Chapter 1 looks at the 1816 company of exiles on the shores of Lake Leman (the threshold of the Shelleys 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.

Keywords: Barrett, Byron, Milton, Dante, Cain, Philoctetes

Critics often put the ‘exile’ of Byron in inverted commas, but in the spring of 1816, the year in which Ugo Foscolo arrived in England, there is no doubt that Byron felt forced out. In Thomas Medwin’s account, Byron itemizes the ‘obloquy and opprobrium’ cast on his name after his separation from Lady Byron:
I once made a list from the Journals of the day, of the different worthies, ancient and modern, to whom I was compared. I remember a few: Nero, Apicus, Epicurus, Caligula, Heliogabalus, Henry the Eighth, and lastly the King ... I was abused in the public prints, made the common talk of private companies, hissed as I went to the House of Lords, insulted in the street, advised not to go to the theatre.¹

Byron modelled the vehicle in which he would leave England on Napoleon’s carriage. He did not pay the carriage-maker’s bill and headed for Switzerland, ‘perhaps the dearest country in Europe for foreigners, its people being the most canny and rascally in the world about all that has to do with money’.² A more lyrical first look at exile on the continent followed on the shores of Lake Geneva:

Rousseau–Voltaire–our Gibbon–and de Staël–Leman! these names are worthy of thy shore,
Thy shore of names like these, wert thou no more,
Their memory thy remembrance would recall:
To them thy banks were lovely as to all,
But they have made them lovelier, for the lore
Of mighty minds doth hallow in the core
Of human hearts the ruin of a wall
Where dwelt the wise and wondrous; but by thee
How much more, Lake of Beauty! Do we feel,
In sweetly gliding o’er thy crystal sea,
The mild glow of that not ungentle zeal,
Which of the heirs of immortality
Is proud, and makes the breath of glory real!

(p.22)
The four presences summoned here were all marked by periods of exile. Forced out of France by Louis XV, Rousseau visited Lake Leman in the summer of 1764; also excluded by Louis XV, Voltaire stayed in the Chateau de Prangins above Lake Leman in 1754–5 before buying his own estate and ‘founding a second Carthage’, as he wrote to his friend;\(^3\) Gibbon was initially sent away by his father to Switzerland in 1753–8 to ‘recover’ from his early conversion to Catholicism; in 1783, he broke his ‘English chain’ and went into the ‘voluntary banishment’ of life in Lausanne.\(^4\) De Staël was exiled by Byron’s hero, Napoleon, and her experience posed a question for Byron’s attitude to ‘the most extraordinary of men’.\(^5\) Byron’s sonnet does not recall the particular circumstances of each banishment, but it interweaves some of the more general motifs of exile, including the power of names to stir memory and the ancient hallmark of elegy, ‘the ruin of a wall’. The lengthened octave lingers over memory and remembrance, mirroring the gravitational pull of exile, before the \textit{volta} suddenly propels us into Byron’s immediate time and space. The etymology of exile is rooted in the verb \textit{ex-salire}, to leap out, and in the sudden release of energy in ‘but by \textit{thee}’, we hear the shock of finding oneself on an alien shore, however beautiful.\(^6\) In the sonnet to Leman, Byron develops the voice of shared exile with which he had experimented in \textit{Hebrew Melodies}. On a reflective ‘crystal sea’ he makes himself part of a displaced community of ‘mighty minds’—one of ‘the heirs of immortality’ whose remembered presence ‘makes the breath of glory real!’

There is, then, for the Romantic and Victorian writers we are considering, a sense in which exile is a shared, even glorious, isolation—a ‘populous solitude’—braced with the Satanic conviction of the ‘puissant legions, whose exile/Hath emptied heaven’, that ‘The mind is its own place’.\(^7\) The (p.23) model of heroic Miltonic independence in exile appealed to Byron, especially when it involved excoriating Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge (Walter Savage Landor is the only 19th-century writer in this book who had no axe to grind with the poet laureate).
In the cases of Byron and Percy Shelley, being an outcast fostered an outlook of cosmopolitan relativism which they set against the insularity of the Lake School, but in their writing, these intellectual gains coexist with acute loneliness, an awareness of missing home, and un-philosophical complaints about a shortage of basic necessities like tooth powder.

Actual or imagined communities of thinkers were one of the greatest consolations of exile. ‘Exile made me lose the ties that bound me to Paris, and I became European’, wrote Madame De Staël. Byron boasted to Murray of his growing Italian identity: ‘I have lived in the heart of their houses, in parts of Italy freshest and least influenced by strangers,—have seen and become (pars magna fui) a portion of their hopes, and fears, and passions, and am almost inoculated into a family. This is to see men and things as they are’. Byron’s writing from Italy intimates that he has experienced the shock of another culture without reducing that other place to the terms of his own understanding. Learning to speak and write in Italian is a significant step, and the subsequent translation of English into Italian forms puts this shift of cultural perspective into artistic practice.

For Byron, the embrace of Italian life always carries an implicit rejection of the ‘tight little Island’ of his birth. Not every exile, however, was able to retain such a wholehearted hybridity. When asked if he would bring up his son as a Tuscan, Robert Browning wrote forcefully, ‘Of course Pen is and will be English as I am English and his Mother was pure English’; but in his poetry, Browning embraced an adoptive Italian identity: ‘Open my heart and you will see/Graven inside of it “Italy”’. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was less certain about her English allegiance: ‘It’s only Robert who is a patriot now, of us two’, she told John Kenyon in 1851, ‘England ... is a place of bitterness to me ... I’m a citizeness of the world now ... and float loose.’
Exile could reinforce patriotism on some fronts, while erasing it on others. Inevitably, national identity becomes less secure, but De Staël’s forward-looking Europeanism was an exceptional alternative, and appeared so to those she gathered around her at the time. Visitors to Coppet included compatriots like Mathieu de Montmorency and Juliette Récamier, who were willing to be exiled themselves for the pleasure of her company. The shores of Lake Geneva also welcomed the sexual exile William Beckford (who purchased and read his way through Edward Gibbon’s library while he was in Lausanne in 1796–7), the German philosopher A. W. Schlegel, the Swiss writer Charles Victor de De Bonstetten (years earlier, the friend of Thomas Gray), the Swiss-Italian historical economist Sismondi, and, of course, Byron, who spent the summer of 1816 there before arriving in Venice in November.

One of the defining features of exiled intellectual life was the treasuring of books and conversation. Nineteenth-century exiles sought each other’s company and libraries, and formed leagues of intimate intellectual altercation. They often expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the salon culture that had been established by seasonal English visitors and founded a new sort of conversational interchange through book sharing and discussion of new works in progress. Malicious observers (such as Robert Southey) would accuse the Byron-Shelley party of founding other sorts of leagues, but either way, the loneliness of exile was not technically that of solitary confinement, even in the case of Walter Savage Landor, who was the writer least inclined to join any sort of group.

The interplay of new physical contexts with intellectual and imaginative inheritances creates an artistry of mixture and contrast. Edward Said remarks, ‘Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal’. The question of how we read the literary result of such awareness—as a new hybrid blend, or as two distinct interwoven strands, or as binaries with something else held in tension between them—is addressed throughout this book.
For Byron, as we have seen, exile could be transformed into a literary fellowship, a timeless space already inhabited by the four minds he felt he was joining on the shores of Lake Geneva. For Elizabeth Barrett, Byron and Shelley formed part of that prior company and she eagerly anticipated her own entry into the hallowed ground of poetic homelessness. Barrett’s first mentor was the Greek scholar Hugh Stuart Boyd, who had published *Thoughts on an Illustrious Exile* (1825), a warm account of Napoleon’s religious toleration, just before Barrett began corresponding with him.\(^{15}\) As an ardent supporter of Napoleon, Barrett’s intellectual pantheon was remarkably similar to Byron’s, and the cast of her mind inclined her to exile even before she met Robert Browning and contemplated ‘breaking the bonds all round into liberty & license’:

Papa used to say . . “Dont read Gibbon’s history – it’s not a proper book – Dont read ‘Tom Jones’ – & none of the books on this side, mind” – So I was very obedient & never touched the books on that side, & only read instead, Tom Paine’s Age of Reason, & Voltaire’s Philosophical Dictionary, & Hume’s Essays, & Werther, & Rousseau, & Mary Woolstonecraft . . books, which I was never suspected of looking towards.\(^{16}\)

Byron’s *Don Juan* was one of the proscribed books that Elizabeth Barrett read against her father’s wishes. As Marjorie Stone points out, Barrett boldly praised Byron’s *Cain* in her 1824–6 notebook when ‘controversy over this “blasphemous” text was still intense’.\(^{17}\) Her notebook puts the works of Byron at the head of the list of books that Barrett wants to acquire and, while discussing Sir Egerton Brydges’s *Letters on Lord Byron*, she notes: ‘“Cain” is I think appreciated justly after consideration,—but, after consideration, it must be always so appreciated’.\(^{18}\)
Elizabeth Barrett’s decision to place the ambitious *A Drama of Exile* at the beginning of *Poems* (1844) underscores the prescience of this exploration of exile, conducted in dialogue with her literary precursors, Milton and Byron, before her actual act of rebellion two years later. Stone suggests that Elizabeth Barrett draws on Byron ‘to revise Milton, at the same time significantly altering his representation of Eve in *Cain*’.\(^{19}\) Analysis of the drama’s rhetoric helps us to see the interplay of personal history and poetic debate. In her Preface to the volume, Barrett dwells on the condition of outcast humanity, especially the double grief of Eve:

> My subject was the new and strange experience of the fallen humanity, as it went forth from paradise into the wilderness; with a peculiar reference to Eve’s allotted grief, which, considering … the consciousness of originating the Fall to her offence, - appeared to me imperfectly apprehended hitherto.\(^{20}\)

\(^{(p.26)}\) Barrett’s Eve replicates Barrett’s own experience of exile in that she has to confront an absolute turning point in her own history. Eve’s exile is a coming to terms with the adamantine finality that severs past from present, while at the same time looking forwards to a vista of unending, monotonous incertitude. Barrett tells her readers that she ‘took pleasure in driving in, like a pile, stroke upon stroke the Idea of EXILE’, and she described her position as author in terms of fear of Edenic exclusion:

> I felt afraid ... of my position. I had promised my own prudence to shut close the gates of Eden between Milton and myself, so that none might say I dared to walk in his footsteps. He should be within, I thought, with his Adam and Eve unfallen or falling, – and I, without, with my EXILES, – I also an exile!\(^{21}\)
Barrett articulates the characteristic threshold location of exiled debate. Her intense identification with the fallen Eve, according to her biographers, is due to her belief that she was responsible for, and therefore deserved, the long period of depression that followed the accidental drowning of her brother, ‘Bro’, in 1840. Barrett’s sense of being the ‘pilot of her proper woe’ links her with Byron’s outlook in 1816 and it leads to a similarly heightened apprehension of ‘then’ and ‘now’, and a deep sympathy with a spectrum of mourners, rebels, and outcasts. Barrett would have understood Said’s observation that exile is a ‘jealous’ state, perpetually insecure and aware of its own fall into watchfulness. Her sensitivity to the doubled exile of place and mind is evident in her note on the temporal setting of her drama:

If it should be objected that I have lengthened my twilight too much for the East, I might hasten to answer that we can know nothing of the length of mornings or evenings before the Flood, and that I cannot, for my own part, believe in an Eden without the longest of purple twilights. The evening, הָעָר, of Genesis signifies a ‘mingling’, and approaches the meaning of our ‘twilight’ analytically. Apart from such considerations, my ‘exiles’ are surrounded ... by supernatural appearances; and the shadows that approach them are not only of the night.

Exile is here presented as a ‘mingling’ which explores, in terms of light and shade, Said’s ‘contrapuntal’ musical analogy. Barrett sets her first scene with Adam and Eve in ‘the extremity of the sword glare’ (ll. 389–90), the light cast by those who guard the gate to Eden. The stage direction is (p. 27) taken directly from Byron’s mystery play when Cain describes ‘the walls of Eden, chequer’d/By the far-flashing of the cherubs’ swords’ (I. 1 273–4). As Lucifer predicts, it is the ‘thought of a shut gate of Paradise’ (l. 190) that constitutes the main burden on Eden’s newest exiles. Images of the gateway, the key turning in the lock, and the door swinging shut are loaded upon them. Eve’s doubled perspective is evoked sharply in her juxtapositions of the time before and the time after, her painful double awareness of what she was and what she now is: ‘For was I not,/At that last sunset seen in Paradise,/... —Was I not, that hour;/The lady of the world’ (ll. 1232–8). While Adam attempts to offer consolation, Eve is impelled to articulate the grief of a perpetual measurement of change:
The bow shot of exile

Alas, me! Alas,
Who have undone myself, from all that best,
Fairest and sweetest, to this wretchedest
Saddest and most defiled – cast out, cast down –
What word metes absolute loss? Let absolute loss
Suffice you for revenge. For I, who lived
Beneath the wings of angels yesterday,
Wander to-day beneath the roofless world. (ll. 1288-95)

The image of the ‘roofless world’ dilates and renovates a description that was usually applied to picturesque ruins. As Eve feels her bare head lose the shelter of the angels’ wings, Byron stands behind the grammar of the turning point between the time past and the time present.

The poetry of the immediate aftermath of Byron’s exile in 1816 is dominated by material signs of exclusion and separation like the ‘massy door’ of St Mark’s (‘Venice. A Fragment’, l. 6), and accompanying images of being shut out. The action of Marino Faliero is dramatically suspended on the imagined sound of the door as the Doge awaits the bell that will signal revolution:

- the signal hath not rung –
Why pauses it? My nephew’s messenger
Should be upon his way to me, and he
Himself perhaps even now draws grating back
Upon its ponderous hinge the steep tower portal,
Where swings the sullen huge oracular bell. (IV. 2.177–82)

The broken staccato rhythms of the first four lines of blank verse here convey Faliero’s nervous impatience, giving way to a more mesmerized encounter with the physical boundaries of Venetian power. Faliero’s reverie, drawn out by inversion, leaden piling of adjectives, and the delayed noun ‘portal’, dwells on the moment preceding the crisis he has instigated and half dreads. The hinge of the door here shadows the swing of the bell, (p.28) all the heavier for the fact that they are not starting to move and the audience knows that their respective sounds will not be heard.

The momentousness of the turning point features in Byronic comedy as well as tragedy. In the English ghost story in Don Juan, Byron pauses to reflect in mock-gothic mode on the noise of doors opening and closing:
It opened with a most infernal creak,
Like that of hell. ‘Lascite ogni speranza,
Voi, ch’entraste!’ The hinge seemed to speak,
Dreadful as Dante’s *rima*, or this stanza;
Or – but all words upon such themes are weak...
The door flew wide, not swiftly, – but as fly
The sea-gulls, with a steady, sober flight – (XVI,
116–17)

Why, we want to ask, are there ‘sea-gulls’ here? I would suggest that the opening and closing of a door recalls—however distantly—Byron’s own decisive departure from England and the memory of a receding coast which (like the ghost) returns to haunt him more often than is anticipated. Byron’s characteristic second thought or variation on the simile domesticates the earlier echo of Dante’s sublimity, while at the same time yielding the sense of infinite distance opening up.

Dante’s presence is to be expected where ideas of social and spiritual ostracism are linked. In the 1840s, Anna Jameson provided a Satanic portrait of Dante as ‘an exile, worn, wasted, embittered by misfortune and disappointment and wounded pride’. Madame De Staël pointed out the way in which Dante shared the imaginative reflexes of his inmates in hell:

> It is as if, banished from his own country, Dante has transported his consuming sorrows to imaginary places. His shades continually ask for news about the living, just as the poet himself enquires about his native land and hell appears to him in the shape of exile.

It was De Staël’s awareness that women writers are, by default, outcasts that drew Elizabeth Barrett to her, and Barrett judged Fanny Burney very harshly for shunning the woman she had ‘compassionated warmly as an exile’ on the basis of a rumour about her personal life.

*(p.29)* Just as Byron had to come to terms with the clash between De Staël and Napoleon, Elizabeth Barrett needed to account for the less than perfect rapprochement between her two idols. In 1832, she wrote:
I have read Corinne for the third time, & admired it more than ever. It is an immortal book, & deserves to be read three score & ten times – that is, once every year in the age of man. Lord Byron hated Madme. de Stael because she was always prominent in conversation & used to lecture him; but I believe he estimated her Corinne, & am sure that his writings were the better for his readings ... it is no new observation that Harold has often spoken with the voice of Corinne.27

Byron’s writing is in sympathy with De Staël’s melancholy when he presents Childe Harold as ‘the wandering exile of his own dark mind’ (III. 3). Although she blamed Napoleon for the immediate circumstances of her dislocation, De Staël recognized that her own temperament contributed to the darkness of exile, which she experienced as a death sentence:

One becomes like a stranger to oneself ... Thus exile condemns one to go through goodbyes, separations, everything is like the moment of death and one must attend to it in the meantime with one’s whole being.28

The exiles in this book were all exiles of the mind, as well as ousted expatriates in Italy; we shall turn now to the ways in which their displacement works aesthetically, overlapping rhythms of home with images of distance from home. The contrapuntal perception of the exile we have been tracing comes through in many of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s letters from September 1846 onwards. Her epistolary unsettledness recalls Cicero’s observation on exile: ‘From the way my letters chop and change I expect you perceive the agitation of my mind’.29 By the time she reached Pisa, the immediacy of the wrench away from her London home had softened a little, but Barrett’s letters still veer in paragraphs between the new life and the old:

Also we have driven up to the foot of mountains, & seen them reflected down in the little pure lake of Ascanio – & we have seen the pine woods, & met the camels laden with faggots, all in a line. So now ask me again if I enjoy my liberty as you expect. My head goes round sometimes – that is all. I never was happy before in my life –
Ah but of course painful thoughts recur! There are some whom I love too tenderly to be easy under their displeasure . . or even under their injustice.\(^{30}\)

The list of triumphantly achieved new visions, including the camels that used to roam around Pisa, is the consolation of the traveller, but it is seen through ‘thick vapours of dreamland’ and an ‘anger left behind’. Regret at the loss of home jostles with a kind of literary homecoming in visits to such places as Vaucluse and Pisa, which Elizabeth associates with Petrarch and Byron.\(^{31}\) Her expulsion from her father’s home is twinned with a pilgrimage to find her literary forefathers.

‘To be so cast off is a lasting grief to me, notwithstanding all other sources of happiness’, Elizabeth writes in May 1847, but she chooses to see her flight to Italy in terms of the liberty of a leap out of England: she appeals to a correspondent to imagine her change ‘from the long seclusion in one room, to liberty and Italy’s sunshine’; and as she contemplates reducing her opium intake, she reminds her sister that this should be possible because ‘it has been very different from England, & I have had much more liberty’.\(^{32}\) The political association between Italy and freedom would be at first a happy coincidence and then a vein of increasingly deep commitment for her.
In the course of the first year in their ‘strange home’, the Brownings jointly express a divided view of their old home: ‘At all events some day or other we hope to return to England’, Robert wrote in November 1846, while Elizabeth also constantly assures her English correspondents ‘we have not taken root in Italy for life ... we are both to be marked on the arm as pilgrims’; ‘we shall go back to you all one day’; ‘we have’nt given up England & never shall’. But at the same time, there are signs of a gradual detachment from the prospect of return: ‘I cannot help considering myself wronged ... that is my impression: and it could only deepen painfully by a return to England at the present time’; ‘we may reach England, I prophecy, before you reach France. Settling in England is different & more difficult ... but I long to see some dear, loving faces that glitter with a melancholy light in the distance!—yes, the faces ... of my dear, dearest sisters—If they did not write to me, I could not bear this absence’. The ‘glitter’ of her sisters’ faces suggests, however distantly, the angels facing out of Eden, a vision that haunts Elizabeth through the words of Milton and Byron.

(p.31) One of the most obvious signs that the Brownings regard themselves as exiles, rather than seasonal visitors or health tourists to Italy, is their determined avoidance of, and sense of separation from, the other English abroad: ‘We live here in the most secluded manner, eschewing English visitors and reading Vasari’; ‘As for society, we should like to know a few Italians ...—but for the “English abroad”, I am sure you never heard me say that I desired to have anything to do with them’; ‘If it were not for “the fashion of England” we should yield to the spring-temptation of the Baths of Lucca ... but the English fashionables, the pink mantillas & gaming houses keep us off’. They were not, of course, full members of any new Italian community either, but they embraced their in-between status. From Casa Guidi windows, almost smug in their ability never to tire of each other’s company and certain that it is ‘very delightful to be in Italy just at this time, when it is so thoroughly alive’, both Brownings position themselves apart from and above both English and Italians, with Robert expressing the hope that the Risorgimento would lead to dwindling numbers of English: ‘our pleasure will not be greatly diminished, if all those rumours operate as they are said to do in keeping away the flocks of travellers’.
During the course of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s first year in Italy, the simple experience of housekeeping (or lack of it) gradually evolves and transforms her epistolary travelogue into a form of social criticism directed against England:

But tell me if people of small incomes are not justified in leaving their own country of dear England, on the mere grounds of the cheapness of this Italy? I did not imagine the difference to be so great...

Now tell me, . . . what right has England to be the dearest country in the world? – But I love dearly dear England, we hope to spend many a green summer in her yet...

Our baker’s wife is an Englishwoman married to a German, and she said to Wilson [Elizabeth’s maid] . . . “Ah you may talk of England – everybody does that! but when you go back you will cry your eyes out for Italy, just as I did when I thought I would return, and then longed to get out of it all again. England is not a place for the poor. They are treated like dogs there, and never enjoy anything like other human beings – The rich on one side, the poor on another, . . . that’s the way in England – Here we are all men & women & can reach to the same pleasures.” Which has a great deal of truth in it – I am jealous for poor England.

Across Elizabeth’s letters in her first year abroad, we hear a gradual conversion to a different way of doing everyday things. Initially, she finds Italian (p.32) ‘ways of living and sleeping, e sopra tutto cooking; all very new and dreadful’, but she is already reaching toward Italian forms of pleasure: ‘We have our dinners from the Trattoria at two oclock, & can dine our favorite way on thrushes & Chianti … It is a continental fashion, which we never cease commending’; and before long, Italian plenitude points to a lack or deficiency in England: ‘Consider how the poor must rejoice in all this fruit … heaps & heaps of fruit that might have ripened in Paradise!’; ‘Figs & grapes are most wholesome nourishment—Think of these advantages for the poor! I think sometimes of our poor, Poor of England, & sigh for them.’ This letter conveys a growing sense of distance as the plural ‘our poor’ slips into a more remote ‘Poor of England’.
One of the immediate differences between England and Italy that Mary Shelley also noticed is a lack of rigid demarcation between social classes. Elizabeth comes to this perception through the taste of fruit and after the comic description of being 'driven out of Eden', when the Brownings were required to curtail their much-anticipated visit to the monastery of Vallombrosa by 'that little holy abbot with the red face' (a witty reincarnation, this time, of Milton’s cherubim with ‘dreadful faces’ and ‘fiery arms’):

No little orphan on a house-step, but seems to inherit naturally his slice of water-melon & bunch of purple grapes: and the rich fraternize with the poor as we are unaccustomed to see them, listening to the same music & walking in the same gardens & looking at the same Raffaels even!  

Elizabeth is distinctly a spectator in this letter, but the contemplation of shared food and shared aesthetic experiences allows her identity to merge, imaginatively, with Italian existence. The pronouns ‘we’ and ‘them’ in relation to ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in this passage are not immediately easy to attribute. One difference between the perpetual traveller and an exile is that an exile consciously tries to establish a home somewhere else and so exile always brings with it, as Dante registered, the taste of another man’s bread. A studied awareness of how different things were in England marks the Brownings as exiles, rather than travellers. Their letters develop a pattern of regular backward-looking comparisons alongside the exuberant catalogues of new sensations that characterize the outlook of the tourist in transit.

When we try to assess the part that material details play in exiled life and writing, we need to be aware that class and gender condition knowledge of all the things that can be most strange about living abroad, such as food and domestic chores. In Lerici in 1822, Percy Shelley could not understand why Jane Williams missed her last kitchen:

Williams seems happy and content, and we enjoy each other’s society – Jane is by no means acquiescent in the system of things, and she pines after her own house and saucepans to which no one can have a claim except herself. – It is a pity that any one so pretty and amicable should be so selfish.
Most readers and all cooks will regard this quite differently and share Jane’s reservations about a ‘system of things’ without adequate saucepans in accommodation regularly flooded with seawater. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was always more inclined than Percy Bysshe Shelley to write about the exigencies of domestic life, but her sensitivity increased when Wilson unexpectedly usurped Elizabeth’s role as the chief invalid in the household, an event which ‘finished reversing the world’ for Elizabeth:

I have acquired a heap of practical philosophy & have learnt how it is possible (in certain conditions of the human frame) to comb out & twist up one’s own hair, & lace one’s very own stays, & cause hooks & eyes to meet behind one’s very own back, besides making toast & water for Wilson … considerably assisted by Robert’s counsels “not quite to set fire to the bread” while one was toasting it. He was the best & kindest all that time, as even he could be, & carried the kettle when it was too heavy for me.43

Wilson’s illness was caused, apparently, by her taking English pills for bilious disorders after seasickness on the journey to Italy and the semi-permanent indigestion that resulted from their new diet. Her panic in the face of life abroad, and her suffering in silence until too ill to stand and assist Elizabeth washing and dressing (the point at which Elizabeth first became aware of her maid’s discomfort) remind us of the homesick casualties in Byron’s retinue: the boys from England and Greece who had to be sent back at the first port of call, and the almost silent, constant resistance to life abroad of Fletcher, the servant from Nottingham who remained with Byron throughout his exile from 1816 until Byron’s death in Greece. The muted discomfort and unhappiness of these figures is an important reminder that exiled life in Italy was much more of a daily upheaval for servants than for their employers, who often only exchanged one salon or study for another.
Byron leaves little indication that he did more than laugh at Fletcher’s complaints, but after Wilson’s intestinal spasm there are suggestions in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s letters that she becomes more sensitized to the physical differences between English and Italian domestic life. ‘I have been & am very well, & we burn the Grand Duke’s pinewood’, Elizabeth wrote to Anna Jameson in February 1847, echoing earlier exiles in the Forest of Arden and Percy Shelley’s ‘Letter to Maria Gisborne’ (‘And we’ll have fires out of the Grand Duke’s wood’ (l. 308)). But later in March, she incorporates into a letter her maid’s response to the fire:

You cant guess what our pinewood fires are. They shoot one through & through (at least one’s gowns) with red hot arrows. This black silk gown, I have on, is shot into fifty holes … beside some lawful wearing out at the elbows – and Wilson says “Really you must make it last till the fire is done with.” You see, there is no ‘guard,’ no ‘fender’ … and splinters of the wood fly every moment.44

Filtered through the warier perspective of the maid who had to do the mending, we can hear Elizabeth almost boasting about the exciting danger of Italian life without any ‘guard’ or ‘fender’. The image of being shot with arrows recalls the iconography of Catholic churches, and captures the immediacy of first-hand experience, or being pierced by material existence in a way that had never before been possible for her.
The image of the arrow released recurs in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s writing from Italy and gains symbolic significance as she begins to take an interest in Italian politics. Florence is described as ‘most beautiful ... The river rushes through the midst of its palaces like a crystal arrow’, and ‘with the golden Arno shot through the breast of her, like an arrow . . and “non dolet,” all the same’. Her allusion is to the Roman heroine, Arria, who showed her husband how do die honourably by stabbing herself and then handing him the dagger saying, ‘it doesn’t hurt’. By invoking Pliny, Elizabeth is thinking through a Roman, rather than an English tradition and accepting exile as a form of glad martyrdom. The metaphor of piercing light is prefigured in her first experience of architecture in Genoa: ‘we wandered through close alleys of palaces looking all strange & noble, into a gorgeous church where mass was going on—altar pressing by altar, every one of a shining marble encrusted with gold—Great columns of twisted porphyry letting out the inner light of some picture’, and the river in Pisa, ‘the rolling, turbid Arno, striking its golden path betwixt [the palaces] underneath the marble bridge’. The recurring motif is of a vital, elemental current making its way between flanks of stone. It suggests an erotic awakening which takes us from the Brownings’ honeymoon to their first wedding anniversary, but the passage ‘through’ or ‘betwixt’ two less yielding structures also reminds us of (p.35) the path of the exile and the challenge of trying to steer a course between impermeable domains.

The shooting arrow finds a place at the heart of the poem Casa Guidi Windows:

I can but muse in hope upon this shore
Of golden Arno as it shoots away
Through Florence’ heart beneath her bridges
four!
Bent bridges, seeming to strain off like bows,
And tremble while the arrowy undertide
Shoots on and cleaves the marble as it goes,
And strikes up palace-walls on either side.

There is an echo of Byron here that I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, but I want to look now at the ‘bow shot’ that measures the distance of exile.
Bows and arrows are associated with exile in the famous lines of Dante’s *Paradiso* Canto XVII, quoted by Wilde: ‘Thou shalt leave everything loved most dearly, and this is the shaft which the bow of exile shoots first’ (ll. 55–7). In addition to the piercing pain of an arrow wound (a foreign body that twists in the flesh when one moves), the bow is an instrument under pressure, stretched almost to breaking point, and the arrow is pulled one way and then sent another, driven away and unable to return of its own volition. Once the shaft is removed, an arrow wound can close over and, in this respect, it resembles the invisible wound of Cupid’s arrow, desire. Like love unreturned, exile is a blend of physical and mental pain, the ‘cleft heart’ described by Byron’s Japhet as he contemplates the destruction of his old world; like love, exile blurs the boundaries of bodily and mental suffering.48

One of the earliest bow shot metaphors of exile is found with the figure of Philoctetes, the master archer from the *Iliad* Book II who, because of a noxious wound on his foot, was marooned on the island of Lemnos with the bow of Heracles as his sole support. Although he is mentioned only in passing in Homer’s epic narrative, Philoctetes was the principal subject of dramas by Aeschylus and Sophocles (of which only the latter is extant), and his tragedy provided a salient model for the apprehension of exile by 18th- and 19th-century writers and artists. *Philoctetes* appeared in Gilbert Wakefield’s school selection of Greek Tragedies and was translated by Thomas Sheridan in 1838. In the 1770s, James Barry dedicated his (p. 36)
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image of Philoctetes on Lemnos (see Figure 2) to the maverick supporter of the American War of Independence and Catholic claims, Sir George Savile. In 1812, William Blake made a study of the moment when Philoctetes is asked to help the men who had rejected him (see Figure 3), and the tragedy was nominated as the subject for the visual art competition, the Prix de Rome, in 1838.\textsuperscript{49} Considering this classical precedent in a little more detail will enable us to assess the different gradations between travel and exile and to appreciate the 18th-century legacy of interest in the psychology of exile. (p.37)
Philoctetes begins as a traveller on the way to Troy, but his rejection by his fellow crew members turns him into something else. At the beginning of Sophocles’s drama, Philoctetes’s obsessive attachment to his ‘beloved bow’ is a conspicuous sign of his alienation. His broken soliloquies stand in stark contrast with the purposeful, terse directions of Odysseus, who comes to Lemnos to trick Philoctetes into handing over the mythical weapon that will secure the fall of Troy. The final scene in which Philoctetes and Odysseus face each other dramatizes two different responses to exile: a painful brooding on loss and betrayal, and a ruthlessly pragmatic instinct for survival. When Philoctetes leaves the island, however, Sophocles makes him bid an almost regretful farewell to the cave that was his home ‘and to the (deep) male crashing of the sea’ (ja½ j tupor aqsgm pÖmtou). Philoctetes has built a new relationship with the landscape he was cast into, just as Percy Shelley’s lyric on the Aziola (in Chapter 7) traces a response to a sound that is at first unnamed, alien, (p.38) and resisted, and then accepted and part of the strange music of exilic consciousness.
In translations of Homer and Ovid by Dryden, Pope, and Cowper, there is a tension between portraits of Philoctetes as hardened and dehumanized by exile and those in which Philoctetes represents an enduring human capacity for sympathy and an urge to communicate. William Hazlitt and William Wordsworth follow the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers who used Philoctetes as an example of the human instinct to seek out or create sympathy in inanimate objects. Hugh Blair observes that, ‘all passions struggle for vent, and if they can find no other object, will, rather than be silent, pour themselves forth to woods, and rocks, and the most insensible things; especially, if these be any how connected with the causes and objects that have thrown the mind into this agitation.’\(^5\)

Blair then aligns Philoctetes with that ‘moving and tender address which [Milton’s] Eve makes to Paradise just before she is compelled to leave it’.\(^5\) This is the first of several *envoi* passages in which we shall see the heightened significance that exile imparts to inanimate things.

The address to the earth is a familiar trope of exile, which leads Hazlitt to view Philoctetes as the precursor to Robinson Crusoe:

> Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him.\(^5\)

Taking his cue from the Greek drama, Hazlitt identifies exile as a precondition for consciousness, evident in the visceral throb of homesickness that underlies the earliest myths of modern man.
Romantic-period sonnets on Philoctetes reveal the way in which exile intensifies the key cognitive events of Romantic poetry, as described by Percy Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry*. Poetry, Shelley writes, creates a ‘being within being’ and ‘purges the film of familiarity’; it compels us to imagine that which we know; it ‘creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds’.  

Thomas Russell’s Miltonic sonnet XIII, ‘Suppos’d (p.39) to have been Written at Lemnos’ (1789), recreates the exile’s experience of time: ‘each rolling light/Of heaven he watch’d, and blam’d it’s lingering flight’ (ll. 4–5). Russell projects a heightened experience of sound: ‘By day the sea-mew screaming round his cave/Drove slumber from his eyes, the chiding wave,/And savage howlings chas’d his dreams by night’ (ll. 6–8), and exiled consciousness imprints the landscape of Lemnos with a preternaturally heightened anticipation of the voyage home: ‘in each low breeze, that sigh’d/Thro’ his rude grot, he heard a coming oar,/In each white cloud a coming sail he spied’ (ll. 9–11). Russell’s miniaturized psychodrama helps us to see the centrality of exile to the psychological and affective expectations of the Romantic period.

Like Russell’s, William Wordsworth’s 1826–7 sonnet envisages exile as a new responsiveness to external nature:

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When Philoctetes in the Lemnian Isle
Lay couched; -- upon that breathless Monument,
On him, or on his fearful bow unbent,
Some wild Bird oft might settle, and beguile
The rigid features of a transient smile,
Disperse the tear, or to the sigh give vent,
Slackening the pains of ruthless banishment
From home affections, and heroic toil.
Nor doubt that spiritual Creatures round us move,
Griefs to allay that Reason cannot heal;
And very Reptiles have sufficed to prove
To fettered Wretchedness, that no Bastile
Is deep enough to exclude the light of love,
Though Man for Brother Man has ceased to feel.
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The variants of this sonnet make Philoctetes sound curiously like one of Keats’s fallen Titans in *Hyperion*: ‘Reclined with shaggy forehead earthward bent/ ... silent like a weed-grown Monument’ (ll. 2–3 (1827)), lending an additional mythical association to the outcast figure. Wordsworth’s sonnet suspends the pressing bodily need that Sophocles brings to the fore: to feed himself, Philoctetes had to hunt and, as the bow was the only way he could catch food, the painful walk to the end of his bow shot (where the hunted animal would fall) also measures the distance from his former home and happiness. Following Cowper’s view of the companionship of insects in the Bastille, Wordsworth focuses on the almost involuntary (p.40) growth of new ties in the midst of the pain of banishment. His sonnet houses the 1790s belief that by blessing creatures unawares, humanity might survive the attenuation and perhaps even the death of human affections.

In Philoctetes, we see a classical figure of exiled isolation; in the Judaeo-Christian mythic tradition, Milton’s rebel angels have a more communal experience of exile. Shelley describes the conversation in ‘Julian and Maddalo’ as:

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Forlorn
Yet pleasing, such as once, so poets tell,
The devils held within the dales of Hell
Concerning God, freewill and destiny:
Of all that earth hath been or yet may be,
All that vain men imagine or believe,
Or hope can paint or suffering may achieve. (ll.
39–45)
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Milton’s first exiles from Heaven have been used as comparisons with many other groups of aliens, including Scott’s description of the Highlanders in *Waverley*, but here Shelley draws on the full resonance of biblical exile and intellectual elitism. The fallen angels are versions of the Romantic poets in their free-ranging philosophical debate and in the more vulnerable huddle of concern about the point of suffering. If exile is inherited as a theme of lyric, elegy, or tragedy in what the ‘poets tell’, the actual experience of exile leads to a collision of these high forms with conversation, letters, and prose. The material evidence of exile in the Romantic period reminds us that the metaphysical reach of Romantic poetry remains in the company of flesh and blood, however often modern definitions of Romanticism tend to exalt abstraction or mythical transcendence. The bow shot of exile is a metaphoric flight that lodges in the body and the following chapters aim to keep the airy mental leap of leaving home in touch with the physical and psychological upheaval of being forced to move house. With these stresses in mind, the next chapter investigates the domestic context of exile.

Notes:


(2) *BLJ* VIII, 175.


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(9) *BLJ* VII, 170–1.

(10) Dibdin’s phrase; see *BLJ* V, 136.


(12) *BC* XVII, 70.


(15) *Thoughts on an Illustrious Exile, Occasioned by the Persecution of the Protestants in 1815, with Other Poems* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), p. 4

(16) *BC* XI, 320.


(18) I am grateful to Wellesley College Library, Special Collections for permission to quote from Browning MSS. D1405.


(22) *Reflections on Exile*, p. 178.

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(26) BC VI, 196.

(27) BC III, 25.


(30) BC XIV, 42.

(31) BC Monna Innominata Zuccato, Petrarch in Romantic England, p. 156.

(32) BC XIV, 98, 143, 214.

(33) BC XIV, 57, 109, 299, 335.

(34) BC XIV, 162, 310.

(35) See Marino Faliero, V.1.500–4 for ‘glittering’ portraits contrasted with the blackened name of the Doge.

(36) BC XIV, 99, 104, 146.

(37) BC XIV, 317.

(38) BC XIV, 189, 282, 304–5.

(39) BC XIV, 43, 59, 220, 267.

(40) BC XIV, 298.

(41) Diary of an Ennuyée The Diary of an Ennuyée [London: Henry Colburn, 1826], pp. 49
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(42) PBSL II, 427.

(43) BC XIV, 111, 117.

(44) BC XIV, 142.

(45) BC XIV 213, 298.

(46) BC XIV, 23, 25.


(48) Heaven and Earth, I.3.49.


(50) F. Storr, Sophocles, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1913), II


(52) Blair, Lectures, III, 418.


(54) PBSMW, 698.


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