World Citizenship in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Juvenilia: Volcanoes, Hunger, and Politics of the Larder

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In 1858 Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB)[1] declared her son Pen "shall be a 'citizen of the world' after my own heart & ready for the millennium" (BC 25: 98).[2] Living in Italy for most of the fifteen years of her married life and passionately supporting Italian unification and independence in her mature poetry, she proudly regarded herself as a "citizen of the world." But world citizenship is a perspective towards which EBB strove in her juvenilia long before she employed the phrase explicitly; much of her childhood writing expresses her compulsion to address social and political issues and to transcend national prejudices in doing so.

Recent critics have illuminated EBB's gender and political views in fascinating detail. Marjorie Stone, to cite one example, has ably traced EBB's commitment to "a poetry of the present and 'the Real'" and her "turn towards human and contemporary subjects, away from the self-confessedly mystical and abstract subject matter of her 1838 volume" (27, 24–25).[3] We should recognise, however, that a strong political impulse surfaces in even her earliest writings and in her recollections of childhood. Her letters from early childhood demonstrate her precocious interest in power negotiations between nations, and also between individual citizens and governments. At age six, for example, she informed her mother and father that "the Rusians has beat the french killd 18.000 men and taken 14000 prisners"—an account which, though mistakenly attributing victory to the wrong side, documents her early interest in the Napoleonic wars (31 August 1812, *BC* 1: 9). More telling for consideration of her aesthetic-political theory, her earliest known poem—composed in the month she turned six—in four lines critiques the British government's policy of impressing civilians (including Americans, who were no longer British subjects) to serve in the British navy.[4] Entitled "On the Cruelty of Forcement to Man: Alluding to the Press Gang" (1812), it suggests in its final two lines the responsibility of the viewer—specifically the extremely young female poet—to grapple with the moral and ethical implications of this military practice:

> Ah! the poor lad in yonder boat,
> Forced from his wife, his friends, his home,

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Now gentle Maiden how can you,
Look at the misery of his doom! (*HUP* 31)[5]

Her last two lines pose a question that will shape her poetic career: *How* can you represent disturbing issues that demand your attention? Although her brief first poem does not resolve this conundrum, by expressing her query as an exclamation, she leaves no uncertainty that she must do so. Indeed, her lineation invites us to read the final line of the poem as an imperative.

EBB's early awareness of the artist's responsibility is evident not only in "On the Cruelty of Forcement to Man" but also "From the blest sea with a majestic pull" (written in 1816 at the age of ten) and "Ye muses warbling in melodious spells" (written in 1819 at the age of thirteen). In the former, her work evokes mainstream political visual rhetoric, as exemplified by the political cartoons of James Gillray, to both celebrate and register anxiety about the excessive appetite of "John Bull"; the later poem focuses on a domestic scene. In both, however, food is very much at the forefront; in both, and in other youthful writings as well, EBB uses depictions of international politics and of domestic scenes to engage with contemporary concerns about hunger, consumption, greed, and moderation as matters of personal choice and national policy.

"From the blest sea with a majestic pull": Imagining the Plight of the Homeless and Hungry

Among a large number of childhood poems that commemorated life at her girlhood home, Hope End, and effusively celebrated family members, a small but distinctive number engage with international events, such as her 12-line poem "On an Eruption of Mount Etna" (1814; *WEBB* 168–69).[6] Written on 8 May 1814, two months after she had turned eight, the poem imagines the experience of women and children who had lost their homes and possessions in a major eruption of the Italian volcano more than two years earlier.[7] The highest active volcano in Europe and still one of the world's most active, Etna had a major eruption extending from 27 October 1811 to May 1812, a period in which EBB turned from five to six. While it is unclear what prompted her to recall the volcanic eruption two years after it happened,[8] her resulting poem imagines the personal distress of homelessness and hunger experienced by the volcano's Italian victims:

Loud blows Octobers chilling blast
And, Etna's fire brands rudely cast,
Many a cottage burns upon the ground,
Many a thundering hissing's heard around;
And children mourning their unhappy fate, 5
And anxious mothers cry—Oh! 'tis to late!
We built our cottage on this wretched hill,
But now its over, poverty stands still,
No cloaths have we,—no lively home,
But o'er the hungry deserts forced to roam…. 10

A couple of months after imagining the hunger of those displaced by Italy's volcanic eruption, she remarked the hunger gap between England's rich and poor in "The Beggar Boy's Petition to Little

Sam" (1814; *WEBB* 178),[9] addressed to her young brother Samuel (about two and a half at this time), in which a hungry supplicant begs for food: "A piece of bread is all I ask. / To give it, is a happy task! / Plenty your rosy dimpled cheeks bespeak / Whilst I, your charity am forced to seek!" (ll. 9–12).

EBB eventually connected the plight of the homeless and hungry not so much to natural disaster or the financial luck of birth as to the consequences of national policies. In an untitled manuscript from 1816, when she was only ten, EBB penned a jocular poetic fragment (published for the first time in the Pickering & Chatto *Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* [*WEBB* 232–33] and, like her other juvenilia, reproduced here with her original misspellings and punctuation errors) that stages a dinner to be shared by Britain's iconic John Bull and his French enemy Napoleon Bonaparte:

From the blest sea with a majestic pull
From Neptunes arms I carried good John Bull
Sense in his cradle he despised the glare
Of sceptered pride & mocked the wiles of care
His mother Fortune favors with her grace 5
And sends plum pudding to puff out his face
Of him is Europes colonies afraid
He eats the food which they united made
Besides they too regard his ponderous size
Which soon would crush them to their dire surprise 10
His large circumference there's none to tell
His body rounded would fill up a well
But I must hence and move with step al[ert]
To see John Bulls repast with Bonap[arte]

———

Welcome good Bonaparte a dancing [lacuna--possibly *djin*?] 15
My welcome is a hearty glass of gin
Tho niether grenoilles nor frog I boast
Yet good roast beef on you I think not lost
Then sit I pray upon this English seat
And eat & talk & Bony talk & eat— 20
[Bony:] Your English Majesty is very good
To thus prepare for me such wholesome food
To eat your dinner I have come from far
Un peu de ceci et un peu de cela
Et si vous plait un peu des tres bon vin 25
Ma mais etre francaise ne peut souffris du gin

I'm very sorry friend indeed to find
That you and I are not of the same mind
To drink good wine you must return to France
The country where you learnt so well to prance 30
But drink some gin before you spread your sail
Nor leave old England with a wish to rail

Si donc my bon ami your corporation
How much you eat requires no explanation
I pray you do not wish to make mine so 35
For I should blush when I myself should show

Using contrasting national culinary stereotypes to suggest the traditional incompatibility of the English and French (John Bull likes roast beef and gin, whereas Bony prefers frogs' legs and wine), young EBB's verse laughs at the English icon as much as at the French emperor.

But the fragmentary jeu d'esprit has a serious subtext, adumbrated as sly criticism of the corpulent John Bull, whose "mother Fortune … sends plum pudding to puff out his face" (ll. 5–6). Unlike EBB's toddler brother Sam, on whom Fortune happily bestows "Plenty" that produces "rosy dimpled cheeks," John Bull satisfies himself by depriving others: "Of him is Europes colonies afraid / He eats the food which they united made / Besides they too regard his ponderous size / Which soon would crush them to their dire surprise." The particulars of this fragment's focus on food, Europe's colonies, and England's excessive appetite accrue significance in the context of prevailing attitudes toward Napoleon and of food scarcity at the end of the Napoleonic wars, scarcity which became famine during 1816, known as "the year without a summer."

As Linda Colley's book *Britons* reminds us, the importance of conflict with France in fostering British cohesion and patriotism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can hardly be overstated. EBB in childhood clearly shared both great national pride and the anti-French sentiment that saturated her culture during the extended period of almost continuous warfare with the French through the eighteenth century and up until Napoleon's final defeat in 1815. Like many political caricatures that visually expressed this enmity and British sense of superiority and self-righteousness, EBB's poem pits a large, strong, smugly well-fed personification of the nation, John Bull, against a comparatively small, effete Bonaparte. The young girl's imagined dinner with John Bull and Napoleon conjures imagery extremely familiar from the visual culture of the age, especially from the caricatures drawn by James Gillray (1756–1815), one of the Romantic period's most popular and talented satiric caricaturists, recently called "the father of the political cartoon" (Rowson). His images, usually etchings that were subsequently hand-coloured, were shown in the shop windows of his publisher and print seller, sometimes printed in journals such as the *Anti-Jacobin*, and widely dispersed in France as well as England. Gillray was identifiably neither Whig nor Tory, for he satirised all sides. (He depicted King George III as dull-witted and miserly, for example.) But he consistently ridiculed Bonaparte, and while ostensibly glorifying John Bull, at the same time made this representative of Britain a comical figure of gluttony with political ramifications.

There is no direct evidence of EBB's having encountered any of Gillray's cartoons in particular; however, his popularity and influence were such that EBB could hardly have avoided being exposed to Gillray's stock characterizations (of John Bull and Napoleon in particular) and his sceptical attitudes, which were even more widely circulated than his cartoons themselves. I would argue that, regardless of whether or not we can demonstrate a direct influence, a close study of Gillray's work can illuminate the significance of key imagery and diction in EBB's world at the time of writing and in her work in particular.

From his early works caricaturing the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic wars, Gillray frequently used visual metaphors of consumption to contrast French and English governments. His diptych "French Liberty vs. British Slavery" from 1792 (Fig. 1), depicting the

economic burdens and scarcity borne by the French during and after their revolution, tacitly expressed the desirability of British stability while also satirizing Englishmen's complaints against their government: An emaciated Sans Culotte on the left with tattered clothes but a jaunty revolutionary cap, gnawing a leek with a pot of snails in the background, celebrates his "liberty" while, ironically, overlooking his physical immiseration: "O! Sacre Dieu! Vat blessing be de Liberte. Vive le Assemblé Nationale!—no more Tax!—by Gar, how ve live!—we svim in de milk & honey." The extent to which martial endeavours have displaced such cultural values as the arts is suggested by a sword that has replaced the bow overlying a violin and by a large map of "French conquests" hanging where we might expect a painting above the mantel. In contrast, John Bull vividly conveys the British sense of superiority to the French. The well-clothed and overly well-fed John Bull hacks at a huge joint of beef, flanked by a bottle of hock and a flagon of ale, while complaining, "Ah! This cursed Ministry! They'll ruin us, with their damn'd Taxes! — —why, Zounds! They're making slaves of us all, & starving us to death!—." The cartoon's criticism of English economic policies registers in the icon hanging above John Bull of a warrior Britannia, whose symbolic shield has been replaced with a large bag of "Sterling." While the humour of the verbal text in both panels depends on the comic gap between the words and the images, the cartoon conveys complex serious meanings as well, including suggestions that the principles claimed in the French Revolution may be more important than a scant diet, and a critique of Englishmen's lack of appreciation for what they have.

Fig. 1. James Gillray, "French Liberty vs. British Slavery," 21 December 1792 (Library of Congress).

Many of Gillray's most famous political caricatures develop this trope of celebrating English superiority but with a satiric edge. For example, his "John Bull Taking a Luncheon:—or—British Cooks Cramming Old Grumble-Gizzard with Bonne-Chére," a hand-coloured etching dated 24 October 1798 (Fig. 2), was published just after Nelson's victory over the French at the Battle of the Nile. Nelson stands in the forefront of British admirals and naval heroes serving up victories for "Old Grumble-Gizzard," John Bull, to satisfy his appetite for "frigasees"—fricasseed enemy frigates—washed down with a jug of "True British Stout." John Bull exclaims: "What! More Frigassees?—why you sons of bitches, you! where do ye think I shall find room to stow all you bring in?—" Nelson's plate is labeled "Fricassee à la Nelson"; the next platter is labelled "Fricando à la Howe"; and a platter coming behind laden with Dutch cheese is identified "à la Duncan," honouring English military leaders for their successes against the French. Complicating this celebration of British conquest, a citizen beyond the window at the left expresses unease with his own government. The figure nearest the window aims a distressed look at John Bull and worries, "Oh, curse his guts, he'll take a chop at us, next." His fearful words and worried glance transform an image of crowds rejoicing over British victory into a visual representation of panic, and his anxiety for the future relates directly to John Bull's excessive appetite and monstrous "guts."

Fig. 2. James Gillray, "John Bull Taking a Luncheon: —or—British Cooks Cramming Old Grumble-Gizzard with Bonne-Chére," 24 October 1798 (National Maritime Museum, London; photo by Tima Warner).

Closer to the time of EBB's jocular fragment imagining a dinner to be shared by John Bull and Napoleon, Gillray's "The Plumb Pudding in Danger—or—State Epicures Taking un Petit Souper" (26 February1805; Fig. 3), probably Gillray's best known political cartoon, represents not John Bull but Prime Minister William Pitt, wearing a regimental uniform and hat, sitting at a table with Napoleon. They carve shares of a large plum pudding representing the world. Though Pitt himself is excessively thin, he carves a slice for Britain considerably larger than Napoleon's—Pitt claims the entire Atlantic and presumably the Americas, while Bonaparte gets 'only' Europe. This caricature specifically references unsuccessful overtures made in January 1805 by Napoleon, newly crowned emperor, for reconciliation with England, but more generally depicts the two nations' appetites for world dominance, underscored by the text beneath the title: "'the great Globe itself, and all which it inherit,' is too small to satisfy such insatiable appetites."

Fig. 3. James Gillray. "The Plumb-pudding in Danger—or—State Epicures Taking un Petit Souper," 26 February 1805 (British Library).

In all these images, Englishness is associated with plenty and Frenchness with comparative want. But British plenty is linked to consuming the world, and John Bull's excessive size—the "guts" that worry his own countrymen—suggests that he simply supplies his wants more effectively than the

French under Napoleon have done.[10] Young EBB's jocular poem on the failed dinner of Napoleon and John Bull participates in this established contemporary convention of gustatory satire, using familiar imagery of consumption to celebrate British conquest of the French. EBB's poem evokes mainstream political visual rhetoric, which simultaneously celebrates John Bull's greater size, strength, and vitality while making him at once both laughable and terrifying, to develop the worrisome undercurrent discernible in "The Plumb Pudding in Danger." She notably imagines John Bull's excessive appetite, not just from the English perspective suggested in the scene beyond the window in "John Bull taking a Luncheon," but from the perspective of the colonies who are consumed, or themselves starved, because of England's voracious appetites.

As EBB's shaky French in the lines on John Bull and Napoleon suggests, she had begun learning the language only recently—the first reference to her writing French appears at age ten in June 1816, six months after she returned from a month-long journey to France with her parents.[11] The Barretts were among the first wave of English rushing to Paris after the Napoleonic wars ended. The story goes that when her parents were ready to leave their home Hope End, their headstrong eldest child insisted on accompanying them. Her trunk hastily packed, EBB set off with them for her first European excursion.[12] In her account of the trip, the nine-year-old registers a mix of British condescension, childish thrill at participating in adult activities, and a traveller's excitement in a foreign land. Her prose "Notes on a Trip to Paris October and November, 1815," beginning "I was very much delighted when I set off for France, and have never repented my resolution to go—," alternately records pleasure in the sights and disappointment in the accommodations, noting damp sheets, dirty rooms, and variable quality in food.[13] Perhaps unsurprisingly for such a young traveller, she shows only occasional sensitivity to the scarcity that years of Napoleonic wars would have created for the French and to the strains engendered by the sudden resumption of tourism and its demands.

In Dover harbour, she is moved by the "chalky rocks which tell the passing stranger it is England—England the only asylum for the forlorn and the helpless!" (*HUP* 1: 165). In contrast to this heroic sense of England, at Calais she observes that the "men with bare legs" ferrying them to shore look "more like monkeys than men" (166). French food is inconsistent: she enjoys a "sauce piquante" at "Monsr. Quillac's fine hotel," with its "comfortable beds in handsome rooms." But she awakes to "a bad breakfast" and a carriage drawn by "thin half starved … plough … horses." From this point on, the Barretts mostly find dirty beds and skip breakfast at unsatisfactory hotels, pausing later to breakfast "entirely on pears and grapes" (167), though at Formerie they "breakfasted on honey, butter, tea, pears and eggs" (171). In Rouen, at an "extremely dirty" hotel they "had a bad dinner" (172). "Mrs. Packer's Hotel" in Boulogne, in contrast, sounds as if it is run by an Englishwoman; there, predictably, they enjoy "a capital dinner and clean beds" (166). Some of the French food is excellent—though sarcasm may undercut her praise: In Abbeville, they enjoy "dishes" that "alone were enough to tempt any one from America to eat them"; "the wine too," she observes, "was without exception the most delicious I had drunk in France" (166-67). But such pleasures are fleeting. On their return, back in Abbeville they "found one reason to complain," for "the old cook was gone, and another, tho' a man, not nearly so good a cook, had usurped her place—On such little causes, how much of human happiness is founded!" (172). At journey's end, assured of plentiful, agreeable food, they greet Dover with English pride and happiness, rejoicing "to find ourselves by a good comfortable English fireside, which, even foreigners must allow, is preferable to all the luxuries in the world" (173).

While this prose account of her 1815 travels in France evinces proud Englishness predictable so soon after the British defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, the John Bull and Bony poetry fragment written within the next year gives a more nuanced view of English policies in the world economy, one with a

particularly timely though understated subtext. With the corpulent John Bull threatening the food supply of Europe's colonies, EBB represents English rapacity in a year when agricultural disaster spread widely across the Northern Hemisphere, including New England, eastern Canada, and much of western Europe. The massive April 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), at that time under Napoleonic rule during French occupation of the Netherlands, was the largest volcanic eruption in at least 1,300 years and remains the greatest volcanic eruption in history. The ash expelled into the atmosphere produced a volcanic winter (adding to atmospheric ash expelled by four other volcanic eruptions since 1812)[14] that lowered global temperatures, with disastrous consequences for agriculture. The resulting famine was the worst of the nineteenth century and the last genuinely world-wide famine, seriously afflicting Britain, Ireland, Wales, France, Switzerland, and Germany and the North-eastern U.S. as well as China and India, prompting food riots in both the UK and France. As Gillen D'Arcy Wood remarks, "To be alive in the years 1816–18, almost anywhere in the world, meant to be hungry." Wood explains that although the affluent, like EBB, were largely personally sheltered from these effects, starvation quickly became pronounced among the general population in a three-year "tsunami of famine, disease, dislocation and unrest." In the context of the beginning of food shortages in the "Year Without a Summer" (1816 has also been termed "the Summer that Never Was," the "Poverty Year," and "Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death"), cartoonists' culinary satire became even more disturbingly effective.

In June 1816, a political caricature by George Cruikshank linked excessive English consumption not only to food but also to the artistic and historical heritage of other nations. In "The Elgin marbles! Or John Bull buying Stones at the time his numerous Family want Bread!!" (Fig. 4), Cruikshank satirized the government's decision to purchase for the English nation the Elgin Marbles, sculptural figures that Lord Elgin had had stripped from the Parthenon and shipped to his homeland.[15] In Cruikshank's cartoon, amid widespread hunger during the Year without a Summer, a caricature of Lord Castelreagh, Leader of the House of Commons, exhibits the government's expensive but inedible purchase to an unusually slim John Bull and his hungry children, who cry in unison, "Don't buy them, Daddy! We don't want <u>stones</u> give us <u>Bread</u>! give us Bread! give us Bread!"[16] An obese woman who is clearly not starving adds, "Let him take his <u>Stones</u> back again to the <u>Turks</u> we don't <u>want them</u> in this country!!"

In the context of England's pervasive gustatory satire throughout the Napoleonic wars and the international calamity of widespread starvation in 1816, then, young EBB's manuscript references to John Bull's gluttony can clearly be seen to constitute a prescient criticism of this figuration of England as an excessive consumer of the world's food and its cultural capital. When her poem's Napoleon remarks John Bull's "corporation"—identified by the *OED* as a colloquial vulgar reference to a "large and prominent" abdomen[17]—EBB is implying that John Bull's fat derives from consuming more than England's share of the world's food. While James Gillray's familiar depictions—across decades—of a small, sometimes emaciated, Napoleon underscored the emperor's weakness relative to John Bull's robust health, such imagery of starving French men, women, and children acquired a newly disturbing global resonance over the course of 1816. Echoing her admonition to her toddler brother Sam to feed the poor beggar at the door, EBB wrote a brief composition in French in June 1816 that promoted feeding the hungry, a topic whose urgency *at* that time—referencing post-war scarcity compounded by worldwide agricultural disaster—probably exceeded the power of her limited facility with the French language to convey: "How many of your brothers are hungry while ye enjoy delicacies?"[18]

Fig. 4. George Cruikshank, "The Elgin Marbles! Or John Bull buying Stones at the time his numerous Family want Bread!!," 10 June 1816 (Art Institute of Chicago).

Politics of the Larder in Domestic Settings

ELSEWHERE in her jocular verse relating domestic events, EBB anticipates or echoes her critique of the excessive appetite she attributes to John Bull in the 1816 poem quoted in the previous section, associating appetite with poor self-control and inadequate government. Writing "An Epistle to Henrietta" at eight, for example, she comically conveys the shortcomings of her five-year-old sister in terms of excessive consumption: "Thy gentle smile displays thy virtues sweet, / Altho' dear Addles far to much you eat" (dated 14 May 1814; *WEBB* 170, ll. 1–2).[19] Five years later, writing at thirteen, she similarly cites the excessive consumption of her younger siblings as a sign of trouble and the need for good governance. In a letter written to her traveling parents, she describes "how we have been since your departure": Six-month-old Henry "is as well as can be imagined if a piece of Apple Dumpling had not interfered … very rudely indeed." Three-year-old George suffers "the *curse* of such an appetite mortal before never possesed," exposing him "to the laughter & ridicule of our little hilly world." Henrietta shares his "curse" of excessive appetite "to such a degree *that* it is often necessary to ration her food." In this comical litany of avid overeating, she refers to her own greater delicacy, for the wind has "cruelly" "beat me about." Without any transition at all, recounting these irregularities in the home arising in her parents' absence leads directly into an account of a superior nation, as she

reports that the Classics tutor "Mr McSwiney believes Greece to surpass Rome in every respect but in conquests he says that tho she is trodden under foot by the Turks yet even in the countenance of the inhabitants she bears the marks of her former greatness of soul virtue & grandeur he says she is conquered but still 'virtue' is not banished" (*BC* 1: 70). (We can conjecture that the Greeks did not overeat, though perhaps the Romans did.)

In March 1819, when she had just turned thirteen, EBB pursued the relationship between good governance and moderate consumption in a comical account of a day at Hope End with her siblings, "Ye Muses warbling in melodious spells" (*WEBB* 300-01). Written in mock heroic manner imitative of Alexander Pope, the piece reaches its most intense pitch at mid-day dinner:

> Roast mutton smoking on the board we view
> In a cracked dish theres mashed potatoes too
> O'er joyed and hungry to our seats we haste
> And bless the cook who served the rich 'repast'
> And then we guess what pudding shall arrive
> Some hope tis tart & on that hope they live.
> One says 'Its bad I know'—another 'nice'
> One bread—one suet—lo! it comes—'tis rice!
> Oh fatal pudding![20] At that hated sound
> Fierce Discord spreads her jealous wings around
>
> On every side despair & murmurs rise
>
> And Nursery Hall resounds repeated cries
> Not half such grief in Hectors bosom sprung
> When Troy in ruins jaws tremendous hung
> Not half such cries nor such resounding ire
> The Trojans uttered with their towers on fire[21] (*WEBB* 301, ll. 39–56)

The day rounds to a peaceful close, however, with "gentle night" and "silent peace" induced by the "short repast" of tea (ll. 67, 63). Whereas at lunchtime varied appetites and individuals' personal desires for favourite puddings had spawned chaos and ire double that attending the fall of Troy, a common and humble tea—with its "one large plate of toast" democratically satisfying all tastes—sends the children to their beds to embrace "the sweets of ease" (ll. 64, 68). In this depiction of domestic scenes as in her depiction of nations, then, EBB's continuing awareness of the political implications of consumption patterns is evident. In this poem as in "From the blest sea with a majestic pull," young EBB shows a keen sense of what the political cartoonists clearly understood—the symbolic, economic, and social importance of "fatal pudding" in the fortunes of nations and their peoples.

IN HER early poems and her prose account of travel in France, young EBB registers concern with national characteristics and belief in moderating one's own appetites and accommodating the diverse appetites of others. For all her youthful jocularity, this interest anticipates what will become her serious adult preoccupation with responsible citizenship in the world community. Strikingly, in her juvenilia she sometimes expresses her tenets indirectly, using tropes associated closely with stereotyped women's domestic concerns such as menus and food preparation. She more earnestly associated

women directly with topical political concerns in that very first poem recorded by her mother in 1812, when EBB was only six. There she addressed British impressment of sailors, a topic in the forefront of England's international relations in 1812: "Now gentle Maiden how can you / Look at the misery of his doom!" (ll. 3–4).

While the young poet's sympathy or empathy for "the poor lad" being forcibly removed "from his wife, his friends, his home" (l. 2) may not be surprising, her sense of responsibility to act on those feelings is. These lines reveal that even at age six, EBB assumed that art had political purpose and, more specifically, that women—even young girls—bore responsibility to confront governments' violations of individuals' rights. The poem implies less about the evils of naval impressment than about her own sense of responsibility to write about any political oppression she observes. When she asserted that Pen should be "'a citizen of the world' after" her "own heart," she was describing a heart that was already beating steadily at a very early age.

NOTES

[1] To avoid the confusion of using her maiden name (Elizabeth Barrett Barrett) and her married name, throughout the essay I refer to Elizabeth Barrett Browning by the initials she frequently used to sign her manuscripts and letters. Both she and Robert Browning expressed pleasure that her initials and characteristic signature would not change with their marriage (*BC* 11: 248–49).

[2] For discussion of EBB's views on the cosmopolitan education of her son and its relationship to her poetic practice, see Beverly Taylor, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Politics of Childhood," and Christopher M. Keirstead. EBB associated the concept of "citizen" or "citizeness of the world" with both personal experience and international political concerns. In 1852 she wrote her beloved distant kinsman and friend JohnKenyon about her bitter estrangement from England, on the personal level fostered particularly by her father's obdurate refusal to reconcile following her marriage, and on the political level by England's failure to support Italy's independence: "I'm a citizeness of the world now, you see, and float loose" (*BC* 17: 70).

[3] Yet even so magisterial a study as Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (Routledge, 1993), while it ranges beyond the traditional canon to include many women and working-class writers, scarcely mentions EBB.

[4] What were you thinking about at age six?

Britain's practice of seizing sailors from merchant ships and forcing them to serve in the Royal Navy ("forcement" or "impressment") constituted one cause the United States declared war on England in 1812, while Englnad was still at war with France. The London *Times* discussed the problem of impressment. See, e.g., "Parliamentary Proceedings," 26 June 1812; "American Papers," 10 March 1812; as well as editorial comment calling impressment "the disgrace of England and of a civilized age" ("Upon Hearing Cuxhaven," 3 October 1811). On naval impressment see Nicholas Rogers, esp. pp. 134–38.

[5] First published in *HUP* 1: 31. Punctuation follows that of the manuscript copied into a notebook by EBB's mother, in the Berg collection of the New York Public Library; see Philip Kelley and Betty A. Coley, D666. All quotations from EBB's works in this essay follow *WEBB*. EBB's juvenilia appear in vol. 5, this first poem on pp. 159–60. On this poem and other juvenilia, see Taylor, "Childhood Writings."

[6] First published in *HUP* 1: 40–41.

[7] See "Etna, Eruptive History" on the Smithsonian Museum's *Global Volcanism Program*. http://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=211060.

[8] Though I have not traced composition of this poem to any specific event, young EBB may have been inspired by reading a travel narrative or a book review that mentioned the volcanic eruption.

[9] First published in *HUP* 1: 51.

[10] As Lizzie Collingham has demonstrated, from as early as the mid-sixteenth century "reliance on faraway places to supply England … with food was to become a hallmark of empire" (5).

[11] EBB wrote a series of letters in French to her mother in 1816–17. Her French from this period—as evident in the poem fragment on Bonaparte and John Bull—contains many errors of spelling, diction, and syntax (*BC* 1: 30n2).

[12] Her prose "Notes" on her travels appears in *HUP* vol. 1, pp. 165–73. See also Gardner B. Taplin 16–17.
[13] A letter to her aunt Arabella Graham-Clarke posted a month after EBB returned from the trip praises France. She admires the Louvre ("the most magnificent thing in the world") and the Jardin des Plants with its "most beautiful black flower soil" (*BC* 1: 20).
[14] Significant recent volcanic eruptions included La Soufrière on Saint Vincent in the Caribbean and Awu in the Sanghe Islands, Indonesia, both in 1812; Suwanosejima in the Ryukyu Islands, Japan, in 1813; and Mayon in the Phillipines in 1814. For further details on 1816 as the Year without a Summer and its food shortages, see Wood, "1816, The Year without a Summer," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, 2 July 2015, http:/www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=gillen-darcy-wood-1816-the-year-without-a-summer; Richard B. Stothers, "The Great Tambora Eruption in 1815 and Its Aftermath," *Science*, vol. 224, 1984, pp. 1191–98; John D. Post, *The Last Great Subsistence Crisis in the Western World* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1977); Clive Oppenheimer, "Climatic, Environmental and Human Consequences of the Largest Known Historic Eruption: Tambora Volcano (Indonesia) 1815," *Progress in Physical Geography*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2003, pp. 230–59; William and Nicholas Klingaman, *The Year Without Summer: 1816 and the Volcano that Darkened the World and Changed History* (St. Martin's Press, 2013); and Wood, *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014). The unusual darkness, cold, and rains spawned by the disruption to the world's atmosphere prompted English writers to imagine the end of the world, as represented by Byron's poem "Darkness" (written July 1816), and also contributed to anxieties expressed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Last Man* (1826).
[15] See M. Dorothy George, 1: 172 and Description of "The Elgin Marbles."
[16] As a young adult EBB would later criticise Lord Elgin's pillaging of the marbles from the Parthenon as a "profanation" (*BC* 2: 108).
[17] The OED cites a usage of "corporation" from Tobias Smollett's 1813 *Ferdinand Count Fathom* that contrasts significantly with EBB's reference to John Bull's potential for devouring the produce of Europe's colonies: Smollet's speaker declares "my corporation is made up of good wholesome English fat" (1: 156).
[18] EBB's French original, addressed to the "[génération d'Adam!": "Combien de vos Frères, au moment ou vous jouissez de délices, sont affamés?" (*HUP* 1: 106–07).
[19] First published in *HUP* 1: 42–43.
[20] EBB's emphasis on the divisive effects of "fatal pudding" in the domestic scene resonates with Gillray's famed 1805 image of "The Plumb-pudding in Danger" (Fig. 3) as an emblem of international relations.
[21] This early poem was previously published in Paul Landis and Ronald E. Freeman 338–40.

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