Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 3 suggests that exiled writers (with the exception of Landor) gradually began to incline towards aspects of Catholic worship in Italy. That their sympathetic curiosity was not new is shown by comparison with earlier travellers to Italy, William Beckford and Hester Piozzi, but that it was unusually receptive and creative is shown by comparison with the furious anti-Catholicism of Charles Dickens and the more exploratory scepticism of Dorothy Wordsworth. The Pisan circle’s questioning of English religious orthodoxy is continued by the Brownings who responded in kindred forms to the visual and aural force of Catholic art, music and the lived reality of the Catholic faith in Italy.

Keywords: Roman Catholic, Protestant, travel, Beckford, Piozzi, Wordsworth, Jameson, Dickens, Browning, art
Religious ideas determine many of our archetypal figures and images of banishment: the expulsion from paradise, wandering Jews, scapegoats driven into the wilderness, the melodies of the diaspora, and the sad heart of Ruth amid the alien corn.\textsuperscript{1} When English writers moved to Italy, their encounter with Catholic habits of worship inevitably coloured their experiences of exile. In order to recover what is different about the treatment of religious themes in the writing by those who felt themselves shut out from home, we need to place their work in dialogue with contemporaries who covered the same ground, but who felt free to return.

To varying degrees, the exiles in this book had already found themselves outside the domain of the Church of England before leaving English shores. It is not surprising, therefore, that they discovered more in the fabric of Italian Catholic life than the monstrous idolatry depicted by their orthodox ex-compatriots. By examining the experience of English writers who might be classed securely as travellers (Charles Dickens and Dorothy Wordsworth) alongside those who occupied a more marginal position between traveller and exile (Hester Piozzi and William Beckford), and then reconsidering the way Anna Jameson ventriloquizes the voice of an exile, we can reassess the exiled visions of Italian Catholicism and English orthodoxy that appear in the work of Byron, the Shelleys, and the Brownings.

David Alderson suggests that in order to become a unified nation state, Britain relied on the Church of England as a ‘suturing agent’ and defined itself through a manly, austere Anglicanism associated with military discipline, as opposed to a volatile, feminine, superstitious other which needed to be colonized or subordinated to the establishment.\textsuperscript{2} The existence of the established church in England means that for the whole of the 19th century, religious questions invariably possess a political dimension. Like (p.80) Ireland and India, Italy was undeniably other in its habits of worship and travel literature and had always paid close attention to the social effects of the Catholic faith.

C. P. Brand’s pivotal study of British responses to Italy in the early 19th century concludes that
[a]s a result of their journey to Italy the majority of travellers were confirmed in their anti-Catholic beliefs ... The superstition of the uneducated Italians, the severity of the convents, the relics of paganism in the Catholic ritual, these and a dozen other objections caused the average Englishman to turn from Catholic Italy with disgust.  

Walter Savage Landor is the only exiled writer in this study who maintains his settled prejudice against Catholicism as a creed, although he supported the campaign for Catholic Emancipation back in England. Landor’s contemporary exiles do not behave like Brand’s ‘average Englishman’, and seem rather to ‘incline’ (to use Byron’s word) toward Catholic Italy to supply an expressive language that might articulate their sense of exclusion from full participation in the Protestant nation state. The most complete example of such a turn in this book is Claire Clairmont, who attended mass with her friend, Signora Orlandini, in Florence during Lent 1821 and later converted to Catholicism.
One Catholic tradition that had always horrified English Protestant spectators—the provision of sanctuary in church for murderers, as described in the opening scene of Radcliffe’s *The Italian*—appeals to outcasts from English society who were looking for shelter for the criminalized individual. Exiles were able to hear a different music in the ceremonies and art of Italian Catholic churches, a music that spoke of a more yielding inclusivity in daily life, however much they loathed the apparatus of priestly power and the Inquisition. In March 1847, Elizabeth Barrett Browning tells her sister with some amusement that ‘a priest came in full canonicals to bless all the rooms of the house . . omitting ours on account of our being heretics’. Recurrently, we can see Romantic exiles trying to release the sublimity of Italian art and music from Catholic dogma. In Milan cathedral, for example, Percy Shelley found ‘one solitary spot among these aisles behind the altar, where the light of day is dim & yellow under the storied window, which I have chosen to visit & read Dante there’. In ideological terms, Shelley would resist the lesson of the ‘storied window’, but he is happy to read Dante in its amber light. Hybrid use of Catholic art works by those who felt outside orthodox English Protestantism strongly marks the writing of English exiles and occasionally tinctures other examples of English travelogue. Even Dickens, who is a more vehement anti-Catholic than Landor, finds when he is in Italy that ‘sitting in any of the churches towards evening, is like a mild dose of opium.’

Gothic fiction of the 1790s borrowed the corrupt reputation of the 16th-century Catholic Church to mirror abuses of power in the current British establishment. In 19th-century writing, the link between the Papacy and tyranny of any kind remained a live issue. When Lady Morgan describes her horror at the dungeons and the suite of the Grand Inquisitor in Bologna, she also reports the speech of a local woman: ‘If you, a foreigner feel thus, what must I feel, who am an Italian and a mother?’ Morgan remarks: ‘If power should never be trusted to a man, least of all should it be given to him who arrogates a divine mission’. With this observation, Morgan empathizes with the situation of a fellow woman and categorizes the Inquisition as another example of patriarchal despotism that they both endure.
The pioneering feminist critic, Ellen Moers, pointed out many years ago that Madame De Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) advanced a potent female aesthetic for Romantic-period writers; the religious dimension of this aesthetic, however, has been generally overlooked. De Staël uses the plot of a love affair between a repressed Protestant British man (Oswald) and an expressive Catholic Italian woman (Corinne) to structure her account of clashing North-South perspectives. Corinne makes an eloquent appeal for mingling ‘love, religion, genius, with sunshine, perfume, music, and poetry’, while Oswald argues for the virtues of ‘austerity in principles and actions ... authority in duty’ and ‘impressive simplicity’. In this way, De Staël maps aesthetic issues onto their religious divide. Corinne sees pictures, statues, and church architecture as a lavish celebration of the ‘useless’, an expression like that made by a woman who anointed Christ’s feet with perfume—a gesture of aesthetic excess to be enjoyed for the moment. Oswald, meanwhile, observes uneasily to her that ‘poetic enthusiasm which makes you so attractive is not the healthiest way of being devout’. For English exiles in Italy, the lived experience of Italian religious practice and art led to new forms of expression and, in some cases, a questioning of the patristic traditions of the Church of England and the establishment power in which it was ensconced.

(p.82) **Half-Rome**

At the end of her *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* (1789), Hester Lynch Piozzi contemplates the effect that travel can have on different temperaments:

> With regard to the general effect travelling has upon the human mind, it is different with different people. Brydone has observed, that the magnetic needle loses her habits upon the heights of Aetna, nor ever more regains her partiality for the north, till again newly touched by the lodestone: it is so with many men who have lived long from home; they find, like Imogen,

> That there’s living out of Britain;
And if they return to it after an absence of several years, bring back with them an alienated mind – this is not well. Others there are, who, being accustomed to live a considerable time in places where they have not the smallest intention to fix forever, but on the contrary firmly resolve to leave sometime, learn to treat the world as a man treats his mistress, whom he likes well enough, but has no design to marry, and of course never provides for – this is not well neither. A third set gain the love of hurrying perpetually from place to place; living familiarly with all, but intimately with none; till confounding their own ideas (still undisclosed) of right and wrong, they ... profess that climate and constitution regulate men’s actions ... try[ing] to persuade their companions into a belief most welcome to themselves, that the will of God in one place is by no means his will in another.\textsuperscript{12}

Tellingly, Piozzi sees religious relativism as one of the more dangerous legacies of travel. She asserts her identity as a ‘British traveller’ throughout the Observations, celebrating ‘English simplicity’, ‘British charms’, appealing to ‘my country women’, and toasting ‘as we do old England for ever’.\textsuperscript{13} Yet, her account of Italy throws back a number of critical reflections onto England and Piozzi welcomes ‘all the new ideas I have acquired since England lessened to my sight upon the sea’, while distancing herself from the totalizing views of some male precursors: ‘one might as well hope to get a just view of nature by looking through a coloured glass, as to gain a true account of foreign countries by turning over pages dictated by prejudice’.\textsuperscript{14} These rhetorical reassessments do not make her into an exile, of course, but an examination of the way in which Piozzi’s Protestant outlook is modified through first-hand encounters with the particulars of Italian Catholicism allows us to assess the religious sensibility of exile from a fresh perspective.
Hester Piozzi’s travel writing dances on the brink of the ‘alienated mind’ and the cosmopolitanism she warned other readers against in *Observations*. Her trip to the continent (1784–7) followed her second marriage to a man who was a musician and, more controversially, a Catholic. This choice of second husband caused a rift with her family and led to a lasting breach with her mentor, Dr Johnson, whose strong disapproval might lie behind Piozzi’s comparison of herself with the displaced and senseless interloper in *The Tempest* as she contemplates her first Italian palace: ‘I go about like Stephano and his ignorant companions, who longed for all the glistering furniture of Prospero’s cell … while those who know the place better are vindicated in crying, “Let it alone, thou fool, it is but trash”’. From an initially anti-Italian position in *Thraliana*, Piozzi develops a voice that could accommodate what Dickens would call the ‘delightful jumble’ of travellers in an amenable and independent way, and her outlook becomes more Catholic in all senses.

Piozzi’s sympathetic awareness of different religious outlooks is what distinguishes the *Observations* from many contemporary accounts of Italy by male writers who document only one point of view. Piozzi notes, for example, that the Italians refer to themselves as ‘*Noi altri Christiani*’ to distinguish themselves from British visitors whom they ‘class among the Pagan inhabitants’, and she takes the habitual anti-Catholic theatrical analogy a stage further by using it to reflect back on the vagaries of English custom. In Lucca she remarks:

> the ideas of devotion and diversion are so blended, that all religious worship seems connected with, and to me now regularly implies, a festive show …

Well, as the Italians say, ‘*Il mondo e bello perche e variabile*’. We English dress our clergymen in black, and go ourselves to the theatre in colours. Here matters are reversed, the church at noon looked like a flower-garden … while the Opera-house at night had more the air of a funeral, as every body was dressed in black.
As well as her fascination with the differences between English and Italian religious customs, Piozzi shows great interest in the eclecticism within religious life in Italy. She describes regional and historical variations in Catholic practice and she celebrates the spectacle of a mingling of different faiths. In Livorno, for example, Piozzi looks down from her balcony upon a utopia of religious tolerance and harmony:

a Levantine Jew, dressed in long robes, a sort of odd turban, and immense beard ... a Tuscan contadinella, with the little straw hat, nose gay and jewels ... Here an Armenian Christian, with long hair, long gown, long beard, all black as a raven; who calls upon an old grey Franciscan friar for a walk; while a Greek woman, obliged to cross the street on some occasion, throws a vast white veil all over her person, lest she should undergo the disgrace of being seen at all.19

Piozzi is fascinated by the way in which Catholicism was grafted on to pre-Christian forms of worship so that the figures of Diana and St Agnes are merged, as are the images of the Madonna and Cybele ‘with a tower on her head’.20 She tries to explain these compounds by emphasizing the tenuousness of Christianity in its early stages: ‘When Christianity was young, and weak, and tender, and unsupported by erudition, dreadful mistakes and errors easily crept in’.21 And yet, scriptural errors emerge in her account as strangely compelling and beautiful in their own right.

Amongst the Lazaroni of Naples, Catholicism still bears the vestiges of much more ancient practices and Piozzi extends the traditional linkage of Catholic custom with the Far East when she relates the ‘half-Indian custom’ of men tattooing religious symbols onto the skin.22 ‘One need not’, she points out, ‘wander round the world with Banks and Solander, or stare so at the accounts given us in Cook’s Voyages of tattooed Indians’, when all this is easily visible in Naples:
The man who rows you about this lovely bay, has perhaps the angel Raphael, or the blessed Virgin Mary, delineated on one brawny sun-burnt leg, the saint of the town upon the other: his arms represent the Glory, or the seven spirits of God, or some strange things, while a brass medal hangs from his neck, expressive of his favourite martyr.\(^{23}\)

The sacred and the secular meet on the body of the man, which Piozzi gazes on unashamedly. By adorning his flesh with objects of devotion, the boatman embodies all the gross superstition that Protestantism despised, (p.85) and yet, the effect as detailed by Piozzi is undeniably powerful. A similar conflict of erudition and instinct occurs when Piozzi is shocked to see girls bowing down to the figure of the Black Madonna at St Luce near Bologna ‘in open defiance of the Decalogue’.\(^{24}\)

Her textual recoil is, however, followed by the afterthought: ‘We have in England a black Madonna, very ancient of course ... in the cathedral of Wells in Somersetshire’, Piozzi notes, adding that this icon is ‘eminently handsome’.\(^{25}\) Piozzi’s fascination with the culture of the black Madonna hints at the subversive potential of Mariolatry when merged with the cult of Isis, Demeter, or Cybele. She then becomes the goddess of Byron’s address to Venice as a ‘sea Cybele’ in the opening of Childe Harold Canto IV: ‘fresh from ocean,/Rising with her tiara of proud towers’ (IV, 2), and the ‘awful power’ William Beckford bows to when he encounters her in the gallery in Florence.\(^{26}\)
Without explicitly pursuing any subversive cultural resonances, Piozzi’s inclusion of the black Madonna has the effect of quietly undermining orthodox certainty. Dickens, by contrast, disparages the ‘black statue of St. Peter ... which is constantly having its great toe kissed by good Catholics’. For him, the links between Catholicism and Paganism are either comic, like the compound oaths of the driver that ‘begin with Christianity and [merge] into Paganism’, or they suggest the hardened acquisitiveness of Catholic Rome, whereby ‘battered pillars of old Pagan temples [are] dug up from the ground, and forced, like giant captives, to support the roofs of Christian churches’. Beckford and Piozzi are both much more open to the merger of older pagan religions with Christianity, and Piozzi’s discussion of the black Madonna leads to a discussion of matters of taste in worship, suggesting that no one faith has exclusive access to the truth, and to an admission that ‘men of learning’ are utterly unable to account for anomalies within the history of the English church.

Piozzi highlights the pagan rituals embedded in English traditions such as the Rose Queen festival, which is likened to ‘Romish’ superstition, and she acknowledges the residual power of the older faiths in Italy: ‘they live nearer the original seats of paganism; many old customs are yet retained, and the names not lost among them, or laid up merely for literary purposes as in England.’ Mary Shelley will make the same point in her *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, when she says of the link between Catholic and Pagan ceremonies that ‘[w]e have obliterated all this among ourselves’, but then goes on to lament the loss of that older connection. In both accounts, English Protestant culture is subtly divested of its superiority. Piozzi criticizes aspects of the Catholic church in Italy (for example, the custom of sanctuary for criminals), but in her selective praise for other aspects of the faith, such as the homage accorded to martyrs, the startling convention of carnival cross-dressing, fireworks, and a soprano taking the part of St Peter in the Passion of Metastasion, she makes the cruder satire of Kemble and Dickens appear strangely insular and atavistic.
Hester Piozzi’s playful, conversational style is a vital part of her enlightened perspective. She unbends Miltonic allusion, for example, borrowing ‘Il Penseroso’ s image of a ‘Pensive Nun’ in a description of the uses of gondolas for what she euphemistically calls ‘the purposes of refined gallantry’.\(^\text{31}\) As Dussinger remarks, ‘in contrast to Gray, Gilpin and West, Piozzi has a relatively loose aesthetic agenda’.\(^\text{32}\) Looseness was noted as a stylistic flaw by Elizabeth Carter, who, in 1789, enjoyed the book, but said that she was sometimes put out of humour by Piozzi ‘being so vexatiously desultory’. Having led her readers to something, ‘away she whisks ... and leaves them staring and wondering what is become of her’; these rapid transitions contribute to a mobility of perspective that can cut free from English cultural pieties.\(^\text{33}\)

William Beckford evades conventional piety by cultivating an aesthetic of drowsy reverie. His ‘dreaming epistles’, as he describes them, provide a series of loosely connected sketches of famous sites and random orange groves in which the identity of the young British nobleman on tour deliquesces into an Italianate fantasia.\(^\text{34}\) Beckford’s visits to Italy in 1780–1 (p. 87) and 1782 were made as he was attempting to come to terms with his homosexuality (but before he was forced to leave England in the wake of the Powderham scandal).\(^\text{35}\) Although Beckford was accompanied by a retinue so large that he was once mistaken for the Emperor of Austria, his letters describe a series of solitary excursions in which he ‘cast many a longing, ling’ring look behind’, as he put it, using the medium of Gray’s Elegy to express his home and lovesickness.\(^\text{36}\) The first edition of Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents (1783) was suppressed at the insistence of Beckford’s family and not reissued until 1834, in a modified form, as the first volume of Italy. Although it had a limited circulation, elements of Beckford’s aesthetic response to Italian Catholicism are evident in Vathek’s blend of Dante, Milton, and oriental fantasy, which would be devoured by Byron and the Shelleys.

While Fanny Kemble flinched in disgust from the ‘four-post bed’ with ‘horrid canopies’ over the high altar, Beckford, who specializes in arriving at historic monuments just as they are about to close, enters St Peter’s at dusk and succumbs to one of his reveries:
I knew not where I was, or to what scene transported. A sacred twilight concealing the extremities of the structures, I could not distinguish any particular ornament, but enjoyed the effect of the whole ... No human being stirred. I heard a door close with the sound of thunder, and thought I distinguished some faint whisperings, but am ignorant from whence they came. Several hundred lamps twinkled round the high altar, quite lost in the immensity of the pile. No other light disturbed my reveries, but the dying glow, still visible through the western windows. Imagine how I felt upon finding myself alone in this vast temple.37

Beckford projects his isolation onto the interior space of the church, which has already shed any of its associations with a ‘particular’ faith. By describing it as a ‘temple’, Beckford follows the tradition of travel writing that traces the pagan foundations of Italian Catholicism, but here Beckford is not making a satiric point, he is looking for an unusual spiritual sponsor. Unlike Dickens and Kemble, he has no inhibitions about drapery: ‘I wished his Holiness would allow me to erect a little tabernacle under the dome’, Beckford writes in Letter XXII, ‘But I cannot say, I should (p.88) be perfectly contented, unless I could obtain another pavilion for you.’38 In this ‘little encampment’, Beckford planned that ‘we would have all the space to ourselves, and to such creatures as resemble us’. There would be ‘No priests, no cardinals’; instead, it would be a palace of artifice with reading, drawing, and music, ‘transparent curtains of yellow silk, to admit the glow of perpetual summer’, and lamps to make a moon and ‘theatrical sun to rise and set, at pleasure’.39 Beckford’s fantasy makes St Peter’s into a prototype of his aesthetic refuge at Fonthill, where he later designed a taper-lit shrine to St Anthony in the oratory.

Always ready to lie down and sleep in the various shrines and sites he visits, Beckford allows his consciousness to merge with the foreign landscape. Drawn into the ‘gentle motion’ of the waves off the Lido, he lets himself drift:
The tide rolled over me as I lay floating about, buoyed up by the water, and carried me wheresoever it listed. It might have borne me far out into the main, and exposed me to a thousand perils, before I had been aware; so totally was I abandoned to the illusion of the moment. My ears were filled with murmuring, undecided sounds; my limbs, stretched languidly on the surge, rose or sunk, just as it swelled, or subsided. In this passive, senseless state I remained, till the sun cast a less intolerable light.  

Such languor challenges the trajectory of self-improvement that was supposed to be the aim of the grand tour. In place of steady application to the acquisition of a measured ‘good taste’ and the acquisition of English manliness, Beckford (when he is awake) is drawn to the thrillingly excessive, such as his worship of the ‘idol’, the male soprano, Gasparo Pacchierotti.

Besides his enthusiasm for music, the *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* are attuned to what are usually ‘unheard melodies’ in Italy. Beckford notices the way the famous music of the gondolieri acquires a peculiarly ‘plaintive and interesting tone’ under the arches of the Rialto bridge; he records the ‘distant buzz and rumour’ of Venice heard from across the water and he relishes the ‘airy language’ of pine trees and the ‘plaintive’ chorus of the gondolieri, who are waiting for him to finish one of his naps: ‘half in this world, and half in the other’, Beckford writes, ‘[I] believed, like the heroes in Fingal, that I had caught the music of the spirits of the hill’. Beckford’s gothic experience of Italy renders it much closer to the superstitious ‘other’ faith of Italy than orthodox Protestantism, despite the dutiful conclusion of the Letters with a discourse on British cultural and moral superiority. (p.89) Although he fulfils the requirement of the grand tour in closing his narrative with a return home, Beckford’s explorations of interior states, ‘half in this world, and half in the other’, create an aesthetic of indeterminacy that anticipates the subsequent dream visions of English exiles in Italy.
Charles Dickens’s approach to Italy (apart from Venice), and Rome in particular, could not be more different. In the series of ‘Travelling Letters Written on the Road’ that he produced for the *Daily News* between January and March 1846, he identifies himself as a ‘Foreigner’ or a ‘Traveller’ and expresses ‘an ardent, but ungratified longing’ to speak with other English tourists, just as Kemble admits, ‘I feel in Rome like nothing but Boccaccio’s Jew’. The sketches were published as the book-length *Pictures from Italy* in May 1846. Robert Browning described it as ‘readable & clever’, although he felt that Dickens ‘seems to have expended his power on the least interesting places,—and then gone on hurriedly, seeing or describing less and less’. Elizabeth Barrett received Robert’s letter just as she was cutting the pages herself and she was ‘glad to have [his] thoughts of the book to begin with’; in 1846, therefore, she read Italy in England through Dickens, and Dickens through Browning.

In Dickens’s imagination, Catholicism is a nightmare of domestic furnishing so that ‘draperies of the gaudiest and most sparkling hues’ which float over the streets at the Carnival make the buildings seem to have been turned ‘inside out’. There is a similar disruption of interior and exterior in Bernini’s statues, the ‘kind of bright carpet’ hanging over the Vatican balcony on Easter day, and the way the curtain at the entrance to the Sistine chapel acquires a life of its own and ‘wind[s] itself about the unwary, like a Serpent’. In his relentless descriptions of carpets, sashes, canopies, parasols, and coverings, Dickens suggests that Catholicism breeds a suffocating materiality, a view emphasized by his metaphors of a ‘goldsmith’s shop’ or a ‘lavish pantomime’ for St Peter’s, and toyshops, crackers, enamelled snuff boxes, and cake bonbons for other religious sites around Italy. The imputation of a commercial motive behind the ‘whole concern’ is omnipresent, as if the Catholic Church controlled a gigantic rival entertainment industry.
(p.90) Beginning with Puritan opposition to the theatres in Elizabethan London, there is a long tradition of Protestant objection to elements of popular performance in the decoration of the Catholic churches and in the behaviour of the penitents. In Naples, for example, Hester Piozzi observes an act of contrition by a lady ‘looking like Jane Shore in the last act, but not so feeble’. 49 Piozzi admits that, together with the rest of the congregation, her own heart was ‘quite penetrated’ by the sight; but in the last analysis, she finds the ‘burst of penitential piety ... indecorous’. 50 Fanny Kemble likens the funeral decorations for Pope Gregory XVI to ‘the operatical representations of the tomb of Ninus in the Semiraminde’, and less impressive than ‘some theatrical exhibitions of which I have seen’. 51 Charles Dickens describes the showing of a miraculous ‘Bambino’, like a puppet theatre which is shut back in its box at the end, ‘and the money all collected, [the priests] retired, and so did the spectators’. 52 While Dickens and Kemble remain resolutely sceptical and detached observers, Piozzi oscillates between distant curiosity and imaginative involvement in the ceremony.
Receptiveness or resistance to Catholicism is conveyed in form and style as much as content: Piozzi and Beckford adopt a more gentle ebb and flow of description and reflection: Kemble and Dickens use a matter-of-fact voice or the ‘eye of common sense’ that is designed to ‘keep my English audience within speaking distance’, as Dickens outlines in his Preface. Although she often seeks out ‘female voices’ and breaks up her accounts of various sites with passages of confessional poetry, Kemble’s descriptive prose adopts the same register as Dickens, with caustic observations about the ‘monotonous’ features of Catholicism. In their determination not to be stirred by Rome, their tone of adverbial detachment is identical. Kemble says of St Peter’s: ‘how absolutely like what I had imagined it was ... it in no way exceeded or differed from my expectations’. Dickens tells his readers, ‘I felt no very strong emotion ... The effect of the Cathedral on my mind, on that second visit, was exactly what it was at first, and what it remains after many visits. It is not religiously impressive or affecting’. A shared use of bathos deflates Catholic mystery at key points, such as Dickens’s much-anticipated entrance to Rome and St Peter’s in Easter week or the emergence of the miraculous Bambino from its box. At other points, his relentless anaphora mimics the repetition of hollow ritual:

The same monotonous, heartless, drowsy chaunting, always going on; the same dark building ... the same lamps dimly burning; the self-same people kneeling here and there ... the same priest’s back, with the same large cross embroidered on it ... the same miserable cripples exhibiting their deformity at the doors ... the same preposterous crowns of silver stuck upon the painted heads.
One of the terms that Dickens, Kemble, and Dorothy Wordsworth share and use repeatedly is the word ‘gaudy’, to describe Catholic shrines, churches, and ecclesiastical vestments. The word has long-standing anti-Catholic undertones (the gaudy is one of five tapers burnt to commemorate the Virgin’s joy). The negative sense of gaudy as ‘pomp’ or ‘show’ came in after the Reformation and is evident in William Wordsworth’s opposition to ‘gaudiness’ in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. William Beckford, however, explicitly unshackles the ornamentation of St Peter’s from orthodox Protestant criticism when he refers to the ‘vast arches glowing with golden ornaments so as to lose all glitter and gaudiness’. As with his description of the cathedral in Florence, Beckford creates an alternative idea of a sanctuary: ‘However prophane I might feel myself’, Beckford states, ‘I took the liberty of entering, and sat myself down in a niche … A sort of yellow tint predominates.’ It allows him to experience what he calls the ‘colour of sanctity’.
Beckford’s enthusiastic response to the Catholic colour of Italy is curiously replicated in those rare moments in which Dorothy Wordsworth drops her Anglican guard. We find anti-Catholic pertinacity gradually yielding to new combinations of belief in the journals of the tour she made with William on the continent in the autumn of 1820, the year her other brother, Christopher, became the ultra-orthodox Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.\(^6^0\) Almost as soon as the Wordsworth party left England, Dorothy declared that she ‘longed for the stillness of an English Sabbath’, but her journal is fascinated by the vital, festive aspect of church-going in Italy, concentrating on impressions of surface colour and suggestions of pagan exoticism.\(^6^1\) A mountain chapel is described as possessing ‘something of a festive aspect, accordant with our notions of a Grecian or Italian Temple ... the inner walls painted in bright colours, with figures, at that distance indistinctly seen.’\(^6^2\) Despite her initial suspicion of visual show and representation (‘it was like being admitted to a Theatre in the midst of a performance’, she writes of the Cathedral at Como), Dorothy’s journal suggests that exposure to Italian mass and festivals, even for the short duration of their visit, allowed her to shed some of these ingrained prejudices.\(^6^3\) Her prose makes subtle tonal shifts to meet new aesthetic and religious principles and we can detect an intermittent relaxation of her northern Protestant inhibitions about ‘gaudy garments’, ‘parade, glitter and flashy colours’.\(^6^4\)

‘[H]ow busy every one is here in quest of pleasure!’ Dorothy remarks, somewhat disparagingly, in a letter from Milan to Catherine Clarkson, in which she also describes the Duomo as ‘wanting the solemnity and massiveness of ... our Cathedrals’.\(^6^5\) In the more private space of her journal, however, Dorothy expresses a feeling of physical release in the prospect ‘outspread’ of the other-worldly interior of the cathedral:

I wandered about with space spread around me; the floor on which I trod was all of polished marble, intensely hot, and as dazzling as snow; and instead of moving figures I was surrounded by groupes and stationary processions of silent statues - Saints - sages - and Angels. It is impossible for me to describe the beautiful spectacle, or to give a notion of the delight I felt.\(^6^6\)
Her sensual bewilderment comes from a mixture of sublime space with high artifice and it is interesting that the ‘stationary processions’ of religious statues enhance, rather than diminish her joy in the ‘spectacle’ (invested here with a more positive meaning). A moment of similar aesthetic and religious apostasy occurs on the Sunday in Milan when Dorothy goes to watch the fireworks. On the way to the display she watches ‘a glorious sunset. I thought I never before had beheld such a mixture of lightness in substance with the brilliancy of rosy or ruby colouring ... and, after such a spectacle expected to find it [the firework display] very tame’. 67 She surprises herself, however:

Then began the fire-works, and, with them, our childish delight; for all the preparations were despicable, and at best could but raise a smile that served to put away the sadness one could not help feeling at sight of so many thoughtless people having no better employment for a sabbath evening than gazing at such fooleries. But when the rockets mounted to the clear sky, twisting, eddying, shooting, spreading – I was really in ecstasy, having never before seen any fire-works better than we sometimes exhibit to children. The trains of smoke were hardly less beautiful than the mounting fire. 68

This anticipates Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s rapture at the fireworks in Florence in June 1847: ‘it was my turn to be a child ... Great temples, living in light up in the sky ... fountains of flame ... which took away your breath! ... living fiery serpents which seemed tensing & curling when you looked at them!’. 69
The fireworks in Milan mark an important turning point in Dorothy’s Italian journey. After obligatory disapproval of ‘childish … fooleries’, she is prepared to confess that she was moved to ‘ecstacy’, and her response to the ‘twisting, eddying, shooting, spreading’ effect of the lights suggests a loosening and dilating of both mental and physical constraints. The moment is brief, and as if to counter this lapse, Dorothy soon afterwards records her more familiar distrust of a ‘Priest, in his scarlet cap and party-coloured robes, more like a showman, addressing a crowd on the outside of his stage, than a minister of the Gospel in a Christian Temple’. With the vignette of the priest as actor-conjuror, Dorothy shakes herself free of the spell of the ‘burning red’ spectacle of the fireworks, but the possibility of a more hedonistic participation in the other culture has been admitted privately.

As she moves further into Italy, Dorothy is moved by the sound of Rustics ‘chaunting the service’ and people in a boat ‘chaunting’ the Litany. Her delight in the ‘heart-stirring’ music of the mass is related to her appreciation of the ‘sweet sound of the Italian tongue [which] has a bewitching charm’, and during the service in Milan, she is seduced by ‘the sound of sacred music, which upon minds unfamiliarized to such scenes (p.94) had an irresistible power to solemnize … spectacle’. Wordsworth’s experience of Catholic voices and music is not simply a brush with the sublime of sudden or unexpected noise, it is the penetration of her consciousness by a sound she knows to be alien or ‘bewitching’. For converse instances of English Protestants blocking their ears to Catholic enchantment, we need only turn to Dickens and Kemble.
Dickens does not enjoy the sound of the Catholic service, which he describes in Modena with ‘officiating … priests crooning the usual chaunt, in the usual low, dull, drawling, melancholy tone … the same monotonous pulsation, the centre of the same torpid, listless system’. High Mass in St Peter’s is no better, with singers ‘in a crib of wire-work (like a large meat-safe or a bird-cage)’ who ‘sang most atrociously’. Throughout his time in Italy, the power of Catholic music is less evident than the sound of the ‘receptacle for contributions of the Faithful … vigilantly jingled by an active Sacristan’, and at the supposed high point of the Christian year, the Miserere in the Sistine Chapel, Dickens (without a ticket for entrance to the chapel itself) can hardly hear anything at all: ‘Sometimes, there was a swell of mournful voices that sounded very pathetic and sad, and died away, into a low strain again; but that was all we heard’. Disappointing as this is, it is less dreary than Kemble’s account (also from outside the door):

Thus, in the heat, suffocation, and intolerable stench of an Italian crowd … I heard through the door, blocked up with human figures, the few notes of the miserere which oozed through the living wall … It was not, after all, we found, the famous miserere, but one by a modern composer.

Emphasizing the gross corporeal aspects of the crowd, and turning the music into a substance like ‘the distressing and nauseous effluvium proceeding from the corpse’ of the Pope she sees lying in state in the Sistine Chapel in 1846, Kemble ruthlessly disenchants a religious service that even Percy Shelley wanted to attend.
The violent hostility of Dickens and Kemble may be influenced by perceived threats to the Church of England at the time they were writing. Migration in the 1840s meant that there were more Catholics in England than ever before. The growth of the Oxford Movement led to fears that the established church would fragment, especially when Newman converted to Catholicism in 1845. Dickens responded to rising panic by publishing 'A Crisis in the Affairs of Mr John Bull' (1850). Landor brought out *Popery; British and Foreign* in 1851, in which he wrote, ‘as an Englishman, I must declare … No religion hath ever done so much mischief in the world as that which falsely … calls itself the catholic’. But the tenor of these articles is characteristic of the mid-19th century. Anna Jameson’s 1826 *Diary of an Ennuyée* was published in the years before Catholic emancipation, when the Church of England seemed indomitable, and her performance of exile plays out in swings between anti-Catholic satire and pro-Catholic sympathy.

Anna Jameson

Initially, the experience of Catholic forms of worship in *Diary of an Ennuyée* exercises Jameson’s acerbic wit. She wishes herself a Roman Catholic ‘for one half hour only’ during the procession of the Pope; criticizes ‘gaudy colours’; suggests that the dressing up of the crucifix warrants the attention of ‘our South Sea Missionaries’; disapproves of the smell of the embalmed Cardinal Tomasi; and mocks the itemization of one of the Virgin’s ‘shifts’ among a list of relics. All the familiar anti-Catholic barbs find their mark, but the merger of the ancient Roman religion and Catholicism exercises an ambiguous appeal. The Ennuyée laughs, at first, at the way in which ‘two divinities, whose attributes could not be mistaken, had been converted from heathenism into two very respectable saints’, but in the verse that punctuates her prose, she is drawn to the ‘beautiful forms of ancient Faith …/lingering round us still’. She softens to the involvement of crowds of people and animals in Catholic ceremonies and, as the Diary progresses, she discovers a kindred sympathy in scenes of female devotion:
I remarked a picture of the Virgin said to be possessed of miraculous powers; and that part of it visible, is not destitute of merit as a painting; but some of her grateful devotees, having decorated her with a real blue silk gown, spangled with tinsel stars, and two or three crowns one above another of gilt foil, the effect is the oddest imaginable. As I was sitting upon a marble step philosophizing to myself, and wondering at what seemed to me such senseless bad taste, such pitiable and ridiculous superstition, there came up a poor woman (p. 96) leading by the hand a pale and delicate boy, about four years old. She prostrated herself before the picture, while the child knelt beside her, and prayed for some time with fervour; she then lifted him up, and the mother and child kissed the picture alternately with great devotion; then making him kneel down and clasp his little hands, she began to teach him an Ave Maria, repeating it word for word, slowly and distinctly so that I got it by heart too. Having finished their devotions, the mother put into the child’s hands a piece of money, which she directed him to drop into a box, inscribed, ‘Per i poveri vergo gnesi’ – ‘for the bashful poor;’ they then went their way. I was an unperceived witness of this little scene, which strongly affected me.81

As with her response to the painting of Hagar, it is the image of an isolated mother that strikes her. The sound of the scene overpowers her sceptical ‘philosophizing’ and, against her better judgement, she gets the prayer ‘by heart’.

Along with its unfolding sympathy for aspects of Catholicism, *Diary of an Ennuyée* provides a space for criticism of the arrogant orthodoxy. Jameson’s narrator is scathing about the English visitors who ‘convert St Peter’s into a kind of Hyde Park’; she ‘blushed for [her] countrywomen’, and ‘the shameful conduct of the English, in pressing in and out of the chapel, occupying all the seats, irreverently interrupting the service, and almost excluding the natives’. The culmination of this satire is when the sound of an English voice interrupts the *Miserere* in the Sistine Chapel: ‘just in the midst of one of the most overpowering strains, the cry of the condemned souls pleading for mercy, which made my heart pause, and my flesh creep—a lady behind me whispered loudly, “Do look what lovely broderie Mrs L has on her white satin spencer!”’. Reversing the usual English disapproval of pontifical robes, Jameson’s narrator turns the ‘satin spencer’ into a whitened sepulchre and renders the loud voice from home as the sound of desecration.

Jameson’s claustrophobia in the presence of other English tourists anticipates the sense of distance and distaste that pervades Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s experience two decades later, when she attends English divine service in Italy. Jameson suggests that

> To attend public worship among our own countrymen, and hear the praises of God in our native accents, in a strange land, among a strange people; where a different language, different manners and a different religion prevail, affects the mind, or at least ought to affect it ... yet I cannot say that I felt devout this morning. The last day I visited St. Mark’s, when I knelt down (p.97) beside the poor weeping girl and her dove basket, my heart was touched, and my prayers, I humbly trust, were not unheard: to-day, in that hot close crowded room, among those fine people flaunting in all the luxury of dress, I felt suffocated, feverish, and my head ached – the clergy men too –

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(p.97)
Jameson and Barrett Browning share impatience with crowds flaunting their finery and the witless English clergymen who serve the Anglican communities of Florence, Naples, and Rome: ‘the truth is that a church is made of men’, Barrett Browning wrote in exasperation to her sister, ‘A church means an assembly of men. Holy & venerable men, perhaps ... but men incapable of an error?’  

Barrett Browning ignores the theology that makes the office holy, rather than the man, in order to strike at masculine infallibility. Jameson’s sympathy with Catholicism is, as Judith Johnston has argued, closely related to her feminist aesthetics in works such as *Legends of the Madonna.*  

In 1847, Jameson wrote to Lady Byron from Rome, explaining how the study of art had assisted her understanding of the nature of Catholic belief:  

& while I am farther, than ever before in my life, from all capability of entering into this belief, I have more & more sympathy with its effects – more & more comprehension of its past & present power – a deeper & deeper conviction that this power, must, like the ancient mythology merge into poetry.

The point at which Catholicism and ancient mythology merge into poetry provides a source for writers who were disenfranchised by gender or intellectual persuasion and who needed a repository for mystery apart from the established church.

The Other Half-Rome  
Percy Shelley visited Rome between the autumn of 1818 and the summer of 1819. His satirical hostility to Catholicism anticipates the repulsion of Charles Dickens 25 years later, towards the ‘panorama of horror and butchery’ on view in depictions of the martyrdoms: ‘women having their breasts torn with iron pinchers, their tongues cut out, their ears screwed off, their jaws broken, their bodies stretched upon the rack, or skinned upon the stake, or crackled up and melted in the fire’.  

Shelley complained to Peacock about the number of crucified Christs on display: (p.98) ‘One gets very tired indeed ... of seeing that monotonous & agonized form for ever exhibited in one precriptive attitude of torture’.  

He hated Old Testament ‘hacking and hewing’ and he objected to Michelangelo’s *The Last Judgement,* likening it to Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus:*
God is leaning out of Heaven, as it were eagerly enjoying the final scene of the infernal tragedy he set the Universe to act ... Under the Holy Ghost stands Jesus Christ, in an attitude of harranguing the assembly. This figure which his subject or rather the view which it became him to take of it, ought to have modelled of a calm severe awe-inspiring majesty, terrible yet lovely, is in the attitude of commonplace resentment ...

Jesus Christ is like an angry pot-boy & God like an old alehouse keeper looking out of a window.  

Shelley does not labour his point, but as with Dickens, the metaphors of theatre and commercial eating premises materialize the beliefs of the faithful. From an aesthetic point of view, Shelley accepted the need for terror in this scene; his objection is to the painter’s taste for low-grade horror as much as the doctrine of eternal damnation. Hunt agreed and supported Shelley’s preference for Raphael over Michelangelo:

as to the horrible picture you mention ... That figure of Christ in particular, is every way a mistake and a monstrosity - Do you remember Raphael’s ‘Christ, and the miraculous draught of fishes?’ that wonderful figure containing all the negative beauty, at least, of his doctrine, without any of the deformity of the faith which swallowed it up, - that self-sustained excess of gentleness, - that extreme of weakness, meeting, on the very strength of its existence with power, - that passive obedience made paramount, - neutralizing slavishness by disarming despotism - making a part, as it were, of the ærial element about it, a thing issuing from out the air, and if it were to be carried away by it, as if it would submit & so resume itself.  

Hunt explicitly disconnects wonder from ideology. ‘Negative beauty’ is part of the conversation Hunt was having with Hazlitt, Reynolds, and Keats about creative power. Hunt’s letter was written in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre, and his celebration of the pacifism that can ‘disarm despotism’ or the powerful ‘from the very negation of power’ is both a response to the immediate political situation and in accordance with his own long-standing views on the role of the martyr.
The ideal strength within mildness that Hunt and Shelley both sought appeared in Italy in the androgynous figures painted by Raphael and Correggio. For Shelley, Correggio’s Christ is ‘inexpressibly fine’: ‘the whole figure seems dilated with expression, the countenance is heavy as it were with the weight of the rapture of the spirit the lips parted, but scarcely parted’.93 Shelley’s description of the painting is strikingly close to the ideal female figures of his imagination—Emilia in Episychidion, Beatrice in the portrait that inspired the Cenci, and the female figure in the Triumph of Life are ekphrastic creatures, ‘too gentle to be human’ (l. 21). The almost abject quiescence of trecento images of saints presents an abstraction of exiled passivity, the heroic endurance of the martyrs of Regency England from Leigh Hunt to Princess Charlotte.94

Shelley’s enthusiasm for this feminine latent power recurs in the ‘passive & gentle Maddeleina’, the ‘depth of ... passion & rapture’ in Raphael’s St Cecilia, and the ‘heavy’ intensity of Guido’s Madonna Lattante: ‘Her eyes are almost closed, her lip deprest; there is a serious and even a heavy relaxation as it were, of all the muscles ... as if the spirit of a love almost insupportable from its intensity were brooding over and weighing down the soul, or whatever it is’.95 The ‘soul, or whatever it is’ indicates his wariness about adopting Christian terminology, but Shelley’s reverent contemplation of the face of the Virgin takes him as close as he ever comes to sharing a religious faith.96 Shelley uses the Catholic ‘Mitres’, ‘thrones’, and ‘tia/of pontiffs’ that he had witnessed as priests and cardinals officiated over the crowds in Rome as visual symbols of human enslavement; but untied from its doctrinal moorings and anticipating Pre-Raphaelite ideals, Italian Catholic religious art also allowed Shelley to articulate the resistance of the ‘listening heart’ to tyranny.97
The state of receptive suspension that we find in Beckford’s Waking Thoughts, Shelley’s art appreciation, and the swooning transitions between monumental sites in the fourth canto of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage are peculiar appropriations of Dantean dream vision. Byron was encouraged (p.100) to compose something on Dante’s exile by Teresa. He told Medwin that The Prophecy of Dante was ‘intended for the Italians’, but in the Preface he says that an address to the Italian reader is a deviation, ‘when my business is with the English one’.98 As he discusses his translation of terza rima, Byron admits that the only English version he has seen before is by ‘Mr Hayley … quoted in the notes to Caliph Vathek’.99 Beckford, therefore, has a curious subterranean role in the mediation of Dante to Byron in exile and, although there is no evidence that the Pisan circle knew of Beckford’s suppressed Italian travelogue, Byron appears to have obtained more than one copy of Vathek after he left England in order to have Beckford’s visions of crime and eternal damnation to hand.100 Beckford helps to orientalize Dante for Byron; their shared interest in the embodiment of extreme rebellion and inexorable punishment might have been assisted in both cases by the influence of Calvinist mothers.

When Byron and Shelley turn to Dante in Italy, they advertise an extreme self-consciousness about their position between two cultures and outside the orthodox faith of both. Their attraction to the Purgatorio implies an instinctive sympathy with souls in exile. Childe Harold Canto IV, Cain, Heaven and Earth, and The Triumph of Life all imagine the individual floating in the void of space without a steady Virgil as a guide, ‘like anatomies that dance/Within a sunbeam’ (ll. 446–7). Dante’s poetry informs their visions of vistas of time and space, but so too does the ‘“Divina Comedia,” embodied upon the walls’ that they encountered in Rome and Pisa.101

In the town that was the backdrop for much of the great poetry of late 1821–2, the 14th-century Last Judgement and Triumph of Death on the Campo Santo supply images of plague, destruction, and infernal punishment; and the huge Theological Cosmography of Piero di Puccio maps endlessly recessive circles of planets, stars, realms of archangels, cherubim, and sepahim (see Figure 4). To a believer, these are circles of belonging; to an outsider, the dominion of space is in the hands of an implacable judge. These painted visions of immense height and distance are vertiginous: to
19th-century travellers, souls ‘seem absolutely to float in the air, so lightly and delicately are they portrayed’. Responding in words to the wonder and the terror of the biblical sublime, and perhaps mindful of the role of the camera stellata in English history, the Shelleys and Byron roam the starry realms of the Catholic universe, while questioning its vision of judgement.

Figure 4. Leo von Klenze, Der Camposanto in Pisa, 1858

Oil on canvas; 103.5 × 130.5 cm,
Neue Pinakothek München

By kind permission of bpk Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen

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In December 1821, the English poets in Pisa were incensed by a rumour that a man had been condemned to be burnt alive at Lucca for sacrilege; Shelley immediately proposed that Byron should lead a posse that would enter the town and rescue him.\(^{103}\) We might see their joint effort to infiltrate Dante’s terza rima as an artistic raid on dogmatic theology, with the aim of rescuing Dante’s tender human element from the clutches of religion.\(^{104}\) At the start of The Triumph of Life, Shelley disengages his sunrise from a church service when he images mountain tops as ‘smokeless altars’ and flowers ‘Swinging their censers in the element’ (ll. 5, 11). In the later stages of the poem, the image of the ‘chrysolite/Of sunrise’ (ll. 414–15) evokes the yellow light of the stained glass that had bathed Shelley as he read Dante in Milan cathedral. Shelley had always been a ‘free and deep … speculator’, as Hunt called him, but his ability to merge the apparently incompatible world views of atheism and Dante’s Christian mythology draws on the exiled art of living in two places at once, while being nowhere at all.\(^{105}\)

Shelley’s modification of traditional religious forms is accompanied by a blend of English and Italian landscapes. The poet has one foot in Italy, in the shade of a chestnut ‘athwart the steep/Of a green Apennine’ (ll. 25–6), but his ‘waking dream’ (l. 42) leads him through the concentric rings of what is more like an English wood of ‘overarching elms’ (l. 71). Thoughts on a green shade draw on literature, memory, and also on the letters Peacock wrote to Shelley at his most homesick, reminding him of evening strolls under the trees around Marlow during the late summer of 1818: ‘the woods are most delightful in the thickness of their shade: for the heavy rains of the spring brought out an unusually luxuriant foliage’; ‘I have been very late on the river for several evenings under the beams of the summer moon: and the air has been as warm as the shade by day, and so still that the tops of the poplars have stood black in the moonlight as \(\text{(p. 103)}\) motionless as spires of stone’.\(^{106}\) Mingling with his memories of English woods, Shelley’s remapping of Dante’s form is evident in the way the poet feels ‘sick of … this perpetual flow/Of people’ (ll. 298–9).
The poet’s introduction of himself in line 21, ‘But I’, is a grammatical and metrical identification of the poet as the odd one out or outsider to ‘Ocean’s orison’ (l. 7) and the ‘Sweet talk in music’ (l. 39) of the birds and fountains. Shelley’s ideological hostility to ‘Constantine … And Gregory and John and men divine’ (ll. 284–7) predates his exile in Italy, but his experience of the crowds and ceremonial carriages, such as the ones that throng round the processions and festivals of Holy Week in Rome on ‘a public way/Thick strewn with summer dust’ (ll. 43–4), is etched into the poem and set disconcertingly against the memory of English verdurous gloom, mossy lawns, wet grass, willows, ‘lily-paven lakes’ (l. 368), and jonquil (l. 420; not ‘gionchiglia’). In particular, the ‘sad pageantry’ (l. 176) of the old men and women who ‘Limp in the dance and strain with limbs decayed/To reach the car of light’ (ll. 167–8) is reminiscent of the cripples around Catholic shrines and churches, whose clamorous begging offended Charles Dickens and Dorothy Wordsworth, and may also reflect Shelley’s awareness of the ‘Tarantella’ customs from the Apulian region of southern Italy that he would have encountered in various forms around Naples. The poet’s distance from this ‘ribald crowd’ (l. 136), and the instruction that he should ‘from spectator turn/Actor or victim’ (ll. 305–6) mark him as a visionary outsider, although he has the weary, stained, exile Rousseau as his guide, rather than Virgil, just as Byron’s Cain has the cosmic ennui of Lucifer to guide him through the abyss of time.

Intensified remoteness from the crowd is a sign of Byron’s exiled realignment of perspective in Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. Compared with the ‘mimic train of merry Carnival’ around St Sophia in Constantinople at the end of Canto II, the appearance of St Peter’s in Canto IV yields a different apprehension of sacred space. In the earlier canto, the Lenten carnival is in full swing, ‘Though Turban’s now pollute Sophia’s shrine’ (II, 79), and both the narrator and Harold (despite themselves) participate in the pleasures of the ‘gamesome crowd’:

(p.104) Nor oft I’ve seen such sight, nor heard such song,
As woo’d the eye, and thrill’d the Bosphorous along.
Loud was the lightsome tumult of the shore,
Of Music chang’d, but never ceas’d her tone,
And timely echo’d back the measur’d oar,
And rippling waters made a pleasant moan. (II, 79–80)

Of course, there is the poet’s reflex return to the ‘hearts that throb with secret pain’ (II, 82), but as with the rest of Childe Harold Cantos I and II, the surrogate outsider figure ‘at a little distance stood/And view’d, but not displeas’d, the revelrie,/Nor hated harmless mirth, however rude’ (II, 72). Harold’s ‘little distance’ from the crowd indicates the gradations of a superior sensibility and class consciousness, but does not cut him off entirely from group festivity. In Canto III, Byron voices a greater degree of separation from the crowd: ‘I stood/Among them, but not of them’ (III, 113), and in Canto IV, the poet’s recollection of St Sophia is charged with the consciousness that all ties between him and the crowd have been snapped:

I have beheld Sophia’s bright roofs swell
Their glittering mass i’the sun, and have survey’d
Its sanctuary the while the usurping Moslem pray’d. (IV, 153)

The emphasis on what he ‘beheld’ and ‘survey’d’ leads into Byron’s famous meditation on the experience of the lone spectator in St Peter’s. These stanzas contemplate the apprehension of the sublime ‘part by part’ (IV, 157), and in repeated soundings between the ‘vast and wondrous dome’ and the mind that ‘[gets] by heart/Its eloquent proportions’ (IV, 153, 157), Byron places the poet observer in a state of isolated suspension. The poet’s loneliness is suggested by his mention of ‘Zion’s desolation’ as a marker of passing time, and in the listing of qualities which are ‘aisled/In this eternal ark of worship undefiled’ (IV, 154). ‘Aisled’ is one of many unique Byron usages recorded in the OED. It is glossed there as ‘located in an aisle’, but this, I think, does not quite capture the word’s evocation of parallel passages stretching out into the distance (picked up more faithfully in the sound, if not the spelling, of Matthew Arnold’s ‘in the sea of life enisled,/With echoing straits between us thrown’). In exile, spatial awareness acquires critical intensity as the outcast maps the distance between himself and home. In ‘aisled’, we hear Byron’s knowledge that, apart from ‘thy God’, mortal millions live alone.
Byron’s survey of St Peter’s withdraws the consciousness of the poet from other tourists: ‘the sating gaze/Of wonder’, and from other worshippers or \(\textbf{(p.105)}\) connoisseurs: ‘the mere praise/Of art and its great masters’ (IV, 159). The poet who projects his personal ruin onto Rome also fathoms his own situation in St Peter’s: ‘But thou, of temples old, or altars new,/ Standest alone—with nothing like to thee–’ (IV, 154). Spenserian stanzas are wrought around an act of reverential attention: as E. H. Coleridge notes, stanza 156 can be ‘paraphrased, but not construed’.110 In the heightened awareness of consciousness and phenomena enforced by verse, we can detect the way that exile sharpens the main preoccupation of Romantic poetry—the relationship between viewer and object, and between interior and exterior worlds. Unlike Beckford’s reverie, there is not even the sound of the other visitors departing, and the variant for stanza 159: ‘and ye return not as ye came’ also renders the other realm of the St Peter’s stanzas as the essentially solitary trajectory of the exile.111

While Dickens and Kemble give animated sketches of the oddity of Catholic festivals, Byron and Shelley present themselves as the odd ones out in an orthodox view of the universe. Byron articulates an exiled religious sensibility in blank verse in \textit{Cain} and \textit{Heaven and Earth}, his versions of the Catholic mystery play, when he dramatizes what it feels like to be shut out of a religious service in which the rest of the family participates. The difference that exile makes in Byron’s verse is an audible one and his dramatic form forces us to hear different theological positions in character. \textit{Cain}’s chopped blank verse exchanges, which struck many contemporary reviewers as coarse and discordant, mean that the reader has to listen to the disruption of dogmatic assertion by doubt.
T. G. Steffan has analysed Byron’s use of verbal parallelism and biblical archaism to lend a scriptural character to the dialogue. More than a mood, the use of anaphora captures the repeated cadences of religious services, which Byron would have heard in both England and Italy without feeling at one with the rest of the congregation. The ‘stiffening’ of the line that Steffan detects when the cumbrous epithets of piety are inserted allows Cain to break through with another language—a speech that strikes Abel as odd: ‘your words are strange today, my brother’ (III.1.171). Rather than the silent reading experience of mental theatre, this is a play that demands to be read aloud so that we hear Lucifer ventriloquizing ‘the tyrannous threats to (p.106) force you into faith’ (II.2.461), or Abel’s mechanical piety: ‘we must perform our task together ... Choose one of those two altars’ (III.1.208–10). The play defamiliarizes biblical text: the bewildering instructions and the unaccountable smoke surrounding Abel’s sacrifice configure a ceremony that might as well be heathen; Cain approaches the altar as a stranger in a church service who does not know where to stand: ‘No—I am new to this; lead thou the way,/And I will follow—as I may’ (III.1.222–3), and the murder of Abel appears as a response to, and a replication of, stony religious intolerance.

In *Heaven and Earth* Byron uses flat rhyme or pararhyme to conjure the obeisant notes of the unthinkingly faithful: ‘Whate’er our God decrees,/The God of Seth as Cain, I must obey,/And will endeavour patiently to obey’ (III, 427–9). Noah is the voice of orthodox belief, larding homily with banal aphorism: ‘forget/That they exist’ (II, 495); ‘Be a man!/And bear what Adam’s race must bear, and can’ (III, 694–5), and the doomed chorus in the last scene dutifully chimes ‘thy sire’ with ‘we must expire’, exhorting Japhet to ‘raise/Thy song of praise’ (III, 856–7, 881–2). About to be engulfed by the audibly rising waters, a lone mortal chants ‘Blessed are the dead ... Still blessed be the lord’ (III, 883, 893).
Breaking against the monotony of these beatitudes, female voices provide the music of humanity: Adah’s enraptured watch over her sleeping child and her sturdy acceptance of her office ‘to dry up tears, and not to shed them’ (III.1.548); Aholibbamah’s and Anah’s unflinching advice to their angel lovers to leave them, rather than lose God’s grace, and the nameless woman’s desperate attempt to place her infant son in the ark are all decisive notes of selfless love. In the frescoes of the Fall, the death of Abel, and the Flood in the Campo Santo in Pisa, female figures are placed in unusually prominent positions: the viewer cannot miss Eve nursing an infant and women leaning on the open timbers in the middle of the ark as it is built. In these art works, as in Byron’s mystery plays, loving feminine voices are not drowned out by noisier orthodox justifications for ethnic cleansing: forthright declarations of love and acts of maternal devotion exist as pools of commitment that impeach narrower scriptural readings of biblical history.

*Heaven and Earth* was issued in the second number of the *Liberal*; Edward Williams heard Percy Shelley read it aloud the day he finished the fair copy of the play that he and Percy had been revising. He called Byron’s work ‘an improvise’ and noted ruefully that ‘there are several pages in the manuscript without a single correction’. Heaven and Earth can be seen as a response to biblical narrative and to local political conflict. As well as the paintings of violent martyrdoms, Old Testament havoc, and genocidal religious wars that were entwined with the religious architecture of Italy, and in addition to news of the religious burning in Lucca, the Pisan circle was aware of new trouble brewing between Muslims and Christians.
In October 1821, Ipsilantis’s defeated troops were given safe passage through Tuscany en route for Livorno.\textsuperscript{115} Greek sympathizers gathered in Pisa and the Shelles were excited by the prospects of Mavrocordato’s ‘infant republic’.\textsuperscript{116} In a letter to Maria Gisborne of late December 1821, Mary Shelley reported that ‘Our friends in Greece are getting on famously—All the Morea is subdued and much treasure was acquired with the capture of Tripoliza—Some cruelties have ensued—But the oppressor must in the end buy tyranny with blood—such is the law of necessity’.\textsuperscript{117} At Tripoli, the Orthodox Christian Greek army had slaughtered thousands of Muslims, including women and children. Mary Shelley’s axiom sounds dispiritingly like Raphael’s acceptance that ‘earth must die’ (III, 559) simply because ‘‘Tis decreed!’ (III, 805). One of the political legacies of exile was that the lofty vantage point of the satirist or historian (Dante in \textit{The Prophecy of Dante}) is often clouded by the sensation of being a powerless spectator (Japhet in \textit{Heaven and Earth}) to the destruction of a forsaken world.

Without giving any sign that Byron’s mystery plays and the newspaper reports of religious genocide might be related, Mary Shelley talks about her response to \textit{Cain} in the same letter to Maria Gisborne:

\begin{quote}
To me it sounds like a revelation … One has perhaps stood on the extreme verge of such ideas and from the midst of the darkness which has surrounded us the voice of the Poet now is heard telling a wondrous tale.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

Mary’s journal records the reading of \textit{Heaven and Earth} that Williams had heard a few days earlier on the evening of 14 December. Conversation between Byron and Shelley is one of the sounds that Mary most associated with her first exile, as she recalls in the Preface to \textit{Frankenstein}. Echoes of their voices reverberate when she returned to Italy in the 1840s as a professional travel writer and thought of making Venice her home.\textsuperscript{119} Mary Shelley’s later response to Catholic Italy weaves recollections of the sound of Percy Shelley, Byron, and Hunt’s words into a subtle revision and recasting of the religious ideals of the Pisan circle.\textsuperscript{120}
Mary Shelley’s return to Italy in the 1820s had been impeded by the demands of Godwin who ‘intends to make [her] returning to Italy an affair of life and death with him’. Other lives and deaths were inextricably bound up with her memory of Venice and La Spezia, and, like Jameson, she drops heavy hints to her reader about ‘The difference to me!’ Rambles in Germany and Italy is written from the perspective of an exile returning home. Mary’s later prose is coloured by memories of the religious dissenters who shared her first exile, but also a reconsideration of their reading of divine law, and a recalibration of their vision, to give maternal and familial love greater weight.

Mary Shelley’s later contemplation of the religious art of Italy begins with a questioning of the authority of male art historians: ‘I was told that I ought not admire it [the Pietà by Titian]; yet I could not help doing so: there was something impressive in the mingled awe and terror in Mary’s face, when she found the body of Jesus gone.’ The ‘yet’ hinge in this passage is significant. As with Byron and Jameson’s Diary of an Ennuyée, Shelley’s residual exilic consciousness emerges in a pattern of reflection or afterthought, persistently qualifying pejorative views of Catholicism. We might see the habitual Byronic proviso or tempering of opinion as the textual embodiment of the exile’s backward glance.

In the History of a Six Week’s Tour, the record of her first encounter with Catholicism on the continent, Shelley had demurred at the figures of saints ‘in wretched wax work’. She followed her husband’s preference for the ancient temple over the modern church, but she also kept up an uneasy attendance at the Protestant church in Pisa so that people would not misconstrue her motives for staying away. By the time of her later visit to Italy, Mary is a more orthodox Protestant: Trelawny remembered that he met her ‘going to chapel (Sir John Dean Paul’s) on weekdays, and it is no imputation to her that she conformed to the customs of the State religion in which she had been reared.’ In the Rambles, however, the resistance to Catholicism that we saw in the writing of Dorothy Wordsworth and Anna Jameson also undergoes modification.
Shelley comments on the ‘superstition’ and ‘absurd buffoonery’ that made people believe that the cholera outbreak of 1837 would not invade Rome, and the illuminations and processions which were undertaken to keep plague at bay, ‘Yet’, she notes ‘many redeeming touches in the dark picture’. In particular, Shelley praises the conduct of the Jesuits: ‘[t]hey were seen taking, with gentle care, babes from the sides of their mothers, (p.109) who lay dead in the streets, wrapping them tenderly in their black gowns, and carrying them to ... refuge’. The image of maternal monks accords with Shelley’s view of a country where ‘nature is the indulgent mother instead of the stern overseer of our species’, and her travelogue often focuses on actual households, the situation of mothers, and older women. In one such encounter, Shelley describes the faith of a ‘Juno-looking’ woman from Capri with a sick child to care for:

‘Sono sempre allegra,’ she said. ‘I am gay – we ought to be gay. ‘Siamo come Dio vuole.’ ‘We live as God pleases, and must not complain’ ... ‘Ma, allegra, Signora’ – ‘the Virgin will help us;’ and she began, in a sweet voice, to sing a plaintive hymn to the Virgin. Poor people! their religion is hung round with falsehood; but it is a great, a real, comfort, to them.

With her reflection on the way that a ‘false’ religion may offer ‘a real comfort’, Shelley locates moral value in the ‘hangings’ of Catholicism which had always appalled Protestant observers. Her linkage of Juno and the Virgin in the same anecdote is an example of the pagan and Catholic meeting point mentioned by Anna Jameson. Shelley’s suffering mother troubles the prose with almost queasy pathos, epitomizing the over-determined appeal to the viewer that often appears in exiled works of art.
In the Sistine Chapel, Mary Shelley finds that ‘the eye is so fed by sights of beauty, “that the sense aches at them”’, a comment that recalls Othello, possibly filtered through Childe Harold’s response to Greece: ‘the sense aches with gazing to behold/The scenes our earliest dreams have dwelt upon’ (II, 88). The underlying allusion to Othello’s tortured admiration of Desdemona before he kills her, marvelling that what he believes to be false can look so true, captures the mingled seduction and resistance in Shelley’s revisitation of Catholic shrines. In 1819, the Shelleys had failed to get tickets for the performance of the Miserere in the Sistine chapel, but during Holy Week in April 1843, Mary was able to attend, and shared with her readers the experience of Catholic ecstasy:

the soul is rapt – carried away into another state of being. Strange that grief, and laments, and the humble petition of repentance, should fill us with (p.110) delight – a delight that awakens these very emotions in the heart – and calls tears into the eyes, and yet which is dearer than any pleasure.133

The ‘other state of being’, which Mary Shelley locates in the idealized forms of Catholic adoration, recalls the artistic aims of Percy Shelley. In her delight in Catholic church music, Mary might be remembering Percy’s strong reaction to the sound of the organ in the church at Pisa, where, according to Leigh Hunt, they discussed the idea of a religion based on charity, rather than faith; it also repeats her delighted experience of Rome, where she describes ‘the music of heaven & the singing of Angels’. Rambles in Germany and Italy foregrounds Percy’s ideal of connection between a transcendent and earthly sphere, but encapsulates it in a densely layered allusion. Following the preferences of her husband and Leigh Hunt, Mary Shelley affirms Raphael’s aesthetic and moral supremacy:

of all men he had firmest hold of that ‘golden chain which is let down from Heaven, and with a divine enthusiasm ravishes our souls, made to the image of God, and stirs us up to comprehend the innate and incorruptible beauty to which we were once created.’136
Mary had recently been working on Shelley’s notebooks for the edition of *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* she published through Edward Moxon in 1845. She attributes this quotation to ‘Plato’s Ion. Shelley’s Essays’, but it has always puzzled her editors, who note that it is ‘not recognizably’ from this source. The golden chain image is from Lucian and is translated thus almost verbatim in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in the section of the third partition on the objects of love, in which Burton considers the twofold division of love into the volatile raging lust that overwhelms men like the sea, or divine love that lifts them to contemplation of higher things. Mary’s misattribution is shadowed by her melancholy, her desire to rescue Percy from restless love and the sea itself, and the impossible ideals of her father, whose reason was celebrated by Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age* as ‘the golden chain let down from heaven, which links all accountable and all intelligent natures in one common system’.

(p.111) In Mary Shelley’s writing about the wonders of religious painting in Catholic Italy, we can hear the voice of compound exile, of a woman who felt rejected, alienated, and estranged from her father, from England, and from her husband. The experience of standing among, but apart from the congregation of another faith, and the solitary experience of sacred space sharpen the exile’s acute awareness of distance, but Shelley’s reaching for the ineffable also retrieves human links and points of connection across the void defined by earlier Romantic poetry. The Brownings’ encounter with Catholicism in Italy provides a final case study of the way that an auditory experience of religion shapes the poetics of exile.

The Brownings and the Sound of Strangeness

The noise of Catholicism conditions Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s earliest responses to Italian life. ‘We have been nowhere but into churches’, she admitted, before revealing the proximity between religious and poetic reliquaries:
‘We have heard a mass, a musical mass for the Dead, in the Campo Santo— and achieved the due pilgrimage to the Lafranchi Palace’. \(^{139}\) The Brownings were observant Christians, so church attendance had to be maintained in Italy, although it was the aspect of their new environment that they found more trying than any other. On the first Christmas day after she left England, Elizabeth wrote to tell her sister that she was only ‘impressed for the first ten minutes’ by Christmas Eve service at the Duomo in Pisa. \(^{140}\)

Elizabeth’s dissatisfaction with Catholic services is bound up with a sense of jarring sound, particularly conversation in the wrong intervals:

the people walked up & down & talked loud while the service proceeded ... with the usual hoarse chanting of old priests, & curtsies & gestures of various sorts – all magnificent & feeble . . . saying nothing to the senses even, – which mine cd. be impressed by. If they would have let the organ & the choir sound & sing on, & the incense burn . . . I liked that cloud of incense floating about the brazen crucifix . . . we might have felt an effect ... At the moment of the uplifting of the host, . . . for that one moment . . . there was attention & silence, & everyone knelt or stood still. That one moment of devotion was the only one for the people, observe – I have looked everywhere to see more than this & cannot see it ... how English protestants can come here, & ever be English Puseyites afterwards I cannot understand. \(^{141}\)

\(^{(p.112)}\) The mention of ‘English Puseyites’ suggests Elizabeth’s resistance to what were seen as the ‘Romanizing’ tendencies of the Oxford Movement. Pusey’s love of ritual, especially rituals of penitence, meant that his name was associated with noisy exhibitionism. \(^{142}\) In her mention of ‘the usual hoarse chanting’, Elizabeth (who has only been in Pisa for a few months) is probably drawing on the script of Charles Dickens, rather than her own experience. But we can already detect a warmer response to Catholic music and gradually, we find a more open attitude to the different forms of worship in Italy: ‘I am able to walk out, & watch the lizards in the walls, & see the ceremonies in the churches ... All is delightful to me ... The cathedral is not like cathed(rals in) England—I felt no cold at all’. \(^{143}\)
During the course of their first year abroad, the Brownings begin to prefer the voice of Italian devotion to the forms of English worship that are available in Florence. At the start of Lent in February 1847, Elizabeth writes to her sister:

we heard three sermons last week at the Duomo, besides one (by far the worst) in the English church ... Arabel, we could not go often to hear such trash . . . it amounted to imbecillity . . . The catholic discourses delivered four times a week during Lent, I had much more satisfaction in listening to . . . the voice, the articulation, the vibrative earnestness of the tones of the preacher . . . a friar in a brown vesture & a rope round his waist . . . legs & feet as bare as nature left them . . . his striking gestures as he stood in the chair of the great cathedral . . . above all, the crowds of listeners . . . men . . . thronging, standing leaning against the columns with uplifted dark Italian faces, . . . such a crowded & breathless congregation . . . all made a grand sight; & the coloured sunshine streaming through the windows . . . The chanted, muttered Latin mass leaves them as I told you, a congregation of promenaders – but the words of their own language, appealing to their sympathies & experience, draw them, fasten them, impress them . . . the silence in the great crowd seemed to take away your breath.  

Elizabeth’s new experience of being part of a crowd is connected with her delight in the sound of vernacular Italian (rather than a Latinate service), with a sense of a new nation, and also a growing estrangement from the sound of English inanity:

The imbecillity & inconsequence of the English preacher is something past describing . . . We found it disagreeable altogether to go to that room . . . a mere room . . . into a selection of pink & blue bonnets, everybody looking at everybody – ‘a shilling for entrance’ . . . in the meanwhile we mean to hear all the Lent sermons in the cathedral.
The pincer tong inverted commas around ‘a shilling for entrance’ suggest Elizabeth’s repudiation of this mercantile aspect of English culture. The awkward reality of being part of an English crowd honed her sense of alienation. The English in the recently built Chapel of St George the Martyr were exactly the species that the Brownings sought to avoid in Bagni di Lucca. Ironically, it is in the Church of England, in the company of the English, and hearing the sound of spoken English, that the Brownings experience their greatest sense of national estrangement. By contrast, the Catholic services throng with crowds that, after an initial sense of strangeness, they felt much easier about joining. Elizabeth identified an unusually inclusive ‘harmony’ in Florentine communal celebration: ‘You never see fighting with fists, nor hear blasphemous language. It is the sort of gladness in which women may mingle and be glad too ... How different a thing a crowd is here to an English crowd’. The reason, she decided, was to do with the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism:

One reason is that our religious teachers in England do not sanctify the relaxations of the people. The narrowness which cuts down literature & refuses to accept Art into the uses of the Christian Life, is more rife with injury & desecration than you see at first glance—Of this I am more & more sure the more I see & live.

Elizabeth’s readiness to see a better way of integrating social and political life with art and the ‘relaxations of the people’ through Catholic teaching is a significant step, and one which derives from her position as an exile and a heretic. But it is also a feminist vision of a society ‘in which women may mingle’. To this extent, the ruined paradise of an Italy that is not yet even a nation can teach England a lesson.
The exiled experience of churchgoing in Italy energized the first long poem that Robert Browning wrote after his departure from England in his *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* volume (1850). Other critics have suggested that this confrontation with forms of worship was probably prompted by the death of Browning’s mother. Ian Jack observes, ‘in such circumstances a man is led to question his own beliefs about life and death’, and both he and Richard Cronin trace the importance of correspondence between the Brownings about dissenters.  

Within this biographical context, I would like to refocus attention onto the Brownings’ auditory experience of going to both Catholic masses and English services abroad. The poem is not just an ecumenical discussion; it is a dramatization of what it sounds like to be an outsider. Richard Cronin and Lee Erickson attend to the speaker’s solipsism and ‘visionary isolation’, and link this astutely with the situation of Percy Shelley’s prophetic dreamers, but there is more to be said about the exile’s sense of being a ‘misfit’. Ian Jack suggests that Browning chose the wrong metre for the poem, but the relentless tetrameter beat helps to build the pressure of noise that is vital to the poem’s effect of dislocation.

At the start of Browning’s poem, the poet bursts out of the ‘Zion Chapel Meeting,/On the Christmas-Eve of Forty-nine’ (ll. 134–5) into English rain, before describing the repugnance that propelled him away from ‘the flock’ (l. 136) and its accompanying ‘human noises’ (l. 140): the ‘mighty report’ of the umbrella (l. 50), the ‘snort,/Like a startled horse’ (ll. 52–3) of the large woman, the hinges of the door, the footsteps on ‘broken clogs’ (l. 60), the coughing, and then the ‘pig-of-lead-like pressure/Of the preaching man’s immense stupidity’ (ll. 143–4). The vision that ensues when he leaves the chapel (or falls asleep) contemplates human varieties of faith and doubt with equal detachment—a panorama of faiths that draws on the Brownings’ deracination from their usual habits of worship in 1846 and their experience of Catholic churches in Italy. The poem relishes the full irritation of the Brownings with their fellow communicants in Italy. Sound is invasive; it enters the body involuntarily, like the experience of being jostled by another person’s movement, which is equally jarring and brings to a crisis one’s sense of self and other. The church provides a microcosmic, alienating experience of the English nation in the form of a crowd, rather than a community.
Robert Browning transposes the congregation from the realm of pink mantillas into lower-middle-class English urban wretchedness; but the ‘imbecility’ of the preacher is unmistakable, together with the palpable horror of being crowded with other English people on the same bench:

My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor …

(p.115) The shoemaker’s lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. ‘Twas too provoking!
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it,
And saying, like Eve when she plucked the apple,
‘I wanted a taste, and now that’s enough of it,’
I flung out of the little chapel. (ll. 173–86)

The burlesque version of Paradise Lost alerts us to the way an exilic sensitivity underpins the comedy. Browning dramatizes his own sense of exclusion and renders the nine fellow members of his congregation as a mural of the damned. Fraser’s Magazine found Hogarthian caricature with ‘frescoes of judgment, heavy with the gloom and pomp of the Sistine … grotesquely bound up together in Christmas Eve.’¹⁵² The mixture of English and Italian art is significant, for as an Englishman abroad, Browning belongs to both, and to neither. In the description of ‘the swarming hollow of a hive,/The whole Basilica alive’ (ll. 51–2), sound is again the measure of the scene’s strangeness:

The taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God’s hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)
At the silver bell’s shrill tinkling. (ll. 571–9)
These sounds are all disparate and inchoate so that the experience is of distracting multiplicity. When the scene shifts to the German university of higher criticism, Browning catalogues the noises at the start of a lecture: the ‘step by step’ progress up ‘the creaking rail to the lecture-desk’ (ll. 809–10); the ‘cough-preludious’ (ll. 818), ‘the auditory’s clearing of throats’ (ll. 827), and the Professor’s ‘grave voice, sweet though hoarse’ (ll. 840). Sensitized by his life abroad to the oddity of the ‘light speech we utter’ (l.1351) (their days of reading together would have been very quiet), and the otherness of ‘the frothy spume and frequent sputter’ (l. 1352) of less controlled conversation, Browning’s poem forces the reader to sit through an English sermon as well. In a church service, the recursivity of the human voice is ineluctable, and Browning captures it in the rhythm that contemporary reviewers found grotesquely complicated, with the Athenaeum and the Edinburgh Review (p.116) both detecting ‘doggerel’, while other reviewers sensed ‘all kinds’ of style, ‘outlandish’ style, and a style of ‘gaudy ribbons’.  

The poem dwells on the issues of religious schism in England, the controversies caused by Strauss and Newman, and the family upheavals that led Browning’s father to leave the Church of England and join the non-Conformist chapel faith of Browning’s Dundonian mother. But the poem is also a trying out of what an English poetic voice sounds like from abroad. Elizabeth wrote of the poem, ‘there is nothing Italian in the book’, which is only superficially true, as the pressure of being in Italy is all around it. The poem looks back at home through the medium of Italian experience. ‘Christmas Eve’ can be read as using an English crisis of faith to explore an exile’s crisis of identity. The poet is repelled by English speech until ‘the giving out of the hymn reclaims me’:

I put up pencil and join chorus  
To Hepizibah Tune, without further apology,  
The last five verses of the third section  
Of the seventeenth hymn in Whitfield’s  
Collection,  
To conclude with the doxology. (ll. 1355–9)
In a comic turn clinched by Byronic feminine rhyme, Browning is reclaimed by music; he overcomes his distance from the others by preserving it in the chiming of separate syllables. To conclude with the doxology is a defiant marker of English custom for, as Henry Matthews observed in *Diary of an Invalid*, ‘most of the Italian Preachers’ conclude abruptly and ‘hurry down the stairs of the pulpit, without doxology, prayer, or blessing’. Browning is not at home with his neighbours in the Mount Zion chapel, but he is not at home anywhere, and Cronin’s location of him alongside his wife’s vantage point on Italian politics is characteristically shrewd:

He assumes in the religious sphere a very similar posture to that assumed by his wife, as she surveys Italian politics from her Florentine window, neither quite separate from the citizenry that parade along the streets beneath her, nor yet quite subsumed within them.

The classic location of the exile, ‘retired, apart’, is realized in the Browning’s encounters with Italian Catholicism, and as we have seen, their new vantage point helped them to reconceive the nature of the established English church, the treatment of the English poor, and the divisive character of English society.

The reception of ‘Christmas Eve’ tells us that Browning’s departure from England did not go unnoticed. David Masson reviewed the volume and detected that the author’s genius ‘kept aloof from the beaten ways—snugly ensconced, as it seemed, for the most part, in some Italian or other foreign retreat, whence it could see all that was going on, and yet be at liberty to build up its own fancies’. Charles Kingsley was even more nationalistic:

How can Mr. Browning help England? By leaving henceforth ‘the dead to bury their dead,’ in effete and enervating Italy, and casting all his rugged and genial force into the questions and the struggles of that mother-country to whom, and not to Italy at all, he owes all his most valuable characteristics.
While they were in exile, however, the members of the Pisan circle and the Brownings became more firmly ‘dis-established’. Their embrace of Catholic aesthetic forms from poetry, music, and art allowed them to inhabit more than one religion, as they inhabited more than one country and (through reading) more than one epoch. By returning as a ‘foreign shape’ to their own century and country, they paved the way for a new cosmopolitan pluralism.\footnote{160}

Notes:
\footnote{1}{David Williams discusses the binary traditions whereby the exile can be a Cain or a Christ figure in ‘The Exile as Uncreator’, \textit{Mosaic} 8.3 (Spring 1975): 1–14 (pp. 13–14).}
\footnote{2}{David Alderson, \textit{Mansex Fine: Religion, Manliness and Imperialism in Nineteenth-century British Culture} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 30–1.}
\footnote{4}{\textit{BLJ} IX, 119.}
\footnote{5}{\textit{BC} XIV, 162.}
\footnote{6}{\textit{PBSL} II, 8.}
\footnote{7}{Charles Dickens, \textit{Pictures from Italy} (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1846), p. 60. Venice is also depicted as a strange waking dream.}
\footnote{8}{Lady Morgan, \textit{Italy}, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1821), I, 286.}
\footnote{9}{Ellen Moers, \textit{Literary Women} (London: The Woman’s Press, 1978)}
\footnote{10}{De Staël, \textit{Corinne}, pp. 179, 180–1.}
\footnote{11}{De Staël, \textit{Corinne}, pp. 179, 180.}
\footnote{12}{Hester Lynch Piozzi, \textit{Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany}, 2 vols (London: A. Strachan and T. Cadell, 1789), II}
\footnote{13}{Piozzi, \textit{Observations and Reflections}, I, 62, 67, 68, 150, 154.}


(17) Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, I, 359. Contrast with Charlotte Eaton, who recounts the verdict of an old priest on their ‘sight-seeing’ party that they were all ‘“Lutherani! si! e vann’tutti, giu, giu, giu –” ’; see *Rome in the Nineteenth Century … Written During a Residence at Rome in the Years 1817 and 1818*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1820), I, 349.


(27) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 169.

(28) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, pp. 87, 200.


(32) Dussinger, ‘Hester Piozzi, Italy and the Johnsonian Aether’, p. 46.


(34) Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 89.

(36) Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 112.


(38) Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 156.

(39) Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 156.


(41) Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, pp. 92, 93, 95, 96.


(43) *BC XII*, 344.

(44) *BC XII*, 346.

(45) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 176. *Pictures from Italy* English

(46) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, pp. 218, 228.

(47) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, pp. 41, 64, 156, 166, 173.

(48) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 191.


(52) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 191.

(54) Kemble, *A Year of Consolation*, I, 59; II, 13. Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 193. Kemble’s account of the carnival in Rome is verbally so close to the same section in *Pictures from Italy* that it appears to have been based on Dickens’s. Her account of the famous picture of Beatrice Cenci, however, is in marked disagreement. Dickens finds ‘transcendent sweetness and beauty’ (p. 147), while Kemble finds ‘a pretty, round, silly, sensual open mouth, and that is all’ (II, 88).


(56) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, pp. 166, 169.PBSL

(57) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 193.

(58) Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 156.


(64) De Selincourt (ed.), *Journals*, II, 229, 237.


(67) De Selincourt (ed.), *Journals*, II, 238.

(68) De Selincourt (ed.), *Journals*, II, 239.

(69) BC XIV, 230.
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(70) De Selincourt (ed.), *Journals*, II, 240.
(72) De Selincourt (ed.), *Journals*, II, 197, 237.
(73) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 93.
(74) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, p. 170.
(75) Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, pp. 194, 218.
(76) Kemble, *A Year of Consolation*, I, 122.
(77) Kemble, *A Year of Consolation*, II, 89.
(78) Walter Savage Landor, *The Last Fruit off an Old Tree* (London: Edward Moxon, 1853), pp. 162
(85) *BC XIV*, 245.
(89) *PBSL* II, 50.
(91) Thornton Hunt (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 141.
There is less evidence of Byron’s response to Catholic art, but Aurora, who is a Catholic, is an example of a seraphic heroine whose motionlessness and steady gaze might have been inspired by religious painting.


The Triumph of Life The Complete Works, IV

CPW IV, 215, 499.

Byron wrote to Samuel Rogers in March 1818 to ask if he would acquire from Beckford ‘a copy in M.S.S. of the remaining tales ... I have a french Copy of Vathek which I bought at Lausanne’ (BLJ VI, 17).

E. H. Coleridge notes Byron’s use of ‘son of clay’ is from the Halls of Eblis in Manfred; McGann notes that the phrase is reused in Heaven and Earth. The geography of Eblis is suggestively Catholic with aisles, vaults, brazen lamps, and an infinity of censers, together with an antic crowd of damned souls. The isolation of Beckford’s crowd of the damned strongly anticipates Shelley’s The Triumph of Life.

[anon], Hand-Book for Travellers, p. 459.

[anon], Hand-Book for Travellers, p. 463.

Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams: Shelley’s Friends. Their Journals and Letters, p. 117.

For Shelley’s interest in the uncertainty of Dante’s Purgatorio and Inferno, see PBSL II, 112; and Pite, The Circle of Our Vision, p. 168. For Byron’s emphasis on Dante’s gentleness, see BLJ VIII, 39.

Thornton Hunt (ed.), Correspondence, I, 149.

The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock, I, 126, 145.
Shelley told Medwin that he almost fainted at the smell of the jonquils on one of the high Apennines (MWSJ, 216).

Percy was too dispirited to ‘be conversant’ with Pisan paintings and sculptures, according to Mary (Essays, p. x), but Gittings suggests that Lasinio’s engraving of the Campo Santo frescoes influenced Keats, and Shelley could have encountered the images through the same medium, if not in Italy. See Robert Gittings, John Keats: The Living Year (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 55–6; and Weinberg, Shelley’s Italian Experience, p. 238.

‘To Marguerite—Continued’ (ll. 1–2). Byron makes more of the aisle/isle in ‘Venice: A Fragment’ (1816).


CPW II, 178.


PBSL II, 358.

PBSL II, 368.

MWSL I, 212.

MWSL I, 212.

In April 1841, Mary Shelley visited Anna Jameson (whose work she had reviewed in 1826), and she probably also met Fanny Kemble at this time, although an earlier meeting in June 1837 is possible.


MWSL I, 385.
The comparison with Juno recalls Jameson’s account of a woman ‘standing at her door spinning with her distaff … her form and features would have been a model for a Juno’ (Diary of an Ennuyée, p. 281).

Following Percy Shelley’s interest in depictions of religious transport, Mary Shelley dwells on examples of rapture and other-worldly endurance which she finds in Titian’s ‘Assumption of the Virgin’ and the ‘Death of Abel’, the frescoes at Padua, and the work of the elder Florentines.


BC XIV, 50, 62.

BC XIV, 90.
(141) BC XIV, 90-1; ‘we are strongly against every pretence or pretext of Puseyism’ (BC XIV, 96).


(143) BC XIV, 92, 125.

(144) BC XIV, 130.

(145) BC XIV, 131.


(147) BC XIV, 301.


(150) Jack, Browning’s Major Poetry, p. 127.


(154) BC XVI, 90.

(155) George Whitefield’s A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship
Cain or Christ


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