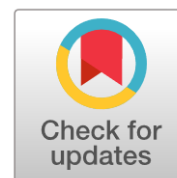


## “MY NAME TO ME A SADNESS WEARS:” SELF AND OTHER ACCORDING TO *DIARY BY E. B. B.*

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### Abstract

This paper dwells on the issue of selfhood in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Diary* (1831 – 1832). It explores individuation against three major presences in the poetess's life: her father (and family), Hugh Stuart Boyd, and literature. The employed strategy of research includes a phenomenological (interspersed with feminist touches) focus on select excerpts from the *Diary* which reveal the writer's concern for *Self* as the recognition of the priority of a precursory *Other*. Observations are made on the limits of human perception, time and space as human variables, the ontological essence of interpretation, and memory as a premise for cognizing life as care. A rare example of prose-fiction in the poetess's oeuvre, her diary could be read as an instance of simultaneous self-nullification and self-affirmation, which offers possibilities for a dialectical definition of female genius as dialogue through narrative.

**Keywords:** Elizabeth Barrett Barret (Browning), diary, Self, Other, care, guilt, death, hermeneutics

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## A Thought for a Background

To write with confidence on the apriority of the *I-Thou* relationship with respect to the diary of one of many traumatized, precocious, and devotionally self-abnegating Victorian literary daughters (25 at the commencement of this venture) seems like a precarious undertaking. The stakes: Martin Buber's foundational research on the matter. Implying the eternity of Jesus's unsurpassed redemptive concern for man, Buber propounds reciprocity inherent in the anthropology of love: 'Love does not cling to the *I* in such a way as to have the *Thou* only for its "content," its object; but love is **between** *I* and *Thou*' (Buber, 1937, pp. 14-15; emphasis added). One of the momentous cues of Buber's Christological interest in drawing a demarcation line between *I-It* and *I-Thou* is his argument regarding the mutual responsiveness as oughtness in the 'natural' combinational element of the latter as opposed to the 'natural' divisional essence of the former (p. 24). If an allusion be permitted, Elizabeth Barrett's diary (1831-1832) could be interpreted as a compendium of her excruciating confessions about the impossibility of attaining selfhood out of touch with an Other who she foregrounded in designing the ethico-aesthetic premise of her own being.

Early enough (June 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>, 1831), Barrett prefigured a Buberian clinging to a better Other in validating her own life. A heteroglot narrator livestreams and dramatizes her environment, her fear of leaving home, and her irredeemable sense of inferiority<sup>1</sup>:

Can I not still look unto **the hill from whence cometh my hope**? That hope is a hope of **spiritual blessing**; but I have found & «known» it to be one of **temporal comfort** also! Walked out with **Bummy & Arabel**, on the «bank» on the other side of the water. Strangers may soon walk there, with other feelings than mine. Bummy asked why I seemed grave. ... **Papa in better spirits**. How often I thought of Mr. Boyd today! He is the only person in this neighborhood, whom it will affect my happiness to leave. **I shall be very sorry to leave Eliza Cliffe «but not unhappy. Why did I scratch that out? — Let me be honest, If I cant be wise!»**

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Barrett's original spelling and punctuation, as in the extant manuscript of her diary, have been adhered to (with all of the writer's own linguistic infelicities of quoting from other sources), following the edition of *Diary by E. B. B* referenced hereby (and abbreviated as *UDEBB*), and considering the editors' full notation. The conventionally accepted abbreviation "EBB" has been employed to address the poetess. The Brownings' correspondence has been referred to as "BC", followed by the respective date(s), volumes, and pages.

... **Must [Mr. Boyd] not care a good deal for me, ... ?** And in the case of caring at all for me, must he not wish, «for» his own sake, to «live» near me, wherever I am? **I shall never get any «certainty, by» this interrogative system.** Hope says one thing; & «Fear», another, in reply! – **If we do leave this dear place**, what a consolation it w<sup>d</sup>. be to me, not to leave besides, **the dearest & most valued friend I have in the world «!!» – But God’s will be done in all things. I wish those words were as clearly written in my heart, as on «my» paper – in spite of my alleged illegibility! – No letters today – [Papa] is not in good spirits;** & I am not in great ones. Now I am going down to prayers! «bell» ringing! — Read **nothing but the Bible** today. (*UDEBB*, pp. 12-13, emphases added)

Until the end of her life EBB seems to have remained coy about, and dissatisfied with, her diary which she abandoned unexpectedly. Having lasted for less than a year (4<sup>th</sup> June 1831 – April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1832), it documents her agonizing infatuation with the blind scholar and neighbor H. S. Boyd, her anxiety about her father’s diminishing health and financial affairs, the loss of her poetic cradle (Hope End, the family estate), her recollections of her mother (who died 7<sup>th</sup> October 1828), her growing curiosity about literature, and her insatiable zest for knowledge. As can be inferred from the emphasized parts of the current excerpt, the *Diary* provides priceless information about the poetess’s insurmountable hunger for affection, her self-identification in familial terms, as well as her ultimate doubt about her worth as a servant of God, of truth and of the pen. EBB commemorates a ‘hill’ (a pun on Cinnamon Hill in Jamaica, the family estate, and the intervention of divine help; *UDEBB*, p. 12, note 1), her maternal aunt (Bummy), one of her junior sisters (Arabel), father Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett (Papa), Hugh Stuart Boyd, and Eliza Cliffe (a neighbor who painted a portrait of EBB). And just as in a poem of 1838 titled *To E. W. Cliffe Painting My Picture*, when in a self-reflective gush the poetess imagines herself dead (‘And when my lips are mute & faded – / And when my brows are cold & shaded,’ ll. 11-12), questioning the verity and efficacy of a piece of art (‘Albeit each line & hue agree – / It will not long resemble me,’ ll. 7-8), in her *Diary*, discovered as late as 1961, she doubts her own ability to do justice to herself as a friend, as a member of the family, and as a writer. She interrogates her own sincerity of mind, her confirmed Christianity, and her right of authorship – all traits of her striving outside the confines of her own being, written self-recitation, and toward an external interlocutor as a bona fide moral corrective.

## What a Diary Could Give

EBB's quest for a better Other was founded on literary role models she would interpret forever in her diary: Pindar, Shakespeare, Marie de France, The Bible, St Gregory Nazianzen, Madame De Staël, Mary Shelley, Ann Radcliffe etc. Pivotal was the role of father Barrett. The poetess regarded her own writing as a duty to humanity. Her diary betrays incompleteness and self-denigration, yet achievement and self-parade. From a phenomenological angle of looking, the quoted excerpt contains a conundrum: a *post eventum* preservation of experiences through narrative based on actual memory, and narrative as immediacy *in eventu*, a 'cognitive instrument' of composition which conditions the very 'possibility of the event', as Paul Ricoeur argues in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 241, 246). Through her diary EBB sculpted her especial grasp of existence as conversation and responsibility in a 'bipolar model of signifier and signified' (p. 247), securing a peculiar mutual complementation between Self and Other, confessor and confidant, or author and recipient, always seeking for an interlocutor.

Expertise feminism has been especially sensitive to point out diurnal life-writing as the 'right' type of creative expression of woman (Kaplan, 1999, p. 75) in the period 1830 – 1860 whereby woman sought to serve some great cause. EBB's diary is an instance of feminine self-analysis as homage to a loftier authority: God, father, H. S. Boyd (Cooper, 1988, pp. 5-7). It could also be perceived as a metonym of the cloistered maiden (no need to tautologize over such maidens in the works of Tennyson, R. Browning, or D. G. Rossetti), or an intellectual rebel (Lupton, 1999, pp. 34-35) striving for an Iserian ex-centric liberation through writing. Alethea Hayter's proficient take on EBB's development as a Congregationalist insists on the poetess's view on the 'direct relation of the soul to God' through suffering (Hayter, 1962, pp. 28, 30) which also spurred EBB's motivation to interpret, and employ in communication with other people, The Holy Bible. At that, father was ever the last resort for the often emaciated young mind, engaged in vehement reasoning: 'My own dear kind Papa! — How very kind to think of me & my pedestals at such a time! — How *I ought* to love him! — ought! — how *I do*' (*UDEBB*, pp. 26-27). Father Barrett sanctioned the edition of EBB's first major poetic collection *Essay on Mind, with Other Poems* (1826). She commemorated him in her juvenile birthday odes and in her letters.

*Diary by E. B. B.* demonstrates the processual nature of the *I*. The narrative Self identifies with an Other who triggers the emergence of identity primarily ‘through all that happens to [the *I*]’ rather than [merely] through what the *I* may be willing to commit” (Levinas, 1979, p. 36). Thus, the *I* emerges as sufferance rather than perpetration. Emmanuel Levinas’s speculations on the ontology of exchange totalizing the *I-You* dichotomy could help the scholar discern the role of parent in the young writer’s denial of the ‘monotonous tautology: “I am I”’ (1979, p. 37) in her incantatory self-chastisement:

**We** are sinful deeply sinful, sorrowful creatures; & if **Thou Oh Lord** most merciful holy & true, dost not wipe away **our** sins & **our** tears, oh Lord Who < ^under Heaven, > «will» cease to sin & weep? **Speaking & feeling for myself**, — the dye of **my** sin, & the stain of **my** tears, will last for ever! — ... **I** had a letter from **Papa** today. (*UDEBB*, p. 66, emphasis added)

In her diary EBB reproached herself for almost any aberration from the normal order of things, and most certainly for her abiding desire to see what lay beyond the world of home and of received wisdom (*UDEBB*, p. 149).

### **Limned by Family**

EBB’s idolatry of the two chief fathers in her life, as can be inferred from the quoted excerpt, conveys a sense of obligation which could also be encountered in the majority of her early ballads where self-sacrificial maidens waste away in the expectation of a male rescuer (*The Romaunt of Margaret*, 1836), or bravely follow, only to perish, an ungrateful male role model (*The Romaunt of the Page*, 1838). It is against her family that EBB defined herself – a sinner in need of protection. Such self-stigma befits a general critical outlook on the poetess as an infantilized invalid cursed by failing health, frequent hysterical bouts, fairly limited social contacts, and absolute devotion to parent. There is hardly a single diary entry without mention being made of the father’s wellbeing, daily routine, and regularity of communication. One of the commonest phrases appears to be ‘No letters today!’ The lack of a written statement could stand for no bad news (father was well or/and the selling of the lavish castle-like Hope End, which the family would lose through failing business, was postponed) or no good news (e.g. father was unwell or actually unable to find a customer for Hope End, hence the promise of even drearier times for all). However interpreted, the father was the

paramount external referee in the young writer's account of life. But both agent and object of narrative mutate and get peculiarly intertwined. As James Olney's competent research on autobiographical writing suggests, diurnal narrative leads to a mutual mirroring, reshaping, and fictionalization of both self and life within the processual nature of identity (Olney, 1980, pp. 21-22, 24). Father, as a steadfast external presence, helped the writer grasp existence as wholeness: he aided her mind in escaping solipsism, he was a light out of the darkness of her not seeing herself from without (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 32), a plea 'before the moral system of an outer, objective life' (Spender, 1980, p. 120). Yet father was that spatiotemporal barrier beyond which the young writer was often unable to perceive the prospective range of her own potential. As a result, she at once obeyed and caviled – her composition confirmed and denied him. The undulations of her attitude to her father were reciprocal to the undulations of her own self-perception.

Papa's health was a major concern, as was his power over time and space. By ordering the adjustment of the clock he would control EBB's faith: 'half an hour more forward; & this sent my hopes forward ... before we are removed for ever from this sound' (16<sup>th</sup> June 1831, *UDEBB*, p. 18). When leaving Hope End, the family chose to take the clock (p. 18, note 1). It was a priceless token of EBB's happy infancy and a herald of her adulthood, perhaps just as emblematic as Big Ben in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* – that invention which counts time humanised against time cosmic and natural. In Woolf the dispersal of the leaden circles of Big Ben symbolises the sameness of gambled, disunited souls in the psychological account of the injured memory of post-war England on a London day in June 1923 (adroitly linked to time as the illness of the communality of existence through memory in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, Part III). In EBB's diary the focus on time humanised seems narrower: EBB's record of the adjustment of the clock parallel to her registration of her self-managed scholarly progress with the Classics (Aeschylus) against the temporality of her brothers' education ('I heard Stormy & Georgie read Homer & Xenophon — as usual, — tho' I have not yet commemorated them here —', p. 18). The documentation of the passing of time bears an unfortunate feature: the poetess sensed 'coldness', H. S. Boyd's condescending attitude toward her in a "skeleton" of Friendship", which propelled her to seek solace in God: 'Read, as I do every day, seven

chapters of Scripture. My heart & mind «are» not affected «by» this exercise as they should be – witness what I have written today’ (p. 19). She soliloquised over mortality and over her own insufficiency of skill, fearing some immense affliction (p. 4), empathising with the grief of the family nurse (4<sup>th</sup> September 1831, p. 116), or worrying over the wellbeing of her brother (‘dear Bro convalescent,’ 20<sup>th</sup> August 1831, p. 96). She rebelled against her own imperfection and self-imprisonment: ‘I cant bear anyone to think of me ... what I am! — Last night I read some of my diary to Arabel in bed! My diary is not meant to be read by any person except myself...’ (2<sup>nd</sup> January 1832, p. 202). She announced her own failing health (‘I am not well...,’ 21<sup>st</sup> April 1832, p. 239), searching to bestow all her love on an Other. Devastated by the loss of her own mother, she was ‘hung upon the past’ which reverberated with her mother’s ‘you will never find another person who will love you as I love you’ (13<sup>th</sup> August 1831, pp. 88). Such states exacerbated EBB’s unflagging sense of duty to her dearest people but her own spirit remained ever unfulfilled:

... there is no use in writing. The world is the world. I cannot make it Heaven. Only it is hard that I who w<sup>d</sup>. have done «everything», sh<sup>d</sup>. be directed by those for whom I w<sup>d</sup>. have done it, to the example of those who w<sup>d</sup>. have done nothing. // Mr. Boyd pressed me earnestly to go to see him for two or three days — “There is no harm in asking! — Do ask your Papa.” I was obliged to say “I will think of it”: tho’ thinking is vain! // Went away in the pouring rain. Left (23<sup>rd</sup> April 1832, UDEBB, p. 241)

How could she go, do something and be away from father who might require her? The elliptical, unpunctuated ‘Left’ closes the Diary and throws at the scholar a final ambiguity. A supplication for a leave of absence denotes the escapist range of EBB’s diurnal annals which recite her fear of easing away unappreciated as a human being. Yet her unfolding sense of identity required caution in her every discussion with father:

Papa & I talked about predestination this evening. The first time I have ventured on the subject these two years — I mean with him. (8<sup>th</sup> January, 1832, p. 204)

Finished the preface to my Prometheus, — & delivered it to Papa in the evening... in my opinion [he] did not very much «... like», it... (27<sup>th</sup> February 2019, p. 219; here EBB mentions her first translation of Aeschylus’s drama from Ancient Greek, published in 1833)

Fearing his daughter's 'turning into a shadow', Papa adamantly boycotted her secretarial toil in reading and translating for Boyd – even if she held 'a pistol to [her] head' (11<sup>th</sup> March 1832, p. 224). Bringing to the discussion Susan Sontag's exploration of illness as metaphor, it could be argued that the spectrality of the image of "shadow" inventories the covert 'medical paternalism' of regarding female creative will as a deviation from normalcy, especially in cases where the woman may be intent on psychologizing her experience in trying to control events beyond her reach (Sontag, 1978, pp. 7, 55-56, 68). EBB suffered from consumption, a spine injury, menstrual irregularities and anorexia nervosa. Her bodily disorders entailed a dependence on others who would alleviate her suffering yet infantilize and immure the young writer within her own mind which became her fixation and immunity against physical feebleness. EBB's diary, as a 'personal narrative least colored by artifice,' as Judy Lensink asserts (Lensink, 1987, pp. 39-41), sentimentalised her ambiguous obedience to her father, camouflaging poorly what Victorian patriarchal vigilance found particularly hard to value: worth of *woman as an equal Other*. On the other hand, EBB's trust in the instrumental agency of family could be found to anticipate Gadamer's opinion on the prefatory role of an individual's social context (rather than one's own independent judgment) as 'the historical reality of his being' against which subjectivity would be a "distorting mirror" (Gadamer, 2006, p. 278).

### **Noema and Noesis: Hugh Start Boyd**

Interpretation is the abiding feature of EBB's diary, particularly in view of the writer's 20-year long acquaintance with the blind, 'limited, ineffectual' Hugh Stuart Boyd (Hayter, 1962, 54). Boyd's work on the Greek Fathers appealed to the young poetess: she followed him in her preferences for Christological literature in the period 1827 – 1832 (Taplin, 1957, pp. 26, 29, 40, 51). A mind full of life rather than natural asceticism, in her early odes and ballads, such as *Bertha in the Lane*, she nonetheless saw herself as 'Lord Byron's page' or an accepting sister (Shutz Boas, 2010, pp. 52-53, 57) in need of an 'instinctive and informed... brother-babe' – a need met by Robert Browning, rather than by father, Bro, or Boyd, as Barbara Dennis argues in her study of *Aurora Leigh* (Dennis, 1996, 34, 36). Examining poems related to Boyd (e.g. *Wine of Cyprus* (1844), the 1850 sonnet triptych *HSB: His Blindness, His Death, and Legacies*), an early



biographer reveals EBB's lingering between a fancy for Ancient culture that Boyd transmitted to her, the void of time she sensed in his absence, and her faith in literature as a carrier of moral truth (Ingram, 2017, pp. 13-15). EBB was a voracious reader: printed culture became a shared experience with a tutorial Other to whom she clung as a voluntary apprentice, assuming the task of articulating justice and freedom for all men (as in *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* (1847), or *Hiram Powers' Greek Slave* (1850)). Such a task could be accomplished through meticulous, methodical learning from the past, as EBB would also demonstrate in her essay sequence *Some Account of the Greek Christian Poets* (1842).

In her early esteem of Boyd, EBB reported a nearly hysterical, phantasmal anxiety over his health ('Arabel dreamt last night that he was dead & that I was laughing'), preceded by the well-known initial sentence of puzzlement over whether she should 'burn this sheet of paper,' and then the inter-textual confession that 'words stick in my throat like «...» Amen in Macbeth's' (4<sup>th</sup> June 1831, *UDEBB*, 1969, p. 1-3), apparently provoked by Boyd's dissatisfaction with the quality of her own published verses. There could be registered diminution of the writer's self-confidence and a tendency for reclusiveness because of Boyd: 'for the thousand & first time I <owned> myself (to myself) a fool' (21<sup>st</sup> June 1831, p. 26). She was an unwelcome guest at the Boyds, expected to depart sooner rather than later (24<sup>th</sup> June 1831, p. 30). Redundancy ('I suppose he means to neglect me altogether,' 29<sup>th</sup> June 1831, p. 36) worked its way in. 'Porsonia' (as she was dubbed by Boyd, after the classical scholar Richard Porson) got drawn into the intimate life of the "nasty Boyds" (10<sup>th</sup> July 1831, p. 52) who discussed reading Coleridge. She was urged to ponder over St John's gospel and expound on 'Election & perseverance' (26<sup>th</sup> Sept 1831, p. 140), fearful of incurring Papa's anger over her outrageously frequent and protracted visits to Boyd, admitting to there being 'no room for me in the carriage' (17<sup>th</sup> Oct 1831, p. 160), disrespected ('He did not seem to care ... much about parting with me —', 20<sup>th</sup> October 1831, p. 163), considered merely 'a funny girl' (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1832, p. 231), and engaged in endless entertainment of, translation, reading, and copying for, sulky Boyd whose "'drudgeries' w<sup>d</sup>. «... devolve» upon me' (4<sup>th</sup> July 1831, p. 44). Boyd became an ultimate physical presence which would steer the young writer's perception per se.

An anticipation of Levinas's obligating *Face* (Levinas, 1979, pp. 50-51), Boyd competed with father Barrett over the position of an exemplary Other. He fostered in EBB self-identification through knowledge countered by a sense of subalternity, secondariness, and an almost anomalous figurative and literal starvation:

Mr. Boyd gave me Nonnus's paraphrase of St John's Gospel — ... *that I might hunt for hiatus[e]s for him. I was reading some of it today, which is the day of the general fast. Whenever he says exactly what is in Scripture, he does not say it as well as Scripture says it: and whenever he introduces more than is scriptural, he does it ill. Jesus wept is "done into" Jesus shed "unaccustomed tears from his eyes unused to weep" ... // I was quite exhausted with fasting today. My head was dizzy, my limbs languid, my «mind» incapable of applying «itself» to any subject. ... I won't fast again without being more sure of Scriptural premises than I can feel just now. At church. // Not reading Nonnus, — but correcting my press instead. My translation does not please me altogether. (21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1832, UDEBB, pp. 226-227, emphasis added)*

Boyd's iconic authority gradually cracked – primarily over his oftentimes inexplicably callous and derogatory attitude toward his pupil. In her letters EBB shared her devotion to Boyd's example, striving for knowledge as the justice of a poet's being, consecrating the 'grand moral Harmonicon' that Homer through Boyd was (*BC*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1827, Vol. 2, pp. 91-93), chastising herself as 'an unassisted student — "*slovenly*" enough' (*BC*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1827, Vol. 2, p. 99-100), 'a lame horse' (*BC*, October 1831, Vol. 2, p. 217) under 'Mr Boyd's parental authority' (3 October 1830, Vol. 2, p. 262). She was grateful yet she remonstrated: 'I have not deserved to be pained by *you*. ... and I think, never can deserve, that you should forget me or neglect to write to me, or withdraw your friendship from me' (*BC*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1832, Vol. 3, pp. 18-20). There was no reciprocity in the proper sense of the word: in her tutor she saw more than there was. In this sense, the *Diary* remains EBB's written record of what she was as well as what she foresaw she could (not) be through a protective, greater Other.

Through Hugh Stuart Boyd EBB called into question her own spontaneity of mind by way of recognizing the presence of an Other as 'an irreducibility to the I, to... [her] possessions:' the young writer struggled for transcendence of egotism through 'appreciating in discourse a non-allergic relation with alterity' (Levinas, 1979, pp. 43, 47). In the logic of Levinas's perception of Other, Boyd could be seen as at once as a noematic and a noetic

vindication of writing. He surges as an intentionality founded on an actual, real, exemplary Other – remembered, but also as the developmental reflexivity of the mind in the experience of reasoning and cognizing through the creation of a better Other (p. 127). In Ricoeur's terms, Boyd was the young diarist's diplomacy between '*la mémoire* as intention and memory (le souvenir) as the thing intended': 'the noesis of remembering and the noema of memories' (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 22-23) – a duality which secured, also, a mutuality between viewer and viewed. The diary became that shared space which allowed the writer *to be* through moderation of the egology of 'the solitary consciousness of self;' 'the other' was both the primordial physical 'not-me' and the 'constituted' in 'me' (2006, pp. 115, 118). One excerpt from the *Diary* speaks for itself: 'I do like & admire Gregory's prose!! — & *I enjoy reading a beautiful style so much the more, when I can read it with one who enjoys it too — when I <^can> read it with Mr. Boyd*' (19<sup>th</sup> September 1831, *UDEBB*, p. 132). Away from Boyd's Ruby Cottage at Malvern, EBB sank and failed (15<sup>th</sup> November 1831, p. 177), yet finally she redirected her attention toward her own original composition and translation (15<sup>th</sup> February 1832, p. 216). Boyd was at once an ineradicable presence and a desired absence – both would stir EBB's creative agency. She would write on Boyd because he *was* and *was not* there: he would place the poetess outside herself by offering a unique and irreducible presence which would request from her what Bergson named an 'immediate intuition' (Bergson, 1991, p. 75) - Boyd was to EBB a tangible manifestation of reality, intuitively sensed yet rationally verified. Such care would defeat causality through 'time in prayer' and 'space in sacrifice' – for an Other (Buber, 1937, pp. 9, 50).

### **An Other, Better Word**

EBB has been perceived as a 'Miltonic daughter,' 'a prosthetic, a ... satellite rather than ... [a] manager' of her own life (Rodas, 2007, p. 103, 106, 109), a passive observer in a masculine world of woe. A position visible, also, in the theme of premature or sudden death in her poetical meditations: *The Mourning Mother, The Seraphim, The Poet's Vow, Remonstrance, Isobel's Child, The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus, Consolation, Bereavement, Cowper's Grave, The Measure, Little Mattie, Sent to Mama on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1814, De Profundis, etc.*

EBB inhaled literature as an otherness which instilled in her a sense of duty and a vigilant need to interpret. Still, her sophisticated smirk over literality transpires at all times:

Hotter than hot — but went to Church in despite of the sun. Went to church? Yes! & to Chapel — heard a preacher, who reversed an ancient precept, <^ into> — *Si vis me ridere, dolendum est tibi*. So much melancholy never before created so much mirth! I am very sorry I went to hear him; <for> the frame of mind into which he threw me more than once, was unchristian & to be repented «of». (31 July 1831, *UDEBB*, pp. 72-73)

The reference to Horace's *Ars Poetica* ('Si vis...') – 'If you would have me weep, you must first feel grief yourself' (p. 72, note 1) – symptomatizes EBB's ontology through a chronically mimetic outlook on empathy founded on primary example whereby the viewer always responds, comes second, sabotaging her own initiative. But by commemorating an Other, she pens her own Self; by recollecting, she creates; by worshipping, she rebels. In the excerpt discussed, there could be found an example of what Gadamer prescribes as 'a heightened truth' of the being of the world through presentation (i.e. the immediate reality of life which contextualizes Horace as the art of received, written wisdom). In addition, the 'ontological reality of the picture' (or, the text) actualizes the 'continuity' of the presenter with herself in the historical mediation between a 'dead', literary, past and a living, familiar, present (Gadamer 2006, pp. 132, 135-136, 156).

The *Diary* testifies to a striving for being valued by an Other: father, God, or a scholarly authority that would equal EBB's own capacious mind and humanism. As she wrote she felt safe in the hands of Christ – '«this» unweary benefactor' who, she hoped, would teach 'the unthankful & unworthy' to love more through the word (19<sup>th</sup> June 1831, p. 23). She compared herself to literary heroines and other writers, ready to learn German just for the sake of accessing directly '*the Sorrows of Werter* [rather than] Klopstock's *Messiah*' (13<sup>th</sup> July 1831, p. 55). She mourned her own internal exile, quoting in the original Lamartine's *Méditations Poétiques* (23 July 1831, p. 64), praising Mary Shelley for her *Frankenstein* (9<sup>th</sup> August 1831, p. 83), wondering how anyone could ever lose one's taste for poetry, '& yet live' (10<sup>th</sup> August 1831, p. 85), alluding to herself as a 600-year-old proud reader, with a sense of taste and speed – as opposed to other women in the vicinity (11<sup>th</sup> August 1831, p. 86). She barely

disguised her impatience of meeting Boyd – in inchoate Italian: ‘Aspettare e non venire ... *tre cose a far morire*’ (2<sup>nd</sup> September 1831, p. 112). She expostulated on *The Holy Bible* and the message it conveyed in chapter 5 of *Romans* (8<sup>th</sup> September 1831, p. 121). She admitted, in an ekphrastic self-projection, to being complimented on resembling a Vandyke (28<sup>th</sup> November 1831, p. 185). Commiserating with the unfortunately married shepherdess of J. F. Marmontel’s *La Bèrgere des Alpes*, 1763 (28<sup>th</sup> November 1831, p. 186), she withdrew from the possibility of marrying: ‘I am not (I think) built for posterity’ (23<sup>rd</sup> January 1832, p. 208). The chaste literary maiden that she was, she heralded Christina Rossetti’s ‘not customarily spiritual’ (Karamitev, 2015, p. 239) yet empathetic and martyred femininity of Lizzie from *Goblin Market*, while echoing de Staël’s lonely female artist from *Corinne* (3<sup>rd</sup> March 1832, *UDEBB*, p. 220).

### **In Need of Approval**

Similarly, in EBB’s poetry, the motifs of loss, feebleness, self-split, insult from paternal underestimation, and the incurable sense of derivativeness, emit a striving for external appreciation and a perpetual need for dialogue. The poet may be caught dwelling on the death of her mother, as in *The Deserted Garden* (‘My childhood from my life is parted,’ l. 81), or she might rebuke herself for her uncouth ‘rhyming’ of classical literature, unable to resuscitate the bliss of her infancy (*Hector in the Garden*, ll. 478-47, 105-107). As early as 1814, she dismissed herself as ‘a chatting parrot’ (*Epistle to Henrietta*, l. 16). In 1827, in *The Poet’s Enchiridion*, alternatively titled *The Development of Genius*, she attained a minimalist, defective vision of her own talent: ‘my silent song’, ‘my harp... her theme is gone’, ‘my narrow song’, ‘My lips ask ‘What is life’ with faltering breath / And all things sensible do answer – *Death*’ (ll. 4, 13, 21, 65-66)! The call-and-response structure of the latter example tallies with EBB’s philosophy of self-questioning and self-denial visible in her mature verses, as in *Mother and Poet* (ll. 11-15): ‘so tired, so tired, my heart and I,’ having ‘trusted men’ and ‘dealt with books’, ‘once ... loved, used’ (*My Heart and I*), unengraved and unread (*The Pet-Name*, 1-5, 11-15), ‘paling with love’, ‘too bold to sin, too weak to die,’ a ‘native’ of Florence, intoned and entombed solely by the song of the bird of love (*Bianca among the Nightingales*, ll. 19, 64, 82, 141-143). A poetizing nightingale herself, ostensibly a ‘*Vox, et prætera nihil*’ (2<sup>nd</sup> July 1831,

UDEBB, p. 41), encaged at home, playing 'on the guitar to please the people who asked me, till my voice was worn out' (2<sup>nd</sup> September 1831, p. 114), she would be nonchalantly written off by her very idol of knowledge:

Mr. Boyd observed that "if we remained at Hope End, & if I were to die, it was clear to him that my family wd. break off all intercourse with his." If I were to die! — <Not> an improbable case; but supposed so coldly! — (4<sup>th</sup> August 1831, p. 78).

At this stage, the exploration of the dichotomy *Self-Other* in EBB's diary could go a number of other ways. For instance, psychoanalysis: self-denial against a higher authority which suggests a cathetic 'circumscription of the ego,' paralleled by an expectation of punishment (Freud, 1953, pp. 244, 246, 255). The pedestal of righteousness was presided by Christ in whom EBB took refuge while being awed by Boyd and her own father. Papa, mourning the loss of his wife, was only too eager to protect his poeticizing daughter by shutting her off, as he thought, from harmful contact with the exterior world (Dally, 1989, pp. 37-38). The familiar story of a Victorian daughter's metamorphosing into a writer of her own upon parental (dis)approval, as a most recent perspicacious biographer showcases (Sampson, 2021, pp. 8, 12). From here the road would be short to a feminist retrieval of the filial nuances of diurnal self-narrative as an endless trade between 'the completely formed [and] that which is in the process of being formed' – an oscillation between duty and choice, enclosure and escape, passivity and activity, totality and separateness, perpetuation and creation, yet toward a Catherine-Earnshaw-like admission of the absolute fidelity of 'Nelly, I am Heathcliff' (Beauvoir, 1956, pp. 41, 54, 150, 618).

In delineating the anthropological dimensions of the problem of Otherness in EBB's diary, eye-opening could prove certain early biographies, psychological, and further hermeneutic-phenomenological research. For instance, Martha Foote Crow's disquisition on EBB's tendency to avoid 'direct realism' by way of embracing a "seraphic", highly individualized approach to depicting presences by spiritualizing them through aporetic crossing-overs between life and death (Foote Crow, 1907, pp. 82, 93, 116). Research on the diurnal formation of the human imagination based on the reproduction of an 'original event' (e.g. EBB's mother's death, which could also be termed, following Ricoeur, an *axial moment*) would confirm the

ontological role of memory in autobiographical writing which, also, permits the self to be a producer of a narrative as well as 'the object of [the] intentional relations' of others (Moore and Barresi, 2013, pp. 293, 299). M. Bakhtin's monumental work on art as answerability, with the aesthetic event emerging between two non-coincidental 'emotional-volitional attitudes', could help the scholar discern the primacy of the Other in Barrett as a truth engendered in infancy through parental care, also man's inborn 'insufficiency of cognitive comprehension' in the absence of an Other who could only ever be 'experienced by me as connatural with the outside world' (Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 40-41, 86, 209, 212).

### Conclusions

Given that there has been no dearth of interest in EBB, there stands out the relative sparsity of published studies especially on the poetess's diary – not unsurprisingly against a peculiar absence of female autobiographies of celebrated 19<sup>th</sup>-century English women of letters such as the Brontës, E. Gaskell, Fr. Trollope, G. Eliot, and Chr. Rossetti (Jelinek, 2004, p. 76). If a further, Modernist, context to the problem of Self as concern for Other be permitted, one might refer to the *Diary of Virginia Woolf* (1882 – 1941) and the *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* (1888 – 1923). Each captivates the reader with an observer's sensitivity for detail, the troubled expectation of an epiphanic resolution of some tension in communication, the foreboding of some disaster ingrained in the daily registration of mortality, as the last entries, in implying departures, indicate. Departures for the Elizabethan age (while Woolf documents the emergence of *Between the Acts*) or for memories of friends (E. Bowen, E. Sitwell; Woolf, 1953, p. 365). Or departures from the possibility of a Chekhov scholar's finding the right word in Russian for reporting the acute pang of loss, dark, and ultimate uncertainty of what life signifies in the absence of a friend ('I am cold,' 'cinders,' 'black paper,' 'I would like to speak Russian with you'), against the 'gentle whispering' of the November leaves (Mansfield, 1954, p. 336).

*The Diary of E. B. B.* chronicles the poetess's growing awareness of human identity as processual relationship, insufficiency, and forthcoming completion, rather than categorical achievement. A palimpsestic record of personal experiences which allows for (re)editing and

compounding perceiving subject and perceived object, source and result, start and finish, and faith and failure, a diary is a story in progress. If story signifies exchange in time and space between Self and Other, then EBB's diary represents the writer's anxiety of being 'robbed of support' by (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 166), as well as her hope of rescue through, narrative as dialogue.

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