

*FOREIGNIZING THE IMAGI-NATION:
GIOVANNI RUFFINI'S CONTRAPUNTAL RISORGIMENTO*

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Summary: Giovanni Ruffini, author of the 1855 novel *Doctor Antonio*, is mainly remembered as the quintessential exiled Risorgimento patriot who, in Mazzini's footsteps, from London advocated Italy's freedom and unification. This article presents Ruffini as a more complex contributor to the politics of nation-ness. It highlights how *Doctor Antonio* engages with a neglected aspect of the Risorgimento, namely, the coexistence of the nation-building project and of a European consciousness as openness to geographical displacement and cultural crossfertilization. Ruffini raises the paradoxical possibility of inhabiting dislocation, projecting emotional attachment upon a plurality of cultural visions rather than upon the monadic paradigm of the nation-state.

“[T]o hear a foreign language; to dwell amid uncomprehending and unsympathizing strangers; (...) to read day after day new instances of the brutality under which your cherished land is doomed to groan; to look at the sombre sky of London while dreaming of the golden sky of Rome” (*North British Review* 568)... All this, according to a rather melodramatic 1856 review of Giovanni Ruffini's *Doctor Antonio*, “must be a fearful trial (...) to the unchastened spirit and the loving heart” (568). To be sure, at first sight, whether we linger on the author's lot as a guest of foggy Albion or on his character's drama of belonging in sunny Belpaese, we can find abundant evidence of the pathos of distance from one's homeland for which Ruffini was remembered for decades. Although not very popular anymore beyond the academic walls, the image of Ruffini crystallized for a long time the quintessential exiled patriot and writer, who, in Mazzini's footsteps, from London advocated Italy's freedom and unification, and, thanks to the setting of his most important novel, turned his Liguria region into a popular tourist destination for British and European travelers at large. Unquestionably, the multiple displacements at work in *Doctor Antonio*, written in English from Paris, published in Edinburgh in 1855, and set between the Italian Riviera and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the midst of the revolutionary movements of the 1840s, seem to corroborate the reviewer's connotation of “patriots languishing in exile and yearning at once for their country's emancipation and their own return” (568).

Yet, the coincidence of the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification with

the 130th anniversary of Ruffini's death can also offer a symbolic occasion to investigate *Doctor Antonio's* unconventional approach to the Italian national cause. Indeed, far more than "A Tale of Italy," as the subtitle of the 1857 New York edition labels it, Ruffini's novel provides an articulated vision on the cultural and political relations between Italy and Great Britain by creating characters that embody different national traits and offer multiple and often conflicting perspectives on the two countries. Precisely these multifaceted representations suggest that, for Ruffini, living outside the nation – although a nation still in progress—is tantamount to thinking beyond the nation, not simply because the nation-making process consists of "reinvention and renegotiation" (O'Connor *Romance* 9;11) from both inside and outside geographical, political and cultural boundaries, but, more radically, because Ruffini's spirit is intrinsically European.

In addition to offering a critical examination of conservative and progressive responses to the Italian unification from both national contexts, the novel, I hence claim, highlights a more neglected aspect of the Risorgimento, namely, the coexistence of the nation-building project and of the Europeanist discourse as openness to geographical displacement and to cultural crossfertilization beyond frontiers. Bringing to life the Goethian and Mazzinian idea of Europeanness as a literary and ultimately political dimension, and experiencing it himself as a participant in, and a critical spokesperson of different cultures and institutional systems (Italy, England, Switzerland, France), Ruffini elaborates a supranational vision in which exile does not merely reinforce Italian patriotism by enriching the Risorgimento discourse with foreign ideologies (Isabella *Risorgimento* 5). Rather, the exilic condition, both in its actual and metaphorical sense, shapes Ruffini's European consciousness in terms of what Edward Said connotes as a "contrapuntal" awareness of "simultaneous dimensions" ("Reflections" 149), which in *Doctor Antonio* attenuates the primacy of the Italian nationhood myth altogether.

1. The dark, the fair, and the unfair: Ruffini's critical projections

If we trust another reviewer of *Doctor Antonio*, although Ruffini is "a name proscribed at home" (*Tait's* 683), the object of his writing allegedly remains a tender yet truthful account of the extension of his country's "sweet influences" (683), transcending mere sentimentality and challenging "the defamers of Italian capabilities" (683). In the novel, however, such defamers are primarily English characters themselves, quite far, at first sight, from the romanticized reconstructions of the Italian nation that the cultural and political imagination of Victorian England copiously produced. On

the one hand, as Mary O' Connor has argued, the enthusiastic narratives of the English middle class were as crucial to the invention of Italy as the nationalistic discourse(s) of the Italian Risorgimento itself (O'Connor *Romance* 3;9). On the other hand, however, the "light, elegant, well balanced" (*Antonio* 8) English carriage that in the first pages of *Doctor Antonio* struggles to negotiate the "irregular and serpent-like" (8) Ligurian roads also paves the way to the novel's insistent polarization between an aristocratic, aloof, dispassionate Britain and a disorganized, chaotic, unruly Italy. These temperamental stereotypes are further substantiated through the physical descriptions of the two male characters—"the Englishman" and "the Italian", as they will systematically be defined throughout the novel—and their respective evaluations of each other's national cultures, or, we should rather say, their reciprocal othering. Sir John Davenne's "almost feminine" (10) complexion, his "clear blue eye" (10), "lofty brow" (10), and carefully brushed "glossy grey hair" (10) produce an "agreeable" yet "calculated" impression which cannot conceal "blots on this polished surface" (10). In Sir John's obstinacy and "contemptuous pride" (11), Antonio locates the quintessence of his nationality, "as if in the baronet's face he had seen the flag of Great Britain hoisted" (20).

In the novel, therefore, the "Automedon" (11) of the "aristocratic" (11) English carriage who forces the Italian "democratic-looking calessino" (17) out of its way works as a moral and political metaphor for the contrast between an arrogant if not imperialistic England and an Italian peninsula connoted as a far less influential but freedom-and-equality seeking land, towards which England does not harbor particularly warm feelings. The baronet's behavior, indeed, corroborates the power asymmetry between the two nations, as Sir John violently goes at the far weaker Italian coachman, against whom he would have even solicited the intervention of the King of Sardinia—as the narrator cynically writes. Among the negative Italian stereotypes fabricated by Sir John's hostility it is hence not too surprising to find "the bloodthirsty republican conspirator, plotting for ever against his lawful sovereign" (63). This is how the complex political turmoil in favor of Italy's unification appears to the members of the Davenne dynasty, guided by "high tory principles" (52) and a "war-like spirit" (51), loyal to the royal cause since the Norman period, the repression of Irish and Scottish unrest, and of any revolutionary movement. Therefore, despite the British travelers' access to Continental Europe after 1815, not even a Grand Tour can help a "self-centered" (40) individual like Sir John to overcome "the spider's web of prejudice spread over his intellect" (53). This perceptive barrier makes him conceive of Europe as a cultural entity detached from

his island, in contrast with the narrator's opening reference to the "public highways of Europe" (7) which evokes geographic and symbolic connections between different regions.

Predictably, "the odd-looking figure" of Doctor Antonio, clashing "with all the Englishman's preconceived notion of medical gentlemen" (20)— "a tall, dark, black-bearded man", wearing "a broad-brimmed conical hat" (20) that makes him look like the Corsican anti-French brigand Rinaldo Rinaldini — cannot but reinforce the English baronet's alertness to the potential dangers of Italy as "the classical land of banditti" (20), "stilettoes, (...) and vendette" (46), a "cursed" (35) and "devilish disagreeable country" (46) frozen in time where "everything goes wrong" (63), or even pure "wilderness" (45) where he feels "as if he had fallen in with a tribe of Red Indians" (46). Ruffini is here transcending the idealizing picture of Italy's solemn archaism seen as a custodian of its venerated historical patrimony. Through Sir John Davenne, he evokes fearful reactions like the ones expressed in Goethe's *Italian Journey* about Italians as dangerous cavemen and murderers, hence reinstating the myths that, as Joseph Luzzi has shown, the European Romanticism produced of an irrational, backward, and violent Italian peninsula, strategically forged by the foreign imaginary in contrast with the progressive and more sophisticated Northern countries (Luzzi *Romantic* 62).

Not surprisingly, therefore, what the narrator extols as "fair Italy"'s "imperishable spell to soften and subdue all natures, however rugged and rebellious" (*Antonio* 216) exerts only a temporary effect on the baronet. All the seductive and maternal clichés of a feminized Italian peninsula able to arouse filial attachment in whoever "tasted the sweet milk of [her] breast" (216) do not succeed in bonding Sir John's heart to this putative "parent land" (216). A scandalistic newspaper article about the union between a young English noblewoman and an Italian painter suffices to revive Sir John's avowed "unconquerable aversion to marriages with foreigners" (302), and to reinstate the endemic contemptuous superiority that leads him to see in Italy not so much the "Mother" (216) of love as the receptacle of "confounded (...) adventurers" (302) deserving to be blown out.

As we will see, the baronet's merciless repudiation of the culture of feelings, tolerance and intercultural dialogue unwittingly works as an indirect threat which inhibits Doctor Antonio's undeclared love for Sir John's daughter Lucy. Yet, the next Davenne generation proves even more unforgiving towards any betrayal of their own national cult. Sir John's son, Aubrey, introduced as more intelligent than his father, will put his alleged extra dose of grey matter in the service of arrogance and violence, reacting more vehe-

mently than Sir John against the disgraceful news of the Anglo-Italian elopement: the English girl's "matrimonial alliance" (313) with "the cowardly Italian beggar" (313) will be short, in his view, because her father—"one of the best shots in England" (313)—will soon make her "a jolly widow" (313).

Significantly, here stereotypical national attributes are overturned: it is the proverbially self-controlled and unemotional English character, and not the fiery, "silly demonstrative" (62) Italian, to be associated with dangerous, virulent reactions, legitimized in this case by the imperialistic aura of the British political power. Once Aubrey seems to regain the refinement and impassiveness of his class, his appreciation for Doctor Antonio's professional and personal talents answers to mere instrumental reasons, since he realizes they made his sister happy, *despite* Antonio's Italian-ness. Antonio may as well appear to him as "gentleman-like" (315) as an English aristocrat, endowed with a nobility of soul potentially compatible with Lucy's social rank, yet, although he even admits that the two youths "would make a handsome couple" (315), Aubrey quickly restores the asymmetry between the two cultures and value systems, threatening the inferior Italian "other" so as to prevent an actual liaison with his own sister. Aubrey would rather see Lucy "dead and buried than married to that man" (315).

Comparing *Doctor Antonio* to Ruffini's previous novel *Lorenzo Benoni*, the section of *The North British Review* symptomatically titled "Italian Character and Italian Prospects" blames *Doctor Antonio* for not giving readers "the Italian nature depicted by Italians, Italian oppressions as felt by Italian sufferers" (*North* 286). Although in negative terms, this appraisal highlights a pivotal element of Ruffini's approach to a recurring issue in the Risorgimento discourse, namely, national character. Tropes about Italianness are central to the intellectual and political debate while Italy is struggling to achieve nationhood. However, as Perry Anderson and Silvana Patriarca, among others, underline, national character is a "settled" and "self-sufficient" disposition (Anderson *Zone* 270), which "tends to naturalize and psychologize sociocultural traits and attitudes" (Patriarca "National" 313), and which, indeed, in a newly unified Italy, would soon consolidate not only specific moral values but also alleged attributes of an entire people or race, while simultaneously creating their own Other (310). For its part, *Doctor Antonio* can be said to adopt national stereotyping and self-stereotyping with an ironic and critical attitude, setting up strategic binary oppositions between apparently monolithic features and values to relativize and multiply perspectives. The supposed flaw that the reviewer finds in the novel's insufficient Italianness hence lays bare Ruffini's more nuanced attitude towards the dis-

course on national character “as a tool of nation-building” (Patriarca *Vices* 7-8). Without neglecting the Italian cause, Ruffini adopts national political and cultural properties to challenge, rather than reinforce, essences and ideological boundaries that obstruct a wider vision. In so doing, he also validates and takes one step further Patriarca’s objection to Anderson’s distinction between the alleged objectivity of national character and a notion of national identity as a subjective, relational concept and “self-conscious projection” (Anderson *Zone* 270). Patriarca maintains that the conceptual boundaries between the two are ultimately blurred because both national character and national identity are in fact produced in the realm of representation (Patriarca “National” 313). Ruffini’s novel not only exhibits the fictional nature of national images, hence delegitimizing their realistic or referential validity. It also uses them to construct a transnational cultural setting in which otherness does not work as a contrastive external reference in opposition to a self-identical national discourse, but rather informs each national trope from within. Criticizing Austria for its inability to understand the Italian character, the *North British Review* article insists on pigeonholing Doctor Antonio, praising him as “a fine specimen of a superior class of Italians” (*North British* 287) but still confining him to his patriotic, domestic niche. In fact, Ruffini’s protagonist enacts a wider narrative in which it is not only the solution of the Italian problem to be “European rather than Peninsular” (*North British* 298) but the very ideals and values at stake. Shaped, like Ruffini himself, by the exposure to various cultural contexts and by the experience of repeated estrangement, Antonio can be said to embody and promote a Europeanness characterized by what Zygmunt Bauman defines as the “internalization of difference” (*Europe* 7), an intellectual and ethical stance that “defies monopolistic ownership” (7) because “the perpetual effort to separate, expel and externalize is constantly thwarted by the drawing in, admission, accommodation and assimilation of the ‘external’” (7).

2. The extraterritorial within: for a European cultural geography

It is precisely against the backdrop of a double national caricature—the proverbial Italian backwardness and savage primitiveness, and an English chauvinism that encloses the mind “as within a Chinese wall” (*Antonio* 52)—that the narrator soon brings to the foreground the “sympathetic communication” (28) between Doctor Antonio and Sir John’s daughter, Lucy Davenne, each of whom “had had a glimpse into the nature of the other” (28). Acting as the critical consciousness of her self-righteous father, Lucy immediately shows her openness to ethnic and cultural differences. It

is precisely in the interaction with her that the multifaceted personal history of Antonio emerges in all its complexity, starting from the many nuances of his connotation as a “stranger” and “foreigner” with which Sir John had labeled that “black bearded Esculapius” (44) only to corroborate his “unbounded and exclusive admiration for all that was, and an utter abhorrence of all that was not English” (52). It is all the more ironic that Sir John’s mental closure manifests itself not so much in his own country as in the very land and culture of the “other”, where he himself is in fact the stranger. Significantly, however, Antonio, too, considers himself a stranger and an exile on what should be his own homeland because, as he explains to Lucy through a detailed description of his fragmented country’s political predicament, being born in Sicily he comes from a different state, still in the oppressor’s hands. As both Antonio and Lucy reveal the internal discontinuities and exclusions inherent to the apparent homogeneity of the national discourse with their respective references to marginal regions like the Sicilian and the Irish (166), the narrator’s recurring definition of Antonio as “the Italian” hence sounds like a speech act, positing his nationness through linguistic performance in the absence of a political reality.

Yet this very promise of rootedness in a forthcoming monolithic heritage is formulated in the framework of a wider linguistic and cultural belonging. Not only can Antonio facilitate his interlocutor’s understanding by shifting from Italian to French and English. He also substantiates Lucy’s perception of an undefined difference that sets him apart from his community by disclosing to her that, as the nephew of a British officer, he was educated in English, which became almost as familiar to him as the language of his own country. Beyond Lucy’s fantasies about the fascinating nobility of soul and rank that she associates with the doctor’s foreignness, Antonio’s multiple allegiances at a historical conjuncture when Italy is tackling the *questione della lingua* as a paramount political cohesive factor in the nation-building process challenge the irreplaceability and untranslatability of the mother tongue that Hannah Arendt, for instance, will rather uphold as the mark of a subject anchored within the space of a singular cultural and ethnic memory, despite the estrangement brought about by exile. At the same time, Antonio does not unilaterally coopt his own linguistic and cultural Britishness to express that form of dissidence which in Julia Kristeva connotes the exilic condition as a transgressive act of separation from the “real or symbolic community” (Kristeva “Intellectual” 298) represented by the heritage of one’s native country.

Realizing for the first time, and only thanks to Antonio’s account, the political and administrative complexity in the different Italian states, Lucy

admits that her lack of understanding was caused by her family's absolute detachment from Roman life, having "visited exclusively among the English" (*Antonio* 122). Not surprised, Antonio cynically replies that strangers usually "come to Italy as they would to a convenient hotelry" (122), hence with no genuine curiosity about local people. For his part, Antonio believes that the way to attain knowledge of people and places is "to mix with *all* classes of society" (123), and it is precisely upon this ethics of inclusiveness that the emotional relationship of friendship and undeclared love between him and Lucy is founded. Both are willing to share their respective differences as enrichment, as an opportunity to treasure the alterity they discover in themselves and to open up to wider cultural horizons.

If what distinguishes nations as imagined communities according to Benedict Anderson is not "their falsity/genuineness" (*Imagined* 6) but "the style in which they are imagined" (6), Lucy and Antonio cross the boundaries of their respective nations by appropriating and identifying with each other's iconic cultural practices. Defining himself as "a great devotee" (*Antonio* 70) of the English national beverage, Antonio shares with Lucy the quintessential British ritual of tea. Likewise, Lucy defends Antonio against her father's blame by responding to Sir John with an Italian proverb, hence challenging his univocity with the language and the culture of the "other". If sometimes Lucy's reactions to the host culture still seem biased, open dialogue between the two successfully overcomes misunderstanding. Hence her initial "horror of oil" (71) and her astonishment at Liguria's lack of demand for butter subsidy when Antonio reminds her that they "are not in England" (71), and reassures her that oil is "an excellent substitute" (71). However, while he helps her broaden her culinary horizons by initiating her to Italian eating habits, he also participates, in his turn, in her own country's food culture, not simply as a consumer but rather as a promoter of it, by churning butter for Lucy.

This symbolic step towards cultural otherness exacerbates the contrast with Sir John's own approach to the alterity of the host culture in similar circumstances. The self-interest prompting the baronet's sporadic investment in Italian practices emerges quite clearly when he attempts to convince another English physician to violate the prohibition "to examine another man's patient except in his presence" (82). The usually intransigent Sir John now dismisses the medical code as a mere "formality" (82) because "we are in Italy, you know, not in England" (82). Likewise, when he intends to collect the best orange and palm plants in the neighborhood and transplant them "to the seigneurial seat of all the Davennes" (181), the baronet reifies and consumes the culture of the other, reducing compre-

hension to simple material grasping. He literally takes pieces of Italy to graft them into his own domestic soil for his personal gratification.

The primacy of the English turf over the Italian ground, in material and symbolic terms, seems at first reinforced by Lucy's praise of her country's unique production, which Antonio endorses with his own deference towards his second motherland: "I feel inclined beforehand to admire everything that is English" (196). Yet he is equally ready to dissociate himself from the pride of the English race embodied in Sir John's "lack of regard for the dignity of others" (95), to which he reacts by symbolically reclaiming his Italianness as he puts on "the very conical hat that had so scared and shocked Sir John" (97). Likewise, Lucy's pride in certain aspects of her own culture does not inhibit her critical spirit, which, for instance, leads her to despise the English physician whom her father summoned as a more reliable expert on her health than the "foreign" (102) Doctor Antonio.

As the two young people acknowledge the snares of any discourse about national peculiarities, be they ontological or postulated, they find in literature the ideal tool with which to break the couple nation/imagination. Through literary exchanges Lucy and Antonio construct for themselves a cultural homeland conceived as a dialogical movement that makes understanding possible through translation and confrontation. As if offsetting Antonio's *cri de cœur* against the particularisms and the bureaucratic barriers that hinder harmonization and interaction between different Italian states and artificially keep alive different nationalities, the evocation of lines from major European works, from Milton and Giusti's poetry to Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, Saintine's *Picciola*, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, binds the two characters in an emotional and intellectual complicity based upon border crossing. The ideological subtext of this transnational republic of letters is Mazzini's essay "D'una letteratura europea", which, not accidentally, opens with a homage to Goethe's *Weltliteratur*—"Io intravedo l'aurora di una LETTERATURA EUROPEA: nessuno fra i popoli potrà dirla propria; tutti avranno contribuito a fondarla" (*D'una letteratura* 29).¹ It can be argued, however, that for Goethe the "freer system of intellectual give-and-take" (Strich 32) made possible by "more neighbourly relations" (32) among nations thanks to the circulation of literary works is supposed to reach a worldwide extension, while at the same time his own nation,

¹Mazzini not only endorses Goethe's international view of human and cultural relations. By incorporating foreign models in his own writing, he also exemplifies the performative value of translation as the main vehicle for the circulation and exchange of ideas across frontiers that Mme de Staël had championed in her 1816 seminal essay, published in Italian as «Sulla maniera e l'utilità delle traduzioni».

Germany, preserves its centrality: “a universal world literature is in the process of being constituted, in which an honorable role is reserved for us Germans. All nations are paying attention to us” (Goethe *Essays* 225). For its part, the allegedly universal vision that leads Mazzini to extol the idea of “umanità” as the point of convergence of *any* nation in fact focuses specifically on Europe, a perspective that Ruffini’s *Doctor Antonio* well substantiates.²

Far from ancillary or derivative with respect to the European political project, literature is extolled by Mazzini as an expressive form endowed with a poetic *and* a poietic—that is anticipatory and creative—function: “l’ufficio della Letteratura anch’esso si muta, e dove prima esprimeva, e seguiva, precede, e indovina” (*D’una letteratura* 44). The discursive dimension of literary Europeanness is intrinsically political insofar as it generates the conceptual and emotional premises for the transition from the national to the supranational sphere: “la storia particolare delle nazioni sta per finire; la storia Europea per incominciare” (70). As nations set out for a common destination, it is literature itself that, as a creator and promoter of a shared symbolic patrimony, has to formulate and guide that “tendenza Europea” (67) which Mazzini presents as “una concordia di bisogni, e di desiderj, un comune pensiero, un’anima universale” (67). Despite the

²The European focus of Mazzini’s international openness emerges, for instance, from numerous explicit claims validating the priority given to the Old Continent in his supposedly cosmopolitan stance, such as «Europe—we might say the world, for Europe is the lever of the world» («Europe» 446). Goethe himself, although not equally explicitly, seems to have originally conceived of *Weltliteratur* as a mainly European phenomenon, having announced the plan of an article to be titled «European, i.e., World Literature», focusing on the benefits of exchanges among the main European national literatures (Schulz and Rhein, *Comparative* 4). Nevertheless, despite the unconditional openness advocated by this Romantic Europeanness, its Eurocentric and potentially imperialistic ideology cannot be denied, as other claims by Mazzini show: «E questa civiltà europea, che con una mano s’innalza un trono in Europa, coll’altra incomincia a tentar l’Africa e l’Asia, cacciando in Algeri il principio europeo (...) non è poesia? (*D’una letteratura* 112-13). Ruffini’s novel is not alien to this hierarchical and domineering vision of European civilization. Reconstructing the story behind the sanctuary of the Madonna of Lampedusa, Antonio tells the Davennes about a villager’s miraculous escape from the Turks by using the picture of the Madonna as a sail. In line with the prevailing discourse on European identitarian self-awareness founded upon the opposition to a designated cultural alterity, the sanctuary commemorates a victory against the threat of non-European infidelity, celebrating «the faith that brought about the Crusades» (*Antonio* 256).

magical and venerated sound of the term “Patria” (71), every foreign literature for Mazzini conveys aesthetic, ethical, and intellectual values with which each individual and nation can and should identify:

Ma dovremmo perciò disprezzare quanto sorge di Bello e Sublime oltre i nostri confini ? La parola della Verità dovrà cadere invano per noi, perché fu trovata sott’altro cielo, e da stranieri intelletti? No: noi deporremo ogni pregiudizio nazionale; e diremo a’ Sommi scrittori di tutti i popoli, e di tutte le età: Venite! noi vi saluteremo fratelli (71).

Ruffini’s protagonist is no less sensitive than Mazzini to the need to “forget preconceived notions” (*Antonio* 175) and, rather, to “remember all, and compare” (175), highlighting the power of the comparative approach as exposure and openness to difference. This constitutes yet another discrepancy with Sir John’s unilateral cultural hierarchies, according to which Paris, although rather agreeable, remains “vastly inferior to London” (167), and the Champs Elysées cannot even “be compared to Hyde Park” (167).

It is precisely the emergence of a fraternal bond across national frontiers, able to overcome what in Mazzini are “le differenze che disgiungono una gente dall’altra” (*D’una letteratura* 45), that Ruffini depicts when Antonio, after promptly identifying a line from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* that Lucy quotes, ascribes it to an author who could “embody, and ‘give a local habitation and a name’ to the feelings of a whole nation for centuries to come” (*Antonio* 173). Significantly, with this response Antonio not only acknowledges Shakespeare’s symbolic power in Lucy’s homeland as a passive consumer of a foreign cultural icon. He also shows his emotional investment by appropriating, in his turn, a Shakespearean quotation from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,³ to convey his own sense of belonging to the English playwright’s world. Indeed, corroborating Lucy’s remark that he seems “as much at home with Shakespeare as with [his] own poets” (173), Antonio confirms that Shakespeare *is* indeed one of his poets (173).⁴ Through Antonio’s inclusive, transcultural domesticity, Ruffini

³“(…) the poet’s pen/ Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing/ A local habitation and a name” (*Midsummer* Act 5, Scene 1).

⁴ As Stephen Greenblatt maintains, Shakespeare’s works are «part of an Englishman’s inner being» («Racial Memory» 50), with crucial political and spiritual implications at the individual and social level. In Ruffini, the «communal consensual identification» (50) promoted by the English writer *par excellence* not only consolidates national sentiment but also generates international cultural solidarity across time and space.

hence elaborates on Mazzini's own standpoint on the role of monumental figures as icons of national identity, foregrounding their potential as messengers of Europeanness. Already in two 1830 essays by Mazzini, *Del dramma storico* and *Della fatalità considerata com'elemento drammatico*, Shakespeare had emerged as the highest expression of an individual thought and drama ("Fatalità" *Scritti* 303; 307), "la più alta formola dell'io (...) senza amore pel *collettivo*" ("Dramma" *Scritti* 274) which will fade after him. Two years later, in "Pensieri. Ai poeti del sec xix", Mazzini declares the death of this individual epoch, shared by other singular, exceptional individuals like Byron and Napoleon, all geniuses and heroes whose uniqueness and self-centeredness are for him incompatible with the social, popular nature of the new century, coterminous with the European ideal (*D'una letteratura* 98;109;112).

Nevertheless, Ruffini seems to tell us that, despite his aura of singularity and superiority, an author can simultaneously be a national cultural icon and generate emotional attachment at the European level, more in line with what Mazzini himself had observed in "Carlo Botta e i Romantici": "i Sommi non sono d'alcun paese; (...) il genio è europeo e (...) gli scrittori che lo possiedono sono i benefattori della razza, sotto qualunque grado di latitudine abbiano sortita la scintilla che li anima" (*Scritti* 60). This is probably yet another European adaptation of more global Goethian observations like "there is not such thing as patriotic art or patriotic science. Both belong, like all good things, to the whole world" (Strich 35). As Mazzini declares, after the time of the particular, a "tempo europeo" has come ("Dramma" *Scritti* 218), which puts an end to the Italian, English, French individual, and inaugurates the epoch of "l'uomo di tutti i tempi e luoghi" (268). Likewise, literature itself requires a "concetto *europeo*" (270) beyond "forme nazionali" (270). Ruffini validates the social and aesthetic implications of Mazzini's European discourse through his literary practice, not only by adopting a form that does not faithfully reproduce any national canon and rather synthesizes diverse European traditions (Christensen 15; 24-5; 162), but also by making his main characters the embodiment of such cohesion across frontiers. Ready to relinquish cultural sovereignty in line with Mazzini's idea of the nation as a means to promote supranational values, Antonio and Lucy can thus be depicted as having "so much in common" (*Antonio* 197) although being "different in type" (197). "Such a contrast, and yet such a harmony" (197), the narrator comments, offering an intimation, however utopian, of the "unity in diversity" motto that has inspired the more recent Europe-building project.

As Ruffini's two protagonists share the reading of the *Divine Comedy*,

a stanza by “an exile” (259) like Dante may awaken “the regret of the distant fatherland” (259) that “strikes home to [their] heart” (259). Yet distance and alterity shape Antonio’s exilic identity as an openness and inclusiveness that clash with Sir John’s autarchic notion of patriotism. A voluntary exile within the “little London of his own” (63) that he builds around himself during his stay in Rome, Sir John further retrenches behind the English newspaper par excellence, *The Times*, “as a barrier” (190) between himself and the intercultural exchanges in progress around him. If, as Benedict Anderson observes, the newspaper is a seminal form of imagining that creates the cultural roots of national consciousness (*Imagined* 24-25), through Sir John’s self-referential approach to his own culture Ruffini exemplifies the sort of sterile intellectual isolation and “cieca vanità nazionale” (*D’una letteratura* 35) that Mazzini intends to distinguish from the independence of a nation, the main prerequisite for the accomplishment of European unity.⁵ A “walking notification of ‘no trespass allowed’” (*Antonio* 132), as the narrator mockingly describes him, Sir John makes assertions of belonging by fending off the ravages of “a condition of estrangement” (Said “Reflections” 140). For its part, the emotional and cultural complicity between Antonio and Lucy shows that what lies beyond the frontier is not so much “the perilous territory of not-belonging” (140) but rather the “undomesticated” (as opposed to the domesticity of the nation), “provisional”, “innovative” experience of Said’s intellectual exile, who “never sees things in isolation” (*Representations* 44). The characters thus also delineate the liminal, dialogical space in which one of Ruffini’s subsequent novels will accommodate another intellectual exile, the protagonist of *A Quite Nook in the Jura*. That nook of domesticity will be, not accidentally, a Swiss village where precisely the interaction of individuals of different languages, nationalities, and political backgrounds will generate in the protagonist a “feeling of home” (*Jura* 308) made simultaneously of “privacy and life in common” (308).

3. Denationalizing patriotism, foreignizing the imagi-nation

What remains to be seen, then, is why a novel that champions an identitarian model of plurality, hybridity and marginality transcending the binary opposition between “us” and the “outsiders” (Said “Reflections” 140), ultimately seems to restore the exclusive cult of nationhood. The tragic epilogue of *Doctor Antonio* and the rationale of the main events leading to it

⁵ For the role of the nation in Mazzini’s ultimate European goals see also Albertini 31-6.

can in fact suggest a subtler message than the mainstream interpretation of Ruffini's patriotism. The turning point in the novel's plot and ideology can be found in the scene of Antonio's pledge to himself when Lucy's departure from Bordighera under her insensitive family's pressure brings their Platonic romance to a close before the two protagonists find the courage to avow their deep reciprocal sentiments. I claim that Antonio's resolution to abide by his duty ignoring the question of happiness leads him to compensate for his thwarted feelings for Lucy through a totalizing emotional attachment to his country: "So now, *Viva l'Italia!* my first and my last love!" (*Antonio* 303). Devotion to the national cause becomes Antonio's dominant and unique object of desire only as a sublimation of his true but unfulfilled wish, that of a transnational bond with cultural alterity. The narrator's comments on Antonio's reaction substantiate this hypothesis, as he wonders whether Antonio's meditations had "conquered the struggle within or only ministered to the combatant sufficient strength to control and keep down its outward manifestation" (303).

"The Idyl at a close" (304), therefore, stands not simply for the end of his romance with Lucy but also for the debacle of the European dream, which Antonio's sacrificial gesture has now scaled down to the boundaries of the nation. Once reunited against all odds in Naples eight years later, the two protagonists seem to rekindle their romance leaving Italian political vicissitudes aside and recreating the international flavor of their previous happiness. In fact, however, the "volley of musketry" (376) that violently invades the private enclave of their shared memories and emotions materializes once again the primacy of the national cause over the international scenario. Yet, precisely when the reality principle of the motherland's needs prompts Antonio to full-heartedly engage in the fight for Southern Italy's independence and wins over the pleasure principle represented by a kiss on Lucy's lips, Antonio also lays bare what his authentic priorities are in his heart. Indeed, while on the one hand he now seems to be nothing else than the embodiment of his own nationality—being presented as "The Italian" (377)—, on the other hand, in his final confession to Lucy, Antonio demonstrates that nationness in fact emerges once again as a compensatory cathectic object. It is love for her (hence, symbolically, attraction to and identification with an extranational dimension) that has always occupied his heart and still does. His country has gained priority over her and all she represents only because "prejudice, armed with a pedigree, stood between [them]" (377), thwarting their union and prompting his pledge to his homeland.

The alleged "heroic spirit" (377) and "noble heart" (377) that dictate

Antonio's "self-immolation" (377) do not only consolidate the patriot's sacrificial ideology so common in the Risorgimento imaginary, of which Ruffini is often unproblematically seen as a powerful representative.⁶ After Antonio is arrested for suspected conspiracy, his ultimate refusal to quit the jail out of solidarity with his fellow Italian prisoners despite Lucy's rescue plot leads indirectly to Lucy's death, to the killing of the wider European intercultural connection (symptomatically evoked one last time by Lucy's partaking of Antonio's cultural roots as she sings a Sicilian song she learnt from him) in the name of the monadic paradigm of patriotic love (Antonio's enduring suffering, prayers and "hopes for his country" (430) on which the novel ends).

Significantly, however, despite Antonio's reduction of the historico-political horizon within the borders of his homeland, Ruffini keeps the foreign element alive, reinforcing his contrapuntal vision of Risorgimento by dotting his account of Southern Italy's vicissitudes with triumphant references to English figures who, despite differing political ideologies, participate in the Italian unification process. Prompted by Lucy's questions on Sicily, Antonio begins to provide details about the "mismanagement of his unfortunate native island" (219), which, while debunking once again Sir John's unilateral vision, also allow him to reevaluate the more articulated role of Britain in the making of the Italian nation. Not only does Antonio reject Sir John's unconditional support of kings' right of self-defense by arguing in favor of a nation's right to defend "its liberties and independence" (220). He also deconstructs the baronet's obsession with monarchic regimes threatened by "ultra-democratic" (220) parties "implanting republics on the ruins of every throne" (220). With a more balanced and critical view, Antonio illustrates the complex scenario of the Sicilian kingdom, and the multifaceted British contributions to its history. Reiterating the "essentially monarchical" (220) inclination of the Sicilian people, he promptly underlines that the very tools for Sicilian self-protection, namely, its 1812 constitution and its parliamentary government, were modeled upon Great Britain.

Antonio's narrative turns into an increasingly outspoken praise of Britain as an exporter of democracy on Italian soil, when it enumerates the numerous circumstances in which the Italian Southern Question benefited from British aid, from the logistical support of English ships to King Ferdinand of Bourbon and his wife Caroline of Austria taking refuge in Sicily away from the French invasion of Naples, to the English gold and

⁶ See, for instance, Nota; Marazzi; Isabella «Exile».

soldiers allocated for the royals' protection and ultimately ruthlessly exploited by the scheming Queen Caroline's secret dealings with Napoleon against the English themselves (223-5). And if, Antonio continues, until 1810 "England remained an attentive but passive looker-on" (243) of Sicilian events, its role becomes prominent when Lord William Bentinck took over as British minister plenipotentiary and commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. It is with the exciting tones of an adventure novel that Antonio describes the cunning and courage of Lord Bentinck who bravely expels the Bourbon royals from Sicily foiling a plot they had fomented: "But the royal conspirators had forgotten to take Lord William Bentinck into their reckoning" (228). And when Queen Caroline tries to counterattack "to get rid at once of the English and the constitution" (229), Doctor Antonio reiterates with satisfaction the British minister's heroism— "But Lord William was once more too much for her" (229)— fully endorsing the British parliament's policies towards Italy.

Antonio's narrative further authenticates the vital importance of the British intervention in the Sicilian events by acknowledging its disastrous disappearance after Napoleon's fall. With the English evacuation decreed by the Treaty of Vienna, it "was as though the good genius of Sicily had departed" (230) with Lord Bentinck himself. Symptomatically, the loss of the English coincides with the loss of the iconic symbols of Sicilian nationness—the coin and the flag—and of Sicilian liberties under the aegis of the Bourbon Neapolitan crown, hence ultimately with the loss of Sicily itself, deprived of any representative power in Vienna and sacrificed by Austria and its allies in the name of European peace. Significantly, as Antonio makes these claims, he explicitly defends the British parliament's own views and policies, Lord Bentinck's included, despite the tragic outcome brought about by the interferences of other foreign powers. Most interpretations of the British attitude towards the Risorgimento highlight the pragmatism with which British policies filtered the Italian cause through their own national interests, giving priority to a European balance of power (for instance, Hayes 205-11; Clements 3-4). Bentinck's own actions did not receive England's approval. He was indeed recalled and later sent to India. Yet, through Antonio's admiring tones, Ruffini rather depicts a different kind of British political model, one that is inspiring precisely for its daring involvement in the life of a neighboring land.

This fascination for British politicians as veritable protagonists of dramatic moments of Italian history becomes all the more intriguing in the last chapters of the novel, set in Naples during the 1848 revolutionary insurrections against the Bourbons. Antonio fights strenuously in a penin-

sula swept by “a tide of national feeling” (*Antonio* 350), where the “once proscribed name of Italy” (358) resonates all over, further evoked by cultural artefacts like tricolor flags and hymns to liberty that promote an Italian consciousness. The narrator himself underlines that Antonio’s heart is now all set on “his country” (361), meaning “of course Italy, for Antonio’s patriotism was not confined to the isle in which he was born, but embraced the whole of the motherland” (361), including “the leading men of Italian emigration” (361) whom Antonio intends to rally around the cause of Italian independence. Yet even when the patriotic rhetoric seems to be the most fervent, the narrator refuses to take sides with either republican or monarchist forces. Rather, through a multifaceted explanation of conflicting motives and goals, he extols English charismatic agents in the Italian cause. When Doctor Antonio is arrested as an alleged member of the “Secret Society for the Italian Unity” (393)—a group highly evocative of Mazzini’s own secret anti-Austrian plots—and made to share an inhumane detention together with real historical figures such as Risorgimento patriots Carlo Poerio, Luigi Settembrini, and Michele Pironti, the narrator commends “a noble-souled English statesman” (396), William Gladstone (ironically a Tory like the snobbish and biased Sir John Davenne, before becoming liberal), for his 1851 report denouncing the State prosecution, “a cry of indignation” that “soon re-echoed by all Europe” (396). And if it is true that in 1855 Gladstone tried to arrange Poerio and Settembrini’s escape from prison, and even secured financial support from the British government to Garibaldi to facilitate their rescue by boat (Smith 21), there is an intriguing connection between these alleged secret dealings behind the real political curtain and the similar escape attempt that, in Ruffini’s novel, Lucy organizes for Antonio with the aid of the British attaché and of Antonio’s faithful friends Battista and Speranza. Far from a simple stock situation frequent in adventure novels, this episode offers further evidence of Ruffini’s fabulation of Italian historical events not as a way of claiming the Italian-ness of the Risorgimento movement but, rather, as a glorification of the foreign contribution to the Italian building process.

Along the same lines we can reinterpret the narrator’s revelation that the name of Lord Palmerston appeared in a forged letter allegedly sent to Poerio exhorting Italian people to proclaim the republic on the wave of Mazzini’s secret plot and of the imminent arrival of Garibaldi. By inserting this historical detail independently of its truthfulness, Ruffini provides the vision of a more tolerant and plural England, adding democratic, liberal, and parliamentary ideas to the aristocratic aloofness of Sir John Davenne and the absolutism of his son Aubrey, although England in fact diminished

Palmerston's alleged championing of the Italian revolution. Yet, more importantly, beyond a mere Anglophilia allegedly still functional to the fabrication of an Italian motherland myth, Ruffini's celebratory fictionalization of British figures as Risorgimento heroes reveals a desire to overcome the "inherently limited" (Anderson *Imagined* 6) nature of the national imagined community itself through what I propose to define as the "foreignization of the imagi-*nation*", that is, the creative construction of a homeland modeled upon a contradictory cultural multiplicity rather than upon indigenous myths.⁷

Significantly, this unhomey, defamiliarizing perspective inseparable from the dimension of exile informs Ruffini's fiction of nationhood as much as his real-life experience of displacement, as most of his and his brother Agostino's correspondence further underscores. In a letter to their mother, Agostino announces their imminent relocation to London praising the British capital as the hospitable city *par excellence*, where "non vi sono leggi eccezionali per gli esuli" (*Lettere Cagnacci* ed. 137), and "ogni uomo, straniero o indigeno, è sotto la tutela del diritto comune" (137). In London, Agostino hence foresees, "noi saremo uomini e liberi: noi avremo un nome, (...) una personalità, (...) l'indipendenza, cose delle quali, da gran tempo, avevamo perduto l'abitudine" (137). Significantly, the motto of Mazzini's "Giovine Europa" — "Libertà, uguaglianza, umanità"—resonates here, and, indeed, the Ruffinis' letters depict London as a sort of miniature Europe that, *pace* Sir John Davenne, values a diversity leading towards the "other". Despite the disenchantment for the troubled European peregrinations that ultimately take Giovanni to Paris, what prevails in the two brothers' exchanges is their opposition to parochialism in favor of a more global approach informed by the awareness that no country is perfect, and, ironically, even less their own.⁸ Giovanni and Agostino's

⁷Ruffini's pioneering view can be further appreciated in the very Mazzinian ideological framework to which it seems to belong. In his 1871 essay «Nazionalismo e nazionalità», Mazzini will state that «Language, territory, and race are just indications of *nationality*» (Recchia and Urbinati eds. 65), and that they «remain unstable when they are not all combined» (65) in a common goal. For Mazzini, this goal will ultimately have to coincide with «the establishment of a United States of Europe» (63). By foreignizing the imagi-*nation*, Ruffini's novel blends the political and cultural phases in Mazzini's design, accomplishing that «progressive education» («Foreign» Recchia and Urbinati eds. 140) which for Mazzini will be «both national and European» (140).

⁸Therefore, while the Ruffini brothers recognize that living in England restores in them «la dignità d'uomo, la propria individualità» (Cagnacci ed. 148), they also

openmindedness and their critical outlook on unconditional patriotism are unequivocally confirmed the moment the two brothers, no longer ostracized for their political activism, have the chance to return to Italy. Instead of putting an end to their exile out of love for their homeland, both choose to remain abroad—Giovanni moving to Paris, Agostino to Edinburgh. And, significantly, when Giovanni reluctantly accepts his political candidacy in his Ligurian town of Taggia, it is the homecoming process rather than the long separation from his motherland that proves deeply disaffecting to him. Indeed, in a compelling 1848 letter to his brother from Turin, Giovanni summarizes his emotional impact with his country with the term “disappunto” (Cagnacci ed. 340). Apart from nature, which, he claims, has not betrayed him, all other Italian manifestations disheartened him, because they all concurred to substantiate Italy’s provincialism—“tutte le piccollezze, tutti i pettegolezzi, tutte le ambizioncelle” (341)—and to efface his hope for authentic freedom and for the spirit of community he was still nurturing while in Paris. Not surprisingly, this dismal human landscape includes also the Italian political scene, where, in Giovanni’s view, what matters is only to produce sensational effects and to be read in newspapers, with no commitment to authentic unification: “Vedo Savoïardi, Piemontesi e Liguri, ma Italiani pochi” (342). Paradoxically, it is hence within the borders of his disappointing nation, rather than abroad, that he experiences the most dramatically reductive aspect of exile, the alienation that makes him feel “forestiero in Italia (...) persino in mezzo a questi genovesi e conoscenti antichi” (355). Valuing the productivity of exilic dislodgement more than the supposed emotional toll of cultural uprootedness, Giovanni hence gives voice to the shock of his estranging experience on native soil by exclaiming “che abisso dall’atmosfera mia abituale!” (346).

underline their lack of «anglomania» (203). Agostino, for instance, recollecting circumstances that did not make him fall in love with that country, concludes with disillusionment that ultimately «tutto il mondo è paese, e tutti gli uomini sono formati dello stesso fango» (203). Likewise, once settled in Edinburgh while Giovanni relocates to Paris, Agostino despises the superficiality and cultural narcissism of Italian expatriates in London, as he writes his mother: «Gl’Italiani dentro son pappagalli ad altro non buoni, che a parlare del *loro bel cielo* e della *gloria* dei padri loro, quasi che si fossero fatti il primo colle mani loro, o quasi che la seconda non fosse il loro più sanguinoso commento alla presente loro dappocaggine» (263). The Ruffinis’ critical position vis-à-vis pride in one’s own nationhood and national character can hence be summarized by the following statement: «Cara la patria, cara la madre, ma più cara la coscienza!» (267).

The invention of *italianità* well shows that the nation-building process is not only far from natural but also never straightforward or self-contained. Its ideals and myths have been adapted and reinterpreted in a relational context across time (during and after the unification) and space (inside and outside the national community). However, even when these powerful patriotic narratives are hybrid compositions blending indigenous and foreign elements, they aim at consolidating the construction of homeland as a nation-state. For its part, the “skilful interweaving of English with Italian interests” (*Tait’s* 683) that the *Tait’s* reviewer underlines in *Doctor Antonio* does not simply result in “a still more powerful advocacy” (683) for the Italian cause. It is the very dream of Risorgimento as the construction of Italianness that ultimately vacillates in this novel. However, as it deconstructs the discourse of the nation, *Doctor Antonio* lays the foundation of a wider, more intriguing identitarian narrative. Giovanni Ruffini’s contrapuntal Risorgimento raises the paradoxical possibility of inhabiting dislocation, of projecting the emotional attachment of the imagined community upon a plurality of cultural visions rather than upon the monadic paradigm of the sovereign state. This exilic condition does not yet express the “transcendental homelessness” (Lukács *Theory* 41) with which the form of the novel will respond, according to Georg Lukács, to the philosophical “urge to be at home everywhere” (29), but it already represents a deterritorialization attempt within the finite yet porous boundaries of Europe. The European design may still be an “unfinished adventure” (Bauman, *Europe*), as much in Ruffini’s novel as in our own time. Perhaps the element endemic to Europeanness is precisely the utopian spirit itself, as Bauman provocatively asserts (36). But for its part, *Doctor Antonio* invites us to think constructively of what Mazzini had already proclaimed about the productive power of utopias, hence ultimately about their feasibility: “Fu schernita sovente col nome di sogno la idea d’un uomo, che precorreva d’alcun secolo ai destini dell’uman genere, finché il tempo (...) non ebbe posto il suggello de’ fatti alla verità” (*D’una letteratura* 30).⁹

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⁹ A shorter version of this article entitled “Giovanni Ruffini’s contrapuntal Risorgimento: Italy, Britain, Europe” was presented in London on October 28, 2011, at the international conference «Britain, Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento», organized by the Italian Cultural Institute, London, in conjunction with the University of Wales, Newport, and the Association for the Study of Modern Italy.

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