

## Teleoaffectivity: Love in *Casa Guidi Windows*

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Open my heart, and you will see,  
Graved inside of it, Italy.<sup>1</sup>

The above ‘lyrical outburst’ from Robert Browning’s poem ‘De Gustibus’ suggests more than an enduring interest that the English had in Italy or in its national politics. The diction and the rhyme invite spectatorship, offering viewers a glimpse into Browning’s metaphorical heart to find it inextricably linked with Italy. This trope of the heart, which serves as a symbol of his affection for the country, signifies the intense feeling and deep affection that Elizabeth Barrett Browning shared with her husband, Robert, for the people of Florence, Tuscany, where they lived after their marriage in September 1846. Indeed, Barrett Browning represents her feelings for Italy as ‘a warm affection for a beautiful and unfortunate country’, in the Preface to her first volume of Italian poems, *Casa Guidi Windows*, a bipartite work, published in 1851.<sup>2</sup> The first section, initially entitled ‘A Meditation in Tuscany’ was written in 1848, concerning the energy in Italy that year at the prospect of revolutionary political changes, but published three years later with a second part – representing Austrian suppression of the Italians and the failure of Italy’s unification – under the new title. Historically, Italy was a divided region, but in January 1848, it became the revolutionary vanguard of the uprisings in Europe, beginning with the revolt of Sicily that would eventually spread across the peninsula against various autocratic governments and growing foreign occupation. This revolutionary movement was a cause that Barrett Browning sympathised with, supported, and held dear to her ‘heart’.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Giuliana Artom Treves in *The Golden Ring: The Anglo-Florentines, 1847–1862*, trans. Sylvia Sprigge (London: Longmans, Green and Co.), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor, eds, vol. 2, *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Gen. Ed. Sandra Donaldson, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010), 481–566. All quotations from *Casa Guidi Windows* are from this edition and, hereafter, references to *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* will be abbreviated to *WEBB*, preceded by the name of the editor(s) and followed by the volume and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the Italian Risorgimento, see Robert Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Luigi Salvatorelli, *The Risorgimento: Thought and Action*, trans. Mario Domandi (London: Harper Torchbooks, 1970).

*Casa Guidi Windows*, then, is as much about affective politics as European democratic affairs. In this essay, I situate Barrett Browning's politics of the 'heart' – sentiments, affection, sympathy with the oppressed Italians, tender feelings, emotions, hopes and desires – in the context of creative 'teleoaffectivity'.<sup>4</sup> This dyadic term combining 'teleology' and 'affectivity' I borrow from the work of the social theorist Theodore R. Schatzki, who conceptualises it as an integrative social practice.<sup>5</sup> Before looking at his definition I want to set out a basic understanding of the terms of the dyad. By 'teleology', I mean two interrelated understandings: firstly, that human action can be explained in terms of purposes, that is, doing something for the sake of it or for the reason that it exists; and, secondly, that things can be explained 'in terms of final causes'.<sup>6</sup> 'Affectivity' refers to the affections or emotions as opposed to the intellect or the rational. Schatzki defines 'teleoaffectivity' as 'a field of correct or acceptable ends, behaviours or 'projects to pursue for the sake of those ends' including 'a variety of acceptable and even correct emotions, feelings and passions'.<sup>7</sup> His definition embraces the first explanation of teleology as well as terms associated with sentiments of the heart. This conjunction of doing something for its correct and hoped-for outcome with the more subjective quality of correct feelings and emotions suggest that teleoaffectivity might involve socially moral questions about rightness, appropriateness or even justice. Significantly, Schatzki locates teleoaffectivity firmly within social practice, 'practice' being 'a set of considerations that governs how people act'. Schatzki is careful to point out that action includes speech acts, doings and sayings. Thus, 'what a person does' or says 'on any occasion depends' on 'the understanding' 'of the situation', diagnosed 'as somehow unacceptable' and the desire for a 'condition that remedies the unacceptability that the action performed is designed to bring about'.<sup>8</sup> Teleoaffectivity's distinctive character, therefore, lies in action that pertains to the emotions and is socially motivated, designed for the purpose of correcting an unacceptable situation.

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<sup>4</sup> I wish to acknowledge that my understanding and my use of the 'heart' trope, 'image of the heart' and 'affect' in this effort owes an enormous debt to the work of Kirstie Blair: *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second Edition (New York: Penguin, 2005), 611–12; My goal is not to offer a strict teleological reading of *Casa Guidi Windows* in this second sense, though there will be instances when I read Barrett Browning's work retroactively.

<sup>7</sup> Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 124.

<sup>8</sup> Schatzki, *Social Practice*, 96.

Schatzki's notion of 'teleoaffectivity', I suggest, offers a productive way for reading *Casa Guidi Windows*. Thus a teleoaffective practice is crucial to our understanding of the poem's politics and poetics, especially when examined alongside her antislavery verse.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Barrett Browning's discursive engagement with Italy's political independence, her understanding of its politics and of the Italians themselves, her hoped-for outcome for their national unification, her demonstrated affection and tender feelings for the people confirm her participation in a nineteenth-century social practice of love.<sup>10</sup> My use of the word 'love' to describe Barrett Browning's affection for the Italians should not be interpreted to mean love in a personal sense caused by desire. As one contemporary historian notes, the phases of Italy's struggle for independence were 'very near to her [Barrett Browning's] heart'.<sup>11</sup> In fact, she would often wonder 'that anybody in the world [could] think or *feel* anything else but Italy'.<sup>12</sup> No surprise therefore that she was considered the de facto poet of the Risorgimento,<sup>13</sup> who possessed 'too high a conception of the poet's office and responsibility' to 'play at believing' in any position or a cause 'that she did not in her heart of hearts believe'.<sup>14</sup> These statements reverberate with the tropes of the heart in *Casa Guidi Windows*, suggesting that it is Barrett Browning's love or affection that motivates her high level of social and political engagement.

Affective discourse as a politics of feeling inevitably raises questions with respect to the sentimentality and fellow-feeling of those who intervene in the sufferings of others. Is Barrett Browning's own politics of affect in *Casa Guidi Windows* particularly subject to this appraisal because of her gender? How does she forge a political community with the Italians from her own position of privilege? Is there a distancing effect that undermines her politics of feeling? Is her affection and sympathy for the oppressed Italians analogous to a sentimental

<sup>9</sup> While it is not evident from her antislavery poems, Barrett Browning had a complicated relationship with slavery. Her family relied on and profited from slave labour from the three slave plantations that her father Edward Moulton Barrett owned in Jamaica, West Indies. See R. A. Barrett, *The Barretts of Jamaica: The Family of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Winfield, Kansas: Wedgestone Press, 2000), 89, 92–4. See also, Catherine Hall, et al. eds, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> See Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, 120.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Trollope, *What I Remember in Two Volumes* (London: Richard, Bently and Son, 1887), 2:180.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in the front matter of Alison Chapman's, *Networking the Nation: British and American Women's Poetry and Italy, 1840–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Artom Treves, *The Golden Ring*, 76; see also Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Selected Poems: Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, selected and with an introduction and prefaces by Margaret Forster (London: Chatto and Windus, 1988), 240.

<sup>14</sup> Trollope, *What I Remember in Two Volumes*, 2:179.

gaze? In the last few decades, critics such as Amit Rai in *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race and Power, 1750–1850* and, more recently, Stephen Ahern, in his Introduction to *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo Atlantic, 1770–1830*, have investigated these queries and dynamics in antislavery discourse. When ‘A Curse for a Nation’ (1855), considered one of Barrett Browning’s most controversial antislavery works, was republished in her second volume of Italian poems, *Poems Before Congress* (1860), the editor of the *Athenaeum*, Henry Chorley, condemned it and cynically concluded, ‘We may be allowed to ask, in the extenuation of our hasty and incorrect inference, – why a rhyme on Negro Slavery should appear among ‘Poems Before Congress’?<sup>15</sup>

While the Italians were not ‘colonised’ or ‘enslaved’ in the way we have come to understand those systems in transatlantic slavery, many passages in *Casa Guidi Windows* nonetheless reverberate with Barrett Browning’s earlier antislavery writings. I suggest that the politics and poetics of *Casa Guidi Windows* as well as its composition during Barrett Browning’s most active antislavery years favour reading it as an antislavery work.<sup>16</sup> Notably, its publication is flanked by her three American abolitionist poems<sup>17</sup> – ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’ (1847) and ‘Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave’ (1850) that precede it and ‘A Curse for a Nation’ which follows.<sup>18</sup> I argue that Barrett Browning figures all forms of oppression as analogous to slavery, and that she unambiguously employs the abolitionist rhetoric and imagery of oppression and resistance in *Casa Guidi Windows* and throughout many of her poems of social protest such as ‘The Cry of the Children’ (1842),

<sup>15</sup> See Donaldson, ed., *WEBB*, 4:447; *The Athenaeum*, No. 1693, 7 April 1860, 477–8, 477. Barrett Browning’s act of including this poem in the volume created a ‘scandal’ and generated enormous opprobrium when it was published in England. For discussions of this incident, see the essays by David J. DeLaura, ‘A Robert Browning Letter: The Occasion of Mrs Browning’s “A Curse for a Nation”’, *Victorian Poetry* 4:3 (1966), 210–12 and Leonid M. Arinshtein, ‘“A Curse for a Nation”: A Controversial Episode in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Political Poetry’, *The Review of English Studies* 20:77 (1969), 33–42. Notably, when the poem was published in a known antislavery periodical *The Liberty Bell* in 1855 for the 1856 issue, it received little critical attention. See Stone, ‘Cursing as One of the Fine Arts: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Political Poems’ in Donaldson, ed., *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1999), 197.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Mermin was the first critic to make a connection between *Casa Guidi Windows* and Barrett Browning’s *Liberty Bell poems*, noting that her Italian volume adds to the ‘defiant energy of the antislavery poems’, but she does not identify *Casa Guidi Windows* as an antislavery poem in itself. See *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 164.

<sup>17</sup> Mermin identifies these three antislavery writings as Barrett Browning’s ‘poems about America ... and all three are denunciations of slavery’. See *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 154.

<sup>18</sup> For ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’ and ‘Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave’, see Stone and Taylor, *WEBB*, 2:409–30 and *WEBB*, 1:147–50, respectively; for ‘A Curse for a Nation’, see Donaldson, *WEBB* 4:599–604.

‘The Cry of the Human’ (1844) and, to some extent, *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Barrett Browning often conflates the images and language of oppression, resistance and freedom in her dissenting politics, whether the work is antislavery, anti-imperial or anti-oppression, when writing about the condition of the oppressed, women, children and enslaved Africans.<sup>19</sup>

In *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning employs the language and imagery of antislavery to plead with England to help liberate Italy. She depicts England with ‘hands, stretched’ and to release | A bond-slave (Part I, 718–719). The term ‘bond-slave’ in abolition discourse describes the material condition of enslaved Blacks. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the earliest use of the term dates to the mid-sixteenth century and means ‘a person compelled to provide labour without pay; a person held in slavery’. The image of ‘hands, stretched’ recalls the Wedgwood antislavery medallion depicting a kneeling Black man in chains with his hands raised to the heavens. Such a point would not have been lost on a British or American audience. Barrett Browning draws on the same language and image in her abolitionist poem ‘A Curse for a Nation’ in which she depicts the enslaved Africans in American colonies as ‘writhing bond-slaves’ (l. 63), thus forging a thematic link with *Casa Guidi Windows*. In fact, the second part of *Casa Guidi Windows* continues this motif of enslavement, with the poet challenging the ubiquity of slavery in mock interrogation of America, ‘No mercy for the slave, America? –’ (II. 646), in an allusion to the oppression of captive Africans in the South.

*Casa Guidi Windows* may be linked with antislavery politics on another level. As Leigh Coral Harris points out, Italy experienced metaphorical as well as actual colonisation. She argues that the Austrian Empire’s imperial subjugation of Italy was analogous to colonial slavery:

*Casa Guidi Windows* unmasks the relationship between politics and aesthetics; it takes the popular clichéd British images of Italy as a feminine figure and idealized landscape and questions their truthfulness and use. The poem confronts its readers with the startling argument that worshipping Italy is a form of colonial condescension: an idealisation of Italy nullifies British recognition of its political identity. In fact, the poem suggests that the country’s actual colonization by the Austrian empire and figurative, aesthetic colonisation by the British empire effect a similar political subjugation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, a passage in *Aurora Leigh* which alludes to her social protest poem ‘The Cry of the Children’ and to her American antislavery ballad ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’: [Romney Leigh]: ‘You ... | Will write of factories and slaves, as if | Your father was a negro, and your son | A spinner in the mills’ (Book II, lines 192–6). See Donaldson, ed, *WEBB* 3:1–317.

<sup>20</sup> Leigh Coral Harris, “‘Mythos’ to ‘Logos’: Political Aesthetics and Liminal Poetics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Casa Guidi Windows*”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28:1 (2000), 110.

Matthew Reynolds makes a similar point about the attitude of English travellers who experienced the peninsula and viewed the Italians as what might be called other,<sup>21</sup> defining their own identity against the Italians whom they considered as backward, simple, children of a larger growth who did not deserve liberty.<sup>22</sup> Barrett Browning was not the only contemporary who recognised and challenged the discourse of the Italians as the other of Europe. In October 1847, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, an American journalist living in Rome, and a strong supporter of the Risorgimento, objected to what she viewed as the tendency of

a large proportion of my countrymen here [who] take the same slothful and prejudiced view as the English, and after many years' sojourn, betray entire ignorance of Italian literature and Italian life [...]. [T]hey talk about the corrupt and degenerate state of Italy as they do about that of our slaves at home. They come ready trained to that mode of reasoning which affirms that, because men are degraded by bad institutions, they are not fit for better. [...] I listen to the same argument against emancipation in Italy, that are used against emancipation of our blacks.<sup>23</sup>

The implication is that the Italian Risorgimento and the antislavery movement in America shared the same problems of representation and subjugation. Fuller's comment gains force because of the comparison between the 'free' Italians and the enslaved Africans on American plantations. Rather than engaging in othering of the Italians, I suggest that Barrett Browning challenged the representational storehouse of Italy, a point that both Harris and Reynolds make. This may lead to some 'fantasies of identification'<sup>24</sup> but as Stone has noted, 'Barrett Browning's experience as a woman who had also 'learnt silence' – at least insofar as expressing her anger was concerned – contributed to her imaginative identification with the oppressed Italians'.<sup>25</sup>

Few scholars have focused on the affective discourse in *Casa Guidi Windows*. Christopher M. Keirstead sees Barrett Browning's language in the poem 'as one of warm compassion, a "warm affection"', which she 'exploits' to disarm 'the

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse, 1830–1870: English Poetry in the Time of Nation Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>22</sup> David Brion Davis notes that the enslaved Africans in the West Indies were regarded as childlike, unreliable, backward, indolent and people who must be cared for and disciplined. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 555–7.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Fuller, *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 2 vols, (Boston: Phillips, Samson and Company, 1852), 2: 227 and 29, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39076006245497&seq=7>>. See also, Artom Treves, *The Golden Ring*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Rai, *Rule of Sympathy*, 163.

<sup>25</sup> Stone, 'Cursing as One of the Fine Arts', 193.

critic ready to charge her with abandoning the domestic sphere'.<sup>26</sup> He notes that 'the nation becomes an emotive essence conveyed via the language of feeling to which the poet is especially attuned'.<sup>27</sup> For Alison Chapman, in her comprehensive account of Barrett Browning's life in Italy, especially at Casa Guidi, *Casa Guidi Windows* as an act of writing is 'a politicized salon poem, advertising and circulating the domestic space as a scene of writing, encoding it with pro-Risorgimento politics'.<sup>28</sup> Richard Bonfiglio analyses 'two overlapping' and 'conflicting domestic tropes': 'the politics of the heart' and 'the politics of the hearth' that he situates within 'a microcosm of national and international politics'.<sup>29</sup> He contends that Barrett Browning 'introduces the rhetoric of liberal cosmopolitanism into her poem *Casa Guidi Windows* in order to imagine the Italian cause as an English domestic duty'.<sup>30</sup> The notion of 'duty' is one that is central to the practice of teleoaffectivity, that purposiveness for the teleologically signified thing to do because things matter.

In her chapter on Barrett Browning in *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, Kirstie Blair contends that the poet 'interlace[s] personal and political events' to demonstrate that she sees the heart in terms of nationalism and politics as well as

romantic love and poetics. In *Casa Guidi Windows* Barrett Browning exploits the idea that her poem is subjective and heartfelt, yet she also intends it as a powerful intervention in Italian affairs through the affect which the poem might have upon its readers' hearts. *Casa Guidi Windows* uses heart as an image for the kind of sympathy the reader and poet should have for the cause of Italian liberation, and also attempts to stir up the hearts of the Italian people in order to foster revolution.<sup>31</sup>

Blair offers us a comprehensive metaphoric understanding of 'heart' without restricting its association to the domestic sphere. Barrett Browning was very much aware, Blair tells us, of how her personal emotions and feelings would influence her political poetics and transform the reader to her position. Indeed, her commingling of sympathy, politics and poetics arises out of a deep affection

<sup>26</sup> Christopher M. Keirstead, 'A "Bad Patriot"?: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Cosmopolitanism', *Victorian Studies Journal*, 33 (2005), 76.

<sup>27</sup> Keirstead, 'A "Bad Patriot"?', 76.

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, *Networking the Nation*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Bonfiglio, 'Liberal Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of the Heart(h): Mazzini, Gladstone, and Barrett Browning's Domestication of the Italian Risorgimento', *Modern Philology*, 111:2 (2013), 300.

<sup>30</sup> Bonfiglio, 'Liberal Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of the Heart(h)', 300.

<sup>31</sup> Blair, *Culture of the Heart*, 127.

and purposiveness of duty in the face of an injustice, or to use Schatzki's words, out of the motivation to correct an unacceptable situation. Following Blair's work, I add that 'heart' in *Casa Guidi Windows* paradoxically signifies affect and intellect, as so much of the poem achieves its rhetorical impact through emotive and rational argument for the teleological.

## Teleoaffectivity in *Casa Guidi Windows*

When Barrett Browning resolved to write a poem in support of the Italian Risorgimento, it was not because it was commissioned.<sup>32</sup> Rather, she was motivated by her love of freedom and sympathy with the Italian cause as well as her own philosophy of the poet's duty. By intervening in Italian affairs, she was resolutely participating in a nineteenth-century socio-political practice, a teleoaffective form that intertwines heartfelt emotions with action designed to correct an injustice or unacceptable situation. Linking the emotions with politics in poetry was considered somewhat of an improper admixture in Victorian culture though attitudes were beginning to change by the end of the 1840s.<sup>33</sup> However, the anonymous reviewer of *Casa Guidi Windows* in *The Christian Examiner* for January 1852, criticises Barrett Browning for what they consider to be the serious error of a woman mixing poetry with politics.<sup>34</sup> But as Blair has argued, the rhetoric of the heart could very well be a way to understand the politicisation of affect.<sup>35</sup>

Barrett Browning's 'teleoaffective practice' in *Casa Guidi Windows* happens in rather complicated ways. She celebrates Italy's past, defends its right to independence, questions or challenges its commitment to achieving freedom, incites revolution and advocates for Italy's unity, synthesising these different roles of praise singer, defender, rallying war-figure and Victorian sage. Early in Part 1, Barrett Browning confirms her love for the Italians with an image of the heart: 'Shall I say | What made my heart beat with exulting love | A few weeks back' (1. 445–446)? The word 'beat' here is self-consciously chosen to connect the metrical beat of a line of poetry to the pulsating beat of the heart. Indeed, the language

<sup>32</sup> The first poem Barrett Browning wrote after the 1845 incident was composed at the request of the Boston Antislavery Society in America to aid its antislavery cause. It would be her first abolitionist poem – and her most written about – 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point, whose compositional phase dates to around 1846. See Stone and Taylor, *WEBB* 1:409.

<sup>33</sup> Blair, *Victorian Poetry and Culture of the Heart*, 109–12.

<sup>34</sup> Clara Dawson, ed, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2: 220.

<sup>35</sup> Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, 118.

throughout Part 1 is arousing, evocative and fast-moving like the ‘golden Arno’ that ‘shoots away | Straight through the heart of Florence’ (1. 52–54). Commenting on this image, Reynolds notes that the shooting arrow into the heart of Florence could function as an allusion to Cupid, suggesting ‘a polity struck by the love of freedom’ while at the same time paradoxically setting off a war.<sup>36</sup> This kind of tension is common in *Casa Guidi Windows* and points to the complexity of the poem’s teleoaffective practice – the poet’s rhetoric of the heart and political imagining of Italy’s liberation.

In the following passage, Barrett Browning appropriates the role of praise singer for the Italian people and its cause. Her sentiments and desire express the political will of Italy whose prospects of liberty she celebrates after witnessing the popular movement towards political reform and nationhood started by Pope Pius IX and Leopold II, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, in early 1847:

Amen, great Angelo! the day’s at hand.  
 .....  
 The hopeful child, with leaps to catch his growth,  
 Sings open-eyed for liberty’s sweet sake!  
 And I, a singer also, from my youth,  
 Prefer to sing with these who are awake,  
 With birds, with babes, with men who will not fear  
 The baptism of the holy morning dew,  
 (And many of such wakers are here,  
 Complete in their anointed manhood,  
 Who will greatly dare and greatlier persevere).<sup>37</sup>

This celebratory passage alludes to Michelangelo’s representation of his suppressed fellow Florentines, and himself who was forced to flee Florence into self-exile.<sup>38</sup> The first line is full of anticipation and the poet’s ‘hopeful’ and praiseful voice unites with a young boy’s, who sings ‘*O bella libertà*’ (I.3). There is a regenerative energy in the lines, and the imagery of a new beginning augurs liberation for all those who sing ‘open-eyed’ like the poet herself. This is one of the more joyful passages in *Casa Guidi Windows* in which Barrett Browning employs a preponderance of assonant syllables and arousing language for political affect.

<sup>36</sup> Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> *Casa Guidi Windows* I: 145–161.

<sup>38</sup> James M. Saslow points out that Michelangelo fled to Bologna at the fall of the Medici, never returning to live permanently in Florence though he sojourned there periodically. *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 10.

Yet, amid this celebration and praise, a note of caution creeps in – as in so many other passages in Part I. Barrett Browning warns that to achieve liberty will require ‘men who will not fear’, and sing ‘open-eyed for liberty’s sweet sake!’ The unusual syntax of line 154 (not the expected word order) creates consecutive alliterative sounds, cushioning any undercurrent of doubt about the Italians’ fortitude. Margaret Forster notes that Barrett Browning voiced ‘caution about the future of the liberal movement’.<sup>39</sup> However, the prosody of the lines suggests that she was very much attuned to the feelings of the Italians. In a later passage, she uses a swimming image, offering a similar cautionary message to the Italians, ‘Strike out, all swimmers! Cling not in the way | Of one another, so to sink: but learn | The strong man’s impulse, catch the fresh’ning spray’ (I. 399–401). This forthright warning – full of imperatives, ‘strike out’, ‘cling not’, ‘learn’, ‘catch’ – is nevertheless compassionate and motivating, suggesting that Barrett Browning discerned that the Italians’ desire for independence, since national unity might still prove illusory for Tuscany and Italy’s other divided independent states. These examples mark her tender feelings and duty of care as she seeks to correct an unacceptable situation by mobilising the Italians.

That mobilisation began with Michelangelo’s art. In several extraordinary passages in *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning represents the artist’s work as the first embers of resistance in solidarity with his fellow Florentines who are oppressed by despotic rulers. Portraying the sculptor’s series of antithetical marble statues *Night and Day* (1526–33) and *Dusk and Dawn* (1524–31) as engaging in subversive rebellion (see Figure 11.1), Barrett Browning reflects:

What word will God say? Michel’s Night and Day  
 And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn,  
 [.....]  
 Three hundred years his patient statues wait  
     In that small chapel of the dim St Lawrence.  
 Day’s eyes are breaking bold and passionate  
     Over his shoulder and will flash abhorrence  
 On darkness and with level looks meet fate,  
     When once loose from that marble film of theirs;  
 The Night has wild dreams in her sleep, the Dawn  
     Is haggard as the sleepless, Twilight wears  
 A sort of horror. (I. 73–4; 80–8).

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Forster, *Selected Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1988), 240.

This protest that the statues perform in silence marks a paradoxical speechless outcry against the deprivation of liberty in Italy. ‘Marble scorn’ suggests the loathing of the statues’ respective providential duties as long as tyranny remains in Florence, writes Julia Markus.<sup>40</sup> She notes that the phrase evinces Michelangelo’s ‘feelings at the ruin of his country’.<sup>41</sup> To show that the situation was unacceptable and needed remedy, Michelangelo created his protest-art to convey truths that were inconvenient or politically prohibited. In a poetic riposte to a fellow Florentine’s satire on his statue *Night*, the sculptor makes the statue declare her refusal to awake from slumber ‘as long as injury and shame endure’ in the land, avowing, ‘Not to see and hear is a great boon to me; | Therefore, do not wake me’.<sup>42</sup> There is a passionate kinship between Barrett Browning’s poem and Michelangelo’s art and poetry. They both believe in the ‘ability of art to save, deliver, awaken or redeem society’;<sup>43</sup> both engage in the practice of diagnosing their respective social and political condition of Florence as unacceptable; and share the same purpose of wanting to relieve an injustice. Barrett Browning knew Michelangelo’s statues well and perhaps felt an affinity with him because of her own political interest in captive bodies,<sup>44</sup> which she explored in her 1850 ekphrastic sonnet of a marble statue of a female Greek slave as well as in her abolitionist poem about a fugitive slave woman.

In assuming the role of a rallying war-figure, Barrett Browning employs passionate appeals to the emotions to make the Italians think and act. First, she admonishes them to make a clean break with the past, for ‘We do not serve the dead – the past is past!’ (I. 217), if Italy is to achieve political liberation. However, she acknowledges the difficulty of shaking off that past. Chapman notes that Barrett Browning urges ‘the heart of Italy to beat again through the ossifying myths and legends circulating and strangling Italy’.<sup>45</sup> In other words, despite the ‘dust’ and ‘dregs’ (I.221–22) of literary tradition and other oppressive forms,

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<sup>40</sup> Julia Markus, ed., *Casa Guidi Windows* (New York: The New York Browning Institute, 1977), 75.

<sup>41</sup> Markus, 75

<sup>42</sup> Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 247.

<sup>43</sup> See Michael Feola on the relation between aesthetics and politics. *The Powers of Sensibility: Aesthetic Politics Through Adorno, Foucault and Rancière* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>44</sup> In addition to Michelangelo’s allegorical nude statues named for times of day, he worked on the politically leaning sculptures of four slaves. Naked and partly trapped in the rough-hewn marble block, these unfinished statues seem doubly oppressed as their emerging forms struggle to awake (*Slave*, awaking) and rebel (*Slave*, rebelling).

<sup>45</sup> Chapman, *Networking the Nation*, 255.

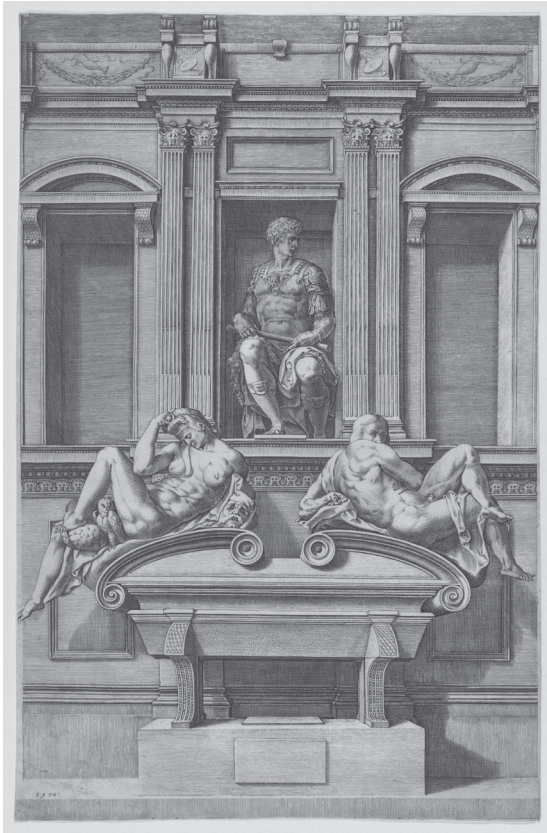


Figure 11.1. Cornelis Cort after Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Night and Day*, Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, 1526–1533 (1570). Engraving, 55.9 × 40.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1945, public domain.

Italians must persevere and shake off the lethargy of the past if they are to overcome imperial suppression. Barrett Browning exhorts them

Will, therefore, to be strong, thou Italy!  
Will to be noble! Austrian Metternich  
Can fix no yoke unless the neck agree;  
And thine is like the lions when the thick  
Dews shudder from it, and no man would be  
The stroker of his mane, and much less would prick  
His nostril with a reed. When nations roar  
Like lions, who shall tame them, and defraud  
Of the due pasture by the river-shore?

Roar, therefore! Shake your dew-laps dry abroad.  
 The amphitheatre with open door  
 Leads back upon the benchers, who applaud  
 The last spear-thruster. (I. 661–73)

In this passage, Barrett Browning appeals to the Italians' pride ('be strong'), country ('be noble') and fear ('yoke') through stirring and emotive language to persuade them to actively participate in their own liberation. However, lacking in fighting spirit, the Italians must be roused. The overt persuasive language of the first two lines marks the passage's affective quality and conveys the poet's heartfelt feelings even when her words are hard to hear. Urging them to 'Will, therefore', 'Roar, therefore', Barrett Browning logically appeals to the Italians' emotions and intellect; the use of the anaphora reinforces the sad alternative that lies before them: rebel or be yoked. To win political freedom, the passage suggests, there must be a simultaneous working of 'heart and brain' (I. 426) to resist the yoke of subjugation.

The image of being yoked is a familiar one in transatlantic slavery. Captive Africans were fastened by the neck in pairs to be sold as chattel. Barrett Browning employs this image to rouse the Italians into bold action. Esther Schor suggests that she understood well the potential of images like these 'to evoke both sympathy and fear'.<sup>46</sup> In the line 'Austrian Metternich | Can fix no yoke' to the Italians' necks, Metternich becomes a proxy slave driver though any real threat of enslavement is allayed by the assurance that he will not prevail, as their necks are like 'lion's' with 'dew-laps' and one does not yoke lions – 'therefore! Shake your dew-laps'. 'Austrian Metternich' is a reference to Clemens von Metternich (1773–1859), who was a very influential figure in European politics before and during the revolution of 1848, and the chief instigator behind the Austrian-led suppression of democratic uprisings in Italy.<sup>47</sup> Barrett Browning felt that he was an evil man and referred to him in ugly reptilian terms.<sup>48</sup> In her attack on him, she rhymes 'Metternich', 'thick' and 'prick', producing a triple rhyme that

<sup>46</sup> Esther Schor, 'The Poetics of Politics: Barrett Browning's Casa Guidi Windows', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 17:2 (1998), 313.

<sup>47</sup> Stone and Taylor, *WEBB*, 2: 552, Note 98.

<sup>48</sup> Foster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 214. In a letter to her sister Arabella on 13 September 1847, Barrett Browning accused Metternich of orchestrating a disturbance of the peaceful celebrations in Tuscany to justify Austrian military interference and described him as a 'hateful and loathsome' man who 'puts out these fangs, ... trembling in his hole, poor reptile, for his power in Italy'. See Scott Lewis, ed, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her Sister Arabella*, 2 vols (Waco, Texas: Wedgestone Press, 2002), 1:132.

evokes distaste or perhaps humour, though the former is more likely. Naming him directly as an antagonist underscores her moral outrage and politics of feeling. The Shelleyan image of the lion as a symbol of resistance is a familiar one to Barrett Browning who knew Shelley's work well, and quoted his opening line, 'I am listening here in Rome' from 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819) in three stanzas of her 1854 poem 'A Song for the Ragged Schools of London'.<sup>49</sup> Shelley's lions are exhorted to shake their chains, but Barrett Browning's are unfettered, making her political statement a bolder one. In assuming the roles as rallying war-figure, defender and agitator, Barrett Browning is arousing the passions and emotions – the rhetoric of the heart – of the Italians and seeking to influence the audience, as she exercises the moral and ethical responsibility a poet has to correct an injustice.

As happens often in Part 1 of *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning intertwines these roles with the prophetic voice of the Victorian sage. The notion of her appropriating the role of a sage may seem to run counter to the genre of this historically male preserve. However, George P. Landow, Linda Lewis and Thais E. Morgan among others have shown us that prophetic writing was not the sole preserve of male poets writing in prose. Morgan notes that 'sage discourse can be of any genre' and that women produced prophetic writing.<sup>50</sup> Barrett Browning could be said to adopt the prophetic pattern in *Casa Guidi Windows*, though only in a modified form, by giving public voice to a contemporary issue of interest to all in society.<sup>51</sup> As she stated in 1845, in relation to writing a poem on the Corn Laws, she could not 'refuse to give or rather to refuse to attempt to give, a voice to a great public suffering, when I am asked to do it ... and when I recognize the existence of the suffering', announcing her intention to participate in the nineteenth-century social practice of seeking to correct an unacceptable situation or injustice.

In a key passage that forms the climatic end of Part 1 of *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning writes prophetically:

When faithful spirits pray against a wrong)  
To this great cause of southern men, who strive  
In God's name for man's rights, and shall not fail!

<sup>49</sup> Donaldson, et al. *WEBB*, 5: 35, Note 1.

<sup>50</sup> Thais E. Morgan, ed., *Victorian Sage Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>51</sup> See George P. Landow's essay 'Aggressive (Re)interpretations of the Female Sage: Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra*', in Morgan, *Victorian Sage Discourse*, 33. See also Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 188.

Behold, they shall not fail. The shouts ascend  
 Above the shrieks in Naples, and prevail.  
 Rows of shot corpses, waiting for the end  
 Of burial, seems to smile up straight and pale  
 Into the azure air and apprehend  
 That final gun-flash from Palermo's coast  
 Which lightens their apocalypse of death.  
 So let them die! The world shows nothing lost;  
 Therefore, not blood. Above or underneath,  
 What matter, brothers, if you keep your post  
 On duty's side? [...]

.....  
 Heroic daring is the true success,  
 The eucharistic bread requires no leaven;  
 And though your ends were hopeless, we should bless  
 Your cause as holy. Strive – and, having striven,  
 Take, for God's recompense, that righteousness! (I. 1200–10; 1215–19)

Full of Christian fervour, the passage suggests reliance on God, hope in the afterlife and spiritual bliss; it denounces 'a wrong' perpetrated against Italy,<sup>52</sup> and it incites revolution and war, and calls for deadly sacrifice. The rhetoric of these lines, and in *Casa Guidi Windows* on a whole, synthesises Barrett Browning's various philosophical positions on the place of affect in politics and poetry, as well as her moral and religious views in a modernising world. Angela Leighton views the poem as 'a summing up of [Barrett Browning's] lifelong preoccupations' and praises it for its 'rough energy and forthrightness'.<sup>53</sup> Reynolds's analysis of the poem finds it cavalier in its 'choice of metaphor', 'strident and headlong', and 'often strained'.<sup>54</sup>

This conclusion is arguably one of the most uneasy passages in Part 1, with competing auditory and visual images. The 'shouts' which 'ascend' to the heaven could be either in prayer or praise to God, but they nonetheless are loud enough to drown out the 'shrieks' of pain from the wounded; paradoxically 'Rows of shot corpses' seem 'to smile'. Even more troubling in the passage is the ambiguity of the word 'lightens' which serves to illuminate the scene of the soldiers' bodies scattered on the ground but also possibly to relieve or lessen the number of the dead. In other words, fighting back by killing your opponents would likely reduce your

<sup>52</sup> The word 'wrong' is Barrett Browning's byword for injustice, slavery and oppression in all its forms, creating a poetic echo chamber within and across her political and antislavery poems. The word also invariably rhymes with 'strong'.

<sup>53</sup> Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (London: University of West Virginia Press, 1992), 110.

<sup>54</sup> Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse*, 93.

own casualties. Reynolds finds these images disturbing, singling out the ‘callous’ sentiment in the line, ‘So let them die!’. This outlandish declaration is perhaps meant to remind us that death is nothing to fear if one believes in immortality, as Reynolds suggests, offering this as a defence for the apparent opposites in the passage. He argues that a contemporary reader, if he held a firm belief in the hope of the resurrection, might not have found her language particularly bizarre.<sup>55</sup>

I now want to render another way of reading of the passage. Amidst its rhetoric of violence and death, there is a more serene image of the Second Coming, when the dead in Christ shall awake, putting an end to all suffering. This is the hope that the lines express – hope for an end to dying for those ‘waiting for the end | Of burial’. This syntax does not suggest that the bodies are waiting to be buried; rather, they are waiting for that time when there will be no more deaths or burials. In anticipation of that day, the dead (‘shot corpses’), happy with this knowledge, ‘seem to smile straight up and pale | Into the azure air’ where Christ will descend from the clear blue sky, and God will reward them with his ‘recompense’. Thus, what seems like a disregard for the soldiers’ lives is Barrett Browning’s way of drawing together the struggle for liberty and spirituality. This reading may not fully account for the real material condition of the Italian fighters, but I do not think Barrett Browning is advocating literal violence, for as she says, ‘the Heavens forbid | That we should call on passion to confront | The brutal with the brutal’. The image of violent revolution (guns and blood and death) serves only to arouse passion, a show of ‘lion’s-vengeance for the wrong men did | And do now’. In a somewhat peculiar but nonetheless logical argument, she assures the Italians and the audience: ‘We only call, because’ ‘the sight’ ‘of lion-strength hurts nothing; and to show | A lion-heart’ ‘helps something’ ‘and will instruct a foe’ ‘to stand aloof’ (1. 676–83). Barrett Browning seems to be suggesting, as Blair has pointed out, that the rhetoric of the heart with its attendant emotions and feelings cannot be separated from politics and the role of poetry or religion.<sup>56</sup>

I have attempted to provide an approach to reading *Casa Guidi Windows* which goes some way, I hope, to explaining how to situate and understand Barrett Browning’s love for the Italians – the tropes of the heart and her intervention in the nineteenth-century political affairs in Italy which are part and parcel of social practices. The concept of ‘teleoaffectivity’ seems a fitting approach for such a reading because it involves motive, intention, design, duty and responsibility alongside correct feelings, affection, passions and emotions. Teleoaffectivity helps us understand why the political poetics of *Casa Guidi Windows* is so often framed

<sup>55</sup> Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse*, 93.

<sup>56</sup> Blair, *Victorian Poetry and Culture of the Heart*, 118.

in terms of the heart. I have argued that love motivates Barrett Browning to support Italian unification and to appropriate the various roles that account for the latent analogy she makes between repression in Italy and antislavery. Although transatlantic slavery is not critical to the essay's argument, it nevertheless interlaces with teleoaffectivity and highlights the difficulty of writing about Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows* without considering her abolitionist poetics. My essay demonstrates that matters of the heart and matters of Italy are part of a larger continuum in Barrett Browning's political and poetic thought.

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