(p.vii) Preface

This book explores the ways in which exile concentrates the aesthetics of two generations of 19th-century British writers who felt forced to leave England and chose to live in Italy. The study responds to recurrent issues raised at Romantic research seminars in Scotland: Richard Cronin drew attention to the oddity that the two English poets who responded most directly to the politics of England in 1819 wrote from abroad; Nigel Leask queried whether exile in Italy could be counted as real exile compared with transportation to Australia; and Dale Townsend asked about the relationship between exile and cosmopolitanism. Matthew Roe reformulated the original research question in Venice in 2009 when he asked (with some asperity) why Lord Byron wrote so much poetry in a place where everyone else just went on holiday.
The book also enters broader debates shaped by recent monographs on travel writing; the Italian literary inheritance in English literature; the ‘vitality of reading for form’; and discussions of the importance of Italy for the English political imagination.1 In many former studies, Italy becomes synonymous with an idealized destination, the end point of a quest for differently imagined freedoms of a political, aesthetic, or sexual nature. The present book is more interested in the aesthetic tensions and juxtapositions in the dialogue between two nations and cultures, rather than la bella figura of psycho-sexual liberation or Risorgimento politics. My intellectual debts are, therefore, mainly to critics and editors who have focused on the formal and philosophical ramifications of travel to and residence in Italy for English writers.

In the coda to his study, Michael Scrivener suggests that a cosmopolitan ethos is involved in ‘energetic reading and appropriation of Italian literature and culture.’2 This book explores the cosmopolitan dynamic of the Pisan circle in more detail, suggesting that while exile in Italy is real enough, the artist’s experience as an English reader abroad compounds the experience of being a denizen of more than one society at the same time. While benefitting from Chloe Chard’s work on tropes of intensification in travel writing (which is where Italy becomes the main focus of her enquiry), my examination of travel writing takes the representations of Italy’s foreign excess into thoughts about the relationship between viewer and phenomena, linking this with the aesthetics of 19th-century poetry.3 I shall build on Stephen Cheeke’s searching analysis of Byron’s nostalgia, particularly his idea of ‘an Anglo-Italian project in which the Italian and the English elements are each quite distinctly and faithfully rendered’.4 Whereas Cheeke focuses on the geo-historical specificity of ‘being there’ and ‘having been there’ for Byron’s imagination, this book examines the more radically conflicted significations of ‘being here while not being there’.5 I shall be working with the hybrid aesthetics of travel writing previously discussed with reference to women writers and gender by Elizabeth Bohls and Katherine Turner, in relation to single poets such as Percy Shelley by Benjamin Colbert and Alan Weinberg, and with respect to the exotic territory beyond Europe by Nigel Leask.6 Maria Schoina’s examination of ‘Anglo-Italian’ identity in the Pisan circle is a key point of departure: Schoina is
concerned with ‘acculturating strategies’, rather than exile, but her attention to ‘betweenness’ provides a valuable counter-approach to the topic through the theoretical lenses of Zygmunt Bauman, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Stuart Hall. Scholarly work on the reception of Italian poets in England by Antonella Braida, Peter Cochran, Ralph Pite, Peter Vassallo, and Edoardo Zuccato will be brought into dialogue with broader studies of intertextuality and English Romanticism by Michael O’Neill and Susan Wolfson. While remaining alert to the gender politics of 19th-century writing, I suggest that discussion of these issues can proceed further in a mixed forum and my book will build on Wolfson’s detailed attention to the subtle borderlines of gender using the *Romantic Interactions* methodology, rather than segregating male and female case studies. I am particularly keen to continue discussions of the merger of Romantic and Victorian aesthetics by Richard Cronin, Britta Martens, Marjorie Stone, and Michael O’Neill’s brilliant suggestion of a ‘post-Romantic doubleness of vision’ resulting from the ‘reactive and responsive interplays’ of later poets with Byron and Percy Shelley. Linking O’Neill’s work on the reception of Romantic writers with philosophical discussions of exile by Edward Said, this book sees doubled vision as a key element in the artistry of exile, and my analyses of Walter Savage Landor, Anna Jameson, and the Brownings will focus on the complex legacy of Byron and the Shelleys for the English in Italy in the 19th century.

All the authors I shall be considering favoured discursive modes of literary creation and used the disjunctions of exile to probe, challenge, and seek answers to compelling questions about literature, art, religion, law, history, and politics. Exile has always been a dialogical condition, fostering reflection on the difference between here and there, then and now, presence and absence. Turner’s study of Napoleon, ‘War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet’ (reproduced on the front cover), gives the fallen emperor a double to contemplate in the shape of his own reflection in the wet sand before him. This brooding watchfulness is shadowed by the figure of the guard standing behind him, whose image is also mirrored on the shining water. Suspended in Turner’s prismatic sunset, these other selves invite the viewer to enter Napoleon’s concentrated focus on the gulf between his former boundlessness and present fixity.
For the writers in this book, the artistry of exile heightens their use of transition, rupture, juxtaposition, and their exploitation of a mixed medium that can hold competing forces in tension. Exile frames the way in which they examine their personal histories and their artistic development. Narratives of exile form some of the primary myths of Western literature: the loss of home as told by Homer, Dante, and Milton shapes the way that literal homes and metaphorical paradises are lost, found, and regained in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This book places its \( \textbf{(p.x)} \) focus on the interplay between the imaginative and actual deracinations and homecomings of the Byron-Shelley-Hunt circle (1816–1825), and of their 19th-century followers and second selves in Italy, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1846–61). The Brownings and the Pisan circle were intimate groups of writers, but this book also considers the outsider, Walter Savage Landor, and the mobile, mediating figures, Anna Jameson, Fanny Kemble, and Lady Blessington, who linked the Pisan circle with the next generation of English writers in Italy in the 1840s and 1850s.

In responding to the material it encounters, and the associations that material pulls in its wake, the book follows the uneven experience of exile. There is, after all, no reason why the chapters of a book should be exactly the same size and the following chapters fall naturally into different lengths according to the number of strands of argument. Musical and dramatic forms could have accommodated the varying duration of different themes, but this book settled into the traditional shape of an Italian meal with its progression from \( \textit{l’antipasto} \) to \( \textit{il primo, il secondo} \), and then \( \textit{il dolce} \). This mode of organization proved more organic and appropriate than a regulated symmetry for a number of reasons, including the fact that most of the book was written at the kitchen table. The particularity of domestic life abroad—‘the taste of another man’s bread’ singled out by Dante—is a significant part of the lived experience of exile and in a study of this kind it was necessary to read with the grain of the primary material.

The Introduction presents the classical and Christian lineage of the metaphor of exile and places it in relation to the actuality of banishment under different political regimes in England from the Civil War to the post-Waterloo period, noting the ironies of the two-way traffic of exile between England and Italy. There is a brief discussion of the extent to which it is
possible to desynonymize exile and other forms of what might be called ‘reluctant travel’ in the 19th century and a consideration of the role of exile in definitions of Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. Chapter 1 looks at the 1816 company of exiles on the shores of Lake Leman (the threshold of the Shelles and Byron’s Italian experience), and the Brownings’ delighted, bewildered entry into Pisa in 1846. The ideal of the intellectual group or circle is discussed in tandem with lamentations about the isolated, interior experience of banishment, and the unfamiliar texture of a new locale. Keeping mythic and material responses to exile in dialogue, the biblical book of Genesis and Sophocles’ tragedy of Philoctetes exemplify the polarities of solitary and communal exile. Chapter 2 examines the twinning of literary and historical figures to shape voluntary and involuntary kinships within exile. Framed by the scandals of Caroline of Brunswick and Lucretia Borgia, the chapter explores the Pisan circle’s expulsion from, and rejection of, English domestic mores.

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. Chapter 4 looks at narrative as one of the consolations of exile, and focuses on the Pisan circle’s use of ‘Boccaccio’s lore’ to foster a more tolerant, cosmopolitan ethics and sexual politics in exile. Chapter 5 continues the discussion of narrative art by examining the way in which exiled writers turn to history, especially the life-writing of Plutarch, as a way of fathoming the distance that exists between them and their estranged English audiences. Romantic-period debates about the role of the historian in reanimating the past and producing imaginative affect in the reader, as recently discussed by Mark Salber Phillips, are seen to have a correlative in the hybrid historical and dramatic forms of Byron, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley. Chapter 6 develops the nexus of narrative, history, and the law by considering the dedication to Don Juan
as a document of satiric belonging and non-belonging; the
dramatic dialogues of Landor as a distinctive form of political
transmission to the reader, and the framing books of The Ring
and the Book as an exiled discussion of the relationship
between history, poetry, and readerly affect. Finally, Chapter 7
draws together the book’s intermittent discussion of a
distinctive poetics of exile in a conversation between English
poets (living and dead) and the unfamiliar, but gradually
internalized music of their Italian surroundings.

Re-examining the role exile plays for this spectrum of 19th-
century writers involves a series of case studies of individuals
and groups, and the book proceeds through a series of
interlinked, historicized, close readings with reference to
contemporary philosophy and psychology. In his powerful
meditations on exile, Edward Said argued that the ‘bolus of
direct experience’ is lacking in most formal criticism with a
focus on ‘textual matters’. One of the arguments of this book
is that attention to ‘textual matters’ is exactly what transmits
the experience of exile in literature. ‘[E]xperience is not simply
what happened’, Chinua Achebe reminds us, ‘[e]xperience is
what we are able and prepared to do with what happens
(p.xii) to us.’ The fact that the writers concerned are also
treated as readers necessitates quotation of a wide range of
other sources. Initially, I kept quotations in their original
language and supplied a parenthetical quotation, but this
made the book excessively long. I have therefore retained the
French, Italian, Latin, and Greek alongside the English only
when the sound or the precise etymology of the words makes
bilingual citation desirable.

Notes:

(1) Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (eds), Reading for
Form (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press,
2006), p. 5

(2) Michael Scrivener, The Cosmopolitan Ideal (London:
Pickering & Chatto, 2007), p. 214

(3) Chloe Chard, Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel
Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600–1830 (Manchester:
Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 48–95

(4) Stephen Cheeke, Byron and Place: History, Translation,
Nostalgia (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 150


(7) Maria Schoina, *Romantic ‘Anglo-Italians’: Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 165


