

Introduction: 'Un paese tutto poetico' – Byron in Italy, Italy in Byron

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The connection between Byron and Italy is one of the most familiar facts about British Romanticism.¹ The poet's many pronouncements about the country (where he lived between 1816 and 1823), its history, culture and people, as well as about his own experiences in Italy and among Italians, are well known and part of his legend. More particularly, Byron's debauchery in Venice and would-be heroics in Ravenna are often known even to those acquainted with the poet's biography only in its most simplified versions. In contrast, though the critical panorama has been changing in recent years, serious attention to Byron's literary engagement with Italy has tended to be discontinuous. Yet he wrote much of his greatest poetry in Italy, and under its influence, poetry that would have a profound bearing not only on the literature but also the wider culture, history and politics of the whole of Europe, and not least Italy itself.

As a result, Byron's relationship with Italy, and the poetry it produced, speaks to a much broader modern-day audience than simply a literary one. This book bears witness to this fundamental fact about Byron's Italian writings by relating the texts Byron wrote in Italy to numerous features of early nineteenth-century European (and particularly, of course, Italian) culture, and highlighting many of their hugely influential contributions to the histories of all kinds of literary and non-literary discourses concerning, for example, identity (personal, national and European), politics, ethnography, geography, religion – even tourism.

However, these contributions and their influence are rooted in an underlying dual phenomenon – Byron’s ‘Byronisation’ of Italy and Italy’s ‘Italianisation’ of Byron – and the principal aim of this book is to broaden and deepen our understanding of this complex two-way process and its implications for the ways in which we read the poetry – and other writings, particularly the letters – that Byron produced in, and on, Italy.

The process can still be seen working itself out in Italy, where plaques are present wherever Byron resided or visited. In some cases they appear where the building is no longer extant (as in Ravenna’s Piazza San Francesco) or even where he never was. Possibly the best-known example of the latter is the notorious inscription on the ‘Grotta Byron’ (‘Byron Grotto’) in Portovenere, placed there in 1877, hymning Byron’s swim from Portovenere to Lerici (defying ‘the waves of the Ligurian sea’) and memorialising the fact that this grotto inspired him ‘in the sublime poem *The Corsair*’.² Byron’s Italian years saw him produce a great deal of poetry, but, of course, not *The Corsair*, which was published in 1814. Though diverting, however, the mistake on the part of the Italian authors of the inscription is a telling one, for it demonstrates the extent to which Byron’s relationship to Italy – and the influence of that relationship in areas well beyond literature – has become a blend of fact, invention and reinvention, fantasy, legend and myth.

The ‘Byron Grotto’ inscription, among many others, whether reliable or fanciful, is just one example of that kind of invention of tradition that draws upon celebrities and their aura in order to appropriate them for, to make them an integral part of, a culture, discourse or context to which they never belonged and which can transform them almost beyond recognition. Thus, inscriptions – literal, literary and more widely cultural – tend to interweave Byron’s life, myth and writings, and Italy as their *locus*, in ways that obscure all of these things as much as they illuminate them. In many cases, they make manifest the appropriative intentions of the Italian scholars and authorities who put these plaques up.³ They also bear witness to the lasting legacy of nineteenth-century perceptions of Byron as an Italian poet, or at least a profoundly Italianised one, which began to spread after his death. These perceptions too generated their own myths. As Byron’s posthumous reputation evolved in the nineteenth century, the poet was increasingly linked to Italy – to the extent, for example, that ‘the

British cultural consciousness' saw it as axiomatic that 'it had been first and foremost Italy which had provided the stage for the display of Byron's public image as mad, bad, and dangerous to know'.⁴ This, of course, is not the case at all – Byron was 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know' long before he got to Italy.⁵ But myths about 'immoral' Italy rubbed off on Byron, just as myths about Byron rubbed off on Italy. The 'Byronisation' of Italy went hand in hand with the 'Italianisation' of Byron – and to such an enormous extent that hordes of later travellers to Italy (think of Charles Dickens or the many tourists clutching their *Murray's Handbooks*) got to grips with the peninsula by first engaging with (agreeing or disagreeing with, revelling in or condemning) Byron's and Italy's constructions of each other.

Nevertheless, the deep-seated Italianness of Byron himself while in Italy, and of large and significant portions of his poetic output, is beyond dispute. In everything, from his love affairs in Venice to his relationship with Teresa Guiccioli, from his adoption of the *ottava rima* and the models of Alfieri and Casti to his translations of Dante and Pulci, from his Venetian satire, *Beppo*, to his dramatisations of Venetian history, we see Byron saturating himself and his work in the Italian culture surrounding him. Thus, Mary Shelley, in an 1826 review of three books on Italy for the *Westminster Review*, defines the 'Anglo-Italian' as a figure who 'understands Italian', 'attaches himself' to the locals and 'appreciates' their manners, and specifically posits Byron as the prototype of this figure and *Beppo* as the starting point of the 'Anglo-Italian literary tradition'.⁶ And in Italy, almost a century later, a young Umberto Bosco, one of the major voices in twentieth-century Italian Studies, could still confidently claim that Byron was an 'almost Italian' poet: 'more than a foreigner full of affection for Italy', Byron 'becomes among [Italians] almost Italian; so feel our own contemporaries, so it will be sung hereafter'.⁷

It is with the real, historical 'Anglo-Italian' Byron, and his 'almost Italianness' as a poet – rather than the fantasies, myths and legends that later came to surround and obscure him – that this volume is primarily concerned. However, as soon as we identify this as our topic we run into other, typically Byronic, complications. As we throw the spotlight on Byron in Italy and Italy in Byron, the links connecting the writer and the country very quickly reveal themselves to be composed of a series of intersecting, interactive and constantly shifting planes: personal (the poet's love affairs and friendships, both British

and Italian), situational (a chameleon-like poet adapting to very different localities and local cultures within a disunited and variegated country), cultural (the weight of Italy's heritage, its present-day artistic and literary vitality, Italy's lack of social, linguistic and cultural unity resonating with Byron's antipathy to systems) and political (the Holy Alliance and Italy's constitutional ambitions and aspirations to independence interweaving with Byron's Whiggish cult of liberty). And as we watch all of this become refracted through the prism of Byron's literary inventions, as well as through his constant, highly performative self-inventions and reinventions, in his letters as well as his poetry, we begin to recover just how unusually pervasive, astonishingly far-reaching and highly distinctive Byron's 'Byronisation' of Italy and Italy's 'Italianisation' of Byron were – and why Byron's engagement with Italian culture became so widely influential in the first place.

Byron's relation to Italy was neither stable nor consistent. It is much more fascinating than this from the very outset, and the chapters in this book stress this fact. The aim here is not to reduce Byron's interactions with Italy to a single trope, theme, idea or even ideology but to explore them in all their complex variety. Those interactions varied across genre, for example, but also across time, as Byron and Italy became more and more embedded in one another during the poet's seven-year stay. Byron's first sight of Italy from the Alps is inscribed in the final stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, where the clouds lead the poetic 'I' in the direction of the Alpine range and the land beyond it:

The clouds above me to the white Alps tend,
 And I must pierce them, and survey whate'er
 May be permitted, as my steps I bend
 To their most great and growing region, where
 The Earth to her embrace compels the powers of air.

Italia! too – Italia! looking on thee,
 Full flashes on the soul the light of ages,
 Since the fierce Carthaginian almost won thee,
 To the last halo of the chiefs and sages,
 Who glorify thy consecrated pages;
 Thou wert the throne and grave of empires; still,

The fount at which the panting mind assuages
 Her thirst of knowledge, quaffing there her fill,
 Flows from the eternal source of Rome's imperial Hill.

(109–10)

These stanzas mark Byron's initial poetic approach to, and crossing over into, Italy – his introduction to the land he had decided to visit as an extension of his tour through Belgium, Germany and Switzerland but which instead became his adoptive country until his departure for Greece in 1823. The lines are fully conventional in terms of imagery. They feature an assortment of well-established *topoi*: the crossing of the barrier of the Alps, a rite of passage for travellers and a 'must' in literary reworkings of the trip to Italy; the reference to Hannibal; the description of a land favoured by nature and art (going back to the classical *laus Italiae*); the apostrophe complete with exclamations (conveying overwhelming emotion in the face of the inexpressible); the evocation of the past cultural glories that find continuity in the present; imperial history and, eventually, Rome. Byron's poetic entrance into Italy is therefore 'canonical', his moves fully encoded and recognisable – he is going to tread on 'classic ground' and wants to make all the right gestures.⁸ And the alliterative image of the light of past ages 'full flash[ing] on the soul' captures a typically Romantic visionary awareness of all the pluralities of the past, simultaneously – a kind of Italy-induced euphoria.

Filled with clichés as they are, however, these early lines on Italy pave the way for *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV (1818) and, though conventional and formulaic themselves, anticipate the much more intricately conflicted lyricism of Canto IV, its complexities and contentiousness – its anti-imperial discourse, its reworking of the *topos* of the 'ruin', its engagement with the living forces of present-day Italy, its monumentalising of the self in place and time.

The Italy Byron encountered once he had crossed the Alps in 1816 was a divided country that had been deeply affected by recent revolutionary and Napoleonic upheavals and by the Restoration instigated by the Congress of Vienna. From the 1790s onwards, the north had been largely in the sphere of French influence, especially the territories of the Cisalpine Republic (1797–1802), later transformed into the Kingdom of Italy (1805–14). In particular, the 1797 Treaty of Campoformio between France and Austria brought about the cession of Venice, Istria and Dalmatia to Austria and the creation of an independent Ligurian

state. After the mainland territories of the House of Savoy were occupied and then annexed by France, Sardinia became the seat of the Piedmontese monarchy until 1814. The State of the Church became the short-lived Roman Republic (1798–99), while the Parthenopean Republic lasted only a few months in 1799. The Kingdom of Naples was a Napoleonic client state between 1806 and 1814, while in the same period Sicily was under British occupation. With the return of the *ancien régimes* in 1814, a general state of unrest ensued, with secret societies forming (most famously that of the Carbonari), increased surveillance by local powers who were generally under the influence of Austria, and the interference of other powers, especially Russia, through networks of espionage. Politically, the state of the country was potentially explosive. Socially, different forms of disunity (political, economic and linguistic) divided the population, which oscillated between a rooted localism and nascent nationalism, or between resignation and acquiescence and an urge to rebel against Austrian-sponsored despotisms. Culturally, in music, literature and the arts, this field of tensions translated into a multifaceted and contradictory panorama in which nostalgia for past glories combined with the desire to embrace changes inspired by either foreign or home-grown impulses, as well the need to stop the process of cultural marginalisation on the international stage and return to playing a major international role.⁹

As Byron grappled with this culture of fragmentation, conflict and contradiction, the works he produced while in Italy were as impressive in their formal variety as they were astonishing in their content, for example: *The Lament of Tasso* (1817), *Beppo* (1818), *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV* (1818), *Mazeppa* (1819), *The Prophecy of Dante* (1821), *Marino Faliero* (1821), *Sardanapalus* (1821), *The Two Foscari* (1821), *Cain* (1821), *The Vision of Judgment* (1822), *Werner* (1822), a translation of the first canto of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* (1823), *Heaven and Earth* (1823), *The Age of Bronze* (1823), *The Blues* (1823), *The Island* (1823), *The Deformed Transformed* (1824) and, of course, *Don Juan* (1819–24). Many of these works, of course, also directly address Italy and Italian culture, and each does so in its own, distinctive and original way, as the chapters in this book seek to demonstrate.

However, Byron's literary Italy emerged not only from within its Italian contexts but also from within the context of many other Europe-wide engagements with Italy and its culture, from the late eighteenth century through to the 1820s. From the outset these

variously draw upon Gothic and anti-Catholic demonisations, are tinged with Grand Tour-style aristocratic pleasure-seeking and revel in the multiplication of references to classical, medieval and Renaissance culture. After 1815 these become imbued with political reimaginings of the country in terms of what Marilyn Butler identified as a liberal, post-Waterloo ‘Cult of the South’, in contrast to the Germano-Slavic policies of the tyrannous Holy Alliance.¹⁰ In addition, Italy was a staple component in the myth of the ‘warm south’, which, as Esther Schor reminds us, the Romantics made into an ‘imaginary elsewhere of lemon trees and olive groves’ and a ‘sensuous landscape of desire’.¹¹ Byron’s Italy emerges, then, in the context of – indeed, as a reaction to – what Maureen McCue has termed a ‘post-Waterloo fever for Italy’ that swept right across Europe, fuelled by Napoleon’s final defeat and the reopening of the Continent to travel – and therefore by the fact that after 1815 travel to Italy became easier and cheaper.¹² Italy was no longer the prerogative of the aristocracy but available to middle-class tourists too.

Throughout the Romantic period, the presence of Italy in poems, novels and plays was pervasive, ubiquitous and multiform – and it only became more so in the post-Napoleonic period. Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), along with Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806), are only a few of the most famous instances of Gothic Italy. Even more influential was Madame de Staël’s *Corinne, ou l’Italie* (1807). Mary Shelley continued this female Italian tradition in her 1826 *Valperga*, linking Italian history to the contemporary liberal preoccupation with despotism and the politically representative polity, and Stendhal would turn to more recent, though equally politicised, Italian history in *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839). Some of the most popular stage plays in Britain in the aftermath of Waterloo – Henry Hart Milman’s *Fazio* (1818), Richard Lalor Sheil’s *Evadne* (1819) and Barry Cornwall’s *Mirandola* (1821) – reworked in various ways the Renaissance *topos* of the Italian court as a hotbed of intrigue, as did Shelley in *The Cenci* (1819). At the same time, Leigh Hunt promoted an Italianised poetics in *The Story of Rimini* (1816), and Keats, Barry Cornwall and John Hamilton Reynolds followed him in offering their versions of Cockney Italianism in metrical tales on Italian themes. And then, of course, there were Italian histories – key examples being Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), Roscoe’s lives of Lorenzo de’ Medici (1796) and Leo

X (1805), Sismondi's *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge* (1807–17) and Daru's *Histoire de la République de Venise* (1819) – and travel books such as Hester Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789), Eustace's tours of Italy (1813, 1815), Lady Morgan's *Italy* (1821) and Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (1816–29), with their enormous shaping power over all kinds of representations of Italy. The figurative arts and music played their role, too, as did the several waves of political exiles looking for asylum abroad from the failed Italian uprisings of the early 1820s, who crucially contributed to the increasing popularity of their country's culture in Britain and elsewhere. Translations of, and guides to, Italian literature also flourished: Pierre-Louis Ginguené's *Histoire littéraire d'Italie* (1811–19) was an especially formative example in Byron's case.¹³

This Europe-wide Italomania informs Byron's Italy at every turn, as he variously draws on, challenges and develops what had become an enormous body of writing on Italy by the time he lived there. He also shared with other contemporary writers on Italy a wide-ranging textual knowledge of the country and its literature, developed through his readings in both Britain and Italy. He claimed to have 'perused either in the original, or Translations', 'Tasso, Ariosto, Petrarch, Dante, Bembo [and] Metastasio' in his 1807 'Reading List',¹⁴ and the catalogues for the sales of his books in 1813 and 1816 indicate that by then he had acquired two copies of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, three of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, at least two copies of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, three different editions of Petrarch's poetry, a thirteen-volume edition of Machiavelli's works, Bandello's *Novelle*, Goldoni's *Memoirs* and John Black's 1810 *Life of Tasso*.¹⁵ He first read Ugo Foscolo's *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* in 1813,¹⁶ and lists Alfieri's works among 'my Italian books' in an 1813 letter to Lady Melbourne.¹⁷ Stendhal tells us he read 'Buratti's works' and 'Goldoni's comedies' in Milan in 1816,¹⁸ in anticipation of going to Venice, and his letters, as well as the notes, prefaces, advertisements and dedications to his poetry – and, of course, the poetry itself – attest to a knowledge of many more Italian writers including Casti, Filicaja, Forteguerra, Guarini, Monti and Parini. But he also prided himself on his direct knowledge of the country and its culture. In his correspondence, some of which he wrote in Italian,¹⁹ he never tired of stressing the fact that he was in Italy and that he was writing from

there: 'I have lived in their houses and in the heart of their families', he famously tells John Murray in a letter of 1820.²⁰ Informed by all kinds of reading, Byron's Italy is also a very personal one.

Yet his personal relation to the country is complicated by a pervasive dialectic between familiarity and distance. The Italy Byron encountered and wrote about was simultaneously a land already known, from his reading and his own experience, and an always new and surprising adventure. This ambivalent attitude becomes a central component of his vision and interpretation of Italian culture, geography and people. For Byron, being in Italy is irreducibly dual. He is both inside Italy and Italian life, and self-consciously outside it, as an English lord, a Scottish mercenary, a cosmopolitan poet, a European celebrity or even just 'a broken Dandy' on his 'travels' (*Beppo*, 52). This, of course, has political as well as experiential and literary implications: being in Milan or Venice means being aware of the Austrians; being in Ravenna of the authority of the papal legate and of the overall supervision of the Austrians; being in Tuscany (Pisa and Leghorn in particular) means knowingly taking advantage of a regime (temporarily) tolerant of liberal ideas. Byron's direct and personal relation to Italian society is thus also strongly geopolitical, as well as geocultural, but here, as always, intimacy and distance go hand in hand, for he is both embedded in historical and political realities and viewing them from afar.

As a consequence, his involvement in Italy generally is participative and emotional yet also fascinatingly ironic and, at times, even aloof. This doubleness emerges in many episodes and anecdotes recounted in his letters. A revealing instance is his journal account of an encounter in the countryside near Ravenna with a young woman, Rosa Benini, the wife of the local *vetturino* (coachman), who unexpectedly asks him who the pope is.²¹ Byron explains as best he can, mildly amused by the situation (having to explain the pope to a Catholic woman) and probably also scandalised by the ignorance in which the people are kept. But his account of the meeting most pointedly dramatises his relation to Italy as simultaneously that of an insider and an outsider. He is here encountering, and playing a part in, the 'real' life of Italy, as well as explaining Italian culture, in Italian, to an Italian. Yet he marks out his distance from *her* Italian culture – it is as if Rosa Benini hailed from another land entirely. As an insurmountable barrier rises between them, Byron is surprised and does

not entirely understand what is going on: Italy has suddenly become illegible. The doubleness enshrined in this episode will return again and again in the chapters of this book, as their readings of Byron's life, poems and letters situate their texts within – and between – a range of historical (inter)national, literary and personal contexts.

The volume as a whole inevitably draws on a long history of scholarly work on the topic of 'Byron and Italy'. In the anglophone world of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, this work was primarily biographical. Landmark studies here – still very useful today – include Peter Quennell's *Byron in Italy* (1935), Iris Origo's *The Last Attachment* (1949) and Doris Langley Moore's *The Late Lord Byron* (1961). Literary criticism was for a long time limited to a few scattered chapters and journal articles, though important work on Byron appeared in book-length studies of 'Romantic' Italy generally such as C. P. Brand's *Italy and the English Imagination* (1957). However, as Alan Rawes and Mirka Horová maintain, even these few studies of Byron and Italy tended to be lost within 'an increasing volume of critical work on Byron that, on the whole, treated Byron's writing while in Italy as engaged with British, rather than Italian, concerns, or read Byron's poetry in glorious isolation'.²² For a long time – into this century – the only English-language critical book wholly focused on Byron and Italy was Peter Vassallo's *Byron and the Italian Literary Influence* (1984), a comparative study that offers plentiful information on the poet's borrowings from recent Italian literature (Casti in particular), especially in relation to his *ottava rima* work, as well as exploring his knowledge of Italian classics and more general connections with Italian culture. In Italy, the first half of the twentieth century saw the publication of works on the impact of Byron and Byronism in Italy,²³ as well as a number of studies of Byron's influence on nineteenth-century Italian writers, his 'local presence' (in Venice, Ravenna and Bologna, among other places) and a number of biographical works, often mixing fact with fiction.²⁴ The most important early twentieth-century Italian critical work on Byron was by Mario Praz, in a number of essays on the poet published between 1924 and 1966 and books such as *La fortuna di Byron in Inghilterra* (1925) and *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romanica* (1930). In the wake of Praz's early work on the poet, 'Byron scholarship in Italy became more mature and critically aware', but the question of the poet's engagement with Italy and its culture

was still largely treated, in Italy as in the anglophone world, in an exclusively biographical key, or, sometimes, as an episode in the larger sweep of cultural history.²⁵ Indeed, while there was a steady stream of Byron scholarship in Italy during the twentieth century, most studies of Byron's relationship to the country and its culture were decidedly narrative and descriptive rather than critical, with occasionally outstanding contributions such as the essays published by Giorgio Melchiori between 1958 and 1981, though even these mostly focused on Byron's impact on Italian literary and political discourse, rather than on Italy's impact on Byron and his literary recreations of it.²⁶

The twentieth-first century has seen all this change, both in English-speaking countries and in Italy. Indeed, with Italian scholars increasingly publishing in English, and in the climate of global critical conversations made possible by digital technologies, it makes little sense any more to talk about two separate critical traditions, which have come dramatically together around the topic of 'Romantic Italy' generally, and Byron and Italy in particular, in recent years. The books, chapters, essays and special journal issues that have been published this century testify not only to the swell of international scholarly interest in Byron's relationship to Italy but also to a number of new directions within the field.²⁷ Emphasis is now being placed on the intersections between biography and writing in Byron's Italian poetry, issues of intertextual relations between Byron's texts and Italian ones, the historical and political questions Byron's texts raise about Italy during the early Risorgimento and Byron's 'Italian' self-constructions and the questions of identity, cultural geography, otherness, language and cosmopolitanism that these constructions raise.

Some broad themes emerge across this contemporary body of work on Byron and Italy. One is Italy as a construct in Byron's work, an object viewed through a variety of filters, from reading and from lived experience, that bring with them a plurality of discourses about the country and its culture – historical and literary, sociological, economic, political and so on. A second is Byron's Italy as a place for performance, and not merely a space of writing: the poet himself, as he appears in both his letters and his verse, is here read as a literary spectacle, performed for an international audience, in the context of a peculiarly spectacular country and society. A third theme is that of Byron's social experience of Italy – his participation in several groups and networks such as the coterie of Milanese intellectuals, the Pisan

circle, his life and work with Leigh Hunt and his family, his relationships with Mary and Percy Shelley, Thomas Medwin and others, or his links to the Gambas and their revolutionary and liberal friends. Yet another theme is Byron's very different constructions of Italy through different genres of writing – lyric, dramatic, epic, mock-epic, romance, satire, etc. – which lend themselves to what we may tentatively call a 'new formalist' investigation of the ways in which the choice of genre and metrical structure is conditioned by contextual historical, political and cultural forces.

Perhaps, though, the most prominent and most widely shared pre-occupation among the new generation of writers about Byron and Italy centres on location and locatedness. Two monographs that read Byron's relationship to Italy as a complex exercise in self-location, as well as cross-cultural and transnational identification, have led the way here. On the one hand, Stephen Cheeke's *Byron and Place* (2003) explores the intersection in Byron's thinking about place between 'being there, being in-between, having been there' and finds that the experience of Italy offered the poet an opportunity to produce another original reconfiguration of this triad in the 'hope that belonging nowhere may represent a freedom to belong anywhere and to speak any language, to cease to be a stranger, [...] a hope that had come under sharp pressures post-1816 for Byron, and yet [...] a hope that *Childe Harold* canto four re-asserts'.²⁸ On the other hand, Maria Schoina's *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'* (2009) attends to Byron's displacement to and acclimatisation in post-Napoleonic Italy, as part of a wider phenomenon – found also in the Shelleys and Leigh Hunt – that aimed at the creation of a 'hyphenated identity and displayed varying degrees of identification with Italianness in an attempt to establish a bicultural identity', a process evidently fraught with ambivalences and contradictions.²⁹

From these and other perspectives, current scholars across national and international traditions have been turning to the topic of Byron and Italy with unprecedented enthusiasm and a new spectrum of critical approaches. This volume brings many of these scholars and their perspectives together to take the pulse of current debates, contribute to them and open up new lines of enquiry for the future. As it does so, it also raises a series of questions that are central to Byron Studies more generally and especially pertinent to the transnational and intercultural aspects of the poet's figure and output. Thus, if the

focus of the volume is on Byron 'writing Italy', its implications are much wider. How did Italy affect, change and inform Byron's thinking about matters far beyond Italy? 'Being there' certainly affected his sense of his own individual identity and of the labile nature of the self. It affected his politics – both in theory and in practice. And, of course, it profoundly affected his whole development as a writer – of lyrics, dramas, satires and more. Byron did not just become rather 'un-English' as a man in Italy (Moore describes him looking not like a British aristocrat but like a decadent Continental fop in Genoa).³⁰ He also started to be seen, especially by detractors, as rather un-English as a poet: Southey, from his highly hostile standpoint and aware that Byron would be reading him, called *Don Juan* 'an act of high treason on English poetry'.³¹ In fact, the chapters in this book, addressing the multiplicity and plurality of Byron *and* Italy, explore some of the ways in which the poet turned the country and its culture into an essential element of what Peter Manning calls 'the ensemble of life and work we call "Byron"'.³² They examine constitutive tensions within this Italianised ensemble at both a textual and an experiential level. They consider the deep-lying interaction of fact and fiction, the ambivalent points of view, Byron's being in Italy but also imagining himself as belonging elsewhere, the spirituality and material experience of Italy at a particular moment in its history, and the web of connections and gaps between these dimensions, as all fundamentally constitutive of Byron's Italy. Accordingly, they help this book to return its topic to the centre of critical debates not just about Byron but British and European Romanticism much more widely – at a moment in our own history that is once again forcing Britain to think deeply about its relationship with the rest of Europe and forcing Europe to rethink its understanding of the British.

The first two chapters of the volume, by Nicholas Halmi and Gioia Angeletti, announce the book's two broad thematic approaches to 'Byron and Italy': via Byron's engagement with Italian culture (here poetry, but elsewhere art, drama and history) and via his engagement with Italy as a living society, a real place and an active, urgent, human reality. Both chapters also introduce a central aspect of Byron's engagement with Italy that later chapters will return to again and again: his constant 'Italian' self-invention and reinvention, in both his poetry and his letters. Our understanding of Byron's complex, contradictory reimagining – and reimaging – of himself in Italy is then

further enriched by the third chapter, by Jonathan Gross, on Byron's 'Italian' Britishness, in contrast to his 'Anglo-Italianness'. The Italian Byron was deeply rooted in, but also endlessly fluctuated between, 'two worlds' (*DJ*, XV, 99), and at every turn Byron's engagement with Italy throws into sharp relief questions of national, personal and public identity.

Focusing on *The Lament of Tasso*, *The Prophecy of Dante* alongside Byron's translations of Filicaja in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, Halmi first explores the ways in which Byron 'exploited both the writings and the figures of Italian writers (especially the exiled Dante and imprisoned Tasso) to construct his own cosmopolitan poetic identity', reinventing himself as simultaneously – and ambiguously – an English and an Italian poet. Championing the cause of Italian freedom and unification in his poems on Dante and Tasso and the translation of Filicaja, Byron presents himself as the modern culmination of an Italian, nationalist poetic tradition he helped to invent – for Italian as much as for British consumption. In the translation of Pulci, however, Byron stresses his foreignness to both British and Italian poetic traditions, cutting a cosmopolitan figure not through identity but through difference. While in his letters – and, of course, many of his poems – Byron is both British and Italian, Italian literature could also offer the poet a way of being neither.

Where Halmi focuses on Byron's poetry, Angeletti gives her attention to Byron's 'idiosyncratic letters and journals' to British correspondents and their 'ethnographic observation of the human and cultural geography of Italy'. Insisting on the contingent reality of the country, rather than an idealised 'Italy', these letters show Byron as a cultural mediator between Italy and Britain as he immerses himself in, and offers an insider's view of, Italy's quotidian life, its 'anthropological and ethnographic *marginalia* or *minutiae*'. Yet, as Angeletti shows, Byron's letters home also perform a delicate balancing act between immersion and difference, as he retains his Britishness even as he acquires Italianness. This Anglo-Italian doubleness, already foregrounded as a key element of Byron's poetry by Halmi, here becomes a fundamental feature of Byron's life in and letters from Italy as well – and will resurface again in a number of other chapters too.

In typical Byron fashion, however, the doubleness of his identity in relation to Italian life and culture is not a matter of blurring distinct

selves into one another but of the coexistence, side by side, of sharply defined singularities. Jonathan Gross's chapter thus stays with the letters to discuss some of the ways in which Byron's Italianisation actually intensified his sense of his own Britishness, which everywhere underpins and complicates his relationship to Italy: even as the British poet was 'rebranding' himself as almost but never entirely Italian, the Italianised British aristocrat was reimagining himself as a Scottish mercenary in the midst of Italian revolution. As Gross shows, under the influence of Madame de Staël's Lord Nelvil and Walter Scott's novels (which he avidly read while in Italy), Byron depicted himself in his letters home as an aristocratic Scottish lord leading a band of troops or as serving the Italian cause 'like Dugald Dalgetty' in Scott's *A Legend of Montrose*. As Gross puts it, Byron 'never felt himself more Scottish than when residing in Ravenna, Venice, Genoa and Pisa'.

A sequence of four essays follows, each focusing on Byron's relationship to one crucial aspect of early nineteenth-century Italian culture: its geography (Mauro Pala), its visual artistic inheritance (Jane Stabler), its Catholicism (Bernard Beatty) and its early Risorgimento politics (Arnold Anthony Schmidt).

Pala's chapter on the geographies of Italy foregrounds another key theme of the volume, first introduced by Angeletti and returned to by other contributors: while reading Byron's poetry confronts us repeatedly with the poet's digressive, fluid *mobilitéé*, studying his relationship to Italy in particular repeatedly confronts us with his capacity for sustained attention to the given. However, as Pala demonstrates, focusing on Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, attending to the given is not simply a matter of 'seizing' the 'colouring of the scenes which fleet along' (*CHP*, III, 112) for Byron. The poet's depictions of Italy's landscapes and cityscapes are, rather, 'complex, heterogeneous and personal negotiations' not just with 'real places' but also 'their attendant histories' – negotiations that 'not only make place an essential element of the consciousness observing it but also make that observing consciousness an essential element of place'.

Stabler's chapter turns from Italian landscape to Italian art, offering us a 'way of reading Byron's response to' the art of Italy 'beyond well-known classical and Renaissance paintings and sculptures' by concentrating on 'the relationship between Byron's *Cain* and the church art of Ravenna'. Stabler's method here is openly speculative, and this allows her to suggest a whole range of ways in which 'the

visual art of Ravenna might have shaped the creativity' of *Cain*: for Stabler, 'the form of *Cain* departs from all Byron's previously stated aesthetic preferences, but not from what he could see around him in Ravenna's religious art'. Her speculative method also allows her to raise some important and fundamental questions about Byron's possible absorption of all sorts of Italian artworks that he never mentions but certainly saw, the creative role of memory in Byron's response to the art he encountered in Italy, and the poet's 'fascination' not just with the art he did see, but, through that art, with 'ways of seeing and knowing'.

Beatty documents the evolution of Byron's personal and poetic relationship with Catholicism from what was presumably his first real encounter with it at Newstead Abbey in 1798 through to the final cantos of *Don Juan* and the figure of Aurora Raby. Detailing and exploring Byron's experience of Italian friars, priests, cardinal legates, a pope and, most importantly, Italian Catholic women, Beatty suggests that, in Catholic Italy, 'spiritually, Byron found something sensible to grasp at'. Ranging across Byron's poetic career, Beatty sees the poet begin as a John Knox in response to Catholicism but progressively become not only a thinker of 'theological precision' but also a 'sympathetic outsider and even insider' to Italian Catholic experience.

Rather than approaching Byron's much-discussed engagement with the early Risorgimento through biography, Schmidt throws new light on Byron's Italian politics from a formalist perspective. Taking *The Two Foscari* as his case study, and rooting his discussion in the highly politicised contemporary Italian critical debates about the dramatic unities, Schmidt teases out the political implications of Byron's adherence to the unities by comparing his play to Alessandro Manzoni's *Il conte di Carmagnola*, which programmatically violates them. Focusing specifically on the playwrights' representations of the fifteenth-century mercenary leader, Francesco Bussone da Carmagnola, Schmidt shows how these writers' use or abuse of the unity of time in particular reveal Manzoni's Risorgimento agenda on the one hand and Byron's 'general scepticism about leadership' and 'uncertainty about social and political change' on the other.

The last four chapters together offer an extended study of the major literary works Byron wrote in Italy and/or on Italian topics. Byron's 'Italian' works are here grouped generically and set against various biographical, historical and literary contexts – British, Italian

and more widely European – in order to allow us to think about Byron's literary investment in Italy in broader terms than those offered by the study of individual works alone, though, naturally, individual works are discussed in detail. As a result, new perspectives emerge on Byron's narrative, lyric, dramatic and satirical poetry per se – most especially on the ways in which each offered Byron its own distinctive way of entering, exploring, absorbing, processing and deploying Italian culture. The ways in which Byron engaged with Italy are never reducible to any kind of singularity, and his use of multiple genres when writing about the Italian world foregrounds this very clearly.

We begin with Byron's Italian narrative poems. Peter Graham singles out *Parisina* (written in England but on an Italian topic) and *Mazeppa* (written in Italy but on a non-Italian topic). 'Considered separately and together', Graham argues, these two poems 'can help readers understand the intricate fabrication of Byron's Anglo-Italian identity', while considering them 'in dialogue' and in relation to Italy 'throws new light on these two tales generally sidelined in the Byron canon'. In *Parisina*, Graham shows us, Italy offers a 'cautionary tale' to Regency England and offers Byron a place to 'imagine and poetically release' things in his own life that he had to publicly suppress in England. In *Mazeppa*, Byron explores key aspects of his life in Italy in an imagined location 'displaced from Italy rather than to it'. Both demonstrate, in surprising ways and in contradiction to much critical thinking about Byron, the importance of 'not being on the spot' to both the poet's narrative method and his poetic self-fashioning.

Alan Rawes turns to Byron's Italian lyric mode, taking *Childe Harold IV*'s description of the Palatine as an exemplary instance of the sustained poetic attentiveness highlighted by Pala. Rawes puts this description alongside the accounts of the Palatine in Goethe's *Italienische Reise* and de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie*. Comparing these three texts, which together 'largely defined the Romantic reinvention of Italy and, in particular, Rome', Rawes draws out their very different ways of responding to the city, arguing that, 'while the fictional and autobiographical works of de Staël and Goethe appropriate the ruins of Rome for their own needs and purposes, *Childe Harold IV* presents us with an attentive responsiveness to the ruins of Rome per se'. Where Goethe seeks an education in Rome, and de Staël finds consolation, Byron creates a wholly original lyric mode and persona

that are ‘highly attentive to “all” the “treasures” of “eye”, “ear”, “heart” and “soul”’, reinventing Rome as an ‘exhaustless mine’ (*CHP*, IV, 108, 128) of experiences that hosts of later tourists then came to explore, relish and revel in.

Byron’s dramatic representations of Italian history – *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari* and *The Deformed Transformed* – are the topic of Mirka Horová’s chapter. Demonstrating the extent to which ‘play’ – in its ‘performative’ and ‘sportive’ but also ‘competitive’ and ‘manipulative’ senses – underpins Byron’s dramatic rendering of Italy in these works, which combine the carnivalesque and the grotesque to paint a profoundly disturbing picture of Italy’s past, Horová shows how Byron’s Italian dramas use Italian history to think about the ways in which European historical ‘progress’ more generally, and the ‘humanising’ role of art in that progress, repeatedly, endlessly and inevitably descend into sheer violence. For in Byron’s dramatic art, as Horová argues, Italy ‘becomes *pars pro toto* for the Renaissance’, Venice ‘represents republicanism’, and ‘Rome stands for the entirety of human history’. Byron’s Italian dramas give us a distinctive, coherent and relentless reading of Italian history through particular episodes of it, a reading that places ‘Byron’s ideas about the nature of, and the forces ruling, not just Italian but all history’ centre stage.

Bringing together many of the themes of previous chapters, Diego Saglia’s chapter focuses on Byron’s ‘Italian’ satires – *Beppo*, *Don Juan* and the late prose fragment, ‘An Italian Carnival’. Saglia foregrounds in particular Byron’s ‘parabasic “turn” to Italy’ in these works, arguing that the poet’s ‘complex self-positioning in Italy lies behind’ both their ‘innovative poetics’ and their ‘delineation of an unprecedentedly multiform world view’. Saglia begins with the ‘ambivalences and contradictions’ embedded in *Don Juan*’s references to Pulci, Ariosto, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, showing the extent to which Italy’s literature serves ‘to construct Byron’s medley mode’ even as that literature ‘falls prey to the mode’s own subversive discourse’. Turning to *Beppo*, Saglia teases out the ways in which the figure of the *cavalier servente* ‘provides Byron with a fluid gestural and performative model for his Italian turn’ and illuminates ‘essential facets’ of the ‘inherently Italian, parabasic nature’ of Byron’s Italian satire. Finally, with ‘An Italian Carnival’, which ‘reprises’ the ‘Janus-faced attitudes and approaches to Italy’ that so deeply mark Byron’s later poetic satires,

Saglia brings us back to the letter from Byron to John Murray already mentioned in this introduction:

I have lived in their houses and in the heart of their families – sometimes merely as ‘amico di casa’ [‘friend of the family’] and sometimes as ‘Amico di cuore’ [‘friend of the heart’] of the Dama – and in neither case do I feel authorized in making a book of them. – – Their moral is not your moral – their life is not your life – you would not understand it.³³

For Saglia, ‘in a way, in the 1823 fragment, the poet seems to comply with Murray’s request by drawing a picture of Italy, seen through the lens of Carnival’, but this volume as a whole offers a bolder claim. Situating himself ambiguously and performatively somewhere between the ‘them’ of Italy and the ‘you’ of Britain, Byron did ‘make a book of’ Italy, in all the senses conjured up by that small phrase. And the chapters of that book – *The Prophecy of Dante*, *Childe Harold IV*, *Beppo*, *Marino Faliero* and *Don Juan*, to mention just a few – helped set the stage for the total reimagining of Italy, from the inside and the outside, that ran throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. As Italy Italianised Byron, so Byron Byronised Italy, leaving in his wake a land ‘still impregnate with divinity’, ‘where the deep skies assume / Hues which have words, and speak to ye of heaven’ (*CHP*, IV, 55, 129).

Notes

- 1 The Italian quotation in our title (‘a country all poetic’) is taken from Byron’s dedication to *Childe Harold IV*, in *CPW*, vol. II, p. 123. The phrase was coined by the Piedmontese poet Diodata Saluzzo Roero (1774–1840) and quoted by Ludovico di Breme in *Intorno all’ingiustizia di alcuni giudizi letterari italiani* (1816). See A. Colombo, *I lunghi affanni ed il perduto regno’: cultura letteraria, filologia e politica nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007), pp. 126–9.
- 2 See M. Curreli, ‘Golfo dei poeti, lapidi bugiarde e altri miti’, *Soglie*, 6:2 (2004), 19–44.
- 3 On plaques and Byron’s name and works in Italy, see B. Schaff, ‘Italianised Byron – Byronised Italy’, in M. Pfister and R. Hertel (eds.), *Performing National Identity: Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 103–21 (pp. 115–19).

- 4 Schaff, 'Italianised Byron – Byronised Italy', p. 110.
- 5 Lady Caroline Lamb coined this famous phrase in her diary on the day she met Byron for the first time in 1812. See E. Jenkins, *Lady Caroline Lamb* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), p. 95.
- 6 M. Shelley, 'The English in Italy', *The Westminster Review*, 6 (October 1826), 325–41 (p. 327). Shelley is reviewing Lord Normanby's *The English in Italy*, Charlotte Anne Eaton's *Continental Adventures* and Anna Jameson's *The Diary of an Ennuyée*. See also M. Schoina, *Romantic Anglo-Italians: Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 65–72.
- 7 In Italian: 'più che straniero affezionato all'Italia, [Byron] diventa tra noi quasi italiano; tale lo avvertono i contemporanei, tale sarà cantato in seguito' (U. Bosco 'Byronismo italiano', *La Cultura*, 3:6 (1924), 252–64 [p. 262]).
- 8 On the notion of 'classic ground' and Italy as a paradigmatic instance of this concept, see C. Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 8–10.
- 9 For useful historical accounts of post-Napoleonic Italy, see D. Mack Smith, *The Making of Italy, 1796–1866* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1988); L. Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society and National Unification* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); S. Woolf, *History of Italy, 1700–1860* (London: Methuen, 1979).
- 10 See M. Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 120–37.
- 11 E. Schor, 'The "warm south"', in J. Chandler (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 224–5 (p. 224).
- 12 M. McCue, *British Romanticism and the Reception of Italian Old Master Art, 1793–1840* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 2.
- 13 Byron acquired a copy of Ginguené's *Histoire* while in Italy. See J. Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 17.
- 14 *CMP*, pp. 3, 1.
- 15 P. Cochran, 'Byron's library', available at <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/byrons-library.pdf>.
- 16 See Byron's marginalia in the copy of Foscolo's novel he read in 1820, in D. D. Fischer and D. Reiman (eds.), *Shelley and His Circle, 1773–1822*, 8 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961–2002), vol. VIII, p. 1108.
- 17 Letter of 5 October 1813, in *BLJ*, vol. III, p. 133.

- 18 'Stendhal's account of Byron at Milan', in Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, 6 vols, ed. R. E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1902–4), vol. III, pp. 438–45 (p. 445).
- 19 See Carla Pomarè, "I am now an Italoquist": Byron's correspondence in Italian', *The Byron Journal*, 44:2 (2016), 97–108.
- 20 Letter of 21 February 1820, in *BLJ*, vol. VII, p. 42.
- 21 See 'Detached thoughts', No. 117, in *BLJ*, vol. IX, p. 51.
- 22 A. Rawes and M. Horová, 'Introduction', *Tears, and Tortures, and the Touch of Joy: Byron in Italy, Litteraria Pragensia*, 23:46 (December 2013), 1–5 (p. 2).
- 23 See, for example: G. Muoni, *La fama del Byron e il byronismo in Italia* (Milan: Società Editrice Libreria, 1906); G. Muoni, *La leggenda del Byron in Italia* (Milan: Società Editrice, 1907); A. Porta, *Byronismo italiano* (Milan: Cogliati, 1923).
- 24 See G. Iamartino, 'Translations, biography, opera, film and literary criticism: Byron and Italy after 1870', in R. Cardwell (ed.), *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, 2 vols (London and New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), vol. I, pp. 98–128.
- 25 Iamartino, 'Translations, biography', p. 125.
- 26 See Iamartino, 'Translations, biography', p. 126.
- 27 See, for example, and in addition to recent studies mentioned elsewhere in this introduction: G. Angeletti, *Lord Byron and Discourses of Otherness: Scotland, Italy and Femininity* (Kilkerran: Humming Earth, 2012); L. Bandiera and D. Saglia (eds.), *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); F. Burwick and P. Douglass (eds.), *Dante and Italy in British Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); L. Crisafulli (ed.), *Immaginando l'Italia: itinerari letterari del Romanticismo inglese* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2002); P. Cochran, *Byron and Italy* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012); J. Luzzi, *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008); C. Pomarè, *Byron and the Discourses of History* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); J. Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination, 1789–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); D. Saglia, *Lord Byron e le maschere della scrittura* (Rome: Carocci, 2009); D. Saglia (ed.), *Byron e il segno plurale* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2011); A. A. Schmidt, *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); A. Yarrington, S. Villani and J. Kelly (eds.), *Travels and Translations: Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013).

- 28 Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 14, 97.
- 29 Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'*, p. 5.
- 30 See D. Saglia, 'Touching Byron: masculinity and the celebrity body in the Romantic period', in R. Emig and A. Rowland (eds.), *Performing Masculinity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 13–27 (p. 21).
- 31 Letter to Walter Savage Landor of 20 February 1820, quoted in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Byron: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 179.
- 32 Quoted in C. Tuite, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. xix.
- 33 *BLJ*, vol. VII, p. 42.