John Bull's Italian Snakes and Ladders
John Bull's Italian Snakes and Ladders
English Attitudes to Italy
in the mid-nineteenth Century

By

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ABBREVIATIONS

All references in the text to the writings of John Ruskin are to the standard collected edition by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (1903-12) *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, hereafter referred to as *Works*.

The Illustrated London News is abbreviated to *ILN*, after its first appearance.
In this study I examine representations of Italy and Italians in the mid-nineteenth century and the uses made of them by English writers and readers, revealing constructed and contested meanings. I shall also suggest some reasons for, and advantages conferred by, their circulation. Italians were shown on the one hand as despised public nuisances, personified by organ grinders, but were also depicted in the most glamorous and fashionable settings such as opera houses. English musicians changed their names to Italianate versions, to claim ascribed musical excellence, yet it was a common trope to contrast feckless and dirty contemporary Italians with their great ancestors. The range of meanings accorded to the sign ‘Italian’ was vast and this is the source of my title metaphor: as John Bull played his Italian Snakes and Ladders, his self esteem and self-image waxed and waned correspondingly. This book explores how and why Italy operated as an important mechanism in the construction of Englishness, particularly at this crucial period. (I feel forced to use the term “Italianness” for its countertype, to distinguish a concept which has not previously been isolated semantically.)

My interest in these questions stems from my own study of the Italian language over a period of some years. In perhaps predictable stereotyping, when I spoke Italian in the company of English friends I was jokingly ascribed sophistication and sensuality, but I also observed a strangely equivocal reaction. Italians were envied and despised in apparently equal measure, and their very existence seemed to force self-examination and comparison, defining what were perceived as English qualities. Italian friends confirmed the complexity of their national image in England, and I became interested in how and why this range of discourses and uses had developed. Stereotypes and uses of the French have been richly studied (Colley 1992; Gibson 1995; Cohen 1996, 1999 and Varouxakis 2002). Obviously there had been considerable intercourse between England and the Italian peninsula since the Renaissance and before, but a key period to examine is the birth of Italy as a nation state. Taking the period between 1840 and 1870 as that of the Risorgimento, when the Italians were fighting for their own national identity, I found that this coincided with intensified national debate on Englishness. Indeed, the extraordinarily high profile which this Italian resurgence was accorded in English media seems to

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1 I discuss my choice of start and end dates in the first chapter.
have further stimulated such national debate. How could the English position themselves on the changing European map, and how could they establish or consolidate their position of superiority? What were their distinctive qualities?

Writers have studied the relations between England and Italy more generally, or with a particular political or historical focus, or have examined the impact of specific periods or aspects of Italian history upon Victorian culture, but I wished to consider the above questions in relation to a particular audience, one most likely to be exercised by issues of nationalism and identity. I shall consider the construction of Italianness from the point of view of the middle-class male reader, and how the range of representations of this concept was used to provide answers to the questions. Class positioning, masculinity and national identity can be seen as fragile walls to the edifice of self-esteem, supporting each other from similar foundations. My sources are chosen with this readership in mind. Even though the *Illustrated London News* and *Punch* sometimes constructed themselves as publications with appeal to all the family (see page 11), the majority of their items clearly appeal to a male audience, using a diet of national and international news and politics. The representation of male and female Italians conveyed clear benefits to the male reader, and recognition of Latin terms drew on a form of cultural capital more likely to be acquired during the education of the male reader. Cartoons showing the paterfamilias besieged by itinerant Italian street musicians, and novels such as *The Last Days of Pompeii*, had implicit appeals to such a reader, with their male protagonists. As Brennan (1990, 49) reminds us, “Nations … are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role.”

I have set out to examine shared representational conventions, and the way in which they have functioned, interrogating images as “culturally shared ways of seeing” rather than as transparent views of natural phenomena (Codell 1991,4). The versions of Italianness in circulation established an iconography of “the Italian”, emblematic representations which could be repeated or alluded to as a taxonomy, building up a complex map of discourses about Italians. Sometimes these might conflict, or they may be traced as combining to create a field of prejudice as, for example, the construction of Italians as primitive, closer to nature, and more instinctive. Such a view could shade either into ideas of dirtiness, disreputability and evil or, conversely, into the Italian as exemplar of pre-lapsarian bliss. The uses to which these images were put by producer and consumer determined which connotations were evoked. And I hope to show that Italy, and more particularly Italians, held a surprisingly important place in Victorian self-fashioning.
CHAPTER ONE

“A MAN WHO HAS NOT BEEN IN ITALY
IS ALWAYS CONSCIOUS OF AN INFERIORITY”

Dr. Johnson remarked that “A man who has not been to Italy is always conscious of an inferiority” and discourses of superiority and inferiority have been woven around the inhabitants of England and Italy for centuries (quoted in Pemble 1987, 60). There was a feverish peak of interest in Italy during 1859-60 as dreams of Italian unification became a reality, and the creation of ‘Italy’ at last was summed up by Gladstone as “among the greatest marvels of our time” (1887, 297). However, events and discourses in the preceding years and the decade after, in both countries, present a fascinating series of developments in the construction of national identity and masculinity, intersecting with cultural and class identity. Simon Dentith uses the concept of faultlines, “major structuring oppositions within the social order, around which, or across which, cultural objects are constructed”, citing the country vs. city opposition as well as race, gender and authority (1998, xi). I would argue that the construction of the multifaceted and multivalent cultural object “the Italian” creates an English/Italian opposition which reveals, if examined, several such mid-nineteenth century faultlines. We therefore see a heterogeneity, a fluidity or even an instability of meaning which Dentith argues is implicit in cultural objects – and is very obviously shown in the contradictory varieties of Italianness. In this study I seek not merely to map a taxonomy of Italian representations, but to examine contexts and uses – in particular, how producers and consumers positioned Italians and what norms were offered or implied for Englishness, by opposition. Hence my central metaphor, of a game of Snakes and Ladders in which the players are forced to make and remake identities as they meet new representations with which to compare themselves.

The use of opposition to define or set norms is a familiar mechanism. There are examples of such “antagonistic identification” in European literature since the Middle Ages (D’Appollonia, 1998, 68) and arguably there can be no identity without an alterity against which to define it. Antony Easthope in his study of nationalism and masculinity maps the roles the Other can play in such a discourse:
So, the other side is: (1) unstable, constantly varying in shape and outline; (2) a false appearance; (3) an organization made up from different bits and pieces; (4) irrational and animal. All this is on the outside and ‘we’ must defend ourselves against it constantly so that, in contrast, we, the patriotic male, can be (1) single and undivided in body and ego; (2) true and real; (3) unified and solid, the same all the way through; (4) rational, subject to reason and law (1990, 57).

The first set of roles, above, will be revealed as characteristic of the Italian in the emerging English narrative of construction of national identity by exclusion. This study will highlight the fragility of some aspects of John Bull’s self image, which had to be remade in contexts from street confrontations to pictures depicting Rome. Easthope relates such a nationalism to masculinity in that it makes hard-edged divisions:

- a really firm line is drawn between the two, a defended barrier, like the battlements around the self or the hard edges of the male body. ‘We’ are familiar, ‘they’ are foreign; ‘we’ are inside, ‘they’ are outside. In this version of nationalism, friend and foe, at home and abroad, are superimposed on an idea of the masculine ego and its other, everything outside that threatens it (56).

I, too, view the construction of national identity as being inherently involved with issues of masculinity, acting on and springing from disputed concepts of the male at this transitional period. The question of which norms the English tried to establish for themselves, and those which they repudiated, is central and invites consideration of the psychological mechanism of projection.

Such a simplified binary opposition, however, does not necessarily act as the most useful model for the multiple systems of representation seen operating in texts, or the ambivalence frequently encountered in representations of Italy and Italians. It has been argued that ‘identity’ (however illusory) depends for its completion upon an Other, and thus produces a desire for and even an identification with this Other, particularly in the realms of construction of gender (Lacan 2004; Zizek 1989). Thus projection need not be envisaged as operating simply to displace insecurities and fears directly onto an Other, but ambivalence felt about the self may well be reflected in an ambivalent construction of the Other, leading to such contradictory stereotypes as the Noble Savage and the Wild Man, for example. Representations of Italians in the mid-nineteenth century can feature them as cowards yet brave patriots, effeminate yet potent seducers, dirty peasants yet sophisticated artists, simple and childlike yet cunning and manipulative, morally bankrupt yet primally innocent, and inheritors of the glory of Rome and the Renaissance – yet incapable of gaining or ruling their own country. As they made efforts to change the factual basis of this last attribution, their role as the Other shifted, as did the balance of the English/Italian nexus and John Bull’s self-construction. The mid-Victorian
period which I take as my focus was filled with political instability and change, both at home with the rise and demise of Chartism and abroad with revolutions and wars in Europe, America and China. It is the period identified by W.L. Burn as the “Age of Equipoise”, a contentious phrase which has stimulated discussion since its coining in 1964. Such equipoise can be seen as an uneasy balance at best, but it is undeniable that certain key political and economic events would have led to the desire for some balance. 1 Derek Beales (1961, 9) is of the opinion that “almost every year between 1848 and 1865 some external question stirred English feeling deeply, often to the extent of inducing a crisis in home politics”. Discourses about national identity at this period interact with anxieties about race, social stability, respectability and even cleanliness, as well as gender and class, and Figure 1-1 illustrates this, being the central section of a double page spread from Punch in 1849. Here John Bull and his family are shown, safe and well fed as an object lesson amidst the revolutionary chaos of the rest of the world. Their home environment and their improving leisure pursuits act both as a contrast to the violence and instability around them, and as a model for the aspirational reader.

![Figure 1-1 "There is No Place Like Home"](image)

1 See Wolff and Seed 1988 and Hewitt 2000 for debate over the usefulness and accuracy of ‘equipoise’ as a metaphor for this period.
There is an element of satire here, but the image evokes contemporary anxiety about revolution which would have required the externalisation of such forces, so that the householder could feel secure. Created by John Arbuthnot in 1712, the corpulent, strong yet peaceable yeoman John Bull, more human and lively than the traditional lion and unicorn of England, drew on a graphic tradition of the presentation of Englishmen in popular pictures and engravings. But from the 1780s onwards his construction tapped into currents of social and political concern, as he served as a well-fed, prosperous point of implied reference both for volatile, revolutionary foreigners and for hunger rioters at home. Between 1800 and 1810, for example, this archetype appeared in more than 400 caricatures, and as Jeannette Surel demonstrates in her study of the figure, he was elevated in the social hierarchy to a gentleman farmer “sufficiently comfortable financially for identification to seem desirable, yet near enough for it also to be plausible” (1989, 21). Suspicion of foreigners was informed by science, too; mid-century writers such as Herbert Spencer popularised concepts of racial and social “progress” and “maturity” which encouraged a complacent superiority to other nations, validated apparently by the national economic prosperity and the political and social freedom enjoyed by the English householder. Yet there was undoubtedly residual Italophilia which has been identified by many, including Maura O’Connor (1998) and Charles P. Brand (1957), which impacted on the construction of the Italian, increasing the range of positions and heterogeneity of representation and use. The complexity of “Italianness” was also informed by the circulation of information about Italian historical and cultural achievements, and fashion for such cultural forms as historical novels and opera, to provide a fund of powerful images which might well require containment. Moe (2002, 17) declares in his study of attitudes within Italy itself that the foreign vision of Italy at this period “alternates between denunciations of backwardness and exaltations of the picturesque”, but I have found a less polarised, more subtle range of positions. Such complexity makes the period of the English reaction to the movement for the unification of Italy, the Risorgimento, particularly fascinating.

For the first half of the nineteenth century the Italian peninsula was split into a variety of states, ruled by Dukes, two Kings and of course the Pope. There is little agreement amongst historians as to when the Risorgimento begins; as with most “movements” the origins are debatable. The Italian historian Indro Montanelli states his opinion in the very title of L’Italia del Risorgimento (1831-1861) in the standard Storia D’Italia series, but begins the volume with

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2 The work of Spencer, Tylor and others in the field of cultural and racial anthropology will be discussed in later chapters.
3 See Riall 1994 and Beales and Biagini 2002 for more detailed accounts of origins and progress of the Risorgimento.
the acknowledgement that this rather arbitrary start date has been challenged by other historians, who would move the date back to 1815, 1789, or even the middle of the eighteenth century (1998, 5). His narrative and analysis ends in 1861 with the formal establishment of Italy with Rome as capital, but others have chosen 1815-1870 (Rudman 1940) 1825-1875 (Leicester Museums 1968), or 1840–1864 (O’Connor 1998) as their focus. The French Revolution, leading to the Napoleonic uniting of Italy, or the Treaty of Vienna (1815) which partially restored pre-Napoleonic rulers and boundaries, might well be a logical or convincing starting point, but the first that most English would have noticed of an Italian revolutionary movement was an influx of Italian political exiles. This began with individuals, such as the noted writer Ugo Foscolo, after 1815, and rose to several hundred in the 1820s and 1830s, amongst whom were Antonio Panizzi in 1823, Gabriele Rossetti in 1824 and Giuseppe Mazzini in 1837.4

These exiles were generally given a sympathetic reception, and learning Italian or supporting the safely distanced cause of Italian unification became fashionable, especially stimulated by the many articles written in English journals by the (largely middle class and well educated) exiles. They had fled following the imprisonment of Carbonari or similar political activists and the violent putting down of attempted revolutions in Piedmont and the Two Sicilies in the 1820s and in the Austrian-held territories in the 1830s. As well as the flow of articles, there were more substantial texts: Le mie prigioni by Silvio Pellico (1832), an horrific exposé of his imprisonment in Austrian prisons, was translated in 1833 and went into two English editions that year, as well as being published in the original Italian, and new editions continued to appear in 1834, 1842 and 1846. Italian language and literature became a fashion which could be used to signify compassion, glamour, youth, the exotic, and a myriad of other Romantic qualities – with Byron, Shelley and Keats as leaders, perhaps, but spreading steadily through the English upper and middle classes, joining with the residual images of Italy derived from the Grand Tour. Unfortunately, this inscription subjected Italians to the insecurity which attends such trends. Writing in 1852, Carlo Beolchi reminisces about his arrival in England in 1824:

It was easy for the Italians to find employment as teachers of the Italian language, which then formed part of the education of the young English miss. Society-ladies undertook to obtain pupils in the various provincial cities. When they had found a sufficient number, they informed the Italian Committee, which then sent an exile, who was provided with letters of recommendation to the leading families.5

5 Carlo Beolchi, Reminiscenze dell’Estilio, (1852) quoted in Brand, 28.
The link with female patronage is an interesting one, and no doubt contributed to the feminisation of Italian men which will be explored in the next chapter, but here I would like to highlight the uncertainty and disempowerment involved in the patronage system described above. As Harry Rudman comments in his study of *Italian Nationalism and English Letters*, “after all, the English propertied classes had secured their position against a narrow oligarchy by the Reform Bill of 1832 and could safely indulge in liberalism, especially when it was directed in anticlerical and antidespotic ways” (1940, 19). The “indulgent” spirit proceeds from a perceived relationship of superior to inferior, and Rudman indicates two of the qualities of Englishness which this strategy reinforced. Such needy Italians were thus of considerable use in national self-fashioning.

So even at this period the discourse about Italians was multistranded; as well as occupying a position of low social and economic status, many of the exiles indulged in petty squabbles in the public prints, for example. After the trial of Queen Caroline in 1820, the squalid and mendacious impression left by the Italian witnesses was slow to dissipate. Brand, focusing on “the Italianate fashion in early nineteenth-century England” (his subtitle) sees interest in Italy peaking between 1815 and the beginning of the 1830s, with the study of Italian language and letters declining as part of “a dissatisfaction with modern Italy, and a growing interest in Germany” (1957, 45). His evidence is based on lists of books published and translated on specifically Italian subjects, so has a rather narrow focus, but more importantly his study considers interest in Italy as identical with approbation of the country and its inhabitants. Interrogating the ambiguous inscription of Italians (and believing that they become more interesting as they are less admired), I would take issue with his comment “by 1840 the fashionable interest in Italy had declined; by 1850 it had largely disappeared” (228). Discourses about Italians were employed and explored by the Brownings, Collins and the Pre-Raphaelites, for example, suggesting the persistence of a strong interest. The closer relations between the English court and Germany did certainly contribute to a change of fashion, as did the evanescent nature of the Romantic fancy for all things Italian. But this change of fashion led to a much richer and more complex forum for the creation of Italian meanings, especially when informed by the vicarious excitement of a liberation struggle, at a safe remove. It can be argued that the later period is the more significant, precisely because of political events: according to John Pemble, between 1840 and 1860 dedication to the cause of Italian liberation “acted like a ferment on public, private, and literary life, and roused Protestant England to its greatest moral crusade since the campaign against slavery” (1987, 10).

The liberation struggle was kept in the English public consciousness through the 1830s and 1840s by articles about the morality of occupation and the right to
self-determination, often by Giuseppe Mazzini, which paid homage to self-ascribed English values of sturdy independence and fair play. The election in 1846 of Pio IX, an apparently liberal pope who immediately eased repressive conditions and introduced reforms in the Papal States, set off riots and risings in the rest of Italy during the next two years. The casting of the Pope as hero created some uncertainty among British Protestants, and Mazzini’s anticlericalism was popular, enabling antipapist sentiments to unite with sympathy for Italian freedom. In a dramatic development, Pio was forced to flee in November 1848; Mazzini left England and in March was part of the triumvirate which took charge of the Roman Republic, established in February 1849. The struggle thus took on a thrilling reality for the English, at a safe distance, and disappointment was great when, in alliance with Austria, French troops regained Rome in July. An English song from 1849 refers to the Italian struggle:

Shout, Britons, shout, till all the world throughout,
Your cheering voice shall hear o’er ev’ry land and sea;
Our duty is to fight,
For the cause of truth and right,
And to set the slave and tortur’d brother free.

The quietism of John Bull in Figure 1-1 was clearly not the only possible discourse about foreign struggles, in 1849. Gladstone, shocked by conditions for political detainees in Neapolitan prisons, published two open letters to the Prime Minister in 1851 which further influenced public opinion. But the failure of revolutionary uprisings, usually linked with dangerous republicanism, changed the tenor of the “Condition of Italy” debate. Despite setting up support groups such as the Friends of Italy (1851-5) and producing a torrent of articles and pamphlets, the radical Giuseppe Mazzini was increasingly vilified or marginalised, especially after another failed insurgency in Milan in 1853, and the Kingdom of Piedmont with its anglophile Chief Minister Count Camillo Cavour came to the fore. The prospect of Italy as a constitutional monarchy, modelled flatteringly upon that of Britain, was attractive and contributed to the perception that the Italians could, reassuringly, emulate “Us” as well as being excitingly “Other”. When Piedmont offered to join France and Britain in the Crimean War in 1855, and took a seat at the Congress of Paris in 1856, legitimacy was accorded to this small state and Piedmont became a credible focal point for a united Italy, although the official policy of non-intervention was maintained. As Maura O’Connor, in her discussion of British policy at this

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6 Quoted in Cunningham 1981,19.
period, concludes, “what British neutrality amounted to officially was sympathy for the Italian people and for the wrongs done against them” (130).

When France entered an alliance with Piedmont in 1858, and Austria invaded in April 1859, the Derby government’s inaction proved unpopular with the country and parliament, showing the strength of pro-Italian feeling. Palmerston’s new government was pressed to intervene, but the Treaty of Villafranca in July between France and Austria left Piedmont isolated again. At this period The Times covered Italian events almost every day, and popular journals such as the ILN and Punch frequently featured sympathetic coverage of the struggle for independence. The dramatic episodes of Garibaldi’s Sicilian campaign in 1860 sent the English press into a phase of fevered excitement and hero worship, only exceeded by the reaction to Garibaldi’s visit to England in 1864. Victor Emmanuel’s adoption of the title King of Italy in March 1861 forms a convenient point from which to date the birth of the Italian state. Punch certainly thought so; a cartoon a few days later shows a feminised Italy being introduced to John Bull and Britannia at an imagined Nations’ Ball (Figure 1-2).

![Figure 1-2 “The New Arrival” Punch, XL, 1861:131.](image)

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7 The discourses centering around Garibaldi and Mazzini and their uses for varied class, gender and political interests, will be explored in my final chapter.
Yet the struggle continued. The area of Venetia was only gained for the new Italian state after the Austro-Prussian war in 1866 and Rome only in 1870, and Garibaldi remained active in Italy and extremely popular in England. Rome, in particular, became a *cause célèbre*, carrying the potent symbolism of Empire as well as providing an opportunity for anti-Catholic sentiment. Novelists, poets and painters responded to the recent thrilling events by alluding to the *Risorgimento* directly or else to Italy’s glorious past. And of course the construction of Italians, as I shall argue, remained ambiguous throughout this period; *Punch*’s campaign against the Italian organ-grinders reached its height in 1859-62, as the journal was simultaneously lauding the Italians – or at least some of them - as brave heroes. Figures 1-3 and 1-4 were published within three months of each other in 1860, and illustrate radically opposed constructions of Italians, as Mr. Punch kicks some of them out, while Garibaldi is presented as a St. George figure. It is possible to trace a development over the 30 or so years, however: as Italy’s struggle for nationhood began to enlist English political sympathies, the Italians had also to be pictured more frequently as inferior or dependent in some way for the maintenance of English self-esteem and the construction of a satisfying relationship.
This fertile ground for conflicting and ambivalent inscription of Italy and England is the field of my study. I have selected 1840 as a notional starting date, although I shall be examining cultural products such as Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii*, published in 1834 but still reprinted and widely
influential in the following decades. I continue through the militarily active period of the Risorgimento, and examine the aftermath of the setting up of the final form of the Italian state, notionally ending at 1870 but alluding to novels and paintings produced in that decade. Changes, after all, take time to impact on artistic and public mores. This “horizontal slice” method will inevitably sacrifice some opportunities for tracing threads of discourse from their origins, but where this is vital I shall pursue such threads briefly, looking at them as residual elements – for example the Shakespearean and Gothic inheritance, when discussing Italian duplicity and villainy. Such a horizontal study must be selective and yet should be representative. I have sought to establish a solid base of knowledge about representations of Italians in the period by a detailed study of the Illustrated London News (ILN) and Punch from 1840-1870. These two periodicals were selected because of their large circulations, their use of woodcut and engraved illustrations, and their appellation of the male, middle-class reader. Punch, for example, reached an estimated 165,000 people in 1850 and the ILN was so immediately popular that its circulation was 20,000 after the first six weeks of publication, and later climbed to an estimated 250,000 readers in 1852. The appellation of the middle-class male reader by the ILN is illustrated by a poem published in 1850, said to be “from a correspondent”, clearly meant to be spoken by a male. There are two verses showing the family, “my wife, my daughters” and “little Jack” waiting for the postman’s knock, and then when “the welcome folded packet greets our sight” orders are issued by the speaker;

Now, Alice, stir the fire, and wife, do you
Just trim the lamp – we’ll have good light to view
The Illustrated London News (9 February 1850, 98)

The illustration of news will be central to my argument: as Brian Maidment remarks, “one of the aims of mass-circulation graphic satire … is that of representing social anxieties and complexities through simplified visual codes which draw on (and construct) stereotypes, emblems, and repeated images” (2000, 104). The development of steel or wood engraving and lithography by this period, added to advances in mechanised papermaking, printing and distribution, ensured the wider availability of images – and their wider popularity. Many pictorial magazines, not requiring literacy, thus appealed to a

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8 The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (1999, 1147) shows that the novel went through twelve editions in the 33 years until 1866.
10 On technological developments and the changes in this period see P. Anderson 1991; for an illuminating survey of recent work on periodicals see Boardman 2006.
mass audience, but periodicals such as *Punch* and the *ILN* contained fairly sophisticated articles, referring to Dante, Italian opera, and recent art exhibitions, for example. Entertainment was presented more respectably as the worthy pursuit of knowledge, validating the reader, and an important strand of the mission of the *ILN*, founded in 1842, was to increase knowledge of other countries, stated on the first page of the first issue:

To keep continually before the eye of the world a living and moving panorama of all its actions and influences ... The literature – the customs – the dress – nay, the institutions and localities of other lands, shall be brought home to you with spirit, with fidelity, and, we hope, with discretion and taste.

Articles and illustrations provide texts for critical reading, but in addition I wish to consider the intertextual nature of the whole publication, attempting to gain a more comprehensive insight into the reader’s construction of Italy and Italians during the reading of an issue. I have worked on the *ILN* in depth to analyse the detail of advertisements and regular if unspectacular features over the period. Such work enables some recuperation of the texture of the reading of the *ILN*, which was not, of course, solely perused for its illustrations. However, such visual texts, because of their ease of initial reading yet their iconographic complexity, are particularly powerful inscribers of cultural messages and give an insight into the variety of representational possibilities current and available at this period (see Maidment 1996 and Sinnema 1998).

Writing in the context of periodicals, Brake and Finkelstein (2000, 4) assert that the reader is “the product of a complex set of negotiations and exchanges between the historically informed discursive practices and the individuals and communities with whom they come into contact.” This book will pursue this conviction more widely, examining the uses made by English painters of Italian subjects, and the changing patterns of interest in Italian painters, using key paintings exhibited or reproduced, as texts. Contemporary novels such as *Roccabella* by H.F. Chorley, Reade’s *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Collins’s *Antonina*, and *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Bulwer-Lytton, and histories such as *The Story of Italy* by Anna Jameson will provide examples of the literary construction of Italians. I shall be using some works which seem to have been forgotten for many years but were clearly of contemporary importance – for example, the illustrated part-work *Italy Illustrated*, or *Selvaggio* by Anne Manning.11 There will also be exploration of more canonical works such as *Daniel Deronda* and *The Woman in White*, as well as Dickens’s *Pictures from Italy*, the poetry of the Brownings and some of Ruskin’s writings. Ranging more

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11 I must add that the discovery of such volumes has been one of the delights of this study.
widely, I shall also refer to contemporary anthropological theories, cultural myths such as John Bull, and of course the construction of the public figures of Garibaldi and Mazzini, to show the uses made of these images to preserve or challenge English self-fashionings. The strengths of such a choice should be evident; this period is a time characterised by the break up of some old certainties, transition, the forging of new identities, and a more than usual insecurity about male self-positioning in terms of class, gender and nationality.

To summarise my argument, the construction of Italians moves from pity and idealisation to competition and more overt hostility, as they become more like the English in political terms - but strategies are always more complex and ambiguous than a simple statement can suggest. Mapping the English creation of identity through a study of the pictures, novels, poetry and popular press produced within these Risorgimento years brings to mind the thrills and reversals of a game – but a lived one.

My study thus relates to several debates or fields which have received attention in the study of the mid-nineteenth century, or in cultural studies generally. The making of nationalism and cultural identity has been notably explored by Edward Said in *Orientalism*

> Every writer on the Orient … assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he [sic] refers and on which he [sic] relies. Additionally, each work on the Orient affiliates itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself. The ensemble of relationships between works, audiences, and some particular aspects of the Orient therefore constitutes an analyzable formation … whose presence in time, in discourse, in institutions … gives it strength and authority (1978, 21).

Although Said has shown how such constructions of the Orient are used to inscribe and support Eurocentric power ‘politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively,’ he does present dominant representations as unquestioned, thus almost conspiring with the world-project he delineates (5). In *Orientalism* he focuses much more on the ‘positional superiority’ at the heart of ‘the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively’ (7; 3). The book is a *tour de force*, setting out a framework for interrogating the discourse of cultural domination through “strategic location” – the author’s position in a text with regard to the material – and “strategic formation” analysing relationships between texts and how they acquire and circulate referential power. Said performs close textual readings, clearly believing in “the determining imprint of individual writers” and examining “the dialectic between the individual text or writer and the complex collective
He discovers that “the Orient” is produced, contained and represented by dominant frameworks, and that there is a process of polarisation taking place in which it becomes a repository for negative attributions, but also a signifier for indulgence and unacceptable pleasure. Not surprisingly, this representation owes more to the producing culture than to its alleged object. Later writers have gone on to interrogate his work, pointing out the contestation and range of variation of such stereotypes. Multiple systems of representation are now more likely to be explored, identifying discourses linked to certain cultural and social practices, and relating the whole to a complex interlocking framework of cultural and social needs.

Martin J. Wiener’s *Culture and the Decline of the English Industrial Spirit* (1985) traces a growing polarity between industrialism and ‘Englishness’, the latter often identified with the pastoral vision. He has also posited a conflict between the social and intellectual values of industrial society and those of the aristocracy, leading to tensions within the developing bourgeois culture, reflected in anxieties and discontents surrounding the idea of material progress. The present study will argue that the resulting ruralist myth and idealisation of the past was displaced on to an Other – yet patriotism also demanded the projection of weaknesses or fears on to this Other. Bryan Cheyette’s work on constructions of ‘The Jew’ in England between 1875 and 1945 is an example of this, demonstrating how such protean racial representations can be seen as contributing to the development of a modern British cultural identity, and foregrounds this quality: “the Jew, like all ‘doubles’, is inherently ambivalent and can represent both the ‘best’ and the ‘worst’ of selves” (1993, 12). Krishan Kumar (2003) takes this almost for granted and seems to imply its arbitrariness.

Homi Bhabha has explored the fragile self-construction behind the creation of the Other, focusing on passages in *Orientalism* in which Said refers to a vacillation between desire and fear. Such a concept is developed into a reading of the stereotype as fetish, pointing out that in beliefs about racial purity and superiority we see a similar mechanism to that of the resolution of castration anxiety and sexual difference in the enshrining of a fetish:

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of

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12 For revision of Said see, for example, Duncan and Ley 1993.
Bhabha shows how the construction of the stereotyped other reveals only the desires and defences of those involved in the construction. He too stresses the ambivalence of the stereotype, calling it a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must always be anxiously repeated … as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (66)

He also interrogates nationalism and examines the production of the nation by a continual narration, speaking of a “double narrative movement” by which people are both subjects and objects of the continuously re-inscribed, national discourse, interpellated as national subjects as they are told about themselves, their history, and their characters. Again he focuses on the ambivalence of the process, the “pedagogical” building up of substantiating detail and the “performativ[e]” re-inscription, and locates the writing of the nation in this split site. Bhabha is writing, of course, about a colonial environment and so the power relationships are more evident, but his remark that “the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power – whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan – remains to be charted” (66) encourages me to embark upon such a charting as a strategy.

However, the relationship between Italy and England was not an avowedly colonial one – although there are certainly overtones of this in some strands of discourse – so my stereotypes are perhaps more wide-ranging, and I shall be using axes of power such as gender and class, as well as ethnicity, as focal points for examination. I am more interested in examining the strategic nature of identity and self-defining, as well as its shifting nature. Stuart Hall (2000, 4) describes the process of constructing identity as “a suturing”, which conveys the progressive crafting of a work in progress, responding to varied and changing personal and social needs as well as external influences and events. I believe that examination of the representations of Italians will reveal some important elements of such mid-nineteenth century English self-fashioning.

At this point it seems germane to establish why I use the term English rather than British; most writers on nationalism (such as Bhabha) take the English as the focal nation but some (for example, Colley 1992, Cheyette 1993) choose to employ the concept of British and Graham Dawson (1991) has even coined “English-British”. Benedict Anderson’s study of Imagined Communities articulates the non-essentialist view of national identity, pointing out that
nationalism’s “multiple significations are cultural artefacts” and, as his title suggests, arbitrary identity-constructs which command emotional legitimacy (1983, 13). In Ian Baucom’s study of the use of foreign spaces and Empire to define English identity, Out of Place, (1999) he argues that Britishness is a collectivity defined by territory and law, but lacking any real possibility for subjective identification, so chooses Englishness. Catherine Hall writing about the 1830s and 1840s, remarks that “Englishness marginalizes other identities … Englishness was British, whereas those on the margins could never claim the right to speak for the whole” (1992, 206). And Peter Mandler’s recent study not only makes a convincing case for English being the key affiliation, but argues with “identity” as being too loose: he substitutes “national character” (2006, 4). Nevertheless I have chosen to focus on identity, as more of a construct, and this book looks at how Englishness was performed and sustained, reflecting both the frequent exclusion of Scots, Irish and Welsh from national discourses in the mid-nineteenth century and also the identity chosen by contemporary narratives when invoking virtues such as fair play, moderation, and even parliamentary government. Britain is not usually relevant to my argument, apart from some narration about empire when Rome is invoked: it is the English at this period who are discussed in terms of their racial identity, their hygiene, or their moral principles. It is the characteristics of Englishness which are the ones produced by the discourses of Italianness.

These discourses create myths, one of the ways in which nations “establish and determine the foundations of their own being” (Schöpflin 1997). Few would now take the essentialist view of national qualities, agreeing with Rosemary Mitchell that “the cultural manifestations of nationality and national identity are in no way ‘natural’, inevitable, or monolithic” (2000, 8) but there has been a range of opinion about the creation, circulation and beneficiaries of such national myths. Ernest Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have seen the nation as an essentially modern construct, but Anderson (1983) focuses upon shared cultural inheritances and their mediation through printed works. Anthony D. Smith’s monumental work in this area (see 1991; 2001) has identified four major paradigms of the nation and national identity (modernism, perennialism, primordialism and ethno-symbolism). Of these, the last one considers the importance of ethnic origins, linked with the constructed, cultural aspects, and he has explored this further in Myths and Memories of the Nation (1999). Smith stresses that such identity is subjectively created, “collective cultural identity refers not to a uniformity of elements over generations but to a sense of continuity” (1991, 25), and Guibernau (2004, 135) develops this, focusing on the emotional force with which beliefs are held, “what matters is not chronological or factual history but sentient or felt history.” Tim Edensor
(2002) focuses even more closely on lived cultural practices and speaks of a matrix within which national identity is created, constantly shifting.

Catherine Hall also stresses that nationality, however apparently secure, is constructed upon “shifting sands” of “a complex set of articulations in which class, gender and ethnicity are all axes of power, sometimes mutually reinforcing each other, sometimes contradicting each other” (1992, 207). Like Easthope, Sinha in Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century reads the construction of national identity through the lens of gender performativity, as well as considering the economic and social dimensions. She suggests that these stereotypes were produced by, but also were instrumental in producing, shifts in the political economy of colonialism; as demands for economic participation grew, the representation of the Indians as an “‘artificial’ and ‘unnatural’ class of persons … substituted for a straightforward defence of racial exclusivity a supposedly more ‘natural’ gender hierarchy between ‘manly’ and ‘unmanly’ men.” Similarly, British imperial manliness was re-inscribed, as “the ‘feebleness’ of the Bengalis served to justify their loss of independence to the British” (1995, 5; 15).

This analysis of binaries is reminiscent of George Mosse’s work on masculinity in which he identifies the nineteenth-century alliance of nationalism with bourgeois morality as being instrumental in promoting respectability as a masculine ideal – but one which creates its opposite as a fascinating Other. He argues that male beauty, with its potential as a homoerotic symbol, had to be disciplined, separated out and reclaimed as part of the conventionally ascribed masculine role, and in The Image of Man (1996, 26) he extends his study to examine the masculine stereotype in greater detail, showing its intersection with revived notions of chivalry and theories of physiognomy, “linking morality and bodily structure”. Thus masculine bravery, honour and virtue were visibly demonstrated and male beauty reclaimed, as we see in contemporary pictures and descriptions of Garibaldi. Mosse also sets up the category of “counterotypes”, the direct opposition against which the manly man could define himself, drawn from outsiders who “symbolized physical and moral disorder” or those who did not conform to social norms (57). Thus the construction of masculinity intersects with issues of power, control and the definition of boundaries.

In this period the inscription of masculinity is clearly privileged, given the interpellation of the male reader or viewer in the majority of cultural exchanges; the cultural products designed for women are demarcated by specific title address or agreed “womanly” subject. Brake and Finkelstein agree that at this period “an assumed masculinity remained the default position for most kinds of writing and reading” (2000, 5). This is one reason why I shall primarily consider
the male reader as consumer of texts, visual and written. But my subject matter, 
the representation of Italy and Italians, also largely concerns males (apart from 
in the musical field, where women are also represented), and national identity at 
this period is bound up with masculinity, rather than the construction of 
femininity. I intend to range more widely, however, looking at a framework of 
Italianness in which the multiple representations will be shown to intersect with 
changes and shifts in several areas of identity, as well as the Victorian use of 
history to explore and establish difference.

The performing of masculinity, of course, has been linked directly with 
social positioning and class – notably by John Tosh in his work on the creation 
of middle-class social identities. He argues against over-simplification, warning 
that “masculine identities diverge from – and in some contexts overlay – class 
identities” (1999b, 75) but in much of his work on domesticity has focused on 
what can be described as the middle classes. This social grouping is particularly 
interesting in the complexity of its self-fashioning, as “the speed and scale of 
urbanization had brought together myriads of people who were now apparently 
removed from the constraining structures of traditional society” (1999a, 31) and 
“the distinctions of status and wealth to be found within the middle class were 
greater than in either the working class or the upper class” (1999a, 13). Because 
of this latter point, Tosh argues for the use of the term “middle class”, because 
of its residual implications and heterogeneity, rather than the unified concept of 
a “bourgeoisie.” Davidoff and Hall (1987) also use “middle class” in their 
survey of provincial gender and social roles, public and private, as does Hoppen 
in his 1998 comprehensive study *The Mid Victorian Generation*. The definition 
of terms and parameters in this field is of course extremely contentious: Simon 
Gunn (1988, 34) has critically surveyed recent readings of this Victorian social 
grouping, concluding that

if the development of the English middle class was marked by a significant 
degree of structural fragmentation, there nevertheless existed resources in social 
and economic organisation which served as powerful impulses to class cohesion.

The potential insecurity and instability of those belonging to this middle class is 
of key importance in examining the cultural products made available which 
participate in discourses about the English and their Italian Others.

Examining cultural practices and social and psychological self-fashioning as 
displayed in texts, I shall refer to the work of theorists who could be described 
as sociologists, psychologists and even anthropologists, as well as literary 
critics. Clifford Geertz (1973) for example, examines culture as a process of 
exchange, and his description of a network of practices participating in the 
creation of meaning informs my project. His concept of “thick description” 
allows for meaning not only within an event or text, but also very much outside