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Riassunto: Tra ottobre del 1822 e luglio del 1823, quattro numeri della rivista *The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South* furono assemblati tra Pisa e Genova e pubblicati a Londra da John Hunt. La rivista letteraria, che ebbe un ciclo di vita breve e ostacolato, risultò da una stretta coalizione di intellettuali radicali, gli espatriati inglesi del cosiddetto Circolo Pisano. L'articolo intende ricostruirne la storia travagliata, valutando il periodico non nei termini di un modesto sforzo collaborativo, bensì in quelli di un'impresa interculturale significativa e capace di formulare nuove tendenze in ambito sia politico che letterario.

Abstract: Between October 1822 and July 1823, a total of four issues of *The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South* were edited between Pisa and Genoa and published in London by John Hunt. The short-lived and ill-fated literary periodical was the product of a close coalition of radical intellectuals and expatriates associated with the Pisan circle. The article seeks to retrace the periodical's troubled history and examine it not as a collaborative effort of little merit, but as a significant intercultural enterprise that articulated novel tendencies in both politics and literature.

Parole chiave: Byron, Hunt, Shelley, periodici letterari, espatriati britannici, circolo pisano

Key words: Byron, Hunt, Shelley, Literary Periodicals, British Expatriates, Pisan Circle

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Recent scholarship has reappraised *The Liberal* despite a lack of comprehensive and in-depth critical editions; its marginal impact and flawed paratextual apparatus complicate the construction of a thorough and sustained investigation. While outdated and limited in critical scope, Leslie P. Pickering's *Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and The 'Liberal'* (1925) and William H. Marshall's *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and 'The Liberal'* (1960) remain valuable foundational studies. Conceived in the name and spirit of literary and reformist circles, *The Liberal* was a risky venture, politically and financially wise. Questions surrounding its survivability and collapse must, among other factors, also be understood in relation to the social disparities among its founders, which led to a lack of internal cohesion and uneven commitment to the enterprise. The periodical's afterlife was affected by interpersonal and entrepreneurial problems that accompanied its short run from draft to print. Yet, despite its brief journey, the ill-fated quarterly review holds considerable significance within Romantic periodical culture and contemporary scholarship, particularly for its ambitious aim to disseminate liberal thought through literature from the continent.

Aimed at a British readership, *The Liberal* was co-edited in Pisa and Genoa by P.B. Shelley (who died before the first issue appeared), Lord Byron, and Leigh Hunt, and published in London by John Hunt, brother of Leigh, between October 1822 and July 1823. The editorial project was initially conceived by Lord Byron, who would also be the first to question its prospects for success.[1] And to Byron the journal owed its title, set «to contribute our *liberalities* in the shape of Poetry, Essays, Tales, Translations, and other amenities».[2] This happened at a time when «the Tories had suc-

1 «I am afraid the journal is a bad business, and won't do; […] I can have no advantage in it». Byron to John Murray from Genoa, Oct. 9th1822 (John Cordy Jeaffreson, *The Real Lord Byron: New Views of the Poet's Life,* Frankfurt, Antigonos Verlag, 2025, vol. 2, p. 201).

2 Emphasis added. Leigh Hunt's *Preface* to the first issue of *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South*, Volume the First, London, printed by and for John Hunt, 1822, p. VII. Byron's first choice of title was *Hesperides*. Cf. Anne Blainey, *Immortal Boy:*

ceeded in making the terms liberal and radical synonymous».[3] The subtitle *Verse and Prose from the South* hinted at the Mediterranean displacement from where the editorial board was operating, far from Britain's orthodoxy and from the vaporous «stove of society».[4]

In his prefatory advertisement, Hunt stated enthusiastically that *The Liberal* would include Italian,[5] German, and Spanish literature in hopes of getting assistance from foreign correspondents. This never turned into reality, perhaps owing to the great animosity caused by Metternich's proclaimed war against liberals, fomented by Byron's suspicious association with the Pisan circle and the Carboneria. A living legend and a patron of the cause of liberty, Byron's international fame as a poet and political reformer was deemed fundamental by Leigh Hunt, as it would prove more appealing to readers from across the Channel.[6] The two had met for the first time in 1813 along the River Thames. Still, they became acquainted at the Horsemonger Lane Gaol, where Hunt and his brother were serving a two-year sentence on the charge of seditious libel against the Prince Regent, and where they continued to edit *The Examiner*. Byron paid Hunt a visit in April 1813 with the help of their mutual friend Thomas Moore, offering him support[7] and showing his appreciation for *The Feast of the Poets*.

A Portrait of Leigh Hunt, New York, St. Martin's Publishers, 1985, p. 134, and William Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal*, Philadelphia, The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960, p. 71.

3 Jonathan Gross, «Byron and *The Liberal*: Periodical as Political Posture», *Philological Quarterly*, 72, 4, Fall 1993, pp. 471-485: 474.

4 «The truth is, my dear Moore, you live near the stove of society, where you are unavoidably influenced by its heat and vapours». Lord Byron to Thomas Moore from Pisa, Mar. 1st 1822 (George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: Selected Letters and Journals*, Leslie A. Marchand (ed.), Cambridge (MA), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 283).

5 The prominence of Italian literature throughout the four issues is indisputable, and so is Hunt's commitment to it (see his *Letters from Abroad*, his translation from Ariosto's *Episode of Cloridan, Medoro and Angelica*, his review of Giambattista Casti's *I Tre Giuli*, his short story *The Florentine Lover* and his *Epigram of Alfieri*).

6 In this regard, the fact that Hunt opened each issue with a major piece by Byron is telling. See *The Vision of Judgment*, *Heaven and Earth*, *The Blues, a Literary Eclogue* and the translation of the First *Canto* of Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*.

7 In prison, Byron handed Hunt some material to help him with *The Story of Rimini*, which he would later review. See Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries. With Recollections of the Author's Life and of His Visit to Italy*, London, Henry Colburn, 1828.

However, such a seemingly promising alliance would not strengthen over the following years, and the two of them met again in Leghorn only in 1822, when Hunt finally moved to Italy after lengthy negotiations with Percy Bysshe Shelley, his «friend of friends».[8] However, this Triumvirate,[9] as Hunt would call it, was not bound to last. Shelley's demise before the first issue appeared preannounced the conclusion of *The Liberal* project and destabilised that community of radicals, as it meant the loss of a unifying voice, a gentle mediator between Byron – who could not help venting his aristocratic background, nor would renounce his aristocratic privilege – and Hunt, penniless and at the mercy of the sales of *The Liberal*.[10] Hunt's continuous need for financial support from his partners[11] and the difficult relationship between his wife, Marianne,[12] and Byron contributed to the undoing of a collaboration initially based on trust and mutual esteem.

Some of the personalities surrounding Lord Byron (including his publisher, John Murray, John Cam Hobhouse, and Douglas Kinnaird) disapproved of his association with the Hunts and the radical Pisan milieu. In a letter to Mary Shelley, Byron would lament the «continual declamation against the Liberal from all parties – literary – amical – and political».[13] Even before the first issue of *The Liberal* appeared, the literary venture

8 Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, Thornton Leigh Hunt (ed.), London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1860, pp. 241-242.

9 «We will divide the world between us, like the Triumvirate, and you shall be the sleeping partner, if you will; only it shall be with a Cleopatra, and your dreams shall be worth the giving of kingdoms» (Leigh Hunt to Percy and Mary Shelley from Hampstead, Sep. 21st. 1821, in Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt,* Thornton Leigh Hunt (ed.), London, Smith, Elder and Co, 1862, vol. 1, pp. 172-173). Hunt's words here are inauspicious, as Shelley would literally become the «sleeping partner» less than a year later, dying at sea off the Gulf of Spezia in July 1822.

10 By 1821 Hunt had given up *The Examiner* and *The Liberal* was to become his only source of income.

11 Following the legal prosecution that left him bankrupt, Hunt appealed to both Byron and Shelley for financial help.

12 Byron could barely stand the six Hunt children, who were known to smear the walls of Palazzo Lanfranchi. Marianne Hunt, for her part, had always doubted the good faith of the English Lord. In a letter to Mary Shelley from Oct. 4th 1822, Byron wrote: «[Hunt's children] are dirtier and more mischievous than Yahoos; what they can't destroy with their filth they will with their fingers» (George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: Selected Letters and Journals*, cit., p. 289).

13 Byron to Mary Shelley, Feb. 24th 1823, in George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, Leslie A. Marchand (ed.), Cambridge (MA), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980, vol. 10 (1822-1823), p. 108.

was already a scandal. A satirical epigram targeting Byron appeared in the Tory periodical *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*,[14] quoting: «'Twould be wrong, noble Bard, Oh! Permit me to tell ye, / To establish a league with Leigh Hunt and Byshe [*sic*] Shelley».[15] Although such protests were broadly directed against the Pisan group as a cabal of disreputable radicals, profligates, and blasphemers,[16] Hunt's involvement was the most critical aspect of the matter. Having embarked on a «perilous voyage on the un-cockney ocean»,[17] Hunt, the sickly and impoverished 'poetaster,' had reformed his Cockney school of Poetry; the expatriates' enthusiasm for all things liberal being a good enough reason to acquiesce in Shelley's urging him to join them.

In her *Vie de Byron en Italie,* Teresa Gamba Guiccioli would praise Byron's generosity toward the Hunts while portraying them as ungrateful and deceitful. Byron, writes she, needed to make use of some of his unpublished writings, and the Hunts' proprietorship of *The Examiner* (which, however, Leigh had given up in 1821 to avoid prosecution) sufficed as a reason to launch the project.[18] Perhaps, the fact that Shelley had published pseudonymously his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and the sonnet *Ozymandias* in *The Examiner* sounded convincing to Byron, especially in view of his friction with his reticent publisher. Not to mention Hunt's good share of experience in the field as editor and writer for *The Indicator*, which attests to his «active role in promoting political change by means of cultural discussion [as well as his] use of foreign literature as a tool for articulating political dissent».[19] Byron needed a platform; Shelley sought to

14 The magazine later came to be known as *Maga*.

15 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, XI (1822), p. 460. Cited in William Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

16 In the first act of Howard Brenton's play *Bloody Poetry* (1984) Shelley «Bysshe» introduces himself and his circle as a «little band of atheistical perverts, free-lovers, we poeticals – leaving England» (Howard Brenton, *Plays: Two*, London, Bloomsbury, 1989, p. 239). The *Liberal* episode is mentioned as well in 2.10; Bysshe refers to it as «a voice in England - radical, fierce, uncompromising […] a banner! A beacon!» (*Ibid.*, p. 303).

17 «Letter from London», *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, XI (1822), p. 237. Cited in William Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 46. The *Maga* satire had always been fierce toward Hunt and Hazlitt. Ironically, Byron himself often teased Hunt for his unrefined manners and triviality.

18 See Teresa Gamba Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy,* Peter Cochran (ed.), Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2005.

19 Serena Baiesi, *Politics, Literature, and Leigh Hunt's Editorial Spirit in* The Liberal, in Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Serena Baiesi, Carlotta Farese (eds.), *Imprinting Anglo-Italian*

promote social reform. Hunt depended on those five shillings per copy. *The Liberal* felt thus a chance for «all contracting parties [to] publish all their original compositions and share the profits»,[20] although Shelley proclaimed himself a mere link between his partners, being and «desir[ing] to be, nothing».[21] In the aftermath of his tragic death, Mary, who shared Casa Negrotto in Albaro, Genoa, with the Hunts for a short time, assumed his role as mediator, contributor, and conductor[22] and honoured his legacy in the radical literary circle.

This proved a hard task, considering the blistering attacks the periodical received during its anticipatory phase and the limited readership it later gained abroad, both influenced by ready-formed opinions, an excess of sensationalistic bias, and the low expectations placed on the enterprise before it even took off. William Wordsworth,[23] for instance, had heard «that Byron, Shelley, Moore, Leigh Hunt [were] to lay their heads together in some Town in Italy, for the purpose of conducting a Journal to be directed against everything in religion, in morals and probably in government and literature».[24] The first number was perceived as mainly political by conservative reviewers, despite Hunt's preliminary statement that their work would not be of a political character.[25] In fact, its subversive nature made it the most anticipated and opposed issue, especially for its use of vitriolic satire against the monarchical institution. Aside from Byron's *The Vision of Judgment*, which targeted Robert Southey and his hagiography of George III, his *Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh* created the most sensation.[26]

Relations in The Liberal, Bern, Peter Lang, 2023, pp. 89-114: 95.

20 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Letters of Percy Shelley*, Frederick Jones (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, vol. 2, p. 254.

21 *Ibid.*

22 See *A Tale of the Passions* and *Giovanni Villani*.

23 «Turdsworth», as Byron would call him. The two, who had met once at Samuel Roger's house in 1815, had a strained relationship, as the English peer often directed his satire against the early Romantic.

24 Wordsworth to Walter Savage Landor, Apr. 20th 1822, in Ernest de Selincourt, Alan G. Hills (eds.), *The letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth,* vol. 3, *The Later Years, Part I 1821-1828*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 124.

25 Cf. *The Liberal,* cit., vol. 1, p. VII. The public backlash that *The Liberal* received during its short life later prompted Hunt to submit a proposal to Tuscan authorities for a journal to be called *Molini's English Magazine* (which claimed no political pretentions). For further insights see: Timothy Webb, «A rejected prospectus: Leigh Hunt, Giuseppe Molini and the search for new readers», *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 19, 2023, pp. 55-92.

26 Interestingly, the «two Roberts» (Lord Castlereagh and Southey) once held radical

Shelley had explicitly castigated the Viscount in *The Masque of Anarchy* (prefaced and edited by Hunt) after hearing about the domestic tragedy of the Peterloo Massacre at Manchester, and again implicitly in a sonnet, *England in 1819*, wherein leech-like sycophants[27] drain the country. Byron's *Epigrams* grotesquely comment on the circumstances of the statesman's suicide, calling him a Cato and twisting the sense of liberty as dependent upon the man cutting his own throat with a penknife.

Byron's sting is most remarkable and provocative in *The Vision of Judgment*; the satirical poem gave the periodical notoriety but caused considerable misfortune to John Hunt,[28] while John Murray was hesitant to publish this and other radical writings by the English peer, as he feared legal reprisals. Despite the insistence of Byron and Hunt, Murray withheld the original preface and revised proofs[29] (later included in the second edition), which contained mitigated passages; therefore, the piece was put into print in its most mordant form. Signing himself as QUEVEDO REDIVIVUS,[30] Byron accuses Robert Southey of flattery, hypocrisy, and servility, and does not use his quill frugally in criticising his writing skills. The «unscholarlike Mr. Southey»[31] – he recalls – is also the author of a blasphemous play entitled *Wat Tyler* (1817), which exposes his early republicanism.[32] Byron likely puns on 'Renegado'[33] (a label Southey had received from an MP for his political inconsistency) in response to Southey's denunciation of his 'bravadoes' in his preface to *A Vision of Judgment* (1821). In this loyalist 'version' of the *Vision*, the Poet Laureate had accused contemporary writers (read Byron and Shelley) of

views but later aligned with the establishment.

27 I read this as another reference to the despised, dying king of the opening line, who was notoriously being treated with leeches.

28 As the only prosecutable partner among the 'Liberals', John Hunt was tried and fined £100 for publishing Byron's work and causing George IV's distress. Byron was relieved from all responsibility by Leigh Hunt in the *Advertisement* to the Second Edition (Jan. 1st 1823).

29 Douglas Kinnaird also received the proofs, but chose to keep them.

30 The pieces in *The Liberal* were deliberately left unsigned. Here, Byron pays tribute to the 17th-century Spanish satirist Francisco de Quevedo, a master of *sueños*.

31 *The Liberal*, Vol. 1, p. iv.

32 Byron's attacks on Southey are numerous and scathing. See his *Letters*, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) and the dedication to *Don Juan* published posthumously.

33 «Although'tis true that you turned out a Tory […] / And now my epic renegade, what are ye at / With all the lakers, in and out of place?» (George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan* (Dedication, I, 3; 5-6), in Id., *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron,* Frankfurt, Outlook Verlag, 2024, vol. 7, p. 45.

setting up a Satanic School of Poetry. Byron's retaliation in the first number of *The Liberal* thus becomes a battleground between angels and demons, whereby «we learn the angels are all Tories».[34] The infamous King George III is brought to trial before a chaotic court and judged on the matter of religious policy for opposing William Pitt's fight for Catholic emancipation. Byron portrays him as an enemy of liberty, a 'Royal Bedlam', a pitiable figure, blind, insane, and unfit to rule. The souls of Junius pseud. and John Wilkes are summoned as witnesses, as well as the living Southey, who Byron depicts as a clumsy orator in the act of annoying the unhappy bystanders: «But stuck fast with his first hexameter, / Not one of all whose gouty feet would stir».[35] The reference here is double and doubly impudent. On the one hand, it mentions gout as a luxury disease that afflicted George III; on the other hand, it calls into question Castlereagh,[36] mocking him as an unskilled debater and orator. The foreign secretary is also hinted at in the stanza XCIV through the mention of Southey's «poetic felony *de se*».[37] Ironically, Castlereagh, who had committed suicide, was so powerful in life that he escaped the posthumous *felo de se*[38] verdict on the grounds of insanity and was consequently buried in consecrated ground in Westminster Abbey.

Byron's brilliant parody in *ottava rima* elicited mixed reactions. While Goethe «enjoyed it as a child might»,[39] the Tory press was indignant. The review of *The London Literary Gazette* was not long in coming, and the entire issue was criticised caustically:

> We have now very fully exhibited and discussed this publication; and we find, on casting up the account, that Lord Bryon has contributed impiety, vulgarity, inhumanity, and heartlessness; Mr. Shelley, a burlesque upon Göthe; and Mr. Leigh Hunt, conceit, trumpery, ignorance, and wretched verses. The union of wickedness, folly, and imbecility, is perfect; and, as they congratulate the Devil, so do we congratulate the Authors of the Liberal.[40]

34 George Gordon Byron, *The Vision of Judgment* (XXVI, 208). *The Liberal*, vol. 1, p. 12.
35 *The Vision of Judgment* (XC, 719-720), *Ibid*., p. 33.
36 Not by chance, the statesman is mentioned in stanza XCIII.
37 *The Vision of Judgment* (XC, 752), *The Liberal*, vol. 1, p. 34.
38 The practice was abolished in 1823 under common law.
39 Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, Thomas Sadler (ed.), Frankfurt, Salzwasser-Verlag, 2022, vol. 2, p. 436.
40 *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c*., n. 259, London, B. Bensley, Jan. 5th 1822, p. 694.

The fact that criticism of the second number was generally more moderate is quite telling. While the first issue had been long-awaited and perceived as a threat to political and moral decency, subsequent issues were dangerously neglected. As a result, the periodical's «sales quickly declined, [and] the press hysteria subsided».[41] In a way, *The Liberal* fell short even of the worst expectations, although «the alliance between Byron and Hunt represented a powerful symbol of the way in which political and literary interests could transcend class division».[42] Unfortunately, Byron's and Hunt's literary tastes were irreconcilably divergent; as Byron acknowledged, «He admires the Lakers, I abhor them; in short, we are more formed to be friends at a distance, than near».[43] Many criticised Hunt's Cockneyfied translation of Ariosto; on the whole, the periodical lacked cohesion and appeared somewhat cobbled together. Its style and tone were affected by Hunt's state of despondency, at its worst after Shelley's death. He himself admitted that, as the major contributor, «the articles from his own pen in the 'Liberal' [were] far inferior to what he could have wished them».[44] To bolster the editorial workforce, the liberals from the South, now including Charles Armitage Brown,[45] were joined by William Hazlitt and Thomas Jefferson Hogg from London. Reviews of the second number proclaimed *The Liberal* generally dull and of cheap literary quality. While Byron was untouched by mere stylistic observations coming from *The Imperial Magazine* and *The London Literary Gazette*, Hunt's writing, preponderant throughout the four issues,[46] was widely judged mediocre despite his professed devotion to *belles lettres*.

The sales flop and the negligible resonance of the second number in the States reflected a growing sense of apathy among both readership and booksellers. Nearly half of the six thousand available copies were sold;[47] consequently, fewer copies were printed for the following issue to save on paper costs. Such numbers announced the endeavour's financial failure,

41 David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine. Biography, Celebrity and Politics*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 115.

42 *Ibid*.

43 Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 77.

44 Michael Eberle-Sinatra, *Leigh Hunt and the London Literary Scene. A Reception History of his Major Works, 1805-1828*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 99.

45 Signed as «Carlone» (*Les Charmettes and Rousseau*) and «Carluccio» (*Shakespear's Fools*).

46 Of the sixty articles published in *The Liberal*, thirty-four were authored by Hunt.

47 Cf. William Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

and Byron grew even more disillusioned with its chances of future success. Shelley's translation of the *Walpurgisnacht* from Goethe's *Faust* received little appreciation; Mary, whose posthumous editorial work can hardly be overstated, was unsuccessful in her attempt to include his *Defense of Poetry* in the second issue of *The Liberal*. As Marshall observes, this omission was regrettable: although it «would probably have done little to increase the sale, [it] would have heightened the general literary attainment of *The Liberal*».[48] While no new material was available from Shelley, his figure was revived in a parody attributed to William Gifford (*The Illiberal! Verse and Prose from the North!!*, 1822), in which a troubled Byron receives a letter from his lamented friend, now doomed in hell. Besides, being as short-lived as the original, «*The Illiberal* proved even more ephemeral than the periodicals from which it drew its satire».[49]

By early 1823, Byron had ensured that *The Age of Bronze* (a poem written in the style of his *English Bards*) would be published separately rather than anonymously in the third issue of the profitless periodical, for which he contributed *The Blues, a Literary Eclogue*. The poetic play poured scorn on literary criticism and the intellectual women of the Bluestocking society. Since this publication was also anonymous, the *Noctes Ambrosianae* of *Blackwood's Magazine* failed to recognise Byron as its author,[50] while *The Literary Register* attributed the piece to Hunt, hastening Byron to withdraw from the alliance he claimed he had sustained solely out of philanthropy. Despite this, Mary Shelley informed Edward John Trelawny that the third was «an amusing number and L. B. [was] better pleased with it than any other».[51] Fortuitously, *The Liberal* made it to the fourth issue before its public collapse. Byron left Italy for Greece with Trelawny in July 1823 to fight against Ottoman rule. His last contribution to the periodical was a translation of the first canto of Luigi Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore,* which the Hunts had possessed since 1822 but had retained to prioritise original works. Mary Shelley waited until Marianne Hunt delivered her seventh child before departing for England. The last issue of *The Liber-*

48 *Ibid*., p. 142.

49 *British Satire, 1785-1840*, John Strachan (ed.), London, Routledge, 2003, vol. 3, p. XVI.

50 «The last Number contains not one line of Byron's! Thank God! He has seen his error, and kicked them out» (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1823, vol. 13, p. 607. Quoted in Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron*, Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), Frankfurt, Outlook Verlag, 2020, vol. 4, p. 527).

51 Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Betty T. Bennett (ed.), Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, vol. 1, p. 338.,

al appeared on 28th July 1823, by which time the group had dissolved. Tensions arose between the Hunt brothers owing to the periodical's financial disaster and ongoing public disputes.

If the periodical failed to consolidate radical influence, its share in terms of literary versatility was noteworthy. Unlike other periodicals of the early 1820s such as *The London Literary Gazette* (which mainly published poetry and essays and relegated foreign literature to brief paragraphs), *The Liberal* was a panoply of genres. It featured poetry and satire, but also a great deal of prose in the form of essays, translations, drama, and criticism. Its content was both intellectual and personal, *engagé* and entertaining. What Thomas Moore defined «a miscellaneous *pot au feu*»[52] is, from our modern, critical perspective, a treasure trove of collaborative, heterogeneous literary endeavours.

I have discussed the importance of the periodical as a vehicle for wit and satire, highlighting Byron's ascendency through his *The Vision of Judgment*, *Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh*, and *The Blues*. The buffooning *Letter to the Editor of 'My Grandmother's Review'* is another satirical piece that responds to William Roberts' pedantic attack on the first two cantos of his *Don Juan* in *The British Review*, particularly to his literal interpretation of a couple of verses in which Byron feigns to admit to bribing his «Grandmother's Review – the British»[53] to contain their criticism. Leigh Hunt's *The Dogs* must have appeared to Georgian readers as a relatively weak and excessively articulated satire on the British military hierarchy. Hunt's attempt to emulate Byron's *ottava rima* is self-declamatory but ineffective, for it results in pretentiousness. The poem is introduced by a war anecdote on a group of starved Scottish infantrymen assigned to feed biscuits to the Duke of Wellington's hounds (which are accorded more respect than his human subordinates). *To A Spider Running Across A Room*, a minor piece, originated as well from Hunt's *bestiarium*. The author catches a spider scampering around (a symbol of Tory luminaries) and threatens it with his 'avenging shoe'. Direct references to Robert Southey, the conservative journal *John Bull*, and the *Blackwood*'s circle are made: «He's not the Laureat, not my turne'd old Bob; / Not Bull the Brute, nor Gazetteer the grub».[54]

52 George Gordon Byron, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of His Life*, Thomas Moore (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, vol. 2, p. 628.

53 George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan* (I, 209) in Id., *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, cit., vol. 7, p. 135.

54 *The Liberal*, vol. 3, p. 178.

Like other Romantic literary periodicals, *The Liberal* fulfilled its role as cultural mediator by integrating French and Spanish subjects and by including translations of excerpts from Italian and German works. Shelley's poetical rendition of the *May-Day Night* scene (*Faust*, I, xxi) appeared in the first number, albeit with some omissions. As Hunt specifies in the introduction, the original text was beautifully rendered in the lamented friend's exercise and would have been appreciated even by Webster and Middleton; Shelley (who possessed a limited knowledge of German but benefited from his acquaintance with John Gisborne in his engagement with the text) softened Goethe's grotesquerie by employing a measure of poetic licence while skilfully engaging with Northern folklore. His merit lay in undertaking the translation of the segment since Coleridge had never completed his own. Byron's *in ottava* translation of the first canto of Luigi Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, instead, reflects his subversive nature as a poet. Pulci, an anti-spiritualist, was accused of irreligion and buried as a heretic. In his advertisement, the English Lord takes his defence and highlights the challenge of translating Tuscan proverbs; the Italian language is, he observes, «a capricious beauty, who accords her smile to all, her favours to few, and sometimes least to those who have courted her longest».[55] The mock-chivalric poem, infused with elements *alla burchia*, aligns seamlessly with Byron's irreverent wit. The two of them also shared a fraught relationship with the political establishment, as Pulci had broken with the Medici Court over philosophical dissent.

As he himself recalled, William Hazlitt joined *The Liberal* when, «after Mr. Shelley's death, I was invited to take part in this obnoxious publication».[56] Although Hazlitt despised Shelley and was critical of Byron, he was a friend of Hunt's and had contributed essays and criticism to the *London Magazine* and the *New Monthly*. His *My First Acquaintance With Poets* blends memoir and criticism, setting an autobiographical tone that follows the model of Leigh Hunt's *Letters*. The author recounts his first encounter with Coleridge, which took place in Shrewsbury in 1798, as well as his later acquaintance with William Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, and Robert Southey. The Lakers, whom Byron so abhorred but Hazlitt revered, featured in his collection *The Spirit of the Age* (1825). Hazlitt, who was deeply impressed by the way they apprehended nature, attributes to Coleridge the defining qualities of a poetic genius. His simple and lucid

55 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

56 William Hazlitt, *Lives of the Great Romantics, Part 1: Shelley, Byron and Wordsworth by Their Contemporaries*, John Mullan (ed.), London, Pickering & Chatto, 1996, p. 188.

prose conveys a sense of intellectual and aesthetic exchange while reporting Coleridge's critical judgment on writers such as Virgil, Shakespeare, Thomson, Fielding and Richardson. The piece ultimately reveals Hazlitt's position as both insider and outsider, at once a man of letters influenced by the greatest, and a keen, informed observer of the literary trends of his own age. Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817) might have prompted Charles Armitage Brown to contribute *Shakespear's Fools* to the third issue of *The Liberal*. In this critical essay, Brown surveys Shakespeare's jesters across multiple plays (Feste, Lavatch, Touchstone, Lear's Fool and 'poor' Yorick) by aligning them with a more dramatic interpretation that transcends mere comic relief. The fools are not stock characters, but individualised figures, each marked by distinctive and personal traits and each wearing their own livery.

Leigh Hunt's *Letters from Abroad* constitute the only continuous thread throughout the four issues of *The Liberal*. The abundance of personal experience the author provides (mostly drawn from his journals) presupposes that readers would sympathise with him. Hunt narrates his experience of and inside Italian society, observing how men are Mammonites, generally preoccupied with the accumulation of wealth, while women literally display their dowries as garments. Vain and immodest at first glance, these women stand in stark contrast to their English counterparts. Hunt repeatedly calls upon the reader's imagination, inviting them to supplement an initial, elementary impression with even more detail. Thus, the architectures of Pisa and Genoa are reconstructed brick by brick; he captures the beauty of the small Tuscan city and the 'Superb' also by retracing their eventful histories, confident that the quasi-exotic allure of Italy would captivate his English readers more. Hunt's personal and digressive narrative «resorts to the familiar in order to describe what appears different. In other words, he translates 'otherness', whenever encountered, in terms of sights and places familiar to his English readers».[57] Thus, Genoa's narrow alleys are compared to London streets; the Leaning Tower of Pisa is reimagined as a more elaborate version of the most familiar London Monument. Piazza dei Miracoli is mentally transformed into a grassy, less central version of Parliament Square. Across his four *Letters*, Hunt educates readers on Italian legislation, topography, vegetation, and food culture, praising (like many of his British contemporaries

57 Maria Schoina, «Leigh Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad' and the Anglo-Italian Discourse of *The Liberal*», *Romanticism*, 12, 2, 2006, pp. 115-125: 120.

in Italy) the trellised vines and the juicy, Brobdingnagian quality of the fruit. He also meditates on musical culture, informing his Anglo-Italian addressee, Vincent Novello, of Rossini's supremacy over Mozart. Hunt further incorporates linguistic and literary commentary, invoking figures such as Carlo Frugoni and Giambattista Pastorini (unknown to most British) and translating Vittorio Alfieri's satire on money-gathering. His description encompasses minor Genoese poets, Italianisms, and local idiomatic expressions, which he translates and elucidates for the sake of cultural understanding.

Medieval Italy, fractured by the conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines, frames Hunt's prose novella *The Florentine Lovers* and Mary Shelley's historical fiction *A Tale of the Passions*. Hunt was modestly familiar with Italian literature, whereas Mary Shelley had undertaken a rigorous and deeply engaged study of Italian history.[58] Both narratives explore the theme of political factionalism and its repercussions in domestic and romantic spheres. Ippolito de' Bardi and Dianora de' Buondelmonti are lovers in the tale Hunt adapts from Leon Battista Alberti; caught in a legal entanglement, they manage to reunite in spite of the political rivalries dividing their households. A similar (though far more tragic) division marks a couple of secondary characters in Mary Shelley's narrative. Gegia and Cincolo are joined in marriage but divided by political allegiance, the former supporting the papal cause and the latter the imperial side. Despina, their foster daughter and a descendant of the Elisei family, visits them disguised as the Ghibelline Ricciardo. Her enduring memory of her beloved Manfred[59] compels her to support his legitimate heir, Conradin; to do so, she seeks the intercession of the traitor Lostendardo, whose actions ultimately lead to her and Conradin's demise. Shaped by bloodshed and inflamed by partisan fervour, Shelley's tale is imbued with political discourse and serves to establish a parallel with post-Napoleonic Italy. There is, moreover, a distinct sense of emotional engagement, as well as the insertion of autobiographical elements *à la* Hunt.[60] His *Florentine Lovers*, which was published in the first issue, «provides Mary Shelley with fertile intertex-

58 Particularly of Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen-Âge* and Giovanni Villani's *Florentine Annals*. See the *Preface* to her novel *Valperga* (written 1817-1821).

59 Descendant of the House of Swabia. See *Valperga*.

60 See Conradin, who «has arrived at Genoa, and perhaps has even now landed at Pisa» (*The Liberal*, vol. 2, p. 298).

tual ground»,[61] fulfilling her «dialogical and interdiscursive desire to integrate her story with other texts published in *The Liberal*».[62] Yet, internal inconsistencies and weak cohesion with the other pieces hindered the maintenance of a shared vision and a steady editorial line.

Despite its radical aspirations, *The Liberal* failed to make a real impact on the political and literary stage and disappeared from the periodical scene «in as meteoric a manner as it lived».[63] Its prioritisation of satirical sketches made it seem politically uncommitted, even as it projected an insurgent ethos. Limitations in vision and style, its geographical distance from its readership, the lack of a unitarian 'Southern' voice, and Byron's waning enthusiasm proved a guarantee for failure. Nonetheless, the journal's academic revival is more significant than ever. The editors' struggles are indicative of the difficulties faced by radicals in a climate dominated by conservatism and censorship. At the same time, the project's singularity in terms of protagonists, logistical challenges, and ideological ambitions offers novel insights into the history of print culture and political commentary, while extending the Romantic canon beyond poetry and the cult of the isolated genius.

61 Fabio Liberto, *The 'united voice of Italy':* The Liberal *and Mary Shelley's* A Tale of the Passions, in Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Serena Baiesi, Carlotta Farese (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 203-235: 222.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

63 Leslie P. Pickering, *Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and the "Liberal"*, New York, Haskell House, 1966, p. 7.