A Spirit of the Age: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1822–26 Notebook, Romantic Writers, and the Commonplace Book Tradition

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"Question. Why does the mind find pleasure in the representations of anguish?" This fundamental problem in ethics and aesthetics is posed in a 231–page manuscript notebook that Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (EBB)[1] used in the years prior to publishing *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems* (1826) at age twenty (Fig. 1). Following the catalogue title in *The Browning Collections: A Reconstruction,* the notebook—now in Wellesley College Library—is customarily identified simply as the "1824–26 Notebook."[2] In this article, I present a detailed overview and analysis of this neglected archival text, arguing that it is a valuable research resource for multiple reasons and for differing audiences: not only Victorian poetry specialists, but also Romantic and Victorian literature scholars more generally and investigators in the fields of juvenilia, manuscript and print culture, and history of the book. I also present evidence that EBB used this particular notebook for a wider span of years than its catalogue title indicates and identify it accordingly by the dates "1822–26" in my title and throughout. The notebook includes commentaries on a wide range of authors and books (principally though not exclusively Romantic writers publishing at the time), as well as "Stray Thoughts," textual extracts, notes and memoranda ("List of Books I wish to have," "Addresses of Editors"), and drafts of original writing.[3] Its contents open a window on a transitional period in nineteenth-century literary history and also cast new light on the intellectual and artistic formation of a writer who would become England's most internationally influential nineteenth-century woman poet by mid-century. Beginning when she was sixteen, probably after her prolonged illness and return to the Barrett family estate at Hope End in May 1822, the young author left a documentary trail of her omnivorous reading across fields and genres: not only

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literature (poetry, fiction, essays) but also philosophy, rhetoric, political theory, history, letters, memoirs, and biographies. In effect, the notebook suggests, she was fashioning her own autodidactic version of a liberal education in a period when women were shut out from the formal advanced schooling provided to her brothers.

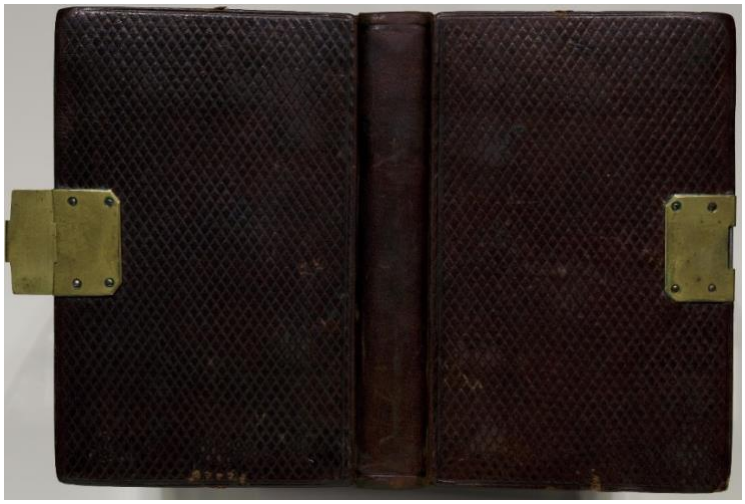


Figure 1. EBBCB *exterior view, showing binding and clasp.*

Like the juvenilia and notebooks of other Romantic and Victorian poets such as Alfred Tennyson, EBB's 1822–26 notebook includes much that speaks to issues, themes, motifs, and artistic tendencies in her mature works. For example, the college-age young woman querying the mind's paradoxical pleasure in representations of anguish would go on to write antislavery poems like the sonnet "Hiram Powers' Greek Slave" (1850) and "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1847): one addressing the limits of art's "ideal beauty" in representing a white enslaved woman's "house of anguish" (l. 2), the other immersing readers in the dramatic representation of a Black fugitive enslaved woman's traumatic suffering.[4] As a key resource for understanding both the contexts that shaped EBB's mature poetry and the literary works she copiously produced before turning twenty, her 1822–26 notebook thus complements the lively autobiographical essays dating from an earlier phase of her adolescence. These essays, published in 1984 by Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson, are now much cited by scholars (in part due to the pathbreaking example of Dorothy Mermin), and include vivid self-portraits of the precocious girl "mount[ing] Pegasus" at four, showing "feats of horsemanship" at six, and from age seven on reading histories of England, Rome, and Greece; Alexander Pope's translations of Homer; Milton, and Shakespeare.[5] The extraordinarily large body of poetry EBB produced after ambitiously "mount[ing] Pegasus" is now evident in hundreds of pages of annotated fine print in volume 5 of the 2010 *Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* beginning with her "earliest-known literary works" collected in fair copy in the album "Poems by Elizabeth B. Barrett."[6]

Laurie Langbauer rightly points out that the existence of a "movement of juvenile writers, beginning around the Romantic period," is still a tradition that is not "fully established" or sufficiently theorized.[7] Langbauer characterizes "the British juvenile tradition during this time" as "usually" made up of "schoolboys and undergraduates published in their teens," such as Henry Kirke White, Robert Southey, and George Gordon, Lord Byron ("Prolepsis and the Tradition" 889). However, gifted girls such as the young Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters were also a key presence in this tradition, their works now increasingly available in reader-friendly formats in editions from the Juvenilia Press established by Juliet McMaster and Christine Alexander. In the case of EBB, two major works have long dominated critical discussion, treated most fully in studies by Mermin, Simon Avery, and Donald Hair—each study of great value, but focused on other issues and contexts than a tradition of juvenilia.[8] The first of these works, EBB's Homeric epic *The Battle of Marathon* (1820), was published in fifty copies by her father when she was fourteen; the second, *An Essay on Mind*—completed and with a prospective publisher months before she turned twenty (*BC* 1: 221)—ambitiously treats "two classes" of "mental operations, or productions of the mind," as the young author explains in the verse essay's preface: "the philosophical" (divided into "History, Physics, and Metaphysics") and "the poetical."[9] Aside from these two long poems and her autobiographical essays, EBB's juvenilia remain under-investigated, despite a growing body of scholarship indicating how fruitful such research can be. This includes three pioneering articles by Beverly Taylor exploring the poet's childhood writings in relation to her views on education and cosmopolitan politics; Jerome Wynter's discussion of EBB's liberalism in "The African" (c. 1822), her first extended poem on slavery (published *WEBB* 5: 391–408); and Rachel Isom's analysis of "the language and figures of 'enthusiasm'" (29) in EBB's juvenilia. Inspired by Taylor's example, six young scholars are also editing a Juvenilia Press edition of selected works by the young EBB.[10]

Since its miscellaneous contents make it a hybrid, borderline genre liable to remain lost in the archives, EBB's largely unpublished 1822–26 notebook has been even less explored than many of the poetical works among her juvenilia.[11] Uncharacteristically, even the catalogue entry describing its contents in *The Browning Collections* is far from comprehensive, in contrast to the meticulously cross-referenced cataloguing of published and unpublished poems in her many notebooks used for composing and inscribing fair copies. Taylor underscores the importance of studying EBB's juvenilia together with her mature works by demonstrating that her engagement with contemporary subject matter is evident in her early poems and letters from the start, contrary to the view that she turned to such subjects in mid-career, then addressed them most vigorously and extensively in representing "this live, throbbing age" (V. l. 203) in *Aurora Leigh*.[12] The contents of the poet's 1822–26 notebook reflect the engagement with contemporary politics and issues that also characterizes her juvenile poetry, further illumining the underpinnings of her later

artistic practice. Much as EBB took her subject matter "from the times, 'hot and hot'" (*BC* 21: 111) in *Aurora Leigh*, many of the works she comments on or sometimes acutely criticizes in the notebook she began using in 1822 were "from the times," published in the first half of the 1820s.

For this reason, EBB's 1822–26 notebook offers a kind of mirror of the period itself—much as, in very different ways, William Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age: or, Contemporary Portraits* does in a series of essays published in 1824–25. Several of Hazlitt's essays were first published in the *New Monthly Magazine,* prominent among periodicals the young poet was reading and aspiring to publish in herself, as her notebook indicates. Hazlitt does not figure among writers treated in the notebook, while EBB, of course, was still far from figuring among spirits of the age in Hazlitt's terms. However, her record of her exploratory reading across genres, fields, national boundaries, and genders presents a striking contrast to Hazlitt's all-male, exclusively British cast of influential thinkers, writers, and politicians. It offers what historians might term a "history from below" in some respects (age, intellectual networks, gender), if not others (EBB's privileged social class and race). Although private, her notebook commentaries on books and writers also reveal how she began to hone a critical voice shaped by the public voices of reviewers in the periodical press of the period. The 1822–26 notebook thus offers fuller understanding of the writer who by the mid-1840s would not only be a leading transatlantic poetical spirit of the age herself, but also a collaborator with Richard Hengist Horne—more extensively than is often recognized—on the essays in *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844). Even specialized studies of *A New Spirit of the Age* acknowledging that EBB had some role in the collection tend to refer to Horne as the collection's solo author. For example, in a 2005 article, Horne's "insightful" criticisms on Alfred Tennyson in various passage are praised, even though some of these passages were written by EBB, as a volume of *The Brownings' Correspondence* published in 1990 demonstrates.[13]

EBB's 1822–26 notebook offers such a revealing mirror both of her own formation and the period it dates from because it is, in effect, a commonplace book, although one that, even as it continues the early-modern commonplace book tradition, reflects Romantic and later nineteenth-century transformations in that tradition. Commonplace books were traditionally used "to collect aphorisms and other extracts of texts ('commonplaces')" considered to "be worthy of remembrance" or of value as aids to composition, or both (Brewster 12)—particularly important when access to books was often highly limited. "As a device for assembling passages, lines, or words of special moment, the commonplace book served as both a memory aid and a mirror of the mind of its owner," as Jennifer Jenkins observes; "Thomas Jefferson's literary commonplace book documents his reading from adolescence to age thirty, and contains 407 entries" (1375). Such books thus played an important role in storing and organising knowledge, either under pre-determined categories or, after John Locke published "A New Method of a Common-Place-Book" in the late seventeenth century, using Locke's alternative method involving both a "pre-

prepared index" and the categorising of entries by "the first letter and first vowel" in the "head that they had been assigned."[14] Contrary to views in some quarters that the commonplace book tradition declined after Locke, the now burgeoning research on commonplace books across fields and periods emphasises continuation of the tradition in altered forms, as scholars discuss its relation to changing historical contexts and its overlap with other forms: diaries, journals, albums, scrapbooks, the "repurposing" of digital texts in social media, and the "global commonplace book we now know as the World Wide Web."[15]

In the nineteenth century, commonplace books were still widely used, as George Eliot's "Quarry" for *Middlemarch* suggests. They were also published or presented as gifts on occasion: Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published "extracts from their commonplace books together" (Hess 469); Anna Jameson gathered "unconnected fragments" and "collections of notes" (vi) in *A Common-Place Book of Thoughts, Memories, and Fancies* (1855); and Felicia Hemans's son Charles presented a commonplace book belonging to his mother to EBB, with a note affixed dedicating it to "*Mrs Browning in token of admiration & respect."* After the dedication, in its recipient's hand, appear the words, "*Mrs. Hemans's Commonplace Book. EBB.*"[16] These words suggest that EBB may well have identified her own 1822–26 notebook (in which Hemans figures among authors treated) as a commonplace book too. Another notebook among her scattered manuscript remains is catalogued by the Huntington Library as a "[Commonplace book, containing passages copied from various authors]." As Mermin notes, this "undated commonplace book opens with an excerpt from Coleridge's *The Friend* on the theme that 'Every power in Nature & in spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means & condition of its manifestation: and all opposition is a tendency to re-union.'" In this instance, as the Huntington Library's catalogue designation suggests, the notebook's contents more clearly correspond to traditional conceptions of the commonplace book's function and form.[17]

Romantic Transformations in Commonplace Books: EBB and Coleridge

As Jillian M. Hess demonstrates, Coleridge's notebooks (which he referred to as his '"common-place books,"' among other terms)[18] offer particularly striking examples of the Romantic evolution of the commonplace book from a compilation of "readerly extracts to a fusion of readerly and writerly notes," thus mediating between "original and received ideas" in keeping with "Coleridge's theory of the mind as an active participant in knowledge formation."[19] EBB's 1822–26 notebook takes a similarly mixed form to Coleridge's early "Gutch commonplace book," which combines "reading notes, textual extractions, memoranda, and original writing"; like his notebooks too, hers reflects a fascination with both eighteenth-century philosophies of mind and the Romantic movement towards "post-Kantian

transcendental theories of knowledge."[20] EBB's question about the mind's paradoxical pleasure in anguish is one of numerous examples of "textual extraction" in her 1822–26 notebook, in this case in an extended entry quoting, paraphrasing, and selectively summarising various theories set out in George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776).[21] Even in this instance, however, she is not merely copying extracts so much as analytically synthesising theories in a section of Campbell's comprehensive "philosophy of rhetoric" that seems of particular interest to her.

In other cases, she quotes selectively in order to question, as when writing of a passage in David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*: "To be questioned. 'The most lively thought inferior to the dullest sensation'— p 17 v. 2."[22] Similarly, in an entry on Immanuel Kant's theories of knowledge, she places a passage in quotation marks and underlines it: "he asserts 'that experience is the productrice of all knowledge & that we could not have a single idea without it.'" She then remarks in parenthesis, "This passage is extracted from Rees's new Cyclopedia & I cant help thinking the last line a misconstruction of the original Author. Surely experience is not necessary for the reception of simple ideas!"[23] Such remarks underscore the keen young autodidact's difference from the readers who simply copied extracts into their commonplace books, prompting the parody of one such figure in Jonathan Swift's "A Tale of a Tub" (1704): "For, what tho' his Head be empty, provided his Common place-book be full?" (qtd. in Brewster 33).

Much as Coleridge's notebooks are "sites not just of reception, but of conception," used to "experiment with ideas" as well as "to record quotations" (Hess 475, 471), EBB's 1822–26 commonplace book contains creative compositions and numerous original speculations mixed in with notes and commentaries on her reading. An entry titled "Stray Thoughts. April 1825" employs terminology similar to Coleridge's, who titled one of his notebooks "'Fly-Catcher / a day-book for impounding stray thoughts" (qtd. in Hess 474). In EBB's case, some of these thoughts take the simple form of a metaphor to illustrate a commonplace: "A habit of severe study gives energy to thought. As lute strings by excess of tension are made musical"; "Silen[c]e & stil[l]ness the precursor of all passionate feeling. The very waves have silence when they raise their dark brows upon high & look around Before they bay the Heavens, bursting in foam & sound!" (*EBBCB* 88–89). The most extended notes among these "Stray Thoughts" mix textual extraction and reflection in quoting John Milton's *Areopagitica* while expressing various thoughts about the value of "Mixed Reading." They thus speak to Milton's influence on both the young poet's Dissenting belief in the need to "wrestle with wrong" (as the notebook entry puts it) and the mature poet's defence of uncensored reading of "books bad and good" in a key passage of *Aurora Leigh*, in which Aurora describes herself as "dashed / From error on to error," with "every turn" bringing her closer to "the central truth."[24] In this case, we can clearly see how an apparently random "stray" thought in a writer's juvenilia can underlie and inform a major work published decades later. Another stray aside in EBB's remarks on Bernardin de St. Pierre's *Harmonies of Nature*

(1815) offers an intriguing gloss on her later choice of the protagonist's name and her mixing of the poetical with the prosaic in *Aurora Leigh*: "M^r. St. Pierre follows the example of many poetical prose-writers, making a mere dray-horse of Pegasus — & as L^d Bolingbroke said "I really can[']t stand the rose-fingered Aurora in prose" (*EBBCB* 168).

Other more substantial entries in EBB's 1822–26 commonplace notebook take the form of more purposeful notes or drafts of text for her own compositions, like "Hints for my Preface to 'Essay on Mind"' (*EBBCB* 57–61),[25] and a draft of a submission titled "For the New Monthly Magazine" (*EBBCB* 33–50). The latter corresponds closely in wording with an early text of "A Thought on Thoughts" sent to the magazine's editor (Thomas Campbell) and first published by Kelley and Hudson, who date it "ca. May 1823" (*BC* 1: 180–83).[26] Although not accepted and published at the time, this "descriptive narrative" of the "ancient and respectable house of the Words," in "former times … the most intimate friends of the Thoughts" is one of EBB's most delightfully witty youthful compositions. It parodically details the quarrels between the Thoughts and the Words ("little gentlemen … of very inflammable tempers," proverbially at war). The young author vividly describes the eccentricities of "M^r. Philosophical Thought" ("rather too fond of studying his own pedigree") who dictates long chapters "to his secretary (M^r. Locke)" on disputes over whether "the young Ideas" had "the free use of their eyesight before they came into the world." In contrast, "M^rs. Poetical Thought" is "a venerable old Lady who boasts of having wet nursed Homer, and led Shakespeare about in leading strings." We also meet "Concise Thought," who has "a dwarfish form" contracted by "the help of tight stays" because he "holds the Words in utter detestation."[27]

The most substantial original composition in the notebook is of an entirely different nature than this fanciful *jeu d'esprit*. Dated 1822, it is titled "Defence of the Bishop of Worcester[']s Objection to Mr. Locke[']s assertion 'that possibly we shall never be able to know whether any mere material Being thinks or no"' (Fig. 2). This "Defence" bristling with learning is itself an example of armed "Philosophical Thought" demonstrating its "pedigree," as the sixteen-year-old sets out to "prove" that Locke's "doctrine of materialism" and views on the "immateriality of the soul" are invalid, by analysing his use of authorities in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew sources.[28] Yet, despite the striking differences between this learned philosophical disquisition and the playful parody of "A Thought on Thoughts," they both underscore EBB's interest in the metaphysics of mind expressed elsewhere in her 1822–26 notebook and in *An Essay on Mind*. In this "astonishingly complex" verse essay concerned with "the power and politics of knowledge" (Avery 57), there is an evident fascination with turning "the pow'rs of thinking back on thought" (l. 201) and the "nature" of mind's "substance"—despite the young author's prefatory claim that the poem is more concerned with the "productions" and "effects" of the mind than its "operations" (*WEBB* 4: 78).

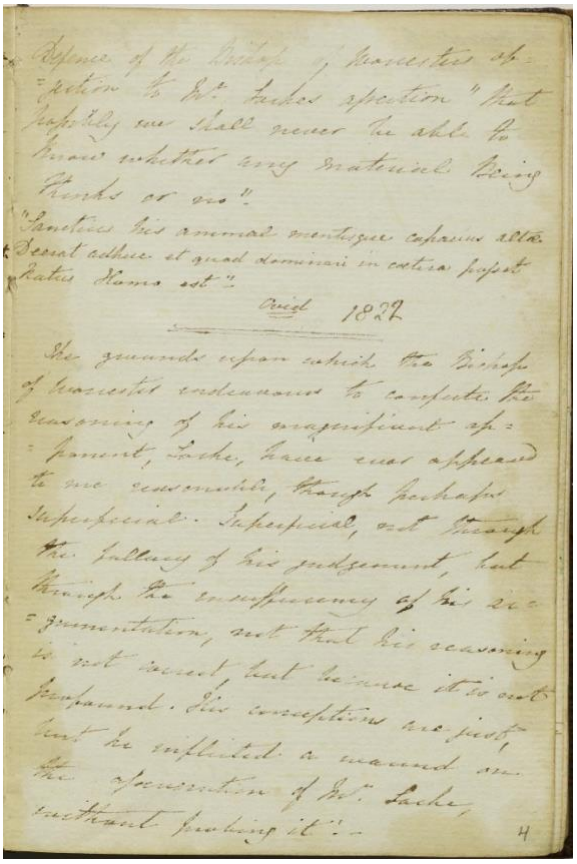


Figure 2. Essay on Bishop of Worcester and Locke, 1822*,* EBBCB*, p. 4.*

As in the case of Coleridge and other Romantic writers, EBB's notebook is not organised by topic or indexed by Locke's or any other method; instead it moves towards a "more flexible" chronological structure (Hess 468). The notebook may have been catalogued as dating from "1824–26" in part because the notes by EBB on "Kant[']s Philosophy" beginning on the verso of the marbled end paper are clearly dated in her hand "4. 1824." However, these notes are written in darker ink and a more compact hand than several items that immediately follow it in the notebook, among them the essay on Locke and the Bishop of Worcester, dated 1822, and the draft of "A Thought on Thoughts" for the *New Monthly Magazine* submission, dated "ca. 1823" in the case of the later version published in *The Brownings' Correspondence.* Thus, the Kant notes seem to be a later insertion.[29] EBB may have numbered the pages in her commonplace book when she inserted these notes, since the numbers are similarly written in dark ink and a compact hand.

The structure and sequencing of the notebook is further complicated by the fact that EBB flipped the notebook around and wrote from the back of it; the writing from the back is thus upside down to the writing from the front, although she

numbered the notebook sequentially from the front (with occasional missing pages or misnumberings).[30] The two directions meet on the middle of page 182, where a brief comment on a recent tale by Jeannie Halliday appears above "Addresses of Editors" (Fig. 3); however, the addresses are written upside down to the comment because they are written from the reverse direction of the notebook. The tale by Halliday is evidently "A Tale of Our own Times" in *Tales Round a Winter Hearth* (1826); the editors' "Addresses" include Campbell's for the *New Monthly Magazine* and another evidently copied from an advertisement for [John] "Thelwall's Monthly M. The Panoramic Miscellany[.] Italian & English Poetry received there" (*EBBCB* 182).

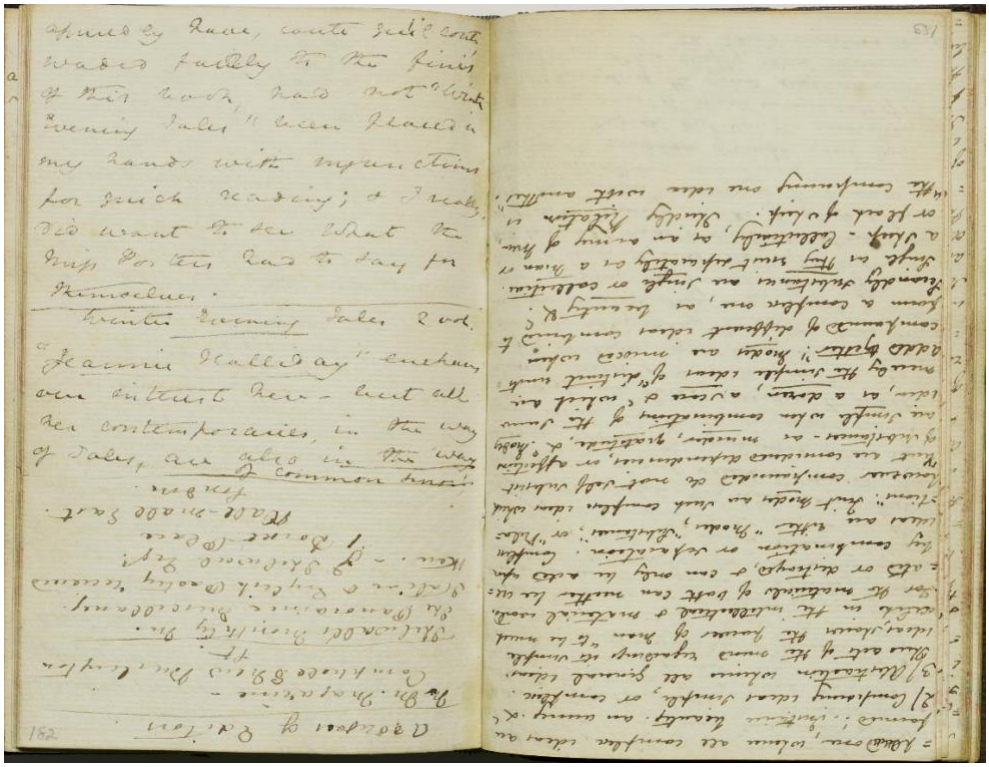


Figure 3. EBBCB, *pp. 182–83.*

Chronological sequence is also complicated if one considers the end of the notebook (or the new beginning marked by EBB's flipping it around and writing from the reverse direction). The verso of the marbled end paper inside the back cover (*EBBCB* 231) features a sketch and memoranda, one of the memoranda dated "1825." An unfinished opening of a "Short Analysis of Locke's Essay on Human Understanding. Book I[st]." is similarly dated "1825" (198). If one reads from the back of the notebook (i.e., from page 231 in reverse order), the few entries dating from 1826 in the notebook appear after this Locke analysis dated "1825," and thus appear to follow a chronological sequence. Most notable among these is an entry recording EBB's comments on Anna Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyée* (178–79).[31] However, the

dating and order of entries between the back cover and the Locke analysis (including notes on Italian and middle-English authors among other contents) are unclear.

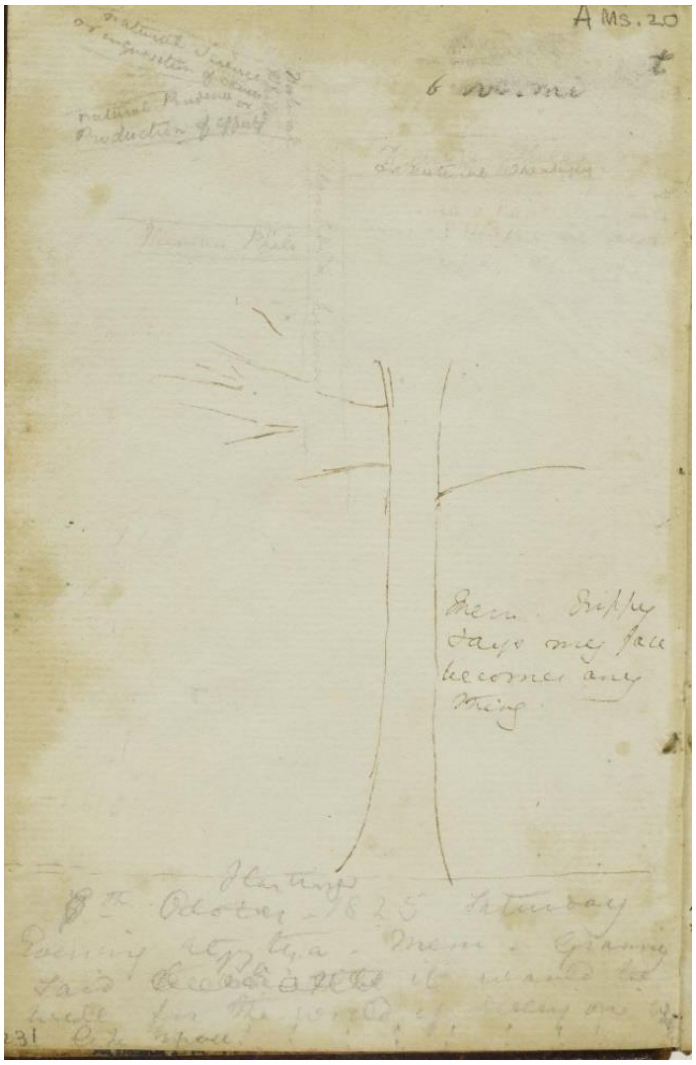


Figure 4. Tree sketch with memoranda, EBBCB*, p. 231.*

The sketch and accompanying memoranda on the verso of the marbled end paper at the back of the notebook are particularly intriguing (Fig. 4). The sketch (evidently drawn over an earlier partially erased sketch) represents a tree with labelled branches. These labels suggest that the tree relates to the departments of knowledge treated in *An Essay on Mind.* "Natural Philosophy" is written sideways where the top left branch emerges from the tree: the upper branch emerging from this in turn is labelled "Natural Science / or [?]Inquisition of Causes," and the lower branch, "Natural [?] Evidence or / Production of effects." "Natural Theology" appears on an upper right branch, with other words too faded to discern. The two memoranda

written beneath the tree's branches offer a charming glimpse of EBB's bantering exchanges with her paternal grandmother Elizabeth Moulton and her grandmother's life-long companion, Mary Trepsack or "Treppy" (also sometimes "Trippy")—the orphaned daughter of a Jamaican planter taken in as a ward by the poet's great-grandfather. Both were very enthusiastic fans of the young poet's literary endeavours, as the memoranda beneath the branches of the tree suggest; indeed, Treppy, acting as a "most munificent patroness" according to EBB's father, underwrote the publication costs of *An Essay on Mind, With Other Poems* (*BC* 1: xlviii, 237). At the bottom of this last page and the sketch of the tree, EBB wrote, "Hasting. 8th October. 1825. Saturday Evening at tea. Mem. Granny said [illegible deletion] it would be well for the world if every one was like you! ! ! ! ! ! ! !." This is accompanied by a similar statement above it on the page, to the right of the tree's trunk: "Mem. Trippy says my face becomes anything." As the "Chronology" (xlviii) and numerous letters in Volume One of *The Brownings' Correspondence* indicate, EBB and her sister Henrietta went to Hastings in July, 1825 for an eleven-month stay with Granny and Treppy.

This record of a domestic scene on a particular date intermingling with signs of intellectual and artistic activity (in the sketch of a tree of knowledge) is not unlike the "Diary Papers" of Emily and Anne Brontë. Much as in their diary papers the two sisters cast their vision towards the future; by October 1825, EBB, her grandmother, and Treppy were all looking forward to fulfilment of the young poet's hopes, since *An Essay on Mind, With Other Poems* had been with a prospective publisher since mid-August (*BC* 1: 221). As Langbauer establishes, juvenile authors are especially inclined to adopt a stance of prolepsis, "oriented towards the future."[32] In a tongue-in-cheek poem by her loving brother Edward or "Bro" for his sister "Ba" written three years earlier, we catch a glimpse of a similar domestic scene, underscoring the nurturing support of her intellect and aspirations for future fame that EBB, unlike the orphaned Brontës, received from her grandmother and Treppy alike. Bro's poem dates from 28 July 1822, shortly after his sister's long illness and time in a spine-crib subjected to treatments such as leeches. Alluding to these treatments, he describes proud "Granny" singing of Ba "till her cough interferes":

> "What a wonderful child, of all knowledge no lack
> What a contrast her brains to her leachy old back,
> Her strains are well worthy the very best of the Nine,
> And her head how deserving a far better spine–
> But look at her extracts—'Tis not to abuse you
> Though in Latin it is 'tempore et usu'
> Greek, Latin, & Hebrew, serve her for quotation,
> And in Justice, she brings them out in rotation, …." (*BC* 1: 162)

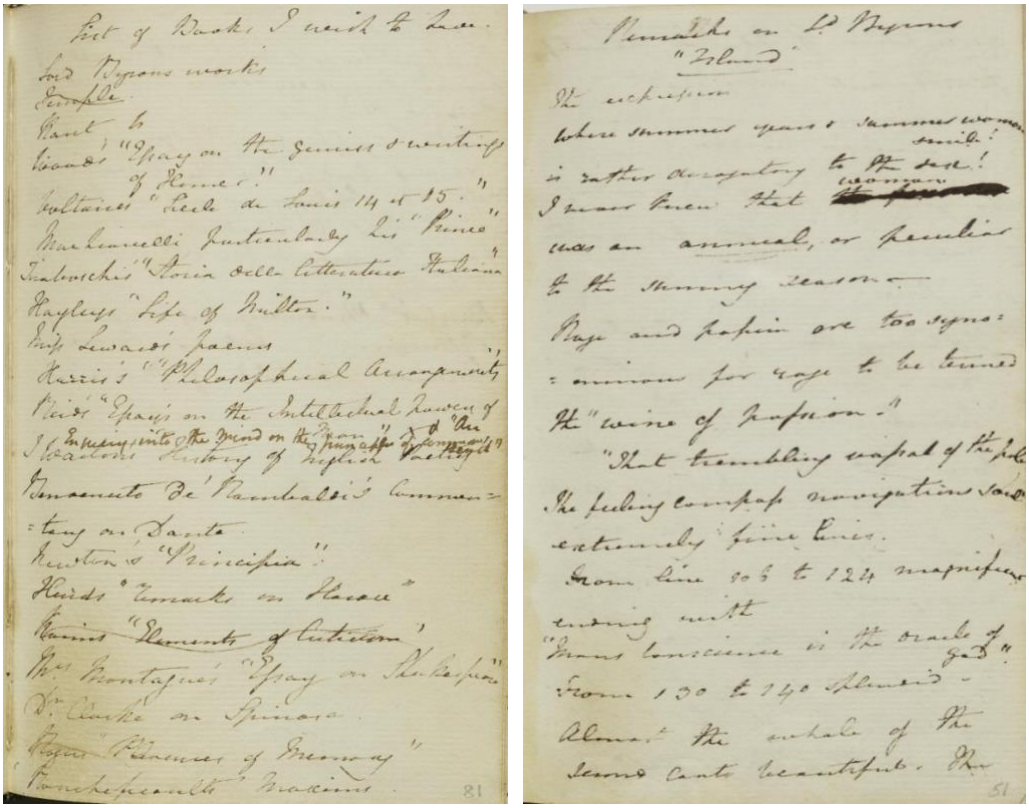
One wonders if Bro had read EBB's essay on the Bishop of Worcester's dispute with Locke, dated the same year, where she does, in effect, bring out quotations in "Greek,

Latin, & Hebrew" in rotation. Evidence elsewhere in the correspondence and juvenilia suggests the siblings' influence on each other's writing. Moreover, commonplace books in general were of a "semi-public, semi-private nature" and often shared with friends (Hess 466, 469). Possibly EBB's sketch of the tree of knowledge was shared with her grandmother and Treppy in order to explain the "productions" of the mind in *An Essay on Mind* to them. Certainly, "Ba's *pome*," as one of her little brothers (Septimus) termed it, was considered difficult to comprehend even by EBB's most literary sister, Arabella (*BC* 1: 235–36).

The Apprentice Critic: Reviewing Contemporary Authors and Books

WHILE EBB's 1822–26 commonplace book includes some original compositions, memoranda of various kinds, and textual "extracts" from established works of history, philosophy, and rhetoric, the largest category of entries is made up of commentaries on more contemporary works. Many of these are written in a voice and manner that seems to be patterned on the voices of reviewers in periodicals, while others seem more informal and private as the keen young writer waxes eloquent in satirically dissecting the books she assesses. On occasion, as the examples below indicate, she even refers to a notebook commentary as a "review," or titles it in a way that emulates the format of published reviews. She also focuses largely on recently published books, as a reviewer would do. Authors treated or mentioned in the notebook range from major figures like Lord Byron, Letitia Landon, Madame de Staël, and Mary Shelley to others influential at the time (Robert Southey, James Hogg, James Montgomery, Anna Jameson, James Fennimore Cooper), to a host of writers more obscure now but not necessarily so at the time. EBB comments, for instance, on William Lovell Edgeworth, Maria Edgeworth's father—whose 1820 *Memoirs*, completed by Maria, indicate that he "was not a man of Genius," but "suspected he was."[33] Recurring topics include poetry, fiction, the French and Greek revolutions, liberalism, and religion. EBB also routinely comments on aspects of form (versification, metaphors, prose style) or, less often, on material aspects of books now analysed in histories of print studies.

Among the poets whose books EBB assesses, Byron stands out: "Lord Byron[']s works" top a two-page "List of Books I wish to have" (*EBBCB* 81, Fig. 5).



Figures 5 and 6. "List of Books I wish to have," EBBCB*, p. 81 (left). "Remarks on L*d*. Byron[']s 'Island',"* EBBCB*, p. 51 (right).*

Given her focus on books published in the period covered by the notebook, however, Byron is a less pervasive presence than one might expect of the chief formative influence on her more ambitious adolescent narrative poems (for example, "The African" and "The Enchantress"). She seems to have been shifting, as she matured, from idol worship and emulation of Byron to a more scrutinising attitude, judging by Her "Remarks on L[d]. Byron[']s 'Island'" (Fig. 6). She may well have read this when it was hot off the press in the summer of 1823, and she expresses mixed views on the poem:

> The expression ["]Where summer years & summer women smile![”] is rather derogatory to the sex! I never knew that woman [written over "the fair sex"] was an annual, or peculiar to the summery season — Rage and passion are too synonimous for rage to be termed the "wine of passion." (*EBBCB* 51)

However, she goes on to praise several lines, passages, and "the whole of the second canto," along with the "exquisitely beautiful" description of Newton (*EBBCB* 51–52). Other entries not directly on Byron but including references to him make it clear, as

her "Stanzas on the Death of Lord Byron" (1824) and *An Essay on Mind* do, that she values him as much for his Hellenism and liberal politics as for his poetry.[34] She describes "Greece in 1823 & 1824, by Col. [Leicester] Stanhope" as a "fine spirited generous book which lets us look on the face of Greece unmasked," singling out "one pathetic letter descriptive of the last moments of Byron, addressed to Stanhope by the friend of our Poet Trelawney" (*EBBCB* 124–25).

In contrast, in what she terms her "little review" of the 8-volume *Memoirs de Madame de Genlis,* she finds it "absolutely ridiculous" for "an old woman on the wrong side of 80" to talk of "our Childe Harold, our Corsair, our Manfred, & say thereupon — leur vogue passera.' I am indignant in thinking of these things." Here, she is clearly not emulating the public voice of a reviewer. She goes on to check the ageist attitudes informing her remark on "the wrong side of 80" (initially she wrote "70") by observing, though somewhat condescendingly, "I can hardly get up a sufficient portion of unprejudiced candour to allow that it is a pleasing sight to behold an aged person in undiminished mental energies." Nevertheless, she quickly reverts to critique again, as she sets out a writerly rule of conduct that she certainly does not follow herself: "I do wish Philosophers would write about Philosophy, Politicians about Politics, Poetical critics about Poetical criticism, & Ma^{me} de Genlis about things she understands" (*EBBCB* 154–56).

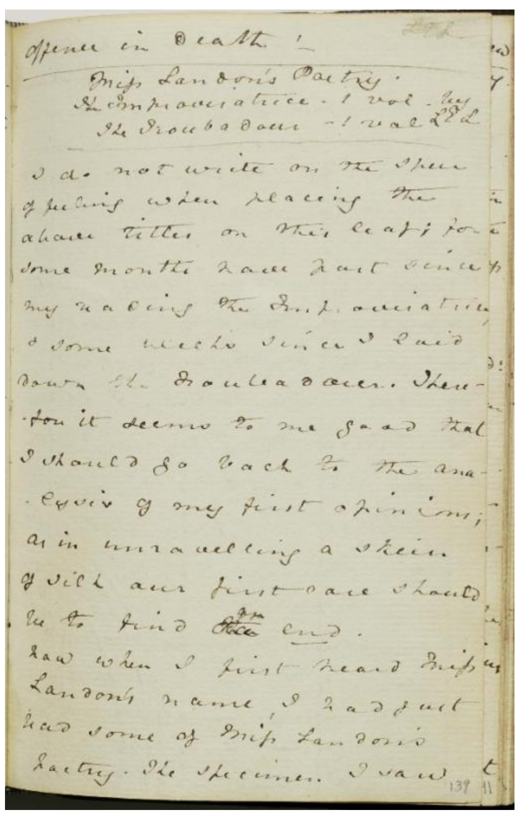

offence in death!
Miss Landon's Poetry.
L'Improvisatrice - 1 vol.
The Troubadour - 1 vol
I do not write on the spur of feeling when placing the above titles on this leaf; for some months have past since my reading the Improvisatrice & some weeks since I laid down the Troubadour. There-fore it seems to me good that I should go back to the ana-lysis of my first opinions; as in unravelling a skein of silk our first care should be to find the end. Now when I first heard Miss Landon's name, I had just read some of Miss Landon's poetry. The specimen I saw

Figure 7. "Miss Landon's Poetry," EBBCB *139.*

EBB's extended comments on Landon's poetry (139–44) express her evolving view of a woman poet emerging during the early 1820s as both a model and a rival. They also anticipate the contrasting representations of Hemans and Landon in her later elegies addressed to each poet. This entry appears under the title "Miss Landon's Poetry. / The Improvisatrice — 1 vol. by LEL / The Troubadour — 1 vol," with a line beneath, as if it were an actual review title in a periodical (Fig. 7). (Intriguingly, "LEL" is inserted in pencil and crossed out in the top righthand corner of the page, as if she were taking note of Landon's trademark use of her signature initials in publishing.) However, despite the entry's review-like features, EBB also employs a conversational tone, as if she were writing a diary entry or letter to a close friend:

> I do not write on the spur of feeling when placing the above titles on this leaf; for some months have past since my reading The Improvisatrice, & some weeks since I laid down The Troubadour. Therefore it seems to me good that I should go back to the analysis of my first opinions; as in unravelling a skein of silk our first care should be to find an <u>end</u>.
>
> Now when I first heard Miss Landon's name, I had just read some of Miss Landon's poetry. The specimen I saw was in the Literary Gazette: & it was entitled "<u>The [?Deserter],"</u> if I remember right what I have no pleasure in remembering. This specimen was undoubtedly very weak — weak as to its versification & its fancy — common-place as its [*sic*] subject. I therefore laughed outright on hearing Miss Landon's reputation. I deemed her Critics transformed [her] into divine without a Circe; I considered her fair self a very ordinary, poetry-writing young Lady.
>
> Circumstances prevented my meeting with The Improvisatrice before the expiration of some months; & in the meanwhile I laid hold on an article of the Westminster Review strictural on Miss Landons Poetry.[35] This article by the way is one of the [?silliest] things I ever read. It contains in the first place a misstatement of the commendation expressed by the Literary Gazette towards the Poet. "Miss L" say the Westminster, "is according to the Literary Gazette the first of bards living or dead: Homer Shakespeare! '"Hide your diminished ray!'"— Now the fact is that the L.G. merely encourages Miss L. in the cultivation of her superior understanding; assuring her that by the dint of cultivation she may surpass in poetical genius all <u>female</u> writers whose works have yet been given to the world. In this statement after an unprejudiced examination of Miss Landon's merits, I fully agree with the Literary Gazette. While saying so however I contemplate the improvement incident to cultivation; for at <u>present</u> I

> am far from considering Miss Landon superior or even equal to Mrs. Hemans in poetical execution. She writes more negligently but less daringly — with more <u>flow</u> but less power. But Mrs. Hemans is older; and her time of improvement has narrower limits than that allotted to Miss Landon. Therefore I agree in the expectation cherished by Mr. Jerdan; tho' conditionally. "The Improvisatrice" is beautiful & graceful; its versification is a characteristic & easy drapery for practical thoughts which put themselves into the prettiest attitudes in the world. The worst of it is, that they are fond of ever & anon putting themselves into the <u>same</u> [triply underlined] attitudes, whereby arises tautology. But where there is so much beauty we forgive expectation; & are rather glad to be haunted by the old faces of Miss Landon's ideas!

EBB goes on to cite an example of a repeated motif in Landon's poetry and to dispute the objection that her rhymes "are often imperfect," instead observing that "there are some faults more agreable than faultlessness"—an early articulation of theories of rhyme that she would embody in her own rhyming practice and articulate in both her correspondence and her overview of English literary history, "The Book of the Poets" (1842).[36]

More than most other entries in EBB's 1822–26 notebook, her comments on Landon's poetry convey the reading process unfolding over time. In part, this feature arises from the common delays or difficulties in obtaining access to books that contributed to the practice of keeping commonplace books (in this case, the "some months" that expired before she could obtain a copy of Landon's *The Improvisatrice*). More notably, however, this entry embodies to an unusual degree the process of evolving reflection at work in the apprentice critic's formation of her own considered opinions on other writers. Thus, she turns back to reassess her first impressions and initial judgements of Landon's poetry; she takes into account the samples these are based upon; and she further reflects upon her judgments in light of the conflicting critical views expressed in *The Literary Gazette* and the *Westminster Review*. While her stated objective is to engage in "an unprejudiced examination of Miss Landon's merits," the very care that she takes to ensure that her opinions are "unprejudiced" hints at her underlying feelings of identification and rivalry with Landon. The sense of identification comes to the fore in the conclusion to her entry: "If I were acquainted with Miss Landon,—or if I had one of the privileges of intimacy," she remarks, "I "might enquire with something of anxiety wherefore her subject should be <u>toujours perdrix.</u> Is it necessary that to preserve the excellence of her poetry, love & love only should constitute the 'head & front'?" (144). As EBB expresses a desire for "the privileges of intimacy" with a fellow woman poet, she also seems to wish that she could warn Landon of the perils of an obsessive focus on love (which she emphasises in the allusion to *Othello* [1.3.420]), much as she might offer advice to a

young female friend. Her age-based contrast between Hemans and Landon in relation to their "poetical execution" and "power" similarly brings out her identification with the younger woman poet, although in a manner that marks both as models and rivals. EBB would later reverse her opinion of these two influential female precursors, finding Landon the more powerful poet, though still lacking in the polish and execution of Hemans.[37]

EBB's complex, nuanced and generally favorable response to Landon's poetry contrasts sharply with the most highly critical review among her commentaries on contemporary authors: a satiric dissection of Lætitia-Matilda Hawkins's *Memoirs, Anecdotes, Facts, and Opinions* (1824). The most striking aspect of this entry is EBB's elaboration of a gendered analogy between the physiognomy of books and differing kinds of faces. "I have not lived very long in the world; but I have lived an observing time & have seen many kinds of faces," she begins, describing numerous types before she classifies Hawkins's book, using her numbered table of "face modifications":

> 1st. moderate sized regular features, with expression/. Do.tt without expression.
> 2d moderate sized, irregular features with expression/ Do.tt without expression.
> 3 little pretty features, with expression. Do.tt without expression.
> 4 little ugly features with expression. Do.tt without
> 5 large coarse features with expression—
> 6 large coarse features without expression—
> Now the physiognomy of Miss Hawkins' book seems to me to coincide precisely with the last division of my face-regulation—It is precisely a large & coarse & inexpressive physiognomy.
> If her book were a powerful book, I would excuse coarseness; & if it were an eloquent book I would excuse trifling: But in good sooth, it is neither powerful or elegant, tho' coarse & trifling. I don't see any interest in her stories, & cant for my life laugh at her good jokes.
> Her style is very unwomanly, but not a whit the more masculine fore that!" (*EBBCB* 130–32).

EBB's concluding remarks in this entry—addressing Miss Hawkins's puffing of her brother's essay on "The Reform of Parliament; The ruin of Parliament"—suggest that her animus is intensified by her Whig opposition to the book's conservative politics.

In most cases, her comments on books are more balanced than her dissection of Miss Hawkins's "large & coarse & inexpressive" book. Of James Hogg's *Queen Hynde* (1825), she observes, "We shall find here some very fine lines, & some deplorably bad ones — some admirable poetry, & some excelling nonsense." Yet she finds a virtue in the mix: "Mediocrity is what we can least bear in poetry, & Hogg never tries our

patience in this respect. He will either sink or swim, he will either dive or fly, but he wont be content with a vulgar walk on dry ground. He may break a string of his lyre thro' excess of rapture; but he will never turn a hand organ till his auditor turn sleepy. With him there are 'ups & downs' in poetry as in life, but there is no wearisome highway on a flat" (*EBBCB* 122–23). Here as in other entries in her commonplace book, one can see the young poet-critic trying out the assertive, conventionally male "editorial 'we'" that she would later satirise in *Aurora Leigh,* where Aurora remarks of her journeyman work for periodicals to earn a living: "I learnt the use / Of the editorial 'we' in a review / As courtly ladies the fine trick of trains," sweeping it "grandly through the open doors" (Book I, ll. 312–15). EBB's comments on Hogg's poetical "'ups & downs'" are immediately followed in her commonplace book by the opposing example of a poet who furnishes his readers with "a highway on a flat": Samuel Jackson Pratt in *Sympathy: or a Sketch of the Social Passion* (1788). She remarks, "his poetry puts me in mind of that celebrated race, 'good kind of people'; not that it is by any means a good kind of poetry,— but that it is very amiable & very dull — respectable & tedious" (123). Her longer remarks on another eighteenth-century collection of poems by William Shenstone similarly express her Romantic dislike of poetry with "cold & inanimate" versification, a lack of "visions or even sensibility," and "pastoral allegories" she judges "phlegmatic"—"as ineffectually pastoral as if [Shenstone] had spent his life in town." While these comments on Shenstone resonate with EBB's later depiction of Aurora rejecting her pastorals as "pretty, cold, and false" (Book 5, l. 130), this entry is chiefly of interest because it leads her to an early articulation of her own poetics: "I am more and more convinced that an unagitated life is not the life for a Poet," she reflects. "His mind should ever & anon be transported like a young tree. It should be allowed to shoot its roots in a free soil, & not vegetate in a corner. Look at the lives of our great Poets — Shakespeare's, Milton's, Byron's — & find the truth of this!" (*EBBCB* 157–59).

EBB remarks on James Montgomery's *The Wanderer of Switzerland and Other Poems* (1811) allude to the practice of textual extraction in commonplace books, suggesting how this private practice carried over into the public discourse of reviewing: "I have no room or leisure for making extracts — or I might extract passages from this poem of prodigious strength & poetic excellence," she begins. Typically, however, like many reviewers she does not provide any examples of excellence. Instead, she first notes formal faults: "As a poem it is defective in plan; & it is moreover laden with an unmanageable kind of metre which tho' good for fugitive pieces, will give no room for the carrying on of action — and conceptions. Stanzas of four lines are miserable vehicles for a lengthened composition." Then, she refers once more to passages "replete with poetical power," but again does not cite any; instead, her fault-finding becomes more satirically exuberant. Montgomery

> not only sometimes but oftentimes sinks into commonplace; & then (woe unto his poetical character! For he endeavours to swell out his

> flat cadences, as people swell out balloons . . . [*sic*] with air![38] He calls in the help of pitiful allies indeed — such as marks of admiration, long dashes, ohs & ahs, & the repetition of nouns substantive. Here is an example apposite enough —
> "O Britain! Dear Britain! The land of my birth;
> O isle, most enchantingly fair!
> Thou pearl of the Ocean! Thou gem of the Earth!
> O my Mother! My Mother! Beware!"
> Oh Montgomery, Montgomery beware: say I! This is very bad; & I might, if I liked, quote worse still! (*EBBCB* 152–53).

The apprentice critic turns a contemporary ballooning metaphor to very different ends in her praise of the Gothic tale "Matthew Wald. By the Author of Adam Blair" (i.e., John Gibson Lockhart). In this case, her reflections on laying *Matthew Wald* down "[a]bout three months ago … with an awakened imagination, & thrilling heart" lead into more general reflections on novels as being "like water colours" that "generally fly with time." Readers "look at them as we did the other day at Mr. Courtney the Aeronaut, in a wondering, breathless, admiring mood till they have fluttered down" and then "wonder again how we could have wondered so easily." *Matthew Wald*, however, is one of those "rare works" that, even three months later, can "conjure up the passionate feeling" that it evoked in a reader's first experience of it. The novel is animated by a "spiritual sensible soul," and has "the expressive countenance of poetry," a "fitful wildness, & startling passion, & subduing energy" (*EBBCB* 113–14).

Her comments on "The Pilot by the Author of the Spy" [James Fenimore Cooper] make use of metaphors of painting and drawing, not ballooning, to advance a more mixed assessment. Despite "some fine drawing here," and "a masters touch" elsewhere, there are "no subdued lights" and "shadows." "Our Author does not excel in delicate finishing," she observes, focusing on the representation of women in the novel. The author makes "sad work" of portraying "feminine gentleness" in Cecilia Howard, but his Katherine "is a free spirited, free spoken maiden, interesting withal" (*EBBCB* 112–13).

Not so the protagonist of Anna Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyée,* published anonymously in 1826. Like other readers at the time, EBB reads this as the journal of an actual heartbroken young English lady, but finds the book "a little Ennuyeuse": "At first setting out I deemed my travelling companion vastly agreeable but for her blue devils; & at taking leave, I was inclined to suspect the blue devils of being the most agreeable part of her." She also finds its style, both in English and French, marked by "affectation": "I should even say the blue Devils were affected if the poor Author did not die at the end!." EBB also "cannot forgive the Lady" for the "non-divulging of her agonizing mistery [*sic*]," exclaiming, "Surely the interested reader might be made the confidante!" (*EBBCB* 179–80).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus* (1818) appeared prior to the years when EBB was using her 1822–26 commonplace book. However, in the course of making notes on John Dunlop's *History of Fiction* (1814), she pauses to speculate about a possible prototype for Shelley's creature in a "tract" by Avicenna (the preeminent Muslim philosopher and physician). "N.B.," she writes,

> the celebrated Avicenna feigns that a human being was produced in a delightful but uninhabited island without intervention of mortal Parents, by mere concourse of the elements. The Being thus hatched; without instruction obtains knowledge by its own exertions —— !
>
> Perhaps it was from this work that M^rs^. Shelley took the idea of her Modern Prometheus, whose acquisition of knowledge is related in an interesting manner —— ! (*EBBCB* 110–11).

EBB may have been especially interested in this passage not only because of the parallels with *Frankenstein* but also because Dunlop goes on to emphasize that the creature in Avicenna's "sketch," though "destitute of instruction," "obtained what is most essential to personal convenience and finally arrived, by meditation, at the abstract truths of religion."[39] Such an example would be appealing for a young woman who defended the Bishop of Worcester in disputing Locke's claim "that the immateriality of the soul is not demonstrable," arguing in defence of "not only the soul's immateriality," but also "its immortal capabilities." As she reasons, "The soul is a cogitative Being! Cogitation is a spiritual mode. Nothing can be invested with a spiritual mode but what is spirit."[40]

Despite these speculations on Shelley's *Frankenstein* and her comments on recent novels by Jameson, Cooper, Lockhart, and others, poetry figures more prominently in EBB's 1822–26 commonplace book than fiction. Notably, there is also very little attention to drama aside from a play by Sophocles (*EBBCB* 127–30). This stands in contrast to her commonplace book now in the Huntington Library (noted above), which includes passages from the Elizabethan dramatists and from August Wilhelm von Schlegel's dramatic criticism, as well as extracts from religious writings and transcriptions of poems by William Blake.[41] Of the two commonplace books, the generic mix in her 1822–26 notebook more directly reflects the interests she earlier describes in "Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character": "At ten … I read that I might write. Novels were still my most delightful study.… At eleven I wished to be an authoress. Novels were thrown aside. Poetry and Essays were my studies" (*BC* 1:350).[42] During her mid- to late adolescence, as her 1822–26 notebook testifies, essays in philosophy, rhetoric, and politics by authors such as Locke, Campbell, Kant, and Hume, among others, remained important in the study she undertook as an autodidact fashioning her own liberal education. She was also reading a remarkably wide range of other prose genres: history, letters, memoirs, and biographies. Religion is an undercurrent or explicit focus in more of the notebook's entries than is initially

apparent, as her remarks on Avicenna's possible influence on *Frankenstein* suggest. For instance, she is deeply moved by the "apostolic spirit" of William Cowper's letters and their revelation of his "harassed, consumed, gentle & most angelic mind. There are passages in these letters fitted to drown us in tears," she observes (*EBBCB* 134). This reading would later influence one of her most widely praised and polished early poems, "Cowper's Grave" (1838, *WEBB* 2: 322–29).

Her reading is also notable for the European and cosmopolitan interests that are a pronounced feature of EBB's later works as well as works of juvenilia analysed by Taylor (2020)—although her 1822–26 notebook registers her Anglocentrism as well on occasion. She translates from the Spanish two tender personal letters by the Jesuit author José Francisco de Isla to a friend and to his sister,[43] and after reading *Memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini* in a recent English translation (1822) by Thomas Roscoe, she observes, "I should like to have fallen upon this work in its original tongue" (*EBBCB* 149–50). She comments at greater length on Lord Holland's *Some Account of the Lives & Writings of Lope Felix de Vega & Guillen de Castro* (1817), agreeing with the Whig Lord's scepticism of reports that "'no less than 1800 plays'" by Lope de Vega had been acted on the stage and "'twenty one million three hundred thousand of his lines actually printed.'" This would entail his writing "on an average more than 900 lines a day"—not credible even if he did commence writing "at thirteen years of age" (*EBBCB* 172–73). Nevertheless, the prolific Spanish author would figure among the pithy portraits of classical, European, and English "king-poets" (ll. 728, 379–81) that she would later present in a much-cited passage of "A Vision of Poets" (1844, *WEBB* 1:179–223).

EBB's transnational and political interests are further reflected in the numerous books that she discusses concerning the French Revolution and British liberal modes of governance. After reading Madame [Henriette] Campan's *Memoirs of the Private Life of Marie Antoinette* (1823), she expresses some sympathy with the French queen, but also states that she "grew angry once or twice with the Author—but remembered she was a French woman, & forgave her sins" (*EBBCP* 138). She expresses less mixed feelings about Jean-Louis De Lolme's *The Constitution of England* (1771), a book by a "Genevan Republican" which "should be read by every Englishman," given its "excellent reasoning," although "a fault is that he can find no fault" with the British "temple of liberty" (160–62).

Other works discussed in EBB's 1822–26 commonplace book that reflect both her interest in politics and in the French Revolution include "Las Cases' Journal of Napoleon's Conversation" and Madame de Staël's "Considerations on the French Revolution."[44] The first engages her "deepest interest." Although she finds Las Cases "too monarchical" as a follower of Napoleon, she especially admires his comparison of Napoleon to "Prometheus chained to his rock," remarking that "[t]he heart of this modern Prometheus was exposed to the vulture; but tho' daily devoured never became less great" (*EBBCB* 147–48): a response reflecting the strain of Romantic Prometheanism in her earlier works. Her reading of Las Cases also resonates in her

later representation of the French Emperor in "Crowned and Buried" (1844), first published in 1840 as "Napoleon's Return."[45] She comments on Las Cases again in responding to de Staël's sharply critical representation of Napoleon (who exiled her).

As references in EBB's juvenilia and later letters attest, de Staël was an empowering example of a woman writer and intellectual for the young poet: author of that "immortal book" *Corinne* (1807) and among the inspiring female figures she salutes in the concluding lines of "Fragment of 'An Essay on Woman'" (c. 1822), written under the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft (*WEBB* 5: 16–19).[46] However, her opinion of de Staël's *Considerations* on the French Revolution is more divided—and chiefly because of the work's critique of Napoleon:

> Mme de Stael's "Considerations' are amazingly eloquent & wonderfully prejudiced. We think too much of the exile as we read her animadversions on Napoleon, & too little of the Philosopher. Place De Stael versus Las Cases, & it will be hard to say where enthusiastic attachment & where enthusiastic prejudice should have their barriers. The poor Emperor Alexander has a 'thick & thin advocate' in the daughter of M. Necker — whether consistently or not I abstain from saying. It is my opinion that the latter chapters of this work on the subject of the English Constitution & the Love of Liberty are more strikingly eloquent than the prior ones. Indeed in the detail of facts by which these prior ones are occupied there is less room for oratorical display. This work, as a whole, is a very masterly work — written with freedom both of style & sentiment — Its writer is endowed with the masculine faculty of being comprehensive. (*EBBCB* 166–67)

De Staël's similarly eloquent invocation of England as an example of liberty in abolishing the slave trade may underlie one of two quotations from her works written on the last leaf (page 230) of EBB's 1822–26 commonplace book: "Il n'est aucun pays sur la terre qui ne soit digne de la justice [There is no country on Earth that is not worthy of justice]." In this case, EBB includes the source of the quotation beneath, citing de Staël's 1814 title in full, though without accents: "Appel aux souverains reunis a Paris pour en obtenir l'abolition de la traite des negres [Appeal to the sovereigns gathered in Paris to obtain the abolition of the slave trade]." Although this might be seen as simply an example of the aphoristic quotations often copied into commonplace books, it is of particular interest as EBB's first explicit manifestation of interest in a specific abolitionist text that I am aware of (evidently dating from after her composition of "The African"). It also points to de Staël's hitherto uninvestigated impact on EBB's later political engagement with the antislavery movement. Significantly, however, de Staël's 1814 *Appel* is a text that praises England as a model to other European nations for its past abolition of the slave trade, rather than

criticising it for its ongoing exploitation of the enslaved in its colonies. EBB would not overtly and unequivocally express her views on this latter issue, including the condition of slaves on her father's Jamaican estates, until after the passing of the Abolition Act in 1833, when she stated to Julia Martin, a close family friend, that the bill emancipating slaves in British possessions had "ruined the West Indians," but she was "glad, and always shall be, that the negroes" were "virtually—free!——" (*BC* 3: 86).

Concluding Questions

THIS ESSAY opens with a question posed by the young EBB in the commonplace book that she began using in 1822 and closes with a series of questions or lines of inquiry arising from the contents and form of that book. Some of these relate to the light it might cast on the poet's later development, poetics, and writing as a literary critic. One wonders, for instance, how the omnivorous reading across genres that the commonplace book reflects may have contributed to her experimentation with hybrid genres in works like *Aurora Leigh*, much as Coleridge's commonplace "style of note-taking influenced the form of his published works—particularly his commitment to working within multiple genres at once" (Hess 464). *Aurora Leigh* is an epic verse-novel, but it also incorporates several genres that jostle together in the young EBB's commonplace book: memoir, letters, journal-like writing, and the philosophical argumentation characteristic of essays and Victorian sage discourse.

A second question I have touched upon at points also calls for deeper exploration. The notable focus on books published in the years when EBB was actually using her 1822–26 commonplace book suggests that her reading was enhancing her awareness of her own age, as she was coming of age. In Book Five of *Aurora Leigh,* she presents a fully developed manifesto calling for a poetics of the present age and embodies it in engagement with contemporary issues throughout. However, this comes after decades and apparent detours into a poetry that is sometimes more oriented towards the past. Is the lively engagement with the present that we see both in EBB's precocious juvenile poetry and in her 1822–26 notebook continuous through her career? Or intermittent and interrupted, and if so, why and in what ways?

Finally, how might more examination of the review-like assessments of works often hot off the press in EBB's commonplace book add to fuller understanding of the later writing she did as a literary critic throughout her career? The critical writing of other nineteenth-century poets like Matthew Arnold is highly visible in volumes of essays. In contrast, much of the literary criticism EBB produced is dispersed and less visible, often because her detailed comments on a wide range of contemporary writers and works are embedded in her correspondence, especially in her letters to Mary Russell Mitford. Or this criticism is published under the name of others, as in the case

of her substantial contributions to the essays on Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle in Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age,* a collaborative collection taking up (though in very different ways) Hazlitt's project two decades earlier in *The Spirit of the Age*.

Another set of questions I have raised but by no means resolved concerns the larger commonplace book tradition. To what degree is EBB's 1822–26 commonplace book similar to others in the same period, as parallels with Coleridge's earlier notebooks might indicate? Or, as commonplace books become more flexible in their form, do they also take more individualised forms? For instance, Ann Radcliffe's commonplace book as Cheryl L. Nixon describes it is "predominantly" comprised of "lists of medicines" and Radcliffe's "descriptions of physical reactions to them." Its material form too differs from EBB's, since it has "pinned-in pages and folded-in scraps of paper," making it like "the bodies of Radcliffe's heroines," trying to "conform to and escape" constraints (356). These differences point to another, more fundamental question. When can we or should we identify a "notebook" as a commonplace book? As Cary Nelson points out, "[t]he commonplace book … is not a fully demarcated category" (qtd. in Feder 546).

Finally, what is the relationship, if any, between Romantic transformations in the commonplace book tradition that Coleridge and EBB similarly exemplify and the movement of juvenile writing that scholars such as McMaster, Alexander, Taylor, and Langbauer have made more visible? Do juvenile writers make more use of commonplace books than mature authors and use them for more varied or different purposes? Do they play an especially vital role when gifted young writers face barriers to education arising out of their gender (like EBB) or their social class (like the butcher's son, Henry Kirke White), or their race (like Phillis Wheatley a generation earlier)?[47] While EBB's use of a multi-function commonplace book beginning at age sixteen suggests that this may be the case, one would need to consider many more examples of commonplace books used by juvenile writers before arriving at any certain answers to such questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

[1] Prior to marrying Robert Browning in 1846, Elizabeth Barrett Browning customarily used her full maiden name "Elizabeth Barrett Barrett" or often simply her initials "EBB" (sometimes "E.B.B.") in signing many letters and poetical manuscripts as well as in publishing. Both poets were pleased that she would remain "EBB" in taking on her husband's last name (*BC* 11: 248–49). Traditionally critics identified her as "Mrs. Browning," while modern critics have often opted for the anachronistic "Barrett Browning," or alternated between this compound and "Elizabeth Barrett," but neither are forms of her name used by the poet herself. This article follows the practice of using the poet's initials also employed by the editors of *BC* and *WEBB*.

[2] Entry D1405 in *The Browning Collections* (see "R" in "Works Frequently Cited). An updated online version of this invaluable comprehensive catalogue, along with *The Brownings' Correspondence,* is now available as part of *The Brownings: A Research Guide,* hosted by the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Texas. See https://www.browningguide.org. The notebook can be viewed online (catalogued following *R* as the "1824–26 Notebook") in the Digital Repository of Wellesley College Library, Special Collections: see Works Frequently Cited.

[3] *EBBCB* 81–82, 87–90, 182. All page references are to the numbers inserted in this ms. notebook in EBB's hand.

[4] The ethical and aesthetic issues in both poems have provoked much debate. See, e.g., Stone, "Between Ethics and Anguish," Lootens, and summaries of criticism in the headnotes in *WEBB,* vols. 1 and 2, edited by Stone and Taylor: vol. 1, 416–17 for the headnote to "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," and vol. 2, 147–48 for the headnote to "Hiram Powers' Greek Slave."

[5] See the autobiographical essays "My Own Character," "Glimpses into my Own Life and Literary Character," and "My Character and Bro's Compared" (*BC* 1: 347–58). These are frequently cited by Mermin, especially in "Chapter One: Childhood and Youth" (17 *passim*).

[6] "Poems by Elizabeth B. Barrett" is included among other works of juvenilia published in *WEBB*, volume 5; edited Donaldson, Patterson, Stone, and Taylor. For discussion, see Introduction xxxi–xxxii.

[7] Langbauer, "Prolepsis and the Tradition" 889. See also Langbauer, *The Juvenile Tradition*, for a fuller exploration of this tradition.

[8] Mermin emphasises the complex gender dynamics in *The Battle of Marathon* and *An Essay on Mind*; Avery addresses the liberal politics shaped by EBB's Whig family background in both poems, and Hair focuses on the philosophies of language and mind shaped by Locke and Francis Bacon in *An Essay on Mind*.

[9] *An Essay on Mind* (Introduction and annotations by Simon Avery, *WEBB,* vol. 4, edited by Donaldson) 78.

[10] See Taylor, "Childhood Writings," "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," and "World Citizenship"; Wynter; Isom; and Bontempo et al.

[11] On the tendency for borderline genres to become lost in the archives, see Feder 541–42. EBB's 1822–26 notebook is briefly described and cited by Mermin (30–31); one original essay from it is published in *WEBB* (see note 29 below). Some transcriptions of selected contents of the 1822–26 notebook are available under "Manuscripts" online: see Stone and Lawson.

[12] Taylor, "World Citizenship" 33; *Aurora Leigh* in *WEBB,* volume 3, edited by Donaldson, "Critical Introduction" by Marjorie Stone.

[13] The first section of Appendix IV in *BC* reprints the essays on Thomas Carlyle and Tennyson in *A New Spirit of the Age* in their entirety (8: 341–67), drawing on the manuscript Horne sent to the printer and using a mixture of typefaces to indicate which passages EBB wrote. Paul Schlicke acknowledges EBB as Horne's "principal coadjutor" on the collection (846), but otherwise repeatedly refers to Horne as the author, praising for instance comments on Tennyson's underlying "'vacillation'" and self-distancing in his poetry (843) written by EBB (see *BC* 8: 367) as an example of Horne's insight.

[14] "Page numbers were then written next to each initial letter and vowel combination in the index indicating where entries could be found" (Brewster 14–15); see also Hess 467.

[15] McPhail O7. I am indebted to my colleague Christina Luckyj for calling my attention to McPhail's article on commonplace books and the internet. Brewster cites but opposes views that the commonplace book tradition declined after Locke (14). On the tradition's continuation, transformations, and overlap with other forms, see also Hess, Feder, Nixon, and Jenkins.

[16] The dedication continues "*from Charles Hemans Rome, May 25th 1854.*" See A1166 in *R.*

[17] See the *Guide to Literary Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* (Huntington Library, 1979, HM 4934) 62 and Mermin 31. Examination of its contents indicates that this is the notebook catalogued in *R* as D1415. I am grateful to Sarah Francis, Assistant Curator of Literary Collections in the Huntington Library, for assistance in accessing these contents virtually.

[18] Hess 463, 473. On other terms used by Coleridge for his notebooks—e.g., "full confidantes"—see Hess 473. A revised version of Hess's essay appears in her study *How Romantics and Victorians Organized Information* (Oxford UP, 2022).

[19] Hess 463, 471.

[20] Hess 476, 478, 465. The Gutch notebook differs from Coleridge's later more diaristic and confessional notebooks covering "'every aspect of his life,'" as Richard Holmes observes (qtd. in Hess 466), from his philosophical theories and lecture notes to his dreams, sexual fantasies, and opium addiction.

[21] Pages 95–99 in the notebook summarise and at points paraphrase the hypotheses of philosophers, including l'Abbé du Bos, David Hume, Thomas Hobbes, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontanelle, and Campbell himself on why the mind finds "pleasure in anguish." These views are presented and discussed by Campbell in book 1, chapter 11 (1: 280–338 of the 1775 2-vol. edition).

[22] *EBBCB* 85. EBB is citing a passage from "Of the Origin of Ideas," section 2 of the "First Enquiry" in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* The context of this passage in Hume helps to explain her questioning. It is preceded by the statement, "All the colours of poetry, however splendid, can never paint natural objects in such a manner as to make the description taken for a real landscape." See *Hume Texts On-Line*, https://davidhume.org/texts/e/2.

[23] *EBBCB* 1–3. EBB appears to be citing Abraham Rees's *The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature* (published serially from January 1802 to August 1820). I am indebted to Denae Dyck for first suggesting this source.

[24] See *Aurora Leigh* Bk. 1, ll. 779–800 in *WEBB,* vol. 3; see also *EBBCB* 88–89. EBB cites "As Milton hath it 'A wise man may learn more from an idle pamphlet than a fool from sacred scripture.'" For the original statement by Milton, see https://milton.host.dartmouth.edu/reading_room/areopagitica/text.html.

[25] Additional drafts of the preface and text for *An Essay on Mind* appear in another notebook, inscribed by the author "E. B. Barrett Boulogne 1824" (see *R* D1404 and D0248).

[26] Not accepted by Thomas Campbell, but EBB persisted and a revised version was published in the *Athenaeum* in 1836 (see *WEBB* 4: 275–85).

[27] Cited passages are from the University of Texas fair copy of "A Thought on Thoughts" as published in *BC* 1: 181–83, which varies at numerous points from the earlier wording in the 1822–26 notebook; e.g., in the notebook, instead of referring to her "descriptive narrative," EBB first writes "my faithful family sketch," then crosses out "family sketch'" and inserts "memories" above it (34). The allusions to the British Foreign Minister George Canning and to Byron and other authors in paragraph two of the text published in *BC* (181) also do not appear in the notebook version.

[28] As an original composition in a more polished state than versions in other manuscript sources, this essay is the only content of the notebook included among works published in *WEBB* (5: 420–25). The presence, position, and careful handwriting of this essay suggest that EBB began using the notebook for fair copying some of her own more ambitious works of juvenilia, then turned it to more miscellaneous purposes.

[29] The notes on Kant continue on the first leaf (recto and verso), but it is quite possible that EBB may have initially left this leaf blank when she first began using the notebook in 1822 to draft her essay on Locke and the Bishop of Worcester; in some of her other notebooks, this leaf is used as a title page. "Kant I" also appears high on the "List of Books I wish to have" later in the notebook (81).

[30] The blank page following an unfinished Locke analysis on page 198 is numbered "200"; there is no page 199. Pages 176–77 are also missing.

[31] "1826" only appears in EBB's hand in the notebook in the entry title "Literary Souvenir for 1826" (*EBBCB* 169). As her phrasing implies, however ("for 1826"), she may well have read and commented on this annual late in 1825, given the common practice of post-dating annuals aimed at the Christmas market to the following year.

[32] Langbauer, "Prolepsis and the Tradition" 892. See Langbauer, *The Juvenile Tradition* for a fuller exploration of the relations between prolepsis and juvenile writing.

[33] *EBBCB* 115. She is responding to *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Began by Himself, and Concluded by His Daughter, Maria Edgeworth* (London: R. Hunter & Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1820, 2 vols.).

[34] On the pervasive impact of Byron on EBB's early poetry and liberal politics, see Mermin 26, 34, 36–37; Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 59–64; Avery 56, 58–60; and Wynter 302–07.

[35] Mermin, who briefly discusses some of these comments on Landon (31–32), identifies this as an "attack" appearing in the *Westminster Review* (no. 3, 1825, pp. 537–39).

[36] For an overview of EBB's theories of rhyme and debates they occasioned, see Stone and Taylor 45–46; Hair provides an in-depth study of these theories in the context of the poet's study of the history of English prosody and "the relations between music and poetry" (16).

[37] On EBB's later complex and changing response to Hemans and Landon, see "Felicia Hemans" (1835) and "L.E.L.'s Last Question" (1839) and the prefatory information in the headnotes to the poems (*WEBB* 1: 535–43).

[38] EBB does not close the parenthesis that begins before "woe." The three spaced periods after "balloons" seem to mark the empty space in Montgomery's poetry that she is

mocking, not an ellipsis. Her satirical exuberance in remarking on Montgomery's faults is further conveyed through three heavy lines drawn under the close of the entry.

[39] Dunlop 3: 329.

[40] *EBBCB* 19–20, 23–24, as published in *WEBB* 5: 423–24.

[41]See *R* D1415, D1427. As the updated description of D1415 (now in the Huntington) indicates, the Blake extracts (D1427) were originally contained in this notebook.

[42] Her juvenilia do, however, occasionally include experiments with drama: for example, "the blank-verse scene of 189 lines" discussed by Taylor on the tribulations of the Queen Consort Caroline when the Prince Regent "force Parliament to consider a bill to deprive her of her title and to dissolve their marriage" ("Childhood Writings" 147).

[43] *EBBCB* 66–75. "Isla" is mistranscribed as "Zola" in the catalogue description of the notebook in *R* D1405.

[44] EBB's abbreviated titles for *The Memorial of Sainte-Helene: Memoirs of the life, exile*, and *conversations* of the *Emperor Napoleon*, by Comte Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné de Las Cases (which began appearing in eight volumes in 1823), and de Staël's *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la révolution française, depuis son origine jusques et compris le 8 juillet 1815* (1818).

[45] EBB also considered Napoleon as a possible subject for an epic poem in 1841; see the headnote to "Crowned and Buried" in *WEBB* 2: 5–6. On EBB's Romantic Prometheanism, see Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 53–54, 67–76; Lewis 16–48, and Avery 61–63.

[46] On *Corinne*, see *BC* 3: 25; for an overview of EBB's invocations of de Staël as a woman of genius, see Stone (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 41).

[47] On Kirke White and his importance to the Romantic tradition of juvenile writers, see Langbauer, *The Juvenile Tradition*; on Wheatley, see Hodgson's insightful reading of the suppressed trauma in her poetry.

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