

Editorial:

Resonances of Resistance in the Long-Nineteenth Century

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RESISTANCE IS NOT an entity to be defined, but a response that takes its form from the political and cultural conditions by which it is prompted. The long nineteenth century—flanked by the French and Russian Revolutions and punctuated by radical new legislation, industrialisation, and wars across Europe, America and Asia — seems to exemplify a form of resistance prompted by industrial, political and cultural upheaval. Nonetheless, during this period, change became both a form of resistance and a reason for it. Constitutions, laws, ideologies and the status quo were guarded all the more jealously in the face of new opposition. Resistance meant social mobility and social rigidity; it meant monarchy and it meant republic; it meant abolition, and it meant the prevailing barbarism of enslavement and discrimination. These conflicting circumstances gave rise to material culture as resistance: to resistance represented and reimagined. The examination of resistance as process and protest, continues to direct and divide scholarly discourse. Equally, resistance represented through music, art and literature, complete with all their accompanying partialities and omissions, provides an index—albeit a fragmented, complex and contradictory one—to public feeling, ideology and politics, that nuances our understanding of the nineteenth-century studies interdiscipline.

Defining resistance as a phenomenon shaped by circumstance was central to cornerstone twentieth-century approaches on the subject and enables us to trace the roots of the persistent imagination of resistance in conjunction with conflict and revolution. In the influential study *The Struggle for Mastery of Europe*, A.J.P. Taylor argued that the simultaneous existence and absence of political resistance were

responsible for the outbreak of World War One. Whilst the Austro-Hungarian and Russian governments had become convinced that war was a vital measure in order to stave off violent resistance and even revolution from ethnic minorities and the working classes, Wilhelm II's Germany was able to contemplate a large scale conflict precisely because the social democratic movement within the country had been successfully integrated into the nation's popular notions of militarism, thereby dramatically reducing the prospect of resistance through social unrest.¹

Similarly, in his later, Marxist work *The Age of Revolution: Europe from 1789-1848*, Eric Hobsbawm aligns resistance and conflict more closely through his narrative of the rise of 'the spectre of communism', which he argued was exorcised in 1848.² After this point, and during the third quarter of the century, he suggests, 'political revolution retreated', where 'industrial revolution advanced'.³ In these works and others, resistance is aligned so closely with revolution that the two are almost synonymised. Resistance is defined based on its visible effects, so that it is not only shaped by circumstance but seen to be the shaper of circumstance. Using this logic, we can trace patterns of resistance through the long nineteenth century by attending to moments of agitation and change.

Nonetheless, revolution is one of many contexts in which resistance can be understood. Even in the famously tumultuous social and cultural conditions across this period, overstating change over continuity leads to a limited understanding of the era, and in this, resistance is no exception. Given the resistance to which watershed moments gave rise, it is important to question readings which consider them to be wholly transformative. This is an issue with which Charles Breunig grapples by highlighting the continuities in European politics and society between 1780 and 1820. Breunig argues that the French Revolution and Napoleonic era were aberrations rather

¹ *Ibid.* pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

² E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe from 1789 to 1848* (London: Shenvall Press, 1962), p. 4. Subsequently Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*.

³ E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1975), p. 14.

than the demonstration of a new social norm, given that the Treaty of Vienna marked the success of the European autocracies over the achievements of the revolution, and witnessed the restoration of the Bourbons to the throne of France.⁴ Here, resistance to change by the social elite, ultimately ushered in new eras of autocracy as opposed to dispelling them.

By reducing the importance of political coups d'état in the narrative of the early nineteenth century, Breunig takes an opposing view to those who would place revolution at the centre of an understanding of resistance, and yet, it is possible to reconcile the two. Resistance by definition only arises in situations where there are opposing views. If resistance does not meet with opposition, then it ceases to be resistance. In Britain, the long-nineteenth century gave rise not only to revolution but, in the wake of the 1832 Reform Act, to Peel's new Conservatives and a renewed support for the protection of King and Constitution with which they came to be associated. This was a climate that saw Dickens's famous attack on the Poor Laws and Malthusian Political Economy in *Oliver Twist*, and Lord Melbourne's disgust at the novel's treatment of workhouses and coffin-makers: 'I don't like these things', he had declared, 'I wish to avoid them'.⁵ Resistance does not simply arise from the desire for change and revolution, but also the need for stasis and status quo.

Resistance, then, is shaped by its surrounding conditions, and yet it is also moulded by various cultural media. This makes an understanding of the cultural discourses through which resistance was described, expressed or censored, essential. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, groups of radical poets such as the Della Crusicans rose in support of the political strife in France by publishing poetic

⁴ C. Breunig, *The Age of Revolution and Reaction, 1789-1850*, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), p. xiii.

⁵ Quoted in Philip Horne, 'Crime in *Oliver Twist*', *British Library* (2017) <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/crime-in-oliver-twist>> [Accessed: 12/01/2020].

conversations in newspapers such as the *World*.⁶ Such platforms not only facilitated political resistance to the Pitt administration, but literary resistance to Neoclassical modes of writing, as well as providing a forum in which women writers could express their political views pseudonymously.⁷

The 1830s onwards saw the rise and redoubling of fora through which resistance could be expressed and debated. As Louis James has argued, political unrest in the years immediately prior to the Reform Act was different to previous kinds of agitation because it was linked to 'wider cultural aspirations', including 'educational movements, discussion groups, and libraries', as well as 'the printed word'.⁸ The rise of popular fiction and the popular press, alongside the development of new modes of production, circulation and consumption both increased the efficiency of the media through which resistance could be expressed and meant that those media became sites of resistance themselves. The 'Taxes on Knowledge', which included taxes on paper and the printing of news, led to creative composition as a form of resistance and led to the rise (and ultimately the demise) of an elicit radical press.⁹ As James argues, political movements and printed matter were often ephemeral, but the publication and cultural networks behind them were not. Therefore, cultural networks both show resistance to be grounded in political moments and provide an enduring means for its expression.¹⁰

Because resistance is necessarily read in the context of the warring ideologies that have prompted it and often also through the media in which those warring ideologies are played out, it is easy to homogenise or to assume that groups are unified in their resistance because they share a particular politics, ideology or mode of

⁶ See for example: Michael Gamer, "'Bell's Poetics": *The Baviad*, the Della Cruscan, and the Book of *The World*, in *The Satiric Eye*, ed. by Stephen E. Jones (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 31-53.

⁷ Judith Pascoe, "'That fluttering, tinselled crew": Women Poets and Della Cruscanism', in *Romantic Theatricality, Gender, Poetry and Spectatorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 68-94.

⁸ Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2017) p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

expression. Recent criticism has become increasingly alert to the heterogeneity of resisting groups. Charles Esdaile's work, for example, has offered an important counterpoint to the widely accepted notion that the Spanish nation was unified in its resistance to Napoleonic occupation in 1808. He highlights that far from being unified by patriotic fervour, the Spanish people actually resisted efforts by the Spanish government to facilitate mass opposition against the occupiers.¹¹

Further recent turns in scholarship have enabled us to retain a nuanced perspective, alert to heterogeneity, as well as a mindfulness of continuities in resistance movements during the long-nineteenth century and beyond. The University of Colorado's 'Resistance in the Spirit of Romanticism' conference reflects this shift by considering the importance of the broader temporal continuities between moments of resistance within and beyond the long-nineteenth century.¹² Bringing the political, social and cultural resistance of the Romantic era into dialogue with modern resistance movements, such as 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too', the conference showed how resistance in the long-nineteenth century also stakes a claim to modern relevance.

The articles in this issue of RRR build upon these developments in scholarship, considering the full length of the nineteenth century, and the nuances of resistance in a given moment, whilst simultaneously reflecting the manifold ways in which resistance continues to be studied. Gabriel Polley's illuminating micro-history explores anti-colonial resistance, framed as religious unrest, in the town of Nablus in Palestine. In the process, he sets the Nablus Uprising of April 1856 within the context of growing discontent over European influence in the region, which had seen the prioritisation of the rights of Christian minorities, resulting in resentment from the local Muslim majority

¹¹ C. Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (London: Penguin, 2003); C. Esdaile, 'Popular Mobilisation in Spain, 1808-1810: A Reassessment', in *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe: State-formation in an Age of Upheaval, c. 1800-1815*, ed. by M. Rowe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 90-106 (pp. 102-103).

¹² *Resistance in the Spirit of Romanticism* (University of Colorado, September 2018).

population. By decentralising Eurocentric newspaper reports of the event, he displaces the problematic Western perspective in favour of a decolonised version of events.

Where Polley offers a re-assessment of the usefulness of Western journalism in understanding an act of political resistance, Delphine Gatehouse's piece considers the benefits and limitations of using the cartographic archive to resurrect another such act. Gatehouse reads George Eliot's *Felix Holt* as a reflection upon the Great Reform Act, and a way to nuance the extensive debates about the nature of the novel's Conservatism. In doing so, she provides an exceptionally detailed dual focus on the hermeneutics of the text—with its aerial and cartographic tendencies—and the political and cartographic contexts with which it is in dialogue.

Moving forwards to readings of resistance in canonical works published later in the century, Tracy Hayes provides a ground-breaking perspective on the notion of the 'other', and in the process has written an article which itself resists the existing discourse on the relevance of marginalised characters in Hardy's novels. Through a study of his minor characters, Hayes identifies a paradox between Hardy's resistance to masculine stereotypes, and the way in which their actions partially conformed to David Gilmore's 'imperative triad' of the man as procreator, provider and protector.

In her piece on George MacDonald's *Adela Cathcart*, Jessica Lewis pursues these puzzling questions about masculinity beyond the canon, drawing the focus away from the fairy tales told by the men in the novel, which, until now, have preoccupied studies of the text. This has enabled a fresh focus on Adela's illness, rather than its cure, reinstating Adela's significance as a protagonist and offering an illuminating interpretation of her illness as a form of resistance, because it prevents her from fulfilling the domestic role expected of her.

Similarly, Erin Louttit's analysis of the understudied Marie Corelli novel *Young Diana*, also considers the implications of representing the female body as a site of resistance, as Diana spurns society at the point of achieving the physical ideals that it extols. Reading this tension in conjunction with Diana's conservative feminism, Louttit explores resistance to Victorian socio-familial ideals, concluding that Corelli represents

female resistance in this way in order to demonstrate that the gaze of the stereotypical Victorian male is deeply flawed.

With a similar attention to the critical potentials of perspective and paradox, Helen-Frances Dessain's piece reads Robert Seymour's caricature 'The March of Intellect' in two distinct but interrelated ways, by attending to potential resonances with the chapter of Daniel in the Bible, and Edward Irving's preaching. Dessain particularly highlights how Seymour let his viewers decide whether he was ridiculing millennialists or providing a corrective to the notion that the advances of enlightenment would offer salvation from the abuses of past patricians. In turn, she demonstrates how a single medium might be interpreted by various resistance groups and their ideologies.

Through their ability to sustain the ideologies of opposing resistance groups, caricatures offer a strikingly versatile medium that serves a clear function for the modern scholar. Through a concentration of implied meaning, it becomes an index through which the manifestations of resistance might be understood and juxtaposed in a single piece of visual culture. Such caricatures and the journalistic, literary and historical sources explored in this Issue of *Romance, Revolution & Reform* are the lenses through which our authors explore how resistance was shaped by its given cultural moments, explore the tensions to which such moments gave rise, and draw upon cross-temporal resonances to question why this matters. As a whole, this collection of papers makes an important contribution to the study of the significance of such moments. We leave it to the reader to peruse their rich continuities.