

**Gioia Angeletti, *Lord Byron and Discourses of Otherness: Scotland, Italy, and Femininity*. Edinburgh: Humming Earth, 2012. Pp. 167. £14.95. ISBN 9781846220388.**

Writing to the Pisan Circle member John Taaffe, Jr., on 12 December 1821, about his resolute attempt to rescue a sacrilegious man from being burnt alive at Lucca, Lord Byron reflected obliquely on the atrocious state of contemporary Italian politics and, by extension, on the consequences of his own exile: ‘I am a Citizen of the World – content where I am now – but able to find a country elsewhere’. Byron’s involvement in social and radical developments outside his own national context were just as important to him as emergent nationalist tendencies.

Like most of the characters in his works, Byron was constantly travelling: from Scotland to England, then to Portugal, Spain, Albania, Greece, back towards Switzerland, and then to Italy. Such was the manner of his travels that his notorious worldliness can also be regarded in light of Edward Said’s contention in *The World, The Text and the Critic* (1983), that, like their authors, texts are ‘always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society’ and that ‘in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly’. This attachment to place has been successfully explored by some of Byron’s best critics. Aligning her study with the ground-breaking work of Diego Saglia (1996), Jane Stabler (2002; 2013), Stephen Cheeke (2003), Susan Oliver (2006), Maria Schoina (2009) and others, Gioia Angeletti casts fresh light on Byron’s discourses of place, not by breaking new grounds or contesting previous findings, but by focusing close attention to the significance of ‘otherness’ in Byron’s Italian and Scottish experiences.

In the Introduction, Angeletti declares her main intent to concentrate on ‘Byron’s complex relationship with Italian otherness – in terms of place, culture, and people (mainly female) – and his wavering position vis-à-vis the English and Scottish Self’ (3). Chapter 1 offers a substantial analysis of Byron’s Scottish literary heritage and highlights links and similarities with other writers such as Robert Burns and James Hogg. Scottish Enlightenment and Scottish Romanticism, Angeletti contends, made lasting contribution to Byron’s intellectual and cultural life. The ensuing three chapters prioritise Byron’s engagement with the Italian ‘other’. In Chapter 2 Angeletti focuses, in particular, on the role of the *Improvvisatore* [sic] Tommaso Sgricci, and shows how Byron, despite rebuffing such a role, can be considered in this light in his adoption of a digressive style and more informal mode of narration, as in *Beppo* (1818) and *Don Juan* (1819–24). In Chapter 3, Venice, which Angeletti rightly sees as a synecdoche for Italy, becomes a feminine entity and the centre of exoticism while remaining at the same time a place of disguise and sexual hybridity. Chapter 4 also situates Venice in relation to Venetian women, whose ‘histrionic behaviour and sexual energy, can be regarded as masks of the author and projections of his chameleon personality’ (10). Lastly, the prologue and the epilogue both focus on ‘AnOther Byron’ (15; 135) and demonstrate how the Romantic poet himself can become the object of otherness through different forms of ‘translation’. Angeletti draws attention to Caroline Lamb’s parodic rewriting of *Don Juan* and the nineteenth-century poet Andrea Maffei’s Italian translations of Byron’s work, which, were ‘promoting a cosmopolitan idea of literature that could only benefit from the assimilation of foreign elements’ (139) in their ‘crucial contribution to the concept of *Weltliteratur*’ (139) both during and after the Risorgimento. If Angeletti concludes her study by highlighting the relevance of translations to Byronic scholarship, then she could have offered a more considered rationale of Maffei’s significance. To a predominantly English-reading audience his translations appear rather perplexing when compared to the flamboyantly eccentric representations of the poet offered by Caroline Lamb.

My only real reservation about *Lord Byron and Discourses of Otherness* has to do with the choice of its subtitle and therefore with what, on the one hand, one expects to see in the book and what, on the other hand, the book does not do. As Angeletti admits, ‘three chapters of this book (from Ch. 2 to Ch. 4) look at Byron’s manifold encounter with Italian otherness’ (10) – as does the Epilogue – leaving therefore only a marginal space to Scotland (Chapter 1), thus disappointing the reader’s expectations of representative coverage between the two countries. Stranger still is the association of her third category, femininity, with both Scotland and Italy, since it appears to be discussed only in relation to the latter rather than being a common theme for comparison between both countries. Although written consistently throughout in firm, clear, and elegant prose, at times repetitions of concepts (see references to the ‘icon of the city’, the ‘protean city’, and the ‘chameleon city’ in both Chapters 3 and 4) and typographical errors (including, notably, an insistence on Anne Radcliffe), undermine this study’s clarity of focus. Overall, in this well-researched monograph, Angeletti offers a compelling account of place in Byron’s poetry; one which shows it to be simultaneously local and national and, by implication, vast and cosmopolitan – a world in which we are all Citizens.

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