The Liberal

Ian Macgregor Morris examines the role played by *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, and its editors, Leigh Hunt, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, in the emergence of Liberal thought and culture

The Pisan Trium

The Libertine, the Atheist, an

Leigh Hunt (1784–1859); line engraving by Henry Meyer from a drawing by John Hayter, 1828. (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822); stipple and line engraving by William Finden, Black & Armstrong, Amelia Curran, 1819. (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron (1788–1824); stipple engraving by Henry Meyer from a drawing by James Holmes, 1824 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

> Are there not three of us? And ought we not to have as much strength and variety as possible? We will divide the world between us, like the Triumvirate.[1]
>
> Leigh Hunt to Shelley, 21 September 1821

In July 1822 three youthful idealists met in the city of Pisa to plan a new literary endeavour. The result of their efforts, *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, would run for only four issues and has generally been marginalised in the histories of literature and politics. Yet the authors have not: Leigh Hunt, editor of radical newspaper *The Examiner*, was joined by Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron. Hunt compared the circle to the three Roman potentates who carved up the empire between them; George Croly, writing in the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine*, made the same analogy to a very different purpose.[2]

The aftermath of the meeting is perhaps better remembered than the journal itself: Shelley's drowning on his departure from nearby Livorno. Despite a deteriorating personal relationship, Hunt and Byron persevered, more out of a mutual respect for Shelley than for one another. The first issue, in October 1822, was met with a level of withering criticism that, with hindsight, appears quite out of proportion to the influence of the journal itself. Yet the nature of those attacks reveals concerns surrounding the perceived connections between political reform, religious orthodoxy and personal morality.

Recent scholarship has suggested that the journal normalised the *term* 'liberal' within political discourse through the very controversies it engendered.[3] However, the furore also marks one thread in the development of the *concept*: amidst the rhetoric lie traces of long-running disputes that formed competing definitions of 'liberalism'. First and foremost, critics sought to situate the journal and its creators within long-standing traditions of freethinking, libertinism and atheism.

Ellen Meiksins Wood has described democracy as an 'idea of ambiguous ancestry', identifying the development of the modern concept through manifestations that may make modern democrats uncomfortable. The same could be said of liberalism. Political ideals do not form in a realm divorced from the often paradoxical world of cultural practice. While the thought of Locke and Spinoza must form the core of any understanding of political liberalism, the cultural milieu that produced, critiqued and appropriated their ideas left a mark upon them.

And here *The Liberal* proves to be particularly revealing. Hunt's insistence that they include a variety of literary genres resulted in a veritable cornucopia that wanders from the suggestive to the subversive. The volumes are not, on first inspection at least, particularly cohesive in terms of content or even ideology. But they do reflect a range of ideas, attitudes and sentiments that challenge established standards of taste and behaviour, as well as those of politics and religion. Critics adopted a carefully constructed language that evoked some of the most notorious associations of the previous century, from the extreme profanity of the *Hell-fire Club* and the Satanic republicanism of the

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d *The Liberal*

Calves' Heads Club, to the more genteel degeneracy of the Society of Dilettanti. Behind this critique lay a comprehensive rejection of the ideas of the *philosophes* and the impulses of the libertines: the two trends which had corrupted, respectively, the minds and the souls of a previous generation, thus paving the way for the French Revolution.

Such accusations were by no means unfounded. Each member of the Pisan Circle embodied elements of such 'degeneracy': Hunt was imprisoned for his 'libellous' comments about the prince regent; Shelley was known, in Wordsworth's uncharitable words, for his 'pretty paganism'; and Byron's personal conduct was the proverbial 'talk of the town'. With the new journal, they suggested that they had no intention of denying their reputations, but rather that such reputations could be read another way: a 'liberal' acceptance of free-thinking, atheism and libertinism.

Daisy Hay has suggested that *The Liberal* generated a liberal 'mode of behaviour'.[4] In what follows I hope to show that the Triumvirs of *The Liberal* were actively engaging with a variety of legacies in what could be termed a 'performance of liberalism', or perhaps better, of what they thought a liberal should be. Certainly, many of these traits – the rampant anti-clericalism, sensualised lifestyle, and even the ardent cosmopolitanism – were roundly rejected by what would become the liberal Victorian establishment. But they envisioned a particular embodiment of liberalism that was cosmopolitan, individualistic and tolerant; and most crucially, a liberalism of action.

The Professors of the Satanic School

> The object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect, the connection between politics and all other subjects of interest to mankind having been discovered, never again to be done away. We wish to do our work quietly, if people will let us.[5]
>
> Leigh Hunt

> This Manifesto of the Pisan Conspirators … the very supremacy of weakness and wickedness in which the Professors of the Satanic School have indulged.[6]
>
> *New European Magazine*

The names associated with *The Liberal* were enough to create a sense of foreboding. Leigh Hunt had long been a pariah to the establishment he constantly critiqued, a 'demoralizing incendiary' whose verse was 'vile, profligate, obscene, indecent, and detestable'.[7] His incarceration had only served to enhance his reputation: his cell became a cultural centre in its own right, hosting a string of literary and philosophical figures. It was one of those visitors – who had recently awoken one morning to find himself famous – that dubbed Hunt the 'wit in the dungeon'.[8]

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In contrast, the Tory press labelled Hunt the 'King of Cockeyne' and those around him the Cockney Circle.[9] The label sought to demean the radical journalist in terms of both class and locale, an unworthy metropolitan contrast to the sublime – and more conservative – Lake poets. Shelley and Byron were associated with the 'Cockneys', although their social status required a different critique. The former's rampant atheism made him a target of often unimaginative and generic attacks, although the deployment of such longstanding tropes is itself revealing of how conservative writers were responding to the threat of liberalism. While Byron's 'private' life – if any actions of the poet could be described as such – provided scope for criticism, his growing 'degeneracy' was attributed to something more pernicious than aristocratic excess.[10] His association with the 'Cockney Bluestockings', murmured the Tory journalists, had tainted his entire being, prompting his 'heartless, heavy, dull, anti-British garbage'.[11]

Establishment concerns were expressed most fervently by Robert Southey, poet laureate, who in abandoning his youthful radicalism had become the Cockney Circle's *bête noire*. His encomium to the late George III, *A Vision of Judgement* (1821), opened him to far greater ridicule than he bestowed; but it also framed the political struggle and the place of the radical writers within it. He lambasted the circle around Hunt:

> The school which they have set up may properly be called the Satanic school … Moral and political evils are inseparably connected. … Where the manners of a people are generally corrupted … government cannot long subsist … There is no means whereby that corruption can be so surely and rapidly diffused, as by poisoning the waters of literature.[12]

The tone and ideology of the attacks against the Circle display a remarkable consistency with the critiques that had raged against the freethinkers and libertines of previous centuries. This was not a matter of a lazy derivativeness, but a conscious strategy to situate a radical politics that, to conservative minds at least, had been discredited by the events of the last generation. In the febrile atmosphere of regency England, Tory thinkers associated the growing pressure for reform with Jacobinism. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre and the repressive governmental measures known as the 'Six Acts', the prospect of violent change appeared almost tangible. Conservative opinion repeatedly identified moral and cultural patterns that had led to the Revolution in France: religious nonconformity, a spectrum of opinion that stretched from dissenting to deism and outright atheism; moral degeneracy, often related to a lack of faith and associated with libertinism; and a rejection of traditional values and customs, which, from an English perspective, was characterised by an excessive classicising and a continental orientation. Former radicals such as Southey and Wordsworth had adopted a more conservative outlook and were often pronounced in their condemnation of the youthful idealism of Hunt and his associates. But they also recognised that such 'deviant' modes of thought had a long history in European society: these were no passing affectations, but seductive ideas that had infested the cultural life, indeed soul, of the nation. The seismic impact of the American and French Revolutions all too often overshadows the continuities between earlier ideas and subsequent developments such as the growth of liberalism. Yet a key feature of the ideological struggles of the early nineteenth-century concerned these very legacies. The language, tone and substance of these conflicts were part of a culture war that had,

through various manifestations, been underway for a century and a half. For conservative writers, past experience warned of the dangers of reformist policies that threatened the very structure of the social order; and their wholesale condemnation of transgressive ideas and behaviour had become increasingly shrill since the 1790s. Hunt and his circle, however, rather than merely disputing such concerns, sought to invert them though literature. Thus Southey's charge of 'Satanism' encouraged Byron's development of the so-called 'Byronic hero', which in recasting Milton's Satan challenged the theological landscape of *Paradise Lost*.[13]

It was within this context of conflict and critique that the new journal was conceived. It is unclear whether Byron or Shelley was the prime mover, although Byron had been thinking of a journal for some time.[14] The basing of their efforts in Italy – a detail stressed in the subtitle, and therefore integral to the identity of the journal – reflected a cosmopolitan orientation quite at odds with the increasing parochialism of British political culture.[15] Their notion of 'liberalism' was a 'function of place'.[16] This meant, on the one hand, the *classical*, the ancient alternatives to modernity, embodied in the *lieux de mémoire* – the sites of memory – of ancient culture and action; and on the other, a cosmopolitan contrast to the emerging nation state. Mary Shelley, who remained an associate of the Circle after her husband's death, identified some features of what she termed the 'Anglo-Italians', individuals who spoke the local language and whose interest went beyond visiting 'churches and palaces, guidebook in hand': they have 'lost the critical mania in a real taste for the beautiful', and feeling 'pity' for their benighted countrymen 'have erected a literature calculated to disseminate … a portion of that taste and knowledge acquired in the Peninsula'; they are 'well-informed, clever', and perhaps most significantly, an 'active race'.[17] Shelley contrasts the Pisans with the insularity of their critics, but stresses that they seek to *improve* their homeland. Her language is deeply coded, echoing the story of the cave from Plato's *Republic*: the individual who has seen the 'truth' – by virtue of leaving his abode, quite literally through travel – seeks to free his 'fellow-bondsmen' from ignorance.[18] Both Shelley and Plato portray a figure who is condemned for exposing the 'chains' of a repressive society. Her metaphor succinctly legitimises the entire project of *The Liberal* and frames the critique as driven by the terrified intolerance of the unenlightened.

Eighteenth-century precedent coloured both the self-styling of the Circle and the hostility of their detractors. Mary Shelley's reference to the 'long tradition' of English on the continent invoked the most extreme manifestation of the Grand Tourist: the Society of Dilettanti. While the Dilettanti had become a respectable institution, its founding generation was remembered primarily for a rampant Italophila that was used to perform a particularly refined form of libertinism. Moreover, many of the leading Dilettanti were rumoured to be associated with some of the most notorious circles of eighteenth-century England: the probably apocryphal *Calves' Heads Club*, a radical republican group that supposedly celebrated the execution of Charles I but also practiced Satanism; and the *Order of the Friars of St Francis*, a circle of libertine aristocrats who parodied religious rituals as sexual symposia. Such associations placed the Dilettanti as a key ancestor of the Pisan Circle in terms of transgressive practice, if not in actual ideology. This is not to imply that the Dilettanti were revolutionary, 'liberal', or even Whiggish in outlook, although they did foreshadow the Pisan's anti-clericalism. Rather, it is that they practised modes of behaviour that would become a template for subversive action in a more volatile, and paranoid, political climate.

After some debate, the editors settled on the title *The Liberal*. It was an emphatic statement. As an adjective the associations were generally congenial: but *politically* the meaning was quite ambiguous. In Britain the connotations were essentially foreign, un-English; while across Europe the term was undergoing a process of definition through use and action, of which the Pisan Circle were part.[19] They hoped to access the positive associations of the English word, a counter to the vitriol usually written about them, and thereby present their ideas as congenial, reasonable and non-threatening. But the cosmopolitan associations, especially of the revolutionary struggles in Spain, Italy and Greece, were paramount.

Such concerns were echoed in the diverse contents of the four issues. While some pieces were unashamedly partisan, especially Byron's verse, these sat alongside generous translations from various languages, short stories, and descriptive pieces such as Hunt's 'Letters from Abroad'.[20] While Hunt wrote much of the content himself, the circle of contributors included Mary Shelley, William Hazlitt, and Thomas Jefferson Hogg, alongside posthumous works of Percy Shelley. The tone varies, but there is a thoroughly cosmopolitan perspective throughout that forces readers to think beyond their own horizons; and there are many inferences, some more explicit than others, to reform and

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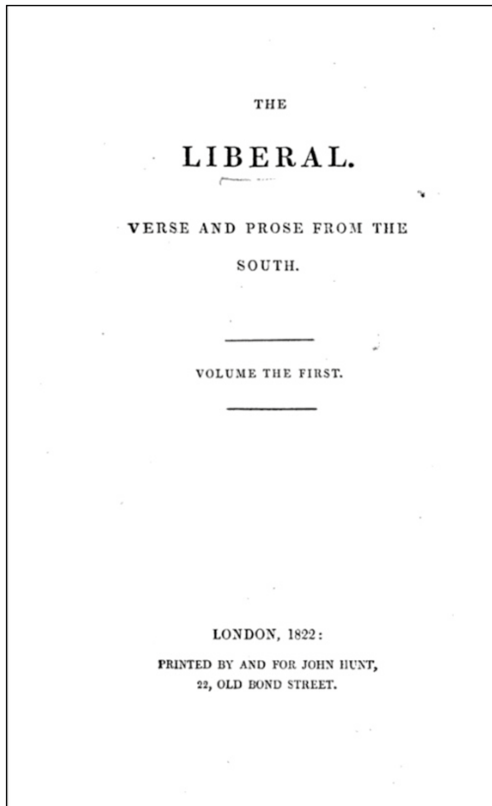
THE

LIBERAL.

VERSE AND PROSE FROM THE SOUTH.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

LONDON, 1822:

PRINTED BY AND FOR JOHN HUNT, 22, OLD BOND STREET.

revolution. Their 'weapon', if one can term it as such, was *literature*, in its broadest possible sense. There was to be no 'political programme' as such, but a vision of 'liberalism' that was cultural as much as political – 'taste and knowledge', in Mary Shelley's words. But as we have seen, a conservative such as Southey feared that this amounted to 'poison'.

For some commentators it appears that the reputations of Hunt's circle did more to define the term 'liberal' than *vice versa*. Responses varied, from rival publications that satirically 'reclaimed' the word, to an outright rejection:

> And this they call Liberalism, the essentials of which are candour and moderation! If Liberalism seals the heart to every tender sensation of loyalty and patriotism … make morality a toy … throw off all check, and bring society to a chaos of wickedness, let us banish it as a traitor, and avoid it as a pestilence.[21]

In the conservative rejection of the term there lay an opportunity for Whigs and reformers that would be formative to 'liberalism'.

Such responses suggest a sense of trepidation even before the appearance of the first number. The radical productions of the Hunt circle were a known quantity, but some feared that the new publication represented a rather different threat. Shortly after the fateful meeting in July, the *Literary Chronicle* remarked that the new journal 'has been looked for with considerable anxiety', before adding, somewhat uncharitably, that the death of Shelley would hopefully end the entire venture.[22] Rumour mingled with disdain: Wordsworth commented that the Pisans 'are to lay their heads together in some Town of Italy, for the purpose of conducting a Journal to be directed against everything in religion, in morals and probably in government and literature, which our Forefathers have been accustomed to reverence'[23]

The new journal was the latest stage in a 'culture war' that was engulfing the worlds of letters and politics. Moreover, it was a bold statement of principle and intent on the part of the Triumvirs. The association with the 'South' carried resonances of a cosmopolitanism that embraced two complementary currents: firstly, classicising elements that had underlain radical and transgressive thought throughout the Enlightenment; and secondly, the subversive behaviour that characterised libertine action and the Grand Tour, and the social networks that these individuals developed. These two currents operated together, giving freethinking and counter-cultural actors a geographical space that was both literal and ideological; and that was, moreover, buttressed by the 'philosophical arsenal' of antiquity.

Freethinkers and libertines

> Be present then, and put life into our work, ye Spirits … not of ye miserable tyrants, slaves, bigots or turncoats of any party … but all who have thrown light and life upon man, instead of darkness and death; who have made him a thing of hope and freedom, instead of despair and slavery; a being progressive, instead of creeping and retrograde.[24]
>
> Leigh Hunt

Leigh Hunt's preface presented the term 'liberal' as way of thinking that was fundamentally progressive, forward looking but with a keen eye on predecessors; yet within the context of British political life such language created unavoidable resonances with Jacobinism.[25] The Tory press, for its part, struggled in a somewhat paradoxical response. They sought to demonise, to paint the writers as atheists and radicals beyond redemption; yet they also dismissed them as talentless and impotent. Thus *Blackwood's Magazine* mocks Hunt's ideas as 'a poor tame dilution of the blasphemies of the *Encyclopedie* … a crude, vague, ineffectual, and

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sour Jacobinism'.[26] Trepidation is balanced by a casual dismissal, leaving one uncertain as to whether these exiles were to be feared or derided. But the overriding parallel presented was with the freethinkers of previous generations.[27] And even though the Pisan Circle are consistently judged as inferior, they nevertheless represented a threat in an unstable political climate.[28] This sense of imminent danger was not restricted to the Tory press. The dissenting *Investigator* reveals that some reform-minded commentators were no more sympathetic: in response to Byron's claim that revolution in England was 'inevitable', the reviewer rails at his inactions: 'He lifts not a finger to prevent it; but has taken up residence for many years abroad associating almost exclusively with foreigners … he must be a coward or a traitor'.[29]

The casting of the Pisans as freethinkers was not lazy rhetoric, but a carefully constructed assault on the politics and morality of the liberal movement. To understand this debate, one must turn to a long-running intellectual, cultural and moral conflict dating to the mid-seventeenth century: this was the framework the Tory critics drew upon, the key to their entire strategy. In this discourse, a freethinker *was* a libertine: by definition, atheistic and therefore lacking any moral code; they seduce through 'wit', beguiling the unwary with clever words, operating only for their own interest. These were the forerunners of liberalism, and their degeneracy – an established 'truth' to many Tory writers – attested to the vices and malign nature of Hunt and his friends.

In the late seventeenth-century, it was in what Jurgen Habermas termed the 'public sphere' that the 'scourge' of freethinking rose to threaten the established order of Church and King.[30] The fervent concoction of coffeehouse and club, fuelled by a burgeoning independent press, created a space that traditional forms of authority could not police, in which new ideas were freely circulated. One can see the seriousness of the perceived threat in the attempts of the authorities to respond, laughable though they may appear to a modern observer. Charles II's *Proclamation to Restrain the Spreading of False News, and Licentious Talking of Matters of State and Government* (1672), and his pitifully unsuccessful *Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee-Houses* (1675), use a language of conspiracy and of political and moral corruption. Such measures revealed the impotence of royal power to counter the new discourses that were sweeping an increasingly literate society.[31] Such decrees of state proved to be of little effect: it was *within* the emerging public sphere that the cultural conflict would take place.

In conjunction with the philosophical refutation of leading freethinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza and Anthony Collins, conservative writers adopted a strategy of moral conflation.[32] This required the reduction of various forms of natural philosophy, religious scepticism and political nonconformity into a single *moral* quality, which was then sensualised. All forms of scepticism and deism were reduced to atheism. Finally, the lack of respect for received standards was conflated with a lack of seriousness, thus rendering the individual a 'wit'. A lack of religious faith, they argued, twisted all judgements toward the cynical, because it prompted the assumption that all others are like the freethinker himself; that is, acting entirely out of self-interest. This necessary link between atheism, wit and libertinism was elaborated upon by the Jesuit theologian, William Darrell, who decried 'Atheistical Wit': 'If you love your Soul, and resolve to save it, avoid the Conversation of Libertines and Atheists … They are Satan's Deputies, Devils by Proxy'.[33]

This language of condemnation sought to discredit subversive ideologies through an association with the most notorious examples of excess and depravity. Figures such as the Earl of Rochester served as 'proof' not only of the trope of libertinism, but also that the figure of the libertine himself was deeply tragic, beset by his own misery. Such figurations became the model for characterising subversive figures throughout the eighteenth century and into the context of *The Liberal*. Thus Rochester presaged Byron, his alleged deathbed reformation suggesting that the younger poet was not lost to hope.[34]

Such tropes were applied to the entire Pisan Circle, and to Byron in particular: his writing *is* the seductive wit of the Libertine, and it stems from a bitter cynicism – that is, a lack of faith – that poses a risk to the reader.[35] Accusations of Satanism are applied by reviewers with a playful wit that clearly seeks to engage with the tone of *The Liberal*: thus the *Gentleman's Magazine* responds to Byron's use of a demon to satirise the late king, by suggesting that 'this fiend of lust and malignity … may in some sort be called his Lordship's patron *daemon*'.[36] Critics need only invoke these images to situate the Pisan Circle in a tradition of trangression, and thus discredit their aspirations to political legitimacy. What may appear to a modern reader, and indeed some at the time, as hyperbole, was a tactic to negate the liberal threat by situating it in a 'damning' context.

This philosophical libertinism inspired subversive practice, both moral and political, throughout the eighteenth century and into the Romantic period. It involved a very particular search for wisdom with 'knowledge being defined as a deepening of sensation'.

Yet the legacy of libertinism, as these writers well knew, was far more nuanced. Freethinkers had responded to the condemnation of scepticism and wit, forging new modes of thought. The Earl of Shaftesbury argued that ridicule revealed 'truth' through exposing absurdity and imposture: no subject, he insisted, is too sacred to forbid the question, 'Is it not Ridiculous?'[37] Such thought reflects the development of *libertinisme* érudit, transgression as a carefully considered ideology.[38]

This philosophical libertinism inspired subversive practice, both moral and political, throughout the eighteenth century and into the Romantic period. It involved a very particular search for wisdom with 'knowledge being defined as a deepening of sensation'.[39] It embraced an emancipation from authority, morality and religion, and a pursuit of personal fulfilment through sensuality and pleasure. Libertines would typically avoid public display of their convictions, but were personally liberated from the conventions that blight others; they sought a self-control determined only by their own judgement, not the moral code of society, and thus they were free.[40] Such a philosophy was carefully calculated and utterly dismissive of social values. However, it was also a *private* mode of behaviour: the Libertine was not a revolutionary, he cared not at all for the common good. He was by definition completely self-centred, autonomous, and therein lay his liberty. In public life he appeared the epitome of polite sociability.[41] To live such a life of deception, however, caused no distress, for he had no conscience. It is little wonder, then, that he was deemed dangerous.

While generally a literary motif, this figure did allow writers across the political spectrum to conceptualise transgressive behaviour. Certainly, for the conservative critics of *The Liberal*, the *libertin* érudit served as powerful rhetorical tool, suggesting a malign, manipulative presence: precisely what they sought in invoke in readers' imaginations. Yet liberals who saw social institutions as fundamentally unnatural and repressive – for example, Shelley's outburst against marriage[42] – may have read the manipulation of those institutions in a very different way. That is not to say Shelley, or even Byron for that matter, sought to manipulate and deceive. Rather, in the *libertin* érudit they saw a philosophically aware figure forced to negotiate a repressive social environment in order to free himself from it. On such a reading, it is the social institutions, not the individual, that is flawed.

The figure of the 'Byronic hero', all too often cast as a stylised self-representation of the poet, was a manifestation of the *libertin* érudit: a powerful form of social critique, the very 'posioning' of literature that Southey feared. Daniel Watkins has considered the characters of Byron's later texts, observing that the poet:

> never identifies guilt in his characters with wrong personal choices; their guilt is always presented as socially determined … he depicts individuals who knowingly and firmly reject both their specific social roles and the culture that has assigned them these roles.[43]

Characters such as the Biblical Cain, synonymous with the betrayal of the most fundamental familial ties, become tragic heroes. Cain is 'never malicious, never criminally insane, but rather driven to distraction by the politics of Paradise … by a social order that makes criminal activity virtually inevitable'.[44] This is the *libertin* érudit, whose crimes, if such they be, are the inescapable fate of those who dare think for themselves within the stifling confines of a repressive system. Watkins adds that 'society allows Cain no expression except endorsement; in such a world any resistance would be extreme and violent'.[45] This is the libertine response to repression, which in its extreme form as imagined by the Marquis de Sade was indeed innately connected to violence.[46] Within this are traces of the revolutionary impulse that emerges in Byron's later thought as he grew increasingly frustrated with the pace of moderate reform.[47]

For the development of liberal thought, the primacy of the individual within libertine discourse is central. Whiggish notions of liberty had centred on the 'liberation of individuals within a hierarchical society … contingent upon the perpetuation of social and political inequality'.[48] Here lies slippage between the world of drawing room sensibility and the dark recesses of libertine action. Since Shaftesbury, Whig apologists had defended privilege as a necessary evil, that access to the elite need be regulated by standards of 'politeness', qualities of education and etiquette that – for the foreseeable future – were best inculcated by breeding. Libertine and Whig alike adroitly negotiated social practices and strictures for their own benefit. Indeed, one could well read the anti-heroes of the libertine novel as nothing more than a satire on polite society. The centrality of the individual in liberal thought emerged from this context, one of self-interest. The contribution of the libertine was to *reveal* it to be so.

For all the myths of the mysterious libertine navigating society in his own interest, the most infamous examples of libertine practice in early-modern England were associative. Individually such malevolents harmed only themselves, and those who lacked the spiritual fortitude to resist their 'wit'. But together they presented a quite different proposition; and this is precisely how the Pisan Circle was conceived by both their critics and themselves. Once more, our sources for such associations emerge from critique and satire, suggesting that these clubs, and the threats they posed, existed more in the public imagination than in reality. An *Order of Council for suppressing certain impious Clubs* (1721) declared that:

> Certain scandalous clubs or societies of young persons, who meet together, and, in the most impious and blasphemous manner, insult the most sacred principles of our holy religion, affront Almighty God himself, and corrupt the minds and morals of one another.[49]

But even contemporary commentators doubted whether any such clubs actually existed.[50] A rich vein of scandalous 'journalism' provided lurid details, repeating and developing rumours so that such tales, by their very ubiquity in the public imagination, became common knowledge. Like the Pisan Circle, these clubs were emerging at a time of great uncertainty. Amidst such paranoia, there appears to have been a conflation of the threat of Jacobite-Catholic absolutism with both Puritan republicanism and Satanic libertinism, into one amorphous whole. Through the conflation of subversive ideas and absurd stories, critics sought to show that the rhetoric of freethinking was ideologically insubstantial and disingenuous.

Eighteenth-century tropes of 'foreignness' and patterns of associative sedition – imagined or real – determined and shaped conceptions of *The Liberal* and the threat it posed. Hunt, Shelley and Byron were fully aware of these patterns, and understood that the only possible response was to embrace them. Associative libertinism was most fully embodied by one group that provides a revealing parallel to the Pisan Circle. The Society of Dilettanti were formed nominally for the promotion of Italian art and opera, although the rakish reputation of the leading members ensured that, from the very start, they were not taken seriously. This, however, they took as their starting point. From Shaftesbury they adopted the principle, which they developed into an insistence, of ridicule as essential to polite conversation. For the early Dilettanti, quite literally nothing was sacred. In the notorious portrait Francis Dashwood submitted to the Society, he appears as 'St. Francis at his devotions'; while the blasphemy is clear to any viewer, it carries coded aesthetic clues that intensify the statement, subverting symbols of Christian asceticism into a statement of a sublime pagan sensuality.[51]

Such parody was performed with a knowing wink to the viewer, playing on the knowledge that their aristocratic status gave them freedom to transgress. The Dilettanti anticipated and provoked outrage, fulfilling and fanning rumours of their debauched behaviour. Indeed, the only alleged meeting of the *Calves' Head Club* for which we possess anything approaching evidence lies in press reports of riots caused by Dashwood's circle goading a mob with provocative toasts.[52] Acts of transgression that were the subject of paranoid terror a generation before became comedic performance.

Their refusal to take themselves seriously made them appear less threatening, but that did not prevent them from serious endeavours. Moreover, they remained very much part of the establishment: Dashwood served as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Tory-led ministry of Lord Bute, although his performance in office remained comedic. However, their flippant demeanour left an enduring mark on eighteenth-century political culture: perhaps their most significant legacy lay in fracturing the mirage of religious awe. Their ridicule of the sacred endured because it was melded to a cultural positioning that implied something more substantial than jest alone. And herein lay their relevance for the liberal libertines of the Pisan Circle.

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Seria ludo: a Liberal *virtù*?

> We are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge.[53]
>
> Leigh Hunt

The Dilettanti were notorious for enjoying their wine – the 'actual' qualification for membership, joked Horace Walpole, was 'being drunk'.[54] It was 'within their cups' that they expressed their ideas most adroitly. They raised their glasses to toasts such as 'Grecian Taste and Roman Spirit', 'Viva la Virtù' and 'Seria Ludo', literally 'serious games'. These mottoes reveal their intense classicising and a curious combination of the puerile and the profound. While the classical world was integral to polite learning, it carried subversive

potential: the Dilettanti were cultivating ideological and aesthetic links with a past that was pre-Christian and, in the main, fiercely anti-monarchic. The 'Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns', nominally a late seventeenth-century dispute over ancient versus modern learning, was, in essence, part of an ongoing cultural battle that pitched pagan precedent against Christian modernity. 'From the reading' of ancient histories, warned Thomas Hobbes, 'men have undertaken to kill their kings'; similarly, the great French historian of antiquity, Charles Rollin, warned his readers 'not to imbibe, unperceived … sentiments' of 'heathen authors'.[55] Libertines and atheists found inspiration and justification in the classical for transgression: Rochester used Seneca to deny divine justice, while Dashwood replaced the crucifix with Venus as the object of theological contemplation.[56] Antiquity provided a 'philosophical arsenal', and engagements with the classical would be a driving force of the Enlightenment.[57] In *seria ludo* lies the essence of the Dilettanti: a carefully coded citation of the classical that imbues action, a programme that is necessarily both frivolous and philosophical.[58]

Shaftesbury had drawn on antiquity to generate a model of polite society that formulated liberty as 'a condition of discourse and cultural production': 'the language of politeness' demonstrated 'good taste in … social interactions, … cultural predilections and activities'.[59] This constituted *virtù*, an aesthetic sense that rejected the parochial in favour of principles of cultural production that both the Dilettanti and the Pisans identified first and foremost with Italy, rendering their principles fundamentally cosmopolitan. The *virtuoso* was an individual whose knowledge and understanding was broad and inclusive; a better path, claimed Shaftesbury, to becoming 'A Man of Virtue' – distinct from, but related to, *virtù* – than the 'the profound researches of *Pedants*'. Indeed, 'the arts of virtuosi and that of virtue become, in a manner, one and the same'.[60] However, it also fostered a sense of superiority akin to the libertine dismissal of morality. This overlap between the virtuosi and the libertine was recognised throughout the eighteenth century: the Tory satirist Ned Ward imagined a 'Virtuoso's Club' who sought to 'propagate New Whims' through their absurd abstractions;[61] while decades later, Gilray's *The Charm of Virtù* (1794) presents Dilettantism as little more than libertine fetishism.[62]

Nevertheless, these principles would underlie both the Dilettanti and the Pisans. In the preface to one of their ground-breaking archaeological works, Robert Wood outlines the principles of the Dilettanti in terms that would later be echoed by Mary Shelley:

'We wish the title of our work to be taken in its largest acceptation, old as well as new,– but always in the same spirit of admiring and assisting rather than of professing … we are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge, and … we go in the full length in matters of opinions with large bodies of men who are called LIBERALS.'

> Some gentlemen who had travelled in Italy, desirous of encouraging, *at home*, a taste for those objects which had contributed so much to their entertainment *abroad*, formed themselves into a Society, … Friendly and Social Intercourse was, undoubtedly, the first great Object in view; but …it is hoped this Work will show that they have not, for that Reason, abandoned the Cause of *Virtù*, in which they are also engaged.[63]

Joy in transgression was an integral aspect of, not inimical to, the passion for cultural excellence: these are inextricable aspects of the *virtù* to which they aspired. Thus Dashwood's portrait, mentioned above, carries clues displaying his aesthetic sense and learning alongside, indeed *innate to,* his devotion to the sensual. It is quite literally a performance of libertinism.

In the preface to *The Liberal*, Hunt expressed a notion of 'liberalism' which owes a great deal to these previous concepts:

> We must confess we have a regard for the Dandies, properly so called … we mean the pleasant and pithy personages who began the system, and who had ideas as well as bibs in their head.[64]
>
> We wish the title of our work to be taken in its largest acceptation, old as well as new,– but always in the same spirit of admiring and assisting rather than of professing … we are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge, and … we go in the full length in matters of opinions with large bodies of men who are called LIBERALS.[65]

Hunt's liberalism is inclusive, looking both back and forward, open to all new knowledge, thus gaining a wide perspective; and thus exudes *virtu*, 'polite' in a Shaftesburyean sense. Its critique is never absolute, but appropriate to the context:

> The force of our answers will always be proportioned to the want of liberality in the assailant … although we condemn by wholesale certain existing demands upon our submission and credulity, we are not going to discover every imaginative thing in a religion to be nonsense … nor, on the other hand, to denounce all levity and wit to be nonsense and want of feeling.[66]

For Hunt, 'liberal' knowledge is a *mode of behaviour* that must balance civility, sociability and a cosmopolitan learning; the critique of individuals or institutions is *proportionate*.[67] Thus in the first number of *The Liberal*, Byron's 'The Vision of Judgment' and 'Epigrams on Lord Castlereagh' ridicule Southey and the former foreign secretary with a savagery that shocks to this day; but this is not *illiberal* because of the nature of the opponents and the witty manner of composition.

Both Pisans and Dilettanti embody Shaftesbury's vision of ridicule as a way to critique and reveal as part of an enlightened form of cultural production. They share a rejection of convention that is libertine in essence, and thus they were coalesced into one subversive tradition by critics. The difference between them lies the context of their transgressions. The outrage over Dashwood's *Order of St Francis* was greater than that over the Dilettanti, as it emerged amidst political conflict between former members, the Earl of Sandwich and John Wilkes. It was the act of *publication* – firstly of Wilkes' radical journal *The North Briton*, and then the discovery of the scandalous poem *An Essay on Woman* – that made them matters of public concern.[68] Dashwood's circles were essentially private affairs, that courted rumour, not publicity. It was only in the paranoia the 1790s that the Dilettanti too faced more sustained criticism.[69] However, the Pisan Circle operated at a time of great political uncertainty and specifically intended to *disseminate* their ideas; this gave political direction to their transgressions.

This difference of critique is reflected in the scale and intensity of the conservative attack, rather than its form. The precedents of libertines and Dilettanti gave critics ready-made tropes. But it also hindered them: in their fixation to situate the Pisans within a subversive tradition, they failed to take into account what had changed. Moreover, it made their critique predictable. As Hunt, with a 'liberal' sense of irony, announced: 'The least we can do is to let these people see, that we know them, and to warn them how they assail us'.[70]

Critique and dismissal

> Never was there a greater outcry raised among the hypocrites of all classes, than against this publication.[71]
>
> Leigh Hunt

Amidst the hyperbole and shrill rhetoric, a threefold pattern can be detected that echoes, indeed often repeats, the conservative discourse of the previous century. Firstly, critics questioned the conviction of the transgressors; secondly, they queried their sanity; and thirdly, they expressed surprise at their ineffectiveness.

Amidst the hyperbole and shrill rhetoric, a threefold pattern can be detected that echoes, indeed often repeats, the conservative discourse of the previous century. Firstly, critics questioned the conviction of the transgressors; secondly, they queried their sanity; and thirdly, they expressed surprise at their ineffectiveness.

The question of conviction rests on the flippant – one could almost say *laissez-faire* – attitude amongst wits and libertines. The rakes of Restoration drama tended to reform: faced with the 'strength' of faith the libertine was supposedly powerless, because he believed nothing – or, what was worse, whatever was fashionable or convenient.[72] Tales were circulated to 'prove' that freethinkers were cowards lacking the courage of their convictions, conducting childish performances of transgression. In his account of the 'Atheistical Club', the Tory hack Ned Ward claims the 'worshippers' fled in terror when a prankster wearing a bearskin interrupted their invocations, fearing Satan had indeed arrived.[73] An almost identical scene appears in a story of *The Order of St Francis*, in which the Earl of Sandwich mistakes a baboon for the Devil, and is reduced to a state of panic, crying out: 'Spare me, gracious devil! … [I am a] wretch who never was sincerely your servant! I sinned only from vanity of being in the fashion … I never have been half so wicked as I pretended'.[74] These scenes serve to ridicule as much as demonise: when confronted with the 'reality' of their spurious claims, like Rochester before them, they quickly recant. Such tropes were applied to the Cockney Circle: Southey insists that despite 'all their efforts and bravadoes, they are unable entirely to disbelieve' the religion they attack; while another critic dismisses Shelley's atheism as a 'superficial audacity of unbelief'.[75] The Pisans speak not from conviction, but because their loss of faith has left only 'the wretched feeling of hopelessness'.[76] Thus Byron, 'because he is miserable himself, in consequence of his vices and his follies, is labouring, with the zeal and alacrity of a fallen spirit, to render others like unto him'.[77] The critics seek to re-affirm the faith that the Pisans attack by insinuating that these liberals are driven by a miserable resentment of what they have lost; that they have no political programme or ideology beyond malign bitterness.

Secondly, the question of sanity echoes attacks on the intellectual 'limitations' of libertines, who were derided as being 'no more capable of Reason than an Ape', as 'puzzled and confounded', and forfeiting 'all pretence to wisdom'.[78] For the Pisans this is taken to an extreme: one critic stated of Shelley's blasphemy that 'we never thought that any one … outside of bedlam, could have uttered' it; and also wondered whether 'Byron [would]

ever become permanently, what we cannot but think and hope he is by fits and starts, a lunatic'.[79] Such accusations echo Ned Ward's accounts of both the Atheistical Club and the Virtuosos, serving to discredit the Pisans and frame their ideas as nothing more than the exhortations of the permanently befuddled. This renders them aggressive, unreasonable, and thus unworthy of consideration. Thus the *Literary Register* rejected Hunt's journal not so much for its ideology, but for its tone:

> We are ready to peruse a book which shall seek to dethrone heaven itself … If we can believe the doer sincere, we shall respect him; but if it be attempted with sneers and scuffs instead of calm assertion and argument – if our quiet belief – say prejudice – is to be insulted with mockery, and not be approached with argument … [this] can only arouse our loathing and our chastisement. Such … is the manner in which the 'Liberal' puts forward its infidelity.[80]

Finally, critics sought to apply the *coup de grâce* to the new journal. The editors' insincerity and insanity led to the 'failure' of *The Liberal* as either a political or literary project. Critics contrast a sense of trepidation with a bemused relief:

> This so much puffed, and so long promised work … [readers are] prepared for blasphemy and impurity of every kind … but we doubt that they can anticipate all the atrocity of 'The Liberal' … [but] its capacity of doing mischief is contracted by a stupidity greater than the best men could have hoped for.[81]
>
> When the grand Pisan Conspiracy was first bruited about, we did expect that a production of at least some mark and likelihood would be the issue. That it would be as conspicuous for bitterness as profligacy, for wit as malignity, and for talent as inclination to do mischief. But alas for this Foreign Levy and Domestic Treason! It is only as impotent as disgusting, as foolish as egotistical, and as despicable as indecent.[82]

Critics took great pleasure in dismissing the publication altogether, echoing tropes of Satanism and transgression in mocking tones: 'the union of wickedness, folly, and imbecility, is perfect; and, as they congratulated the devil, so do we congratulate the Authors of the Liberal'.

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The critical response to *The Liberal* is the principal reason for its brief existence. Some contributions, especially Byron's attack on Southey, are still read, but in isolation rather than as part of an overarching concept. Shelley's untimely demise and the relationship between Hunt and Byron resulted in a somewhat disjointed production. Thomas Carlyle, who had not yet grown dismissive of Byron, appeared somewhat confused by the lack of any discernible coherence to the first volume:

> Hunt is the only serious man in it, since Shelley died: he has a wish to preach about politics and bishops and pleasure and paintings and nature, honest man; Byron wants only to write squibs against Southey and the like. The work will hardly do.[85]

Carlyle does praise the production on several occasions, but also reveals the reason for its failure: 'they will not sell it, it is so full of Atheism and Radicalism and other noxious *isms*', adding in another letter that 'the honest people *of letters* are much shocked at the appearance of Byron's and Hunt's Magazine *The Liberal,* which hardly one of the Bibliopolists will venture to sell a copy of.'[86] The outrage, it appears, had made the journal hard to come by. One must therefore assume that the fate of *The Liberal* owed far more to the critiques of the press than any reading of the journal itself.

Epilogue: liberal revolution.

> Whenever we see the mind of man exhibiting powers of its own, and at the same time helping to carry on the best interests of human nature … there we recognise the demigods of liberal worship;– there we bow down, and own our lords and masters;– there we hope for the passing away of all obscene worships … of all monstrous sacrifices of the many to the few.[87]
>
> Leigh Hunt

The legacy of *The Liberal* may indeed lie in the normalisation of the term. Yet it also provides insight into the legacies from which liberalism developed, often rejected but nevertheless formative. And it suggested that ideology, however loosely defined, embodies behaviour.

Hay remarked that it 'is easy to discover what *The Liberal* is against: less easy, perhaps, to discover within its pages a manifesto for change'.[88] If one seeks a specific programme,

one will indeed be disappointed. But in the very act of critique and satire, the authors of *The Liberal* were never seeking to tell readers what to do or think. What underlies the programme of the Pisans is the principle that being a 'liberal' is not merely a question of ideology, or of politics in the sense of party. It is a *cultural*, as much a political, stance. And crucially, liberal revolution was to be *de*scriptive, not *pre*scriptive, for in the latter lay only the replacement of one set of moral certainties with another. The events of the 1790s had shown that revolution conducted with moral absolutism can only result in horror: in dictating 'truths' the Jacobins became the tyranny they sought to overthrow. It is not so much that the Jacobins were wrong in principle, but that they took themselves too seriously: after all, Robespierre dismissed wit as the 'aristocracy of the mind'.[89] Their inability to laugh at themselves meant that they could not *see* themselves critically. In their rejection of the light-hearted sociability that underlay liberal *virtù*, they echoed the conservative critics of previous generations; as Shaftesbury would have said, they became ridiculous.[90] Their prescriptive form of revolution was doomed, because they swept away the certainties, however oppressive, that had allowed people to orientate themselves and give their lives meaning, however false that meaning may have been. Gilbert Highet once suggested that the gradual turn to a 'Spartan' model of education represented 'the hopeless, suicidal enterprise of denying the French their cuisine, their wine, and their conversation'.[91] Soon after the fall of their sombre regime, one French commentator remarked that 'the people hunger for laughter'.[92]

In contrast, the Pisan Circle sought a descriptive form of revolution; one that revealed absurdities, shattering the mirage of religious and monarchic awe. Such a task, in the tradition of Shaftesbury and the Dilettanti, was best achieved through ridicule. The character in Plato's cave would have succeeded – and survived – had he been able to *show* the real world, rather than just announce it: but a people will kill to keep the chains they do not recognise as such. Ridicule, however, reveals the true state of what is mocked: it does not *declare* something is false, but merely highlights the absurd, thus inviting closer, more critical, inspection. Then the individual – the key component of liberalism – can recognise the true state of things for themselves.

This is, perhaps, what offended Tories and moderates alike: it was not merely a matter of Catholic emancipation or extending the franchise, necessary steps though those were. A theme that was evident in radical thought since James Harrington's *Oceana* (1651), and stressed by several of the more radical *philosophes*, is that real change must involve the 'manners' of a people.[93] The Pisans understood liberalism as a programme of cultural revolution every bit as radical as that of the Jacobins, perhaps even more so: for they sought to enable the individual to determine their own cultural and moral understanding, a form of *libertin* éruditisme for all. Such a programme, of course, necessitated revealing the chains of a repressive society that prevented self-realisation. The Triumvirs of *The Liberal* sought a balance that was 'liberal' in the most literal sense, and dared to admit that they did not have all the answers: 'a spirit of admiring and assisting rather than of professing'.[94] They suggested readers determine answers, if indeed there are answers, for themselves. This, first and foremost, was the liberal of *The Liberal*.

The Pisans understood liberalism as a programme of cultural revolution every bit as radical as that of the Jacobins, perhaps even more so: for they sought to enable the individual to determine their own cultural and moral understanding.

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1 *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt* (London, 1862), vol. i, p. 173.
2 *Blackwood's Magazine*, Dec. 1821, pp. 696–700. The reference was to the political arrangement between Octavian (the future Augustus), Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, formed in 43 BC.
3 J. Gross, 'Byron and "The Liberal"', *Philological Quarterly*, 72 (1993), p. 471; M. Schoina, 'Leigh Hunt's "Letters from Abroad" and the "Anglo-Italian" Discourse of The Liberal', *Romanticism*, 12 (2006); D. Hay, 'Liberals, Liberales and The Liberal', *European Romantic Review*, 19 (2008); D. Craig, 'The origins of "liberalism" in Britain: the case of The Liberal', *Historical Research*, 85 (2012), pp. 469–70, 487–9; J. Leonhard, 'Translation as cultural transfer and semantic interaction', in M. J. Burke (ed.), *Why Concepts Matter* (Leiden, 2012), p. 105f; J. Stabler, 'Religious Liberty in the "Liberal," 1822–23', in D. F. Felluga (ed.), *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (2015).
4 Hay, 'Liberals', pp. 313, 318.
5 *The Liberal*, 1, p. vii.
6 *New European Magazine*, 1 (Oct. 1822), pp. 354–5.
7 *Blackwood's Magazine*, 3 (Jul. 1818), p. 453;

Blackwood's Magazine, 2 (Jan. 1817), p. 416.

8 Byron to Thomas Moore, 19 May 1813. The phrase has proven enduring, with at least three studies of Hunt choosing it as a title: A. Blainey, *Books at Iowa*, 34 (1981), pp. 9–23; G. Kucich, *European Romantic Review*, 10 (1999), pp. 242–53; A. Holden, *The Wit in the Dungeon: The Remarkable Life of Leigh Hunt* (Boston 2005).

9 On the 'Cockney Circle', see J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (Cambridge 1998); Craig, 'Origins of liberalism'; M. Horová, 'The Satanic School', and M. Schoina, 'The Pisan Circle and the Cockney School', in C. Tuite (ed.), *Byron in Context* (Cambridge 2019).

10 *The Investigator* (Oct. 1822, p. 357) remarks that Byron himself made his 'domestic history … a matter of legitimate investigation' through his 'frequent and unmanly allusions to it'.

11 *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1822, p. 351; *Blackwood's Magazine*, Jul. 1823, pp. 88, 92.

12 R. Southey, *A Vision of Judgement* (1821), pp. xvii, xviii, xx–xxi.

13 Horová, 'Satanic School', pp. 184ff. Critics did dispute this reading: *The Investigator* (Oct. 1822, p. 353) insists that while, in Milton, the arguments of the Devil are 'introduced only to be refuted', in Byron's Cain he 'has not only the best, but the whole of the argument to himself'. Whether we agree with this interpretation or not, we should note a sophisticated differentiation between what Mikhail Bakhtin would later identify as monologic versus dialogic forms of narrative, deployed in this case to critique radical literature as unreasonable and absolutist, essentially embodying the very fanaticism it seeks to attack.

14 Gross, 'Byron and The Liberal', p. 475; Stabler, 'Religious Liberty', n.p.

15 M. Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford 1981), pp. 113–37; D. Simpson, 'The Limits of Cosmopolitanism and the Case for Translation', *European Romantic Review*, 16 (2005), pp. 142–5; J. N. Cox, 'Cockney Cosmopolitanism', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 32 (2010), pp. 245–59; M. Schoina, 'Pisan Circle', pp. 217–8.

16 Gross, 'Byron and The Liberal', p. 478.

17 Shelley, 'English in Italy', *The Bijou*, Oct. 1828, p. 327.

18 Plato, *Republic,* 514a–520a.

19 Gross, 'Byron and The Liberal', pp. 471–2; Stabler, 'Religious Liberty', n.p.; Hay, 'Liberals', p. 310; Craig, 'Origins of liberalism', p. 477ff; Schoina, 'Letters from Abroad', p. 117; Leonhard, 'Translation as cultural transfer', pp. 96–107.

20 See Stabler, 'Religious Liberty', n.p.; Schoina, 'Letters from Abroad'.

21 *A Critique on The Liberal* (London, 1822), pp. 14–15. Satirical responses included: *The London Liberal: An Antidote to Verse and Prose from the South*; and *The Illiberal, or Verse and Prose from the North*. See also *Council of Ten* VI (1823), pp. 149–78.

22 *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 169, 10 Aug. 1822, p. 504. See also *The Investigator*, Oct. 1822, p. 368.

23 Wordsworth to W. S. Landor, 20 Apr. 1822; E. de Selincourt (ed.), *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* (London, 1939) vol i, p. 69.

24 *The Liberal*, 1, p. viii.

25 Leonhard ('Translation as cultural transfer', 107) terms it a 'progressive semantic indicator'. See also Craig, 'Origins of liberalism', pp. 478–9.

26 Oct. 1817, pp. 37, 39. See also Craig, 'Origins of liberalism', p. 486. On the Circle and Enlightenment ideas: Cox, 'Cockney Cosmopolitanism', pp. 248–9.

27 Most explicitly expressed in *Council of Ten*, VI (1823), pp. 150–1.

28 D. V. Erdman, 'Byron and Revolt in England', *Science & Society*, 11 (1947), pp. 234–48; Craig, 'Origins of liberalism', p. 476.

29 *The Investigator*, Oct. 1822, p. 358. Byron made the claim in an appendix to *The Two Foscari* (in *Collected Poetical Works*, vol. vi, p. 223).

30 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge Mass., 1989).

31 William III's *Proclamation for Preventing and Punishing Immorality and Prophaneness* (1697) displays much the same zeal, but is more ambiguous in its demands, seeking to encourage a general change in literary culture.

32 While Hobbes and Spinoza provided very different challenges to orthodox thought, Collins's *A Discourse of Free-thinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Freethinkers* (1713) provided perhaps the most comprehensive argument and summary. See P. Miller, 'Free-thinking and Freedom of Thought in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 599–617.

33 *The gentleman instructed, in the conduct of a virtuous and happy life* (London, 1713), pp. 92–3.

34 *The Investigator*, Sep. 1822, p. 360; Oct. 1822, pp. 320–1.

35 Such critiques were not restricted to the Tory press. See: *Edinburgh Review*, Feb. 1822, pp. 448–9; *Eclectic Review*, Mar. 1823, p. 216.

36 *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1822, p. 349. The use of the Greek spelling 'daemon' evokes and reverses the idea of the Socratic daimon, rendering Byron's 'inspiration' Satanic, and thus his thinking as depraved as the philosopher's was sublime. This parallel could be taken much further: See Plato's *Symposion*, 202d–e. A similar trope appears in *The Investigator* (Oct. 1822, p. 351), which describes Byron as Satan's 'laureate'.

37 *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*, pp. 40–2; see also *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1707). On wit and ridicule, see R. Lund, *Ridicule, Religion and the Politics of Wit in Augustan England* (London, 2012).

38 This was most clearly expressed in the anti-heroes of libertine literature, who can serve as models for understanding the philosophical basis of early modern transgression. See T. Gregory, '*Libertinisme érudit* in seventeenth-century France and Italy', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 6 (1998), pp. 323–49. The most notorious examples of the libertine novel appeared as the growing cult of sensibility was taming the sexual excesses of the aristocracy: Rochester's *Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery* (1684) was more satirical. The model libertine begins to emerge in characters such as Versac in the novel by Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (aka Crébillon fils), *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit ou Mémoires de M. de Meilcour* (1736–8). The classics of the genre appeared in the later eighteenth century, such as Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) and Sade's *L'Histoire de Juliette* (1797–1801).

39 P. Sollers, 'What is Libertinage?', *Yale French Studies*, 94 (1998), p. 205.

40 For an excellent summary of the literary libertine, see E. Russo, 'Sociability, Cartesianism, and Nostalgia in Libertine Discourse', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30

(1997).

41 Russo, 'Sociability', pp. 387–91.

42 'Chastity is a monkish and evangelical superstition, a greater foe to natural temperance even than unintellectual sensuality; it strikes at the root of all domestic happiness, and consigns more than half the human race to misery … A system could not well have been devised more studiously hostile to human happiness than marriage.' Notes to *Queen Mab*, p. 112.

43 'Byron and the Poetics of Revolution', pp. 107–8.

44 Ibid. p. 108.

45 Ibid.

46 L. Frappier-Mazur, 'Sadean Libertinage and the Esthetics of Violence', *Yale French Studies*, 94 (1998), p. 184f.

47 'Byron and the Poetics of Revolution', p. 96ff.

48 A. Kriegel, 'Liberty and Whiggery in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Modern History*, 52 (1980), p. 277.

49 *Gazette*, 29 Apr. 1721.

50 Thomas Gordon, 'Reflections occasioned by an Order of Council for suppressing certain impious Clubs that were never discovered', *Cato's Letters*, 29, 13 May 1721.

51 B. Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles, 2008), pp. 33–7; J. M. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti: Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2010).

52 *Weekly Oracle*, 1 Feb. 1734. J. M. Kelly, 'Riots, Revelries, and Rumor?: Libertinism and Masculine Association in Enlightenment London', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), pp. 759–95.

53 *The Liberal*, 1, p. ix.

54 Walpole to Horace Mann, 14 Apr. 1742.

55 *Leviathan, or the matter form and power of a common-wealth* (1651), pp. 170–1; *The ancient history* (London, 1738), vol. i, pp. xvii–xviii.

56 *A Translation from Seneca's 'Troades'*, Act II, Chorus.

57 P. Gay, *The Enlightenment* (London, 1966–69),vol i, pp. 32–44; I. Macgregor Morris, 'From Ancient Dreams to Modern Nightmares: Classical Revolutions in Enlightenment Thought', in T. Coignard, et. al (eds.) *Lumières et histoire* (Paris, 2010), pp. 301–21; L. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature & History in Early Modern France* (Chicago, 2011); I. Macgregor Morris – U. Degner, 'Événements de circonstance: the Classical Tradition in the Age of Revolution', in M. Oergel (ed.), *(Re-)Writing the Radical* (Berlin, 2012), pp. 186–203.

58 Redford, *Dilettanti*, p. 3.

59 L. E. Klein, 'Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England', *Historical Journal*, 32 (1989), pp. 603, 588.

60 'Advice to An Author', *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), vol. i, pp. 215–7.

61 *Secret History of the Clubs* (London, 1709), p. 11. The obvious model for Ward in this case is Aristophanes' parody of philosophers in *The Clouds*, an association that reflects a general suspicion linking subversive thought and the likes of Socrates: Swift, after all, associated the *Calves' Heads* with John Toland, whose *Pantheisticon, sive formula celebrandae sodalitatis socratica* challenged established religion in favour of 'Socratic' societies. The model of Socrates, of course, was an appealing one for thinkers fearing persecution. See I. Macgregor Morris, 'The Refutation of Democracy? Socrates in the Enlightenment', in M. B. Trapp (ed.), *Socrates From Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 209–27.

62 James Gillray, *The Charm of Virtù – or a Cognoscenti discovering the Beauties of an Antique Terminus* (1794).

63 R. Wood, 'preface', *Ionian Antiquities* (1769).

64 *The Liberal*, 1, p. vii.

65 Ibid., pp. viii–ix.

66 Ibid., p. xii.

67 Stabler, 'Religious Liberty', n.p.

68 Kelly, 'Riots, Revelries, and Rumor'; and *Society of Dilettanti*.

69 Kelly, *Society of Dilettanti*, pp. 243–63; Redford, *Dilettanti*, pp. 113–28; J. R. Moore, 'History as Theoretical' Reconstruction?', in J. Moore, I. Macgregor Morris, A. Bayliss, *Reinventing History* (London, 2008), pp. 157–62.

70 *The Liberal*, 1, pp. xi–xii.

71 *The Liberal*, 2, p. v.

72 Thus William Darrell's dismissal of deism: 'his Religion is universal, calculated for all Meridians … he is any thing without, and nothing within; so that his whole Religion turns upon Convenience and Interest' (*Gentleman instructed*, p. 92).

73 *The second part of the history of the London clubs* (London, 1720), pp. 7–8. Ward's conflation of atheism and Satanism was typical of such rhetorical strategies.

74 Charles Johnstone, *Chrysal; or, The adventures of a guinea* (London, 1760–65) vol. iii, pp. 242–3.

75 Southey, *Vision*, p. xix; *Blackwood's Magazine*, Jan. 1819, p. 475.

76 Southey, *Vision*, p. xx.

77 *The Investigator*, Jan. 1823, p. 84.

78 Darrell, *Gentleman instructed*, p. 92; Mary Astell, *Bart'lemy fair: or, an enquiry after wit* (1709); Isaac Barrow, *Against Foolish Talking and Jesting* (1678).

79 *The Investigator*, Oct. 1822, pp. 357, 342.

80 *Literary Register*, 19 Oct. 1822, p. 241.

81 *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1822, p. 348.

82 *Literary Gazette*, 19 Oct. 1822, p. 655.

83 Ibid., 2 Nov. 1822, p. 694.

84 *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1822, p. 348.

85 Carlyle to Jane Welsh, 28 Oct. 1822.

86 Ibid; Carlyle to Alexander Galloway, 6 Nov. 1822.

87 *The Liberal*, 1, p. xii.

88 'Liberals, *Liberales* and The Liberal', p. 318.

89 M. Rapport, 'Laughter as a Political Weapon', in A. B. Duncan and A. Chamayou (eds.) *Le rire européen* (Perpignan, 2010), pp. 241–55.

90 Robespierre's outrage at the mockery of his *Cult of the Supreme Being* could have come from the pen of many a seventeenth-century Tory cleric: 'il s'est permis sur ce sujet les plus grossiers sarcasmes et les déclamations les plus indécentes!' ['in the presence of the people he allowed himself, on this subject, the most crude sarcasm and the most indecent claims'] (*Papiers inédits trouvés chez Robespierre, Saint-Just, Payan, etc.* (Paris, 1828) vol. ii, pp. 19–20). The Jacobin 'religious' ceremony displayed a remarkable parallel to the classicising blasphemies of the Dilettanti, but without the crucial element of self-aware humour.

91 *The Classical Tradition* (London, 1949), p. 399.

92 'Le peuple a faim de rire'. *Le Contradicteur*, 4 Messidor An 5 [1797], p. 1.

93 Macgregor Morris, 'Ancient Dreams to Modern Nightmares'.

94 *The Liberal*, 1, p. viii.