

The International “Commerce of Genius”: Foreign Books in Romantic-Period London

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This essay addresses the question of the presence and availability of foreign books in London between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After considering the difficulties related to obtaining foreign volumes from private libraries, such as that of Holland House, it turns to examine the role played by periodicals in reviewing foreign titles and advertising the lists and catalogues of those booksellers who stocked and sold foreign works. Focusing on some of the most successful among them (such as Boosey, Treuttel and Würtz, Deboffe and Dulau), the essay sketches out a map of their businesses in London, the languages they covered, their different groups of customers, as well as the commercial and political risks to which they were exposed. As this preliminary investigation makes clear, this multifaceted phenomenon has not yet been the object of detailed explorations and reconstructions. Accordingly, this essay traces the outline of, and advocates, a comprehensive study of the history of the trade in foreign publications in London and Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century. By filling a major gap in our knowledge of the history of the book, this reconstruction may also offer invaluable new insights into the international coordinates of the literary field in the Romantic era, and particularly in the years after Waterloo, when the cross-currents of an international “commerce of genius” (as the *Literary Gazette* called it in 1817) became an intrinsic feature of an increasingly cosmopolitan cultural milieu.

In January 1817 the London-based *Literary Gazette* opened its first issue by proclaiming the dawn of a new cultural age characterized by a revived interest in literature and celebrating “the capital of the British empire” as “the centre of literary [and scientific] information, as well as the emporium of commercial speculation” (1). As it promoted a cosmopolitan outlook in keeping with post-Napoleonic confidence, the *Gazette* also promised regular and detailed reports on foreign literatures “so essential to the commerce of genius, by the opening of the Continent, and the restoration of that intercourse which was so long suspended among the Nations of Europe” (1). In its issues, readers would find a combination of “Original Correspondence; Foreign and Domestic,” a section of “Critical Analysis of New Publications; English and Foreign,” and a “Review of British and Foreign Drama.” In order to source this information the editors

could rely on a network of “men of the first literary eminence” based in the main European capitals (2).

This picture of post-Waterloo London as the epicenter of a new international balance of political and economic power is also an aspirational portrait of the capital as a center of cultural power based, among other things, on the collection, diffusion, and discussion (and, albeit to a lesser degree, production) of foreign-language works (Paris, of course, remained the main obstacle to the cultural supremacy of the British metropolis). Moreover, the *Literary Gazette* confirms the extent to which periodicals played a major role in this phenomenon as crucial tools for advertising the presence of these relatively scarce goods on the capital’s (and the nation’s) literary market. Reviews, magazines, and gazettes were fundamental sites for listing, publicizing, and debating foreign-language books.

Eighteenth-century periodicals had already laid the ground for this interest in international publications and, especially near the end of the century, started to present themselves as particularly focused on foreign literatures. Thus, for instance, the patriotically titled *English Review* (founded in 1783) was actually subtitled “An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature,” its preface announcing that readers could expect “occasional accounts of literature in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain” (3). Later, the early nineteenth-century Reviews not only introduced groundbreaking innovations into periodical writing, but also continued a variety of time-honored practices, among which was the advertising of foreign publications. A quick glance at random issues reveals that the *Edinburgh* for October 1803 featured a series of foreign titles in its “Quarterly List of New Publications”; that for April 1807 contained an extensive list of “Books lately imported by M. de Boffe, Gerard-Street, Soho, London” with the usual mixture of titles related to a variety of disciplines; and the November 1820 issue carried a much more concise advertisement for “Works Imported by Boosey and Son, Broad Street” (247-48; 513). Similarly, the *Quarterly* for December 1812 featured a “List of New Publications” with a section of books “Imported by T. Boosey, 4, Broad-street, City” and one for volumes imported “by Messrs. Dulau & Co, Soho-square” (515-16). The new-style Reviews also continued to provide regular coverage of selected significant foreign titles. Indeed, it was a piece about a foreign book in translation—Don Pedro Cevallos’ *Exposition of the Practices and Machinations which Led to the Usurpation of the Crown of Spain*—that sparked off the wave of indignation against the *Edinburgh*’s Francophile Whiggery, which, in turn, paved the way for the foundation of the *Quarterly*.

Although periodical publications may give the general impression of a free circulation of foreign bibliographic commodities and their unimpeded availability, in actual fact readers and writers often found it hard to obtain the foreign publications they needed to consult, and more particularly so in the case of rare, specialist items. An example of this is Robert Southey’s complicated reception of a consignment of books from Lisbon in late 1803. On 29 October of that year he wrote to his brother Tom that the resumption of hostilities after the rupture of the Peace of Amiens in May had affected him “in every possible shape,” and

especially because “in the King George packet [he] lost a whole cargo of books [from Portugal], for which [he] had been a year and half waiting, and [his] uncle searching” (*Life* II, 230-31). It was only on 12 March 1804 that he was able to write triumphantly to Coleridge that “a box of books is safely harboured in the Mersey” with “some duplicates of the lost cargo” (*Life* II, 271). As Southey was then hard at work on the *Chronicle of the Cid*, a crucial turning point in that project was the long-awaited arrival of the *Poema del Cid* contained in Tomás Antonio Sánchez’s *Colección de poesías castellanas anteriores al siglo XV* (4 vols, 1779-90). But even with this valuable book in his possession, he continued to carry out additional archival research. Thus, on 13 October 1806, he informed John Rickman that he was planning a trip to London in the spring “to inspect certain books for the Cid at the [British] Museum and at Holland House” (*Life* III, 55); similarly, on 13 June 1807 he wrote to Hartley Coleridge: “The Chronicle of the Cid is to go to press as soon as I receive some books from Lisbon, which must first be examined” (*Life* III, 103). An avid collector and reader of books such as Southey enables us to appraise the relevance of foreign publications to Romantic-period writers and scholars, and, particularly, writers with distinctly scholarly (if not outright pedantic) inclinations. By the same token, the vicissitudes of the lost cargo of 1803 and Southey’s repeated visits to archives in London testify to the difficulties attendant on securing and consulting foreign books, and especially those of a rare and specialized kind.

Over time Southey assembled one of the most substantial private collections of foreign titles (especially Spanish and Portuguese) in the country.¹ In 1803 he wrote to his friend John Rickman that he deemed himself “rich ... in foreign books considered as an Englishman” (*Life* II, 199-200). Yet, he still needed to visit other, well-stocked libraries, such as the British Museum or Holland House, that often contained manuscripts or the only available copy of a specific work. In September 1813, during the last phases of the composition of *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*, he went to London where he met Lord Byron and, at the same time, consulted the library at Holland House and its impressive collection of Iberian materials. On that occasion he wrote to his wife: “I borrowed from Lord H. the Spanish plays connected with the story of Roderick. I read thro [sic] both and made notes from them in the course of the morning” (*Letters* II, 77).²

Although the Holland House library was open to many, it was not open to everyone, as Mary Shelley was to find out in the 1830s. While writing a series of biographical profiles of famous Spaniards for Dionysius Lardner’s *Lives of the*

1. See “Catalogue of the Spanish and Portuguese Portion of the Library of the Late Robert Southey Esq., LL.D. Poet Laureate,” *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 178 (Jan.-Mar. 1943): 91-154.

2. The books Southey may have borrowed on this occasion were “Quintana’s Pelago [his tragedy *Pelayo*, 1805],” “Varga’s Pelago [*Pelayo*]” (most likely José de Vargas Ponce’s tragedy *Abdalaziz y Egilona*, 1804) and the “Cronica del Rey Don Rodrigo.” See Princess Marie Liechtenstein, *Holland House*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1874), vol.2, 181.

Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal (1835-37), she applied to use the collection but was denied access.³ Even Thomas Moore's attempt at interceding on her behalf was to no avail. Then, in October 1835, she addressed a disconsolate letter to John Bowring to ask permission to consult his own collection, since London had no "Spanish Library," and the only remaining solution would have been to "go to Spain" (Bennett 260). Mary Shelley's difficulties indicate that, although a variety of recently published books in Spanish and other foreign languages were generally available in 1830s London, the rarest and most valuable of them were still concentrated in repositories of knowledge that exerted some degree of control over that knowledge and the cultural capital it afforded.

To be sure, Southey's and Mary Shelley's experiences constitute highly specific and, in certain respects, extreme instances. By the same token, books written in the languages of the Iberian Peninsula belonged to a particular category, as they were less in demand than those in French or Italian.⁴ But it is precisely because of their peculiarities that these writers' experiences in dealing with Spanish books place into bold relief the problems attendant on securing and consulting foreign publications in Romantic-period London. On the one hand, these anecdotes testify to the complex conditions of availability of foreign books as repositories of specialist knowledge in Britain between the eighteenth and nineteenth century; on the other hand, however, they also raise the more straightforward and fundamental question of where readers might obtain foreign-language volumes of any kind.

As the epicenter of the publishing industry, London would be the natural answer. For centuries the capital had been home to a lively foreign book trade, hosting a community of foreign-language printers and publishers in the main European languages, with French traditionally predominant. This panorama underwent some major changes in the mid-eighteenth century. If Britain had a long history of foreign-book importing, "it was only from the 1740s," as Giles Barber notes, "that they were readily and promptly available ... as current stock items soon after publication" (125). By the turn of the century, London boasted a network of foreign-language booksellers whose trade, nonetheless, was at the mercy of Continental events (most obviously the French Revolution) that could occasionally hinder the arrival of consignments. But even during the most difficult periods in the war years between 1793 and 1815, these entrepreneurs continued to do business (nearly) as usual. By the early nineteenth century, this network represented an intrinsic and significant portion of London's map of cultural and leisure activities.

Histories of the book trades have little to offer on the topic of the availability

3. See Lord John Russell, ed., *Memoirs, Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853-56), vol. 7, 136.

4. See the data in Barry Taylor, ed., *Foreign-Language Printing in London 1500-1900* (Boston Spa and London: British Library, 2002).

of foreign-language publications in Romantic-period Britain. Apart from certain focal points, such as the activities of exiled French printers and publishers in the 1790s, it is still a largely under-researched area.⁵ A possible way of starting to fill this gap in the knowledge may be that of recording the presence of suppliers of foreign books in Romantic-period London (for which information is relatively abundant) by examining where the capital's well-to-do young ladies could obtain foreign-language publications in order to practice one of their key accomplishments.

When Mary Russell Mitford began to keep a diary in 1819, she used a copy of *The Literary Pocket-Book; or, Companion for the Lover of Nature and Art* (printed by Keats's publishers, C. and J. Ollier, and edited by Leigh Hunt), five issues of which appeared between 1818 and 1822. Mitford's father gave his literary and nature-loving daughter a copy of the first edition (1819), and she dutifully wrote in it until 1821.⁶ A distinctively "Cockney" combination of the natural and the artificial/artistic aimed at female buyers living in the metropolis, the pocket book in question provided the most disparate information, much of it related to the training of female accomplishments.⁷ One section listed foreign language teachers in London—mostly for French and Italian—and among these is one "Sig. Polidori, Italian, 37 Great Pulteney-street, Golden-square," Gaetano Polidori the father of John William, Byron's personal doctor and the author of *The Vampyre* (Hunt 207). In addition, it contained a list of places where foreign-language books might be purchased. Presumably assembled by Leigh Hunt, himself a writer with strongly cosmopolitan literary leanings, this list includes the following London booksellers: "Berthoud and Wheatley, Soho-sq.; Bohn, Frith-street, Soho; Bohte and co., York-street, Covent-garden; Boosey and sons, New broad-st.; Bossange and Masson, Great Marlborough-st.; Dulau and co. Soho-square; Hayes, King-street; Keys, Coleman-street; Treuttel and Wurtz, Soho-square" (Hunt 204).

However incomplete, the record in the *Literary Pocket-Book* throws into relief the West End, especially the areas of Soho and Covent Garden, as the main centers of London's foreign-language book trade. Of all the places mentioned, only New Broad Street and Coleman Street are in the City. It also highlights the fact that the main dealers in foreign books—Boosey, Treuttel and Würtz, Deboffe and Dulau (who eventually merged)—were also, unsurprisingly, publishers of foreign-language titles (Burrows 67). Most of these businesses had been in London since the late eighteenth century. The Swiss bookseller Joseph Deboffe opened his shop at 7, Gerrard Street, Soho, in 1792 and then moved to 10, Nassau Street (also in Soho) where he remained between 1808 and 1818. The Boosey

5. See Burrows 56-94.

6. Held at the British Library, shelfmark C.60.b.7.

7. On the "Cockney school" and its combinations of the natural and the artificial, as well as its investments in a metropolitan culture of consumption, see Elizabeth Jones, "Keats in the Suburbs," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 45 (1996): 23-43.

business was started by John Boosey in the late 1760s and included a lending library and a bookshop stocking French, German, Italian, Spanish, Danish, and Russian titles. In 1792 Thomas Boosey opened a shop at 4, Old Broad Street (differently from what Hunt's information says) and continued to trade from these premises until 1832 (the company is still in trade today as Boosey and Hawkes) (Burrows 68). In 1807, Henry Colburn opened his "English and Foreign Circulating Library" at 48-50 Conduit Street, off New Bond Street, where he also published more than a hundred works, almost half of which were in French or about French topics. Later, in the pacified post-Napoleonic climate, further foreign booksellers opened their premises in the British capital. Bossange, Masson and Leblanc established themselves in Great Marlborough Street in 1815, while Treuttel and Würtz opened their shop at 30 Soho Square in 1817 and, as was common practice, proceeded to publish a "List of books just imported."

Hostilities during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars may have hampered or slowed down the booksellers' central activity of importing books and advertising them in periodical publications, but never entirely interrupted them. In December 1798, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* carried two pages of "Foreign Publications Imported by De Boffe," in which everything is French apart from an English-German phrasebook (the *Phraseologia Germanica*) (845-46). As a Francophone émigré without any overtly "Jacobinical" sympathies and more inclined to counter-revolutionary politics, Deboffe would have been the right kind of foreigner for the *Anti-Jacobin*. Later, *The British Critic* for December 1805 (significantly, the year of Trafalgar) featured a generic "List of Foreign Publications, Just Imported," a four-page mini-catalogue of French works, ranging from the *Poésies* of the fifteenth-century Marguerite-Eleonore Clotilde de Vallon-Chalys to a *Numismatique Chinoise* (695-98). This was followed by a list of "French Books just published here" and a catalogue of "French Books just imported by B. Dulau and co. Soho-Square" (698). Nevertheless, dealing in foreign, and especially French, books at such a time might also be stigmatized as an unpatriotic activity. The editors of the short-lived *General Review of British and Foreign Literature* (January to June 1806) made a point of stressing that, notwithstanding this title, they were "ardently devoted to their Country," as well as "those Liberties which have given us the superior Vigour we possess," and thus principally offered pieces on British books (Jan. 1806, 3). Then, from the second issue, they began to include publications in French, German, and Italian, and the issue for April contained a page of "New French Books, just imported by J. Deboffe" (Apr. 1806, 400). As seen above, the practice of advertising new imports went on undeterred even after the reorganization of the periodical market brought about by the arrival of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review*.

Unsurprisingly, "foreign" publications mostly meant French titles. The language and literature of the Gallic enemy remained the most widely known and admired throughout the Romantic era, in spite of the wars and the rising popularity of Italian, Spanish and (especially from the 1820s onwards) German.

French books had always been the most quantitatively substantial category in foreign-language printing in London and the British foreign-language book trade more generally (Shaw 261-64). Accordingly, the steady demand for books from France justified the publication of dedicated catalogues. Continuing a well-established practice, soon after opening his new shop in 1794, Joseph Deboffe published a “*Catalogue des livres françois de J. de Boffe, libraire, Gerrard-Street, Soho, a Londres.*” At well over one hundred pages, it listed all the books in stock, but the initial “Avis” also reassured purchasers that, at Deboffe’s, “On peut se procurer ... tous les Ouvrages & Feuilles périodiques qui paroissent, tant en Allemagne, qu’en France & en Suisse, par la voie la plus prompte” (*Catalogue* n.p.).⁸ Should items in the catalogue be unavailable, “ils seront remplacés le plutôt possible” (*Catalogue* n.p.). The speed in procuring books from abroad was one of the key features of these businesses, and reassurances such as the above testify to the competitiveness of what was a restricted, but highly lucrative market.

Foreign bookshops in London catered for libraries (the Bodleian bought books at Treuttel and Würtz’s in the 1820s and 30s) and wealthy purchasers and scholars (the antiquarian Francis Douce, for instance, was a loyal customer of Deboffe’s). They also provided the foreign stock of circulating libraries (often run by the booksellers themselves) which, throughout the period, offered an ever increasing selection of foreign-language works, especially in French and Italian. In 1787, the *New Catalogue* for John Boosey’s circulating library at 39, King Street, Cheapside, carried a substantial section of “Livres françois” (969 titles) and a much smaller one of “Libri italiani” (96 volumes). Later in the period, in 1828, the *Catalogue des livres français et italiens* available at “le Cabinet Littéraire de J. Andrew, 167 New Bond Street,” carried prefatory information in French for the benefit of self-improving or foreign customers, and listed 826 titles in French and 127 in Italian.

However, wealthy customers and lending libraries of various descriptions were not the exclusive targets of foreign booksellers. Other catalogues, of a much less ambitious kind, show that these traders also catered to the needs of a language-learning public, as in Dulau’s *Catalogue des Livres d’Ecole, ouvrages élémentaires, instructifs et amusans pour la Jeunesse, Grammaires, Dictionnaires en François, Grec, Latin, Espagnol, Portugais, Allemand, Arabe, etc. Qui se trouvent chez B. Dulau et Co.* (1805). Among other things, this title reveals that, though learning and teaching tools could be bought in Romantic-era London for an impressive variety of foreign languages, French was still the most popular and best stocked. Indeed, it is far from surprising that some of the most enterprising foreign booksellers in London came from over the Channel. The proximity between the two countries, the cultural prestige and preponderance

8. In addition, the ECCO database contains catalogues of French books available at several London booksellers published for the years 1702, 1735, 1744, 1773 (the multiple catalogues of the “Société typographique” on the Strand) and 1784.

of French, and the strength of the publishing industry and retail network in France amply justified this state of affairs.

Until they closed their bookshop in 1817, and Treuttel and Würtz advertised themselves as “successors to Mr. De Boffe of Nassau Street,” Joseph and his son Jean-Charles Deboffe were major retailers and publishers of French works especially, though not exclusively, of a conservative and royalist kind.⁹ Soon after setting up in London in 1793, the father issued the two-volume *Correspondance générale des émigrés, ou les émigrés peints par eux-mêmes* collected by Count Rousselin Corbeau de Saint-Albin from the archives of the Convention Nationale in Paris. In 1795, Deboffe and Boosey sold copies of an anonymous bilingual play in five acts titled *L'Emigré à Londres* and *The Emigrant in London*. Years later, when François-René de Chateaubriand wrote the preface to a new edition of his *Essai historique, politique et moral sur les révolutions anciennes et modernes* (1826), he noted that it had been first printed in London by Baylis in 1796 and sold by Deboffe in 1797. Such activities fit in with London's role as a major center of counter-revolutionary printing activities, during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, and the center of production of a significant number of French newspapers and magazines—the *Courier de Londres*, the *Mercure Britannique* and the *Journal de France et d'Angleterre*, among others (Burrows 65-67). Inevitably, political events involved foreign booksellers and their businesses in a variety of unpredictable ways. Again, taking Deboffe as a significant example, Prince Talleyrand became a frequent visitor and customer at his Soho shop during his exile of 1792-93, and the two men continued to correspond after that date. Later, in 1794, the bookseller and printer was subpoenaed to appear in court at the Treason Trials against John Thelwall, John Horne Tooke, and Thomas Hardy, charged with having sold copies of *Le Moniteur*.

If foreign bookshops and their owners were occasionally caught up in events of national and international relevance, they also (and more continuously) functioned as centers of aggregation and exchange for exiled communities, as in the exemplary case of Vicente Salvá's bookshop in Regent Street which was an invaluable cultural and social point of reference for the Spanish *liberales* in the 1820s.¹⁰ Overall, however, these bookshops served a wide variety of constituencies (first and foremost, British readers interested in foreign

9. Jean-Charles Deboffe placed an advertisement in the *Bibliographie de la France, ou Journal général de l'imprimerie et de la librairie, année 1817* (Paris: Pillet, 1817), where he defined himself “libraire à Londres” and informed readers that, as the business had just been sold to Treuttel and Würtz, “toute personne qui aurait remis ou envoyé, soit à lui, soit à son père M. Joseph Deboffe ou prédécesseurs, en commission ou en toute autre manière, des livres imprimés, cahiers, ouvrages à gravures ou autres, de les retirer d'entre ses mains, avant la fin de février prochain” (656).

10. See Vicente Llorens, *Liberales y románticos: una emigración española en Inglaterra (1823-1834)* (Madrid: Castalia, 1979), 61-62, and Ana Rueda, “Vicente Salvá: su política editorial desde el exilio y su agencia autorial,” *Crítica hispánica* 34 (2012): 299-322.

books), as well as acting as export offices for foreign markets. Rudolf Ackermann's shop on the Strand, "The Repository of Arts," is exemplary in this respect. Its large stock of Spanish publications was aimed at the new Spanish American republics and their aspirational bourgeoisie, which the resourceful German expatriate determinedly targeted as a profitable new market.¹¹

In the changed climate of the post-Napoleonic settlement, a new world order, new commercial opportunities and new print technologies created the conditions for a much more intense demand and regular supply of foreign publications. In Britain, in particular, the quantity of imported books saw a steady rise after 1815 and climaxed impressively between 1823 and the economic crash of 1825-26 with its serious consequences for the book trade. As the figures in the Customs records indicate, the quantity of imported books increased not only for French, which was invariably the most popular foreign language, but also for German, Spanish, and Italian. According to Barber, in 1816 books were imported from France to the tune of £10,621, but this figure nearly doubled to £19,166 in 1825. Even more remarkably, as for Spanish books, the £207 of 1816 grew to £3,120 in 1825 (142).

After 1815, foreign books and bookshops were increasingly conspicuous features of the London-based publishing market. Particular cases of "foreignizing" writers and intellectuals such as Southey and Mary Shelley illuminate the complications related to obtaining scarce, because highly specific, volumes; more generally, however, it was relatively easy to purchase a foreign book in 1820s London, since those who could afford them were able to choose among a variety of well-stocked and widely publicized shops, which also promised to procure any publication that should not be immediately available. Periodicals played a crucial role in this quickly expanding world of mostly foreign, competing businesses. Commenting on the recent phenomenon of "The Foreign Reviews," a new generation of publications entirely dedicated to untranslated works, on 7 January, 1829 the *Athenaeum* remarked that considering whether "periodicals are or are not the best media for transmitting thoughts from one part of the world to another" is an otiose question, and saluted the creation of the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (1827) and the *Foreign Review* (1828) as "the commencement of a new era in our literature" (1). And this was an era that had come into being thanks to the close-knit, London-based network of booksellers, publishers, printers, printing shops, retail premises, and periodical publications (with their powerful apparatus of lists, advertisements, notices, and reviews). By weaving together material and discursive phenomena, these players and venues fed an interconnected and mutually sustaining system that could meet the demand for foreign publications both at home and in farther-flung markets.

That said, the international and multilingual "new era" of literature an-

11. On this aspect of Ackermann's business, see Eugenia Roldán Vera, *The British Book Trade and Spanish American Independence: Education and Knowledge Transmission in Transcontinental Perspective* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 45-97.

nounced by the *Athenaeum* was to prove problematic from the outset. Beginning as a splinter of the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, the *Foreign Review* sought to steal its contributors and drive it out of business. Yet the gamble did not pay off, and the *Foreign Quarterly* eventually absorbed its rival, reigning supreme as the most reliable review of untranslated works until it merged with the *Westminster Review* in 1846. In addition, around mid-century, curiosity about foreign literatures and the market for foreign books seemed to dwindle, partly through the onset of increasingly insular political and cultural attitudes (France 2). By contrast, earlier decades had witnessed a growing interest in and demand for foreign-language volumes, an interest which gathered momentum with the end of the Napoleonic emergency, the reopening of Continental travel, and the return to peacetime commercial relations with the rest of Europe and the world. As this essay suggests, this is a multifaceted phenomenon about which we need to know much more. The tentative and inevitably incomplete picture sketched here can only serve to highlight the need for accurate and detailed information and, at the same time, raise additional questions: what was the composition of the stock of imported (and advertised) foreign-language titles? What was the proportion between old stock and recent or new titles; or between rare and antiquarian and more affordable volumes? Did booksellers control this market or did they suffer competition from other dealers such as individual agents at home or abroad working for wealthy collectors or major institutions? Where were the books sourced and did France act as a major through-way for foreign-language stock in general? Can we trace records of actual transactions and thus form a more accurate idea of who bought what and when? Why did foreign-language bookshops close down and how was their stock disposed of?

Finding answers for these and many other related questions may contribute to enriching our understanding of the complex mosaic of print culture between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. New research into the relevance of foreign publications is likely to reinforce further current constructions of this period as a crucial transitional and transformative moment in the history of the book trades. A thorough knowledge of the presence and impact of foreign-language books in Romantic-period London (and Britain more widely) can offer us additional insights into the international coordinates of the literary field between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and thus enable us to form a more detailed picture of the multiple and intersecting cross-currents of the “commerce of genius” which, as the *Literary Gazette* noted in 1817, was an intrinsic feature of the contemporary cultural climate.

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