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CONSTRUCTING NATIONHOOD THROUGH LITERATURE: ITALY, BRITAIN, AND *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

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ABSTRACT

Nineteenth century Europe witnessed the collapse of an old order, which in turn spurred the development of new ideas, means of communications, and consequently new nations. Given its creative potential, the novel played a crucial role in developing these new, imagined communities. This thesis will looks closely at the correlation between the "nation" and the elements of the "novel" through an analysis of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* and its commentary on the Italian Risorgimento. Part of a British, literary trend that focused upon the Italian struggle, Collins' work is evidence that the nation making process is every-occurring, as to define another nation is to refine one's own.

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Introduction

Following the collapse of an old order, 19th century Europe witnessed the development of new ideas, means of communications, and consequently new nations. Among these grew the efforts of a fractured, Italian peninsula to unify around one authority. This process – known as the Risorgimento – expanded beyond both politics and the peninsula in that it drew the attention of many of Europe's leading artists and authors. As citizens of one of the most powerful and liberal countries of the time, British writers in particular wove their political opinions on the Risorgimento into works of popular literature. Often praised as the forerunner of the modern mystery novel, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* also contains a sub surface plot that echoes Italy's struggle for unification and liberation.

While occupying what we consider a separate sphere, novels such as Wilkie Collins' were not only influential, but also necessary to the nation-building phenomena of the 19th century. A close read of *The Woman in White* will reveal how literary elements such as setting and symbolism can have political weight, while defining "nation" and tracing it's birth will make evident how imaginative mediums build the foundation of our national identities. Ultimately, I will show how criticism of a foreign nation from one that is already established does more than just shape one's conception of an "other" – it also redefines one's own nationhood. As a result, literary mediums hold the potential to influence the most powerful, abstract constructions in the world beyond their early development.

In order to expose this nation-making process as seen in the relationship between Italy, Britain, and their literary exchange, one must first have an awareness of the political landscape of 19th century Europe. After a brief summary of the Italian Risorgimento, I will provide a cultural

analysis of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, and explore how it contributed to the "Italy" discussion. Next, I will look at the shared elements between the novel and the nation in order to explain how they developed in tangent – as well as how they continued to develop despite the political solidity of Great Britain.

The Italian Risorgimento

While the unification of Italy took roughly two years, the process of national revival that spurred and solidified the event – what Italians call the "Risorgimento" – originated in the 18th century and lasted into the 20th century (Beales and Biagini 2). Taking into account the importance of the international dimension, historians often pinpoint the Treat of Aix-la-Chapelle, drawn in 1748, as the official start of the Risorgimento. Along with peace, the foreign, Enlightened despots that held power in the Italian Peninsula introduced Enlightenment ideals and mild reformism into their rule. These reforms reduced the influence of the church and the nobility, yet did not go so far as to introduce representative institutions into their territories (21). Still, the reformist seed was planted.

The French Revolution intensified the influence of the Enlightenment, and Napoleon Bonaparte brought this new intensity to the European lands he conquered. By 1799, every territory in Italy excluding Venetia had a representative government, and by 1809 Napoleon had established the Kingdom of Italy in the northern peninsula, placed his brother on the throne in the south, and imprisoned the Pope. In addition to representative government, Napoleon spurred a new class of professional bureaucrats. Italy's current, tri-colored flag came into existence – along with whispers of nationalism, and secret societies such as the Carbonari developed. Such societies advocated not only for reform, but also for liberal values such as freedom and equality (25-30).

With the defeat of Napoleon and subsequent Treaty of Vienna in 1815, the Holy Alliance – made up of Austria, Russia, and Prussia – succeeded in restoring the old dynasties of the Italian Peninsula. In not allowing an Italian Federation, Chancellor of Austria Metternich inadvertently united the Italian people in their subservience to Austria. Britain - influenced by Italian émigrés,

popular British opinion, and the Whig party - had supported the national movement when convenient, but ultimately chose to preserve peace and the balance of power established by the treaty. Yet having a degree of liberty, the upper classes of Italy's Lombard territory actively sought economic freedom from Austria's market, in order to participate in that of Northern Europe. The Austrians responded to their demonstrations with suppression (33-35).

The repression of the Lombardians spurred radical sentiment and solidarity in the following generation. The most extreme of these rebels – led by Philippe Buonartti – believed in the perfectibility of both mankind and the world through liberal values, preferring universal improvement to a specifically Italian cause. The least radical sought minimal, government reform, but change nonetheless. Between 1820 and 1821, constitutional coups occurred in Naples and Piedmont, yet both coups were reversed. Santorre di Santarosa of Piedmont advocated for unification, yet his cries applied only to the north. In 1832, the papacy defeated a revolt in the Papal States with Austrian, military aid (40-45).

Italian historians Beales and Biagini attribute the failure of these revolts to the lack of a unified cause, as well as the narrowness of the educated class in which any cause existed. As proposed by Albert M. Banti, effective reform first requires unity (11). Giuseppe Mazzini recognized this, and through the 1830s developed an Italian, national, revolutionary program that utilized the "quasi-religious" politics of nationalism for liberal reform. His writings, along with those of a more moderate Alessandro Manzoni, infiltrated the upper middle class through literary journals, and other classes through debate clubs and public readings (56-64). In addition to this blossoming national consciousness, sympathetic political parties in France and Britain took power abroad (50).

Elected in 1846, Pope Pius IX became the peninsula's first, plausible hope for national autonomy. His religious authority appealed to those more traditionally minded, yet at the same time he enacted reforms in the Papal States and formed a customs union with Tuscany and

Piedmont. However, his actions were not nearly as revolutionary as those in the year 1848 – across Europe and especially in Italy. The revolt in Sicily started the continental spree, and resulted in a constitution Sicilians of all classes expressed a deep faith in. While these revolts prioritized nationalism and autonomy over liberalism and reform, constitutional coups succeeded across the Peninsula. Rebels that didn't sought refuge in the Papal States – renamed the "Roman Republic" after riots caused the Pope to abandon the city (89-91).

In 1849, Austria and international reinforcements successfully reacted. The power reestablished the pope in Rome, and Italians realized the religious leader could no longer be relied upon as a means of national autonomy (95-97). However, yet another leader was working his way up the Piedmontese administration. A realpolitik, Cavour valued France's liberal ideals and Britain's economic and political systems, yet used practical means to bring them to fruition in his Italian territory. For example, Cavour saw participation in the Crimean War – in which Britain and France fought against Russia – as a means to secure benefits for Piedmont in the subsequent Congress of Paris. Two years later, Cavour made a secret agreement with France's Napoleon III (sanctioned by Britain) that resulted in the expulsion of Austria and unification of northern Italy by 1859 (107-120).

In 1860, plebiscites in central Italy asked to be annexed into north Italy – now a constitutional monarchy with Victor Emmanuel as King and Cavour as Prime Minister. That April, Giuseppe Garibaldi – a general from Sardinia – led "The Thousand" to Southern Italy to conquer the Kingdom of Naples. His success spoke for the potential of democratically inspired volunteers over monarchist armies, and completed Italian unification with the exception of Venice and Rome. The Kingdom of Italy under King Victor Emmanuel eventually acquired Venice in 1866 and Rome in 1870 (124).

While Austria and French troops were defeated by Garibaldi, Britain likely could have intervened with success. However, a unified Italy provided essentially free trade for Britain in

the southern Mediterranean, preserved the balance of power, and satisfied popular opinion at home, where Garibaldi was regarded as a liberal, noble hero. In reality, Garibaldi chose unification over social reform, given that his conquest in southern Italy predominately benefitted the landed elite. Such concessions upset leaders such as Mazzini, who had hoped to witness reform through popular insurrections and republicanism rather than diplomacy and moderate monarchism (126-130). It would also draw the attention of liberal-minded politicians and writers abroad, as is the case with Wilkie Collins and his publication of *The Woman in White*.

The Woman in White

While While *The Woman in White* was published in 1860, Wilkie Collins takes his readers to the London of 1851. The main plot line follows drawing teacher Walter Hartwright from his encounter with a strange "woman in white" to his forbidden love for his aristocratic student – Laura Fairlie – who looks just like her. Keeping a promise to her deceased father, Laura marries fellow landowner Sir Percival Glyde, despite her feelings for Hartwright, after which Hartwright travels to South America. Laura and her sister Marian spend the first half of the novel trying to protect Laura's wealth and identity from her scheming husband and his Italian friend Count Fosco. Yet Glyde and Fosco succeed, sending a returned Hartwright on a quest to restore Laura's identity. Ultimately, Hartwright must turn to his own Italian friend, Pesca, to enact justice. Against the odds, Hartwright succeeds in reestablishing Laura's name, marrying her, and even entering the landed gentry. An interesting plot in itself, Collins also employs both a unique form and symbolism in order to guide his readers into making real-world connections.

The Britain of 1851

In contrast to the gothic-inspired and at times fantastical plot, Collins sets his novel in the reality of 19th century Britain. In addition to alluding to events such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the influx of immigrants, Collins narrates his novel as if it were a testimony in the court of law – the reading public a jury. Apart from literary form, Collins asserts the reality and integrity of his story's context through a preface and revised second edition, in which details surrounding the "law" are corrected to mirror those of Britain (ix). Collins' astuteness to the validity of his novel invites a historical analysis often overlooked by those who herald *The Woman in White* for its innovations in the mystery genre. In his "Introduction", Frederick R. Karl acknowledges the underexplored potential of the work when he states:

> A rapid reading of Collins creates the impression that he is totally concerned with plotting […] A more careful reading, however, reinforces the sense of Collins as a profoundly social and cultural writer who embeds his narrative details in manners, morals, and eccentricities of his characters – and who then moves those characters along as much by their own qualities as by the externals of plot the novelist exerts. (1)

By legitimizing the environment to which his characters belong, Collins thereby invites readers to find cultural significance in the most minor details of *The Woman in White*.

More specifically, the weight Collins' gives his novel's setting allows readers to consider the Italian Risorgimento as a source of significance given that two of the most influential characters – Fosco and Pesca – are from Italy. While certainly supportive, the fact that Collins lived in Italy for two years is not necessary to see how an awareness of the foreign country's political situation fueled *The Woman in White* – the connections are in the text (3). After establishing the symbolic significance of both Fosco and Pesca, I will trace how these characters integrated the drama of Italy into that of a corrupt marriage.

Fosco

If Collin embeds cultural significance in the traits of his characters, than Count Fosco is the embodiment of the authoritative, reactionary force – a villain to both Laura and Italy. To see Fosco as a microcosm of the enemies of the Italian Risorgimento may seem far removed from the plot of *The Woman in White*, yet Collins draws too many physical, characteristic, and philosophic comparisons to ignore. For example, many narrators – including Fosco himself – constantly reinforce the Count's status as a foreigner. Madame Fosco acknowledges her husband's "foreign forms of politeness" (307), while Hartwright observes his strange and showy behavior at the opera against the stoic British (565). Yet the Count owns his outsider status. The way Fosco

speaks reveals a self-perceived barrier between himself and his peers, as he only uses British expressions in a sarcastic manner (325).

In addition to being a foreigner in both his self-perception and that of the British, Fosco is an outsider to his homeland of Italy. On top of his ambiguous status as an exile, Fosco's final narrative reveals him to be a Count of the Holy Roman Empire (594). During this time period, the Holy Roman Empire included Austria – the very country that held the Italian territories under its rule from the Treaty of Aix-la-Chappelle to Garibaldi's "March". Additionally, Collins likens Fosco to Napoleon on multiple occasions - once for his looks (222), and the other for his ability to sleep on command (590). Both Napoleon and Austria held absolute authority in the Italian territories under the guise of Enlightenment principles. From his appearance, title, and most mild mannerisms, the Count imitates the powers that prevented a republican and nationalist movement on the peninsula.

Yet Fosco's likeness to the foreign rulers of the 18th and 19th centuries goes beyond his outsider quality, it also appears in his ability to simultaneously instill fear and thereby gain the loyalty of everyone around him. His power imitates the ultimate control possessed by the Enlightened despots. Both Madame Fosco and Percival Glyde, for example, have histories of wild behavior and outbreaks yet are totally submissive to the Count. Marian observes that he could "tame anything", and shares how Fosco subdued a wild dog by simply insulting him. Indeed, Marian is unsure whether she likes the Count or is afraid of him, as his power provides security yet vulnerability at the same time (221-227). Frederick R. Karl verbalizes this by noting that Fosco is a man of contrasts – "although gentlemanly and considerate, [Fosco] is insidious and deceitful" (10). Coincidentally, the term "Enlightened despot" is a contradiction unto itself, given that the virtues of equality clash with the authority of a despot's ego.

Collins symbolically compares Fosco to an Enlightened despot through the Count's reoccurring interaction with his pet, white mice. The white mice – like an ignorant population –

are unintelligible to their ruler's values, yet at the same time adore him for the basic needs the ruler provides. Fosco recognizes this, and asks his mice, "What is your own private notion of a virtuous man, my pret-pret-pretty? A man who keeps you warm and gives you plenty to eat. And a good notion too, for it is intelligible" (238). Here, Fosco undermines the definition of a "virtuous man" by reducing its typical associations of liberty and truth to the satisfaction of comfort and hunger.

Indeed, the way in which Count Fosco most mirrors a despot is through his faith in his own beliefs and authority over an external code of virtue. To be a totally self sufficient and self-defined ruler means not to answer primarily to one's own motives. Fosco challenges the code of virtue early in the novel when, after Laura claims crimes cause their own detection, he remarks, "how easily Society can console itself for the worst of its shortcomings" (237). For Fosco, justice is merely a "consolation", rather than a principle. He goes on to expose the relativity of all principles, arguing that the "John Englishman" and the "John Chinaman" will assert the correctness of their own virtues until one is puzzled "which is the right sort and which is the wrong". Rather, the person who capitalizes on an opportunity – regardless of morality – will reap the benefit (238).

Having discredited society's moral code on the grounds that it changes by nation and does not ensure material success, Count Fosco depends on himself for truth. To conclude his debate with Laura, he remarks, "when the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for true face, mine is the rash hand that tears the face off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath" (240). His faith in his own rash hand grows more apparent with the plot, as he warns Marian and Hartwright to stay out of his self-made path (446). Fosco goes so far as the capitalize the word "me" in a written threat to Hartwright – a threat in which he describes himself as a man who "snaps his big fingers at the laws and conventions of society" (545). As if self-endowed authority wasn't enough, Fosco recognizes his potential to be an authority for others by

earning their faith. In his final confession, Fosco admits that his plot was successful because, "both [his partners] believed in ME" (605). Just as the rulers in Italy protected their authority by ensuring the population's faith in the legitimacy of their rule, so too did Fosco. Despite his foreignness, the Count manages not only to manipulate his peers, but also to win the trust of all but those few characters that held onto (what the novel likens) a stronger ideal.

Pesca

As the extreme harbinger of liberty, Pesca serves as the foil to Count Fosco and, consequently, the Reaction sympathizers during the Italian Risorgimento. Collin makes this contrast quite clear when he reveals Pesca to be a member of a secret society that actively opposes tyranny. While referred to only as the "Brotherhood", Pesca's society sharply imitates those that blossomed across Europe – and specifically Italy – in the 19th century. Although there is not enough information to identify which secret society Pesca belongs to (the Carbonari, Free Masons, etc.), one is given enough to infer that he is was in allegiance with Buonartti.

To start, Buonartti was much more influential in the early stages of the Risorgimento – the time of Pesca's more zealous activity in Italy (570). Secondly, the object of Pesca's Brotherhood and Buonartti's are one and the same. Pesca describes this intention and its ramifications as:

> [T]he destruction of tyranny and the assertion of the rights of the people […] so long as a man's life is useful, or even harmless only, he has the right to enjoy it. But, if his life inflicts injury on the well-being of his fellow men, from that moment he forfeits the right, and it is not only no crime, but a positive merit, to deprive him of it. (571)

In this respect Pesca's society mirrors Buonartti's in two ways – in its proclamation of freedom and equality for all people, and its extreme expectations. The Brotherhood condones murder as a practical means to better the greater good, while Buonartti too believed in the perfectibility of

mankind. Consequently, both organizations sought to influence the international community. Pesca confides to Hartwright that his society has presidents in Italy and abroad (572), while in his organization's journal Buonartti wrote, "Our institution belongs to the whole world" (222). Thirdly, Pesca and Buonartti's societies share a similar internal structure. Pesca describes layers of presidents, secretaries, and members, that remain anonymous to other another (572), whereas Buonartti advocated that members be separated into "Grades" – or a levels of a hierarchy - according to each individual's dedication and level of enlightenment (223). Whether or not Collins intended Pesca to be an immediate member of Buonartti's society is not as important as the fact that Pesca believes so strongly in the liberal values underlying most secret societies of the time, that he was willing to kill.

Just as Fosco's authoritative philosophy translates into all areas of his life, so too does Pesca's faith in humanity. This is evident in the two Italians' profession - or lack thereof. Fosco's status as a wealthy aristocrat perpetuates a valuing of the accumulation of wealth and power, while Pesca's position as a professor indicates esteem for knowledge and the sharing of it. Recalling the Risorgimento, Fosco's lifestyle imitates the centralization of power as preferred by the despots, while Pesca's choice mirrors the dispersion of power as advocated by liberalists. As in reality, Fosco and Pesca's difference in caste tends to go beyond the financial distinctions of class and into the ideological. Additionally, these images of take and give suggest Fosco's extremely large girth and Pesca's being "the smallest human being [Hartwright] ever saw" (21) have symbolic significance beyond the simple contrast.

Collins' careful construction of Fosco's mannerisms as contingent with the character's beliefs holds true for his depiction of Pesca as well. Whereas the Count separates himself from his British peers, Pesca embraces everything about his new home. After Hartwright rescues Pesca from drowning, Pesca adopts the phrases, activities, and dress of the British, leading Walter to believe, "the ruling idea of [Pesca's] life appeared to be, that he was bound to show his

gratitude to the country which had afforded him asylum and a means of subsistence by doing his utmost to turn himself into an Englishman" (22). While Pesca's new mannerisms suggest a nonattachment to his homeland, he does not completely abandon Italy, as evidenced by Pesca's decision to teach his native language to British students. Consequently, Pesca is in constant exchange with the British population – adapting and teaching, getting rescued and being the rescuer. The dynamic imitates the allegiance that existed between the suppressed liberals in Italy and the great, liberal power of Britain during the Risorgimento – an allegiance that stemmed from a shared value system. It also echoes the empathy the English middle class had for Italy, given that they saw their own nation as having descended from the Roman Empire (Morgan 622).

Symbolic Implications

Having drawn attention to the Italian Risorgimento through the characters of Fosco and Pesca, Wilkie Collins invites his readers to apply a political and cultural lens to the domestic drama at the heart of the mystery novel. At one end there is Sir Glyde and Count Fosco - gentlemen symbolically allied with the established despots of the Italian peninsula. On the other end there is Hartwright and Pesca - members of the educated caste sympathetic to the liberalists seeking independence and reform through Italian unification. In order to literally protect his position, Glyde must destroy his wife Laura. In contrast, Hartwright spends the second half of the novel literally trying to restore Laura's identity. According to Maura O'Connor, It was not uncommon for Italians and the British alike to portray Italy as a beautiful wife in need of liberation from a foreign husband. This stemmed from a belief shared by Italian nationalists and their English supporters that "women's domestic values should form the basis of a nation's public virtues" (Morgan 622). In the case of *The Woman in White*, Laura becomes symbolic of the peninsula – her struggle fundamentally the same as Italy's.

In the beginning of the novel – as in the beginning of the Risorgimento – tradition had power. Unwilling to break an oath for true love, Laura trusts Glyde will use his authority to

liberate her. Rather, he ensures her submission through marriage. When Glyde and Fosco completely destroy Laura's identity by switching her with a deceased Anne Catherick, Laura and her sister Marian place their faith in Hartwright to correct this wrong. On the historical timeline, the Italians began to seek out alternative forms of government to foreign despots. Thus begins both Hartwright's and the Italians' quest for Laura/Italy's true autonomy.

Yet just as Italians struggled to place their faith in a common, guiding cause, so too does Hartwright fail to receive aid from traditionally righteous institutions. The "Law" for example, becomes a roadblock for Hartwright despite the honesty of his goal. When family lawyer Mr. Kryle cannot help him, Hartwright resolves to work outside of the law, yet he cannot avoid it. As Hartwright nears exposing Glyde, Glyde's men take advantage of the law's unyieldingness to falsely imprison him (502). Additionally, Collins sprinkles his narrative with slights against the effectiveness of "Law", likening it to "the preengaged servant of the long purse" (18), and as capable of disputing any statement regardless of its nature (139). In other words, the law fails to provide an unbiased protection of the truth, and is therefore discredited as a viable, social code.

Collins also takes the space to expose the limitations of religion as an authentic, moral indicator. The three most religious characters, for example, fail to see the reality of their situation. Although suspicious towards Mrs. Rubelle, witness Eliza Michelson turned a blind eye on account of her husband's "precept and practice" of Christianity, and it's tenet to "do as I would be done by" (364). Quick to cry mercy for a dead man's soul, the clerk of the burning church "sat crouched up […] moaning to himself […] helpless", rather than aid Hartwright in saving Sir Percival. The clerk's proclamations of death are almost comical against the townsmen's rational suggestions (513). Yet the character that stands in starkest contrast to her proclaimed religion is Mrs. Catherick, who uses the clergyman's mandatory bow as a reassurance of her social status. Despite her past sins, Mrs. Catherick's face, "light[s] up with gratified pride" – pride being a deadly sin in the Christian ethic – when the clergyman lowers his head.

Hartwright is shocked by such a ceremonial yet unjustified exchange (488), and the incident speaks to the corruptive potential of the institution. While less relevant to the surface plot line of *The Woman in White*, Collins' religious critique mirrors the lost faith many Italians felt when their Pope failed as a source for national liberation and reform in the 1840s.

Ultimately, it is the secret society to which Pesca belongs – not the Law or Christianity - that gives Hartwright the upper hand in the drawing teacher's battle against Count Fosco. While the novel contains the literal defeat of the despotic Count at the hands of the liberal Brotherhood through Fosco's assassination, the authoritative undermining occurs when Hartwright recognizes his own "higher motive" during his confrontation with the Count. By ignoring his craving for revenge, Hartwright distinguishes his purpose as, "the motive of serving the cause of Laura and the cause of Truth" (587). For Hartwright, the "Truth" becomes a guiding authority unto itself. In having Pesca serve as the means by which Hartwright can act upon this Truth, Collins suggests that the liberal value system cherished by Pesca and his society is the most fundamentally conducive to virtue and honesty, and therefore the least corruptible model of authority.

In short, a historically informed reading of *The Woman in White* will draw the conflict between power and morality out of the domestic sphere and into the international arena. Through Hartwright's journey, one will observe that the Aristocracy, Law, Religion, and even Liberalism all triumph their own moral codes. Their variety and relativity suggests that their authority stems not from an inherent correctness, but rather their ability to garner a population's *faith* in their own legitimacy. Published at a time when Italy's future remained unsure, Collins' *The Woman in White* suggests Liberalism as the surest model for establishing honesty and autonomy, given that it is Pesca that enables Hartwright to liberate Laura.

Imagining Nations

Having traced how Collins weaved political and cultural commentary into *The Woman in White*, one can then observe how this decision both reflected and contributed to the nation building activity of 19th century Europe. While correlating diplomacy and politics with the pleasures of the romance novel challenges our conception of disciplinary boundaries, the mutual influence becomes evident when one considers the definition of "nation", the developing world in which they evolved, and the creative potential of the novel (Morgan, 621). Indeed, such a process was not unique to Collins or Britain. In assessing the symbiotic relationship between the Italian Risorgimento and its Italian authors, I aim to highlight the universal conditions of nationhood before returning to the specific contributions of *The Woman in White.*

The Birth of the Nation

Although associated with governments and geographical boundaries, a nation is essentially, "a social and cultural unit, that is, it is defined by attitudes of men and women rather than by provisions of laws and treaties." A product of the abstract, the nation's two minimal requirements are a distinct, national perception and unity around this perception (Beales and Biagini 7-8). Why and how this perception developed is a question Benedict Anderson answers in his text *Imagined Communities*. Regarding where and why, Anderson pinpoints the 18th century as the dawn of the "nation". He argues that as religious modes of thought began to lose their hold – owing in part to the Reformation's challenge to religion as an institution – people looked towards the secular to transform "fatality into continuity [and] contingency into meaning." Because nations provided a sure sense of morality, purpose, and identity, populations developed deep, emotional attachments to them (4-11).

Anderson also credits the rapid success of this paradigmatic shift to the blossoming of both the novel and the newspaper. The convergent boom in both capitalism and the print industry – combined with the adoption of a print language that exceeded the vernacular without delving into Latin – spread these publications to an educated reading population now open to political-religious material (41-48). Both the novel and the newspaper encourage readers to think in terms of a representative body – one of the elements of a nation – over the individual (33). Additionally, the novel in particular has the potential to elicit an emotional response. Wilkie Collins recognized this, and wrote, "The only narrative which can hope to lay a strong hold on the attention of readers is a narrative which interests them about men and women-for the perfectly obvious reason that they are men and women themselves" (x). Consequently, it is these "men and women" that create nations, and to encourage an emotional response is to provide an experience that can strengthen one's identification to a nation.

The Literary Roots of Italy

Given this correlation, it is no surprise that the concept of an Italian nation derived from literary tradition and developed through literary circles. According to Alberto M. Banti, works by Petrarch and Dante carried the ancient virtues of republicanism and stoicism into the present day, and ultimately served as the foundation for the democratic nationalist message (8-9). Such a transfer would not have been possible were it not for the simultaneous expansion of the popular press in the 19th century, as well as debate societies and clubs that held public readings. Additionally, Italian novelists incorporated these philosophies into their popular fiction – thereby granting political messages their emotion response. Ugo Foscolo, for example, promoted the importance of history by capitalizing on the emotion of love – whether it be for a woman or for Italy as seen in *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (73 – 80).

While last letters was both popular and political, the Italian novel most credited for its influence on the Risorgimento is Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*. For the novel's final

publication, Manzoni wrote in an accessible language that combined the written language of the northern bourgeoisie with the freshness of the Tuscan, common people's dialect. This was the first attempt at a national language, and it proved successful – Manzoni's creation being the foundation for modern Italian. In this sense, *The Betrothed* provided the print language recognized by Benedict Anderson as essential to the creation of the "nation". Additionally, a fixed yet spoken language creates a simultaneous sense of antiquity and continuation – both of which are central to the idea of a nation (Anderson 46).

Manzoni also instilled a sense of origin and tradition in his Italian readers by setting his narrative in a historical past. *The Betrothed* takes place in 17th century Lombardy, and tells the story of a young man named Renzo whose attempts to marry his true love Lucia have been thwarted by an evil nobleman. Separated and on the run, Renzo and Lucia encounter a mixture of corrupt and virtuous individuals who constantly put the lovers' faith to the test. Despite being a work of fiction, Manzoni asserts the reality of *The Betrothed* not only through his setting choice, but also through his incorporation of historical figures – such as Cardinal Frederigo Borromeo (ch. 22). What is more, Manzoni passes his novel off as a translation, asking in his foreword, "… but when I have laboured through this ancient story from its defaced and faded manuscript […] who will labour through the task of reading it?" As a whole, *The Betrothed* is a testimony to an "immemorial past" of the Italian Peninsula – yet another contribution to the growing "nation" (Anderson 11)

Having established historical legitimacy for *The Betrothed*, Manzoni's symbolism becomes all the more powerful. Renzo and Lucia, for example, encounter characters that – while set in a distant past – represent the competing, contemporary institutions of 19th century Italy. Don Rodrigo's arbitrary laws make him an enemy to the people even before he tries to take advantage of Lucia, the town's lawyer and priest obey him out of both greed and fear, and the mob Renzo joins during his rebellion does not have their facts correct. As in Collins' mystery

novel, Manzoni's plot suggests that authorities such as the aristocracy, the law, and institutional religion are inherently corruptible. Rather, Manzoni triumphs pure faith as the most virtuous, leading principle. While this principle is woven throughout the plot in a simultaneously humorous and educational tone, the author sums it up when Renzo and his now wife Lucia conclude:

> The most prudent and innocent conduct is not necessarily enough to keep [troubles] away, also that when they come, through our fault or otherwise, trust in God goes far to take away their sting, and makes them useful preparation for a better life. This conclusion may have been reached my humble folk, but we find it so just, that we have decided to place it here, as the very essence of our whole story. (ch. 38)

Having critiqued church figures in his narrative, Manzoni's appraisal of "trust in God" suggests that it is faith in the universal "God" that is the true "just essence" of his story, rather than the propagation of Catholicism. Like Collins, Manzoni undermines the institutions in order to expose a truer authority.

Although published several decades apart, *The Betrothed* and *The Woman in White* share many characteristics that led to their success as both popular novels and political literature. Both authors drove their plot through action, a love story, and some comedy, and therefore appealed to multiple tastes. Though in the past, their settings are of this world and therefore establish a degree of realism. Lastly, the novels exceed their domestic plots by commenting upon the cultural conditions of the time – and specifically the situation in Italy – by critiquing the vying authorities. Yet this is where the fictions fundamentally disagree with each other. Whereas Manzoni's novel triumphs spiritual Faith, Collins' heralds Truth stemmed in justice and equality.

The International Dynamic

While similar, this distinction between Faith and Truth reflects a difference in the conditions of each author's environment. Writing in Italy pre-Unification, Manzoni's priority was unity, which required the quasi-religious Faith of nationalism *The Betrothed* advocates. His novel more so establishes a cultural identity rooted in the past - and asks his readers to believe in it - than he does suggest reform. Writing twenty years later from a sympathetic Britain - at a time when unification was already underway – Collins' novel reflects an interest in the spread of liberalism as the True code of virtue, but without the passionate, Italian solidarity necessary to the Risorgimento. Collins seems to recognize this, as during Pesca's defense of his violent society the Italian states:

> It is not for you to say – you Englishmen, who have conquered your freedom so long ago, that you have conveniently forgotten what blood you shed […] but judge us not! In the time of your first Charles you might have done us justice – the long luxury of your own freedom has made you incapable of doing us justice now. (571).

For the first time, Pesca distinguishes himself from Englishmen. Collins makes this separation even more distinct by having Pesca continue his rant in Italian, rather than English. This distinction isolates the more radical elements of Pesca's secret society from Britain's governmental policy, yet his cries for freedom acknowledges a shared political ideology - one more aligned with the reformists of Britain than the moderates of Manzoni's day. Additionally, this ideology is forward looking rather than past-oriented, as epitomized by one of Marian's closing statements, "We can be just as explicit, and much more interesting, by referring to the future" (622).

Collins was neither the first British author to comment upon "the Italian question" nor the only one to address Britain's political stance in light of it. In her text *The Romance of Italy and*

the Political Imagination, Maura O'Connor observes how a wide array of English narratives on Italy helped create two conceptual nations over the course of the 19th century. These narratives contrasted the beauty of Italy with the gloom of Britain – in both landscape and the population's demeanor. Collins incorporated these stereotypes into *The Woman in White* to a degree, at one point calling Italy "the most interesting country in the world" compared to the "conventions of London" (193). While seemingly trivial stereotypes, Tricia Lootens recognizes the nation-building potential behind such remarks. In an analysis of the novel *Corinne* Lootens writes, "to name one's impassioned land 'Italy' is to locate that emotional space within precise and highly charged projects of defining nation-states" (179). Her argument echoes Anderson's emphasis on emotion as a nation-building element.

Yet these 19th century narratives often went beyond the superficial, and – like Collins' mystery novel - encouraged middle class, British readers to reconsider their own political and social beliefs side by side with English involvement in Italian liberation (Morgan 621). In addition to spanning the century, they also crossed literary genres - poet Percy Bysshe Shelley being one of the earlier, more radical advocates of both Italian emancipation and universal liberalism. According to scholar Thomas H. Schmid, Shelley's 1820 works on Italy marked a point in which the poet was "never more keenly aware […] of the interdependence of nationalist struggles for reform, [and] of the absolute necessity of seeing injustice anywhere, at least anywhere in Europe, as a threat to justice everywhere". Shelley's poems not only entertained, but also addressed the distinction between revolutionary movements versus political ideals, as well as the role of England in supporting one or the other (61-62).

Thirty-one years after the publication of Shelley's Italian-inspired works, British poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning too criticized the political decisions of Britain. In her collection *Casa Guidi Windows*, Browning questions why her nation wouldn't help a weaker Italy – given their mutual values - by writing, "No light of teaching, liberal nations, for the poor […] No remedy,

my England, for sucli woes" (126-127)? In the words of Sandra Gilbert, it is by aligning herself with Italy's revolutionary cause that Browning fully realizes her opposition to the "strictures and structures" of England (199). On the surface, these writers seem wrapped up in the events of Italy, yet their criticism ultimately challenged the identity of their home nation.

In addition to the contrast between Count Fosco and Pesca – as well as the plot line that triumphs both Pesca and justice – *The Woman in White* is sprinkled with sentences that create an Italian identity clearly influenced by that of the British. Fosco acknowledges this exchange when he provokes Marian with, "You know the character which is given to my countrymen by the English? We Italians are all wily and suspicious by nature […] set me down, if you please, as being no better than the rest of my race. I am a wily Italian and a suspicious Italian" (245). While Fosco's acceptance of such a stereotype is sarcastic, he is at the same time just as presumptuous about the British. In his confrontation with Hartwright he demands, "your moral clap-traps have an excellent effect in England – keep them for yourself and your own countrymen (585). Though writing from the perspective of an outsider, Collins opens up debate about his own homeland's authoritative code. Along with his fellow, English authors', Collins' work reveals more about his impressions of Britain's national identity than the surface, subject material may suggest.

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that 19th century Europe witnessed the development of romanticism and nationalism, the novel and the nation. As argued by Benedict Anderson, the movements perpetuated one another: The novel provided the language and emotional response key to reaching an audience, and then encouraged that audience to recognize and empathize with a larger community. Given the fact that a nation is an abstract identification, its existence depends upon the same creative and imaginative processes that the novel relies upon. As explained by poet Samuel Coleridge, it is the idealizing faculty of the imagination that allows for national self-determination, since without the governing ideas of the imagination, "men vanish" (Schmid 84). The nation then provides the common audience the novelist aims to appeal to or comment upon.

A case study of *The Woman in White* and the Italian Risorgimento exemplifies this interaction. By setting his novel in England during the mid 19th century – and then making two of his most influential characters Italian – Collins invites his readers to find the symbolic connection between his work's domestic plot and that which comments upon the struggle of the Italian Peninsula. Just as Hartwright and Laura must refute or go around society's traditionally powerful institutions in order to reaffirm the Truth, so too did Italy have to wade through vying authorities to establish its nationhood. In comparing *The Woman in White* to Alessandro Manzoni's quintessential, Italian novel *The Betrothed*, one can see a shared literary technique as well as an agreeable commentary on the Risorgimento – suggesting that the authors' interpretation and method were both intuitive and influential.

Given Britain's long-standing status as a nation, it is not surprising that the English writers of the 19th century channeled their creativity into the unset future of Italy. Maura O'Connor identifies this as an attempt by British authors to construct an Italy more like England,

arguing that the country's imperialist attitude was just as prevalent on the continent as it was further abroad – just through a different medium (Morgan 623). Yet the contrast of the essence of *The Woman in White* and *The Betrothed* reveals the extent to which each author was more concerned with their own nation's identity. Whereas the Italians of both Manzoni's novel and the mid-19th century generally prioritized unity, Collins' novel triumphs the importance of universal liberalism. As an already secure nation, Britain could afford to refine it's ideological identity; attempting to reconcile its empire status with the virtues of liberalism. Collins and his contemporaries used the chaos in Italy as a backdrop for self-analysis. In employing the creative potential of the novel, writers remodeled the malleable artifact that is the nation.

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