Literary Empires
Mapping Temporal & Spatial Settings of Victorian Poetry

Look, the world tempts our eye,
And we would know it all!
We map the starry sky,
We mine this earthen ball,
We measure the sea-tides, we number the sea-sands;

We scrutinise the dates
Of long-past human things,
The bounds of effaced states,
The lines of deceased kings;
We search out dead men's words, and works of dead men's hands;

—*Matthew Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna"*

Setting is a basic characteristic of literature. Novels, short stories, dramas, film, and much poetry—especially narrative poetry—typically have an identifiable setting in both time and space. Victorian poet Matthew Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna," for instance, is set in Greek Sicily in the fifth century BC. "Empedocles" was published in 1852. Swinburne's Tristram of Lyonesse (1882) is set in Ireland, Cornwall, and Brittany, but in an uncertain legendary medieval chronology. In the absence of a narrative setting, many poems are situated temporally and spatially through allusion, metaphor, and other tropes. Victorian Hellenism and Victorian medievalism are two frequently discussed phenomena in Victorian literature. Many Victorian poets were fascinated by the literature, history, and culture of ancient and classical Greece and medieval Europe and the literary traditions inspired by those periods. Major Victorian poets, including Tennyson, the Brownings, Arnold, Rossetti, and Swinburne, provide a rich variety of representations of classical and medieval worlds. But what does the quantifiable literary data reveal about these phenomena? Of the total number of published works or lines of verse from any given period, or among a defined set of authors or texts, how many texts have classical, medieval, biblical, or contemporary settings? How many texts are set in other periods, such as the Renaissance, with which Robert Browning was so fascinated? The data can answer these questions and provide scholars with other insights into literary history. After explicitly documenting (in XML code, a database, or other structure) the temporal and spatial settings of individual literary works, one can map and visualize the distribution of literary settings across historical periods and geographic space; compare these data to other information, such as year of publication or composition; and visualize networks of authors and works sharing common settings. The data set is a growing collection of novel works titles, dates, date ranges, and geographic identifiers and coordinates. Challenges include settings of imprecise, legendary, and fictional time and place.

The map here is based on a sampling of poems by Victorian poets Robert Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne. A prototype online version is available at http://purlocic.org/swinburne/vis/acsvis0002/.
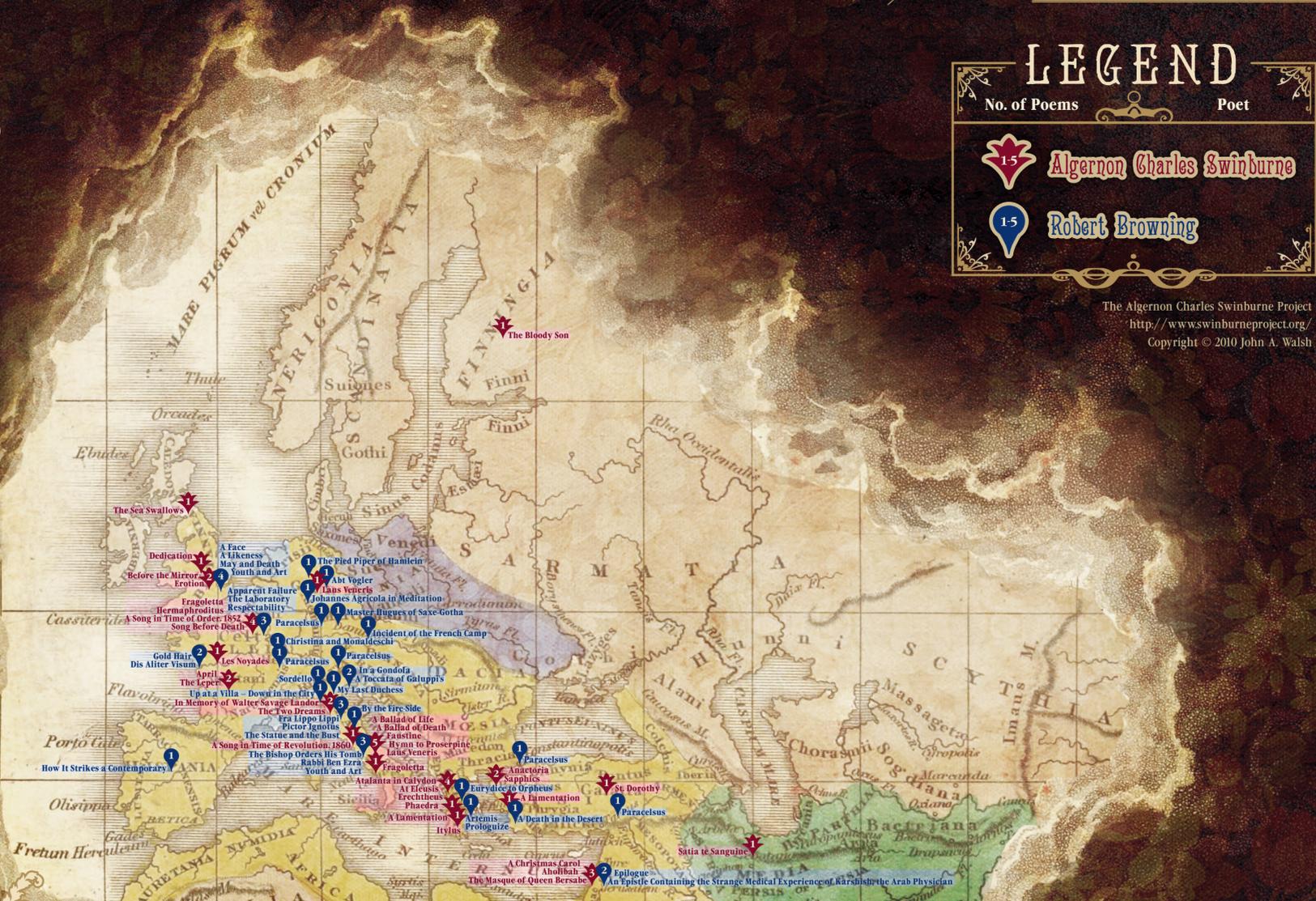
LEGEND

No. of Poems	Poet
1-5	Algernon Charles Swinburne
1-5	Robert Browning

The Algernon Charles Swinburne Project
http://www.swinburneproject.org/
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TIMELINE

2000BC — 500AD — 1400AD — 1800AD — 1900AD

Robert Browning 1812–1889
Algernon Charles Swinburne 1837–1909

2000BC–499AD   500AD–1399AD   1400AD–1799AD   1800AD–1900AD

Poems Sorted by Temporal Setting

Time	Place	Poet	Poem	Collection
1865	Oxford	Swinburne	Dedication	Poems and Ballads, First (1866)
1864	London	Swinburne	Before the Mirror	Poems and Ballads, First (1866)
1864	London	Swinburne	Erotion	Poems and Ballads, First (1866)
1864	Florence	Swinburne	In Memory of Walter Savage Landor	Poems and Ballads, First (1866)
1864	London	Browning	A Likeness	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1863	Paris	Swinburne	Hermaphroditus	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1863	France	Browning	Epilogue	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1860	Italy	Swinburne	A Song in Time of Revolution, 1860	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1860	Rome; London	Browning	Youth and Art	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1856	Paris	Browning	Apparent Failure	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1856	French coast	Browning	Dîs Aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de Nos Jours	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1855	Venice	Browning	A Toccata of Galuppi's	Men and Women (1855)
1855	Italy	Browning	By the Fire-Side	Men and Women (1855)
1855	Paris	Browning	Respectability	Men and Women (1855)
1855	Tuscany	Browning	Up at a Villa—Down in the City	Men and Women (1855)
1852	Paris	Swinburne	A Song in Time of Order, 1852	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1852	England	Browning	A Face	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1852	Dulwich Wood, London	Browning	May and Death	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1850	Madrid	Browning	How It Strikes a Contemporary	Men and Women (1855)
1809	Ratisbon, Germany	Browning	Incident of the French Camp	Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
1799	Paris, Naples	Swinburne	Fragoletta	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1795	Paris	Swinburne	Song Before Death	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1793	Nantes	Swinburne	Les Noyades	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1771	Germany	Browning	Abt Vogler	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1762	Pornic, France	Browning	Gold Hair	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1700	Saxe-Gotha, Germany	Browning	Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha	Men and Women (1855)
1657	Fontainebleau, France	Browning	Christina and Monaldeschi	Jocoseria (1883)
1653	France	Browning	The Laboratory	Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)
1608	Florence	Browning	The Statue and the Bust	Men and Women (1855)
1564	Ferrara	Browning	My Last Duchess	Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
1550	Germany	Browning	Johannes Agricola in Meditation	Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
1550	Würzburg; Constantinople; Basil; Colmar; Salzburg	Browning	Paracelsus	Paracelsus (1835)
1505	France	Swinburne	The Leper	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1500	Rome	Swinburne	A Ballad of Death	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1500	Florence	Browning	Pictor Ignotus	Men and Women (1855)
1500	Rome	Browning	The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church	Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)
1435	Florence	Browning	Fra Lippo Lippi	Men and Women (1855)
1376	Hamelin	Browning	The Pied Piper of Hamelin	Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
1350	Florence	Swinburne	The Two Dreams	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1264	Venusberg; Rome	Swinburne	Laus Veneris	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1250	Lombardy	Browning	Sordello	Sordello (1840)
1200	France	Swinburne	April	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1135	Rome	Browning	Rabbi Ben Ezra	Dramatis Personae (1864)
313	Rome	Swinburne	Hymn to Proserpine	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
311	Caesarea Mazaca	Swinburne	St. Dorothy	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
125	Rome	Swinburne	Faustine	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
100	Desert near Ephesus	Browning	A Death in the Desert	Dramatis Personae (1864)
66	Bethany	Browning	An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician	Men and Women (1855)
1	Bethlehem	Swinburne	A Christmas Carol	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
550 B.C.	Iran/Persia	Swinburne	Satia te Sanguine	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
550 B.C.	Israel and Judah	Swinburne	Aholibah	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
596 B.C.	Lesbos	Swinburne	Anactoria	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
596 B.C.	Lesbos	Swinburne	Sapphics	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
991 B.C.	Shiloh, Israel	Browning	Epilogue	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1000 B.C.	Jerusalem	Browning	The Masque of Queen Bersabe	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1222 B.C.	Athens	Browning	Artemis Prologuizes	Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
1235 B.C.	Mount Oita, Troy	Swinburne	A Lamentation	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1236 B.C.	Troezen, Greece	Swinburne	Phaedra	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1245 B.C.	Underworld (Greek)	Swinburne	Eurydice to Orpheus	Dramatis Personae (1864)
1246 B.C.	Calydon, Greece	Swinburne	Atalanta in Calydon	Atalanta in Calydon (1865)
1357 B.C.	Daulis, Greece	Swinburne	Itylus	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
1399 B.C.	Athens	Swinburne	Erechtheus	Erechtheus (1876)
1420 B.C.	Eleusis, Greece	Swinburne	At Eleusis	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
	Northumberland	Swinburne	The Sea-Swallows	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
	Finland	Swinburne	The Bloody Son	Poems and Ballads, First Series (1866)
	Venice	Browning	In a Gondola	Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
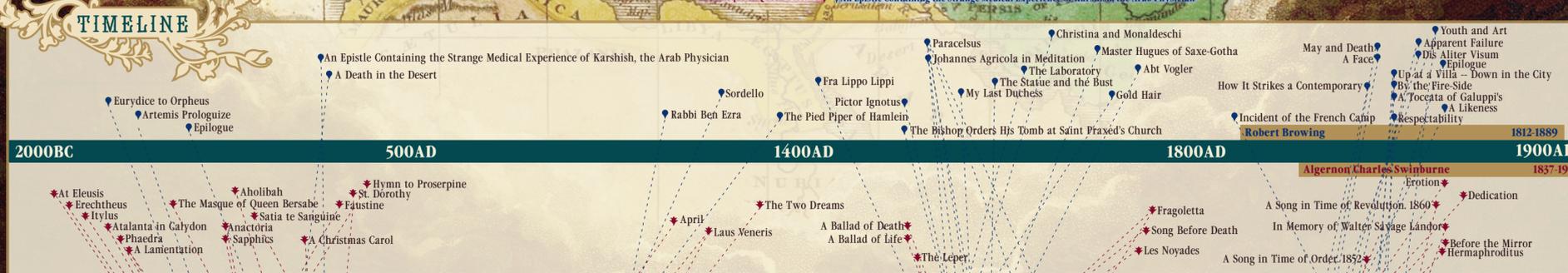
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