

2025



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**REAP** Revista de Estudos  
Anglo-Portugueses

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# JAPPS

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Journal of Anglo-Portuguese Studies

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Centre for English, Translation  
and Anglo-Portuguese Studies



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**TÍTULO**

Revista de Estudos Anglo-Portugueses / Journal of Anglo-Portuguese Studies

Número 34 2025

ISSN: 0871-6820

SCOPUS / LATINDEX / RUN / MIAR / DOCBWEB

URL: <https://revistas.fcsh.unl.pt/REAP>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34619/gpwb-21jj>

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da Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Av. de Berna, 26 - C - 1069-061 Lisboa

<http://www.cetaps.com>

**DESIGN**

Nuno Pacheco Silva

**PAGINAÇÃO**

Pedro Panarra

**EDIÇÃO**

Tiragem: 100 exemplares

FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

Edições Húmus, Lda., 2025

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**DISTRIBUIÇÃO**

Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies

Depósito Legal n.º 93441/95

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# “The infection of liberty has reached this country”: The First Liberal Attempts in Portugal Represented by the British Press

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## Introduction

The Liberal Revolution of 24 August 1820, in Oporto, marked the beginning of a more resonant and compelling effort to change the state of political affairs in Portugal, which had been significantly encouraged by the circulation, since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, of pre-liberal ideas and the profusion of conceptions of liberty and law that tried to fight against the old tendencies of the Old Regime, redefining the political contract between the people and the sovereign, under the mechanisms of juridical and parliamentary control. This rule represented a kind of political backbone of liberalism and constitutionalism that strengthened its position, both in theory and in practice, in many European and American states. As a result, Portugal faced the challenges posed to a peripheral power, at the centre of a territorial dispute over Portugal and the Atlantic in the international scenario, personified by the hegemonic interests of the most considerable maritime and commercial power at the time, Great Britain, Spain and the Eurocontinental supremacy

led by the French civilisational model, of which the Napoleonic Wars were the most obvious consequence.

During this military campaign that spanned the entire European continent, Portugal faced three incursions by French armies into its territory. These invasions were justified by accusations of Portugal adopting a dilatory and hesitant international policy, aimed at ending Lisbon's satellite status to London. The core issue was the enforcement of the Continental Blockade, decreed by Bonaparte in an effort to economically suffocate Britain. Portugal became a strategic target to support British power in the Atlantic. For France, it served as a pawn to limit maritime dominance and hinder free trade, the foundation of Britain's wealth and power. (Sardica, *A Europa Napoleónica e Portugal* 79-89) Ultimately, the Napoleonic order posed a serious threat to the Portuguese monarchy, with disastrous potential outcomes: on the one hand, the threat of French and Spanish annexation of Portugal, which would mean the end of the Bragança dynasty's sovereignty; and, on the other, the risk of breaking the long-standing Luso-British alliance and Britain's conquest of Brazil and other colonies vital for the Portuguese economy.

Due to this political turmoil, the Portuguese court moved to Brazil in 1807, under the protection of London, which objectively demonstrated the British ascendancy over Portugal, under conditions that greatly contradicted Portuguese sovereignty and reflected "the early recognition of Portugal's inability to secure its own independence".<sup>1</sup> (Bonifácio 328) Naturally, since 1807, British ambitions for Portugal found in the protection granted the ideal scenario to dictate Portugal's total dependence on the allied power. Politically, militarily and economically, the prince-regent consented to the growing assertion of British interests in the metropolis and the colonies, particularly in Brazil. There is a consensus that the protectorate situation in which Portugal found itself, driven by circumstances, led to the emergence of nationalist and patriotic sentiments, based on the propaganda of anti-absolutism and an economic situation faced by Portuguese

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1. Our translation from the Portuguese.

society that increased, after the anti-French sentiment, an enormous unease with the urgency of English interests in Portugal. Fernando Dores Costa highlights the role of Beresford in this situation, noting that he saw his powers strengthened by the prince-regent, who subordinated all authorities to military rule. If that could be accepted in wartime, it soon became notorious that this exceptional condition would be the manifestation of an effective British political and military order in Portugal. (Costa 187)

From an economic perspective, the socio-demographic impacts and devastation caused by years of war had led to the slowdown in trade to worrying levels for the national bourgeoisie, as well as the inoperability of industry and the impossibility of resuming agricultural activity. Alongside this socio-economic paralysis, there were also strong British commercial interests in Brazil, strengthened by the favourable conditions of the Treaty of 1810 and the early manifestations of Brazil's autonomist and independence movements, which would ultimately lead to its independence in 1822. (Sardica, *Portugal e Inglaterra, o Liberalismo e o Império* 34) However, the population's dissatisfaction was also fuelled, particularly since 1817 and Gomes Freire de Andrade's conspiracy, by the army, where "the resentment of this foreign military domination or the expectation of the places liberated by its end later served to explain the assent of the Portuguese officialdom to the pronouncement in Porto".<sup>2</sup> (Ramos 151)

Finally, the government in Lisbon, handed over to a regency discredited by the state of British military dependence, never able to recover from the consequences of the Napoleonic wars, was threatened by the actions of secret organisations, namely the Freemasons and the Sanhedrin, who capitalised on the kingdom's feeling of political orphanhood and a growing popular support for political regeneration in the country. This was in the face of the defence of the Joane monarchy by the British authorities installed in the capital and the reinstatement of absolutism by the Holy Alliance across Europe in the post-Napoleonic period.

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2. Our translation from the Portuguese.

After the new political order resulting from the Congress of Vienna, it became paramount for the British that the Portuguese satellite did not yield to the continental absolutism of the Holy Alliance. Under no circumstances could it allow itself to be dominated by any Spanish influence or any Franco-centric resurgence. The goal was to avoid the revitalisation of trade blockades as had occurred in 1806. (Sardica, *Portugal e Inglaterra, o Liberalismo e o Império* 33) In any case, the much-desired stability of the Concert of Nations faced enormous liberal resistance throughout Europe. In Spain, following the Constitution of 1812, the reformist spirit was revived during the so-called liberal triennium (1820-1823), while similar movements spread throughout Greece and Sicily. In 1821, the Greek Revolution ceased to be a simple, localised movement, extending to central Greece and clearly taking on an anti-imperialist stance against Ottoman power, with consequences that would be felt throughout the Mediterranean. (Maurizio, *Southern Europe*) Meanwhile, the 1820 uprisings in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies adopted the constitutionalist discourse and the liberal message of regeneration. These were supported by General Pepe's actions, which spread beyond the Italian peninsula and became another revolutionary wave in the Euro-Atlantic liberal tide. (Fruci 40)

Within this context, Portugal remained under the influence of England's interests, consolidating the political relations between the two countries since medieval times, alongside the growth in trade relations. Nonetheless, according to Bonifácio, it was not only mutual trade interests but mainly British national security that became the major concern for the British government due to the competition between England and France, after the Peace of Vienna. (Bonifácio 285)

Consequently, Portugal was influenced by an English presence led by General Beresford, whose political, economic, and diplomatic influence caused some discomfort among the Portuguese social and political elites. The Anglo-Portuguese relations drew particular interest from the British press regarding the events of 1820, which, with varying degrees of reliability, aimed to report news from Portugal

through private letters, Portuguese newspapers, or foreign press sources, especially French papers.

Over the last few decades, the increased use of various historical sources has expanded this concept to press production and the representations it creates on a wide range of subjects, including political, economic, social, and cultural history. Since the methodological renewal of history in the twentieth century, interest in newspapers and periodicals as reliable sources, often as primary or secondary sources, has grown significantly. However, other sources must also be considered to validate the most commonly and traditionally used sources, as well as those that approach the study of the past from new historiographical perspectives. Press information, when carefully examined, helps to understand past phenomena and representations. Such a methodological approach, of course, has raised some suspicion as the information provided by newspapers may be considered biased and distorted, according to Luca. (112)

Although newspapers can be biased, properly analysed content provides valuable insights into specific contexts. Cross-checking with other sources is essential to avoid misinterpretation. Álvaro Costa de Matos argues that the press is crucial for reconstructing history, filling gaps when contextualised within editorial, political, and cultural frameworks. Periodicals reveal both propaganda and challenges to authority, shaping public opinion and offering a lens into the society that produced them. (Matos 176-178)

This study examines British press reactions to Portugal's 1820 Liberal Revolution, focusing on editorial perspectives shaped by Anglo-Portuguese relations and post-Napoleonic Europe. It highlights how British newspapers represented the revolution in its first year and the role of transnational information networks in constructing and circulating these narratives.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Part of this study was presented at the International Conference *Bicentenários: As Revoluções Liberais de 1820 e o seu Impacto na Cultura Literária*, organised by CEHUM-Minho University, in July 2022, albeit under a different title. Furthermore, following two exploratory publications on this subject (Couceiro and Silva, "News from Portugal" and "Liberalismo e opinião pública"), which covered only the initial months after the revolution, this study aims to provide a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis about the topic under investigation.

In our analysis we selected several newspapers with varying editorial lines – Conservative/Tory-supported –, such as *The Times*, the *Morning Post*, *The British Press*, *Public Ledger*, *Daily Advertiser*, and *The Sun*; the moderate Liberal – Whigs-supported – include the *Morning Chronicle*, *The (London) Star*, *The Globe*, *The Statesman*, and *The National Register*; alongside those adopting a more radical stance – *Monthly Repository*, *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, *The Black Dwarf*, and *The Examiner*. All are based in London, but other regional newspapers also covered this issue, such as *Leeds Intelligence*, *Windsor and Eton Express*, *Carlisle Patriot*, and *Caledonian Mercury*.

Coverage of Portugal's Liberal Revolution was far more frequent in London-based newspapers than in regional, Scottish, or Irish papers, with many titles often repeating the same reports. Still, it is vital to analyse differences in editorial lines and the political and social nuances and critiques expressed in this coverage. To do so, one must also consider the British context of the early nineteenth century, marked by reformist ideas, social unrest, and a press that played a crucial role in championing freedom of the press and serving as a beacon of hope and a regulatory instrument against political corruption. Within this climate, the Portuguese revolution was interpreted in contrasting ways: for some, the liberal revolution in Portugal meant liberty and a more controlled monarchy, but others viewed it with suspicion.

## **1. Reform and Political Radicalism in Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century**

Britain's first decades of the nineteenth century were crucial in shaping reforms, driven by political, economic, and social shifts. Therefore, the interest in the Portuguese revolution coincided with a period of political unrest in Britain. The early nineteenth century was marked by vigorous political radicalism. Following Waterloo, radical political ideas spread from various ideological groups, influenced by the social and political transformations envisioned by the French Revolution and rooted in Enlightenment thought.

Political radicalism was a key element that balanced the bipartisan political landscape, which was mainly dominated by the most traditional ruling parties, the Whigs and Tories. For a more radical political faction, the press served as a “mobilisation forum” aimed at radical parliamentary reform. (Gilmartin 1) Enlightenment ideals, especially the belief in reform through critical public discourse among a growing educated population, began to regain influence within the radical press, as Paul Keen argues. (xi)

By 1820, Britain, especially England, was grappling with intense social and political unrest. The cauldrons of reform agitated the Tory government, led by Lord Liverpool, who served as Prime Minister from 1812 to 1827. Liverpool’s government, “reactionary” but sitting “edgily on the right centre”, inherited “a post-war slump”, severe industrial unrest, lingering war debt, and the challenge of reintegrating demobilised servicemen. The Whig opposition attacked it heavily “through the medium of the new literary reviews, and a rich culture of popular protest, from the ‘unstamped’ newspapers of Henry Hetherington and Richard Carlile to the bucolic radicalism of William Cobbett and the visionary millenarianism of William Blake”. (Morgan 492)

The claims and protests for parliamentary reform reached their peak in 1819 with the Manchester Massacre, also known as the Peterloo Massacre. Faced with a huge demonstration organised by Henry Hunt, one of the most outspoken radical figures in society, the Manchester Magistrates, fearing the radicalism it involved, ordered the yeomanry to suppress the peaceful protests. This decision resulted in the death of eleven people and the injury of over 400. (Black 214; Morgan 493; Hilton 252) According to Hilton, this episode “held great importance for the Radicals, but for the political nation, as a whole, fear of the mob outweighed acknowledgement that on this occasion the local authorities had overreacted”. (252)

The Whigs and the Radicals, further angered by this tragedy, used the press as a powerful tool to disseminate liberal ideals and accelerate the process of parliamentary reform. According to Victoria Gardner, “press freedom became vital to ensure good governance because

newspapers came to act as mediators between parliament and people, enabling the exercise of public opinion". (197) Victoria Gardner describes the newspapers of the time as 'parasitic' as they "relied on European newspapers and correspondence, diplomatic dispatches, merchants and the captain of ships, printed scaffold speeches, and Royal exchange and coffee-house gossip". (198)

In the wake of the Peterloo Massacre, and in an effort to prevent mob disturbances, the government enacted repressive laws. Ratified in November 1819, the Six Acts negatively affected the Radical Press by raising Stamp duties on newspapers and periodicals. Furthermore, public meetings of more than 50 people could not be held without prior approval. (Hilton 252)

## 2. The Role of the British Press in the Early Nineteenth Century: Liberty Claims

Despite the approval of the Newspaper Stamp Duties Act and the Seditious Meetings Prevention Act, (Gilmartin 67) which "redefined taxes on newspapers", (Shattock xviii) newspapers still enjoyed some press freedom, even though it was limited by "obvert practices such as the prohibitive 'taxes on knowledge' targeting the radical press". (Bantman 3) Nevertheless, to survive, some newspapers became affiliated with political causes and parties. For example, T. J. Wooler, the editor and owner of the *Black Dwarf*, a satirical radical unstamped newspaper, when struggling to maintain regular publications, was sponsored by Major J. Cartwright, one of the prominent supporters of Reform.

Based on the premise of the sanctity of the liberty of the press, the British Press was "perceived as a means of protection against governmental oppression, with a key mission to educate and enlighten the people in political matters and integral to popular sovereignty". (Bantman 3) The Press as the Fourth Estate gained consistency in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Newspapers were considered a "public watchdog", (Barker 12) playing a pivotal role in denouncing

corruption and defending citizens' rights. (Barker 1-2) The end of the Printing Act in 1695, which removed several printing restrictions, the right to report Parliament in 1771, and the 1774 Act, which abolished perpetual copyright, (Williams 14, Barker 1, Hilton 15) marked meaningful steps towards freedom of the press in England. It was not until 1861, with the abolition of the final press tax, that its full impact was achieved.

Despite high illiteracy rates, a print culture was becoming part of people's lives. London dominated the printing world. Since the eighteenth century, readership has steadily increased, and books, newspapers, and periodicals have gained widespread popularity. Newspapers and periodicals were shared and read by the working and middle classes interested in reform. (Harris and Lee) Public houses were also "the most important access points" in facilitating many press titles, which were provided to customers. Furthermore, as noted by Michael Harris and Alan J. Lee, "group purchase and reading, the hire and posting of copies, loan arrangements between business colleagues, neighbours, or families and their dependents gave a widespread experience of the press". (23)

With only a few titles available in the early eighteenth century, the proliferation of newspapers became evident throughout the nineteenth century. Despite the strict restrictions on press freedom, London experienced a rise in the number of newspapers published during the "revolutionary years of 1816-1821" as "the annual production of stamped newspapers rose from seven million in 1801 to 16.3 million twenty years later". (White 228)

Notwithstanding its social and political regulatory role, the press also served the interests of politicians. According to Harris and Lee, (23) politicians used the press to pursue their political goals, influencing voters at elections despite the limited scope of the franchise. Therefore, by contributing "to the gradual extension of the political nation", (Harris and Lee 23) the newspapers claimed to be a powerful and legitimate communication channel, shaping public opinion.

Newspapers followed different editorial policies depending on their owners' political aims. The owner served as both editor and

writer, commenting on current events. Kevin Williams argues that the emergence of the editor is linked to the rise of class politics. (17) To survive, due to the numerous duties imposed on the press, newspapers became associated with political causes or parties, finding ways to secure patronage.

*The Times*, a newspaper supported by the Tories, served the interests of the upper classes. It began in 1785, initially known as the *Daily Universal Register*. (Brake and Demoor, xii) *The Morning Chronicle*, Whig-supported, was founded in 1769 with William Woodwall serving as "its printer, reporter and editor", succeeded by James Perry. (Hunt 99, Brake and Demoor x) Frederick K. Hunt claims that in 1819 *The Morning Chronicle* "was the most uncompromising of all opposition papers, and its sale was then higher than either before or afterwards, till 1835, when Sir Robert Peel's Tory Ministry was supported by the Times". (Hunt 110-111) The conservative *The Morning Post* first appeared in 1772. It was "a liberal opposition paper", (Hunt 142) but in the early years of the nineteenth century, it became Tory. (Brake and Demoor x) *The Globe*, an evening paper, founded in 1803, "moved from apolitical to Whig to Tory over the century". (Brake and Demoor x)

The revolutionary and reformist atmosphere of Britain's first two decades of the nineteenth century, as well as the years leading up to the Reform Act of 1832, was also marked by the widespread circulation of radical newspapers, periodicals, and books. In fact, between 1816 and 1820, the "hand-press" and the "weekly periodical" helped shape popular Radicalism, with the liberty of the press being one of its key claims, alongside political organisation and freedom of public meeting. (Thompson 738-739) Founders of newspapers, including John and Leigh Hunt, Henry Hunt, Richard Carlile, T. J. Wooler, and William Cobbett, (Thompson 661) were also influential voices of the radical movement. They fed a radical press that served reform interests and parliamentary reform, in addition to voicing "the suffering labouring classes of England". (Smith 25)

William Cobbett's weekly *Political Register*, founded in 1802, was initially Tory, (Thompson 492, Shattock xvii) but ultimately radicalised. (Brake and Demoor x) Leigh Hunt was the first editor of

*The Examiner* in 1808. This newspaper “served with brilliance as the weekly of the Radical intelligentsia”. (Thompson 741) Furthermore, Henry Hunt established the satirical radical newspaper *The Black Dwarf* in 1817, which continued until 1824. It targeted the working and middle classes interested in reform. Henry Hunt and his contributors wrote about “Universal Manhood suffrage, the misuse of sedition laws and the suspension of the Habeas Corpus, the justice system, taxation, parliament”, (Brake and Demoor 58) among other topics.

The few examples provided illustrate the diverse purposes of newspapers, reflecting the political connections and editorial lines that guided their owners at the time. These individuals could also serve as editors, illustrators, or writers, featuring news about political and social events, to promote liberal ideas and denounce corruption. Some served the interests of their benefactor, giving visibility to their patron’s political or economic interests. The revolution in Portugal was also a matter of interest to the British Press, regardless of each newspaper’s editorial line.

### 3. The Liberal Revolution in Portugal: British Press Representations

Unsurprisingly, the events in Portugal provided news that was understood and portrayed differently depending on each newspaper’s editorial stance. For Whig and radical papers, the revolution was seen as a hopeful and eagerly awaited event. Conversely, more conservative newspapers, such as *The Times*, regarded the revolution’s outcomes with fear and suspicion:

The news from Portugal of this day is highly interesting. It appears that Gen. Amarante,<sup>4</sup> who at first seemed to be attached to the old government, and upon whose adherence great faith was placed, has joined the

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4. General Amarante (Francisco da Silveira Pinto da Fonseca Teixeira) was the first Earl of Amarante, also known as General Silveira. He was a senior officer in the Portuguese Army and a politician who gained prominence during the Peninsular War.

revolutionary Party. The business, therefore, may be considered as decided in the country of our faithful ally. Would to God we were equally well assured that the Portuguese would as speedily arrive at tranquility and a free establishment; but revolutionary courses are fearful and uncertain ones to all parties; they should neither be provoked on the one hand, nor adopted without overwhelming necessity on the other. (*Apud The Sun*, 27 September 1820)<sup>5</sup>

of the REGENCY, it is evident that the Revolution goes on prosperously and apace, and this is fully confirmed by an arrival also from Oporto. The soldiers, as fast as they are enabled to express their sentiments, join the patriotic cause. The regiment of Santarom had raised the Constitutional Standard, and it was reported that the 20th regiment being deserted by its leaders, two British Officers carried them over to the Portenians. Count Amarante is also said to have declared in their favour, but we should rather think it is the troops and province of Tras-os-Montes he commanded. The province of Beira and its Governor, Victoria, have entered into the patriotic coalition, as well as the corps under Count Barbacena. In short, the population and strength of the country seem deserting the Regency as fast as they can, notwithstanding the powerful aid of Count Palmella's counsils, and the stratagems resorted to. In order to bribe the soldiery by satisfying their arrears of pay, the Regency had attempted to raise a contribution or loan among the capitalists, but after all their exertions they could only get one subscriber for about 100*l.* sterling. This shews the feeling of Lisbon. They had also suspended the British Officers in the Portuguese service for six months, thinking by this means to conciliate the public opinion. On the 10th the Creole sailed for Rio Janeiro with the news of the Revolution, and it seems strange that they had not one of their own ships ready. The Perola was, however, fitting out, no doubt to be in readiness for any emergency. The Government paper had risen from 27 to 23½ discount. A large fire had broken out near the river at Boa Vista, in the shipwright's stores, by which a large quantity of staves, iron and coals had been destroyed. The favourable accounts transmitted by Colonel Sepulveda to the new Government at Oporto, had induced them to move on towards Lisbon, and for the present to establish themselves at Coimbra. This exhibits the attitude in which they stand, and the firm reliance they have on the entire concurrence of the people.—(*Ibid.*)

[*The Times.*]

The News from PORTUGAL of this day is highly interesting. It appears that Gen. Amarante, who at first seemed to be attached to the old Government, and upon whose adherence great faith was placed, has joined the Revolutionary Party. The business, therefore, may be considered as decided in the country of our faithful ally. Would to God we were equally well assured that the Portuguese would as speedily arrive at tranquility and a free establishment; but revolutionary courses are fearful and uncertain.

abhorrence.—(*Ibid.*)

[*British Press.*]

THE LISBON PAPERS contain several Proclamations, addressed by the Regency to the troops at Oporto, and in other parts of the kingdom, carefully distinguishing those who, as they say, deviated from their duty, and those who, by not declaring publicly for the Constitutionals, are concluded by the Regency to have been faithful to the old Government. In these addresses the members of the Regency venture to assume a high tone, but their swaggering is not sufficient to conceal the real terror that influences their conduct. They boast of the fidelity of the major part of the army, and tell the "deluded" few, that if it had so pleased them they might soon have displayed the strength of the King's authority, and the irresistible weight of their vengeance. And yet in the Proclamation for convoking the Cortes, the Regency acknowledged that they thus acted in conformity with the general wishes of the army and the nation! The Junta forming the Provisional Government of the northern provinces are acknowledged by a large portion of the army and several of the provinces. They have lately removed the seat of their Government from Oporto to Coimbra, leaving a Committee at the former place. The Lisbon Papers, under the control of the Regency, affirm that the discipline of several of the Oporto troops has been extremely relaxed, to a degree dangerous even to their Officers. Accounts from Oporto of the 13th say, that this army had then commenced its march upon Lisbon.—An impression prevailed very generally, both in Lisbon and Oporto, that the British Cabinet would interfere in the internal affairs of Portugal, and maintain the old form of government.—This belief has excited an angry feeling among all classes of persons, but, as it would seem, more particularly among the troops, for it is to the troops that the Regency especially address themselves when they undertake to remove the impression. They affirm, that not only has no foreign Power offered to lend its aid to the Government for the restoration of the long-established usages, but that the Regency entertained no desire to receive any such assistance. English persons and property continue to be respected in every part of Portugal.

[*Morning Herald.*]

IT IS TO BE FEARED THE REVOLUTION in PORTUGAL will not be completed without a shock between the Lisbon and Oporto Parties. In the Capital of the Kingdom there is a feeling of jealousy against Oporto. We have even under-

Majesty's secret instigators. The Ward of Farringdon Without is informed, that "the Selish Faction" is aiming a blow at the rights of every individual in the realm. The Inhabitants of Cripplegate are reminded of the 5 domineering views of that Selish Faction." The Spitalfields Addressers hear of the same "Selish Faction" as her ugly enemies. And the People of Leeds are informed, that "the Selish Faction are her Majesty's accusers."—The people of England who know that under this term, the Selish Faction, is included all that is great, venerable, wise, or honourable in the country, will not fail to appreciate such language. They will feel that she who is made to express her hope that she may be the means of "overthrowing the power of this Faction," and of "delivering the people of England from oppression," is made in effect to assume to herself the office of First Revolutionary Leader.

[*Morning Post.*]

A MEETING was yesterday held at the FERRASONS' TAVERN, to CONGRATULATE the QUEEN on the ATTORNEY-GENERAL having closed his CASE. The room was full, and the Ladies, in their best bits and tuckers, presented as splendid a display of fashion and beauty as Mrs. Watson, and the Radical belles exhibited at the Crown and Anchor on the day of the memorable meeting to congratulate the triumph of Mr. Hunt. We make no comparison between the two cases, but some may think the exultation of yesterday a little premature, as the Crown and Anchor Congratulations turned out to be. It seems, however, that her Majesty's friends, in the plenitude of their purity, are quite astonished and delighted at finding the facts proved to be so very slight, though in the same breath they rave against the perjuries of the witnesses who state so much. Mr. Hobhouse made his appearance among the Ladies with boots and spurs. They ought to have given him a vote of thanks (after the manner of Joe Miller) for leaving his horse behind. He came, and was called to the chair, and took about an hour from the company to amuse himself with a speech. Some parts of his harangue were very edifying. He has discovered that if all that has been deposed against her Majesty should prove true to the letter, it will not be a question of "morals," but of "manners." John Cam Hobhouse, Esquire, has discovered that a Queen of England may recline on her coach with a lover in the face of day;—that she may sit on his lap, with her arms round his neck;—bathe with him;—all without the slightest imputation on her morals, though pos-

Fig. 1 – Extracts of letters and articles from other newspapers. *The Sun*, 27 September 1820 (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002194/18200927/020/0004>)

5. V. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> All newspapers, except *The Black Dwarf* and *The Monthly Repository*, have been consulted at this online archive, which displays digitized versions of the newspapers.

This extract exemplifies the common practice of news publication followed by various newspapers, whether based in London or more provincial areas. Possibly due to delays in sourcing information and the necessity to keep the public informed about recent and relevant topics, newspapers relied on news published by other papers, dispatches, or private letters. As shown in Figure 1, *The Sun*, besides trusting *The Times*, also reprinted news from *The Morning Herald*, *The Morning Post*, and *British Press*.

News about the revolution in Portugal began to be published in British newspapers on 12 September 1820, including titles such as *Windsor and Eton Express* and the *Globe*. These papers reproduced the content of the Portuguese *Gazette* dated 30 August and featured extracts of letters, as seen in the *Globe*:

The Lisbon packet (...) has brought the “gratifying” intelligence that a revolution in the government of Portugal has already commenced. The revolution, it seems, originated in the city of Oporto, where the garrison proclaimed a constitution and then extracts of letters are shown. (*Globe*, “Foreign Intelligence”)

The most common headlines we can see are “Revolution in Portugal” or “Portuguese Revolution”. All newspapers relied on national secondary sources, such as *The Lisbon Papers* (*Gazeta de Lisboa/Lisbon Gazette*), dispatches, private letters, or Paris Papers (e.g., *Moniteur de Paris*). Essentially, the same news is reported, including the Proclamation of Independence by the Provisional Junta, which was issued on 24 August 1820. Figure 2 illustrates this, as seen in *The Morning Post* (“Revolution in Portugal” 4):

"Braga, August 27, 1820."

**PROCLAMATION.**

**THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE ARSENALS OF THE  
DIVISION OF OPORTO, TO THE PEOPLE OF THE SAME  
DIVISION AND THE TROOPS STATIONED IN IT, AND  
THE NATION.**

Portuguese! The day of glory and national independence has at last dawned. A Government, chosen by the People, is appointed; and speedily the same Cortes which existed at the time of the glorious restoration of the Portuguese name (but of which a feeble Administration has bereft us), secured our independence and the Throne of the most Serene House of Braganza. We are now about to confer equal benefits, securing in the most solemn manner a Constitution analogous to our customs, and which will protect us from the vices which despotism is sure to introduce into the most useful Institutions of the State. Wait quietly, I entreat you, the glorious destinies which are preparing for you. Confide in the Government which the Nation has chosen; and let every one perform willingly that to which he may be invited by his Country.—Exclaim with me—'Long live our good King John VIth.' 'Long live our sacred Religion.' 'Long live the Cortes, and by its means the Portuguese Constitution.

(Signed) "PHILIPPE DE SOUZA CANAVARRO.  
Head Quarters, Oporto, Aug. 25, 1820."

**PROCLAMATION.**

**FROM THE PROVISIONAL JUNTA OF THE SUPREME GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM, TO THE PORTUGUESE.**

"If the agitation which pervaded the several nations of Europe, shook their thrones, your army saved the country; immortalizing its name, it is not less meritorious that it should have removed it from the abyss into which it was precipitated by the almost total loss of the national representation.

"An inconsiderate Administration, full of error and vice, had

Fig. 2 – Proclamation of Independence from the Provisional Junta (*The Morning Post*) (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000082/18200922/005/0002>)

*The Star* published extracts of anonymous letters (dating from 8 September), news from the Portuguese press (*Lisbon Gazette*), and telegraphic dispatches from Paris announced in Calais on 9 September. *The Star* highlighted the inevitability of the revolution, bearing in mind the revolutionary episodes in Spain and Naples in the defence of constitutional values. The desertion of the Royal Family to Brazil, leaving Portugal's governance at the mercy of a foreign power, would also serve as a trigger to the revolution, as *The Star* wrote:

Ignorant of the real feelings of the Army, the Brazil Government had no doubt that an immediate remittance of power, to pay the arrears, would remedy the evils that began to be apparent. How ignorant must they have

been on the tone and feeling inspired among the troops by the events of the war which expelled the French from the peninsula! They had fought side by side with the Spaniards under constitutional banners, and in the same glorious cause. (*The Star*, "Revolution in Portugal")

Published on 14 September, letters from Oporto and news from the *Diário Nacional* (dated 31 August) provided further details about the events in Portugal, including arguments that help explain the causes of the revolution. Another letter, allegedly from an Englishman, emphasised the role of the British in Portugal:

In truth, the conduct of the English officers is highly laudable, and duly appreciated by the Portuguese; they are suspended from actual service until the pleasure of the Cortes is known, but in the meantime continue in possession of their pay and rank in the army; in fact, so pleased is the Provisional Government with their conduct, that it has issued a circular stating the above, and complimenting them in the highest terms for the services it will always feel grateful. (*The Star*, 14 September 1820)

This letter exempts the British from any possible onus on the revolution's causes or from a more irregular behaviour or attitude, as, naturally, they are educated and polite in any circumstance, as the letter claims. Like the Portuguese revolutionaries, the British also sought to throw off the yoke of tyranny and despotism both abroad and at home, using the argument of their relatively long constitutional tradition.

An article published in *The British Press*, a Tory newspaper, warned about the dangers of declaring independence while the royal authority remained in the former colony, Brazil. As such, it would appear more difficult to establish a limited monarchy "in consequence of the absence of the king from Portugal, and his consequent freedom from all personal and moral control." (*British Press*, 13 September 1820, 2) The article also highlighted the long-standing relationship between Britain and Portugal, particularly emphasising the crucial importance of trade between the two nations, a point strongly supported by those

who favoured the mercantile system. However, the article's stance was clear. It supported the Revolution unless it threatened Britain's commercial and economic interests.

(...) nothing could be more impolitic in our Government than to suffer at the present moment any part of our trade to be affected by a punctilious adherence to diplomatic forms. It is the duty of every change that takes place in the domestic concerns of another nation, until the contrary is clearly shown, and we certainly have no right even negatively to control the free expression of a people's will unless our own interests are materially affected. We trust that our Government will in their actions be careful how they injure the property of any considerable body of our mercantile body. (*British Press*, 13 September 1820, 2)

However, newspapers with a more liberal editorial independent stance, such as *The Statesman*, *The Morning Chronicle*, *The National Register*, or radical newspapers, went further in their interpretation of the events in Portugal and, more specifically, of the role of the British in Portugal. On 13 September 1820, *The Statesman*, in a piece of news titled "State of Opinion in Portugal", reinforced the idea that Portugal had lost its European political and economic importance due to the tyranny of a government that became narrow, bigoted, and tyrannical, curtailing people's liberty. Whilst progress and the spirit of liberal ideas illuminated the rest of Europe, Portugal remained stationary and under the complete servitude of the political and ecclesiastical institutions. (*The Statesman*, "State of Public Opinion in Portugal" 1) *The Morning Chronicle* ("Portuguese Revolution") and the *National Register* (24 September 1820) underlined that "the spirit of liberty is extending itself in every direction". "The powerful voice of a nation cannot be resisted" in their quest for liberty. As Portugal's ancient ally, Britain should rejoice in the face of these hopeful events.

Nonetheless, *The Morning Chronicle*, although applauding the ideals of the Portuguese Revolution, prudently refuted the idea that they supported the revolution in Portugal, Spain, and Naples on the grounds that the military brought it about. This newspaper's

position, in line with the principles of Whiggism, is that the British Government should never place its “trust in an armed force” as a Standing Army “might easily be made an instrument for the overthrow of the Government” (*The Morning Chronicle*, “Revolution in Portugal” 2) and, consequently, would be a pending threat to the Throne and the Constitution of Britain. This, of course, is in accordance with the seventeenth-century anti-army ideology, which defended the idea of “No standing Armies”, arguing that a standing army would be inconsistent with a free government, going against the constitution of the English monarchy. Being a tool for tyranny, visible in Cromwell’s autocratic rule, liberals feared the maintenance of a professional and costly military force. Instead, militias would better safeguard citizens’ interests and individual liberties. (Schwoerer 1) *The Carlisle Patriot* also reacted to the Revolution in Oporto, praising it, but calling attention to the potential dangers coming from a military mutiny:

It is true, that where the influence of the people has been extinguished, as in the lately revolutionized countries, by a long course of oppression, by the army alone can freedom be achieved; but it will always be found that, as in the case of Spain and Portugal, the soldiers’ motives are merely selfish; and never, never should a military mutiny be desired as the instrument of civil reformation, but in that case of dark and hopeless slavery, when the captive would become the lightning or the earthquake to rend his prison walls. The strongest government is that which owns no force but citizen soldiers. The weakest, that which permits the interference of soldier citizens. (*The Carlisle Patriot*, “Revolution in Portugal” 2)

This newspaper’s approach raises questions about the political, ideological, or corporate origins of the revolution in Oporto, as the British press was fully aware of Portugal’s political turmoil, driven by the sense of political abandonment due to the absence of the Portuguese crown in Brazil. Furthermore, another suspicion arose from the forced submissive positions of Portuguese officers concerning British dominance over the Portuguese Army. This uncomfortable

situation led to the death sentence of the Portuguese Army officer Gomes Freire de Andrade in 1817.

The radical press, such as *The Examiner*, *The Black Dwarf*, and *Cobbett's Political Register*, for instance, depicted the events in Portugal as "glorious" and, by selecting words carefully, potentially establishing an analogy with the 1688-89 "Glorious" Revolution, created a discourse aligned with the same liberal ideals defended at home: "Our attention has been so entirely absorbed by the affairs of her Majesty, that we have scarcely been able to look at the glorious events, which have taken place in Spain, Naples, and especially Portugal." (*Political Register* "Affairs of Portugal" 26) The pre-revolutionary situation in Portugal is described as "monstrous", and the revolution is seen as "the voice of independence" by *The Examiner*. (17 September 1820, 3) *The Monthly Repository* also emphasised the importance of liberty, a highly prized value that had gained prominence in Portugal. However, it is very critical of the English influence in Portugal (Couceiro and Silva "News from Portugal" 494):

The infection of liberty has reached this country, in which the abuses and intolerableness of a wretched system of misgovernment had created and given strength to a spirit of discontent, whose first step was irresistible. (...) She [Portugal] has long existed like a colony of England, and has owed her nominal independence, not to the patriotism or public virtue of her people, but to the strong and terrible hand of English power. (...) Her rich and extensive vineyards (...) have only served to fill the coffers of a cruel and grinding monopoly. (*The Monthly Repository*, "Portugal" 564)

*The Black Dwarf* reports the news about Portugal by discussing the situation in Spain. Once again, the importance of defending the priceless value of freedom is emphasised, praising Spain, Portugal, Naples, and Sicily for their struggles for liberty, rooted in the ideals of social justice and political freedom. (*The Black Dwarf*, "Dinner in commemoration (...) " 469) They are portrayed as the champions of liberty, in contrast to Britain, whose unwritten constitution is described as a "mass of confusion, incomprehensibilities, and uncertainties". (*The*

*Black Dwarf*, "Dinner in commemoration (...)" 467) Therefore, in a very sardonic manner, *The Black Dwarf* published a piece of news highlighting a dinner commemorating the revolutions in Spain, Naples, Sicily, and Portugal, as Figure 3 illustrates:

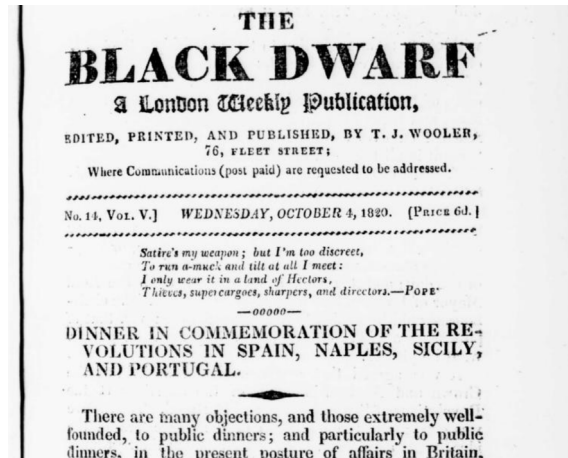


Fig. 3 – Dinner in commemoration of the revolutions in Spain, Naples, Sicily, and Portugal  
([https://archive.org/details/sim\\_black-dwarf\\_1820-10-04\\_5\\_14/page/n5/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/sim_black-dwarf_1820-10-04_5_14/page/n5/mode/2up))

It renewed toasts to the:

Spanish Cortes; genuine representatives and assiduous regenerators of their native land. (...), wished "success to Naples and Sicily in amicably adjusting their future relationship, and in consolidating their freedom! And may the resurrection of patriotism in Portugal replace her with dignity on the roll of the free nations!" (*The Black Dwarf*, "Dinner in commemoration (...)" 470)

Additionally, and more importantly, it underlined the significance of political liberty:

May those who seek freedom in religion, freedom of the person, or freedom of the Press, not fail to discover, that would they enjoy any of these, they must first secure that whole of which these are parts: namely POLITICAL LIBERTY, which includes them all. (*The Black Dwarf*, "Dinner in commemoration (...) " 470-471)

The first three or four months after the revolution were characterised by a surge in the dissemination of news about the revolution in Portugal, with the same information reported in various newspapers and periodicals. In 1821, news about the revolution became scarce because the revolutionary stance had lost its visibility and interest in the press, as it was regarded as a taken-for-granted event that was not objectively confirmed. Nonetheless, there are still newspapers dedicated to covering the events in Portugal, as well as the revolutions in Madeira and Brazil.

In January 1821, *The Morning Chronicle* reported on the Constitution of the Cortes in Lisbon. It praised the provincial deputies as distinguished and "the best characters" the Cortes could have. As the newspaper reports, Portugal was finally shedding "an abject state, governed according to the whim of a few privileged Nobles and Court favourites". This body of national representatives, which was freely elected by the people, would curb long-standing privileges and empower the people with "imprescriptible rights which belong to men in every clime". No pending threats would extinguish "the patriotic flame [that] has been enkindled in Portugal". (*The Morning Chronicle*, 12 January 1821) This newspaper, a Whig-supported one, emphasised the importance of civil liberties. As liberal ideas spread, they were believed to lead to a better world – a core Enlightenment principle that fuelled the promotion of universal liberalism.

In March 1821, several reports on the revolution in Madeira appeared in the *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* (14 March 1821). Reports on the revolution in Rio de Janeiro followed in April, May, and August (*Caledonian Mercury*, "Revolution at Bahia" 4). On 28 April, *The Morning Chronicle* addressed the revolution in Bahia, which had taken place on 10 February 1821, and published the Declaration

of Bahia. However, it wrote a preamble to it, praising the system adopted in Portugal as the best way to avoid civil war and protect the wealthiest people in the Portuguese colony, taking into account the considerable enslaved population that might rebel against the established system:

Notwithstanding the crooked policy on which the Cabinet of Rio de Janeiro seemed determined to act, it was clear the people of Brazils would declare in favour of the system adopted in Portugal, as the only means of promoting their real interests, and avoiding a civil war, for the strength of the country consists in European soldiery, and European capitalists, and these are naturally joined by the rich creoles (...). (*The Morning Chronicle*, 28 April 1821)

We can then infer from these statements that the European capitalists might also be referring to the British trade interests, which, in this period, had preferential treatment in trade with Brazil, as endorsed by the Commercial Treaty of 1810. This treaty allowed the direct entry of British traders into the Brazilian seaports. Furthermore, this treaty was expected to be renegotiated in 1825. Interestingly, two days later, *The Morning Post* reported the same news about the "Revolution at Bahia", which was also covered by *The British Press* and *Leeds Intelligence* on the same day of publication. The initial paragraphs were identical: "By the ship Maria Elizabeth, arrived from Bahia, which place she left on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, bound to Hamburgh, accounts have been received of an important revolution that broke out there on the 10<sup>th</sup>". (*The Morning Post*, "Revolution at Bahia") Nevertheless, it lacked the critical (political) positioning of *The Morning Chronicle*, as it reported the news in a very objective manner, only attaching the Declaration of Bahia. Once more, relying on the same sources and reproducing news from other newspapers was a familiar pattern.

## Concluding Remarks

Our analysis highlights the growing influence of the British Press during the tumultuous first decades of the nineteenth century. It emerged as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion in a society grappling with turbulent political times. The period also saw the rise of liberal and radical ideas, which would eventually pave the way for parliamentary reform, with the first more noticeable impact being the passing of the First Reform Act in 1832.

The liberal revolutions in Europe, especially in Portugal, marked important steps towards freedom, which newspapers helped to shape. Although the coverage varied across papers with different editorial viewpoints, often without much critical alignment, some newspapers with a Whig or radical stance viewed the Portuguese revolution as an exemplary event to criticise internal political strategies and promote liberal values such as liberty and the constitution, while also criticising the oppressive British presence in Portugal. However, both Tory and Whig newspapers greeted the revolution cautiously. It took some time to fully understand the true significance of the event. As long as it did not threaten the crown's power in Britain or undermine constitutional principles, the revolution was largely celebrated.

However, the news did not reach the newspapers directly, nor did the newspapers verify their sources. They had to rely on other newspapers or secondary sources, such as letters or dispatches, as evidenced by the news in *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Sun*. By doing so, they constructed their discourse around the (forcefully imagined) idea of revolution. The circulation of news through multiple channels highlights the significance of these transnational networks in promoting literacy, despite high illiteracy rates, as well as the liberal values of freedom and political justice. These were justified in the struggle between two major opposing forces as described in *The Black Dwarf*: on the one hand, the patrons of despotism and those who supported reform and liberty, on the other. The latter were patriots and brave men who would "live to see the blessed

dawn of liberty", according to the romantic J. W. Dalby, a frequent contributor to the periodical:

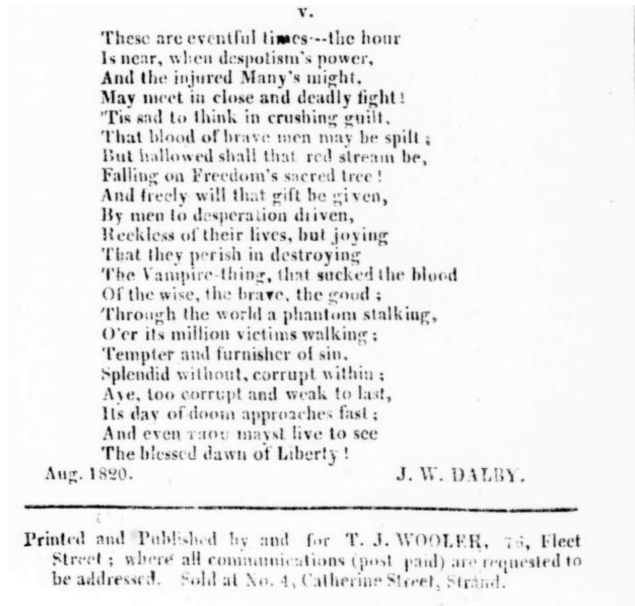


Fig. 4 - "To Major Cartwright"  
([https://archive.org/details/sim\\_black-dwarf\\_1820-08-23\\_5\\_8/page/n35/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/sim_black-dwarf_1820-08-23_5_8/page/n35/mode/2up))

Ultimately, it became clear that the British approach to internal politics was not immune to external political pressures arising from some of the revolutionary experiences in European kingdoms, including Portugal. The British regarded Portugal, Spain, and Naples with caution and suspicion, believing that the revolutions in these countries could threaten the stability of the British constitutional monarchy. We can therefore say that the stance of liberal newspapers was as conservative as that of Tory-supported ones, both fearing the importation of violent revolutionary influences from abroad.

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