



ITALIAN PERSPECTIVES 20

# Ugo Foscolo and English Culture

Sandra Parmegiani



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UGO FOSCOLO AND ENGLISH CULTURE

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# ITALIAN PERSPECTIVES

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SANDRA PARMEGIANI



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# CONTENTS



<i>Author's Note</i>	ix
<i>Brief Chronology of the Life of Ugo Foscolo</i>	x
Introduction	1
1 Sterne's Presence (and Absence) in the <i>Epistolario</i>	7
1.1. The Polyphonic Nature of Foscolo's Letters	7
1.2. <i>A Sentimental Journey</i> and Foscolo's Epistolary Narrative	14
1.3. Asserting Didimo's Voice	27
1.4. Political Flux and the Quixotic Self	36
1.5. The English Exile: A Paradigmatic Shift	43
2 Foscolo, Reader of Locke	61
3 Foscolo and Hume	85
4 'Et penitus fato divisos orbe Britannos': British Culture in the <i>Epistolario</i>	103
Conclusions	137
<i>Bibliography</i>	139
<i>Index</i>	145

TO RUSS AND FRANCESCA

## AUTHOR'S NOTE



The abbreviation EN is used throughout the text to refer to the *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Ugo Foscolo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1933–1986), a 22-volume set which, although incomplete, remains the best edition of Foscolo's works.

I am grateful for this opportunity to thank the people who played a role in the making of this book: Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz for the many hours spent debating this project; Anna Laura Lepschy and Zygmunt Barański, editors of *Italian Perspectives*, for their unfaltering support of this work; Giulio Lepschy for some of the finest hours spent remembering 'poor Foscolo' around Chiswick; Peter Loptson for generously offering his expertise and his time to discuss the philosophical aspects of the book; Sarah Rolfe for her translation of Foscolo's letters into English; John Walsh for his translations from Latin; Graham Nelson for his guidance and patience; Amanda Wrigley for her careful reading of the manuscript and her most valuable suggestions; and Carolyn Hammond and James Marshall from the Chiswick Library Local Collection for their kindness and superb efficiency. A final thanks to my family: to my parents, whose encouragement and love have been a constant source of strength, and to my husband Russ, without whom this book — and so much else — would not exist.

s.p., December 2010

## BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF UGO FOSCOLO



- 1778 Born on Zante, an Ionian island under Venetian rule.
- 1793 Joins his family in Venice, where his mother had moved to after the death of her husband.
- 1793–97 Studies at the San Cipriano School in Murano and at the ‘public schools’ under the ex-Jesuits. Frequent the Venetian salons of Giustina Renier Michiel and Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi (with whom has a liaison). Meets Ippolito Pindemonte and Aurelio de’ Giorgi Bertòla.
- 1796 Attends Melchiorre Cesarotti’s classes at the University of Padua. Writes the *Piano di Studi*.
- 1797 His first tragedy, *Tieste*, is performed in Venice, at the Sant’Angelo theatre. After the Treaty of Campoformio, leaves Venice and moves to Milan. Meets Giuseppe Parini and Vincenzo Monti and writes for the *Monitore Italiano*.
- 1798 Moves to Bologna and writes for several periodicals. Begins the publication of the novel *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* with the publisher Marsigli.
- 1799 Joins the National Guard as lieutenant of general Tripoult. Interrupts the publication of the novel. Marsigli asks Angelo Sassoli to finish it and publishes it under the title *Vera storia di due amanti infelici ossia ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*.
- 1801 Returns to Milan.
- 1802–03 Publication of the *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, the *Orazione a Bonaparte pel congresso di Lione*, the *Poesie di Ugo Foscolo*, and the *Chioma di Berenice*. Liaison with Antonietta Fagnani Arese.
- 1804–06 Joins the Italian Division of Napoleon’s army for the cross-Channel invasion of England. Spends time in Valenciennes, Lille, Calais and Boulogne-sur-Mer. Liaison with Fanny Hamilton, with whom he fathers a daughter, Floriana.  
Translates Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. Meets Alessandro Manzoni in Paris. Returns to Milan.
- 1807 Publication of *Dei Sepolcri*. Liaison with Marzia Martinengo Cesaresco.
- 1808–09 Appointed to chair of Italian and Latin eloquence at the University of Pavia. Delivers the inaugural lecture *Dell’origine e dell’ufficio della letteratura*. The chair is revoked and returns to Milan.
- 1810–11 Publication of the ‘Ragguaglio d’un’adunanza dell’Accademia de’ Pitagorici’. His second tragedy, *Ajace*, is performed at La Scala in Milan and is shortly afterwards censored because of its anti-French allusions. End of his friendship with Vincenzo Monti.

- 1812–13 Leaves Milan and moves to Florence. Frequents the salon of the Countess of Albany. Meets Quirina Mocenni Magiotti. Publication of the *Viaggio Sentimentale* together with the *Notizia intorno a Didimo Chierico*. Composes fragments of *Le Grazie*. Returns to Milan. *Ricciarda*, his third tragedy, is performed in Bologna.
- 1814 Joins the army as deputy chief of staff until the Austrian invasion of Lombardy.
- 1815–16 Voluntary exile in Switzerland. Publication of *Didimi clerici prophetae minimi Hypercalypseos liber singularis* and of a new edition of the *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*. Moves to England.
- 1817 Publication of the *Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis* together with a few chapters of the *Viaggio sentimentale*. Works at the *Lettere scritte dall’Inghilterra* and *Le Grazie*.
- 1818–27 Collaborations with the *Edinburgh Review*, *European Review*, *London Magazine*, *Quarterly Review*, and other British periodicals.
- 1818 Publication of the *Essay on the Present Literature of Italy*, included in John Cam Hobhouse’s *Historical Illustrations of the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold*.
- 1819 Publication of *Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians*.
- 1823 Delivers fourteen public lessons on Italian literature in London. Publication of *Essays on Petrarch*.
- 1825 Publication of the *Discorso sul testo della Divina Commedia*.
- 1826 Publication of the *History of the Democratic Constitution of Venice*.
- 1827 Dies in Turnham Green and is buried in Chiswick.



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## INTRODUCTION



In 1813 Ugo Foscolo's *Viaggio sentimentale di Yorick lungo la Francia e l'Italia* was published in Florence by the Molini press.<sup>1</sup> This was the third Italian translation of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* in eleven years; Foscolo's work is preceded by the Venetian edition printed by Zatta in 1792 and the Milanese edition published by De Stefanis in 1812.<sup>2</sup> In a survey of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Italian 'anglomania', marked by a significant increase of interest in British authors, Foscolo's translation represents a landmark both in terms of philological exactitude and linguistic and cultural sensitivity. Evidence of this lies in the fact that Foscolo's translation has passed the test of time, remaining almost unscathed by two centuries of close critical scrutiny. Foscolo is one of the Italian intellectuals who was most receptive to and engaged with English literature and culture at the turn of the century and during the following three decades. To date, the studies that have investigated this relation focus primarily on his translation of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, while not much work has been done towards an exploration of the comprehensive influence of English culture on Foscolo's aesthetic, literary, and philosophical views.

Ugo Foscolo was born in 1778 on the island of Zante, a Ionian Venetian dominion, to Andrea Fosco and Diamantina Spatis. After his father's death he moved to Venice, where his mother had already re-located part of the family, and there the fifteen-year-old Foscolo starts his literary, intellectual, and sentimental education. Among his teachers at the San Cipriano school in Murano is Angelo Dalmistro, an expert in and translator of English literature. The young Ugo frequents the Venetian salon of Giustina Renier Michiel and that of the cultured and fashionable Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi, with whom he has a brief but passionate love affair and who will remain a faithful friend for the rest of his life. The Venetian Republic in which Foscolo is now coming of age is particularly receptive towards European culture and its fairly permeable customs allow the entry of a considerable number of foreign books. The Venetian publishing industry is — until the fall of the Republic — the most vibrant and productive in the Italian peninsula, with a sizeable number of translations of European authors. At the University of Padova Foscolo attends some of the lectures by Melchiorre Cesarotti, the renowned translator of *Ossian* into Italian.

His literary taste is now rapidly developing, influenced by a voracious and international literary appetite, as attested by the 1796 'Piano di studi', a veritable literary programme in which he lists his past and future readings, his already planned works, and those he wishes to embark on.<sup>3</sup> His first tragedy, *Tieste*, is performed in Venice in 1797 and marks his first great success. The same year Napoleon's troops enter Italy and Foscolo, like many Italians, welcomes them. His ode to *Bonaparte*

*liberatore* attests his enthusiasm and reveals how he nurtures the aspiration of the future establishment, on account of the Italian Kingdom under French rule, of an independent Italian republic. Moreover, in Venice Napoleon seemed inclined to establish a free republic and in May 1797 the city is organized into a municipality with democratic rule. When, five months later, the Treaty of Campoformio reveals that Napoleon had in fact already handed Venice over to the Austrians, Foscolo's disillusionment is great. Nonetheless, he takes up Napoleon's offer to those involved in the Venetian democratic municipality to become full citizens of the Cisalpine Republic and moves to Milan. There he meets the prominent men of letters of the time, among them Giuseppe Parini and Vincenzo Monti, and contributes to the *Monitore Italiano*, which is shortly afterwards suppressed by Napoleon's censorship. He then moves to Bologna and writes for several periodicals. It is here that in 1798–99 Foscolo starts the process of publishing *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (*Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*), an epistolary novel in which he merges the story of an unhappy love, imbued of pre-Romantic sentimentalism (not dissimilar to Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*), with that of a disillusioned Italian patriot prostrate with grief for the loss of his homeland. Military duty calls him, and Foscolo interrupts the publication and enrolls in the National Guard; but the publisher Marsigli wants to capitalize on the book, and has it finished by Angelo Sassoli and printed with the title *Vera storia di due amanti infelici ossia ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*.<sup>4</sup> The first autographical edition of the novel appears only three years later in Milan and over the next year Foscolo publishes almost all the corpus of his poems.<sup>5</sup> *Ortis* proves to be a great success and brings fame to his author in Italy and abroad.

The years 1804–06 see him again enrolled in the Italian Division of Napoleon's army for the cross-Channel invasion of England. He resides mostly in Valenciennes and Boulogne-sur-Mer. In France he meets a young English woman, Fanny Hamilton, with whom he fathers a daughter, Floriana. He has no relationship with Floriana until the 1820s, during his English exile. The French military sojourn is marked by his first translation into Italian of sections of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. After his return to Milan, Foscolo works at the poem 'Dei Sepolcri' which he publishes in Brescia in 1807; the meditation on tombs and on the power of memory over the destructive force of time remains, to this day, one of Foscolo's poetical masterpieces. In 1808–09 he takes up the chair of Italian and Latin eloquence in Pavia, where he delivers the inaugural lecture 'Dell'origine e dell'ufficio della letteratura' ('On the Origin and Duty of Literature'). He gives six more lectures before the chair is revoked and then returns to Milan. Literature is for him inextricably connected with individual and collective participation — directly or tangentially — in the national cause, and in defence of this principle he fights several literary battles. At the same time, in Milan he ends his friendship with Vincenzo Monti and publishes the polemical 'Ragguaglio d'un'adunanza dell'Accademia de' Pitagorici' ('Details about a Meeting of the Pythagoreans' Academy'). His second tragedy, *Ajace*, is performed at La Scala in Milan, but is not well received, owing to some alleged anti-Napoleonic insinuations.

In 1812 Foscolo moves to Tuscany, and in Florence is a regular guest of the Countess of Albany's salon. The Tuscan sojourn represents a moment of great

creativity far from Milanese literary quarrels. He meets Quirina Mocenni Magiotti, with whom has an intense love affair, and who will remain his most faithful friend well into his English exile. In Pisa, he publishes the *Viaggio sentimentale* together with the *Notizia intorno a Didimo Chierico*, his most prolific literary alter ego. In Tuscany he works on this third tragedy, *Ricciarda*, and on some fragments of *Le Grazie*. After the battle of Lipsia, Foscolo returns to Milan and joins the army as deputy chief of staff until the Austrian invasion of Lombardy. The Austrian government offers him the position of editor on a new literary journal, *Biblioteca Italiana*. Foscolo at first accepts, but on 30 March 1815, the day before taking the oath of loyalty to the new government, he leaves Italy in an act of self-imposed exile and takes refuge in Switzerland. He is first in Zurich and then in Hottingen. From Switzerland he lashes out at his political and literary enemies with the publication of the satire *Didimi clerici prophetae minimi Hypercalypseos liber singularis*. He also publishes another edition of the *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* with the false publication details of London, 1814.

In September 1816 Foscolo leaves Switzerland and boards a ship that will take him to England where he spends the last eleven years of his life without ever returning to Italy. Foscolo's English period is marked at first by a triumphal reception as the author of *Ortis* and as an internationally renowned writer and patriot. He starts the 'Lettere scritte dall'Inghilterra', an unpublished work in which he compares England and Italy on the basis of his first 'unspoiled' impressions. Another edition of the *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, published in London by John Murray in 1817, also includes a few chapters of the *Viaggio sentimentale*. In his early English years Foscolo has access to the library of Holland House and is in close relations with — among others — William Stuart Rose, Roger Wilbraham, and John Cam Hobhouse. He begins a series of collaborations with *The Edinburgh Review*, *The European Review*, *The London Magazine*, *The New Monthly Magazine*, *Quarterly Review*, and *Westminster Review*. These, however, soon bear the mark of tiresome tasks to be completed mostly in far from perfect French and with the help of English translators. In 1818 John Cam Hobhouse includes Foscolo's *Essay on the Present Literature of Italy* in his *Historical Illustrations of the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold*. The text causes a strong reaction on the part of the Italian Romantics who consider themselves underrated and insulted by Foscolo's opinion of the classical-romantic controversy as an 'idle enquiry'. In England he devotes himself almost exclusively to a wide range of literary criticism. His main contribution remains a series of essays on Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Financial difficulties emerge quite early on in Foscolo's English life. In 1823, following the advice of Lord and Lady Dacre, he reluctantly delivers fourteen public lessons of Italian literature in London. Unable to administer his finances properly and at the same time forced to work for the periodical press in order to ensure a steady income, Foscolo's last English years are marked by a progressive inability to exert full control over his life. Hounded by creditors and in poor health, he dies in Turnham Green on 10 September 1827. In 1871, soon after the unification of Italy, his body is moved to the church of Santa Croce in Florence.

In 1910 Eugenio Donadoni published a seminal study which was regularly reprinted up to the 1960s and which still constitutes one of the few comprehensive

overviews of the relationship between Foscolo and European culture.<sup>6</sup> In 1978, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Foscolo's birth, Mario Puppo considered the European cultural aspects of the young Foscolo's education during his Venetian years, and in 1978 Giuseppe Nicoletti published an annotated catalogue and a critical study of the books owned by Foscolo prior to his voluntary exile in 1815 which shows the writer's extensive interest in the literature, history, and philosophy of England.<sup>7</sup> Nicoletti's work represents also a most valuable integration of the 'Piano di studi' outlined by the eighteen-year-old Foscolo in a letter to a friend, which lists, by topic, the founding works of his literary, historical, and philosophical education. Yet to this day there has not been a systematic study of Foscolo's ties with English culture as a whole. This book originates from these considerations and from the belief that Foscolo's personal association with English culture of the late Augustan period and the early Romantic movement ought to be further explored.

Comprising more than three thousand letters spanning over three decades, Foscolo's private correspondence is an extremely valuable source of evidence for monitoring his literary, philosophical, and political views; the *Epistolario* is also a place where he experiments with literary themes and ambiances and where he exercises an often private form of literary criticism. Foscolo's letters ultimately produce one of the most complete yet most complex self-portraits in the history of Italy's modern autobiographical writing.

Another reason for the choice of the *Epistolario* as the primary focus of this study is the fact that Foscolo's correspondence has not yet been examined in its entirety; all the previous analyses considered either specific periods of Foscolo's life or particular epistolary exchanges between Foscolo and one (or more) of his correspondents. The 1980s saw the publications of anthologies of Foscolo's correspondence with Antonietta Fagnani Arese and with Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi, and, ten years later, in her remarkably rich and thorough work *La prosa epistolare del Foscolo*, Paola Ambrosino analyzed several aspects of Foscolo's autobiography through his letters.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately this work takes into account only eight years of Foscolo's life and approaches the letters by subject, thus precluding a diachronic study of Foscolo's ideas in the areas of literature, philosophy, and politics.

The *Epistolario* is also the only one of Foscolo's works which, almost two hundred years after the writer's death, has not yet been fully published. An abridged edition in three volumes was issued in 1850 by Le Monnier, and only in 1949 was the complete edition of Foscolo's letters first put into print.<sup>9</sup> The tenth volume of Foscolo's *Epistolario* (which includes the letters of the last three years of his life in England) is still in progress and will appear as the twenty-third volume of the *Edizione Nazionale* of Foscolo's collected works. The slow progress on the *Epistolario* is due to its size (since with its ten volumes it constitutes half of Foscolo's complete published works) and the difficult task of reconstructing the relationships with his many correspondents, especially during the last beleaguered years of his English exile. The present study therefore represents the first analysis of the relationship between Foscolo and English culture through a reading of all the available published letters, from Foscolo's Venetian years to 1824, three years before his death.