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## GEOGRAPHY OF A STEREOTYPE: A COMPUTATIONAL STUDY ON THE ITALIAN PRESENCE IN THE BRITISH NINETEENTH CENTURY NOVEL

### 1. Introduction: Italy as a *Situation d'Écriture*

The study of the role of Italy as an imaginative necessity in the shaping of the English literary experience has always been at the core of both Italian and British scholarly tradition. As far as Italian criticism is concerned, for example, Piero Boitani's *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, or the collection of essays by Michele Marrapodi titled *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, along with Massimiliano Demata's "Gothic Italy", represent but a few distinguished contributions to the subject. On the other hand, in a more contemporary and international perspective, Stephen Hebron (2006), David Laven (2003), and Charles Brand (2011) have further highlighted the symbiotic relationship between the British literary production and the perpetuation of over-simplified stereotypes about Italy seen as directly derived from Renaissance culture and the early forms of letters and travel diaries of *Grand Tour* visitors in the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly enough, what seems to powerfully emerge from the above-mentioned studies is a common idea of the almost entirely fictionalised nature of the Italian setting as perceived and used throughout British literature. In fact, more than an actual geographical space, Italy is used as a forge of literary possibilities, where specific areas appear as embedded in an abundance of objects, images, and symbols that soon crystallised into forms and narratological conventions. This is what Roland Barthes defines as a *situation d'écriture*, when referring to Japan in his book *Empire of Signs*. A writing situation constituting the tangible correlative of the condition of estrangement and otherness at the root of the dynamics of aesthetic creation, where the foreign country appears in the eyes of the writer as "a reserve of features whose manipulation — whose invented interplay — allows to 'entertain' the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own" (Barthes 1970, 3). But how could Italy be constructed as a writing situation? What were the tropes and the semantic traits connected to the Italian fictional identity? And how did these ascend, evolve, and decline within the British literary system?

Using the innovative tools of computer-based macro analysis (Jockers 2013), in the following discussion I will give evidence of the occurrences and the transformations of the Italian stereotype throughout the British novel from 1780 to 1890.<sup>2</sup> The article will be articulated in three parts: after a brief introduction dedicated to

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Churchill defines the construction of the Italian sensational imagery in Renaissance England as a repository of violence, intrigue, and distrust, associated with the peculiarity of Roman Catholic institutions:

"Italy and the exploitation of excitement in literature was to be found in the English Renaissance tragedy which, from Marlowe to Otway, had habitually associated sensation and horror with an Italian setting and had created a most potent image of a country of incest and intrigue, violence and hypocrisy, whose Church was Anti-Christ, whose Jews pursued the evil trade of usury, and whose intellectuals were typified by the fiendish Machiavelli" (Churchill 1980, 6).

<sup>2</sup> The choice of such a specific time frame is due to the nature and periodisation of the literary corpus at the core of my experiments, namely the Stanford Literary Lab database of 18th and 19th century novels.



the theoretical premises at the basis of the methodology applied, I will give an account of the origins of the project and describe the different phases of computational analysis. I will then conclude by presenting the outcomes of the experiment, while also providing a possible critical frame for data interpretation.

## **2. Methodology: Theory and Practice of Literary Macro Analysis**

In his work on the evolution of literary forms, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Franco Moretti introduces the pioneering concept of distant-reading, which can be summarised as the need for a new bird's eye perspective in the study of literary phenomena as an alternative to the more canonical close-reading of a limited number of masterpieces. In fact, in this age of digital revolution, the idea of a more comprehensive study of literature has been gaining concreteness thanks to the use of computer-based macro analysis. As the word suggests, computer-based macro analysis is an experimental methodology that applies the theories and statistical tools of computational linguistics to the analysis of huge corpora of digitised literary texts. The quantitative investigation of thousands of books at once allows computer based-macro analysis to expand the object of study of literary criticism as never before, which in turn brings us one step closer to the Formalists' dream of a *vision d'ensemble* of the literary system.

In the sole territory of the United States there are currently more than fifty centres for Digital Humanities working on projects based on computer-based literary macro analysis, including the Stanford Literary Lab, where this project and article began. Indeed, the present work is part of a larger on-going experiment of the Stanford team about the use of geographical locations in 19th century British-Irish and American novel. The aim of the project is to use new empirical tools and evidence to investigate the changes in the relative representation of different areas in the fictional space of the novel, thus assessing the possible relationships between geographical locations and the development of specific literary genres (Moretti 1997, 197).

## **3. The Experiment: Preparing the NER location tagging**

The preliminary stage of the experiment included the construction of the **Stanford's Name Entity Recognition (NER)** tool, an application that allows the unsupervised extraction and classification of single units of text according to a set of predefined categories. These categories can be proper nouns, quantities, percentages, or, as in the case of my research, geographical locations. After the entity recognition tool was developed and tested, it was run on the 3,603 digital texts which constitute the Stanford Literary Lab database of 18th and 19th century novels. By the end of the process each text had been tagged with location identifiers, so that a frequency matrix could be extracted to show the exact number of occurrences of each location name within the single works of the corpus. Subsequently, the frequency mean of such locations was calculated and statistically standardised according to the expected rate of occurrences across the decades. The graphical output was obtained by converting the numerical evidences of the matrix into a legible bar chart through R, an open-source program for statistical analysis (Jockers 2014). Below are the charts on the occurrence of Italian locations in the 3,603 18th and 19th century British Novels:

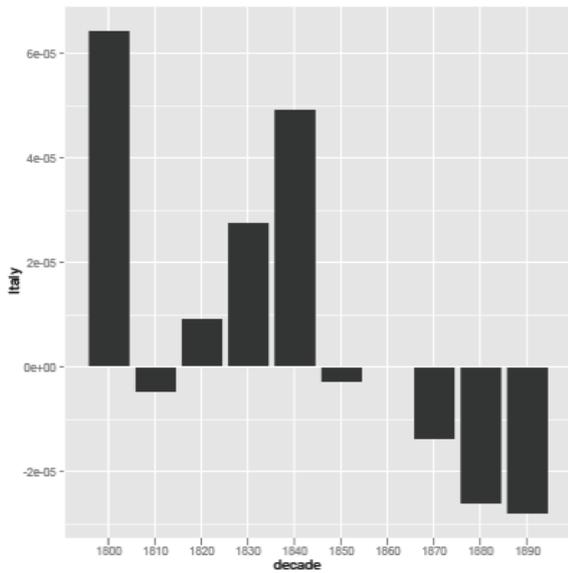


Fig. 1: Corpus presence of *Italy*

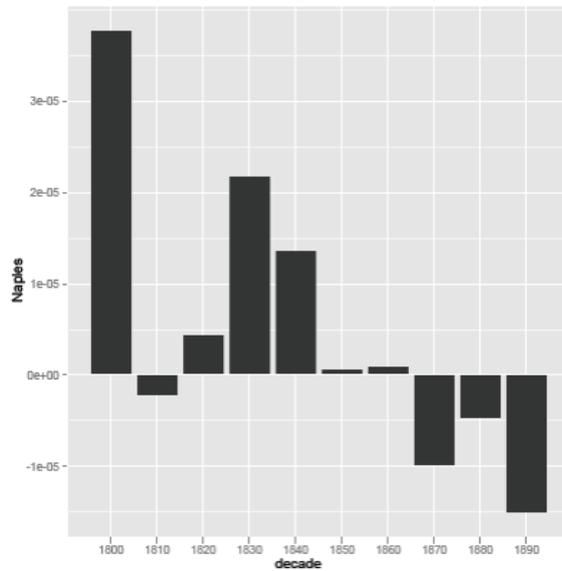


Fig. 2: Corpus presence of *Naples*

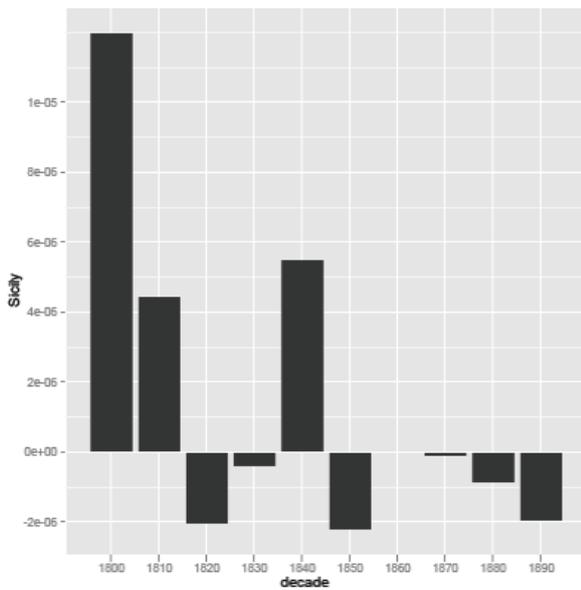


Fig. 3: Corpus presence of *Sicily*

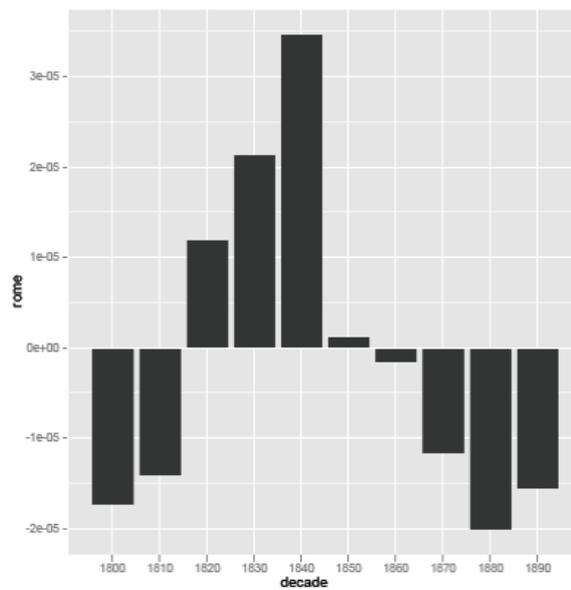


Fig. 4: Corpus presence of *Rome*

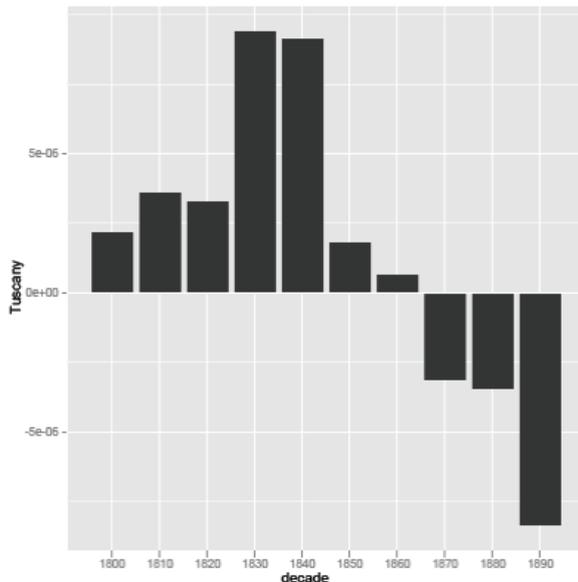


Fig. 5: Corpus presence of *Tuscany*

As these graphs suggest, the Italian presence in the British novel can be seen as articulated in three different directions encompassing the idea of Italy both as a single country as well as its specific regions (Sicily, Tuscany) or cities (Naples, Rome). Though these three categories do not conform to a homogeneous diachronic behaviour, the statistical significance of their frequency is evidently lost immediately after the 1840s, whereas their highest scores are uniformly recorded between the end of the 18th and the first decade of the 19th century. In addition to that, as the 19th century progresses, a new peak is recorded between the 1830s and 1840s, when the city of Rome and the Tuscan region make their tardy appearance in relatively consistent percentages.

Assuming Moretti's premise that "a new space [...] gives rise to a new form" (Moretti 1997, 197),<sup>3</sup> it is possible to interpret the changes in the relative representation of different geographical areas in the fictional space of the novel noticing that the early years of triumph of the southern Italian setting — and in particular Naples and Sicily — coincide with the decades of maximum effluence of the Gothic novel. As the Italian south was mostly excluded from the classical trails of the Grand Tour and therefore ignored by 18th century travellers, the construction of gothic Italy was almost entirely a literary one. Indeed, rather than to first-hand accounts, it appears as far more connected to the residual stereotypes of the Jacobean drama and the impact of Piranesi's sinister prison fantasies.<sup>4</sup> The very idea of a monstrous helmet that falls from the sky (the opening of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*) clearly recalls the similar helmets which appear in the eighth plate of Piranesi's *Carceri* series. In this perspective, Italian southern regions perfectly served the aesthetic purpose of being a land of mystery and the unknown; the geographical declination of the discourse of sublime "sufficiently far from everyday life not to be incredible, [...] yet sufficiently close to be threatening" (Churchill 1980, 6). But what about Rome and Tuscany? Is their late circumscribed peak in the 1830s and

<sup>3</sup> In his *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti explains the relationship between geography and narratology in these terms:

"Space is not the 'outside' of narrative, then, but an internal force, that shapes it from within. Or in other words: in modern European novels, what happens depends a lot on where it happens. And so, whether we know it or not — we do so many things without knowing that we are doing them — by following 'what happens' we come up with a mental map of the many 'wheres' of which our world is made" (Moretti 1997, 70).

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi argued that architecture should indulge in grotesque ornaments and redundancy. His prints of *Carceri* constitute an impossible place containing spatial paradoxes with staircases that simultaneously exist on two planes. In particular, the inner spaces of Piranesi's prisons are so big and continuous that it is architectonically impossible to distinguish between interiors and exteriors, and bridges and parapets respond to no logic or necessity.



1840s part of the same gothic discourse? Or can it be considered an index of a shift in the Italian semantic identity?

In order to answer the above questions, I proceeded with the second phase of the experiment aiming to explore the semantic behaviour of the following sets of locations: Italy as a country, southern Italian areas, the Tuscan region, and the city of Rome.

#### 4. The Experiment: Mining Semantic Fields

As regards the methodology, the second phase of the project required the creation of a customised script named Words-Cohort Correlation (Correlator for short), a tool developed by Ryan Heuser capable of generating unsupervised semantic fields by grouping together words considered to share a similar frequency trend throughout the historical range of the corpus. Originally applied to the analysis of the semantic behaviour of the abstract values during the 19th century (Heuser and Le-Khac 2012), this method allowed me to isolate the semantic differentiating factors within each of the four groups of Italian locations. Table 1 shows the semantic field generated by the keyword *Italy*. The positive numbers in the brackets correspond to the score of standard deviation above the average for each of the correlated words records:<sup>5</sup>

retribution (+0.95212)	dressing-room (+0.83568)	committed (+0.85166)
mysterious (+0.95135)	rushed (+0.83531)	paces (+0.84876)
vice (+0.93082)	reverie (+0.83436)	branches (+0.84869)
haunt (+0.90634)	lightning (+0.83427)	hinges (+0.84812)
traces (+0.90544)	valet (+0.83389)	dense (+0.84745)
bride (+0.90355)	graceful (+0.83217)	hearts (+0.84694)
expended (+0.90317)	orphans (+0.83214)	enveloped (+0.84497)
prison (+0.89489)	steps (+0.82999)	require (+0.84465)
ceremonious (+0.88746)	underwent (+0.82891)	coaches (+0.84271)
pinning (+0.88617)	villain (+0.82841)	elapsed (+0.84163)
chateau (+0.88377)	beauty (+0.82756)	tainted (+0.83950)
struggles (+0.88148)	regained (+0.82678)	hollow (+0.83574)
tenants (+0.88099)	regions (+0.82603)	expiration (+0.81264)
enables (+0.87999)	lofty (+0.82583)	gazed (+0.80937)
roof (+0.87934)	fulfill (+0.82531)	debtor (+0.80879)
creditor (+0.87531)	proceeding (+0.82362)	monsters (+0.80870)
fearfully (+0.87190)	voluptuous (+0.82300)	covering (+0.80809)
riveted (+0.87035)	glistened (+0.82295)	stupor (+0.80784)

<sup>5</sup> In statistical terms, the measure of standard deviation is used to quantify the amount of dispersion of a set of data values from an expected value or mean. In this way, a low standard deviation indicates that the data points tend to be close to the mean, while a high standard deviation indicates that the data are spread out over a more significant range of values.



depicted (+0.86593)	murdered (+0.82097)	ringlets (+0.80764)
estates (+0.86338)	soothe (+0.82054)	plunged (+0.80754)
deceit (+0.86242)	cavalier (+0.81873)	ruined (+0.80514)
inquiries (+0.86193)	death-like (+0.81734)	fearful (+0.80444)
death-bed (+0.85857)	indications (+0.81719)	arrive (+0.85203)
refuge (+0.85439)	sire (+0.81572)	myriads (+0.81416)
treacherous (+0.85305)	plebeian (+0.81418)	

**Table 1:** Correlations for keyword *Italy*

Similarly to the results found for Italy as a whole, Table 2 shows how southern locations, such as Naples, Palermo, and Sicily, appear to be connected to the same threatening semantic domain typical of the Gothic.

artifices (+0.89130)	obligations (+0.80676)	moments (+0.77348)	philanthropy (+0.82424)
dungeons (+0.88229)	gloomy (+0.80638)	rewarded (+0.76880)	horrors (+0.82384)
assiduously (+0.88071)	deceit (+0.80455)	confine (+0.76777)	medicines (+0.82373)
inquisitor (+0.87937)	adieu (+0.80315)	beholding (+0.76625)	endeavour (+0.82347)
dreadful (+0.87777)	crimes (+0.80274)	tranquility (+0.76568)	hero (+0.82274)
ignominy (+0.87315)	terrify (+0.80259)	vice (+0.76563)	misfortunes (+0.82245)
recurred (+0.87191)	signor (+0.80255)	captivated (+0.76497)	don (+0.82160)
signora (+0.87131)	fraternal (+0.80194)	terror (+0.76456)	deluded (+0.82148)
convent (+0.86628)	terrified (+0.80123)	lamentations (+0.76397)	vicious (+0.81727)
trembled (+0.86267)	ruffians (+0.79973)	conjured (+0.76350)	emotions (+0.81552)
assassin (+0.86151)	infamous (+0.79818)	palpitating (+0.76338)	embracing (+0.81379)
fear (+0.85964)	tremble (+0.79753)	charmed (+0.76337)	conjectures (+0.81296)
Madrid (+0.85547)	caverns (+0.79354)	inquisition (+0.76296)	alleviate (+0.81244)
court (+0.85539)	paces (+0.79226)	proofs (+0.76286)	artful (+0.81220)
tormented (+0.85472)	pallid (+0.79154)	diffident (+0.76285)	nun (+0.81211)
gaming (+0.85406)	obedient (+0.79138)	intention (+0.76230)	mournfully (+0.81141)
rigid (+0.84978)	injure (+0.78793)	depravity (+0.76181)	groan (+0.80944)
hero's (+0.84810)	unacquainted (+0.78756)	ill-fated (+0.75935)	endeavour (+0.80797)



fails (+0.84545)	tortures (+0.78751)	cavern (+0.75909)	vices (+0.80735)
unmindful (+0.84443)	robber (+0.78725)	expiring (+0.75893)	alighting (+0.80706)
monk (+0.84399)	calamities (+0.78566)	deprive (+0.75821)	receives (+0.80697)
mortally (+0.84201)	efforts (+0.78276)	awaits (+0.75693)	signora (+0.87131)
horror (+0.84192)	ardently (+0.78264)	chamber (+0.75588)	convent (+0.86628)
grieves (+0.84136)	infinite (+0.78060)	deprived (+0.75587)	trembled (+0.86267)
atrocious (+0.84032)	vaults (+0.77977)	expired (+0.75540)	assassin (+0.86151)
obdurate (+0.83827)	humane (+0.77974)	fortune (+0.75511)	fear (+0.85964)
dungeon (+0.83539)	hapless (+0.77966)	innocence (+0.75478)	Madrid (+0.85547)
confident (+0.83515)	innumerable (+0.77859)	fainting (+0.75383)	court (+0.85539)
perfections (+0.83344)	captivating (+0.77757)	confinement (+0.75382)	tormented (+0.85472)
amiable (+0.83287)	cultivate (+0.77730)	groans (+0.75275)	gaming (+0.85406)
fainted (+0.83246)	torn (+0.77660)	seduced (+0.75241)	rigid (+0.84978)
caprices (+0.83169)	engaging (+0.77652)	libertine (+0.75162)	hero's (+0.84810)
extremely (+0.82924)	unheard (+0.77527)	horrid (+0.75147)	fails (+0.84545)
rural (+0.82767)	fix (+0.77464)	wretched (+0.75051)	unmindful (+0.84443)
informing (+0.82763)	opulent (+0.77370)	enraptured (+0.75013)	monk (+0.84399)

**Table 2:** Correlations for keywords *Naples* and *Sicily*

On the other hand, the results reported in Table 3 for the word *Rome* delineate a different kind of imagery that will be discussed below.

richness (+0.95963)	strife (+0.89318)	palaces (+0.82123)	weapon (+0.87620)
embroidered (+0.95363)	gaudy (+0.89289)	magistrate (+0.81834)	midst (+0.87615)
demonstrations (+0.951)	calculation (+0.89217)	payment (+0.91491)	rein (+0.87559)
crowded (+0.94994)	furnished (+0.89189)	enterprise (+0.91490)	galloped (+0.87490)
bustling (+0.94918)	brow (+0.89100)	arrest (+0.91486)	expediency (+0.87201)
falsely (+0.94733)	retainers (+0.89045)	sprinkled (+0.91437)	vast (+0.87197)
number (+0.94358)	royal (+0.88723)	mounted (+0.91395)	attorney (+0.87100)



walls (+0.94173)	perfumed (+0.88537)	harassing (+0.91349)	highness (+0.87052)
flourishing (+0.93954)	pestilence (+0.88429)	splendid (+0.91309)	statues (+0.86716)
mob (+0.93818)	halls (+0.88418)	conflicting (+0.91282)	rivalry (+0.86662)
draught (+0.93648)	defy (+0.88307)	ground (+0.91199)	cannon (+0.86598)
demon (+0.93632)	magnificent (+0.88304)	pope (+0.91124)	dwellings (+0.86420)
spectacle (+0.92652)	truth (+0.88228)	swear (+0.90796)	glassy (+0.86337)
realm (+0.92524)	vessels (+0.88130)	devouring (+0.90695)	sophisticated (+0.86183)
figured (+0.92521)	ushered (+0.88114)	constituted (+0.90689)	follower (+0.86083)
dimensions (+0.92413)	high-minded (+0.88085)	familiarly (+0.90659)	gallantly (+0.85948)
wine (+0.92061)	affair (+0.88069)	building (+0.90457)	holiness (+0.84982)
lordly (+0.91850)	bloodshed (+0.88067)	pompous (+0.90274)	canvass (+0.84724)
squire (+0.91828)	demeanor (+0.88051)	dazzling (+0.90272)	apprentice (+0.82125)
beset (+0.91822)	arrested (+0.88010)	leathern (+0.89771)	
tread (+0.91692)	habitual (+0.87991)	sentinel (+0.89653)	
single (+0.91602)	regiments (+0.87967)	gates (+0.89652)	
calculating (+0.87633)	court (+0.87869)	cloak (+0.89632)	

**Table 3:** Correlations for keyword *Rome*

Finally, Table 4 shows the correlations for *Florence* and *Tuscany*.

staggering (+0.96213)	slap (+0.90467)	table (+0.87884)
purchases (+0.95717)	cushion (+0.90395)	boudoir (+0.87869)
flinging (+0.95351)	overhanging (+0.90366)	oriental (+0.87108)
grinning (+0.94502)	interposed (+0.90353)	waistcoat (+0.87058)
glance (+0.93277)	glancing (+0.90122)	mother-in-law (+0.86992)
thrusting (+0.93115)	astounding (+0.90119)	Hand (+0.86924)
confidential (+0.92511)	unusual (+0.89982)	Mastery (+0.86779)
hissing (+0.92213)	tumbler (+0.89636)	blanched (+0.90628)
winked (+0.92143)	bolted (+0.89588)	drawing (+0.90564)



exciting (+0.91920)	handkerchief (+0.89500)	tone (+0.90559)
aloud (+0.91736)	rambling (+0.89443)	clothing (+0.88157)
spinster (+0.91728)	satin (+0.89236)	glass (+0.88056)
glimpse (+0.91629)	loan (+0.89236)	tranquilly (+0.88019)
intently (+0.91537)	sprang (+0.89204)	bust (+0.90725)
ghastly (+0.91229)	appreciate (+0.89170)	shirt (+0.90638)
sternly (+0.91215)	awaiting (+0.89094)	expression (+0.88300)
moment's (+0.91183)	handkerchiefs (+0.88940)	wink (+0.88287)
pause (+0.90799)		

**Table 4:** Correlations for keyword *Tuscany*

The data resulting from the unsupervised word-correlation procedure reveal an interesting differentiation in the significant traits of these four sets of locations. In fact, whereas groups 1 and 2 (Italy as a country along with Naples, Palermo and Sicily) seem to be ascribable to the same type of semantic identity, although with slight variations; such is not the case for groups 3 and 4 (Rome, Florence and Tuscany). Indeed, as a whole country, the location named Italy is proven to be highly correlated to a specific set of genre-determined words: *Mysterious, Vice, Haunt, Chateau, Orphan, Treacherous, Villain, Death-like, Ruined, Prison, Confinement, Voluptuous, Libertine*. Likewise, the correlation experiment confirms the association of the semantic identity of Naples, Palermo, and Sicily to the motifs and features belonging to the gothic conventions evoked through words, such as *Artifice, Dungeons, Nun, Monk, Inquisition, Horror, Fainting, Ruffian, Fear, Misfortune, Torture, Pallid, Robber, and Captivating* (Perazzini 2013).

On the other hand, the semantic field related to the central areas of the Italian peninsula does not seem to be articulated around this same univocal connotation. In fact, the like-trend words that correlate with Rome can be divided into at least two categories: Turmoil (*Demonstration, Mob, Walls, Weapon, Regiment, Arrested, Sentinel, Cannon, Rivalry, Conflicting*) and Nobility (*Gallantly, Court, Palace, Royal, Cloak, Squire, Sophisticated, Furnished, Vessel, Mounted, Pompous, Galloped, Demeanour, Highness, Calculation*). Similarly, Tuscany encompasses a narrower version of the same aristocratic imagery which characterises Rome with the presence of correlations, such as *Purchase, Clothing, Satin, Glass, Table, Boudoir, Oriental, Waistcoat, Awaiting, Handkerchiefs, Flinging, Glancing, Expression, Wink, Loan, Pause*. Beside suggesting a radical increase in the cultural significance of a new type of genteel sensibility both in terms of material culture and social habits, the changes in the composition of the semantic field of Tuscany certainly implies a shift in genre-determined associations that are worth exploring elsewhere.

## 5. Conclusion

As the characterisation of literary space has always been subject to symbolic readings, the concrete details of actual geography have more to do with a spiritual hermeneutic rather than with immediate observation. In this perspective, the two experiments presented constitute an attempt to operationalise what Moretti defines as *ortgebunden*, that is to say the place-bound nature of literary forms, where the emergence of new geographical regions in the realm of British cultural imagery can be seen as associated to the rise of specific genres. The study of such direct proportionality between the historical occurrence of our set of Italian locations and their semantic behaviour has then revealed how the gothic novel is certainly the form that more than any other exploited the mysterious geography of the *Bel Paese* as its major source of inspiration. Articulated on a claustrophobic narrative of confinement, it is indeed during the dark season of this genre that the southern areas of the peninsula impose themselves as a synecdoche for the whole country, thus popularising the stereotype of Italy as an exotic *laba*, to use Baudelaire's words, of sublime landscapes,



violence, despotic ruling classes and degenerate passions. Not too dissimilar from the late-century Orientalist reverie, Italy was turned by the gothic writers into a de-domesticised space of strangeness and subversion, where the tensions and bewilderment of the Age of Revolutions could find their environmental conditions of possibility.

Then, as the 19th century progressed, the statistical relevance of Italian central locations, such as Rome and Tuscany began to obscure the primacy of the southern regions. Although it is clear that the representation of these new areas eludes the specific constraints of the gothic imagery, both chronologically and semantically, the variety of correlations that these locations produce does not seem to allow a conclusive classification in terms of a genre-determined geography. One possible interpretation of the rise of the Roman and Tuscan settings within the British novelistic corpus could be linked to the discourse of emotional apprehension of decay that pervaded post-Romantic literature. Indeed, the publication of the last volume of Edward Gibbon's masterpiece *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1789 should be seen as a major formative element in the anticipations of all subsequent English literary representations of Rome. The political desolation of Italy in the tumultuous season of the Risorgimento is therefore embodied in the semantic characterisation of Rome through an imagery of riots, public demonstrations, as well as palace plots; all elements that echo Gibbon's original reflections on the vulnerability of civilisation that paved the way to the English interest in the Italian cause for freedom. Another possible speculation regarding the shift of the Italian semantic identity toward a more refined and aristocratic set of values geographically tied to the Tuscan region can be traced to the consequence of the succession of studies on Renaissance Italy of considerable quality and importance.<sup>6</sup> As the cradle and symbol of such a cultural experience, Tuscany imposed itself in the British literary imagery as a space of individualism, amoral enjoyment of life, and colourfulness which appeared to be repressed by the dominant ethos of the Victorian period. Moreover, the horizon of narratological possibilities disclosed by the emergence of Tuscan locations in the space of the British novel may also be interpreted as a Victorian satire of what George Eliot would call "the brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society" and their perverted values.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, as in many other pioneering studies in computational criticism, the hermeneutical interpretation of literary evidence does not always meet one's expectations. This is mainly due to a paradigmatic problem, namely the fact that the corpus-based model of literary history proposed by macro-analytical approaches clashes with the analogical text-based interpretative practice that we, as scholars, are still tied to. In the case of this project, for example, turning the above presented critical speculations into a more empirically supported thesis will take a further perfecting of the experiment that would combine macro and micro perspectives, distant and close-reading. I am aware that identifying and taking into account the single novels of the Stanford Literary Lab corpus that contributed to the construction of the semantic characterisation of the Italian setting across the decades would certainly improve the quality and the validity of the interpretation while providing further explanations to the statistical data retrieved. However, it is possible to consider this work as a preliminary study that serves to stress the potential of the computer-based macro-analysis not only in terms of enabling the investigation of larger-scale literary phenomena but also, and especially, for its capacity of suggesting new stimulating challenges otherwise unperceived and unperceivable.

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<sup>6</sup> As Hilary Fraser points out in her book *The Victorian and Renaissance Italy*, before the popularity of the scholarly works by Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds in the 1870s, the Victorian re-invention of Renaissance Italy can be rooted to the increase in gallery exhibitions from mid-century and to the positive contribution from 1849 of the publication of the London-based Arundel Society or "Society from promoting the knowledge of Art".

<sup>7</sup> From the 1840s on, a series of minor works of fiction mocked the character of the tourist in Italy. The perverted values of Anglo-Florentine society were attacked in Charles Lever's *The Dodd Family Abroad* (1852–4), or Frances Trollope's *The Robertses on their Travels* (1846), and *Tales of All Countries* (2nd series, 1863), or *Travelling Sketches* (1866).



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