Summer 2014

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Recommended Citation

Knox, Marisa Palacios. "Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in" Aurora Leigh"." Victorian Poetry 52.2 (2014): 277-300.

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> I feel at every page, as I read your book, the deep truth of that assertion of Strabo's . . . "To be a good poet one must first be a good man."[1]

Edward Bulwer Lytton's words of praise for Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* demonstrate the confusion of categorization that her "novel-poem" presented for its first readers.[2] Lytton elects not to paraphrase his translation of Strabo's aphorism so as to acknowledge Barrett Browning's gender; he includes her, instead, within the ostensibly universal category of the male poet. At the same time, the quotation directly aligns the quality of the poem with its author's identity. It seemed that Victorian critics like Lytton could neither avoid defining the aesthetic value of *Aurora Leigh* in gendered terms nor yet decide to which gender its hybrid form belonged.

Admirers of *Aurora Leigh* tended to see it as a harmonious marriage of the masculine domain of poetry and the feminine domain of the domestic novel. Alongside the encomia of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Ruskin, Leigh Hunt praised the poem for its "combination of masculine power with feminine tenderness."[3] Some reviewers, however, expressed their discomfort with Browning's appropriation of "Milton's organ . . . to play polkas in May-Fair drawing-rooms."[4] Writing in the *Westminster Review*, George Eliot applauded "Mrs. Browning [for being], perhaps, the first woman who has produced a work which exhibits all the peculiar powers without the negations of her sex."[5] A review in the very next issue countered, "Mrs. Browning seems at once proud and ashamed of her womanhood. She protests, not unjustly, against the practice of judging artists by their sex; but she takes the wrong means to prove her manhood."[6] Evidently some readers still saw Barrett Browning's attempt to transcend the categories of "masculine" and "feminine" through their aesthetic union as a female author's usurpation of the universal position of the male subject.[7]

Aurora Leigh illuminates the vexed relation in Victorian criticism between the deployment of conventionally masculine styles or subject matter by women authors and the comparatively fluid identification across gender lines expected of women as *readers*.[8] Barrett Browning's heroine is a reader of literature who seeks inspiration for her own writing through identification with male authors and male subjects. In our own time, critics such as Helen Cooper, Angela Leighton, and Beverly Taylor have argued that Aurora's masculine sources of identification and inspiration are temporary obstacles to her self-affirmation as a female artist.[9] This essay will argue, to the contrary, that Aurora's deliberate fluctuations across the boundaries of gender identification, both as reader and as writer, maintain the integrity of her female subjectivity. It will do so by situating Aurora's fluidity of gender identification within the Victorian discourse of feminine readerly sympathy. Women readers were exhorted from girlhood to prepare for the experience of subsuming themselves in their husbands—their legal and political representatives—by imagining themselves amid or even within male characters engaged in masculine activities. Femininity itself was conceptualized as the ability to identify with men. Aurora, however, far from effacing herself, undertakes an active, "elective affinity" with her father through his literary legacy as well as with her male muses of poetry. This strategy of masculine identification as an active aesthetic choice enables rather than represses Aurora's poetic self-expression.

Written during the debates surrounding the reform of marriage law that would continue through the end of the century and published a year before the passing of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, *Aurora Leigh* narrates the development of a female subject which culminates in her prospective marriage. Nevertheless, the work promotes an emphatically literary rather than marital or relational mode of female identification with masculinity. Despite its hybrid status as a novel-poem, *Aurora Leigh* abhors the idea of fusion, especially one in which the female self is absorbed into wifely influence. Using the trope of the nosegay, Barrett Browning represents art as an ideal of productive combination without the dissolution of individual elements—such as the dissolution of female identity within legal marriage.

I. Falsetto Muscularity

While the *Dublin University Magazine* went so far as to condemn Barrett Browning as "unfeminine in thought" and *Aurora Leigh* as "a closed volume for her own sex" in its review, such criticisms were not necessarily injurious to the work's artistic reputation, as Barrett Browning was aware.[10] As a child, Barrett Browning announced her ambition to be "the feminine of Homer."[11] In adulthood she notoriously claimed in a letter to her future critic Chorley that she could not

locate for herself a feminine tradition from which to draw inspiration for her particular poetic practice: "I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none."[12] Her following sentence is not as widely quoted: "It is not in the filial spirit I am deficient, I do assure you—witness my reverent love of the grandfathers!" Despite having written an obituary for the prolific poetess Felicia Hemans, Barrett Browning set herself apart from any matriarchal poetic lineage as a preemptive strike against such critics as the one in the *Saturday Review* who assumed that "women, in writing poetry, draw their style from other women, and thus miss that largeness and universality which alone compels attention, and preserves a work through all changes of sentiment and opinion."[13] The *Saturday Review* distinguishes Barrett Browning for at least attempting objectivity, but judges her to have succeeded "not more than partially." To be labeled as a women's poet (that is, a poet for women) would deprive her work of both expressive individuality and universal relevance (that is, relevance to men). According to such critics, women could only be partial poets; the *gestalt* of the poetic form eluded the "poetess" with the addition of the feminine suffix. Refuting Barrett Browning's attempt to evade the gendered constraints of the genre through her creation of the hybrid form of the verse-novel, the poet Sydney Dobell, while praising "poetry such as Shakespeare's sister might have written, if he had had a twin," felt compelled to conclude, "I hold it to be no poem—for no woman (not even such a 'large-brained woman and large-hearted man' as Mrs. Browning, who has occurred but once since literature began, and will not come again for a millennium or two) can create one."[14] Dobell even wrote a sonnet addressed "To the Authoress of 'Aurora Leigh'" that casts her as an amanuensis for Shakespeare: "with her dear sex / In his voice, (a king's words writ out by the queen)."[15]

While Barrett Browning paid homage to her literary "grandfathers," Aurora identifies her artistic self with men even while she advocates the rights of women. She does not care to exercise her feminine "influence," the special capacity attributed to women in the nineteenth century at the expense of official political "power."[16] As when, in the recurrent breast imagery in the poem, she wants not to nurse but to suck from the paps of poetic inspiration, Aurora prefers to reverse the traditional gender dynamic and be *influenced*—as male writers supposedly are by their muses—by those male writers that she claims as hers: "My own best poets, am I one with you, / That thus I love you, —or but one through love?"[17] Aurora desires to merge her identity into "one" with her predecessors, among whom she names Byron, Pope, and Keats. Her chicken-or-egg question—whether inspiration follows from her receptivity to these muses or whether she is receptive because already inspired—presupposes the role of her own agency in loving poetry. The fact that she can even question the nature of the afflatus forestalls the kind of

forcible penetration by a literary patriarch that Susan Gubar describes as "the terror of inspiration" for female writers, which encompasses a "terror of being entered, deflowered, possessed, taken, had, broken, ravished—all words which illustrate the pain of the passive self where boundaries are being violated."[18] Even when Aurora does characterize herself as a passive figure, being "ravished" artistically, she still compares herself to a male figure: Ganymede, plucked by Zeus to serve and drink divine nectar with the gods (1.927).[19]

Beverly Taylor notes Aurora's tendency to identify with masculine mythological analogues like Ganymede, Pygmalion, and even Jove, but sees Aurora's reverence for the male literary tradition as an impediment to her growth as a female poet (pp. 17–18). As a teenager, Aurora's confidence in her own status within the pantheon is still tentative:

> Such ups and downs
> Have poets.
> Am I such indeed? The name
> Is royal, and to sign it like a queen,
> Is what I dare not. (1.933–936)

It is therefore not surprising that Aurora is afraid to "sign it like a queen"; using the female signature would subject her poetry to the depreciative label of what her cousin Romney condescendingly calls "woman's verses" and herself to the conventional feminine identity that she refuses (2.831). Aurora distinguishes herself from the feminine role of inspirational catalyst, saying of herself and her poetic fellows together, "We call the Muse" (1.980). Even as she self-deprecatingly concludes, "what effete results / From virile efforts!" she sets herself among the "virile" who incidentally create "effete" art, rather than among the feminine who ape masculinity (1.984–985). Although she does not redefine these gendered aesthetic terms, she implies that "virile" and "effete" characteristics can exist simultaneously in poets, regardless of their sex. But while Aurora shies away from the feminine poetic roles of muse and queen, *Aurora Leigh* remained subject to this type of categorization on the basis of authorial identity—as in Chorley's tribute to "the authority of a prophetess, the grace of a muse, the prodigality of a queen" in Barrett Browning's performance.[20]

Although Aurora, like Barrett Browning, acknowledges no female poets to whom she could be the successor, elements of *Aurora Leigh* draw from a heritage of women's novels, most obviously *Jane Eyre* as well as *Corinne* and *Ruth*, whose characters Dorothy Mermin calls the "aunts and cousins, if not grandmothers" of Barrett Browning's.[21] For Barrett Browning to own these female relations, however,

is to invite the kind of criticism visited upon the limitations of the feminized novel form along with the non-poetic poetess. The prolific reviewer E. S. Dallas lamented the phenomenon by which the "great public figure withers" from the domesticating influence on the novel of women authors treating traditionally feminine subjects.[22] The critic Richard Holt Hutton, in an 1858 review of the novels of "Authoress" Dinah Mulock Craik, expands upon his subject to distinguish the category of "feminine" novelists from their masculine brethren by "the complete *insulation* of the interests of the feminine novelists in the story they are telling." Women novelists "*believe* so much more intensely in their own stories" and therefore "never carry you beyond the tale they are telling; they are a great deal too much interested in it."[23] Hutton's repetition of these "in"-ward prefixes (insulation, interest, intensity) as modifiers for female novelists signals his own belief in the inscribed nature of the feminine imagination; these authoresses are not so much actively creating as immersing themselves within a preexisting story.

Not only are feminine novelists interested themselves, they are the cause of interestedness in others: in their fictions "the interest is the more intense" for male and female reader alike, and "You are more identified with the story, more immediately oppressed by the perplexities which arise; while, at the same time, they are associated with a less extensive range of interests" (Hutton, pp. 469, 470). Anticipating Matthew Arnold's advocacy of critical "disinterestedness," for seeing "the object as in itself it really is," Hutton sees feminine fiction by contrast as projecting a claustrophobic subjectivity that threatens to absorb the reader as it presumably has absorbed its female creator.[24] As Hutton implies throughout his article, such an "extension" of sympathies would in actuality be a contraction of the man into the woman's narrow worldview, even more so when the hypothetical identification occurs with a female character.

Although the integrity of male selfhood was supposed to be strong enough to withstand such temptations, men were hardly encouraged to identify with "feminine" plots or fictional women. Walter Bagehot, in accusing women novelists of being jealous of their own characters, asserted the perspective of the male reader as emphatically non-identificatory with either female authors or characters: "the purchaser of a novel is a victim on finding that he has only to peruse a narrative of the conduct and sentiments of an ugly lady."[25] Even male authors such as Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope were not exempt from reviewers' criticism for catering too much to feminine concerns, although not necessarily for ineptitude in portraying them.[26]

Imaginative incursions into male mentality and physicality by female authors were often derided in moral as well as aesthetic terms by critics who at the same time assumed that male authors were able to render faithful portraits of women

without being guilty of indecent trespassing. Coventry Patmore labeled *Aurora Leigh* as a "strange book for a modest, sensible little woman like Mrs. Browning to have written."[27] William Thackeray, rejecting Barrett Browning's poem "Lord Walter's Wife" from *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1861, explained that "In your poem, you know, there is an account of unlawful passion, felt by a man for a woman, and though you write pure doctrine, and real modesty, and pure ethics, I am sure our readers would make an outcry" at reading of a man's attempted seduction of his friend's wife from "one of the best wives, mothers, women in the world."[28] The content of Barrett Browning's poetry was thus ineluctably associated with and constrained by her identity as a woman—and a moral, modest woman at that—in a way that men's writing was not.

Hence the temptation to women writers of poetry as well as fiction to identify themselves in the literary marketplace as men. Elaine Showalter has demonstrated that male pseudonyms originally protected published women authors from the taint of masculine professionalism.[29] The Victorian trend of women writers identifying themselves on a professional and public level as male by signing under a man's name was not merely a convenient deceptive armor for femininity to enter the public sphere and maintain a measure of privacy as well as purity from commercialism: it also expanded the imaginative landscape within which the writer could wander without censure. While Barrett Browning never wrote under a male pen name herself, she was nevertheless still accused of putting on "the gait and the garb of man, but the stride and strut betray her."[30] Although he praised *Aurora Leigh*, D. G. Rossetti later warned his sister Christina against the "falsetto muscularity" of "the Barrett-Browning style"— the incongruous combination of a deceptively feminine voice with a threatening masculine power.[31] Even without disguise, the poetess and authoress could still be accused of merely mimicking, instead of embodying, the poet and the author.[32]

II. Father's Library

Even though reading appears to be a more passive occupation than writing, the woman reader was granted much more imaginative license than the woman author to slip into male clothes without fear of personal exposure, admonition, or ridicule. Victorian female readers often and unashamedly articulated their identification with male characters and figures. Social reformer Octavia Hill endeavored to share her own vicarious pleasure in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* with her friend Mary Harris in 1856 by asking her to "imagine how I delight in the athletic games, and try to feel how I prize the book."[33] M. Carey Thomas, the future president of Bryn Mawr, recalled that as a teenager she "read herself as literary heroine and hero respectively" of *Little Women* and Thomas Carlyle's *On*

Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History.[34] While Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* to supply her publisher's demand for "a *girls' story*," even though she claimed she didn't "enjoy that sort of thing," she portrays her heroines—based on herself and her sisters—as eager participants in the Pickwick Club, in which they assume the roles of its gentlemen members and only reluctantly accept an actual male (Laurie) into their ranks as the valet Sam Weller.[35]

When girls experienced and enacted masculine identification in their reading, they were not necessarily rebelling against conventional gender roles, but rather following the suggestions of numerous advice manuals and other improving literature. Sarah Stickney Ellis, the prolific authority on English femininity, prescribed a course of identification for the ideal "youthful reader" in *Daughters of England*, who in her reading is "in reality associating herself with a being of the highest order of mind, seeing with the eyes of the author, breathing his atmosphere, thinking his thoughts, and imbibing, through a thousand indirect channels, the very essence of his genius."[36] John Ruskin's "Lilies: Of Queen's Gardens" lecture of 1864 similarly promotes identification as the mechanism by which women ought to interact with texts and in so doing collaborate with male authors:

> it is not the object of education to turn a woman into a dictionary; but it is deeply necessary that she should be taught to enter with her whole personality into the history she reads; to picture the passages of it vitally in her own bright imagination; to apprehend, with her fine instincts, the pathetic circumstances and dramatic relations, which the historian too often only eclipses by his reasoning, and disconnects by his arrangement: it is for her to trace the hidden equities of divine reward, and catch sight, through the darkness, of the fateful threads of woven fire that connect error with its retribution. But, chiefly of all, she is to be taught to extend the limits of her sympathy with respect to that history which is being for ever determined, as the moments pass in which she draws her peaceful breath.[37]

Ruskin thus justifies women's identification through reading with male figures and authors as a preparatory exercise for cultivating sympathy with the world at large. Ellis similarly correlates a "love of poetry" with the true "woman, who, in her inexhaustible sympathies, can live only in the existence of another, and whose very smiles and tears are not exclusively her own" (p. 94). Women should thus be trained (even though it was supposed to be their natural instinct) through literature to identify with others in general, and men in particular. As Ruskin argued, in agreement with Ellis, "a girl's education should be nearly, in its course and material of study, the same as a boy's; but quite differently directed. A woman, in any rank of life, ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as

may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends" (p. 82). Through such identification, a woman could derive a sympathetic understanding of the pursuits or "pleasures" of her spouse or male relatives in which she could not directly participate.

Men were often believed to be the primary cause as well the main beneficiaries of women's masculine identification. While the mother was most commonly responsible for children's early education, a common explanation in nineteenth-century fiction for masculine literary proclivities in female characters—often expressed in a taste for the classics—was the influence of the father, metonymically represented by his library. Heroines of novels often find themselves let "loose," according to Ruskin's repeated recommendation for girls, into "a good library of old and classical books" (p. 83). Showalter notes the prevalence in biographies of Victorian women writers, including Barrett Browning, of "identification with, and dependence upon, the father; and either loss of, or alienation from, the mother" (p. 61). Likewise, the intellectual nature of heroines is almost invariably attributed to some sort of patrimony, whether from a genetic inheritance of cleverness, such as with Maggie Tulliver and *The Daisy Chain's* Ethel May, or direct teaching, as with Elizabeth Gaskell's eponymous Cousin Phillis or George Eliot's Romola.

Since they cannot follow their fathers into a profession or public status, however, none of these female characters regard the paternal heritage as an example from which they cannot diverge. While Showalter invokes Romola's stewardship of her father's library as a symbol of female homage to the male intellect, Romola sacrifices the library, though involuntarily, and ultimately uses her classical education by her father to instruct in turn her dead husband's illegitimate son (p. 44). Barrett Browning's Aurora has an intimate but irreverent relationship to her paternal literary legacy:

> Books, books, books!
> I had found the secret of a garret-room
> Piled high with cases in my father's name;
> Piled high, packed large, —where, creeping in and out
> Among the giant fossils of my past,
> Like some small nimble mouse between the ribs
> Of a mastadon, I nibbled here and there
> At this or that box, pulling through the gap,
> In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy,
> The first book first. (1.832–841)

Slipping into the relics of her "father's name" (a temporary alternative to the "royal name" of the queen), Aurora is able to consume literary material at her own will. Aurora is no female Quixote or even a female Waverley, seduced by romances into delusive worldviews. As "small" as she is in proportion to the mastodon, she presents her "nimble" movement through her father's library as a series of adventures without any anxiety of influence from these "giant fossils" of the past, what Leighton deems "the long shadow of the Father Muse."[38] She consumes literature—in an almost parasitical fashion—but is not consumed by it; her own personality is never willingly subsumed by the subjects of her self-directed but indiscriminate reading, when she admittedly "read books bad and good – some bad and good / At once" (1.779–780).[39]

The freedom with which Aurora treats literature as a playground is itself another paternal legacy. Barrett Browning's father, "WHOSE ADMONITIONS GUIDED MY YOUTHFUL MUSE EVEN FROM HER EARLIEST INFANCY," as she wrote at fourteen in her dedication of her first printed work, *The Battle of Marathon*, exerted a very forceful influence upon her artistic beginnings; her protagonist Aurora, however, enjoys a more informal and less restrictive education from her father while he is alive.[40] He who taught Aurora "the trick of Greek / And Latin" uses the same tactic "as did the women formerly / By young Achilles" and "wrapt his little daughter in his large / Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no" (1.714–715, 723–724, 727–728). Her father's carelessness as to the costume of gender extends to Aurora's own allusion, in which she is Achilles, a Greek warrior disguised in girl's clothing, in addition to being a girl enveloped in a man's garment. Such inattention to what is fitting caused *Aurora Leigh* to be lauded by writer and reformer Frances Power Cobbe, who said the poem "bears the relation to Psyche that a chiselled steel corslet does to a silk boddice with lace trimmings."[41] While the "silk boddice" corresponds with what Cobbe calls "the received notion of a woman's poetry," *Aurora Leigh* by contrast is depicted as another masculine and martial costume for its authoress to assume at will.

For Aurora, however, the gender division is still observed in the mode of didacticism; her father passes on his masculinity, whereas her aunt prescribes "a score of books on womanhood" (1.427) and a regimen of needlepoint. Whether by genetics or education, the motif of transmission of stereotypically masculine characteristics from father to daughter simultaneously reinforces and questions the aptness of a binary gender ideology, as when Maggie Tulliver's father laments that his daughter instead of his son inherited his intelligence in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).[42] Eliot also provides a contrasting example of both femininity and masculinity being contingent positions, not defined by essential traits, but rather by power relations. Tom Tulliver, usually confident and stereotypically male

in his predilections, flounders in his misguided academic studies and becomes "more like a girl than he had ever been in his life before" (p. 124), especially in contrast to his sister Maggie's natural, untutored skill with Latin—including the lesson Tom is supposed to learn about masculine nouns with tricky feminine endings in the Eton Grammar. Femininity for men in the novel is constituted not by inherent weakness of mind, but instead a temporary condition of depressed self-esteem.

Inversely, then, momentary mental forays into masculine roles might elevate a girl's aspirations. Thomas imagined herself as one of Carlyle's heroes, and Hill read with her sister the *Lives of Great Men* (Hull, p. 105). Charlotte Brontë, with her father's full encouragement, identified with the Duke of Wellington, whom she wrote about with her siblings in their "Young Men" plays.[43] Catherine Maria Sedgwick advised in *Means and Ends; or Self-training*, directed at young girls, that "[m]any have been stimulated to magnanimity and disinterestedness by the memoirs of Collingwood," the admiral second-in-command to Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar.[44] M.A. Stodart, giving her *Hints on Reading: To a Young Lady*, asserts the universally inspiring nature of such accounts:

> we feel the truth of the beautiful line; "Homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto" [I am a man, I think that nothing human is strange to me]. Well do I remember the exquisite delight which, in early childhood, I derived from Plutarch, and from Johnson's Lives of the Poets, and I would give something for the fresh, vigorous enjoyment which, on the first perusal of these books, seemed to arouse all my faculties."[45]

Stodart simultaneously recounts her own personal affinity with biography and presumes the same response from her female readers: identification with great men of history and letters.

Kate Flint characterizes this mode of identification with male figures as the absorption of an "idealized, reassuring image of patriarchal society," a way for girls and women not only to establish connections with male relatives but also to placate those cheering on the sidelines in reality with vicarious literary activity and adventure.[46] Yet such participation by proxy was as likely to stimulate as to mollify ambitions to venture beyond the Ruskinian "Queens' Gardens" to the "Kings' Treasuries." The theoretical solution to this problem would be an indissoluble union of the sexes: marriage, which, according to Margaret Oliphant, "is like dying—as distinct, as irrevocable, as complete."[47] As girls were thought to exercise their capacity for sympathizing with male family members through literary identification, marriage would be the culminating act of masculine identification for which they had been prepared.

III. The Solution and Dissolution of Marriage

In the same year that *Aurora Leigh* was published, contemporary legislative debate on marriage reform had been catalyzed by the very public divorce and tireless advocacy of Caroline Norton, who described the state of affairs between a married couple in the following terms: "As *her husband*, he has the right to all that is hers: as *his wife* she has no right to anything that is his."[48] Very little had changed materially in the relations between wives and husbands since William Blackstone articulated the common law in his *Commentaries* of 1765.[49] Under the principle of coverture the woman's status was inseparable from but unequal to that of her husband; the oneness of the couple did not comprise a marriage of halves but rather the envelopment and effacement of a smaller part by a greater one. The wife's "separate existence" was a legal fallacy (Blackstone, p. 442).

In the 1856 essay on "The Laws concerning Women" quoted above, Oliphant dismissed the implications of coverture and defined the marriage sacrament as an equivalent, mutual merger of man and wife that nullified the possibility of divergent interests. She ridiculed the idea that a woman's identity could be fully absorbed by her husband:

> Mighty indeed must be the Titanic current of that soul which could receive one whole human being, full of thoughts, affections, and emotions, into its tide and yet remain uncoloured and unchanged. There is no such monster of a man, and no such nonentity of a woman, in ordinary life. Which of us does not carry our wife's thoughts in our brain, and our wife's likings in our heart, with the most innocent unconsciousness that they are not our own original property? (p. 381)

Yet in this anonymous article Oliphant adopts the male perspective of a husband, if not necessarily her husband, and voices his thoughts about "our wife"—the collective wife of man, presumably—thoughts that might be the "original property" of the wife, but were transferred over seamlessly to his ownership after marriage. In her defense of men's ability to identify with women—an ability that she argues renders the legal protection of wives' persons and assets from husbands both unnecessary and detrimental to domestic unity—Oliphant undermines her argument by displaying only her own identification with men, and thereby reiterates on a psychological level the laws in question that transformed a married woman's original property into her husband's.

The Divorce Reform and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 struck a significant blow against the principle of coverture, at least in terms of its irrevocability, by allowing women the right to sue for divorce as well as to keep property and

earnings gained after separation; husbands, however, were granted the right to divorce wives for adultery whereas women had to prove instead their husbands' cruelty, desertion, or incest. The Married Women's Property Committee, formed by Barbara Leigh Smith, Bessie Rayner Parks, and Mary Howitt in 1855, had circulated petitions and submitted tens of thousands of signatures (some of which were collected by Barrett Browning herself) to Parliament in support of the reform, but the patent double standard of the new law regarding the grounds of divorce signified that the debate over women's rights in marriage and beyond was only in its beginning stages.[50]

Hence in 1858 William Roscoe contended that any additional political concessions to women were gratuitous, since the "sincere desires of any large number of the real women in this country necessarily secure immediate attention, and certainly exercise at least their full share of influence over the action of the men. For women to say they are unrepresented, is as if the sugar in the tea should complain that it was not tasted."[51] Roscoe's simile illustrates the very act of absorption described in Blackstone's account of coverture (and dismissed as mere semantics by Oliphant): the man is the solvent into which the woman is absorbed, and marriage is the solution for the problem of representation, because husbands and fathers as heads of households represent the women in their lives in the public sphere. Oliphant would concur with Roscoe that on the basis of physical and emotional proximity men are the appropriate representatives for women: "There is no man in existence so utterly separated from one-half of his fellow creatures as to be able to legislate against them in the interests of his own sex" (p. 380).

Roscoe also invokes the idea of "influence"—the feminine "sugar" that sweetens the tea—frequently broached at the time as the woman's equivalent of power. Thus Alice Vavasor in Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* agrees to marry her politically ambitious cousin George because "[s]he was not so far advanced as to think that women should be lawyers and doctors, or to wish that she might have the privilege of the franchise for herself; but she had undoubtedly a hankering after some second-hand political manoeuvring."[52] Whereas under coverture men absorbed the material property of their wives, influence ostensibly allowed wives some access to their husband's mental property. This imagery of female influx is similar to the phenomenon of readerly identification, in which the supposed fluidity of the feminine psyche permits women to enter the minds of fictional males who are both represented and their representatives on the page. The complementary forces of identification and influence would theoretically more than compensate for lack of representation: they would actually accommodate women to the practice of representation by men—even for single or "superfluous" women who had no direct delegates.

Rachel Ablow's recent account of marital sympathy in Victorian novels aligns the notion of male sympathy with susceptibility to "feminine influence" and by implication with the egocentric variety of identification, whereby the husband sees his better self reflected on the surface of his "better half," while ignoring the existence of the better half's own interiority.[53] While Ablow characterizes this discourse as a strategy to maintain conventional gender roles—with the wife as the husband's moral center, the guardian of the "private" sphere—the dynamic of female identification that allows for imaginative mobility into the public sphere was also used as an inspiration instead of a substitute for activity outside the realm of novels. Married women, as we have seen, were just as likely, if not more so, to be advocates for progressive and political causes, including women's rights within and outside of marriages. For, as Cobbe noted when discussing the problem of "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" what women were trained to be attracted to in men could be just as attractive in themselves, for themselves: "A woman naturally admires power, force, grandeur. It is these qualities, then, which we shall see more and more appearing as the spontaneous genius of woman asserts itself" (p. 605).

IV. Sharper Perfume

For Aurora, then, the assertion and development of her "spontaneous genius"—the *Künstlerroman*—must precede the marriage plot. While David Copperfield can pursue his *Bildung* and marital bliss in parallel plot lines, *Aurora Leigh* aims to reconcile the seemingly opposing narrative trajectories of what Mermin calls the "creating of an indissoluble identity" for Aurora as a gendered subject and artist, and the submergence of identity that marriage supposedly requires.[54] Aurora herself offers up a disparaging version of the familiar conceit of nuptial bliss as female dissolution, "where we yearn to lose ourselves / And melt like white pearls in another's wine," which sounds almost identical to "another swine" before whom the bride might cast her worth in pearls (5.1078–79). Either way, the wife's identity and her assets are no longer her own.

Aurora Leigh combines its high-flown musings about the nature of poetic inspiration with discussion of very topical political concerns: prostitution, socialism, and of course the marriage laws. The discourse of men on these subjects is captured without Aurora's narrative commentary as she eavesdrops upon the conversation of a young German student and Sir Blaise Delorme, who debate contemporary mores while ogling Lady Waldemar. Sir Blaise opines that "sexual prejudice / And marriage-law dissolved" would amount to "A general concubinage expressed / In a universal pruriency" (5.724–527). Despite its varied subject matter and hybrid form, the narrative of *Aurora Leigh* is to some extent sympathetic to

the reactionary views of Sir Blaise in its thematic resistance to the idea of unrestricted mixture—whether through the absorption of the female into marriage, the horrors of sexual intercourse outside of wedlock that Sir Blaise fears and Marian Erle suffers during her rape, and the prospect of marriage between classes that causes a "hideous interfusion" of the poor into Pimlico (4.547). When Barrett Browning first began conceptualizing *Aurora Leigh*, she announced her intention to create a novel-poem "running into the midst of our conventions, & rushing into drawing-rooms & the like 'where angels fear to tread'; —& so, meeting face to face & without mask, the Humanity of the age."[55] Humanity in *Aurora Leigh*, however, is rather narrowly confined to that class existing in "drawing-rooms & the like."

Aurora ultimately befriends the lower-class Marian, but they hardly meet on equal grounds, and the kiss of Marian's baby—the product of her rape— is as fearsomely invasive as it is beautiful:

> The whole child's face at once
> Dissolved on mine, —as if a nosegay burst
> Its string with the weight of roses overblown,
> And dropt upon me. Surely I should be glad. (7.949–952)

The baby represents the result of a certain kind of marriage that Aurora rejects throughout the verse-novel; motherhood is yet another stage in female identity's dissolution—the mutual absorption in this case of the woman and child, who is not a meticulous work of art but rather a spontaneous overflow of sensuality, "roses overblown," barely contained by the blank verse meter. The "nosegay," a collection of flowers intended for aromatic appeal, is a recurrent trope in *Aurora Leigh*, which, like its heroine, "use[s] the woman's figures naturally" and subversively, often side by side with masculine imagery (8.1131). The selective process of making a nosegay, whether the material comprises flowers, human beings, or words—as in the original sense of an anthology[56]—creates an artificial means of imposing unity through proximity without committing the violence of complete, "hideous interfusion."

Romney Leigh, Aurora's cousin, wants Aurora's essence to infuse his own life, but only within the domestic sphere. He apostrophizes her as his "flower" in a note to Aurora following his first rejected proposal to her and dismissal of her poetic vocation. As a concession he urges her:

> Write woman's verses and dream woman's dreams;
> But let me feel your perfume in my home,
> To make my sabbath after working-days.
> Bloom out your youth beside me, —be my wife. (2.831–834)

Aurora's responsibility would be to suffuse Romney's domestic life with a kind of holiness ironically unavailable in the public sphere where he passes his "working-days" devoted to activism on behalf of the poor. Aurora's occupation of "woman's verses," belittled by the impersonally gendered qualification as well as its pairing with "woman's dreams," is represented as irrelevant and extrinsic to the uxorial atmosphere Aurora will create in Romney's home through marriage.

Romney's figuration of Aurora's feminine influence as a kind of spiritualizing floral fragrance adheres to contemporary cosmetic trends, which differentiated sharply between men and women as (respectively) the subjects and objects of olfactory perception. Perfume had only relatively recently undergone the gender divide in which "sweet, floral blends," connoting both fertility and delicacy, became exclusively feminine territory, while male use suffered a general decline.[57] As Janice Carlisle notes in her study of the sense of smell in novels of the 1860s, floral scents advertised the availability of middle-class women in the marriage marketplace. Moreover, the physically protean form of fragrance itself, as Carlisle observes, felicitously "spiritualizes or literally seems to disembody what it also necessarily recognizes as indisputably material."[58] As such, and as a recurring conceit in *Aurora Leigh*, fragrance symbolizes the simultaneously miscible and marked qualities of fluid feminine identity.

Scent, a mixture itself, can trespass beyond prescribed material boundaries and yet retain its distinctiveness. A different perfume of Aurora's from the one Romney sought in the marital home follows him beyond the hearth:

> For none of all your words will let me go;
> Like sweet verbena which, being brushed against,
> Will hold us three hours after by the smell,
> In spite of long walks upon windy hills.
> But these words dealt in sharper perfume, —these
> Were ever on me, stinging through my dreams,
> And saying themselves for ever o'er my acts
> Like some unhappy verdict. (8.438–845)

Her words have the integrity to cling to Romney's consciousness and repeat themselves without becoming lost. Aurora's identity, her essence, is inseparable from her words, and thus in spite of its mobility, does not evanesce even as it penetrates Romney's conscious and unconscious mind. Nor does Romney claim her words and thoughts as his own property, unlike Oliphant's portrayal of the unwitting husband ventriloquizing the wife, but rather incorporates her ideas into his self-judgment while still attributing them to her. Romney thus moves beyond

his vision of Aurora as the modern, domestic "Muse" described by Isaac Disraeli, the "wife who reanimates the drooping genius of her husband and a mother who is inspired by the ambition of beholding her sons eminent."[59]

Aurora herself, as discussed earlier, does not fear the dissolution of self in identification with men as mentors or muses, such as her "own best poets" with whom she from the beginning actively seeks oneness:

> Does all this smell of thyme about my feet
> Conclude my visit to your holy hill
> In personal presence, or but testify
> The rustling of your vesture through my dreams
> With influent odours? When my joy and pain,
> My thought and aspiration, like the stops
> Of pipe or flute, are absolutely dumb
> Unless melodious, do you play on me,
> My pipers, —and if, sooth, you did not blow,
> Would not sound come? or is the music mine,
> As a man's voice or breath is called his own,
> Inbreathed by the Life-breather? (1.883–194)

Instead of being the vehicle for Romney's moral transcendence via her sanctifying incense in the home, Aurora aspires to an aesthetic transcendence that is dependent upon her receptivity to the "influent odours" of literal inspiration. While Bina Freiwald contends that Aurora's desire to merge her own identity with that of her male influences is fundamentally at odds with *Aurora Leigh*'s commitment to representing a model of female genius, Aurora's structuring of her own inspiration as a series of questions for these poets denotes active subjectivity.[60] She is not merely invoking muses, but interrogating their contributions, concluding with a reference to her own voice that shapes the breath with which she is inspired by her literary predecessors, "As a man's voice or breath is called his own," and thus she models an identification that is flexible, not straightforward submission or narcissistic imposition, but still creatively fruitful.

How, then, does the reader reconcile what Herbert Tucker calls this "reconception of identity as a dynamically interactive process" analogous to that of "chemical solutions," with the union of Aurora and Romney at the denouement of the poem?[61] Many critics giving credence to Aurora's proclamation, "O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!" (9.657) agree with Deirdre David that the verse-novel ultimately betrays its own ambitions by regressing into a "form-giving

epithalamium for . . . essentialist sexual politics."[62] However inferior, "Art," not "Love" is apostrophized as Aurora's possession. Moreover, the nosegay poem *Aurora Leigh* is the only product we know to issue from the merger of love between Romney and Aurora, not a biological child. Love is deferred and contained, whereas art—the poem—is profligate, trespassing beyond generic categorization, while still shying away from marrying its distinctive parts into a cohesive whole. *Aurora Leigh* is a novel, but it is bound up with the rhythm of verse; its alternate registers of lyric exaltation and catty high society chatter lie side by side rather than fused into a completely unified form.[63]

The critical impulse tends toward imposing some kind of "solution" upon the problems of *Aurora Leigh*, but *Aurora Leigh* is emphatically not a solution in any sense of the word, and does not believe in a solution-based approach to artistic or social problems (as demonstrated by the failure of Romney's socialist project as well as his averted marriage to Marian as a political statement). *Aurora Leigh* is, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have noted, built instead upon "compromise": between the artist's desire (of both Barrett Browning and Aurora) to expand past the limits of convention and a woman's prevailing fear of societal and individual dissolution.[64] Such a compromise prevents any complete resolution of opposed binaries, even the "fusion of individuality and care for others" that Christine Sutphin argues is achieved by Aurora at last.[65] The union of Aurora and Romney, which the latter compares to both a "Sweet shadow-rose" and a "human, vital, fructuous rose," only to be reminded by Aurora that "this very social rose smelt ill" in comparison with the "Flower of Heaven" (9.884-97), is yet another imperfect pairing, and not a true mixture combining diverse elements, since it is the inbred coupling of Leigh with Leigh. Aurora and Romney's relatively loose ties of kinship thus preclude the necessity of union through the dissolution of one or both parties; the identities of husband and wife are therefore connected but discrete.

The influence of Aurora's writing, however, has infiltrated the minds of other women, other potential wives. As the artist Vincent Carrington tells Aurora of his fiancée, Kate Ward, "She has your books by heart more than my words, / And quotes you up against me" (7.603–604). Kate furthermore insists that in Vincent's portrait of her she hold Aurora's book instead of his palette as the more felicitous emblem of her identity. Literature has preemptively intervened in the complete marriage of their minds, as Aurora's words are positioned by Kate "against" Vincent's. Barrett Browning thereby depicts the possibility of readerly identification as an affirmation of self that stands as a bulwark against the more pernicious self-effacement possible in marital union.

Conclusion

Despite Barrett Browning's own prediction that her poem would "be shoved away from the reading of young girls" for its scandalous content,[66] by the turn of the century *Aurora Leigh* had become associated with the less-than-redoubtable tastes of "immature femininity."[67] Many women testified to an early identification with the heroine. The feminist author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, recalling reading *Aurora Leigh* at sixteen, claimed that Barrett Browning thus "revealed to me my own nature."[68] Honor Sharpe, the novelist heroine of *Under My Own Roof*, also speaks of a strong emotional affiliation with Aurora: "Through how many foggy places in my life that book had helped me! I had often said, with white lips, 'We'll live, Aurora! we'll be strong. The dogs are on us—but we will not die.'"[69] The words quoted by Honor are spoken by the character Aurora herself in the first person plural, as though she were encouraging the kind of collective feminine identification that spawned the Aurora Leigh Clubs for girls listed in the bulletins of the New York Public Library into the early twentieth century.[70] Ironically, then, the work that Barrett Browning referred to several times as her own version of Byron's scandalous *Don Juan*, which she had been forbidden from reading by her father as a child, was ultimately heralded as a pristine text for a young female readership.[71]

While Virginia Woolf argued that in spite of *Aurora Leigh's* novelistic pretensions, "The poem becomes one long soliloquy, and the only character that is known to us and the only story told us are the character and story of Aurora Leigh herself," the poem's influence on its Victorian readers surpasses that of the character, both on an individual and a social level.[72] Susan B. Anthony presented her own "read & re-read" copy of the book to the Congressional Library in 1902, "With the hope that Women may more & more be like 'Aurora Leigh,'"[73] while the journalist and crusader against child prostitution William Thomas Stead opined that "Mill on the Subjection of Women had, I think, much less influence than Mrs. Browning's 'Aurora Leigh.'"[74]

Aurora Leigh's own history of reception from an aspirationally masculine poem to an inspirational resource for women demonstrates not only the inherent heterogeneity of the verse-novel, but also the flexibility of identification depicted therein. *Aurora Leigh* models female readerly identification without employing the tropes of female quixotism: the complete absorption of self within or else the narcissistic projection of self upon literature. Rather, Aurora experiences literary influence deliberately as both subject and object, but without assigning each position a gender and thus not undergoing the "fusion" of gendered perspectives that Woolf describes, following Coleridge, as the ideal of the "androgynous mind" in a "fully fertilised" state.[75] *Aurora Leigh* resists perfect fusion, and the sexual but

static paradigm of creativity it denotes, in favor of representing artistry through the "woman's figure" of fluctuating gender identification, which is never fixed and thus never neutralized.

Notes

1 Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton Lytton to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, December 26, 1856, in *Personal and Literary Letters of Robert, First Earl of Lytton*, ed. Lady Betty Balfour, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, 1906), p. 84.

2 Barrett Browning to Robert Browning, February 27, 1845, in *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett 1845–1846*, vol. 1 (London, 1899), p. 29.

3 Leigh Hunt to Robert Browning, January 1, 1857, in *Cornhill Magazine* 76, no. 456 (1897): 739. See also Dante Gabriel Rossetti, December 18, 1857, in *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham 1854–1870,* ed. George Birkbeck Hill (New York: Stokes, 1987), p. 189; John Ruskin to Robert Browning, November 27, 1856, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 36 (London: Allen, 1903–12) p. 247.

4 [H. F. Chorley], review of *Aurora Leigh*, by Barrett Browning, *Athenaeum* 1517 (1856): 1425.

5 [Eliot], "Belles Lettres," *Westminster Review* 67 (1857): 306. Eliot herself would of course also be described both positively and negatively by critics as the combination of a "feminine heart and intellect" with a "male ideal . . . the ideal of power." Richard Simpson, "George Eliot's Novels," *Home and Foreign Review* 3 (1863): 541.

6 [John Nichol], review of *Aurora Leigh*, *Westminster Review* 68 (1857): 221.

7 For extensive discussion of how *Aurora Leigh*'s generic mixture is complicit with its subversion of traditional gender categories, see Dorothy Mermin, "Genre and Gender in *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Newsletter* 69 (1986): 7–11; Marjorie Stone, "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: The Princess and Aurora Leigh," *VP* 25, no. 2 (1987): 101–127; and Alison Case, "'My Broken Tale': Gender and Narration in *Aurora Leigh*," in *Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 107–124.

8 The comparative aptitude of girls for identifying with characters and plots associated with the opposite sex is still taken as an article of faith, especially among pedagogues. A recent study found women reporting themselves having twice as many identificatory experiences, especially in terms of seeing "similarities between themselves and the world of fiction," as men did while reading autobiographies of men and women. Els Andringa, "The Interface between Fiction and Life: Patterns of Identification in Reading Autobiographies," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (2004): 209.

9 See Helen Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Woman & Artist* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988); Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1982); and Beverly Taylor, "'School-Miss Alfred' and 'Materfamilias': Female Sexuality and Poetic Voice in *The Princess*

and *Aurora Leigh*," in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. Anthony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (De Kalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1992).

10 Review of *Aurora Leigh*, *Dublin University Magazine* 49 (1857): 470. Terry Lovell, among others, has contended that higher literary status in the Victorian period was awarded not necessarily to male authors, but to those writers whose audience was perceived to be predominantly male. See *Consuming Fiction* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 83.

11 Barrett Browning, in *The Brownings' Correspondence*, ed. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson, vol. 1 (Winfield: Wedgestone, 1984), p. 361. In this childhood essay, Barrett Browning describes a semi-fictionalized version of herself: "Beth was a poet herself—& there was the reigning thought—No woman was ever before such a poet as she w.^{d} be. As Homer was among men, so w .^{d} she be among women."

12 Barrett Browning to Chorley, January 7, 1845, in *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Frederic George Kenyon (New York, 1897), 1:232.

13 "Poetesses," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 25, no. 656 (1868): 679.

14 Dobell to M—, January 10, 1857, *The Life and Letters of Sydney Dobell*, ed. E[mily] J[olly], vol. 2 (London, 1878), pp. 66–67. Dobell is quoting Barrett Browning's own epithet for George Sand in "To George Sand: A Desire."

15 Dobell, *Poems* (Boston, 1860), p. 184

16 Henry Thomas Buckle, "The Influence of Women on the Progress of Knowledge," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 57, no. 340 (1858): 404.

17 Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1995), 1.881–882. All subsequent references to *Aurora Leigh* will be parenthetical citations from this edition.

18 Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page and Female Creativity," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 302.

19 When she considers the figure of Danae, as sketched by artist Vincent Carrington, she almost immediately translates the sensual content of Danae's union with Jove into a model of aesthetic inspiration. The dynamic in which "Self is put away / And calm with abdication. She is Jove / And no more Danae—greater thus" (3.135–137) is re-interpreted by Aurora to symbolize "[t]wo states of the recipient artist-soul" (3.139).

20 While Joyce Zonana, arguing for Aurora's redefinition of the Muse as embodied in her own subjectivity, claims that Aurora "does not contradict" those who address her thus, Aurora does disclaim the titles of muse and prophetess, which tend to be given to her by untrustworthy characters. The villainous Lady Waldemar, for example, introduces herself to Aurora by asking, "Is this . . . the Muse?" which Aurora vehemently denies, "No sibyl even" (3.363). "The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8, no. 2 (1989): 250.

21 Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 185.

22 E. S. Dallas, *The Gay Science*, vol. 2 (London, 1866), p. 299.

23 [Richard Holt Hutton], "Novels by the Authoress of *John Halifax,*" *North British Review* 29 (1858): 470.

24 Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," *Essays in Criticism* (London, 1865), pp. 18, 1.

25 [Walter Bagehot], "The Waverley Novels," *National Review* 6 (1858): 460.

26 See Nicola Diane Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1996), p. 75. Bulwer Lytton, who compared Barrett Browning to "a good man," had the previous decade satirized "School-Miss Alfred" Tennyson for adopting a female perspective in "O Darling Room" and "Mariana." See Lytton, *New Timon: A Romance of London* (London, 1846), p. 51.

27 Patmore to Allingham, February 18, 1857, in *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore*, ed. Basil Champneys, vol. 2 (London: Bell and Sons, 1900), p. 185.

28 Thackeray to Barrett Browning, April 2, 1861, in *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Kenyon, 2:444.

29 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 19. Linda H. Peterson has recently reexamined the complex and ever-shifting status of women writers and their definition of professionalism in the nineteenth century. Peterson notes that mid-nineteenth-century women writers tended to justify their "professional labor" as a feminine practice of "service to the reader and the nation." Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009), p. 45.

30 Review of *Aurora Leigh*, *Dublin University Magazine*, p. 470. During the time period in which *Aurora Leigh* was composed, Barrett Browning and her female friends Hattie Hosmer and Mrs. Kinney decided to array themselves as male students in order to view art at a particular monastery, at the suggestion of Hosmer. According to Kinney, instead of waiting for her husband to pick her up in the carriage "so that we could enter [the monastery] unseen" Barrett Browning started "walking slowly on the square up and down! It must have been an extra dose of opium that pushed her to such a wild step." Robert Browning then "declared that now he would not venture to carry out our plan, as we no doubt had been discovered, and that the police might follow us, and the whole matter be exposed in the papers, with our names." See Ronald A. Bosco, "The Brownings and Mrs. Kinney: A Record of Their Friendship," *Browning Institute Studies* 4 (1976):116–117.

31 Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Christina Rossetti, December 3, 1875, in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters*, vol. 2 (London, 1895), p. 323.

32 Barrett Browning disarmingly acknowledges this practice, however, by having Aurora admit, "like most young poets, in a flush / Of individual life, I poured myself / Along the veins of others, and achieved / Mere lifeless imitations of life verse" (1.971–974). Such imitation is not the refuge of the uncreative authoress, but rather part of the common developmental process for "most young poets."

33 *Life of Octavia Hill, As Told in Her Letters*, ed. C. Edmund Maurice (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1913), p. 90.

34 Barbara Sicherman, "Reading and Middle-Class Identity in Victorian America" in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800–1950* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2002) p. 150.

35 Louisa May Alcott, *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, and Journals*, ed. Ednah D. Cheney (Boston, 1889), p. 198–199.

36 Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (New York, 1842), p. 22.

37 John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), p. 81

38 Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), p. 140.

39 Gail Marshall describes Barrett Browning's artistic relationship to Shakespeare as that of the disobedient, but still reverent daughter: "her words witness to Shakespeare's creative richness, but from another sphere, another century, which does not seek to supersede Shakespeare's own place and authority, but simply to make them available, in some sense to translate them, for EBB's contemporaries." Her use of Shakespearean allusion "draws attention both to EBB's own innovations, and to the persistence of Shakespeare alongside her own voice." Marshall, *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), p. 55.

40 Barrett Browning, "Battle of Marathon," in *Mrs. Browning's Complete Poetical Works* (New York, 1887), p. 521.

41 Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1862): 602.

42 "That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't. The little un takes after my side, now; she's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid. . . . It's no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep—she'll fetch none the bigger price for that." Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), p.11. Tulliver's account of the unpredictability of inherited traits simultaneously imagines Maggie's intellect as both natural and incongruous for her position as a woman.

43 See Juliet Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Woodstock: Overlook, 2002), p. 10–12 *passim*.

44 [Catharine Maria Sedgwick], *Means and Ends, or Self-Training* (Boston, 1839), p. 245.

45 M. A. Stodart, *Hints on Reading: Addressed to a Young Lady* (London, 1839), pp. 28–29.

46 Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), p. 203.

47 [Margaret Oliphant], "The Laws concerning Women," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 79 (1856): 380.

48 The Hon. Mrs. Norton, *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (London, 1856), p. 13.

49 "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a *feme-covert*.

. . . For this reason, a man cannot grant anything to his wife, or enter into a covenant with her: for the grant would be to suppose her separate existence; and to covenant with her, would be only to covenant with himself." William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England,* 16th ed. (London, 1825), 1:441–442.

50 Dorothy M. Stetson, *A Woman's Issue: The Politics of Family Law Reform in England* (Westport: Greenwood, 1982), p. 61.

51 [W. C. Roscoe], "Woman." *National Review* 7 (1858): 361.

52 Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), p. 111.

53 Ablow, *The Marriage of the Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 3-4.

54 Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 200.

55 Barrett Browning to Robert Browning, February 27, 1845, in *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett 1845–1846*, vol. 1 (London, 1899), p. 32.

56 Derived from the Greek words for "flower" and "collection," the first definition of "anthology" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is a "collection of the flowers of verse."

57 Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 83.

58 Janice Carlisle, *Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), p. 47.

59 Isaac Disraeli, *The Literary Character; or the History of Men of Genius*, ed. B. Disraeli (London, 1867), p. 208.

60 Freiwald, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*: Transcendentalism and the Female Subject," *Proceedings of the Xth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Anna Balakian and James J. Wilhelm, vol. 2 (New York: Garland, 1985), p. 415.

61 Herbert F. Tucker, "Aurora Leigh: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends," in *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*, ed. Alison Booth (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1993), pp. 75–76.

62 Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), p. 157.

63 I would thus align myself with Monique R. Morgan's description of *Aurora Leigh* as "discrete units juxtaposed with each other" and Case's account of its "uneasy coexistence" of genres, as opposed to Stone's argument that "Barrett Browning does not merely mingle genres; she fuses them together to form a new whole." See Morgan, *Narrative Means, Lyric Ends: Temporality in the Nineteenth-Century British Long Poem* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2009), p. 121; Case, *Plotting Women*, p. 108; and Stone, "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion," p. 115.

64 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), p. 575.

65 "Revising Old Scripts: The Fusion of Independence and Intimacy in *Aurora Leigh*," *Browning Institute Studies* 15 (1987): 44.

66 Barrett Browning to Arabella, October 4, 1856, in *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Her Sister Arabella*, ed. Scott Lewis, vol. 2 (Waco: Wedgstone, 2002), p. 258.

67 K. M. B., "A One-Sided Correspondence," *Overland Monthly* 5 (1885): 404.

68 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Chapters from a Life* (Cambridge, 1896), p. 64.

69 Adelaide Louise Rouse, *Under My Own Roof* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1902), p. 30.

70 New York Public Library, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 24 (1920): 184.

71 See *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Her Sister Arabella*, p. 257; Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, December 30, 1844, in *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836-1854*, ed. Meredith B. Raymond and May Rose Sullivan (Waco: Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor Univ., 1987), p. 47.

72 Virginia Woolf, *Second Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt, 1986), p. 212.

73 Reynolds, introduction to *Aurora Leigh*, p. vii.

74 *Books Which Have Influenced Me* (New York, 1887), p. 35.

75 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1957), p. 98.