Victorian Poetry, Europe, and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism

Keirstead, Christopher M.

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If one were to attempt to compose an Atlas of Victorian Poetry—something to chart its destinations locally, nationally, and abroad—no poet would likely pose a greater logistical challenge than Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It was a problem her contemporaries struggled with as well, one compounded by the complex political attachments she felt to the locations of her poetry. After the great success of *Aurora Leigh* (1856), which crossed multiple national and generic borders, *Poems before Congress* (1860) was widely condemned in the British press as the work of a “denationalized fanatic” who could not see past her devotion to France and Italy. The release of Barrett Browning’s posthumous *Last Poems* in February 1862, however, provided her supporters with an opportunity to reassess her legacy. To Andrew Wilson writing in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, Barrett Browning was simply the latest embodiment of a long-standing tradition of English poets who had traveled to the Continent and featured Italian settings and sources in their poetry, a tradition that went as far back as Chaucer. Nor did he ignore the significance of international politics in her work. In fact, what is most intriguing about his commentary is his rather fanciful account of how Barrett Browning’s ideological commitments might live on and continue to inspire a new generation of poets:
Mrs. Browning lived to see Italia all but *unita* and regenerate. We are so close to that event, that we can scarcely as yet appreciate its magnitude, or fully enjoy its poetical aspects. Perhaps it may be that Italy independent, prosperous, and happy, will lose somewhat of its poetic charm; but the realization of its hopes, and its fulfilment [*sic*] of the aspiration of so many great minds should only encourage the poet to wander still farther east, and find other lands, whose ideas are still unfulfilled, that will afford him an external life typifying that of his own soul. He may penetrate to the sublime spectacles of the East, and find repose in the conflict of man with the wild-beast world—in the great tragedies which, even in this age, there assert the existence of unmeasured powers—and in the beneficent sway of social organization over teeming myriads of people.  

While Wilson’s account of Barrett Browning’s interest in nation-building is familiar enough—indeed, it is the focus of much recent discussion of her work—his mixture of safari and colonial administration might strike us as an odd destination to arrive at after reviewing her poetic career. Except for a fleeting wish to visit Egypt and Palestine mentioned occasionally in her letters, the poet expressed little desire to venture outside of Europe. And regardless of her interest in or ability to travel great distances, she was clearly troubled with contemporary trends in British geopolitics, supporting neither the Liberal faith in free markets nor the country’s growing acceptance of imperial expansion. “[T]he selfishness & most ignoble narrowness in England sickens me,” she wrote to her sister Arabella in 1859, succinctly and forcefully stating an opinion that remained consistent throughout most of her life: “we have always been selfish & cruel in our foreign policy,—always.”

Even today, with the benefit of a century and a half of historical hindsight, defining Barrett Browning’s engagement with the wider world would be difficult, and I begin with this predicament to illustrate the larger issues that still face us as critical geographers charting the multiple courses of Victorian poetry. Wilson’s itinerary is not without a certain logic, in fact, and anticipates the turn that epic would begin to take in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, as Herbert F. Tucker recounts in what is probably the closest work we have as yet to an Atlas of Victorian Poetry, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse 1790–1910* (2008). As epic penetrated more deeply into Wilson’s ambiguous “East” in the 1860s, it took with it a myth of progress that, Tucker writes, “partially anticipated the ideal condition of modern humanity: categorically Western, presumptively male, emphatically Anglo-Saxon.” Although bounded by these imperial and Orientalist frames of reference, such works could nonetheless form the basis of an incipient cosmopolitan-
ism, one genuinely curious about and respectful toward unfamiliar cultures. Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia* (1879) was one such work intended to bring East and West into closer dialogue, even if Arnold sends his Buddha on a “westward migration to a safe home among English readers capable of recognizing their own cherished truths in a distant, imported original.” This kind of “postnationalist outsourcing,” as Tucker reveals, was the culmination of a larger trend that followed the decline of the more patriotic epic efforts of the Napoleonic period. By the 1840s, “emigrant epics” as diverse as Browning’s *Sordello* (1840) and Macaulay’s *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) “reflected the geographic expansion of empire and subjoined to it a bid for the *translatio imperii* from Roman, Greek, and more racially Aryan origins.” Epic was a genre that came to the Victorians pre-equipped to travel, in a sense, and it can surprise us with the range of its historical and geographic destinations and the complexity of its ideological commitments.

I would argue still, however, that our Atlas of Victorian Poetry remains incomplete and has not yet adequately mapped the complex geography of Barrett Browning or many of her contemporaries. As my title suggests, this book proposes to strike toward a different heading—not the empire, nor any individual country, but something more abstract, with boundaries that continue to shift and invite controversy. This location is Europe or, more precisely, the ever-impending Europe of the future. It is the Europe that Matthew Arnold describes in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864), where he insists that his contemporaries envision “Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result.” For Arnold, Europe embodied a cosmopolitan idea of culture with which England must more closely align itself if its global influence was to be at all redeemable or progressive. He would make similar pleas throughout much of his prose and poetry while attempting to sort through the multifaceted political and cultural affiliations that complicate any notion of cosmopolitanism—just as here Arnold interrupts himself, in a sense, and begins qualifying the “purposes” of this new Europe before he actually finishes his thought.

The key purpose missing from Arnold’s European confederation, of course, is a *political* one. We can attribute this absence to Arnold’s usual coolness toward more radical programs of social change, but his diminished expectations exemplify as well the kind of critical cosmopolitanism—the recognition of the *challenge* of cosmopolitanism—that distinguishes the body of poetry I will examine in this book. This is not to say that these poets saw no role for politics in cosmopolitan thinking: as Barrett Browning’s work alone testifies, the rich debate that can erupt between geopolitical and cul-
tural forms of cosmopolitanism gives these poems a vital energy and added relevance to similar debates today. As Arnold reveals, Europe could not be approached with the same sense of cultural proprietorship that characterized more imperial encounters—that right to bestow Wilson’s “beneficent sway of social organization” and versify its “unfulfilled” ideas—the same archival, scholastic impulse that stocked the exhibits of Victorian museums. If the nations of Europe could not surpass England in the global marketplace or threaten it militarily, they were nonetheless still empowered, the joint custodians of the European ideal Arnold gives voice to. These nations included pre-unita Italy, despite the condescension sometimes evident in remarks like Wilson’s. And Barrett Browning, we should remember, always stressed that England’s cultural indebtedness to Italy was the greater one by comparison.

The Victorian idea of Europe was still Eurocentric in that it did not accord the same political rights to Britain’s colonial possessions and thus did not directly challenge imperialist ideology. At the same time, as citizens of the world’s only true superpower in the nineteenth century, many Victorians felt history had charged them with the task to be the stewards of a better global future, one free of the “selfishness & most ignoble narrowness” that had rankled Barrett Browning. Whatever “progress” was, it was not something that was uniquely British or Anglo-Saxon, even if another vocal contingent at the time insisted otherwise. This sense of responsibility in turn fueled a strong intellectual and emotional desire among Barrett Browning, Arnold, and many other artists and intellectuals to embrace the challenge of cosmopolitanism. At its core, this challenge consisted of the need to negotiate national identities and aesthetic traditions within a larger European cultural matrix. But there was another dimension to this challenge, one more unique to Victorian poetry and the historical moment it inhabits: an impulse of self-criticism that guarded against the intoxicating rhetoric of cosmopolitanism itself—its confident faith in its own inevitability. A strong awareness of the difficulties of maintaining genuine, transformative contact between cultures permeates the work of the Victorian poets under consideration here. Thus, at the same time Britain’s empire expanded globally, the encounter with Europe in verse fostered a sustained scrutiny of British national identity that simultaneously guarded against overinvestment in notions of progress—and overindulgence in poetry’s capacity to effect political and cultural change.

In this way, Victorian poetry anticipates how theorists of cosmopolitanism today, including Bruce Robbins and Kwame Anthony Appiah, have sought to temper the concept’s former adherence to universalistic modes of thinking and give it new purchase as a guide for individual and national conduct. In his introduction to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the*
Nation (1998), Robbins summarizes the kind of critically oriented cosmopolitanism he sees emerging from the volume as a whole: "the authors of these essays conclude that cosmopolitanism is located and embodied, and they go on to measure such critical, normative power as may remain to it. Exploring a range of diverse cosmopolitanisms, they participate in and comment on the term's scaling down, its pluralizing and particularizing." For Arnold too, as we will see, cosmopolitanism was a flexible but durable ideal that must dwell in verse and prose, in the spirit and the intellect. Appiah, in his contribution to Cosmopolitics, speaks of the need to cultivate a "rooted cosmopolitanism" that recognizes the "responsibility to nurture the culture and politics" of one's home while also recognizing that "each local form of human life is the result of long-term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization." To varying extents, the poets I examine here were all self-consciously, even patriotically English and were always well attuned to that intensely Victorian obsession, the Condition of England. At the same time, poets such as Barrett Browning understood the important, even transformative role that poetry could play in reassessing the claims made upon us by local and international attachments, whether in the realms of art, politics, or simple everyday living. Hers was part of an effort that encompassed the whole of the Victorian period and attracted a diverse range of poets. How these poets adapted cosmopolitan thinking to specific European contexts—and how it worked in tandem with their other aesthetic aims—is my overall focus in this book.

In another sense, my aim is to bring poetry into a conversation that has already been underway in Victorian studies more generally, one that has sought to test the applicability of cosmopolitan interpretive frameworks to the period. As Lauren M. E. Goodlad asks in a recent contribution to PMLA, turning the question in the other direction, "Can criticism of nineteenth-century literature illuminate our globalizing world in the first decade of the twenty-first century?" This piece follows a recent special edition of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net co-edited by Goodlad and Julia M. Wright which speaks of a turn "away from insular nationalist frameworks and toward the embrace of terms such as internationalism, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and geopolitics." Amanda Anderson’s The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment (2001) played an important role in that turn and perhaps remains the best expression of the rich potential yield of cosmopolitan and cross-channel perspectives when brought to bear on Victorian poetry and, more broadly, “any full consideration of Victorian understandings of race, nation, and empire.” She adds, “[w]hile cosmopolitanism in certain key instances can be shown to support nationalism and imperialism, and while its own elitist and narrowly European forms
must be acknowledged, it still often gives voice, within the Victorian context, to a reflective interrogation of cultural norms."\textsuperscript{13} As Anderson advises, the goal of this redirected criticism should be not to dismiss the contradictions within Victorian cosmopolitanism but, quite the contrary, to draw attention to the conflicts of interest that arise when authors attempt to look beyond but also become entangled in other more limiting domestic or imperial commitments.\textsuperscript{14} My aim is not simply to offer a happy, revisionist alternative to postcolonial critiques of Victorian literature pioneered, most notably, in the work of the late Edward Said. Indeed, much of my own theoretical and critical vocabulary borrows from authors such as Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Mary Louise Pratt for the light they shed on notions of travel, border-crossing, and transnational identity. At the very least, as Pratt reminds us, it is important to remember that “Europe was constructed from the outside in as much as from the inside out.”\textsuperscript{15}

The future of Britain, and of British poetry, was nonetheless, for many, largely to be found in Europe—in the notion of a progressive, cosmopolitan cultural and (more elusively) political domain. Returning specifically to Arnold, my study asks what kind of confederation he was seeking and what role poetry—Arnold’s primary vehicle for “culture”—must play in it.\textsuperscript{16} To pose a question suggested by the title of Benedict Anderson’s influential study of nationalism, just what kind of “imagined community” did Europe form for Victorian poets and how did their work attempt to manifest that community? It was a multidimensional contact to be sure, encompassing diverse encounters with European places, peoples, politics, and culture. The poets who make up this study—Arthur Hugh Clough, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Morris, and Thomas Hardy—have been selected precisely because they engage the breadth of collective European futures—and pasts—and participate in complex acts of translation, border-crossing, and hybridization that transact with theorization of these concepts today. Each poet also examines the uncertain relationship that poetry and literariness share with other manifestations of cross-cultural contact, including trade, whether in goods or ideas; personal encounters through travel and diplomacy; and even war, both as an ironic coming-together between nations and as a possible prelude to a more evolved, united Europe. Closer investigation of their works will enrich our ongoing debates about cosmopolitanism and cross-channel, Anglo-European identity.

Despite this promise, and despite the progress Tucker makes specifically with epic, the study of Victorian poetry in the early twenty-first century remains a mostly nation-centered affair. Current handbooks and critical guides on Victorian literature, for instance, include chapters on poetry and
patriotism, poetry and empire, but not poetry and Europe or poetry and cosmopolitanism. This neglect is not without reason, of course. The case for Victorian poetry as a cosmopolitan or widely European genre would seem to be held back by its own constitutive terms “Victorian” and “poetry.” To begin first with the problem of genre, it is notable, for instance, that none of the essays included in “Victorian Internationalisms” and, similarly, a special issue on “Global Formations Past and Present” for Nineteenth-Century Contexts features Victorian poetry or poets in its analysis. Comparably, the one essay on the Victorian period included in the critical anthology The Idea of Europe in Literature (1999) concerns itself with the novel, specifically Charlotte Brontë’s Villette (1853). Anderson’s The Powers of Distance likewise focuses almost exclusively on nonfiction prose and the novel, including Villette. These biases, again, are not without reason: with its Belgian setting, culturally displaced heroine, and broadly European cast, the cosmopolitan reach of Brontë’s novel should be immediately obvious. Anderson also devotes a chapter to George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda (1876), and once more it would be difficult to name another Victorian intellectual, with the possible exception of Arnold, who was more committed to a full reckoning of trends in continental thought and politics than Eliot (and Arnold never attempted anything as rigorous as translating Strauss’s Das Leben Jesu). The marginalization of poetry in these discussions may have something to do with the limitations of poetic form and language vis-à-vis the novel. Poetry simply demands more awareness of diction and rhythm—so much so, perhaps, that “no art is more stubbornly national than poetry,” as T. S. Eliot once observed. That most ubiquitous of novel champions, Mikhail Bakhtin, finds the epic the epitome of a hegemonic “monoglossia” and poetry in general to be shackled by the demands language places on the form: “Even when speaking of alien things, the poet speaks in his own language. To shed light on an alien world, he never resorts to an alien language, even though it might in fact be more adequate to that world.” It would follow that the Victorian novel, less dependent on linguistic subtleties, more multi-vocal, was better suited to imagining cosmopolitan encounters. This observation is true in some contexts: Barrett Browning’s decision to write a novel-poem, Aurora Leigh, as I will argue, did have a significant impact on how the work dramatizes Anglo-European identity. And however overdetermined Bakhtin’s definition of genre may be—Tucker, for instance, demolishes it as effectively as anyone—his arguments can still resonate on an instinctive, practical level. One senses that teachers of world literature today, dealing mostly with monolingual students, tend to opt for novels and short stories in part because more is lost when poetry is translated from one language to another.
What, then, is the case for poetry? Beyond co-opting from the novel, in what ways could it facilitate the kind of complex border-crossing I am attributing to it? It should first be stressed how many Victorian poets—particularly Swinburne and the Brownings—did in fact translate elements of foreign language and prosody into their work: diction, structure, and choice of verse form in many cases reflect these poets’ deep familiarity with non-English poetic traditions both ancient and modern (and, one might add, their readers’ familiarity—something that opens poetic cosmopolitanism to charges of elitism, an issue I deal with more fully in my chapter on Browning). More broadly, poets sought to revivify notions of travel, mobility, and transcendence that had always adhered to classical epic poetry and its descendants while readapting this cultural capital to other subgenres including lyric, epistolary verse, and the dramatic monologue. Similarly, the idea of poetry as an archetypal, universal language, articulated strongly earlier in the century by Shelley and Coleridge, continued to find new advocates. Thomas Carlyle’s Hero as Poet, for instance, is also, ideally, a “World-Poet.” Drawing an analogy between poetry and Christian ecumenicism that reappears in diverse guises all the way up to Hardy, Carlyle further reflects, “May we not call Shakespeare the still more melodious Priest of a true Catholicism, the ‘Universal Church’ of the Future and of all times?” Arnold would attempt to express something of this transcendent capacity in his Preface to the First Edition of Poems (1853), where he challenges “the opinion which many critics of the present day appear to entertain against subjects chosen from distant times and countries” (1:3). Such cosmopolitanism of range is complimented by the poet’s prerogative, when armed with the right subject, “to appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time” (1:4). Poetry thus charged itself with the mission to cross borders and bring different nations and traditions into dialogue. More practically, continental travel offered a way of ensuring the viability of poetry in the literary marketplace by continuing a successful subgenre of poetic travelogue popularized mainly by Byron earlier in the century. Rather than simply adapting the verse travelogue to new settings and historical developments, however, Victorian poets queried their own authority to travel in an age that increasingly questioned the relevance of the form to the great political issues of the day. At the same time, the Victorian cosmopolitan poet would have to resist the temptation to find refuge in the more patriotic and imperial tradition of the kind Wilson had mapped out for Barrett Browning’s successors. In this respect, poetry may have had to work harder than the novel to be cosmopolitan—to do more to escape from narrow nationalistic and self-aggrandizing postures. But
if poetry’s investment in cosmopolitanism came with greater risk, it was one that could pay higher dividends: the kinds of border-crossing fashioned in these poems resonate with a unique complexity and self-scrutiny.

This complexity points to why I have chosen to stay within the historical bounds of “Victorian” poetry rather than broaden my study to encompass the whole of the nineteenth century and begin, for instance, with Byron or Felicia Hemans. The limitations of “Victorian” poetry still deserve close consideration, however. In a recent *Victorian Poetry* forum devoted to the question of the genre’s future, Erik Gray notes that Romanticism, even if its meaning remains the subject of intense debate among scholars, has the advantage of signifying “a European-wide movement in thought and art.” *Victorian* poetry, in contrast, “limits the field it names chronologically, generically, and even nationally.” 26 In terms of literary history, we would appear to have an imperial epoch book-ended by two more expansive, international movements: the Romantic period looking outward, the Victorian inward, followed again by a more global modernism. Joseph Bristow reveals how as early as the 1890s, critics had begun to set this pattern, weaving an official imperial history of Victorian poetics that boasted of

a standard of assured maturation, in which the 1830s mark the infancy of modern democracy, agnosticism, and evolutionary theory; meanwhile, the 1890s signal the empire’s grown up destiny. . . . [T]he poetic development of the period can be witnessed best through the literary canonization of an exclusive band of poets whose careers advanced in accordance with this escalating chronology. 27

Barrett Browning, Bristow notes, has been especially ill-served by this national-imperial account of the genre, which leaves no room, for instance, for the study of her ballads. As he bluntly puts it, “as far as I can see, the epithet ‘victorian’ has no relevance whatsoever to Barrett Browning’s critically recovered oeuvre. She could not embody its epoch” (104), while, one might add, a figure such as Tennyson could.

This critical legacy calls upon us, at the very least, to revise and expand our own sense of what “Victorian” poetry can encompass. I am contending here that “Victorian” poetry remains useful in marking a particular kind of poetic engagement with Europe among English poets whose work was published during or right after the reign of Victoria. At the same time, my aim is not to set off the Victorian period as uniquely cosmopolitan: not the least valuable result of a study of Victorian poetry and Europe would be to restore a sense of continuity between the Romantic period, the Victorian era, and
the twentieth century. The encounter with Europe in Victorian poetry nonetheless reflects specific aesthetic, cultural, and historical factors unique to this time frame, from roughly mid-century to the dawn of the twentieth century. As I hope to demonstrate in the discussion of Matthew Arnold that follows, concepts of a united, cosmopolitan Europe and a Europeanized English verse gained particular momentum in the wake of the revolutions of 1848, posing new challenges and opportunities for poets such as Barrett Browning and Clough. Later in the century, as European geopolitics continued to fluctuate, and as new thinking about evolution, race, and ethnicity gained stronger traction in the public sphere, Victorian poetry again met this challenge with complex interventions of its own into the major cultural and political debates of the time.

Arnold’s career forms a microcosm of the broader movement I study, and a fuller discussion of his work and its influences will help to illuminate some of the motives that sent these poets to the Continent. Exploring Arnold’s early exposure to key German philosophers and writers who sought to articulate a cosmopolitan idea of Europe will also enable me to establish a set of theoretical benchmarks against which to assess various Victorian and British modes of internationalism. Some of Arnold’s best known poems, including “Dover Beach” and “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,” in which he forges his own poetic engagement with the Continent, provide added insight into the different directions assumed by other contemporary poets in Europe. And even as Arnold turned away from poetry later in his career, his investment in Anglo-European cultural ideals remained strong. Essays and longer studies including “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” “Heinrich Heine,” and Culture and Anarchy in turn aid our understanding of cross-cultural poetics in Browning and Swinburne especially. Similarly, Arnold’s attempt to stage the marriage of race and cosmopolitanism in On the Study of Celtic Literature (1866) would find an unlikely disciple in William Morris. Arnold also mirrors each of these poets in his struggle to integrate essentially cultural forms of cosmopolitanism with political and economic ones. If he tends to reject the more radically progressive ideas of Europe, most of the different aesthetic and ideological directions Europe could take seem to register with Arnold in some way—as he either embraces or discredits them. The limits of Arnold’s Europeanism, then, are just as telling as its horizons, making him a fitting springboard into a broader consideration of the encounter with Europe in Victorian poetry.28

In Arnold we see the convergence of three interrelated ideals—Europe,
cosmopolitanism, and poetry—that evolve over the course of his career with the political and cultural upheavals of the time and the influences of a diverse range of European authors. Three German thinkers in particular would have a strong impact on him, just as they would on numerous subsequent commentators in his time and our own: Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Pinpointing which specific texts or passages would reemerge later in Arnold is not my goal so much as to elucidate some of the primary ideas of Europe and cosmopolitanism at work in the nineteenth century. Following this analysis, I take up how these early influences shaped Arnold’s reactions to the events of 1848.

It was Arnold’s father, Thomas Arnold, who first built up in his son a strong belief in the benefits to be had from travel, multilingualism, and familiarity with a wide range of European authors—a legacy, of course, that he also bestowed on Clough, Arnold’s classmate at Rugby. Rugby was unique at the time in insisting on intensive training in French as a full part of the curriculum, later offering German as well. It should thus come as no surprise that Matthew would gravitate so easily toward the works of French Romantic authors such as George Sand, and, though her, Etienne Pivert de Senancour, whose Obermann (1804) engraved itself thoroughly upon his consciousness. As Arnold said in “Stanzas in Memory of the Author of ‘Obermann,’” though a “sadder sage” than Wordsworth or Goethe, Senancour’s “spell” was undeniable: “The hopeless tangle of our age, / Thou too hast scanned it well!” (81–84).

Arnold began the poem while visiting Thun in the Swiss Alps in September 1849, a trip undertaken in part as an act of homage to Senancour. In a prefatory note to the same poem, Arnold again touched on the kind of troubled yet hopeful sense of “modernity” that he found in Senancour and was always inseparable from his own encounter with Europe: “The stir of all the main forces, by which modern life is and has been impelled, lives in the letters of Obermann; the dissolving agencies of the eighteenth century, the fiery storm of the French Revolution, the first faint promise and dawn of that new world which our own time is but now more fully bringing to light—all these are to be felt, almost to be touched, there” (135–36).

The philosophical prototypes for Arnold’s idea of Europe would be found more among the German authors on his bookshelf, although the concept of an idealized “respublica litteraria” of Europe goes back at least as far as Erasmian humanism and was also a defining characteristic of Enlightenment ideals expressed in works by Montesquieu and Voltaire. Writing from a more political perspective, English authors as well had voiced calls for a federal republic of Europe, including William Penn in the Present and Future Peace of
Europe (1693) and Jeremy Bentham in his *Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace* (1786–89). Kant's “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent” (1784) and “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (1795), however, both of which Arnold may have been familiar with, present the most comprehensive and ambitious conceptual blueprints for a peaceful, cosmopolitan existence for Europe and the world as a whole. Kant looked toward an unprecedented “great political body of the future,” the crowning evolutionary achievement of world history:

Although this political body exists for the present only in the roughest of outlines, it nonetheless seems as if a feeling is beginning to stir in all its members, each of which has an interest in maintaining the whole. And this encourages the hope that, after many revolutions, with all their transforming effects, the highest purpose of nature, a universal cosmopolitan existence, will at last be realised as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop.

This idea that the future meant cosmopolitanism—that the movements of world history were assuredly drawing all nations together—would become a powerful one in the nineteenth century. It was a hope shared not just by Arnold but contemporaries as diverse as Victor Hugo, Prince Albert, and Thomas Hardy, whose Immanent Will, while derived mainly from Schopenhauer, morphs into something very close to Kant's vision by the end of *The Dynasts*. Likewise, many of the challenges posed by Kant's ideas—including the uncertain promise of world trade in achieving a balance of power between nations and the easy slide from universalism to Eurocentrism—find their way into the works examined here and continue to challenge attempts to theorize cosmopolitanism today.

Herder's place in this account of Arnold's cosmopolitanism might seem more uncertain, since he is typically identified with a virulently nationalist, inward-looking Volksgeist—a mystical blending of landscape, language, and ethnicity culminating in distinct and pure national units. As James Tully notes, however, Herder's line of reasoning in his *Ideas for the Philosophy of a History of Mankind* (1784–89), even more so than Kant's writing on cosmopolitanism, leads to “the presumption that all cultures are of intrinsic worth and that they have their own histories.” Since no particular culture was necessarily superior to or more advanced than another, Herder's concept of nationhood did not by definition rule out a kind of cooperative internationalism. Overall, Herder presented Arnold with an idea of “culture” that was rich, complex, and dynamic, convincing him of the importance of cross-
cultural analysis and deep exposure to the languages and literatures of other countries. Hence Arnold’s later insistence in “The Function of Criticism” that “every critic should try and possess one great literature, at least, besides his own; and the more unlike his own, the better” (3:284). It was important for the intellectual and artistic elite of each nation, as Goethe would advise as well, to be fully engaged with the cultural output of other nations. The problem with Herder, as we will see, and the kind of “national internationalism” that energized disciples such as Giuseppe Mazzini, was the power it continued to invest in essentialist and easily racialized notions of national identity. In turn, the sense that these intrinsic national identities could not coalesce with other national traditions without becoming “diluted” in the process created suspicion toward more translated, hybridized spaces of culture. As the century progressed, these impressions hardened into an increasingly powerful and dangerous article of faith for some. Arnold found himself arguing against these voices even if, somewhat contradictorily, *Culture and Anarchy* and *On the Study of Celtic Literature* helped to legitimize the belief that race gave individual cultures and literary traditions their essential characteristics and was thus an indispensable interpretive tool for literary criticism.

Goethe, finally, provided Arnold with a model for his mostly belletristic sense of Europe’s cosmopolitan future. Goethe shares Arnold’s openness to other cultures and the idea that poetry, like Kant’s sense of international politics, was moving inevitably toward a broadly inclusive *Weltlitteratur*. Goethe wrote late in life, “I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind . . . national literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand.” From Goethe Arnold derived an unswerving faith in the ability of art to restore Europe to a sense of common purpose and rehabilitated spirituality. Arnold included Goethe with Byron and Wordsworth in a triumvirate of great European voices in his “Memorial Verses,” written on the occasion of the latter’s death in 1850 (and again it is indicative of Arnold’s expansive literary sights that he chose to lament Wordsworth’s loss as a European event, not just an English one). Goethe had “looked on Europe’s dying hour / Of fitful dream and feverish power” (23–24) and concluded, in Arnold’s mind, “The end is everywhere, / Art still has truth, take refuge there!” (27–28). To some extent, Arnold’s wish to Europeanize English poetics was wrapped up in the continual longing that he shared with Carlyle to find the “next” Goethe. He would remark in *On The Study of Celtic Literature* that “when Goethe came, Europe had lost her basis of spiritual life; she had to find it again; Goethe’s task was,—the inevitable task for the modern poet henceforth is, . . . to interpret human life afresh, and to supply a new spiritual basis to it” (3:381).
In Arnold and in the poets who make up this study, there always remains this vital if diverse and unevenly articulated spiritual component—the hope that poetry can perform the unifying function once fulfilled by Christianity. Carlyle, as we have seen, had already enlisted poetry in the service of this spiritually recharged and nondenominational World Church. Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the two poets studied here who most closely identified with Christianity, likewise pushed for a broadly ecumenical, non-dogmatic form of Christian cosmopolitanism (and thus one, as they understood it, operating largely outside the auspices of the Catholic Church). It was a religious mission that the arts, of course, had a vital role to play in, as Browning would dramatize in “Fra Lippo Lippi” (1855). In opposition to Church hierarchy, Lippi espouses a freely exercised creativity that invites broad participation and investment by the artist’s audience:

For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. (300–306)

A world of strangers thus becomes a world of individuals brought together through a divine spirit of recognition: they see God, and themselves, in others. Similarly, the dramatic monologue was a form that created a close if sometimes uncomfortable fellowship between subject, author, and audience. Whether favorable or antagonistic toward the consciousness being portrayed, however, Browning’s ultimate message was always the same: “This world’s no blot for us,” as Lippi puts it, “Nor blank; it means intensely, and it means good: / To find its meaning is my meat and drink” (313–15). For Browning, paying attention to the world around you and getting to know your neighbors, in all of their diversity, were moral, intellectual, and religious imperatives.

Moving from these spiritual and aesthetic varieties of cosmopolitanism to the “People’s Spring” of 1848—the moment, in many ways, when the Victorian poem of Europe first begins to take shape—it becomes clear why Europe’s great international moment seemed to have arrived. Proclamations of an emerging confederation of Europe reached a crescendo the likes of which would not be heard again until late in the century, and then mainly as a way of countering the militaristic nationalism that would culminate
in the First World War. The events of 1848, and their fallout over the next couple of years, would likewise form the political backdrop to Clough’s and Barrett Browning’s first European poems. Arnold would not return to the Continent until September of that year, but he followed events closely from London, and in a letter to his sister Jane, stressed the wider European significance of the February 1848 revolution that restored republican government to France:

How plain it is now, though an attention to the comparative literature for the last fifty years might have instructed any one of it, that England is in a certain sense far behind the Continent. In conversation, in the newspapers, one is so struck with the fact of the utter insensitivity, one may say, of people to the number of ideas and schemes now ventilated on the Continent—not because they have judged them or seen beyond them, but from sheer habitual want of wide reading and thinking . . . I am not sure but I agree in Lamartine’s prophecy that 100 years hence the Continent will be a great united Federal Republic, and England, all her colonies gone, in a dull steady decay.39

The poet Alphonse de Lamartine was one of the leaders of the provisional government that had replaced France’s constitutional monarchy, and the kinds of feelings Arnold attributes to him here, of course, resonated deeply with Arnold himself, steeped as he was in European literature.40 England failed to take notice of the Continent at its own peril, Arnold proclaims, and his fellow citizens had no right to dress imperialism in the language of “progress” if they were unwilling to engage even their closest European neighbors. In Europe, newspapers such as the Revue Germanique et Française and the Revue des Deux Mondes, a particular favorite of Arnold and the Brownings, reflected a broad-minded absorption of international trends in science, philosophy, and literature—the building blocks of the civic life of the future.41 Arnold’s comments also reveal his mostly intellectual sense of what “Europe” was: the major concentration of “the best that is known and thought in the world,” as he would put it in “The Function of Criticism” (3:283). Poetry that was not fully conversant with European books and ideas simply “did not know enough,” an estimation that diminished Byron’s achievement in his mind vis-à-vis Goethe’s, left Wordsworth, “profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety” (3:262)—and left Arnold himself, of course, open to charges of gross overstatement. His later battles against “Philistinism,” however, were as much about how little Britain’s economic capital measured up against a more lasting and vital trans-European
intellectual capital—and how little his contemporaries had done to break down borders of the mind as they had on the front of world trade.

The pan-European sentiments expressed in Arnold’s letter were echoed widely on the Continent, with many again attempting to establish some kind of correspondence between the increased flow of trade and that of ideas and culture. The following summer of 1849 saw the convening of a “Congress of Peace” in Paris that featured among its proclamations a plan for a “United States of Europe.” One of the delegates, Victor Hugo, expressed the heady feelings of the political progressives in attendance: “A day will come when you France, you Russia, you Italy, you England, you Germany—all of you nations of the continent will, without losing your distinctive qualities and your glorious individuality, be blended into a superior unity, and constitute a European fraternity.”

Hugo, in many respects, was reinvoking the lost dream of a Napoleonic “association européenne,” but one decidedly less martial and aggressive, a future governed more by merchants and artists than generals. Such sentiments were not entirely unknown in England, despite Arnold’s sense of its intellectual isolation: free trade messiah Richard Cobden was an active participant in the Congress—and discussions of a confederated Europe, then as now, often centered on economic issues. In October of the same year, Prince Albert, drumming up support for the Great Exhibition of the Art and Industry of All Nations that would gather two years later at the Crystal Palace in London, offered a vision of a global village united by trade, travel, and advances in science and communication technology:

Nobody . . . who has paid any attention to the features of our present era, will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition which tends rapidly to the accomplishment of that great end to which, indeed, all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind. Not a unity which breaks down the limits and levels the peculiar characteristics of the different nations of the earth, but rather a unity, the result and product of those very national varieties and antagonistic qualities. The distances which separated the different nations and parts of the globe are gradually vanishing before the achievements of modern invention, and we can traverse them with incredible ease; the languages of all nations are known and their acquirements placed within the reach of everybody; thought is communicated with the rapidity and even by the power of lightning.

How Arnold responded to the kinds of sentiments expressed here—particularly the role of culture versus economics in forming this new Europe—pro-
vides a barometer against which to measure the attempts of other Victorian poets and intellectuals to formulate their own ideas of Europe. Sustaining a role for poetry alongside these sciences and technologies of cosmopolitanism—telegraphs and railroads, but also books, newspapers and the post—the conveyors of “languages . . . and their acquirements”—becomes a particular preoccupation for mid-century poets such as Clough and the Brownings.

Was poetry part of this larger movement or should it define itself against these mostly material forms of fellowship? Was “Europe,” in other words, something that should nourish the mind or the body? In what ways could poetry serve as the catalyst for Europe, whatever form it would assume?

As a poet himself, Arnold could not find the immediate answer to these questions, and his own poems of Europe search mostly in vain for the Continent of his dreams. If the more strident internationalism that followed in the direct wake of the 1848 revolutions had faded by the fall of 1851, when Arnold toured France, Switzerland, and Italy on his honeymoon, it was still the year of the Great Exhibition in London, which had opened in May to enormous crowds overwhelmed by the possibility of a world in which all nations would be brought together through peaceful economic exchange. Another international peace conference, again stressing the importance of a future European confederation, was held in Exeter in August. It was, then, a year for reassessing Europe’s progress toward unity, an idea that haunts the two most notable poems to emerge from Arnold’s tour, “Dover Beach” and “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.” Each has important implications for understanding his and the broader Victorian encounter with Europe, and the longing they express maps the direction followed by other poets over the course of the century. Arnold confronts his disillusionment in these poems, to be sure, but we also see the beginnings of the more tempered, critical cosmopolitanism that would continue to evolve in his prose work.

At its core, “Dover Beach” is a poem about failed connections—above all, between humanity and the divine, which the poem tries to compensate for with love between individual human beings. This failure to connect achieves continental proportions as well. The poem begins with England and France in a kind of awkward juxtaposition to each other, both close at hand yet slipping away:

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. (1–5)
In this, the first of a series of “self-destructive” metaphors in the poem, as David G. Riede describes them, the two nations appear to recognize each other in fleeting glimmers of light before the more ominous, impenetrable barrier of the cliffs of Dover assumes prominence. These images recall another of Arnold’s great poems of separation and longing from several years earlier, “To Marguerite—Continued,” where the estrangement of lovers again mirrors a more collective divide. “We mortal millions live alone” (4), he declares of an isolation compounded by the feeling that “surely once . . . we were / Parts of a single continent!” (15–16). In “Dover Beach,” the ties of faith that once united Europe and held France and England in closer proximity to each other continue to unravel. The continental drift seems only to have worsened, in fact, an effect Arnold registers aurally as well as visually with the sound of the slowly eroding sea shore, one of the many geological references in the poem:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world. (21–28)

The poem’s littoral setting, one that Browning would use later to great effect from the French side of the Channel in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country (1873), stresses the simultaneous presence of boundaries and horizons. The poem resonates with feelings of transcendence but also with impassable distance. England and France, so close geographically, may descend finally into the darkness and rivalry of a continent and civilization self-destructing. While the two nations should be, like Arnold and his lover, “true / To one another” (29–30), the poem’s famous closing image leaves the reader “as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night” (35–37). Arnold’s simile is broadly applicable to many forms of spiritual or intellectual crisis, but if we recall its specific international context, it also alludes to the fear that the centuries-long military rivalry between England and France will renew itself. These ignorant armies clashing by night embody a Europe of intense energy—of material progress and competition—but missing a deeper, spiritual component to give it a heading and purpose.
“Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse” continues Arnold’s pilgrimage into the heart of Europe and further dramatizes his sense of spiritual loss as he uncertainly “[m]ounts up the stony forest-way” (20) to the mountain home of the eleventh-century Carthusian monastery at Isère. Its inmates and their dogged, stern faith invite the kind of nostalgia for pan-European Christendom that Arnold absorbed from Romantic writers such as Novalis. Arnold’s backward spiritual glance, however, was one tempered by an intellectual commitment to the modernity of those “rigorous teachers” who had “seized [his] youth, / And purged its faith” (67–68). Finally arrived at this isolated religious outpost, he asks, “And what am I, that I am here?” (66). Arnold immediately passes from a moment of (literally) high touristic fulfillment—he has traversed a difficult mountain pass and has found what he was looking for largely as he imagined it—to a crisis of travel. This place is indeed a “living tomb” (72), a performance of an idealized past that is now hollow at its core. Arnold thus endures the failure of the Grand Tour as “heritage tourism”—much as Clough had the year before in Italy, as we will see. Arnold’s journey does not strengthen him so much as provide additional grounds for self-indictment. “Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born” (85–86), he has discovered little beyond the fact that he is not well situated no matter where he travels in Europe. Indeed, Arnold’s oft-repeated expression of the Victorian crisis of faith is a geographical metaphor not just a temporal one: he cannot locate himself in time or space. Caught between past and future, between England and Europe, Arnold looks with foreboding to a still distant modernity that will bring the sort of integrated identity and landscape he seeks.46

Arnold’s subsequent survey of his Romantic predecessors—Byron, Shelley, and Senancour—further expounds this sense of loss and poetry’s unfulfilled task. All had sought out Switzerland and its mountain retreats as the sublime natural center of Europe. Childe Harold, for instance, in a rare moment of peace, floats undisturbed on the waters of Leman, “Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake / Earth’s troubled waters for a purer spring” (3.799–800).47 Byron’s escapism, however, as Arnold sees it, becomes a spiritual dead end, a dramatic display of futility:

What helps it now, that Byron bore,
With haughty scorn which mocked the smart,
Through Europe to the Aetolian shore
The pageant of his bleeding heart?
That thousands counted every groan,
And Europe made his woe her own? (133–38)
These lines mark the cultural divide that opens up between the Europe of Byron and the still unborn Europe of the Victorian poem. While largely critical of Byron, Arnold also pays tribute to the confident poetic authority he embodied and his command of the European landscape, both objects of nostalgia for the Victorian poet who traverses a seemingly more confusing, disintegrated space. As Arnold had put it earlier in “Memorial Verses” with the kind of blanket pronouncement more typical of his prose criticism, Byron “taught us little; but our soul / Had felt him like the thunder’s roll” (8–9). Like Byron, Arnold himself succeeds only too well at embodying loss. What was needed was a poet who could do more than write Europe’s epitaph, someone who possessed “Goethe’s sage mind and Byron’s force” (61). This new poetry would integrate England with Europe, as Byron had, while restoring a sense of spirituality and purpose that Arnold felt he had not. It would be smarter and more serious—perhaps a “Don Juan without the mockery & impurity”—as Elizabeth Barrett foreshadowed of the epic novel-poem that would become Aurora Leigh. Or, not entirely dispensing with mockery and impurity, such a poem might go where Arnold had pointed but feared to tread, where Clough and Swinburne ventured. Whatever form this cultural blockbuster would assume, it would not come from Arnold himself; of course, who largely abandoned poetry after 1851. But from the critical sidelines, Arnold would continue to press poets as he had pressed himself to fashion a more open intellectual engagement with the Continent and to sustain the genre’s relevance to other kinds of border-crossing, whether social, economic, or political. How much they listened, and how much they would attempt to fashion their own encounter with Europe against Arnold, is the subject of the rest of this book.

Even though she follows Clough in my study, I want to begin my outline of individual chapters by turning first to Barrett Browning and offering some extended analysis of how she responds to the challenges that Arnold saw facing post-Byronic, Anglo-European poetics. She was, as G. K. Chesterton would declare, “by far the most European of all English poets of that age; all of them, even her own much greater husband, look local beside her.” Chesterton generalizes broadly here on several levels, but he is correct to identify an influential, long-standing, and multifaceted engagement with Europe in Barrett Browning’s work, one that certainly rivaled Arnold’s in its depth. They thus make for a revealing juxtaposition. More intensely religious than he, and more boldly political, Barrett Browning would accordingly reformulate Arnold’s spiritual and intellectual mission while still retaining his faith
that conceiving cosmopolitanism was a task best mastered by poets and artists, not scientists or political theorists.

Arnold would give expression to these dueling claims upon modern identity in a March 1848 letter to Clough, where he charged England as a nation with dwelling in the same historical no-man’s-land between past and future that he would find himself in abroad three years later. Simultaneously, he seems to forecast the same way out of this impasse that Barrett Browning would chart more fully in *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) and later works, including *Aurora Leigh* and *Poems before Congress*—a path that allowed the poet to synthesize powerful spiritual longings with the rationalistic, democratic “spirit” of modern times. Arnold writes, “our weakness [as a nation] is that in an age where all tends to the triumph of the logical absolute reason we neither courageously have thrown ourselves into this movement like the French: nor yet have driven our feet into the solid ground of our individuality, as spiritual, poetic, profound persons. Instead of this we have stood up hesitating: seeming to refuse the first line on the ground that the second is our natural one—yet not taking this.”\(^5\) While not necessarily embracing the free-wheeling rationalism Arnold describes here, Barrett Browning did look to France to take the lead in moving Europe forward politically toward universal republicanism. In her work, this political faith merges with the spiritualized, individualistic advocacy Arnold alludes to, which Barrett Browning locates more in a transnational or trans-Herderian sense of the poet’s ability to give voice to the “souls” of different nations. She thus just as easily finds Arnold’s spiritual “solid ground” in Italy and France as she would in England. In turn, more than any Victorian poet, with the possible exception of Swinburne, she would open herself to charges of repudiating her own nationality.

“Italy and the World,” from *Poems before Congress*, does the most to fuse Barrett Browning’s religious aims with the more political cause of a united Europe, where “civilisation perfected / Is fully developed Christianity” (51–52).\(^5\) She alludes specifically here to St. Paul’s vision of a world united under one church, “No more Jew nor Greek” (46), and thus comes close to advocating what Linda M. Lewis calls “a form of Christian empire,” one with antecedents in Dante’s *De Monarchia*.\(^5\) Barrett Browning’s efforts might be more closely aligned, however, with the kind of religious cosmopolitanism that arose *in conjunction* with Enlightenment rationalism but has since fallen off our historical radar due to the same “Enlightenment metanarrative which proclaims the birth of modernity in the decline of religion,” as Srinivas Aravamudan argues.\(^5\) In Barrett Browning, Christianity fully developed becomes indistinguishable from the democratic political rejuvenation she identifies as its catalyst—hence revolutionary, progressive France becomes
Europe’s spiritual center rather than the more “Christian” nation, England. Barrett Browning’s New Europe, with Italy now at the center of the struggle for freedom, is a spiritual production—God’s love rechanneled between individuals, a love that redeems and, with its maternal overtones, as we will see, feminizes the public sphere. New Europe is also just as fundamentally a product of this world—a civic body—the rational outgrowth of the natural, political evolution Kant espouses in the “Idea for a Universal History”: “The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realisation of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.”54 Once individual states had achieved ideal forms of representative republican government, the larger world fraternity he had dreamed of would follow. Barrett Browning’s poem patterns a similar kind of logic. The world would witness, after Italy, “one confederate brotherhood planting / One flag only, to mark the advance, / Onward and upward, of all humanity” (48–50). Later, Barrett Browning would find an unlikely co-prophet of sorts in Swinburne, whose *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) looks as well toward a future European confederation that would germinate in Italy. In “The Eve of Revolution,” Swinburne commands his contemporaries to “[b]uild up our one Republic state by state, / England with France, and France with Spain, / And Spain with sovereign Italy strike hands and reign.”55

The more politicized nature of Barrett Browning’s internationalism reveals the limits of how far Arnold was willing to go, outside of the purely literary and intellectual realm, in imagining a confederated Europe. Typically, perhaps, even after Arnold had encouraged Clough in his wish to visit France in 1848 and absorb the flow of new ideas being “ventilated” there, he warned him off politics, reflecting in “To a Republican Friend, 1848,” “when I muse on what life is, I seem / Rather to patience prompted, than that proud / Prospect of hope which France proclaims so loud” (15–17). Arnold was also always ambivalent toward the kind of divinely sanctioned national internationalism celebrated by Mazzini and, with greater circumspection, I would argue, by Barrett Browning in “Italy and the World.” While supportive of the principle of Italian nationhood, and encouraging England to take a more proactive stance toward achieving that goal, Arnold seems to want to close off all political avenues to that end short of diplomacy. In “England and the Italian Question” (1859) he remarks, “The principle of nationality, if acted upon too early, or if pushed too far, would prevent that natural and beneficial union of conterminous or neighbouring territories into one great state, upon which the grandeur of nations and the progress of civilisation depends”
Arnold’s belief seems to be that if Europe proceeds boldly with intellectual and spiritual unity, politics will inevitably take care of itself: his wish, as he detailed later in *Culture and Anarchy*, was for a kind of “smart revolution” from above. Barrett Browning, in contrast, was more willing to sacrifice political stability to achieve higher ends. To his credit, Arnold does point out the blind spot in Mazzini’s larger vision—the assumption that violence practiced on behalf of the nation would be relatively contained and would cease once nations achieved their “natural” borders and sovereignty. If history has proven this belief to have been grossly optimistic, the question remains of whether Europe should be primarily a cultural idea, a group of trading partners, a political federation, or some combination of all three. Europe’s pathway toward Appiah’s “rooted cosmopolitanism”—making nationalism and internationalism work on behalf of each other—was and remains a difficult road to navigate.

Arnold’s pro-Europe comments are never quite so political or religious as Barrett Browning’s, but they do find spiritual common ground with her in their skepticism toward the belief that the task of uniting Europe should be entrusted to the same captains of industry who were driving the engines of Britain’s economic progress. For Arnold, the rhetoric of free trade coalesced all too easily with the aims of a closed-off, profit-seeking middle class that put monetary concerns ahead of spiritual and intellectual enrichment. Barrett Browning likewise stresses the fatal contradiction behind the notion that individual profit seeking would somehow invite international cooperation. *Casa Guidi Windows*, for instance, mocks the Great Exhibition as a thinly veiled exercise in economic one-upmanship: “These corals, will you please,” one nation says to the next, “To match against your oaks?” (2.592–93). Barrett Browning looked toward France to model a more selfless, fraternal kind of foreign policy: Louis Napoleon’s continued failure to live up to that ideal would be a source of ongoing frustration to her, even if she never lost faith that France would eventually fulfill the ideals of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848. “Napoleon III in Italy” (1860) thus directly challenges him at the same time it underscores England’s more egregious political failures. France, she maintains, may yet “[u]nselfishly—shiver a lance / (As the least of her sons may, in fact) / And not for a cause of finance” (375–77).

Barrett Browning’s resistance to marketplace Europe also explains, in part, her aversion to the nascent forms of communism that were also beginning to take hold with some intellectuals on the Continent and influencing Chartist poets back in England (and, one could add, the later, postconversion Morris of *The Pilgrims of Hope*). Here she again finds common ground with Arnold, who likewise appears never to have seriously contemplated the kind
of European union that entailed the radical redistribution of wealth that would also mean the end of national governments, which Marx contended were simply reconstituted forms of class power. The influence of Marx himself had yet to be felt by the time Barrett Browning composed *Aurora Leigh*, but his theoretical precursors—Saint Simonism and Fourierism—come under heavy suspicion in the poem as false political unifiers. Her response to them reveals why communist internationalism could not comfortably coexist with a poetic authority dependent on notions of the spirit and individual creative genius.56 Aurora, in fact, defines poetry against the collectivist, class-oriented internationalism espoused by her would-be suitor Romney. “Without a poet’s individualism / To work your universal,” she warns him, his social schemes will fail:

| It takes a soul,                   |
| To move a body: it takes a high-souled man, |
| To move the masses, even to a cleaner stye: |
| It takes the ideal, to blow a hair’s-breadth off |
| The dust of the actual.—Ah, your Fouriers failed, |
| Because not poets enough to understand |
| That life develops from within. (2.479–85) |

In the end, the poem decisively, even violently, discredits Romney’s theories: the model phalanstery into which he had transformed his estate burns down in a riot started by the very inmates he had intended to help, while he himself is blinded, à la Rochester, when the ancestral Leigh home collapses.57 Barrett Browning thereby discredits both the liberal faith in free trade and the socialist insistence on the material and economic bases of history and identity: in her mind, both ideologies share the same roots in an anti-spiritual, anti-aesthetic ethos.

Later a reformed Romney reunites with Aurora in Italy, in keeping with the poem’s movement toward synthesis of body and soul, individual and collective, and art and politics. If not adopting Romney’s more radical political solutions, Aurora does endorse the idea that the poet must become more actively engaged in politics and play a leading role in reinventing Europe. Playing a kind of chorus to Aurora at the end of the poem, Romney pays tribute to the high ideals of her mission:

| The world’s old,                   |
| But the old world waits the time to be renewed, |
| Toward which, new hearts in individual growth |
| Must quicken, and increase to multitude |
In new dynasties of the race of men;
Developed whence, shall grow spontaneously
New churches, new economies, new laws
Admitting freedom, new societies
Excluding falsehood: HE shall make all new. (9.941–49)

If not a Marxist vision of the future, Aurora’s would still have been recognizable to Herder or Kant in its gravitational movement from smaller to larger units of identity. Churches, like nations, will give way to a more inclusive collective. Similarly, in the manner of Goethe, Barrett Browning unites under one poetic umbrella the aesthetic, spiritual, and the political—the three governing forces of her larger vision of a “new dynasty” of men (and women). These were grand ambitions, as Barrett Browning was well aware, and if they are easy to critique on practical political grounds, we should recall that she was equally concerned with manifesting cosmopolitanism on a more modest, personal scale that was still revolutionary in its own right. In chapter 3, I examine how Barrett Browning’s own status as a woman traveler prompted new insight into the ways Aurora and her companion Marian Earle could embody a subaltern “cosmopolitanism from below,” one that overturned firmly entrenched assumptions about who held the authority to travel in Victorian society.

Barrett Browning’s political and poetic development did not stop with *Aurora Leigh*, however. In later poems discussed in chapter 3, Barrett Browning continues to hammer out possible affiliations between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, with a stronger eye toward the personal sacrifices involved for women in achieving the kind of vision that closes *Aurora Leigh*. “Mother and Poet,” for instance, emphasizes the hollow victory of national liberation—and women’s political empowerment—if that power comes at the expense of women’s maternal identity, broadly defined to include not just child-rearing but empathy across social and cultural borders. Women thus had a unique inroad toward a rooted, even “domesticated” cosmopolitanism that could speak for the “body” and the “soul” of Europe. If Barrett Browning’s was a cosmopolitanism that could come only from the marginalized position of a woman poet seeking entry into political discourse, it nonetheless would move to the center of the Victorian poetic encounter with Europe—the one that most broadly encompassed the genre’s diverse political, spiritual, and aesthetic ambitions—and the most in tune, in many ways, with attempts to theorize cosmopolitanism today.

My study of individual poets begins not with Barrett Browning, however, but—ironically, perhaps—with Clough: the closest personally to Arnold but the furthest away from him and Barrett Browning in his attempts to bring
Europe into being. Clough made a three-month stay in Paris in the spring of 1848, reporting to Arnold’s brother Tom in New Zealand, among other correspondents, on his disappointment at the failure of the revolution to institute substantial reform and enfranchise the peasantry and working class: “there is no doubt that France’s prospects are dubious and dismal enough, and one is almost inclined to think that the outbreak was premature.” Visiting Rome the following spring, as Mazzini’s newly declared Roman Republic struggled to keep itself intact, Clough continued to write letters, but this time in verse as well. In the process, he would create perhaps the most nuanced and highly self-critical investigation of the ideal of poetic border-crossing to be found in Victorian poetry. Clough’s *Amours de Voyage* (1849; publ. 1858) immerses itself in emerging European networks of transportation and communication—including the post—of which the poem itself, in some sense, is a product. *Amours de Voyage* aims to test Prince Albert’s belief that a more closely knit modern Europe would emerge in the wake of these technologies of cosmopolitanism. In the end, however, even as different European nationalities intermingle with greater ease at the major tourist destinations of Italy, Clough remains a kind of flâneur in crisis. While he criticizes nationalism along with strongly rooted, uncompromising affiliations of any kind, Clough at the same time remains highly attuned to the sorts of class and cultural privilege that inform the seemingly free-floating, uncommitted nature of the traveler as flâneur. A cosmopolitan Europe—one that exists apart from the cash nexus of tourism and aggressive strains of nationalism and imperialism—remains a distant, unrealized prospect for Clough. He instead embraces travel-in-verse as a necessary exercise in destabilizing one’s own cultural and ideological attachments—a cosmopolitanism of negation, perhaps—but one that provided him with a powerful critical tool for exploding false affinities.

With Robert Browning and Swinburne, my study moves toward less directly political interventions in Europe and instead analyzes the poets’ efforts to fashion poetry into an idealized cultural “space-in-between,” to adapt Homi K. Bhabha’s concept, one that balances the idea of travel as personal enrichment with the demands of a more engaged ideal of world citizenship. Bhabha describes this space as an “an interstitial temporality, . . . an endlessly fragmented subject in ‘process,’” an engagement that is essentially “translational” rather than “concentric.” As a postcolonial subject, Bhabha, of course, is forced into this kind of translation, one he seeks to take charge of and transform into a new identity, neither rooted in a more “authentic” and illusory ethnic ideal nor dictated by the lingering intellectual apparatus of colonialism. Browning is a translational subject by choice, but in some sense, he faces the same dilemma as Bhabha. He experiences the rich
rewards offered the well-traveled, well-read intellectual, and values his multiple national affiliations—Italian, French, even Greek and German—while never losing his deep attachment to those “home-thoughts” celebrated (from abroad) in the title of his most famous short lyric. But Browning must also cope with the potential of this ideal to descend into a self-absorbed, privileged cultural elitism. Aijaz Ahmad, for instance, cautions us that “speaking with virtually mindless pleasure of transnational cultural hybridity . . . amounts, in effect, to endorsing the cultural claims of transnational capital itself.”

This is a challenge at the heart of cosmopolitanism as Appiah sees it as well, which has always alternated, he suggests, between a sense of ethical “obligations to others that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith or kind” and the celebration—and consumption—of what distances us, “which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” and “learn[ing] from our differences.”

Browning’s whole career, one could argue, was an ongoing process of engaging, dramatizing, and learning from those differences. With his earliest short dramatic monologues in *Bells and Pomegranates* (1842), Browning sought to enter into the varieties of European national consciousness, as he mapped out in his section titles—“Italy” for “My Last Duchess,” “France” for “Count Gismond,” and “Cloister (Spanish)” for “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister.” These poems, along with *Sordello, Pippa Passes* (1841) and, of course, *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69) all offer suitable case studies for probing Browning’s border-crossing, but I argue that it was in a relatively late poem, one set in modern France, that Browning delved most deeply into the ways travel replicates the same tensions that define his signature form, the dramatic monologue. *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* is a poem consumed with borders and the urge to transcend them—borders of lyric and drama, England and Europe, culture and politics, and, not least of all, men and women. Browning stages a debate between himself and the poem’s interlocutor, Anne Thackeray, over what it means to travel in Europe and to reinscribe that experience: where does one establish the border between self and other, between home-thoughts and those that can come only from dwelling abroad? Finding himself on both sides of cultural and political divides that begin to open up in the 1860s, Browning likewise forms a borderline or transitional figure in my book as whole. On the one hand, Browning must defend himself from critics such as Charles Kingsley, who berated him for abandoning England in favor of an attenuated cosmopolitanism—and, at that, one fixated on Italy and France rather than on what Kingsley (and Carlyle, among others) increasingly regarded as England’s true racial and cultural peer, Germany. In Kingsley’s mind, Browning failed to turn “all his rugged genial force into
the questions and the struggles of that mother-country to whom and not to Italy at all, he owes all his most valuable characteristics.” On the other hand, *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, even as it champions Anglo-French cultural exchange in the face of such criticism, still reveals Browning’s determination to distance himself from more radically destabilizing kinds of internationalism: politically, the threat posed by class revolution—symbolized in the poem by the Paris Commune of 1870—and, culturally, the sensual “effeminacy” he associates with aestheticism. Browning’s ideal of cosmopolitan engagement with Europe, as we will see, co-evolves with his attempts to sort through the complications of Victorian gender and cultural politics—to create an open, responsive, yet still apparently masculine and heterosexual kind of border-crossing.

Indeed, Swinburne, that most notorious of poetic aesthetes, takes the spiritual and intellectual confederation envisioned by Arnold into radical new territory, recharging the notion of a culturally receptive, cosmopolitan England and in the process revealing that crossing national boundaries involves the testing of other cultural boundaries, including those grounded in sexuality and gender. In another sense, *Poems and Ballads* (1866) simply executes the more radical if muted of Arnold’s aims in *Culture and Anarchy*, as Robert J. C. Young describes them: “For Arnold the public functions for culture are all rigorously stabilizing, harmonizing, and reducing all conflict or dissent. But at the same time, culture’s role is also, paradoxically, to destabilize.”

Europe was not a destination for Swinburne so much as an object of translation—a discursive entity—which partly explains the paradox of why Victorian England’s most “French” poet spent so little time there, as he revealed to E. C. Stedman in 1875: “I was never in France or Italy for more than a few weeks together, and that not more than three or four times in my life.” Swinburne’s is thus a France of the imagination, a place not as “real” or contemporary as Browning’s, and yet, in another sense, *Poems and Ballads* seems more deeply immersed in the matter of France—or more thoroughly and troublingly *outside* England. As one of Swinburne’s fiercest critics, Robert Buchanan, would observe, “no one accuses the author of [*Pippa Passes*] and of the “Ring and the Book,” of neglecting the body; and yet I do daily homage to the genius of Robert Browning.” Similarly, John Morley, who praised *The Ring and the Book* for jarring a complacent British public with “a rude inburst of air from the outside welter of human realities,” had unloaded on Swinburne several years before, whom he deemed “all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages in Lemprière.”

Clearly the frank sexual desire of poems such as “Love and Sleep” was guaranteed to affront many critics, but I argue in chapter 5 that their reac-
tions betray that something more than “good taste” was at stake in the cultural crisis precipitated by the publication of *Poems and Ballads*. To these critics, Swinburne becomes the icon of a dangerously “continental” strain of poetry obsessed with the aesthetic surfaces of the body and language, one that threatens to undermine a stronger, more authentic English verse. Even allies such as William Morris felt a certain unease with Swinburne, complaining once that he “never could really sympathize with Swinburne’s work; it always seemed . . . to be founded on literature, not on nature.”68 This sense of alienation from oneself and nature in fact reveals how vital *literariness*—as a specific kind of cultural translation—is to cosmopolitanism. For Swinburne, aestheticism becomes a twin process of negotiating culture and negotiating desire. The marriage of England and the Continent mirrors the overriding question in *Poems and Ballads* of what it means for two people to come together and desire each other—with all of the complex feelings of longing, uncertainty, and discomfort that ensue. A literary/cosmopolitan body emerges from the volume whose essence is its very difficulty to translate—to locate in England or France, in the present or in the many historical spaces that the poems occupy. Swinburne’s verse resides at the crossroads of the “natural” and the “literary,” destabilizing both entities in the process and anticipating the radical cross-cultural “poisoning” associated later in the century with Decadence.

The controversy over aestheticism and the fluidity of England’s cultural borders points as well to the greater role that race would play in Victorian discussions of national and European identity. Arnold was again a leading voice in the debate, arguing on behalf of inquiry into the racial history of different European populations while still insisting on the essentially unifying, cosmopolitan fruits of such an investigation.69 The “English mind,” for instance, as he maintained in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, embodied a mixture of European racial tendencies that should make it flexible and receptive to the products of many cultures. It was a gift, however, that needed to be understood to be deployed effectively: “so long as we are blindly and ignorantly rolled about by the forces of our nature, their contradiction baffles us and lames us; so soon as we have clearly discerned what they are, and begun to apply to them a law of measure, control, and guidance, they may be made to work for our good and carry us forward” (3:383).70 Of the poets I study here, William Morris follows Arnold most closely in making the case, through poetry, that to know race is to know England and to know Europe. Assuming a different compass heading than Arnold, Morris turns to the “Northland of old and the undying glory of dreams” (9:125), as he remarked in “Iceland First Seen,” composed during the first of two trips to
Europe’s farthest Atlantic margin. Choosing a geographically and historically remote setting, Morris nonetheless insisted that he had found a lost cultural center, “the first grey dawning of our race” (7:286), as he wrote in the verse prologue to his translation of the Volsunga Saga, which he would rerender shortly after in an epic poem of his own.

And yet, given this kind of claim, Morris’s epic poetry of the North turns out to be remarkably racially uncharged. Morris aims to redraw the map of European culture, but he never seems to invest as heavily as Arnold in the fruition of poetic racial recovery—that it will somehow “carry us forward.” It is enough that it carries us back. To adapt another of Arnold’s phrases from On the Study of Celtic Literature, Morris writes the poetry of the “science of origins,” one that seeks to meet Norse culture on its own terms, achieving a kind of objective, distanced reverence. “The Lovers of Gudrun,” the longest of the tales from The Earthly Paradise (1868–70), and Sigurd the Volsung (1876) portray the struggles of Europe’s most mobile, sea-oriented culture as it engages with other regions of Europe. Sigurd, with his gestures toward a pan-European community governed by ideals of justice and fairness, embodies Morris’s efforts to balance ideals of rootedness and travel. In the end, it is difficult to cull a clear political or ideological message from Morris concerning race and European identity: what he delivers is a sort of poetic-racial aestheticism. Race for Morris is a powerful component of language and the literary production that grows out of it, but it does not seem to hold much more beyond that for him; race is a given, but one that needs to be understood critically, not glorified. Through Morris, Victorian poetry engages in a cosmopolitan, counterracial discourse even if, at times, it validates the contemporary tendency to view cultural traits as being somehow racially imbedded. Overall, despite his orientation toward Icelandic and Nordic landscapes and literature, Morris is just as prepared to celebrate wider notions of travel, hybridity, and cross-European migration.

Morris is the only poet in these chapters who beats a path away from the central destinations of the Grand Tour, which perhaps raises a question: beyond Italy, France, ancient Greece, and Scandinavia, one could inquire, where is the rest of Europe in this study? I should stress first that my aim is not to provide an encyclopedic overview of Anglo-European poetics, but even so, I admit that there are important destinations that have been passed over. Eliot’s The Spanish Gypsy (1869), for instance, situated at Europe’s westernmost border with the Islamic world, would provide another opportunity for reflection on race and European identity. Elsewhere, the ongoing movements for Greek and Polish independence attracted attention from poets including Barrett Browning but also Walter Savage Landor. This
book nonetheless stays within the main geographical boundaries of Victorian “Europe”—the powerful and emergent countries of the western half of the continent—and also the North, so important to specifically Anglo-European notions of identity. My study thus perpetuates a certain Western European geographical bias, but one reflective of the historical moment it concentrates on and one that does not invalidate what was still in many ways a dynamic and multifaceted engagement with Europe in Victorian poetry.

One missing destination in particular, however, merits more explanation in light of its important role in the history and culture of Europe in the nineteenth century. With such a strong philosophical presence in European cosmopolitan thinking and in Victorian intellectual life at large, why was Germany largely “off the map” for poets? One explanation is simply cultural habit: for centuries, Italy and France had always held stronger attraction for literary artists and travelers. Germany, nonetheless, would come to play a significant role in Victorian travel poetry because of its absence—an absence that speaks volumes about how poetic authority had been defined by Arnold, for instance, and re-echoed in the Brownings. Germany could signify any number of things to different Victorian writers and artists, but Arnold’s On the Study of Celtic Literature gives perhaps the best indication of why Germany—Goethe's efforts aside—was perceived as being antithetical to poetry’s “spiritual” mission. Germany was to be praised for its “industry, well-doing, the patient and steady elaboration of things, the idea of science governing all departments of human activity.” Its culture, however, tended toward a “lack of beauty and distinction in form and feature,” reflected as well in “the slowness and clumsiness of the language” (3:342). Germany was a set of contradictions for Arnold, although never enough so to undermine his faith in the accuracy of these stereotypes in the first place: Germany was spiritual, yet hostile to faith; intelligent, but ploddingly so. Aurora Leigh conveys much the same idea in its presentation of Aurora’s brief encounter with an anti-religious English student studying in Germany, a prototype of sorts for Eliot’s Will Ladislaw in Middlemarch (1871–72). Aurora listens silently at a dinner party as the student condemns Romney’s Christian socialism, boasting, “You’re slow in England. In a month I learnt / At Göttingen enough philosophy / To stock your English schools for fifty years” (5.755–57). Later in the poem, however, she delivers a rebuke meant to capture what’s missing from German intellectual life. Barrett Browning’s specific target is Friedrich Augustus Wolf, who, with his assertion that Homer was an editorial invention, had done to him what the Higher Criticism was now attempting to do to Christianity: “Wolf’s an atheist; / And if the Iliad fell out, as he says, / By mere fortuitous concourse of old songs, / Conclude as much too for the
universe” (5.1254–57). Aurora instead turns towards Italy and France, where she will fashion a more faith-based republicanism that shuns materialist and dryly historicist accounts of cultural identity. Germany becomes the source of an anti-spiritual modernity for her, no longer the benign, largely pastoral home of Goethe and Carlyle’s Romantic idealism. It also did not help that Germany was so closely associated with Austria, the primary obstacle toward the realization of Italy’s freedom. In Part II of Casa Guidi Windows, Austria comes off as a militaristic, spiritually wanting culture, “wearing a smooth olive-leaf / On her brute forehead, while her hoofs outpress / the life from these Italian souls” (2.418–20).

Robert Browning’s stance toward Germany also helps illustrate why the country did not assume a greater, more positive presence in Victorian poetry. He shared Elizabeth’s distrust of the Higher Criticism and attacked Strauss in Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day (1850), where he appears in the guise of an off-putting and vain lecturer who once again hails from “Göttingen,—most likely” and addresses an audience on the “Myth of Christ” (794; 859). Contemporary German intellectual life had little to offer the Victorian poet trying to rehabilitate Christianity and reunify Europe along more spiritual lines. France, of course, had its own set of committed secularists and overfondness for theory—“[t]oo absolute and earnest, with them all / The idea of a knife cuts real flesh,” as Aurora Leigh opined (6.22–23)—but these forces were counterbalanced by another: a greater dedication to democratic and egalitarian principles and to the arts as a means of advancing them. Browning’s wrath quickened only when these impulses fell out of balance with each other and became extreme, as they had in the case of Léonce Miranda, whom he profiles in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country. Thus Browning’s sometime hostility toward France should not be confused with the kind of High German cheerleading one sees in Carlyle. “That noble, patient, deep, pious, and solid Germany,” Carlyle wrote to The Times at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, “should at length be welded into a Nation, and become Queen of the Continent, instead of vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless and oversensitive France seems to me the hopefullest public fact that has occurred in my time.” These were adjectives Browning might apply to Louis Napoleon, whom he caricatures in Prince Hohensteil-Schwangau, Saviour of Society (1871), but not to France as a nation. For Browning, the year 1870 did not signal the triumph of Germanic over French culture and principles but was, rather, “folly’s year in France” (3233), when it failed to live up to its own best national standards. Overall, then, in Victorian poetry, Germany fails to resonate as an actual destination but it does provide a vital
source of friction and debate. Even Morris, as we will see, with his preference for the more northern reaches of Europe, was careful to distance the type of cultural work performed by his translations and adaptations of Icelandic sagas from the “Teutonism” on display in Carlyle and, as we saw earlier, Kingsley.

As it moves from Morris to Hardy at the turn of the century, my study also passes over some late-century poets who could conceivably find a viable place in a study of Victorian Anglo-European poetics. I plead the usual limits of time and space, but would also observe that during this era, Victorian poetry, when set abroad, did in some respects take the mostly imperial turn that Wilson anticipated upon the death of Barrett Browning. One thinks, for instance, of Rudyard Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads (1892) or Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Travel” from A Child’s Garden of Verses (1885), where he famously “should like to rise and go / Where the golden apples grow; / Where below another sky / Parrot islands anchored lie” (1–4). By and large, what is missing from Victorian poetry following Morris are what one might term the “big” poems of Europe—whether epic or of epic ambitions or length—that continue the kind of project undertaken by mid-century poets to map Anglo-European space and dramatize its multilayered encounters. (I would include Swinburne’s Poems and Ballads among these major efforts even if it is not one continuous narrative or travelogue.) That said, the kinds of cultural translation pioneered in Poems and Ballads would indeed continue to flourish and evolve but in different directions after Swinburne—a promising subject for a study concerned with more specifically aesthetic or fin-de-siècle encounters with Europe. Arthur Symons’ London Nights (1896), for instance, brings France over to England in ways not ventured by Swinburne, who, despite his admiration for Baudelaire, did not attempt to recreate the specifically urban, contemporary cosmopolitanism of the flâneur, who becomes a much more visible figure in British Decadent verse. Such a study could also explore the ways “Michael Field” (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper) combined elements of travel and aesthetic appreciation in Sight and Song (1895), which carefully notes the museum “setting” of each of these ekphrastic poems. Like Swinburne’s “Hermaphroditus,” which he situates “Au Musée de Louvre, Mars 1863,” Bradley and Cooper reconfigure the encounter with art in European galleries less as distanced appreciation and more as active interrogation of the cultural and gender borders art puts on display.

The Victorian long poem of Europe would dramatically reassert itself, however, with Thomas Hardy’s The Dynasts: An Epic-Drama of the War
with Napoleon (1904–8), the capstone to my investigation and to the Victorian effort to give poetic shape and spirit to Europe. As an author who first encountered Europe through the more local lens of the Wessex novels, Hardy likewise provides an occasion for reexamining basic questions of genre: indeed, in comparison to his historical novel of the same period, *The Trumpet-Major* (1880), *The Dynasts* dramatically revises what happens to local identity in the context of a European-wide conflict. The poem’s complex structure and multiple perspectives work to destabilize forms of national and local allegiance while still paying tribute—as Morris had—to the powerful grip they hold over individuals. Hardy’s closest affinity in this study, however, is with Barrett Browning, for he returns in many ways to the same question that confronted her at mid-century: how the quasi-religious devotion that defines the imagined community of the nation could evolve into the intellectual and spiritual confederation of Europe that Arnold had anticipated. Comments from the preliminary notes to *The Dynasts* echo Barrett Browning’s call in the preface to *Poems before Congress*, as we will see, to balance patriotic feeling against wider interests: “Patriotism,” he wrote, “if aggressive and at the expense of other countries, is a vice; if in sympathy with them, a virtue.”

For Barrett Browning, poetry becomes the essence of a new spirituality that would expand and promote larger public goals. If Hardy, in contrast, could not re-tailor Christianity into the spiritual fabric that would reunite Europe, the poem is still deeply spiritual in its own way, suggesting there was an essence beyond material reality, a larger web of energy or Will that, though unconscious of itself, weaves its way collectively through each individual mind. As it manifests itself in *The Dynasts*, the “Immanent Will” bears some affinity to the national will that Barrett Browning wishes to see ignited in *Casa Guidi Windows* and “Italy and the World.” By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the imperial ambitions of Germany made it much more difficult for Hardy to celebrate emergent European nationalisms. With the benefit of this historical hindsight, Hardy portrays the greatest military conflict of the nineteenth century as a “Clash of Peoples” (4:5) animated by powerful but blind national feeling. During the Battle of Borodino, the “Spirit of the Years” observes,

*Thus do the mindless minions of the spell In mechanized enchantment sway and show A Will that wills above the will of each, Yet but the will of all conjunctively;*
When individuals act on behalf of national identity, or think they do, they merely carry out the indifferent energy of the Will. The concept of the Will also notably diminishes the importance of race in calculations of national and European identity: such distinctions seem merely arbitrary and destructive. Only when humans perceive the working of the Will, and the two work in tandem—“Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair”—will such collective cosmic energy become the spirit that goes international (III. After Scene.110). In terms of crafting a cohesive spirit of Europe, and, eventually, the entire world, one could say that Hardy and Barrett Browning both finally arrive via different paths at the doors of the same World Church—one centered on the faith that there is some kind of constructive, immaterial force that can bind nations and peoples together. To some degree, they both follow Kant in the belief that war, whether the great European conflict at the beginning of the nineteenth century or later wars for national independence, might finally steer humanity toward a cosmopolitan future: “All wars are accordingly so many attempts (not indeed by the intention of men, but by the intention of nature) to bring about new relations between states, and, by the destruction or at least the dismemberment of old entities, to create new ones.” As The Dynasts conveys through its form and content, cosmopolitanism was all about gaining the right critical vantage point on oneself and on the world at large.

Together, the chapters that follow seek to rechart Victorian poetics, establishing the importance of the encounter with Europe to poets across the period, from Arnold to Hardy. Each author affirms that poetry must cross borders and conceive cosmopolitanism in ways not being realized in the political realm or in the culture at large. “Europe wants to be one,” Friedrich Nietzsche would insist in Beyond Good and Evil (1886): “The mysterious labour in the souls of all the more profound and far-reaching people of this century has actually been focused on preparing the path to this new synthesis and on experimentally anticipating the Europeans of the future.” For many Victorian poets, as for Nietzsche, Europe was always about the future, something that would emerge out of this mysterious soul work in which poetry must play a vital role. From our own perspective in the early twenty-first century, as readers of these poets, Europe served them just as crucially as the testing ground for debating questions not just of international politics, but of religion, economics, sexuality, and gender that still
confront us. By examining their efforts, I hope to reveal the important position Victorian poetry holds in understanding the ongoing British effort to define its place in Europe and in the wider world. At the same time, I hope to revise our understanding of poetry itself, showing its flexibility and adaptiveness to international contexts—its promise as a discourse of critical cosmopolitanism.