

Introduction

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Aims and objectives

My research focuses on The Italian book collection of The Leeds Library: mapping the circulation of Italian books between the 18th and 19th century in Leeds. The Italian presence in Leeds is quite significant, today you can see this through Italian family run businesses in service sector and beyond as well as hearing conversations in Italian around the streets. However, the Italian presence in Leeds can be seen as early as the 1700s. For example, through buildings such as The Leeds library and the city museum which are modelled after the palazzo corner in Venice and in the Duke of Wellington statue by Italian artist Baron Carlo Marochetti. Additionally, Italians have been recorded to be in Leeds since 1881 with 54 Italian residents and continued to grow to 170 in 1911. The Italian community in Leeds is amongst the oldest in England, which is why it is important to study how Italian culture influenced literature bought by The Leeds library.

The Leeds library has a large and varied Italian collection, however half of it, has not been catalogued into the Leeds library system. So as a part of my research period I was tasked with cataloguing the Italian collection into their system as my knowledge of Italian from my degree allowed me to understand titles and to determine genres and extra additions within the books. My aims were also to look through archives in search for Italian titles admitted into the library and Italian subscribers/people who could have read the collection. The archives included catalogues, borrowing books, ledgers and minute books from the formation of the library in 1760. As my research went on my aims changed to investigating individuals found to be connected to the collection, as well as completing previous aims.

Research methodology

To research the Italian book collection in the Leeds library I looked at two varying forms of materials. One being the Italian collection itself, which as a part of my research, I was cataloguing into the Leeds library system. This meant I could see physical copies of the Italian books which led me to determine the popularity of each book; Through looking at return date marks which were most commonly found in books bought in the early days of the library (late 1700s) and their condition (whether the binding was rotting away and if it was annotated). From this I gathered why the books were being used by analyzing annotations found or looking at details such as the genre. Furthermore, the other materials I was looking at were the libraries archives, which included catalogues of their stock and subscribers, ledgers and records of when and by who books were borrowed. These materials allowed me to access information at a much quicker pace than the physical collection and meant I could spot trends within the records and could further research names of subscribers to conclude whether they could be potential readers of the Italian collection. I split my day into two halves to look at each form of material daily and continued this method until the last week of my 4-week period in the library.

Results

People

Within the libraries catalogues an Italian name was found. Since the opening of the library in 1768, Horace Cattaneo, a man born in Italy in 1739 has been a subscriber. Cattaneo was linked to prominent members of society in Leeds. For instance, Gamaliel Lloyd who was Mayor of Leeds between 1778-1779. Lloyd and Cattaneo were in business together in export trade. This means as well as Cattaneo, Lloyd could have potentially known multiple languages in order to conduct trade with various countries. Both Lloyd and Cattaneo became members of the Foreign Library which was a library separate to the Leeds library but had shared premises, since its opening in 1778. This could suggest that they both were readers of Italian literature at the Leeds library, considering their membership and links to languages. However, we can't be certain of this due to no surviving records from 1700s existing that detail who borrowed which books.

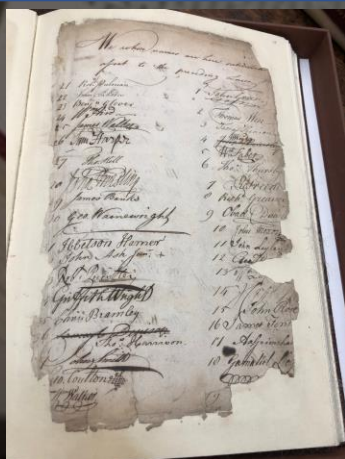


Fig 1: This image shows a list of subscribers at The Leeds library from original documents originating in 1768

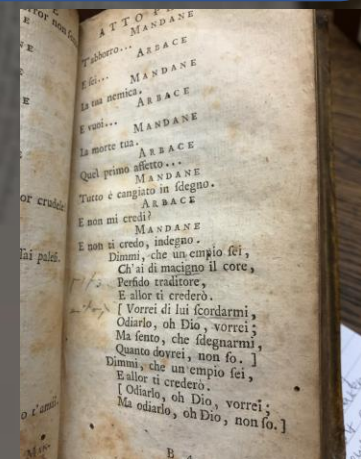


Fig 2: This image shows the symbols annotated in the margins of Metastasio Operes T.X

Trends

The catalogues from 1768-1816 show that Italian literature as well as literature about Italy bought into the library, overwhelmingly consisted of travel journals from people who travelled to Italy. The influx of these journals was consistent over 1768-1816 showing the continued interest in travelling to Italy by subscribers. Also, books on the history of Italy and about the Pope were just as common. Subsequently, the trends are due to the grand tour which was a popular activity for young nobility in England to do. From the Elizabethan period, it was encouraged by Queen Elizabeth I to have knowledge of the history, culture and the languages of European countries. This initially was due to her desire to have well educated individuals represent her in foreign courts. As a result, mostly young gentlemen went on tour of places like Rome, Naples and Paris. This continued to be popular in the 1700s as seen by trends in the catalogue records. However, the travel journals and historical works weren't only limited to discussing Italy but also France another popular stop on the grand tour, showing the libraries stock was heavily influenced by culture during 1700-1800s.

Annotations

When cataloguing the Italian collection into the libraries system I came across a few books that included annotations inside. The books that included annotations were mainly from the earlier periods in the library (1700-1800). This is a result of taught reading habits in 1600-1700s which encouraged readers to annotate books to be active when reading. One of the most significant annotations from my research came from Metastasio's Operes collection of 4 books within the library. The annotations included underlining of words and symbols within the margins. The symbols in the margins reminded me of pronunciation marks used when learning languages, so from this we can infer that the book was possibly used for learning Italian. However, the book is also a stage work by Metastasio so the pronunciation marks could also be due to performance practice and wanting the rhythm of speech match the rhythm of the line.

Moving forward

During my last research week, I was focusing on borrowing books of subscribers during the 20th century, although this is outside the chosen period our research is focused on, me and my supervisors were hoping that trends in later centuries might be able to reveal more about the differences or similarities of reading habits of Italian literature in general over time. As well as to reveal the type of people reading Italian literature, since the borrowing books were produced more recently the cataloguing of who took books out and when is easier to determine as the libraries system improved, meaning we have names and more accurate dates to cross reference and research. In addition, given more time I can research each name to see who they were and how that might have led them to reading Italian literature, seeing if it has changed from just the elite in society being able to access it and to see if the rigid structures of gendered reading have diminished or have been upheld given the changing society.

Furthermore, in my last week at Leeds library I discussed with one of the librarians about looking into further records to try and find out more about the process of selling books to the library and the merchants who sold them books, to piece together why there were separate sellers for foreign literature and English literature and how the sellers had access to such literature.