POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS

BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING:

A CRITICAL EDITION

By

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Chapter 1

Coming to *Poems Before Congress*

On 12 March 1860, *Poems Before Congress* (*PBC*), a short volume of political poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB),[1] was issued by Chapman and Hall, London. While living in Italy, EBB had written the poems over the course of the previous year in response to the War of 1859 in which Italy and France battled Austria for Italian freedom from foreign rule. Just over a year after publication of *PBC*, she died. All of EBB's previous publications were corrected by her or with her supervision; this volume was *not* republished in any subsequent editions while she was living (although a second edition appeared to be planned). However, *PBC* was included in later collections of her work, most notably in Charlotte Porter and Helen Clark's six-volume *The Complete Works Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1900). But even this massive undertaking offered only a few and fairly brief annotations for *PBC*, some incorrect.[2] Since its first publication, scholarship on the poems in *PBC* has been partly inhibited for lack of an authoritative and annotated text. Only three articles in the last twenty-three years have touched at all on *PBC* as a volume, and only one of those has dealt with the poems in depth, but still without an authoritative text to work from.[3] But it is not only this volume of EBB's poetry that went unnoticed in the years after EBB died. Recently,

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[1] I refer to Elizabeth Barrett Browning as EBB throughout for reading ease, for when she was unmarried, she used the initials EBB for Elizabeth Barrett Barrett.

[2] For example, in "Italy and the World," Porter and Clark identify a reference to Heptarchy as the "leagued *six* counties of Anglo-Saxons" when there were seven kingdoms that made up this Heptarchy (Wessex, Sussex, Kent, Essex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria).

[3] Note the gap between treatments of the poems in the mid-1980s and the two articles from 2005. See the following three articles: Katherine Montwieler, "Domestic Politics: Gender, Protest, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Poems Before Congress," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 24.2 (2005): 291-317; Christopher Keirstead, "A 'Bad Patriot'?: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Cosmopolitianism," *VIJ* 33 (2005): 69-95; Sandra M. Gilbert, "From *Patria* to *Matria*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Risorgimento," *PMLA* 99.2 (1984): 194-211.

Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor briefly reviewed EBB's dramatic fall from the canon after her death and one result of such a fall:

> In Tricia Lootens' apt terms, EBB became a "lost saint," venerated as a cultural icon suffused with sentimental religiosity, while her work fell from view. The most conspicuous residue of her critical misfortunes through much of the twentieth century is the lack of either a sound scholarly edition of her complete works or a comprehensive teaching edition with authoritative texts and annotations. (393)

In an end note, they write that this "lack is being remedied by an international team of scholars headed by Sandra Donaldson now preparing a comprehensive scholarly edition of EBB's poems, scheduled to appear from Pickering and Chatto in 2008" (402, n. 13). The work of this dissertation will be distilled for inclusion in that edition. However, this scholarly edition of *PBC* offers much more than can be included in the forthcoming collected works, especially detailed annotations as well as interpretive comments and exploration of historical and literary contexts in chapters two through four.[4]

The Interpretive Chapters and the Poems

> "How shall we re-read thee? Let me count the ways."
> Simon Avery[5]

In a recent article, Avery asks this compelling question that plays with the first two lines of the famous Sonnet 43 from *Sonnets from the Portuguese* about how to read, or re-

[4] See *Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions* at: http://www.mla.org/cse_guidelines.
[5] See Simon Avery, "Telling it Slant: Promethean, Whig, and Dissenting Politics in Elizabeth Barrett's Poetry of the 1830s," *Victorian Poetry* 44:4 (Winter 2006): 405-424.

read, EBB. He argues that she is a key Victorian figure we have come to approach from a "number of illuminating and persuasive critical positions" (405). Multiple perspectives are a key to understanding a Victorian poet who played many roles in her life: poet, daughter, sister, wife, mother, lover, citizen, political commentator, scholar, reader. The poems of *PBC* illuminate a variety of her roles: poet, citizen, mother, scholar, political commentator. These poems especially, because of the explicit political agenda, reflect her hunger for immediate knowledge of politics and her need to tell the poetic truth of that knowledge. To read EBB today, and especially the poems in this volume, it is important to remember that EBB was deeply committed to gathering as much news as possible in any way possible.[6] With the exception of the last poem, "A Curse for a Nation," every poem refers at some point to actual historical figures and incidents of the time, some famous, some particular to EBB's life and experiences.

A modern reader of EBB also needs to remain mindful of her lifetime of learning and knowledge of multiple languages (Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Hebrew)—all facilitated by

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[6] In the journal *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, Simonetta Berbeglia explores Robert Browning's membership in *Vieusseux's* reading rooms from 1847-1861 (after the year of EBB's death, he never returned to Florence and never subscribed again). In her article, "Robert Browning at *Vieusseux's* (1847-1861)," Berbeglia looks at the registers to see who was a member while Browning was, who was actually in the reading rooms when he was there, who lived where in Florence, and what reading materials were available. She suggests the reading rooms were far more than places to read a multitude of newspapers and periodicals; Vieusseux's reading rooms were a gathering spot for the social exchange of information and gossip as well a location to make important acquaintances. EBB was sure to know whom Browning had met there, what they had said, and what he had read while there. A cousin of Napoleon III's, Gioacchino Napoleone Pepoli, was a member at the same time as Browning and is mentioned in EBB's poem, "Summing Up in Italy" published in *The Independent* (27 September 1860): 1. EBB not only read newspapers herself (as noted elsewhere), but undoubtedly got secondhand news from her husband and may have heard gossip from political insiders through his acquaintances from the reading rooms. EBB mentions Browning rushing to the "Reading Rooms to get sight of" a review of *Aurora Leigh*, which he suspected was unfavorable (Lewis 2: 279).

an independent income and years of relative physical solitude, a good portion of her life lived outside the realm of normal social obligation.[7] To re-read EBB, from one to all of her poems, one must embrace her eclecticism, "count" the many ways to approach her, remembering that she was many things, including a dedicated and accomplished Greek scholar who would not miss reading a racy French novel whenever she had the opportunity.[8] She embodies an international and intellectual sensibility that few can achieve in the world today.

In the chapters following this introduction, I offer historical and literary context for EBB's *PBC* as well as literary interpretation of individual poems. In Chapter Two, "'I cry aloud in my poet-passion': Elizabeth Barrett Browning Claiming Political 'Place' through *Poems Before Congress,*" I demonstrate that through the publication of these poems, for the first time, EBB explicitly engages in the conversation of European politics and claims her place as an astute observer of current affairs. I suggest that EBB's notions of citizenship evolve through her poetry—much of which is political—until she reaches a pinnacle of political awareness, vocal power, and poetic determination in *PBC,* thus enacting a poet-citizenship through this publication.

Heroics is the focus for Chapter 3, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, and Alfred Tennyson on Napoleon III: The Hero-Poet and Carlylean Heroics." In this chapter, I explore EBB's response, along with two other prominent poets of her time, to Napoleon III through the lens of Carlyle's thinking on heroics and hero worship. His work

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[7] Her seclusion was partly due to her periodic illnesses but was also a choice (Kelley and Hudson xix).

[8] She complains in a letter that there was not easy access in Florence to the latest French novels (even at *Vieusseux's* she wrote) and was reduced to "read some of my favorites over again" (Kelley 14: 342).

was a vital part of the Victorian concept of the heroic and was admired by EBB. Her critics have accused her of blind hero worship, but this chapter shows that her hero worship was far from blind and focused more on deeds done by men, than the men themselves. I make a connection between the first and second French Empires and their impact on British political assumptions about Bonapartism—and how this was manifested in EBB's treatment of Napoleon III. I also briefly examine the reaction to *PBC* by critics (and EBB's praise of Napoleon III), and the response to her work by two friends in their letters to her. I underscore the heroic in EBB's publication of these poems, knowing the controversy they could cause, and suggest she embraced the role of Hero-Poet through this volume. Her sense of citizenship through poetics is thus extended into the realm of the heroic.

In Chapter 4, "Women Who Talk About Italy: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Poems Before Congress* and Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy,*" I look at EBB's role as woman poet, and the roles women play in the poems of *PBC* in light of *Corinne, or Italy* and EBB's interest in and knowledge of this novel which helped form Victorian ideas of Italy. Especially fascinating are the images of the women in *PBC* that echo public and private actions of de Staël's main character, but with more positive results for the women EBB creates and the role she assumes herself.

Chapter 5 includes brief headnotes and extensive annotations for each of the poems, noting historical and geographic context, offering interpretations, and pointing out variants from previous publications. I include several scanned images of the original 1860 publication.

I conclude my dissertation in Chapter 6 by looking at the contemporary and more recent critical reception of *PBC*. I argue that not only was *PBC* likely to have been issued as

a second edition had EBB lived longer, but that it would have included some of the last poems EBB wrote, many on Italian events. I refer to published and unpublished letters to corroborate my thinking. I suggest a future expanded edition of this dissertation to include some or all of those poems to honor her intention of publishing a second edition of *PBC*.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on contextualizing EBB's view of herself as a poet and as a citizen. The last section begins with a brief introduction to her flirtation with visiting Italy just before her engagement to Browning and their subsequent decision to relocate there after marriage. The chapter ends with a chronology of EBB's years in Italy.

A "Citizeness of the World"

For a good portion of her life, EBB lived in England, but for the last 15 years, she lived primarily in Europe. She saw herself as always a poet, but more than an Englishwoman, more than a citizen of Britain. Her idea of herself as a "citizeness of the world"[9] colored the way she wrote in her letters, the way she developed her characters in her poetry, and the way she raised her son (born in Italy in 1849). Throughout her letters from the continent, she writes in a way that distances herself from merely identifying with one nationality—she connects to Italy as part of her homeland—an addition to what was her homeland rather than a dismissal of the old to be replaced by the new (she argues for this view in the preface to *PBC*). In the major work of her life, *Aurora Leigh*, the main character is both English and Italian. Perhaps the most important incarnation of her transcendence of

[9] From a letter written in 1851 (Kenyon 2: 13).

boundaries (besides her view of herself), was helping her son become a "'citizen of the world' after my own heart & ready for the millennium" (Lewis 2: 347).[10]

In "A 'Bad Patriot'?: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Cosmopolitanism" Christopher Keirstead examines what he calls EBB's poetics of cosmopolitanism and the evolution of this poetics from her publication of *Casa Guidi Windows* (*CGW*), through *Aurora Leigh* and *Poems Before Congress*, to the publication of "Mother and Poet."[11] Keirstead suggests that "what characterizes Barrett Browning's work is [a] struggle to push beyond boundaries of self and nation and to make cosmopolitanism something that is lived as well as inscribed" (70). He uses a definition of cosmopolitanism from Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen's *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*:

> Cosmopolitanism suggests something that simultaneously: (a) transcends the seemingly exhausted nation-state model; (b) is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local; (c) is culturally anti-essentialist; and (d) is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity, and interest. In these ways, cosmopolitanism seems to offer a mode of managing cultural and political multiplicities. (qtd. in Keirstead 70)

In using this definition to think of EBB and cosmopolitanism, Keirstead does not forget the possible connotations of the term, and rightly so. EBB is accused, by more than one reviewer of *PBC*, of being cosmopolitan, not congratulated for it.[12] Just as Richard Cronin

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[10] Her son, Robert Weidemann Barrett Browning, was raised to speak multiple languages and identify with France and Italy as much as with England.
[11] First published in *The Independent* in New York (2 May 1861): 1; later part of *Last Poems*.
[12] Charles Synge Christopher Bowen in *The Spectator* (31 March 1860) suggests EBB hides behind a male mask of cosmopolitanism using a variety of unflattering terms to describe and

suggests that EBB negotiates her ideas of citizenship through *CGW* ("*Casa Guidi Windows*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Italy and the Poetry of Citizenship"), Keirstead writes that EBB begins to enact cosmopolitanism through *CGW*—her first contemporary political poem set in another country treating current events. Her enactment of this ideal is elevated and more deeply explored, merging public and private, in *Aurora Leigh* as the verse novel ends with a household formed of diverse individuals navigating their way to a multi-cultural, multi-national identity beyond the merely national. Indeed, Keirstead suggests EBB's ease in elopement might be the first manifestation of "lived" cosmopolitanism. When she leaves England with Browning, she rejects English identities that consist of 1) a straitened concept of the domestic at the heart of her father's household—by insisting his children did not marry, he infantilized them as well as positioned himself as the ultimate patriarch, and 2) a narrow view of poetic possibilities predicated on her position as a poetess. Through her marriage, she makes a literal and intellectual escape from England to create a life in Italy (and on the continent). She forges a "hybrid Anglo-European identity" with her poetry as "a site of continuous renewal of that identity" (Keristead 83). Keirstead posits that *PBC* is an additional location for renewing identity on her way to a fully-realized concept of cosmopolitanism in "Mother and Poet." While Keirstead's assessment supports my conclusion that the poems of *PBC* are a vital part of her corpus, and that her last "Italian" poems, including "Mother and Poet," are profoundly connected to *PBC*, it is too dismissive of *PBC*. EBB's vision for internationalism, transnationalism, indeed, cosmopolitanism is explicitly within this small collection of political poems. To infer that the volume "on

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name the position: imbecile, illogical, renegade, dilletante, seditious, repulsive, fanatic. William E. Aytoun in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* also denounces EBB as cosmopolitan—employing as many of the worst possible connotations of the term (April 1860).

balance, mostly provides what could be termed hopeful celebrations of international cooperation" (84) is to make the mistake of assuming these poems are far removed from each other and from the ones that follow in *Last Poems*. In fact, the poems of *PBC* and those later poems focused on Italy cling to one another to tell of political change and chronicle important historical circumstance—the poems in *PBC*, grounded in her international experience, share a truth EBB believed she must tell as a poet. In so doing, she created a political poetics well beyond nationalism.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning on Italy and, Finally, in Italy

On 12 September 1846, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett married Robert Browning at St. Marylebone Church in London. One week later they sailed for Italy. Their prior exchange of letters mentioned Italy many times. Fairly early in their correspondence, EBB called it "your Italy" (Kintner 1: 108).[13] But by September 1845, Robert wrote to EBB, "wish by wish, one gets one's wishes--at least I do--for one instance, you will go to Italy" (Kintner 1: 189).[14] Later in that month, EBB first begins to talk of truly traveling to Pisa with a sister and/or brother for her health but it seems is prevented from this travel "for personal advantage" by her father (Karlin 125). On 11 October 1845, EBB starts a letter that suggests she will be able to travel to Italy in the winter for her health after all. She writes of George, her brother, settling all with her father one evening, and names the possible days when she might sail and

[13] This letter is dated 30 June 1845.
[14] In all letters from all collections, I have replicated punctuation as it was printed, so that sometimes, an en dash may be followed by two-thirds of an ellipsis, or indeed function as end punctuation, or two hyphens will appear next to each other that might otherwise be an em dash. In this letter, dated 11 September 1845, Browning also vividly describes Italian scenes commenting on Mary Shelley's travel writing on Italy and Samuel Rogers's long poem *Italy*.

where Browning might direct letters so that they might reach her by the time she arrives in Gibraltar. The next day (12 October), she adds to the letter:

> All this I had written yesterday--and to-day it all is worse than vain. Do not be angry with me--do not think it my fault--but *I do not go to Italy* ... it has ended as I feared. What passed between George and Papa there is no need of telling: only the latter said that I 'might go if I pleased, but that going it would be under his heaviest displeasure.' George, in great indignation, pressed the question fully: but all was vain ... and I am left in this position ... to go, if I please, with his displeasure over me, (which after what you have said and after what Mr. Kenyon has said, and after what my own conscience and deepest moral convictions say aloud, I would unhesitatingly do at this hour!) and necessarily run the risk of exposing my sister and brother to that same displeasure ... from which risk I shrink and fall back and feel that to incur it, is impossible. Dear Mr. Kenyon has been here and we have been talking--and he sees what I see ... that I am justified in going myself, but not in bringing others into difficulty. The very kindness and goodness with which they desire me (both my sisters) 'not to think of them,' naturally makes me think more of them. And so, tell me that I am not wrong in taking up my chain again and acquiescing in this hard necessity. The bitterest 'fact' of all is, that I had believed Papa to have loved me more than he obviously does: but I never regret knowledge ... I mean I never would *un*know anything ... even were it

> the taste of the apples by the Dead sea--and this must be accepted like the rest. (Kintner 1: 232-33)[15]

EBB decides not to go to Italy and risk her father's displeasure for herself, but more importantly, the decision is made to spare her siblings. She continues:

> Am I wrong in the decision about Italy? Could I do otherwise? I had courage and to spare--but the question, you see, did not regard myself wholly. For the rest, the 'unforbidden country' lies within these four walls. Madeira was proposed in vain--and any part of England would be as objectionable as Italy, and not more advantageous to *me* than Wimpole Street. To take courage and be cheerful, as you say, is left as an alternative--and (the winter may be mild!) to fall into the hands of God rather than of man…. (Kintner 1: 233)

Throughout the following year they fell in love, became engaged, and decided to leave England for Italy. It was for health considerations that Italy was chosen—it was viewed as a location for healing by many and had been suggested as a place for EBB to find her health the previous year—but it was also for monetary reasons they chose Italy. Browning writes EBB that they can manage in Italy fairly well on her income and what he can earn from his writing (Karlin 290). Italy was a land of sun and healing, but it was also

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[15] As they planned their escape in 1846, they were careful not to directly involve EBB's sisters, Henrietta and Arabella, so they should be blameless when their father finally discovered what had happened. Her sisters knew of her attachment and engagement to Browning, but they could know nothing of the details. Both EBB and Browning showed concern for those left behind in the Barrett family and told each other they must exercise caution even in seeing each other as they prepared for departure (late August and early September 1846). EBB knew her brothers and father were aware of her friendship with Browning, but she did not tell any of them of the depth of her feeling nor of her imminent marital plans, as it turned out with good reason. Her brothers shunned her for a time, but they relented eventually. However, her father sent a scathing letter and never spoke to or wrote to her again after September 1846.

considerably less expensive to live there than many other locations and had well-established English and American expatriate communities.

Italy became the obvious destination, then, to begin their married life, and they did indeed settle there, in Pisa for a time, after they eloped. For the next 15 years, their primary residence was in Florence at Casa Guidi.

A Chronology of EBB 1846-1861: Her "Italian" Life[16]

EBB's life in Italy exerted a deep influence on her poetic production. Her work in these years regularly focused on Italian concerns, incorporates Italy as a life-changing locale, or includes Italian characters, or those who are part-Italian (such as *Aurora Leigh*). Her time on the Continent, though, was not exclusive to Italian cities. She spent time in France, and particularly in Paris, where she was a first-hand witness to Napoleon III's *coup d'état*. To trace her travels, current political events, and her publications is to more fully understand her sense of being a "citizeness" of the world (at least the Western European world).

1846

Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett are married at St. Marylebone Church in London 12 September. A week later, Elizabeth Barrett Browning meets her husband to embark upon their life together. They travel to Le Havre and then to Paris where they meet Anna Jameson, who travels with them to Pisa. After the party arrives in Pisa, the Brownings

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[16] Several chronologies are available with more detailed information on the Brownings's lives, travel, specific hotels where they stayed, addresses of their apartments, notes on personal and family events, and political affairs as well as concurrent literary publications. See Avery in Avery and Stott (210-38); Lewis (2: 557-66); Baguley (xv-xxii); Willoughby (54-89); and Martin Garrett's *A Browning Chronology: Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning*.

take up residence at Collegio di Ferdinando by mid-October. • EBB has seven poems published in the October *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.[17]

1847

The Brownings move to Florence in the spring and secure lodgings in Casa Guidi[18] in mid-summer, but move to various apartments through the following spring. They visit Vallombrosa in mid-July. • They celebrate their first wedding anniversary during celebrations after the Grand Duke Leopold II of Florence allows a Civic Guard. • EBB begins work on "A Meditation in Tuscany." Four more of EBB's poems appear in *Blackwood's* in May with an additional three published in June.

1848

In late spring, the Brownings take up permanent apartments in Casa Guidi to which they always return after traveling and call home until EBB's death in 1861. The Brownings take a three-week trip around northern Italy. • Revolutions break out across Europe: Paris, Vienna, Florence, Berlin, Sicily, Rome (and more). Leopold II of Tuscany appears to be a liberal reformer as does Pope Pius IX, but both prove to be false and flee Florence and Rome respectively, to meet in Gaeta (in 1849). A republic is declared in Rome. Louis Napoleon is

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[17] To show the extent of EBB's poetic work in this period, I note most of EBB's periodical and major British publications (not reprints of previous poems in subsequent periodicals), and I do include some American publications as well. For a full list of her printed works, please visit *The Brownings: A Research Guide* at http://www.browningguide.org. Her publications are not evenly dispersed during these years, but they do reflect her growing commitment to publishing poems reflecting an explicit political agenda from "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" to *Casa Guidi Windows* through *Aurora Leigh* to *PBC* and her last Italian poems.

[18] Actually, their residence was called Palazzo Guidi, but after the birth of their child, EBB referred to it as Casa Guidi (Lewis 2: 559). I refer to it as such throughout this work.

inaugurated as president of the Second French Republic at the end of the year. • "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" in published in the anti-slavery gift book, *The Liberty Bell*. Titled as "A Meditation in Tuscany," the first part of what would become *Casa Guidi Windows* is rejected by *Blackwood's*.

1849

Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning is born in March. In late June, the Brownings take a short trip around to various locales in northern Italy then settle for the summer in Bagni di Lucca. • Sardinia/Piedmont is defeated by the Austrians early in the year—Charles Albert abdicates in favor of his son Victor Emmanuel (the monarch under whom Italy is united twelve years later). The Roman Republic falls to French troops. • In July, EBB presents Robert with *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. One of EBB's poems is published in the *Athenæum* in December ("A Child's Grave at Florence").

1850

The Brownings spend part of the summer in Florence. They travel to Siena in August and stay through October. • The Pope returns to the Vatican with French assistance. Universal suffrage is abolished in France. Count Cavour becomes Prime Minister for Piedmont. • EBB is suggested as a candidate for the Laureateship upon Wordsworth's death (in an article by T.K. Hervey in the *Athenæum* on 1 June). *Poems* (2 volumes), expanded and revised from 1844, is published by Chapman and Hall. In October, "Hiram Powers' 'Greek Slave'" is published anonymously in *Household Words*.

1851

The Brownings embark upon an extended retreat from Italy beginning in May (they do not return to Florence until November of 1852). They stay for long periods in Paris and London. While in Paris, they witness Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* (2 December) and its attendant ceremonies. In London for the summer, they meet many family members (not EBB's father) and attend the Great Exhibition. On their way back to Paris, they travel with Thomas Carlyle. • *Casa Guidi Windows* is published by Chapman and Hall.

1852

On two occasions while in Paris, EBB meets a literary hero: George Sand. They remain in Paris for the winter until removing to London for the summer in early July. They return to Paris for a short stay where they watch, from a balcony with friends, Louis Napoleon's triumphant arrival in Paris (October) before their return to Florence in November. • On 2 December, one year after his successful *coup*, Louis Napoleon establishes the Second French Empire and declares himself Napoleon III. • Additional editions of EBB's *Poems* (2 volumes) are reprinted in England and the U.S.

1853

After a winter and spring in Florence, the Brownings stay in Bagni di Lucca again for the summer. They return briefly to Casa Guidi before spending the winter and coming spring in Rome (they come home to Florence in June 1854). • Napoleon III marries Eugenia de Montijo in the early part of the year. • EBB begins to work on *Aurora Leigh*. *Poems* continues to do well (with a 3rd edition in England and two printings in the U.S.).

1854

By June, the Brownings are back in Florence where they stay for about one year. • The Crimean War begins; by the end of the year, France, Britain, and Austria have agreed to an alliance against Russia. • EBB writes "A Plea for the Ragged Schools of London"; Browning writes "The Twins"; both are published in a thin pamphlet sold at a charity bazaar organized by Arabella, EBB's sister. Two separate collections of EBB's poetry are printed in America.

1855

At the end of June, the Brownings travel again to Paris and London. They stay in Paris into July, then move to London where they remain until October. Toward the end of that month, they return to Paris (and stay there until June 1856). • Emperor and Empress of France officially visit Britain in April; Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visit France in August. Sardinia/Piedmont joins the alliance against Russia. Victor Emmanuel, King of Piedmont visits France, with Count Cavour, in November. • EBB's "My Kate" is published in *The Keepsake* in London.

1856

In June, the Brownings travel from Paris to London, and in August to the Isle of Wight where they can be near several of EBB's brothers and her sister, Arabella. In September, they return to London, then move back to Florence by the end of October (where they stay until the following summer). EBB's cousin John Kenyon dies leaving her and

Browning a legacy to ensure their financial security. • The Crimean War ends with the Treaty of Paris (March). Because of Piedmont's entry into the war, Napoleon III supports Piedmont's having a representative at the table during the talks for the Treaty, against Austrian wishes. • While on the Isle of Wight, EBB works on proofs of *Aurora Leigh*, which is published in November. "A Curse for a Nation" is published in *The Liberty Bell*. *Poems* (4th edition) in three volumes is issued by Chapman and Hall.

1857

After a winter, spring, and early summer in Florence, the Brownings move again to Bagna di Lucca for the remainder of the summer through early October. EBB's father dies having written to her only once after her marriage to Browning. She is devastated by the news but learns he had written to a mutual acquaintance that he had forgiven his married children (for marrying) and prayed for them (Garrett 108). • Gustave Flaubert and his novel, *Madame Bovary* (1856), are the center of scandal and legal scrutiny in January. Both Browning and EBB read the book in the fall. The Emperor and Empress of France make another state visit to Britain in August. Napoleon III meets with Czar Alexander II and after negotiating some other issues, gets the Czar to agree that "he would not aid Austria if France turned Austria out of Italy" (Blumberg 18). • EBB writes a letter to Napoleon III on behalf of Victor Hugo, but it is never sent. "Amy's Cruelty" is published in *The Keepsake*. *Aurora Leigh* sells well and goes through a 2nd and 3rd printing by March.

1858

The Brownings leave Florence in early July for France, where they stay until October. They return to Florence in mid-October, then in mid-November travel to Rome for the winter. • Felice Orsini, a known associate of the Italian patriot exiled in England, Giuseppe Mazzini, attempts to assassinate the Emperor and Empress in January. As they enter the Paris Opera, three bombs explode nearby, killing several and injuring over 150 others. The imperial couple are not injured. Orsini is executed in March. However, Napoleon III sees an opportunity to air his concerns for Italian freedom from Austria by using the assassins's trial to air their grievances (and forward his own imperialistic agenda). At his behest, Orsini's letters are published in prominent French and Piedmontese newspapers. Two key events happen as a result of the publication: 1) Cavour reacts to the letters by writing a law that criminalizes the publication of assassin's letters; and 2) the Austrians misunderstand the publication of the letters and believe Napoleon is being victimized. Napoleon is able to use the situation to his advantage to lay the groundwork for his involvement in the fight for Italian liberty from Austria and position himself, and France, for potential geographic and political gain. A secret, and constitutionally illegal, meeting between Cavour and Napoleon III takes place in Plombières in July to settle an alliance between France and Italy should Austria attack Italy. A treaty is made between France and Piedmont in December. British government officials are well aware of the possibility of war, having heard directly from Napoleon himself, as early as 1857, of "his plans for the regeneration of Italy. . . . he explained his program for the expulsion of Austria from Italy, which included an alliance with Sardinia [Piedmont], a *rapprochement* with Russia, and Lombardy as the theatre of war. Rome and Naples were not to be disturbed; Rome, because the political situation in France

forbade [many Catholics]; Naples, because it enjoyed the protection of Russia" (Urban 114).
• A new edition of *Poems* (2 volumes) is printed in the U.S.

1859

Wintering in Rome, the Brownings return to Florence by late May where they remain until early August—hearing and seeing all the war-time excitement of Florence and the political activity at the nearby Pitti Palace. After the peace of Villafranca, they move back to Siena in August and stay until mid-October. They return briefly to Florence before leaving in November for another winter in Rome. • Early in the year, Prince Napoleon (aged 35, the son of King Jerome, Napoleon I's last surviving brother) marries Princess Clothilde (Victor Emmanuel's oldest daughter, aged 15)—a marriage alliance between the imperial family of Bonaparte and the royal family of Piedmont to reinforce the political treaty made in late 1858. Rumors of war between Austria and an allied France and Italy emerge from all parties. An anonymous pamphlet is published, "*L'Empereur Napoléon III et l'Italie*." Arthur de la Guéronniére is the author (but Napoleon III may have been a co-author). The pamphlet criticizes the Italian governments's reluctance to endorse and enable real reform. Britain purposely remains neutral: "There was no difference of opinion on one point; if the war should come, England must remain neutral. Her support could never be extended to reactionary Austria, and fear and distrust of France nullified all desire to aid Italy, and came perilously near to killing all sympathy for the Italian cause" (Urban 141). Austrian aggression finally triggers a movement by France and Italy to mobilize for war in the spring. Napoleon III marches 10 May for Italy. Two major battles are fought and won by France and Italy: Magenta (4 June) and Solferino (24 June). Shortly after, peace talks between Napoleon

III and Franz Josef of Austria result in the Treaty of Villafranca (mid-July) ending the war before all Italian regions have secured freedom from foreign rule. When Cavour hears the details of the peace, he resigns immediately. Before he tenders his resignation, he makes a "terrible scene… was purple in the face and breathing with difficulty, so that an apoplectic stroke was feared; he 'seemed almost to have lost his mind'" (Mack Smith 174). The Treaty of Zurich, settling outstanding issues from the summer's war, is signed 10 November. A congress is additionally scheduled to arrange Italian governance. The issue of another anonymous pamphlet in early December, again written by Arthur de la Guéronniére, "*Le pape et le congrés*," demands that the Pope give up all temporal power. • A 4th edition of *Aurora Leigh* is printed by Chapman and Hall; another printing of *Aurora Leigh* is issued in the U.S. EBB's *Poems* (in 3 volumes) is published in the U.S. "A Tale of Villafranca" is published in the *Athenæum* on 24 September 1859 (minus Stanza VII, inserted when this poem is included in *PBC*). EBB had been writing poems for her forthcoming political volume through the spring, summer, and fall.

1860

In early June the Brownings leave Rome for Florence where they stay for just a few weeks before summering in Siena again. In mid-October, they return to Florence briefly before returning to Rome for the winter in late November. In December, EBB learns of her sister Henrietta's death. • The planned congress for January of this year is canceled after Pope Pius IX takes public umbrage with the pamphlet (mentioned above) requesting restriction of his secular power and suggesting his responsibilities remain only ecclesiastical. Cavour resumes his position as Prime Minister. Nice and Savoy are officially ceded to

France in March with plebiscites in June finalizing the transfer. Throughout this year, various Italian states, including Tuscany, vote to join Piedmont. Giuseppe Garibaldi, famed Italian military leader, invades and conquers the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which joins Piedmont under Victor Emmanuel's rule. Victor Emmanuel invades the papal states. • Despite the cancellation of the congress, EBB keeps the name of her volume, and *PBC* is published 12 March 1860 by Chapman and Hall. In the U.S., it is published as *Napoleon III in Italy and Other Poems* printed by C.S. Francis and Co. (New York). Seven of EBB's "Italian" poems are published in *The Independent* (New York) beginning at the end of March with "A Court Lady" (the fourth poem in *PBC*). Other poems, one each, appear in June, September, October, and December; two poems are published in August. "La Dama di Corte" an Italian translation by Francesco Dall'Ongaro of "A Court Lady" is also published as a broadside in Florence. Two poems are published in *Cornhill*, one on Italian politics. The fifth edition of *Aurora Leigh* is released by Chapman and Hall; another printing of *Aurora Leigh* is issued in the U.S. *Poems* (2 volumes) is printed in the U.S. again along with *Poetical Works*.

1861

The Brownings spend the first part of the year in Rome. They travel back to Florence in early June. Cavour dies on 6 June—a great blow to EBB. After several weeks of illness, EBB dies in Robert's arms on 29 June. EBB is buried in the Protestant Cemetery on 1 July. Shops are closed in mourning. Browning reads from EBB's "The Sleep" at the graveside. On 1 August, Browning and their son leave Florence. Browning never returns. • Victor Emmanuel is declared King of Italy by parliament in March. On 24 June, France recognizes

the Kingdom of Italy. • Three more of EBB's Italian poems are published in *The Independent* (New York) one poem in March, one in May, and one posthumously in July. Another of her poems is published in the same periodical in May, "Only a Curl" (this poem was also privately printed in Baltimore). *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* is printed in the U.S., as well as another issue of *Poems* (2 volumes). Before her death, the editor of *Cornhill*, William Thackeray, rejects EBB's poem "Lord Walter's Wife" as not suited to the audience; EBB sends another poem that is published in early June, "Little Mattie."

1862

Florentine officials erect a plaque over the entrance to Casa Guidi commemorating EBB's long-time residence in and commitment to Italy. • *Last Poems* is published by Chapman and Hall on 20 March—almost exactly two years after *PBC*. Others of her poems are printed in subsequent editions in both England and America.

CHAPTER 2

"I cry aloud in my poet-passion"[1]: Elizabeth Barrett Browning Claiming Political "Place" through *Poems Before Congress*

From a young age, EBB was interested in and commented upon political events: at six years old, she composed four lines on the injustice of press-gangs.[2] Throughout her life, she wrote many poems reflecting her knowledge of political events: Greek democracy (ancient and contemporary), Spanish revolution, Napoleon I's exploits, child labor, slavery, the Italian *Risorgimento*.[3] In 1860, when she published *PBC*, she stepped directly onto the

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[1] From "Italy and the World," stanza XXI, seventh poem in *Poems Before Congress* (Barrett Browning 55). All quotes from *Poems Before Congress* are from the first edition from Chapman and Hall, London (1860).

[2] The following four lines appear in EBB's juvenilia: "Ah! the poor lad in yonder boat / Forced from his Wife, his Friends, his home, / Now gentle Maiden how can you / Look at the misery of his doom?" A transcription of EBB's writing by her mother, dated 1812, makes this short poem the earliest recorded poetic composition of EBB. "Pressing" men into naval service was a topic of much discussion when EBB was a child; by the time EBB was six in 1812, "this practice, debated in Parliament and protested in the press, provided a catalyst for war between Britain and the United States," and no doubt, provided EBB with inspiration for these lines. Many thanks to Beverly Taylor for providing me with the above information from her article, "Childhood Writings of Elizabeth Barrett Browning: 'At Four I First Mounted Pegasus.'"

[3] I list some of EBB's poems here that pertain to issues stated above. On Greek democracy, see *The Battle of Marathon* (1820). For an argument rethinking the political possibilities of this first of EBB's works, see Avery (Avery and Stott 45-56). On the Spanish revolution, see the following: "Riga's Last Song" (in *An Essay on Mind and Other Poems*, 1826); "On a Picture of Riego's Widow" (in *An Essay on Mind and Other Poems,* 1826); and "Death-Bed of Teresa Del Riego" (in *Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems,* 1833). On Napoleon I, see "Crowned and Buried" (first published as "Napoleon's Return" in *The Athenaeum,* 4 July 1840). Later political poems include: "The Cry of the Children" (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1843) on the condition of child labor in England; "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (*The Liberty Bell,* 1848) about the evils of American slavery. Poems touching on Italian affairs begin with *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) and include *Poems Before Congress* (1860) as well as Italian poems in *The Independent* (1860-61) that also appear in *Last Poems* (1862). The dates listed here are all original publication dates for these poems and volumes.

political stage, addressing a political entity, raising her poetic voice to comment directly on politics as it was happening, and claiming her right to have a place among all writers and thinkers concerned with liberty and freedom. *PBC* embodies EBB's need to tell "her" truth about political engagement, international relations, patriotism, political oppression, and women who work within a patriarchy to subvert gender roles.[4] It represents a zenith of EBB's commitment to political analysis and commentary through poetics.[5]

A focus on the creation of EBB's political persona and the role she takes on as she envisions an international citizenship[6] must begin with a brief overview of her first encounter with Italian struggles for freedom and her response to that: *Casa Guidi Windows (CGW)* written to reflect on the revolutions in Italy in 1848 and their outcome.

Flourishing Among the Revolutions: The First War of Italian Independence

The end of the 1840s was a time of revolution across much of Europe: revolutionary activity exploded in multiple locations in France, the German states, across the Italian peninsula, and in Austria. EBB was living in Florence at that time, and in 1848, she witnessed many of the revolutionary events she wrote about in *CGW*.

In her introduction to *CGW*, Julia Markus writes: "Mrs. Browning believed that poetry was a form of action" (xxxii). More recently, Richard Cronin has written that *CGW* is a "poem that seeks to define the nature and duties of citizenship" (35). Through *CGW*, a

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[4] EBB creates several women characters in *PBC* who do this (see Chapter 4 for more detail), as she does herself by becoming an overtly political poet (see Chapter 3 for more on her heroic turn as poet of *PBC*).
[5] More precisely, *Poems Before Congress*, and EBB's other Italian poems gathered in *Last Poems*, represent *the* zenith of her overtly political-poetic activity.
[6] Looking at the range of content in her early political poems, she was always working toward a concept of international citizenship by focusing on English, French, Spanish, and Greek political issues.

commentary on current political events, EBB continued progress toward a poetry that enacted politics. Cronin poses a question—and possible answer—that he suggests underlies EBB's writing in this two-part poem. The answer, indeed, illuminates the congruity between EBB's notions of citizenship and those of Victorian society in general:

> How could Italy achieve nationhood, and its people the dignity of citizenship, without submitting to a patriarchal rule of law…? Her solution is articulated in her poems, best of all in *Casa Guidi Windows*, and it is founded on a re-definition of citizenship not as a state but as a process. It is not an idea peculiar to Barrett Browning, and might, in fact, be claimed as the dominant Victorian idea of citizenship. It supposes that the individual is neither subsumed within the state nor distinct from it, but rather that the idea of citizenship is realised in an unending process of negotiation by means of which the individual defines and redefines her place within the body politic. (41)

The two parts of *CGW* are an exploration of the attempt to free Italy from rule by various oppressors, including Austria (ruling many of the northern regions of Italy then and in 1859). The first part of the poem is a celebration of the restoration of Florentine civil liberties in September 1847—filled with hope and joy for the future. The second part records the deep disappointment felt by many as revolutionary attempts failed and an Austrian army marched into Florence in May 1849, with the Grand Duke Leopold II at its head.[7] In Part II, EBB also records a degree of disillusion with the Italian people who failed to perpetuate and defend the revolutions, and more precisely and close to home, seemed to welcome Grand

[7] Pope Pius IX had already negotiated with Austria to subvert and defeat the Roman Republic.

Duke Leopold's return to Austrian-sanctioned rule in Florence.[8] As a poet, EBB notes the historical events of the time in both parts of *CGW*, but it is also as a citizen that she comments and critiques. Throughout *CGW* EBB considers the process of citizenship by virtue of an unending negotiation between herself and the "body politic," a relationship she "defines and redefines." While the effort of 1848 ultimately failed, EBB's response to it, through *CGW*, is the beginning of the poetic and political fusion she continues in *PBC* in 1859-60.[9]

The Second War of Italian Independence: On the way to *Risorgimento*

From the late 1790s, and before,[10] through 1859—the year of the Second War of Italian Independence—various residents of the Italian peninsula, and others, urged through writing and occasional action that the states making up the Italian peninsula should be united, at least to eliminate foreign rule, if not united as one kingdom.[11] The First War of Italian

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[8] Leopold fled Tuscany after an insurrection in 1848 (joining the Pope in Gaeta in early 1849). In spring 1849, at the same time Austria was re-conquering other Italian states that revolted in 1848, local Tuscan officials invited Leopold to return to Florence in the hope that his return would prevent a direct Austrian invasion. He was also in negotiation with Austria to return to power with their help. His perfidy was found out, but he still returned to Florence, eventually allowing thousands of Austrian troops to occupy Tuscany as well as revoking the constitution.

[9] For more discussion on *CGW*, see Armstrong 2003; Avery and Stott 2003; Cronin 2003; Chapman 2001; Harris 2000; O'Connor 1998; Schor 1998; Gilbert 1984; Markus 1977. In the late 19th through the 20th century, Italian scholars have written of EBB as a heroine of the *Risorgimento* and compare her to Italians writing for the same purpose; see specifically Bisignano (204, 208, 264). *CGW* is the first of her works that solidified her position as a poet of the *Risorgimento*.

[10] Dante Alghieri is often seen as an important link in the history of those wanting to unite the states of the Italian peninsula—but a thorough treatment of his and other Italian patriots' roles prior to the 19th century are beyond the scope of this chapter—see the next note for some detail on later patriots and writers.

[11] Many Italians were concerned about unifying the peninsula from the early to mid-19th century, but they were usually the educated upper middle classes who wrote or formed and

Independence (1848) partially worked to this end but was unsuccessful. By the end of the 1850s, the time was ripe again for action of some kind; Piedmont/Sardinia wanted a stronger kingdom, to oust Austria from Italian soil and would be glad to have a united Italy—under Piedmont's crown; France wanted a stronger buffer between its borders and Austria (and wanted to support Piedmont), would have been glad to acquire new land, and would gladly have set up a kingdom of Central Italy with a French ruler.[12] But Austria did not want a united Italy nor Italian freedom of any kind; it wanted to remain ensconced in as much of Italy as the Treaty of 1815[13] would allow. France and Piedmont would have lost much had they publicly partnered to declare war on Austria—perhaps even triggering a continent-wide war. However, through some creative, and largely secret, political machinations on the part of Napoleon III, Emperor of France, and Count Cavour, Prime Minister of Piedmont (and through a conveniently-timed Austrian blunder), Austria became the aggressor so that France could align with Piedmont—and come to its aid—without much interference from any other country.[14] Two major battles were fought and won by the combined forces of France and

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participated in societies to promote reunification, such as: Vittorio Alfieri, Vincenzo Gioberti; Count Camillo di Cavour; Count Cesare Balbo; Massimo d'Azeglio; Giuseppe Mazzini; Alessandro Manzoni. It was through the efforts of many of these that Italy became a united nation. Cavour and d'Azeglio both served as prime ministers of Piedmont, Cavour playing the most crucial role as reunification began in earnest in the late 1850s through his death in 1861. Most notable of the English promoters was Jessie White Mario who wrote and spoke on behalf of Mazzini's vision of a united Italy. For more details on the intellectualization of a united Italy, see Hearder (153-97); Holt (105-15); Duggan (87-140).

[12] See Holt, Hearder, or Duggan, and particularly Blumberg, for a much more detailed explanation of this war, its impetus and results.

[13] The Congress of Vienna in 1815 worked to realign Europe—and reward the victors—after Napoleon I's defeat. Many of the political difficulties in EBB's time, namely the Italian situation, was a result of the redrawing of political boundaries.

[14] A British statesman remarked at that time: "We should not be sorry to see the Austrians driven out of Italy for good and all, though most people would regret that the Emperor Louis Napoleon should be triumphant, and that such a course of perfidy, falsehood, and selfish ambition should be crowned with success" (qtd. in Beales 68).

Piedmont.[15] All looked good for Italian unification, but for a variety of reasons (pressure from home, the Prussians, other countries, the Pope), Napoleon sued for peace with the Austrian emperor, Franz Josef, in the summer of 1859, excluding Piedmont from the negotiations. This peace, while unpopular with EBB (and others), at least initially, eventually laid the ground work for a unification of Italy under one government, but not because it was planned that way by anyone or any country.[16]

In 1859

By 1859, EBB was obsessed with the coming of a war that could mean Italy's unification. She was already a poet of the *Risorgimento* by virtue of *CGW* and had an intellectual, emotional, and financial investment in Italy (Lewis 2: 210).[17] She actively sought news from all quarters: newspapers (Italian and English), friends and acquaintances, political leaders, and personal observations. Her letters of 1859 show how closely she followed the war and how it affected her life.

In January of 1859, EBB wrote to her sister Arabella of her hopes for Italy and the French desire to assist Italy (specifically Piedmont): "I am in a high state of excitement about politics & the French attitude in regard to Italy—Is it not for this I have waited, hanging (in my soul) on the skirts of Louis Napoleon, & believing that it *would* come?—Some of my

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[15] The battle of Magenta took place on 4 June 1859, the battle of Solferino on 24 June 1859.
[16] Indeed, a book about the chaotic and coincidental nature of this war by Arnold Blumberg is titled *A Carefully Planned Accident: The Italian War of 1859*. Blumberg implicitly acknowledges EBB's importance as a voice for this war and the *Risorgimento* by quoting the first stanza from "First News from Villafranca" on the dedication page, a poem first published in *The Independent* in New York on 7 June 1860, later included in *Last Poems* (1862).
[17] The Brownings subscribed to support the war with a monthly financial contribution (Lewis 2: 210).

friends will admit that I have an insight into politics" (Lewis 2: 391).[18] In subsequent letters through the winter and spring addressed to Sarianna Browning, her sisters Henrietta and Arabella, and her friends, EBB wrote of the "ignoble" way the English acted toward the Italians and French, her perception of Napoleon III's political intentions toward Italy, the arranged marriage between the houses of Bonaparte and Savoy, the talk of coming war, and the immorality of the reporting of *The Times* (Huxley 304, 308, 310-11, 313-14; Lewis 2: 391-2, 395, 398, 403-05; Kenyon 2: 307-12). Comments about those making the news and in the news are liberally scattered throughout her letters—Cavour, Napoleon III, Massimo d'Azeglio—as is her belief in their good will toward Italy and their support of Italian liberty and reunification. Despite the failures of 1848 and the uncertain political chaos of early 1859, EBB remained positive that the cause was just. Alison Chapman in "Risorgimenti: Spiritualism, Politics and Elizabeth Barrett Browning" writes that EBB's continued faith in and enthusiasm for the *Risorgimento* is "the triumph of hope over experience" (73).[19]

Her firsthand knowledge of European history might have also assisted her in remaining hopeful despite many disappointments. Writing to her sister Arabella in April

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[18] Lewis includes an endnote (2: 392, n. 14) explaining what EBB may be alluding to in her January letter: comments she knew of by Napoleon III of France and Victor Emmanuel of Piedmont. At a New Year's reception in Paris, Napoleon spoke to the Austrian Ambassador: "'I regret,' he said, 'that our relations with your government are not as good as they were in the past; but I pray you to tell the emperor that my personal feelings for him have not changed.'" Victor Emmanuel, in a speech opening parliament in Turin on 10 January 1859, said: "'While we respect treaties we cannot be insensible to the cry of anguish … that comes to us from many parts of Italy'" (Holt 207).

[19] See Chapman's article for more detail about the tantalizing connections between EBB's interests in spiritualism and Italian politics—how each invades and supports the other. Chapman writes that EBB, despite discovering that her close spiritualist friend Sophie Eckley is a fraud in 1859, continues to employ the "language and symbolic resonance of spiritualism" and that "what is significant about her continued adoption of spiritualist discourse… is the renewed vigour it gives to her political aspirations for the resurrection of Italy as a nation" (75).

1859 from Rome, she reviewed the history of European relations and various alliances and treaties from the early 1800s through 1859, demonstrating her grasp of European political history. In this letter (and others) she writes as an intellectual, not just as a partisan or champion of Italy's *Risorgimento*. She justifies Italy's desire to cast off Austrian rule by comparing it to a Belgian revolt in 1830 that led to the successful establishment of Belgium as an independent Catholic nation in 1831. She suggests that the Treaty of Vienna in 1815, which put both Belgium and Italy in positions of oppression as possessions of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and Austria respectively, was no longer a valid justification for continued Austrian governance in Italy, since the treaty had already been broken several times. She also chastised her sister for not understanding the current situation in northern Italy and criticized the English government for standing by while the Treaty was repeatedly abused:

> Do you know what goes on in Lombardy, Arabel, & how it is more galling than anything here or at Naples? & are you of opinion, because we were conquerors in 1815, we had a right to throw a refined people bound like a dog, to the huntsman's whip, saying "This is yours!",— And because we did it once, sealed this hideous compact, are we to hold to it for ever as if it were Holy Scriptures? A treaty against the interest of a nation, & without its consent, .. nay, in defiance of its protest- And this treaty to hold? Yet we wink at the breach of treaties when it suits our interests- The establishment of Belgium was against these very treaties,—yet we let it pass. The restoration of a Buonaparte was against them also, yet we found it convenient to agree. And when Austria swallowed up Cracow alive, she tore those same treaties

> from top to bottom, while we stood by quietly. No government ought to stand, against the consent of a nation,—and no treaty ought to hold, against the consent of a nation,—just as no law is good a moment, against a general moral sense- You sh.[d] see the bitter smile with which the Italians talk of the English plea for "treaties!" The Devil keeps his special approbation for this sort of honesty—while the angels turn away their eyes to the professed thief rather-
>
> The war has begun, we hear. May God defend the right- (Lewis 2: 405)

EBB regularly communicates with many correspondents, most of which receive her political views mixed in with family news, condemnation of the British people or foreign policy regarding aid to or understanding of the situation in Italy, or the calumny of *The Times*. And she faithfully offers her opinions and her insights on the Italian struggles. Whether these prove to be right or not is irrelevant. Her dedication to understanding as much as she could, discussing, thinking, and writing about the *Risorgimento* is a key to understanding the depth of intellect and passion she gave to the poems in *PBC* and beyond[20] and the place she claimed by her poetic/political action.

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[20] EBB published many more poems focused on the political situation in Italy after *PBC* in *The Independent* throughout 1861. However, modern judgment, as well as contemporary judgment, of her poetics and her political and historical understanding and interpretation widely varies. For instance, in an Italian biography of EBB from mid-20th century, the author writes: "In truth, she will never be a woman of clear political thinking, but only an intelligent woman athirst for ideals and justice who judges, exalts or condemns, sometimes without reason or against reason, changing views…. a poetess who saw everything through a veil of poetry with which she transformed everything" (qtd. in Bisignano 242). This biography was written long before EBB's letters began to be collected; materials were more scattered and less available to researchers in mid-20th century.

EBB was in Rome when the war started, but she did not suffer from lack of news because she was away from her beloved Tuscany (Lewis 2: 482-83, n. 6).[21] Throughout the early part of the summer of 1859, she remained positive about the success of the war. As she prepared to leave Rome for Florence in May, she wrote to her sister, Henrietta:

> Now we shall have a free Italy. And the Italians will fight nobly, since they have leaders and faith, and a unity of conviction from the north to the south.[22] Things have ripened since 48 and 49—Tuscany, for instance, has conducted itself with a "superhuman virtue" say certain of our friends who witnessed the late movements there, and I am going back in joy to the tricolour,[23] and a "government united to Piedmont."…
>
> Meanwhile, there is nothing you need fear for us. You know we are apt to flourish rather in revolutionary atmospheres. (Huxley 314)

EBB may be referring here to her own enthusiasm for times of revolution. In a letter to Sarianna Browning, she wrote, "We have two great flags on our terrace, the French flag and the Italian" (Kenyon 2: 313). Her letters touching on the military successes at Magenta

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[21] EBB rightly criticizes the Derby government for its noninterference in the Italian cause, but she also sometimes misses that the Palmerston government (Palmerston immediately precedes and follows Derby as Prime Minister) was actually in favor of a stronger Italy and worked to that end, albeit without the direct intervention EBB wanted. By 1860, though, EBB was *not* enamoured by Palmerston's success in requesting funding for greater national defenses. For more on British reaction to the war in 1859 and the Italian Question in general, see Denis Mack Smith (1997); Derek Beales (1961); Miriam Urban (1938).

[22] This was certainly a belief common to many of the upper middle classes with education, and some enlightened aristocrats, with leisure and the disposition to think and write. The peasant class, however, was often divided from all upper classes, by the immediate need to merely survive for one thing, and among themselves, divided by language differences as well as beliefs. Italy suffered, as did the American North and South at about this same time, from an industrialized north and an agricultural south whose economies and cultures clashed, adding to the delay of unification and serving to question the veracity of global statements about what "Italians" believed, wanted, or would commit to as a nation.

[23] The "tricolour" EBB refers to here is the flag of a united Italy: red, white, and green.

and Solferino were particularly triumphant. She wrote to her sister, Arabella, just after the battles had taken place and when it looked as if Italy and France might triumph over Austrian forces:

> The sort of excitement we live in here you can scarcely image to yourself. Other wars have to do with commerce & political theories—this had to do with life, love, national salvation. The people have tears in their eyes through profound feeling. The poorest & most ignorant study the maps & count the advances & retreats, as if each had a personal enemy at his shoulder. (Lewis 2: 414)

When Napoleon III signed the peace accord with Franz Josef in July 1859, EBB was devastated because her expectations for Italian liberty and reunification were far greater than the peace treaty afforded; Savoy and Nice were ceded to France, and Austria was allowed to maintain control over the region of Venetia. Of that time, she wrote, "I have been living and dying for Italy lately" (Kenyon 2: 334). She was so ill after hearing the news of Villafranca that the Brownings retired to Siena for the summer to recover her health. She wrote to Henrietta from Siena:

> …. [N]ot a line have I written since the peace.
>
> I fell that day from the mountains of the moon where I had walked hand in hand with a beautiful Dream—now fled away. The grief, the despair overwhelmed us, none of you can imagine of.
>
> I will never forgive England for her part in these things—never—in helping Prussia and confederated Germany, by a league of most inhuman

> selfishness, to prevent the perfecting of the greatest Deed given to men to do in these latter days.
>
> So we have lost Venetia. There remains however much gain—and we begin to be hopeful about the ultimate conclusions, on account chiefly of the stedfast [sic] mind and admirable feeling of the populations of central Italy. Nothing can have been finer than the bearing of all these peoples. On the day of the notification of the peace, the portraits and busts of the Emperor Napoleon disappeared throughout Florence. Florence where scarcely a man would have refused to die for him the day before! We were all blind incredulous, dizzy with grief. But the passion of the moment passed, and we returned to justice—and to the admission that after all the emperor's first duty was to France. Most magnanimous in their sense of gratitude have the Italians been. (Huxley 317)

While still in Siena, however, EBB published the poem, "A Tale of Villafranca" in *The Athenæum*, 24 September 1859 (397-98). It would eventually become the third poem in *PBC*. EBB had written to Henry Chorley, editor of *The Athenæum*, to plead for publication of her poem. Stanza VII, not included in that version of the poem, explicitly criticized the popular volunteer riflemen groups supported by the Poet Laureate, Alfred Tennyson, albeit anonymously.[24] Shortly after publication, EBB wrote to Chorley again, and to her sister

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[24] "Riflemen Form!" was first written and shared with Coventry Patmore in a letter dated mid-January 1852—titled "Rifle-Clubs!!!"—a reaction to Louis Napoleon's *coup d'etat*. At that time, Tennyson was not interested in publishing this verse as his letter suggests: "Very wild but I think too savage! Written in about 2 minutes! The authorship is a very deep secret! mind, Mr. P. Really I think on writing it out it's enough to make a war of itself. My wife thinks it too insulting to the F. and too inflaming to the English. Better not make a broadsheet of it, say I" (Lang and Shannon 2: 21). When it was first published in *The*

Arabella, that she had eliminated Stanza VII because she wanted the poem printed and thought the stanza in question would prevent publication. She explained to Chorley that the offending stanza 'was left out' purposely—although she was "sorely tempted" to send it the day after her first note to him (Kenyon 2: 334-38).[25] Stanza VII may have been "left out" to ensure publication, but she also did not send the stanza when she could have because she feared it might "annul any small chance of 'Athenaeum' tolerance which might fall to me" (Kenyon 2: 335).[26] Demonstrating a political sophistication and a confidence in her fame, and how it could be used to ensure a public and published voice, EBB shows the depth of her desire to speak for the *Risorgimento*. She wanted this poem published, and she wanted it published immediately, in a periodical she knew would reach an audience of her readers and peers. However, she clearly understood the limits of what would be acceptable as well as how to position herself rhetorically and philosophically to achieve her goal.

Throughout the rest of 1859 (and until EBB's death in June 1861), her letters continue to reflect her passion for and commitment to freedom and liberty, especially Italian freedom and liberty in pursuit of reunification. And her poetry does the same. Many of the last poems she wrote in 1860 and 1861 before her death concern the Italian question.

Times—"in a muted version as 'the War'"—Tennyson signed it only 'T'. which led some readers to speculate that this poem was "Martin Tupper's work (similar in subject and tone, at least)'" (2:20). EBB knew that this was Tennyson's work. In a letter to her sister, Arabella, dated 3 June 1859, she writes: "And to think of Alfred Tennyson!… Oh—your rifles, your rifles.. to defend yourselves, when nobody thinks of attacking you—while a nation is actually struggling here between life & death'" (Lewis 2: 411). This is treated in much more detail in the next chapter.

[25] Perhaps in anticipation of her planned volume, *PBC*, she writes in the letter to Arabella, "You wont [sic] like any of it, any of you—but more truth was never written—Indeed whenever I have been false to the truth, (too often!) it has been in prose. In poetry, the love of the truth *constrains* me" (Lewis 2:422).

[26] Stanza VII appears in nearly the same form in "A Tale of Villafranca," the third poem in *PBC*, as she wrote it out for Chorley in her letter in the fall of 1859.

Daring Publication: "a right to say her say"[27]

Along with *CGW*, *PBC* directly addresses a political problem of some magnitude in 19th century Europe—what was to be done about Italy? The peninsula occupies a key geographical location in Europe bisecting the Mediterranean, linking the East with the West, connecting Africa with Northern European countries. What was to be done about who governed and controlled Italy was an issue many countries were eager to see resolved. Many felt all areas of the peninsula should be united, or reunited. EBB was obviously in favor of a full *Risorgimento*. As mentioned previously, Cronin writes that EBB's *CGW* illustrates "a re-definition of citizenship not as a state, but as a process" (41). Through the publication of *PBC*, she pointedly enacts that process of citizenship, claiming her right to question and to speak on a political topic and in a public forum, through print, directly placing herself and her work in direct confrontation of a political entity. In another look at *CGW*, in "*Casa Guidi Windows*: Spectacle and Politics in 1851," Isobel Armstrong quotes the speaker of the poem from the second part suggesting that "[i]ndividual action may be impossible for a poet, an intellectual, an ex-patriot – 'What now remains for such as we, to do?'" (65). Armstrong notes that the despair doesn't negate the possibilities inherent in the first part of the poem. This was still true for EBB's poetry in 1859 and 1860 as she was writing most of the poems for, and then publishing, *PBC*. The speaker of *CGW* asks, "What now remains for such as we, to do?"; EBB answers with *PBC*'s publication: use a poet's fame and resources to publish poems that will open readers' eyes to issues surrounding the *Risorgimento*. She asks; she answers.

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[27] Robert Browning writes to their mutual friend, Isa Blagden, in January 1860 regarding the publication of *PBC*: "…I think she [Elizabeth] has a right to say her say" (McAleer 55).

Until 1860, when *PBC* was published, EBB had not previously and publicly asserted her voice politically by *directly* addressing a body politic. The title of the collection exploits the grammatical ambiguity of the word "before" to draw attention to the complexity of the gesture it embodies: the volume is issued in advance of the meeting of the international political gathering which was to decide the future of Italy, but is also placed in front of, and in the way of, this "congress."[28] Moreover, the poems contained in the volume address issues that are of relevance to more than one congress. For instance, "A Curse for a Nation," the last poem in the volume, could be seen to address the American Congress as the poem indicts the institution of slavery, long illegal in Britain. "A Curse for a Nation" does not state the name of the nation being cursed, allowing for multiple interpretations of which nation is addressed and for what purpose. Is the cursed nation guilty of a *de facto* slave-owning culture (such as that in America) or a culture that only seems to enslave certain members, women and workers, for example (such as that in England)? Or is the curse also applicable to the "enslavement" of the Italian peoples by foreign rulers? It could be any or all of these.

Which congress does *PBC* address and which poems are meant for whom, and to what end?[29] Because the answer to these queries may be varied and multiple, this small but loud-voiced volume becomes many volumes, and the poems become many poems—doubling (at the minimum) their audience and their possible intent. The volume is in keeping with the

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[28] Two congresses were planned—one just before the war, and one just after, to decide on its aftermath. Neither took place. EBB was aware of both these proposed congresses (Lewis 2: 400; Kenyon 2: 328).

[29] The sexual connotation of "congress" is another avenue of interpretation available in the analysis of this volume, given the sexual politics in several of the poems, such as: "The Court Lady," "The Dance," and "A Curse for a Nation." It's not possible to explore this topic in depth here (see the chapter on *Corinne, or Italy* and *PBC*). For thinking on EBB's feminisation of Italy in *PBC* and criticism of the same in *CGW,* see Chapman ("'All that I'" 2001), and for a sexual/political reading of *PBC*, see Montwieler (2005).

doubling so prevalent in Victorian poetry, especially considering that from the title page to the last page *PBC* "dramatizes relationships of power" (Armstrong, *Victorian* 16). The process of citizenship EBB enacts with the publication of *PBC* becomes a process of international citizenship that explores traditional notions of boundaries—national/international, poetic/politic, private/public—and interrogates their existence.

Despite the ambiguity in the title and content and the doubling therein that leads to a breaking down of boundaries—or maybe because of it all—EBB is aware of the possible reactions her British readers may have to this collection. She is prepared for negative repercussions upon the publication of *PBC* just as she was for *CGW* and *Aurora Leigh*. Her letters just prior to the publication of these other two works show that she was aware of possible backlash that would come upon their publication. But before the publication of *PBC*, she seems to have delighted in the possibility of controversy. She had stepped onto a different stage with this work. By virtue of the implied audience, it is an international political stage where controversy is regularly part of the play.

In one letter from this period, she writes: "I'm going into the fire for him [Napoleon III] with a little 'brochure' of political poems" (Kenyon 2: 356). Her conflation of the poetic with the political was something she anticipated would not necessarily be popular with her readers. She referred to *PBC* as "my thin slice of a wicked book" for which "[e]verybody will hate me… so *you must* try hard to love me the more to make up for that. Say it's mad, and bad, and sad: but *add* that somebody did it who meant it, thought it, felt it, throbbed it out with heart and brain, and that she holds it for truth in conscience and not in partisanship"

(Kenyon 2: 361-62).[30] To her sister Arabella, she wrote, rather defiantly, "As to my book which is to cost *me*, you hint, all my readers . . I cannot help it—they must go." She fearlessly continues:

> If ever I gained a reader worth having, or did any good, as you say, it was by speaking the truth as I saw it—not the popular truth, not the English truth, not any other soul's truth but just my soul's truth—& I shall speak it now as I did before. Certainly I was never surer of any truths than I am of these—Not with regard to Napoleon III,—(who, of course, being a man, after all, may be a cheat like the rest,—)[31] but of the general question, . . of the immorality of the political doctrine held & maintained in England (& illustrated brilliantly through the past year) in & out of parliament. So I speak. There's a preface as well as the verses, & the truth (as I see it, observe—) is spoken out everywhere. Nothing is said with the intention of giving offence—nothing, more sharply than seemed necessary. (Lewis 2: 448)

EBB knew what the volume might cost her, but her truth must be told (as she saw it). She had an obligation and the power to fulfil it. She dared publication because she had to, but she included a preface to temper the possible negative reaction of readers.

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[30] Lady Caroline Lamb's famous description of Byron—that he was "mad, bad and dangerous to know" is echoed here, perhaps as a nod to Byron's political activism in poetry and action that EBB so valued. In 1816, Lamb wrote a novel, *Glenarvon*, in which her circle and Byron (briefly her lover) were thinly disguised as characters. My thanks to Marjorie Stone for directing me to the originator of this phrase.

[31] This particular exhibition of skepticism aligns with her claim in the preface to *PBC*, that though she writes a poem in praise of Napoleon III, she is not "merely a courtier" (vi), and allows her modern readers a place to begin understanding her subtle interrogation of heroes as well as her worship of them (Kenyon 2: 361-62).

The Preface: A "Say" Before Her "Say"

The naming of this volume of poems is a powerful political action that problematizes insular nationalism with the ambiguity of *congress*. The preface, though, is where EBB explicitly claims it is right and good to first rupture, then move past national boundaries. The contemporary readers for whom EBB was writing would know something of current affairs, that countries around the world, and especially in Europe, were still tied to one another through noble and royal marriages as well as increasingly complicated treaties and economic relationships within and without imperial hierarchies. But none of that meant readers weren't rabidly nationalistic anyway (witness the formation of the volunteer rifle corps in response to Napoleon III's rise to power). Fear of imperial intentions of a Bonaparte could trump almost any other altruistic international vision a people might hold.[32] The preface works to temper that potentially narrow reaction to the events of 1859 in Italy. Simon Avery writes that EBB uses her prefaces "as ways of offsetting potential criticism from the reading public and the literary establishment" (160).[33] As well, Chapman suggests that EBB's political savvy is astute in this case: "The preface to *Poems Before Congress* pre-empts criticism in the British press by redefining patriotism in a brave condemnation of British foreign policy. For her patriotism does not mean 'exclusive devotion to one's country's interests'" ("Risorgimenti"

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[32] The abject fear of a Bonaparte Emperor cannot be discounted. Many in England in 1859 had lived through and remembered Napoleon I's conquests and what the early 19th century wars had cost England. From April 1859 to November 1859, in *All the Year Round*, Charles Dickens published *A Tale of Two Cities* that graphically revisited the trauma and loss of the French Revolution and perhaps worked to revive thoughts of the Revolution's attendant aftermath including an ambitious and imperialistic Napoleon Bonaparte. For those too young to directly remember the early years of the century, this book may have worked to create an aura of anxiety surrounding the events leading to Napoleon I's reign—that and the always too short distance from England to France.

[33] See also Vivienne Rundle (1996) for a discussion of other of EBB's prefatory writings.

85).[34] EBB's need to mitigate possible negative response to *PBC* can be illuminated by juxtaposing how she defines her intervention in readers' responses both privately and publicly and what that might mean.

At the end of 1859, EBB writes a letter that echoes important ideas in the preface to *PBC*. The letter is dated 29 December 1859, the preface February 1860. Could this letter be a rehearsal for the preface? Maybe. Could EBB have been writing the preface at the same time as the letter? Maybe. Could the letter have come *after* the preface? Maybe. However, the illustration of concepts and issues is more concisely and cohesively presented in the preface than they are in the letter.[35] It wouldn't be a new and revolutionary endeavor for an author to privately rehearse a public performance. That EBB rehearses, in her letter, what she wants to convey in the preface wouldn't be interesting except that *while* she attempts to strike down the walls between nations, enacting an international citizenship, a call for a reassessment of how international relations might be better handled through her publication of *PBC*, she crisscrosses the private and the public transcending the distinction between those spheres in the letter/preface.

The relationship between the individual and the society can also be brought into relief by juxtaposing EBB's private utterances and public declarations in this letter and the preface. Cronin argues that *CGW* is "a civic poem" that suggests "civil society comes into being, like

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[34] But as Chapman notes, the ploy didn't work as many reviews were negative.

[35] Frederic Kenyon remarks in a footnote on the connections of this letter to the preface: "Mrs. Browning is here quoting from her own preface to *Poems before Congress*" (2: 359). However, I know of no other letters or documents that suggest the letter is quoting from the preface. Other of her letters from 1859 contain phrases and words that are used in other of the *PBC* poems. Most notably, the word "deed" appears in many of her letters and takes on a prominence in several of the poems. A contemporaneous composition for this particular letter and the preface is a likely, and safe, assessment. But such a conclusion still supports the idea of EBB's intriguing conflation of private and public in this case—in itself an act that supports the breaking down of barriers at the heart of *PBC*.

the poem itself, in an unending process of negotiation between the claims of the individual and the claims of the state, which is why a civil society is at once always building and never built" (49). The back and forth nature of the letter and preface, and our inability to know with certainty which came first, mimics the very sort of civic relationship Cronin claims is manifest in *CGW*. As a private citizen, EBB writing a letter to her friend is separate from the state, but as a published writer, she is a public citizen joined to the state by topic and intent (Cronin 50).

In her letter to Mrs. Martin, EBB writes:

> So you and others upbraid me with having put myself out of my "natural place." What *is* one's natural place, I wonder?…. The natural place of everybody, I believe is within the crust of all manner of prejudices, social, religious, literary. That is as men conceive of "natural places." But in the highest sense, I ask you, how *can* a man or woman leave his or her natural place…. Circumstances, the force of natural things, have brought me here and kept me; it is my natural place. And, intellectually speaking, having grown to a certain point by help of certain opportunities, my way of regarding the world is also natural to me, my opinions are natural deductions of my mind. Isn't it so? Still I do beg to say both to you and to others accusing that Italy is not my "adopted country." I love Italy, but I love France, too, and certainly I love England. Because I have broken through what seems to be the English "Little Pedlingtonism,"[36] am I to be supposed to take up an Italian "Little

[36] *Little Pedlington* (1839, 1852) is a two-volume satire by John Poole (1786?-1872) in which the village of Little Pedlington and the Pedlingtonians are depicted as dishonest, cynical, egotistical, and hyperbolic. EBB writes of this novel on at least two occasions in 1843

> Pedlingtonism"? No, indeed. I love truth and justice, or I try to love truth and justice, more than any Plato's or Shakespeare's country. I certainly do not love the egotism of England, nor wish to love it. I class England among the most immoral nations in respect to her foreign politics. And her "National Defence" cry fills me with disgust. But this by no means proves that I have adopted another country—no, indeed! In fact, patriotism in the narrow sense is a virtue which will wear out, sooner or later, everywhere…. As to Italy, though I nearly broke my heart over her last summer, and love the Italians deeply, I should feel passionately any similar crisis anywhere. (Kenyon 2: 358-59)

These excerpts from the preface are especially relevant to the letter above:

> What I have written has simply been written because I love truth and justice *quand même,*[37]—"more than Plato" and Plato's country,[38] more than Dante and Dante's country, more even than Shakespeare and Shakespeare's country.[39]

(Kelley 8: 27) and again in 1844 (Kelley 9: 174), and most importantly, uses this phrase in her letter here and later in her preface to *PBC*.

[37] Above all.

[38] Here EBB alludes to her earlier support of the struggle for Greek independence in poems published when she was a teen: "Stanzas, Excited by Some Reflections on the Present State of Greece" and "Thoughts Awakened by Contemplating a Piece of Palm Which Grows on the Summit of the Acropolis at Athens." In another poem,"Stanzas on the Death of Lord Byron," EBB shows her ongoing support of Greek independence. In her unpublished autobiographical work, "Beth," she "relates her childhood fantasy of leading Greek troops as an armored warrior-poet, inspiring them with her song" (from an untitled essay, Kelley 1: 361) (Taylor and Stone forthcoming).

[39] "Shakespeare's country" echoes the quoted letter EBB wrote to Mrs. Martin (December 1859) in which it appears that she tries to justify her support of the Italian cause as one that is beyond national ties: "I love truth and justice, or I try to love truth and justice, more than any

> . . . .
>
> Nationality is excellent in its place; and the instinct of self-love is the root of a man, which will develope into sacrificial virtues. But all the virtues are means and uses; and, if we hinder their tendency to growth and expansion, we both destroy them as virtues, and degrade them to that rankest species of corruption reserved for the most noble organisations. For instance,—non-intervention in the affairs of neighbouring states is a high political virtue; but non-intervention does not mean, passing by on the other side when your neighbor falls among thieves…. Freedom itself is virtue, as well as privilege; but freedom of the seas does not mean piracy, nor freedom of the land, brigandage….
>
> . . . .
>
> So, if patriotism be a virtue indeed, it cannot mean an exclusive devotion to one's country's interests,—for that is only another form of devotion to personal interests, family interests, or provincial interests, all of which, if not driven past themselves, are vulgar and immoral objects. Let us put away the little Pedlingtonism unworthy of a great nation, and too prevalent among us. If the man who does not look beyond this natural life is of a somewhat narrow order, what must be the man who does not look beyond his own frontier or his own sea? (Barrett Browning v-vii)

In Table 1, I've placed parts of the letter and the preface next to one another to better illustrate their similarities. Justice and truth are concerns in both—love of truth and justice motivates writing (i.e., action). That EBB transcends "little Pedlingtonism" is an issue in both—a cry for

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Plato's or Shakespeare's country" (Kenyon 2: 359). Both this allusion and the one to Dante are examined in more detail in terms of Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes* in Chapter 3.

the importance for all humans to look beyond their own self-serving place in a society. "Place" in self-realization, in political action, is discussed at length in both—place is a natural phenomenon, and it is a compassionate place wherein human action to ease the hurt of others is paramount. Patriotism is analyzed in both—it must be something that goes beyond national boundaries. EBB calls for a kind of cosmopolitan patriotism because, she suggests, insular nationalism won't move humankind forward. An English statesman, "with a heart too large for England" (viii), she hopes, will work political magic eventually leading to compassionate internationalism, implying as Chapman notes, a criticism of contemporary British foreign policy ("Risorgimenti" 85).[40]

[40] This thinking also reveals a leaning toward an imperialistic, colonial mindset, as it is an "English" statesman who will do the leading. The complexity of EBB's relationship to colonialism and imperialism needs to be explored to add another layer of depth to reading her poetry.

Table 1: Letter/Preface Comparison[41]

Letter to Mrs. Martin, 29 December 1859	Preface to *PBC*, February 1860
I love truth and justice, or I try to love truth and justice, more than any Plato's or Shakespeare's country.	What I have written has simply been written because I love truth and justice *quand même,*— "more than Plato" and Plato's country, more than Dante and Dante's country, more even than Shakespeare and Shakespeare's country.
Because I have broken through what seems to be the English "Little Pedlingtonism," am I to be supposed to take up an Italian "Little Pedlingtonism"? No, indeed.	Let us put away the little Pedlingtonism unworthy of a great nation, and too prevalent among us. If the man who does not look beyond this natural life is of a somewhat narrow order, what must be the man who does not look beyond his own frontier or his own sea?
So you and others upbraid me with having put myself out of my "natural place." What *is* one's natural place, I wonder?…. The natural place of everybody, I believe is within the crust of all manner of prejudices, social, religious, literary. That is as men conceive of "natural places." But in the highest sense, I ask you, how *can* a man or woman leave his or her natural place…. Circumstances, the force of natural things, have brought me here and kept me; it is my natural place. And, intellectually speaking, having grown to a certain point by help of certain opportunities, my way of regarding the world is also natural to me, my opinions are natural deductions of my mind. Isn't it so?	Nationality is excellent in its place; and the instinct of self-love is the root of a man, which will develope into sacrificial virtues. But all the virtues are means and uses; and, if we hinder their tendency to growth and expansion, we both destroy them as virtues, and degrade them to that rankest species of corruption reserved for the most noble organisations. For instance,—non-intervention in the affairs of neighbouring states is a high political virtue; but non-intervention does not mean, passing by on the other side when your neighbor falls among thieves…. Freedom itself is virtue, as well as privilege; but freedom of the seas does not mean piracy, nor freedom of the land, brigandage….
I love Italy, but I love France, too, and certainly I love England…. I certainly do not love the egotism of England, nor wish to love it. I class England among the most immoral nations in respect to her foreign politics. And her "National Defence" cry fills me with disgust. But this by no means proves that I have adopted another country—no, indeed! In fact, patriotism in the narrow sense is a virtue which will wear out, sooner or later, everywhere…. As to Italy, though I nearly broke my heart over her last summer, and love the Italians deeply, I should feel passionately any similar crisis anywhere. (Kenyon 2: 358-59)	So, if patriotism be a virtue indeed, it cannot mean an exclusive devotion to one's country's interests,—for that is only another form of devotion to personal interests, family interests, or provincial interests, all of which, if not driven past themselves, are vulgar and immoral objects. (Barrett Browning v-vii)

[41] The various portions of the letter and preface are arranged according to similarity, not as they appear in order in either the letter or the preface.

The last phrase excerpted from the letter, "I should feel passionately any similar crisis anywhere," reveals EBB's commitment to any injustice, as demonstrated throughout her life and works, from the earliest years until her death. In the preface EBB writes, "If the man who does not look beyond this natural life is of a somewhat narrow order, what must be the man who does not look beyond his own frontier or his own sea?"—and illustrates the same principle that all injustice is worthy of her notice. EBB suggests, through the public question in the preface, what the private citizen of the letter should do, the implication of the preface statement being, should not everyone "feel passionately any similar crisis anywhere"?

In the letter and the preface she chooses her language carefully to explain why she has written the poems, what their purpose is, what may be wrong with current notions of nationalism and blind patriotism, and what her dreams are for the future; and she claims a place among political poets transcending public/private and national/international divides. Cronin writes: "Barrett Browning's insistence that the poet's responsibilities as an artist and her responsibilities as a citizen are inseparable… To select a metaphor is to make a political decision" (42).[42] And she makes a political decision as she crafts her arguments in both the letter and the preface to trouble a place she had occupied previously—the threshold. If the threshold was located between the private and the public, the letter and the preface woven together and pulled apart (by the tension and connections between them) allow EBB to go beyond the middle ground to a place where she occupies both spaces at once as private and public citizen.

Simon Avery suggests that in *CGW*, EBB "occupies one of those threshold positions which [she] constantly utilises in her poetry… situating herself within the 'feminised'

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[42] Cronin writes about the long opening movement in *CGW*, but it is applicable to *PBC,* especially the preface/letter.

domestic space but also on the edge of the 'masculinised' public/political space" (160). But by moving beyond the window where she gazed before and by addressing a political body in *PBC*, she steps away from the threshold Avery speaks of—a liminal place from which one *must* eventually move—erasing the line between many boundaries and putting herself, as poet, in the middle of political reality. However, watching a political spectacle, behind a window or otherwise in a threshold position, does not mean one doesn't participate in that spectacle; Armstrong argues that the "very act of gazing through the window becomes part of the political experience" ("Spectacle" 51). But because *CGW* is not addressed to a body politic the way *PBC* is, the transcendence of threshold in *PBC* happens, and spectacularly so, because of the implied but direct political action of the title. EBB's place as poet changes from a tentative, albeit participatory one as spectator, to a unambiguous and encompassing place that is interior *and* exterior, political *and* poetic, private *and* public. EBB attempts through this volume to transcend many separate spheres, including the separation of the genders and assigned roles.[43] Read together, the letter and preface highlight the transgressive shifting of boundaries that each alone doesn't necessarily accomplish.

The preface to *PBC* allows its author to play many parts on an international stage addressing many audiences (as the title of the volume implies); it attempts to direct readers' response; it is a forum for criticism of British foreign policy; it is a place that she must claim to justify doing all of the above; and it is a place where she claims she must be to tell the truth as she sees it. There is more than a touch of irony in EBB's decision to conclude, and

[43] See Montweiler (2005) for thinking on the political role allowed most women—an exclusively vocal role. EBB and other women authors could take on a wider responsibility for advocating a political movement through publication, a publicized speech, but they could not participate in political debate by voting or holding public or governmental roles.

have her say, in the preface with the hope that "poets who write of the events of [a future] time, shall not need to justify themselves in prefaces" (viii).

The Poems: Placement, International Citizenship, and Place

PBC consists of only eight poems; EBB's description of it as a "thin slice" of a volume is entirely accurate. It *is* thin—but it is thick with criticism (and praise), brash condemnation, and brave hope. The arrangement of poems within the volume is designed to maximize its polemical impact. "Napoleon III in Italy," an ode to the French Emperor, appears first in the volume. It seems fantastically insensitive to what was a dominant English position of the time—opposition to Bonapartism. The poem's prominent placement highlights the challenge presented to readers, especially English readers; no real resolution had come to Italy's chaotic political situation by the time of *PBC*'s publication, and a Bonaparte had significantly expanded his empire through the war of 1859. The volume ends with "A Curse for a Nation," a poem with an uncertain connection to the "Italian" poems preceding it, but one with a fierce message and unrelenting voice. Between the first and last poems, both of which inspired controversy, lie other poems that EBB could have begun the volume with to mitigate a possible negative British reaction.[44] It is not surprising that many critics and readers were worried by the opening poem and/or offended by the closing one.[45] Tricia Lootens has written:

> Gone was the poet whose carefully worded modest pleas for paternal and public indulgence had so charmed early Victorian audiences. Barrett

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[44] See Chapter 5 for a much more detailed discussion of poem placement in *PBC*.

[45] There were few laudatory reviews in England. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the nineteen British reviews of *PBC* published before EBB's death in 1861.

> Browning's public stance in *Poems Before Congress* was one of direct challenge: England's Queen of Song was ready to assert her own interpretation of the relationship between nationalism and literary achievement… (262)

To begin and end with poems that challenged was, perhaps, fitting considering her stated purpose. Critical reception did not appear to be a concern in EBB's positioning of these bookend poems.

For what reason did EBB choose to put these two controversial poems in this particular order?[46] To push readers? To surprise readers? To support the good that Napoleon III actually did for Italians by placing that poem first? To equate political oppression with slavery? To support the *Risorgimento*? The answer to all these questions could be "yes." It would be unwise to think this "wicked" collection is uncritically supportive of anyone or anything, beyond freedom and liberty. Yes, Napoleon is praised for his contribution, but he is criticized as well for his failings,[47] albeit not as much as the Grand Duke Leopold II and Pope Pius IX are castigated for their cowardice and betrayal.[48] EBB is correct in this,

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[46] In all manuscripts I have seen for these poems, "Napoleon III in Italy" is always first, and "A Curse for a Nation" is always last.

[47] Juxtaposing "Napoleon III in Italy" with "An August Voice" (in which Napoleon is the speaker) shows that EBB does not unequivocally praise Napoleon. In the second poem, Napoleon, the speaker, asks the people of Tuscany to recall their Grand Duke—who is shown to be a cheat, a liar, a coward. Yet Napoleon continues to ask, and then tells them to do it. But only because of Napoleon's negotiated treaty, as he admits in the poem (concluded without Italian representation), do they have to recall such a worthless leader. It is an oblique criticism, but a criticism nonetheless, and powerfully questions Napoleon's role. Avery writes: "'An August Voice' is a sharp critique, presumably in the voice of Napoleon, of those who betrayed the Italian cause by seeking to reinstate Duke Leopold" (178). See the next chapter for a more detailed treatment of this topic.

[48] Leopold is assigned proper blame periodically in *PBC* for his role in oppressing Italians; the pontiff comes under attack in several places but most notably in "Christmas Gifts," for his fraudulent leadership—both of the spirit and the flesh.

though: without Napoleon's interference in 1859, the states of the Italian peninsula might not have united as one country, or at least not as soon as they did, and in this instance, he deserves the credit she gives him. But she was not blind to his possible faults: "with regard to Napoleon III… who, of course, being a man, after all, may be a cheat like the rest…" (Lewis 2: 448). He was eager to gain land as well as secure a buffer between his country and Austria—and he achieved those ends. But because he'd had a long association with Italy, and as a young man had been active there as a revolutionary, he was also motivated by some measure of altruism (Blumberg 17). That EBB chooses to go forward with the publication of poems, with an initial poem that prominently favors and praises Napoleon III's exploits, despite continued controversy surrounding him through 1859 and into 1860, is an indication of her passion for and commitment to the *Risorgimento*.[49]

The first and last poems do demand readers' attention and signify EBB's commitment to provoking strong responses in her readers. The poems in between envision and explore women's roles during war, Italian citizens' commitment to change, and political leadership. Two poems, "The Dance" and "A Court Lady" (the second and fourth poems in *PBC*), were frequently cited by contemporary reviewers as more appropriate content for a woman poet: dancing and nursing. These two were also regularly mentioned as being the best of the poems in *PBC*.[50] However, neither poem can be read that simply. Each is a powerful commentary on the power of women to affect change politically and control typically male public environments. "The Dance" offers what seems like a gentle, romantic, domestic interpretation of war. A Florentine woman suggests a dance with French soldiers while

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[49] I explore "A Curse for a Nation" as the last poem below and in greater detail in Chapter 4 where I compare it, as the final poem of *PBC*, with the ending of *Corinne, or Italy*.
[50] See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of reviews concerning these and the other poems in *PBC*.

Florentine men look on, approve, and embrace the act, literally with a kiss they give to the French soldiers. The woman who speaks, who advocates the dance, connects powerfully to the historically male effort of war with her public speech and her sexual and political offer, and when her speech turns into action, she upsets traditional roles as the men become involved following her lead. "The Court Lady" shows a woman dressing in her finest apparel and jewels to visit soldiers in hospital. While there, she bridges regional differences through her speech, suggesting that throughout Italy all soldiers who fought for freedom and who are now injured, whether recovering or dying, are in "the Court of the King" (38). This woman speaker asserts the right to proclaim a political state that unifies Italians and acknowledges the French political and martial connection with "Italian" patriots.

The third poem in the volume, "A Tale of Villafranca," specifically addresses the peace treaty made between the French and Austrian emperors and the bitterness with which it was received in Florence. Through this tale, a mother tells her Florentine son (who may also be English), of great deeds that were attempted but thwarted by short-sighted statesmen. She dares to judge both Italians and European leaders who failed to help Napoleon III achieve the desired aim of Italian unity. Two other poems appear as additional interrogations of leadership. "An August Voice" tacitly criticizes Napoleon III's role in a too-early peace as well as blaming the Tuscans for their repeated acceptance of the ineffective Grand Duke's governance. "Christmas Gifts" condemns the Pope's and the Catholic church's alleged self-serving pomp and inability to understand the needs of Italian citizens who desire to be free; however, "a king of the west" (Napoleon III) does understand and delivers the necessary gifts (48).

The last of the "interior" poems, "Italy and the World," placed just before "A Curse for a Nation," offers a vision of a resurrected Italy and hope for the future based on the call for an internationalism promoted in the preface, but not without criticizing those who proved obstacles. EBB suggests how citizenship should be enacted through the writing and publication of this poem—the poem in the volume that most closely echoes her own beliefs as seen in her letters and in the preface.

As in the preface, England is openly criticized in "Italy and the World." The poem opens with "Florence, Bologna, Parma, Modena"—a partial list of participants in the previous year's war—in their graves, but ready for "resurrection" (50). In Stanza II, the speaker directly accuses the English of inactivity during the war: "And meantime (you made your reflection / If you were English), was naught to be done" (50). Chapman asserts that the beginning of the poem is an indictment of "the passive politics of England that postpones Italy's destiny" ("Risorgimenti" 88), and indeed it is. More criticism comes later, in Stanza XX, where EBB seems to emerge powerfully into her poem, echoing the preface and displacing the speaker of the poem:

> I cry aloud in my poet-passion,
>   Viewing my England o'er Alp and sea.
> I loved her more in her ancient fashion:
>   She carries her rifles too thick for me,
> Who spares them so in the cause of a brother. (55)

EBB, as author and speaker here, claims a place, a right to cry aloud in "poet-passion," to question the action of a government and a people (and the formation of the volunteer rifle corps, again). England remains her England, but she is separated from it (literally and

metaphorically). In order to "cry aloud" against its current course, she redefines her place as citizen from a nationalistic, geographical position within England to that of an internationally-located critical voice. She moves away from patriotism to question her country, as suggested in the preface: "if patriotism be a virtue indeed, it cannot mean an exclusive devotion to one's country's interests,—for that is only another form of devotion to personal interests, family interests, or provincial interests, all of which, if not driven past themselves, are vulgar and immoral objects" (vi-vii). Her move away from a constricted nationalism was enabled by her physical move to Italy that allowed her the freedom to explore the various roles of the patriot and expatriate.[51] Critique of country must be part of a virtuous patriotism, a more inclusive nationalism that transcends borders to allow nations and individuals to work for a greater good, a cosmopolitanism that suggests individuals who enact a borderless patriotism are "able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to… the global and the local" and are also capable of "representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity, and interest" (qtd. in Keirstead 70).

Stanza XXI follows with advice on how to cure England's illness of insular nationalism: "Suspicion, panic? end this pother. / The sword, kept sheathless at peace-time, rusts. / None fears for himself while he feels for another" (56). Here, as in the preface, EBB suggests that to look beyond oneself is the answer to what she asserts as England's misbegotten foreign policy, and if this means fighting when needed, then so be it.

A better future becomes possible in the world of this poem because distinctions that mark difference will fall away. In Stanza XX, EBB envisions that there will be

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[51] It was also to Italy that she fled to find a literal and metaphorical freedom—from illness and the patriarchical restrictions of her father's household. Her marriage certainly was not restrictive in the sense that her role as daughter was. She could write what she pleased and publish what she pleased once she left England.

No more Jew nor Greek, then,—taunting

Nor taunted;—nor more England nor France!

But one confederate brotherhood planting

One flag only, to mark the advance,

Onward and upward, of all humanity. (53)[52]

Italy's reunification, and resurrection, can be the beginning of a better way: "let us be greater / By this new future than that old story" (56). The creation of a united Italy can be a model for the world, a vehicle to change as "nations, rising up, their sorry / And foolish sins shall put away" when all come together to disavow "the patriot's trick / To better his land by egotist ventures" 56-7).

Italy is drawn as a nation rising up "heroic and renovated" acting as an "example" (52). The lesson to be learned from a resurrected Italy is not dissolution of national identity, but what is possible if nations look beyond themselves. EBB suggests an expanded definition of nationalism in this poem that includes multiple nations, that diffuses boundaries, that becomes an internationalism/transnationalism/cosmopolitanism enabling action beyond one's nation based on compassion, not on hegemony. The poem concludes:

… when, in the session

Of nations, the separate language is heard,

Each shall aspire, in sublime indiscretion,

To help with a thought or exalt with a word

Less her own than her rival's honour.

[52] See the echoes of this cosmopolitanism in *Corinne, or Italy*—mentioned in a later chapter.

Each Christian nation shall take upon her
  The law of the Christian man in vast:
The crown of the getter shall fall to the donor,
  And the last shall be first while the first shall be last,[53]
And to love best shall still be, to reign unsurpassed. (57-9)

The greatest nations will always look beyond their borders; they shall be "unsurpassed" for the effort. An Italian *Risorgimento* was not possible without help from other nations. If not for France in 1859, Italian troops could not have ousted Austria from crucial northern regions nor made progress toward additional annexations and eventual unification. Implied throughout the poem is praise for France and blame for England as "Italy and the World" offers harsh comment on isolationism along with an idealistic vision echoing that of the preface (and the action of publishing *PBC*); it is a world where narrow, thoughtless patriotism transforms into something more like international citizenship. Interestingly, the placement of this poem just before "A Curse for a Nation" may serve as a warning to readers. A future including more empathy for others may be possible, but not in the world of "A Curse for a Nation," which acknowledges and condemns nations that allow and support slavery and oppression. With her call for transcending a sense of nationalism and a broader concept of citizenship in "Italy and the World," indeed, with the publication of the volume itself, EBB claims a place in the ongoing Italian struggles as a key political

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[53] In connection with the mention of "Christian nation" and "Christian man," EBB implies a more direct connection with Christianity by alluding to a variety of Biblical verses. The order of "last" before "first" appears in Luke 13:30 and Matthew 20:16, but the phrase also appears in Mark 10:31 and Matthew 19:30. My thanks to Linda K. Hughes for reminding me of this important Biblical connection. See Cynthia Scheinberg's book for more on EBB's conception of Christianity in her poetry: *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture*.

commentator and ensures that readers are aware of her vision of the issues surrounding the politics of the *Risorgimento*.

Once a Political Poet, Always a Political Poet

From six years old until her death in 1861, EBB crafted a poetics of political compassion meant to support and promote liberty and freedom, always looking for and working to claim her place among political writers.[54] EBB's role as advocate of the *Risorgimento* consists of a multitude of places which include the personal, the poetic, the revolutionary, the private/public, the political, the national and international, the powerful. Sandra Gilbert comments on EBB's relationship to the *Risorgimento*, suggesting that she may have experienced something of a risorgimento herself, but:

> By the time she wrote *Poems Before Congress*, Barrett Browning's quasi-feminist vision[55] had darkened…. [T]he author imagines the redemption of

[54] Through her life EBB moves from vocalization of political beliefs and commentary in private to a public forum, with a clear political purpose in poems intentionally political such as, "Cry of the Children" (1843), "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848), and *CGW* (1851). *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is not addressed to a political body; it does not directly comment upon current political events in the same way that the above-mentioned poems do. However, it *is* political. It touches on the politics of the age, asking questions about poetry, relationships, gender roles, political philosophy, and what is the right and just treatment of individuals by civil society. Rebecca Stott writes of EBB and *Aurora Leigh*: "In this outspoken and dissenting poem, Elizabeth Barrett Browning not only continued to refuse her place in the woman's apartment as a 'clipt' woman, but has also indeed claimed and confirmed her rank among not only great political thinkers and speakers, but also among political and epic poets" (Stott 209 in Avery and Stott; see also Avery 43-44 in Avery and Stott).

[55] EBB considered herself a poet first, a woman second, and would not have considered herself a feminist by any definition of the word then or now; she was not an advocate of women's suffrage, for instance, but she was an advocate of her personal freedom that she enjoyed because of her financial independence and unique marital situation in which Robert Browning, like Italy, was EBB's rescuer and a rescuee.

> her *matria*[56] by, and only by, the grace of the French ruler, Louis Napoleon…. And, in fact, Italy's risorgimento was finally achieved only by the maneuvers of traditionally masculine "heroes" like Louis Napoleon, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Victor Emmanuel, Charles Albert, and—most of all—the Machiavellian statesman Cavour…. For inevitably the reality of patriarchal history, with its successes and successions, obliterated Barrett Browning's implicit but impossible dream of a *matria*. (209)

The dream of a *matria* to fulfill all citizens' needs is as impossible as a *patria* to do the same. Constrained gender roles are as restrictive as narrowly conceived concepts of nationalism. EBB problematizes the traditional roles of women as she explicitly takes on the role of political writer, and creates women who do the same in her poems in *PBC*. Patriarchy did overshadow a feminist vision in general; it was indeed men who most visibly ensured Italy's reunification. However, *PBC* is not a darkening of EBB's quasi-feminist vision, but an envisioning that goes beyond traditional gender roles for women[57] just as it goes beyond national and political boundaries.

EBB risked her reputation with the publication of *PBC* by doing what some men always did: standing up for a cause in print, claiming a place on the public stage, speaking when it mattered.[58] Matthew Reynolds suggests that EBB's "understanding of the Risorgimento echoes her own struggle for liberty and unification" and that "[h]er response to

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[56] Gilbert suggests EBB created Italy as a *matria*, a motherland, in *CGW* and *Aurora Leigh*.
[57] EBB's exploring and exploding of gender roles is examined in more detail in Chapter 4.
[58] EBB was always willing to take risks, although she was not always "allowed" to do so. EBB was asked to write a poem in support of the Anti-Corn Law League (1845), but her father and brothers did not support her composition of a poem for such a political issue; it would have been seen as inappropriate. But EBB certainly didn't feel that way. She wrote to Mary Russell Mitford on 11 February 1845: "What was the folly called 'my poetical reputation,' in comparison to the duty to which I was invited?" (Kelley 10: 66).

the Risorgimento was shaped by her feeling for her own verse; and both… were governed by the idea of a marriage between Italy and England" (44-5).[59] As an international citizen, a cosmopolitan, an English poet living in Italy, she may have been the embodiment of such a marriage: poetry and politics, English and Italian, part of a *matria* and *patria*. She certainly saw herself moving beyond mere nationality in her response to Italy's fight for freedom and the French assistance in that endeavor. But EBB's efforts on behalf of the Italian *Risorgimento* went beyond her own sense of a home country, her own struggles for personal and professional freedom.[60] She did achieve a kind of risorgimento, but she transcended her personal achievement because *PBC* became more than a collection of poetry she chose to write and publish—it *was* political action. As a poet-citizen, she deliberately acted on behalf of Italy, an Italy she hoped to see created. She lent aid to a fight for freedom and liberty (as she did more than once). Did she successfully claim a place on the political stage of her day? To the extent that EBB became, and still is, an important voice for the *Risorgimento*, she most certainly did.

[59] "[A] marriage between Italy and England" strongly evokes thoughts of the half Italian, half English Aurora Leigh, very like Germaine de Staël's Corinne before her. See Chapter 4 for more on the connection of *PBC* to this novel. EBB crafted herself, in letters and in poetry, as being from England, certainly, and knowing the English well, but she deeply identified with the fight for Italian reunification and freedom (Reynolds 44-5).

[60] It was not just the readers of her publications who knew of her political commitment; local Italians knew of at least one poem first hand from *PBC* that dealt with the current events of 1859. "The Court Lady" was translated by Francesco Dall'Ongaro, an Italian poet and professor at the University of Florence, and distributed as a broadside: "La Dama di Corte."

CHAPTER 3

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, and Alfred Tennyson on Napoleon III: The Hero-Poet and Carlylean Heroics

> [T]he Hero can be Poet, Prophet, King, Priest or what you will, according to the world he finds himself born into. I confess, I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be all sorts of men. The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic Warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher;—in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these.[1]
>
> Thomas Carlyle
> *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*

Like the Hero-Poet that Carlyle describes, EBB undertakes a heroic mission in the last volume of poems published in her lifetime, *PBC*, a volume supporting the Italian *Risorgimento*. In authoring these poems, knowing they would be controversial,[2] she assumes the persona of a Hero-Poet and "Heroic warrior," who is also a "Politician … Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher." When *PBC* was published in 1860, EBB was at the height of her fame and unafraid of conflict, or of courting the ire of her readers, in the pursuit of justice and liberty, fervently supporting the cause she believed in. Carlyle had described Napoleon I in this way: "Napoleon had a sincerity…. [I]n Practice: he, as every man that can be great, or have victory in this world, sees, through all entanglements, the practical heart of the matter; drives straight towards that" (303). Committed to staying informed on European politics,

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[1] See Carlyle's chapter, "The Hero as Poet: Dante, Shakespeare" (100).

[2] EBB understood that the poems would be less than universally lauded: "Everybody will hate me for it" (Kenyon 2: 360); "I'm going into the fire for [Napoleon] with a little 'brochure' of political poems" (Kenyon 2: 356). She elsewhere observed, anticipating "the storm of execration that would follow" (Kenyon 2: 380): "[y]ou wont like any of it, any of you—but more truth was never written" (Lewis 2: 422).

EBB regularly read periodicals and newspapers,[3] and when it seemed time for her to act, she saw and drove straight toward the practical heart of the matter: she wrote poems not only in support of the *Risorgimento*, but also of Napoleon III's intervention in Italy. In writing the heroic warrior, she became one as well.

PBC begins with "Napoleon III in Italy," an ode to the French Emperor, a figure held in contempt and feared by many in England from the time of his *coup d'état* in 1852 through (and beyond) his intervention in Italian affairs in 1859. Because the first poem in *PBC* is, at quick glance, a vigorous ode to the French Emperor, EBB was accused of hero worship (in this case and many others). While she was given to bold, blatant, even blind worship of heroes, it is crucial to remember that her motivation as a poet, and a person, was informed by her lifelong commitment to principles of liberty. From her early years until her death, she worshipped good causes, and she became a hero worshipper as part of the process of commitment.[4] Whoever lent himself to the right cause might become worthy of her praise—despite other personal, professional, or political misdeeds. In this chapter I want to reframe her political and poetical conflation of heroes and causes—the *right* causes with the heroes who enabled those causes to succeed—by reconsidering the longstanding critical vilification of her hero-worship within the context of Carlyle's notions of the heroic.[5] Carlylean

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[3] EBB writes in October of 1859: "I generally read through three newspapers a day" (Lewis 2: 430). See also Simonetta Berbeglia's article on Browning's membership to Vieusseux's.

[4] Throughout her life EBB wrote poems that were explicitly and implicitly political, focusing on heroes and the heroic in history, including *The Battle of Marathon* (1820), "Riga's Last Song" and "On a Picture of Riego's Widow" (in *An Essay on Mind and Other Poems*, 1826), "Death-Bed of Teresa Del Riego" (in *Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*, 1833), "Crowned and Buried" (first published as "Napoleon's Return" in *The Athenaeum*, 1840), "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (*The Liberty Bell*, 1848), and *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851). See a list of EBB's publications at: http://www.browningguide.org.

[5] A year after Carlyle published his lectures on heroes, EBB wrote to Mary Mitford in 1842, "I am an adorer of Carlyle" (Kelley 5: 281). By 1844, Carlyle's portrait, along with four

concepts of the hero had great importance in the Victorian period and, as I point out below, at least one of EBB's correspondents, Robert Bulwer Lytton, used Carlyle's principles both to praise and to criticize what she attempted in the 1860 volume. Yet another of EBB's correspondents, Alfred Tennyson's brother, Frederick, reacted negatively to EBB's ode to Napoleon III (but for reasons different from Robert Bulwer Lytton and even his brother, although at first glance Frederick Tennyson's reaction seems aligned with Alfred Tennyson's and Coventry Patmore's). Comparing EBB's treatment of Napoleon III to that of Alfred Tennyson, the other most widely recognized poet in England at this time and Poet Laureate since 1850, provides another illuminating context for her work. Tennyson reacted to Napoleon III's coup in 1852 (as did Coventry Patmore—another prominent figure of the time) and to his intervention in Italy in 1859 quite differently than EBB. Juxtaposing EBB's assessments against Tennyson's clearly defined, opposing political/poetic reactions to Napoleon III clarifies what she attempts in the volume—poetically, politically, and even heroically.[6]

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other portraits from *A New Spirit of the Age* (Robert Browning, Harriett Martineau, Alfred Tennyson, and William Wordsworth) hung in EBB's room on Wimpole Street (Kelley 5: 366). EBB also contributed substantially to R.H. Horne's essay on Carlyle in that same publication (Kelley 8: 353-59). Carlyle was a friend of Browning's before their marriage and remained a friend to both Brownings throughout the 1850s. As early as the late 1840s, EBB was investigating the Carlylean hero in her poetry. Dorothy Mermin writes of EBB's criticism of leadership in *Casa Guidi Windows* that "[t]he Carlylean hero whom the first part of the poem calls for is not likely, she thinks, to be either the duke or the pope"; later Mermin writes that "the poet's role as she defines it in *Casa Guidi Windows* is not to mourn the heroic past but to inspire the present and call forth new heroes" (167). In "An August Voice" and in "Christmas Gifts" (in *PBC*), EBB respectively criticizes the Duke and Pope who both fail the people in 1848 and again in 1859, praising the one "hero," Napoleon III, who seems to have finally emerged by then. Even if his leadership is slightly ambiguous due to his private goals, his public goals appear supportive of the *Risorgimento*.

[6] The works of Tennyson and EBB were compared by contemporary readers, and reviewers of *PBC* compared EBB's poetry with Tennyson's. In *The Daily News* (29 March 1860), "Italy and the World" was compared positively with lines from "Lockesley Hall." In *The*

A Napoleonic *Coup*

On 2 December 1851, Louis Napoleon, President of the French Republic, staged a successful *coup d'état*—on the 47th anniversary, to the day, of his uncle Napoleon I's assumption of the title Emperor of France, and the 46th anniversary of Napoleon I's famous victory at the Battle of Austerlitz. One year later, on 2 December 1852, Louis Napoleon became Napoleon III, Emperor of the Second French Empire.[7] His *coup* was widely supported by the French people, as reflected in a plebiscite,[8] and viewed with trepidation by many in England.

In response to the *coup*, Coventry Patmore wrote a letter to *The Times* in early 1852 proposing that "some of us and of our friends should combine for the purpose of learning, in the cheapest and quickest way, how to handle a rifle" to ensure that "our capabilities of self-defence may be increased" (3).[9] Patmore suggests that "[w]ithin a week from this time we shall be in full operation" and that the rifle club would shortly be asking for government sanction and assistance. Friends of Patmore's, Alfred Tennyson and his wife Emily each contributed £5 to his club (Martin 365). Tennyson felt so strongly about England's self-defense that he wrote several martial poems in early 1852 in support of the rifle clubs. In a letter to Patmore from mid-January 1852, Tennyson includes four stanzas—titled "Rifle-

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Morning Post (14 April 1860) the reviewer suggests that both poets "meddle with politics" unsuccessfully (3).

[7] Napoleon II, son of Napoleon I, was recognized as the successor to the imperial crown but died before ever ruling France.

[8] Roger Price writes that in November 1852, a plebiscite stated: "'the imperial dignity is re-established. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte is Emperor of the French, under the name of Napoleon III.'" This plebiscite garnered 7,824,000 positive votes, an improvement of nearly 400,000 positive votes from the *coup* plebiscite held in December 1851 (43).

[9] This letter was signed "C.K.P."

Clubs!!!" (Lang and Shannon 20-21). This verse could only be called inflammatory jingoism, but it was apparently not meant for publication under Tennyson's name. Two stanzas serve to illustrate its intemperance:

> We thought them friends and we had them here,
>   But now the traitor and tyrant rules!
> And Waterloo from year to year
>   Has rankled in the hearts of the fools.
>   We love peace but the French love storm,
>   Riflemen, form! Riflemen, form!
> Riflemen, riflemen, riflemen, form!
>
> Ready, be ready! they mean no good,
>   Ready, be ready! the times are wild!
> Bearded monkeys of lust and blood
>   Coming to violate woman and child!
>   We love liberty; they love storm:
>   Riflemen, form! Riflemen, form!
>   Riflemen, riflemen, riflemen, form!

This posture might strike the modern reader as wildly inappropriate from the Poet Laureate, revealing a deep-seated fear of all things Napoleonic, but Tennyson was aware of what he had wrought and concluded the note with this:

> Very wild but I think too savage! Written in about 2 minutes! The authorship is a most deep secret! mind, Mr. P. Really I think on writing it out it's enough to make a war of

> itself. My wife thinks it too insulting to the F. and too inflaming for the English. Better not make a broadsheet of it, say I.

The implication here is that Tennyson might have been thinking of writing some verse for broadsheets to support the rifle clubs. He did publish some of his martial poems at this time in various periodicals, but anonymously or pseudonymously, signed as "Merlin" or "T." (Martin 365). A letter that Emily Tennyson wrote to Patmore conveys the clear sense that the Tennysons did more than write and publish: "We have distributed all the notices except two." Despite Emily's support and praise for Patmore's efforts, telling him he is blessed with "earnestness of energy" and that he may prove to have "mainly contributed to the safety" of England, she also insists on caution in using Tennyson's name: "[a]t all events do not speak of him as an 'agitator' for any cause whatsoever…. The word has come to have so evil a meaning, a sort of hysterical lady meaning if nothing worse" (Lang and Shannon 24).[10]

Modern critics are not forgiving in their assessment of Tennyson's martial work—and use terminology that Emily had feared would be applied to her husband had he been publicly and widely associated with a political cause. The martial poems of early 1852 are described

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[10] Critics of his time also found Tennyson's foray into political realms disturbing. Emily's caution to avoid publicly associating with a cause as an "agitator" was not heeded by Tennyson later in his career. After he assumed his baronetcy, he published overtly political poems directly criticizing Gladstone's policies. He was "attacked and parodied in the press and accused of jingoism" as Philip Norton notes; he also points out that when Tennyson accepted his baronetcy, he came under fire from a virulent Victorian press that found him an easy public target (169-70).

as those that "any admirer [of Tennyson] would wish had never seen light"; "[i]n them, Tennyson slips across the narrow line dividing ardent patriotism from hysteria, proclaiming his dislike of the French, shrilly urging England to 'Arm, arm, arm!', and succeeding only in manifesting the hollow belligerence of the unmartial man caught up in blind chauvinism" (Martin 365). Another modern critic, Philip Henderson, also illustrates Tennyson's vehemence toward France: "'By the holy living God,' exclaimed Tennyson, 'France is a loathsome state!'" (95); to further emphasize Tennyson's emotional response to France and Napoleon III, Henderson describes him as shedding tears while writing another of his martial poems (which were unrelated to his role as Poet Laureate), with the additional observation that the "astonishing violence of Tennyson's political pronouncements was largely the violence of the sedentary man who knew he would not have to fight himself" (96).

In mid-December 1851, EBB was in Paris during the *coup* commotion and celebration—and *not* reacting to Napoleon III's successful quest for imperial power as Tennyson had. She wrote to her sister: "No indeed, we are not shot, my dearest Arabella" (Lewis 1: 431). She soothes her sister's worry over the Brownings being in the midst of a *coup*, then later judges: "I believe that the salvation of France as a free nation may be involved in this very coup d'etat [sic]" (Lewis 1: 432). On Christmas day she writes to her sister again: "Remember I do not bind myself for Louis Napoleon's purity of motives, nor do I pretend to say that he will not make improper uses of his unparalleled position at the moment" (Lewis 1: 440-41). In January of 1852, she pointed out to Arabella: "Remember—it is on the ground of democracy, that I set my foot, & on no other ground. Louis Napoleon may show himself worthy of all our curses in three months more– I dont [sic] enter into sureties for Louis Napoleon—he may be worthy presently of our curses. But up to this

moment, in the name of justice, no. In pure justice, I cry *no*. He has not done ill up to this moment– And France does not think so" (Lewis 1: 450). In February, she wrote again asking Arabella to refrain from calling her a Napoleonist: "I am no Napoleonist, by any possible wrenching of the word. I love truth, justice, & *the people*—that's my confession of faith" (Lewis 1: 458).

Later in 1852, EBB witnessed Louis Napoleon's return to Paris from Bordeaux: "Yesterday was a grand day with us. … we saw the great spectacle of Louis Napoleon passing on after his entrance into Paris— Nothing so magnificent was ever seen before…. As the people shouted he bowed to right & left, & those who were cursing him stopped suddenly to call him at least a brave man" (Lewis 1: 504). In another letter, EBB describes what she is thinking as she watches the spectacle:

> I don't see the English papers, but I conclude you are all furious. You must make up your minds to it nevertheless—the Empire is certain, and the feeling of all but unanimity (whatever the motive) throughout France obvious enough. Smooth down the lion's mane of the 'Examiner,' and hint that roaring over a desert is a vain thing. . . . For my part I did wave my handkerchief for the new Emperor, but I bore the show very well, and said to myself, 'God bless the people!' as the man who, to my apprehension, represents the democracy, went past. (Lewis 2: 90)[11]

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[11] EBB rightly assumes that *The Examiner*, in which Tennyson had published a martial poem, "Hands All Round!," in February 1852, would negatively cover the *coup* and the subsequent establishment of the Second Empire. She purposely deflects praise for Napoleon to the people whom he represents. A key point to understanding why she values a hero is understanding that it's not necessarily what a hero *is* that matters—it's what he does and what or whom he represents that moves her to praise.

In the years between this event and publication of *PBC*, EBB came to view Napoleon III as the savior of Italy—the only leader sufficiently strong or visionary enough to come to Italy's aid. And truly, he worked to ease Italy's oppression—but in the interest of gain for himself and France as well.

A War and Poems for the *Risorgimento*

When EBB began to write the poems for *PBC* she had not changed her opinion of Napoleon III. From 1852 to 1859, she had lived seven more years with a primary residence in Italy, which had a good deal to do with her view that Napoleon III's willingness to intervene in Italian affairs in 1859 was absolutely the right thing to do. To her sister-in-law Sarianna Browning, she wrote that Napoleon is "[t]he only great-hearted politician in Europe—but chivalry always came from France…." (Kenyon 2: 307).

Over the course of the year her belief that Napoleon would deliver Italy out of the hands of Austrian control varied little. But after the Treaty of Villafranca, which squandered much of the progress made by the French and Italians, she succumbed to dismay and anger, expressed to her sister Henrietta on hearing news of the peace (Huxley 317). She was not alone in her state of despair: she wrote to Sarianna that the "young men of Florence were confined to their beds by the emotion of the news…" (Kenyon 2: 320). To her friend Fanny Haworth she explained: "Observe—I believe entirely in the Emperor. He did at Villafranca what he could not help but do. Since then, he has simply changed the arena of the struggle; he is walking under the earth instead of on the earth, but *straight* and to unchanged ends" (Kenyon 2: 323). It is here that EBB most uses the language of Carlyle to describe the hero who "sees, through all entanglements, the practical heart of the matter; drives *straight*

towards that" (emphasis mine). She *is* angry with Napoleon but gets over it quickly, knowing that the Great Deed, referred to throughout many of the poems of *PBC*, was at least partially accomplished, setting Italy on its way to reunification and freedom from foreign oppression.[12] After the peace, EBB became ill, but when she had time to reflect, she salvaged the good that came from the conflict and moved on, creating her poetic homage to the cause which she believed would soon come to pass: Italian reunification.

Recently, Katherine Montwieler has argued for the importance of reading *PBC* as a whole, recovering EBB's last volume published in her lifetime as a vital collection structured by a complex internal dynamic. If the poems are read "across the volume," she argues, a "theme emerges: the ability, right, and obligation of women writers to speak out against miscarriages of justice, a dramatization of the ways men in power respond to such 'intrusions,' and the effects of these encounters" (294). While Montwieler focuses on the gender politics of the collection, the volume can also be viewed as a sustained and multi-sided interrogation of Carlylean hero-worship: hero as king, hero as politician—and for EBB herself, what it means to be a Hero-Poet.[13]

In the volume's preface EBB explains that she loves truth more than "Dante and Dante's country, more even than Shakespeare and Shakespeare's country"—citing the very poets Carlyle uses to illustrate the hero as poet. She aligns herself with these examples but moves beyond them, for her love of truth motivates her writing as a poet without a specific country. She thereby assumes great power that she further elaborates upon:

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[12] Writing to Henrietta she describes pulling a Napoleon medal off the clothing of her son (Huxley 319). In a letter to Mrs. Martin she says she understands that this "first charge *freed Italy potentially* from north to south" (Kenyon 2: 327).

[13] For this work, I am treating only a few of the poems that most closely address Carlylean concepts of the hero.

> I confess I dream of the day when an English statesman shall arise with a heart too large for England, having courage in the face of his countrymen to assert of some suggested policy,—"this is good for your trade: this is necessary for your domination; but it will vex a people hard by; it will hurt a people farther off; it will profit nothing to the general humanity: therefore, away with it!—it is not for you or for me." When a British minister dares speak so… then shall the nation be so glorious… (vii).

But there is no English statesman, no British minister who "dares speak so"; in lieu of such a leader, the poet must speak, and EBB speaks through these poems—as a politician, a legislator, a thinker, a philosopher. She becomes the Hero-Poet as she advocates political actions, invokes "glorious" deeds on the part of the visionary English statesman her preface imagines, and pronounces judgment on leaders who succeed and those who fail.

EBB begins *PBC* with "Napoleon III in Italy," an ode to the emperor's intervening in Italy with the explicit purpose of eliminating oppressive Austrian rule in the Northern Italian regions.[14] What has been overlooked, however, is that the poem is an ode to the people as well: those who voted for the warrior and who kept him in power. The first stanza makes clear where Napoleon III's power and greatness originate: "eight millions up and swore / By their manhood's right divine / So to elect and legislate" (1). In the fourth stanza, the poet privileges the people again: "I, reverencing the people, did not bate / My reverence of their deed and oracle." Later the poet suggests that Napoleon may have been criticized by some, but that the people's choice is more important than critical reception:

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[14] Napoleon's less obvious purpose was to acquire gain for France and, of course, glory for himself. He certainly walked away from the intervention the victor—with Nice and Savoy ceded to France for its efforts.

Autocrat? let them scoff,
  Who fail to comprehend
That a ruler incarnate of
The people, must transcend
All common king-born kings…
The people's blood runs through him,
Dilates from head to foot,
Creates him absolute,
And from this great beginning
Evokes a greater end
To justify and renew him—
    Emperor
    Evermore. (15)

Subsequent stanzas suggest that the people could not have chosen such a man in error. Throughout, the ode shows Napoleon attempting great deeds, but the confidence expressed by the people's vote empowers him to seek that greatness, and the people continually ratify his heroism. A hero must, through right action, be worthy of that mandate. Moreover, greatness must confer benefits beyond the hero himself. In stanza fourteen, EBB articulates her vision of the hero who merits praise from beyond as well as within a nation's borders:

  Great is he,
Who uses his greatness for all.
His name shall stand perpetually

As a name to applaud and cherish,
Not only within civic wall
For the loyal, but also without
For the generous and free. (19)

A hero "uses his greatness for all"—a democratic-sounding notion that jibes strangely with the underpinnings of Bonapartism in this passage[15]—and harkens back to the volume's preface where EBB bemoans the lack of a British minister who will dare to speak. She writes that when such a man will speak out on behalf of others in need, "when a British public applauds him speaking, then shall the nation be so glorious, that her praise, instead of exploding from within, shall come to her from without, as all worthy praise must" (vii-viii).

Lacking that public British politician's voice, then, EBB herself provides it throughout the poem. As she proclaims the poet's reverence for the people, she also claims the right to chronicle the relationship between Napoleon III and Italy: "… God set in me to acclaim and sing… By democratic passion!" As Montwieler suggests, "[w]hile the ode is about Napoleon III, it is also about the right of the woman poet to speak of any subject she chooses" (299). EBB claims power for the poet by declaring that the "poet's chrism" rather than the "priest's" consecrates the worthiness Napoleon demonstrates by helping others.

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[15] Bonapartism has many connotations, but I use it here to mean the kind of government formed around one man by virtue of military strength marshaled to replace an aristocratic rule no longer functioning. It appears to be democratic because the "people" support the move, but it leans (and topples headlong) into the realm of fascism. In 1852 Karl Marx wrote "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," a pamphlet in response to Louis Napoleon's coup. Republishing it in 1869, Marx suggested in his preface that Napoleon "demonstrates how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity [Napoleon III] to play a hero's part" (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/index.htm). Marx acknowledged the role of leader played by Napoleon III to be heroic, but denigrated the man. EBB's assessment was much more complimentary but not totally positive.

"The praise of the emperor," writes Montwieler, "pales next to the poet's self-aggrandizement" in claiming "for the woman poet the same greatness earlier championed by Shakespeare and Byron…. The real hero of the poem is not the emperor at all, but the exultant speaker…" (299-300). EBB may not be able to take up arms as Byron did, but she surely assumes the role of the Carlylean Hero-Poet Shakespeare, from her native country, and Dante, from her adopted country, even as she moves beyond the nationalistic boundaries of each.

In the volume's later poems EBB interrogates what is heroic, tempering the initial representation of Napoleon in the opening ode by making him the speaker in another poem and thereby indirectly opening him up to criticism. She also directly engages in a poetic battle with Tennyson, and by extension Patmore, and other supporters of the rifle clubs in two poems. In the last poem, she investigates societal failures, the lack of heroes, and the need, first, to illuminate a corrupt and immoral situation, then to change it.

The fifth poem in the collection, "An August Voice," positions Napoleon III as the speaker. The speech occurs after the French Emperor has negotiated a peace treaty, the Treaty of Villafranca, with Franz Josef of Austria. Part of that agreement, made without Italian representation, directed Italians to recall to office their previous Austrian-backed Hapsburg rulers. Tuscany was compelled to recall the Grand Duke Leopold II, a man proven to be fickle, weak, and quick to betray Italian citizens. Although the Tuscans had no choice or say in the matter, Napoleon III, as speaker, seems to imply that they can exercise their will. Most stanzas begin with a question: "You'll take back your Grand Duke?," suggesting that a choice may exist. But after the first line's question, many of the stanzas contain largely condemning descriptions of the Grand Duke. Most stanzas end with the declarative

statement, "You'll call back the Grand Duke," suggesting that the opening query notwithstanding, the matter has been settled. Using "your" at the start of the stanzas also confers a stronger link between the Tuscan people and their Grand Duke—implying they approve of or are aligned with their leader—a gesture undercut in the stanzas' concluding statement by replacing "your" with the distancing "the," reinforcing the implication that the people have no choice, and that the recalled leader would not be *their* choice, if choice existed. By using both a question and a statement similarly worded in most of the stanzas, EBB conflates the weak with the heroic and interrogates the "greatness" of Napoleon III. He *did* a good deed by attempting to help the Italians unite, but he also allowed the reinstatement of an abysmal leader whose loyalty was clearly to the Austrians. Much like Carlyle describing Napoleon I, EBB shows Napoleon III as less than perfect but still great in deed.

Napoleon III's "august voice" also criticizes the Italians for putting up with the Grand Duke for so long and assumes they are so irresolute that they will, of course, despite everything, take back an ineffectual and insincere ruler. In the last stanza, Napoleon asks the question once more, "You'll take back your Grand Duke?," and then says: "Observe, there's no one to force it" (45). But readers would have known that wasn't accurate—the treaty Napoleon made with Franz Josef did enforce the Duke's restoration. Napoleon's speech finishes with this advice:

> *I* charge you by Great St. Martino
>   And prodigies quickened by wrong,
> Remember your Dead on Ticino;
>   Be worthy, be constant, be strong.
> —Bah!—call back the Grand Duke!! (45)

He suggests what they should do—be worthy, be constant, be strong, but worthy of what? Constant to what ideal? Strong for whom? Does Napoleon charge Tuscans to be strong throughout the experience of calling back the Grand Duke? Or is he actually supporting a further rebellion against Austria? It's unclear what the speaker's intention might be. The very ambiguity of this portrait of Napoleon unsettles the notion of EBB's blind hero worship. Napoleon indicates that he sacrificed for the Italians, but it was nevertheless his treaty with the Austrians that excluded the Italians from having a real choice in their future.[16] Additionally, his "Bah!" suggests a snappishness, perhaps meant to show disgust for whatever choice the Italians make, or for their weakness in allowing such a wretched leader to remain in power for so long.[17]

This is a confused, angry and resentful Napoleon[18]—a very different hero than the one sketched in the opening ode. It is an "august" voice that speaks—the voice of an imperial leader, an imposing, demanding, daunting voice that disallows others to speak—but one that here cleverly illuminates an important aspect of heroics: human fallibility. Heroes are great men because they help people, but they can be flawed, changeable, cantankerous, unreadable. Shortly after the publication of *PBC,* EBB observed to her friend Isa Blagden: "I

[16] Napoleon III's actions did precipitate Italian unification but such was not his intention. He wanted Nice and Savoy (and got those states) and a federated collection of Italian states as an ally—not a strong united Italian nation that might be more threat than buffer for France.
[17] The Tuscans were forced by the Austrians to take back the Grand Duke Leopold II in 1848 when revolution failed, and again, as part of the Treaty of Villafranca, in 1859.
[18] In 1857, EBB wrote a letter to Napoleon III in support of Victor Hugo (who was living in exile), one of Louis Napoleon's earliest and harshest critics. The letter was never sent, but it reveals a complex understanding of Napoleon III, that goes beyond blind hero-worship. She asserted that Napoleon III's greatness rested in his ability to "allow for the peculiarity of the poetical temperament, for the temptations of high gifts, for the fever in which poets are apt to rage and suffer beyond the measure of other men," and that his greatness also rested in his ability to forgive (Kenyon 2: 261-62).

don't sell my soul to Napoleon, and applaud him *quand même*" (Kenyon 2: 273-74).[19] She is, indeed, *not* the courtier, as she claims in the volume's preface, despite having written "Napoleon III in Italy." She can, however, still applaud him "above all" for the good he accomplished. Her assessment of Napoleon III is that he is both praiseworthy and complex beyond mere praise. Compared with and against the ode "Napoleon III in Italy," "An August Voice" presents a more balanced picture of an imperfect man who nonetheless attempted great deeds, who set great deeds in motion, but not a perfect man.

Two other *PBC* poems, "A Tale of Villafranca" and "Italy and the World," directly criticize leadership and offer response to Napoleon III. EBB critiques the self-defense movement in England that arose in 1852 and that was promoted again in 1859 to counter any possible Napoleonic invasions. EBB's poetic criticisms through these poems were prompted by Tennyson's poem, "The War,"[20] which he allowed to be published in *The Times* (a paper EBB loathed) in mid-May, 1859. "The War" was a much-tempered version of "Rifle-Clubs!!!" (penned hastily for Patmore and excerpted above).[21] The poem evoked expressions of surprise and distress from EBB at Tennyson's support of the rifle corps.[22] In June 1859, she asked John Ruskin, "What—not even our poets with clean hands? Alfred Tennyson

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[19] The phrase *quand même* is the same she uses in the preface to talk about how she values truth and justice.

[20] Tennyson's "The War" appeared in *The Times* on 9 May 1859 (10). Signed "T.," this poem was published in the far right column after most columns on the page were filled with news of Sardinia (Piedmont), Naples, the Papal States, France and Austria: an effective position given the political fear aroused by a Napoleonic march into Italy.

[21] In May 1859, Alfred and Emily Tennyson wrote to Charles Richard Weld to say: "I send you the song *in its last form*. I don't think the Times will put it in—but you can try if you like—another paper will—to be signed T" (Lang and Shannon 223-24).

[22] EBB and Tennyson were well acquainted and had met and been friendly in the early 1850s.

abetting Lord Derby. That to me was the heaviest blow of all" (Kenyon 2: 316).[23] And in October 1859, she observed to William Allingham: "I confess to you that I took very much to heart Alfred Tennyson's invocation to the Riflemen, at the beginning of the war" (Allingham and Williams 103).

Between these letters of June and October, EBB first published "A Tale of Villafranca" on 24 September 1859 in the *Athenaeum* (397-98), later republishing it as the third piece in *PBC*. While the poem primarily comments on the peace Louis Napoleon negotiated with the Austrian Emperor, Franz Josef, the *PBC* version also includes a stanza, the seventh, which explicitly criticizes the rifle clubs—a stanza that EBB purposely suppressed in the *Athenaeum* text in order to have the poem printed, as a letter to its editor Henry Chorley indicates.[24] If this small incident illustrates her determination to use her power for what she perceives as a good and right cause, it also demonstrates her understanding of the extent of her fame and her willingness to use it. "A Tale of Villafranca," like "Napoleon III in Italy," celebrates the French Emperor as a "great man" who "Imagined a great Deed… To help a people's need" (26). Taken with her reiterated reverence for the people, praise for great leaders who risk much, and privileging of those who help others throughout the poems, Stanza VII of the poem is severely sarcastic and critical. Indeed, the *Athenaeum* might well have rejected the poem if she had included it:

> A great Deed in this world of ours?
>
> Unheard of the pretence is:

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[23] On the same day, she wrote to Arabella: "And to think of Alfred Tennyson!… Oh—your rifles, your rifles .. to defend yourselves, when nobody thinks of attacking you—while a nation is actually struggling here between life and death!" (Lewis 2: 411).

[24] She told Chorley that she knew she had "left" out the offending stanza the day after she sent her original note to him pleading for the poem's publication, which indicates that she had time to correct the omission had she chosen to do so (Kenyon 2: 334-35; Lewis 2: 422).

It threatens plainly the great Powers;

Is fatal in all senses.

A just deed in the world?—call out

The rifles! be not slack about

The national defences.

It is the fault of others—the politicians who worked against Napoleon's intervention in Italy—that the "just deed" was not carried to its fullest extent, the poet implies, as she describes "sovereigns, statesmen, north and south," rising "up in wrath and fear," and "protesting by one mouth, / 'What monster have we here? . . . A great just deed—and not for pay? / Absurd,—or insincere'" (27). Ironically, EBB suggests, the anti-Napoleonists are in fact afraid of Louis Napoleon's potential sincerity, a characteristic that Carlyle considers primary in the hero, because it will negatively impact their "'status quo,'" as well as threaten "Our holy treaties where,— / Our rights to sell a race, or buy, / Protect and pillage…" (28).[25]

Stanza XX of "Italy and the World" (the seventh of the volume's eight poems), further developing EBB's bitter critique of England's failure to intervene in Italy, includes a second allusion to the rifle clubs supported by Patmore and Tennyson:

I cry aloud in my poet-passion,

Viewing my England o'er Alp and sea.

I loved her more in her ancient fashion:

She carries her rifles too thick for me,

Who spares them so in the cause of a brother. (55)

[25] As examples of the heroic, Carlyle mentions Napoleon and Cromwell, among others, for whom sincerity was key: "I should say sincerity, a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic" (57).

Importantly, unlike Tennyson, she articulates her views on both Napoleon III and the rifle clubs under her own name, in a volume of her own poems directly addressed to a political cause. In this poem, more than any others in *PBC*, EBB presents a vision of transnational/international unity—with "[N]o more England nor France! / . . . National voices, distinct yet dependent, / Ensphering each other, as swallow does swallow" (52)—that contrasts strongly with the jingoism of Tennyson's narrowly nationalistic martial poems. As a hero, Napoleon does as much as he can; it then becomes the charge of nations and their people to "take upon [them] / The law" (58) to make a benevolent future for all nations.

PBC concludes with the much-discussed "A Curse for a Nation," in which a woman poet is compelled by an angel to curse, to write, to shed light on a nation's wrongs. While earlier critics have emphasized the poet's donning the role of prophet in this poem,[26] she can also be seen as playing the role of the poet-hero, whom Carlyle describes as legislator, thinker, philosopher, and politician, illuminating societal wrongs and suffering for doing so. It was this final poem, combined with the opening ode to Napoleon III, that caused the vehement critical outcry against *PBC*. "A Curse for Nation" was originally written as a poem cursing slavery in America, and included in *PBC* partly at Robert Browning's suggestion (Kenyon 2: 366-67). In its new context, many mistook the curse as meant for England, but in fact the curse of the poem is manifold: it is a curse on leaders who have allowed enslavement to exist and continue; it is a curse on all who have colluded to keep any kind of enslavement alive; it is a curse on the readers to bear the burden the writer has had to bear—a call to action, a rhetorical *tour de force* in which EBB suggests that all who read the woman's curse should create one of their own and spread it about as needed. It is as the

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[26] See also Stone (1986; 1999) and Slinn (2002).

Hero-Poet that EBB names what is heroic, what should be heroic, what isn't heroic, and takes her place before a congress speaking loudly and precisely, attempting to rally others to her cause. The preface and the poems, all together, thus complete a sustained interrogation of the nature of heroism: heroes who get it right, and heroes who don't, as well as the poet-hero who tells the story of it all. EBB begins the volume as a poet praising a hero's actions and ends as a poet writing a woman writing a curse upon those who fail to play the heroic roles needed to right wrongs.

Reactions: Friends (and Critics)

PBC was not considered a success by many of EBB's British critics.[27] One of EBB's friends reacted as many of the critics did—negatively. Alfred Tennyson's brother, Frederick,[28] was a dear friend of the Browning's and spent much time with them while they were in Italy. From England in September of 1860, he writes to EBB to share his thoughts on the volume, but first he contextualizes his response by telling her what may have prompted him to write: "[w]e have had Victor Hugo here this summer he came to attend a Garibaldi meeting and made a grand ovation. He seems still to be in great vigour and though I could see his face but imperfectly from the opposite side of the room his voice is clear and

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[27] A list of twenty-five contemporary reviews (including posthumous and American reviews) treating *Poems Before Congress* is available at: http://www.browningguide.org. Many British reviews were vitriolic to say the least. On average, the American reviews of the volume were more positive. Nineteen of these twenty-five were published in EBB's lifetime.

[28] I refer to Frederick Tennyson throughout this section as Tennyson despite possible confusion with his brother referred to earlier as the same.

lion-like."[29] Tennyson writes of a speaker who praised Hugo, and through that speech, praised Garibaldi as well:

> I will give you some idea of the people of this place when I tell you that one of the orators a Dr. Dickson with exquisite refinements and in V. Hugo's presence said 'I am aware that a great gun is coming after me, nevertheless and apropos to Garibaldi there is a man to whom the very best of lyrics is due. Oh! That you had written an ode to him the true Patriot, the great Liberator, the noble heart, and not glorified the Arch. Thimblerigger and gloomy sporting man.'"

Tennyson repeats the words of Dr. Dickson to Hugo, but it is clear he means them for EBB as well! He continues by supporting her reason behind writing an ode to Napoleon III—her "pure ideality"—while he suspects much inherent evil of the man as "proven" by Mr. Savile, named below:

> As for your L. Napoleon if he were not at all times more anxious for pudding than praise, though he may do his best to amalgamate them, would he have broken off short and left the selfsacrificing and the undisciplined to carry out his own project – to the imminent danger of its annihilation? But let us hope the best. The ungenerous London Press has given you no credit for the pure ideality which led you to apotheosize the man who with many here passes for the "Beast from the Sea" and with most for a Beast you have been figuring in

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[29] My thanks to the Armstrong Browning Library for permission to quote from this unpublished letter from Frederick Tennyson to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, dated 29 September 1860 (60173). All subsequent quotations of Frederick Tennyson are from this letter. I have tried to replicate the punctuation and spellings as they appear in the letter when they do not hinder modern reading.

> Periodicals as the Imperialist Poetess! Probably you will not be shaken in your opinion by anything I can say, but I confess that few things have appeared to me more strange, not to say startling than the discovery that a certain Mr. Savile has lately made. You are aware that the French Emperor's name in its entirety is Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Now the number 666 or rather different numbers forming a total of 666 turned into corresponding numeral letters of the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages… bring out this name in its completeness. Judge for yourself…

Several things are striking in this passage: 1) Tennyson notes a certain hysterical reaction to Louis Napoleon—supporting his brother's and Patmore's thinking; 2) he acknowledges EBB's position of "pure ideality"[30]; 3) he is aware of the disparagement of her by many in the British press (who point to her "insanity" with her ode to Napoleon III[31] and in one case, align her with a pythoness[32]—very beast-like); 3) he intensifies the hysteria with Mr. Savile's mathematics showing that Louis Napoleon may indeed be *the* Beast.[33] After this passage, Tennyson lists the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew letters of Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's

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[30] Tennyson may mean here that EBB wrote from a position in which her ideals were pure—she supported liberty and freedom.

[31] Henry Chorley in *The Athenæum* (March 1860) wrote that EBB showed an appalling blind faith in Napoleon III "as the hope of Italy, and flinging out malediction against England." He ends his review suggesting that EBB has, on this occasion, taken "to its extremity the right of 'insane prophet' to lose his head,—and to loose his tongue" (372).

[32] In "Poetic Aberrations," the oft-quoted negative review from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (April 1860), the critic, William E. Aytoun, writes that "Plutarch says of the Pythoness, 'that, going with great reluctancy into the sacred place to be inspired, she came out foaming at the mouth, her eyes goggling, her breast heaving, her voice undistinguishable and shrill, as if she had an earthquake within her labouring for vent.' We grieve to say that Mrs. Browning… has been seized with a like fit of insanity" (492).

[33] Tennyson is not the only one to think of Napoleon this way or to, at least, report on the talk of this. EBB writes to Fanny Haworth in 16 June 1860: "You are moved to set down the Emperor as 'the Beast' 666, of course" (Kenyon 2: 373).

full name with number equivalents in three columns—each column adding up to 666. He writes on—after the numerology—adding a more detailed explanation and quoting EBB's lines from "Napoleon III in Italy" back to her:

> [666] Which we are told is the 'Number of a MAN!' Now if he should turn out to be THE BEAST recollect that you with ALL the World have wondered after him! "Is this a man like the rest, this miracle" and again.[34] "Nay, but he, this Wonder…"[35]

But he does go on to admit that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's name as well as Lord Henley's may also turn out similarly, "and no doubt all over the world similar cases might be discovered if one were to take the trouble to look for them, but surely we are not to look anywhere except among crowned heads of great Empires. To say the least of it, the thing has a very queer look." Indeed.

To explain a possible connection this numerology may have to the Bible, Tennyson suggests that some parts of the Bible are literal:

> If it is one of my weaknesses to believe that the Bible speaks the truth in plain language unless there be a very good reason for not doing so, I have so many that you will not perceive it among the rest. Now the Apocalypse, though a symbolical Book, is not entirely so. There are numbers of expressions that can only be taken literally, and "the name of a Man" surely can mean nothing but the name of a man, or what in earth or heaven can it possibly mean?

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[34] Here Tennyson quotes EBB's lines back to her from "Napoleon III in Italy," Stanza XV: "Is this a man like the rest / This miracle…" (16).

[35] "Napoleon III in Italy," Stanza XVI: "nay, but he, this wonder…" (16).

After so strongly arguing for Louis Napoleon as the Beast, his conclusion of this matter seems to leave open the possibility that Napoleon III may *not* be the Beast after all: "[H]ow can we be certain that the convertibility of his name into 666 may not signify that he has it not the 'Mark of the Beast' at least the numbers of his name? But whether L. Napoleon be the Beast or not I wonder at nothing he has done. I only wonder what he is going to do next…"

The Beast, apparently, is as the Beast does. But then we learn more. Frederick Tennyson's reaction to EBB's poems—mainly because of the leading poem focused on Napoleon III—appears to be similar to the reaction of his brother and Coventry Patmore to Louis Napoleon, but there is actually a much more practical reason for his displeasure with and suspicion of the Emperor. In a post-script, he writes:

> I hope I have not pained you by my random strictures on L. Napoleon. Perhaps I ought not to have said what I have. I fear I may have been somewhat influenced by looking at him through the distorting lens of disappointed avarice. I feel personally embittered against the fellow. I consider that he has robbed [me] of at least £2000. Do not laugh. This is how he did it. Last year on my way from Pisa to Livorno I met a Sardinian General officer in a railway carriage who assured me it was his firm belief that the Emperor after finishing with Italy, would attack England. This he told he had from headquarters. I mentioned this to many in London. I thought they treated the intelligence with a very unjustifiable indifference. But there arose shortly afterwards a fresh Invasion panic. I need not tell you how Money markets are affected by such a condition of things. Now I had about 160

> hundred Pound Shares in the Manchester and Sheffield Railway, which for many years had been quoted at a very low figure indeed, and I felt certain that if I did not dispose of them immediately, I should have to do so eventually at a much greater disadvantage or perhaps realize nothing at all. In that case I should have been greatly damaged myself and several of my brothers would have been completely ruined. I sold them at 38 [pounds] and thereabouts. But since then they have risen 10 [pounds] per share and are still rising. This is my destiny no doubt, as it has always been. But 'Circumstance the Unspiritual God, and Miscreator' takes in my mind the form of the French Emperor and I must therefore beg you to be lenient to the results of this hallucination, if it be one.

It should not be surprising at all that someone might react badly to a friend's praise of a leader who had been the cause of "disappointed avarice." Frederick Tennyson's reaction adds depth to the British position on Bonapartism, helping modern readers and scholars to remember that an ideological stance can be informed by a damaged pocketbook. And fortunately for EBB, this friend seems to have treated the entire topic with some sense of humor.

Another of EBB's friends wrote to her after publication of *PBC* to share his thinking, acknowledging the volume's power, and specifically responding to her treatment of Napoleon III in relation to Carlylean concepts of the hero. In a letter, sent the same month as Frederick Tennyson's, Robert Bulwer Lytton[36] writes of *PBC* in early September 1860:

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[36] Robert Bulwer Lytton was the son of Edward Bulwer Lytton, the famous novelist, playwright, and politician. Active in politics, Robert was a published poet, a friend of the

> …. I have read and re-read many times, your "Poems before Congress." I did not write to you after my first reading of the Poems, because my impressions were confused in everything but a vague sense of some disappointment at the form, & more antagonism to the substance. I well own that I closed the book with a sense of irritation not allayed by the great beauty of one or two passages in it. But your poems have the merit inherent to all that is intrinsically good in art. The more they are studied the more their beauties are apparent, the more they command admiration, & haunt the memory. Their beauty as verse, is much greater than I at first recognized. There are fine flashing & keen strokes thro'out.[37]

Lytton suggests that politics, being more science than art, interferes with the reading of poetry should the reader not necessarily agree politically with the poet's stance. Such is the incongruity between politics and poetry that disturbed him upon first reading the poems. He writes that "it was not till I read again & again, that I fully embraced the poetical beauty of the book."

Brownings, and a fairly regular correspondent of both Robert and Elizabeth from 1853 through her death in 1861, and with Robert until his death.

[37] My thanks to the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, for permission to quote from the manuscript and typescript of the Robert Bulwer Lytton letter to EBB, dated 3 September 1860 (60163). All subsequent quotations of Lytton are from this letter. I have tried to replicate the punctuation and spellings as they appear in the letter, though I have spelled out words that were abbreviated when I thought abbreviation would hinder modern reading. In an earlier version of this chapter, I believed this letter was hitherto unpublished, but I have since discovered it was previously published in *Letters from Owen Meredith (Robert, First Earl of Lytton) to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, edited by Aurelia Brooks Harlan and J. Lee Harlan, Jr. (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 1936): 159-170.

Lytton, nevertheless, is not without his own political position, one that is more aligned with Tennyson's support of the rifle clubs than with EBB's critique of them, in the name of a strong England and self-defense:

> If I understand you well I cannot but think you are not quite fair to the rifle-movement…. I do not know if I rightly interpret a verse of yours on this matter—perhaps I altogether mistake your meaning in it, but if it be that it would have been nobler & better to have armed & fought for the Italians before we armed for ourselves I can't go with you in that opinion— It seems to me that a man should protect his own wife in preference to the most unfortunate unprotected ladies— But in any case I think we had no ground for interference in Italy, & no right to interfere….

Lytton also suggests that intervention is a risky endeavor altogether, no matter how noble, citing the example of intervention "for Greek nationality" which he calls a sad failure (a cause close to EBB's heart when she was younger). He cautions that "once you admit intervention on the right side, you cannot exclude it on the wrong side, & what follows? The deadliest of conflicts a general conflict for principle!" While he defends the "rifle-movement," Lytton is politically more moderate in his views than either EBB or Alfred Tennyson, although he seems more closely aligned with Tennyson/Patmore regarding gender roles and the saving of English women—at least in the case at hand. About his politics, he writes: "I am afraid you will think from what I have said that I am a Tory rampant in retrograde, and altogether at odds with you upon politics— I don't think however that we start from different points, or by opposite roads, only perhaps that I only go half way with you."

Significantly, Lytton seems to share with EBB a Carlylean understanding of Louis Napoleon:

> I regard L.N. as a man of undoubted genius, and unquestionably as a *great constructor*. There are evidences of this thro'out France. If he has gagged the Press, and silenced speech, he has also freed capital, and called into existence a material prosperity that speaks for itself, and for him. And it may be justly said of him that he has only made himself the master of France, to make France the mistress of Europe. I do not look upon him merely as an adroit and reckless adventurer who has play'd double or quits with Fortune. For I credit him not only with a conviction in his own destiny but with an equal, and an honest, conviction that it is the best destiny for France. He has large views & generous enthusiasms and I do not believe his ends to be selfish because I see his means to be unscrupulous….

Lytton looks at various political affairs in Europe through its history, suggesting that similar to many leaders, Napoleon III is likely sincere. He writes, "No man can be absolutely insincere, who has intense convictions & L.N. has these no doubt, but he seems to me a practical enthusiast & not like that poor monomaniac Mazzini, but like Cromwell & Mahomet—neither of them positively bad men, nor positively good men, but both of them great men."[38] Connecting Cromwell and Mahomet with sincerity, and with Napoleon's sincerity, acknowledging them all complex men, who are nevertheless great men, echoes

[38] Carlyle treats Mahomet in Lecture II, "The Hero as Prophet. Mahomet: Islam," and Napoleon I and Cromwell in Lecture VI "The Hero as King. Cromwell, Napoleon: Modern Revolutionism."

strongly Carlyle's treatment of both these men in *On Heroes*, as well as his treatment of Napoleon I, so often compared to Napoleon III.[39]

By commenting directly on EBB's apparent hero-worshipping, Lytton most concretely connects EBB's treatment of Napoleon III with Carlyle's concepts of the hero: "You see I am really not *very* rabid against him… but perhaps I am overmistrustful of hero-worship—lest it should unconsciously degenerate into devil-worship, or the substitution of personality for principle." It is this last declaration that most draws EBB's *PBC* and Alfred Tennyson's martial poems in response to Napoleon III together for fruitful comparison. Does EBB substitute personality for principle? Does Tennyson? In EBB's eagerness to see Italy united, does she give Napoleon III too much credit? Are both Tennysons too blindly critical of Napoleon III (is Patmore)? The answers to these questions depend on one's perspective. Alfred Tennyson would have said EBB was wrong-headed in her praise of Napoleon III. We know EBB was disappointed and hurt by his support of the rifle-clubs formed as a direct result of Napoleon III's political action. Both poets reacted strongly to political situations in 1852 and again in 1859. However, EBB boldly proclaimed her stance in name and deed in 1859. Tennyson wrote/published behind a mask in 1852, and again in 1859, perhaps to protect his position as Poet Laureate, perhaps to avoid a public/critical backlash. While both poets were famous, examining how they chose to use, or not use, that fame in relation to one of the most important political figures in mid-nineteenth century European politics offers an intriguing way of re-seeing both in terms of poetry and politics.

[39] See, for example, the comparison of Napoleon I's march into Italy with Napoleon III's intervention in Italian affairs by a reader of *The Times* in a letter published 12 May 1859. The letter includes the text of a Napoleonic Imperial decree from Italy, dated 10 June 1809, of which the writer observes, "[t]he present movements of his successor, Napoleon III., after a cycle of half a century, may make this interesting to your readers" (7).

PBC is clearly more than a “hysterical,” jingoistic reaction penned in haste, despite being “written under the pressure of the events they indicate” (v). EBB’s poems in this volume include thoughtful and challenging commentary on political events, a choice of subject matter she strongly defended: “Artistically, I may have failed in these poems—that is for the critic to consider; but in the choice of their argument I have not failed artistically, *I think*, or my whole artistic life and understanding of life have failed.”[40] *PBC* includes speakers who are women,[41] poets, mothers, angels, reluctant writers, great leaders—but the author is the Hero-Poet who brings the collection all together. EBB can “sing the Heroic Warrior” because she becomes “a Heroic warrior” by her political action, by speaking out in her own voice in her “poet-passion” on some of the most controversial events of her time.

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[40] From a May 1860 letter to Henry Chorley (Kenyon 2: 383).

[41] See Chapter 4 for a discussion of women in *PBC* and the possible influence *of Corinne, Or Italy* on the portrayal of these female speakers. See also Montwieler’s discussion of other poems in *PBC* in terms of gender and politics—particularly those with prominent women figures: “A Court Lady,” “The Dance,” “A Tale of Villafranca,” and “A Curse for a Nation.”

CHAPTER 4

Women Who Talk About Italy: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Poems Before Congress* and Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy*

Corinne, or Italy by Germaine de Staël (1766-1817) was published in 1807 and became an instant success internationally.[1] Corinne, the daughter of an Italian woman and an English father, spent her early youth in Italy, but after her mother's death, she lived in England where her talent, intelligence, and high spirits were an uncomfortable fit with the repressive social conventions that dictated a woman's life in the north. Corinne's story, told from her adult perspective, tells of the freedom she enjoyed beyond the boundaries of a particularly strict British patriarchy: as soon as she could, she shed her surname, and moved to Italy where she could develop her talents and interests until she had achieved fame and was revered as an artist. The south allowed her a lifestyle unobtainable in England—as a single, independent, wealthy woman, she may be outgoing, enthusiastic, gregarious, entertaining—in short, she could become the artist she longs to be in Italy.

On the occasion of a great public success, Corinne meets a Scottish lord, Oswald (Lord Nelvil), who is touring Italy for his health. They fall in love, but he cannot forsake the duty he feels toward his land and home for the enriching and enlightening love of a woman like Corinne, an artist who cannot give up her art for him. Because Oswald feels guilt over a difficult relationship with his father, whom he is mourning, he is more determined to return to Scotland and his family lands to be the lord his father wanted him to be, and more

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[1] Part of the proof of its success was de Staël's continued exile from Paris by order of Napoleon I. He first banished de Staël from Paris in 1802. De Staël's early works "undermined the status quo… [and] had to be perceived as subversive" (Goldberger xv). In 1807, *Corinne, or Italy* directly conflicted with Napoleon I's notion of women's place in society as well as supporting the national identity of Italians who were under Napoleonic rule at the time.

importantly, to marry a good, proper English woman. Corinne is a revolutionary in her belief that she can have love and life both, but comes to understand that Oswald cannot meet her needs, and in choosing him, she risks her life and her art. Oswald eventually chooses Corinne's half sister, Lucile, a seemingly docile and perfect Englishwoman—or rather, society chooses her for him. Corinne dies, miserable over her lost love.[2] But she exacts what is a damning revenge that haunts Oswald the remainder of his life.[3]

This novel's importance as a literary influence extended well past the borders of France and well beyond the early 19th century.[4] It "exercised deep and enduring influence over the women who read it, enlightening them on the society they lived in, encouraging them to speak out, to create, and indeed to be full human beings in their own right" (Goldberger xv).[5] As influential as it was for women readers, it also worked to develop British political notions of Italy as a victim, as a feminized entity, as a Romantic notion of a nation divided which could and should be united again. De Staël has Corinne reply to Oswald's harsh judgment of Italy: "Perhaps living in Italy, you will come to feel compassion for this beautiful country that nature seems to have adorned as a victim" (54). Maura O'Connor suggests that several early 19th century writers had a great deal of influence over the British political conception of Italy including: Lord Byron, Germaine de Staël, Samuel

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[2] De Stael published an essay in 1793, *On the Influence of the Passions*, in which she talked of the "destructive force of emotional dependence on another person"—exactly what happens when Corinne falls for Oswald (Goldberger xxxviii).

[3] This interpretation of the ending of *Corinne, or Italy* is discussed at the end of this chapter.

[4] Noted readers of *Corinne, or Italy* include: Sir Walter Scott, Nathanial Hawthorne, Jane Austen, Mary Godwin Shelley, Margaret Fuller, Fanny Kemble, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Anna Jameson, and, of course, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Goldberger xlix-l; Lewis 16).

[5] Male readers were also deeply affected by this novel's power as pointed out in a later note, and as mentioned above, Napoleon I responded to the work by extending de Stael's exile from Paris.

Rogers, and Anna Jameson (as well as other less well-known artists).[6] All wrote about Italy and "actively contributed to the creation of an idealized view of Italy by encouraging," O'Connor notes, "their audience… to add a bit of imaginary to the real in their encounters to the place" (19). While Italy is cast as a beautiful victim of politics, it is also drawn as a liberal location in which great personal freedom is possible; it is physically and metaphorically a land that can restore one's health (as is mentioned in *Corinne* on the first page).[7] Corinne, or Italy, could have been an escape for Oswald, for his health and happiness, but he was too governed by the rules of English patriarchy, so could neither save Italy (Corinne) nor be saved by Italy (Corinne). Italy/Corinne is figured both as a victim that needs to be saved and a messianic agent that is capable of saving one's intellectual and physical life, *if* valued properly. EBB (and Robert Browning, too) saw Italy as a place to escape to for improved health and increased happiness. And for EBB especially, Italy became a land of physical and intellectual freedom. *Corinne, or Italy* helped to shape EBB's vision of Italy as a messianic agent, but her reality went far beyond the limits of the novel; unlike Corinne or Oswald, EBB *is* saved by Italy, and in her turn as the author of *PBC*, and a poet of the *Risorgimento*, she attempts to save Italy, or at least help in its reunification.

EBB wrote in a letter to a friend that *Corinne* was an "immortal" book that should be read "three score & ten times" (McCarthy 176).[8] Avriel Goldberger, in the introduction to

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[6] Of these, two were literary heroes of EBB's (Byron and de Staël), and one was an acquaintance (Rogers); Anna Jameson was a dear and intimate friend of EBB's. Anna Jameson traveled with the Browning's for part of their elopement to Italy, assisting as needed with arrangements. In her work, *Diary of an Ennuyée*, Jameson directly mentions *Corinne* as an influence on the diarist (28, 195, 198).

[7] Oswald travels to Italy on the advice of his doctors who "prescribed southern air" as a cure for his melancholy and in fear that "his lungs might be affected" (de Staël 3). Later in the book, he returns to Italy to regain his health again (398).

[8] EBB also read a translation of de Staël's history of the French Revolution (Taplin 20).

her translation, describes Corinne as "a multitalented woman with an exceptional mind who has the courage to break with her past, live a life independent of the usual social norms, and become what she has the ability to be: poet, *improvisatrice*, prophet and guide to her people" (xxxvii). EBB must have seen much to appreciate in such a character to have advocated the reading of the novel seventy times. Linda Lewis points out that many English women, artists in particular, found the freedom of French women enviable, and further understood their political commentary had weight (even if their political reality was far different). Women in France had salons bristling with excitement and intellectual challenge. Women in England had parlors or drawing rooms in which they could quietly read or sew (Lewis, *Germaine* 9-10). This description is reductive here but is illustrative of the general liberties accorded French women versus English women—as perceived by English women. Lewis also describes the power of Corinne as a model of a woman artist breaking down barriers between the public and private, between nations (despite her ultimate failure[9]): "Corinne was half-English, half-Italian, and 100 percent cosmopolitan. English women poets and novelists wished also to transcend geographic and nationalistic boundaries as their French predecessors had transcended" (*Germaine* 10). But English women writers also found their French predecessors courageous, too. EBB's courage in the face of repercussions she knew would come on publication of *PBC* is not unlike de Staël's willingness to risk all to publish her works.[10] Certainly the censorship of Napoleon I was more potentially damaging to de

[9] But as a Romantic heroine, could Corinne's story have ended in anything but her death?
[10] Linda Lewis in *Germaine de Staël, George Sand, and the Victorian Woman Artist* discusses the influence both these French writers had on EBB as a writer, woman, poet.

Staël than the literary critics who would come to judge *PBC*. But that fact does not diminish the regard EBB felt for the novel and its author who dared publication.[11]

When EBB was a young girl, de Staël was a famous author. Soon after travel to the continent opened up (with the defeat of Napoleon I in 1814), EBB traveled to Paris with her parents.[12] Just after Napoleon's abdication, de Staël had reopened her salon to great success in Paris (Goldberger xiii). While in Paris, it seems likely that EBB, even though a young girl, may have been aware of de Staël's literary works and her connection to that city. Recently, Simon Avery spoke of this early travel as an important influence on EBB's political beliefs, on her perception of France and French literature, both of which would play an important part of her growth as a writer, artist, and political commentator.[13] Regardless of whether EBB was aware of de Staël's fame and works while she was actually in France, she did become an enthusiastic supporter of *Corinne, or Italy*, suggesting the work's importance to EBB as a reader and writer later. Scholarly endeavor has traced the influence of *Corinne* on *Aurora Leigh*, inextricably linking these two works.[14]

However, previous studies have not analyzed the relationship between the ideals espoused by the character Corinne (and in the novel) and those revealed in EBB's *PBC.* Yet

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[11] Linda Lewis, Karen Szmurlo, Madelyn Gutwirth, Ellen Moers, Avriel Goldberger and more have noted the influence of Germaine de Staël's work and life on later Romantic and Victorian women writers.
[12] She was in Paris the fall of 1815 with her parents.
[13] From a presentation in London on 11 November 2006.
[14] One can find roots of this discussion in Ellen Moers regarding the importance of de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* and its influence on EBB's *Aurora Leigh*. See also Gardner Taplin's biography of EBB, the introduction to *Aurora Leigh* by Cora Kaplan, Marjorie Stone's book-length treatment of EBB; Angela Leighton also traces *Corinne*'s influence on Victorian women poets, including EBB. For a specific treatment of the novel's influence on EBB as a writer, see "*Corinne* and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning" by Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet. Linda Lewis's recent work on the influence of de Staël, and George Sand (whose first name was Aurore), on Victorian women artists also attends to the connection between *Corinne* and *Aurora Leigh*.

given the wide-ranging impact of the novel, EBB's enjoyment and endorsement of its worth, and the Italian connection between the works and the authors, it is a relationship that should be explored.

The Dream of a United Italy

Corinne, or Italy and *Poems Before Congress* both do a great deal to "recover" a united Italy and support reuniting the peninsula. In her title, de Staël calls the nation "Italy" as if it was one united country rather than many small states ruled by multiple foreign governments.[15] Through the character of Corinne, de Staël also shows a united feeling within the peoples of Italy as they support Corinne as an artist—she is universally celebrated whenever she travels through the peninsula as an important and beloved *Italian* artist and indeed claims that is one of the reasons she chose Italy (over England) as a home: "I acknowledge… that this enthusiasm for talent is one of the main reasons I am so fond of this country" (de Staël 104). When she is near death, she also thanks Italy as a liberal nation: "You have allowed me glory: you, the liberal nation that does not banish women from its temple…" (416).[16]

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[15] There is much that could be discussed regarding *Corinne, or Italy*—and the meaning of this title—is it a choice that must be made by Corinne or Oswald, are the character and the country one, is Italy feminized through this conjunction, is Italy a protagonist? The answer is yes to all, making the title of this novel as ambiguous and intriguing as *Poems Before Congress* (see Chapters Two and Three arguing for the multiple interpretations of this volume of poems).

[16] Further evidence of de Staël's liberal vision ("tragically rare") is her description of events in Ancona early in the novel in which she "mixed Greek, Catholic, and Jewish populations" (Goldberger xlvi; de Staël 12). EBB notably suggests in a poem from *PBC* ("Italy and the World"), not mentioned in this chapter, that an ideal world will no longer have distinctions such as "Jew nor Greek" nor will there be "England nor France!"—and that a successful unification of Italians will lead the way—suggesting another link between these works, but one which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

De Staël also unifies Italy through description. Part of the intrigue of (and difficulty in reading) *Corinne, or Italy* is its lengthy travelogue sections. But these serve as more than a chronicle of what visitors might want to see when in Italy. As Corinne travels around Italy, Rome especially, she helps Oswald see the greatness of Italian history through visits to great works of art and architecture. When she first captures Oswald's eye and interests in Book II, "Corinne at the Capitol,"[17] Corinne gives an improvised speech that begins: "Italy, thou empire of the Sun; Italy, to whom the world stands subject; Italy, cradle of learning, I salute thee. How many times the human race has fallen under thy sway, dependent on thy arms, thy arts, thy skies!" (de Staël 26). She praises a nation that is named as one despite its political divisions (and despite the reality of the false unification under Napoleonic rule). The remainder of the improvisation continues along this theme mentioning important Italian poets and artists, but most importantly, Corinne explores Italy as an independent state directly citing Dante (as well as others) as a "poet of Italian independence" (28). Corinne "carries out a prophetic mission to the people of Italy, reminding them of the greatness that was theirs once and would be again were they a free and united people" (Goldberger xxxii). In a letter she writes to Oswald, in Book VI, Section III, Corinne again defends and defines an "Italy" that is seen as a nation yet still oppressed and torn asunder by current political realities:

> You say what all foreigners say about Italians, what seems to strike them at the outset. But to judge a country that was so great at various moments of history, one must probe deeper. How is it that under the Romans this was the most military of nations; among the medieval republics, the most jealous of

[17] A chapter alluded to in multiple poems by British women poets including Felicia Hemans ("Corinne at the Capitol"), L.E.L. ("The Improvisatrice"), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (*Aurora Leigh*).

> her freedom; in the sixteenth century, the most illustrious in letters, science, and the arts? Has she not pursued glory in all its forms! And if she no longer has any, why not blame her political situation, since in other circumstances she proved so different from what she is today? (100-1)

Corinne directly addresses the fact that Italy is a country divided and wrongly so. In conversation with her guests, even as she decries the lack of legitimate Italian theater, she sends a political message suggesting why a national culture has struggled to establish itself in some ways. She speaks to her *salon* audience including Oswald: "Division of a country into states normally favors freedom and happiness, but it is harmful to Italy…. Elsewhere governmental authority represses the individual impulse. In Italy that authority would be welcome if it fought the ignorance of states that are separated and of men who are isolated from one another" (118).

De Staël first traveled to a united Italy when she was exiled by Napoleon I from Paris, (ironically, it was an Italy united under Napoleon I in 1804). It is through these travels that she was to gather her information for *Corinne, or Italy*. She tirelessly sought experience and exposure to Italian art, literature, language, and landscape, traveling with August Wilhelm von Schlegel (among others). She visited Rome again in the spring of 1805 after which she began writing the novel. EBB's time in Italy was far more extensive than de Staël's, EBB having moved there shortly after her marriage to Robert in 1846 and ending with her death in 1861. Between her first residence and her death in Florence in June 1861, she spent a great deal of time in France and some short periods in England as well, but while in Italy, she regained a remarkable health that had eluded her in England, gave birth to a robust son, traveled extensively, and produced some of the more politically potent and remarkable works

of her career. EBB became an avid proponent and active supporter of the Italian *Risorgimento*—much of this support is manifest in *Casa Guidi Windows*, which traces the Italian movement to unite in 1848 and is most explicit in *Poems Before Congress*, poems directly supporting the war of 1859 and the unification of Italy. *Aurora Leigh*, published between these two works, ends happily in an Italy which allows for Aurora's professional and personal fulfillment (unlike Corinne's fate—but very like EBB's real life)—an Italy that heals. Italy, in these major works of EBB's Italian years, is portrayed as a victim, a beautiful woman in need of rescue, a strong nation in need of a unifying force to rise again, a nation that deserves help and recognition, but Italy is also a place of immense freedom for women. This has been discussed extensively in reference to *Aurora Leigh* and to the woman speaker who tells the tale of Italian politics from the windows of Casa Guidi, but the women of *Poems Before Congress* live in a world much like these early worlds EBB created and not unlike that of de Staël's Italy. The result of EBB's work in *PBC* is similar to de Staël's novel in that she advocates the greatness of a united Italy, supports an Italy striving to unite politically, and portrays women who "speak out" when it's necessary, despite the consequences.

"The Dance" and Corinne: Physical Politics

Significantly, in *PBC*, EBB creates four women speakers who mirror the experiences of Corinne. Four poems prominently feature women: "The Dance," "A Tale of Villafranca," "A Court Lady," and "A Curse for a Nation." Each poem features a woman in an intriguing position politically. They knowledgeably discuss Italian affairs defining and defending

political action—and in the act of speaking, they take political action—connecting to moments in Corinne's story.

"The Dance," the second poem in the volume, appears, at first glance, to be a socially-oriented, domestic, and benign reaction to the military situation of 1859. A Florentine woman, riding through the Cascine[18] in her carriage, suggests a dance with French soldiers (in an act of gratitude for their involvement in the war). The Florentine men not only approve the act, they embrace it literally with a kiss given to the French soldiers. Transcending the traditionally male arena of war with her public speech and her sexually-charged political offer of liaison, the woman speaker turns her speech into action. She upsets the historically narrow roles of men and women in politics, as the men become involved in an international relationship at *her* suggestion. In a public place, a woman initiates a link between two nations in support of one nation's freedom. The relationship she creates mirrors that of battlefield conditions making "The Dance" an exchange of more than social meaning. It mimics a bravado that is often needed to succeed in war. To complicate matters, though, the dance is also a sexualized act in which women are the barter between two men to seal a victory, a political connection. The woman here, rather than brokering a political and social relationship through men in private for her daughter as many women did, creates a public political alliance for all. She speaks to all and publicly directs the action.

The woman who suggests that Italian women dance with French officers is the "noblest lady present" (any woman *not* of noble birth would not have been able to make such a suggestion):

> Then the noblest lady present took upon her

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[18] The Cascine was a public park-like area in Florence for strolling, taking carriage rides, listening to music, dancing, etc.

To speak from her carriage for the rest;

'Pray these officers from France to do us honour

By dancing with us straightway.'—The request

Was gravely apprehended as addressed. (23)[19]

The crowd is "startled" by the suggestion, but they make a circle within which the dancers may move. They are silenced by the gesture of the dance: "some lips trembled" (23). It's an unexpected event, at the least; at the most, it is stunning. What happens as they dance, though, is described in sensual terms:

They danced there till the blue that overskied us

Swooned with passion . . .

And the mountains, heaving mighty hearts beside us,

Sighed a rapture in a shadow, to dilate,

And touch the holy stone where Dante sate. (24)

The dance *is* sexual: the sky "swooned with passion," the mountains heaved, "sighed a rapture… to dilate"—the very essence of Nature is overwhelmed by the dancing. Dante was one of the most important Italian poets advocating an independent and united Italy—that the sexuality is connected to Dante's stone[20] turns the sexuality explicitly political by connecting the act of dance to Italian freedom and the *Risorgimento*. The dance is a battle for freedom acted out by men and women—this battlefield is different that the one occupied by men only, as the woman is the catalyst by which men are connected in this battle. The woman claims the power to maneuver troops and dictate events. She is the general, the men and other

[19] I have kept all the single quotation marks as EBB used them in the poems.

[20] Dante's stone is near the cathedral in Florence's Piazza del Duomo—Porter and Clark mention that the Brownings passed it every day while out for carriage rides. It is alleged to be a site where Dante frequently sat while in Florence.

women her soldiers. Together they all bond to fight against the Austrian troops that had occupied Florence in years past, and who were the current enemy of both Italian and French troops.

After the dance, the French men return the women to "their kinsmen of the south"—until an overpowering "overflowing feeling" moves the Italian men to kiss "the martial strangers mouth to mouth" (24):

> Then the sons of France bareheaded, lowly bowing,
>   Led the ladies back where kinsmen of the south
> Stood, received them;--till, with burst of overflowing
>   Feeling . . . husbands, brothers, Florences' male youth,
>   Turned, and kissed the martial strangers mouth to mouth.[21]

Katherine Montwieler suggests that the "The Italian women… initiate a romance with the French soldiers that their husbands and brothers willingly complete"; she further notes that the women "use their bodies as liaisons between the two nations" (302). This sexuality is present, to be certain, between the women and men, and between the men themselves. Because the men are soldiers, the sexuality of the act becomes political and moves the dance to a martial level mimicking battlefield conditions in which all fight for a just cause.

The end of the poem sees all united through reverent cheers for a sexual, political, physical, martial, and finally, inevitable unification:

> And we felt as if a nation, too long borne in

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[21] Montwieler writes that the kiss represents a "homo-erotic union" between the French and Italian men (302); yet, the kinship that binds participants in military or political action could be seen as homo-social—there's certainly a homosexual history within military history to support such examination. Also see Scheinberg's reading of "mouth to mouth" in poems published by EBB before *PBC,* in annotations for this poem in Chapter 5.

By hard wrongers, comprehending in such attitude
That God has spoken somewhere since the morning,
That men were somehow brothers, by no platitude,
Cried exultant in great wonder and free gratitude.

The crowd is "exultant" which seems both sexual and martial—it is a climax *and* a battle won. The woman speaker has achieved something remarkable with her one multi-meaning gesture: through a simple dance, she has given Italians a chance to unite with the help of France (which was indeed the reality of the war of 1859). She is the initiator of this action sealing the relationship that allowed Italy to seek its independence and freedom from oppressors. The dance is a sexual, military, and political act—powerfully perpetrated by a woman in public and with God's blessing: He had "spoken somewhere since the morning" in seeming support of this act instigated by a woman.

Corinne, too, dances—making sexual and political connections—in public. She does not initiate the dance, as the woman in "The Dance" does, but she is a public artist—an *improvisatrice*. She participates in a demonstration of a dance that parallels the sexual tension between men and women and subtly echoes the struggle of nations to seek and find their own liberty.

Shortly after meeting Oswald, both he and Corinne are present at a ball. Corinne is asked to dance the Tarantella[22] with a local Prince. Surprising and disturbing to Oswald, she accepts immediately (he unfavorably compares her acceptance to that of women in England who would require multiple requests before reluctantly assenting). The Tarantella in this

[22] Named after Taranto in Southern Italy, the tarantella is an old dance (Middle Ages or older) connected to the bite of a tarantula, the cure of which was supposed to be frenetic dancing. It is a dance for couples and is today often performed at weddings.

story is identified as Neopolitan, but it has variations among the peoples of Southern Italy and Sicily. Its legend is varied, but it often represents a sexual relationship between a man and a woman, a partnership—a shifting of dominance and submission throughout the dance (as the woman in "The Dance" was both dominant in directing action, but submissive in dancing and being led back to the Italian men—the woman in the Tarantella is object *and* subject). Tarantellas are quick and dynamic dances, much more staccato than the sensual seemingly slower dance in "The Dance," but just as full of a sexual and sensual tension. Corinne and an Italian prince dance, with Corinne first kneeling as the prince dances around her; "there is a moment" writes de Staël, "when the woman kneels while the man circles round her, not as master but as conqueror" (93)—an important distinction, perhaps, because a conqueror earns the right to dominance through battle as opposed to a master who may assume the right of power without earning it, such as in the relationship between a master and slave. In the Tarantella, the woman also conquers the man at the end of the dance, when the man kneels and the woman circles around him. At the conclusion of the dance, with the prince kneeling, Corinne calls to him to stand—thus the partnership is completed (93). Together, Corinne and the prince complete the dance, not unlike the partnership that forms in "The Dance" where multinational men and women are connected via a physical gesture. The Tarantella in *Corinne, or Italy*, has less overt political connotations than "The Dance" (it's not explicitly war time in Corinne's Italy[23]), but Corinne's dance does suggest the political realities of a woman's place in social contexts—and through dance, a woman can claim power that is personal and political creating a partnership with a man. And by specifically

[23] There is an English battleship that Corinne and Oswald visit for a Sunday service at one point implying that there is some kind military action on the periphery of the novel's main story; however, no French troops are mentioned as occupying Italy anywhere in the novel—one of the omissions that irritated Napoleon I (Goldberger xxxii).

naming an *Italian* dance with sexual connotations, de Staël puts Corinne in a position to demonstrate her sexuality—and the open joy with which she embraces her life in Italy. As well, the dance displays her political alignment with Italian culture and life—for her sexuality *is* essentially political. Corinne always works within a position in which she is interchangeable with Italy as the title of the novel indicates. Corinne's freedom and liberty are Italy's.

Corinne is fully aware from the beginning of her relationship with Oswald that the political realities of society dictate how he will view her (from his English perspective)—she works both with that and against it as she struggles with her personal and professional liberty that would be sacrificed if she chose to live in England.[24] There is no question that English society is more restrictive than Italian society as portrayed in this novel. Corinne's story is as much about restrictive gender roles as it is a battle between those roles and between national mores and values that dictate those roles. Her battle in this dance is a vivid example of the freedom she enjoys and a powerful battle (as real as that of the war of 1859) to proclaim her right to liberty. Like the woman and others in "The Dance," Corinne with her French and Italian audience achieves an exultant moment. She dances in public, in a sexually-charged dance to exhibit her liberty joining together her English and Italian heritage into one multinational persona.

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[24] Oswald reacts with pain and anxiety over Corinne's tarantella—actually moving away from her after she finishes the dance—while the Italians and French present at the ball congratulate her on her grace and talent, celebrating her triumphant physical act (93).

"A Tale of Villafranca" and Corinne: Domesticity and Politics

Next to the bold and public action of the woman in "The Dance," and Corinne's performance in the Tarantella, the woman in "A Tale of Villafranca" (the third poem of *PBC*—immediately following "The Dance"), tells a mother's perspective of the peace treaty made between the French and Austrian emperors in the summer of 1859 and the bitterness with which it was received in Florence. Through this tale, a mother tells her Florentine son of great deeds that were attempted but thwarted by short-sighted statesman. She dares to judge both Italian and European leaders who failed to help Napoleon III achieve the desired aim of Italian unity (not *his* sole aim, but he certainly facilitated Italian nation-building through his actions). In this poem, a woman affects the future by telling her son, a male member of the younger generation, a perceived political truth. Not only does this young man receive information about a military and political situation from a woman, but presumably, he learns that it is right and good that women should share this kind of information with their children—a different conception of a mother's function than a traditional Victorian notion of motherhood.

The mother tells of the missteps of politicians, judging them as they have judged Napoleon III's intervention:

> Then sovereigns, statesmen, north and south,
>
>   Rose up in wrath and fear,
>
> And cried, protesting by one mouth,
>
> 'What monster have we here?
>
> A great Deed at this hour of the day?
>
> A great just deed…

Absurd,—or insincere.' (27)

In a later stanza, the English are directly criticized for self-centered behavior; the volunteer rifle corps movement is mentioned as a form of nationalistic isolationism. Such a corps functions to save only a few—the volunteers do not think of helping anyone but their own national defense.[25]

A great Deed in this world of ours?
  Unheard of the pretence is:
 It threatens plainly the great Powers;
  Is fatal in all senses.
A just deed in this world?—call out
The rifles! be not slack about
  The national defences. (29)

Interestingly, the woman's son appears to be both English and Italian, making the mother either English *or* Italian, or like Corinne, she and her son may be both: "They say your eyes, my Florentine, / Are English : it may be" (30). The criticism of England and praise of the military action of Napoleon III in defense of Italy is powerful commentary by a woman. If the child is indeed part English and part Florentine, then the mother's political tutelage is especially powerful in this case—ensuring that the son will not look uncritically in the future upon political and military action having to do with both England and Italy. Like EBB's vision of herself at a "citizeness of the world,"[26] this child will not be nationalistic, but internationally aware, cosmopolitan, like Corinne. Corinne, as a child of one English parent

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[25] EBB's anti-British foreign policy as well as her harsh judgment of the rifle corps and its supporters is dealt with at length in other chapters.
[26] From a letter to her cousin John Kenyon, July 1851 (Kenyon 2:13).

and one Italian parent, possesses an international perspective that is broader than that of Oswald's narrower British notion of the world.

The woman speaker claims the right to tell of and judge these events. Ironically, though she renounces speech by suggesting she cannot continue speaking because of her grief. Presumably, though, she will be able to recover should political events allow great deeds to be fulfilled:

> Ah, child! ah child! I cannot say
> A word more. You conceive
> The reasons now, why just to-day
> We see our Florence grieve.
> Ah child, look up into the sky!
> In this low world, where great Deeds die,
> What matter if we live? (31)

The end of the poem is desperate but not without hope—it is only "just to-day" that they are grieving. The poem also ends with a question rather than a statement. It may indeed matter a great deal whether "we" live, if the child learns discerning political thinking from his mother. He may expect women to understand and participate in such discussion in the future. The hope might be that great deeds may one day be possible if women can tell these stories and if children can learn from them—the hope may also include who is allowed to tell political stories in the future. EBB gives us a portrait of a strong woman changing the future by claiming the right to speak and teach a male child beyond the bounds of domesticity, beyond motherhood, in the realm of the political.

Corinne also teaches beyond the sphere of domesticity. While she is not a mother, she is still a teacher with a profound effect on her niece, passing on her beliefs that women have a right to explore and expand their talent, that women have a right to speak out and develop as human beings in their own right. She affects the future of her world by her actions of speaking out and teaching, similar to the mother in "A Tale of Villafranca." There is hope for a better future if Corinne's message is heeded and acted upon by Juliette, her niece (the child of Oswald and Corinne's half-sister, Lucile). After visiting Corinne for the first time, Juliette reports that Corinne promises to "teach me everything she knows" (410-11). Corinne does, indeed, teach Juliette to develop her talent and to value it as well. Corinne as a magnificently-talented teacher, passes on what she must for the next generation to carry on a cosmopolitan existence, speaking many languages, understanding many cultures, developing the sensitivity to be open to all, closed to none, and free to choose. Juliette will be a legacy for Corinne, in the way the son will be for the mother in "A Tale of Villafranca"—both young people attain an awareness through a bitter lesson of what could have and should have been, but also aware of what can be.[27]

"A Court Lady" and Corinne: A Right to Political Speech

Moving away from the domesticity of the home with tales and knowledge shared among family members, the fourth poem in *PBC*, "The Court Lady," examines a noble woman's visit to a military hospital where many Italian men (and French) are ill or dying. While there, the court lady, never named,[28] bridges regional differences through her speech,

[27] It is this "legacy" of Corinne's that enacts the vicious and angry revenge at the end of book—discussed in the latter part of this chapter.
[28] This unnamed lady can more easily function in place of a feminized Italy as noted below.

suggesting all who fight for freedom are valued and have made a just sacrifice. She speaks to many soldiers from various regions in Italy and offers them words of hope. However, her words are not just words of prayer or sympathy. She "administers doses of political inspiration as well as gestures of kindness, comforting not as an altruistic sister of mercy" but something more nationalistic than that (Montgomery 305). This woman speaker asserts the right to proclaim a political state that unifies Italians and acknowledges the French political and martial connection with "Italian" patriots. She explicitly suggests all the men in the hospital, whether French or Italian, have fought in a just cause, and proclaims all Italians are one as a result of their battle—they are united with the help of France. As the woman moves through the hospital, she herself becomes a uniting figure. Indeed, the speaker is compared to Italy in a powerful simile:

> 'Art thou a Lombard,[29] my brother? Happy art thou,'
> she cried,
> And smiled like Italy on him: he dreamed in her
> face and died.

Maura O'Connor has written that Italy was feminized for English travelers through early 19th century literary metaphors and descriptions of Italy as oppressed by foreign rule, a damsel in distress (20). Here, though, while Italy is equated with this noble woman, it is a stronger Italy who speaks—not a victim at all, but a proactive, political voice. The court lady names the provinces of Italy and its ally, France, talking of the bravery of all soldiers fighting for Italy in the attempt to oust Austria from Italian soil. She claims the right to speak and to

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[29] Other Italian regions/cities mentioned include: Rome, Tuscany, Venice, Piedmont; the court lady praises Frenchman equally with Italian patriots from all over the peninsula, and she condemns Austria and Catholic church

speak with power about what is right regarding the war of 1859. With this simile in mind, we could rename this poem, "The Court Lady, or Italy" similar to de Staël's novel which also conflates a woman and Italy.[30] Italy is the salvation of Corinne (at least initially) but a victim of long-standing prejudice and misunderstanding by the English (as embodied by Oswald) and the subject of a long line of foreign rulers (including Napoleon I); Italy is a place of salvation where de Staël travels with beloved friends and family seeking a kind of healing from her Paris exile; Italy is also the literal salvation of EBB—where she flees from the north to recover her health. The Italy in which EBB lives, though, is still the victim of foreign rule (until the war of 1859).

At the end of the poem, the court lady speaks to a young soldier of Piedmont, the state under which Italy is eventually united.[31] She claims he has done "well," calling Piedmont "noble." Most significantly, though, EBB ends the poem with these lines:

> Back he fell while she spoke. She rose to her feet with a spring,—
>
> 'That was a Piedmontese! and this is the Court of the King.' (38))

The young soldier dies, and the woman claims that all in the hospital are in a "court" honoring the "king" of all the Italian states: Piedmont. The court lady asserts her right to speak out by declaring a political state, perhaps prefiguring the reality of Piedmont and its king who was poised to unite Italy when these poems were published.

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[30] It's interesting to think that Oswald "kills" Corinne (or Italy), just as England turns away from Italy in its hour of greatest need—in EBB's opinion. EBB writes negatively of English policy toward Italy throughout her letters while living abroad.

[31] Piedmont was widely recognized as a state with a long history of monarchy and independence from foreign rule (the House of Savoy had ruled Sardinia/Piedmont for hundreds of years until Italy unified under Victor Emmanuel—the King of Piedmont in 1859—when the events of the poem take place).

Corinne regularly asserts the right to speak about political matters in educating Oswald about Italy and in figuring Italy as a nation. As a member of the aristocratic class, like the court lady, she is allowed a certain kind of freedom needed to function as a political thinker and artist. She creates her own courts—salons—in which she is crowned as a benevolent ruler. Indeed, she is "crowned" at the Capitol in a very public manner as poets of old were crowned for their great popularity and achievement. She is essentially the center of a court of culture—hers and the public's. In this sort of court, she is free to declaim and declare in the unfolding of a vision of Italy she hopes Oswald will understand. Early on in the novel, she assumes that Italy had once been a nation by telling Oswald Italy has "not been allowed to be a nation for a long time" (36-7). When Oswald criticizes Italy's governments, Corinne explains Italy's situation: "Other peoples have borne a similar yoke… without the degree of imagination that leads to dreaming another destiny… '*We are slaves, but slaves who still quiver*, said Alfieri'" (59).[32] Later, she continues the explanation that while Italians may have faults, it is partly the foreign domination that is to blame:

> Throughout the ages, making this beautiful country a prey for their endless ambition, foreigners have conquered and torn her to shreds, only to reproach her bitterly for the faults of nations vanquished and torn to shreds! The Italians gave Europe the arts and sciences and now she turns their gifts against them, often contesting the last glory allowed nations without military strength and without freedom: the glory of science and the arts. (101)

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[32] Goldberger writes that de Staël is brave to quote Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803) in this novel as he was openly opposed to Napoleon I's troops as they marched into and overran Italy (423, n. 8). Alfieri is "said to have been the first Italian to assert the national will to become a nation-state" (Holt 23).

De Staël understood the nature of a divided Italy (despite its "uniting" under Napoleon I as King of Rome[33]) and has Corinne judge the nation, the people, the history, the art, the culture throughout the novel in her explanations to Oswald. Sometimes it is not a complimentary judgment (just as EBB sometimes suggested Italians could be stronger proponents of their own *Risorgimento*[34]). Through *Corinne*, de Staël takes a political stand, whether intended or not, which enables future readers to envision an Italy delineated and described by a woman. Even if the nation was figured as a victimized woman, through *Corinne, or Italy*, the nation is also shown to have an exuberant love of life, a healing joy, and innumerable important historical contributions to the arts and sciences. In *PBC*, EBB creates women who participate in seeking the political freedom of Italy and who judge current political situations—powerful and controversial women.[35] The most controversial, and perhaps the most powerful, woman in *PBC* is the speaker in the last poem of the volume. It is this last poem juxtaposed with the end of Corinne, that forms a most intriguing connection between de Staël's 1807 novel and EBB's 1860 volume of poetry. Both endings are ambiguous, angry, and fascinating.

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[33] In one of those fun twists of history, Napoleon I's conquering of the Italian peninsula actually laid some of the foundation for the Italian nation's reunification later on. He imposed a bureaucracy that forced diverse states to implement a level of similar government—one that transcended regional differences—to work together. The Napoleonic invasion, while largely destructive to Italy in general, did put in place a bureaucracy that "gave Italians their first indications of the benefits of unity" (Holt 25).

[34] See Part II of *Casa Guidi Windows*, for example.

[35] Indeed, EBB becomes a woman who participates in the pursuit of Italian freedom through her writing and through her life—she remains in Italy throughout the war and supports the effort financially, as well.

"A Curse for a Nation" and Corinne: Cursing "from the depths of womanhood"[36]

"A Curse for a Nation" appears last in *PBC*, but it is not explicitly related to the *Risorgimento*. Originally published in the U.S. in 1856,[37] this two-part poem is a direct condemnation of the institution of slavery and those who enable it to continue. In the first part, the "Prologue," an angel comes to visit a woman at night to tell her she must write a curse to send to a nation across the "Western Sea" (59). The woman protests that she is not able to curse her "brothers… across the sea"; however, the angel suggests it is by virtue of her love that a curse may come. The woman answers that her "heart is sore" for her "own land's sins" and lists several "sins"—offering additional proof that *she* cannot curse another land who sees sins in her own. But the angel persists saying that it is because the woman can "see and hate / A foul thing done *within* thy gate" that she must write a curse (61). The angel eventually wins, telling the woman she shall write on behalf of all women:

> Weep and write.
> A curse from the depths of womanhood
> Is very salt, and bitter, and good.

Immediately, the woman replies to the angel's determination:

> So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed,
> What all may read.
> And this, as was enjoined on me,

[36] See the stanza partially quoted below from "A Curse for a Nation" (61).
[37] First published in *The Liberty Bell* (Boston, 1856): 1-9, it is likely that English readers had not seen this poem before and would have believed it was naturally connected to the theme of the poems—the recent military and political events in Italy—and must therefore refer to England, especially given EBB's clear condemnation of British foreign policy in the preface to *PBC*. Although, a close reading shows that the woman speaker is clearly delineating between the "nation" cursed and her own (or EBB's own, as speaker and poet were often conflated in the reviews of this volume).

I send it over the Western Sea. (61)

The next part of the poem includes "The Curse" shaming the land across the "Western Sea" for what they have done to support and sustain slavery. Of the ten stanzas in this section, the first three give reasons for the curse, the last seven show what the curse will consist of—what will happen to the nation cursed. But each stanza in the curse section ends with: "This is the curse. Write." It appears that the curse is not just that uttered by the woman, but it is a curse suffered by her as well, the curse *is* what she has just written, but it is also a curse to write curses. The woman essentially becomes a slave to the angel/curse and must do as she is told. For example, the second stanza gives a reason for the curse:

Because yourselves are standing straight
in the state
Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves,—for this crime
This is the curse. Write. (62)

The woman suggests that this nation, freedom's most ardent "acolyte," deserves to be cursed for the hypocrisy of being founded on principles of liberty yet maintaining "bond-slaves."[38] But just as she states "this" is the curse—meaning what came just before, she follows with "Write." This one word suggests several possible interpretations: 1) there is more cursing to come; 2) it is an encouragement for the woman to continue; and 3) writing is a curse, too—after all, the woman mourns the fact that she is being forced to write this curse.

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[38] By using this particular term, EBB may have been covering both sorts of "slavery" that were then or had been part of the U.S. labor force: slaves and indentured servants.

The curse of womanhood might be good, but it is costly, apparently, to those who have to do the cursing.

After six stanzas describing what the cursed shall suffer, the final stanza implies that the most potent part of the curse, or the culmination of all previous cursing, is that those who are cursed will suffer from an awareness of their evil and *then* must go forth themselves to curse. The final line begins with "THIS" in small capitals to indicate an emphasis.

> Go, wherever ill deeds shall be done,
> Go, plant your flag in the sun
> Beside the ill-doers!
> And recoil from clenching the curse
> Of God's witnessing universe
> With a curse of yours.
> THIS is the curse. Write. (65)

The curse is partly that the cursed must in their turn, curse, *but* as in every other stanza, there is the matter of the confusing antecedent—"this." Does "THIS" refer to what was just written or what follows, or both? Because EBB includes "Write" at the end of this stanza, although it is the end of the poem and the woman does not write anymore, this particular "Write" may indicate that the curse was the writing and is to write. The angel assigns a cursed duty to the woman—the woman then assigns the same to those she curses. This may even be a reference to the fact that EBB felt that as a poet she must tell the truth as she saw it at all costs—including gambling with her reputation and future income with the publication of her works

on Italy—the curse of those who tell painful truths is that they risk alienation of their audience.[39]

"A Curse for a Nation," might seem like a strange choice to include with poems about Italian freedom, as it is not directly connected to the Italian question. While it was included in this volume at Robert Browning's suggestion, EBB says in a letter she included it willingly—and in another letter she playfully suggests it "fit" England in a way.[40] However, in terms of supporting freedom on many levels, this poem is an appropriate inclusion in this volume. The poem condemns those who steal individual freedom—and curses those who enslave.

One stanza even suggests the difficulty of European politics in 1859, with its many convoluted treaties, royal relationships, links to "empire," and older, feudal rule based on boundaries and ownership of land and peoples:

> Ye shall watch while strong men draw
>
> The nets of feudal law
>
> To strangle the weak,
>
> And counting the sin for a sin,
>
> Your soul shall be sadder within

---

[39] I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3 the risk EBB knew she was taking in publishing *PBC* and that it was her choice to do it anyway.

[40] Both letters are written just at the end of March and the beginning of April 1860 (Kenyon 2: 367; 375). Worth noting is the timing of the publication of "A Curse for a Nation" in *Poems Before Congress*—March 1860. The preface is dated: Rome, *February*, 1860. Throughout EBB's work on these poems (1859) and in their compilation, it can't have escaped EBB's attention that across the Atlantic, the U.S. was very likely going to experience civil war over slavery. She and Browning had many American friends in Rome and both were well aware of international affairs. Her publications for *The Independent* (after *PBC*), most notably a prose piece on the connections between Italy and America, show she is explicitly aware of U.S. politics. For more details on this, please see Chapters 5 and 6.

Than the word ye shall speak.

This is the curse. Write. (63)

Although this was written in the mid-1850s for a very different audience, this stanza's curse certainly could apply to those nations EBB believed did not come to the aid of Italy in its quest to oust foreign rulers and achieve unification. Marjorie Stone argues that EBB "is capable of writing a curse that can be recycled in different polemical contexts, yet lose none of its force" ("Cursing" 155).[41] Looking closely at other stanzas, too, one can find echoes of the political turmoil associated with oppressed peoples, not just slaves.[42] This below stanza certainly evokes visions of insulated isolationist nations cowering behind their borders—and does fit EBB's vision of England's treatment of Italy:

When fools cast taunts at your gate,

Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate

As ye look o'er the wall

For your conscience, tradition, and name

Explode with a deadlier blame

Than the worst of them all.

This is the curse. Write. (64)

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[41] See "Cursing As One of the Fine Arts: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Political Poems" for Stone's detailed exploration of the cursing found throughout EBB's poetry from her earliest works until her last.

[42] Please see the headnotes for this poem in Chapter 5 for more on the response to this poem. For instance, Leo Arinshtein writes in "'A Curse for a Nation': A Controversial Episode in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Political Poetry" that readers of the originally published poem "could not fail to understand that [EBB] meant those Americans who, forgetting their own condition before the Revolution, refused freedom to the Negro race"; but, despite that the poem has a "high level of generalization in the expression of her views letting the text open to other interpretations" (34).

"A Curse for a Nation," willingly placed at the end of this volume, suggests a purposeful ambiguity as there is no note included in *PBC* to explain the poem was published previously for an American audience. The nation cursed could be the U.S. and could be England and could be both. Blame is assigned, but it is a blame with an uncertainty—who is to blame, for what? The curse is clear enough—someone will suffer and they should, but who are "they"? Like the title, *Poems Before Congress*, in which "Congress" is open to interpretation, this poem is open to powerful connections to the Italian *Risorgimento*, whether originally intended or not. It is in EBB's nature as a poet to curse and to be sure the curse is resounding. The curse in "A Curse for a Nation" is indeed resounding; it is an angry ending, an aggressive indictment of wrong, an indignant curse.

Similarly, *Corinne, or Italy* ends with a curse and an exacting of revenge. The novel revolves around seeking and finding individual freedom—but that freedom is taken away from all characters. It is a novel about the kind of slavery that disallows humans the freedom to live as they might choose, a cultural and social as well as political slavery. The ending is a denunciation of the ways in which such slavery intrinsically molds beliefs that taint existence and narrow personal liberties. The slavish regard Oswald continues to have for English social and political institutions disallows his happiness which he seemed to have found in Italy with Corinne. Corinne found that freedom, happiness, and liberty she needed in Italy, but when she came into contact with the British Oswald, she lost what was most precious. Such a narrowly-figured existence, such as Oswald's, contaminates cosmopolitan relationships between people and nations which could be healthy, happy, and enriching. Like the woman speaker in "A Curse for a Nation," Corinne is cursed by her circumstances but also seems to assign blame where blame is due, cursing Oswald then seeking revenge for his

abandonment of her. In essence, Oswald's abandonment of Corinne mirrors England's abandonment of Italy, as EBB saw the situation and stated so clearly in her preface. The ending of *PBC*, through "A Curse for a Nation," is connected to the preface, connected to England's unwillingness to intervene where needed. It's a curse on any and all governments and people who watch suffering but do nothing to alleviate it. But the ending for *Corinne* especially shows the north as incompatible with the south, England abandons Italy, and Italy suffers for it.

Corinne, or Italy's ending is "meant to make the reader uneasy" (Goldberger xlii). It is a rapid finish, as "A Curse" is a harsh and quick cursing and condemnation—words are not minced nor is too much time taken for exposition. The final chapters of *Corinne, or Italy* are "remarkably effective in capturing our total attention for the relentless rhythm of the last sections which swells to almost epic proportions" (Goldberger xlvii). ("A Curse" is similarly absorbing and demanding—with the fire and brimstone ending of "THIS is the curse. Write.") For most of the novel, the interspersing of long sections of descriptive travelogue ensures the story crawls along in starts and stops. At the end, readers are entirely immersed in the saga of Corinne, Oswald, and Lucile as they come together while Corinne is dying, pining for Oswald's lost love, miserable over his inability to value her, no longer able to produce art nor appreciate the art around her. Oswald has abandoned Corinne and married her half-sister, Lucile. With their daughter, Juliette, they come to Italy for Oswald's health. While in Florence, Oswald arranges for Juliette to visit Corinne (he is denied her presence). Mentioned earlier, Juliette comes under Corinne's tutelage. It is in this relationship that Corinne most effects a change for the future—hoping Juliette will be able to develop her talents and skills without withering under a restrictive environment; but Corinne also uses

Juliette to punish Oswald for his past. Juliette plays a "Scottish air that Corinne had sung to Nelvil [Oswald]" (410)—taught to her by Corinne. When he hears his daughter sing the song, he is so affected he drops to his knees and weeps. Corinne has made Juliette promise to play the same tune every year on the same day—not a year will go by in Oswald's life without a reminder of his having loved and abandoned Corinne.

Eventually Lucile and Corinne are reconciled through Juliette. Corinne even begins to tutor Lucile in how to love Oswald more effectively by being like the Corinne of the past. Corinne even tells Lucile, "since I must die soon, my only personal desire is that Oswald find some traces of my influence in you and your daughter, and that at least he can never enjoy feeling without remembering Corinne" (413). It's clear Oswald must suffer and must assume blame for Corinne's demise. In a conversation he has with Corinne's best friend, Oswald states, "Then you find me guilty"; Count Castel-Forte replies, "Forgive me, but I think you are" (404). When Corinne finally dies, Oswald nearly goes mad: "[h]e was so wild they at first they feared for his reason and his life" (419). He follows the funeral procession from Florence to Rome and forsakes his wife and daughter for a time. Eventually he returns to them and England, but readers are left with more questions than answers in the last lines of the novel:

> The order and purity of Lord Nelvil's domestic life were exemplary. But did he forgive himself for his past behavior? Was he consoled by society's approval? Was he satisfied with an ordinary lot after what he had lost? I do not know, and on this score I wish neither to blame him nor to grant him absolution. (419)

There are several ways to think about this ending. First, one might be moved to ask: by whose standards is Oswald's domestic life exemplary? And if it is indeed "exemplary," then what is the purpose of the following questions except to undermine the very assignment of the term "exemplary"? Second, how could Oswald forgive himself for his past behavior? Doe he not suffer from intense guilt? He all but swoons when he hears his daughter play a song that Corinne played for him; he must ask Castel-Forte for his opinion (regarding Oswald's guilt)—if Oswald felt guilt free, would he have sought such judgment? Corinne says, toward the end, that she forgives Oswald, but if this is the case, then what of her desire for him to be reminded of her consistently through Lucile and Juliette? Avriel Goldberger writes of the ending and Corinne's supposed forgiveness:

> [D]oes she really forgive him? Are not all her dying efforts with Lucile… and Juliette gestures of defiance and revenge? Is not the child meant to carry on her work to new levels of triumph? Dead or alive, Corinne will be at the Nelvils' side so long as they live. The parents will see her in their child. Oswald will see her in Lucile as well. And if he can never forget her, can he ever dull the pain of his guilt or loss? Indeed *should* he be allowed any respite? (xlii-xliii)

Finally, the last two questions at the end of the novel raise the issue of Oswald's guilt and peace: "Was he consoled by society's approval? Was he satisfied with an ordinary lot after what he had lost?" Oswald's character initially might have been consoled by society's approval and satisfied with an ordinary lot, but perhaps not after having loved Corinne—perhaps not with her constant influence around him in Lucile and Juliette, always there to remind him of what he could have had but chose to throw away. Even if he is in England,

Italy will haunt Oswald. Perhaps. After reading the last "cruelly ambiguous" statement, which is "unexpectedly modern," it seems that as the narrator suggests, one cannot either blame or absolve, but it's tempting to weigh the evidence and pronounce Oswald guilty (Goldberger xlii). Like the ambiguous title, *Corinne, or Italy*, the ending is unsure, even if angry. Interestingly, *Aurora Leigh* does not end on such a note. It is not until *PBC* that a political anger explicitly pours forth in EBB's writing—that the volume is focused on Italy makes the comparison to *Corinne* compelling, especially given the relative inconclusiveness in both conclusions.[43]

EBB may not have been explicitly drawing a parallel between the end of the *Corinne, or Italy* by including "A Curse for a Nation" in *PBC*, but the power and ambiguity of both endings are stunning when read together. Both endings claim a great deal of power for women's judgment "from the depths of womanhood," social and political power that is based on the right to judge, to comment, and ultimately to seek justice through deed and word.

An "Italian" Poet

Throughout her life in Italy, EBB's letters are filled with news of Italian politics, and toward the end of her life, she frequently writes of the successful unification of Italy.[44] In the last year of her life, she wrote many poems with Italy and Italian politics featured

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[43] Even though such a connection goes beyond the scope of this chapter, it's important to note that "A Curse for a Nation" may very likely have been a work in progress at the same time as *Aurora Leigh*—both of these having been published in 1856.

[44] Technically speaking, not all Italian states were united as one when Victor Emmanuel assumed the title, King of Italy in early 1861, but it was a forgone conclusion that it was to take place eventually and soon.

prominently.[45] Just fourteen days before she died, in one of her last letters, she wrote to her sister of the coming national recognition of Italy, "The Italian Kingdom is to be recognized by France directly" (Lewis 2: 542). EBB created women, like de Staël's Corinne, who talked about Italy, who supported Italy, who created a modern Italian state—necessarily metaphorical—before it was a political reality.

As a poet of the Italian *Risorgimento*, EBB enacts Corinne's spirit and aligns herself with de Staël, who repeatedly attempts to explain Italy and literarily unify the peninsula through the character of Corinne and through the novel itself. *PBC* is an angry volume of poems that assigns blame to oppressors and ascribes praise to those who support one Italian nation. *Corinne, or Italy* is an angry novel that resonates in the women speakers of *PBC*. A reading of *PBC* can benefit from a reading of de Staël's novel—the link should be part of the analysis of EBB's Italian works, especially her last and most politically ambitious, *PBC*. Not only does EBB create women who enact the spirit of Corinne in this volume, she herself becomes a poet of the *Risorgimento*, a prophet of her people—her Italian people.[46] In so doing, EBB places herself, not within a poetess tradition, or even a poetic tradition, but in a literary political tradition. Linda Lewis asserts that *Corinne, or Italy* is a political novel that argued for "freedom and dignity for women, affirming the possibility of human political progress, and longing for a future of enlightened, united, energetic, and independent people" (*Germaine* 41). Through *PBC,* EBB claims a place on the political stage, and creates her role as Hero-Poet. But, through her creation and placement of women speakers in *PBC*, she

[45] See EBB's Italian poems in *Last Poems*, published posthumously, 1862. In Chapter 6, I suggest these have a powerful connection to *PBC*.

[46] EBB calls Italy, "my Italy," on multiple occasions, but in this particular letter to Henry Chorley, she suggests it is *her* country she has high hopes for in the ongoing war for liberty in 1859 (Kenyon 2: 352).

places herself, like de Staël, within a tradition of political commentary by, for, and about women.

CHAPTER 5

Poems Before Congress by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Critical Edition of *PBC*

Over the last one hundred and forty seven years, little attention has been paid to *Poems Before Congress* (1860). The poems in this collection are sometimes analyzed individually, and sometimes noted as a whole collection, or mentioned as the last in EBB's life that she published, but not reproduced nearly as often as or read with as much interest as "Sonnets from the Portuguese" or *Aurora Leigh*, for instance. Several things happened after publication of this volume that may have minimized the visibility or perceived worth of these poems to subsequent readers and scholars:

- Of the contemporary reviews, many were extremely negative, and of these disparaging reviews, several were in influential periodicals such as the *Athenæum*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and *Fraser's Magazine*.[1]
- EBB published very little in British periodicals in the next year (1860-1861). Only three poems were published in *Cornhill Magazine*: "A Forced Recruit at Solferino," "A Musical Instrument," and "Little Mattie." She was being paid handsomely for poems published regularly in *The Independent* (New York), which may account for her diminished publication in British periodicals. Had she published more for an English audience, the poems of *PBC* may have found a longer-lasting critical niche.
- *Aurora Leigh* was still selling well (in its fifth edition in 1860[2]) despite many highly disparaging critical reviews of *PBC*, and it continued to overshadow *PBC*

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[1] See Chapter 6 for more a discussion of and additional information for the nineteen reviews of *PBC* that appeared in British periodicals for 1860.

in sales and critical attention. By June of 1860, EBB had heard from her publisher (Chapman and Hall) that as well as suffering no loss of sales for *Aurora Leigh* due to *PBC, that* volume "was selling in spite of vituperation" (Heydon and Kelley 149). However, her death within a year and a half after *PBC* was published guaranteed "*that* volume" would not go into subsequent editions.

- EBB's death on June 29, 1861. The laudatory obituaries and posthumous reviews tended to gloss over *PBC* by naming it only as the last volume she published in her lifetime.
- The publication of *Last Poems* (1862) focused attention, within a year of EBB's death, on poems that were not as politically controversial as those in *PBC*. The content of many poems focused on Italian affairs in *Last Poems*, and while the volume did include some challenging poems, none directly criticized her homeland as *PBC* did. The author's death removed her somewhat from disapproving reviews that would have been seen as unchivalrous at the least.
- *PBC* was never again published as a volume, but only included in subsequent selected collections of EBB's work (such as Porter and Clark's massive collection from 1900). This slight volume may not have been seen as valuable poetically because it was so politically focused. Collections of EBB's works did not include substantial annotations for *PBC,* ensuring that these poems would stay mired in the political convolutions of mid-19th century European politics making the poems less attractive for modern readers. Thus, *PBC* became lost to modern

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[2] EBB writes to her friend, Fanny Haworth, that Aurora Leigh was "in the press for a *fifth* edition," in mid-1860 (Kenyon 2: 394).

> readers who need to know, while they are reading the poems, political, military, and social details of the time to fully appreciate EBB's frame of reference.

The critical treatment here of *PBC* attempts to change the perception of the poems as the least of EBB's works, challenge assumptions that EBB was too tired or ill at the end of her life to "read" the politics of her time correctly, and contextualize the poems, with deep and broad annotations to help modern readers find the value of EBB's commentary on current affairs, re-place her among the greatest poets of her age, and claim her as a biased, but confident and competent political interpreter.

I have tried to replicate the fonts and placement of text exactly as they appeared in the 1860 edition.[3] The preface and each poem contain substantial footnotes that contextualize, define, or illuminate content. Footnotes also contain variants for the two poems published prior to this volume: "A Tale of Villafranca" and "A Curse for a Nation." I have included brief notes before the poems discussing particular historical contexts and noting form/meter.

On Manuscripts and the Order of Poems

Three manuscripts exist that I know of—one manuscript, a printer's copy, I have personally seen at the University of Texas, Austin, at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC manuscript). It is bound in a notebook with notes to the printer. Another manuscript, a printer's copy bound with the printer's corrected proof, dated "Rome, February 1860" (the same as the preface to this volume), is held by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Rowena Fowler, the noted Victorian literature scholar, generously

[3] Figures 1-4 replicate pages from the 1860 edition.

shared her detailed notes on this manuscript with me (V&A manuscript).[4] This appears to be the last manuscript copy as it has directions for the order of the poems in which they finally appear (the same order as the HRC manuscript) and is bound with the printer's proof that corrects the order. The third manuscript is preserved at the Karpeles Manuscript Library in Santa Barbara, California (Karpeles manuscript).[5] Of the three, this last is the earlier manuscript of these poems judging from the substantial deletions, additions, and elaborate changes included.

The Karpeles manuscript appears to be bound with a cover sheet prepared by someone other than EBB or Robert Browning. I suspect it was a curator or previous owner of the manuscript. For example, the same hand that created the cover sheet with a table of contents, titled the last poem "The Curse for a Nation"—which was never its title.[6] Curiously, in this manuscript, in EBB's hand, the poem is titled "The human's curse" and in the first stanza the third line reads: "Write the human's curse for me" instead of what was published: "Write a Nation's curse for me."[7] The cover sheet to these pages also includes this text: "The original manuscript drafts of these poems. The complete series comprising:" then lists the poems in the order noted below. At the bottom of the page appears, "Also drafts of other poems which may be unpublished."[8]

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[4] I give my deepest thanks to Rowena Fowler for the gift of her original notes.

[5] I am grateful for the generosity of the Karpeles Manuscript Library for sharing with me a photocopy of this manuscript.

[6] In the 1856 version of this poem in *The Liberty Bell*, and in this volume the title of the last poem is "A Curse for a Nation."

[7] The Karpeles manuscript needs to be viewed and studied carefully as EBB's notes and changes appear to be in pencil or very light ink and are, in some places, only a ghost of what was written. A photocopy, while of immense interest to this study, is inadequate for determining manuscript variants.

[8] Part of "A Drama of Exile" is included in these manuscript pages, but looking at a photocopy it's impossible to tell difference in paper, age, or ink to determine if this page was

The final order of the poems in *PBC* is confirmed by looking at the V&A and HRC manuscripts. However, the order is different in the Karpeles manuscript (the provenance of which I do not know). See Table 2 for a comparison of the poem order from the three manuscripts.

Table 2: Manuscript Order Comparison

Karpeles manuscript order	**Final published order (V&A and HRC manuscripts)**
"Napoleon III in Italy"	"Napoleon III in Italy"
"A Tale of Villafranca"	"The Dance"
"Italy and the World"	"A Tale of Villafranca"
"A Court Lady"	"A Court Lady"
"Christmas Gifts"	"An August Voice"
"An August Voice"	"Christmas Gifts"
"The Dance"	"Italy and the World"
"The Curse for a Nation" [sic]	"A Curse for a Nation"

To read the poems in this order is to read a very different volume—despite the first and last poems remaining the same. EBB's final order, though, suggests her sensitivity to possible reader reaction by interspersing the more domestic matter with the highly political material. For instance, ultimately placing "The Dance" immediately after "Napoleon III in Italy" may have been an attempt to temper reader reaction to Napoleon with a poem that follows depicting a lovely scene in a park with dancing (it was one of the poems widely praised). Then "A Tale of Villafranca" is placed next—a poem that overtly criticizes various European

in any way connected with the poems from *PBC* or just a random slip of paper caught in with the other pages.

governments for forcing Napoleon to seek an early peace. Despite its domestic setting, it very much tackles the political subject of the disappointing peace. EBB next included "A Court Lady," which may have been placed in this spot to diffuse an unrelenting focus on politics by overtly showing a woman performing a "woman's" duty—visiting soldiers in the hospital. The satirical "An August Voice," follows "A Court Lady," focusing again on politics, but not in praise of political leaders. Instead, this poem ridicules most of the political leaders it mentions, most notably the Grand Duke Leopold II. Next, "Christmas Gifts," indicts the Pope for his lack of quality spiritual *and* secular leadership—fitting nicely with the critique of secular leaders in "An August Voice." Including "Italy and the World" after that and just before "A Curse for a Nation" may have been a strategy to allow the reader to experience two possible reactions: 1) relief that there is hope for a better future with better leaders; and 2) hope for a future that is unlike the world in the last poem—a world condoning and actively promoting slavery.

The final order also appears to be chronologically connected to the events of the year—or roughly connected, at least. Essentially put together as commentary throughout 1859, the poems make sense in their final order. In Table 3, poems are listed in the left column and their possible connection to actual events in the right.

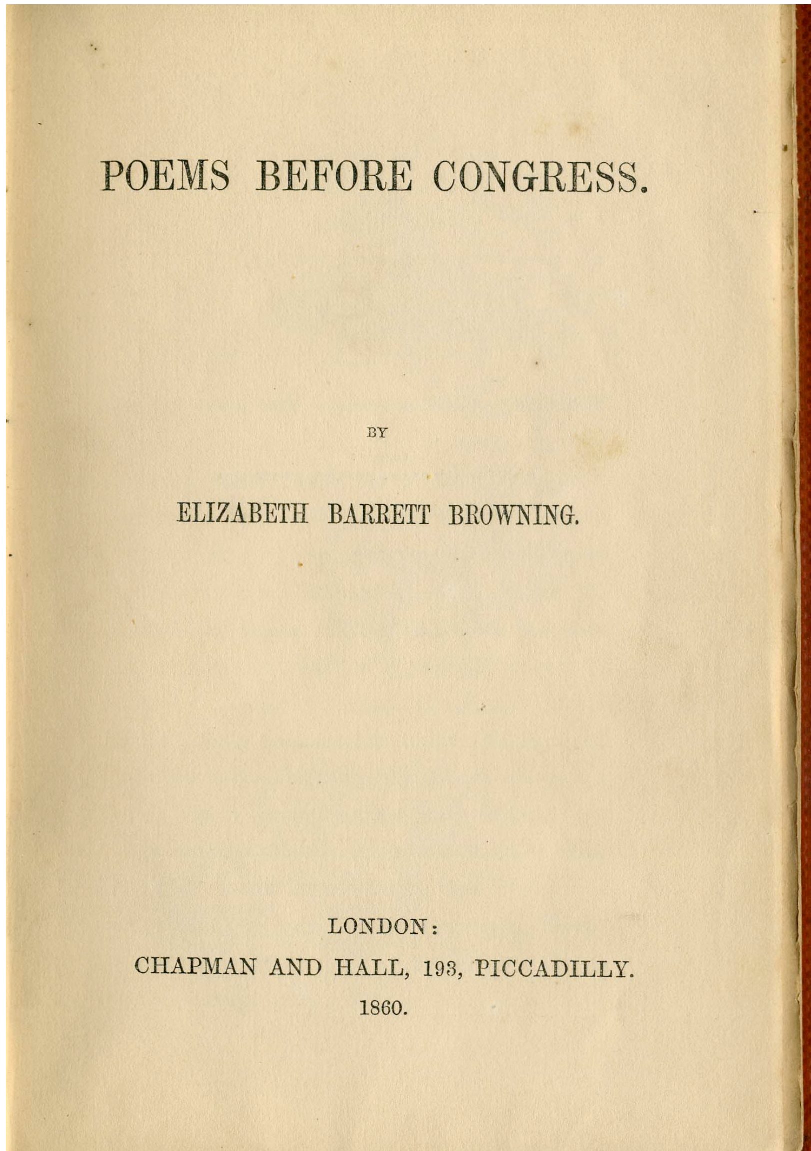
Table 3: Poems and Chronology of Events, 1859

Title of Poem	**Approximate Chronology**
"Napoleon III in Italy"	Notes a hopeful future, written before and/or during the actual war.
"The Dance"	Takes place during or just after the war when there is hope for a reunification.
"A Tale of Villafranca"	A disappointment after the war with an inadequate peace.
"A Court Lady"	A hopeful spin on the sacrifices of the war—during the war or just after.
"An August Voice"	Ridicule for leadership who allowed for a disappointing resolution to the war effort—takes place in August, post-peace.
"Christmas Gifts"	An twist on the real gifts Italy needs for Christmas—influenced perhaps by the pamphlet issued in December 1859, by Arthur de la Guéronniére (and mostly likely, Napoleon III), "Le pape et le congrés."
"Italy and the World"	A dream of what is possible as Italy is reuniting and will continue to unite—serving as a model for international cooperation and Christian brotherhood in the future.
"A Curse for a Nation"	A curse and condemnation for what can happen when governments condone slavery—of any kind. Perhaps a warning to readers to adhere to the dream of the previous poem, to avoid the heinous condition of government and people represented in this poem.

EBB certainly appears to have placed these poems in a very specific order, for a variety of possible reasons—to shock and stimulate readers, to temper sustained reaction, to mirror the actions of the previous year. Throughout the poems, though, EBB successfully praises and

blames as she deems necessary, warns of the dangers of short-sighted isolationist nationalism, curses slavery of all kinds, and elevates women and women poets to their rightful place as political commentators. Whatever her reasons, the order is carefully recorded in her final printer's proofs and the published volume enabling modern scholars to speculate for and debate with their own readers.

Figure 1: Title Page for *Poems Before Congress*



POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS.

BY

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1860.

The Preface

EBB was devastated emotionally and physically by the Peace Treaty of Villafranca—negotiated and signed by Emperor Napeoleon III of France and Emperor Franz Josef of Austria in the summer of 1859. But by August or early September she had recovered enough health and strength to write "A Tale of Villafranca" and request its publication in September. It is very likely that throughout much of 1859, she wrote some parts of the poems collected here. Certainly she began writing her ode to Napoleon early in 1859. In the month the volume was published, March 1860, she wrote to Robert's sister Sarianna that the collection was originally planned as a collaboration between herself and Robert:

> Robert and I began to write on the Italian question together, and our plan was (Robert's own suggestion!) to publish jointly. When I showed him my ode on Napoleon he observed that I was gentle to England in comparison to what he had been, but after Villafranca (the Palmerston Ministry having come in) he destroyed his poem and left me alone, and I determined to stand alone. What Robert had written no longer suited the moment; but the poetical devil in me burnt on for an utterance. I have spoken nothing but historical truths, as far as the outline is concerned. But the spirit of the whole, is, of course, opposed to the national feeling, or I should not in my preface suppose it to be offended. (Kenyon 2: 368-69)

EBB attempts to mitigate a possible negative reading through the preface but seems to assume here that British readers will notice the "spirit of the whole" is opposed to the "national feeling" and be offended. In June 1860, a letter to a friend shows that she is still thinking, months after *PBC* was published, about what had "burnt for an utterance" and

affirms that it was worth saying. She writes to Eliza Oglivy acknowledging that *PBC* may be offensive to some, that the critics did not like it generally, but that it had to be done anyway:

> In sending a few copies of my book to you & some friends, I felt as if I might be offending unaware. But you have forgiven me my gift. Thank you. Not so, have I fared with the English press, by which I am declared renegade & unnatural sinner, in all sorts of type. I dont [sic] know if you have access to the newspapers & periodical publications, to be aware with what great ferocity these dogs of war have been up & at my little book. And now that its [sic] pretty well over, I am still alive, & feeling considerably relieved in having spoken out the word that burnt in me. Whether truth or not, to you, it was truth to me—& the reception found for it in England simply confirms me in the belief that it is God's truth as well as mine. If the consciences of men had been in a less morbid state, there would have been less irritation & more temper & justice towards a writer who could only be disinterested in her view. (Heydon and Kelley 149)

Here EBB reiterates her position in the preface—she only wrote the truth as she saw it. Yet this isn't the first instance in which EBB rhetorically shaped a preface to temper what she believed would be less than positive critical reception. Simon Avery argues that EBB often used "introductions, prefaces, and advertisements as ways of offsetting potential criticism from the reading public and literary establishment," contextualizing her work as simple reactions to the events of the time. "For as she might have seen it," Avery continues, "if she openly admits her limitations as she thinks others might see them, then how can she

be held to account for the more subversive views which may be presented?" (160).[9] To be sure, EBB was a fully skilled writer and rhetorician who chose her words carefully, whether in poem or preface.

[9] See also Vivienne Rundle's work on EBB's prefatory writings (1996). She does not treat the preface in *PBC* with any kind of depth as she focuses on earlier works by EBB, but her analysis is useful if extended to this particular preface. For example, she suggests EBB's prefaces "accomplish a three-fold design, addressing her relationships with her father, with her readers, and with the poetic tradition within which she was attempting to situate herself" (247). The first of these is not overt in *PBC's* preface (EBB's father was dead when the poems were written and published), but the final two *are* relevant. EBB does work with her preface to manipulate reader response, and she does justify poetic insertion in politics, although not explicitly as part of a tradition. But looking under the surface to who her literary heroes were, it is apparent that she aligns herself with poets who were politically active, such as Byron.

PREFACE.[10]

These poems were written under the pressure of
the events they indicate, after a residence in Italy
of so many years, that the present triumph of great
principles is heightened to the writer's feelings by
the disastrous issue of the last movement, witnessed
from "Casa Guidi Windows" in 1849.[11] Yet, if the
verses should appear to English readers too pun-
gently rendered to admit of a patriotic respect to
the English sense of things, I will not excuse
myself on such grounds, nor on the ground of my
attachment to the Italian people, and my admiration
of their heroic constancy and union. What I have
written has simply been written because I love truth
and justice *quand même,*[12]—"more than Plato" and
Plato's country,[13] more than Dante and Dante's

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[10] All the line breaks and small-capped letters/words in this preface as well as in all the subsequent poems appear exactly as they do in the 1860 first edition of *Poems Before Congress*. Original page breaks and page numbers are noted in square brackets, e.g., [page 1], at the beginning of the text from that page. Facing pages are not indicated.

[11] *"Casa Guidi Windows" in 1849*. In this long poem EBB describes, in Part 1, her exuberant view of the celebration of the liberal reforms granted as a result of the first Italian War of Independence, 1847-49. Part 2 of *Casa Guidi Windows* (*CGW*) illustrates the dashed hopes of those longing for a *Risorgimento*: in 1849, the Italians were defeated at Novara, enabling the return of Austrian dominance over most northern Italian states. After Novara, Charles Albert, king of Sardinia/Piedmont, abdicated in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel, leaving this kingdom as the only region in northern Italy ruled by an Italian monarch and government. In *CGW*, EBB interrogates the leadership of European nations and the Roman Catholic church, and finds them all wanting. Originally published in 1851, *CGW*, is "in actuality, one of the most detailed accounts of the political happenings in Florence in 1847 and 1849 that has come down to us" (Markus xxx). She was viewed by prominent Italians at the time this poem was published to have understood the politics of the time: "both Francesco Guerazzi, dictator of the Roman Republic, and the revolutionary republican Giuseppe Mazzini contacted her on the publication of *Casa Guidi Windows* to praise her support of unification – despite the fact that neither of them is depicted very positively in the poem" (Avery 175).

[12] *quand même*. Above all; EBB uses this phrase in a letter to her friend Isa Blagden written after the publication of *PBC*: "I don't sell my soul to Napoleon, and applaud him *quand même*" (Kenyon 2: 273-74).

[13] *Plato's country*. EBB was a supporter of the "19th-century struggle for Greek independence" in early poems, published when she was fifteen, "Stanzas, Excited by Some Reflections on the Present State of Greece" and "Thoughts Awakened by Contemplating a Piece of Palm Which Grows on the Summit of the Acropolis at Athens." In another poem (published at eighteen), "Stanzas on the Death of Lord Byron," EBB also shows her support

country,[14] more even than Shakespeare and Shake-
speare's country.[15]

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And if patriotism means the flattery of one's
nation in every case, then the patriot, take it as
you please, is merely a courtier; which I am not,
though I have written, "Napoleon III. in Italy."[16]
It is time to limit the significance of certain terms,
or to enlarge the significance of certain things.
Nationality is excellent in its place; and the
instinct of self-love is the root of a man, which
will develope into sacrificial virtues. But all the
virtues are means and uses; and, if we hinder their
tendency to growth and expansion, we both destroy

---

of the Greek effort. (Taylor and Stone forthcoming). My thanks to Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor for an early look at their selected works of EBB forthcoming from Broadview Press.

[14] *Dante's country.* EBB mentions first Dante, then Shakespeare in a nod to Carlyle's use of these two writers as models of the "Hero as Poet" in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic Through History* first delivered as a series of six lectures in 1840, then published as a volume in 1841. EBB wrote to Miss Mitford that "I am an adorer of Carlyle" in 1842 (Kelley 5: 281). EBB also mentions Dante and his "stone" (located in Florence) in both *CGW* (Markus 19) and *PBC* (24). See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth exploration of *PBC* and Carlylean heroics.

[15] *Shakespeare's country*. EBB wrote to Mrs. Martin (December 1859) echoing the words here in what reads like a justification of her support for the Italian cause as one that is beyond national ties: "I love truth and justice, or I try to love truth and justice, more than any Plato's or Shakespeare's country" (Kenyon 2: 359). The preface is dated February 1860—an indication that EBB may have looked back to her letter for inspiration or that she was writing both at nearly the same time. See Chapter 2 for a detailed comparison of this letter to the preface.

[16] *"Napoleon III. in Italy."* The first poem in this volume, an ode, champions the French emperor, Napoleon III, for his support of the Italian cause—with financing and troops. At that time, it may have appeared to some that Napoleon III's insertion into the Italian revolt from Austrian rule was motivated by good intention alone. But without question Bonapartism had at its core "military greatness and martial display," and "Napoleon's particular objectives appear to have been to 'restore France to its proper rank' as the pre-eminent European power, by destroying the 1815 peace treaties and securing the natural frontiers on the Alps and Rhine, and to ensure the pacification of Europe by means of its reconstruction on the basis of its major nationalities" (Price 406). Later, EBB would find, as many others had known or suspected all along, that Napoleon had his own political and territorial agenda, but it cannot be denied that his intervention did make the difference in eventual Italian reunification (Martin *Red Shirt* 531).

them as virtues, and degrade them to that rankest
species of corruption reserved for the most noble
organisations. For instance,—non-intervention in
the affairs of neighbouring states is a high political
virtue; but non-intervention does not mean, passing
by on the other side when your neighbor falls
among thieves,—or Phariseeism would recover it from
Christianity. Freedom itself is virtue, as well as
privilege; but freedom of the seas does not mean
piracy, nor freedom of the land, brigandage; nor
freedom of senate, freedom to cudgel a dissident
member,[17] nor freedom of the press, freedom to
caluminate and lie.[18] So, if patriotism be a virtue

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indeed, it cannot mean an exclusive devotion to
one's country's interests,—for that is only another
form of devotion to personal interests, family
interests, or provincial interests, all of which, if

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[17] *nor freedom of the senate, freedom to cudgel a dissident member*. Refers to U.S. Senator Charles Sumner, a vehement and unapologetic abolitionist. In 1856, he gave a speech that severely criticized fellow senate member, Andrew Pickens Butler. In retaliation, Congressman Preston Smith Brooks, Butler's nephew, caned Sumner in the Senate chambers. Sumner was seriously wounded and spent several years in Europe recovering. It was while he was in Italy that EBB met him. He wrote out some lines from *Casa Guidi Windows* and then gave them to EBB who added, "Given to me Mr. Sumner of the United States—EBB. Rome. 1859." (Harvard University ms. L243). The Brownings spent the winter of 1859 in Rome. EBB also mentions him in a letter to Anna Jameson (14 May 1859): "Yesterday we dined at the Storys to bid farewell to Mr. Sumner who goes today to Turin" (Armstrong Browning Library ts. 59132). The Brownings had moved back to Casa Guidi in Florence by 30 May 1859. This reference to Sumner might have signaled to readers a connection between the content of this preface and the inclusion of the poem, "A Curse for a Nation" (a direct criticism of American slavery), in a collection of poetry otherwise about the fight for Italian independence.

[18] *nor freedom of the press, freedom to calumniate and lie*. Such charges may be directed toward *The Times*, a publication for which EBB nursed an active disdain and for which she held little respect. In early 1859, she writes to her sister that "the Times takes it politics from the place where it takes its morals… which is the lowest place" (Lewis 2: 395). In a letter from late 1859, she writes to a friend in England, "You cannot judge the people or the question out of the 'Times' newspaper, whose sole policy is, it seems to me, to get up a war between France and England, though the world should perish in the struggle. The amount of fierce untruth uttered in that paper, and sworn to by the 'Saturday Review,' makes the moral sense curdle within one" (Kenyon 2: 359). In another letter, she calls it "that black-hearted Times newspaper" (Lewis 2: 422).

not driven past themselves, are vulgar and immoral
objects. Let us put away the little Pedlingtonism[19]
unworthy of a great nation, and too prevalent
among us. If the man who does not look beyond
this natural life is of a somewhat narrow order,
what must be the man who does not look beyond
his own frontier or his own sea?

I confess that I dream of the day when an
English statesman shall arise with a heart too
large for England, having courage in the face of
his countrymen to assert of some suggested policy,
—"This is good for your trade: this is neces-
sary for your domination; but it will vex a people
hard by; it will hurt a people farther off; it will
profit nothing to the general humanity: therefore,
away with it!—it is not for you or for me."
When a British minister dares speak so, and
when a British public applauds him speaking,
then shall the nation be so glorious, that her

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praise, instead of exploding from within, from loud
civic mouths, shall come to her from without, as
all worthy praise must, from the alliances she has
fostered, and from the populations she has saved.

And poets who write of the events of that time,
shall not need to justify themselves in prefaces, for

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[19] *little Pedlingtonism*. A two-volume satire by John Poole (1786?-1872), *Little Pedlington* (1839, 1852), is about the village of Little Pedlington and the Pedlingtonians who are the embodiment of dishonesty, hyperbole, cynicism, and egotism. EBB's use here suggests that wherever these traits arise, there is a little bit of Little Pedlington. In a letter to Mrs. Martin (December 1859), EBB writes that "Because I have broken through what seems to me the English 'Little Pedlingtonism,' am I to be supposed to take up an Italian 'Little Pedlingtonism?'" (Kenyon 2: 358-59). She mentions John Poole as early as 1843 in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford referring to a text EBB had been reading: "… all this [reading] did really & irrepressibly remind me of the glories of 'Little Pedlington' as chronicled by Poole" (Kelley 8: 27). Again in 1844, EBB mentions Poole in a letter as the author of "'Little Pedlington'" and suggests he is a contributor to *Punch*, though the editors of the *Brownings' Correspondence* found no evidence to confirm this assertion (Kelley 9: 174; 175, n. 3).

ever so little jarring of the national sentiment,
imputable to their rhymes.

ROME, *February*, 1860

Figure 2: Table of Contents for *Poems Before Congress*

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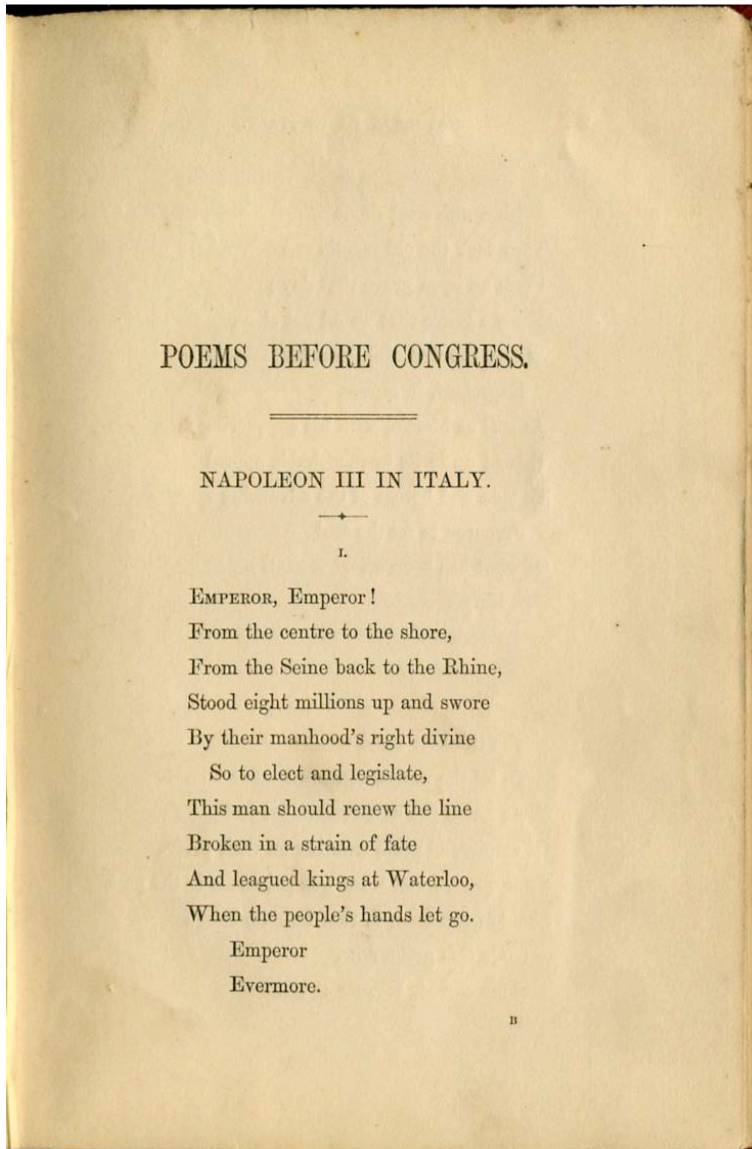
Figure 3—Page 1 of *Poems Before Congress*



POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS.

NAPOLEON III IN ITALY.

I.

EMPEROR, Emperor!
From the centre to the shore,
From the Seine back to the Rhine,
Stood eight millions up and swore
By their manhood's right divine
So to elect and legislate,
This man should renew the line
Broken in a strain of fate
And leagued kings at Waterloo,
When the people's hands let go.
Emperor
Evermore.

B

"Napoleon III in Italy"

EBB may have found inspiration for the title of this poem from a pamphlet, "*L'Empereur Napoléon III et l'Italie*," written by Arthur de la Guéronniére (with Napoleon III's approval and likely help). The pamphlet was meant to create public sympathy for a possible Italian invasion in the name of liberty. EBB writes of the pamphlet favorably in February 1859 as "magnificent" and that she had "expected this from Napoleon" (Kenyon 2: 307).

This ode to Napoleon III, Emperor of France, includes nineteen stanzas that celebrate Napoleon's intervention in Italy's war of independence waged against Austria in 1859. It is the longest in the volume at 418 lines. As noted in the introduction to the preface, EBB most likely began writing this in the spring of 1859. The stanzas are of varying length and do not follow the Pindaric ode formula exactly. Most stanzas end with the declaration, "Emperor / Evermore," (Stanzas 1-5, 8-9, 11-14, and 16-19).[20] While this poem does not exactly break into thirds, nor include a clear choral response, the repetition at the end of many stanzas in support of Napoleon III could be considered a strophe-like element in the poem. EBB certainly considers the response of Napoleon's detractors and includes these—which might be thought of as antistrophe. The third part of a traditional ode, the epode, brings the previous elements together, or in this case, completes the meditation on Napoleon with a "discovery" of what is truly heroic reinforcing why Napoleon III should be the emperor

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[20] "Emperor / Evermore" is not unlike incremental repetition, a rhetorical device from the ballad tradition. EBB experimented with form, meter, and rhyme and was criticized for it (see Chapter 6). This could be an instance where she meshed parts of one form with another. Later footnotes emphasize, in more detail, the echo between "Emperor / Evermore" here and "Nevermore" in Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven* which contains incremental repetition. "Emperor / Evermore" is not merely a refrain, but grows in complexity as it is used. Interestingly, this is a rhetorical device shared by the last poem, "A Curse for a Nation," to great effect in the stanza-ending lines: "This is the curse. Write."

evermore. EBB takes on the role of the coryphæus,[21] the leader of the chorus as a modern poet in this instance standing center stage, to sing the final movement.

This ode, in the tradition of an actual chorus, contains multiple instances of sound imagery. The most obvious is in Stanza X that begins and ends with “Shout for France and Savoy!” (11-12). In the course of this stanza, “shout” is used ten times. Throughout the poem, “shout” is employed another five times (2 II:1; 4 V:13; 7 VI:31; 13 XI:16).[22] Other sound words include “sing” (1 occurrence), “song” (2 occurrences), “choir” (1 occurrence) and musical instruments, such as “drum” (2 occurrences); “trumpet” (1 occurrence); “trump” (1 occurrence); “war-trump” (1 occurrence).[23] Through the use of sound words, EBB strongly connects the literary tradition of odes (with the chorus) to the actual martial content of the poem, the shouting of a people at political events (which is also echoed at the end of “The Dance”), the commotion of a battle or troops marching.[24] Even the end of some stanzas has an abrupt sound linking to the overall use of sound words. “Emperor Evermore,” at the end of many stanzas, echoes a rhythm of marching troops taking those last few steps before

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[21] In “Italy and the World” (Stanza XIV), EBB insists that individual (national or regional) voices be silenced like ancient choruses, so that one voice may speak to unite Italy—as if the *Risorgimento* itself was a classical ode with a final unifying movement: “Hush your separate voices before us, / Sink your separate lives for the sake / Of one sole Italy’s living for ever!” (54).

[22] The original publication did not include line numbers; therefore, I do not include them in this particular version, although I acknowledge the need for such in any subsequent editions of this dissertation. When I refer to specific words or lines, I include the page number with the stanza and the line number, e.g., 4 V:24 (page 4, stanza V, line 24).

[23] For more sound word repetitions in this and other poems in this volume, see Gladys Hudson’s *An Elizabeth Barrett Browning Concordance*.

[24] The noise of this poem with the repeated endings of some stanzas may also connect this ode with the ballad tradition.

stopping, the silence then haunting the cessation of sound before the soldiers resume the march when the next stanza begins.[25]

[25] The American version of these poems, published by C.S. Francis & Co. (1860) was titled after the first poem, *Napoleon III and Italy and Other Poems*. For a more detailed exploration of this poem and EBB's thoughts on Napoleon III, please see Chapter 3.

[page 1]

NAPOLEON III IN ITALY.

I.

EMPEROR, Emperor!
From the centre to the shore,
From the Seine back to the Rhine,
Stood eight millions[26] up and swore
By their manhood's right divine
So to elect and legislate,[27]
This man should renew the line
Broken in a strain of fate
And leagued kings at Waterloo,[28]
When the people's hands let go.
Emperor
Evermore.[29]

---

[26] *Stood eight millions*. In 1850, the Assembly (the French governing body) adopted an act limiting suffrage, but the act was annulled by President Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. He called for a plebiscite in December 1851 to confirm his *coup d'état*—he "dissolved the Assembly and convoked the people to vote on his election for ten years and for a new plan of government" (Porter and Clark 3: 422, n. 2). Another plebiscite in November 1852 confirmed the re-establishment of the empire and Louis Napoleon's assumption of the title Emperor Napoleon III. Votes in the affirmative neared 8 million; 7,824,000 positive votes were counted, an improvement of nearly 400,000 positive votes from the *coup* plebiscite held in 1851 (Price 43).

[27] *So to elect and legislate*. This is the first reference in this poem to the ongoing reverence EBB invests in the people's democratic choice of leader. Napoleon leads France and is a hero by and with support of the people.

[28] *renew the line… Waterloo*. It was at Waterloo that Napoleon I's "line" was broken by the alliance of "leagued kings" from Russia, Austria, Prussia, and England. Napoleon III was not descended in a direct line from Napoleon I; he was a nephew, but the connection is a powerful one given his choice of name as emperor. The name "Napoleon" evoked worrisome memories for those who saw a possible repetition of the past, especially among the English, many of whom remembered first-hand or had been taught to fear the threat of an Imperial France.

[29] See "Nevermore" in Poe's "The Raven." Twice EBB mentioned the rhythm of "The Raven" in letters: once to Poe himself, saying that Robert Browning was struck by the rhythm (Kelley 12: 198) and once in a letter to Robert in which she tells of her cousin, John Kenyon, being "taken" with the rhythm (Kelley 12: 136). In 1845, Edgar Allen Poe had dedicated "The Raven" to EBB (Kelley 12: 164, n. 7). EBB playfully wrote to her cousin: "Today Mr. Poe sent me a volume containing his poems & tales collected, . . so now I *must* write & thank him for his dedication. What is to be said, I wonder when a man calls you the [']'noblest of your sex". . . "Sir, you are the most discerning of yours"! (Kelley 12: 165).

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II.

With a universal shout
They took the old regalia out
From an open grave[30] that day;
From a grave that would not close,
Where the first Napoleon lay
   Expectant, in repose,
As still as Merlin,[31] with his conquering face
Turned up in its unquenchable appeal
To men and heroes of the advancing race,—
   Prepared to set the seal
Of what has been on what shall be.
      Emperor
      Evermore.

III.

   The thinkers stood aside
   To let the nation act.
Some hated the new-constituted fact
Of empire,[32] as pride treading on their pride.
Some quailed, lest what was poisonous in the past
Should graft itself in that Druidic bough[33]

Throughout this period Poe is a topic of conversation, but not just for his dedication, he also reviewed some of EBB's works upon which she comments at various times (Kelley 11: 209; 10: 208). In one letter she also writes that the previous evening she rather abruptly cut off a sentence: "While I was writing it, came 'a tapping, tapping at the chamber door,' as sings my dedicator, Edgar Poe" (Kelley 13: 33). In this ode to Napoleon III, it is worth noting that many of the stanzas end with the repeated lines, "Emperor Evermore," echoing "nevermore" from Poe's poem, "The Raven." There is no mention in her published letters of 1859 that this was intentional, but Poe clearly played in her thoughts for a time previously and may have had some influence here, many years later.

[30] *open grave*. This may be an "allusion to the ashes of Napoleon I., not permanently entombed until Napoleon III. installed them… in the solemn mausoleum of the Hôtel des Invalides" (Porter and Clark 3: 423; no. 15). EBB writes about Napoleon I's ashes in "Crowned and Buried" first published on 4 July 1840 as "Napoleon's Return" in *The Athenæum*.

[31] *Merlin*. Merlin was forever enclosed in "a rock under a stone" when his own charms were used against him (Porter and Clark 3: 423, n. 19).

[32] *Some hated the new-constituted fact / Of empire*. The Second French Empire established by Napoleon III.

On this green now.
Some curse, because at last

[page 3]

The open heavens to which they had look'd in vain
For many a golden fall of marvellous rain
Were closed in brass;[34] and some
Wept on because a gone thing could not come;[35]
And some were silent, doubting all things for
That popular conviction,—evermore
Emperor.

IV.

That day I did not hate
Nor doubt, nor quail nor curse.
I, reverencing the people, did not bate
My reverence of their deed[36] and oracle,
Nor vainly prate
Of better and of worse
Against the great conclusion of their will.[37]

---

[33] *Druidic bough*. Porter and Clark suggest that EBB acknowledged that some readers may have equated the current imperial reign of Napoleon III with Napoleon I's exploits, with a disadvantage accorded to Napoleon III. They write: "The boughs of oak cut by the Druids in their mysterious rites were those to which mistletoe clung. The allusion may be to the fear of the element of empire in this democratic imperialism, which like the parasite mistletoe clung to the living bough and would likewise imperil the vital present, if grafted upon it, with the burden of the past and dead ideas. It is the way of thinking about the second empire which Robert Browning seems to express in his 'Prince Hohenstiel Schwangau'" (3: 423-4; no. 31).
[34] *closed in brass*. The "golden fall of marvelous rain" that does not happen, Porter and Clark suggest, refers to the empire closing "all opening for a miraculous golden period, making their socialistic dreams of a perfect brotherhood manifestly impossible" (3: 424; no. 35). If so, then the enclosing in brass—less valuable than gold—would support this reading of a disappointment regarding a "golden period."
[35] *a gone thing could not come*. Perhaps here EBB refers to the "Legitimist Party, whom nothing but a return of the old *régime* and the ancient monarchy could ever content" (Porter and Clark 3: 424; no. 36). Members of the Legitimist Party were royalists who believed in the hereditary right of succession for French kings based on laws dating back to the Middle Ages. In Stanza XIV, EBB writes of Napoleon's being beyond "common king-born kings" (15) undermining the whole Chain of Being philosophy upon which inherited monarchy rests.
[36] *deed*. Here this is a reference to the action of the people—their support of Napoleon III. This is the first use of this word used multiple times throughout this poem and "A Tale of Villafranca." See for example, Stanzas II-IV in that poem (26-27).

And yet, O voice and verse,
Which God set in me to acclaim and sing[38]
Conviction, exaltation, aspiration,
We gave no music to the patent thing,
Nor spared a holy rhythm to throb and swim
About the name of him
Translated to the sphere of domination
By democratic passion![39]

[page 4]

I was not used, at least,
Nor can be, now or then,
To stroke the ermine beast[40]
On any kind of throne,
(Though builded by a nation for its own),
And swell the surging choir for kings of men—
'Emperor
Evermore.'

V.

But now, Napoleon, now
That, leaving far behind the purple[41] throng
Of vulgar monarchs, thou

---

[37] In this and preceding lines, EBB again shows her value for the people's power and choice; while this is an ode to Napoleon III, the people approved his occupation of the Imperial throne. The final line on this page also refers to the people's right to choose: Napoleon III leads by virtue of "democratic passion."
[38] *O voice and verse, / Which God set in me to acclaim and sing*. The "poet" writing this ode claims God's ordination or appointment to do so. Along with the "poet's chrism" being more valued than the "priest's" in the next stanza, the poet assumes an indisputable position of power.
[39] *Translated to the sphere of domination / By democratic passion!* Here EBB values the people's will to accord power to a leader through their vote.
[40] *ermine beast*. Ermine is a fur associated with royalty. Linking "ermine" with "beast" EBB may be suggesting that fawning and kowtowing to royalty is distasteful, especially given her use of "vulgar" to describe "monarchs" in the next stanza and the lines "I was not used… to stroke…." In the preface, she carefully disassociates herself from the role of "courtier" despite having written this ode (vi). EBB blamed other European political leaders for Napoleon III's inability to fully enact the reunification of Italy because the 1859 war was cut short. Reunification of the peninsula of Italy into one strong nation was *not* a goal of Napoleon's, but it became a byproduct of his intervention in Italian affairs.
[41] *purple*. A color associated with royal or imperial rank—an association that Napoleon exceeds in his altruism on the part of Italy—or so it is portrayed here.

   Tread'st higher in thy deed[42]
   Than stair of throne can lead,
   To help in the hour of wrong
The broken hearts of nations to be strong,—
   Now, lifted as thou art
   To the level of pure song,
We stand to meet thee on these Alpine snows!
And while the palpitating peaks break out
Ecstatic from somnambular[43] repose
With answers to the presence and the shout,

[page 5]

We, poets of the people, who take part
With elemental justice, natural right,
   Join in our echoes also, nor refrain.
We meet thee, O Napoleon, at this height
At last, and find thee great enough to praise.
Receive the poet's chrism,[44] which smells beyond
   The priest's, and pass thy ways;—
An English poet warns thee to maintain
God's word, not England's:[45]—let His truth be true
And all men liars! with His truth respond

---

[42] *Tread'st higher in thy deed*. Napoleon III's deed, coming to the aid of the Italians, may be more important than his title—or in this case, action transcends imperial place. It is because of this that Napoleon is worthy of praise, not simply because he is emperor (Porter and Clark 3: 424, n. 69).

[43] *somnambular*. Suggests that up to this moment a sleep-like state had been dominant, but as Napoleon attempts to "help in the hour of wrong" even the mountains awake and the poets echo the shout—giving poets "of the people" (such as EBB) quite a position of power.

[44] *poet's chrism*. The poet's blessing or anointing with a "holy" oil, in this case, is more powerful than the priest's chrism ("smells beyond") supporting the idea that the poets of the people have a right to speak, an almost heretical statement given that chrism is a sacramental anointing in many religions, especially the Catholic religion—which still held great sway in France and Italy. In this statement EBB also seems to imply that the poet is in a more ideal position, better than that of an ordained spiritual leader, to determine a praiseworthy secular leader—then praises him. This is a lofty claim for the office of poet but one she sees as mandatory for poets. Later in "Christmas Gifts" in Stanza IX, EBB gives the people the power to bless, taking such power away from the Pope, again diminishing the role of "priest" in secular matters (49).

[45] *not England's*. The speaker of this poem warns Napoleon to listen to "God's word" and not England's advice. England took the stance of non-intervention, although Lord Malmesbury (the prime minister of England prior to the Second War of Independence in 1859) was supportive of reforms to ease the burden Italian states bore (such as high taxes) as a result of their Austrian liege-lords's greed.

To all men's lie. Exalt the sword and smite
On that long anvil of the Appennine[46]
Where Austria forged the Italian chain in view
Of seven consenting nations,[47] sparks of fine
   Admonitory[48] light,
Till men's eyes wink before convictions new.
Flash in God's justice to the world's amaze,
Sublime Deliverer!—after many days
Found worthy of the deed thou art come to do—
        Emperor
        Evermore.

VI.

But Italy, my Italy,
Can it last, this gleam?

[page 6]

Can she[49] live and be strong,
Or is it another dream
Like the rest we have dreamed so long?
   And shall it, must it be,
That after the battle-cloud has broken
She will die off again
Like the rain,
Or like a poet's song
Sung of her, sad at the end

---

[46] *Apennine*. The Apennines, a mountain range extending north and south throughout the Italian peninsula—a geographic point of unification running through many regions.
[47] *seven consenting nations*. Seven nations of Europe (Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, Sweden, Portugal, and Spain) signed the Treaty of Paris on 30 May 1814 defeating France and Napoleon I. Later at the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), much of the land held by France was redistributed. It is this arrangement that was so precious to the European nations in mid-century that to reprimand Austria for the way it treated its holdings (primarily Italy) or to interfere in the Austrian empire's business could have upset the balance of power. The implication is that those seven nations did not want to damage the political status quo—so allowed Austria to virtually enslave Italy.
[48] *Admonitory*. EBB seems to be extending the metaphor that Austria forged the chains of Italy's bondage on the most prominently Italian mountain range/anvil in sight of the seven nations mentioned above—the sparks that fly are an admonition of fault. Napoleon III, as a "Sublime Deliverer!" will unbind the chains so forged.
[49] *she*. Italy was frequently figured as a female in need of rescuing. In this case, the allusion appears to be to the long-standing desire for unification by Italian patriots and others supportive of the *Risorgimento*.

Because her name is Italy,[50]—
Die and count no friend?
Is it true,—may it be spoken,—
That she who has lain so still,
With a wound in her breast,
And a flower in her hand,
And a grave-stone under her head,
While every nation at will
Beside her has dared to stand
And flout her with pity and scorn,
Saying, 'She is at rest,
She is fair, she is dead,
And, leaving room in her stead
To Us who are later born,
This is certainly best!'

[page 7]

Saying, 'Alas, she is fair,
Very fair, but dead,
And so we have room for the race.'
—Can it be true, be true,
That she lives anew?
That she rises up at the shout of her sons,
At the trumpet of France,
And lives anew?—is it true
That she has not moved in a trance,
As in Forty-eight?[51]
When her eyes were troubled with blood
Till she knew not friend from foe,
Till her hand was caught in a strait

---

[50] *Because her name is Italy*. EBB wrote to Isa Blagden: "I dreamed lately that I followed a mystic woman down a long suite of palatial rooms. She was in white, with a mask, on her head the likeness of a crown. I knew she was Italy, but I couldn't see through the mask" (Kenyon 2: 321). EBB was not alone in her conception of Italy conflated with a woman: see Maura O'Connor's *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination*, and as a literary precedent, see particularly *Corinne, or Italy*. Corinne sustains a metaphorical "wound in her breast" (see a few lines below this), and if Corinne is interchangeable with Italy, or a choice between the two, then it is significant that both she and the Italy EBB figures here are "wounded" by the choices of English men. In the case of Corinne, Lord Nelvil does the damage; in the Italy of 1859, in EBB's view, it is the British government.
[51] *As in Forty-eight*. The first war of Italian Independence begun in 1848 amidst a revolution-wracked Europe; it was only moderately successful instituting some reform but eventually failed. Austrian rule was reinstated throughout most of the northern Italian states. Only Sardinia/Piedmont remained free and relatively strong.

Of her cerement[52] and baffled so
From doing the deed she would;
And her weak foot stumbled across
The grave of a king,[53]
And down she dropt at heavy loss,
And we gloomily covered her face and said,
'We have dreamed the thing;
She is not alive, but dead.'

[page 8]

VII.

Now, shall we say
Our Italy lives indeed?
And if it were not for the beat and bray
Of drum and trump[54] of martial men,
Should we feel the underground heave and strain,
Where heroes left their dust as a seed[55]

---

[52] *cerement*. A burial garment which is wrapped around a corpse—the corpse that may or may not be Italy.

[53] *The grave of a king*. Charles Albert, head of the House of Savoy, King of Piedmont, abdicated after a horrific loss to Austria at Novara in 1848-9 and died shortly thereafter. It was to the House of Savoy that many Italians looked to lead the *Risorgimento*, as this House could trace its roots to a Count Thomas of Savoy (d. 1233) and his descendents who ruled since that time over variations in territory without a break in their line (Hearder 147-8). The duchy of Savoy was established in 1416, with the title of king being given to the head of the House of Savoy through the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 (Sicily was acquired as part of this treaty). In 1720, Sicily was exchanged for Sardinia's kingship (Hearder 150). Charles Albert's son, Victor Emmanuel, who succeeded him, eventually became the first King of a united Italy in early 1861 (Venetia followed soon after to make a fully united Italy in 1866).

[54] The use of language to describe the movement of "martial men" here at and the end of many of the stanzas ("Emperor Evermore"), which is itself staccato, suggests a booming, stomping rhythm of marching armies.

[55] *Where heroes left their dust as a seed / Sure to emerge one day?* This question harkens back to lines (663-670) in *CGW*, Part II, which speak of those Italians fallen in battle being "seeds of life":

> These Dead be seeds of life, and shall encumber
>   The sad heart of the land, until it loose
> The clammy clods and let out the spring-growth
>   In beatific green through every bruise.
> The tyrant should take heed to what he doth,
>   Since every victim-carrion turns to use,
> And drives a chariot, like a god made wroth,
>   Against each piled injustice. (Markus 59)

Sure to emerge one day?
And if it were not for the rhythmic march[56]
Of France and Piedmont's double hosts,[57]
Should we hear the ghosts
Thrill through ruined aisle and arch,
Throb along the frescoed wall,
Whisper an oath by that divine
They left in picture, book, and stone,
That Italy is not dead at all?
Ay, if it were not for the tears in our eyes,
These tears of a sudden passionate joy,
Should we see her arise
From the place where the wicked are overthrown,
Italy, Italy? loosed at length
From the tyrants thrall,
Pale and calm in her strength?
Pale as the silver cross of Savoy[58]

[page 9]

When the hand that bears the flag is brave,
And not a breath is stirring, save
What is blown
Over the war-trump's lip of brass,
Ere Garibaldi[59] forces the pass!

---

[56] *rhythmic march*. Here EBB explicitly mentions the rhythm that she alludes to a few lines above. Indeed, each stanza feels like a marching of troops who stop in stutter-step rhythm at "Emperor Evermore" (see previous note comparing the rhythm to "The Raven").
[57] *France and Piedmont's double hosts*. France was to commit roughly twice as many troops as Piedmont to what would become the Second War of Italian Independence in 1859 (approximately 200,000 to 100,000). Italy committed far fewer troops to the war effort. Hearder writes that "French forces were less than twice as numerous as the Piedmontese" (185).
[58] *silver cross of Savoy*. The silver cross is the symbol of the House of Savoy (King Victor Emmanuel was the head of the House of Savoy in 1859 ruling the kingdom of Sardinia/Piedmont). It is under this house that Italy was ultimately united. For a detailed treatment of the House of Savoy and its role in the *Risorgimento*, see George Martin's *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy* (1969).
[59] *Garibaldi forces the pass!* Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), a widely known and much-lauded Italian military leader, led troops through southern Italy to help liberate the southern regions (the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) from the Bourbon monarchy of King Ferdinand II and to secure eventual Italian freedom from Austria (see *On Board the Emma* by Alexandre Dumas for an account of his tangential involvement with Garibaldi's victories in the south of Italy and Garibaldi's march up the Italian peninsula). The reference in this poem is to Garibaldi's late-May 1859 holding of the passes near Lake Maggiore (passes that led directly

VIII.

Ay, it is so, even so.
Ay, and it shall be so.
Each broken stone that long ago
She flung behind her as she went
In discouragement and bewilderment
Through the cairns of Time, and missed her way
Between to-day and yesterday,
Up springs a living man.[60]
And each man stands with his face in the light
Of his own drawn sword,
Ready to do what a hero can.[61]
Wall to sap, or river to ford,
Cannon to front, or foe to pursue,
Still ready to do, and sworn to be true,
As a man and a patriot can.
Piedmontese,[62] Neapolitan,[63]

---

to Austrian territory) with just a few thousand men. His troops' daring stand prevented over 11,000 Austrian soldiers from engaging in "the main theatre of operations and had renewed the luster of a world-wide reputation…. The Austrians spoke of him as the '*rötteufel*'—'the red devil'—told stories of how he ate the flesh of his prisoners, raw, without salt, and of how they had seen bullets bounce off his chest" (Larg 159). As much as he was vilified by his enemies, he was adored by his fellow Italians. One of Victor Emmanuel's aides said that the Lombards, post-victory, treated Garibaldi as "'the head of a new religion followed by a crowd of fanatics. The women, no less than the men, brought their babies to Garibaldi so that he could bless and even baptise them" (qtd. in Larg 159). He was also beloved and adored in other countries, such as England.

[60] *Through the cairns of Time, and missed her way / Between to-day and yesterday, / Up springs a living man*. Out of the burial mounds of Time (or really out of time) created by a woman's (Italy's) perilous journey through death to life again, springs "living man." This line and subsequent lines actually attempt to create a national identity for Italy through words. The creation of Italian man from the stones cast aside "long ago" suggests an autochthonous relationship of Italians with the land, despite the divisions named below. Twelve lines later, EBB names them "sons of the land."

[61] *Ready to do what a hero can.* Every man is a hero who fights for Italy, regardless of rank, or nationality—as EBB shows in "A Court Lady." This poem may be an ode to Napoleon III, but EBB is clear about the people's role in keeping him in power, and she is clear here about the role of the soldier in the war.

[62] *Piedmontese*. From Piedmont, the Northern Italian kingdom whose leaders and people led the *Risorgimento*.

[63] *Neopolitan*. A person from the city of Naples which was actually under rule of the King of Two Sicilies—a historically abusive kingship. Neopolitans fought alongside Piedmontese and others for a united Italy.

[page 10]

Lombard,[64] Tuscan,[65] Romagnole,[66]
Each man's body having a soul,—
Count how many they stand,
All of them sons of the land,
Every live man there
Allied to a dead man below,
And the deadest with blood to spare
To quicken a living hand
In case it should ever be slow.
Count how many they come
To the beat of Piedmont's[67] drum,
With faces keener and grayer
Than the swords of the Austrian slayer,
All set against the foe,
'Emperor
Evermore.'

IX.

Out of the[68] dust, where they ground them,

---

[64] *Lombard*. Lombards were directly connected geographically with Austrian rule and had experienced a great deal of wretchedness from the revolts of 1848 through the beginning of the Second War of Italian Independence. EBB mentions their dire situation in a letter to her sister Arabella in April 1859 (Lewis 2: 405).
[65] *Tuscan*. Tuscans fought to throw off the yoke of Austrian rule despite their Austrian ruler/puppet, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold II, whom EBB originally championed in 1848 for his endorsement of liberal reforms. By 1859, he was largely seen as a coward and an ineffective ruler—EBB suggests this in "An August Voice" below.
[66] *Romagnole*. A native or inhabitant of the region of Romagna (a northern Italian area known as Emilia-Romagna), Romagnole is the only word in *Poems Before Congress* to appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* with an illustrative quote. This may be one small indication of the near universal literary dismissal of *Poems Before Congress*, as there are well over one thousand illustrative quotes from EBB's other poetic, and even prose, writings in the *OED*.
[67] *Piedmont's drum*. Sardinia/Piedmont took the lead in the Second War of Italian Independence and called all Italians to fight for their freedom from oppressors—namely Austria in northern Italy where the battles of this war were fought. It was finally Piedmont that united Italy into one kingdom.
[68] *Out of the*. EBB uses anaphora to begin eight of the following thirteen lines. "Out" powerfully connects the abusive behavior of the Austrians to the goal of the war: to get Austria "out" of Italy. This anaphora also aurally connects with the repeated "shout" in the

Out of the holes, where they dogged them,
Out of the hulks, where they wound them
In iron, tortured and flogged them;
Out of the streets, where they chased them,

[page 11]

Taxed them and then bayoneted them,—
Out of the homes, where they spied on them,
(Using their daughters and wives),
Out of the church, where they fretted them,
Rotted their souls and debased them,
Trained them to answer with knives,
Then cursed them all at their prayers!—
Out of cold lands, not theirs,
Where they exiled them, starved them, lied on them;
Back they come like a wind, in vain
Cramped up in the hills, that roars its road
The stronger into the open plain;
Or like a fire that burns the hotter
And longer for the crust of cinder,
Serving better the ends of the potter;
Or like a restrainèd word of God,
Fulfilling itself by what seems to hinder.
'Emperor
Evermore.'

X.

Shout for France and Savoy![69]
Shout for the helper and the doer.

[page 12]

Shout for the good sword's ring,
Shout for the thought still truer.
Shout for the spirits at large
Who passed for the dead this spring,

---

subsequent stanza linking the goal of the war with the hoped-for result that engendered celebratory shouting.

[69] *France and Savoy*. France comes to the military aid of Italians seeking freedom from their oppressors. It is the House of Savoy that occupies the Sardinian/Piedmontese throne; Savoy is also a region of Northern Italy that is eventually ceded (along with Nice) to France in payment for its role in the war—much to the protest of many Italians including Garibaldi who was from Nice.

Whose living glory is sure.
Shout for France and Savoy!
Shout for the council and the charge!
Shout for the head of Cavour;[70]
And shout for the heart of a King[71]
That's great with a nation's joy.
   Shout for France and Savoy!

XI.

Take up the child, Macmahon,[72] though
Thy hand be red
From Magenta's dead,[73]

---

[70] *the head of Cavour*. Count Camillo Benso di Cavour (1810-1861) was a key minister for King Victor Emmanuel beginning in 1852. He was the prime minister under which the Second War of Italian Independence was fought. Italian freedom and unification were his central goals while a member of the Piedmontese government. His secret meeting and agreement with Napoleon III in 1858 laid the groundwork for the ensuing French/Italian alliance.

[71] *the heart of a King*. Victor Emmanuel ascended the throne of Piedmont in 1849 upon his father's abdication and at 29 had to negotiate a very difficult treaty with Field Marshal Radetsky of Austria (who defeated his father, Charles Albert, at Novara). He declared to Radetsky that he would not deny the constitution of Piedmont but would follow the constitutional policy of his father:

> Marshall, sooner than subscribe to such conditions I would lose a hundred thrones. What my father has sworn I will maintain. If you wish a war to the death, be it so! I will call my nation to arms once more, and you will see of what Piedmont is capable in a general rising. If I fall it shall be without shame. My house knows the road of exile, but not of dishonor. (qtd. in Porter and Clark 3: 427, n. 239)

"[T]he heart of a King" may also refer to Napoleon III who, with Cavour, arranged the start of the war with Austria as the aggressors, but the most likely allusion is to Victor Emmanuel.

[72] *Macmahon*. EBB writes just before publication of *PBC*: "Macmahon taking up the child is also historical" (Kenyon 2: 360). Marie Edmé Patrice Maurice MacMahon, duc de Magenta (1808-1893), descended from a Jacobite Irish family who relocated to France in the early 1700s, was the commanding officer of the Second Corps of the French army (called the "Army of Italy"). He secured the French victory at Magenta on 4 June 1859 and earned the field rank of marshal during this campaign. Later, Napoleon III named him the *duc de Magenta*. It was "in the throng of rejoicing crowds greeting the victorious French army three days after the battle of Magenta… in the streets of Milan, then evacuated by the Austrians, Macmahon lifted to his saddle-bow a child in danger of being crushed in the press about him" (Porter and Clark 3: 427, n. 242).

[73] *Magenta's dead*. The battle of Magenta, a town in the Lombardy region (near Milan), was a particularly important one for Italians—as it was a resounding victory for the combined forces of France and Italy. The color magenta, discovered as a dye in 1859, was named for the town and the particularly bloody battle that was fought there. In this battle and the one at

And riding on, in front of troop,
   In the dust of the whirlwind of war
Through the gate of the city Milan, stoop
And take up the child to thy saddle-bow,
Nor fear the touch as soft as a flower
   Of his smile as clear as a star!
Thou hast a right to the child, we say,

[page 13]

Since the women are weeping for joy as those
Who, by thy help and from this day,
   Shall be happy mothers indeed.
They are raining flowers from terrace and roof:
   Take up the flower in the child.
While the shout goes up of a nation freed
   And heroically self-reconciled,
Till the snow on that peaked Alp aloof
Starts, as feeling God's finger anew,
And all those cold white marble fires
Of mounting saints on the Duomo-spires[74]
   Flicker against the Blue.
      'Emperor
       Evermore.'

Solferino (24 June 1859), the Zoauves played a key role. Barbara Neri asserts that EBB expressed her passion for Italy's freedom in the clothing she chose to wear in her 1860 portrait. In her unpublished manuscript, "Creating Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Image: What She Wore and What it Means," Neri explains that EBB wore a Zoauve jacket, "a popular fashion item for women, that appropriated the military uniform of Napoleon's fierce Zoauve regiments that figured importantly in the Crimea and Italy." EBB would certainly have seen the illustrations and stories in newspapers about the Zouave regiment's contribution to Italy's fight for freedom. Neri notes that the Zoauves were instrumental in the allied success of the battles of Magenta and Solferino, earning ten crosses of the Legion of Honor and fifty Military Medals at Magenta (4 June 1859). Zoauves had female attachments (*Cantinere*) who wore the same kind of jacket, and among the recipients of the Military Medals after Magenta, was Madame Rossini, the regiment's female *Cantiniere*; "the first woman to be decorated" with that medal. At Solferino, the Zouaves fought to break the Austrian lines and turn the battle in favor of France and Italian troops (24 June 1859).

[74] *Duomo-spires*. Duomo or domo is a "cathedral church (in Italy)" (*OED*). Interestingly, EBB is quoted for usage of this word in two of her other poems with an Italian focus: *Casa Guidi Windows* "We chased the Archbishop from the duomo door" (1851, line 94); and *Aurora Leigh*, "The duomo-bell Strikes ten" (1856, Book VIII, line 44) (*OED*).

XII.

Ay, it is He,
Who rides at the King's right hand![75]
Leave room to his horse and draw to the side,
Nor press too near in the ecstacy
Of a newly delivered impassioned land:
He is moved, you see,
He who has done it all.

[page 14]

They call it a cold stern face;
But this is Italy
Who rises up to her place!—
For this he fought in his youth,[76]
Of this he dreamed in the past;
The lines of the resolute mouth
Tremble a little at last.
Cry, he has done it all!
'Emperor
Evermore.'

XIII.

It is not strange that he did it,
Though the deed may seem to strain
To the wonderful, unpermitted,
For such as lead and reign.
But he is strange, this man:
The people's instinct found him
(A wind in the dark that ran
Through a chink where was no door),

---

[75] *Ay, it is He, / Who rides at the King's right hand!* "He" is Napoleon III; the "King" is Victor Emmanuel. Both rode at the heads of their armies (though neither had any substantial military experience to draw upon) and both entered Milan together after the victory at Magenta.

[76] *For this he fought in his youth.* Napoleon III fought (with his brother) in a revolt in the Romagna province in 1831 when he was Prince Napoleon—a young man, not yet president or emperor of France. His brother died in that campaign leaving him as the inheritor of the Napoleonic line.

And elected him and crowned him
        Emperor[77]
        Evermore.

[page 15]

XIV.

Autocrat?[78] let them scoff,
   Who fail to comprehend
That a ruler incarnate of
   The people, must transcend
All common king-born kings.
These subterranean springs
A sudden outlet winning,
Have special virtues to spend.
The people's blood runs through him,
Dilates from head to foot,
Creates him absolute,
And from this great beginning

---

[77] *And elected him and crowned him / Emperor.* Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was first elected president of France, then in a *coup* named himself Emperor Napoleon III—with the seeming approval of the people via a plebiscite (see previous notes and Chapter 2 for more details). Once again, EBB notes that it is by power of the people that Napoleon III occupies his Imperial position.

[78] *Autocrat?* The question mark implies that others called Napoleon an autocrat, but as descriptor here with the question mark, we are perhaps meant to doubt those who question. A possible reason this poem, and this volume, fell out of literary favor for so long, is that in a post-Hitler 20th century, it's hard not to make a connection between demagogues like Napoleon III and Adolf Hitler. Both were ceaseless propagandists for their causes; both certainly seized power in questionable ways after finding themselves in a political position to do so; both revived flagging economies; both rebuilt and built physical and governmental infrastructures that allowed economic growth; and both called for plebiscites to support their new-found positions (Hitler's government was overwhelmingly approved by a plebiscite in August 1934). A later 20th century sensitivity to absolute power gone awry (in the horrible way that Hitler's did), may have caused more than one modern reader to put aside these poems that begin with an ode to an imperialistic leader who was indeed an autocrat, whether or not the people approved. Without the entire political context and an understanding of EBB's fervor for freedom and liberty, and especially Italy, it would be a simple matter to read this poem as the production of a Bonaparte fanatic. Her paradoxical stance engendered confusion and consternation for some of her contemporary audience, too (as seen in the critical response immediately following publication).

Evokes a greater end
To justify and renew him—
        Emperor
        Evermore.

XV.

What! did any maintain
That God or the people[79] (think!)
Could make a marvel in vain?—
Out of the water-jar there,
Draw wine[80] that none could drink?

[page 16]

Is this a man like the rest,
This miracle, made unaware
By a rapture of popular air,
And caught to the place that was best?
You think he could barter and cheat
As vulgar diplomates use,
With the people's heart in his breast?
Prate a lie into shape
Lest truth should cumber the road;
Play at the fast and loose
Till the world is strangled with tape;
Maim the soul's complete
To fit the hole of a toad;
And filch the dogman's meat
To feed the offspring of God?

XVI.

Nay, but he, this wonder,
He cannot palter nor prate,
Though many around him and under,
With intellects trained to the curve,
Distrust him in spirit and nerve
Because his meaning is straight.[81]

---

[79] *people*. Again, in this stanza as in the previous, and in a number of other places in this poem the "people" are accorded deep respect and given great power over the positions political leaders occupy.
[80] *Out of the water-jar there, / Draw wine.* This allusion to Jesus Christ's miracle at a wedding in Canaan in which he turns water into wine (John 2: 7-11) is supported by the subsequent reference to Napoleon being a "miracle" himself.

[page 17]

Measure him ere he depart
With those who have governed and led;
Larger so much by the heart,
Larger so much by the head.
    Emperor
    Evermore.

XVII.

He holds that, consenting or dissident,
  Nations must move with the time;
Assumes that crime with a precedent
  Doubles the guilt of the crime;
—Denies that a slaver's bond,
  Or a treaty signed by knaves,
(*Quorum magna pars*[82] and beyond
Was one of an honest name)
Gives an inexpugnable claim
To abolishing men into slaves.[83]
    Emperor
    Evermore.

XVIII.

He will not swagger or boast
  Of his country's meeds, in a tone

[page 18]

---

[81] *Because his meaning is straight.* An allusion to Carlyle's description of a hero, Napoleon I in particular, as driving "straight" to the heart of the matter because of sincerity. Interestingly, EBB compares Napoleon's "straight" course to those who have been "trained to the curve"—presumably those politicians who disseminate and dissemble. Ironically, it was Napoleon III and Cavour's secret and illegal alliance struck in 1858 that lit the fuse that eventually blew up into the war in 1859 that led to a unified Italy.

[82] *Quorum magna pars.* These are the "words Virgil makes Æneas use in telling the story of the last night in Troy, besieged by Greeks, '*Quorum pars magna fui*,' 'In which I took a large part,' and applied as a phrase to events in which one may boast taking an important share. The poet uses it here cynically of oppressive treaties in which knaves have 'a large share'" (Porter and Clark 3: 427, n. 347).

[83] This stanza strongly connects in theme to the final poem, "A Curse for a Nation."

Missuiting a great man most
  If such should speak of his own;
Nor will he act, on her side,
  From motives baser, indeed,
Than a man of a noble pride
  Can avow for himself at need;
Never, for lucre or laurels,
  Or custom, though such should be rife,
Adapting the smaller morals
  To measure the larger life.
He, though the merchants persuade,
  And the soldiers are eager for strife,
Finds not his country in quarrels
  Only to find her in trade,[84]—
While still he accords her such honor
  As never to flinch for her sake
Where men put service upon her,
  Found heavy to undertake
And scarcely like to be paid:
  Believing a nation may act
  Unselfishly—shiver a lance[85]
(As the least of her sons may, in fact)

---

[84] *Only to find her in trade*. Porter and Clark suggest this is a "reflection on England's policy of making war for trade's sake in contrast with Napoleon's war for the sake of helping a near neighbor to liberate herself" (3: 427-28, n. 368). If so, then it harkens back to the preface in which EBB writes, "I confess that I dream of the day when an English statesman shall arise with a heart too large for England, having courage in the face of his countrymen to assert of some suggested policy,—"This is good for your trade… but it will vex a people hard by; it will hurt a people farther off… therefore, away with it!—it is not for you or for me" (vii). This thinking is reflected in Stanza IX in Alfred Tennyson's "Maud" (1855):

> Peace sitting under her olive, and slurring the
> days gone by,
> When the poor are hovell'd and hustled to-
> gether, each sex, like swine,
> When only the ledger lives, and when only not
> all men lie;
> Peace in her vineyard—yes!—but a com-
> pany forges the wines.

[85] *shiver a lance*. To engage in battle so that weapons (i.e., a lance) might be shattered or broken into many small pieces—an allusion, coupled with "[u]nselfishly," that suggests Napoleon's motives were altruistic rather than otherwise. An ode may overlook the reality of a situation in praise of its target. EBB admits that the ultimate action was dictated by the realities of political alliances. In multiple letters she acknowledges that Napoleon had to acquiesce when pressure from home and neighbors was so great that he had no choice—such a reality is also acknowledged in other poems such as "A Tale of Villafranca."

  And not for a cause of finance.
        Emperor
        Evermore.

[page 19]

XIX.

  Great is he,
Who uses his greatness for all.
His name shall stand perpetually
  As a name to applaud and cherish,
Not only within the civic wall
For the loyal, but also without[86]
  For the generous and free.
  Just is he,
Who is just for the popular due
  As well as the private debt.
The praise of nations is ready to perish
  Fall on him,—crown him in view
  Of tyrants caught in the net,
And statesman dizzy with fear and doubt!
And though, because they are many,
  And he is merely one,
And nations selfish and cruel
Heap up the inquisitor's fuel
To kill the body of high intents,
And burn great deeds from their place,
Till this, the greatest of any,
May seem imperfectly done;
Courage, whoever circumvents!

[page 20]

Courage, courage, whoever is base!
The soul of a high intent, be it known,
Can die no more than any soul
Which God keeps by him under the throne
And this, at whatever interim,
Shall live, and be consummated
Into the being of deeds made whole.
Courage, courage! happy is he,

---

[86] These lines echo the end of the preface that suggests a nation's worth comes, not from internal praise or "loud civic mouths" alone, but from external sources, "as all worthy praise must" (viii).

Of whom (himself among the dead
And silent), this word shall be said;
—That he might have had the world with him,
But chose to side with suffering men,
And had the world against him[87] when
He came to deliver Italy.
        Emperor
        Evermore.

[87] *And had the world against him when / He came to deliver Italy*. Porter and Clark suggest that in this line "the historic facts justify the poet." They also note that "it was even at the cost of popularity with the conservative element in France, as well as in all the courts of Europe, that Naploeon entered into an alliance with the weakest power in Europe, little Piedmont; and his own back-sliding later at Villafranca and Mentana…. go far to prove that [Napoleon's support of Italy] was hard to stick to consistently" (3: 428, n. 425). Indeed, Napoleon III didn't so much come to "deliver Italy" as he did to gain land and additional political power—but his actions did facilitate a uniting of the peninsula. EBB, after the publication of *PBC* and the subsequent backlash—begun by Henry Chorley's review in the *Athenæum*—writes to Chorley in May 1860: "Observe, I may be wrong or right about Napoleon. He may be snake, scoundrel, devil in his motives. But the thing he did was done before the eyes of all. His coming here was real, the stroke of his sword was indubitable, the rising and struggle of the people was beyond controversy, and the state of things at present is a fact" (Kenyon 2: 381).

“The Dance”

The order of the poems was strictly decided by EBB. It is no accident that “The Dance” comes immediately after “Napoleon III in Italy.” This poem on dancing is about physical motion, but it is also about political motion. A social activity, dancing, moves its participants to powerful political action culminating in a public display of solidarity: “a cry went up, a cry from all” (24).

The woman who speaks out in this poem, and the women who dance, are politically active in linking the Italian people to the French, *their* Italian men to the French soldiers. It is as if those who are depicted in this poem, the French and Italian people in the Cascine, were a part of the chorus connected somehow to the previous ode; they shout for a brotherhood, for a freedom and liberty embodied in their social, yet very political, dance. The notion of brotherhood here, because this poem immediately follows the first in the volume, continues and crystallizes the relationship between the French and Italians that is manifest in “Napoleon III in Italy” through that poem and through Napoleon’s actual intervention in Italy.

The twelve stanzas are quintains with a rhyme pattern of ABABB. Here as elsewhere EBB experiments and plays with language, including eye rhymes such as “south,” “youth,” and “mouth” in Stanza X (24). She also uses double rhymes (as she does in “An August Voice”): “they too” with “away to” in Stanza IV (22) and “overskied us” with “beside us” in Stanza IX (24). The meter in the stanzas is irregular, beginning as trochaic hexameter, ending with iambic pentameter—the combination mimicking the rhythm of a dance that is not entirely predictable nor smooth. The irregular meter works here to build poetic drama as it underscores the actual political development between nations embodied in the dancers.

[page 21]

THE DANCE.

I.

YOU remember down at Florence our Cascine,[88]
   Where the people on the feast-days walk and drive,
And, through the trees, long-drawn in many a green
         way,
   O'er-roofing hum and murmur like a hive,
   The river and the mountains look alive?

II.

You remember the piazzone there, the stand-place
   Of carriages a-brim with Florence Beauties,
Who lean and melt to music as the band plays,
   Or smile and chat with some one who a-foot is,
   Or on horseback, in observance of male duties?

[page 22]

III.

'Tis so pretty, in the afternoons of summer,
   So many gracious faces brought together!

---

[88] *Cascine*. This was a popular wooded park in Florence that was a gathering place for all, located to the west of the Arno River. In a letter to her sister in June 1849, EBB decribed a visit to the Cascine: "We go in the evening, because it is the only fresh drive under green trees & by the riverside, . . and indeed the whole spectacle, when hundreds of open carriages stand still in the open space surrounded by thick foliage, is curious and amusing" (Lewis 1: 249). She wrote of this park in her letters throughout her stay in Florence (Kelley 14: 207-8; and Lewis 1: 88-89, 167; 2: 88). In contrast to the warm feeling Italians feel for the French in this poem, EBB wrote of the Italian/Austrian political tension in 1849 in the Cascine. The Italians "*look* at the Austrian officers—dont [sic] *speak* to them… you never see *intercourse* between an Austrian and a Tuscan" (Lewis 1: 249). In this same letter that EBB predicted, "the next event will probably be war between France & Austria." Although she is ten years ahead of when the war actually began, she aptly read the political situation and the tensions that were at the root of that war. In mid-1849, she wrote of "mock fights" in the Cascine, recreating how Lombards were "slaughtered"; EBB notes that Leopold "claps hands at it" (Lewis 1: 270). She rightly judged Leopold's relationship to Austria through this as well as upon his return to Florence through Austrian help. She realized that he was a ruler of Tuscany at the whim of Austria and fully controlled by Austria, calling him "Wretched Grand Duke!" (Lewis 1: 270).

Call it rout, or call it concert, they have come here,
   In the floating of the fan and of the feather,
   To reciprocate with beauty the fine weather.

IV.

While the flower-girls offer nosegays (because *they* too
   Go with other sweets) at every carriage-door;
Here, by shake of a white finger, signed away to
   Some next buyer, who sits buying score on score,
   Piling roses upon roses evermore.[89]

V.

And last season, when the French camp had its station
   In the meadow-ground, things quickened and grew
      gayer
Through the mingling of the liberating nation[90]
   With this people; groups of Frenchmen everywhere,
   Strolling, gazing, judging lightly . . 'who was fair.'

[page 23]

VI.

Then the noblest lady[91] present took upon her

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[89] *evermore*. The use of this word is particularly resonant in this poem which follows "Napoleon III in Italy" where "evermore" was used so frequently coupled with "emperor." The endless "piling of roses upon roses," almost evokes Sisyphus as the roses will be piled forever, even as the ones lowest in the pile die. A link may exist here between the emperor's "evermore" and this domestic and biological "evermore"—both are endless, both see inevitable, and yet both seem to gain forward motion through some sort of dismissal. Napoleon III is "dismissed" by other statesmen who would damage or thwart his the fulfillment of a great deed. Here a flower girl is dismissed by "the shake of a white finger" (a noble finger would have been white), only to sell to buyers whose task is neverending—the selling and the buying become a task that is evermore—with no respite. See the later usage of "evermore" in "A Curse for a Nation."
[90] *liberating nation.* French troops occupied Florence and were seen as liberators.
[91] *the noblest lady present*. EBB writes to Anna Jameson that "[T]he heroine of the poem called 'The Dance' was Madame di Laiatico" (Kenyon 2: 360). The Marchessa di Laiatico, the wife of Marquis de Laiatico, Prince Corsini (1805-59), danced with French soldiers in the Cascine. Both the Marquis and his wife were Italian patriots opposed to the Grand Duke's close relations to Austria. The Marquis was part of the "Tuscan ministry who demanded the Grand Duke's abdication at the end of April [1859]. He is mentioned in line 29 of 'Summing Up in Italy' (*Last Poems* 1862)" (Lewis 2: 421, n. 14).

To speak nobly from her carriage for the rest;
'Pray these officers from France to do us honour
By dancing with us straightway.'—The request
Was gravely apprehended as addressed.

VII.

And the men of France bareheaded, bowing lowly,
Led out each a proud signora to the space
Which the startled crowd had rounded for them—
slowly,
Just a touch of still emotion in his face,
Not presuming, through the symbol, on the grace.

VIII.

There was silence in the people: some lips trembled,
But none jested. Broke the music, at a glance:
And the daughters of our princes, thus assembled,
Stepped the measure with the gallant sons of France.
Hush! it might have been a Mass, and not a dance.

[page 24]

IX.

And they danced there till the blue that overskied us
Swooned with passion, though the footing seemed
sedate;
And the mountains, heaving mighty hearts beside us,
Sighed a rapture in a shadow, to dilate,
And touch the holy stone where Dante[92] sate.

X.

Then the sons of France bareheaded, lowly bowing,
Led the ladies back where kinsmen of the south[93]

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[92] *stone where Dante sate.* "Il Sasso di Dante," a stone near Florence's cathedral in the Piazza del Duomo, near the Pitti Palace, was not far from Casa Guidi—the Browning's home in Florence. It is the alleged site where the poet Dante Alghieri (1265-1321) regularly sat (Taylor and Stone forthcoming). Porter and Clark write of EBB mentioning that she passed it every day when she and Browning went for drives (3: 408, n. 601).
[93] *kinsmen of the south.* By referring to the Italians as "kinsmen," EBB reinforces the idea of brotherhood she believes in, a international citizenship that prefigures and includes modern ideas of cosmopolitanism.

Stood, received them;—till, with burst of overflowing
    Feeling . . . husbands, brothers, Florence's male
        youth,
    Turned, and kissed the martial strangers mouth to
        mouth.[94]

XI.

And a cry went up, a cry from all the people!
    —You have heard a people cheering, you suppose,
For the Member,[95] mayor . . with chorus from the
        steeple?

[page 25]

This was different: scarce as loud perhaps, (who
        knows?)
For we saw wet eyes around us ere the close.

XII.

And we felt as if a nation, too long borne in
    By hard wrongers, comprehending in such attitude
That God had spoken somewhere since the morning,

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[94] Montwieler mentions a possible homoerotic reading of this kiss (see last note), but in *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture*, Cynthia Scheinberg notes EBB's use of a "mouth to mouth" kiss exchanged between men, a father and son, in "A Vision of Poets" from *Poems* (1844). Scheinberg notes that "[T]he image of being kissed 'mouth to mouth' has many echoes, in particular that of the death of Moses in Deuteronomy. Though the King James Version describes his death by the 'word of the Lord,' Barrett Browning knew… that an alternative translation of the Hebrew is 'mouth' instead of 'word'; likewise, she clearly had access to Jewish… sources which said that Moses dies with the 'kisses of the Lord' on his mouth" (75). An even earlier example of "mouth to mouth" kissing (related to Moses' death) in EBB's poetry appears in "The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus" in *The Seraphim and Other Poems* (1938), which Scheinberg points out is a reference to the "'kissing' tradition" (79). If the kiss in "The Dance" between Italian men and French men implies a new life or liberty for Italians, the kiss may also be a symbol for the death of nationalistic division, harkening back to EBB's earlier works in which a "mouth to mouth" kiss is a kiss of death. Death and rebirth are frequently mentioned in the poems in this volume—Italy's death and rebirth through the *Risorgimento* is a primary example.

[95] *Member.* This may refer to a member of the Italian parliament—an excerpt from *Casa Guidi Windows* was read to the Italian parliament in Turin. Some local connection, however, may be implied since it appears next to "mayor" with the people cheering. The image of a village square crowded with cheering people, even leaning out of the local church's steeple is not hard to see here, all led by local dignitaries like a mayor or a member of a village council.

That men were somehow brothers,[96] by no platitude,
Cried exultant in great wonder and free gratitude.

---

[96] *That God had spoken somewhere since the morning, / That men were somehow brothers*. EBB mentions here that this act, precipitated by a woman, but condoned by or inherently supported by God, had united men making them "somehow brothers"; it confers upon women a public and political power not normally associated with dancing. Toward the end of October 1859, EBB writes to a friend: "the bearing of the French soldiers, encamped in the Cascine, all apparently penetrated, down to the privates, with the idea of performing a great action for others & getting nothing by it. That was really sublime. It was a true fraternization of the peoples" (Heydon and Kelley 144). Certain parts of this statement, read with a post-Freudian eye, along with the mouth-to-mouth kiss from Stanza X lends support to Montweiler's argument that such action, "in an unusual twist, yields a homoerotic union between French and Italian men…" (302).

“A Tale of Villafranca”

Shortly after publication in *PBC*, EBB felt entirely justified in condemning other European leaders in this poem. She writes to multiple correspondents about Villafranca in mid-1860. To Isa Blagden (2 April 1860), less than a month after *PBC* is issued, she writes: “If the war had not stopped at Villafranca, it would have been European; *that*, if not clear at the time, is clear now—clear from the official statement of Prussia.[97] By putting diplomacy in the place of the war, a great deal was absolutely attained, besides a better standpoint for a renewal of the war, should that be necessary. ‘Hence those tears’—of Villafranca!” (Kenyon 2: 374). On June 16, EBB writes to another of her friends, Fanny Haworth, justifying her belief in Napoleon III and denigrating English foreign policy and English manhood in general, in one short statement:

> By the way, I dare say nobody in England lays his face in the dust and acknowledges, in consequence of the official declaration of the Prussian Minister (to the effect that Prussia was to attack on the crossing of the Mincio, and that nothing but the unexpected conclusion of hostilities hindered the general war)—acknowledges that Napoleon stands fully justified in making that peace. I cannot expect so much justice in an Englishman. He would rather bury his past mistake in a present mistake than simply confess it. (Kenyon 2: 396)

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[97] The editors of *Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Letters to Mrs. David Ogilvy* write: “Elizabeth speaks of Baron Schleinitz’s official statement. It reported that if Louis Napoleon had crossed over the River Mincio to battle Austria, that would have induced Prussia to attack France. Such was not the outcome, however, because of the unexpected peace at Villafranca. “I was therefore *literally* right in the poem on Villafranca, she wrote to her sister on the day before this letter” (Heydon and Kelley 148). Baron Alexander von Schleinitz, Prussian Minister of Foreign Affairs, served as one of eight in this post in 1848 and again from 1858 to 1861. The River Mincio is located in Lombardy.

Later that summer, EBB was still rationalizing the peace treaty of the previous summer (with good reason, it turns out), and taking Prussia to task for its role in the cessation of the war. EBB wrote to Anna Martin (21 August 1860) that "Prussia deserves to be—what shall I say?—docked of her Rhenish provinces? It would be a too slight punishment. She caused the Villafranca halt (according to her official confession by the mouth of Baron Schleinitz, last spring)" (Kenyon 2: 402).

Originally published with only eleven stanzas in the *Athenæum*, the poem in this collection contains twelve stanzas total, with the rhyme pattern of ABABCCB. The stanzas contain seven lines each and as Genevieve Wiggins writes, are a

> modification, by expansion, of the ballad stanza, the second, fourth, and seventh lines being iambic trimeter and the remainder of the stanza being cast in iambic tretrameter. Thus, each stanza adds two tetrameter lines followed by a trimeter line to the conventional ballad stanza. This is true except of the two introductory stanzas in which the fourth is a tetrameter line. The use of this simple stanza form seems particularly appropriate for a narrative poem addressed to a child. (36)

This is the first of several poems in this collection to have a brief epigraph. Here "Told in Tuscany" perhaps reinforces the idea that the seat of linguistic and political power resides in the north of Italy; or perhaps this is simply a way to ensure that the location is clear for British readers. EBB may have included this epigraph to solidify her connection to Tuscany, as an author in support of the *Risorgimento*, or it may connect back to the original title of *Casa Guidi Windows*: "A Meditation in Tuscany."

[page 26]

A TALE OF VILLAFRANCA.[98]

TOLD IN TUSCANY.

I.

MY little son,[99] my Florentine,
   Sit down beside my knee,
And I will tell you[100] why the sign
   Of joy which flushed our Italy,
Has faded since but yesternight;
And why your Florence of delight
   Is mourning as you see.

II.

A great man (who was crowned one day)[101]
   Imagined a great Deed:[102]
He shaped it out of cloud and clay,

---

[98] *A Tale of Villafranca*. Originally published in *The Athenæum* on 24 September 1859 (397-98). Villafranca is the name of the town where the Emperors of France and Austria, Napoleon III and Franz Josef, signed a peace treaty on 11 July 1859. No Italian representatives were present, and subsequently, the treaty was not embraced by all Italians. It included the following: 1) Lombardy would be ceded to Piedmont through France; 2) Austrian-appointed rulers would return to power in Modena, Parma, and Tuscany; 3) Venice would remain under Austrian rule; 4) the Pope would be appointed to rule as president over a confederacy of Italian states (Lewis 2: 426). In addition, Napoleon had secretly agreed with Piedmont to annex Nice and Savoy should France come to Italy's aid in a war with Austria.
[99] *My little son.* "This may refer to EBB's child, Robert Barrett Browning (1849-1912)" (Porter and Clark 3: 429, n. 1). It is significant that this child is possibly English and Italian as is Aurora Leigh (and Corinne before her), whether or not EBB meant her own son (see later note). In *CGW*, the speaker also mentions her son (EBB's son would have been only a few months old at that time).
[100] *And I will tell you*. With this line, EBB has the mother claim the authority to speak of the current political situation.
[101] *A great man*. Louis Napoleon essentially crowned himself as Emperor Napoleon III.
[102] *a great Deed.* The liberation of Italy from Austria, and consequently, the unification of the Italian Peninsula's states into one Italian country is a great deed. This was not Napoleon's intention, as mentioned previously. He sought a strong and friendly neighbor in Piedmont, or a Kingdom of Northern Italy. His vision included the formation of a Kingdom of Central Italy (which was *not* ruled by the pontiff), and the southern Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Three Italian kingdoms posed less of a threat to France than one, and likely stronger, unified Italian country. But it was by his great "Deed," coming to the aid of the Italian cause, that ultimately helped to make the *Risorgimento* a reality.

[page 27]

He touched it finely till the seed
Possessed the flower: from heart and brain
He fed it with large thoughts humane,
   To help a people's need.

III.

He brought it out into the sun—
   They blessed it to his face:
'O great pure Deed, that hast undone
   So many bad and base!
O generous Deed, heroic Deed,
Come forth, be perfected, succeed,
   Deliver by God's grace.[103]

IV.

Then sovereigns, statesman, north and south,[104]
   Rose up in wrath and fear,
And cried, protesting by one mouth,
   'What monster have we here?
A great Deed at this hour of day?
A great just deed—and not for pay?
   Absurd,—or insincere.'

[page 28]

V.

'And if sincere, the heavier blow
   In that case we shall bear,
For where's our blessed 'status quo.'

---

[103] "Deed" or "deeds" appear multiple times in this poem as well as "Napoleon III in Italy" (and through her letters to friends and family during 1859). See particularly Stanzas IV and V in "Napoleon III in Italy."

[104] *Then sovereigns, statesmen, north and south*. Porter and Clark suggest this line is supported by EBB's letters in which she cites Odo Russell's thoughts on Napoleon III: "He, although full of distrust for Napoleon, became convinced, upon close observation, that his good will was really towards Italy: 'He is really rather Italian than French in working for Italy, and whatever has seemed otherwise has been forced from him in order to keep on terms with his colleagues the kings and queens of Europe'" (3: 429, n. 22; Lewis 2: 438). Russell was a good friend of the Brownings and a British diplomat in Italy.

Our holy treaties,[105] where,—
Our rights to sell a race, or buy,
Protect and pillage, occupy,
And civilise despair?'

VI.

Some muttered that the great Deed meant
A great pretext to sin;
And others, the pretext, so lent,
Was heinous (to begin).
Volcanic terms of 'great' and 'just?'
Admit such tongues of flame, the crust
Of time and law falls in.

VII.[106]

A great Deed in this world of ours?
Unheard of the pretence is:
It threatens plainly the great Powers;

[page 29]

Is fatal in all senses.
A just deed in the world?—call out
The rifles! be not slack about
The national defences.

VIII.

And many murmured, 'From this source
What red blood must be poured!'

---

[105] *holy treaties.* EBB here refers to the both the Treaty of Paris which determined peace in May of 1814 and the subsequent Congress of Vienna (October 1814-June 1815), which resulted in the subdivision of Europe (post-Napoleon I) and delivery of Italy into the hands of Austria, the Pope, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

[106] Stanza VII was not part of the poem as it was published in the *Athenæum* on 24 September 1859. EBB did not send this stanza with her query for publication as it harshly criticizes Tennyson's poem, "Riflemen, Form!" (published in *The Times* on 9 May 1859) and the rifle corps movement to arm the English people against a Napoleonic invasion; she did not believe the poem would be published with this stanza included (see Chapter 3 for a more in-depth treatment of EBB's and Tennyson's reactions to Napoleon III in 1852 and again in 1859). By the end of 1859, 180,000 volunteers had enrolled. The idea was part of the national discussion just after Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* (moving him from elected president to emperor) in 1852 (Lewis 1: 414).

And some rejoined, ''Tis even worse;
What red tape is ignored!'
All cursed the Doer for an evil
Called here, enlarging on the Devil,—
There, monkeying the Lord!

IX.

Some said, it could not be explained,
Some, could not be excused;
And others, 'Leave it unrestrained,
Gehenna's[107] self is loosed.'
And all cried, 'Crush it, maim it, gag it!
Set the dog-toothed lies to tear it ragged,
Truncated and traduced!'

[page 30]

X.

But HE[108] stood sad before the sun,
(The peoples felt their fate).
'The world is many,—I am one;
My great Deed was too great.
God's fruit of justice ripens slow:
Men's souls are narrow; let them grow.
My brothers, we must wait.'[109]

XI.

The tale is ended, child of mine,[110]

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[107] *Gehenna's.* A place of future torment; hell; also a place of torture; a prison. The word can be found in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic sources in various forms; it is also found in Medieval English literature used to mean "judicial torture" (*OED*).
[108] *But HE*. The use of small caps is an interesting one—suggesting a more lofty station for Napoleon III than that of mere mortal.
[109] *My brothers, we must wait.* Napoleon III, as the "HE" in the first line of this stanza and as the speaker at the end of this stanza, explains that the timing isn't right for his "great Deed" of liberating Italy from its oppressors.
[110] *child of mine*. This poem begins with a reference to the speaker's son—which as Porter and Clark point out (3: 429, n. 1)—could well be EBB's son. A biographical reading of this poem, at this point, becomes all the more tempting, especially given the subsequent lines in this stanza that suggest the child has "English" eyes. As a young child in 1859 (ten years old) Robert "Pen" Barrett Browning was a passionate supporter of the *Risorgimento*. EBB wrote just before publication of this volume that when Pen heard "Napoleon III in Italy" he

Turned graver at my knee.
They say your eyes, my Florentine,
Are English: it may be:
And yet I've marked as blue a pair
Following the doves across the square
At Venice by the sea.

XII.

Ah, child! ah, child! I cannot say
A word more. You conceive
The reason now, why just to-day

[page 31]

We see our Florence grieve.[111]
Ah child, look up into the sky!
In this low world, where great Deeds die,
What matter if we live?

---

was greatly moved: "I want to tell you (oh, I can't help telling you) that when the ode was read before Peni, at the part relating to Italy his eyes overflowed, and down he threw himself on the sofa, hiding his face. The child has been very earnest about Italian politics" (Kenyon 2: 360). However, it must be noted here that the child is a Florentine whose eyes "may" be English—and blue—but then the speaker suggests that may not connote Englishness because she has seen a similar pair in Venice. Another connection may exist (and is worth exploring further) between this child's ambiguous nationality and Aurora Leigh's as well as Corinne's. See Chapter 4 for additional discussion of this poem in comparison to *Corinne, or Italy*.

[111] *Florence grieve*. The Treaty of Villafranca disallowed the provisional government of Tuscany in Florence and reinstated the Grand Duke Leopold II. Florence did indeed grieve. EBB writes to Sarianna Browning of the devastating effect of the peace in the summer of 1859—not just on her personally, but on Florence as well: "[T]hough it may sound absurd to you, it was the blow on the *heart* about the peace after all that excitement and exultation, and walking on the clouds for weeks and months, and then the sudden stroke and fall, and the impotent rage against all the nations of the earth—selfish, inhuman, wicked—who forced the hand of Napoleon, and truncated his great intentions. Many young men of Florence were confined to their beds by the emotion of the news" (Kenyon 2: 319). To her sister, Henrietta, she writes (also in the summer of 1859): "On the day of the notification of the peace, the portraits and busts of the Emperor Napoleon disappeared throughout Florence. Florence where scarcely a man would have refused to die for him the day before! We were all blind incredulous, dizzy with grief. But the passion of the moment passed, and we returned to justice—and to the admission that after all the emperor's first duty was to France" (Huxley 317).

"A Court Lady"

This poem contains twenty-seven couplets with a meter that fairly regularly follows dactylic pentameter, but EBB is not a slave to meter or true rhyme (e.g., in couplet XXV, she rhymes: "lion" with "die on"; in couplet XXVI: "done" and "alone"). Some couplets are heroic, iambic pentameter.

The first seven couplets describe the demeanor and dress of the lady, noting her finery—silks, diamonds, laces—that she would normally have donned "to wear at the court of the king" (33). The rhetorical device of anaphora stands out in the first part of this poem; it is used in the second couplet along with the first line of the third couplet: "Never was lady…" The repetition reinforces the importance of the lady and her uniqueness. The remaining couplets expound on specific situations of various soldiers fighting in the war for Italian independence. She speaks to most of the soldiers to indicate their regional associations and validate their participation in the war as well as offer reassurance.

The quick rhythm of couplets lends a sense of urgency to the somber content: a hospital ward filled with dead and dying soldiers. But the lightness of the rhythm and its speed push the solemn content aside to glorify the acts of war and the righteousness of "brotherhood" formed by such conditions. The court lady is given great political power to pronounce judgment on those who have done the right thing and given up their lives to unify Italy and to assign blame to those who have thwarted that progress (Austria and the Roman Catholic Church). At the end of the poem, the speaker declares that the hospital ward is the "Court of the King" conferring a nobility on those within, or at least a nobility of deed.

However, the court lady could also be read as a harbinger of death, a lovely and kindly grim reaper, who dressed in jewels and silks who has come to see the lives of these

soldiers pass. The first description of her could be seen as unearthly: she has dark purple eyes or dark purple around her eyes, her pale, opal cheeks "burnt with a red and restless spark." She dresses in cold diamonds with laces that "drop from their rays, like a powder of snow" and yet her cheeks burn and she is "gathered… up in flame" as she rides in her carriage (49-50). Is she an icy *and* fiery Death? Does she bring death to the soldiers she visits (many she speaks with die) or is she bringing comfort to each soldier some of whom just happen to die? Or is she both burning Life and the freezing Death? In Stanza X, she is equated to Italy in a simile. It was not uncommon at the time to figure Italy as a distressed woman, but is *this* an Italy/woman who is the Death needed in order for the nation to rise again? In this volume of poems, Italy is born again through Napoleon III's efforts and arises from the grave of the past (Stanzas VII-IX), so is Italy reborn in "Italy and the World" (Stanza IV-VI). Does the court lady function as both Death and Life? Is she the embodiment of what Italy should be, through her declaration at the end of the poem, through a resurrection, one united nation? And is she also a representation of what was, a nation essentially dead, with disconnected citizens from multiple regions, a distressed woman? If she is Italy, then she saves herself through the death of the soldiers. Death is the solution for *her* resurrection. The soldiers die so that she/Italy can live.

It may also be possible to read this poem as a criticism of war and its inherent sacrifices by looking at the lady's ornate dress as mocking of military uniforms and their often elaborate and meaningful adornments.[112] She oversees what amounts to a parade

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[112] However, EBB herself dressed in clothing that represented the soldiers' uniforms (see note below regarding Barbara Neri's work on EBB's dress). To complicate matters further, in a book that EBB valued in her early years, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects,* Mary Wollstonecraft compares soldiers to women suggesting that there is little difference as soldiers are "particularly attentive to their persons,

ground littered with bodies of nameless young men all to unify a country that is intrinsically disconnected. The various regions are named, as well as a Frenchman, only to show their differences still exist. "'Art thou a Romagnole?'" she asks a young man (35). She doesn't ask "are you *from* Romagnole?" She asks if he *is* Romagnole. The question itself implies that the soldier is identified by regional connection first—perhaps identifies himself that way (which was indeed the case for most residents of the peninsula then). In fact, the court that the lady declares exists within the ward is by association, in the final lines, a Piedmontese court, not explicitly an *Italian* court. The Piedmont court became the Italian court under Victor Emanuel, but it was most definitely a Piedmont court to which the citizens of the newly formed country paid homage and a Piedmont king under whom the regions united.

All that said, it seems unlikely that a criticism of war was remotely the intent as EBB does not mention such in her letters; criticism of the *Risorgimento* and war in general are fairly rare in her later work as that was seen to be the path to Italian liberty. But it's worth considering here in relation to her later Italian poem, "Mother and Poet," which does suggest a multi-layered approach to the sacrifices of war. And if read in conjunction with *Corinne, or Italy*—a relationship explored in detail in Chapter 4—this poem becomes a vastly broader treatment of women and their political/professional/personal roles in connection with Italy as both a metaphor and a reality.

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fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures, and ridicule.* Like the FAIR sex, the business of their lives is gallantry. They were taught to please, and they only live to please" (43). Wollstonecraft's original footnote adds: "Why should women be censured with petulant acrimony, because they seem to have a passion for a scarlet coat? Has not education placed them more on a level with soldiers than any other class of men?" (43).

[page 32]

A COURT LADY.[113]

I.

HER hair was tawny with gold, her eyes with purple[114]
were dark,
Her cheeks' pale opal burnt with a red and restless
spark.

II.

Never was lady of Milan nobler in name and in race;
Never was lady of Italy fairer to see in the face.

III.

Never was lady on earth more true as woman and
wife,
Larger in judgment and instinct, prouder in manners
and life.

[page 33]

IV.

She stood in the early morning, and said to her
maidens, 'Bring
That silken robe made ready to wear at the court of
the king.

V.

'Bring me the clasps of diamond, lucid, clear of the
mote,

---

[113] EBB writes to her friend Anna Jameson about this poem: "The 'Court Lady' is an individualisation of a general fashion, the ladies at Milan having gone to the hospitals in full dress and in open carriages" (Kenyon 2: 360). "A Court Lady" was published separately on 29 March 1860 in *The Independent* (New York) on the first page, the same month *PBC* was issued.

[114] *purple*. As a color, purple is associate with royal rank; however, it can also be used to describe mourning or penitence. In this instance, the eyes being "dark with purple" could indicate fatigue (dark purple circles surrounding the eyes) and/or that the eyes are those of one who is noble in rank *and* mourning.

Clasp me the large at the waist, and clasp me the
small at the throat.

VI.

'Diamonds to fasten the hair, and diamonds to fasten
the sleeves,
Laces to drop from their rays, like a powder of snow
from the eaves.'[115]

VII.

Gorgeous she entered the sunlight which gathered her
up in flame,
While, straight in her open carriage, she to the hos-
pital came.

[page 34]

VIII.

In she went at the door, gazing from end to end,
'Many and low are the pallets, but each is the place of
a friend.'

IX.

Up she passed through the wards, and stood at a
young man's bed:
Bloody the band on his brow, and livid the droop of
his head.

X.

'Art thou a Lombard, my brother? Happy art thou,'[116]

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[115] EBB uses woman's dress here as a political act in support of a martial endeavor. As Barbara Neri notes in her unpublished essay, EBB herself chose to wear a Zoauve jacket to visibly align with the war effort to unite Italy (see note for Stanza XI in "Napoleon III in Italy").

[116] *Art thou a Lombard, my brother? Happy art thou*. "[H]appy as a Lombard because to the North Italian belonged a considerable degree of well being and independent life" (Porter and Clark 3: 430, n. 19). The northern Italian economy had historically been much more prosperous than many other regions in the peninsula. As well, this line may be referring to what EBB perceived as the difficulty the Lombards had to endure under Austrian rule. EBB

she cried,
And smiled like Italy[117] on him: he dreamed in her
face and died.

XI.

Pale with his passing soul, she went on still to a
second:
He was a grave hard man, whose years by dungeons
were reckoned.

[page 35]

XII.

Wounds in his body were sore, wounds in his life were
sorer.
'Art thou a Romagnole?'[118] Her eyes drove lightenings
before her.

XIII.

Austrian and priest had joined to double and tighten
the cord
Able to bind thee, O strong one,—free by the stroke
of a sword.

XIV.

'Now be grave for the rest of us, using the life over-

---

wrote to Sarianna Browning in April 1859 that "[w]hat is suffered in Lombardy *exceeds what is suffered elsewhere* (Kenyon 2: 311); consequently to have fought for independence and died in that fighting may have conferred happiness upon a soldier, as indicated.

[117] *And smiled like Italy*. It was not uncommon to allude to Italy as a woman, benevolent and kind, yet enslaved or abused and used by her oppressors. That the "court lady" is so clearly lovely and empowered and smiles like "Italy" suggests that the soldier's life was justly spent in fighting for Italy's reunification. (See a further exploration of the simile in this poem Chapter 4.)

[118] *Romagnole*. This term is used to describe a native or inhabitant of the region of Romagna (a northern Italian area known as Emilia-Romagna); it is the only word from *Poems Before Congress* to appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* with an illustrative quote (see previous note for "Napoleon III in Italy"). Here, by the use of "Romagnole," along with "Austrian and priest" in subsequent lines as "joined to double and tighten / the cord," the speaker points out that the region of Romagna suffered under the dual oppression of the Austrian Empire and papal rule (Porter and Clark 3: 430, n. 24).

cast
To ripen our wine of the present, (too new), in glooms
of the past.'

XV.

Down she stepped to a pallet where lay a face like
a girl's
Young, and pathetic with dying,—a deep black hole
in the curls.

[page 36]

XVI.

'Art thou from Tuscany, brother? and seest thou,
dreaming in pain,
Thy mother stand in the piazza, searching the List of
the slain?'

XVII.

Kind as a mother herself, she touched his cheeks with
her hands:
'Blessed is she who has borne thee, although she
should weep as she stands.'

XVIII.

On she passed to a Frenchman,[119] his arm carried off by
a ball:
Kneeling, . . 'O more than my brother! how shall I
thank thee for all?

XIX.

'Each of the heroes around us has fought for his
land and line,

[119] *Frenchman*. "[T]he disinterestedness of a stranger coming in to assist Italy called out naturally the thanks accorded him" (Porter and Clark 3: 430, n. 35). In her letters, EBB made much of the fact that Napoleon's "disinterestedness" was at the heart of his support of Italy—that he made an effort to help Italy with no reward at the end. The reality was that Napoleon and France were rewarded with the acquisition of Nice and Savoy, but Napoleon's commitment to Italy's *Risorgimento* was genuine in intent—to a point.

But *thou* hast fought for a stranger, in hate of a wrong
not thine.

[page 37]

XX.

'Happy are all free peoples, too strong to be dispos-
sessed.
But blessed are those among nations, who dare to
be strong for the rest!'

XXI.

Ever she passed on her way, and came to a couch
where pined
One with a face from Venetia,[120] white with a hope out
of mind.

XXII.

Long she stood and gazed, and twice she tried at the
name,
But two great crystal tears were all that faltered and
came.

XXIII.

Only a tear for Venice?—she turned as in passion
and loss,
And stooped to his forehead and kissed it, as if she
were kissing the cross.

[page 38]

XXIV.

Faint with that strain of heart she moved on then to
another,
Stern and strong in his death. 'And dost thou suffer,
my brother?'

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[120] *Venetia*. The North-Eastern region surrounding Venice; also referred to as the Veneto. Venetia eventually faced a longer struggle than other areas of Italy, as it was handed back to Austria in the Treaty of Villafranca. By 1866 it had joined a united Italy under Victor Emmanuel's rule.

XXV.

Holding his hands in hers:—'Out of the Piedmont
lion[121]
Cometh the sweetness of freedom! sweetest to live
or to die on.'

XXVI.

Holding his cold rough hands,—'Well, oh, well have
ye done
In noble, noble Piedmont, who would not be noble
alone.'

XXVII.

Back he fell while she spoke. She rose to her feet
with a spring,—
'That was a Piedmontese! and this is the Court of
the King.'

[121] *Out of the Piedmont lion*. This may be "referring to the lion's carcass in which Samson found honey (see Judges xiv., 8), and especially appropriate as a greeting to a Piedmontese, because Piedmont was by far the strongest of the states and ablest to initiate the liberation, as she had under Victor Emmanuel, as well as first under Charles Albert, to rise against Austria" (Porter and Clark 3: 430, n. 49).

"An August Voice"

This poem is full of satirical wit and puns, not what might be expected from a collection begun with an ode in praise of Napoleon III, especially given that this poem's speaker is the subject of the ode. EBB pokes holes in the dignity of political leadership who cannot meet the needs of the people and who are pushed by circumstance to rely on the whim of military power to retain office. The Treaty of Villafranca did stipulate that the Grand Duke be recalled by the people, and he was, but few believed that his leadership was the right solution to the situation, including Napoleon, who acceded to the demand for restoration of the Grand Duke (and other previous leaders in key areas of Italy).

EBB uses other leaders or thinkers juxtaposed to Napoleon III and the Grand Duke to deepen the ironic thrust of the poem. The mention of Francesco Dall'Ongaro and Bettino Ricasoli in the first stanza is deeply ironic as EBB knew Dall'Ongaro to be a revolutionary thinker, poet, and teacher who was unlikely to write a sonnet to celebrate a man mostly seen as a traitor to Florentines. Bettino Ricasoli was part of the provisional government established when the Grand Duke fled Tuscany at the start of the war. That he would explain the need of a constitution to a nobleman supported by the oppressive Austrian regime is not only ironic, it is humorous, outrageous.

Further criticism of the Grand Duke comes by way of his association with the papacy. During his exile from Florence in 1849, he stayed in Gaeta along with Pius IX. His alignment with both the Austrian government and the Pope guaranteed that EBB's satirical pen would be pointed his way eventually, and through this poem it is clear how she feels about Leopold II. What is less clear is her use of Napoleon III in her condemnation.[122]

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[122] For more discussion of this poem, see Chapter 3.

One reading is enough to understand the irony present in the poem, but nuance is easily lost amidst EBB's references to current affairs and prominent figures of the time. Wiggins writes: "The poem is a skillful satire, but practically incomprehensible to the average modern reader who lacks Mrs. Browning's conversance with nineteenth-century Italian politics" (39). But for her contemporary readers, EBB knew these figures would be foremost in their minds, and like a good political satirist, she took advantage of the current news to skewer those she felt were worthy of public skewering and wrapped it all in a pun that begins with a nod to a newspaper.

The poem has twelve stanzas with a rhyme pattern of: ABABCDCDA. The repeated lines "You'll take back your Grand Duke?" or "You'll call back your Grand Duke?" (in question form or statement) function as an introductory line for each stanza and a conclusion. Here, she borrows from the ballad tradition to include an incremental repetition that changes meaning as the poem moves forward, indeed, itself moves the poem forward. The frame of many of these stanzas echo the frame used in the volume (repetition is a key factor in "Napoleon III in Italy" and in "A Curse for a Nation").

Each stanza includes two quatrains (ABAB, CDCD), then the repeated first line in some form. Wiggins writes of the meter in this poem: "[it] is predominantly anapestic trimeter but handled very loosely."[123] She also notes EBB's "use of an unusual and difficult metrical effect which she shared with Poe,[124] amphibrachic verse," which involves "a

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[123] I have found EBB's meter usage to be generally "loosely" handled, suggesting a prefiguring of a more modern poetry which does not strictly adhere to classical rules of composition and values content and effect above form.

[124] There are three intriguing things about this similar use of meter by EBB and Edgar Allen Poe: 1) Poe dedicated "The Raven" to EBB; 2) the echo of "nevermore" resounds in "emperor evermore" in "Napoleon III in Italy"; and 3) Napoleon III is the speaker here.

succession of feet containing a stressed syllable between two unstressed syllables" and offers these lines as examples:

> Providing an easy solution. (39 I: 8)
>
> And ask you to meet his advances. (39 II: 4)
>
> Then called in the foe to protect you. (41 V: 4)
>
> The patriot cousin at Turin. (41 VI: 4)
>
> At thought of bombarding your city! (42 VII: 4)[125] (Wiggins 46)

Wiggins cautions that "[a]mphibrachic verse is always subject to the danger of sounding like a limerick, but in a satiric poem this limerick rhythm is not inappropriate" (46). Indeed, this poem, as satire, has the makings to be highly amusing to its contemporary readers.

EBB did not allow tradition to dictate form or meter. In this poem, she includes multiple double rhymes that often are seen in less serious poetry—supporting the notion that this is a lighter poem meant to satirize and ironically amuse. In the first stanza alone, she includes "upon it" and "sonnet" and "constitution" and "solution" (39 I: 2, 4, 6, 8). In later stanzas, the rhymes include:

> "shock it"; "pocket" (40 IV: 2, 4)
>
> "plain for us"; "vain for us" (42 VII: 6, 8)
>
> "done there"; "sun there" (43 IX: 6, 8)

Most stanzas include an instance of double-rhyming. Wiggins quotes Walter Savage Landor, a dear friend of the Brownings': "How is it possible that so serious a writer as Miss Barrett should not perceive that the two word rhyme is only fit for ludicrous subjects?" (qtd. in Wiggins 47). In this poem, it may be that very tendency to the ludicrous that EBB plays

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[125] Note that this unusual meter is used at the end of quatrains.

upon to underscore the ridiculous situation the people of Tuscany find themselves in as they call back an incompetent leader at the behest of a seeming liberator in league with an oppressor—none of whom are Italian.

[page 39]

AN AUGUST VOICE.

"Una voce augusta."—
MONITORE TUSCANO.[126]

I.

YOU'LL take back your Grand Duke?[127]
I[128] made the treaty upon it.
Just venture a quiet rebuke;
Dall'Ongaro[129] write him a sonnet;

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[126] *Tuscano Monitore*. This is the Italian translation of the newspaper, "The [Tuscan] Monitor." Their motto "una voce augusta" (an august voice) refers "with a grim pun to the voice of the emperors pronouncing at Villafranca, in August, how affairs should go. Napoleon is speaking" (Porter and Clark 3: 430; title note).

[127] *your Grand Duke?* Grand Duke Leopold II, who ruled Tuscany by leave of the Austrian government, left Florence in April 1859 but was recalled after the Treaty of Villafranca: "[O]ne of the conditions of the treaty of Villafranca being the return of Leopold to his Tuscan duchy" (Porter and Clark 3: 430, n. 1). EBB wrote to Anna Jameson in August (approximately a month after the treaty) that, "The vain talk about Napoleon's intervening militarily on behalf of the Grand Duke has simply been the consequence of statements without foundation in the English and German papers…. Napoleon with his own lips, *after the peace*, assured our delegates that no force should be used. And he has repeated this on every possible occasion. At Villafranca, when the Emperor of Austria insisted on the return of the Dukes, he acceded, on condition they were recalled. He 'did not come to Italy to dispossess the sovereigns,' as he had previously observed, but to give the power of the election to the people. Before we left Rome this spring he had said to the French ambassador, 'If the Tuscans like to recall their Grand Duke, *qu'est-ce que cela me fait?'* He simply said the same at Villafranca" (Kenyon 327).

[128] *I*. Napoleon's voice, the speaker here, is "an *august* voice" both because of the resolution of power that took place in August (following the July Treaty of Villafranca) and because he is an *august* presence. This also suggests that both emperors are a combined august or powerful voice. They certainly did not allow any other voices to be heard at Villafranca in July 1859 regarding the dissolution of war and distribution of land; they were the sole arbiters of the peace.

[129] *Dall'Ongaro*. Francesco Dall'Ongaro (1808-1873), an Italian writer and professor of literature in Florence, translated "A Court Lady" for a broadside that was quite popular in Florence, "La Dama di Corte." Porter and Clark describe Dall'Ongaro this way: "Italian poet and patriot priest, who translated Mrs. Browning's Italian poems into Italian" (3: 430, n. 4). The plural "poems" suggests more translations exist than "A Court Lady," but I have not yet found evidence of additional translations. An introduction to the poem lists EBB as a resident of Florence, the author of *Aurora Leigh*, the most recent author of *Poems Before Congress,* and alludes to the preface: "What I have written has simply been written because I

Ricasoli[130] gently explain
   Some need of the constitution:
He'll swear to it over again,
Providing an 'easy solution.'
You'll call back the Grand Duke.

II.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   I promised the Emperor Francis
To argue the case by his book,[131]
   And ask you to meet his advances.

[page 40]

The Ducal cause, we know,
   (Whether you or he be the wronger)
Has very strong points;—although
   Your bayonets, there, have stronger.
You'll take back the Grand Duke.

III.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   He is not pure altogether.
For instance, the oath which he took
   (In the Forty-eight rough weather[132])

---

love truth and justice *quand même,*—'more than Plato' and Plato's country, more than Dante and Dante's country, more even than Shakespeare and Shakespeare's country" (iii). EBB was aware of Dall'Ongaro as a *Risorgimento* poet and Italian patriot before *PBC* was published; in the fall of 1859, she writes to a friend of how her son read "Dall'Ongaro's political poems" (Heydon and Kelley 145).

[130] *Ricasoli*. Baron Bettino Ricasoli (1809–80) was an active political leader and voice for Italian unity. In 1859, he was part of a triumvirate heading the provisional government of Tuscany after Grand Duke Leopold's flight. He skillfully negotiated the annexation of Tuscany to the kingdom of Sardinia through a plebiscite in 1860. Ricasoli succeeded Camillo Benso di Cavour as prime minister (1861–62) of the unified kingdom of Italy (he later held that office again in 1866–67). It was after his retirement from public office that Baron Ricasoli, in his Castello di Brolio (built in 1142), created Chianti through a formula based on Sangiovese. For many years the winery was run by various owners, but was re-acquired by Francesco Ricasoli in 1992—bringing it back into the Ricasoli family.

[131] *I promised the Emperor Francis / To argue the case by his book*. Here it seems as if Napoleon III is disavowing responsibility for the peace treaty.

[132] *In the Forty-eight rough weather*. In 1848, EBB believed the best of Leopold II who seemed to support Tuscan efforts to throw off the Austrian yoke of power because of his

He'd 'nail your flag to his mast,'
   Then softly scuttled the boat you
Hoped to escape in at last,
   And both by a 'Proprio motu.'[133]
You'll call back your Grand Duke.

IV.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   The scheme meets nothing to shock it
In this smart letter, look,
   We found in Radetsky's[134] pocket;

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willingness to allow a Tuscan [or Florentine] civic guard. Leopold resided in Florence—except when fleeing from the wrath of the Italians. The subsequent lines allude to his willingness to "scuttle" his loyalties in return for Austrian protection. He rushed off when things looked grim in the late 1840s and came back at the head of an Austrian army to rule again until 1859.

[133] *Proprio motu*. Or the phase can be written as *motu proprio* ("s" signals plural). This usage is related to EBB's use of *Motu proprios* in *CGW* (II, line 110), meaning by one's own motion, of one's own accord—a legal phrase. Porter and Clark (3: 415, n. 110) write that "the poet alleges that the Duke [in *CGW*], like other Czars or absolute rulers… chose to do nothing save by their own good wills, or *motu proprios."* In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford in 1847, EBB describes how her dog, Flush, ran away and stayed away all night. When he came back the next morning, "he *did* look so very guilty & conscious of evil on his return… 'motu proprio', as our Grand Duke says in his edict" (Kelley 14: 312). A stunning juxtaposition of her dog and the Grand Duke, both of whom had returned (both to their homes in Florence) and both of whom were guilty of fleeing, and then coming back—but not in the good graces of those who received them. The denotation of *motu proprio* is actually deeper than Porter and Clark indicate. It does mean: of one's own motion; of one's own initiative; of one's own accord; by one's own desire; or on one's own initiative. But it is also a Roman Catholic legal term used in papal documents to signify that the pontiff decided upon a provision or declaration personally without advice or input or countersigning or sealing of the document by any other church official. The phrase is also used to signify that a papal *motu proprio,* as part of a dispensation, will be deemed valid, even if counter to ecclesiastical law (or previous decisions by the Pope himself). A *motu proprio* was first used by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484; but it was used secularly, too. In 1763, a *motu proprio* was used to secure succession by a second son to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, leading eventually to Leopold II's installation (on and off again) as Grand Duke, until the annexation of Tuscany to Piedmont in 1860—which ended forever the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. EBB's use of the phrase here could support the reading that the Grand Duke Leopold II would do anything to save himself—of his own desire with a possible reference to the *motu proprio* that gave his family this duchy in 1763. Thus, EBB's use of "both" makes sense if inferred to refer to "both" his oath and the circumstance of his title. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). For more on this in *CGW*, see Markus's notes on *motu proprios* (102, n. 110).

[page 41]

Where his Highness in sprightly style
   Of the flower of his Tuscans wrote,
'These heads be the hottest in file;
   Pray shoot them the quickest.' Quote,
And call back the Grand Duke.

V.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   There *are* some things to object to.
He cheated, betrayed, and forsook,
   Then called in the foe to protect you.
He taxed you for wines and for meats
   Throughout that eight years' pastime
Of Austria's drum in your streets—
   Of course you remember the last time
You called back your Grand Duke.

VI.

You'll take back the Grand Duke?
   It is not race he is poor in,
Although he never could brook
   The patriot cousin at Turin.[135]

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[134] *Radetsky*. Graf Joseph Radetsky von Radetz (1766-1858) was a Czech noble and soldier and eventually Field Marshal for the Austrian Empire's army and commander of forces in northern Italy for many years in the 1830s through the end of his life. He served the Austrian Empire as a vital member of its army for seventy-three years. In 1848, he nearly destroyed the Piedmontese army at Novara (the defeat compelled Charles Albert to abdicate in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel). Radetsky ruled Lombardy and Venetia for Austria until his death in Milan in 1858—one year before the Second War of Italian Independence. The reference here to the letter in Radetsky's pockets alludes to the correspondence between the Grand Duke and Radetsky during the 1848 conflict in which Radetsky promised that if the Grand Duke should flee, deny a provisional Italian government, as well as support Austrian claims to Tuscany, Radetsky would save him and reinstall him "on the throne of his ancestors" (qtd. in Porter and Clark 3: 415, n. 102). EBB mentions him in several letters from 1849, but in one particular letter, she calls the Grand Duke and the Pope, Radetsky's "beloved friends" (Lewis 1: 249).

[135] *patriot cousin at Turin*. Victor Emmanuel's seat of government was in Turin. In 1852, when Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866) resigned his post of Prime Minister, he recommended Cavour as his replacement. In his "address to the Piedmont Chamber of Deputies, he quoted from the passage concerning Charles Albert [Victor Emmanuel's father] in *Casa Guidi*

[page 42]

His love of kin you discern, [136]
   By his hate of your flag and me—
So decidedly apt to turn
   All colours at the sight of the Three.*[137]
You'll call back the Grand Duke.

VII.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   'Twas weak that he fled from the Pitti;[138]
But consider how little he shook
   At thought of bombarding your city!
And, balancing that with this,
   The Christian rule is plain for us;
. . Or the Holy Father's Swiss[139]
   Have shot his Perugians[140] in vain for us.

Windows (II, 694-723)" (Lewis 2: 397, n. 14). In March of 1859, EBB would meet d'Azeglio, who was the son-in-law of "the author of 'Promessi Sposi,'" (Lewis 2: 399) and also a novelist himself. The novel, *I Promessi Sposi* (1825-27), by Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), a best-seller in Italy, "went far to get a version of the Tuscan form of Italian accepted as the language which would be used by the peoples of the united kingdom" (Hearder 177). Both d'Azeglio and Manzoni were prominent in Italian politics in and around Rome and Turin.

[136] *His love of kin you discern*. Leopold II was related to the Austrian ruling family, the Hapsburgs, and hence would have had no love for Napoleon III and the Italians who were working to defeat Austrian rule.

[137] *sight of the Three.** The asterisk indicates that this was a footnote in the original printing by Chapman and Hall (London, 1860) and read: "The Italian tricolor: red, green, and white."

[138] *Pitti*. Leopold II, the Grand Duke, lived in the Pitti Palace in Florence while he governed Tuscany; the Pitti was located across the square and around the corner from Casa Guidi where EBB and Browning kept their primary residence; they could see part of it from their windows and watch celebrations and military marches from their terrace.

[139] *Holy Father's Swiss*. The Roman Catholic church's Pontiff/Pope/Holy Father is guarded by Swiss soldiers. Pope Julius II welcomed 150 Swiss soldiers to St. Peter's Square on 21 January 1506 to be blessed as his personal guard. The Guards have disbanded occasionally as a pontiff was imprisoned or exiled. Currently, there are 100 Swiss Guards, the smallest army in the world. These guards are still responsible for the Pope's safety while in the Vatican City (*Vatican Information Service*).

[140] *Perugians*. Perugia, a part of the Umbrian region in Central Italy, was under the control of the papacy. In 1859, the Perugians forced out the Papal Legate and set up a provisional government. Pope Pius IX sent in his troops headed by Cardinal Antonelli, his prime minister; they found great resistance from the Perugians, but despite their best efforts, the

You'll call back the Grand Duke.

VIII.

Pray take back your Grand Duke.
—I, too, have suffered persuasion.
All Europe, raven and rook,
Screeched at me armed for your nation.[141]

[page 43]

Your cause in my heart struck spurs;
I swept such warnings aside for you:
My very child's eyes, and Hers,
Grew like my brother's who died for you.[142]

Perugians were defeated. It is to this incident that she refers in these lines. EBB had second-hand knowledge of this revolt and its suppression. EBB writes to her sister Arabella (June 1859) that she is very excited about the war that may win Italy's independence, but that there have been difficulties. She offers an extended description:

> The Perugia business has fearfully pulled at our hearts. Some American friends of ours, the Perkins's, were in it—they had an invalid in their family for whose sake they were in Rome last winter, & wished to be in Rome next winter, & of course it was an object meanwhile to keep out of the sweep of the war. They went to Perugia for the summer thinking to be safe & quiet. Well—they have escaped barely with their lives. The pope's Swiss troops attacked the hotel where they were, & prepared to bayonet them all– Mrs. Perkins rushed between the bayonet's point & her husband's heart—a soldier seized her by the ear & threw her aside– He protected her however & all her's [sic] against the rest of the troop, though they had to give up their watches & money . . regular brigandage!– Ten of them were shut up the whole night in the most private closet of the house, . . that soldier lying before the door with a drawn sword. The terror was so great, that Mr. Perkins's mother (before in a nervous state) is quite insane . . remains so. . . . Women & children killed in the streets—& *worse*– It is said that the French ambassador had talked of taking down the French arms & leaving Rome. Cardinal Antonelli is responsible… (Lewis 2: 416)

[141] *All Europe, raven and rook, / Screeched at me armed for your nation*. In the same letter to her sister, quoted above, telling of the harrowing experience of the Perkins family, EBB refers to the Pope, Cardinal Antonelli, and the papal troops as "birds of prey" (Kelley 2: 416). Perhaps EBB puts these words into Napoleon's mouth referring both to the ravens (carrion eaters) and the rooks (a nuisance bird) to show the wide variety of those who were opposed to Napoleon III's armed forces brought to Italy.

[142] *My very child's eyes, and Hers, / Grew like my brother's who died for you*. Napoleon III, as the speaker in this poem, perhaps refers to his son's eyes (Prince Imperial born in 1857) being similar to his brother's eyes who died fighting in an unsuccessful Italian revolt in 1831. The eyes referred to that are "Hers" is ambiguous. Porter and Clark suggest the following: "That his mother's eyes should be included in the appeal seems not so credible, and the poet

You'll call back the Grand Duke?

IX.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   My French fought nobly with reason,—
Left many a Lombardy nook
   Red as with wine out of season.
Little we grudged what was done there,
   Paid freely your ransom of blood:
Our heroes stark in the sun there,
   We would not recall if we could.
You'll call back the Grand Duke?

X.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   His son rode fast as he got off
That day on the enemy's hook,
   When *I* had an epaulette shot off.[143]

[page 44]

Though splashed (as I saw him afar, no,
   Near) by those ghastly rains,
The mark, when you've washed him in Arno[144]
   Will scarcely be larger than Cain's.[145]
You'll call back the Grand Duke.

XI.

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may be glancing a little mysteriously at the Italian lady, his cousin, with whom Louis Napoleon was in his early Italian days in love, and bent upon marrying, had not fortune otherwise ordered" (3: 431, n. 70). Or perhaps, since "Hers" is capitalized, it is a reference to the feminized Italy.
[143] *epaulette shot off*. EBB wrote to a friend in Sept. 1859 that "Napoleon in the thickest of the fire, with one epaulette shot off, was a symbol intelligible to the whole population" (Kenyon 2: 331). Porter and Clark mention this in their notes: "a real incident of Napoleon's Italian campaign" (Porter and Clark 3: 431, n. 85).
[144] *Arno*. A river in northern Italy which runs through Florence.
[145] *Cain's*. After he murdered his brother, Abel, Cain was "marked" for life. The implication here is that should the Tuscans wash away the Grand Duke's "sins" in the Arno—by recalling him to rule Tuscany—his "mark" for his betrayal is large and would remain. See Genesis 4:15 in which Cain is "driven from the land" (not unlike the Grand Duke being driven from Tuscany), and "…the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him."

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
   'Twill be so simple, quite beautiful:
The shepherd recovers his crook,
   . . If you should be sheep, and dutiful.
I spoke a word worth chalking
   On Milan's wall[146]—but stay,
Here's Poniatowsky talking,—
   You'll listen to *him* to-day, [147]

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[146] *I spoke a word worth chalking on / Milan's wall*. On June 5, after the battle of Magenta, Napoleon III entered Milan and "proclaimed the disinterestedness of his motives, saying, 'Your enemies, who are also mine, have endeavored to diminish the universal sympathy felt in Europe for your cause, by causing it to be believed that I am making war for personal ambition or to increase French territory. If there are men who fail to comprehend their epoch, I am not one of them. In the enlightened state of public opinion now prevailing, true greatness lies in the moral influence which we exercise rather than in sterile conquests,' concluding, 'Tomorrow you will be the citizens of a great country'" (Porter and Clark 3: 431-2, n. 95). But this quote does not explicitly say that Napoleon III did *not* also wage war for personal or territorial gain.

[147] *Here's Poniatowsky talking,— / You'll listen to* him *to-day*. Often spelled Poniatowski, this is the surname of the Polish noble family. Stanislaw August Poniatowski (1732-1798) ruled as the last (and elected) King of Poland from1764 until he was forced to abdicate in 1795 when his country was partitioned a third time. One of his descendants is referred to here. It may be Count Walewski, the foreign minister of Napoleon III, who was the natural child of Napoleon I and Marie Walewski (a Polish noblewoman who may have been related to the royal family—she became Napoleon I's mistress at the insistence of the Polish nobility in the hopes that he would aid their reunification). Another Poniatowski (Stanislaw's nephew) performed admirably in Napoleon I's army and was promoted to Marshal of France for battlefield heroics: Josef Antoni Poniatowski (1763-1813). Since he died in combat in 1813, it is unlikely that this is the man referred to in this line. During EBB's lifetime, Josef Michal Poniatowski (1816-1873; nephew of the Marshal) achieved great acclaim as a composer of operas. He became a naturalized Tuscan citizen in 1847. In Florence, a Prince and Princess Poniatowski were part of Grand Duke Leopold II's court, living in Palazzo Poniatowski-Guadagni (there is also a tomb for a Prince Poniatowski in San Marco).

Because this poem suggests an underlying complexity of political truth and untruth, yet another Poniatowski may be the one to whom EBB refers, especially given the emphasis EBB places on "him," suggesting "he" had been listened to before but had proven false. A Prince Stanislaus Poniatowksi (1754-1833) commissioned a series of gems (around 2,500) from "gem-engravers in Rome who turned to Classical literature, especially the works of Homer, Vergil and Ovid for inspiration, and not to the many ancient Classical representations which had inspired Neo-Classical art" (Beazley Archive, Oxford). This Poniatowski published a catalog of these gems that he categorized as "ancient" in 1833. When he died, his collection was auctioned off, and the fraud was widely recognized. One collector, John Tyrrell, published a selection of his purchase in 1859 (with photographs)—the year EBB wrote this poem. But well over a decade earlier than Tyrrell's publication, EBB writes of the

And call back the Grand Duke.

XII.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
Observe, there's no one to force it,—
Unless the Madonna, St. Luke
Drew for you,[148] choose to endorse it.

"Poniatowsky gems" in a letter (1845). It appears that she wrote verse about the subjects of the gems which weren't published until "Last Poems" (Kelley 10: 171). I cannot find proof that EBB knew of the fraud in 1845 or 1859 (or any time between these years) or which Poniatowski she refers to, but it seems likely that she may have meant this last one given the nature of the way he fooled the public, as did the politicians of the time, such as the Grand Duke.

Yet another possibility exists for this reference. Wiggins suggests that EBB means a Joseph Poniatowsky who was born to "a prominent Polish family" in Italy and "served as an envoy to Tuscany." She writes:

> A friend of Napoleon III, he became a French senator in 1855. Ricasoli interviewed Poniatowsky in Paris in 1851, and was asked what could be done to restore harmony between the Grand Duke and the Tuscans. Ricasoli answered that there was no solution except dismissal of Austrian troops and a change of government. [Wiggins cites: W.K. Hancock, *Ricasoli and the Risorgimento in Italy* (New York: Howard Pertig, 1969), p. 170.] The reference of Poniatowsky in the poem implies that in 1859 he still desired an acceptance of the Grand Duke by his people. (41)

This Joseph cannot be the one mentioned above who was the composer and naturalized as a Tuscan citizen in 1847. However, the Poniatowsky Wiggins refers to could well be the same Prince Poniatowski who lived at the family palazzo and was a member of Leopold's entourage and may have been part of the family who moved to France in 1855, becoming as Wiggins points out, a French senator in that year. That Napoleon would refer to him does make sense in this case even if he has not been living in Florence for the four years previous to the war of 1859—if they were friends and Poniatowsky was a member of Napoleon's government.

Interestingly, like the Ricasoli family in Tuscany, the Poniatowski family ended up as vintners. In 1855, family members moved to France. By 1918, they had purchased a vineyard and since then have been producing an award-winning Vouvray. Prince Phillipe Poniatowsky is the current owner of the vineyard.

[148] *Unless the Madonna, St. Luke / Drew for you*. EBB's dear friend, Anna Jameson, who accompanied her and Browning on their honeymoon, aiding their flight from England to France and eventually Italy, wrote *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1854), a two-volume collection of myths and legends surrounding painting. In a chapter on St. Luke, Jameson notes that Luke is often portrayed as a physician. However, "the pretty legend that makes him a painter" is more interesting, although it's a story not supported by earlier tradition (154). She believes it is a legend of Greek origin that gave rise to "innumerable Virgins of peculiar sanctity," one of which Luke carried around with him and with which he performed

[page 45]

I charge you by great St. Martino[149]
    And prodigies quickened by wrong,
Remember your Dead on the Ticino;[150]
    Be worthy, be constant, be strong.
—Bah!—call back the Grand Duke!![151]

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miracles (155). In legend, and in reality, "St. Luke painting the Virgin has been a frequent and favourite subject" writes Jameson, and lists several examples of this, including a Raphael in the Academy of St. Luke, Rome, in which St. Luke is drawing the Madonna while Raphael stands by observing (156).

[149] *St. Martino*. EBB may be referring to Pope Martin I (from Rome), later St. Martin, to whom multiple miracles are attributed. His relics are interred at San Martino ai Monti in Rome (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

[150] *Ticino*. The river in northern Italy that delineated Italian/Austrian boundaries, it was over the Ticino river that the Austrian troops "poured against Piedmont in the uprising of 1849… the Italians had been crushed by Radetsky; and in the campaigns of Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel [in 1859] the Austrians tried to resist the French advance, this battle of Magenta being very nearly a drawn battle and disastrous to thousands, Macmahon's arrival at five in the afternoon barely averting defeat" (Porter and Clark 3: 432, n. 106).

[151] *—Bah!—call back the Grand Duke!!* Finally, the speaker suggests, after questioning throughout the poem, that the Florentines will call back the Grand Duke because they have to—the agreement between Napoleon III and Franz Josef mandating a recalling of Austrian-backed rulers in certain areas (see earlier note). Tuscany was one. But "Bah!" also suggests an element of resignation on the part of Napoleon III, who seems to have wanted to help the Florentines, and at the same time, realizes no one can help them—they should be strong, they should be worthy, they should be constant, but they will have to recall the Grand Duke no matter what else they may desire. It was a situation EBB found frustrating, but it was not a new situation. In 1849, EBB wrote to her sister Henrietta of the Grand Duke's return then, echoing the sentiments here:

> The Austrians are to arrive in Florence tomorrow, & the officers are to be quartered on the inhabitants. I am sick at heart, & so is Robert at the prospects of the country– I, individually, give up the Grand Duke if it is proved, as it almost seems to be, that he has invited or connived at this Austrian intervention—but weakness of head too often is found to extend to the heart & conscience. What is clearly *ignoble*, is the resumption of his Austrian titles coincidently with the Austrian invasion. I give him up now, as Robert did a long time ago. I give him up, having fought for him gallantly– I shed some tears when he went away, and could cry again for rage at his coming back again–"Put not your trust in princes" (Kelley 15: 280)

At the end of this passage, EBB quotes from Psalms 146:3 (*King James Bible*). This would be a philosophy she continued to adhere to for the most part regarding the Grand Duke, but not always with Napoleon III. See Chapter 2 for more detailed exploration of this poem and EBB's ideas of leadership.

“Christmas Gifts”

The battles of the previous summer had coincided with insurrection against papal secular authority.[152] In December 1859, near Christmas time, the Pontiff was very much on EBB’s mind. She was in Rome for the winter finishing these poems and the preface (dated February 1860). She wrote to Sarianna Browning in December that finding an apartment was much easier that winter than in previous ones because the Pope’s obstinacy had left “Rome a solitude and called it peace—very problematical peace.” Later in the same letter EBB writes: “The Pope’s ‘reforms’ seem to be limited…. to an edict against crinolines, the same being forbidden to sweep the sacred pavement of St. Peter’s. This is *true*, though it sounds like a joke” (Kenyon 2: 353). The peace of Villafranca had ended the war the previous summer, but the Pope’s political situation was tense and his position seemed to be unstable. EBB wrote of going to see the Castellani swords created in Rome for presentation to Napoleon III and Victor Emmanuel “in homage and gratitude” but the “whole business had to be huddled up at the end, because of His Holiness denouncing all such givers of gifts as traitors to the See” (Kenyon 2: 354-55). The title of this poem, may be connected to this petty work of the Pope. Christmas gifts should be something the leader of the church would give to or share with his flock, but the poem shows that this is not what happened.

In November 1859, the treaty had been formally signed. Much ground had been gained in the work of the *Risorgimento*, but Venetia had not won its freedom. The treaty allowed for the formation of an Italian Confederation with the Pope as an honorary president of the confederated states. A congress was scheduled (the congress EBB refers to in the title of these poems) to further settle Italian affairs, but Arthur de la Guéronniére’s pamphlet, “Le

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[152] For more detail, see notes on Perugia and the pontiff’s army in “An August Voice.”

pape et le congrés" written at Napoleon III's request (who may have actually been a co-author), was published demanding that the Pope give up all temporal power. EBB mentions she is "delighted," in a letter in late December, that Italy will be represented by Cavour at the congress and that "Antonelli and his party are in desperation, gnashing their teeth at the Tuileries" (Kenyon 2: 360), implying that there was much discontent between the Pope in Rome and the Emperor in Paris.

By January 1860 the Pope had formally and publicly denounced the pamphlet, but ended up losing most of his temporal power over the coming years. And the congress never convened. In February, EBB writes to Anna Jameson that the Pope is in a "fury" over recent events, acting "neither evangelical nor angelical," calling "Napoleon a *sicario* (cut-throat), and Vittorio Emanuele an *assassino*" (Kenyon 2: 361).

The nine stanzas of this poem contain six lines each with end rhymes of ABACBC. Biblical imagery and allusions abound in this short poem as one might expect of a criticism of a spiritual leader who assumes secular power but who fails ultimately in both roles. Some of the imagery might have been suggested to EBB when she and friends attended a Grand Mass at St. Peter's on Christmas Day in 1858 (Garrett 111). The preponderance of sibilants cannot be missed in this poem that hisses when lines are spoken aloud. In the first stanza alone there are fifteen /s/ sounds:

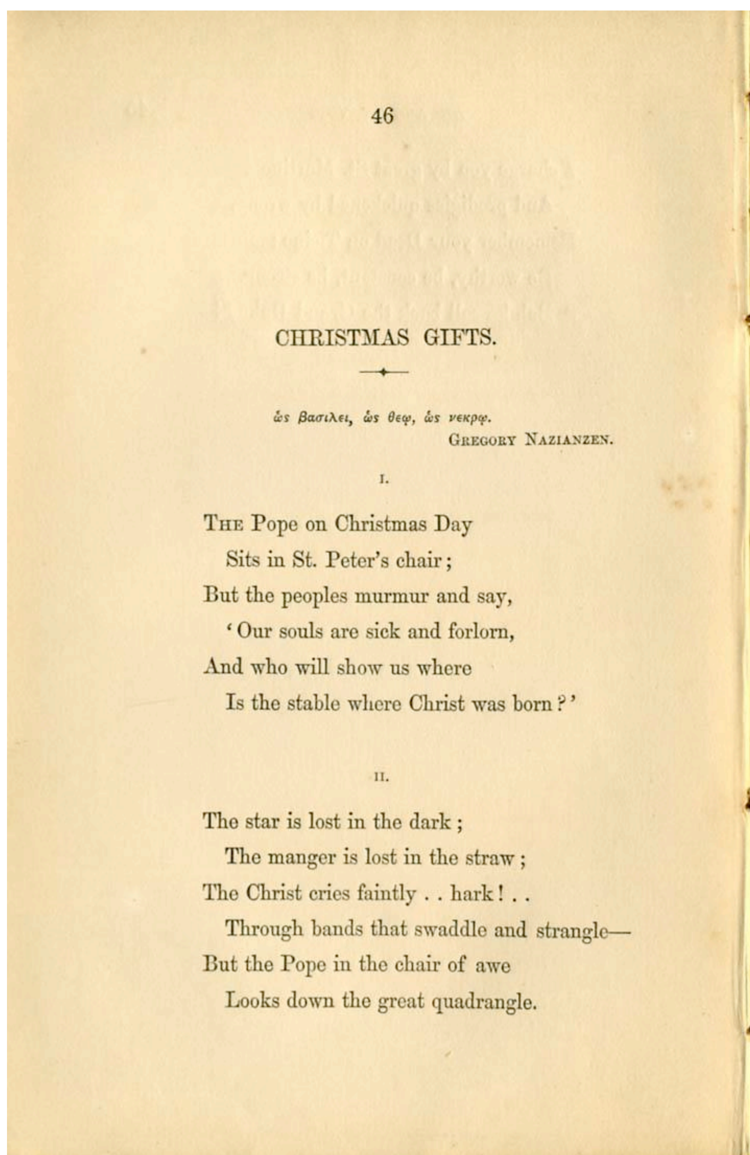
Christmas (2)
sits
St. Peter's (2)
peoples
say
souls (2)
sick
us
is
stable

Christ
was

Indeed, there is hardly a line of the poem that does not include /s/, mirroring the hissing and whispering that show the people are dissatisfied with the Pope (in Stanza V, the people "speak through their teeth).

Furthermore, the meter of this poem, while irregular, mimics nursery rhymes or fairy tales, effectively infantilizing what might usually be revered: the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.

Figure 4—First Page of "Christmas Gifts"



CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

ὥς βασιλει, ὥς θεῳ, ὥς νεκρῳ.
GREGORY NAZIANZEN.

I.

THE Pope on Christmas Day
  Sits in St. Peter's chair;
But the peoples murmur and say,
  'Our souls are sick and forlorn,
And who will show us where
  Is the stable where Christ was born?'

II.

The star is lost in the dark;
  The manger is lost in the straw;
The Christ cries faintly . . hark! . .
  Through bands that swaddle and strangle—
But the Pope in the chair of awe
  Looks down the great quadrangle.

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CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

As to a king, as to a god, as to a corpse.[153]
GREGORY NAZIANZEN.[154]

I.

THE Pope on Christmas Day
   Sits in St. Peter's chair;[155]
But the peoples murmur and say,
   'Our souls are sick and forlorn,
And who will show us where
   Is the stable where Christ was born?'

II.

The star is lost in the dark;
   The manger is lost in the straw;
The Christ cries faintly . . hark! . .
   Through bands that swaddle and strangle—
But the Pope in the chair of awe
   Looks down the great quadrangle.

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[153] Porter and Clark translated the Greek epigraph for this poem (see Figure 4).
[154] *Gregory Nazianzen*. Gregory from Nazianzus (328-390) was the son of two saints (St. Gregory and St. Nonna) and the brother of two more (St. Gorgonia and St. Cesarea). He went into the family business. Before becoming the Bishop of Nazianzus in 362 (replacing his father as bishop), Gregory traveled to Athens to pursue studies with his friend, St. Basil. After his appointment as Bishop, he was much sought after as a speaker, eventually being lured to Constantinople where he was not immediately popular (he was initially stoned by the citizens there). In 380 Theodosius (347-395; Roman Emperor 379-395) appointed him Bishop of Constantinople to stabilize and spread the Nicene orthodoxy. When the strife of politics between church, state, populace, and non-Nicene churches became overwhelming, he retired to the country to write poetry. He is the "earliest Christian poet on record" (Jameson 341) and one of the Christian poets EBB translated. She wrote of him in her essays on Greek Christian poets which were published in the *Athenæum* between February and August 1842 and which were later reprinted in *Last Poems* (1862). An interesting epigraph for this poem, perhaps St. Gregory serves as a comparison to the current pontiff in 1859, Pius IX, who appears to be the opposite of Gregory, an significant early church leader and a martyr (and not a coward by any definition). If so, Pius IX falls far short by the comparison. The fact that Gregory was also a poet may have been as important to EBB as his courage.
[155] *St. Peter's chair*. The chair in St. Peter's Cathedral in which the Pope sits during a Catholic Mass. It could also be an allusion to the pontiff's role that is a direct result of Jesus Christ's charge that Peter become the rock upon which the church is built—"Peter" meaning rock (Matthew 16:18). The Roman Catholic church acknowledges Peter as the first Pope.

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III.

The magi kneel at his foot,
   Kings of the east and west,
But, instead of the angels, (mute
   Is the 'Peace on earth' of their song),
The peoples, perplexed and opprest,
   Are sighing, "How long, how long?'

IV.

And, instead of the kine,[156] bewilder in
   Shadow of aisle and dome,
The bear who tore up the children,[157]
   The fox who burnt the corn,[158]
And the wolf who suckled at Rome[159]
   Brothers to slay and to scorn.[160]

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[156] *kine.* Archaic use of the plural of cow.
[157] *The bear who tore up the children*. The prophet Elisha, on his travels, was confronted by "little children out of the city [Bethel], and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them" (*King James Bible* 2 Kings 2:23-24).
[158] *The fox who burnt up the corn*. Samson punishes the Philistines by letting foxes, with tails afire, run through their fields: "And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them to into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives" (*King James Bible* Judges 15:3-5).
[159] *And the wolf who suckled at Rome*. "[R]eferring to the wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus, the brothers who founded Rome and quarrelled [sic] over laying out the city, Romulus slaying Remus" (Porter and Clark 432, n. 23).
[160] In this stanza (IV), EBB refers to Biblical and mythological allusion to draw a vision of the Pope as actually fostering behavior symbolized by these stories. Instead of the domestic and peaceful "cow" (kine), in the church, it is filled with violence in which eventually brother slays brother. In the previous two stanzas, the pontiff cannot hear or see the Christ child, and instead of angels singing "'Peace on earth,'" the people are oppressed and confused. After this stanza, the Pope is seen to be surrounded by his cardinals, but the people are so unfulfilled and tense, they talk "through their teeth" questioning his position.

V.

Cardinals left and right of him,
   Worshippers round and beneath,
The silver trumpets at sight of him
   Thrill with a musical blast:
But the people say through their teeth,
   'Trumpets? we wait for the Last!'[161]

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VI.

He sits in the place of the Lord,[162]
   And asks for the gifts of the time;
Gold,[163] for the haft of a sword,

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[161] *'Trumpets? we wait for the Last!'* This may refer to the seven angels of the Book of Revelation—each of whom has a trumpet and blows it to devastating effect (*New International Bible* Revelation 8).

[162] *He sits in the place of the Lord*. This may be a reference to the earlier mention of the Pope sitting in St. Peter's chair from Stanza 1; however, the wording here may also suggest that the Pope is actually usurping the Lord's place by asking for "the gifts of the time" (Christmas) which are meant to wage war and maintain a secular kingdom (opposed to the gifts the magi brought to the Christ child for a celebration and reverence for His birth). EBB had no great love for Pio Nono (the nickname of Pius IX). In her preface to *Casa Guidi Windows*, she explicitly mentions that she was not as "crazy" about him as some others were in the heat of the reformation of 1848: "Of the two parts of this poem, the first was written nearly three years ago, while the second resumes the actual situation in 1851. The discrepancy between the two parts is a sufficient guarantee of the truthfulness of the writer, who, though she certainly escaped the epidemic of 'falling sickness' of enthusiasm for Pio Nono, takes shame upon herself that she believed, like a woman, some royal oaths [referring to the Grand Duke's overtures to the Tuscans], and lost sight of the probable consequences of some obvious popular defects" (Markus xli). However, her letters in the early years of her stay in Italy show that she understood that others, at least, valued his "liberality." To Hugh Stuart Boyd, she writes in December of 1846: "The new pope is more liberal than popes in general, and people write odes to him in consequence" (Kelley 14: 85). She is positively glowing over the pontiff, though, by September 1847 when she writes to her two sisters, Arabella and Henrietta: "the Pope is the liberator— He is a great man . . I call him *great*. It is wonderful how a man in such a position, should have his soul free & pure for such a course of action. Liberty seldom originates for a people from the throne, . . and when you consider that it is a Pope's throne, the wonder grows most wonderful…" (Kelley 14: 302). But in 1848 when the Pope fled from Rome, and again by 1859, EBB writes of Pio Nono with an entirely different tone (Kelley 15: 182, 210; Lewis 2: 404).

[163] *Gold*. One of the three gifts the magi brought to the Christ child, the others being frankincense and myrrh (see the following lines in this stanza that list incense and myrrh)

To win back Romagna averse, [164]
Incense, to sweeten a crime,
And myrrh, to embitter a curse.[165]

VII.

Then a king of the west[166] said, 'Good!—
I bring thee the gifts of the time;
Red,[167] for the patriot's blood,
Green, for the martyr's crown,
White, for the dew and the rime,
When the morning of God comes down.'

VIII.

—O mystic tricolor bright!
The Pope's heart quailed like a man's:
The cardinals froze at the sight,
Bowing their tonsures hoary:[168]

(*King James Bible* Matthew 2:10-12). That EBB mentions, and mocks, these gifts as they are asked for by the Pope for secular purposes—and connects to the allusion that the pontiff is usurping the Lord as he "sits in the place of the Lord."

[164] *To win back Romagna averse*. Romagna, a district of northern Italy (known as the Emilia-Romagna region now), was a papal state until the Second War of Italian Independence in 1859. "Averse" as it is used to modify Romagna (despite following the noun), describes the state of Romagna as being opposed or disinclined or reluctant to be won back by the Pope—which indeed it was.

[165] *And myrrh, to embitter a curse*. If the pontiff is using an ingredient, usually reserved for holy uses, to "embitter a curse"—then this accusation may be directed at his misuse of spiritual power for secular purposes. The Pope's curse is one Italy suffers under, not dissimilar to the curse of slavery in America, portrayed it the last poem of this volume.

[166] *Then a king of the west*. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor Napoleon III.

[167] *Red*. Along with "Green" and "White" (in the following two lines), red makes up the three colors of flag of the united Italy. The Italian flag is then referred to in the first line of Stanza VIII, "—O mystic tricolor bright!" These three colors—gifts symbolizing freedom from oppression—are ironically compared to the three gifts the pontiff asks for in Stanza VI, which clearly are meant to support warmongering.

[168] *tonsures hoary*. This description evokes the image of monks' heads shaved entirely or partially—with only a ring of hair around the edges with the crown of the head bald. Coupled with "hoary," the image includes grey or white hair remaining on the head implying advanced age. There is an obscure usage of "hoary" meaning "mouldy, muster; corrupt" which might have been a definition EBB was familiar with given: 1) her opinion that the Pope (and cardinals) were corrupted; and 2) her deep, varied vocabulary and propensity to the arcane (*OED*).

And the eyes in the peacock-fans[169]
Winked at the alien glory.

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IX.

But the peoples exclaimed in hope,
'Now blessed[170] be he who has brought
These gifts of the time to the Pope,
When our souls were sick and forlorn.
—And *here* is the star we sought,
To show us where Christ was born!'[171]

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[169] *peacock-fans*. These fans, called flabellum, were historically made of a variety of materials and used to keep insects away from the sacraments and the priest. The peacock fans specifically referred to here are "used at the Vatican whenever the pope is carried in state… to or from the altar or audience-chamber" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). In *Varied Types*, G.K. Chesterton suggests that the "great curse of the Elizabethans is upon" EBB as "she cannot leave anything alone, she cannot write a single line without a conceit." Then he quotes the final two lines of Stanza VII: "And the eyes of the peacock fans / Winked at the alien glory," which "she said of the Papal fans in the presence of the Italian tricolour" (264). Of her attempt at such "aggressive and outrageous figures of speech," he writes: "She gives the reader the impression that she never declined a fancy, just as some gentleman of the eighteenth century never declined a duel. When she fell it was always because she missed the foothold, never because she funked the leap" (Chesterton 265). Despite these criticisms, Chesterton finds EBB to be a great poet (261).

[170] *Now blessed*. Here the people have wrested away the right to bless from the priesthood to confer their own blessing on the one who most helps them—a secular leader.

[171] The end seems especially heretical as the people have just replaced the priesthood's monopoly on blessing, and now a king usurps the Pope in spiritual endeavors—a secular leader shows the people the true way of Christ, conflating this leader (much maligned in England) with the star showing the way to the manger. Most contemporary critics focused their indignation upon the first and last poems of the volume; had they closely read this, they might have increased their denigration of *PBC* even further.

“Italy and the World”

The twenty-eight stanzas, of five lines each, use rhyme patterns that flow from one stanza to the next in a chain rhyme. The first four rhyming lines are connected to the next stanza by the last line: ABABC; CDCDE; EFEFG; GHGHI. This is followed throughout all twenty-eight quintains to create a continual and explicitly-linked forward movement mirroring the content of Italian unification and an eventual utopian Christian post-national world.

EBB dabbles in experimentation here in rhyme and meter, as she often does. Mostly she uses trochaic tetrameter, but does not adhere to this exactly throughout the poem. In rhyming, too, she plays with words to create pairs such as “taunting” with “planting” and “turret” with “unhurried.” Sometimes the pairings feel strained but not to the detriment of the whole. And as she did so frequently in the satire, “An August Voice,” she uses double rhymes multiple times here, such as “dewy side” with “suicide”; “chorus” with “before us”; “release us” with “piece us.” If taken out of context, the strain of the rhymes is apparent, and the rhymes seem forced, but when mixed with an irregular meter, and read in the context of the whole, the rhymes do not seem forced or too jarring.[172]

The second longest in the collection, after “Napoleon III in Italy,” this poem follows a trajectory of Italy’s reunification as a model for overcoming regionalism and other differences. It is placed wholly in a Christian context as noted in the end—it is as a Christian nation that Italy leads others to a way of seeing the future that includes disinterested prosperity and good will for all nations. This poem’s position is particularly interesting

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[172] The review in *The Morning Post* suggested that *PBC* was “declamation, distorted out of prose, but not elevated into poetry” (3). EBB’s innovation and experimentation caused more than one reviewer to comment unfavorably on her form, meter, and rhyme. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of the reviews.

given its location *after* the portrayal of one Christian world, and its leadership, gone awry in "Christmas Gifts." In "Italy and the World," a system of Christian values is essential for the future good of all, in order for brotherhood and international citizenship to grow and prosper, but a Roman Catholic world will not suit the vision. EBB showed that model as inadequate in "Christmas Gifts." The oppressive model offered by Austria's control of northern Italy, in which a people have no real choice in their destiny, was proved to be ridiculous, if not absurd, in "An August Voice."

Through these poems, EBB has explored various kinds of leadership, and found Pius IX, as well as the Grand Duke, various other European statesmen, and the British government less liberal that she would have wished them to be. However, through the unification of Italy, others may learn how to create a better world.[173]

[173] For a more detailed discussion of this poem, please see Chapter 2.

[page 50]

ITALY AND THE WORLD.

I.

FLORENCE, Bologna, Parma, Modena.[174]
When you named them a year ago,
So many graves reserved by God, in a
Day of judgment, you seemed to know,
To open and let out the resurrection.

II.

And meantime (you made your reflection
If you were English[175]), was nought to be done
But sorting sables, in predilection
For all those martyrs dead and gone,
Till the new earth and heaven made ready.

III.

And if your politics were not heady,
Violent, . . 'Good,' you added, 'good

[page 51]

In all things! mourn on sure and steady.
Churchyard thistles are wholesome food
For our European wandering asses.[176]

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[174] *Florence, Bologna, Parma, Modena*. These are all regions or cities directly affected by the Second War of Italian Independence in 1859.
[175] *If you were English*. EBB resoundingly criticized the British in the preface for what she believed was their noninterference in the *Risorgimento*. She also regularly found fault with British ignorance of the "real" Italian situation in her letters. To Sarianna Browning, she writes in early 1859: "I for one can receive no compliments about 'English honesty' &c., after the ignoble way we are behaving about Italy" (Kenyon 2: 307). In a letter to her sister, Arabella, later in 1859, she writes: "Whatever feeling for Italy has been talked out by the English of late, is simply another form of English jealousy against France" (Lewis 2: 435). After publication of *PBC*, she writes to Arabella again, how "the selfishness & most ignoble narrowness in England sickens me just now: I breathe hard in it all" (Lewis 2: 395).
[176] *European wandering asses*. The wandering ass appears in literature from the Bible and Aesop's Fables through the Middle Ages (see John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, for example) and beyond. Also see Exodus 23:4, "When you happen upon the ox of your enemy, or his wandering ass, returning you shall return it to him" (*LITV Bible*). Aesop's, "The Ass Eating

IV.

'The date of the resurrection passes
   Human fore-knowledge: men unborn
Will gain by it (even in the lower classes),
   But none of these. It is not the morn
Because the cock of France is crowing.

V.

'Cocks crow at midnight, seldom knowing
   Starlight from dawn-light: 'tis a mad
Poor creature.' Here you paused, and growing
   Scornful, . . suddenly, let us add,
The trumpet sounded, and the graves were open.[177]

VI.

Life and life and life! agrope in
   The dusk of death, warm hands, stretched out
For swords, proved more life still to hope in,
   Beyond and behind. Arise with a shout,
Nation of Italy, slain and buried!

[page 52]

VII.

Hill to hill and turret to turret
   Flashing the tricolor,—newly created
Beautiful Italy, calm, unhurried,

Thistles," tells the story of an ass that prefers eating thistles to any more sumptuous or delicate foods. As well, asses eating thistles are part of Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel.* From the thistle's point of view, Hans Christian Andersen tells a tale with a hungry ass. EBB was personally acquainted with Andersen and very likely would have known of his, as well as these other uses of "wandering asses." In this particular case, it appears that the English are speaking from early in the third stanza through the third line of the fifth stanza. "Our" wandering asses might be British expatriates who wandered around Europe, and who, in contrast to the English, did have "heady" and "violent" politics. Perhaps the use of "wandering asses" is EBB's way of suggesting that was how some English at home may have viewed the English abroad who possessed differing political points of view.
[177] *The trumpet sounded, and the graves were open.* As in Stanza V of "Christmas Gifts," EBB seems likely to be referring to the trumpets in Revelation 8; however, actual resurrections happen much later in this Biblical book.

Rise heroic and renovated,
Rise to the final restitution.

VIII.

Rise; prefigure the grand solution
Of earth's municipal, insular schisms,—
Statesmen draping self-love's conclusion
In cheap, vernacular patriotisms,
Unable to give up Judæa for Jesus.[178]

IX.

Bring us the higher example; release us
Into the larger coming time:
And into Christ's broad garment piece us
Rags of virtue as poor as crime,
National selfishness, civic vaunting.

X.

No more Jew nor Greek then,—taunting
Nor taunted;—no more England nor France!

---

[178] *Unable to give up Judæa for Jesus*. Judea refers to the collective Jewish Kingdoms and their peoples who occupied some part of what is called the Holy Land since recorded history (and who fought foreign rule up to the late 1940s when the modern state of Israel gained independence—although who has a right to what land is still a much contested issue). That leaders are unable to give up Judea for Jesus may be an indictment of Judaism. Western Christianity is certainly valued over other religions in the world EBB envisions here. In *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God*, Linda Lewis writes that EBB "classified herself as an Independent or Dissenter [Congregationalist] by early adulthood" although she avoided any regular religious services (11). Her Christianity was inclusive, if anything. When in Rome, she attended Catholic mass; she was married in an Anglican church; she had her son baptized in French Lutheran church; she was a regular reader of Swedenborg (Lewis 12-13). Lewis argues in her book that EBB's women characters reflect connections to both New and Old Testament women. Scheinberg, however, considers how EBB displayed her knowledge and use of Hebrew in her poetry, how she portrayed herself as an authority on Hebrew scriptures, but she argues that the anxiety of occupying such a position was ultimately revoked in the Christianized union of Aurora and Romney in *Aurora Leigh*, and in EBB's life by her own union with Robert Browning which transformed her from an isolated scholar-poetess into "one of Victorian England's most famous Christian women poets" (Scheinberg 70-71; 99-100; 105). This particular moment in the poem may be less a judgment of Judaism, overall, than it is another instance of EBB's demonstration of her Biblical knowledge. Despite this possible reading, the rest of the poem subsumes all other affiliations, religious or political, into a Christian utopian future.

[page 53]

But one confederate brotherhood planting
   One flag only, to mark the advance,
Onward and upward, of all humanity.

XI.

For civilisation perfected
   Is fully developed Christianity.
'Measure the frontier,' shall it be said,
   'Count the ships,' in national vanity?
—Count the nation's heart-beats sooner.

XII.

For, though behind by a cannon or schooner,
   That nation still is predominant,
Whose pulse beats quickest in zeal to oppugn or
   Succor another, in wrong or want,
Passing the frontier in love and abhorrence.

XIII.

Modena, Parma, Bologna, Florence,[179]
   Open us out the wider way!
Dwarf in that chapel of old St. Lawrence
   Your Michel Angelo's giant Day,[180]

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[179] *Modena, Parma, Bologna, Florence*. To indicate a "coming full circle," perhaps, this order is completely reversed from the first line of the poem.
[180] *Michel Angelo's giant Day*. Refers to a sculpture by Michelangelo in Florence which was referred to in *CGW* as well. Porter and Clark annotate this reference: "Michel Agnolo Buonarotti (1475-1564), the Tuscan sculptor, painter, and architect whose force and originality of genius was of the largest stamp and grasp.—*Night and Day And Dawn and Twilight*: [These famous statutes recline in the Sagrestia Nuova, on the tombs of Giuliano de' Medici, third son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Lorenzo of Urbino, his grandson. Strozzi's epigram on the Night, with Michel Angelo's rejoinder, is well known.—E.B.B.]" (Porter and Clark 3: 403, n. 73). The note by EBB, in brackets, is from *CGW*. In reference to these statues—"Michel's Night and Day / And Dawn and Twilight"—Julia Markus writes:

> "Michel" is … the great Florentine sculptor, painter, architect, and poet of the Renaissance. His marble statues, *Night*, *Day*, *Dawn*, and *Twilight* which EBB refers to, are in the New Sacristy of the Church of San Lorenzo… in Florence and were made between 1524 and 1534.

With the grandeur of this Day breaking o'er us!

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XIV.

Ye who, restrained as an ancient chorus,
   Mute while the coryphæus[181] spake,
Hush your separate voices before us,
   Sink your separate lives for the sake
Of one sole Italy's living for ever!

XV.

Givers of coat and cloak too,—never
   Grudging that purple of yours at best,—
By your heroic will and endeavor
   Each sublimely dispossessed,
That all may inherit what each surrenders!

XVI.

Earth shall bless you, O noble emenders
   On egotist nations! Ye shall lead
The plough of the world, and sow new splendours

Giovanni Battista Strozzi's epigram on *Night* and Michelangelo's rejoinder are quoted by Vasari. Strozzi wrote:

> The Night that here thou seest, in graceful guise
> Thus sleeping, by an Angel's hand carved
> In this pure stone; but sleeping, still she lives.
> Awake her if thou doubtest, and she'll speak.

Michelangelo, thinking of the retrogressive political situation in Florence, answers in the voice of Night. His rejoinder is central to the imagery of this section of the poem. Night does not want to wake while tyranny abides in Florence.

> Happy am I to sleep, and still more blest
> To be of stone, while grief and shame endure;
> To see, no feel, is now my utmost hope,
> Wherefore speak softly, and awake me not. (Markus 75, no. 73-74)

It's crucial to know that the imagery EBB tapped for illustrating a somber, wary moment in recent Italian history is now tapped again, but with a twist. *Day* is evoked for which much rejoicing is merited—for an Italy that will rise and will lead the way.

[181] *coryphæus*. The leader of a chorus; also the "title of a functionary in the University of Oxford, appointed (in 1856) to assist the Choragus" (*OED*). Porter and Clark include this definition: "[T]he leader or speaker of the classic chorus in the Greek tragedies was called the coryphæus" (3: 433; no. 67).

Into the furrow of things, for seed,—
Ever richer for what ye have given.

XVII.

Lead us and teach us, till earth and heaven
Grow larger around us and higher above.

[page 55]

Our sacrament-bread has a bitter leaven;
We bait our traps with the name of love,
Till hate itself has a kinder meaning.

XVIII.

Oh, this world: this cheating and screening
Of cheats! this conscience for candle-wicks,
Not beacon-fires! this over-weening
Of under-hand diplomatical tricks
Dared for the country while scorned for the counter!

XIX.

Oh, this envy of those who mount here,
And oh, this malice to make them trip!
Rather quenching the fire there, drying the fount here,
To frozen body and thirsty lip,
Than leave to a neighbour their ministration.

XX.

I cry aloud in my poet-passion,
Viewing my England o'er Alp and sea.
I loved her more in her ancient fashion:
She carries her rifles too thick for me,[182]
Who spares them so in the cause of a brother.[183]

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[182] *She carries her rifles too thick for me*. EBB criticizes England's volunteer rifle corps (see Chapter 3 for a detailed look at her criticism of this and Alfred Tennyson.)
[183] *in the cause of a brother*. EBB was highly critical of Britain's seeming lack of commitment to helping the Italian cause through direct intervention. The preface suggests this but in tempered terms. She rarely held back in her opinions of England or of politics in general in her letters and believed she understood the current affairs of England. She wrote frequently of the English lack of involvement; one example is to her sister Henrietta in early 1859: "For my own part, never did I feel myself so little English as now—No—I won't talk

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XXI.

Suspicion, panic? end this pother.
   The sword, kept sheathless at peace-time, rusts.
None fears for himself while he feels for another:
   The brave man either fights or trusts,
And wears no mail in his private chamber.

XXII.

Beautiful Italy! golden amber
   Warm with the kisses of lover and traitor![184]
Thou who hast drawn us on to remember,
   Draw us to hope now: let us be greater
By this new future than that old story.

XXIII.

Till truer glory replaces all glory,
   As the torch grows blind at the dawn of day;
And the nations, rising up, their sorry
   And foolish sins shall put away,

---

of politics. But judge all of you, what I must be feeling during the present state of things ; and while the infamous Times backs the present ministry into the iniquity of holding the hand of Austria against France in the matter of Italy. If any open step were taken by England on this bad road, I should learn to speak a new language. But there is hope still. The Daily News, for instance, is more generous than I expected; and the Post, Lord Palmerston's organ, speaks bravely and as I would have it. The people of England will never justify Lord Derby in the overt policy—surely it must be impossible. Meantime, I am breathless with emotion, seeing the development which I always foresaw on the part of Napoleon's intentions. Always I have said it would come to this. Tell Arabel, I am thinking of setting up as seer of politics, I am right so often" (Huxley 305-6).

[184] *Warm with the kisses of lover and traitor!* At the core of the Italian *Risorgimento*, one can search and find many who loved Italy well, many who betrayed her, and many who did both. Understanding depends on perspective—to those supporting Mazzini's dream, Cavour exemplified an evil aristocratic politics. To Cavour's supporters (such as EBB), Mazzini became unworthy of the sympathy he was able to produce for Italy, indeed, became seen as dangerous. Garibaldi was a hero—and a lover of Italy. But to the aristocrats who favored a more moderate revolution in which they continued to hold great financial power, he was too egalitarian. His popular support made many conservatives nervous that when the time came to unite Italy, he would not bow to Victor Emmanuel. EBB may be referring to these men who "courted" Italy in various ways over many years.

As children their toys when the teacher enters.

XXIV.

Till Love's one centre devour these centres
   Of many self-loves; and the patriot's trick

[page 57]

To better his land by egotist ventures,
   Defamed from a virtue, shall make men sick,
As the scalp at the belt of some red hero.[185]

XXV.

For certain virtues have dropped to zero,
   Left by the sun on the mountain's dewy side;
Churchman's charities, tender as Nero,[186]
   Indian suttee, heathen suicide, [187]
Service to rights divine, proved hollow:

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[185] *red hero*. The reference here is to the stereotypical 19th century concept of the savage Indian in the American West and the equating of such brutish behavior with the patriot who cannot see past his own country. This is a rare instance where EBB has used "hero" to mean anything less than the traditionally heroic. But this is not the only time she has shown an English-centric propensity for stereotyping other cultures.
[186] *Churchman's charities, tender as Nero*. "Nero, Emperor of Rome, being notorious for his excruciating cruelty, the comparison is grimly cynical" (Porter and Clark 3: 433; no. 123).
[187] *Indian suttee, heathen suicide*. The funereal practice in multiple ancient cultures in which a widow self-immolates upon her husband's pyre was meant to cleanse both the husband and wife of all sin and guarantee their reunion after death. Best known, perhaps, as a Hindu rite, it was outlawed by the British in 1829, but that did not entirely stop the practice. Porter and Clark write of suttee that it is "the Hindoo [sic] custom which exacted as proof of a wife's devoted love for her husband that she throw herself upon his funeral pyre and be burned to death" (3: 433; no. 124). EBB's equating "Indian suttee" as "heathen suicide" in the same breath as Nero suggests a taint of insanity about this particular practice. Her vision of what liberty and freedom meant—for English citizens or Italian citizens or men or women—of course, has to be accounted for with the understanding that her privileged, middle class, white, and financially independent life was largely created by slavery (in her youth, the family plantation in Jamaica provided a lucrative income). Later in life she was still partly supported from monies received via her uncle's will—whose income was initially based on slave labor, but even after slavery was outlawed, on trade with Jamaica (Kintner 1: 320). She has a complicated relationship with colonialism which cannot be responsibly explored here, but is a factor in her political views.

XXVI.

And Heptarchy[188] patriotisms must follow.
—National voices, distinct yet dependent,
Ensphering each other, as swallow does swallow,
With circles still widening and ever ascendant,
In multiform life to united progression,—

XXVII.

These shall remain. And when, in the session
Of nations, the separate language is heard,
Each shall aspire, in sublime indiscretion,
To help with a thought or exalt with a word
Less her own than her rival's honor.

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XXVIII.

Each Christian nation shall take upon her
The law of the Christian man in vast:
The crown of the getter shall fall to the donor,
And the last shall be first when the first shall be last,
And to love best shall still be, to reign unsurpassed.[189]

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[188] *Heptarchy*. Refers to the seven kingdoms that made up Anglo-Saxon Britain (Wessex, Sussex, Kent, Essex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria). After several centuries, in 829, the Heptarchy was united into one nation. Porter and Clark incorrectly identify "Heptarchy" as "referring to the beginnings of the English nation from the leagued *six* counties of the Anglo-Saxons under Alfred" (Porter and Clark 3: 433, n. 126, *emphasis mine*).
[189] In connection with the mention of "Christian nation" and "Christian man," EBB implies a more direct connection with Christianity by alluding to a variety of Biblical verses. The order of "last" before "first" appears in Luke 13:30 and Matthew 20:16, but the phrase also appears in Mark 10:31 and Matthew 19:30 (*King James Bible*).

"A Curse for a Nation" [190]

"A Curse for a Nation" was first published in *The Liberty Bell* (1856), an anti-slavery gift book, in the U.S.[191] EBB revised "A Curse for a Nation" from that publication for inclusion in *PBC,* and the poem has been surrounded by controversy ever since. It was this poem that Henry Chorley bristled at in the first review of *PBC* in the *Athenæum.* He used this poem to illustrate what he believed was EBB's appalling lack of patriotism; the review reproduced the "curse" only, minus the prologue, so the poem appeared as cursing without justification or context. Contemporary reception, perhaps building upon this first "misreading," was generally negative, but modern readings also differ from each other (and from Chorley's), applying a variety of thinking to this one poem. More recently critics have

[190] Porter and Clark offer the following annotation for the whole poem but no additional explanations or variants:

> **A Curse for a Nation** is a denunciation of America's inconsistency, then, in sanctioning slavery while standing for freedom. It was mistaken as directed against England on its appearance and strongly censured as unpatriotic by *The Athenæum* and other English papers and persons. Mrs. Browning explained that in fact *she* did not curse either England or America, that the poem was directed only to America, and she showed how the "curse" was involved in the action of slave-holding. It was persistently taken to be a shoe that fitted, and she wrote to Miss Isa Blagden April, 2 1860 that the truth was, "between you and me," that certain of the much discussed stanzas did suit England, as if they were so intended, although they were never so designed. In America the ardent poem fell in with the ethical fervor of the time against the evil rankling in the heart of the Republic, and helped her deliverance from it through the pending Civil War. (3: 433; title note)

[191] It's worth noting that just about twelve years earlier in 1848, EBB had published "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" in *The Liberty Bell* anti-slavery gift book. It was written shortly after EBB left England and dealt with an issue that haunted her own past: her family's wealth came from slaves working on their plantation in Jamaica. Both this poem and "A Curse for a Nation" are full of violent images, vehemently anti-slavery, exactly right for an anti-slavery gift book. But "A Curse for a Nation" may have been seen as an odd inclusion in a book on Italian/European politics, especially for her English readers who had never see the poem before. EBB published no other poems in *The Liberty Bell* after "A Curse for a Nation" in 1856.

refocused attention on the poetry itself and allowed the ambiguity of the political message to enrich readings of the poem rather than supplant it.

Gardner Taplin, in his 1957 biography of EBB, absolves Henry Chorley from blame for misreading the nation in "A Curse for a Nation" to mean England. Although Chorley's review brought EBB the most pain, as he was a long-time friend, "he was not greatly to blame, for it was not immediately clear against whom or what country the poet vented her curse" (378). Taplin also suggests that she should have not expected a good review given Chorley's perspective on Italian unification in his novel *Rocabella* (1859), which he dedicated to her and which she did not much like—and told him so. Taplin writes about the post-review letters sent between EBB and Chorley, concluding that the exchange "shows the extent to which her obsession with Italian affairs had destroyed her sense of proportion" (379).[192]

David DeLaura explores the context of the first publication of "A Curse for a Nation," its second appearance in *PBC*, and Robert Browning's defense of the poem. In his article, "A Robert Browning Letter: The Occasion of Mrs. Browning's 'A Curse for a Nation'" (1966), DeLaura shows that Browning defended the inclusion of this poem in the volume based on the Ostend Manifesto[193] although the manifesto was written five years prior to *PBC*. Browning wrote that "A Curse" was included "in a volume referring to Italian and European politics, because, just before at the famous Ostend assemblage..." it was resolved

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[192] This is not an unusual reaction to EBB's later poetry, especially for the 1950s, when her reputation as a poet had fallen far from the stellar place she held in her lifetime.
[193] The Ostend Manifesto was a secret document written in 1854 by diplomats from the U.S., France, and Spain in Ostend, Belgium, in which the U.S. attempted to purchase Cuba. If Spain refused the offer, the U.S. would then be free to acquire Cuba without reproach. The document was shortly leaked to the public; some perceived the attempt as one that would add another slave state to the U.S. South.

that "it would be proper for America to interfere thenceforward in questions of European policy." Additionally, Browning suggests the poem was an "admonition to set their [America's] own house in order" (DeLaura 210). DeLaura suggests that the 1854 date was not too far removed from 1859 to justify the poem's inclusion in *PBC* (and was an influence on the poem's first composition): "there is more justification for Mrs. Browning's inclusion of the poem than even her sympathetic modern critics have detected" (211).

A few years later, in his article, "'A Curse for a Nation': A Controversial Episode in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Political Poetry" (1969), Leo Arinshtein cites the above passage as a starting point to analyze DeLaura's thinking and the poem itself. Arinshtein asserts that

> there is really no evidence either in Browning's letter or outside it to show that the second publication of the "Curse" (as distinct from its composition) was provoked by the events at Ostend.... this simply cannot explain why the poem on … slavery appeared in a volume of poems on Italian affairs. If, on the other hand, one admits that Mrs. Browning wished to denounce British policy, her reasons become clear....
>
> The inclusion of the "Curse" in the volume should be regarded, then, as a deliberate ambiguity or piece of literary mystification, through which Mrs. Browning expected "to get relief to her conscience and heart"[194] without exposing herself to a violent reaction. When the storm came she tried to hide behind the shield of her ambiguity. (40)

[194] Arinshtein quotes EBB here (Kenyon 2: 379).

Arinshtein suggests that after the "scandal of *Poems Before Congress* it became impossible for Mrs. Browning to publish anything in England" save a few poems in *Cornhill* (41)[195] and that the "scandal" was responsible for only one English poet writing a poem in memoriam after her death (41-2).

In response to Arinshtein's and DeLaura's work, Robert Gladish quotes EBB's letter to Sarianna Browning explaining Browning's role in the publication of "A Curse" in *PBC* in "Mrs. Browning's 'A Curse for a Nation': Some Further Comments" (1969). He also notes that while EBB did admit in letters that the poem fit England, it was not written for that purpose. Gladish writes that it is vital to remember that Browning apparently had composed a poem that was more harshly critical of England than EBB had been in "Napoleon III in Italy," and that modern readers would be "unfair to suggest Browning recommended inclusion of 'A Curse' in order to provide the volume with the severe, though indirect, attack that he had not been courageous enough to publish himself" (277). Browning was extremely agitated by the harsh criticism leveled at EBB for this poem, perhaps, as Gladish suggests, therefore "his outbursts" were based on a "realization of his own responsibility for the severity of the attacks on his wife" (277). The Brownings, he believes, did not intentionally court the criticism EBB received for this poem, but rather, "the truth of the whole matter is simply what common sense seems most reluctant to accept: that 'A Curse for a Nation' was included in *Poems Before Congress* for no other reason than that it continued the outcry the other poems raised against tyranny, and that the Brownings wished to show that America,

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[195] In an unpublished letter held by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center from EBB to Theodore Tilton, she states that she and Browning did not typically contribute to periodicals, but that Tilton's terms were so generous, and because she was grateful to the American reading public, she encloses two poems for his periodical (*The Independent).* This partially explains the paucity of publishing in British periodicals. For a more detailed review of this letter, please see Chapter 6.

another English-speaking democracy, had little to be proud of in its defense of freedom" (278). Ultimately, Gladish comes to no conclusions except that the matter of motive is "perplexing" (280).

In her article from 1986, "Cursing as One of the Fine Arts: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Political Poems," Marjorie Stone directly addresses previous scholars' work on this poem: "Although critics such as Gladish, Arinshtein, and Gardner B. Taplin have examined the controversy surrounding the publication of 'A Curse for a Nation' in *Poems Before Congress*, they do not consider how the gender bias and patriotic hysteria of the reviewers obscured the artistry and complexity of the poem" (171). Stone's article recovers the importance of this poem focusing on the content and sheer strength of imagery and ingenuity of construction as well as EBB's choice of a woman as speaker, an unprecedented decision for a Victorian poet, rather than looking only at the poem's publication.[196]

More recent work also refocuses attention on the poems, rather than the reception, and this poem in particular. In her 2005 article, Katherine Montwieler suggests reading the volume as a whole, letting the controversy stand aside to see the poems' similarities rather than their differences, and that "A Curse" belongs in this volume because the speaker is compelled, like the poet who composed all the poems, to write.

"A Curse for a Nation" is comprised of two main sections, the "Prologue" and "The Curse." The "Prologue" has thirteen quatrains with AABB rhyming lines. Typically, a ballad employs the ABCB or ABAB rhyme with alternating four-stress and three-stress lines. While the "Prologue" does not follow this pattern or meter exactly, it does have some

[196] In her 1988 dissertation, Tricia Lootens looked closely at the reception of the volume and at "A Curse" in particular, finding that for many reviewers it was the act of cursing as much as the nation cursed that aroused their disapproval—as noted by Stone.

features in common with the ballad. For example, there are few details of setting; in fact, location of both the speaker and the nation cursed are vague. The poem tells of a single, fairly dramatic event—an angel appears to command action on the part of a woman. The "Prologue" is entirely composed of dialogue—many ballads employ some dialogue.

"The Curse" has two parts and follows the "Prologue"; the first part has three stanzas with rhyming lines AABCCB, with the last line functioning at first glance as a chorus or refrain that is repeated in all stanzas in both parts. However, if the "Prologue" can be remotely considered related to the ballad, then the last lines of each stanza in "The Curse," could be read as incremental repetition because the curse itself moves from being a task the woman must perform to a curse she must write then a curse on the readers.[197] Part 2 of "The Curse" contains seven stanzas with rhyming lines AABCCBD. The "D" in each stanza in Part 2 is the same line from Part 1 of "The Curse" that functions as a "B" rhyme in those three stanzas.

Variants from the 1856 publication in *The Liberty Bell* can be found in footnotes.[198] For publication in *PBC*, several lines were revised, some words changed, and punctuation changed in each of the "D" lines in Part 2 of "The Curse." All changes are listed in footnotes.

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[197] Given that EBB so often revised the classical structures of poetry, there may a poetic connection between this poem and "Napoleon III in Italy"—incremental repetition—that goes beyond the possible political connections that may exist and are noted elsewhere.
[198] "A Curse for a Nation" and "A Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" were the only two of EBB's poems to appear in *The Liberty Bell*.

[page 59]

A CURSE FOR A NATION.[199]

PROLOGUE.

I HEARD an angel speak last night,
And he said, 'Write![200]
Write a Nation's curse for me,
And send it over the Western Sea.'[201]

I faltered, taking up the word:
'Not so, my lord!
If curses must be, choose another
To send thy curse against my brother.

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[199] Textual changes are indicated by closed square brackets after the 1860 text; notes on or text from the 1856 version follow the closed bracket. When both textual variants appear and a note is added, the note will come after the variant in parentheses.

[200] *I heard an angel speak last night / And he said, 'Write!* In the first Book of Revelation it is commanded that the "revelation" should be written in a book (by the author who calls himself "John"—who may or may not be John the Apostle) and which should then be given to the seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The instructions (or curse) for this Biblical writer are not dissimilar to the command/curse that is given the woman of this poem. Neither seems to have a choice, both seem to have a built-in audience who need to hear the words that only they can share, both have been commanded by a heavenly entity. The woman in this poem only needs to write one curse for one nation, but she *is* commanded to do it, and her writing of the curse is a curse of its own. The writer in the Book of Revelation must write to the seven angels of the seven churches, but is that less a burden than the woman bears who must curse her brothers, an entire nation? (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). The woman in "A Curse for a Nation" risks much by her cursing, as does the poet who writes of that curse, essentially making the curse her own in the eyes of many readers. EBB was certainly credited with with having hurled a curse at her homeland by many of her contemporary critics (see Chapter 6 for a further discussion of critical response).

[201] *Western Sea*. This sea could be the Mediterranean Sea and/or the Atlantic Ocean. Since this poem was first published for an American audience, it makes sense to assume this was the Atlantic Ocean, but EBB does write—as mentioned by Porter and Clark above, that "certain of those stanzas do 'fit' England 'as if they were made for her,' which they were not, though…" (Kenyon 2: 375). EBB also writes to her sister, Arabella, she is a bit surprised by the misreadings: "The curious thing is that so many critics, friends & foes, have made the same mistake—but the fact is that the cap *does* fit England . . in a general way . . though by no means made for her" (Lewis 2: 454). The first of the reviewers of *PBC* (Henry Chorley) mistakes this curse for one directed solely to England—an understandable reading given the indictment of British foreign policy in the preface.

'For I am bound by gratitude,
By love and blood,
To brothers of mine across the sea,
Who stretch out kindly hands to me.'

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'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
From the summits of love a curse is driven,
As lightning is from the tops of heaven.'

'Not so,' I answered. 'Evermore[202]
My heart is sore
For my own land's sins: for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:

'For parked-up honors that gainsay
The right of way:[203]
For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss:

'For love of freedom which abates
Beyond the Straits:[204]
For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion:[205]

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[202] *Evermore*. Used throughout "Napoleon III in Italy" and again in "The Dance," this word seems to create an afterlife of glory for Napoleon (or may just evoke the consistent grind of fighting for freedom and liberty with little help), a timeless woe for "The Dance," and an endless pain for the woman who is witness to her "own land's sins." Are these three usages related through a connection with the myth of Sisyphus? Here, the burden of the woman cursing another land is that her own land deserves curses, too. And the burden of the poem, the curse, is laid upon the nation (and readers) who in turn curse wherever and whenever needed. Given human nature, this certainly could be a Sisyphean challenge.
[203] *parked-up honors that gainsay / The right of way*. "Parked-up" along with "right of way" may refer to the right of the landed class to own private parks that interfere with ancient right of ways that all persons might have had access to for travel or commerce. "Parked-up" may suggest that the "right of way" was in peril.
[204] *Straits*. The Straits of Gibralter lead from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean—leaving open to interpretation the direction of the curse—to America? England? Certainly meant for America, but as EBB wrote in her letters, it's a poem that could be seen to fit England.
[205] 'For love of freedom which abates / Beyond the Straits: / For patriot virtue starved to vice on / Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion:] This stanza was not included in the 1856

‘For an oligarchic parliament,
    and bribes well-meant.[206]
What curse to another land assign,
When heavy-souled are the sins of mine?’[207]

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‘Therefore,’ the voice said, ‘shalt thou write
    My curse to-night.
Because thou hast strength to see and hate
A foul thing done *within* thy gate.’

‘Not so,’ I answered once again.
    ‘To curse, choose men.
For I, a woman, have only known
How the heart melts and the tears run down.’

‘Therefore,’ the voice said, ‘shalt thou write
    My curse to-night.
Some women[208] weep and curse, I say,
(And no one marvels,) night and day.

‘And thou shalt take their part to-night,
    Weep and write.
A curse from the depths of womanhood
Is very salt, and bitter, and good.’

So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed,

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publication in *The Liberty Bell*. (Included in this version, for this particular volume, it is not surprising that this stanza aligns remarkably well with the theme of the preface and the other poems.)

[206] bribes well-meant.] classes rent. (The 1856 phrase “classes rent” may imply the socioeconomic disparity in the U.S., especially the actual class system that division between slaves, slave owners, non-slave owners, rich, and poor. The U.S. government would have been the original target of “oligarchic parliament,” so it may have been that “classes rent” was a warning of what was going to happen if slavery continued to be held dear, or it could have been a description of what was happening: society was being pulled apart by slavery—all kinds of slaveries in all kinds of societies in all countries.)

[207] *sins of mine?* Here is a line that suggests England is as worthy of cursing as America—or the unnamed country deserving of this curse. The woman speaker suggests that she cannot curse another land when hers is heavy with its own sins. Perhaps this is what EBB had in mind when she wrote to her friend, Isa, and her sister, Arabella, about the poem somewhat fitting England.

[208] Some women] There are women who

What all may read.
And thus, as was enjoined on me,
I send it over the Western Sea.

[page 62]

THE CURSE.

I.

BECAUSE ye have broken your own chain
With the strain
Of brave men climbing a Nation's height,[209]
Yet thence bear down with brand[210] and thong
On souls of others,—for this wrong
This is the curse. Write.[211]

Because yourselves are standing straight
In the state
Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves,—for this crime[212]
This is the curse. Write.

Because ye prosper in God's name,
With a claim
To honor in the old world's[213] sight,
Yet do the fiend's work perfectly
In strangling martyrs,—[214]for this lie
This is the curse. Write.

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II.

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[209] *ye have broken your own chain / With the strain / Of brave men climbing a Nation's height.* Alludes to the American Revolution and the building of the United States by ousting the British as colonial overlords.
[210] brand] chain
[211] This is the curse. Write.] This is the curse — write! (This variance is true for every final line of the remaining stanzas.)
[212] *for this crime*. The crime is that of hypocrisy—the juxtaposition of such freedom as American represents with slavery—as well as the continuation of slavery.
[213] old world's] whole world's
[214] In strangling martyrs,—] On babes and women—

Ye shall watch while kings conspire
Round the people's smouldering fire,
   And, warm for your part,
Shall never dare—O shame!
To utter the thought into flame
   Which burns at your heart.
         This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while nations strive
With the bloodhounds, die or survive,
   Drop faint from their jaws,
Or throttle them backward to death,
And only under your breath
   Shall favor[215] the cause.
         This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while strong men draw
The nets of feudal law[216]
   To strangle the weak,
And, counting the sin for a sin,
Your soul shall be sadder within
   Than the word ye shall speak.
         This is the curse. Write.[217]

[page 64]

When good men are praying erect
That Christ may avenge his elect
         And deliver the earth,[218]

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[215] Shall favor] Shall ye bless
[216] *feudal law*. Suggests that the older laws, feudal laws, which allowed for serfs and vassals, injure the weaker parts of society and that those who sin will be forced to watch the sin in others as part of the curse.
[217] deleted stanza]
Ye shall watch while rich men dine,
And poor men hunger and pine
  For one crust in seven;
But shall quail from the signs which present
God's judgment as imminent
  To make it all even.
       This is the curse — write!
[218] This line and the sixth line in this stanza are indented the same as the last line of the stanza. This is not true of any other stanza in this section of the poem. This is not the case for the 1856 *Liberty Bell* version in which both these lines are indented as is every third and sixth lines of stanzas in this last part of the poem.

The prayer in your ears, said low,
Shall sound like the tramp of a foe
  That's driving you forth.
  This is the curse. Write.

When wise men give you their praise,
They shall pause in the heat of the phrase,
 As if carried too far.[219]
When ye boast your own charters kept true,
Ye shall blush;—for the thing which ye do
 Derides what ye are.
  This is the curse. Write.

When fools cast taunts at[220] your gate,
Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate
 As ye look o'er the wall,
For your conscience, tradition, and name
Explode[221] with a deadlier blame
 Than the worst of them all.
  This is the curse. Write.

[page 65]

Go, wherever[222] ill deeds shall be done,
Go, plant[223] your flag in the sun
 Beside the ill-doers!
And recoil from clenching the curse
Of God's witnessing Universe[224]
 With a curse of yours.
  THIS[225] is the curse. Write.

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[219] As if carried too far.] And sicken afar;
[220] cast taunts at] write taunts on
[221] Explode] Strike back
[222] Go, wherever] Go! while
[223] Go, plant] Plant on
[224] God's witnessing Universe] the witnessing universe
[225] THIS] This (The use of small caps for this word is the only such instance of small caps in this poem other than for the beginning words of each section. This implication here is that the point of the poem, the greatest curse, the heaviest burden falls on the reader. The speaker commands the reader to curse, to "Write." The speaker takes on the angel's role, the reader takes on the speaker's to become a slave to the curse.)

Chapter 6

After *Poems Before Congress*

PBC was more reviewed than any of EBB's previous publications with the exception of *Poems* (1844) and *Aurora Leigh* (1856).[1] Many of the reviews were published in influential periodicals of the day that had reviewed her works previously. The *Athenæum* reviewed nearly every one of her publications (many reviews were written by Henry Chorley). Other periodicals that reviewed her work more than once, included: *The Atlas*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Eclectic Review*, *The Examiner*, *Fraser's*, *The Globe*, *John Bull*, *The Leader*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Spectator*.[2]

The attention given *PBC* may have been due to its topic—the Italian question and attendant politics that had already, and could still, impact multiple European nations. Reviews were also very likely allowed for *PBC* because of EBB's status as a major poet of her time. The release of a volume of new poems by EBB would have been news—no matter what the content.

The reviews, however, did not strictly critique the poems themselves. EBB's experimentation was underappreciated by reviewers of this volume. Most of the poetry was ignored while reviewers reflected on the politics and EBB's gender. Such a powerful and blatant political message as this volume contained, could not fail to move reviewers to comment on the politics—and they did. Depending on a reviewer's beliefs, or that of the periodical, a review was positive or negative; few seem to occupy a middle ground. But the

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[1] See Table 4, at the end of this chapter, for a chronological listing of periodical reviews for EBB's major works, and major editions, from 1826 through 1862 (*Last Poems*).
[2] See Table 5, located immediately after Table 4, for a comparative listing of periodical reviews for EBB's major works by periodical.

normal rules did not seem to apply to this volume. For instance, the Tory periodical, *Blackwood's*, gave the volume a negative review, as would be expected given the content, but *The Morning Post*, a normally pro-French/pro-Emperor newspaper, did not favorably review *PBC*. And despite the politics, any given reviewer might have marked one to several of the poems as quite good. However, no matter whether the poetry was paid much attention or not, the politics of the work was always central to the reviewers. Many found fault with the poetry, such as irregular meter and difficult or unusual rhymes, but the harshest criticism was mostly dispensed by those who disagreed with the politics. And those who believed women should not comment on political matters also tended to find the poems offensive.

Very few reviewers discounted EBB's gender as she tended to do. Many found "cursing" from a lady jarring at the least; usually though they found it insulting in the worst possible ways: EBB was abusing her country *and* unwomaning herself at the same time—a dangerous precedent. Most reviewers read "A Curse for a Nation" as directed to England, although all saw clearly it was a woman cursing in the poem (and most conflated that speaker with EBB). She was variously cast as insane or outright vicious, depending on the overall vitriol of the review. Suggesting she was temporarily insane, as least, saved her previous reputation as a beloved poetess, somewhat. If she was drawn as a monster, it was because of the bad influences of living abroad and/or dabbling in politics that ruined or corrupted her. In one case, she is seen as mother-like, loving both Italy and England as children, not able to choose between the two. It is a less ferocious portrayal than some, but still one that undercuts her intellectual right as a poet to write on political topics. Rarely do reviewers suggest she knew what she was doing or that she understood the nuances of the political scene of the time. Gender seems to have negated a dispassionate review as much as politics

did. And it seems that both together were provocative—not a surprise given the dominant Victorian perspective on women.

Contemporary Critical Reception

March 1860

Five days after *PBC* was issued, Henry Chorley's review, the first of nineteen critical reviews,[3] was published 17 March 1860 in the *Athenæum.*[4] Despite its brevity (just over a column), it offers a great deal of venom. He begins with a heated pronouncement:

> Mrs. Browning is in this book authoritatively dithyrambic, blessing or banning as suits an anointed priestess. She is more political than poetical, expressing her blind faith in Napoleon the Third as the hope of Italy, and flinging out a malediction against England,—infallible, arrogant…. How shall we best give an idea of this pamphlet of sixty pages? It must first be remarked that Mrs. Browning's Art suffers from the violence of her temper. Choosing to scold, she forgets how to sing. In the verse which we quote, there is not so much of lute as of marrow-bone and cleaver…. Her present pamphlet opens with a pœan to the Emperor of the French, and ends with a curse to England…. (371)

He then quotes the entire "curse" section from "A Curse for a Nation." His specious argument that "A Curse for a Nation" is meant for England may be based on several factors,

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[3] There are several other reviews, but I have chosen these nineteen to explore as they were published in English periodicals before EBB died.

[4] This review, like most I discuss here, was published anonymously. I refer to reviewer's names for historical context, when they are available, though their names were not published with the reviews. EBB knew, or knew of, some of the writers of the reviews, particularly Henry Chorley and William Aytoun.

including an honest misreading.[5] However, the finale of the review, while offering a back-handed compliment to EBB's previous poetic efforts, continues to sting and strike:

> The terrible assumption of vain-glory, that those whom the poetess curses must be accursed, seems to be lost in the blaze of her own infallibility as regards Italian men and affairs,—French relations,—English abominations, and every grave, intricate question which makes men weigh, wait and suspend the sledgehammer or—the curse. For all this, Mrs. Browning is here, as before, a real poetess,—one of the few among the few,—one who has written in her time, better than the best of English poetesses,—and proves the same on this occasion by taking to its extremity the right of "insane prophet" to lose his head,—to loose his tongue. (372)

In just a few words, Chorley dismisses the validity of these poems by calling them a pamphlet, something completely unpoetical and purely political. He suggests that EBB is an unpatriotic, blind, and fallible butcher—a stunning and brutal description. At the end, he "damns with faint praise" by writing that EBB is a real poetess, and that she had created some good work previously. By implication he leaves the reader to assume that she has clearly gone insane, at least temporarily.

EBB was hurt by this first review as she considered Henry Chorley a friend (he had been an early and long-time supporter of her work) and a worthy critic. She wrote a letter to the *Athenæum* to correct the misreading,[6] but only part of her letter was printed, making her "look ungenerous, cowardly, mean—as if, in haste to escape from the dogs in England, I threw them the good name of America" (Kenyon 2: 380). As she wrote to Isa Blagden, "Mr.

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[5] Please see Chapter 2 and below for more on Chorley's review and EBB's reaction.

[6] She mentions this in a letter to Isa Blagden at the end of March 1860 (Kenyon 2: 367).

Chorley's review is objectionable to me because unjust. A reviewer should read the book he gives judgment on, and he could not have read from beginning to end the particular poem in question ["A Curse for a Nation"], and expounded its significance so" (Kenyon 2: 367).

A few weeks later, when her letter to the *Athenæum* was not printed fully, EBB wrote to Chorley on 13 April 1860 to complain about the injustice. "Dearest Mr. Chorley," she writes:

> [Y]ou have not been just to me in the matter of my 'Poems before Congress.'[7] Why have you not been just to me?... I never expected from you favor or mercy *because* you were my friend (it would have been unworthy of us both) but I did expect justice from you, *although* you were my friend. That is reasonable.
>
> And I consider that as a conscientious critic you were bound to read through the whole of the 'rhyme' called 'A Curse for a Nation' before ticketing it for the public, and I complain that after neglecting to do so and making a mistake in the consequence, you refused the poor amends of printing my letter in full. (Kenyon 2: 378).

EBB continues by describing the flawed editing of her letter, which she calls a "loose paragraph" that "does not cover a great fault, it seems to me" (Kenyon 2: 378).

Chorley must have written back to her explaining that it was not his doing to print the letter partially, since EBB acknowledges this in a return letter to him in early May. But she still has something to say: "In the matter of reviews and of my last book, and before leaving the subject for ever, I want you distinctly to understand that my complaint related simply to

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[7] In this and subsequent quotes, I retain original quotation marks within the quote.

the mistake in facts, and not to any mistake in opinion" (Kenyon 2: 380). EBB airs her lack of concern over disparaging reviews in a careful distinction between critical vision, which is the right of the critic to create, and content errors, which need to be corrected by those who commit such errors:

> In printing the poems, I well knew the storm of execration which would follow. Your zephyr from the 'Athenæum' was the first of it, gentle indeed in comparison with various gusts from other quarters. All fair it was from your standpoint, to see me as a prophet without a head, or even as a woman in shrewish temper, and if my husband had not been especially pained by my being held up at the end of a fork as the unnatural she-monster who had 'cursed' her own country… I should have left the '*mistake*' to right itself, without troubling the 'Athenæum' office with a letter they would not insert. In fact, Robert was a little vexed with me for not being vexed enough. I was only vexed enough when the 'Athenæum' corrected its misstatement in its own way. *That did* extremely vex me… (Kenyon 2: 380)

Because Chorley's was the first review, EBB also suggests that his was the most damaging in reading, so that "even favourable [sic] critics have fallen here and there into your very mistake; but is not that mainly attributable to the suggestive power of the 'Athenæum,' do you not believe so yourself?" (Kenyon 2: 381).[8]

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[8] EBB doesn't pass up the opportunity in her May 1860 letter to Chorley of making clear her position on Napoleon: "I may be right or wrong.... He may be snake, scoundrel, devil, in his motives. But the thing he did was done before the eyes of all. His coming here was real, the stroke of his sword was indubitable, he rising and struggle of the people was beyond controversy, and the state of things at present is a fact" (Kenyon 2: 381).

Differences in political opinion or poetic judgment aside, there may have been other factors underlying Chorley's negative review. For instance, she presumed on his friendship and position to beg that "A Tale of Villafranca" be included in the *Athenæum* in September 1859. Just after the poem's publication, she wrote to say she had not included Stanza VII because it might have prevented the poem's acceptance (as it criticized the popular volunteer rifle corps movement). That fall, after Chorley dedicated his novel, *Rocabella*, to EBB, she criticized at length his lack of understanding of Italian politics, his "half truths everywhere," and his unsympathetic characters. She even hinted that Robert deemed the dedication "a covert lecture, or sarcasm" for her. "[T]he kindness of the personal address," she writes, makes up for the seeming chastisement (Kenyon 2: 350).[9] This was hardly glowing praise; although she writes that "Robert and I have had true pleasure (in spite of all this fault-finding) in feeling ourselves close to you in your book," but she asserts that in the next novel she would like to see him do justice to Italians, "our sublime Azeglios and acute Cavours and energetic Farinis" (Kenyon 2: 352).[10]

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[9] Robert Browning wrote to Isa Blagden (27 March 1860) and included this comment on Chorley's review: "Do you see the infamous pretence at misunderstanding of Ba's purposes in the poem… 'A Curse for a Nation'—in the Athenæum: the critic leaves out the introduction, every stanza of which contains evidence plain as noonday that the nation referred to is America, and calls it a 'malediction agst. England' just out of spite at Ba's having disapproved of 'Rocabella' for all its fine dedication to her—and left a bitter, foolish letter, received a few weeks ago, without answer. Look at the first part of the poem (omitted in the critique as if it never had existed) and tell me if such a blunder is possible to anybody, honestly reading it, and not an idiot" (McAleer 58). In a letter dated 19 April 1860, Browning again wrote to Blagden to comment on Chorley's and the *Athenæum's* poor treatment of EBB (McAleer 61).

[10] An intriguing echo of the preface to *PBC* appears at the end of the letter: "If I could hear an English statesman (Conservative or Liberal) speak out of a large heart and generous comprehension… I should thank God for it" (Kenyon 2: 352). In the preface, EBB writes: "I confess that I dream of the day when an English statesman shall arise with a heart too large for England…" (vii).

A week after Chorley's review, four more appeared on 24 May 1860. The reviewer in the *The Bookseller* thought "A Court Lady" quite good, suggesting at the review's end that "[r]ecalling, as this poem does, some of Mrs. Browning's former sweetness and purity, we cannot but wish she would leave politics, avoid cursing, and sing to us in the strains of bygone days."[11] This reviewer notes both the opening and closing poems as poor subjects for poetry, writing that the latter is "altogether distasteful."

The Critic writes that "[i]n spite of the old saw about the power of popular ballads, we hold it to be an evil day for the Muse when she is pressed into the service of politics…. In the little volume before us—so very little it is, that the sixty-five pages of verse have to be eked out with thirty-two of advertisements—[EBB] delivers in verse her opinions on Italian politics. Frankly we like neither the opinions nor the manner in which they are conveyed."[12] This reviewer also suggests that EBB's "faith in the purity of Louis Napoleon" is grossly misplaced:

> He is a demigod in her eyes—this fortunate speculator, and this shrewd and crafty politician, who shifts nationalities under treaties, as a man would pass peas under a thimble. She believes that he who has enslaved his own subjects, and holds them bound and gagged with a bayonet at their throats, is the saviour of the world, the proclaimer of the gospel of liberty.

After thoroughly discrediting Napoleon III and EBB's ode, the reviewer terms "A Curse for a Nation" "extraordinary in the violence of its tone and curious bitterness of spirit." "The Dance," in contrast, is the best verse in the volume, reminding the reviewer of EBB's previous poems "Catherina [sic] to Cameons" and "The Poet's Vow."

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[11] All quotes are from page 160.
[12] All quotes are from page 362.

A nine-sentence review in *The Examiner* notes EBB's ill-directed praise of Napoleon III and the curse heaped "upon this nation that drew no sword for Italy." But unlike previous reviews, it suggests that EBB has committed a grave error in her "scorn of orthodoxy in the formation of rhymes" naming a few examples of the particularly bad rhymes—all despite her important contributions to the "literature of her country" (181).

Edmund Ollier,[13] in contrast, writes a gushing review in *The Atlas*. There is no mistaking his enthusiasm for the volume from the first sentence on: "The tumultuous hopes and longings newly born, or rather revivified, by the Italian war of last year, have found a noble utterance in these rough, yet in some sort harmonious, verses by the greatest poetess our language has yet produced—a writer who unites the strength of man's intellect to the largeness of a woman's heart" (231). And as any skilled rhetorician would do, Ollier lists what the detractors of the volume will say, and have said, then gracefully refutes all. Ollier especially embraces EBB's philosophical approach to justify her work in the preface, quoting from it at length and agreeing that the volume "obeys a law superior to the law of schools" (232). He does suggest EBB could have done away with "forced rhyme" or an "extravagant epithet." "But," Ollier goes on, "we are content, and more than content, to receive these poems as they come to us white-hot and scorching from the furnace of love and scorn, of hope and disappointment, of joy and grief, of passion and prophecy, where they have been wrought—roughly wrought, if you will, but with the stamp and warrant of a power that cannot be denied" (232).

Most interesting is Ollier's support of the timing for the poems: "we cannot conceive a better moment for their production than the very week which has been signalised by the

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[13] Edmund Ollier (1827-1886), a historian, was also a contributor to the *Athenæum*.

splendid electoral triumph for the Central Italians over the cause of Austria and the Pope" (232).[14] He more pointedly shows his pro-Emperor stance toward the end of the review when he writes that EBB has the "courage and faith in eternal principles of justice to hail, as the incarnation of a majestic truth, the very man whom demagogues and Tories all over the globe have conspired to stamp with odium." Through her poem "Napoleon III in Italy," EBB has posited the "view of Napoleon's character and position which we have laboured to maintain in these columns" (232).

Ollier considers the other poems praiseworthy, commending the "grace and loveliness" of "The Dance"; the "sweetness" of "A Court Lady"; the "profound pathos" of "A Tale of Villafranca"; the "fierce satire and irony" of "An August Voice." He declares "Italy and the World" the best of the volume. But he does not appreciate hearing a lady curse. In an attempt to anticipate objections of others, though, he proposes that "A Curse for a Nation" be viewed as "simply a sorrowful rebuke to England for not extending her sympathies to other lands." He notes that "objectors to Mrs. Browning's book will probably make much of this little indiscretion" but the poems will "remain as an abiding contribution to an immortal cause" (232).[15] Ollier, being politically aligned with EBB, accepts the poems in the spirit in which they were written to support the *Risorgimento,* finding in PBC both poetic and political value.

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[14] For more details on this loss of the pontiff's temporal power and the annexations and plebiscites, see Holt's *The Making of Italy: 1815-1870* (222-224; 258-261).
[15] In a letter to Sarianna Browning, EBB writes: "The editor of the 'Atlas' writes to thank me for the justice and courage of my international politics" (Kenyon 2: 370).

On 29 March 1860, five days after Ollier's review in *The Atlas*, another review appeared in *The Daily News*, a known pro-Napoleon publication.[16] The reviewer begins by asking two intriguing questions, placing EBB within a list of poets and writers who had championed Italy on some level:

> What is there in that wonderful Italian peninsula which excites the interest and sympathy of all minds capable of passing beyond the boundary of self? How is it that English men, who reside there, become as devoted to the Italian cause as the race itself—that Shelley and Byron sang in their most rapturous manner when singing of the land of Dante[17] and Raphael[18]—that Walter Savage Landor[19] has devoted the service of his genius to the same country—that Leigh Hunt, when within an hour of his death, mingled thoughts of his own relatives with inquiries as to the progress of the work of liberation—that Americans, such a Margaret Fuller Ossoli, William Story, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, partake of the same fascination—and that Mrs. Barrett Browning now dedicates to the country of her adoption a handful of passionate verses, of which her enemies will probably say, that it proves her love of Italy to be greater than her love of England?[20]

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[16] EBB writes to her sister that *The Daily News* is a far superior newspaper compared to *The Times* (Lewis 2: 404) and that it and the *Morning Post* "are the only honest historians" (Lewis 2: 410).
[17] Dante, an important reference in several of the *PBC* poems, also plays a key role in the preface and is linked to heroics through Carlyle (see Chapter 3 for more details).
[18] Raphael's sketch of St. Luke painting the Madonna is mentioned in Anna Jameson's book on sacred art (see note on this reference in "An August Voice"). But EBB was also well aware of him as an artist on her own having seen many of his works in Italy.
[19] Beginning with Walter Savage Landor, every one of the following writers mentioned was a friend of the Brownings, all very much a part of their circle—an interesting group altogether.
[20] All quotes are from page 2.

The reviewer, however, replies, “We do not say this ourselves….”

Perhaps the reviewer begins this way, listing important writers enamored with Italy, as a way to help readers contextualize EBB’s position in a political, historical, literary, and artistic heritage.[21] This reviewer seems to understand EBB’s stance on Napoleon III in the first poem, noting that it must have been written during the first part of the war (as it was) because it reflected excitement of that time which “was not confined to the Peninsula.” The reviewer’s insight into EBB’s liberal politics is clear: “[t]he poetess does not admire the successful dictator because of his power, but because, as it seems to her, he represents the new ideas of nationality, disinterestedness, and popular rule, which she thinks, are destined to lead the world into a wiser and holier future.” The final poem, “A Curse for a Nation” is also mentioned—in nearly the same breath as the first poem—and is read as a curse for England. But rather than take offense at the curse, the reviewer suggests that while EBB “scolds us rather sharply,” she retains the “privilege of a lady to make rebuke one of the forms of love.”

Like Ollier in *The Atlas*, the reviewer in *The Daily News* highlights “Italy and the World,” calling it “the most finished poem in the volume” and compares its vision of merged Italian states as a model for international brotherhood to lines from Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall”: “When the war-drum throbs no longer, and the battle-flag is furl’d / In the Parliament of men, the Federation of the world.”[22]

Just a couple of days after the relatively positive review in *The Daily News*, the review in *The Spectator* was published on 31 March 1860. It can be summed up with its first

[21] Many of these British and American expatriates are mentioned explicitly by Maura O’Connor in *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination* (1998). She also writes extensively of Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* as key texts that influenced the English political conception of Italy.
[22] Please Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion comparing EBB with Tennyson.

sentence: "Here we have sixty-five pages that never should have been printed" (309). The reviewer does acknowledge EBB's genius, past reputation, and production of great poetry. However, the reviewer suggests:

> If we were to judge by the testimony of this volume alone, we might suppose that Mrs. Browning considered poetical inspiration to consist, as it has been vulgarly supposed to consist, in some species of insanity: so that, like the priestesses of the ancient false faiths, she had become "rapt," and is in a state to be incapable of applying rules. The idol of her worship is *power*, intellectual or material, but especially when it takes the form of the tangibly realized. The individual who in our day presents the most striking aspect of power acquired by his personal deeds, and originating with himself, is Napoleon, "lifted by his deeds to the level of pure song:" and before him she prostrates herself in a paroxysm of chronic adoration. It is a woman's mania, and it has gone so far as to overrule not only natural instincts, but good taste, and even the ordinary principles of metrical composition. (309)

At the very end, the reviewer points to the utter depraved political insanity of EBB, the result of which is an inability to follow the "ordinary principles of metrical composition," as if worship of false gods is equal to a false rhyme. But in this case, as in others, there is a hysterical feel to the language used by reviewers, who seem to find offense not only in the poems, but also in the very act of their having been published, having been the written by a woman, *and* having been written particularly by EBB. The irony of accusation (or the irony of the review genre) is that the accusers may suffer from the faults they perceive in the accused.

The Spectator reviewer also objects that the preface is vague and that EBB "preaches against nationality." Each poem is then given a brief, and relatively dispassionate, overview. "A Curse for a Nation," however, is linked to the preface and seen as a curse "upon England for her non-intervention" (310). The reviewer ends: "Mrs. Browning's volume, we presume, is poetry with 'a purpose;' but it defeats its own purpose,—as all false art must. The intention, if we can guess it, is to shame England, and to exalt the Emperor Napoleon" (310). This was indeed *part* of the purpose (besides overtly supporting the Italian *Risorgimento*) but with many more shades of complexity than noted by this reviewer. Judging from the critical reaction through 31 March, it's clear that the volume succeeded in conveying its purpose as all reviewers generally perceived correctly, from an array of positions on the political spectrum, EBB's reasons for publishing these poems: to support the Italian *Risorgimento* through the entire volume, to shame England for non-intervention, praise the French for their active role, and to exalt Napoleon III specifically for his support of Italy, but not just because he was the French emperor or a Bonaparte.

Another review published on 31 March 1860 appeared in *The Saturday Review*. In a fascinating essay, Charles Synge Christopher Bowen[23] guesses (but wrongly) that EBB had created a fictitious character, a man akin to Childe Harold or Don Juan, through which she could explore her topic. Bowen writes the majority of the review deflecting criticism onto this "man," a mask. He suggests that she is doing no less than Byron, who he claims "owes the greater part of his fame to his ingenuity in connecting a fictitious personality of his own with the unsatisfactory but popular gospel which it was his mission to preach" (402). EBB's

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[23] Charles Synge Christopher Bowen (1835-1894) was studying law in London in 1860 at the time he wrote this review for *The Saturday Review*; he later wrote for *The Spectator*. Bowen had a long and very successful legal career.

masculine "mouthpiece," Bowen writes, must have been conceived under the influence of "the cosmopolitan English exile who divides his time between dilletante Liberalism and dilletante art" (403). Judging EBB's criticism of the volunteer rifle corps in "Italy and the World," Bowen writes that it is "a delirium of imbecile one-sidedness" calling him/EBB a "denationalized fanatic" and an "illogical renegade" (403). He continues to deflect criticism from EBB onto the perceived masculine persona: "By an easy fiction, the ex-Englishman of the volume is supposed to be a poet, and Mrs. Browning's genius enables her to display considerable metrical ability even in the repulsive task of embodying his servile and seditious platitudes" (403).[24] The "poet" is later denounced again for being cosmopolitan, not unlike Pontius Pilate, "that ill-famed Liberal" (403)—a damning comparison but still oddly askew and focused on the mask.

In the introductory chapter, I referred to Christopher Keirstad's article on EBB and cosmopolitanism to define the term but noted, as he does, that the term cosmopolitan did not necessarily have positive connotations for the Victorians. In this review, Bowen exemplifies all that is negative about the term: it indicates an individual too weak or indolent to sustain nationalistic feeling, a political, poetical, artistic dilletante (another term fraught with disapproval). Unlike Bowen, the reviewer of *The Daily News* seems to see that EBB advocates, not Bowen's view of cosmopolitanism, but one we might recognize as modern, one that encompasses "the new ideas of nationality, disinterestedness" (2).

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[24] Bowen may have chosen to harangue EBB's masculine creation, rather than attack such a revered woman outright. In a twisted chivalric gesture, he may have purposely chosen to ignore the facts of the poems to create a male antagonist to denigrate. See below for his change of pace in criticizing "A Curse for a Nation."

Of the reviews through the end of March 1860, Bowen is the only reviewer who realized (or knew) that "A Curse for a Nation" was not directed toward England, but with this knowledge comes the direct criticism of EBB:

> The only poem which is unconnected with the subject of the French war in Italy contains a so-called curse against the United States on account of negro slavery. The priestess, or Pythoness, who delivers the commination is, like the bearded exile of the Imperialist eulogy, an English resident abroad, who seems to cultivate patriotic attachment to every country but her own…. This is the stuff which ignorant foreigners delight to repeat; and their pleasure is multiplied tenfold when English renegades can be found to vent calumnies against a land which they have forgotten. (404)

Bowen continues by noting that there are "more barefooted children and rough pavements, and a great amount of neglected poverty in any Italian village than in an English town of thrice the population" (404). Indeed. But the poem is *not* directed to England, he writes. It is confusing then that he calls "A Curse for a Nation" a "so-called" curse, reading the poem correctly for the original audience, yet interchanging the original U.S. audience with the current British audience and illogically disconnecting the "ex-Englishman poet" as the mask for EBB. Perhaps Bowen feels the need to drop the male antagonist he has created because the speaker in "A Curse for a Nation" is obviously a woman. But that begs the question of how Bowen could have read the mother in "A Tale of Villafranca" as a man. The elaborate mask he constructs does not hold up, and his conceit which may have been an attempt to either "unwoman" EBB or protect her, fails utterly.

What Bowen does in this review is something of a *tour de force* in confusion that begins by offering readers a strange fictitious redirection of criticism covering most of the volume, then includes a reading of the last poem correctly directed to the U.S., but then asserts that the poem is the most reprehensible because of EBB's "hysterical antipathy to England" that erupts, he writes, in the first poem and is endemic to most of the characters in the other poems. Bowen ends his review by comparing her work here, to EBB's detriment, to Wordsworth's lines on Napoleon I: "Never may from our souls this truth depart, / That an accursed thing it is to gaze / On prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye." He attempts to shame her by suggesting that Wordsworth could detect a tyrant but that she could not. Bowen attempts to unfurl his critical flag in the face of EBB, but there is no wind, and the flag cannot fly but remains limp and indistinct.

EBB was aware of this review, as she was most others, fairly soon after it appeared. She wrote from Rome to her friend Isa Blagden in Florence (April 1860):

> Dearest Isa, how it touched me, your putting away the 'Saturday Review'! But dear, don't care more for me than I do for myself. That very Review, lent to us, *we* lent to the Storys.[25] Dear, the abuse of the press is the justification of the poems; so don't be reserved about these attacks…. Robert called yesterday on Odo Russell,[26] who observed to him that the article in the 'Saturday Review' was infamous and that the general tone of the newspaper had grown to be so offensive, he should cease to take it in. (Not on my account, observe.) 'But,' said Mr. Russell, 'it's extraordinary, the sensation

[25] William Story (1819-1895) is mentioned by the reviewer in *The Daily News* as one of the Americans who is inordinately fond of Italy.
[26] Odo William Leopold Russell (1829-1884) was a British diplomat and ambassador while the Brownings were in Italy, and a good friend.

> your wife's book has made. Every paper I see has something to say about it,' added he; 'it is curious. The offence has been less in the objections to England than in the praise of Napoleon['] (Kenyon 2: 375-76).

Later in the same letter, she writes: "Mind you read 'Blackwood.' Though I was vexed by George's[27] letter (he is awfully vexed) I couldn't help laughing at my sister Henrietta, who accepts the interpretation of the 'Athenaeun' (having read the poems) and exclaims, 'But, oh, Ba,[28] such dreadful curses!'…" (Kenyon 2: 376).[29]

By the time of the above letter to Isa, EBB had learned of the review in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Review*—as she mentions. She writes of being "vexed" by a letter from her brother who was himself "vexed." In a letter to George, she addresses both the negative reviews in *The Saturday Review* (above) and *Blackwood's* (below):

> Such attacks as the Saturday Review's, for instance, & Blackwood's, almost overstep certain limits. They write to us from Florence that a Saturday reviewer [Bowen], alive & in the flesh, has been there during three weeks. Certain of my friends who are furious at the criticism in question, reproached him with it,—on which he said he was "very sorry, & that it was a brutal article certainly." On which replied my friend properly,—"that he (the reviewer) should be most sorry, not for that particular paper, which was a consistent deduction from the general ideas of the journal, but for the general ideas themselves, & that such a line should be taken by a leading English

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[27] One of her brothers.

[28] "Ba" was the name EBB's family called her.

[29] EBB also writes to her friend Eliza Oglivy: "Did you read the Saturday Review on me, & Blackwood? Professor Aytoun of course did the last" (Heydon and Kelley 149). EBB seems to have enjoyed her publicity to some extent.

> newspaper –" Let me add that this said Saturday reviewer after his three weeks residence in Florence, avowed, "that his opinions on the French emperor were *modified*—though he still thought him *not good for England*." (Landis 224-25)[30]

The *Blackwood's* review came out at nearly the same time as *The Saturday Review* piece, both memorable due to their vehement disapprobation, but not unusual in their focus on issues other than just the poetry as the reviews in the month of March showed. The eight reviews from the time of publication (12 March) through the end of the month, were disapproving in the majority. The few affirming reviews do not balance the others, but do suggest that some readers may have existed who appreciated both the poetry *and* the politics.

April 1860

When the *Blackwood's* review by William E. Aytoun was first published, EBB wrote to a friend about how she came to know its contents: "It came into my head that it might be a stone thrown at me, and Robert went [out] to glance at it. Sure enough it is a stone. He says a violent attack" (Kenyon 2: 372).[31]

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[30] Her letter to George is a deeply thoughtful letter that reviews all angles of the politics of France, England, and Italy in detail as well as her previous reviews, bemoaning especially Chorley's conduct, but is still feisty: "Mr. Chorley has twice offended me by not putting in my letter. Now it seems as if I had taken fright & recanted meanly — "My English readers will be glad." My English readers to the D——l! I am very vexed with him for not printing my temperate letter. I dont [sic] want to please anybody—only God, and by speaking the truth as far as I can. I corrected the Athenaeum because it misstated simply. I have written my mind to Mr. Chorley. I was more vexed as to his correction than the first offence, for giving me the appearance of meanness before the Eng & American public" (Landis 230).

[31] Robert Browning wrote to Isa Blagden at the end of April about the reviews in *The Saturday Review* (and *Blackwood's*, too), that at least Bowen got the audience correct for "A Curse," that Aytoun was a "great ass," and that "we should like to be the weekly and monthly annoyance of these fellows to the world's end" (McAleer 61).

Aytoun's diatribe in the April 1860 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Review*, titled "Poetic Aberrations," may be one of the most oft-quoted reviews to specifically embody what seemed like an overwhelmingly disparaging critical response to *PBC*. Aytoun certainly excoriates EBB's volume, but he is also concerned that it be understood: women should not dabble in politics. He begins: "We are strongly of opinion that for the peace and welfare of society, it is a good and wholesome rule that women should not interfere with politics. We love the fair sex too well, to desire that they should be withdrawn from their own sphere, which is that of adorning the domestic circle" (490).[32] It is as if Aytoun took his thinking whole from Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House." He likens women to angels who are "engaged in deeds of true charity" such as those who visit the sick, pray over the dying, feed and clothe the hungry and naked, but "very different is the case," he writes, "when women addict themselves to politics" (490). Aytoun mentions what a trial it is to have women torment unhappy "male creatures" with their thinking on suffrage, reform, budgets, Hungary, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Italy, and the Poles. He hopes women of his own country would sacrifice the men in their lives for the good of their country, but he writes, "cosmopolitanism

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[32] Aytoun similarly denounced the Spasmodic school of poets in a scathing parody in 1854; in fact, he made it a mission of sorts to prevent the spread of the Spasmodics. In their editorial introduction to the Winter 2004 issue of *Victorian Poetry*, "Spasmodic Poetry and Poetics," Charles LaPorte and Jason R. Rudy suggest, that despite his eagerness to discredit spasmodic writers, Aytoun did not single-handedly bring about their end (426). He did, however, cast aspersions whenever possible in *Blackwood's* through his parodies, which included EBB's *Aurora Leigh*, noted in Tables 4 and 5 here, and mentioned by Florence Boos in her article, "'Spasm' and Class: W.E. Aytoun, George Gilfillan, Sydney Dobell, and Alexander Smith" (578); it is included in the above special issue. In the same volume, see also Kirstie Blair's analysis of EBB's 1840s poetry as an influence on later spasmodic poets, how she "borrows from this fashionable trend" (474), and how she figures *Aurora Leigh* as a successful Spasmodic (in "Spasmodic Affections: Poetry, Pathology, and the Spasmodic Hero"). Four months after Aytoun's review, critic William Howitt in *The Spiritual Magazine* (July 1860) describes EBB's work in *PBC* as having "strange spasmodic starts" (293). For more on Howitt's review, see below.

is quite another thing, and so is identification with foreign nationalities" (490). Thus far, Aytoun sounds the Tory horn of conservative, traditionally-conceived nationalism—what is good for England is good. Cosmopolitanism is seen as a fault, as a failing, like that of Bowen's fictional exiled Englishman, who is an illogical, renegade, dilettante cosmopolitan. And it is clearly a fault suffered by EBB as Aytoun goes on.

After a lengthy introduction chronicling the clear threat women present to the very stability of society *if* they should involve themselves in politics (an addiction to be wary of, akin to drugs or alcohol, as politics turns women unreasonable, disgusting, and dangerous), Aytoun gets to the point of the review. "We have not made those remarks," he writes, "without an appropriate text. We have just received a thin volume of verses—for we cannot call them poems—by one who we are proud otherwise to style as a real poetess, and to whose high merit we have before now borne most willing testimony—Elizabeth Barrett Browning;[33] and very sincerely do we regret, for her sake, that she has fallen into the error of publishing anything so ineffably bad…" (491). Aytoun suggests that EBB has been influenced by her Italian residence, against which he defends England's political position, both domestic and foreign, by noting the long-time peace in Europe since 1815 (was he in another part of the world in 1848?), and England's "indulgent" response to Ireland (ideas of nationality having arisen there based on "real or fanciful ground for complaint"—another example of Aytoun's narrow vision). Aytoun does rightly note that there was no real nationality in Italy to restore, that differences in language, geography, and economics as well as regional feeling would all

[33] Aytoun is one of the few reviewers to refer to EBB as Elizabeth Barrett Browning instead of Mrs. Browning—which may be a deliberate insult—denying what he might feel is her proper due as a wife by leaving out that social address. Later in the review, he does use "Mrs. Browning."

prevent unification but acknowledges that current events look to accomplish unification nonetheless.

Louis Napoleon, he writes, "is calmly proceeding to the appropriation of his spoil" as Italian states (Nice and Savoy) are annexed by France. He uses this assessment of current events to lead into a scathing attack on EBB's hero worship of Napoleon. Because of the first poem in the volume, Aytoun writes that EBB "under the influence of her Cacodæmon, has been seized with a like fit of insanity, and has uttered the following oracular raving…" (492). Then he quotes from "Napoleon III in Italy," calling it "deplorable." He wishes that the volume might have been issued a bit later in the spring as the current "disinterestedness of the hero of her worship" is called into question as Nice and Savoy become part of France in partial payment for its participation in the previous summer's war. EBB writes to her brother George to defend that action. It was understood, she writes, all along to be a likely result and one that made sense, also noting that any annexation would be approved by plebiscite. The popular misconception of the situation is due mainly, she believes, to the representation of the Italians as "victim-voters"[34] by the "Holy Father" in Rome and the "Ex-Grand Duke" of Tuscany, who had lost much by the recent political changes (Landis 227).

Aytoun assesses the rest of the poems as "utterly devoid of merit" until "A Curse for a Nation," which he takes some time to denounce and with vigor. He writes:

> We are always sorry to be under the necessity of contradicting a lady, but we are decidedly of opinion that no angel desired the gifted authoress to do anything of the kind. The communication came directly from a pernicious

[34] EBB suggests that the Pontiff and the outgoing Grand Duke portrayed the Italians as victims of the war who had really no choice but to approve annexation to Piedmont through plebiscites. The Pope and Leopold II lost most or all of their political power when northern and central regions of Italy voted to join with Piedmont for a united Italy.

> little imp who had been turned out of Pandemonium for profanity. Angels, we firmly believe, have a decided objection to all kinds of cursing and swearing; and had Mrs. Browning's good angel been beside her when she penned this very objectionable production, we do think he would have entered his most solemn protest against its publication. (494)

Aytoun guesses that the curse is meant for America, but wonders what "America has to do with the European Congresses or the settlement of the affairs of Italy" (494). In his hurry to condemn women meddling in politics, he may have missed EBB's quite plain reference in the preface to the focus of these poems on truth and justice, liberty and freedom—the need for which is pointed out in "A Curse for a Nation," no matter who is actually cursed. He ends the review with a lesson he hopes EBB will learn: "To bless and not to curse is woman's function; and if Mrs. Browning, in her calmer moments, will but contrast the spirit which has prompted her to such melancholy aberrations with that which animated Florence Nightingale, she can hardly fail to derive a profitable lesson for the future." He then sets "aside the little volume with profound regret that it ever was proffered to the public" (494).

It's no wonder EBB mentioned the review in several letters to be sure her friends read it or to ask if they had. It's sensational. Since *Blackwood's* was a known Tory vehicle and EBB was a known Whig and liberal, the politics of any Tory reviewer would have conflicted with EBB's position and purpose. Lootens suspects it goes well beyond that for Aytoun, and that his concern is focused on both EBB's national *and* sexual betrayal (270). Lootens's assessment seems appropriate as EBB clearly does not understand the role a woman, as Aytoun (and many others) envisioned it, must play to keep English culture secure, to say

nothing of her being influenced by imps and demons. EBB knew she was being portrayed as an "unnatural vixen, who, instead of staying at home and spinning wool… curses her own land…" (Kenyon 2: 374). She seems to understand that her "sins" are both against her nation and her gender, but fear of such reproach did not stop her pen or the printer's press.

Five more reviews of *PBC* appeared in April, most of which bemoan her rhymes at some point, usually finding fault with her politics first, deploring her worship of Napoleon III, and expressing disdain or disapproval of the final curse. On 1 April 1860, *John Bull* carries a review which criticizes EBB for both her praise of Napoleon III in the first poem and for what is perceived as her indictment of his treachery at Villafranca in "An August Voice." Regarding "Italy and the World," the reviewer agrees "to a certain extent with Mrs. Browning that there is too much of this national egotism among us, that it is a growing vice among us, and that it is usurping on the bond of human brotherhood taught by Christianity." However, the reviewer writes, "All these cants about universal fraternity were tried and found wanting half a century ago" (219). Unlike most others who seemed to think the curse disturbingly effective, this reviewer finds the curse at the end "falls flat" as EBB condemns the U.S. to do what it "deliberately chooses to do, that is pursue a perfectly neutral policy in the affairs of Europe" (219). This is an odd assessment that assumes the curse is not about issues of slavery but about the U.S. non-intervention in European affairs. This does not appear to be connected in any way to the Ostend Manifesto of 1854 that essentially allowed for U.S. intervention in European affairs and may or may not have had anything to do with the original impetus to write "A Curse for a Nation." The reviewer's statement seems to have confused EBB's dissatisfaction with British foreign policy with a discontent over U.S. foreign policy ignoring the fact that "A Curse for a Nation" is really more focused on the

inherent ills of U.S. domestic policy, albeit with a lesson all could learn about the evils of enslaving others. Despite some negativity, the reviewer does find, unlike even the more positive previous reviewers, that there are “ample evidences… of her old power in wielding the English language and her wonderful gift of rhythmic melody” (219).[35]

The Morning Post, a known pro-Emperor newspaper, surprisingly offers a review of *PBC* that is not at all flattering, asserting that the poems are “merely very ill-tempered declamation, distorted out of prose, but not elevated into poetry”[36] (14 April 1860). The reviewer likens her attempts at political poetry to Tennyson’s:

> When a poet meddles with politics, he, and still more emphatically she, applies to that intricate subject those faculties and endowments which are least appropriate, and generally speaking, “fudge” is the result. Even Tennyson’s individual withers are not quite unwrung on this point. But Mrs. Browning is altogether flown away with by the resonant steam-eagles of her Italian sympathies.

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[35] One of the U.S. reviews of the poems was published in this month. In the section called the “Editors’ Book Table,” *The Independent* printed a review of *PBC*—called *Napoleon III in Italy and Other Poems* in the U.S.—that begins and ends on a high note. The review starts with a connection to Dante that EBB drew herself in the preface and in several places in the poems: “Dante himself would applaud such a tribute as this to the freedom of his loved Italia.” The reviewer calls EBB a “poet of the people” who “has found at last a hero for her worship, where many see only a calculating villain or scheming despot… still she reserves her homage for the idea which the Emperor impersonates before her. She has no adulation for the man, no flattery for imperial grandeur, but her worship is for the champion of Liberty.” This reviewer assesses well EBB’s stated intent but does go on to say that EBB’s attribution of Napoleon’s sincerity is not acceptable: “We know too much of his perjuries, oppressions, and villainies at home.” However, the reviewer ends with great praise for the volume, writing that when EBB “touches upon Italy, we feel the inspiration of every word” and suggesting that there is an “exquisite beauty of composition in these poems” (8).

[36] All quotes are from page 3.

The reviewer writes that "Napoleon III in Italy" suffers from her "unrhythmical verses" just as England "gets a most unmerciful bullying" in the last poem (which this reviewer assumes is part of EBB's "rampant raid upon England and her cautious policy"). "A Court Lady" is counted as the best of the volume with only one "blemish," "the grammatical error of using the word 'came,' in a sense in which 'went' is intended," but otherwise it "beautifully describes" the "dainty lady's visits to the wounded men." A situation portraying women apparently doing women's work proved to be popular among the male reviewers. Two other poems merit special attention, the reviewer writes: "The Dance" for its "noble" story and "An August Voice" "which possesses point, spirit, and humour." "A Tale of Villafranca" is called a "pretty, but strained and rather foolish little piece" without further explanation.

The Globe, another pro-French newspaper, writes that the "fervour of political feeling which glowed in the pages of 'Casa Guidi Windows' is increased to scorching heat in 'The Poems Before Congress;' the poetic fire is, on the contrary, very smoky and dim" (16 April 1860). The reviewer severely condemns EBB's adulation of Napoleon III, comparing him to the first Napoleon and suggesting that EBB likes the current one because of his similarity to the former, who was an enemy of freedom, devoted to the "cause of self, supported by Blatante Beaste."[37] This does not speak well of EBB's judgment, but this reviewer does stop short of calling her hysterical, insane, or possessed by demons (though the Beast *is* mentioned). The reviewer proposes that there is only one "*true*" poem among them all, "A Court Lady," but writes that "Miss Nightingale and her nurses may be amused at the costume chosen for such an occasion." Of the final poem, little is said, but the reading is correct in

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[37] Frederick Tennyson refers to Napoleon III as "The Beast" (see Chapter 3); EBB writes to her friend Fanny Haworth 16 June 1860 that Fanny is "moved to set down the Emperor as 'the Beast' 666, of course" (Kenyon 2: 393). The Napoleons had this "devilish" reputation, apparently, among a certain crowd in England.

terms of the intended audience, or rather, the original audience: "Let America take to herself 'A Curse for a Nation.'" The review ends: "England has fallen from her favour past redemption. Let us hope all her evil wishes for her country may be as innocuous as they are bitter and ungrateful."

The review in *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* (21 April 1860) is written by a confessed "Napoleon-worshipper" who praises EBB as the "greatest female poet that ever wrote," surpassing "the rest of her sex as greatly in ambition as in genius" (251). The poems are generally admired as "stirring verses" and EBB as a poet who is able to deal with "matters of the day with a far greater ease and power than the laureate uses," although, the reviewer notes, she "like her gifted husband… sometimes goes out of her way to devise uncomfortable and halting metres, whereby to express her thoughts…" (252). Noteworthy is this reviewer's reference to Ireland, wondering what "our Irish friends, now subscribing to the Apostolic Father in Rome, will think of these *Christmas Gifts* accorded to his Holiness by Mrs. Browning" (252). There is no obvious judgment upon that poem, but by connecting it to a perceived Irish disapproval, perhaps this reviewer is leading readers to a discussion of the final poem that is an "attack upon England." "A Curse for a Nation" is in "bad taste and worse metre, besides which disadvantages, its statements do not happen to be correct" (252). Despite the final poem, the reviewer is fairly positive, ending the review with a "beautiful extract" from "Napoleon III in Italy," a short excerpt from "Italy and the World" (the stanza that criticizes the rifle corps—though misquoted), and a proposition that by EBB's "leave, or without it, and by help of our volunteers, we will at least confine the annexations of her darling Emperor *to eastward*" (253). The strange combination of support and denunciation in this review, not unusual by any means in response to *PBC*, is an

indication of the vast divide created by European political allegiances, and in particular, by Napoleon I and III. The complexity and range of response to these poems, sometimes in the same review, suggest that EBB's perception of the political situation is deeply complex itself and that this complexity is manifest in the poems and the reactions of readers.

The last of the reviews for the month following *PBC's* publication, from *The Observer*, is short enough that I quote nearly the whole text here (23 April):

> Mrs. Browning was in Italy in 1849, and witnessed the failure of the movement in favour of Italian independence in that year. These poems are written to commemorate the present triumph of the principle that was then trodden under foot… in Italy. They were written in the full swing of hope and joy—for the poet loves the country and the people as she loves her own land and her own people… but they were written also ere the family compact which places the key to Italy in the hands of France was made public.[38] It is very doubtful that she would have published the rhapsodical eulogy addressed to Louis Napoleon with which the volume opens if that circumstance had been known to her. As it is, a lover of liberty like Mrs. Browning must ever regret that she penned this piece of adulation.[39] In many respects there is much of

[38] This reviewer may be referring to the marriage between Prince Napoleon of France and Princess Clotilde of Piedmont that was part of the agreement between Napoleon and Cavour to ally France with Piedmont against Austria, an alliance that also promised Nice and Savoy to France for their martial intervention on Italy's behalf.

[39] In fact, EBB did know. The alliance between France and Italy became an open secret as early as fall 1858. She writes in a letter to her brother George that it "was understood that Savoy should be permitted its choice, when Italy became a great nation," that because of its economic and geographic isolation from the rest of Italy, it was just as well. She even mentions that "Cavour called Savoy, Piedmont's Ireland, from the disaffection there" (Landis 228). EBB claimed that the poems were written from a perspective of truth. And true to the poetic impulse, perhaps, she published the poems as they were, despite her knowledge of

> the old "fire" in these poems; but they are, to a certain extent, neutralized by events that have occurred since they were written. Under any circumstances, however, they are the outpourings of a noble spirit, and are worthy of a place in every free man's memory.

Thus, the first rash of critical response ended with the end of April, leaving just a few more reviews in 1860 specifically focused on *PBC*.

May–September 1860

The frenzy to review appears to have died down somewhat by the end of April, but not the immoderate reactions. In a longer article in *Bentley's Miscellany* in May that touches on a multitude of topics, the author calls *PBC* an example of literary intemperance (and relative impermanence as it turns out). The author of the article writes that the work on Louis Napoleon is the "only sign of poetry in the volume: the verse—if verse it can be called—is harsh and tuneless; its substance—to be charitable—is unintelligible rant" (445).

One of the more affirming reviews was published in *The Leader* (5 May 1860).[40] In a stunning show of support—given some of the previous reviews—the reviewer sets EBB against an array of political opposites:

> In this day, when all England is arming against France, when every country and every town is full of volunteer corps and amateur militiamen, when in Parliament, in the pulpit, and in the press, one voice is raised against the greed

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political change that did, indeed, to some extent temper them. But the impact of *PBC* was still quite impressive in the number of reviews it garnered and the conversation it engendered.

[40] *The Leader* was known for its alignment with radical causes. George Henry Lewes had been a reviewer for *The Leader* in the early 1850s; he reviewed EBB's *Poems* (1850) and *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851).

> of France and the designs of another Napoleon, when Poet Laureates write war songs to order, and even Martin Tuppers blow a blast upon their penny trumpets, when every one who utters a word in palliation of the Imperial policy is accused of want of patriotism—at such a time… sings the authoress of "Aurora Leigh," and the burden of her song throughout is that France is right and England wrong. The confession is a bold one, and requires a bold spirit for its utterance. (425).

The reviewer asserts that given a chance, readers will find the beauty in her verses, if they can put aside politics. A long quote describing Italy from "Napoleon III in Italy" (including Stanza VI) precedes the writer's portrayal of EBB as having two countries, England and Italy, "much as a mother has two children," one strong and one weak, yet the mother loves both. The implication, in what is a complicated meshing of gender issues, is that EBB is not at fault for loving both England and Italy and pining for Italy's freedom because *she* is mother-like while others, who only focus on their own countries, are selfish. By reinscribing EBB into a maternal role, the reviewer covers her in the blanket of all that is goodness and home and hearth, at the same time giving power to her "confession" as a "bold one." It is somehow both right *and* strong that she speaks up, despite her sex *and* because of it. As the reviewer points out, EBB was indeed right, as "there is no use denying the simple truth, that Louis Napoleon has made Italy free"; it is the conclusion of the poem that "the English public will most object to" (425).

Unlike any previous reviewers, this one takes to task the English political character or foreign policy (that is echoed not only in *PBC* but also in two letters EBB writes—noted below). "To speak the truth," the reviewer writes, "honest truth amongst ourselves we, as a

nation, do not care much about Italy," adding that this feeling may be connected to preconceived notions of Napoleon that are inherently English:

> If the French retired to-morrow from their self-imposed task, and the Austrians reconquered Italy, we might and should protest; but most certainly we should not go to war to hinder them…. We did nothing for Italy; we never should have done anything; and we don't intend to do anything…. We don't really believe that by our moral support we have done much good to Italy, and we should not care much if we had; and if the French like the credit they deserve it, as they had the work. This, or something like this, is our English feeling; and we don't know that it is not a right one after all. What we can't get over is Louis Napoleon. We have made up our minds so completely about him, we have written him down so confidently as a scamp and an adventurer, that we don't like anybody to assert the contrary. Supposing he is not the man we take him for, we have been wrong all along. The mere hypothesis upsets all our received doctrines about constitutional rights, and middle class legislation and general respectability. *Coups de'état* and universal suffrage, and wars for an idea, and regard for facts in preference to laws, are all equally antipathetic to us. (425)

This reviewer comes the closest to understanding EBB's perception of England's antipathy towards Italy, their fear of Napoleon, and her criticism of both. In two letters, EBB repeats a story, that expresses her thinking, told by Odo Russell concerning Monckton Milnes.[41] First

[41] Richard Monckton Milnes was a British poet and politician (1809-1885), and a member of the Cambridge Apostles in the late 1820s (members also included Alfred Tennyson and Arthur Henry Hallam).

to her friend Isa, and then to her brother, George, her words in these letters are very near to the reviewer's assessment of "English feeling":

> It is curious, the state of the English mind, just now. Monkton [sic] Milnes said a clever thing at Paris the other day, which was entirely true. Some Frenchman exclaimed to him—"But what do you English want, after all?" "Why we want," said Milnes, "first, that the Austrians should beat *you* thoroughly—then we want that Italy should be free,—and then we want that the Italians should be grateful to *us* for doing nothing towards it– (Landis 225; Kenyon 2: 376)

In the letter to Isa Blagden, EBB also complains that "men have no courage"; taking Milnes as her example, she writes, "[he] for instance, keeps his sarcasm for Paris, and in England supports his rifle club and all Parliamentary decencies" (Kenyon 2: 376).[42]

The reviewer for *The Leader* then puts the politics and poetry in perspective: "We have spoken first of the political aspects of the book because it is the most important one, and the one most liable to censure. Mrs. Browning's fame is too well established to require us to say much more than that the poetry is worthy of her past. For us, indeed, it has a peculiar charm. We are somewhat weary of poems about King Arthur,[43] or other ideal personages and feel as if poetry were a new thing to us when it sings in living passion of a living time" (425). The reviewer does note the "carelessness" in rhyme that appears occasionally, but "[t]his, however, is all that, as critics, we could suggest" because the "book, indeed, is full of

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[42] Both letters are dated in April 1860.

[43] The reviewer is referring to *Idylls of the King* by Alfred Tennyson; *Idylls* began publication in 1859.

beauties" (426). EBB, the reviewer concludes, "[s]ingle hand… has to fight an up-hill fight; but while she writes like this she will not be worsted" (426).

The next review to appear in June, in *Fraser's Magazine,* is much less complimentary than the one in *The Leader*; however, it is one of the only to suggest politics is a valid topic for poetry. Gender also seems to be a non-factor in political commentary, unlike Aytoun's review that blatantly dismissed women's right and ability to speak on politics. The review article in *Fraser's,* written by John Skelton,[44] is titled "A Raid Among the Rhymers," and signed by "Shirley."[45] Skelton, finds nothing objectionable about politics being the subject of poetry: "We can see no reason why the minstrel should not be permitted to touch the political controversies which agitate his contemporaries" (818). But like previous reviewers, Skelton finds EBB's portrait and praise of Napoleon III excessive, false, and dangerous. As well, "A Curse for a Nation" is seen as insulting—"the most painful feature in her book" (822). Skelton concludes:

> Mrs. Browning's book being intended for a political manifesto, it is perhaps unnecessary to add that *as poetry* it is a complete failure…. on the whole, the poetry is the weakest, most inchoate, most unmusical, and most ineffective we have met with for a long time. We are sorry to be obliged to use this language: had we not a real and most honest admiration for Mrs. Browning's

[44] John Skelton (1831-1897), writer and literary critic, was a contributor to *Fraser's Magazine*, and a contributor to *Blackwood's* after 1869 until his death.

[45] Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* was published in 1849—Skelton's *nom de plume* was taken from the title. He had received a letter from her after his review of *Jane Eyre*. Several collections of "Shirley's" works were published later in the 19th century. Skelton's choice of pseudonym is an interesting twist on gender: a man using the name of a female character who struggles with received gender roles because of her position and her male name.

> gifts we would willingly hold our peace; but the disease is malignant, a sharp remedy is needed, and it is best to speak out plainly. (823)

That Skelton does not find fault with EBB, or any poet, for tackling politics is striking, but he condemns the poetry because it is a "political manifesto"—a perplexing conclusion. Is the poetry "inchoate," "unmusical," and "ineffective" because it's about politics, or because the politics is wrong? The latter seems to be the situation here.

Continuing the cry that EBB does not get the "politics" right is the review in *The Spiritual Magazine* written by William Howitt[46] (July 1860). But he goes further than Skelton to suggest EBB has more wrong with her than an inaccurate portrayal of political reality. He calls her recent work filled with "strange spasmodic starts," "fierce," and "forced, stilted, strained, and theatric" (293). Particularly in *PBC*, he sees the "incarnate lie of France," stating that "it is remarkable that the hissing dissonance of the verse keeps pace with the revolting horror of the theme"; "[i]t is not the melody of the soul's music that we have now, but a shriek of frenzy—an agonized scream" (293). Not only is he deeply offended by EBB's ode to Napoleon, but he is also appalled by the "cursing poured out on England" (294) in the last poem. Like other reviewers, the beginning and end received his attention, with very little comment accorded to the interior poems. Howitt does include a postscript, however, remarking that,

> [s]ince this article, I have heard,[47] but not seen, that Mrs. Browning has disclaimed the application of the "Curse for a Nation" to England, and

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[46] William Howitt (1792-1879), a prolific author and translator, became interested in spiritualism in the late 1840s. He was a good friend to Elizabeth Gaskell, but Robert Browning did not appear to like him. In a letter to EBB, he suggests Howitt, in collecting information on his work on the lives of poets, is indiscrete and pushy (Kintner 2: 668-69).
[47] Howitt is likely referring to EBB's partially printed letter in the *Athenæum*.

> transferred it to America. On referring to her volume again, I observe phrases which might bear out that application, but, unfortunately, these are so vague, that none but the specially prompted reader could so apply them. (295)

Howitt ends the postscript with the profound understanding that EBB is, not insane as other reviews have suggested, but rather, possessed or certainly suffering from a spirit-oriented malady: "It is very singular that this curse is given as a spirit-communication, thus confirming the idea of biologising *ab infra*.[48] May the gifted poetess soon break the dark spell..." (295).

EBB, despite her spiritualist leanings, reacted to Howitt's review with more amusement than concern, but because Browning was a noted skeptic of spiritualism, his reaction was somewhat more gleeful. "Yes," she writes to her friend Fanny Haworth, "I see the 'Spiritual Magazine,' and remarked how I was scourged in the house of my friends. Robert shouted in triumph at it, and hoped I was pleased, and as for myself, it really did make me smile a little, which was an advantage…. 'Biologised by infernal spirits since 'Casa Guidi Windows,' yet 'Casa Guidi Windows' was not wholly vicious it seems to me, nor 'Aurora' utterly corrupt…. Biologised… *he* certainly is" (Kenyon 2: 406). To another friend, Eliza Oglivy, she wrote, "There is… a small controversy going on in the Spiritual Magazine just now as to whether I (EBB) am or am not possessed of the Devil. Mr. Howitt thinks affirmatively. As for me, of course I have not an opinion. Only I should laugh…" (Heydon and Kelley 161).

The last review of *PBC* written before EBB's death, appears in *Weldon's Register of Facts and Occurrences Relating to Literature, Science, and the Arts* (September 1860), about

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[48] *ab infra*. From within.

two months after the Howitt's review. Before even beginning to treat the poems themselves, the reviewer takes to task William Howitt for his attack upon EBB. The reviewer is indignant and feels impelled to right a wrong: "we submit to the momentary sacrifice of our own feeling of warmest friendship for the man, and proceed to deal with him as the unjust accuser of a woman whose name has long been dear to us, and whose fame will be but justly crowned when she is honoured by future generations as the best beloved in English literature" (20).

The reviewer blatantly attempts to shame Howitt by pointing our several moments in *The Spiritualist* review where it becomes clear that Howitt did not carefully read the preface or the poems:

> We point to the simple fact recorded on the title-page of Mrs. Browning's volume, that the poems in question were written "before Congress,"—*before* Louis Napoleon had lied to Italy, if he really has lied…. Mr. Howitt, in the heat of his mistaken zeal affirms the contrary, and speaks of the poet's "wild enchantment" culminating in hymns of worship to this man when he stood condemned in the face of Europe as a liar and a wrong-doer, thrice proved. We point to the mute, yet eloquent testimony of Mrs. Browning's title-page,—"Poems before Congress." We point again to her preface, dated from Rome, February, 1860. Our readers may now do, what Mr. Howitt should have done, look to the dates of recent events for their own perfect satisfaction. (21)

The reviewer also points out Howitt's injustice when "he affirms anything like the worship of Bonaparte" in the first poem. What this reviewer alludes to is something many had missed in their condemnation of both emperor and poet: "Napoleon III in Italy" is not

titled only "Napoleon III," and while an ode to the French Emperor, it is still about events in Italy and "can only be regarded as the incandescent, living emanation of Mrs. Browning's love for that down-trodden land" (21). The reviewer proves his point by extensively quoting passages directly addressing Italy.

The reviewer next addresses a "second grievous injustice, the obloquy of which Mr. Howitt must share with the common herd of review writers, who have one and all not scrupled to treat the poem which bears for its title 'A Curse for a Nation,' as a curse breathed against England" (22). Howitt's postscript is scrutinized, especially his belief that the telltale lines in "A Curse" are only vague references to America. The reviewer quotes from the poem italicizing the phrases that refer to and imply the intended recipient of the curse is America: the poem is sent over the Western Sea—repeated twice; the poet's "own land's sins" are named as opposite to the cursed land, separating the two locations; the cursed land is *not* the Old World—therefore, it must be the New World. "Are these *vague* expressions?" the reviewer asks, "[w]e hardly have patience to answer Mr. Howitt's charge of 'vagueness'" (22)—all of which Howitt "should have perceived, at least when he referred to the poem a second time," and for which he should have "acknowledged his error, or put his MS. in the fire" (22).[49]

Later, the reviewer points out that in many reviews, Stanza XX from "Italy and the World," was often quoted by "Grub-street" reviewers to EBB's disadvantage, leaving off the end line (which is conveniently italicized for readers):

[49] This reviewer points out something EBB would have likely known: in Hebrew the same word means both cursing and blessing. The point of this statement is lost in his argument against Howitt, but it is intriguing information that bears future attention by scholars studying "A Curse for a Nation." For a deeper analysis of EBB's Hebraic work and knowledge, see Cynthia Scheinberg's book, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England*.

> I cry aloud in my poet passion,
>
> Viewing my England o'er Alp and sea,
>
> I loved her more in her ancient fashion,
>
> She carries her rifles too thick for me,
>
> *Who spares them so in the cause of a brother.*[50] (24)

The reviewer is "sincerely happy to say" that Howitt does not do this—the only moment Howitt is allowed respite from being chastised.

The review ends with a quiet satisfaction that justice has been served, that while "Mrs. Browning, perhaps, may now feel that her trust in Napoleon has been misplaced," *PBC* is work "she does not need to look back upon with shame" (24). "There is, indeed," writes the reviewer,

> a wild, lawless viguour in these poems, and there is a depth of enthusiasm in them which scorns the ordinary bonds of verse, as it withers with tenfold scorn the conventionalities of society. But they must be judged from the circumstances which inspired them; and, so judged, they will not be found unworthy of the hand that wrote *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* and *Aurora Leigh*. (24)

There were no more reviews published in EBB's lifetime specifically devoted to *PBC*. But in these nineteen, a fascinating thread reveals itself when they are read altogether: many of the reviewers did not seem to read the volume carefully or all the way through (one suspicion EBB and Browning had regarding Chorley's review). Seven months after *PBC* was published, and after it seemed there would be no more reviews, the *Weldon's Register*

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[50] The punctuation is misquoted in this stanza, but the wording is correct.

reviewer accused Howitt and previous reviewers of not being thoughtful or careful critics. It may have been the case that Howitt, and those other "Grub-street" critics who wrote disapproving reviews, *could not* give *PBC* a full reading—they may have become too distracted by the first and last poems, and the politics of the volume, to give it a full reading. Some critics complained about the short length of the volume, but that did not guarantee all the poems were read with care.

Popular Contemporary Reception

Despite some ruthless, abrasive, and unsympathetic reviews, *PBC* was not overwhelmingly disliked or dismissed by all its readers.[51] I've noted some of EBB's responses to the reviewers throughout the previous sections. She seems to be less bothered by the negative reactions, with the exception of Chorley, as she learned that sales had gone well enough to merit a second edition. To her brother she expressed her overall impression: "Except for the Athenaeum's misstatement, I was prepared for everything,—& in fact, the weight given to the book… has on the whole rather flattered me than otherwise" (Landis 225). Browning wrote to friends of the second edition in June 1860: "I found Frederick Chapman here, nephew of our Publisher… he talks about new editions & other encouragement. Aurora Leigh: *Fifth* is getting ready & the second of 'Before Congress' is imminent" (Hudson, *Browning* 61-62). Perhaps the publicity of some scathing reviews may even have helped the sales. On 11 June, EBB writes to her sister Arabella, "Frederick Chapman (junior partner) says that people in England universally admire my 'pluck'

[51] Robert Bulwer Lytton's letter to EBB, noted in Chapter 3, suggests that some discerning readers may have found the poems compelling, even if they did not agree with EBB's politics.

(meaning my impudence, I suppose) while they revile my politics. The Poems B.C. are likely to go into a second edition soon (Lewis 2: 466).[52] Four days later, on 15 June 1860, EBB writes to her friend Eliza Ogilvy that "[m]y publisher… (Chapman) says there will be no injury—& that Aurora Leigh is in the press for a fifth edition notwithstanding; & that B[efore] C[ongress]. poems are selling in spite of vituperation" (Heydon and Kelley 149). The next day, on 16 June 1860, EBB writes to Fanny Haworth. "Chapman junior is in Florence… and he maintains that I have done myself no mortal harm by the Congress poems… which incline to a second edition after all!" She continues, "[h]ad it been otherwise I yet never should have repented speaking the word out of me which burnt in me. Printing that book did me real good" (Kenyon 2: 394).[53]

EBB received a letter from John Ruskin on 5 November 1860 that indicates the kind of support she may have received from some friends and family (at least those of the same or similar political persuasion).[54] It is an acknowledgment of her "pluck" that Chapman said the English admired. Ruskin writes that he is tired and suffering from melancholy, that he is

> partly in an unspeakable condition—not knowing what to say of myself—or to anyone else. You, I believe[,] were made ill by Villafranca; but you could say your say about it. I could not. I wrote three letters about it to a Scotch paper which I thought would insert them—the editor was frightened at the strong language– I got two put in another paper, the third, the strongest &

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[52] Lewis notes that there "is no evidence that a second edition of Poems Before Congress was published at this time" (2: 468-69, n. 13).

[53] She writes to her brother, George, with the same news of a second edition (Landis 234).

[54] William Michael Rossetti wrote to EBB shortly after publication of the poems "after receiving his copy of *Poems before Congress* that he too believed that Louis Napoleon was a great and noble leader and that he honored her for courageously asserting her ideas in the face of a 'blatant and intolerant' public opinion in England" (qtd. in Taplin 381).

> worthiest—nobody would have– You also *can* write what you feel– I can't…. Now if Italy can only be true to herself… what do you think she *can* do—in way of foodful—soul-ful—work. However—with what oscillation or failure may be appointed for her—she will—as all nations will—now go forward I believe…. There are more now in the world who see than ever before…[55]

No doubt EBB received other supportive letters from her correspondents since she responded to many (some noted above) to discuss her reviews, thank them for their thoughts, and allay their concerns for her feelings.[56]

However, not all readers were charmed by her "pluck." An anonymous letter sent to her at some point before late August 1860 certainly points to the polarization that occurred as a result of *PBC*. To Fanny Haworth, she writes:

> I had an anonymous letter from England the other day, from somebody who recognised me, he said, in some prodigious way a great Age-teacher, all but divine, I believe, and now gave me up on account of certain atrocities—first, for the Poem 'Pan'[57] in the 'Cornhill' (considered *immoral!*), and then for having my 'brain so turned by the private attentions and flatteries of the Emperor Napoleon when I was in Paris, that I have devoted myself since to help him in the gratification of his selfish ambitions.' Conceive of this,

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[55] This letter is included as part of *The Browning Database*, located at the Armstrong Browning Library; it was published previously (Cook 347-48).
[56] Robert Bulwer Lytton was complimentary in his letter to EBB, quoted in Chapter 3. Despite his disagreement with some of her politics, he liked her poetry.
[57] "A Musical Instrument" appeared in *Cornhill* 2 October 1860 (84-85).

> written with an air of conviction, and on the best information. Now of the two imputations, I much prefer 'the inspiration from hell' (Kenyon 2: 406).[58]

The fervor of response may have kept up sales and could have resulted in a second edition, which would have no doubt engendered a new round of reviews and scandalous accusations in and around the periodicals. But contemporary attention for *PBC* died when no second edition materialized. Assessments of *PBC* after September 1860 disappeared while she lived, or were included in memorial reviews of her previous, and less political, poetry after her death.

Modern Reception

Modern reception of *PBC* is partly framed by the construction of EBB, after her death, as an ideal Victorian woman. Posthumous reviewers rarely gave *PBC* much mention as it may have tainted a romantic image of EBB that was more palatable to Victorian readers.[59] Tricia Lootens writes that between "1861 and 1887, a crucial period in the development of English studies, the poet's biography was transformed into a secular saint's legend. The poet's canonization and the decanonization of her work merged as increasing numbers of the poet's works were dismissed, often clearly for the sake of faith in the poet as a sainted epitome of Victorian womanhood—a faith…. doomed from the start" (vi).[60] *PBC*

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[58] EBB had not lost her sense of humor through the challenges of publishing *PBC*, and seemed to have understood that most readers would not understand her support of Napoleon as the people's choice in France and as an agent of change in Italy.

[59] *The British Quarterly Review* (October 1861), reviews the fourth edition of *Poems* (1856), *Aurora Leigh* (1856) (no edition mentioned), and *PBC* (1860). The review gives *PBC* approximately two pages of thirty-one total, really only mentioning the first of the poems.

[60] Lootens's dissertation, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Poet as Heroine of Literary History* (1988), traces in detail the reception of EBB and her works from the mid-19th

is largely forgotten as EBB's legacy moved from that of a great poet, to a writer of love poetry, and finally to the woman who escaped a villainous Victorian father to elope and become Robert Browning's wife.

No substantial scholarly attention was given *PBC* from shortly before EBB's death through Porter and Clark's edition in 1900 and well into the late 20th century.[61] In 1984, Sandra Gilbert's landmark article in *PMLA*[62] really considers only *Casa Guidi Windows* and *Aurora Leigh*. It does not deeply analyze the poems in *PBC* but powerfully uses that volume as a fulcrum for exploring the previous two major works. In 2005, two articles appeared exploring *PBC*, one by Keirstead, the other by Montweiler, with only Montweiler's work deeply probing the poems themselves and treating the volume as a whole. The timing for a critical edition of *PBC* is right, and something that is clearly needed in order for scholarly work to continue on this volume that was such an important one for EBB to have published, in her opinion.

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through the late 1980s. See Lootens's book *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (1996) for more.

[61] Two exceptions to the paucity of attention focused on EBB's Italian poems are G.K. Chesterton's chapter on EBB in *Varied Types* in 1903 and Lewis W. Smith's essay in *The Arena* (February 1909). Chesterton calls EBB "a great poet, and not, as is idly and vulgarly supposed, only a great poetess" (261). He defends her Liberal politics especially regarding the Italian struggle; however, he only reflects briefly on one poem from *PBC*, "Christmas Gifts"—a poem largely ignored by most critics. In Smith's essay, "Italian Freedom and the Poets," he writes of EBB: "of all the poets who have written of Italy, none has written of her so lovingly, so sympathetically, with so warm a glow of enthusiasm as Mrs. Browning…. In the highest sense she is not a great poet. Her poetry lacks… that strength and breadth of vision that we demand of the masters, but it has all of a woman's subtle insight and fine feeling. Nowhere is this shown with more power and perfectness than in that long list of poems in which she pours forth her passion for the cause of Italy. If she were known only by these poems, it might well be fancied that she was an Italian woman, for the Italian women were patriots no less than Italian men" (157). However, Smith only quotes from "Mother and Poet" and "Parting Lovers," never mentioning *PBC* or its poems.

[62] The exception to this is the close consideration given "A Curse for a Nation" (see head notes for that poem for details).

Through much of the 20th century biographical and critical scholars of EBB typically followed Gardner Taplin's lead (1957): "In 1860 she dealt earnestly with what she considered the greatest issues of her time and vigorously defended her right to do so, but the change in subject matter from romantic ballads and pseudoreligious dramas to journalism in verse about politics of the hour was not altogether a gain" (Taplin 381). Virginia Radley, in her 1972 biography of EBB, devotes only a couple of pages to *PBC*, noting that an understanding of the intricacies of the time were needed to read the poems. Dorothy Mermin, in her 1989 critical study of EBB as a poet, dismisses EBB's work after *Aurora Leigh*, as "a few spurts of poetic activity in response to the Italian political crisis" (225). Marjorie Stone, however, acknowledges in her 1995 study, that EBB's Italian political poems, including *PBC*, "remain unjustly neglected" (12). She, like Lootens, notes the decline of EBB's reputation. Stone suggests that "the anti-Romantic spirit of early Modernism led to a preference for qualities thought to be 'Classical'" while EBB was "a Romantic writer fired by Promethean aspirations" (194). Additionally, she writes that the interpretation of "A Curse for a Nation" colored later views of EBB so that "[b]y the turn of the century, such descriptions of [her] poetry as 'hysterical' were increasingly common" (195).

However, Italian reception was not so colored.[63] In 1964, Dominic James Bisignano penned *The Brownings and Their Italian Critics*. He asserts that EBB was early on

[63] An early Italian translation of EBB's work was published in 1834: *Due sonetti di Elisabetta Barrett Browning*, translated by Emilio Lovarini and published in Florence so that poetry lovers in Florence, at least, would have known EBB as a poet for many years before she actually lived there.

considered a "poetess-patriot, whose devotion to the cause of Italian unity rivaled that of the most ardent spirits, ranking her" among important Italian poets of the *Risorgimento* (208).[64]

Bisignano notes that Italian biographers find details of EBB's life to "dwell on which are often ignored by English writers, especially Mrs. Browning's political opinions, her desire to see and talk with Cavour, her enthusiasm for D'Azeglio, her worship of Mazzini" (248). Indeed, EBB's Carte-de-viste Album[65] contains photographs of D'Azeglio, Cavour, and many more Italian patriots and politicians, but not Mazzini's photograph (she grew to believe him a danger to the cause by the late 1850s—but she did think he was a promising Italian patriot in the revolutions of 1848). Another interesting omission by American and English biographers, writes Bisignano, is that of Enrico Nencioni's "visit to and description of Mrs. Browning" which is "recorded by all Italian biographers" (248).[66] Enrico Nencioni (1837-1896), a poet and critic, wrote the first reviews in Italy of both Brownings—he was a "'recognised authority in Italy on English contemporary literature'" (qtd. in Maxwell 210).[67]

The Italian critics and scholars also seem to have treated EBB as an important part of the literary landscape in Italy, and, especially important to this study, *Poems Before Congress*

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[64] Bisignano lists, among others, Goffredo Mameli (1827-1849) and Giovanni Berchet (1783-1851), Italian poets known for their active support of the *Risorgimento*.

[65] In October of 1860, Robert Browning gave EBB an album of photographs of contemporary political figures—"further evidence," writes Lewis, "of her passionate interest in the Italian Risorgimento" (567). Photographs of the major Italian political figures were included as well as French (including Louis Napoleon and his famous pamphlet co-writer, Arthur de la Guéronnière). It is reproduced in Volume II of *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Her Sister Arabella*, edited by Scott Lewis.

[66] On 1 May 1884, Enrico Nencioni published a general review essay on EBB in *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* (5–18).

[67] This neglect of Nencioni may not have changed much since 1964 as I quote from an article on Vernon Lee by Catherine Maxwell, rather than from work on EBB, but it is an essay included among many on EBB in the collection *Unfolding the South*. One exception to the omission of Nencioni in British and American scholarship is work on EBB by Leigh Coral Harris.

as a vital text worthy of exploration and explication.[68] Bisignano concludes that EBB's "dedication to the Italian cause endeared her to all Italians" and that she rightfully "takes her place as one of the heroines of the Risorgimento" (268). Recent Italian scholars, such as Simonetta Berbeglia, keep alive the Brownings' connection to Italy with her work on both Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.[69]

Poems Before Congress and Other Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

This section heading is the title of a book that does not exist but might have. From her letters to friends and family in June 1860, we know that Frederick Chapman, of Chapman and Hall, spoke to her about a second edition of *PBC*. We can also guess that there was no second edition published between then and January 1861 because of evidence in an unpublished letter EBB wrote then. To her friend, Jane Wills Sanford, she writes on 29 January 1861 that "I am glad you liked my poems before [sic] Congress—There are several more (published in America) which will appear in the second English edition."[70]

Exactly six months later, on 29 June 1861, EBB died in her husband's arms in their Florence home, Casa Guidi. With no second edition of *PBC* possible then, or perhaps wanted, Browning oversaw the publication of EBB's "last poems" based on a list she left of "unpublished poems which she herself had drawn up, doubtless with a view to another volume" (Adams 424; Mermin 236). The "unpublished" poems were most likely those included in periodicals (mostly in America) as well as those that were previously

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[68] Bisignano points to works in 1913, 1928, and again in 1947 and in 1950 to illustrate EBB's importance as an "Italian Englishwoman" (248).
[69] An example of Berbeglia's work is quoted in the introduction to this dissertation where I note her recovery of the Brownings' important link to Vieusseux's reading room in Florence.
[70] My thanks to the Armstrong Browning Library for permission to excerpt this letter for my dissertation.

unpublished. "Another volume" is presumably the second edition of *PBC* not EBB's *Last Poems* which was issued by Chapman and Hall posthumously in February 1862.

To fully grasp the role European politics played in EBB's life and the impact it had on her later poetry, one needs to read the poems from *PBC* and the last Italian poems she published *together*. Because she believed a second and expanded edition of *PBC* was going to be published, modern scholars need to speculate on what that might entail. I propose that a second edition of *PBC* be published, one that considers her last poems, published and unpublished, so that a table of contents might appear this way:

Napoleon III in Italy
The Dance
A Tale of Villafranca
A Court Lady
An August Voice
Christmas Gifts
Italy and the World
A Curse for a Nation (the end of the first edition of *PBC*)
Little Mattie*[E]
A False Step*
Void in Law*
Lord Walter's Wife*
Biance Among the Nightingales*
My Kate*
A Song for the Ragged Schools of London*
May's Love*
Amy's Cruelty*
My Heart and I*
The Best Thing in the World*
Where's Agnes?*
De Profundis*[A]
A Musical Instrument*[E]
First News From Villafranca[A]
King Victor Emanuel Entering Florence, April 1860[A]
The Sword of Castruccio Castracani[A]
Summing Up in Italy[A]
Died…*
The Forced Recruit at Solferino[E]
Garibaldi[A]
Only a Curl*[A]

A View Across the Roman Campagna[A]
The King's Gift[A]
Parting Lovers[A]
Mother and Poet[A]
Nature's Remorses
North and South (the end of the poetry in *Last Poems*)[71]

This looks like a robust edition with the most new and collected (though shorter) poems EBB had published in many years; however, in EBB's letter to Wills Sanford, she states that *PBC*, in an expanded edition, would include more poems she had published in America. A second expanded edition of *PBC* might have then included only additional Italian poems published in America (which would leave out "A Forced Recruit at Solferino" published in England), or perhaps EBB meant that *some* of the poems in the coming edition were published in America. One title for a second edition might be, *Poems Before Congress and Other Italian Poems*, and perhaps only include those poems that explicitly address Italy and concerns of Italian politics—including "A Forced Recruit at Solferino." But what to do about "A Curse for a Nation"?

"A Curse for a Nation" would have to be in a second edition (but maybe not where EBB placed it). In the Porter and Clark edition of EBB's poetry, they include a short prose piece written by EBB called "Italy and America" that was published in *The Independent* 12 March 1861. In this article, she explicitly links the struggle between Northern and Southern forces in Italy with the struggle in the U.S.—in mid-March 1861 embroiled in their own civil war. After having spent so many years and so much energy worrying over the reunification

[71] Poems with an asterisk (*) are not explicitly about Italian affairs. Poems which were published in America (all in *The Independent*) are noted with a superscript A. Poems published in England (all in *Cornhill Magazine*) are noted with a superscript E. Several of these poems were unpublished at the time of EBB's death; poems with neither an A or E superscript were unpublished.

of the Italian states, it seems appropriate that EBB expressed a worry about the "dissolution of your great Union" (Porter and Clark 360). Yet she writes that whatever the outcome of civil disturbance, the conscience of America will remain, because its people will rule.[72] In a clear statement of her political beliefs, and expression of empathy for the U.S., she writes:

> I honor Republicanism everywhere as an expression of the people; but it seems to me that a theoretical attachment to any form of government whatever is simply pedantry,—as if one should insist upon everybody's wearing one kind of hat, or adopting one attitude. A genuine government is simply the attitude of that special people. What we require for every man (or state) is life, health, muscular freedom to choose his own attitude. Let us be for the Democracy, and leave the rest. Who cares for the figure at the helm as long as the people's wind is in the sails? I care little. Only I do care that the Democracy should have power—that each man should have the inheritance of a man, and the right of voting where he is taxed. So this is my creed. (Porter and Clark 361)

EBB concludes her article with her support of Napoleon III as a man who stood up to old European political alliances to ensure that Italy could become a nation, stating that "there are some who cannot understand it—and more who will not. It will be enough that the Italian nation understands" (Porter and Clark 361).[73]

With the direct connection made between Italy and America in her article, I find a good argument for keeping "A Curse for a Nation" among poems of Italian freedom. And

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[72] She does write: "'What surprises me is that the slaves *don't rise*!'" (Porter and Clark 361).
[73] One month after this article was published in the U.S., Victor Emmanuel was declared King of Italy. Italy was shortly thereafter united and, though as a united country it has had its share of struggle, it has remained one nation.

evidently, a second U.S. edition of the volume was also discussed later in 1860. In a letter dated 20 October or 8 November 1860, EBB wrote to Theodore Tilton, editor of *The Independent* in New York, in a hitherto unpublished letter,[74] about a next U.S. edition. She asks that Tilton send her letter onto C.S. Francis, the American publisher of *PBC*, so that Francis could include two of her most recent poems: "First News from Villafranca" and "King Victor Emmanuel Entering Florence" (first meant for *The Independent*) in a subsequent edition. She asks specifically that "First News from Villafranca" be placed before "A Tale of Villafranca" and "King Victor Emmanuel Entering Florence" be moved to just after "Italy and the World." I quote from this letter at length to illustrate EBB's thinking at that time about the difference between British and American reception of the volume as well as her intention for poem order:

> I have to thank you, both for my husband & myself, for your kind & sympathetic letter. I am much touched by the generosity of the American public and find a real pleasure, higher than the personal part of it, in observing that your national susceptibility interferes so little with your love for the truth & your sympathy with rescued nations. May God Bless America.
>
> As to matters of business, your liberality, sir, is welcome as a proof of what is better still. We do not often write for periodicals whether at home or abroad, but you will see by what is enclosed, that I have acceded to your request. The poems go straight to you from the brain, & not round by

[74] I gratefully acknowledge the permission of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin for permission to quote from this letter.

> England. When you have done with them, have the goodness to pass them to Mr. Francis for the next edition of "Napoleon III in Italy"[75]…
>
> My book has had a very angry reception in my native country as you probably observe, but I shall be forgiven one day, and meanwhile, forgiven or unforgiven, it is satisfactory to one's own soul to have spoken the truth as one apprehends the truth.[76]

Given her ideas for the placement of at least two poems in a second American edition, I suggest that poems might be arranged as follows, if a modern second edition of *PBC* were titled *Poems Before Congress and Other Italian Poems*:

Napoleon III in Italy
The Dance
First News From Villafranca
A Tale of Villafranca
A Court Lady
An August Voice
Christmas Gifts
Italy and the World
King Victor Emanuel Entering Florence, April 1860
The Sword of Castruccio Castracani
Summing Up in Italy
The Forced Recruit at Solferino
Garibaldi
A View Across the Roman Campagna
The King's Gift
Parting Lovers
Mother and Poet
Nature's Remorses
North and South
Italy and America
A Curse for a Nation

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[75] EBB encloses the title in quotation marks, leaving off "and Other Poems."
[76] Besides the directions for Francis in her letter, EBB apparently enclosed a note meant directly for C.S. Francis with her letter to Tilton.

Connecting “North and South,” “Italy and America,” and “A Curse for a Nation,” (the last three) would make a powerful combination at the end of an expanded second edition. “North and South,” the last poem in *Last Poems*, reflects a national struggle; it is about the Italian struggle to become united, but the parallel to the U.S. Civil War and the effort of that nation to stay united cannot be ignored given EBB’s generally grateful and positive feelings regarding America, and given her belief that a second U.S. edition of the poems was coming soon. It feels like a second edition focusing on a U.S. and Italian connection would be fitting. “A Curse for a Nation” might remain last to continue serving as an example of where nations and people had been and a warning of where nations and people should never go again, or suffer the curses hurled at them for their actions.

For a second edition that was planned but never happened, there are many options and few guidelines. A second edition of *PBC* seems to have mattered a great deal to EBB; in all her letters about the volume, she notes this volume’s importance to her as a poet and the incredible relief she felt upon its publication. We miss a vital part of her essence as a poet, her belief in the purpose of poetry to move men and change lives, if we miss this part of her poetic legacy. Working against some previous assessments of the volume that dismissed it almost entirely, I have argued for its reinsertion into readings of EBB as a major Victorian poet and as an important and astute political observer and commentator. No matter whether an expanded second edition of *PBC* were to include all of EBB’s last and unpublished poems or just her last and unpublished Italian poems, to honor her enthusiasm for and intention of creating a second edition, this is a project worthy of scholarly consideration and endeavor.

Table 4: EBB's Poetry and Reviews[1]

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
Four reviews (including one combined review).	Three reviews (including one combined review).	Twelve reviews (including two combined reviews).	Twenty-seven reviews (including one combined review).	Sixteen reviews (including one combined review).	Sixteen reviews (including two Italian and one French review).	Ten reviews (including six combined reviews; one Italian combined reviewed; four reviews of the 5th edition).	Thirty-seven reviews (including four French reviews; six combined reviews; two Italian combined reviews).	Twenty-three reviews (including three combined reviews and one posthumous review).	Fourteen reviews (including two combined reviews).
The Eclectic Review, July 1826, (78–82). Anon.	*The Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1833, (610–11). Anon.	*The Atlas*, 23 June 1838, (395). Anon.	*The Globe*, 22 August 1844, (1). Anon.	*The Leader*, 30 November 1850, (856–57); 7 December 1850, (880–82); 14 December 1850, (905). George Henry Lewes.	*The Literary Gazette*, 31 May 1851, (372). Anon.	*The New Monthly Magazine*, July 1856, (369–78). Anon.	*The Globe*, 20 November 1856, (1). Anon.	*The Athenæum*, 17 March 1860, (371–72). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Athenæum*, 29 March 1862, (421–22). Henry Fothergill Chorley.
The Literary Gazette, 15 July 1826, (436). Anon.	*The Athenæum*, 8 June 1833, (362). Anon.	*The Examiner*, 24 June 1838, (387–88). Anon.	*The Spectator*, 24 August 1844, (809–10). Anon.	*The Athenæum*, 30 November 1850, (1242–44). John Westland Marston.	*The Standard of Freedom*, 31 May 1851, (11). Anon.	(These poems were widely reviewed in the U.S. in an American edition, this 4th edition, and a 5th edition.)	*The Literary Gazette*, 22 November 1856, (917–18). Anon.	*The Bookseller*, 24 March 1860, (160). Anon.	*The Morning Post*, 3 April 1862, (6). Anon.

[1] Reviews are listed chronologically whenever possible from 1826 through 1863 (with the last review of *Last Poems* as an individual volume). Combined reviews are noted if they are either repeated later in the table or if they are out of order. I have focused on British periodical reviews, but do mention some U.S. reviews, sometimes only listing the number of reviews, when it illustrates EBB's popularity or the long-range popularity of a volume. I have not included British or U.S. reprints of reviews.

[2] Whenever possible, I have included the day of publication as well as the year and month.

[3] *Poems* (1850) is a revised and expanded edition of *Poems* (1844).

[4] *Poems* (1856) is the last edition of these works that EBB herself corrected. I suspected it would have received a number of reviews, but this was not the case.

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
La Belle Assemblée, or Court and Fashionable Magazine, August 1826, (85). Anon.	(A U.S. edition of this volume was published in 1851, and garnered four reviews that year in American periodicals.)	*The Athenæum*, 7 July 1838, (466–68). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Athenæum*, 24 August 1844, (763–64). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Palladium* (Edinburgh), December 1850, (419–21). Anon.	*Rivista Britannica*, [5] June 1851, (283–85). James Montgomery Stuart.[6]		*The Press*, 22 November 1856, (1120–22). Anon.	*The Critic* (London), 24 March 1860, (362). Anon.	*The Critic* (London), 5 April 1862, (340). Anon.
(This volume was also considered in a combined review in the U.S. in 1842.)		*The Metropolitan Magazine*, August 1838, (97–101). Anon.	*The Atlas*, 31 August 1844, (593–94). Anon.	*The English Review*, December 1850, (320–32). Archer Thompson Gurney.	*The Athenæum*, 7 June 1851, (597–98). John Westland Marston.		*The Spectator*, 22 November 1856, (1239–40). Anon.	*The Examiner*, 24 March 1860, (181). Anon.	*The London Review*, 19 April 1862, (375–77). Anon.
		The Monthly Chronicle, August 1838, (195). Edward Bulwer-Lytton.	*John Bull*, 31 August 1844, (551–52). Anon.	*The Morning Post*, 13 December 1850, (2). Anon.	*The Globe*, 10 June 1851, (2). Anon.		*The Athenæum*, 22 November 1856, (1425–27). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Atlas*, 24 March 1860, (231–32). Edmund Ollier.	*The Saturday Review*, 26 April 1862, (472–74). Anon.
		Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, August 1838, (279–84). John Wilson.	*Ainsworth's Magazine*, September 1844, (280–82). Anon.	*The International Magazine*, 1 January 1851, (180). Anon.	*The Guardian*, 11 June 1851, (424). Anon.		*The Daily News*, 26 November 1856, (2). Anon.	*The Daily News*, 29 March 1860, (2). Anon.	*The English Woman's Journal*, May 1862, (204–06). Anon.
		The Monthly Review, September 1838, (125–30). Anon.	*The Sun*, 9 September 1844, (3). Anon.	*The Guardian*, 22 January 1851, (55–56). Anon.	*The Leader*, 14 June 1851, (560–61). George Henry Lewes.		*The Examiner*, 29 November 1856, (756). Anon.	*The Spectator*, 31 March 1860, (309–310). Anon.	*The North British Review*, May 1862 (514–534). Anon.[7]

[5] Shaded boxes indicate Italian or French reviews.

[6] John Montgomery Stuart also reviews this volume in *Scritti Inglesi Sulla Politica Contemporanea*, November 1851 (237–277).

[7] This entry, in chronological order here, repeats a combined review listed below.

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
The Sunbeam, 1 Sept 1838, (243, 245); 8 Sept, (254–55); 22 Sept, (269–70); 6 Oct, (287); 13 Oct, (293–95). Anon.	*The Sunbeam*, 1 Sept 1838, (243, 245); 8 Sept, (254–55); 22 Sept, (269–70); 6 Oct, (287); 13 Oct, (293–95). Anon.	*The Sunbeam*, 1 Sept 1838, (243, 245); 8 Sept, (254–55); 22 Sept, (269–70); 6 Oct, (287); 13 Oct, (293–95). Anon.	*The Metropolitan Magazine*, October 1844, (265–67). Anon.	*The Spectator*, 25 January 1851, (85–86). Anon.	*The Sun*, 20 June 1851, (3). Anon.		*The Leader*, 29 November 1856, (1142–44). Anon.	*The Saturday Review*, 31 March 1860, (402–04). Charles Synge Christopher Bowen.	*Weldon's Register*, May 1862, (209–12). Anon.
		The Literary Gazette, 1 December 1838, (759–60). Anon.	*The Monthly Review*, October 1844, (300–06). Anon.	*The Examiner*, 25 January 1851, (52-3). John Forster.	*The Morning Post*, 21 June 1851, (6). Anon.		*The Tablet* (Dublin), 29 November 1856, (762–63). Anon.	*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1860, (491–94). W.E. Aytoun.	*The Eclectic Review*, May 1862, (419–25). William Henry Smith.
		The Quarterly Review, September 1840, (382–89). John Gibson Lockhart.	*The New Monthly Magazine*, October 1844, (282–84). Anon.	*Fraser's Magazine*, February 1851, (177–82). Charles Kingsley.	*The Spectator*, 28 June 1851, (616–17). Anon.		*The Monthly Review*, December 1856, (743–54). Anon.	*John Bull*, 7 April 1860, (218–19). Anon.	*The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, June 1862, (90–91). Anon.
		The Arcturus, February 1841, (171–76). Anon.	*The New Quarterly Review*, October 1844, (570). Anon.[8]	*The Eclectic Review*, March 1851, (295–303). Anon.	*The Ladies' Companion*, 1 July 1851, (244). Anon.		*The Atlas*, 13 December 1856, (794–95). Anon.	*The Morning Post*, 14 April 1860, (3). Anon.	*Church and State Review*, 1 June 1862, (44–45). Anon.
		(This volume was reviewed in the U.S., twice in 1842, once in 1852.)	*The Examiner*, 5 October 1844, (627–29). Anon.	*The Christian Remembrancer*, April 1851, (371–82). Anon.	*The Prospective Review*, August 1851, (313–25). Anon.		*The Morning Post*, 15 December 1856, (3). Anon.	*The Globe*, 16 April 1860, (1). Anon.	*The Christian Spectator*, July 1862, (415–27). A.H.[9]

[8] Another review of this volume appears in the *The New Quarterly Review* (January 1845) by Henry Fothergill Chorley (77-98).
[9] This entry, in chronological order here, repeats a combined review listed below.

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
			Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, November 1844, (621–39). James Ferrier.	*Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 3 December 1853, (361–63). Anon.	*The Eclectic Review*, September 1851, (306–17). Anon.		*John Bull*, 27 December 1856, (827). Anon.	*Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, 21 April 1860, (251–53). Anon.	*The Dublin University Magazine*, August 1862, (157–62). Mortimer Collins.
			Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, November 1844, (720–25). Christian Johnstone.	*Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1856, (14–20). Anon.	*Scritti Inglesi Sulla Politica Contemporanea*, November 1851, (237–77). James Montgomery Stuart.[10]		*The Saturday Review*, 27 December 1856, (776–78). George Stovin Venables.	*The Observer*, 23 April 1860, (7). Anon.	*The London Quarterly Review*, January 1863, (556–57). Anon.
			The Critic (London), 1 November 1844, (148–52). Anon.	*The New Monthly Magazine*, July 1856, (369–78). Anon.	*Fraser's Magazine*, December 1851, (618–22). Charles Kingsley.		*The Guardian*, 31 December 1856, (999–1000). Anon.	*Bentley's Miscellany*, May 1860, (445–46). Anon.	(This volume was reviewed multiple times in U.S. periodicals.)
			The Sun, 1 November 1844, (2). Anon.	*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 January 1852, (348–61). Joseph Milsand.	*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 January 1852, (348–61). Joseph Milsand.		*The New Quarterly Review*, January 1857, (33–35). Anon.	*The Leader*, 5 May 1860, (425–26). Anon.	
			The Westminster Review, December 1844, (381–92). Sarah Flower Adams.	(There were several reviews of a U.S. edition of these poems in American periodicals in 1850.)			*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1857, (23–41). W.E. Aytoun.	*Fraser's Magazine*, June 1860, (818–23). John Skelton.	

[10] James Montgomery Stuart also reviews this volume in the June 1851 *Rivista Britannica* (283–85).

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
			The League, 7 December 1844, (171–72). Anon.				*The Westminster Review*, January 1857, (306–10). George Eliot.	*The Spiritual Magazine*, July 1860, (293–95). William Howitt.	
			The New Quarterly Review, January 1845, (77–98). Henry Fothergill Chorley.[11]				*Revue Britannique*, January 1857, (102–14). Amédée Pichot.	*Weldon's Register*, September 1860, (20–23). Anon.	
			The Dublin University Magazine, February 1845, (144–54). Samuel Ferguson.				*The British Quarterly Review*, January 1857, (263–67). Robert Alfred Vaughn.	*The London Quarterly Review*, July 1861, (405–06). Anon.	
			The Metropolitan Magazine, March 1845, (322–34). Charles Grant.				*Journal des Débats*, 28 January 1857, (2–3). Philarète Chasles.	(*Napoleon III in Italy and Other Poems,* the U.S. title, received four reviews in American periodicals from April through June.)	
			The Gentleman's Magazine, May 1845, (513–15). Anon.			*Rivista di Firenze*, February 1857, (76). Anon.	*Rivista di Firenze*, February 1857, (76). Anon.[12]		

[11] An anonymous review of this volume appears in the October 1844 *The New Quarterly Review* (570).
[12] *Aurora Leigh* was reviewed again in *Rivista di Firenze* in April 1858 (204-13).

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
			The Prospective Review, August 1845, (445–64). Anon.			*The North British Review*, February 1857, (443–62). Coventry Patmore.	*The North British Review*, February 1857, (443–62). Coventry Patmore.		
			The Student, and Young Men's Advocate, November 1845, (428–31). Anon.				*The Rambler: A Catholic Journal and Review*, February 1857, (152–54). Richard Simpson.		
			The British Quarterly Review, November 1845, (337–52). Martha Jones.				*Edinburgh Weekly Review*, 28 February 1857, (7–9). Charles Hamilton Aidé.		
		The English Review, December 1845, (263–273). Eliot Warburton.	*The English Review*, December 1845, (263–273). Eliot Warburton.				*The National Magazine* (London), March 1857, (314–15; 331). Anon.		
			The Eclectic Review, November 1846, (573–85). Anon.				*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 March 1857, (322–353). Émile Montégut.		
							The Dublin University Magazine, April 1857, (460–70). Anon.		

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
						The National Review, April 1857, (239–67). William Caldwell Roscoe.	*The National Review*, April 1857, (239–67). William Caldwell Roscoe.		
							The Westminster Review, October 1857, (399–415). John Nichol.		
							Revue Contemporaine, 31 January 1858, (257–86). L. Étienne.		
							Rivista di Firenze, April 1858, (204–13). Anon.[13]		
							The Ladies' Repository, October 1859, (611–15); November 1859, (662–67). S.D. Simonds.		
						The British Quarterly Review, October 1861, (350–81). William Henry Smith.	*The British Quarterly Review*, October 1861, (350–81). William Henry Smith.	*The British Quarterly Review*, October 1861, (350–81). William Henry Smith.	

[13] *Aurora Leigh* was previously reviewed in *Rivista di Firenze* in February 1857 (76).

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826).**[2]	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833).**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844).**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850).**[3]	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851).**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856).**[4]	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856).**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860).**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862).**
						The Edinburgh Review, October 1861, (513–34). William Stigand.	*The Edinburgh Review*, October 1861, (513–34). William Stigand.	*The Edinburgh Review*, October 1861, (513–34). William Stigand.	
						The North British Review, May 1862, (514–34). Anon. (5th edition.)	*The North British Review*, May 1862, (514–34). Anon.	*The North British Review*, May 1862, (514–34). Anon.	*The North British Review*, May 1862, (514–34). Anon.
						The Eclectic Review, March 1862, (189–212). Anon. (5th edition.)	(*Aurora Leigh* was printed in multiple editions in the U.S. and widely reviewed.)		
						Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, April 1862, (449–51). George Henry Lewes. (5th edition.)			
						The Christian Spectator, July 1862, (415–27). A.H. (5th edition.)	*The National Quarterly Review*, June 1862, (134–48). J. Challen		*The Christian Spectator*, July 1862, (415–27). A.H.

Table 5: Selected Reviews by Periodical[1]

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826)**	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833)**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850)**	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851)**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856)**	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856)**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860)**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862)**
	The Athenæum, 8 June 1833, (362). Anon.	*The Athenæum*, 7 July 1838, (466–68). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Athenæum*, 24 August 1844, (763–64). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Athenæum*, 30 November 1850, (1242–44). John Westland Marston.	*The Athenæum*, 7 June 1851, (597–98). John Westland Marston.		*The Athenæum*, 22 November 1856, (1425–27). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Athenæum*, 17 March 1860, (371–72). Henry Fothergill Chorley.	*The Athenæum*,[2] 29 March 1862, (421–22). Henry Fothergill Chorley.
		The Atlas, 23 June 1838, (395). Anon.	*The Atlas*, 31 August 1844, (593–94). Anon.				*The Atlas*, 13 December 1856, (794–95). Anon.	*The Atlas*, 24 March 1860, (231–32). Edmund Ollier.	
		Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, August 1838, (279–284). John Wilson.	*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, November 1844, (621–39). James Ferrier.				*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1857, (23–41). W.E. Aytoun.	*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1860, (491–94). W.E. Aytoun.	
			The British Quarterly Review, November 1845, (337–52). Martha Jones.				*The British Quarterly Review*, January 1857, (263–67). Robert Alfred Vaughn.[3]		
						The British Quarterly Review, October 1861, (350–81). William Henry Smith.[4]	*The British Quarterly Review*, October 1861, (350–81). William Henry Smith.	*The British Quarterly Review*, October 1861, (350–81). William Henry Smith.	

[1] I include the periodicals in this table that reviewed *PBC* and reviewed other of EBB's works, either prior to *PBC* or after.
[2] Even years after her death, EBB was a focus for *The Athenæum*. On 28 June 1884, a general review essay by Norman Maccoll (822) was published.
[3] *Aurora Leigh* was reviewed in the *British Quarterly Review* in 1857 and then included in a combined review in 1861.
[4] Combined reviews, posthumous reviews, and reprints appear in shaded boxes.

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826)**	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833)**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850)**	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851)**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856)**	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856)**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860)**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862)**
				Chambers's Edinburgh Journal,[5] 3 December 1853, (361–63). Anon.				*Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, 21 April 1860, (251–53). Anon.	
			The Critic (London), 1 November 1844, (148–152). Anon.					*The Critic* (London), 24 March 1860, (362). Anon.	*The Critic* (London), 5 April 1862, (340). Anon.
							The Daily News, 26 November 1856, (2). Anon.	*The Daily News*, 29 March 1860, (2). Anon.	
The Eclectic Review, July 1826, (78–82). Anon.			*The Eclectic Review*, November 1846, (573–85). Anon.	*The Eclectic Review*, March 1851, (295–303). Anon.	*The Eclectic Review*, September 1851, (306–317). Anon.			*The Eclectic Magazine*, March 1862, (303–11). William Henry Smith. Reprint of *The British Quarterly Review*, October 1861.	*The Eclectic Review*, May 1862, (419–25). William Henry Smith.
		The Examiner, 24 June 1838, (387–88). Anon.	*The Examiner*, 5 October 1844, (627–29). Anon.				*The Examiner*, 29 November 1856, (756). Anon.	*The Examiner*, 24 March 1860, (181). Anon.	

[5] This journal appeared under various titles: *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, *Chambers's Journal*, and *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*.

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826)**	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833)**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850)**	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851)**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856)**	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856)**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860)**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862)**
				Fraser's Magazine, February 1851, (177–182). Charles Kingsley.	*Fraser's Magazine*, December 1851, (618–22). Charles Kingsley.			*Fraser's Magazine*, June 1860, (818–23). John Skelton.	
			The Globe, 22 August 1844, (1). Anon.		*The Globe*, 10 June 1851, (2). Anon.		*The Globe*, 20 November 1856, (1). Anon.	*The Globe*, 16 April 1860, (1). Anon.	
			John Bull, 31 August 1844, (551–52). Anon.				*John Bull*, 27 December 1856, (827). Anon.	*John Bull*, 7 April 1860, (218–19). Anon.	
				The Leader, 30 November 1850, (856–57); 7 December 1850, (880–82); 14 December 1850, (905). George Henry Lewes.	*The Leader*, 14 June 1851, (560–61). George Henry Lewes.		*The Leader*, 29 November 1856, (1142–44). Anon.	*The Leader*, 5 May 1860, (425–26). Anon.	
				The Morning Post, 13 December 1850, (2). Anon.	*The Morning Post*, 21 June 1851, (6). Anon.		*The Morning Post*, 15 December 1856, (3). Anon.	*The Morning Post*, 14 April 1860, (3). Anon.	*The Morning Post*, 3 April 1862, (6). Anon.
						The North British Review, February 1857, (443–62). Coventry Patmore.	*The North British Review*, February 1857, (443–62). Coventry Patmore.[6]		

[6] I've included this combined review of *Poems* (1856) and *Aurora Leigh* (1857) because *The North British Review* reviews EBB's last four volumes in 1862, and this earlier review is by Coventry Patmore (see Chapter 3 for a comparison of his and EBB's political and written responses to Napoleon III).

***An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. London: James Duncan, (March 1826)**	***Prometheus Bound, and Miscellaneous Poems*. London: A.J. Valpy, (May 1833)**	***The Seraphim, and Other Poems*. London: Saunders and Otley, (April 1838)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, (August 1844)**	***Poems*. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (November 1850)**	***Casa Guidi Windows*. London: Chapman & Hall, (31 May 1851)**	***Poems*. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, (1 November 1856)**	***Aurora Leigh*. London: Chapman and Hall, (15 November 1856)**	***Poems Before Congress*. London: Chapman and Hall, (12 March 1860)**	***Last Poems*. London: Chapman and Hall, (February 1862)**
						The North British Review, May 1862, (514–34). Anon. (5th edition.)	*The North British Review*, May 1862, (514–34). Anon.	*The North British Review*, May 1862, (514–34). Anon.	*The North British Review*, May 1862, (514–34). Anon.
							The Saturday Review, 27 December 1856, (776–78). George Stovin Venables.	*The Saturday Review*, 31 March 1860, (402–04). Charles Synge Christopher Bowen.	*The Saturday Review*, 26 April 1862, (472–74). Anon.
			The Spectator, 24 August 1844, (809–10). Anon.	*The Spectator*, 25 January 1851, (85–86). Anon.	*The Spectator*, 28 June 1851, (616–17). Anon.		*The Spectator*, 22 November 1856, (1239–40). Anon.	*The Spectator*, 31 March 1860, (309–10). Anon.	
								Weldon's Register, September 1860, (20–23). Anon.	*Weldon's Register*, May 1862, (209–12). Anon.

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[1] The 1792 2nd edition I cite here was labeled Volume 1, but there was no Volume 2 as noted by the 1970's printer.

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ABSTRACT

POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING:
A CRITICAL EDITION

by Elizabeth D. Woodworth, Ph.D., 2007
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This dissertation includes six total chapters, one devoted to annotations for the poems in *Poems Before Congress* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning first published by Chapman and Hall in London, 1860. The volume has not been reprinted since that time except in a few collected works but never with substantial annotation or critical attention.

Chapter 1 includes a brief introduction to the volume, information on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's (EBB) life in Italy, and a chronology of her years in Italy. Chapters 2-4 explore various aspects of her work as a political poet. Chapter 2 examines how she claims her place among poets of the *Risorgimento*, suggesting the risks she took for publication and her determination to speak on political issues. Chapter 3 explores the influence of Carlylean heroics on her response to Napoleon III, and in contrast, the responses of Alfred Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, Frederick Tennyson, and Robert Bulwer Lytton in an effort to contextualize the role she assumed as Hero-Poet. Chapter 4 compares the women EBB created for *Poems Before Congress* (*PBC*) in light of Germaine de Staël's famous character

Corinne from *Corinne, or Italy*, a novel whose influence has been traced to EBB's verse-novel, *Aurora Leigh*.

Chapter 5 includes a brief introduction to the poems, information on the order of poems based in manuscripts, head notes for each poem and substantial annotations. Chapter 6 follows the trajectory of reception from contemporary through modern critical and scholarly response and suggests a second edition of the volume with possible contents.