 122). Stendhal's account is recorded in *Rome, Naples and Florence* (62-63). For more information on the ballet *Il Duca di Alcantado* by P. Angiolino see Pompeo Cambiasi, *Rappresentazioni date nei Reali Teatri di Milano 1778-1872* (Ricordi, 1872), p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, Giovanni Berchet, *On 'the Fierce Hunter' and 'Leonora' of G.A. Burger: The Semiserious Letter from Chrysostom to his Son* (1816) and the Milanese newspaper *Il Conciliatore* edited by Silvio Pellico, who died in an Austrian prison in 1854.

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