

Britain and Italy
from
Romanticism to
Modernism

A Festschrift for Peter Brand

Edited by Martin McLaughlin



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BRITAIN AND ITALY FROM ROMANTICISM TO MODERNISM

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Peter Brand

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EDITED BY
MARTIN McLAUGHLIN



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FOREWORD



At the beginning of October 1988 I moved to the University of Edinburgh to take over the Chair of Italian from Peter Brand upon his retirement. I had read Peter's books on Tasso and Ariosto, I had occasionally met him—I remember us working together as External Examiners at Reading in the late Seventies—and I was attracted by the high reputation of his department, but I didn't know Peter personally. This lack of communication between fellow Italianists was not an exceptional state of affairs. In 1988 I can hardly say I was familiar with any Italian chair-holder except, of course, Gigi Meneghello, who had originally 'imported' me to Reading. The opportunities for interdepartmental exchange were rare, and in any case, like other colleagues of my generation, I felt that Professors inhabited a rarefied sphere of their own. All this was made worse by the fact that Peter Brand lived and practised his art in the far North, at the other end of Britain, indeed in another country. Paradoxically, his retirement gave me the opportunity to get to know him, and to appreciate what a wonderful person he is.

One of the first things which struck me as I settled down in Edinburgh was how highly regarded and well known Peter was throughout the university. Such a degree of popularity was, in my experience, unusual for an Italianist. My impression was that Professors of Italian by and large tended to be much more devoted to scholarship than to university business. But Peter was exceptional as an Italianist in that he had not only published major books and occupied the highest positions in our professional associations (for many years he had edited the *Modern Language Review* and had been actively involved in the Society for Italian Studies and its journal *Italian Studies*), but he had also been Dean of the Faculty of Arts and, more recently, Vice-Principal of the University of Edinburgh. This was an outstanding record of service for any professor, let alone a professor of Italian, but Peter bore it with great modesty. His attitude

was simple and matter-of-fact: as an employee of the University he had done what he thought was right for him to do. Once retired, he was perfectly happy to be free of all that and instead devote himself full-time to his allotment. The character that sprang to my mind was Cincinnatus.

Indeed Peter had, and still has, qualities that one seldom encounters in the academic world. He was cheerful, energetic, constructive, and very effective. His capacity to analyse and discuss any kind of problem (literary, academic, administrative) was fully matched by his ability and willingness to decide and take action and responsibility. At the same time he was blissfully free of all affectation and self-importance, and he disliked all forms of pompousness in real life as well as in literature. He had retired at the ordinary retirement age, but I never saw a more premature retirement, at least judging by the energy, dynamism, optimism, and enthusiasm that sprung from all his enterprises: from his famous gardening exploits (his tomatoes were already legendary) to his new study of disguise in the European theatre of the Renaissance; from his active participation in the annual departmental play to his continued teaching and advising of students and colleagues.

I must hasten to add that Peter was the least intrusive of former Heads of department. From the moment I took over his Chair, he was very careful to let me and my colleagues get on with our daily business. Quite clearly, we were like a bunch of orphans without him, the more so when Brian Phillips also retired at the end of my first year in Edinburgh. Even knowing this, Peter's discretion was such that he allowed himself to come into the department only occasionally just to pick up his mail. Yet it was apparent that he cared deeply about the department, and when we needed him, we knew we could rely on him to be there, ready to help with words *and* deeds. Thus, when the department suddenly lost its Renaissance specialist, Peter stepped in and took on the teaching and examining of up to two full courses for quite a few years. As far as I know, the only compensation he ever received for this substantial contribution was our personal gratitude.

Peter soon became a good friend, a sort of older brother to me, generous with his advice in personal, as well as professional matters, but not at all put out if in the end I chose to pursue a course of action entirely of my own. We often used to talk about my research or his, the running of the department, and the future of Italian and modern languages in the context of the dramatic changes that were occurring nationally and, in particular, at Edinburgh, where the sudden loss of

one position in Italian dealt a serious blow to the department. In the circumstances Peter was a constant source not only of friendly support and good humour, but also of practical remedies. What distinguished him from most colleagues, in and beyond Edinburgh, was that he never complained. He saw the silver lining in every cloud, and when he couldn't see it, he put it there himself.

It was mainly on the strength of my confidence in Peter that I undertook to co-edit with him the *Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, a project which we shared for over five years and which at the end put our two names on the cover of that handsome volume. Had it been entirely up to me, that book would probably still be in the making. I would have spent too much time musing over the theoretical framework of the new history, and I would have been less firm and decisive with our contributors. But Peter's clarity of purpose was contagious. It was ultimately thanks to him that, much against the prevailing fashion, we decided to skip all discussion of literary theory, choosing to start the volume with the chapter on the origins, rather than with a lengthy methodological introduction. We both wanted to offer the English reader a complete and up-to-date account of Italian literature. We did not wish to challenge the established historical model, partly because we believed in it—after all our task was to produce a 'history'—and partly because we were, and are, convinced that scholars and students alike should acquaint themselves with the canon before going on to challenge it. The other, characteristically 'Brandian', rule was that the volume should be written in legible style. Peter was suspicious of the abstract and obscure discourse that for many years had plagued Italian criticism and was now turning up more and more frequently in British academia. In the event this was not a problem. Though some of our contributors were slow to deliver and some contributions were initially far too long, the book on the whole turned out to be very close to what we wanted: a balanced, well-organized and user-friendly volume, a helpful tool for anyone with an interest in Italian culture. In principle our editorial work was equally divided, but in practice Peter took on more than I did by translating into English all quotations from Italian, and in one notable case a whole critical essay. Of course Peter was fortunate in that Gunvor, his lovely wife and exceptional reader, took an active interest in our endeavours. Indeed Gunvor's generous help was invaluable to both of us, especially when we reached the proof-reading stage; her good taste and sharp eye saved us from quite a few potentially

embarrassing mishaps. And it is largely thanks to her that, at least in the second edition, our index became virtually flawless!

I left Edinburgh early one Sunday morning in August 1995, immediately after completing our work on the *Cambridge History of Italian Literature*. My wife and children had already gone down south, our house in Morningside had been sold, and our belongings dispatched to Cambridge, Mass. Driving south one last time, I was very excited at the thought that soon I would be working in a new country and in a totally new environment, but I was sorry at having to leave the good friends we had made in the previous seven years, and first and foremost Peter and Gunvor Brand. Yet I took comfort in the certainty that, rather than treat my departure as a dereliction of the Scottish Italian ship, Peter was very much behind my decision to go. During the rather long and difficult period in which I was considering my move to Harvard, Peter had been incredibly supportive. He had a very clear understanding of my personal and professional position and, in his usual generous fashion, he was very positive about this new venture. He felt it was the right thing for me to do. Five years later, I can confirm that he was absolutely correct, and I salute his wisdom.

When this collection of essays was conceived, I did not know Peter and therefore I could not contribute to it. Now I am glad that it did not come out then—Peter was far too young for that sort of thing, anyway! The delay has given me time to get to know him, and the opportunity to write these few words as a testimonial, beyond Edinburgh, of my lasting respect, friendship, and affection for him.

Lino Pertile

Cambridge, Mass.
28 June 2000

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CHAPTER 1



Introduction: The Centrality of Dante

Martin McLaughlin

This volume deals with the relations between Britain and Italy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is dedicated to Peter Brand. His 1957 book on *Italy and the English Romantics*¹ was a pioneering work in this area and is still, forty years on, an obligatory point of reference for research in this field. The contributions in the present volume cover: politics, the fine arts (including music), literature and the intellectual life, and the emergence of Italian as an academic discipline. The four major sections into which Brand's study was divided (Travel and Language; Literature; The Arts and Landscape; History, Politics, and Religion) still constitute the major categories of research for scholars working in this period, and all four areas are represented in the present volume, though in reverse order: here we begin with the infrastructure of politics (Mack Smith, Griffith), then work outwards towards the arts (Kimbell, Woodhouse, Fraser), literature and the intellectual life (Campbell, Lindon, Moloney), before discussing the development and institutionalization of Italian language and culture as an autonomous university discipline (Limentani).

However, this is not simply a Festschrift paying homage to a great scholar's ground-breaking research. The general question of relations between Britain and Italy in the nineteenth century has since 1957 become something of a growth industry and remains the object of many contemporary studies.² If Brand's volume dealt with the first half of the nineteenth century, the present work expands on that and takes coverage into the early decades of the twentieth. It attempts to cover the major facets of the political and cultural relations between