

**Alan Rawes and Diego Saglia, eds., *Byron and Italy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. Pp. 246. £63.04. ISBN 9781526100550.**

The eleven essays in this volume felicitously confirm the interest and relevance of research into the numerous interactive and shifting terrains that link the writer and the country. The central twofold question, namely, how Byron Byronised Italy and how Italy Italianised Byron, is appropriately considered in the context of the poet's transnational poetics and cosmopolitan identity, both of which developed within a rapidly changing post-Napoleonic European milieu.

Nicholas Halmi opens with an astute essay about the ways in which Byron exploited the figures of Italian writers Tasso and Dante to fashion his supra-national poetic identity. The characteristically perceptive close reading of *The Prophecy of Dante* allows us to see how the poet invents and reinvents himself as alternately Italian and English in his efforts to interpret or mediate Italy's contemporary political aspirations. Confronting the issue of Byron's Anglo-Italian identity from a different perspective, Gioia Angeletti proposes that the letters and journals Byron wrote in Italy showcase his keen ethnographic eye as they relish in the 'contingent and transient "living truth"' (54) of the country emerging in anecdotes, local episodes and individual stories. But while these ethnographic-like texts perform immersion, Angeletti explains, they also exemplify distancing and disenchantment with Italian society. Our understanding of the poet's multiform and fluctuating identity is further enriched by Jonathan Gross's engaging chapter which argues that Byron's Scottish identity became more pronounced while in Italy because of his identification with the mercenaries of Walter Scott's fiction who embodied military heroism in the midst of the Italian uprising.

Byron's engagement with Italy's geographies is another crucial aspect of his engagement with the country. Using as his case study *Childe Harold IV*, and adopting a 'topoanalytic' approach, Mauro Pala scrutinizes Byron's depictions of landscapes and reads them as mindscapes: 'complex, heterogeneous and personal negotiations with real places and their attendant histories' that turn the 'observing consciousness [into] an essential element of place' (90). Moving on to the intriguing issue of Byron's connection to Italian art, Jane Stabler's inspiring chapter suggests that the mosaic icons of Ravenna which the poet saw (but doesn't mention) during his stay must have had an impact on the form of Byron's *Cain*, and goes on to show how the inscrutable, unfamiliar, 'rugged' nature of mosaic matches the rhythms and tones of his medieval mystery play. Stabler's speculative piece invites us to wonder if and how Byron's imbibing of a variety of art forms in Italy or Greece might have informed his poetic gaze. Bernard Beatty's wide-ranging chapter on Byron's relationship with Catholicism expertly shows the poet's progressive shift in his appreciation of it. The poet's increasing knowledge and experience of Catholic Italy 'made Byron more precisely and variedly theological' than his quasi-Calvinist assumptions (117). In the next essay of the collection, Arnold Anthony Schmidt discusses the political implications of Byron's stylistic choices within the revolutionary climate of the early Risorgimento. Taking *The Two Foscari* as his case study, and comparing it to Alessandro Manzoni's *Il conte di Carmagnola*, Schmidt argues that Byron's adherence to the dramatic unities compromises his pro-revolutionary agenda as it reveals his 'uncertainty about social and political change', while Manzoni's deliberate violation of the unities in his play 'pointedly inspires patriotic activism' (145).

The remaining chapters of the book offer delightful readings of the major literary works that Byron penned in Italy or/and have an Italian topic. Peter W. Graham insightfully demonstrates how *Parisina* and *Mazeppa* are 'displaced narratives' (150) complicating the role of 'being there' in Byron's poetic method and evolving Anglo-Italian identity. Next, Alan Rawes helps us to re-appraise Byron's lyric mode in *Childe Harold IV* by comparing

and contrasting it to two European texts that had a huge influence on the Romantic perception of Rome and Italy: de Staël's *Corinne* and Goethe's *Italienische Reise*. Departing from the autobiographical and fictionalised attitudes exhibited by de Staël and Goethe, Byron's lyricism, according to Rawes, is the product of the persona's radically sustained 'attentiveness', one that re-imagines Rome in a unique way (182). Mirka Horová's chapter argues eloquently that Byron's disturbing rendering of Italian history in *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari* and *The Deformed Transformed* is a synecdoche for all human history which is dominated by violence, death and 'political game-playing in which ethics are altogether absent' (205). Focusing on *Beppo*, *Don Juan* and the prose fragment 'An Italian Carnival', Diego Saglia's closing essay illuminatingly employs the theatrical concept of parabasis to discuss how these works instantiate a 'simultaneous turn towards and away from Italy' (211).

*Byron and Italy* is a most welcome contribution in the field which offers fresh approaches on current debates and opens new investigative paths by posing searching, original, and timely questions.

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