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No Delicate Flower: Victorian Floral Symbolism's Mediation of Social Issues in Selected Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, and Isabella Bird Bishop

Christine Penhale, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Dr. Matthew Rowlinson, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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Abstract

No Delicate Flower: Victorian Floral Symbolism's Mediation of Social Issues in Selected Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, and Isabella Bird Bishop examines floral symbols in the writings of four Victorian authors. Although a large body of work exists on the Romantic literary symbol, its Victorian counterpart is often ignored: Barrett Browning, Tennyson, Ruskin, and Bird Bishop use floral symbols in their work as outward-looking instruments, in contrast to the more inward-looking Romantic symbol, to help understand changing social conditions and address real-world concerns. Although the use of the literary symbol changes from the Romantic to the Victorian period, flowers are constant, paradigmatic symbols that function as a means of important cultural critique.

Chapter one provides context for this project by offering an overview of the Victorian symbol and the language of flowers. Chapter two examines Elizabeth Barrett Browning's floral symbolism in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" (1844) and *Aurora Leigh* (1857), focusing on the way the poet adds to the transcendent Romantic symbol by looking beyond the symbol to real-world issues, such as unjust social practices, specifically those targeting women. Chapter three examines how, in Alfred Tennyson's minor poems, floral symbols model the social unification he advocates. Chapter four analyzes *Maud* (1855), in which Tennyson alters his use of the floral symbol to stress the impossibility of unification in a world gone mad. Chapter five moves away from poetry to prose to explore John Ruskin's *The Queen of the Air* (1869); Ruskin wields the floral symbol to try to unite God and humankind in a time rife with religious doubt brought about by advances in science. Lastly, chapter six provides a postcolonial reading of Isabella Bird Bishop's *The Hawaiian Archipelago* (1875). When Bird

Bishop visits Hawaii, she carries Victorian floral symbolism with her to critique the inhabitants' morality and to reinforce existing power hierarchies between Britain and the global South.

Keywords

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, Isabella Bird Bishop, Victorian Poetry, Victorian Literature, Floral Symbol, Flowers, Language of Flowers, Social Issues, Cultural Critique

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Victorian Floral Symbol

1.1 The Breakdown of the Romantic Symbol

The struggle to understand and define the nineteenth-century symbol has been an enduring endeavor for many writers, scholars, and critics, with one of the first thought-provoking definitions appearing at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Statesman's Manual; Or, the Bible, the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight* (1816). Coleridge's formulation of the symbol frames it as the central way to approach biblical exegesis and relates biblical symbol interpretation to literary analysis. Coleridge believes the symbol is "a sign that partakes of the reality it represents" (Henderson 79). He makes explicit that all "inspired poetry" depends on this "correspondence between sign and referent—manifest in its purest form in God's word" (79). The symbol is used to unite the noumenal and the phenomenal and is characterized "above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual* 30). Robert N. Essick suggests that Coleridge's symbol theory "was always a theology" striving to recover the language of Adam (74). Adamic language is defined as being as "one with human perception, an echo of God's creative Word" (63). In *The Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge attempts to resurrect Adamic language when he maintains that symbols must be "harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors" (37). By describing symbols as both "harmonious" and "consubstantial" with the truth, Coleridge creates a transcendent Romantic symbol that longs for synthesis and has the capacity to access the

Word of God. Through his theory of the symbol, Coleridge advocates for a sense of unity that is later sought by many Victorian authors.

Even during the Romantic period, questions about the function, purpose, and sustainability of the Romantic symbol were percolating. This creates a sense of rudderlessness for authors in the nineteenth century, as “the symbol was the hallowed device, its superiority lying in those well-known Romantic preferences for the organic, the infinite, and the imagination” (Carr 173). Moreover, the Romantic symbol was used by authors like William Wordsworth to demonstrate “an almost mystical absorption in natural beauty . . . [a] feeling of being completely one with nature” (Scourse 10). The Romantic symbol was at first celebrated as being at the centre of Romantic art; it was seen as a political device to protest “against a reality that it saw as constraining and instrumental” (173). Nevertheless, even Coleridge himself eventually came to believe that many of his own works were but allegory, “and the writers who followed him—even conservative and religious ones—were largely skeptical of the tenability of the romantic symbol” (Henderson 79). While examining the Romantic symbol and its decline in popularity, Nicolas Halmi finds that the Romantic symbol originated in the Romantics’ desire to unify the human mind with nature and their need to make sense of how individual freedoms can be retained within a cohesive and regulated social structure (24). Moreover, Halmi explains that the Romantics counted on using the symbol in their work to “reduc[e] anxiety about the place of the individual in bourgeois society . . . [and to cope with] the increasing dominance of . . . science” (24). The Romantics’ growing disillusionment with their society resulted in a fervent utilization of and fixation on the

symbol (24). Ironically, “the symbol was supposed to be the point of contact between the contingent and the absolute, the finite and the infinite, the sensuous and the super-sensuous, the temporal and the eternal, the individual and the universal” (2). On the other hand, though, “it was supposed to refer to nothing beyond itself, so that image and idea were inherently and inseparably connected in it” (2). The Romantics turned to the symbol in order to quiet their growing fear of meaninglessness, only to find that the symbol is at once infinitely meaningful and incapable of being reduced to any particular meaning.

1.2 The Victorian Symbol: In the Shadow of the Romantics

In contrast to the plethora of work published on the Romantic symbol, it is rare to find any sort of comprehensive analysis of the Victorian symbol, in part because the Victorian period stressed reason and positivism while placing enormous faith in the power of the artist to depict reality; the possibility of a distinctly Victorian use of literary symbolism is often ignored, or, at the very least, overlooked. The Victorians’ reaction to the breakdown of the Romantic symbol and the swift cultural changes they both enjoyed and endured did, in fact, change the way they used symbols in their work. The shift from the Romantic to the Victorian period was a time of great cultural transformation, and this foundational shift contributed to the questioning of the Romantic symbol. The effects of modernity are obvious throughout the Victorian period; it was a disjointed and fragmentary period of transition (Houghton xiii) during which Victorians turned their eyes from the past and warily considered themselves future-makers. Robin Gilmour notes that the electric telegraph and railways transformed “the speed of communication and the rhythm of everyday life” (2-3). Additionally, the upsurge of business, the population explosion, the

rise of science, and the decline of Christianity affected the intellectual life of Victorians (Houghton 54; Gilmour 2-3). Even more, industrialization “transformed the social fabric in a yet more profound way” (Adams 7). Faced with uncertainty in a time of unparalleled change, Victorians became concerned about their symbolic mediation of the world.

According to Andrea Henderson, the Victorians viewed symbols much differently from the Romantics; Victorians considered symbols as a “merely conventional or incomplete suture between sign and referent” (80). The concern over the unreliability of the symbol is nowhere more pronounced than in Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833). Carlyle contends that it is “[b]y Symbols . . . [that] man is guided and commanded, made happy, made wretched. He everywhere finds himself encompassed with Symbols” (166). Indeed, like the Romantics, the Victorians initially believed that symbols had the power to alter one’s thoughts, emotions, and actions. Carlyle’s examination of the Victorian symbol, however, reveals that symbols have become “worn-out” and “superannuated” (172). For most Victorians, this was an especially unsettling realization; they had lost the idealized view of the Romantic symbol. As symbols are the medium through which humans perceive the world, it profoundly disturbed the Victorians that the reliability of the medium of their thoughts, emotions, and actions was called into question. The Victorians had the uncomfortable feeling, perhaps only semi-consciously, that their reliance on symbols was no longer secure. This was especially troubling because, unlike the Romantics who mainly used the literary symbol to explore their interiority and the formation of self, Victorians typically used literary symbols to critique social issues and the very make-up of their culture. A close examination of the use of the

literary symbol in selected works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, and Isabella Bird Bishop reveals how their reaction to the breakdown of the Romantic symbol included the use of floral symbols to interrogate social issues and to unite society behind their chosen causes and goals.

1.3 The Victorians and the Floral Symbol

Why did Victorian writers utilize the floral symbol to work through their growing disillusionment with the Romantic symbol? The answer is twofold. The simple answer is that Victorians loved flowers and incorporated them into almost every aspect of their lives. In the Victorian period flowers “took on great significance in the domestic, social, and intellectual lives of the people” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 1). There was, for example, a rise in botanical study in the nineteenth century and greater attention paid to the medicinal qualities of flowers (20). In addition, the Victorian period was considered “the great age of the flower garden” (5). Victorian gardens were abundantly filled with myriad types of flowers, and, more importantly, accessing and working in gardens crossed class boundaries (5). As a result, gardens were considered both a work of art and means for enlightening “the lower classes” through the spread of botanical knowledge (5). Flowers, though, were not relegated only to the outdoors. The growing popularity of flowers led to them being brought indoors for a variety of decorative reasons. Potted plants and cut and arranged flowers added to the aesthetic beauty of Victorian homes (7). Flowers were pressed and dried and turned into ornamentation, and representations of flowers appeared in abundance on picture frames, in needlework, and within other arts and crafts (7). Flowers also enjoyed a tremendous increase in their social use. They were

worn as a part of fashion trends and given as gifts for a multitude of occasions, both celebratory and consolatory: weddings, birthdays, sicknesses, and deaths (9). Flowers also played a growing role in religious services (12) and were typically given to women during courtship (10). The Victorians' burgeoning love of flowers even led to the establishment of florists such as we know today; an increasing number of florists was required to supply flowers for personal wear, gifts, house decoration, funerals, etc. (14). Given the Victorians' near-obsession with flowers, it is unsurprising that flower imagery filled the pages of Victorian texts.

The second, and much more complex, reason why Victorian writers fully embraced flowers when exploring ways to use the symbol in their work is because floral symbols are ideal as a counterpoint to the decline of the Romantic symbol. First, the Victorian floral symbol contains elements of the Romantic symbol that would have softened any type of abrupt change in the use of the symbol. For instance, flowers are usually considered a natural object and are typically seen as aesthetically pleasing, connecting back to the Romantics' use of nature and aesthetics in their use of the literary symbol. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, in the Victorian period there was an increase in industrialism and a questioning of religion due to the rise of science. As a result, observing and admiring nature continued to be a type of religion. Thus, many Victorian authors used the flower as their symbol of choice. In a time of great industrial and urban expansion, nature became increasingly remote in many individuals' daily lives. In reaction to the mechanized world and subsequent growing absence of nature, Victorian authors and readers found solace in the floral symbol, especially when considering

complex and unsettling subjects, such as social issues. The rapidity of change and the challenges to religious faith from science in the Victorian period meant that the universality and transcendence of the Romantic symbol no longer held: Victorian writers needed a language of symbols that was contingent upon their times, and the language of flowers became the means by which they could communicate with their readers and address their social concerns, with greater assurance of the stability of their meaning.

The Victorians' love of flowers, their use of floral symbolism, and the Victorian language of flowers have been explored often, although the popularity of this line of research has sadly fallen by the wayside in recent decades. In the 1970s and early 1980s, critics studied nineteenth-century floriography in an effort to understand Victorian culture. In *The Meaning of Flowers: A Garland of Plant Lore and Symbolism from Popular Custom and Literature* (1977), Claire Powell alphabetizes, orders, and scrutinizes the Victorian language of flowers. She offers specific explanations for the symbolic use of particular flowers based on the flower-lore with which the Victorians culturally engaged in hopes to gain insight into Victorian culture. Similarly, in *The Victorians and their Flowers* (1983), Nicolette Scourse broadly surveys the Victorians' preoccupation with flowers and considers its cultural implications. Scourse studies the Victorians' need to grow, collect, and name plants. She observes how the Victorians' love of flowers led to a profusion of botanical illustrations and texts. Scourse argues that there was indeed a language of flowers: "each flower had a meaning" and was carefully chosen and given as a means of "secret communication," forming a type of "cult" following of flowers (10).

Beverly Seaton's groundbreaking article "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification" (1989) expands the investigation of floral symbolism to include semiotics. Seaton's article is overly ambitious, as she attempts to trace the sign-function of flowers through their personification from classical times to the end of the nineteenth century in Western literature. Through her wide-ranging study of floral sign-function, however, Seaton discovers two distinct elements of flower personification that can be linked to human identity: the biological, associated with the body and/or the heart, and the social, associated with the soul and/or head (681). In other words, Seaton claims that floral personifications are executed with a biological basis, meaning "that flowers are seen to represent persons in their relations to nature, their sexual roles, [and] in the place of mankind in the cosmos" (681), or with a social basis, indicating "that flowers are seen to represent persons in their ranks in society, in their interaction with others, in their characters as different from one another, [and] in their religious orientations" (681). The conclusion of Seaton's historical survey of floral personification is that classical writers related flowers to persons almost exclusively through biology, while medieval writers were concerned with flowers in relation to society, and Renaissance writers achieved a balance between the two modes of expression. She suggests that writers in the eighteenth-century took a social approach to floral symbolism, and concludes her argument by stating that "nineteenth-century concerns pulled it back towards the biological range" (681). Given, as the following chapters indicate, Barrett Browning's, Tennyson's, Ruskin's, and Bird Bishop's repeated use of floral symbols to examine the social

concerns of their period, Seaton too quickly cast aside the idea that nineteenth-century writers also harnessed the social function of the Victorian floral symbol.

Jack Goody expands on Seaton's work in *The Culture of Flowers* (1993) by exploring the sign-function of flowers beyond the West. Through a floral expedition across the centuries and around the globe, Goody discovers that symbolic communication is not expressed through floral imagery in all civilizations (1). Unlike Seaton, who, in "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification" asserts that there is a clear and measurable fluctuation between biological and social modes of floral symbolism in the Western literary tradition, Goody contends that "the actual symbolism of flower use is much more fragmentary, localised and complex" (253). For Goody, the language of flowers may exist, but it is definitely not universally understood. Instead, it is culturally dependent.

Two years after the publication of Goody's text, Seaton responded with a different interpretation of the workings of the floral symbol than she offered in "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification." In *The Language of Flowers: A History* (1995), Seaton narrows her previous study of floral symbolism to its cultural significance in Victorian era France, England, and America. Focusing her analysis on Latour's *Le langage des fleurs*, Phillip's *Floral Emblems*, and Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary*, Seaton argues that the language of flowers, like language itself, does not function as a single and universally understood correlation of flowers to meanings—floral symbols differ from book to book, country to country. After pointing out that the use of floral symbolism is an artistic construct that depends on both textual and cultural contexts,

Seaton offers “A Combined Vocabulary” built from her study of specific nineteenth-century texts from different countries. This taxonomy of nineteenth-century floral symbolism shows a variety of uses and meanings of floral symbols across different countries, demonstrating that floral symbolism is both a cultural and artistic construct. In the Victorian era, floral symbolism operates in such a transparent and evident manner that it can be correlated and catalogued in tables and diagrams, strongly suggesting that Victorian floral symbols are indeed acting as a specific and intentional means of communication.

After Goody’s and Seaton’s relatively broad studies of floral symbolism, most of the research that follows their work explores particular aspects of Victorian floral symbolism in relation to botany, science, and language. For example, Amy King’s *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel* (2003) offers an interpretation of the way in which the girl in “bloom,” or “the female whose social and sexual maturation is expressed, rhetorically managed, and even forecast by the use of a word (bloom) whose genealogy can be traced back to the function of the bloom, or flower, in Linnaeus’s botanical system” (4), enables a sexualized representation of maturation and marriage for novelists from Jane Austen to George Eliot and Henry James. By bringing together the Victorian cultural understanding of botany and floral symbolism, King provides a convincing reading of a previously overlooked cultural figure. Not only does King uncover how the novel and popular science work together to create a cultural figure, but, even more importantly, her work suggests that Victorian authors used floral symbols to examine social issues, such as the sexual maturation and marriageability of women. In

Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll (2016), Gillian Beer examines the cultural context that played a part in Carroll's creation of Alice's world. Beer notes that the Victorian language of flowers emphasizes rules and attempts to be authoritative but is, like most language systems, built upon signifiers and signified concepts that "have a strained collaboration" (147). Beer suggests that the "language of flowers" provides an intricate set of *rules* for expression and indeed for feeling" (148) and that "Carroll's flowers have no truck with any such innuendo" (148). Carroll's treatment of the language of flowers is an example of how his work often pushes back against the rules. Moreover, Carroll's lighthearted attack on the validity of the language of flowers further establishes that it was a symbolic system that was widely acknowledged by Victorian readers; it would have to be in order for his social critique and humour to be successful.

An examination of floral symbolism in the following chapters demonstrates that Barrett Browning, Tennyson, Ruskin, and Bird Bishop use floral symbolism in reaction to the Romantic symbol's loss of influence. In the face of industrialization and tremendous cultural change, they fashion a Victorian literary symbol that is nostalgically rooted in nature, enabling them to explore their cultural concerns and unify readers behind their specific causes. Literature grows out of and participates in human culture and must be understood in relation to the "cultural matrix" (Hall 9) from which it comes. This cultural matrix includes a period's events, but even more importantly, its "underlying attitudes, the themes which concern . . . [an author's] society as a group, and their expression, both direct and indirect" (13). The cultural artifacts of any given period

can be studied for the meanings they convey and the social issues authors analyze with them (Joyce 23; Hall 7). Seaton and others may be correct in their contention that there was no concrete, widespread language of flowers in the nineteenth century but this dissertation demonstrates that when Victorian floral symbols become cultural artifacts, important insights about culture, authors' social concerns, and methods of authorial communication nevertheless can be garnered.

1.4 Chapter Overview

Chapter one, "A Rose Read: Beyond the Symbol in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' and *Aurora Leigh*," explores the floral symbolism of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, beginning with the author under examination who most closely associates their use of the symbol with the Romantics. In "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" (1844) and *Aurora Leigh* (1856), Barrett Browning reconfigures the worn out, transcendent Romantic symbol. When she uses floral symbolism to critique real-world, everyday issues, such as class hierarchies and unjust and problematic gender relations, Barrett Browning subverts and reimagines the transcendent Romantic symbol. She invites her readers to look at and beyond the symbol, proving the Victorian symbol is not "worn out" (172) as Thomas Carlyle argues, but rather serves as a viable method of communication. For Barrett Browning, without symbolic communication, social change is not possible.

Chapter two, "Flowering Unification: Alfred Tennyson's Minor Poems and Their Symbolic Floral Communications," looks at Alfred Tennyson's use of floral symbolism in the following minor poems: "Dualisms" (1830), "To Mary Boyle" (1889), "The

Progress of Spring” (1889), “The Gardener’s Daughter; Or, The Pictures” (1842), “The Flower” (1864), “Flower in the crannied wall” (1869), “Early Spring” (1833), and “Early Spring” (1883). In contrast to how Barrett Browning builds upon and reconfigures the Romantic symbol, most traces of the transcendent Romantic symbol are absent from Tennyson’s minor poems; he does not see a connection between the symbol and God. As a result of the growing distrust in the Coleridgean symbol, Tennyson grounds his symbol purely in everyday concerns and utilizes floral symbolism to explore social issues, hoping to achieve a sense of unity, or unification, to lessen the anxiety that social change often brings about. In Tennyson’s use of the floral symbol, this quest for unity is all that remains of the once robust Romantic symbol.

In the third chapter, “A Problem with Unification: Alfred Tennyson’s *Maud*, Flowers, and the Violent Reconciliation of Opposites,” Alfred Tennyson’s *Maud* (1855) is analyzed. Tennyson alters his use of the floral symbol from what was seen in the examination of his minor poems to stress the impossibility of unification in a world gone mad. The futility of achieving social unity in Tennyson’s cultural context—one of war, industrialization, and insurmountable class differences—is accentuated by his repeated failure to bring together irreconcilable concepts in *Maud*. Here, Tennyson’s use of violent and bloody floral symbolism reveals that an effort to address social issues only leads to violence and death.

Chapter four, “John Ruskin’s Floral Sermons: Flowers Being Good in *The Queen of the Air*,” moves away from poetry to prose and explores John Ruskin’s *The Queen of the Air* (1869). Like Barrett Browning and Tennyson, Ruskin believes in exploring

everyday social issues in his work. Unlike Tennyson, however, who distances the symbol from religion, Ruskin circles back to the Coleridgean symbol. He invokes his concept of Vital Beauty to observe and interpret the aesthetics and biographies of flowers, and conveys these interpretations to his readers by writing floral sermons, passages that are intentionally filled with floral symbolism and meant to educate readers on good and evil as well as how to achieve salvation. Ruskin wields the Victorian floral symbol in an effort to unite God and humankind in a time rife with religious doubt brought about by advances in science.

The Conclusion, “Flower Power: Hawaiian Flora, Isabella Bird Bishop, and the Imperialistic Cross-cultural Pollination of the Victorian Floral Symbol,” examines Isabella Bird Bishop’s *The Hawaiian Archipelago: Six Months among the Palm Groves, Coral Reefs, and Volcanoes of the Sandwich Islands* (1875) and offers a postcolonial reading of Victorian floral symbolism. Not only did the British Empire add to the language of flowers by importing countless flowers from areas that it colonized, but when Victorians visited territories colonized by the British Empire, they also invoked Victorian floral symbolism to critique the inhabitants’ morality. Although Bird Bishop may have enjoyed some freedom from the moral and social restrictions imposed upon women by Victorian Britain, her use of floral symbolism suggests she is still a sociocultural product of her time and reinforces existing power hierarchies.

Chapter 2

A Rose Read: Beyond the Symbol in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" and *Aurora Leigh*

2.1 Barrett Browning's Reinvigoration of the Symbol

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's revolutionary tendencies often led her to violate "poetic decorum by speaking . . . about matters on which respectable women were expected to be ignorant or silent" (Mermin 186). Critics and readers either took issue with or praised her for her controversial subject matter, such as "her attacks on tyranny—slavery, the industrial exploitation of children, the oppression of subject nations, the sexual double standard, [and the] male domination of women" (Mermin and Tucker 339). What made her a heroine to some made her decidedly "unfeminine" to others (339). One of the key ways she communicated to her readers was through her extensive use of floral literary symbolism. There is little doubt that symbolism played an important part in Barrett Browning's view of the world. For example, in a letter from Barrett Browning to Jane Wills-Sanford on 11 May 1858, Barrett Browning offers her friend comfort in a time of distress by drawing attention to the symbolic representation at work in the world. Barrett Browning tells her friend to "[t]ry to be cheerful & to get rest of the soul—This life, this earth is symbolic—Let us look beyond the symbol" (*The Browning Letters Digital Collection*). Even though obviously carrying a religious connotation, Barrett Browning's advice to her friend draws our attention to her ability to see the importance of symbols, in fact noting—like Thomas Carlyle—that the world is mediated through them. For Barrett

Browning, symbols are instrumental as they help one understand the world in which they live. Moreover, Barrett Browning tells her friend to look past the symbol. It will be seen later that Barrett Browning believes that humankind relies on authors to make symbols accessible and to facilitate a *looking beyond* the symbol to vital meaning that illuminates everyday human concerns.

In her little-known poem “A Flower in a Letter” (1839), Barrett Browning outlines the power that she invests in floral symbolism to communicate emotions and themes that are difficult to openly discuss. The first stanzas of the poem explore the symbolic meanings that roses, lilies, violets, cacti, pansies, and tulips embody when presented to a lover. Later, we learn that “[l]ove’s language may be talked with these; / To work out choicest sentences” (31-32). Flowers can function as a means of communication for lovers to help reveal and discuss the depths of their feelings in a way that both shelters them from embarrassment and helps them show emotions that are difficult to express verbally. The reader also learns that flowers are used to symbolize the intensity of emotions during other key moments in life: at a wedding they are strewn on the ground before a bride in promise of things to come (37-42) and at the end of life they are “scattered on a grave” (43) to represent the mourning and loss experienced at the death of a loved one. Floral communication is so complex and instrumental for displaying difficult emotions that the choice of flower scattered at a wedding or placed on a grave is of the utmost importance: the symbolism associated with the flower must properly represent the feelings associated with the occasion.

Moreover, Barrett Browning contends that “[y]oung maids may wonder if the

flowers / Or the meanings be the sweeter” (35-36). This shows that Barrett Browning is directly invoking the convention that flowers express meanings that cannot be stated directly or as completely in words. She also conflates the speaker with a flower through the use of floral imagery. At the close of the poem it becomes apparent that the speaker herself is symbolized as a “poor flower unlike the rest” (83) that is “half-withered” (84) from neglect. Love has been florally communicated to her “in jest” (109), leaving her distraught and bewildered. Symbolic floral messages expressed through flowers must not be taken lightly, for their symbolism is taken as truth—more truth than mere words can hope to transmit. The speaker informs the reader that her lover has dismissed her; she shows him the value of what he has abandoned by explaining that it is the flower, “which grew beneath your eyes” (118) that “supplies” (119) to hers a “beauty worthier singing” (120). In his blindness to her worth, the lover has lost an opportunity to choose a worthy love. In this poem, Barrett Browning deftly wields floral symbolism to show how authors can use the literary symbol to enable readers to see beyond the symbol to the complex feelings and issues actually under examination.

An examination of Barrett Browning’s “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” (1844) and *Aurora Leigh* (1856) reveals that the poet employs both conventional and innovative floral literary symbolism to examine the social issues of her time, particularly those relating to women. As Robert A. Hall explains, authors cannot help but use symbols in their works to address “problems of their respective cultures” (7). Literature grows out of and participates in human culture and must be understood in relation to the “cultural matrix” (9) from which it comes. This cultural matrix includes a period’s events, but even

more importantly, its “underlying attitudes, the themes which concern . . . [an author’s] society as a group, and their expression, both direct and indirect; from these, no author can escape” (13). In Barrett Browning’s cultural matrix, women were categorized in oppressive and limiting ways. Nevertheless, Barrett Browning was a radical thinker, and nowhere is this better shown than in her engagement with the symbol.

As noted in the Introduction, Samuel Taylor Coleridge believes that symbols must be “harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors” (*The Statesman’s Manual* 37). By describing symbols as both “harmonious” and “consubstantial with the truths,” Coleridge links the symbol to the Romantic longing for synthesis as well as the perceived wholeness of the Trinity. With his theory of the symbol, Coleridge advocates for a unity between signs and their referents. Even more, by suggesting that symbols are “conductors” of God’s “truths,” Coleridge argues that symbols are transcendental; they carry the Word of God to humankind. For the Romantics, the literary symbol was “inherently and inexhaustibly meaningful” (Halmi 18): they were consequently less interested in interpreting what message authors were sending their readers and more concerned with “establishing an ideal of meaningfulness itself” (19). The Victorians, however, found themselves “encompassed with Symbols, recognised as such or not recognised” (Carlyle 166). It is this inability to recognize the symbol and lack of concern about authorial message that Barrett Browning addresses in her use of the symbol. One must first be able to recognize the symbol to look beyond it and comprehend authorial meaning.

Born in 1806, Barrett Browning's "formative years . . . belong to the Romantic, not the Victorian period" (Stone 49). Her grounding may be in the Romantic period, but her necessity to persevere in the Victorian period explains why she subverts, reimagines, and revitalizes the transcendent Romantic symbol to explore social issues with her readers. Stone contends that traces of "Romantic revolutionary idealism" can be seen in Barrett Browning's work "in a revised and gynocentric form" (53). Barrett Browning did indeed alter Romantic tropes and subject matter to address the issues of her day. She was, as Linda M. Lewis observes, "a devout, deeply religious poet" (2). Barrett Browning, however, found herself living and writing in a time in which "[q]uestions of religious, racial, and national identity were already under heightened scrutiny . . . due to a number of other historical phenomena," including England's imperialism, debates and movements in the Church of England, and, importantly, an increasing focus on gender differences (Scheinberg 24). Victorians lived in a time of unprecedented scientific, religious, political, and industrial change, and the excitement and anxiety this caused resulted in Victorians generally being both "forward-looking and backward-yearning" (Gilmour 246). Also, although Barrett Browning "ascribed to Christian beliefs," she "resisted the dogma of any particular Christian sect" (Cianciola 368). Barrett Browning is therefore free from any restrictions of faith that would hinder her from bringing together the transcendent Romantic symbol that delivers God's message with symbols that focus on real world issues, such as unjust social practices, specifically those regarding women.

Barrett Browning is "forward-looking and backward-yearning" (Gilmour 246) in her use of the symbol. She straddles the divide between the Romantic and the Victorian

period by contending that symbols are indeed transcendent, as Coleridge believed, but also arguing that it is up to authors to bring the symbols to life by ensuring they are connected with human concerns. Elucidating how symbolism works and its importance in art, Barrett Browning explains,

There's not a flower of spring,
 That dies ere June, but vaunts itself allied
 By issue and symbol, by significance
 And correspondence, to that spirit-world
 Outside the limits of our space and time,
 Whereto we are bound. Let poets give it voice
 With human meanings; else they miss the thought,
 And henceforth step down lower, stand confessed
 Instructed poorly for interpreters,—
 Thrown out by an easy cowslip in the text.
 Even so my pastoral failed: it was a book
 Of surface-pictures—pretty, cold, and false
 With literal transcript,—the worse done, I think,
 For being not ill-done. (*Aurora Leigh* 5.120-33)

Barrett Browning's symbol theory utilizes a Coleridgean view of the symbol as she attests symbols are in "correspondence" with the "spirit-world / Outside the limits of our space and time, / Whereto we are bound." Symbols are therefore transcendent and act as a conduit between humankind and God. Critically, however, Barrett Browning adds a

secular dimension to the symbol when she insists that “poets give . . . voice” to the flower by instilling in the symbol “human meaning” so that it can be understood in new and constructive ways. The speaker’s pastoral fails, as it is comprised of “surface-pictures” and a “literal transcript,” signifying the importance of symbolism for art to be able to convey its message clearly to its audience. “Interpreters” of texts need fruitful and dynamic symbols to decode that are imbued with “human meaning,” and Barrett Browning insists that removing “cowslips”—or symbols that are too literal and conventional and create “pensiveness” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 175) in their interpreters—will help to guarantee successful symbolic communication.

2.2 “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship”: A Ballad for the Empowerment of Women

Victorian writers such as Barrett Browning who participated in the nineteenth century’s significant ballad revival often employed characteristic ballad features such as “the ballad stanza, dialogue and the refrain, tragic and/or topical subject matter, and narrative compression and intensity” (Stone 102). Interestingly, however, the ballad is rarely recognized as a significant Victorian genre, even though it was a favourite of major and minor poets and their readers in the nineteenth century (95). Victorian writers’ use of the ballad was both wide-ranging and inclusive, often exploring a variety of social issues for a broad audience through the genre. Even though some of Barrett Browning’s ballads appealed primarily to women, “neither the poet herself nor the majority of her readers approached them in the context of a separate female tradition” (101). With the ballad revival in the nineteenth century also came a revival of medievalism, two literary

movements that often went hand-in-hand. For Barrett Browning, however, the nineteenth-century medievalism at work in Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle “was thoroughly retrogressive” (Mermin 94). Thus, Barrett Browning believed that medievalism needed to be transformed in favour of a more modern setting and/or themes, as she viewed “the often brutal and violent gender and human relations that prevailed in the Middle Ages” with disdain (Stone 130). Barrett Browning’s ballads reveal that the literary representation of empowerment for women requires modern settings.

“Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,” the last ballad to be written by Barrett Browning, least resembles the other ballads in *Poems* (1844) in either theme or style. Glennis Stephenson explains that in her final ballad, Barrett Browning treats the subject of love in a much more complex manner than in her previous ballads (17). Her early ballads focus almost exclusively on “the failure of love” (17). Barrett Browning’s typical ballad heroines continuously have their attempts at love thwarted by death, inconsistent lovers, and patriarchal norms that impose passive roles upon women (17). By comparison, Barrett Browning’s multifaceted intervention into gender and class relations in “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” reveals her commitment to writing about contemporary social concerns. Of course, her interest in social issues was not entirely new, as evidenced by her previous poems such as “The Cry of the Children” (1842), which attacks the abuse of children in factories and mines. For Barrett Browning, however, questions of gender and class relations become intertwined with the quest for a marriage partner—a thread that begins in “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” and is later addressed in her poem *Aurora Leigh* (Mermin 86; Stone 106).

2.3 The Statue of Silence Speaks

On 30 September 1844 Barrett Browning wrote to Cornelius Matthews, commenting that it “amuse[d] and surprise[d]” her that Thomas Carlyle and Miss Martineau “select[ed] as favorites” “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” (*The Browning Letters Digital Collection*). She explains how in writing the poem she “endeavoured to throw conventionalities . . . into the fire of poetry, to make them glow & glitter as if they were not dull things” (*The Browning Letters Digital Collection*). One of the strategic ways Barrett Browning troubles poetic conventionalities and makes them “glow & glitter” is through her unique rejuvenation of the literary symbol. She associates worn-out symbols with contemporary social issues, such as traditional class stratifications and tired gender roles that complicate the acquisition of a suitable husband.

Barrett Browning delineates the disparity in social rank between Bertram and Lady Geraldine early in the poem. Lady Geraldine is considered far above Bertram: she had “sprung of English Nobles” (15) whereas he “was born of English peasants” (15). After Bertram finds himself falling helplessly in love with her, he believes that the only result for him will be pain and heartache, as he is sure he has no chance of winning her (16). Bertram considers himself “only a poor poet” (17) and Lady Geraldine “so high above” (18) him that she is unattainable for someone of his lowly social standing. He often laments how many rich and noble suitors she has and how her riches far exceed his own, despairing that her “jewels are finer than everyone else’s jewels” (25-27). Unfortunately, Bertram is slow to realize that Lady Geraldine typically views “princely

suitors” with “disdain” (14) and agonizes that he receives the same smile that she offers the poor (23-24).

The symbolic ingredients in Lady Geraldine’s staging of her love for Bertram rejuvenate the symbol and speak through silence, serving as a counter-conventional message. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, this particular scene is written in direct response to Alfred Tennyson’s portrayal of Rose as a silent flower in “The Gardener’s Daughter” (1842). The morning after Lady Geraldine invites Bertram to Wycombe Hall, she beckons him and other guests to accompany her to the statue of Silence in her garden. When the group arrives at the statue, Lady Geraldine’s detailed and complex commentary demonstrates that the trip to the statue and her speech were both preplanned for Bertram’s benefit. For the trip into the garden, she purposefully wears a “virginal white vesture, gathered closely to her throat” (96). This “virginal white vesture,” a colour typically associated with purity and innocence, also connects her to the white marble of the statue of Silence. The statue’s basin is surrounded by lilies that “may seem pure enough to hear” (114). According to nineteenth-century floral symbol theory, lilies often represent purity and sweetness, and less commonly symbolize candor (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-83). Barrett Browning embraces the purity associated with the lilies to call attention to Lady Geraldine’s virginal purity and her pure love for Bertram. Interestingly, however, Barrett Browning also plays on the candor that is less often associated with lilies to illuminate what transpires when symbols become “worn out” (Carlyle 172) and lose their communicative transparency. Symbols, like the statue Silence and Lady Geraldine herself *may* be heard if one reads the signs and strains to hear

their message. Not only are the lilies white, associating them with Lady Geraldine's garments and accentuating her goodness and innocence, they are also linked to the "white vesture" at her throat, hindering her ability to speak directly and openly. This near-strangulation into silence symbolizes how innocence and purity render women incapable of expressing their passion in the Victorian period. An exemplary Victorian woman is thought to be a "submissive wife" who will "love, honor, obey" men (Houghton 348). Even more telling, the lilies "*may seem* pure enough to hear" (114, my emphasis) the singing of the fountain. For lilies, like women, even their purity does not guarantee a smooth flow of communication. Barrett Browning's lilies serve as a representation of the silenced Victorian woman and her attempt to, at least symbolically, be heard through this communication barrier.

As Stephenson explains, Barrett Browning's statue of Silence differs radically from traditional statues of Silence. For example, "the typical statue of Silence has her left hand's index finger on her lips to say 'Hush'" (21), whereas Lady Geraldine's Silence "is asleep; her finger has fallen on her cheek and her symbol rose is held only slackly" (21). Stephenson contends that Lady Geraldine's statue "has become a truer representation of silence" (21); however, in doing so, Stephenson overlooks the struggle that Barrett Browning is portraying with her Silence. Her Silence does not have her finger hushing herself because the Victorian woman is silenced or pressured into silencing her desires by others—there is nothing to hush, as she cannot have a voice. Robin Gilmour notes, "[t]he association of domestic virtue with passivity made the active woman threatening" (193)

to the stability of man. Unless symbols can be reinvigorated, Barrett Browning's sleeping Silence can only hope to escape oppression through the freedom located in dreams.

Stephenson also fails to consider why the rose is held slackly or why Barrett Browning's Silence is holding a rose at all. The rose is held in Silence's "right hand" (121), and not the left, to communicate "yes" to Bertram: yes, she returns his love. The rose is a timeworn symbol of love that has been recycled in innumerable poems and texts. For lovers, it became an opportunity to clandestinely communicate feelings and circumvent the watchful eyes of parents and guardians (Scourse 37). The Victorians relied on roses to communicate love to such an extent that a catalogue slowly developed of over thirty different roses that communicated hidden meanings ranging from lust to pride (38). In this case, Silence's rose represents a love that is impossible to grip tightly, given women's socially imposed inability to voice their feelings of love or control their romantic futures. Intriguingly, rather than a flesh and blood woman, it is a marble statue that holds the rose. A cold imitation and replacement, it lacks the fiery passion and animation of love. Here, Barrett Browning's rose is an imitation, a fake, ironically addressing Carlyle's assertion that symbols are "worn out" (172). Contrary to Carlyle and rather than diminishing the power of the symbol, Lady Geraldine and Barrett Browning argue that what is symbolically communicated carries even more weight than what is being said, because it can bridge silences and open up lines of communication when speech is not possible. Thus, even though the statue fails to meet "all the expected attributes of a typical figure of Silence," Stephenson argues that "it has become a truer

representation of the concept of silence” (21). Unfortunately, Stephenson misses most of the complexity of Barrett Browning’s rejuvenation of the literary symbol.

Barrett Browning offers complex and contradictory readings of Silence’s slack rose to convey that symbols can still be rich vehicles for communication even after they become stagnant and lose their meaning through overuse—they do, however, require a poet to bring them to life by instilling in them human meaning that grounds the once merely religious symbol in the real world. Of course the rose, one of the most clichéd symbols of love in literature, also demonstrates the hardened and formulaic role that love has been relegated to in society. Barrett Browning, however, uses this rose differently; it is slack only because a woman who is being customarily silenced cannot hold it tightly. When Lady Geraldine tells Bertram that “the essential meaning growing may exceed the special symbol” (121), Barrett Browning is explaining that the symbol is vitally important for communication; it is the foundation for the growth of “essential meaning.” Moreover, Barrett Browning’s insistence on calling the statue’s rose a “symbol rose” (21), and not merely a “rose,” further draws attention to the work that the poet does to reinvigorate symbols.

2.4 Proliferation of Excessive, Empty Symbols

Lady Geraldine continues, explaining to Bertram that in the higher classes “true noble men will often through right nobleness grow humble, / And assert an inward honour by denying outward show” (123-24). Regrettably, Bertram does not provide Geraldine the opportunity to continue, silencing her explanation of how her theory applies to him, a member of the lower classes, and misses an opportunity to learn of her adoration. Even

though Lady Geraldine unsuccessfully tries to explain her feelings to Bertram, he misses her symbolic meaning and views her comments as entirely general, thus having nothing to do with the state of their particular relationship. Lady Geraldine is not about to give up, even though Bertram contends that she is “dreaming” (129), as “[t]is the substance that wanes ever, ‘tis the symbol that exceeds: / Soon we shall have nought but symbol! and for statues like this Silence / Shall accept the rose’s marble—in another case, the weed’s” (132-34). For Bertram, symbol is dissipating substance; the social symbols of class are paramount and will soon be all that remain.

Moreover, weeds represent unwanted things; according to Scourse, weeds in literature in the nineteenth century represent “plants which provided nothing towards man’s welfare or, worse still, actually seemed to have been created to positively detract from it” (166). Thus, Bertram is worried that the use of symbolic representation can only lead to unwanted, troublesome weed-like things, such as symbols of class rank taking root, spreading, and distracting from the importance of peoples’ true nature. For Bertram, too much time is spent trying to separate the true meaning—or the flowers—from weeds: symbols that have been polluted and that are beginning to crowd out true meaning. He worries that soon there will be only superficial and hardened symbols such as the statue of Silence, symbols that only communicate surface meaning. Bertram, blind to the symbolic language that Lady Geraldine is using to show her feelings, is actually the one spellbound by surface, missing the depth of the symbols that Lady Geraldine is communicating.

Even though Bertram may harbour democratic views in theory, the very idea that powerful and wealthy Lady Geraldine could possibly be interested in a lowly poet never crosses his mind. Lady Geraldine, however, is not about to give up, “and insistently returns the subject to the personal” (Stephenson 21). She argues that, ““when all is run to symbol in the Social, I will throw you / The world’s book which now reads dryly, and sit down with Silence here”” (135-36). Although the reader can clearly sense Lady Geraldine’s frustration with Bertram and his obliviousness to her love for him, he remains blind to her affection because of his inability to decode symbols. For Lady Geraldine, when symbols lose their ability to convey emotions in the social arena women’s last means of communication will be gone. When symbols become worn out, Lady Geraldine may as well move to the garden with her statue, as she will have become both literally and figuratively silenced.

2.5 Women’s Symbolic Empowerment

Barrett Browning’s earlier ballads “focus primarily on the female perspective, they show the roles of men and women to be firmly, and often fatally, fixed according to traditional standards” (Stephenson 21). “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,” however, circumvents this fateful structure and distinguishes itself from Barrett Browning’s other ballads. Not only is the majority of the ballad told through the lens of Bertram’s experiences, but also Lady Geraldine tasks herself with revivifying symbolic communication to let Bertram know of her love for him. Even when she enters Bertram’s room at the end of the ballad and simply speaks his name, his name symbolically carries with it the full force of her feelings for him, so much so that he swoons. This symbolic empowerment of woman as

lover is perhaps one of the many reasons that this poem is subtitled “A Romance of the Age.”

On 31 July 1844 Barrett Browning wrote to Hugh Stuart Boyd, explaining that “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” is a “romance of the age” because it deals with “all manner of ‘temporalities’” (*The Browning Letters Digital Collection*). The linear progression through past, present, and future is evident throughout the poem, as it describes the burgeoning romance between Lady Geraldine and Bertram; however, temporality can also be applied to the floral symbols used by Barrett Browning. Their meanings change over time and are dependent upon Bertram’s understanding and current state of mind. As his frame of mind changes throughout the poem, his willingness and ability to understand Lady Geraldine’s symbolic messages increases. This models for Barrett Browning’s readers the type of acknowledgement she hopes they develop for the literary symbol and whatever authorial messages the symbol may carry. Barrett Browning’s reinvigoration of the symbol through the use of floral symbolism is developed even further in her later work *Aurora Leigh*—a multifaceted epic that explores a woman’s complex relationship with the world.

2.6 *Aurora Leigh* and the Empowerment of Women

Aurora Leigh was written as the debates surrounding the reform of marriage law swept England, and was “published a year before the passing of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act” (Knox 289). The Act reformed divorce laws by moving divorce litigation to the civil courts from the ecclesiastical courts, restructuring marriage so it became a legal contract rather than a religious sacrament, and divorce and annulment were made available. With

this came a growing independence for women, and more attention was focused on gendered social inequality. Therefore, it is not surprising that Barrett Browning uses *Aurora Leigh* as a means to explore the pitfalls experienced by Victorian women, as she grapples with the subject of marriage, as well as other gendered social concerns, such as prostitution, poverty, and gender equality. *Aurora Leigh* incorporates Barrett Browning's "femininity, her situation as a woman poet, and her increasingly substantial fame into her poetic arguments" (Mermin 3). It is often considered one of the first literary experiments that successfully brought together poetry and the novel, creating the so-called "novel-poem." Thus, it is typically thought her "most innovative work," and, consequently, critics frequently argue that it offers her highest convictions on life and art (Mermin 183). The resulting text is longer than Milton's *Paradise Lost* and attempts to reaffirm "the value of poetry itself" (Adams 177) even as it examines the social issues facing Victorian women. As Barrett Browning was continually worried that poetry was "losing its relevance to contemporary life" (178), it is unsurprising that she continued in *Aurora Leigh* the social work that she had begun in her previous poems, such as "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," by asking herself such questions as: "What kind of poetry can promote meaningful social change? Can women write such poetry?" (Ficke 249). After delving into her use of the floral symbol in both "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" and *Aurora Leigh*, the answers are evident: Barrett Browning's poetic explorations of the hardships faced by Victorian women of all social classes "promote meaningful social change," and it is Barrett Browning *herself* who can unquestionably write "such poetry."

Mary Mullen notes that Barrett Browning's writings "embody historical time and transcend it" (76): she enables contemporary and modern readers to understand the spirit of the age and draws attention to the "people and forms excluded by a linear history" (76). Some of the women's issues that Barrett Browning interrogates in her writing are: the Woman Question, women's work, education, property rights, physical and mental abuse, prostitution, and class. In fact, some mid-Victorian readers found *Aurora Leigh* rife with "intense modernity" not from "its topical allusions and contemporary scenes" (Stone 143), but rather from "the social issues it engaged" (143). Stone questions why a text that is so engaged with the social issues of its time is "seldom included in 'condition of England' discourse" (144). This oversight is unfortunate, as Barrett Browning categorically strove to write of the social conditions that arose in her

. . . live, age,

That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires,

And spends more passion, more heroic heat,

Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing rooms,

Than Roland with his knights at Roncesvalles. (*Aurora Leigh* 5.203-07)

While a great deal of critical attention has been paid to Barrett Browning's exploration of social issues such as gender relations and her illumination of the variety and seriousness of the struggles faced by Victorian women, scant work has been undertaken on how she, at least in part, accomplishes this by bringing social issues to her readers' attention through floral symbolic communication. Barrett Browning scholars have overlooked how she employs flowers to explore social issues, missing large parts of her social message

and commentary on the plight of Victorian women. Moreover, examining Barrett Browning's use of flowers as objects of cultural critique reveals how, unlike the Romantics who more often than not used the literary symbol to explore their interiority and the formation of self and their relationship with God, Barrett Browning manipulates literary symbols to critique the world around her.

Marisa Palacios Knox's "Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in *Aurora Leigh*" is one of the only texts that contains a substantial exploration of Barrett Browning's use of floral symbolism in *Aurora Leigh*. Knox argues that, notwithstanding the hybrid generic composition of the novel-poem, Barrett Browning "abhors the idea of fusion, especially one in which the female self is absorbed into wifely influence" (278). One of the many ways that Knox substantiates her argument is through Barrett Browning's use of the "trope of the nosegay" (278), a small, often-tied flower bouquet given as a gift. Knox argues that "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" (278). As the flowers within a nosegay retain their specific floral meaning even when delivered together, this reading of Barrett Browning's use of nosegays throughout her text is a productive and useful way to look at her aversion to the cessation of individual meaning. Nevertheless, other than a passing mention of the variety of rose imagery used by Barrett Browning, Knox fails to examine the importance of Barrett Browning's prolific use of floral symbolism and how it interrogates a variety of social issues faced by women. Missing the messages communicated by these floral symbols means missing much of Barrett Browning's social

commentary. Additionally, Knox does not consider the use of floral symbolism beyond the nosegay in *Aurora Leigh*, by, for example, looking at how Barrett Browning's floral symbolism in her other poetry, such as "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," works in similar ways, or examining how Barrett Browning's use of floral symbolism differs from her precursors: the Romantics.

Also turning a blind eye to Barrett Browning's complex use of the literary symbol, Monique R. Morgan investigates Barrett Browning's use of simile, contending that "Aurora desires the organic correspondence between tenor and vehicle exemplified by the Romantic symbol, yet she incessantly uses the seemingly more artificial figure of simile to express herself" (141). Curiously, Morgan ignores Barrett Browning's prolific use of floral symbolism, even though it is intertwined with the text as voraciously as clematis with an arbor. Even if one agrees with Morgan's argument that similes are somehow "more artificial figure[s]" than the Romantic symbol, it is unclear why Morgan does not examine how Barrett Browning's symbolism compares directly to the Romantic symbol. *Aurora Leigh*, like "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," draws on the historical meaning of symbolic flowers and reframes and revitalizes floral symbols to create entirely new symbol-images for her readers that they cannot help but notice and relate to.

Barrett Browning deploys floral imagery in *Aurora Leigh* to direct her readers' attention to contemporary social issues, particularly those faced by women. She works against the Victorian belief that a model Victorian woman is one who is a "submissive wife" who will "love, honor, [and] obey" men at all cost (Houghton 348). Instead, she believes that women and men can be equal, albeit differently contributing, partners in the

relationship. To reveal the hardships faced by women, Barrett Browning first must ensure her readers notice her symbols and the authorial messages she attempts to convey. The fact that Barrett Browning utilizes flowers to accomplish this makes sense, as “[f]lowers have been employed to represent our ideas and emotions as far back as we trace our artistic heritage, Eastern or Western” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 38). Barrett Browning harnesses her readers’ knowledge of flowers and deftly manipulates the symbolic use of specific types of flowers to provide a social commentary on the condition of women in the Victorian period in the hopes of propelling her readers to look outside of themselves and beyond the symbol so that they will work to improve the conditions of women.

2.7 The Conventional Rose

Roses are one of the most commonly used floral symbols in literature, and Barrett Browning wields them wisely throughout *Aurora Leigh*. Roses, often associated with beauty, love, and passion in the Victorian period, are considered the “flower of love” (Scourse 37). There are over thirty types of roses used to convey particular communications, delivering emotional messages that are “far removed from each other, ranging from bashful to shame to pride” (38). This identification of the intricate variety of rose communications understood by Victorians indicates that Barrett Browning’s audience was adept at reading and dissecting conventional floral symbolism, skilled enough that Barrett Browning could play with symbolic conventions to express subversive messages to her readers.

Ingeniously, Barrett Browning also includes many instances of the stereotypical use of rose symbolism found in literature in previous periods for her readers in *Aurora Leigh*, enabling them to compare these more common uses to her elaborate and nuanced symbolic floral interventions. Moreover, highlighting these stereotypical floral conventions exposes the negative ways in which they represent women and the unattainable expectations that are placed upon them in the Victorian period. For example, when young, Aurora notes “white-veiled rose-crowned maidens” (1.81) in the streets. Although Barrett Browning does not specify the colour of these roses, their close proximity to the white of the maidens’ veils symbolically equates them with white roses. This display of maidens thus adorned publically accentuates the importance of a woman’s sexual purity, as white roses represent innocence (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 192-93) and lets others know that the possessor of such a flower is “worthy” (192-93). The fact that the roses are worn as crowns calls even more attention to the worthy maidens’ innocence, as crowns of roses symbolize a “reward of virtue” (192-93). A woman’s virginity in the Victorian period would have been unmistakably understood by Barrett Browning’s readers as important, and it is thought that this obsession with purity developed from the “psychological burden” that remained after the “casting off [of] . . . Puritan theology” (Houghton 61-62) and was perpetuated by patriarchy.

Roses in *Aurora Leigh* symbolize more than purity, however, as Barrett Browning investigates the range of symbolic meanings available in Victorian England. Later in life, after Aurora becomes consumed with work, her physical appearance is described as if “[t]he rose [had fallen] / From either cheek” (3.274-75). Scourse argues that “the

maiden's cheek and the blush of a rose were inseparable" (9), and, drawing upon this floral symbolic convention, Barrett Browning reveals the dangers that can befall women who turn away from their socially prescribed roles of wife and mother and instead focus on work. Such bold and transgressive action, read in light of Aurora's union with Romney at the end of the novel-poem, risks the loss of beauty, a woman's chances of acquiring a husband, and the fulfillment of her expected roles.

Barrett Browning also uses conventional rose symbolism as Aurora matures and enters womanhood to point to the restrictive social conventions regarding women's sexuality. Aurora describes herself as "rosebuds reddening where the calyx split" (2.9). A rosebud, in general, symbolizes a young girl (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 192), as well as a "heart which ignores love" (192); more specifically, red rosebuds represent a person who is "young and beautiful" (193). These culturally established symbols perfectly capture not only Aurora's beauty but also her initial refusal of Romney's love. Barrett Browning's use of the term "calyx" may at first seem unconventional because of its connection to the scientific naming and sexualization of plants that was occurring during the period; however, a calyx, the sepals of a flower that form a green, protective cup that enclose a flower's petals and protect the bud, is also symbolic of the womb, thus connecting it to the importance of a woman's ability to bear children. Also, the protective function of the calyx suggests that Victorian women must guard their innocence. Here, we see that Aurora's purity is at risk as her "calyx split[s]" in a hymen-like manner—she matures into a sexual being, one ripe enough to receive a marriage proposal from Romney. By pointing to these conventional symbolic meanings associated with the rose,

Barrett Browning emphasizes the social issues that Victorian women must navigate and highlights the effects of an existence in which Victorian women must plan “from girlhood to prepare for the experience of subsuming themselves in their husbands” (Knox 278).

2.8 Moving Beyond Convention

To communicate the complex nuances at the heart of the social issues plaguing Victorian women, Barrett Browning moves beyond conventional rose symbolism and creates a piercing and complex social critique similar to that which the slack rose (125) communicates in “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship.” One of the many instances of this type of symbolism in *Aurora Leigh* occurs when Aurora encounters Marian Earle and her child, after Marian has been attacked, raped, ruined, and turned out onto the streets. When Aurora first encounters Marian and her child, she mistakenly assumes that Marian has been seduced and harshly judges her for her supposed promiscuous behaviour. Knowing that this will be Aurora’s first thought when spotted by Aurora, Marion “fluttered from [Aurora] like a cyclamen, / As white, which, taken in a sudden wind, / Beats on against the palisade” (6.443-45). Cyclamens symbolize “diffidence” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 174-75) and help to identify Marian’s hesitancy in facing Aurora’s erroneous judgment. The whiteness of the cyclamen is an indicator of Marian’s innocence, highlighting that women’s morality must not be judged based on outward appearances. The palisade walls that the cyclamen beats against symbolize the defensive walls that Marian erects around herself for protection from Aurora’s impending harsh judgment. Marian’s purity is also emphasized by her name, as “Marian” is a variant of

“Mary,” so despite her rape, she can still be seen as an innocent figure, one who is not at fault or soiled in any way by the conception of her child. Barrett Browning makes use of floral symbolism to draw attention to the perils of equating a woman’s worth with her purity, suggesting that one must proceed with judgment cautiously, as it is surprisingly easy to misjudge others.

Barrett Browning also uses floral symbolism to turn her readers’ attention to the plight of fallen women and the social stigma that they carry by exploring how women must shield their children from their supposed tainted origin. When Marian reprimands Aurora for driving her to tears in front of Marian’s child, Marian explains to Aurora that she has

kept forever in his sight

A sort of smile to please him, as you place

A green thing from the garden in a cup,

To make believe that it grows there. Look, my sweet,

My cowslip-ball! (6.698-702)

Comparing the façade of happiness Marian erects for her child to the self-deception one performs by displaying cut flowers in a cup and pretending that they continue to grow indoors, Barrett Browning uses the cup to draw on the womb symbolism we saw earlier, with her use of the term “calyx.” This once again links the floral world to women’s fertility to identify its social construction; it is a manufactured construction that only carries value in a society that upholds such damaging social constructions. Additionally, cowslips, which symbolize pensiveness (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 175), reveal

the psychological upheaval that a Victorian woman would face if she were to bear a child out of wedlock. Also, as cowslips are commonly wild plants and rarely cultivated, the symbol points to Marian's child's illegitimate conception. The statement "To make believe that it grows there" represents how Marian must "make believe" that her child is wanted, thereby symbolically erasing the circumstances of his conception. Also, the image in this passage is a simile that draws attention to an artificial situation, showing that, as Morgan suggests (146), Barrett Browning was aware of the simile's artificiality. Marian is pretending that her child, like cut flowers, does belong in the sort of life—the indoors—that she would have led if she had not been raped and cast out.

It is also important that Marian is creating an artificial environment with objects that are inherently a part of the natural environment: flowers. Cut flowers do not grow indoors and, like Marian's child, stand little chance of survival. Aurora, not knowing of Marian's rape and thinking that she has fallen prey to seduction, proclaims that "She damps her baby's cheeks by kissing them, / As we kill roses" (6.729-30), suggesting that for Aurora, lying to our children about their position in life and the challenges that an illegitimate family faces is tantamount to slowly killing the roses we cut and bring into our homes. Drowning children in false kisses—kisses that conceal the nature of their conception and thus their position in the world—is no better than allowing tears of distress to fall upon their faces. This image is particularly chilling, as earlier in the novel-poem Marian's child is equated with a rose (6.594-97), connecting the killing of roses to infanticide, whether physically or symbolically. In Victorian society, Marian's own fallen status and her child's poverty would be a "disgrace" that would be next to impossible to

overcome (Houghton 184). Using multifaceted floral symbolism to draw her readers' attention to Marian's plight, Barrett Browning builds on her readers' prior knowledge of floral associations by adding new elements of complexity and human meaning to ensure that her readers take notice of her symbols and her social commentary on the judgment faced by "fallen" women, the struggles that they must endure, and the façade that they need to maintain to shield their children.

2.9 Love and Education: Pressing Issues for Women

Barrett Browning also draws on flower pressing, an activity that many Victorian women participated in, to call attention to the limited choices available to Victorian women when it came to romantic relationships; if they did not open themselves to the possibility of love, it was believed that they would slowly lose their beauty and live out their lives lonely and alone. The constrictive pressing of flowers within the heavy pages of a book is suggestive of how women are molded by society rather than being left to flourish in their natural state. Pressing flowers in books was considered a way to preserve some remnant of the flower's beauty as well as the moments that the receiver associated with a flower received, securing a "treasure trove of memories" (Scourse 37). More than just physical objects, pressed flowers gain their own symbolic value; Aurora's overbearing and rigid aunt is described as possessing

cheeks in which was yet a rose
 Of perished summers, like a rose in a book,
 Kept more for ruth than pleasure,—if past bloom,
 But fading also. (1.283-86)

Even though Aurora's aunt possesses some remnants of her beauty, the rose in her cheeks is reminiscent of "perished summers," suggesting her aunt's old age and lack of future prospects. The aunt has spent one too many summers not opening herself up to the possibility of love. Perhaps Aurora's aunt hides herself from the possibility of love, like a "rose in book" that is slowly drying up—dying. Even the pressed flower in the book is "fading" as it, like the aunt, is "past bloom." Keeping the flower out of grief and distress, or "ruth," suggests that the aunt's life is far from complete without the love of a man. Reaching out to her readers through conventional floral tradition, Barrett Browning constructs her floral symbolism in such a way that it serves as a warning to both Aurora and her readers; their choices in life are restricted and they must search for and nourish the love in their lives or face the same fate as Aurora's aunt. A woman without the love of a legitimate husband is like a dead rose in a book—no longer a woman or a flower. Women must not be confined and restricted like a flower pressed in a book; rather, they must search out love and be given every opportunity to freely bloom. Without a loosening of restrictions to enable women to successfully find a suitable romantic partner, it is too easy to fall into a "quiet life, which was not life at all" (1.288-89).

Later in the novel-poem, Barrett Browning turns her attention to the social implications of the education that women are provided with and the gendered hierarchy of knowledge that Victorian women must navigate. As Aurora looks through her father's old books, she recalls his consternation when he discovered that she was pressing flowers within his philosophy books:

Ah, I stained this middle leaf

With pressing in't my Florentine iris-bell,
 Long stalks and all; my father chided me
 For that stain of blue-blood,—I recollect
 The peevish turn his voice took,—‘Silly girls,
 Who plant their flowers in our philosophy
 To make it fine, and only spoil the book!
 No more of it, Aurora.’ Yes—no more! (5.1233-240)

The use of “stained” and “blood” suggests menstruation and offers a gendered reading of the ruining of the page. According to her father, women, taught to press flowers in books, miss the educational value that the books offer them. In fact, their actions “spoil the book” and make it unreadable for themselves and others. It is impossible for women to reap the benefits of philosophy if they are taught to value things like flower-preservation more. Books are preservers of men’s knowledge, and by pressing flowers in books, women are imitating this preserving effect, but to a different end. Also, pressed flowers preserve memories, therefore, the book and flower pressing are indeed performing similar, but gendered, ways of preserving knowledge. Aurora’s father’s disapproval clearly suggests a hierarchy of knowledge in which masculine knowledge and record keeping are privileged over feminine modes. Aurora’s father, by not being able to “read” her pressed flower, is in essence doing the very same thing she is, but not even reading the book. In fact, he is misusing and misreading it for other than its intended purpose.

Barrett Browning specifies that the pressed flower within the philosophy book is an Iris-bell as they typically symbolize a message (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers*

180-81) and “I have a message for you” (180-81) to highlight Aurora’s father’s disapproval *and* the fact that she wants her readers to question his disapproval and the gendered hierarchy of knowledge in the Victorian period. Victorian culture demands that *men* cultivate their “faculties” (Houghton 287), whereas women are expected to remain “womanly” (201) for “[a]t the center of Victorian life was the family” (341), requiring that women remain at home, facilitating acts such as the pressing of flowers in books. In fact, when her aunt educates Aurora after Aurora’s father’s death, she is schooled in dancing, useless texts, and how to please her future husband. No doubt Aurora’s father is turning in his grave as Aurora is taught how to make “[s]pun glass, stuffed birds, and modelled flowers in wax” (1.425) by her aunt, because her aunt “liked accomplishments in girls” (1.426). Accomplishments such as these are the types of accomplishments that Aurora’s aunt—and society—think are appropriate for a woman’s education; this is at odds with what is considered appropriate for a man’s education. After being subjected to schooling such as this, it is not surprising that most upper-class Victorian girls became young women as artificial and useless as “modelled flowers in wax.” Barrett Browning, like Aurora’s father, wants more for women, longing for them to live in the real world and function in society as more than objects appreciated merely for their aesthetic qualities. Barrett Browning uses floral imagery to suggest that Aurora’s father’s misreading of her flower pressing is problematic and judgmental, and reveals that Victorian women will not stop being viewed as “[s]illy girls” until their education is altered.

2.10 Floral Cautions and Marriage

The majority of the narrative in *Aurora Leigh* follows Aurora and Romney's turbulent courtship. The yellow roses mixed with heliotropes that Romney presents to Aurora on a yearly basis offer a floral representation of Aurora's complicated relationship with Romney and, again, warn readers not to let true love pass them by:

To change the water for my heliotropes
 And yellow roses. Paris had such flowers,
 But England, also. 'Twas a yellow rose,
 By that south window of the little house,
 My cousin Romney gathered with his hand
 On all my birthdays for me, save the last;
 And then I shook the tree too rough, too rough,
 For roses to stay after. (6.292-99)

Before Aurora refuses Romney's marriage proposal, the yearly presentation of roses he bestows upon her indicates that he considers Aurora's "[b]eauty [to be] always new" (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 190-91). With this, Barrett Browning shows that Romney values Aurora for her beauty, paying little attention to her intelligence or other qualities that were not associated with the Victorian ideal of womanliness, suggesting that Aurora made the correct decision with her original refusal of his offer of marriage. Additionally, as water often symbolizes emotions, the changing of the water can be associated with Aurora's changing feelings for Romney. The ready availability of the yellow roses and heliotropes in both Paris and England suggests that Aurora does not

consider Romney's love for her unique in any way. The yellowness of roses is often associated with "the decrease of love on better acquaintance" (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 192-93); thus, the yellow roses that Romney gives Aurora once again suggest that Aurora's refusal of his marriage offer was the right decision. When she got to know him better, she realized that his desire to marry her was solely based on her beauty and her ability to be a helpmate with his philanthropic socialist causes, rather than on her intellect, personality, or artistic powers. Additionally, the yellowness of roses paired with the heliotropes reveals Aurora's buried yet burgeoning love for Romney, foreshadowing their union at the end of the novel-poem. As heliotropes are flowers that grow and turn towards the sun, and yellow roses are the colour of the sun and were gifts from Romney, the union of yellow roses and heliotropes in the vase symbolizes Aurora's final turn towards Romney. Moreover, heliotropes represent intoxicating love and "devoted attachment" (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 178-79), perfectly encapsulating Aurora's love for Romney. Lastly, the abundance of "r" sounds in this section, appearing both in alliteration and consonance (depending on one's accent), alliterate with Romney's name. This emphasizes that the yellow roses, heliotropes, and the shaking of the tree are all closely associated with Romney and highlight his ability to affect Aurora's emotions and behaviour. Consequently, because his name alliterates with the "r" in "rough," it also solidifies the sense that Aurora's rough shaking is caused by Romney. Aurora's fear of marriage and having to give up her profession is what causes the tree to shake; this connection is emphasized by the alliteration. Barrett Browning's floral symbolism within this passage warns her woman readers to be sure that they closely examine the

motivations behind any marriage proposals that they receive before they commit themselves to someone.

Although it is clear that Barrett Browning has the marriage of Aurora and Romney in mind from the beginning of *Aurora Leigh*, the symbolism of honeysuckle, also known as woodbine, is used to draw attention to the doubts that Aurora experiences before she finally concedes and accepts Romney's marriage proposal. From her room at Leigh Hall, Aurora explains that "[y]ou could not push your head out and escape / A dash of dawn-dew from the honeysuckle" (1.575-76). Honeysuckle, symbolizing the "chains" and "bonds of love" (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180-81), represents the inevitability of the union between Aurora and Romney. Aurora often arises early to witness the arrival of dawn

And hear the silence open like a flower,
 Leaf after leaf,—and stroke with listless hand
 The woodbine through the window, till at last
 I came to do it with a sort of love. (1.682-85)

The stroking of the woodbine foreshadows her married, sexual intimacy with Romney. *Aurora Leigh's* readers would have realized that the floral imagery used here explains that once Aurora agrees to enter into marriage with Romney she will enjoy it, as indicated by the honeysuckle symbolism, a flower that represents a "generous, devoted affection" (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180-1). Aurora's "listless hand" denotes her initial reluctance to accept Romney's marriage offer and her eventual concession to his request after significant emotional exhaustion. The stroking of the woodbine eventually

becoming an action done out of “a sort of love,” mirroring how love can grow during courtship and marriage, even if initially it may not be what a woman envisions for her future. Later, “[t]hough still the July air came floating through / The woodbine at [Aurora’s] window, in and out” (2.902-03). Even after her initial refusal of Romney’s marriage proposal, the woodbine, which also represents women’s refusal to answer hastily (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180-81), signifies that Aurora will not be able “[t]o dodge the sharp sword set against [her] life” (1.691); for Aurora, as for the majority of Victorian women, marriage is inevitable. Through her repetitive and complex honeysuckle/woodbine imagery, Barrett Browning informs her audience that even though they may experience doubts in choosing a mate, they must take their time and eventually settle on a suitor that they love and that suits the vision they have for their lives.

When Romney writes Aurora to reiterate his marriage proposal, he conflates her with a flower, writing,

Henceforth, my flower,
 Be planted out of reach of any such,
 And lean the side you please, with all your leaves!
 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. (2.827-33)

Barrett Browning is playing on the symbolic convention that conflates flowers with women, objectifying them. This letter points to the many ways that Aurora’s presence

can benefit Romney, but hardly bothers to concretely outline what their marriage offers her. The multiple end-stopped lines suggest that Romney is rigid, staccato; he is still set in his ways and will not be an appropriate match for Aurora until he is able to change. Aurora can “perfume” his home to help him unwind after his work is done, and she is permitted to “bloom out her youth” beside him, with nary a mention of what will happen when, like a wilting rose, the beauty of her youth has passed. Even though Romney does suggest that Aurora will be able to continue her work when they are married, he reduces her calling to a frivolous pastime by labeling it “woman’s verses” and calling her aspirations “woman’s dreams,” firmly limiting her aspirations by gendering them. Romney’s proposal is a metaphorical attempt to pick a flower, an action that leaves the flower little agency. As Knox explains, Romney may want Aurora to “infuse” his life, “but only within the domestic sphere” (290). For Aurora, Romney’s use of floral symbolism makes it clear that he has yet to change his expectations of a marriage partner.

Aurora’s refusal to Romney’s pleading letter suggests that even if men equate women with flowers, they must not be permitted to alter a woman’s essence and unwillingly draw them into their plans. Aurora writes,

You may tease, indeed,
 And blow about my feelings, or my leaves,—
 And here’s my aunt will help you with east winds,
 And break a stalk, perhaps, tormenting me;
 But certain flowers grow near as deep as trees,
 And, cousin, you’ll not move my root, not you,

With all your confluent storms. Then let me grow

Within my wayside hedge, and pass your way!

This flower has never as much to say to you

As the antique tomb which said to travellers,

‘Pause, / Siste, viator.’ Ending thus, I signed. (2.843-53)

In a reversal of conventional floral symbolism that conflates women with flowers, Barrett Browning unearths hidden strength in the flower. In her response to Romney, Aurora equates herself to a flower; however, Aurora’s flower is decidedly fixed by roots that “grow near deep as trees,” symbolizing women as strong and resilient, rather than delicate, submissive, and helpless. Moreover, trees are large and flowers are small, so this unexpected equation of the roots of a flower with that of a tree emphasizes women’s strength and agency. Romney and her aunt may be able to injure her by “break[ing] a stalk,” but they cannot change her true self or take away her agency. Aurora protects her dreams by making clear that the flower that Romney pursues “has never as much to say to [him].” This is important as women are typically characterized as silent and demure, but in this context, Barrett Browning is using silence as a form of resistance. Also, since flowers cannot talk, conflating women with flowers symbolically silences them; however, Barrett Browning smartly turns this silence into a defense mechanism that can be used to thwart inappropriate suitors. Latin phrases such as the epitaph “Siste, viator” are commonly found etched in stone; this suggests that Aurora—and perhaps all women—have the capacity for immovable strength. Also, the imperative mood of the Latin phrase also indicates that women are not to be taken lightly; they are able to achieve agency and

power. Moreover, placing this lesson on a tomb warns Barrett Browning's women readers that giving in to inappropriate men's proposals might indeed result in an untimely death. By conflating women with flowers to provide them with immovable strength, Barrett Browning demands that her readers "Siste" and desist conceding to the demands of men.

2.11 An Attempt to Critique Classification

In contrast to her use of woodbine/honeysuckle symbolism that mirrors the belief that marriage and its subsequent sexuality is a necessity for most Victorian women to achieve happiness, Barrett Browning employs conventional lily symbolism, the floral Christian "emblem of purity" (Scourse 49), to criticize the conflation of women's sexuality with their morality and worth. Barrett Browning, a product of her age, attempts to do this within the rigid class hierarchies of her period. Aurora, in conversation with Lady Waldemar about Romney's plans to marry Marian, a woman far below him in the class hierarchy, realizes that

[t]his woman breaks her social system up
 For love, so counted—the love possible
 To such,—and lilies are still lilies, pulled
 By smutty hands, though spotted from their white;
 And thus she is better, haply, of her kind,
 Than Romney Leigh who lives by diagrams,
 And crosses out the spontaneities
 Of all his individual, personal life

With formal universals. (3.738-46)

This passage shows that even though Barrett Browning strives to improve the opportunities for Victorian women, her floral symbolism is also steeped in class distinctions; there is little doubt that Barrett Browning tries to work within the existing class system to better the social conditions of women. Here, it is apparent that Barrett Browning considers the ability or capacity to love to be, to a certain extent, class dependent. The pause between “possible” and “to such” created by the line break functions to further emphasize the class difference between Romney and Marian. “The love possible” seems like a hopeful and idealized thing and, left at the end of a line with no punctuation to contain it, it suggests the limitless possibilities afforded by love; however, then the end of the phrase completely undercuts such a reading, limiting what is “possible” for people like Marian. Paralleling Marian with white lilies, flowers that symbolize “candor, purity” and “sweetness” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-83), demonstrates the floral symbolic convention of associating women’s sexuality with white lilies, highlighting the importance Victorian women are expected to give to protecting their virginity. Barrett Browning, however, utilizes floral symbolism to explain that “spotted”—or soiled—lower class women like Marian are better than men like Romney who subsume their individuality to “formal universals” and refuse to be moved by passion. Even though Marian may seem soiled, Aurora’s description of her shows that Aurora thinks that Marian will still retain her worth, although her worth can only be improved so much as it is also dependent on her class. To Aurora, Marian is willing to fly in the face of social convention to attain love by defying class hierarchies, whereas

Romney is merely marrying to continue his philanthropic project. Barrett Browning makes it abundantly clear that any loss of Marian's purity at this point is due to the "smutty hands" of others and not of her own doing. Harkening back to the floral symbolism Aurora associated with Marian when in Paris, this new image of Marian as a lily highlights the unjustness of judging the morality and worth of a person based on something that is not within his or her control.

The equation of women with lilies to criticize the conflation of women's sexuality with their morality and worth occurs again when Aurora is at an upper class party and overhears men discussing a "transatlantic girl" (5.737):

"My transatlantic girl, with her golden eyes,
That draw you to her splendid whiteness, as
The pistil of a water-lily draws,
Adjust with gold. Those girls across the sea
Are tyrannously pretty." (5.736-40)

This time, Barrett Browning connects lilies, the flower that commonly symbolizes purity (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-83), with women who are exoticized due to their otherness, further displaying the problematic categorizations at work when equating moral purity with sexual innocence. The enjambment between lines 739-40 emphasizes the distance between England and where the "transatlantic girl" originates, creating a divide between the girl and what they are: "tyrannously pretty." Also, that these lines are connected by the word "sea" highlights the distance from which the girl comes, suggesting she is even more different and other. "Transatlantic girls" seductively "draw

you” into their “splendid innocence” the same way as the pistil, or the female reproductive part of a plant that is comparable to an ovary, draws a bee in with its golden colour. At the center of the water-lily, the water-lily’s gold pistil is similar to the limpid golden pools that form the eyes of the exoticized woman. Importantly, Barrett Browning uses the image of white water-lilies, a colour that is traditionally linked to a woman’s innocence and virginity and also suggests Western women’s white skin, to draw attention to what happens when a woman’s appearance becomes a measure of her morality; from a man’s perspective, a woman’s beauty was considered a “tyranny” that tortures men, as sexual relations for women outside of marriage in the Victorian period were socially unacceptable.

Despite Barrett Browning’s forward thinking, she is also firmly rooted in her time period. Nowhere is this more apparent than when she uses floral symbolism to suggest that altering one’s class position is next to impossible. The class system in Victorian England was extremely rigid, and even etiquette such as “rituals of introduction, calling cards, the chaperoning of unmarried women, [and] intricate decorums of dress” (Adams 6) were ways of navigating social hierarchies, enabling the categorization of new acquaintances, and helping one recognize one’s “kind.” Barrett Browning uses the classifications entrenched by floral symbolism to suggest that only limited social mobility is possible. Explaining to Romney why she cannot marry him, Marian states,

[y]ou take a pink,
 You dig about its roots and water it,
 And so improve it to a garden-pink,

But will not change it to a heliotrope,

The kind remains. (6.1043-47)

Beginning by equating herself with what must be a wild or mountain pink, a flower associated with “aversion” due to its lowly status (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 188), Marian clearly accepts her low social status. Though she makes it clear that some change is possible, as mountain or wild pinks can be nurtured into garden pinks, flowers that symbolize “childishness”—a mixed move towards perfection (188-89) and also infantilization—it will never become as “highly cultivated” (Scourse 22) as a heliotrope, just as Marian will never be able to change her class identity. Heliotropes, flowers that turn towards the sun and honour its brilliance, symbolize a highly “cultivated” social status that is impossible for Marian to reach. She is keenly aware that Romney will never love her with the “devoted attachment” that heliotropes symbolize (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 178-79). As Marian’s “kind,” or social position, is unchangeable, Romney’s marriage to her would be shameful. Barrett Browning’s commentary on the limited changeability of social status for women reveals a social issue that, even though Barrett Browning herself may not have agreed, also demands intervention due to the limitations it places on women.

2.12 Conclusion: Looking Beyond the Symbol

Standing against the popularly held opinion in the Victorian period that art must only be “defended, if it is defended, as an ornament or a recreation” (Houghton 115), Barrett Browning argues that art facilitates a looking beyond the symbol—that “Art’s the witness of what Is / Behind this show” (*Aurora Leigh* 7.833-34). This access to truth that art and

its symbolism enable is what she offers to the readers of “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” and *Aurora Leigh*: these poems utilize symbol as social critique and function instructively so that women can work to rectify the variety of issues faced by Victorian women. For Lady Geraldine, Aurora, and Barrett Browning, floral symbolism magnifies truths and enables its creators to “change the world / And shift its morals” (*Aurora Leigh* 7.854-57). Barrett Browning believed that her experience as a women poet differed greatly from that of men—“that her own vision, feelings, and experiences were in some essential ways quite different” (Mermin 4), and that without symbolic communication, social change is not possible. For Barrett Browning, it would be women poets, surrounded by flowers, who could actually use their authorial voice to change the world. This desire to examine and cure social ills through floral symbolism will also be analyzed in the following chapter that explores Alfred Tennyson’s use of flowers in his minor poems. While Barrett Browning interrogates the social issues experienced by women as they attempt to unify with men in various ways, Tennyson wields floral symbolism to explore the benefits of and difficulties in achieving unification on a much broader social scale. With Tennyson’s use of the symbol, there will also be a further distancing from the Coleridgean symbol and the belief that symbols are a vehicle for the Word of God. Like Barrett Browning, Tennyson is interested in how the symbol can be used to address real world concerns.

In “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” and *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning invites her readers to look at and beyond the symbol, rejuvenating it to show that it is not “worn out” (172) as Carlyle argues, but rather is a viable and valuable vehicle of communication for women in the nineteenth century as they try to navigate love in a culture in which they

are typically silenced. Without such symbolic communication, social change is not possible; her manipulation of the symbol opens minds to new ideas by presenting the world in an innovative and surprising way. Barrett Browning embraces floral literary symbolism to interrogate Victorian gender relations, drawing on the historical meaning of symbolic flowers and reframing them in such a way as to constitute a new symbol-image for her readers. This not only shows how the use of symbols can change over time, but also mirrors the change that Barrett Browning hoped to see within society. There is little doubt that “questions of gender shaped and coloured almost everything [Barrett Browning] wrote” (Mermin 3), but through her authorial voice it is not the sound of Victorian tradition that is heard. Rather, it is the expression of bold and innovative ideas cloaked in floral symbolism, a symbolism that helped Barrett Browning become “the female precursor she herself had sought in vain” (Mermin and Tucker 339) and to mold a century of future Lady Geraldines and Aurora Leighs.

Chapter 3

Flowering Unification: Alfred Tennyson's Minor Poems and Their Symbolic Floral Communications

3.1 Calming Unification

The shift from the Romantic to the Victorian period was a time of great cultural transformation. As noted earlier, the Victorians lived in a period of unprecedented scientific, religious, political, and industrial change (Gilmour 246), and this caused both excitement and apprehension. One of the many ways the Victorians attempted to make sense out of their rapidly changing world was through their use of the symbol. After realizing that many things were relative and “good or true only for [a] particular society at a particular stage in its cultural evolution” (Houghton 15), the Victorians were better prepared to judge their own period, and its writers were more ready to comment upon it through the use of an outward-looking literary symbol. Given the great significance the Victorians placed on flowers in their everyday lives and literature (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 1), it follows that Alfred Tennyson uses floral symbols to critique his world. Additionally, as previously explained, when poets use flowers symbolically, flowers are bestowed with new forms and roles. They become cultural artifacts that can be studied for the meanings they convey and for the social issues that can be explored through analyzing them (Joyce 23; Hall 7). Crucially, when flowers become cultural artifacts, multifarious insights can be gleaned from them that reflect a particular culture's, and author's, social concerns.

Tennyson's use of floral symbolism is abundant, but scholars have rarely taken it seriously, especially in terms of how Tennyson uses the floral symbol to explore social issues. Thus, this project requires the inclusion of responses by Tennyson's contemporaries that explore his use of floral symbolism, such as comments on the reception of his work and contemporary writings that explore his use of flowers. This chapter considers Tennyson's floral symbolism in: "Dualisms" (1830), "To Mary Boyle" (1889), "The Progress of Spring" (1889), "The Gardener's Daughter; Or, The Pictures" (1842), "The Flower" (1864), "Flower in the crannied wall" (1869), "Early Spring" (1833), and "Early Spring" (1883). These particular minor poems were chosen for three main reasons: they all contain an abundance of floral symbolism, their floral symbolism has rarely been investigated, and they offer a picture of Tennyson's use of the floral symbol at the beginning, middle, and end of his career. As mentioned, there was significant cultural transformation from the Romantic to the Victorian period, and it follows that Victorian poets, such as Tennyson, began to employ the literary symbol in a different way. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* illustrates how Victorians were beginning to feel as though symbols had become "worn-out" and "superannuated" (172). This unnerving recognition would have led to a tarnishing of the idealized view of the Romantic symbol—a means of unification to a higher ideal—through the realization that the higher ideal likely never existed. Recall that even though Barrett Browning believes that the literary symbol is in part transcendent and acts as a conduit between humankind and God, she crucially adds a secular dimension to the symbol by insisting that poets use symbols to explore everyday

concerns to make symbols meaningful for readers. As a result of the growing distrust in the Coleridgean transcendent symbol, Tennyson utilizes floral symbolism to explore social issues, hoping to achieve a sense of unity, or unification, to lessen the anxiety that social change often brings about.

Regardless of his precarious position as state-sanctioned Poet Laureate *and* poet who desires to critique the social issues of his period, Tennyson's poetry is undeniably political (Sinfield 154-55). Tennyson's intelligence and morality formed a poet who cannot help but analyze Victorian social issues (Robson 162). Remarkably, in "The Motivation of Tennyson's Weeper," Cleanth Brooks acknowledges that Tennyson is a thoughtful poet who "grapples—particularly in his later period—with the 'big' questions which were up for his day" (177) but insists that Tennyson kept his social critique "out of the . . . symbolism of the poetry itself" (177); a review of Tennyson's use of floral symbolism to explore the social issues of his period and bring about a sense of calming unity will prove that this observation is incorrect. He employs floral symbolism to help fulfill his poetic aim. For Tennyson, "verses have no other aim than to call to life nobler and better sentiments than we indulge in in everyday life" ("Tennyson Resting on his Laurels" 10). Tennyson, like Barrett Browning, believes that poetry must bring everyday concerns to life. It is often thought that Tennyson was more radical at the start of his poetic career and matured into a conservative (Sinfield 179). An examination of floral symbolism throughout his career, however, indicates that Tennyson was, unlike the revolutionary we see in Barrett Browning, always a unity-seeking conservative.

For Tennyson, symbolism, particularly floral symbolism, mediates meaning through the transmission of specific symbolic messages. During this process, Tennyson sets out to satisfy his longing for unification to resolve conflict, a longing that in many of the poems addressed here he attempts to mitigate by drawing on the concept of organic unity. Organic unity was first discussed by Plato in *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and *The Republic* and was later taken up by Aristotle in *Poetics*. Narrowly, organic unity is about literary principles that are internally consistent and develop in a unified fashion. This type of unity is considered organic because it relies heavily on a particular unity of parts that requires an exact order and certain elements that grow out of one another. Later, the idea of organic unity broadened when evolutionary theorists, for instance Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), made it an integral component of their work, and the Romantics, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), became preoccupied with organic form and growth.

During the eighteenth century and the rise of natural history and biology, the term “organic” generally referred to things that were alive and capable of growth (Hirsch 430). Also critical to the development of the theory is that the Industrial Revolution helped to attach a new importance to machines that led the Romantics to begin “to reject eighteenth-century mechanical philosophies of mind, differentiating between organic and inorganic systems, natural and mechanical bodies” (430). Coleridge, building on work by the German critic A. W. Schlegel, famously makes a clear and significant distinction between mechanic and organic form in his groundbreaking essay “Shakespeare’s Judgment Equal to his Genius” (1836). Coleridge asserts that readers of Shakespeare

have to be disinterested and notice that Shakespeare's work is universal and organic. In this discussion, Coleridge outlines the Romantic idea of organic growth. He suggests that a form becomes "mechanic" when "we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material" (46-47). He provides an example of molding wet clay so that we can ensure it retains a particular shape once it hardens. In contrast, organic form "is innate, it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward Form" (46-47). Coleridge's explanation of the differences between mechanic and organic forms captures the concept of organic growth that was flourishing in the Romantic period and was often applied to art: "art is like a living organism, especially a plant, which originates in a seed, [and] continues to grow" (Hirsch 430). This metaphor of a slow-growing organic form "that develops from within . . . [was] crucial to the development of romantic . . . poetry" (431) and for Tennyson.

The belief that Tennyson uses his poetry to explore social issues and strives for a sense of unity in his work is not new. In fact, according to Christopher Ricks, the importance of the unity of pairings for Tennyson was "ingrained, even obsessive" (*Tennyson* 50). Even though Ricks draws this conclusion from the fact that many of Tennyson's poems can be easily categorized into pairings such as: "The Merman" and "The Mermaid"; "Forlorn" and "Happy"; "Despair" and "Faith"; "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade"; and "Locksley Hall" and "Locksley Hall Sixty Years Later" (51), a close reading of Tennyson's use of floral symbolism in his minor poems supports the marriage of Tennyson's complex navigation

of social issues with his desire to achieve calming unification. Ultimately, both Tennyson's need to examine social issues and his intent to do so in a reassuring way is unsurprising given the rapid change and growth in the Victorian period. For Tennyson, the key to achieving this dual purpose is to use floral symbolism to reconcile opposites and achieve a calming sense of unification.

3.2 "Dualisms"

The prominence and prevalence of Tennyson's floral symbolism varied significantly throughout his career; however, even when it functions in the background of his poems it still buttresses his consideration of social issues and strives for unity. Tennyson's minor poem "Dualisms" (1830), found in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, explores the similarities and differences between humans and animals. "Dualisms" is seldom studied, perhaps because it was only included in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* in 1830 and was never reprinted (Ricks, *Poems* 253), or perhaps because it has "overelaborate" rhyme and metre, and contains numerous unhyphenated compound words, a poetic device that Tennyson experimented with early in his career (253). Generally, the poem could be said to be an excruciating read. Regardless, it is an important example of how even when Tennyson's floral symbolism plays a more indirect role in his work it still delves into the concerns of his period. At first glance, the poem may seem rife with sexual overtones due to its use of "the birds and the bees," but it is not about sex so much as the reproduction of life and acquired traits. Appearing well before Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, "Dualisms" draws attention to the anxieties that earlier evolutionary theorists such as Lamarck generated with their work. Lamarck, a French biologist who is

known for Lamarckism—the idea that acquired characteristics are inheritable—was “the first writer to set forth . . . a comprehensive theory of organic evolution that accounted for the successive production of all the different forms of life on Earth” (“Jean-Baptiste Lamarck”). Scientific claims that attempt to construct a sense of unity are often considered to be a result of the era’s rapid change and growth, change and growth that was so extreme that it led to a crisis of faith and growth of unease.

In “Dualisms,” Tennyson first compares the characteristics of animals within species and finds them remarkably the same. “Two bees” (1) that are “[b]oth alike” (3, 4) “buzz together” (3). To draw attention to the similarities between the bees, Tennyson repeats the phrase “both alike” and places the phrase prominently at the beginning of lines. In the next section of the poem, Tennyson describes “two birds” (8) that are also “[b]oth alike” (10, 12) in ways parallel to his portrayal of the bees. The birds are described as being “[b]oth alike” in two separate lines, and the phrase again appears at the beginning of lines to establish its importance. After drawing notice to the similarities between the characteristics of the animals in the poem, Tennyson moves the focus to two children. The children, unlike the bees and birds, share characteristics that are both “[l]ike” and “unlike” (17, 19). Again, Tennyson places his descriptors at the beginning of the lines and repeats them to highlight their importance. Some of the children’s characteristics and descriptors are the same and bring with them a unifying effect: they are “lovelier than Love” (13), wearing matching frocks (16), and both singing (19). Regardless, even with these multiple similarities, there is something about their humanness that makes them able to be unique from each other even in their state of

unification. The “unlike” children who are “like” in so many ways have characteristics that are different from one another. One of the children is “MidMay’s darling goldenlockèd” (21) and the other “Summer’s tanling diamondeyed” (22). Not only are the children associated with different months, but also one sports blonde hair while the other is more susceptible to tanning in the summer sun. Tennyson calls attention to the differing characteristics of the children to distinguish them from animals, perhaps elevating them by making them more complex. Furthermore, by endowing only the humans with differing characteristics, Tennyson is exploring how humans have dissimilar characteristics within the same species—unlike animals. Moreover, ending the poem with a couplet that nearly rhymes to describe the children’s differing characteristics further emphasizes both their variation *and* their bound-togetherness. Making use of his original unhyphenated compound words to further create a bond between the children, Tennyson ends his rhyming couplets with “goldenlockèd” and “diamondeyed”; however, by accenting only the “e” in “goldenlockèd” and not the “e” in “diamondeyed,” he forces the pronunciation of the similar-ending words to differentiate them. Tennyson’s detailed examination of the similarities among animals of the same species alongside a study of how humans can be both unified and different speaks to the evolutionary concerns that were held in the Victorian period.

Even though Tennyson’s use of floral symbolism in “Dualisms” is secondary to his utilization of bee, bird, and children imagery, the poet still embraces flowers to aid his examination of social issues and his desire for harmony. For example, the poem opens with two bees buzzing happily within a “chrystal flowerbell” (1). Although first confined

within this “chrysal” —or innocently transparent, valuable, and circular—floral receptacle, the bees soon break free. By placing the pair of bees within a flower, Tennyson draws attention to their similarities and oneness. Even when the bees escape the flower and fly freely “[t]hrough and through the flowered heather” (5), their likeness and reproductive capacity is further accentuated by the use of heather. Heather represents bedstraw, or the marriage bed, and is associated with the union of love, sometimes after a period of loneliness (Ward 175-79). In fact, in the Victorian period it became a popular wedding flower and between 1840-1913 was considered to be a royal wedding flower (Nelson 231): obviously, heather and the idea of unification are inherently intertwined. With this in mind, Tennyson’s two bees buzzing about in the heather reinforces the bees’ pairing and draws attention to their similarity which helps explain why animals within the same species display corresponding characteristics.

The only other two references to flowers occur in the section of the poem that addresses the differing characteristics of the similar, yet different, children; this floral symbolism is used to illuminate the children’s similarity and innocence. Both children are stringing “lilygarlands” (15) and wearing “blossomwhite silk” (16). Dressing the children in matching “blossom” white outfits attests to their innocence and purity as white flowers almost always symbolize “purity and innocence” (Scourse 49). This also reinforces their similarity, a similarity that Tennyson later nuances by calling attention to the fact that they still have some significantly different characteristics. Moreover, Tennyson tasks the children with the construction of “lilygarlands”; this solidifies their pureness and similarity. Lilies commonly symbolize purity (Ward 243). Consistent with the unification

that Tennyson is trying to achieve in this poem, lilies, like heather, are often associated with weddings (243). Furthermore, by having both children perform the same task, the construction of “lilygarlands,” Tennyson again draws attention to their apparent similarities. Essentially, in “Dualisms” Tennyson’s flowers act as setting and props in the poem, but their symbolism seems inextricable from the consideration of pairings of two and a pairing of singulars. The floral symbolism nuances his exploration of social issues by reinforcing the overall message of the poem: humans, like animals, can be extremely similar; however, unlike bees and birds, humans are able to be similar and still maintain differing characteristics. This neatly distinguishes humans from animals and constructs a unifying paradigm of difference that places some desired distance between animals and humans in the evolutionary system. Dualisms are doubles but also two singularities whose differences can be reconciled.

3.3 “To Mary Boyle” and “The Progress of Spring”

In “To Mary Boyle” and “The Progress of Spring”—both appearing in *Demeter and Other Poems* (1889)—floral symbolism plays a substantial role, perhaps in part due to one of the themes of both poems: the arrival of spring. “To Mary Boyle” was written in the spring of 1888 and published in 1889 (Ricks, *Poems* 1402). It is subtitled “With the Following Poem” and it introduces “The Progress of Spring,” a poem written in the 1830s and dusted off for publication in the late 1880s (1402). “To Mary Boyle” is considered a Horatian epistle. Horace employed the familiar nature of letters to explore philosophical and moral questions. In “The Status of the Verse Epistle before Pope,” Arnold J. Levine helpfully explains that a Horatian epistle is “presented as a letter [and]

discusses serious matters of individual, social, or political conduct in an intimate or middle style. On its discursive level, such a work attempts to persuade a recipient—and, through him, its public readers—of the wisdom in a certain attitude or course of action” (661). Most people, except perhaps staunch Tennysonians, would be surprised to learn that Tennyson composed upwards of thirty-five such poems, some of which are: “To J.S.,” “To the Vicar of Shiplake,” “The Daisy,” “To the Rev. F. D. Maurice,” “Prologue to General Hamley,” “To E. FitzGerald,” “To Ulysses,” and “To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava” (Pritchard 332). This particular Horatian epistle is addressed to Mary Boyle (1819-1890). Tennyson first met Boyle in 1882 (Ricks, *Poems* 1402), and Hallam Tennyson explains that “Mary Boyle was an aunt of my wife’s (Audrey Tennyson, *née* Boyle)” (qtd in Ricks, *Poems* 1402). At the time that Tennyson wrote this poem, Boyle was grieving the death of Lady Marian Alford—she died 9 February 1888—the Lady Marian of Tennyson’s poetry (Ricks, *Poems* 1403).

On the surface, the poem is a touching reminder to Boyle that she had promised to join Tennyson in Farringford by the spring (Pritchard 343). Nevertheless, the “elm-tree’s ruddy-hearted blossom-flake” (3) that is “fluttering down” (4) and “the gold from each laburnum chain / Drop[ping] to the grass” (11-12) serve as time markers that demonstrate that spring is concluding and Boyle has yet to join Tennyson in the country. Tennyson questions if Boyle has forgotten her promise to visit (13-14) and suggests that she “[m]ight find a flickering glimmer of relief” (47) from the grief she must be experiencing at the loss of Lady Marian Alford “[i]n [a] change of place” (48). Tennyson argues that since both he and Boyle are now in their “silver year” (57) they need not be consumed by

grief and “should cease to mourn and sigh” (57): they will not have to live many years upon the earth until they can be united with their loved ones. Tennyson concludes the poem by drawing on a frequently used comparison between the city and the country, proclaiming that Boyle should leave behind the “dark Queen-city, all her realm / Of sound and smoke, / For his clear heaven, and these few lanes of elm / And whispering oak” (65-68). For Tennyson, a natural, country setting is a place of healing and comfort for those in the grieving process.

A closer inspection of “To Mary Boyle” reveals a poem that is chockfull of political commentary. Elaine Jordan explains that “[p]olitics enter Tennyson’s poetry directly” (26). Not only is “To Mary Boyle” used to introduce “The Progress of Spring,” a poem that argues for a type of societal change that is modeled after organic growth rather than abrupt and bloody revolution, it also examines the violence of revolution and the long-lasting effect that it can have on those who experience it. For example, in the poem Tennyson explains “The Progress of Spring” was penned years ago during a time of revolutionary atmosphere: a time of “rick-fire days” (28). Here, Tennyson is recalling “the rick-burnings of the 1830s by agricultural labourers, whose employment was threatened by new machinery” (Jordan 26). In the poem, Tennyson details a fiery, “red night” (35) during which “thirty ricks” (36) were “all flaming” (37). As with the rest of the poem, the poet draws on biographical details when he explains that “[t]hese hands of mine / Have helpt to pass a bucket from the well / Along the line” (38-40). Tennyson himself had helped put out rick fires near Cambridge (Jordan 26). Moreover, the “English homestead” (37) that Tennyson describes as a “hell” (37) was in reality near Cambridge

and Tennyson resided there in 1830 (Ricks, *Poems* 1403). Tennyson was in fact so traumatized by the events of the revolutionary atmosphere that rick-burning makes other appearances in his work; it can also be found, for example, in *The Princess* (366) and *The Grandmother* (39) (Ricks, *Poems* 1403).

Further evidence that “To Mary Boyle” is much more than only a plea to a friend to relocate to the country can be seen in Tennyson’s account of the parable of Lazarus and Dives. This story, found in the Gospel of Luke, describes the relationship between Dives, a rich man, and a poor beggar named Lazarus. In Tennyson’s version, the writing of “The Progress of Spring” falls during a time in which the air is filled with the warning of revolution and “Dives loathed the times” (29) and lived in “fear” (30) and a “sanguine” (31)—or bloody—Lazarus “felt a vacant hand / Fill with *his* purse” (31-32). According to Tennyson, revolutionary times are a time of unrest and fear for both the rich and the poor. His observations of the conditions experienced by all classes of people who have to navigate a revolutionary atmosphere and the fear that acts like rick-burning inspire are issues that are later taken up in “The Progress of Spring.”

In “To Mary Boyle,” floral symbolism functions on a variety of levels. On a simpler level, it acts as we have already seen; it marks the passage of time by indicating that spring is passing. A more subtle and clever use, however, occurs when Tennyson uses the phrase “spring-flower” (19) as a term for the poem “The Progress of Spring,” uniting flowers and poetry, both of which function as gifts, offer aesthetic pleasure, and work to transmit meaning. Most importantly, however, Tennyson makes use of the Victorians’ vast knowledge of flowers to call further attention to the danger of revolution.

Lines 25 and 26, essential lines that describe the writing of “The Progress of Spring” “more than half a hundred years ago” (27) during the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1830s, explain that “The Progress of Spring” “flowered betwixt the . . . sloe / And kingcup blaze.” On the surface, this use of flowers seems to once again signify a timeframe, in this case perhaps suggesting that “The Progress of Spring” was written between the times that the sloe and kingcups bloom. Yet, both sloe and kingcups have distinct traits that are being used here to amplify Tennyson’s revolutionary commentary. The sloe, or blackthorn, is a “common” hedgerow plant (Stewart 282) and a “tough, hardy shrub” that threateningly grows to over fifteen-feet high (282). Tennyson is playing with the “uncultivated” nature of the sloe to represent the lower-class workers who were lighting rick fires, troublesome revolutionaries in the making who, like the sloe, were “best left in the countryside” (283).

In contrast, the kingcup, often known as the marsh marigold, is a “pleasing” plant that rarely grows taller than two feet (Stroupe). This demure and more cultivated plant represents the middle and upper class citizens, those who are often under threat during revolution. But the kingcup—a plant renowned for its brilliant bright yellow flowers—also symbolizes the rick fires that caused Tennyson much trauma. Here, Tennyson turns the beauty and generative warmth of the spring into revolutionary flames. It is important to note that this move was often done by “radicals like Richard Price, Tom Paine and Blake [who] used such images for the spread of libertarian ardour from America to France, and, as they hoped, to England” (Jordan 26). In this instance, Tennyson turns the radical symbol in on itself by using the fiery blooming of the kingcup as a symbol for the

terrifying rick fires. Through the use of this particular floral symbolism, Tennyson is signifying that “The Progress of Spring”—the poem that “To Mary Boyle” introduces—was written during a time in which revolution was in air: a turbulent time that left images of violence burned into the poet’s brain for more than half a century.

3.4 “The Progress of Spring”

“The Progress of Spring” was written in the early 1830s (Ricks, *Poems* 475) but was revised before its publication in *Demeter and Other Poems* (1889) (476). As mentioned, “To Mary Boyle” introduces it in the collection. The poem was at one point titled “Ode on the Progress of Spring.” This suggests that Tennyson brought together two familiar eighteenth-century poetic types in the composition of this poem: the ode and the progress poem (475). Progress poems were popular in the eighteenth century and usually commented on the progress of poetry. Progress poems normally use “mythological terms” to explain and examine “some object or invention” (Terry 51), and their content and themes often relate “to the idea of physical progress or journeying” (51). Tennyson picks up the underlying purpose of both the ode and the progress poem and pens a poem that addresses a personification of spring and comments upon the progress of her arrival.

Superficially, Tennyson’s “The Progress of Spring” describes the arrival of spring through the personified figure of a maiden. Closer inspection shows that Tennyson’s concerns regarding revolution are as prevalent in this poem as they are in its introductory poem, “To Mary Boyle.” Indeed, Tennyson’s fear of revolution turns into a longing for unity. In part, Tennyson’s concern that “reform may become revolution” (Ricks, *Poems* 475) instilled in him a strong adherence to the idea of organic growth. As seen earlier,

organic growth is a Romantic concept that views growth as progressing slowly and always beginning from within; growth or development happens smoothly as it is always already present; it begins from a seed present from the beginning (Coleridge, “Shakespeare’s Judgment Equal to his Genius” 46-47). In “The Progress of Spring” Tennyson takes the Romantic concept of organic growth and applies it directly to the idea of progress. For Tennyson, progress must be achieved in a slow and calm way that avoids revolution; social change must not be thrust upon society in a violent manner but rather slowly, peacefully, and organically, progress out of beliefs that are already present. Organic progress unifies rather than causes unrest. The last two stanzas of “The Progress of Spring” unmistakably illuminate this hope. In the penultimate stanza of the poem, now that Spring has finally arrived, the speaker comments that the people of Britain need to “wed” (92) their “soul” (92) with Spring so that they can “mark / The coming year’s great good and varied ills” (92-93). It is clear that a relationship with Spring is necessary to face the year, although the reason is at first left a mystery. Shortly thereafter, the speaker outlines a hope to avoid an unstable revolutionary environment that is full of strife, “the clash of warring wills” (95), and “the smoke of war’s volcano” (97). Disagreements are apparently common because “our nature cannot rest” (96); disagreements erupt, like a volcano, into war. History shows that the West is “changeable” (98) and that even in “the heart of this most ancient realm” (102) can be heard a “hateful voice” (103) crying ““To arms! to arms!”” (104). The unsettling and chaotic imagery in this stanza enables Tennyson to explore his concerns about revolution and war and to comment on the

violent and destructive ways that humankind usually enacts change and, what some might call, progress.

The final stanza of the poem reveals Tennyson's solution to the threat of revolution: a unifying organic growth. The speaker proposes a "simpler" and "saner" method to achieve progress that is modeled after the "gradual" approach of "Holy Spring" (105-06). Spring slowly and calmly progresses—it is a "gradual" progress that is strongly desired because it brings with it such joy and comfort that it is deemed "Holy." Like God, spring offers a natural and peaceful transition that can unify humankind. This is, of course, in contrast to the abrupt and violent results of revolution and war. The slow and measured progress of Spring is apparent: the leaves change one at a time "in their turn" (107) and birds appear "in their time" (108). Even though the progress is slow—taking a quarter of the year—and gradually occurs from "March to May" (109), Spring is capable of bringing about change "day by day" (111) that is "larger and fuller" (112). The key element of this slow and natural progression is that, as with organic growth, Spring "warmths from bud to bud" (113) and brings to life and fruition "that blind model in the seed" (114). Spring's approach to progress acts exactly like organic growth; she brings about change based on a kernel that already exists within and creates a slow, calm, and natural progression of change. By following this model for the implementation of social change, revolution and war can be avoided. Even though "men have hopes, which race in the restless blood" (115), they can unify their goals and successfully accomplish the life they seek.

Tennyson's symbolic language reinforces his argument about the need for organic rather than revolutionary change. In the first stanza of "The Progress of Spring," Tennyson sets the stage for his theory of organic growth by referencing the crocus, snowdrop, and woodbine, also known as honeysuckle. Tennyson first mentions the crocus, a flower thought to be synonymous with spring's arrival (Ward 102) and also typically associated with "resolution" (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 174-75) because the flower's bulb showcases a slow and sure resolution to work its way up through the soil. Moreover, the bulb of the crocus endures year after year. This suggests a type of stability within cyclicity that is linked to organic growth. A resolution to achieve progress is possible, but it must be a resolution that organically and reliably develops and occurs over an extended period of time. The crocus also symbolizes youth (Ward 103). The concept of youth symbolically referred to here gestures towards new beginnings, as seen with the arrival of Spring, and also to the idea that the person develops from the child. The idea of a youth progressing into an adult suggests a type of organic and natural progression that develops from within and across a generation of time: a person cannot become mature unless they progress through the stage of youth, and, at least in part, the youth that they once were will remain a part of them. How humans progress through stages and retain elements of their previous selves speaks to how organic growth works: change and progress develop from elements that are in harmony with each other, from something that already resides within. The crocus exemplifies how Spring, like youth, offers a new beginning that is achieved through slow and natural development, the type of social development that Tennyson hopes to see instead of revolution and war.

Tennyson draws on the symbolic associations of the snowdrop, kingcup, and the practice of travelling women leaving flowers in their footsteps, to demonstrate the type of organic social progression he favours. The snowdrop that “[w]avers on her thin stem” (3) as Spring slowly moves north regularly signifies both consolation (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 194-95) and quiet modesty (Scourse 59). Consolation, or relief and comfort, denotes the emotions that are possible if one undertakes the organic progress that Tennyson is calling for in the poem. Additionally, the snowdrop is associated with modesty and calmness because of its association with the Virgin Mary. Legend has it, when Mary carried the infant Jesus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to be presented at a temple “chaste snowdrops [were] springing from her footprints” (Ward 333). It is revealed later in the poem that Spring’s footsteps bloom with kingcups, and with this evidence it is even more likely that Tennyson is drawing on the ancient myth of Persephone, which is similar to the legend of the appearance of the Virgin Mary’s snowdrop-filled footprints, when he associates flowers with a woman’s journey and progress. Hades, the god of the underworld, abducted Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. Persephone was denied freedom because she ate the seed of a pomegranate that was offered to her by Hades; however, she is permitted to surface from the underworld each year, and with her arrival also comes spring (Andrews 217). As Spring progresses across the speaker’s garden, “[t]he kingcup fills her footprint” (59). When Persephone ascends from the underworld and begins again her cyclical visit each year, gold and purple flowers are said to spring from her footsteps as she walks (E. Gregory 117)—flower colours that symbolize passion (117). Kingcups are yellow, golden

coloured (Stroupe), linking them to Persephone's passionate flowers and signaling the passion of revolutionary tendencies such as the burning of ricks. Kingcups, however, are also known as marsh marigolds, and, like the snowdrop, marigolds can be associated with the Virgin Mary (Stroupe).

Tennyson uses floral myths associated with Persephone and the Virgin Mary—two figures that have been united by female goddess scholars—to bring Greek, Roman, and Christian myth into conversation. The Virgin Mary's association with Persephone is explained by Persephone's connection to the pomegranate seed; it is when she swallows a pomegranate seed that she is cast into the underworld (Agha-Jaffar 67; Rigoglioso 110). The Virgin Mary is also associated with the pomegranate, linking together the two goddesses. For example, medieval paintings often depict the Virgin Mary holding a pomegranate, "suggesting that the prototype for Mary was Persephone" (Agha-Jaffar 67). Other evidence used to connect the Virgin Mary to Persephone is that in Roman astrology Demeter and Persephone are connected to Virgo, and after "the advent of Christianity Virgo became increasingly identified with the Virgin Mary" (Roberts 10). Although it is unlikely that Tennyson purposefully filled his poetry with Catholic imagery, the Virgin Mary's association with Persephone helps explain how he was familiar with the Catholic symbolism and why he included it. The modesty associated with the snowdrop demonstrates how quiet, appropriate, and slow—even modest—the type of organic social progress is that Tennyson pursues. Moreover, Mary's steady and slow progression between Bethlehem and Jerusalem mirrors the approach that Tennyson's personified Spring takes, further modeling the calm, measured, and sure progress that organic growth

offers. Tennyson is drawing on the multiple associations of the snowdrop and the kingcup to suggest that social progress can be passionate but must also be measured and calm.

Tennyson's Spring, like Persephone, can be counted on to arrive each year in an orderly, deliberate, and restrained fashion, bringing about change that is expected and that one can prepare for in advance.

The poem's first stanza also includes woodbine, another flower that is easily associated with organic growth. The woodbine's leaves do not unfold rapidly but "hour by hour" (7) displaying a kind of patient development that would also benefit social change. Furthermore, woodbine often represents a woman not answering hastily, even to a marriage proposal (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180-81). This symbolic representation of taking time to make a decision characterizes the measured thought that Tennyson would like to see exhibited through social change to avoid war and revolution, a degree of measured thought that has the potential to unify society. Additionally, Tennyson's ingenious use of woodbine to model the kind of social progress he seeks will also speak to readers who possess a particularly adept knowledge of flowers and their growth. These readers will know that woodbine only grows "clockwise" (Pickles 47), understanding that Tennyson is symbolizing the movement of a clock to delineate the passing time, and realizing that non-violent social change requires an absence of rash action.

Tennyson draws also on the violet to represent his desire for social change that occurs in the same manner as Romantic organic growth. When Spring arrives she brings about a progressive change on "farm and field" (23) and also enters the speaker's blood

and lodges within him “all the year” (26) even “though thy violet sicken into sere” (25). The violet is considered “the most beloved of all plants” and was Queen Victoria’s favorite flower (Ward 363). In the Victorian period, the violet is symbolically associated with remembrance (363), modesty, charity, (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 196-97), and humbleness (Pickles 102). These modest and humble connotations are thought to have derived from the flower’s ability to hide “its dark beauty away in the long grass” and because it flowers “so fleetingly” (102). The violet’s connection with remembrance, modesty, charity, and humbleness all parallel the type of social progress that Tennyson would like to see occur. Even though the violet exists only fleetingly and “sicken[s] into sere” (25), or withered flora, because Spring has also entered the speaker’s blood the traits associated with the violet will remain in his blood throughout the year. This suggests that Spring changes the speaker from within, modeling the way in which organic growth functions. Now that Spring courses through his blood throughout the year, when the speaker is faced with decisions regarding social change and progress, he can draw on the symbolic characteristics of the violet—remembrance, modesty, charity, humbleness—to help calm his restless and rash spirit.

Stanza three offers multiple direct references to the idea that progress should be gradual, and highlights the type of environment that this type of progress will bring by further drawing on floral symbolism. Tennyson explains that Spring is “descending slow!” (28), using an exclamation mark to highlight the importance of the pace of progression. Both apricots (30) and peaches (34) take their time to ripen, “gay lent-lilies” (37) greet Spring’s slow progress with a “wave” (37), and “stars of celandine” (39)

appear “out once more” (38). Not only do these lines unite a variety of flora, the measured and gradual changes that Spring evokes in nature reflect the type of organic social progress that Tennyson longs to see. When he describes the lilies as “lent-lilies” Tennyson is drawing on the fact that lilies have long been regarded as a symbol of purity and modesty (Pickles 61) and is also connecting them to lent—a religious time of preparation for the resurrection of Christ. This idea of preparedness is vital to Tennyson, as it relates to how progress must not occur out of the blue but in a way that one can prepare for. The lily is also considered to be one of the oldest flowers (Ward 243, Pickles 61), which, like the violet’s links to remembrance, calls attention to the need to value the past and how to use previous knowledge in the decision-making process to avoid disruption. In stanza three, the “stars of celandine” (39) that “once more in varnished glory shine” (38) also highlight Tennyson’s desire for social change that models organic growth. The celandine, a member of the buttercup family is, like the crocus, symbolically associated with youth (Ward 70). This again establishes a parallel with a youth progressing into an adult, and demonstrates that, as a person matures, elements of their younger self still remain unified with their present self. The progress of maturation depends upon elements that are already present, mirroring the type of change that occurs during organic growth. The celandine also connotes the “first sigh of love” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 172), demonstrating that even intense emotions such as love have a beginning and then develop, modeling the progressive development that Tennyson would like to see occur.

In stanza seven of “The Progress of Spring,” Tennyson’s reliance on flowers to help demonstrate the Romantic idea of organic growth continues, although he moves from particular floral symbolism to flowers in general. Spring tells us that she leaves the south and travels north so that she might “mix with men and hear their words” (82). This indicates that the change that Spring brings about depends upon a unification with others—a non-violent example that Tennyson hopes the people of Britain will follow when they attempt to bring about social change. Moreover, Spring contends that her “hand exults / Within the bloodless heart of lowly flowers / To work old laws of Love to fresh results” (83-85). Even though the flowers may be categorized as “lowly,” Spring takes what is within them and alters the “old laws of Love to fresh results” to “teach the man / . . . to see the bright” (87-88). It is critical here that Spring draws attention to how she enables men to have hope by creating something new from laws that already exist; this illuminates how change is best when it evolves out of an element or an idea that is already present. Ultimately, Spring’s slow, gradual progression that evokes change from what is already present and Tennyson’s intentional use of flowers that are associated with specific traits such as modesty, purity, caution, resolution, chastity, youth, patience, and charity, help to make “The Progress of Spring” an exemplar of the Romantic idea of organic growth and unity. Together, they model how Tennyson would like society to approach change.

3.5 “The Gardener’s Daughter”

In the 1830s, Tennyson developed pastoral narratives that focused on rural and domestic subject matter; he called this grouping of poems his “English Idyls” (Ormond 68). In

these poems, Tennyson offers characters and scenes from ordinary English life. It is thought that Tennyson wrote his pastoral poems “to touch his readers’ hearts with moving accounts of human relationships” (70). Written mostly in 1833 (Ricks, *Tennyson* 93) and published in *Poems* (1842) (Ricks, *Poems* 507), “The Gardener’s Daughter” is Tennyson’s first English idyll (Tucker 299). Critics have examined “The Gardener’s Daughter” more frequently than most of Tennyson’s other early poetry; however, none of the critics perform an in-depth analysis of the proliferation of floral symbolism in the poem. Tennyson does not allude to organic unity in this poem in the same way he does in many of the other minor poems covered in this chapter, but he attempts to achieve a similar sense of unification through the repeated blurring of boundaries and the reconciliation of opposites. Herbert Tucker argues that Tennyson creates relationships that are built upon “equivalencies” and “prize[s] the relationships between terms over any term in itself” (279). This in turn enables the blurring of “categorical boundaries” such as “art and nature, imagination and actuality, for example, or between landscape and state of mind, place and person, or person and person” (280), culminating in the overarching attempt of the poem to reconcile love and death (281). For Tucker, Tennyson’s longing for a reconciliation of opposites produces a poem that strives for “harmony, complementarity, and balance” (279).

James R. Kincaid draws attention to Tennyson’s diffuseness, describing how the poet seems to take the rough edges off everything, including difficult, emotional subjects such as love and death. Indeed, he finds that Tennyson’s early domestic idylls “are so diffuse that diffusion seems to be their very essence. Some are vaguely happy, some are

vaguely sad; but they seem anxious to avoid raising any emotion at all which is sharpened or defined.” Tennyson seeks to smooth over any intense emotion that his subject matter might evoke (Kincaid). Kincaid also smartly points out that Tennyson uses a variety of clichés throughout the poem, in part to offset his ornateness, but these clichés also have the effect of making characters and ideas “unparticularized” and thereby evoke a sense of comforting familiarity in the reader. Kincaid contends that this is in part achieved with clichéd phrases such as, “[s]he stood, a sight to make an old man young” (140) and the act of naming a woman after a flower that often symbolizes love and beauty: “[s]he, a Rose / In roses” (141-42). Moreover, Kincaid points out that words like “heart” and “love” and “rose” occur repeatedly, “floating along without a real context, seeking to call forth the most undifferentiated response possible.” The combination of these factors helps Tennyson build a poem that is a methodically constructed cliché, a comforting cliché that attempts to put the reader at ease—much the same way as Tucker sees Tennyson striving for a reconciliation of differences or opposites—while the poem explores possibly distressing social issues such as the marriage of two people from disparate classes and the resolution of marriage and death. Although Ricks pays little attention to Tennyson’s use of floral symbolism in “The Gardener’s Daughter,” he is ultimately correct when he asserts that “it is the garden, not the girl, that fires the poem” (*Tennyson* 94). Through an examination of Tennyson’s floral symbolism, I argue that Tennyson uses flowers in “The Gardener’s Daughter” to explore the possibility of the reconciliation of opposites and the creation of unification, especially in the context of difficult social issues such as marriage across class difference. What “fires the poem” is

Tennyson's description of the garden *and* the Rose that is planted within it.

When the narrator is first spurred on by his friend Juliet to travel to the garden and to meet Rose, the gardener's daughter, and fall in love, floral symbolism alerts the reader that all is not as sure or wonderful as it appears. Eustace, gesturing to a portrait he has painted of Juliet, asks the speaker when the speaker will paint a picture as fine (22). The narrator explains that it was not Eustace who painted the picture but Love itself, and that only Love was capable of creating "eyes / Darker than darkest pansies" (26-27) and "hair / More black than ashbuds in the front of March" (27-28). In this seemingly threatening statement, Tennyson calls into question the power of observation, suggesting that Eustace's artistic creation is inspired by an idealization that is clouded by love. In other words, when artists use nature in their work, it is a subjective and cultural interpretation, which transforms nature into cultural artifact. In fact, Tucker claims that "[w]hat we encounter . . . throughout the teeming descriptions of this idyllic romance is not nature . . . [but] a nature that art makes; the 'nature' itself is culture" (294). Some botanists argue that ashbuds occur in the front of May and not March as Tennyson claims (451), calling into question the artist's powers of observation. This demonstrates that for Tennyson, the use of flowers is not dependent upon natural facts but on communicating particular ideas. In chapter four of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851), the good but old-fashioned yeoman Thomas Holbrook discusses a line from "The Gardener's Daughter" with Mary Smith, a line that Holbrook appreciates but obviously does not completely comprehend:

He asks "Now, what colour are ash-buds in March?" Mary thinks him "going mad" "What colour are they, I say?" repeated he, vehemently. "I am sure I don't

know, sir,” said I, with the meekness of ignorance. “I knew you didn’t. No more than I did—an old fool that I am!—till this young man comes and tells me. Black as ash-buds in March. And I’ve lived all my life in the country; more shame on me for not to know. Black: they are jet-black, madam.” And off he went again, swinging along to the music of some rhyme he had got ahold of. (44)

In this scene, Holbrook praises a line of Tennyson’s poetry for its “botanical exactitude” as if somehow a poet simply records nature and shares his or her findings with their readers. Upon further inspection, however, it is evident that Holbrook partly misquotes “The Gardener’s Daughter” and appears to overlook the context in which the ashbuds appear in poem. Tennyson’s line “More black than ashbuds in the front of March” (28) offers additional detail and context compared to Holbrook’s rendition: “Black as ash-buds in March” (Gaskell 44). In Tennyson’s version, the ashbuds’ blackness functions as a metaphor that compares “the face in a painting and the face of a season” (Tucker 294). Moreover, if indeed ashbuds are as jet-black as Holbrook explains, then “Tennyson’s hyperbolic comparative ‘More black’” also calls into question the poet’s ability to properly document nature (294-95). Holbrook’s rendition diminishes the very powers of observation that he is trying to compliment. Importantly, however, Holbrook’s interpretation of the poem also shows that he can see the vehicle and not the tenor of Tennyson’s floral symbol, demonstrating the potential for difficulties of reconciling language and its meaning, a unification that Tennyson often explores in his poetry.

Although some of Tennyson’s readers “were surely content to take his cosmetic nature at face value” (294), many would doubt a purely botanical use of flowers and

explore them for hidden meaning; they would not be satisfied as Holbrook was, “mistaking effects of artifice for natural facts” (295). For example, Seaton states that in the Victorian period ashbuds often symbolize “prudence” (*The Language of Flowers* 168-69). Tennyson’s use of ashbuds in this instance, then, draws attention to its conventional usage only to call it into question; its use here interrogates both the prudence of allowing love to colour one’s observation and the narrator’s decision to fall in love and pursue a gardener’s daughter, someone from a far different social standing. Additionally, by launching the idea of the speaker’s visit to Rose with a consideration of pansies, Tennyson is not concerned with the literal appearance of the pansies and how they might actually resemble Juliet’s eyes. Rather, he is interested in the symbolic and cultural associations of the flower: the pansy, according to Sheila Pickles, “was said to be a love potion” that, if carried with you, “would ensure the love of your sweetheart” (74-75). All of the symbolic associations that the pansy carries, and the pansy’s placement in the narrative, just as the speaker is about to venture off to the garden in search of the gardener’s daughter, suggests that the narrator may well form a union with the gardener’s daughter, even though perhaps against her will.

When the narrator first encounters his sought-after garden, it is apparent through the garden’s description that the gardener’s daughter’s humble class position and the speaker’s desire to possess her will make their relationship less than ideal—maybe even dangerous. Tennyson’s attempt to neutralize emotion throughout the poem can perhaps lull the reader into a state of bored security; however, it is imperative to recall that the narrator and his beloved Rose “represent two social classes and walks of life” (Tucker

299). Though Ricks suggests that “no parents seem to exist for either the narrator or the girl” resulting in no need to worry about their differing class positions (*Tennyson* 95), Tennyson makes it plain that their disparate social situations matter even as he moves them towards a union. The narrator, an upper class gentleman who resides in the “humming city” (35), travels to a rural and “murmurous” (47) pastoral setting to meet the object of his growing affection: a daughter of a gardener. At the time this poem was written, the growing contrast between the city and the country “lay at the heart of English social awareness” (Tucker 299), and social stratification was difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.

The garden that holds the gardener’s daughter is located “[n]ot wholly in the busy world, / nor quite beyond it” (33-34), making it a complex space that brings together the city and the rural. The garden is, at best, a tenuous place for the narrator to find a lover. The trail that the speaker and Eustace take from the city to the garden is described as “a well-worn pathway” (108) that “courted” (108) their journey. With this imagery, Tennyson questions the innocence of Rose, for one wonders how many men have worn down the path to court Rose. Tennyson also explains earlier in the poem that the route to the garden passes by “lazy lilies” (42). When the lily, known to be an “emblem of purity” (Scourse 49), is described as “lazy” it interrogates the gardener’s daughter’s innocence; a lazy approach to purity does not indicate a firm resolve to guard one’s innocence. Moreover, the trail on the way to Rose leads “[t]o one green wicket in a privet hedge” (109), implying an inability to change one’s course or to choose another exit from the path. The trapped narrator appears to have no option but to enter into some kind of union

with Rose. How the relationship will end is ambiguous, although its ending could be foreshadowed at the start of the poem when we learn that either the “sound of funeral or of marriage bells” (35-36) reaches the garden from the city. From the beginning, then, Rose’s relationship with the narrator appears to be intertwined with death. Once through the wicket, the narrator and his friend must navigate “[t]hrough crowded lilac-ambush trimly pruned” (111) and are bombarded by a “warm gust, full-fed with perfume” (112). The visitors to the garden are ambushed by lilac bushes that are, like the gardener’s daughter, “trimly pruned” to convey a level of refinement that may not actually be present. Furthermore, lilacs curiously symbolize the “first emotion of love,” one who is forsaken (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-83), and a “broken engagement” (Pickles 58). When the speaker is surrounded, or attacked, by the perfume of the ambushing lilac, an astute reader of floral symbolism is aware that even though the gardener’s daughter might evoke an all-consuming love in the narrator, the navigation of their class difference may make their union extremely difficult.

In September 1847, Barrett Browning wrote to Mary Russell Mitford to share her disgust regarding how Tennyson portrays Rose, arguing that Rose lacks personality, significance, and a voice. She fumed: “His gardener’s daughter . . . is just a rose; and ‘a Rose’ one might beg all poets to observe, is precisely as sensual, as fricasseed chicken, or even boiled beef & carrots” (Barrett Browning, *Letters* 220). Upon closer study, however, Tennyson’s Rose is extremely significant to the poem, even though Barrett Browning may not be particularly pleased about the role Rose plays, especially compared to the empowered roles she bestows upon her Lady Geraldine and Aurora Leigh.

Tennyson insisted that the centre of the poem be “full and rich” (Ricks, *Tennyson* 93), and lines 124-40, the central section of the poem, describe Rose. Although Rose may first seem inconsequential, she is in fact a complex character. By naming the woman who appears at the centre of his poem “Rose,” Tennyson draws on clichéd floral symbolism. As Seaton and Ward explain, the rose is stereotypically associated with “love and beauty” (Ward 313; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 190-91), and, Pickles adds, is known as “the Queen of the Flowers” (88-89). This, as well as the fact that Rose is found in a garden, and associated with the Garden of Eden—“that Eden where she dwelt” (187)—leaves little doubt that Tennyson’s Rose represents a Victorian everywoman. Rose is no Persephone or Virgin Mary whose footsteps spring flowers as they tread upon the ground. Her feet “might have danced / The greensward into greener circles” (132-33) but they do not. Rather, she represents any woman who struggles to find love and form a union with a man in a class-based, patriarchal society.

Right after the speaker passes by the ambushing lilac he attains a sudden view of Rose who is busily attempting to reattach a rose to the trellis that “last night’s gale had caught, / And blown across the walk” (123-24). This “fallen” rose makes Rose both innocent *and* sexualized. Links between Barrett Browning’s statue of Silence and Tennyson’s Rose are plentiful, indicating that Barrett Browning was indeed responding to Tennyson’s depiction of Rose in “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship.” For instance, Tennyson’s Rose is pure and statue-like—immovable in her morality. With “[o]ne arm aloft” (124) and “[g]owned in pure white” (125), she is reaching to repair the fallen rose. As seen in the previous chapter, Barrett Browning challenges this image of an immobile, powerless

woman by using an actual statue wearing “virginal white vesture” (96) in her poem that speaks to Bertram through symbol. Instead of reaching to repair a fallen rose, Lady Geraldine’s Silence’s hand has fallen and her finger is “on her cheek and her symbol rose is held only slackly” (125). Barrett Browning uses her rose to represent a love that is impossible to grip tightly, given women’s socially imposed inability to voice their feelings of love or control their romantic futures—inabilities that clearly plague Tennyson’s Rose. Rose’s “violet eyes, and all her Hebe-bloom” (136) suggest modesty and integrity. Violets are commonly associated with modesty (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 196-97) because they hide their beauty away in long grass and flower fleetingly (Pickles 102); Hebe, the Greek goddess of youth, is generally “represented as a young virgin crowned with flowers” (Dwight 252). But her virginal and innocent appearance is complicated when her white gown is “fitted to . . . [her] shape” (125). Indeed, the “shadow of the flowers” (128) appears to be caressing her body, somewhat diminishing “all the golden gloss” (129), drawing the gaze to move down her body, sexualizing her, “wavering / Lovingly lower, [and] trembl[ing] on her waist” (129-130). In this description, then, Tennyson figuratively brings together two well-known Victorian female stereotypes that Barrett Browning disliked: the innocent maiden and the sexualized “fallen” woman.

After the narrator enters her garden and approaches “Rose / In roses, mingled with her fragrant toil” (141-42), he requests “one rose” (146) from her collection, but, given her name, is asking her to give herself over to him. In response, she seems “[n]either self-possessed / Nor startled, but betwixt this mood and that, / Divided in a graceful quiet”

(151-53), demonstrating clearly Tennyson's need to reconcile opposites as he explores social issues, even differing emotions and feelings. Rose provides "no answer" (156) to the speaker's request, but complies by handing him a rose. Rose's handing over of the rose induces the narrator into a "statue-like" (158) state, reminding the reader of the statue-like description that was given of Rose when the narrator first came upon her; this symbolically unifies the speaker and Rose even though she has not yet offered him an answer to his appeal. After meeting her, the narrator is so fixated on Rose that when he tries to sleep he is unable (170). He takes the rose given to him by Rose to bed, kissing it "over and over" (172), again using flowers to symbolize that an unspoken union between the speaker and Rose has already occurred. After falling into "[l]ove at first sight" (185), no "squall nor storm" (186) could keep him from her garden. He invents reasons to visit, pretending to be drawn there by an interest in a variety of flowers such as tulips (189). This particular choice of flower is telling as tulips symbolize hopeless love (Pickles 100), like the hopelessness of a love that attempts to bridge different class positions.

Tennyson also marks the passage of time leading up to the official union of the narrator and Rose with flowers. Time passes in the garden with the appearance and disappearance of various flowers, depending on the season, dancing "into light" and dying "in the shade" (198). This death of the floral signifies the risks of forming a union with a person outside of your class. From this moment onwards, immediately before Rose officially pledges herself to the speaker, not a single other flower appears in the poem: once the union of the narrator and the gardener's daughter is official, Tennyson no longer needs to rely on floral symbolism to construct meaning. When Rose and the narrator sit

“down upon a garden mound” (209) to confess their love, bells that can be associated with both funerals and weddings again sound from the cathedral tower (215-16). This convergence of death and one of the most important celebrations of life that often occurs in youth again reveals how Tennyson uses his poetry to reconcile opposites, in this case through an examination of interclass marriage. In the end, Rose’s lower class status practically guarantees that she consent to entering into a union with the narrator: the only three words Tennyson permits his Rose to speak is a “faltering, ‘I am thine’” (230).

As previously mentioned, no more flowers are scattered upon Tennyson’s page. Instead, the focus turns to the narrator’s sexual union with Rose, an enjoyment that most likely was made official through the marriage union, even though Tennyson explains that their relationship does not require “pledges given, / And vows, where there was never need of vows” (252-53). The narrator outlines their passionate meetings and describes how his “energy fulfilled itself” (233). During his multiple encounters with Rose, his “passion rose through circumstantial grades / Beyond all grades developed” (235-36). For the speaker, these meetings resulted in “the most blessed memory” (273), whereas for Rose, the results of their union are more ambiguous. Some critics, such as Tucker, contend that the narrator and Rose may have never married and that she became pregnant and died during childbirth (299). Regardless, the end of the poem reveals that Rose is indeed dead—a complex and troublesome ending to a poem that strives so hard to achieve a sense of unification even in light of extreme difference.

Unions such as love and marriage are central issues in Tennyson’s idylls, and an exploration of the floral symbolism in “The Gardner’s Daughter” reveals that such unions

are desired by Tennyson even in the face of complex social issues such as class difference; however, life is complicated and difficult even when unification can be achieved—all is not ideal in Tennyson’s idyll-ic world. Idylls offer “latent but quite visible politics” (Tucker 302), and this is quite apparent even in Tennyson’s first idyll. In the poet’s capable hands, flowers become cultural artifacts that can be studied for the meaning that they convey. Even though some critics find his idylls yawn-inducing, Tucker suggests that Tennyson uses them to write about serious subjects that were of public interest because they provided him with an opportunity to resolve the issues “in the therapies of verse” (301). Tennyson may not always offer neat and tidy solutions to the social issues that he explores through floral symbolism, but his floral therapy highlights issues that require consideration. Although he levels off the surfaces of controversial topics and tempers emotions to achieve a calming harmony, he is able to rouse his readers by, at the very least, drawing their attention to class issues that were deeply rooted in the Victorian period.

3.6 “The Flower” and “Flower in the crannied wall”

Like in “To Mary Boyle” and “The Progress of Spring,” Tennyson again draws on the Romantic concepts of organic growth and unification to explore how knowledge is formed and disseminated in “The Flower” (1864) and “Flower in the crannied wall” (1869). In these two poems, however, Tennyson is more concerned with ideas on a philosophical level. Organic growth is achieved when something—whether an art object or an idea—“originates in a seed, [and] continues to grow” (Hirsch 430). This metaphor of a growing organic form is vital for Tennyson. In “The Flower” and “Flower in the

crannied wall,” Tennyson explores how ideas organically spread, circulate, and are received.

Although “The Flower” was considered “perfect in its form and suggestion” by a reviewer contemporary with its publication (Bar 787), it is rarely examined. According to Ricks, Mrs. Richard Ward explained that Tennyson wrote the poem after a close examination of some love-in-idleness flowers that were growing at Farringford House, Tennyson’s home for forty years until his death, and “made . . . [the lines] nearly all on the spot” (*Poems* 1185). Although many critics argue that the poem examines Tennyson’s feelings regarding the critical reception of his poetry, Tennyson specifically, and somewhat comically, contends that this reading of the poem is incorrect. Tennyson claims that the poem “does not refer to my poetry. It was written as a universal apologue, and the people do not as yet call my flower a weed” (qtd in Ricks, *Poems* 1185). For Tennyson, this poem serves less as a warning about the fickleness of his audience than as a paradigm of how ideas are planted, taken up, and altered over time.

It is unsurprising that Tennyson was inspired by love-in-idleness to write a poem that examines how ideas grow organically, circulate in society, and are received. Love-in-idleness, a member of the viola or pansy genus—the terms for the particular genus are often used interchangeably—is named from the French *pensée*—or “thoughts” in English (Ward 363). What better plant to bring about these ruminations than one that symbolizes thoughts and ideas (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 186-87)? Additionally, love-in-idleness is famous for its appearance in William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In the play, Oberon, the king of the fairies, enlists Puck’s help in a plan to

ridicule his queen, Titania, by making her fall in love with Bottom, a travelling artisan. Love-in-idleness is said to have magical powers because the “juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid / Will make man or woman dote / Upon the next creature that it sees” (2.1.170-72). This literary symbolism is palpably attached to the love-in-idleness at work in “The Flower.” Tennyson shows that individuals who perceive organically grown ideas are sometimes blind to the beauty and truth of those ideas, seeing weeds and thinking them ill. People can be led astray by outward influence, such as magical love potions in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and consequently make erroneous judgments.

“The Flower” opens by suggesting that even when seeds, or ideas that can grow organically, are planted in a “golden hour” (1) people can mistake the resulting “flower” (3) for a “weed” (4)—or an unwanted idea. One of Tennyson’s only good memories from Louth Grammar School was “an old wall covered with wild weeds opposite the school windows” (Martin 31), indicating that for Tennyson at least, weeds may not always symbolize the unwelcome and undesirable. Weeds can have value. The fact there is a “golden hour” in which to plant ideas is important, suggesting that there are opportune moments to send concepts out into society that are rich—“golden”—in wisdom. The concepts that are generated during this propitious time can organically take root and grow into flowers, or beautiful ideas, even though they can be mistakenly thought of as unwanted: society is quick to criticize ideas that appear new. Importantly, the society that Tennyson articulates critiques ideas from a unified perspective. Even though society’s collective opinion may not be correct, mistaking a flower for a weed, society is, at the very least, in a state of harmony, reducing the risk of controversy or unrest. When an idea

is appropriated and accepted it grows “tall” (9) and wears a “crown of light” (10). The idea is recognized by all within society as being valuable. Once an idea has organically grown in society, it is socially acceptable: “Splendid is the flower” (16). At this point during the organic growth of an idea, it is in full circulation: “Most can raise the flower now / For all have got the seed” (18-19). People are replanting the seed of the idea, and it is rapidly multiplying. The growth and spread of new ideas that spring from the original seed are viewed as “pretty enough” (21) or, in contrast, “poor indeed” (22). This demonstrates how the reception of an idea can be altered, especially as the idea disburses through society and is reformed and recycled, even if all the resulting new concepts have organically grown out of a particular idea that was first sown in a “golden hour.”

In a similar vein, “Flower in the crannied wall” examines organic growth and knowledge; however, it also explores the possibility of the union of God and humankind to achieve enlightenment. The poem was written about an experience that Tennyson had while plucking a flower out of a wall at Wagoners Wells near Haslemere (Ricks, *Poems* 1193). “Flower in the crannied wall” is commonly read as “an unambiguous statement of Tennyson’s belief in a relationship between nature and God” and though regularly anthologized it “seldom received any editorial commentary” or “explication” (Sait 27). In “Flower in the crannied wall,” the focus is on the desire for knowledge and how one might try to achieve it, and it demonstrates how complete understanding is beyond human comprehension:

Flower in the crannied wall,

I pluck you out of the crannies,

I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
 Little flower—but *if* I could understand
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,
 I should know what God and man is.

For Tennyson, examining the entirety of an organic system, “root and all” (5), can perhaps offer a type of unified knowledge that would be otherwise unattainable. This use of the concrete to examine abstract ideas—in this case a flower in place of knowledge formation—is akin to the work of William Blake in “The Auguries of Innocence” (1863). Blake captures the same concept in these lines: “To see the world in a grain of sand / And heaven in a wild flower / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / And eternity in an hour” (1-4). Unfortunately, Tennyson’s longing to understand the complexities of life and how everything is interrelated is left unsatisfied. Simon Brittan suggests that the reader is left wondering how the flower got into the crannied wall to begin with. Was the seed “carried there by the wind? Did God want the wind to drop the seed precisely in that spot?” (173). This desire to know how complex and unified systems begin and function is foiled because the flower, “root and all, and all in all” (5) defies definition and “restores the final mystery by using affective symbol” (Hillman Waterston 124). It is impossible to achieve the level of knowledge that the narrator seeks, just as it is impossible for humankind to understand “what God . . . is” (6).

In “Tennyson’s Flower in the Crannied Wall,” J. E. Sait studies the connection between the poem and Goethe’s view of the metamorphosis of plants in *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (1790). Sait explains that Tennyson, like Goethe,

holds a “holistic view of the flower” (28) that can be linked to morphological transformations. This type of system of organic growth is easily related back to Tennyson’s paradigm that explains how ideas grow organically from a seed. In this case, “root and all” (5) and “all and all” (5) can be read alongside Goethe’s two doctrines of metamorphosis: “the former to the plant’s ability to regenerate from any of its single parts and the latter to the ability of man to progress from one life to the next and ultimately to approach God” (Sait 29). This helps to explain the religious component that Tennyson has added to his search for knowledge. Regardless, both complete knowledge and unification with the originator of knowledge, God, remain doubtful. There is significant doubt in Tennyson’s “*if*”(4): it is even italicized to show that understanding God may be beyond human comprehension. Moreover, placing the “*if*” at the centre of the line instead of at the beginning or the ending indicates a gradual acceptance and an embrace of the unknowable that this divine knowledge may not ever come. Importantly, the last line of the poem, “I should know what God and man is” (6), clearly reveals that a union between God and humankind is not possible. Here, Tennyson blatantly breaks the rules of grammar by pairing a single verb with the plural subject. God and man cannot be unified enough to even be fully identified as a singular plural entity. “Flower in the crannied wall” might at first seem like a simple poem, but within its few short lines it expertly uses the floral to symbolize the impossibility of complete knowledge. In “‘The Poet of Science’: How Scientists Read Their Tennyson,” John Holmes looks at how the materialist astronomer Norman Lockyer, physicist and spiritualist Oliver Lodge, and geologist-minister William North Rice all quote “Flower in the crannied wall” in support

of extremely divergent positions. Although Tennyson uses “Flower in the crannied wall” to attempt to make the abstract concrete, the complex ideas within it remain open to various interpretations, modeling, as demonstrated in “The Flower,” that one’s ability to form a unified, exact understanding is impossible, and, perhaps, even unnecessary.

3.7 Conclusion: “Early Spring” (1833 and 1883)

This examination of Tennyson’s minor poems and his use of floral symbolism to explore social issues and create a harmonious sense of unification rightly ends with two versions of the same poem that bookend the majority of Tennyson’s poetic career: “Early Spring” (1833) and “Early Spring” (1883). The 1833 version of this poem is from the Heath manuscript (Ricks, *Poems* 496), and the 1883 version was first published in *Youth’s Companion* (1314). The differences between the two versions are numerous and include the addition of stanzas, the omission of stanzas, and other general rearrangement.

Moreover, and most importantly here, the ending of the poem undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis between 1833 and 1883. In “Early Spring” (1833), the first twenty-six lines are extremely similar in theme to “The Progress of Spring.” The speaker joyously celebrates the arrival of Spring that “[m]akes all things new” (2). “Buds” once again “burst the soil” (9, 10) and Spring enters the narrator’s blood, making it “leap” (13) with excitement and emotion. Written in the early 1830s like “The Progress of Spring”—a time filled with the threat of revolution—the poem features again the crocus and snowdrop to symbolize the social harmony he seeks. The crocus, a flower thought to be synonymous with spring’s arrival (Ward 102), is most often linked to “resolution” (Seaton, *Language of Flowers* 174-75) because it demonstrates this trait when it enacts a

slow but sure resolution to work its way up through the soil; this reveals the calm progression and social harmony that Tennyson wishes would replace disruptive social change. Additionally, the snowdrop typically symbolizes consolation (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 194-95). Consolation, or relief and comfort, exemplify the emotions that Tennyson's Spring brings about, feelings that are possible to obtain if one embraces organic unity and progress.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, lines 27-30 are an examination of how language fails to convey the true meaning and fullness of the world:

My tricky fancies range,
 And, lightly stirred,
 Ring little bells of change
 From word to word.

In this 1833 version of the poem, Tennyson considers words to be nothing but “tricky fancies.” Unable to express the extent of the change that Spring brings about, his words only “[r]ing little bells of change.” Tennyson could be lamenting that his observations of the world and call for social unity only bring about change that occurs painfully and incrementally slowly—“little bells of change”—due to the difficulty that language has in delivering a clear and concise message. Tennyson expands on this concern, stating that:

Ah! Lightest words are lead,
 Gross to make plain
 Myriads of hints of things
 That orb and wane. (30-36)

In these lines, Tennyson is identifying words as inadequate vehicles for communication. Words are too leaden to make plain the myriad of things that never quite stabilizes into a whole, fully grown entity. The young poet Tennyson finds poetic language inadequate because it fails to marry words and reality.

Alan Sinfield explains that this ambiguity of language and its failure to convey true meaning is modeled by the way in which “the poem is forced away from description and into abstraction” (87):

O fullness of the worlds!

O termless field,

Relation, difference,

Not all concealed,

Fair feast of every sense

In part revealed. (43-48)

For Tennyson, the world is “full” in such a way that moves it beyond the scope of language: “it is ‘termless’, not subject to the confines of language” (Sinfield 87). Even though this could be interpreted as an opening up of boundless possibilities of meaning and a freedom to create harmony and associations that might not be permitted within a more rigid paradigm of meaning, it also points to a limit of understanding, a threshold similar to that seen in “Flower in the crannied wall”: “Not all [is] concealed” and things are “[i]n part revealed.” Through an examination of the organic system of language and how it creates meaning, it is apparent that there is a constraint on the extent of knowledge. Sinfield explains that the last stanza of this version of “Early Spring” places

“a spiritual implication in the landscape which is only partially appreciated through the senses” (88):

O soul reflecting forms
 Of the wide beach,
 Comparing at thy will
 Each form with each,
 Let tears of wonder fill
 Thy void of speech. (49-54)

In these lines, Tennyson closes the poem comparing both language’s and the soul’s inability to truly transmit meaning in a way that can match sensory experience. Sinfield contends that Tennyson’s “lack of a clear grammatical subject . . . enacts Tennyson’s difficulty in locating a perceiving self which is free from the inhibitions of language, which can compare ‘at . . . will’” (88). This disconnect between meaning and words can only be filled by “tears of wonder,” leaving the reader wondering how well a poet can convey the meaning of a world that is viewed through a veil of tears.

Significantly, the concluding stanza is remarkably different in the 1883 text and speaks to how Tennyson’s view of language has changed throughout the years. The 1883 “Early Spring” delivers a final stanza that turns again to the “Heavenly Power” (1) that is found in the first line of both versions of the poem:

For now the Heavenly Power
 Makes all things new,
 And thaws the cold, and fills

The flower with dew;
 The blackbirds have their wills,
 The poets too. (43-48)

In this new ending, tears are no longer clouding the poet's view of the world and distorting meaning. Instead, the "Heavenly Power" that brings about Spring's arrival rejuvenates and fills "The flower with dew." The poet's vision, later in his career, is so clear that he is capable of describing the minutia of dew within a flower. Moreover, the inclusion of "poets" in the last line is a new addition. Now it is not only nature, or "blackbirds," that can impose their "will": the poet has confidence in the ability of his words to convey the real meaning of the "fullness" of the world. This mirrors Barrett Browning's assertion that poets can create meaning with the symbol by engaging with everyday human concerns in their verse. In this version of "Early Spring," Tennyson and the natural world are now unified. The poet has enacted his will, a will that he has honed over a lifetime of creating poems that make use of floral symbolism to explore social issues and call for a resolution of conflict through unification. Although the majority of Tennyson's critics seem to think that his superior poetry came earlier in his career, Tennyson's 1883 version of "Early Spring" proves them wrong. "Early Spring" (1883) is superior perhaps not because of its artistic merit, but rather because it is a perfect model of the type of unifying, conservative politics Tennyson consistently aspired to. By bringing the poet, nature, reality, and words into harmony, Tennyson has achieved what he set out to accomplish: his lifelong work is complete.

Chapter 4

A Problem with Unification: Alfred Tennyson's *Maud*, Flowers, and the Violent Reconciliation of Opposites

4.1 Attempting to Unify Irreconcilable Opposites

The “ingrained, even obsessive” (Ricks, *Tennyson* 50) need for organic unity in Tennyson’s minor poems is put to the test in *Maud* (1855) through his forceful and violent fusing of dissimilar concepts. Two often-examined and fundamental ways that Tennyson attempts to bring together irreconcilable opposites in *Maud* are through the speaker’s beliefs that he can bridge the class divide and that war will bring peace. The narrator’s desire to marry and have sex with Maud is, unfortunately, almost hampered by a more commonplace reality than the narrator’s murder of her brother: the class divide, as seen in many of the previous poems examined. The speaker repeatedly doubts the motivation of Maud’s interest in him, pointing out to Maud that “[y]our father has wealth well-gotten, and I am nameless and poor” (1.iv.119). It is almost impossible for the narrator to believe that Maud could be interested in someone who is beneath her. Marion Shaw surmises that the “inability to achieve a good marriage” for Tennyson’s heroes serves as “a metaphor for society’s other discontents” (37). The speaker’s hesitation to cross the class divide, however, is eventually overcome by his desire to have sex with and marry Maud. Joseph Bristow suggests further that the narrator’s desire to enter into a union with Maud is an attempt to make himself whole after the loss of his inheritance and his father’s subsequent suicide, a chance to regain some of the upper-class social status

that he has lost (134). Thus, the potential of some kind of union with Maud is worth the problematic intertwining of disparate classes and its violent and bloody outcome.

Maud can also be seen as the main catalyst for the much-maligned ending of the poem that sees the speaker going to fight in the Crimean War. Bristow explains that Maud, whose name “literally means war or battle,” is the “silent guarantor of her suitor’s love for battle” (134). Maud awakens a passion for war by unifying men behind a cause:

She is singing an air that is known to me,
 A passionate ballad gallant and gay,
 A martial song like a trumpet’s call!
 Singing alone in the morning of life,
 In the happy morning of life and May,
 Singing of men that in battle array,
 Ready in the heart and ready in hand,
 March with banner and bugle and fife
 To the death, for their native land. (1.v.162-72)

Maud’s battle song that touches the speaker’s heart and motivates his eventual decision to join the Crimean War demonstrates that it requires a woman to unite men in action. Or, as the poem also suggests, the painful loss of a woman and love results in a void that must be filled. Although the reader is not privy to any of Maud’s exact words throughout the poem, perhaps illustrating the conventions of women’s roles in poetry of the day, it is the sound of Maud’s song that propels the narrator to turn to war to find peace. Even after

Maud's death and his failure to enter into a relationship that bridges the class divide, the speaker continues to try to bring together seemingly irreconcilable opposites.

Many critics have taken issue with the hero's appeal to war to find his place in the world, and, indeed, this is not the conservative, anti-revolutionary stance that was expressed throughout Tennyson's minor poems. Isobel Armstrong goes as far as to call it a "xenophobic celebration of war" (271). It can also, though, be seen as a misguided attempt to rectify the civil war-like unrest that was occurring in England after the Industrial Revolution. The narrator laments that peace abroad creates unrest at home: "the heart of the citizen hiss[es] in war on his own hearthstone" (I.i.26); unrest at home can be diminished if the nation unites against a common enemy abroad (I.i.47-48; Shatto 164-65; Bristow 131). At the poem's conclusion, the narrator declares, "[i]t is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill; / I have felt with my native land, I am one with my Kind, / I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd" (3.vi.57-59). The speaker believes that if the country can unite behind a cause that it, like his speaker's psyche, will have the chance to heal, though Anne C. Thomas, for example, wonders if this conclusion is "an apt resolution of his speaker's problems, or an indication of continued mental instability" (63). Given Armstrong's contention that the speaker's madness is a result of his need to navigate the mad world in which he lives, his being "one with [his] Kind" might indicate that by choosing to attain peace through war, the speaker is now as mad as his fellow countrymen who use violence to achieve peace at home.

Armstrong explains that it is easy to consider *In Memoriam* as a text that draws on the gradual change model explicated on the surface of Charles Lyell's theories in *The*

Principles of Geology (1830-1833) and *Maud* as some kind of violent “fracture” (252) or aberrant text. Closer inspection, however, suggests that *In Memoriam* is the “exceptional text” (252) and that *Maud* is much more in line with Tennyson’s usual work, as it is “poetry of sensation” that sets out “to attack ideological formations” (253). Although still desiring the organic unity inspired by Lamarck and Coleridge that Tennyson sought in his minor poems, *Maud* is written within a different cultural context and, thus, produces a differently formulated cultural artifact. Armstrong notes a similarity between theories of geological change that propose the risk of built-up tensions and the threat of sudden change due to fractures caused by hidden energy lurking under the surface and models of psychiatry that studied ruptures and fractures within the psyche (270). Armstrong suggests that the speaker’s madness in *Maud*, and his subsequent questionable choices, can be connected to the issues seen in pioneer British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley’s *The Physical Basis of Will* (1880): “the threat of degeneracy and the need for moral responsibility” (Armstrong 282) led to revolutionary change; for Armstrong, “the displacement of frustrated social energy into war is analogous to the ‘volcanic upheavals’ and their terrible catharsis” (282) that take place in *Maud*. The organic unity Tennyson previously sought is no longer attainable. In *Maud*, Tennyson’s use of the floral symbolism of heather, daffodils, passionflowers, roses, and lilies illuminates that even though the poet still values the peaceful unity he sought in his minor poems, attempting to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable opposites constructed by a mad society ultimately leads to nothing but violence and death.

4.2 Bloody Heather

Tennyson's vivid and violent use of heather in the opening scene of the poem serves as warning of the dangers of attempting to bridge the social divide in sex or marriage. The poem opens with the following vivid and disturbing scene:

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
 Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red
 heath,
 The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of
 blood,
 And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers
 'Death'. (I.i.1-4)

The placement of the above lines on the page is the same form in which they appeared in the first edition of *Maud* published by Edward Moxon in 1855. Keeping in mind that poets generally are quite particular about the physical representation of their work, Tennyson likely approved this depiction of his work before the printing. This suggests that Tennyson had a particular reason for its somewhat peculiar form. While making an argument for Tennyson's experimentalism, Linda K. Hughes draws attention to the fact that the "very format of the lines . . . bespeaks excess, a manic push of (textual) speech that spills into the space where another line ought to be" (29). Positioned on its own, dangling in the space that should be assigned to the next line, the word "heath," or heather, draw his reader's attention to the symbolic importance of this flower. Likewise,

dropping down the words “blood” and “Death” to the lines below, Tennyson forges the early association between flowers and violence that can be seen throughout the poem.

The setting in which the heather is located, much like the way in which Tennyson’s words are set on the page, is critical for the poem’s plot; the heather is found in the hollow in which the speaker’s father committed suicide years ago after he was bankrupted by entering into a financial scheme with Maud’s father, and where, in the future, Maud’s brother will be murdered during a duel with the narrator because, it can be assumed, the brother vehemently disapproves of the burgeoning relationship between the speaker and Maud. Without doubt, Maud’s brother sees the speaker as Maud’s inferior. In *A Contemplation Upon Flowers: Garden Plants in Myth & Literature*, Bobby J. Ward states that heather belongs to the *ericaceae* family; they are “scavenger plants that lack chlorophyll and find nourishment from dead or decayed organic matter” (173). There could not be a more fitting plant to use in a setting that is home to acts of violence and inextricably linked to human corpses; there will be plenty of “dead or decayed organic matter” for the hungry heather to feed upon. Additionally, the common name “heather” comes, in part, from the Old English *haeth*, “meaning an untilled track of land” (173). It is also the root of the word “heathen”—the term used to describe someone living away from the church in the “wilderness” (173). Furthermore, heather is thought to symbolize solitude (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 178-79; Ward 177), “no doubt reflecting the quietness and isolation of the moorlands on which it grows” (Ward 177). Also, as Ward elucidates, heather often has a mixed association in literature with isolation and loneliness, and bedstraw and love (174-79). Taking into consideration these associations,

and having “blood-red” (I.i.2) heather be the first plant encountered by the speaker, a reader well versed in floral associations will already start to suspect that the narrator is violent and ostracized in some way from society, unable to fit in or find a sense of belonging, and, perhaps, his growing love for Maud is dangerous.

Tennyson himself repeatedly stated that *Maud* opens with heather described as “blood-red” to call into question the speaker’s mental stability. In his biography of his father, Hallam Tennyson explains that “[m]y father would say that in calling heath ‘blood’-red the hero showed his extravagant fancy, which is already on the way to madness” (316). In the same vein, W. J. Rolfe outlines how Tennyson also commented to Van Dyke, a Tennyson scholar and friend to Tennyson, on his use of “blood-red” heather in the poem, clarifying that “[t]here is no such thing in nature; but he [the narrator] sees the heather tinged like blood because his mind has been disordered and his sight discoloured by the tragedy of his youth” (350). Rolfe also recounts how “[o]nce when reading the poem aloud, Tennyson paused here [during the opening lines] and remarked: ‘Blood-red heath! The critics might have known by *that* that the man was mad; there’s no such thing’” (350). These stories reveal that Tennyson uses the “blood-red” heather to connect violence with nature to show his speaker is mentally unbalanced, so much so that he is no longer connected to nature. Seeing natural objects that are commonly turned to for comfort in a time of distress as an impossible manifestation that cannot occur in nature suggests the speaker may be mentally fragmenting and splintering off from the rest of society, no matter how much he longs to be a part of it, even at the start of the poem.

Instead of using natural symbols to enable the speaker to connect with the natural world and experience a sense of solace, Tennyson associates flowers and violence in such a way that they function as *memento mori*—a symbolic reminder of mortality. In “The Thing in the Poem: *Maud’s* Hymen,” Matthew Rowlinson argues, “[a]t the threshold of the poem . . . there is landscape haunted by Echo” (146). Rowlinson rightly points out that “[p]art of the horror of Tennyson’s hollow is that it does not echo—an echo that returns the same reply whatever is asked is not properly an echo at all” (146). Instead of this improper Echo being “an echo of the dead father” (146) as suggested by Rowlinson, what if the Echo in the poem is Maud’s attempt to find the voice that she is disallowed? Later in the poem we discover that the speaker is motivated to be what he considers patriotic after hearing Maud sing a “passionate ballad” (I.v.165). There is a somewhat confusing moment in the poem, however, that often draws the attention of critics, in which the speaker explains it is not Maud herself who motivates his desire to fight: “Not her, not her, but a voice” (I.v.189). Indeed, the speaker is not drawn in by Maud’s voice; instead, he is compelled to action by Maud through Echo, the distorted version of Maud’s voice that reverberates around the countryside, the Echo we encounter in the first scene of Tennyson’s poem. Moreover, as you will see shortly, there is a connection between the speaker in *Maud* and Narcissus, who, according to Greek myth, became a daffodil after he broke the heart of Echo, a lovelorn nymph, revealing Maud is indeed the haunting Echo found in the poem.

The description of the hollow seems both mouth- and vagina-like—an “erotic orifice” (Armstrong 279)—with its “lips” appearing to be “dabbled with blood-red heath”

(I.i.2). The blood that soaks the heather can be viewed as the “blood of mortality” that Shaw sees flowing throughout the poem and connects to both Maud and her purity (136). Even the term “hollow” can be readily associated with the womb—a space or cavity that can be filled. Moreover, Echo is specifically referred to as a “her” (I.i.4)—pointing again, like the use of the womb-like hollow, to the only woman that appears in the poem. Either by foreshadowing her death or by solving the mystery surrounding the question of whether or not the narrator has sex with Maud and takes her virginity before they are married, this “blood-red,” heather-rimmed talking mouth/vagina that repeatedly answers “Death” regardless of what is asked of it is a floral rimmed portal through which Maud can warn that her life will be at risk if the speaker pursues a person above his class position for sex and/or marriage. For Maud at least, it would be best if the speaker remains fractured and alone, without the benefit of coupling with her, in any sense of the word.

4.3 Dark Daffodils

As with his use of “blood-red” (2) heath, Tennyson constructs a critical link between flowers, violence, and Maud through his use of daffodils. Unlike Tennyson’s use of heath, or heather, which only appears in the opening lines of the poem, Tennyson uses daffodils at three key moments in the poem. During his conversations with his friend James Henry Mangles about his use of daffodils in *Maud*, Tennyson elucidates that “daffodils were favorites of his” and he “liked very much Wordsworth’s daffodils” (70), suggesting the poet traces how particular authors before him have used flowers to make meaning in their work. Tennyson’s daffodils, however, are employed in a much darker

manner than William Wordsworth's. The first instance occurs when the speaker is roused from his bed by violent dreams filled with "pale," "cold," and "dead" images he associates with Maud (1.iii.88-94). The speaker, attempting to distract himself from his growing obsession with Maud, gives up on returning to sleep and wanders into his garden. Once there, the narrator "[w]alked in a wintry wind by a ghastly glimmer, and found / The shining daffodil dead, and Orion low in his grave" (1.iii.100-01). The symbolic literary history of the daffodil is surprisingly rich and complex. The flower is taxonomically called the narcissus (Ward 113), most likely drawing on Greek mythology. As the story goes, Echo, a nymph, was infatuated with the beautiful Narcissus, but he dismissed her, explaining that he would not permit anyone to have emotional power over him (*Metamorphoses* 3.390-91). After Narcissus snubbed many others, one young man prayed to the goddess Nemesis that Narcissus learn what it feels like to not be able to obtain the person he loves (*Metamorphoses* 3.402-05). Narcissus becomes enraptured with his reflection in a pool of water—the very epitome of self-involved—and, unable to leave his reflection or give up hope on the one he loves, wastes away and dies (*Metamorphoses* 3.437-40). Later, "they were preparing the funeral pile, the brandished torches and the bier; but his body was nowhere to be found. In place of his body they find a flower, its yellow centre girt with white petals" (*Metamorphoses* 3.509-10). Narcissus changed into the flower we subsequently call the daffodil (Ward 113).

There is some disagreement among floral symbolism scholars about how the daffodil is characteristically used in literature. Ward posits that "[c]ontrary to the message sent in the myth, the language of flowers assigned to daffodils the connotations

of chivalry and regard” (113-14). In contrast, Beverly Seaton draws attention to how the daffodil, even though it sometimes connotes the ideas of chivalry that Ward mentions, is also frequently used to represent self-love and deceitful hope (*The Language of Flowers* 174-75), drawing much more readily on the popular Greek myth. Tennyson includes daffodils in *Maud* because he likes daffodils, admires Wordsworth’s symbolic use of them, and therefore decides to make them a significant part of his poem. A more nuanced examination of daffodil symbolism and its association with the Narcissus myth, however, reveals two lovers—Echo and Narcissus—who, like Maud and the speaker, represent incompatible partners: a failed unification. The speaker of *Maud*, like Echo, is filled with a deceitful hope that he will be able to bring together irreconcilable lovers. The use of the phrase “shining daffodil dead” (1.iii.101) implies the speaker is the dead daffodil, imprisoned by a love that attempts to bring together a man and woman from disparate social classes and will ultimately lead to both his and Maud’s death. Additionally, the narrator, much like Narcissus who is afraid of a relationship with Echo, fears making himself emotionally vulnerable to a woman for at least the first half of the poem. Before giving in to his attraction to Maud, the speaker laments, “[s]he may bring me a curse” (1.i.73), foreshadowing the certain death of the speaker in the Crimean War and gesturing to the curse that eventually leads to Narcissus’s death. For both Tennyson and Greek myth, making oneself vulnerable to romantic love, especially if the desired partner is in some way deemed unsuitable, leads to death. The chances of a fulfilling romantic relationship, in both *Maud* and the Narcissus myth, are as “dead” as the daffodil in the night sky.

Tennyson also uses the daffodil throughout *Maud* to mark the passage of time, a floral trope that was seen previously in the analysis of his minor poems. It is thought that the name “daffodil” possibly derives from *affodyle*, an old English word meaning “early-comer” (Pickles 30). Daffodils bloom early in the spring and are one of the indicators of the arrival of the season, so it follows that the speaker would describe the daffodil as “dead” within the timeframe Tennyson is using in the poem—spring would be in the throes of its death. Tennyson relies on the description of the sky in which the daffodil is set to indicate a particular season. He told Mangles critics had complained that this particular scene in *Maud* was confusing, as Orion is never “low down in the west” during late spring (Mangles 70). In Greek mythology, Orion is “known as a mighty hunter” (Daly 96) and comes alive, in a way, in the constellation the bears his name. Tennyson explained to Mangles, “[o]f course, . . . [I] meant that Orion was setting over a high hill” (70).

Including Orion, the hunter, at this moment in *Maud* relates back to the violent undercurrent that attaches itself to the floral symbolism in the poem; hunters are celebrated for pursuing a living creature and killing it, mirroring the narrator’s pursuit of Maud and her eventual death. Tim L. Sadenwasser further draws attention to how Tennyson is using the passage of time in this scene, and, critically, links it to Tennyson’s use of floral symbolism. Sadenwasser argues that “the dead daffodil—manifest in the fading yellow light after the sun’s daily burial—displays his fear that, like her father, Maud threatens to bring death and discord” (89-90). This link between the daffodil and potential violence that can occur when individuals pursue love outside of their socially

constructed class position is also found in Tennyson's descriptive language as the narrator gazes upon the night sky after the "sun's daily burial": "wintry," "ghastly glimmer," "dead," and "grave" (1.iii.100-01) can be associated with the language that the narrator uses to describe Maud during his dream: "pale," "cold," and "dead" (1.iii.88-94). The cycle of rebirth that typically takes place during spring and in the night sky fails to occur here, warning the reader that the speaker's desire to bring together dissimilar classes in his quest for romantic love may not come to a happy conclusion.

The next occasion in the poem that features the use of daffodils occurs when the speaker awaits the arrival of Maud during the famous garden scene. The narrator is passionately calling for Maud to come join him in the garden, and once again describes the sky above in vivid detail:

For a breeze of morning moves,
 And the planet of Love is on high,
 Beginning to faint in the light that she loves
 On a bed of daffodil sky,
 To faint in the light of the sun she loves,
 To faint in his light, and to die. (1.xxii.856-61)

The planet that the speaker refers to here as the "planet of Love" is Venus. Romans weaved elements of Greek mythology into the creation of their deities. For instance, the Romans endowed Venus, the Roman "goddess of love and beauty" (Daly 147) with "the characteristics of the Greek goddess Aphrodite" (147). Thus, symbolism associated with the planet Venus is an amalgamation of Greek and Roman myth, representing love and

beauty and “springtime, crop cultivation, and gardens” (147). This makes the placement of this planet overhead while the speaker waits to clandestinely meet Maud in a garden all the more fitting. Throughout the poem, the narrator has been entranced by Maud’s beauty and is seeking love, also indicating that having Venus casting light upon the spot of the narrator’s and Maud’s potential meeting is symbolically appropriate.

Importantly, however, in the night sky above the garden Venus “begins to faint in the light that she loves / On a bed of daffodil sky,” and “die” (1.xxii.58-61). Although once again marking the passage of time by indicating that morning is approaching because Venus is becoming less and less visible as the sun rises, Venus’s fading, or slow death, is also a warning of the results of Maud’s deflowering. The sexual surrender of Venus in this passage is evident, as she gives herself over to the “light” of her life, or the man that she loves. Sadenwasser argues that the implied sexuality of the “bed of daffodil sky” negates the dark imagery associated with daffodils earlier and empowers Maud (89-90). He posits that the passage indicates Maud’s power over the speaker and “her influence over the daffodil into the sky, where its daily cycles of death and rebirth correspond to the speaker’s changing relationship with her. When their love approaches its sexual fulfillment in the garden, the speaker again notes Maud’s affinity with the daffodil, now immanent in the dawn light” (89-90).

Sadenwasser, however, only mentions in passing the inclusion of Maud’s fainting and death in these lines, preferring to take those actions as only further proof that the speaker is fantasizing about bedding Maud (89-90). In fact, this passage is an ominous warning of Maud’s death and what disastrous results can occur when class boundaries are

breached. The speaker's need to have sex with Maud, apparent in this scene, contributed to Maud's demise. Although it is unclear how Maud dies after the narrator kills her brother in a duel, it can be proposed after examining this scene that Maud's brother may have come across a sexual encounter between Maud and the speaker in the garden. If this were the case, this would demonstrate that the pleasure that the narrator seeks with Maud "[o]n a bed of daffodil[s]" (1.xxii.60) leads to her death. Moreover, the "fainting" that is repeatedly referred to in the stanza has been glossed over and associated with orgasm and a fulfilling sexual union. Importantly, however, fainting during sex can also be linked to the term "little death". According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, orgasms have long been associated with death and a "loss of consciousness, *spec.* in sleep or during an orgasm" ("little death"), once again revealing flowers, even a seemingly welcoming bed of daffodils, are used by Tennyson to warn of the violence that can result from an effort to unify—or come together—with someone unequal in class.

The first stanza of part III of *Maud*, the short concluding section of the poem, is the culmination of the association between daffodils and violence Tennyson has been building throughout the poem. Maud dies in part II, and part III opens with the speaker contemplating the time he has spent time in Bedlam at least partially recovering from his madness that finally reached its pinnacle after he murdered Maud's brother, leading to her death:

My mood is changed, for it fell at a time of year
 When the face of night is fair on dewy downs,
 And the shining daffodil dies, and the Charioteer

And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns
 Over Orion's grave low in the west,
 That like a silent lightning under the stars
 She seemed to divide in a dream from a band of the blest,
 And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars— (3.vi.4-11)

As mentioned previously, the narrator is connected to the hunter Orion, as the narrator hunts Maud throughout the poem. Moreover, Orion is again, as seen first in part I, ominously “low in his grave” (1.iii.101), and the daffodil, instead of being “dead” (1.iii.101), much more presently, actively, and violently “dies” (3.vi.6). The daffodil that “dies” symbolizes the imminent violent death of the speaker as he sets off to honour the cause Maud once so passionately sang about. Now that the speaker has attempted to breach the boundaries of social class and unify with Maud and has failed, he is unable to survive on his own. Importantly, what may first seem like a reprehensible decision—joining a much-maligned war—can now be justified. By taking up a cause that Maud champions and dying a violent death in the process, the speaker may very well believe that he will finally unite with Maud on a bed of daffodils, even if only in an afterlife that presumably is blind to class distinctions.

4.4 Irreconcilable Roses

Tennyson uses roses for multiple symbolic purposes in *Maud*, one of them being a further attempt to bring together irreconcilable opposites. There is rather oddly no actual proposal and acceptance scene in the poem, and the following lyric reaffirms how the story takes place “entirely in the space between betrothal and marriage” (Rowlinson 153).

“Go not, happy day” occurs right after the speaker states he must proclaim his love for Maud before they part, he “must tell her, or die” (1.xvi.569-70), and just before he leads Maud home and calls her “my love, my only friend” (1.xviii.599). I suggest that this lyric reveals the hyperbolic anticipation the speaker experiences at the mere thought of joining with Maud in marriage, evident through its “happy” tone, talk of a “maiden” yielding, the “happy Yes” coming from “her lips,” and the speaker’s desire to spread what he is sure will be Maud’s joy-inducing response around the globe:

Go not, happy day,
 From the shining fields,
 Go not, happy day,
 Till the maiden yields.
 Rosy is the West,
 Rosy is the South,
 Roses are her cheeks,
 And a rose her mouth
 When the happy Yes
 Falters from her lips,
 Pass and blush the news
 Over glowing ships;
 Over blowing seas,
 Over seas at rest,
 Pass the happy news,

Blush it through the West;
 Till the red man dance
 By his red cedar-tree,
 And the red man's babe
 Leap, beyond the sea.
 Blush from West to East,
 Blush from East to West,
 Till the West is East,
 Blush it through the West,
 Rosy is the West,
 Rosy is the South,
 Roses are her cheeks,
 And a rose her mouth. (1.xvii.571-98)

First included in the third edition of *The Princess* (1850), this lyric was later incorporated into *Maud* (Ricks, *The Poems* 1066). Tennyson, though, may have regretted its inclusion, as it was “much ridiculed by the critics” (1066). Regardless of the negative reviews it received, this passage is rich with complex floral symbolism. Roses have long been associated with women and suggest love, beauty, and romantic passion (Ward 313; Pickles 88-89; Kramer 55; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 190-93), so it is not surprising Tennyson draws on these symbolic associations to celebrate the love blossoming between Maud and the speaker. This association is especially fitting given

that roses are called the “Queen of the Flowers” (Pickles 88-89), and Maud herself is later labeled “Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls” (1.xxii.902).

Herbert Tucker examines this lyric and points out “the tradition of poetic comparison between women and roses” (420). He crucially adds that although this tradition usually uses metaphor and simile to establish a “connection between beauty and mortality” (420), this rose lyric instead compares women and roses through a biased cultural lens (420). Tucker argues, “[l]ove makes the world go round, for Tennyson’s hero, as and because the British empire does” (421). According to Tucker, Maud’s mouth is an agreeable rose because it “assents to the authority of a patriarchal empire, which her faltering blush of submissive pride also confirms” (421). He supports this postcolonial reading by drawing on images of Britain’s successful colonial conquest present in lyric: “glowing ships” (1.xvii.582) and “the red man’s babe” (1.xvii.589), for example. For Tucker, “a young man’s fancy and the first flush of sexual conquest have utterly merged with the Victorian Englishman’s proudest boast: that upon his empire—rosy red on any good Victorian map of the world—the sun never sets” (421).

Adding further complexity to Tucker’s argument, it is vital that the speaker visualizes Maud’s mouth as a rose when the much anticipated “happy Yes / Falter from her lips” (1.xvii.579-80). Maud’s acquiescent mouth, erotically taking on the vagina-like formation of a red petaled flower, speaks to the opening of the poem when Maud first finds her voice through the Echo in the hollow, a hollow with vagina-like “lips” that appear to be “dabbled with blood-red heath” (I.i.2). Although Maud at first appears to have again acquired a voice—she seems to reply Yes to what the speaker asks of her—

Maud's Yes is without the benefit of the quotation marks that typically mark dialogue because it is not actually her speaking the word "Yes". Maud's response in the passage is formulated and broadcast by the narrator. Although this scene celebrates the potential union of Maud and the speaker on a global scale, it also specifically draws attention to Maud's lack of voice. The narrator speaks for Maud, offering up a response for her until his "maiden yields" (1.xvii.574) and he has gained complete control over her. Moreover, the fact that the narrator's design of a reply for Maud occurs through a floral filter indicates her supposed response is a symbolic one that only represents the speaker's desires and perhaps not Maud's. Much like the British Empire, the narrator seeks complete control of his intended conquests.

Tennyson also uses this lyric to try to merge cultures and cardinal directions. His attempt to bring together the East and the West is supported by his choice of rose as the flower for this lyric because roses "travelled to Europe from China and the near East in the last few thousand years" (Stewart 221). Roses have already made the cross-cultural connection Tennyson is trying to forge. It is not enough, however, that the cultural exchange is a two-way reciprocal street through which flowers, or blushes, move "from West to East" (1.xvii.591) and "from East to West" (1.xvii.592). Instead, Tennyson emphasizes how cultural exchange will keep occurring "[t]ill the West *is* East" (1.xvii.593; my emphasis). In Tennyson's failed reconciliation of opposites, the East consumes the West. It is also worth noting that the speaker is intent on bringing the world together to celebrate what he hopes will be his upcoming nuptials. The cardinal directions Tennyson uses in the lyric, though, completely leave out the north. East, west, and south

are repeatedly mentioned, and described as “rosy”, associating them with one another and closing the distance between them. Tennyson leaves out the north because it is the one direction that the British Empire had yet to conquer; the north had yet to enjoy the rosy glow accomplished by British conquest. At the time this poem was written, the British Empire had already conquered territory to the south (Africa), to the east (India), and to the west (Canada). Only the north, or Russia, remained unclaimed by the British. At the closing of the poem, we learn the narrator joins his countrymen in battle in the Crimean War, travelling “[f]ar into the North, and battle, and seas of death” (3.vi.37). Tennyson’s attempt to shrink the globe by merging the cardinal directions fails in “Go not, happy day” because he precludes north from his celebrations due to his fear of venturing in a direction that leads to land not unified with Britain. Without directional balance and inclusivity, Tennyson’s attempt to reconcile opposites in this lyric is unbalanced and off kilter, much like Maud and the speaker’s relationship.

4.5 Violence and Roses, Passionflowers, and Lilies

Tennyson explained to his friend James T. Knowles that to him passionflowers are “[a] token—I hardly write anything without some meaning of that kind” (Shatto 192).

Nowhere in his writing is this use of flowers as “tokens” that carry meaning more apparent than in *Maud*. Tennyson utilizes lilies, roses, and passionflowers in the following two stanzas to explore the bringing together of disparate concepts to try to achieve unity and the turmoil and violence that result. The first time the passionflower is employed in the poem, roses and lilies and the lion and the passionflower are brought together:

Maud has a garden of roses
 And lilies fair on a lawn;
 There she walks in her state
 And tends upon bed and bower,
 And thither I climbed at dawn
 And stood by her garden-gate;
 A lion ramps at the top,
 He is claspt by a passion-flower. (I.xiv.489-96)

This scene in which Maud's garden is first described is unique because it is the first time in the poem roses and lilies appear together. Roses have long suggested love, beauty, and romantic passion (Ward 313; Pickles 88-89; Kramer 55; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 190-93), whereas lilies are associated with purity and innocence (Kramer 25; Pickles 61; Scourse 49; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-83). During the Victorian period, women were thought to possess irreconcilable and polarizing characteristics; they were deemed either good or bad, pure or impure, virgin or prostitute (Hedgecock 176). In the stanza above, Maud is attempting to "tend" to both her purity and passion, signifying the stirrings of the violent conflict that will occur when these contrasting concepts are brought together as Maud and the narrator clandestinely meet in the garden: the speaker murders Maud's brother; Maud dies of unknown causes, perhaps from grief over the loss of her brother; the narrator is confined to an insane asylum; and, once released, joins the Crimean War and likely dies in battle. The only purity left to either Maud or the speaker is the purity that comes with death. The garden setting in this passage is also critical. The

literary use of gardens is commonly associated with Christian mythology, as “[h]umankind’s birth into innocence and its fall into sin both occur in a garden” (Fischler 763). Choosing to set Maud and the speaker’s meeting in a garden teeming with roses and lilies, Tennyson draws attention to the reconciliation of Maud’s innocent and passionate sides and the violence and death that result from her moral fall. She is no longer the mere Queen of Roses, but “Queen lily and rose in one” (1.xxii.905). For Maud and the narrator, it is extremely hazardous to enter into a sexual relationship, particularly because they are currently unmarried and not equal in social class. This class disparity complicates their relationship and lessens the likelihood of their marriage, meaning any sexual relationship in the garden brought about by the convergence of Maud’s passionate and pure sides puts her at grave risk.

The speaker’s position at Maud’s “garden-gate” and the placement of the “passion-flower” “claspt” around a “lion” further examines the dangers of sexual unification between Maud and the speaker. Adding to work that Rowlinson has done exploring “thematic concerns” related to the hymen in “The Thing in the Poem: *Maud’s* Hymen,” I argue in this passage that the speaker, waiting to breach Maud’s gate, is, in fact, intent on having intercourse with her, ultimately seeking to penetrate Maud’s hymen. His clamoring to break through her gate, or strip her of her purity by piercing her hymen, is connected specifically to the passionflower. Tennyson hyphenates “garden-gate” and “passion-flower,” words that need not be hyphenated. In doing so, he simultaneously links the words together and breaks the words open at the place of the hyphen, symbolizing the desire to come together as lovers and the violent separation the

union will cause. Symbolically, passionflowers represent the “violent pain of love” and susceptibility (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 186-87). The breaking of a woman’s hymen can be a painful, violent act that draws blood. Also, the susceptibility that accompanies the passionflower speaks to how Maud is willing to lower the defenses that safeguard her purity as well as how the presence of the gate in Maud’s garden reveals her vulnerability. The gate creates an access point for the speaker to reach Maud, making possible a sexual union that steals away her purity and leads to three violent deaths. Lastly, it is significant that the passionflower rests at the top of Maud’s gate and is “claspt” around a lion. In the Victorian period, the lion symbolized power (Shea and Whitla 143), the crown, and manliness (Pickles 92-93). Thus, the lion’s placement at the top of Maud’s gate represents the speaker and his display of manly prowess as he prepares to breach Maud’s gate; however, wrapping the lion in a passionflower demonstrates the narrator is overcome with “the violent pain of love” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 186-87) in his pursuit of Maud. This foreshadows the disastrous consequences that his attempt at a relationship with a woman outside of his class brings.

Roses and passionflowers continue to play a critical symbolic role in the poem, again revealing the madness of trying to reconcile dissimilar concepts. The only other appearance of the passionflower in the poem occurs during the famous lyrical passage “Come into the garden, Maud” that closes part II. In this particular stanza, on the night of the ball, the speaker finally breaches the gate and crosses into Maud’s garden, crossing the boundary into Maud’s inner sanctuary for the first time. The result of this boundary crossing is one of joyous hysteria:

There has fallen a splendid tear
 From the passion-flower at the gate.
 She is coming, my dove, my dear;
 She is coming, my life, my fate;
 The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near;'
 And the white rose weeps, 'She is late;'
 The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear;'
 And the lily whispers, 'I wait.' (1.xxii.908-15)

The flowers weep with tears of happiness, anxiety, and impatience as they await Maud's arrival. Although flowers are typically depicted as emotionally invested audience members throughout this drama, this passage demonstrates pathetic fallacy run amok. Transposing the speaker's unbalanced feelings onto the flowers suggests some kind of hallucinatory psychosis. Tennyson himself explained this scene as one that "had, & was intended to have, a taint of madness" (Mangles 69). This dangerous ramping up of emotion and madness foreshadows the terrible confrontation about to occur between Maud's brother and the speaker. Whatever Maud's brother observes in the garden between Maud and the narrator is so upsetting that it leads to the tragic duel, suggesting that the lion no longer being visible at the top of the gate symbolizes the speaker finally breaching Maud's gate, or hymen, and taking her innocence, much to her brother's horror.

Another key element in the preceding passage is the unification of red and white roses. John W. Crawford convincingly argues that Tennyson brings together the white

and red rose with blue larkspur to include “a nationalistic element” in his work (65): “[t]he red of the rose, the white of the rose, and the blue of the larkspur represent the British national colors which call to mind the Union Jack as it is carried into battle” (65). The nationalism this suggests is connected to the narrator’s decision to fight in the Crimean War at the conclusion of the poem. Seaton also contends that bringing red and white roses together symbolizes war (*The Language of Flowers* 190-93). It is possible, however, to also view the union of the red and white roses as evidence of the impending sexual union between the speaker and Maud. Importantly, “[r]ed and white roses together mean Unity in the Language of Flowers” (Pickles 90-91). Soon, Maud and the speaker, lovers from two different social classes, will unify sexually in the garden, leading to the tragic deaths of Maud and her brother, and, by impelling the speaker to join the Crimean War and travel to the non-rosy north, the speaker’s near-certain death.

4.6 Conclusion: Ruskin Comes Into Tennyson’s Garden

As will become readily apparent in the next chapter, John Ruskin, like Barrett Browning and Tennyson, enthusiastically includes an abundance of floral symbolism in his work in a purposeful and methodical manner. It would be remiss, however, to close this chapter without exploring Ruskin’s reading of *Maud*’s floral symbolism in “Of Queen’s Gardens,” which was originally given as a public lecture before it was published in *Sesame and Lilies* in 1865 (Peterson 86). “Of Queen’s Gardens” exemplifies conservative Victorian ideals: women should be educated to be model mothers, helpmates for their husbands, and “Queens” of the domestic sphere, whereas men should be taught to rule their household, be men of moral action, and engage with others in the public sphere.

Ruskin's particular use of floral symbolism will be analyzed in greater detail in the chapter that follows, but here it is necessary to address two of Ruskin's interpretations of *Maud's* floral symbolism.

Maud's speaker claims he can easily trace where Maud has travelled, explaining:

I know the way she went
 Home with her maiden posy,
 For her feet have touch'd the meadows
 And left the daises rosy. (1.xii.432-35)

Women's ability to affect nature through the mere touch of their feet is a common trope in Tennyson's work. As previously mentioned in the chapter on Tennyson's minor poems, in "The Progress of Spring," as the personification of Spring moves across the speaker's garden "[t]he kingcup fills her footprint" (59). Additionally, in "The Gardener's Daughter" Rose's feet "might have danced / The greensward into greener circles" (132-33). In the passage from *Maud* above, Maud's "feet have touch'd the meadows / And left the daises rosy." Creating women characters who control, and even become one with, nature shows how Tennyson's floral symbolism attempts to join disparate opposites, in this case humankind and the natural world. Tennyson eschews the suggestion he is trying to join together Maud and nature when he claims the colour change in the daisies is in fact a botanical phenomenon, arguing, "[i]f you tread on daisies—they turn up underfoot and get rosy" (Rader 315). Regardless of what Tennyson may have said, this floral symbolism noticeably foreshadows the "rosy" world Tennyson paints in "Go not, happy day," which occurs shortly after this observation of Maud's

ability to alter the colour of daisies from white to rosy. Sadenwasser also notes that a botanical phenomenon cannot explain the effect of Maud's feet on the meadow that the speaker praises during the famous lyric "Come into the garden, Maud" (87). The narrator states Maud's footsteps in the meadow have left the meadow "so sweet" (1.xxii.888) that the March wind "sets the jewel-print of [her] feet / In violets blue as [her] eyes" (1.xxii.890-91). With some assistance from the spring wind, Maud's footprints are transformed into violets, violets that symbolize the colour of her eyes, forcing together humans with nature so completely that "Maud physically becomes the nature over which she presides" (Sadenwasser 87). Regrettably for Maud, as the violet's bloom lasts fleetingly (Pickles 102) so too does Maud's life. This illustrates that linking humankind inextricably with nature may not always be beneficial.

Just a few lines later in the same lyric, Maud's relationship with nature changes from one in which she affects nature to one where she demonstrates an unnatural power over the natural world. The speaker anxiously awaits Maud's appearance, and declares,

[s]he is coming, my own, my sweet;

Were it ever so airy a tread,

My heart would hear her and beat,

Were it earth in an earthy bed;

My dust would hear her and beat,

Had I lain for a century dead;

Would start and tremble under her feet,

And blossom in purple and red. (1.xxii.916-23)

Once again fashioning the unusual and unsettling association between flowers and violence found throughout the poem, Tennyson connects the floral to blood. Tennyson told Mangles by “blossom in purple and red” he meant blood (Mangles 40), and the word “blossom” is also naturally associated with the coming-to-life of flowers. The use of the word “blossom” as a hybrid to bring together flowers and blood in a way that connotes violence occurs again at the close of the poem when the speaker joins the Crimean War and laments that the peace that he once “deemed no peace” (3.vi.49) has turned into “[t]he blood-red blossom of war” (3.vi.53). This cements Tennyson’s use of the word “blossom” as meaning both the growth and spread of blood. In the passage above that occurs during the garden scene, the narrator is so infatuated with Maud that if he was dead and buried, her footsteps upon his grave would make his dead body “blossom in purple and red,” a violent image of him suddenly coming back to life through the flowering of blood. Maud’s control over the natural world takes on grotesque and sacrilegious elements when it is transferred onto her effect on the narrator. She is no longer simply altering nature with her footsteps or becoming one with nature; instead, Maud is capable of God-like powers through her ability to resurrect the dead. Tracing all three of the instances in which Maud modifies nature with her footsteps reveals how Tennyson utilizes flower symbolism to explore the consequences of too closely reconciling humankind with the natural world.

In stark contrast, in “Of Queen’s Gardens” Ruskin selectively appropriates Tennyson’s floral symbolism in *Maud* to support his own belief that humankind must become unified with the natural world to access morality. Ruskin uses the Victorians’

love of plants as the lure with which to draw readers into what I consider his floral sermons—passages in his work that are intentionally rife with floral symbolism and meant to educate readers on good and evil to help them achieve salvation. Ruskin begins his examination of Tennyson’s floral symbolism by asking his intended audience, the men who shape the lives of women by controlling what women read and how they are educated, “[h]ave you ever considered what a deep under meaning there lies, or at least may be read, if we choose, in our custom of strewing flowers before those whom we think most happy?” (141). What Ruskin is alluding to is the custom of tossing flowers in the path of people at joyful celebrations, such as weddings. He further explains that the lesson to be taken from this action is not that people should believe their path in life will always be easy, but rather that there is something to be learned from the custom itself (141). According to Ruskin, the lesson is, “[t]he path of a good woman is indeed strewn with flowers: but they rise behind her steps, not before them” (141-42). It is important to realize Ruskin clearly delineates it is only the path of a “good”—or moral—woman that will be filled with flowers by her footsteps.

Ruskin supports his argument by quoting the lines from *Maud* that were elaborated on in detail above, the lines explaining how Maud’s footsteps “have touch’d the meadows, / And left the daisies rosy” (1.xii.434-35). In Victorian texts, daisies commonly symbolize innocence, patience (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 176-77), and morality (Scourse 52), making the flower particularly suitable for Ruskin’s argument and for the conveyance of God’s moral teachings. For Ruskin, the daisies’ alteration caused by Maud’s footsteps is neither “lover’s fancy” (142) nor “a poet’s fancy” (142)

but rather irrefutable evidence that nature shows us women must work to morally “revive” those around them (142). At this point, Ruskin makes an abrupt shift and focuses on how women must be taught to love fallen women and help them (142-43). In the Victorian period, a sexualized woman was considered morally “fallen”, as a woman’s value was tied to her sexual purity. Prostitutes, then, were often thought to have morally fallen to such a degree that they were beyond saving. Ruskin implies that by helping prostitutes, women will gain blessings such as an improved chance of entry into heaven (142-43). Similar to Tennyson, Ruskin blurs the boundary between humankind and flowers. Instead of showing the dangers of conflating humankind with nature, however, Ruskin symbolically presents all women as flowers, flowers that share “thoughts” and “lives” and all deserve a morally righteous life (142). He explains how “in the darkness of the terrible streets,—these feeble florets [the prostitutes] are lying, with all their fresh leaves torn, and their stems broken” (142). The symbolic connection between flowers and violence seen in Tennyson’s work is also evident in Ruskin’s, albeit working towards a different end. The moral degeneration of the fallen women is transferred onto flowers, resulting in visible physical damage such as torn leaves and broken stems. The immoral acts of prostitutes turn literally into physical marks displaying their sin. In Ruskin’s floral sermons, flowers can teach women who needs saving and also serve as a vehicle for god’s moral message.

The next material Ruskin borrows for his argument originates from “Come into the garden, Maud.” First he includes the opening of the lyric but purposefully omits the two lines that explain the speaker is at the garden gate waiting for Maud’s arrival:

Come into the garden, Maud,

For the black bat, night, has flown,

.....

And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad

And the musk of the roses blown. (1.xxii.850-55)

Ruskin does not credit the above request to *Maud's* speaker but rather suggests it is spoken by “Dante’s great Matilda” (143) who appears in volume two of *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio*. Matilda guides Dante through ritual bathings in the rivers Lethe and Eunoe, but, even more importantly, she is described as “a solitary woman moving, / singing, and gathering up flower on flower— / the flowers that colored all of her pathway” (*Purgatorio* xxvii.40-42). By making the words Matilda’s, Ruskin craftily refers back to how a good woman’s pathway will be filled with flowers *and* his contention that Victorian women must take up and care for fallen women, the prostitutes he recently likened to damaged and broken flowers.

Ruskin ignores how Tennyson uses floral symbolism to establish a sensual and romantic scene in the garden. The air is full of the scent of roses and woodbine, flowers that have long carried specific symbolic meaning. As noted earlier, roses suggest love, beauty, and romantic passion (Ward 313; Pickles 88-89; Kramer 55; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 190-93), so it is fitting Tennyson fills the air with their scent as the narrator awaits Maud’s arrival. Moreover, as explained in the previous chapters, honeysuckle represents both the “chains” and “bonds of love” (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180-81) and woman’s refusal to answer hastily (180-81), unmistakably referring

to the narrator's desire to unite with Maud and Maud's hesitation in accepting his proposal. Additionally, "Come into the garden, Maud" recalls the Song of Solomon, "the richly sensuous love poem, with its recurrent imagery of flowers, fruits, spices, fragrances, darkness, and daybreak" (Inglesfield 121). The Song of Solomon can easily be seen as a sexually charged dialogue between lover and beloved (Pope 192-96), which is the reading Tennyson draws on for *Maud*. In comparison, Ruskin desexualizes Tennyson's allusion to the Song of Solomon by associating it instead with a "mystical love," one of a bride—the Church—waiting for her groom—Christ (Pope 183). In "Of Queen's Garden's" Ruskin brings together the Song of Solomon with the Book of John and asks if his readers have ever heard "not of a Maude, but a Madeleine, who went down to her garden in the dawn and found one waiting at the gate, whom she supposed to be the gardener?" (144). In the Book of John, Mary Magdalene mistakes Jesus for a gardener when Jesus questions her about her tears upon her discovery that Jesus' body is no longer in the sepulchre (John 20.1-18). Mary Magdalene, or Madeline to Ruskin, is oftentimes accused of being a harlot who must repent for her promiscuity (Haskins 97). Ruskin contends even fallen women, or the Mary Magdalenes of the world, have the ability to meet Christ "at the gate of *this* garden" (144) if they are tended to by a moral woman who follows his floral sermons. In the end, Ruskin's reading of *Maud* drifts far from Tennyson's garden, a sensuous garden filled with flowers that symbolize the dangers of bringing together irreconcilable opposites.

In the Victorian period, poets were thought to convey truths; nowhere is this more evident than in *Maud*. *Maud* is "at once love story and social critique" (Tucker 406), and

Tennyson performs this social critique with the help of floral symbolism. In “Symbolism in Tennyson’s Minor Poems,” Elizabeth Hillman Waterston explains Tennyson typically follows a particular method of symbolism: Tennyson’s symbols “reinforce our direct attention to the ‘subject’ by dealing with another reality which will create emotional and intellectual responses in its own right but which is recognizable in the particular instance as a sign directing our interest back to the original subject” (113). Although *Maud* is not one of Tennyson’s minor poems or examined by Hillman Waterston to substantiate her argument, the flowers in *Maud* serve as recognizable signs to direct his reader’s attention back to his social critique. Tennyson constructs “a deranged ecology” (Armstrong 255) to illustrate that he realizes the organic unity he previously sought is not attainable in a society gone mad. In this new world, when social classes, romantic partners, and humankind and nature are brought together the result is nothing but violence and destruction. Ultimately, Tennyson cultivates floral symbols to demonstrate that the Romantics’ “fusion of contraries” (Todorov 206) is obsolete.

Chapter 5

John Ruskin's Floral Sermons: Flowers Being Good in *The Queen of the Air*

5.1 Floral Sermons

As mentioned in the previous chapter, John Ruskin, like Barrett Browning and Tennyson, enthusiastically utilizes floral symbolism. It has been demonstrated that Ruskin misreads how Tennyson uses flowers in *Maud*; in the disjointed world Tennyson constructs, the convergence of social classes, romantic partners, and humankind and nature result in violence and destruction. Ruskin, however, reads Tennyson's symbolism in a way that supports Ruskin's belief that flowers communicate morality lessons to help create better, more God-fearing, people. Like Barrett Browning and Tennyson, Ruskin believes in exploring everyday social issues in his work. Unlike Tennyson, however, who distances the symbol from religion, Ruskin circles back to the Coleridgean symbol first discussed in relation to Barrett Browning's work. As noted earlier, Coleridge attests that symbols are "conductors" of God's "truths" (*The Statesman's Manual* 37). For Coleridge, symbols are transcendental (37); they carry the Word of God to humankind. An exploration of Ruskin's use of floral symbolism in *The Queen of the Air* (1869) reveals that he too believes symbols act as a conduit between humankind and God.

The Queen of the Air is primarily composed of three lectures: an address "On the Greek Myths of Storms" given at University College, London makes up section one, "Athena Chalinitis" (Athena in the Heavens); the next part, "Athena Keramitis" (Athena in the Earth), is assembled from work Ruskin did for an undelivered lecture; and the final

section, “Athena Ergane” (Athena in the Heart), was based on a lecture on Greek coins Ruskin delivered at the Art School of South Lambeth (Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years* 153). The text is rarely studied but has become somewhat more popular as some scholars have taken to examining it through an ecocritical lens. Within its pages, Ruskin explains how upon his return to Switzerland after a thirty-five year absence he finds “[t]he light, the air, the waters, all defiled!” (19.293). He is devastated to discover the natural setting polluted by industry and people disrespecting nature. The overarching subject of the text is myths associated with the Greek goddess Athena. In the first section of the text, “Athena Chalinitis,” Athena is painted as an ideal to inspire humans. Part two, “Athena Keramitis,” examines Athena’s role in the vital force found in material organisms and includes contemplations on her association with botany, birds, snakes, and colour. The last section of the text, “Athena Ergane,” surveys how Athena rules over moral action.

Ruskin’s relationship with religion was complicated and fluid, and this allowed for nature to play a large role in whatever religious system he ascribed to at a given moment. His mother was “fiercely Evangelical” (Bloom 1), and even before his birth, she had “dedicated him to the service of God, intending him for the ministry” (1). When Ruskin was a child, “Scripture was read every day,” and the bible served as the foundation of his learning (Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* 13). He did not attend school until he was 14 (15); instead, his early education was composed of Calvinist teachings given by his mother and his father’s lessons on picturesque practice and theory (Hunt 16), along with, of course, Ruskin’s own observations and curiosity (15). Ruskin

travelled a complex religious trajectory that moved through and blended Evangelical Protestantism, naturalism, and Catholicism (Bloom 10-11). Reconfiguring religion to suit his needs enabled Ruskin to amalgamate Christian and pre-Christian models of the world in order to integrate teachings from the Christian bible with ancient myth (O’Gorman, *Late Ruskin* 154). Even with his interest in myth, Ruskin always believed that “the Christian God was his maker and that Jesus Christ was his saviour” (Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* 170). Ruskin’s staunch belief in the existence of “a sound essential morality” (O’Gorman, *Late Ruskin* 154), his focus on messages carried by the material world, and his emphasis on learning from everyday experiences available to all (Birch, “Who Wants Authority” 65) explain how nature became Ruskin’s touchstone.

Ruskin’s formative years at Herne Hill were not only shaped by religion but also moulded by nature (Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* 10-13). During his early years and onwards throughout his life, Ruskin was a proponent of an inner language of nature that was visible to humankind; this natural language allowed him to bring together moral convictions and the natural world. Ruskin believed humans could comprehend how to live a moral life and become closer to God by studying flowers (Birch, “Who Wants Authority” 73). Ruskin mediated whatever religion he happened to be practicing through nature and was on a lifelong search for “a Spirit in nature that was both natural and orthodox” (Finley 86). Witnessing God in nature and interpreting His message was common in the Victorian period, and Ruskin’s approach to this process has been explained in various ways and named different things by scholars over the years. For example, in 1977 Frederick Kirchoff couples Ruskin’s mission to understand how myth

functions with what Kirchhoff terms a “natural religion” that sets out to correct science’s erroneous ways and generate a new appreciation for religion (254).

A few years later, Raymond Fitch classifies Ruskin as an ethical botanist and offers a more comprehensive look at what started Ruskin’s integration of nature into his work by looking back to Volume Two of *Modern Painters*. Fitch argues that Ruskin believes in a “Religion of Nature,” a position “that reads the primary aspects of nature as a system of symbols for the attributes of God, or a divine language” (92). For Fitch, Ruskin’s “Religion of Nature” and the morality associated with the messages given to humankind by God through plants makes Ruskin a botanist who practices “ethical botany” (570). Drawing broadly on how the Victorians viewed religion and their place in the world, in 1985 Beverley Seaton contends many Victorians saw messages from Christ in nature the same way they saw his teachings in the pages of their bibles (“Considering the Lilies” 260). Seaton refers to this Victorian ability to find religious truths in nature as “natural typology” and frames Ruskin as a natural typologist who categorizes nature through the lens of religion (260). Seaton explains how nature “was a real presence for the Victorians”—it had meaning in itself and also outside itself (260). More than twenty years later, Elizabeth Campbell looks at how Ruskin believes plants transmit moral messages by asserting that Ruskin offers “his own version of a post-evolutionary Doctrine of Signatures, in which a plant’s beneficent or malevolent power may be read in its physical appearance, in its leaves and flowers” (116). A short time later, Francis O’Gorman categorizes Ruskin as a natural theologian and discusses how the Victorians believed “the world was created miraculously by God and the evidence of God’s mind

was visible thereafter in the material order” (“*Ruskin, Science, and the Miracles of Life*” 276), with the “material order” including nature.

Although drawing on the work of these previous scholars, I am more interested in how Ruskin interprets God’s messages communicated by flowers and incorporates them into his work through the use of floral symbolism. For Christians, the sacred text is the bible, and Evangelicals especially believed “the Bible was literally the Word of God” (Landow, “*Ruskin’s Language of Types*” 29). Ruskin, however, did not hold the bible to be the only sacred authority. Instead, as seen throughout the scholarship mentioned above, Ruskin also believed nature was equally capable of carrying God’s sacred message. He reads the Word of God in flowers in the same way as he learned to read the Word of God in the bible during his Evangelical upbringing, giving flowers an educational use value for humankind. Certain that nature communicates moral lessons that can assist humankind in achieving salvation, Ruskin includes the messages he receives from flowers in his work to counsel and instruct his readers. Even when he loses his Evangelical beliefs, Ruskin maintains the conviction that the Word of God is made concrete to humankind, albeit through flowers and not the bible. I argue that Ruskin draws on his concept of Vital Beauty to observe and interpret the aesthetics and biographies of flowers, and conveys these interpretations to his readers by writing what I will call floral sermons, passages that are intentionally filled with floral symbolism and meant to educate readers on good and evil and how to achieve salvation. In writing these floral sermons Ruskin acts as a preacher, serving as an interpreter who facilitates the relationship between God and humankind by explaining God’s sacred teachings. Through

incorporating Vital Beauty and flowers' use value into his categorization of flowers, Ruskin battles against an objective view of the world that assumes plants and animals "should be classified on their own terms rather than to accommodate any human agenda" (Ritvo, "At the Edge" 365). Ruskin's floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air* draw on Athena's dual nature to bring together science and religion, ensuring that his readers receive God's lessons on moral behaviour and reinvigorating religion even in light of the scientific advancement in the nineteenth century.

Although Ruskin first classifies himself as "a serious botanist in 1842, when he made a careful drawing of a wood-sorrel at Chamouni" (Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* 310), his use of flowers in *The Queen of the Air* makes him more of a poet or painter. In the Preface to the second edition of volume one *Modern Painters* written in 1844, Ruskin explains there is a "difference between the mere botanist's knowledge of plants, and the great poet's or painter's knowledge of them" (3.36). He argues that a botanist uses plants "for the sake of swelling his herbarium," whereas a poet or a painter will "render them vehicles of expression and emotion" (3.36). For Ruskin, a flower is "a living creature, with histories written on its leaves, and passion breathing in its motions" and "a voice rising from the earth" (3.37). Ruskin considers flowers more than just a natural object; flowers are living beings with biographies that speak a specific symbolic language, one heard only through close and careful study. Although there seems to be an element of personal interpretation to this type of observation, Ruskin maintains "what a flower stalk ought to be, or ought not to be, is not a matter of opinion" (Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 188). Instead, Ruskin draws on biblical scripture and what he determines to be "the

fixed standard of values embodied in the mythology, art, literature, and [the] history of the world” (188) to convert the messages carried by flowers into floral sermons to disseminate God’s teachings to his readers. Considering his reverence for nature, it is no surprise he draws heavily on Greek myth in *The Queen of the Air*. The Greeks established a “close relationship between their religion and the natural world” (Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* 39), a belief system to which Ruskin wholeheartedly ascribed and “hoped to revive in a materialistic age” (39). It is this Greek integration of religion and nature that Ruskin highlights in *The Queen of the Air* and one that contributes to Ruskin’s belief that the Word of God is communicated through flowers.

5.2 Ruskin the Preacher

As mentioned earlier, Ruskin’s mother, Margaret, wanted nothing more than for her talented son to become a preacher. In a letter written 20 April 1837, Margaret writes to John James, Ruskin’s father, explaining that it was young Ruskin’s “privilege . . . [and] his duty” to serve God by becoming a minister (455). She believed if her son became a minister he would acquire “more of a profit and heartfelt satisfaction, & peace, than he could gain from all worldly pleasure put together” (455). Ruskin, however, was not always keen to direct “all his gifts to the glory of the Giver” (456). In his autobiography *Praeterita* (1885-1889), Ruskin reminisces about how his “mother [had] it deeply in her heart to make an evangelical clergyman of [him]” (35.13). He realized he was being “bred for ‘the Church’” (35.24) but did not share his mother’s steadfast belief that he should become a minister. Regardless, Margaret focused Ruskin’s attention on sermon writing from a young age. He often had to write abstracts of sermons to show that he

understood the content and to practice explaining the Word of God to others. According to Ruskin, while abstracting the Reverend Mr. Howell's sermons, Ruskin would preach for his mother and her friends over the family couch (35.25). Sarcastically calling into question how his mother came to conclude this performance was "the great accomplishment" of his childhood (35.25), Ruskin explains how the sermon he performed was "some eleven words long," a length he jokes is most suitable for sermons, and "must have been the purest gospel, for I know it began with, 'People, be good'" (35.26).

All humour aside, Ruskin found his mother's tenacious focus on preparing him to be a minister tedious to say the least. In a letter to his father written on the 21 and 23 of February 1829, Ruskin attests, "I am at the moment rather in a perplexity for it is Saturday and I am only at the 1st head of last Sundays [*sic*] sermon" (178). The pressure of fulfilling his mother's training for the ministry was sometimes too much for the young Ruskin to manage. Looking back at his childhood and the impact of his mother's religious fervour, Ruskin recounts how "the horror of Sunday used even to cast its prescient gloom as far back in the week as Friday—and all the glory of Monday, with church seven days removed again, was no equivalent for it" (*Praeterita* 35.25). Taking into account the pressure Ruskin endured from his mother to enter the ministry, his dismal view of Sundays is understandable.

Eventually, however, Ruskin was able to see the worth of his religious education and the great significance of sermons. Ruskin explicates how he and his cousin Mary, who lived with the Ruskins, "used each to write an abstract of the sermon in the

afternoon, to please ourselves,—Mary dutifully, and I to show how well I could do it” (35.72). Writing sermons became a way for Ruskin to hone and showcase his writing prowess. Nearing the end of his life, Ruskin concedes that when his “mother forced [him], by steady daily toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart” he also acquired an “occasionally serviceable” knowledge of the bible, his ability to be “patient, accurate, and resolute,” and “the best part of [his] taste in literature” (35.14). Ruskin’s exposure to sermon writing and the bible contributed enormously to the writer and man he became. He eventually came to believe that delivering sermons well and properly communicating God’s teachings was “a matter of life and death” (*Stones of Venice* 10.32). The second volume of *Stones of Venice* (1853) contains a chapter titled “Torcello” in which Ruskin outlines the soul-saving work done by preachers. After people have been subjected to the evils and temptations of the world for six days,

[p]recious indeed [are] those thirty minutes by which the teacher tries to get at the separate hearts of a thousand men, to convince them of all their weaknesses, to shame them for all their sin, to warn them of all their dangers, to try them by this way and that, to stir the hard fastenings of the doors where the Master himself has stood and knocked, yet none opened, and to call at the openings of those dark streets where Wisdom herself hath stretched forth her hands and no man regarded.

Thirty minutes to raise the dead in. (*Stones of Venice* 10.32)

Ruskin believes it is the preacher’s job to bring back to life people’s souls and to open up the lines of communication between humankind and God that have been closed.

Ruskin holds that an artist could perform many of the same duties assumed by a preacher. Shortly after Ruskin published the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1843, “a clerical don who had taught Ruskin at Christ Church” voiced doubts that “the fine arts could provide an appropriate career for a devout young man” (*Modern Painters* 3.665). Ruskin soon responded to Osborne Gordon, replying his intent as a critic would be to make “the public to expect and the artist to intend—an earnest and elevating moral influence in all that they admire and achieve” (3.665). Ruskin had found a way to combine the literary ambitions instilled in him by his father and the religious education he received from his mother. Ruskin goes on to justify to Gordon that he is “quite as capable of preaching on the beauty of creation, of which [he] know[s] something, as preaching on the beauty of a system of salvation of which [he] know[s] nothing” (3.666). He later nuances this nexus of religion and appreciation of beauty in 1846 in the second volume of *Modern Painters* with his theories of Typical Beauty and Vital Beauty, which are discussed further in the next section.

Although Ruskin never entered the church, many Ruskin scholars attest that he performed the role of a preacher especially well. One of the earliest and most fervent admirers of Ruskin to write on his ability as a preacher in comparison to other authors is Lewis H. Chrisman. In 1921 in *John Ruskin, Preacher and Other Essays* Chrisman professes, “[a]lthough he wore no black Geneva gown and never stood behind the sacred desk, John Ruskin all of his days was a golden-mouthed, burning-hearted, spiritually minded preacher of the truths of God” (7). Ruskin perfectly combines the roles of artist and preacher (17) and is “a soldier beneath the ensign of the King of kings” (24).

Chrisman argues that Ruskin always ensured he taught his readers to lead a better life (9)—to “Be good” (*Praeterita* 35.26)—and that he cared “for the bodies, the minds, and the souls of his weaker brethren” (Chrisman 17-18). For Chrisman, there is little doubt that Ruskin was a talented preacher who worked to save his readers’ souls. Fifty years and many critics later, George Landow suggests Ruskin “adapts himself to his readers, wielding the phrases of the preacher and the evidence of scripture” (*The Aesthetic and Critical Theories* 340). More recently, Dinah Birch refers to Ruskin as a secular preacher who struggles to make a difference “amid the corruptions of the nineteenth century” (*Ruskin’s Myths* 13). Though only a brief survey, this exploration of Ruskin criticism indicates that some Ruskin scholars believe he takes on the role of preacher to educate his readers about the Word of God. Ruskin’s mother may have believed that her hopes for her son to become a minister were never realized. Ultimately, however, though he never officially entered the Church, by incorporating floral sermons into *The Queen of the Air* Ruskin in some sense fulfilled her objective.

5.3 Vital Beauty

Ruskin’s belief that flowers communicate moral messages that can be observed, interpreted, and converted into floral sermons to spread God’s teachings germinates in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846) and Ruskin’s approach to aesthetics, particularly in his conception of Typical Beauty and Vital Beauty. Overall, both aspects of Ruskin’s aesthetic theory emphasize a connection between the perception of beauty and one’s “moral and religious nature” (Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories* 90). Indeed, Landow explains that Ruskin thinks everyone will have a consistent measure of

and reaction to beauty because “it is God’s will and because all men have a divine element in their nature” (93). This interpretive consistency later suggests everyone who reads Ruskin’s floral sermons should glean the same moral messages, helping to address the individual nature of interpretation. Typical Beauty, Ruskin explains, is associated with art and has six elements—infinity, unity, repose, symmetry, purity, and moderation—; it is “the symbolizing of Divine attributes in matter” (*Modern Painters* 4.210). In comparison, the other half of his theory of beauty is Vital Beauty, or the beauty of living things. Ruskin describes “a slender, pensive, fragile flower, whose small, dark purple, fringed bell hangs down and shudders” as it slowly struggles to break through snow (4.146). The behaviour and beauty of this plant must be seen as “an image of moral purpose and achievement, which, however unconscious or senseless the creature may indeed be that so seems to call, cannot be heard without affection, nor contemplated without worship” (4.146). In fact, Ruskin attests that a flower’s biography, its “nature, its desires, its modes of nourishment, habitation, and death, [are] illustrative or expressive of certain moral dispositions or principles” (4.147).

Realizing this expressiveness in a flower will generate sympathy for all organic beings, leading to great joy (4.147). Moreover, “the justness of the moral sense” can be achieved by “rightly read[ing] the lesson they are all intended to teach” (4.147). Typical Beauty, then, is concerned with qualities and forms of beauty found in art that are aesthetically pleasing because they rightly represent divine nature, whereas Vital Beauty is found within the expressions and beauty of living things and communicates moral truths; it truly is divine nature rather than a mere representation of it as seen with Typical

Beauty. Landow argues that Ruskin's explanation of Vital Beauty demonstrates an aesthetic system in which "beautiful truths exist as part of a divinely ordained great chain of being in which each living creature plays a role as agent and as living emblem of divine intention" (*The Aesthetic and Critical Theories* 149). Ruskin's theory of aesthetics in volume two of *Modern Painters*, specifically his understanding of Vital Beauty, is the genesis for the ideas behind the floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air*.

5.4 *The Queen of the Air* and Flowers' Spirit

Ruskin chooses the title *The Queen of the Air* because he perceives living organisms as possessing a breath, or Spirit of Life, that enables them to communicate God's moral lessons. According to Ruskin, Athena was a crucial deity for the Greeks because she represents the breath or Spirit and is thus called the Queen of the Air. Athena's power, however, is not only seen in the air. It also manifests itself in her animating power; Athena infuses organisms with a spirit, or vital force, that brings living things to life. This spirit enables living things to symbolize morality to humankind and acts as a conduit for the Word of God (19.359). Critically, God's moral lessons are best learned through the observation of flowers. What Ruskin names "the breathing of spirit" constantly creates "its own shell of definite shape out of the wreck around it" and is "strongest" during a plant's flowering (19.357). Ruskin believes "[t]he flower itself is the creature which the spirit makes" (19.357-58). Ruskin is interested in observing and interpreting the manifestation of the invisible spirit in blossoms, and draws on floral symbolism to write floral sermons in hopes to educate his readers and combat the damage done to religion by science and help reunify humankind with God. Focusing on the blossoming of plants lets

Ruskin bring together the aesthetic theories in *Modern Painters* described above and the Word of God. The sacredness of the plant is most visible when it is flowering because this phase of its life demonstrates the plant's "inner rapture," a "rapture of spirit" observable by humankind through the perfected colour and form seen in the flower (19.358). Ruskin argues "the presence of the strongest life is asserted by characters in which the human sight takes pleasure, and which seemed prepared with distinct reference to us, or rather, bear, in being delightful, evidence of having been produced by the power of the spirit as our own" (19.358). Thus, Ruskin believes he can comprehend the moral messages delivered by flowers only because the spirit exists in both humans and plants; it is because of the sameness of this inner essence that humans can appreciate beautiful natural things and comprehend the biographies of flowers. Moreover, this shared inner essence allows Ruskin to develop floral sermons and reconnect his readers with God.

5.5 Beyond the Seed: Moving Past Science to Reconnect With Religion

Ruskin's floral sermons are constructed to move beyond theories about the behaviour and development of species proposed by Charles Darwin, theories Ruskin believes distance humankind from God. Ruskin's floral sermons that emphasize the morality lessons delivered by flowers for the betterment of humankind are in stark contrast to Darwin's "utilitarian doctrine" (149) outlined in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), a doctrine that suggests change within species occurs only "for the good of its possessor" (149). Darwin argues that species change through the process of natural selection, and this process only improves the particular species undergoing the change; natural selection in no way

benefits other species. This anti-religious stance moves away from Christian ideas of how plants and animals were created by God for humankind's benefit and instead contends species change for the sake of the species alone. Darwin acknowledges his theory of natural selection is considered by many to be controversial because it does not support the idea "that very many structures have been created for beauty in the eyes of man" (149). To Darwin, the belief that nature behaves and changes for the benefit of humankind "would be absolutely fatal to [his] theory" (Darwin 149); this is because throughout *On the Origin of Species* Darwin argues species' behaviours and changes occur not for the betterment of humankind but for only the species themselves.

In reaction to Darwin's theory of natural selection, in *The Queen of the Air* Ruskin asserts "the flower is the end or proper object of the seed, not the seed of the flower" (19.357). He concludes, "the reason for seeds is that flowers may be; not the reason of flowers that seeds may be" (19.357). With this, it is evident Ruskin favours the blossoms of a plant rather than its seeds. He argues the blossoming of plants is "correspondent to the joy of love in human creatures, and having the same object in the continuance of the race. Only, with respect to plants, as animals, we are wrong in speaking as if the object of this strong life were only the bequeathing of itself" (19.357). With this it is evident what interests Ruskin is the Vital Beauty of flowers and how this impacts humankind and not the origin of different plant species or their ability to reproduce and change for the species' benefit. Ruskin asserts, "[w]hatever the origin of species may be, or however those species, once formed, may be influenced by external accident, the groups into which birth or accident reduce them have distinct relation to the

spirit of man” (19.358). The inner essence—The Spirit of Life—shared by humankind and other natural organisms is what should be important in the study of species and not how species originate or develop for their own sake. Indeed, it is this shared inner spirit that enables Ruskin to interpret the messages delivered by flowers and write floral sermons that facilitate his readers’ relationship with God.

Ruskin returns to the importance of the flower over other parts of the plant and again challenges Darwin’s theories in *Proserpina* (1875-1886). Within this text, Ruskin declares himself “the gentle and happy scholar of flowers” (25.391) who is “at war with the botanists” (25.216). In *Proserpina*, as with the majority of his work, Ruskin “asserted his characteristic stance as a champion of phenomenal nature against science, as he had opposed technology, commercialism, and industrialism, forces that he saw trivializing or destroying the natural world of Europe and polluting the minds of its inhabitants” (Campbell 114). Ruskin was deeply concerned with the material implications of science, especially Darwin’s work, and the religious doubt that sprang from it. In addition to reacting to Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, Ruskin was compelled to complete *Proserpina* in response to Darwin’s botanical publications in the 1860s and 1870s, including Darwin’s *The Different Forms of Flowers on Plants of the Same Species* (1877) (Smith 862). Darwin’s botanical publications examine the various sexual forms of flowers and the “astonishing array of possible sexual combinations of widely varying fertility” (862). Much of Darwin’s work at this time involved the crossbreeding of flowers of different forms and the study of how a flower’s fertility is significantly improved when it was bred with different rather than similar forms (862). Even more,

Ruskin was deeply concerned by the sexuality Darwin and other botanists ascribed to plants and how this fit into evolutionary theories (866).

As in *The Queen of the Air*, Ruskin explains botanists should be primarily concerned with the blossom of a flower in *Proserpina*. He moves beyond the sexual functions of a flowering plant and instead examines the flower itself and its “purity and order” (25.249). According to Ruskin, “The flower exists for its own sake,—not for the fruit’s sake. The production of the fruit is an added honour to it—is a granted consolation to us for its death” (25.249-50). Ruskin calls attention away from the sexualized processes seen in flowers and turns attention towards the moral lessons delivered by the blossoms and how they benefit humankind. He reiterates the argument made in *The Queen of the Air*, claiming again, “the flower is the end of the seed,—not the seed of the flower” (25.250). He proves his point with detailed examples. For instance, people fond of cherries might think cherry blossoms are useful because they produce cherries; however, they would be mistaken, Ruskin contends: “The use of cherries is to produce cherry blossoms” (25.250). The utility of flowers is not in the material objects they produce. Rather, flowers are useful for the moral lessons they carry from God. When studying the flower, its “glory is in the purity, the serenity, the radiance,—not in the mere continuance of the creature” (25.250). After examining his thoughts on the importance of flowers in his late botanical texts, *The Queen of the Air* and *Proserpina*, it is evident Ruskin draws on his theory of Vital Beauty from *Modern Painters* to interpret the moral messages carried by flowers and then uses floral symbolism to write floral sermons for

his readers so Ruskin can reconnect humankind with God after the religious doubt caused by botanists and science.

5.6 Sermons Around the Dinner Table

A long and detailed section of *The Queen of the Air* is dedicated to the blossoms associated with the food offered to the guests at an imagined English country dinner held in honour of Athena, a dinner comprising a “dish of beans, with the bacon; potatoes; some savoury stuffing of onions and herbs with the meat; celery, and a radish or two, with the cheese; nuts and apples for dessert, and brown bread” (19.368). One might wonder why Ruskin decides to write floral sermons about the blossoms of flowers related to a meal if he is concerned primarily with the aesthetics and biography—the Vital Beauty—of flowers. Ruskin, however, in part explains his choice to examine blossoms through the lens of a meal when he argues it is “always noble and healthy” when “flowers . . . are themselves beheld and beloved” (19.366) because of the acknowledgment of “the animating power” within them which enables the flowers to exhibit “ethical signs of good and evil” (19.366). Ruskin feels scientific advancements lead to species categorizations that lose sight of “animating power” and ethics and instead focus on the use value of nature for nature itself; when the Word of God intended for humankind in nature is silenced nature is valued for the wrong reasons. With Ruskin’s steadfast belief that flowers are useful to humankind for their Vital Beauty—the beauty of the blossoms and the moral lessons gained from their biographies—it is especially fitting that Ruskin writes floral sermons about the flowers on plants needed to grow the food for a meal that would benefit humankind by providing nourishment for the body and the soul.

Ruskin uses a mix of scientific taxonomy, aesthetics, and a flower's use value for humankind to categorize the blossoms in his floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air*. This is not a surprise; although he disagreed with some fundamental aspects of science throughout his life, Ruskin would have wanted his sermons to reach as wide an audience as possible. When he was seven years of age, Ruskin wrote a tale about two characters named Harry and Lucy who studied lightning and rainbows. Importantly, Ruskin includes in his science-filled story rainbows that change into female forms and witches that cast spells in the Alps (*Praeterita* 35.52-56). In *Praeterita*, Ruskin describes how a text that interweaves science and aesthetics is the “perfect type of the inter-woven temper of my mind, at the beginning of days just as much as at their end” (35.56). Over the years, he classified his readers into three groups: “foolish scientific readers [that] doubt my books because there was love of beauty in them”; “foolish aesthetic readers [that] doubt my books because there was love of science in them”; and, lastly, “sensible reader[s]” that “respect [...] dipartite writings” (35.56). Taking on the role of preacher and wanting to save as many souls as possible, Ruskin needs to reach a broad audience. As Ruskin elucidates, his story of Harry and Lucy brings together science and aesthetics and reveals “no tale, however seductive, could ‘affect’ Harry, until he had seen—in the clouds, or elsewhere ‘something like it’” (35.56). Even when he was a mere seven years old, Ruskin realized writing dipartite texts that bring together science and aesthetic theory, like the floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air*, would facilitate a broader acceptance of his work and that this amalgamation works best when delivered through the lens of nature so readers could witness the teachings from his sermons on morality in their own natural

surroundings.

Humans are “the animal that classifies” (Ritvo, “At the Edge” 363) because without the benefit of categorization, they would have no way to make sense of the world (Ritvo, “Categories”). What is frequently given less thought, especially by those performing the classification, is that categorizations are arbitrary. Harriet Ritvo, a scholar who examines nineteenth-century taxonomy and human-animal relations, explains, “[m]ost bodies of material neither define their own boundaries nor provide their own indices, although this taxonomic neutrality may not be obvious to those who use them” (“Categories” 419). Ritvo continues, “[d]ifferent people identify and structure such bodies of material in different ways, reflecting their various interests, needs, social contexts, and historical experiences” (419). Although little work has been done on Ruskin’s plant classification in *The Queen of the Air*, a significant amount of work has been done on his extensive reclassification of plants in *Proserpina*. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin explains a key goal of the text is “to reject many of the received names of plants; and to substitute others for them, relating to entirely different attributes from those on which their present nomenclature is confusedly edified” (25.338). Ruskin invents a plant classification system that moves away from “botanical structure” and focuses instead on “the special character of the plant” (25.340).

Before *Proserpina*, however, in *The Queen of the Air* Ruskin already begins his focus on “the special character of the plant” (*Proserpina* 25.340) when he categorizes flowers in terms of their Vital Beauty and their use value for humans. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, “the most authoritative . . . method of classifying plants . . . [has]

ordinarily been referred to as scientific taxonomy, the set of embedded, hierarchically organized categories labeled with binominal latinized nomenclature, that is associated with the work of Carl Linnaeus” (Ritvo, “At the Edge” 364). Ruskin incorporates more elements of scientific taxonomy into his classification of flowers in *The Queen of the Air* than he later does in *Proserpina*; however, his floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air* also offer an abundance of flower groupings dependent upon flowers’ Vital Beauty and their use value for humans. By incorporating Vital Beauty and human use value into his categorization of flowers, Ruskin is battling against how scientific taxonomy makes an assumption that plants and animals should “be described and classified on their own terms rather than to accommodate any human agenda” (Ritvo, “At the Edge” 365). For Ruskin, the plant classification that he performs while describing Athena’s meal is directly related to satisfying his human agenda. Remember, Ruskin the preacher is intent on helping “People, be good” (*Praeterita* 35.26), and this can only be achieved if he classifies plants in a way that facilitates changing his readers’ moral nature.

5.7 Athena’s Dual Nature

Before delving into a close reading of Ruskin’s floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air*, it is necessary to understand how Ruskin relies and builds on the goddess’s dualistic nature for his subsequent interpretation of the flowers’ beauty, biographies, and use value to humankind. Athena’s dual nature is present from her birth, long before Ruskin places her at the centre of his text. Rather than being born from her mother’s womb, Athena is birthed from the head of Zeus, setting her up to “reign over the traditionally feminine spheres of wisdom and needlework as well as the masculine sphere of warfare” (B.

Gregory 73). Ruskin builds on this initial dual nature by constructing an Athena who “controls and incarnates air, wind, even oxygen” (Weltman 152). In Ruskin’s hands, Athena becomes the goddess of the air, disrupting “the traditional masculine/feminine dichotomy between deities of the air and earth” (152). For Ruskin, Athena not only brings together genders but also acts as platform in which binary opposites such as “air and earth, bird and snake, formation and destruction, [and] science and myth” can be conflated (150). Also, Athena’s dual nature makes her an especially fitting character to place at the centre of a text that includes floral sermons that bring together science and aesthetics to appeal to a wide variety of readers.

Similar to the criticism he faced in regards to his reclassification of plants and his blending of science and aesthetics, Ruskin also came under attack by critics for his portrayal of Athena, with many people claiming he did not properly represent the goddess as she is usually depicted; Athena is commonly associated with “wisdom, warfare, and craftsmanship” (B. Gregory 73). He instead “formed an ideal conception of Athena, and attributed to her guidance or inspiration whatever interests, thoughts, schemes, and hopes were occupying his mind” (Cook and Wedderburn 19.lxvi). Ruskin himself “claims that every myth has a necessary personalized dimension” (B. Gregory 85), and without question he creates his own particular version of Athena to best facilitate his argument. In *The Queen of the Air*, Athena “wears two robes, one of light and one of darkness” (19.306). By making his rendition of the goddess so blatantly dualistic, Ruskin has an easier time incorporating and altering families of flowers so that they “especially belong to Athena” (19.367) through their representation of both good and evil. This inclusion of

good and evil character traits within the same plant family allows him to explore the lack of perfection in human nature and how even in a less than perfect state humans are capable of connecting with God. To save his readers' souls from the perils of the distance between humankind and God created by Darwin and science, Ruskin draws on the dual nature of Athena to write floral sermons that highlight how flowers' Vital Beauty benefits humans by teaching them how to be moral, God-fearing creatures.

5.8 Lessons Learned from Leguminous and Cruciferous Blossoms

The floral sermon Ruskin writes about bean blossoms, a member of what he calls the Leguminous family of plants, takes a somewhat simplistic approach by analyzing only the aesthetic and not the biographical aspects of Vital Beauty. For example, the odour of bean blossoms is said to be “exquisitely sweet, yet pure” (19.368), suggesting that sweetness involves a sense of moral purity and highlighting how the aesthetics of flowers also includes their scent, which fits well with his idea of the breath of spirit that exists in flowers to help reconnect people with God. In sweet-smelling flowers such as those found on bean plants, this breath of spirit becomes so strong the flower cannot contain it; the spirit moves through the plant and, as Ruskin's sermon explains, connects beauty in nature to moral purity with its pleasing scent. He attests beans have beautiful “flowers like butterflies” (19.368) even though the blossoms are also “of all tribes of plants, the most definite; its blossoms being entirely limited in their parts, and not passing into other forms” (19.368). This is of particular interest, as the bean is both “serviceable” to humans because its seeds produce a nourishing food (19.368) *and* beautiful due to its well-defined

blossoms, which, shaped like butterflies, symbolize how freedom and spiritual flight can be enjoyed by living things that are simple and true to one form. Although Ruskin constructs a dualistic Athena to examine how good and evil can be reconciled, his floral sermons at first lack complexity and draw attention to the value of clear delineation. Ruskin may seek to teach about the observation and reconciliation of good and evil, but he begins his floral sermons with the basic fundamentals of his theory—aesthetics—so his readers can easily follow along.

Ruskin determines that the celery and radish incorporated into the English country meal prepared for Athena's dinner belong to the Cruciferous family, which, unlike the Leguminous family, is formed based on plants' usefulness to humans, their beauty, *and* their biography. The floral sermon Ruskin writes to teach his readers about the message God sends through celery and radish is more complex than that seen in his floral sermons about the Leguminous family; it highlights duality and depends heavily on both the aesthetic and biographical components of his conception of Vital Beauty. At first glance, radish and celery can be seen as aesthetically dissimilar given they have radically different forms; the radish is a member of the "umbelled group" which grows low and flat, whereas celery grows high "in spires" (19.369). That, however, is where their dissimilarity ends. Both plants have diminished Vital Beauty, as they are "mean and poor in the blossom, and los[e] what beauty they have by too close crowding" (19.369). Unlike bean blossoms that demonstrate the beauty of distinct flowers, celery and radish are crowded together. Ruskin's floral sermon here instructs his readers that people's beauty is lost if some kind of distinction from others is not achieved, preferably a distinction

made by acting morally and following God's teachings. Ruskin's floral sermon on the Cruciferous family next examines how the family's "humble beauty" and "endless use" are lost if the plants are not "chosen and cultivated" (19.370). When this occurs a plant's use value is lost, as they "run to wild waste" and reveal the evils of "neglected ground" through "their rank or ragged leaves, and meagre stalks" (19.370). Here, the plant's biography symbolizes what occurs when the human soul neglects God. Being neglected and not receiving proper cultivation causes visible damage to celery and radish, damage that also indicates their environment is not conducive to their proper growth. Ruskin's floral sermons about celery and radish reveals that humankind needs to learn from the biographies of the celery and radish so people realize the importance of proper spiritual cultivation and the dangers of neglecting God. Only then can humankind work to better their societal environment to ensure optimal moral growth.

Ruskin strengthens his floral sermon on the Cruciferous family by pointing directly to how this family has "the most curious influence on human character" (19.369) through its ability to connect with and impact the lower classes; this addition to his argument reinforces his claim that flowers' influence has specific use value for humankind and steers the discussion toward the role a flower's "forming spirit" plays in species distinction (19.370). He claims the blossoms of this family are not capable of "perfect beauty" even when properly cultivated (19.370). Instead, "they have every floral quality meanly, and in vain,—they are white, without purity; golden, without preciousness; redundant, without richness; divided, without fineness; massive, without strength; and slender, without grace" (19.370). The wallflower, one of the few examples

within this family that Ruskin does mention is able to achieve “some subdued delightfulness” (19.370), is usually connected in the language of flowers to fidelity in misfortune and in the face of adversity (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 196-97; Ward 369-70). The inclusion of the wallflower as one of the few exceptions makes better sense once Ruskin further clarifies how the Cruciferous family symbolizes the appearance and characteristics of the lower classes, a station in life filled with people who repeatedly must navigate adversity. After observing this family of plants and decoding its aesthetic, biography, and use value for humans, Ruskin finds the adversity faced by the Cruciferous family when it is not properly cultivated and its lack of Vital Beauty results in a “useful vulgarity” (19.370), which is best understood by “the relations of German and English peasant character to its food of kraut and cabbage” (19.370). Only after his readers see this connection can they “begin to feel what purposes of the forming spirit are in these distinctions of species” (19.370). Thus, Ruskin’s first floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air* fight against Darwin’s utilitarian theory of natural selection by using aesthetics, blossom biography, and the use value of flowers so he can sermonize to his readers about God’s moral teachings.

5.9 The Inscrutable Potato Family

Ruskin’s floral sermon about the potato family is one of the only excerpts from *The Queen of the Air* already examined in terms of Ruskin’s use of flowers. In “Flowers of Evil: Proserpina’s Venomous Plants in Ruskin’s Botany,” Elizabeth Campbell makes a convincing argument that Ruskin’s thoughts about the nightshade evolve from the time he wrote *The Queen of the Air* to when he published *Proserpina* (115). After an in-depth

comparison of Ruskin's two texts, Campbell determines Ruskin gained a "growing appreciation for this much maligned family of plants as part of his attempt to make peace with nature's dark side" (115). Campbell, however, misses the connection between the dual nature of Athena and the inclusion of a plant family that possesses a blatantly dual nature of good and evil. Even more, a close reading of Ruskin's floral sermon written about the potato family questions Campbell's contention that "[i]n this phase of his botanical writings, Ruskin has nothing good to say about the nightshades" (122). By accentuating the dualistic good and evil nature of the potato family and the moral lessons that can be learned from this plant family's Vital Beauty, Ruskin nuances his floral sermons to include the importance of the observation and interpretation of good and evil. In fact, he has a significant amount of good to say about the potato family and its use value for humankind.

Many aspects of Campbell's argument are astute and accurate. In *The Queen of the Air*, Ruskin begins his sermon on the potato family by calling it a "scarcely innocent . . . tribe set aside for evil" (19.368). He goes on to outline how some of the potato family's members, "the henbane, the witch's mandrake, and . . . tobacco" (19.369), explain the tribe's evilness. Furthermore, the potato family has "the deadly nightshade for its queen" (19.369). Campbell suggests Ruskin characterizes the potato family as evil because the nightshade, henbane, and mandrake "are among the most poisonous plants in Europe, plants high in tropane alkaloids that affect the central nervous system to cause hallucinations, delirium, coma, and sometimes death" (117). Given this, it does seem unlikely Ruskin would see any use value in these plants for humankind. Moreover,

Ruskin adds a note to this section that draws particular attention to the dangers of tobacco, stating, “[i]t is not easy to estimate the demoralizing effect on the youth of Europe of the cigar, enabling them to pass their time happily in idleness” (19.369). Ruskin believes that tobacco has a devastating impact on the behaviour of Europe’s youth, and this also calls into question the use value of the potato family. Nevertheless, Ruskin adds another footnote in 1883, a footnote I would argue is not as “dire” (117) as Campbell maintains. After describing the potato family as “evil,” Ruskin adds, “Some two out of a hundred and fifty species of *Solanum* are useful to man” (19.368). When he decided to include potatoes in the dinner for Athena, Ruskin is pointedly drawing attention to one of the two species of the potato family that “are useful to man” (19.368). Early in his floral sermon on the potato family, Ruskin is already noting the dual nature of the plant family; the potato family might mostly be “evil” and threaten people’s health and ethics; however, through a close reading of Ruskin’s sermon, it is evident even the potato family manages to be useful to humankind.

Campbell goes on to make an astute connection between Ruskin’s use of flowers in the sermon and sentimental botany, or the language of flowers. Campbell explains that in the language of flowers, “nightshades were often treated disparagingly: during a time when flowers and females were frequently identified with one another, the nightshades, long associated with witchcraft, were easily anthropomorphized as witches and whores” (117). The nightshade’s flowers are characteristically used to represent sorcery, spells, witchcraft, and scepticism (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 186-87), suggesting that Ruskin is drawing on previous symbolic associations when he classifies the potato family

as “evil”. If Campbell bases part of her argument on the language of flowers, it would also be important for her to note the duality of the potato family—their good and evil characteristics—in nineteenth-century sentimental botany. Henbane flowers typically symbolized defect, absence, and imperfection (Seaton 178-79); however, mandrake blossoms were more readily associated with positive meanings like rarity and extraordinariness (184-85). When Ruskin was writing *The Queen of the Air*, it is likely he was well aware of both the good and evil symbolic associations connected to the flowers within the potato family, revealing even at that point of his writing career he was able to see good within the family.

Ruskin next examines how it is difficult to distinguish the nightshade from other flowers “that are happier in function” (19.369). He explains,

the strange thing about this tribe is, that though thus set aside for evil, they are not a group distinctly separate from those that are happier in function. There is nothing in other tribes of plants like the form of the bean blossom; but there is another family with forms and structure closely connected with this venomous one. Examine the purple and yellow bloom of the common hedge nightshade; you will find it constructed exactly like some of the forms of the cyclamen; and, getting this clue, you will find at last the whole poisonous and terrible group to be—sisters of the primulas! (19.369)

It was noted earlier how Ruskin values the bean blossom’s beauty because its flowers are “entirely limited in their parts, and not passing into other forms” (19.368). Ruskin’s conception of Vital Beauty often values well-defined blossoms that are simple and true to

one form. Nightshades, however, are “strange” in that they are not distinct from other flowers that Ruskin deems “happier in function” (19.369). This “poisonous and terrible group” (19.369) of flowers has multiple aesthetic similarities to the primula, or primrose, a flower symbolically connected to youth, childhood, and hope (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 188-89). The primrose is a “harbinger of not only the new life of the plant kingdom but also the renewed spirits of people and their reawakened attraction and love” (Ward 301). In making this connection, Ruskin’s floral sermon further explores the possibility that nightshade flowers are both good and evil, mirroring the duality earlier described to be in Athena herself. Indeed, Campbell notices that as well as being beautifully shaped, the nightshade flower is purple and yellow, both colours related to Athena elsewhere in Ruskin’s text (120-21). Later in “Athena Karamitis,” Ruskin explains how the “perfect colour-conception of Athena” would be one that depicts the goddess wearing a “long robe to the feet, crocus-coloured,” with an “aegis over it of thunderous purple” and a “helmet golden” (19:383). As Campbell notes, “[t]he nightshade blossom, then, displays the colors of Athena’s aegis and helmet” (121). Earlier, Ruskin explains that the colour purple “is light subdued” (19:379), meaning that the nightshade flower is related to darkness. This being said, the “purple and yellow blooms of the common hedge nightshade” (19.369) symbolize the light and dark nature—or good and evil—of both Athena and nightshade blossom. After reading Ruskin’s floral sermon on the potato family, his readers will come to understand that life is much more complex than it appears in his earlier sermons. Good and evil can exist in the world

simultaneously, thus making the skills of interpretation and observation all the more necessary to ensure that individuals make proper moral choices.

To complete his sermon on the potato family, Ruskin attests nightshades are primroses “with a curse upon them” (19.369). It is with this curse that Campbell argues Ruskin “assign[s] the entire family to perdition” and “has nothing good to say about the nightshades” in *The Queen of the Air* (122). Ruskin elucidates how nightshades display “a sign set in their petals, by which the deadly and condemned flowers may always be known from the innocent ones,—that the stamens of the nightshades are between the lobes, and of the primulas, opposite the lobes, of the corolla” (19.369). Campbell believes by cursing nightshades with a signature of evil and having to resort to a “mere botanist’s knowledge” of plants—the use of the words “lobes” and “corolla”—that he criticized in *Modern Painters* (3.36-37), Ruskin reveals deep disdain for the nightshade flower. This integration of scientific taxonomy with the Vital Beauty of plants in actuality calls attention to Ruskin’s elaborate classification system that, as described earlier, brings together aesthetics and science to reach a broader audience. The lesson Ruskin’s floral sermon disseminates is that good and evil exist in the world and one can distinguish them through close observation and informed interpretation. In his floral sermon on the potato family, Ruskin provides readers with clear examples of the skills of observation and interpretation, abilities he hopes his readers will attain. Learning these skills will help people improve their morality; they will be able to better determine what is good and thereby incorporate such things into all aspects of their lives. What Campbell terms Ruskin’s “bittersweet blossom” (121)—the nightshade—is in fact a complex flower that

provides enormous use value for humankind through the lessons it teaches about good and evil.

5.10 The Herbs of the Fields

The last flower sermon I will be examining is Ruskin's comprehensive look at The Herbs of the Field, what he classifies as Gramineae, Carices, Drosidae,—grasses, sedges, and dew-plants. In this floral sermon, Ruskin more blatantly accentuates the use value of flowers for humankind than in any other his sermons, making it unquestionably evident that the purpose of flowers is to serve as a conduit for the Word of God. Ruskin starts with the grasses and states how this “wonderful” plant family is useful to humankind as it “has given us our bread” (19.370). Moreover, because the plants arrive “springing in the early year, mixed with their native flowers” this family of plants is far more responsible for giving humankind “the thought and word ‘spring’ . . . than the new leaves of trees” (19.369-70). He quickly moves on to contrasting grasses with sedges, explaining, “grasses are essentially a clothing for healthy and pure ground” (19.370), whereas “sedges are essentially the clothing of waste and more or less poor or uncultivable soils” (19.371). Even with this significant difference, a difference that accentuates how the plant family in general has use value for humankind because it covers both fertile and poor fields, the plants' flowers have “a common structure” that is “composed always of groups of double husks” and resembles “the ordinary leaves of mosses, as if a moss were a kind of ear of corn made permanently green on the ground, and with a new and distinct fructification” (19.371). As seen in the earlier floral sermons, distinction is an important element of a plant's Vital Beauty; here the distinction of grasses and hedges is that their

flowers are always double-husked and grow into flowers that resemble moss-like miniature ears of corn that develop into a “distinct fructification,” or a growth of seeds. Favouring in this moment both the flower and the seed, Ruskin preaches about the use value grass and sedge blossoms have for humankind by exploring their behaviour and aesthetics.

Ruskin’s floral sermon on *The Herbs of the Field* hits its peak when he discusses rushes, a plant family Ruskin asks his readers to allow him to “give the general name of *Drosidae*, or dewplants” (19.371). Like grasses and sedges, *Drosidae* are celebrated because the plant itself is useful to humankind. Ruskin argues, “[t]hey are not water-plants; but the signs of water resting among dry places” (19.371). The *Vital Beauty*, in this case the plant’s biography, is useful for humankind because the plant’s migration and choice of home can lead people to a vital resource: water. Before long, Ruskin focuses his sermon on the blossoms of the *Drosidae* plants, explaining the *Drosidae* flowers “differ wholly from the sedge and grass in their blossom structure” (19.371). *Drosidae* flowers have a threefold cluster of blossoms that allows him to connect it with “a higher order of plants” (19.371). Classifying rushes by their trinity-like threefold cluster, Ruskin creates a unique “higher order” (19.371) of plants that includes lilies, asphodels, amaryllids, irids, and rushes (19.372). In *Drosidae* flowers, “the floral spirit passes into the calyx . . . and the entire flower becomes a six-rayed star, bursting out of the stem laterally, as if it were the first of flowers, and had made its way to the light by force through the unwilling green” (19.371). The ability of the strong animating spirit of the *Drosidae* flower to fight its way to the light is particularly important for Ruskin’s sermon,

as it symbolizes how people need to battle adversity and science and find their way to God. The salvation of one's soul is not always an easy task; one needs to fight to reach the light of God. Ruskin contends the immensely strong "floral spirit" in the Drosidae flower leads one to believe it could be "the first of flowers" (19.371), or the flower species from which all other flowers originated. One of the reasons Drosidae plants are classified as "dewplants" by Ruskin must be because "[t]hey are often required to retain moisture or nourishment for the future blossom through long times of drought" (19.371). Drosidae plants facilitate successful future blossoming by storing moisture and nutrients in "bulbs under ground, of which some become a rude and simple, but most wholesome food for man" (19.371). With this floral symbolism, Ruskin preaches to his readers about preparing for one's future with God; much of the work one needs to do to prepare his or her soul to meet God, or to make their "way to the light" (19.371), involves crucial preparatory work that takes place below the surface and will eventually result in nourishment for the soul. Moreover, in "long times of draught" (19.371), such as the religious drought in the nineteenth century, it is crucial to remember to tend to one's soul. Focusing on the story of the Drosidae's flowering process, Ruskin draws on his theory of Vital Beauty to create a floral sermon that illuminates how people can learn valuable life lessons from this plant family, lessons that will help them connect with God.

Ruskin then explains how no other "tribes of flowers have had so great, so varied, or so healthy an influence on man as this great group of Drosidae" (19.372). This influence is caused "not so much [by]. . . the whiteness of some of their blossoms, or the radiance of others," but rather by "the strength and delicacy of the substance of their

petals” (19.372). This malleability enables Drosidae flowers to take on an abundance of “faultless” forms that involve “curvature, either in cups, as the crocus, or expanding bells, as the true lily, or heath-like bells, as the hyacinth, or bright and perfect stars, like the star of Bethlehem” (19.372). The substance of the Drosidae flowers mirrors the dual nature of Athena in that both the flower and the goddess are simultaneously strong and delicate (B. Gregory 73). This combination of characteristics allows the Drosidae flower to form into a variety of perfectly “faultless” (19.372) conduits for the Word of God. Ruskin uses the aesthetics and biography of Drosidae flowers to preach to his readers about how their souls need to be malleable to be open to the Word of God; only then will they be able to achieve a “faultless,” “bright,” and “perfect” form.

In his sermon, Ruskin goes on to make multiple crucial connections between the Drosidae flowers and a variety of floral associations to illuminate how the five tribes of flowers in the Drosidae family have contributed “to the spirit of man” (19.373). This is one of the few sections in all of his floral sermons where Ruskin highlights the specific religious associations of flowers to demonstrate how flowers have a tremendous use value for humankind. Ruskin lists: “[f]irst, in their nobleness; the Lilies gave the lily of the Annunciation; the Asphodels, the flower of the Elysian fields; the Irids, the fleur-de-llys of chivalry; and the Amaryllids, Christ’s lily of the field: while the rush, trodden always under foot, became the emblem of humility” (19.373). It is unsurprising Ruskin examines flowers in terms of their numerous religious symbolic associations, especially with respect to lilies. The lily has long been a symbol of purity (Kramer 25; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-83; Ward 243; Scourse 49) and associated with religion and

Christianity (Ward 243). Also, the rush, a seemingly out-of-place addition, represents “humility” (19.373), a Christian trait Ruskin would have wanted his readers to strive for to help them strengthen their relationship with God. Ruskin adds to his sermon detailed evidence of how members of the Drosidae family of flowers have influenced humankind for the better. He argues the Madonna’s lily has “by their lovely form, influenced the entire decorative design of Italian sacred art” (19.373). Additionally, the “ornament of war was continually enriched by the curves of the triple petals of the Florentine ‘giglio,’ and French fleur-de-lys” to such a high degree “that it is impossible to count their influence for good in the Middle Ages, partly as a symbol of womanly character, and partly of the utmost brightness and refinement of chivalry” (19.373). Flowers from the Drosidae family have been incorporated both into art and onto the trappings of war for the benefit of humankind. The lily’s symbolic associations with purity have enabled it to influence “sacred art” (19.373). Similarly, the Florentine ‘giglio’ and the French fleur-de-lys created a “good” influence in the Middle Ages because they were connected to “womanly character,” “brightness,” and “chivalry” (19.373). Even in times of war, the Word of God communicated by flowers can influence humankind for the better.

Lastly, when concluding his floral sermon on the Drosidae family of flowers, Ruskin makes multiple connections to the family’s various flowers and Greek beliefs and myth. With the broad focus of his text being Athena, a Greek goddess, and the more specific focus being a desire to deliver floral sermons to his readers to establish a close relationship between religion and the natural world, a relationship Ruskin valued in Greek culture (Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* 39), it is obvious why Ruskin goes out of his way to

link the Drosidae family of flowers with the Greeks. Ruskin leaves what he would have considered to be one of his most crucial floral sermons, the sermon on the preparation of one's soul for the afterlife, until the end of his section on Athena's meal to ensure that his readers would have already gained the knowledge necessary through all of his other examples to understand the important message. Ruskin argues that asphodels, a member of the flower family under examination, are connected through myth "with Greek thoughts of immortality" (19.374). Asphodels have been a "symbol of death for centuries" (Ward 49), likely because the Greeks planted them "near tombs in the belief the roots would nourish the shades, spirits that had departed their deceased physical bodies" (49). Without question, asphodels are intertwined with Greek culture and how people prepare for and deal with death and the afterlife. Ruskin preaches the asphodel's "useful and nourishing power" would make it "strange" if his readers could "not feel what fixed relation exists between the agency of the creating spirit in these, and in us who live by them" (19.374). Those willing to realize their connection to the spirit of life in asphodels can achieve the agency necessary to prepare their souls for immortality in the afterlife. Additionally, Ruskin mentions the *Amaryllis lutea* and explains how the flower is considered by Greeks to symbolize "the first coming of the breath of life on the renewed herbage" (19.375). Later in the year, "the golden lily and crocus, together with the asphodel, retain always the old Greek's fondest thoughts" (19.375). For Ruskin, the Drosidae family of flowers is of special use to humankind because the family's flowers are so inherently connected to Greek myth and belief that they are abundant with Vital Beauty and an excellent conduit for the Word of God.

5.11 Conclusion: No “Ordinary Botanist”

Like Barrett Browning and Tennyson before him, Ruskin utilizes floral symbolism to explore the social issues of his time. In Ruskin’s case, however, the social issue he is addressing is the movement away from God and religion. Thus, he reinvigorates Coleridge’s conception of the symbol: symbols again serve as “conductors” of God’s “truths” (*The Statesman’s Manual* 37). Ruskin was deeply concerned with the material implications of science, especially Darwin’s work, and the religious doubt that grew from it. Ruskin reestablishes the connection between symbolism and religion that is notably absent from Tennyson’s minor poems and *Maud*. He uses flowers to counteract the work done by Darwin and other scientists not by dismissing science but by unifying its powers of observation and classification with faith in God. Ruskin’s floral sermons that offer his congregation morality lessons derived from flowers for the betterment of humankind are in stark contrast to Darwin’s “utilitarian doctrine” (149) of natural selection outlined in *On the Origin of Species*. While Darwin believed that species change only for the good of the species (149), Ruskin was adamant that species become what they are for the purpose of highlighting their aesthetics and biography—their Vital Beauty—which occurs for the betterment of humankind. Although Ruskin never entered the church, after reading his floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air*, it is clear he embraced the role of preacher. When he writes these floral sermons Ruskin serves as an interpreter who facilitates the relationship between God and humankind by explaining God’s sacred teachings. Specifically, Ruskin’s sermons on the blossoms associated with the food offered to the guests at an imagined English country dinner held in honour of Athena in *The Queen of*

the Air (1869) ensure Victorians see that nature is useful for humankind because it acts as a conduit for the Word of God. The main goal of Ruskin's preaching is to help "People, be good" (*Praeterita* 35.26), and this can only be achieved if they begin to view flowers as sustenance for their soul.

Ruskin closes the section on Athena's meal by scrutinizing the "formative power" of nature (19.378). He explains "with respect to all these divisions and powers of plants; it does not matter in the least by what concurrences of circumstance or necessity they may gradually have been developed" (19.377). What matters instead is what directs the circumstance, the "formative cause" (19.378). Ruskin contends "an ordinary botanist" would tell you leaves form because they are "a 'developed tubercle,' and that its ultimate form 'is owing to the direction of its vascular threads'" (19.378). This is not good enough for Ruskin. He keeps questioning the botanist, asking, "But what directs its vascular threads? [...] What made them want that? What made them seek for it thus?" (19.378). Ruskin argues that "[t]here is no answer" to these questions except that "as influenced by the power of the air under solar light, there is developed a series of changing forms, in clouds, plants, and animals, all of which have reference in their action, or nature, to the human intelligence that perceives them" (19.378). Challenging Darwin's work, Ruskin argues that nature forms and changes for the benefit of humankind, and the "forming power" of nature "enter[s] into and inspire[s] all intelligences that work in harmony with Him" (19.378). The "forming power," then, facilitates a relationship between humankind and God: "whatever intellectual results may be in modern days obtained by regarding this effluence only as a motion or vibration, every formative human art hitherto, and the best

states of human happiness and order, have depended on the apprehension of its mystery (which is certain), and of its personality (which is probable)” (19.378). Ruskin’s floral sermons in *The Queen of the Air* suggest he is far from an “ordinary botanist” (19.378). Rather, he is a minister of God intent on saving the souls of his congregation with his floral sermons, even in a time of tremendous religious doubt.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Flower Power: Hawaiian Flora, Isabella Bird Bishop, and the Imperialistic Cross-cultural Pollination of the Victorian Floral Symbol

6.1 Exotic Imports

During the nineteenth century, the British Empire extended its power to many parts of the world, often leading to “expressions of cultural confidence and racial superiority” (Gilmour 184). In the 1870s, attention was focused more intently than ever before on the British Empire’s colonizing project due to repercussions from the Indian Mutiny (1857-1858), which highlighted the fragility of British control, and the well-publicized, popular, and thrilling narratives of the British exploration of Africa, the “Dark Continent” (180). During this time, many of the flowers that were celebrated by Victorians were, in fact, “exotic imports” from British colonization (Scourse 96). This floral plunder from distant lands fed the “Victorian preoccupation with novelty, the exotic and forming collections” (98). The imported flowers were used to create “escapist” landscapes (108) so Victorians could enjoy some respite from such social concerns as the effects of industrialization, even though imported flowers were also another marker of colonization and the Empire’s decline. Kew Gardens is perhaps the most well-known example of the Victorian penchant for collecting and enjoying the exotic: it was a “complex network of a global botanical empire that connected gardens in locations such as tropical Malaya, Singapore, Calcutta, St Vincent, St Helena and many other distant locales to frosty London” (Baber 676). The British Empire imported countless flowers from around the globe, and these flowers both represented the consolidation and expansion of Britain’s power and became a part of the

Victorian language of flowers.

6.2 British Floral Exports

Just as Victorians brought flowers home from afar, when they visited territories colonized by the British Empire they carried Victorian floral symbolism with them, and in many cases it served as a means to explore and critique the morality of other cultures (Seaton, “Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification” 681). This trafficking in floral symbolism is especially apparent in Isabella Bird Bishop’s *The Hawaiian Archipelago: Six Months among the Palm Groves, Coral Reefs, and Volcanoes of the Sandwich Islands* (1875). Bird Bishop is one of the most intrepid and celebrated of nineteenth-century travellers; her destinations include Japan, India, Tibet, Korea, China, Persia, Kurdistan, and Canada, and in 1872, she set off to explore the Sandwich Islands (McKenzie 14), now known as the Hawaiian Islands. While there, Bird Bishop composed journal entries and a multitude of letters that became the basis of *The Hawaiian Archipelago*. Bird Bishop’s text traces her adventures on the Islands from January to August 1873, and through her observations of the local life and customs of the native Hawaiians, she provides a commentary on the social and political issues faced by native Hawaiians as England and the United States competed for Hawaiian goods and territory.

Bird Bishop’s reading is evident within the pages of *The Hawaiian Archipelago* from numerous biblical references and a multitude of allusions to popular nineteenth-century texts. For instance, Bird Bishop was particularly familiar with Alfred Tennyson’s work, bookending the story of her Hawaiian adventures with apt references to Tennyson’s “The Lotos-Eaters” (1832). *The Hawaiian Archipelago* also includes several

allusions to other poems by Tennyson, as well as quotations from other nineteenth-century authors such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Bird Bishop was undoubtedly influenced by Tennyson's use of the floral symbol, and it is also likely that she read the works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and John Ruskin, given her obvious interests in literature, religion, and nature. In *The Hawaiian Archipelago*, Bird Bishop's use of floral symbolism echoes the approach utilized by Tennyson and Ruskin, authors who simultaneously critique social issues while reaffirming existing power hierarchies. Bird Bishop uses flowers in her text to scrutinize the morality of the inhabitants of the Islands. Even though as a Victorian woman explorer Bird Bishop may desire to escape the moral and social restrictions imposed upon women by Victorian Britain, her use of floral symbolism suggests she is still a sociocultural product of her time and race, like Tennyson and Ruskin, and ultimately reinforces existing hierarchies of power.

6.3 Hawaiian Constructions of Femininity

Bird Bishop sees advantages and disadvantages in the Hawaiians' constructions of femininity. She praises the carefree way in which Hawaiian women ride horses, "flying along astride, barefooted . . . a graceful and exciting spectacle" (31), and she notices that she is never offered any help to climb walls and attributes this to the fact that native women do not require assistance: they are as strong, fearless, and active as Hawaiian men (238). Nevertheless, she quickly counters these positive attributes with the belief that "Hawaiian women have no notions of virtue as we understand it" (255), affirming the Victorian assumptions about the responsibility of women as guardians of morality

through their reproduction of both race and culture, for, she asserts, “if there is to be any future for this race it must come through a higher morality” (255). In Imperial discourse, white women such as Bird Bishop herself have a role in representing the superior race and culture of Britain when they are abroad, yet as Sara Mills suggests, though women travel writers function as part of a larger Imperial enterprise, they face social constraints similar to their contemporaries in England: they are “supposed to travel in order to paint butterflies and flowers” (87), rather than to experience any sort of liberation from their prescribed gender role. Though Bird Bishop enjoys many aspects of the Hawaiian women’s carefree way of life, she warns herself to remember that “the people inhabiting this strip of land between the volcanic wilderness and the sea were a vicious, sensual, shameless herd” who were “civilized” by Christian missionaries a mere “forty years ago” (103). Although her time on the Islands may be enjoyable, it exposes her to the risk of corruption from its “dark moral shadows” (103). At the conclusion of her text, Bird Bishop explains that Hawaiian women “are most charming, essentially womanly, and fulfill all domestic and social duties in a way worthy of imitation everywhere” (444). Importantly, however, she adds that their excellent characteristics work to “cover a multitude of sins” (444). Bird Bishop longs to enjoy the freedom and beauty of the Island and its inhabitants, but is constantly drawn back to the perceived lack of morality in the Hawaiian locals.

6.4 A Floral Critique of Morality

Bird Bishop’s use of floral symbolism illuminates such mixed feelings about being far from Victorian England’s conventions. Closely following her arrival, Bird Bishop

observes women who “wore wreaths and garlands of flowers, carmine, orange, or pure white, twined round their hats, and thrown carelessly round their necks” (21). The description of the colours of the flowers that comprise the wreaths and garlands the locals wear suggests that Bird Bishop views the women’s conduct with mixed feelings. Wearing orange flowers that are generally associated with energy, enthusiasm, and warmth (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 192-93) and white flowers that represent candor, purity, and sweetness (182-83) with the deep redness of the carmine-coloured flowers that often symbolize “fires of the heart” and sexuality (192) is to wear mixed symbols: Bird Bishop thus ponders the Islanders’ ability to refrain from passionate behaviour that would be at odds with British Victorian morality. Additionally, Bird Bishop notes that “[m]any of the young beauties wore the gorgeous blossom of the red hibiscus” (21). Importantly before it was named the floral emblem of Hawaii by the joint legislature in 1923 (Hargreaves 18), the hibiscus was typically used in everyday life and literature due to the flower’s unique ability to remain vital and beautiful for one day, but then slowly “close and fade” at nightfall (18). Furthermore, the redness of the blossom once again points to burgeoning sexuality (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 192). That the hibiscus when picked rarely lasts beyond a day suggests that, like the fading of the hibiscus, the Hawaiian women’s modesty may also begin to fade once evening arrives. When finally arriving at her lodgings for the evening, she notes that the two-storied house is “festooned with clematis and passion flowers, and [has] a shady lawn in front” (32). This “shady lawn” recalls the “dark moral shadows” (103) that haunt Bird Bishop throughout her text. Moreover, as clematis denotes artifice and deception (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers*

174-75) and passionflowers signify both the violent pain of love and susceptibility (186-87), these flowers evoke Bird Bishop's struggles with the morality of the Island's inhabitants.

When Bird Bishop next encounters "foreign ladies" and examines their homes, her use of floral symbolism demonstrates that foreign visitors to the Island experience a degradation of morality because of their continued exposure to Island culture and mores. Though the non-native women on the Islands were "great in numbers" (22), they failed to form their own community and had "so far conformed to native custom as to wear natural flowers round their hats and throats" (22). Even though Bird Bishop next wonders "where were the hard, angular, careworn, sallow, passionate faces of men and women, such as form the majority of every crowd at home?" (22), suggesting that she does see some value in the carefree Hawaiian way of life, her description of the "natural flowers" wrapping "round . . . hats and throats" of the visiting women implies that these women are being symbolically attacked by the flowers—flowers that represent the compromised character of the Hawaiian natives. The excess of nature on the Island is inseparable from the excess of the Island culture: as she surveys the homes of the women foreign to the Islands, Bird Bishop finds the air "heavy with odours of gardenia, tuberose, oleanders, roses, lilies, and the great white trumpet-flower, and myriads of others whose names [she does] not know" (24-25). The combined literal presence of floral profusion and their confusing (English) symbolic associations must have been disorienting for Bird Bishop. Oleander carries the message to beware (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 186-87), which Bird Bishop could take as a warning to ensure that she keeps her behaviour in line

with British patriarchal expectations. Wild tuberose, on the other hand, represent simplicity (192-93), and roses generally symbolize love and beauty (189-90), highlighting the more positive aspects of the Hawaiian people and their way of life. In contrast, even though the lilies and the whiteness of the trumpet flowers symbolize purity and innocence (182-83), trumpet flowers themselves are inherently associated with separation (196-97), indicating, in this context, the parting of foreigners from the behavioural values and expectations of their homelands should they spend an extended period of time on the Islands. Similarly, upon the verandahs, Bird Bishop notices the “deep red, solitary flowers of the hibiscus” that “rioted among . . . fuschias and geraniums, which here attain the height and size of large rhododendrons” (24-25). As previously mentioned, the deep redness of the hibiscus represents “fires of the heart” and sexuality (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 192), and here their sexuality and passion is so rampant that it is actually “rioting,” implying that the foreign houses are under attack from what Bird Bishop perceives as the Islander’s immorality. Additionally, as fuchsias symbolize a longing for taste (178-79) and the presence of geraniums is commonly associated with folly and disappointed expectations (178-79), in this context these two flowers suggest that the foreigners are sorely mistaken if they hope to acquire any kind of elevated taste from the Hawaiians.

Bird Bishop continues to describe the foreign houses symbolically, using flowers to explore her confused feelings about the effects that Hawaiian culture is having on foreigners who move to the Islands. She notices that even though the foreign houses show some individuality, it is peculiar that they are all “decorated and festooned with

flowering trailers” (25-26). This suggests that Bird Bishop is contemplating the influence that the Island is having on the foreigners’ individual personalities and worrying that they might be conforming to an Island way of life, including the Islanders’ less-desirable non-conformity to British Victorian morality. The overwhelming presence of these flowering trailers makes it difficult to tell “what the architecture is, or what is house and what is vegetation; for all angles, and lattices, and balustrades, and verandahs are hidden by jessamine [*sic*] or passion-flowers” (26). Although such observations may indicate how culture and nature are not separated in Island life as they are assumed to be in Victorian life, they also show Bird Bishop’s concern for the effects of Hawaiian culture on the “naturally” superior British culture in the colonies: it is becoming difficult to distinguish the foreigners from the Hawaiians, the Islanders representing the overwhelming plants and the foreigners the overtaken architecture. In other words, the vestiges of “civilization” are being overcome by the “uncivilized.” Moreover, the jasmine, which typically symbolizes sensuality (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180), and the passion flowers, which represent both the violent pain of love and susceptibility (186-87), call into question the morality of the Islanders and expose Bird Bishop’s concerns about the overwhelming effect that this perceived lack of morality may have upon the foreigners. There are fences and walls around the foreigners’ homes that “are altogether buried by passion-flowers . . . mixed with geraniums, fuchsia, and jessamine [*sic*], which cluster and entangle over them in indescribable profusion” (Bird Bishop 26-27). The overtaking of the fences that protect the foreigners’ homes symbolizes the degradation of the foreigners’ ability to resist the morally ambiguous and carefree lifestyle modeled by the

Islanders. Taken together, the passionflowers that signify both the “violent pain of love” and susceptibility (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 186-87), the presence of geraniums that are commonly associated with folly and disappointed expectations, and the jasmine, which typically symbolizes sensuality (180), all reflect Bird Bishop’s trepidation over the negative influence the Hawaiians have on the morality of the foreigners.

When Bird Bishop writes of visiting the Ridge House in Kona a new dynamic is added to her distaste for the inability of the Islanders to model British Victorian morality: horror over the racial mixing that is occurring between the Islanders and foreign visitors, particularly between the Island women and the British men inhabiting the Island. She realizes that its inhabitants are mainly English men who have “married native women, and are rearing a dusky race of children who speak the maternal tongue only, and grow up with native habits” (425). Bird Bishop contends that “the obvious tendency of these marriages is to sink the white man to the level of native feelings and habits” (425). Directly after her disturbing visit to the boarding house, Bird Bishop describes encounters with hothouse flowers near trees that are “so dense, and so matted together with trailers, that no ray of noon-day sun” (426) makes its way through, suggesting that the hothouse flowers, symbolizing the foreign inhabitants of the Islands, are turned native, as it were, by the corrupting proximity of the trees, which symbolize the native Islanders. If the sun never sets on the British Empire, here it has become invisible at the height of noon. Hawaii may at first appear beautiful, but her visit to the boarding house has brought to the surface concerns about the morality of its inhabitants, a morality that lurks in the “dusky” children (425), evidence of “dark moral shadows” (103) that obliterate

enlightenment from a “ray of the noon-day sun” (426). Hothouse flowers “grow in rank profusion round every house, [as do the] tea-roses, fuchsias, geraniums fifteen feet high, Nile lilies, Chinese lantern plants, begonias, lantanas, hibiscus, passion-flowers, Cape jasmine, the hoya, the tuberose, the beautiful but overpoweringly sweet ginger plant, and a hundred others” (426). The “rank profusion” (426) of the confusion of plants that originate from different countries reinforces the sense of Bird Bishop’s unease at the racial mixing she has just witnessed at the boarding house. The fact that the plants are clearly larger and more robust than their English counterparts, with “geraniums fifteen feet high” (426), suggests that Bird Bishop might feel threatened by what she construes as the monstrosity of the locals and worries that this monstrous impurity could quickly overpower and spread to the men visiting the Islands. However, the placement of the most fallen men in boarding houses that are out of the sight of most of society hides their monstrosity and mirrors the behaviour of plants that Bird Bishop observes, in which “[a]ll decay is hurried out of sight” (426).

The symbolism of each of the flowers Bird Bishop encounters at the boarding house also adds to her apprehensions about the effect of the Islanders’ way of life on the foreigners. For example, fuchsias symbolize a longing for taste (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 178-79), and the geranium is commonly associated with folly and disappointed expectations (178-79). Therefore, when taken together here, these flowers symbolically state that the foreigners’ desire for a taste of the forbidden Other will turn to folly. The hibiscus represents the fleetingness of happiness and like a woman with questionable morals, attracts by a façade of beauty during the daylight hours that “quietly close[s] and

fade[s]” upon the arrival of nighttime (Hargreaves 18). Lastly, as jasmine represents sensuality (Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180) and passionflowers signify both the “violent pain of love” and susceptibility (186-87), Bird Bishop’s floral symbolism reveals that she believes that the foreign men who have fallen in with Hawaiian women have cast their morality aside. When Bird Bishop later reflects on this trip to Kona in which she has explored the boarding house and landscape, she concludes: “Kona looks supremely beautiful, a languid dream of all fair things. Yet truly my heart warms to nothing so much as to a row of fat English cabbages which grow in the rectory garden” (438). In language that suggests the haven of a convent and the rectitude of English morality, Bird Bishop is thankful that she did not succumb to Kona’s beauty. Her warming to the cabbages shows her attraction to the structured, orderly moral restrictions of British Victorian society, their fences clearly visible to keep the races apart. Even though she is drawn to the beauty of Hawaii, its signs of non-conformity to British moral standards make her long for home and its familiar moral and social hierarchies.

6.5 Closing Thoughts

An examination of Bird Bishop’s floral symbolism in *The Hawaiian Archipelago* indicates that when she wrote her travelogue, she scrutinizes the culture of the locals through the lens of Victorian floral symbolism. In the Victorian period, “[m]ost people journeyed by book” (Colls 266) rather than physical voyage, and one of the things that middle-class women did with their leisure time was “devour books about travel and adventure” (McKenzie 3). Karen Morin suggests that Bird Bishop’s travelogues encouraged British bourgeois women to carve out “new social spaces” for themselves

(218), but an examination of Bird Bishop's *The Hawaiian Archipelago* reveals that even though Victorian women travel writers may have found "new social spaces," they were never free from the Victorian language of flowers or British moral codes. Bird Bishop's vivid and intoxicating travelogue offered Victorian middle-class women an escape from the restrictive domestic sphere—albeit within the firm confines of British Victorian morality. Throughout this project, a close examination of the use of the literary symbol in selected works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, and John Ruskin has revealed that the shift from the interiority of the Romantic use of symbol includes the use of floral symbols to interrogate social issues at home. When Bird Bishop travels abroad, she packs the language of flowers with her, and participates in a cross-cultural pollination of Victorian ideals.

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Weltman, Sharon Aronofsky. *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture*. Ohio UP, 1998.

Curriculum Vitae

CHRISTINE PENHALE

EDUCATION

- 2012-2017 PhD English, The University of Western Ontario (UWO)
 2010-2011 MA English, University of British Columbia (UBC)
 2005-2009 BA (Honours) English, University of the Fraser Valley (UFV)

ACADEMIC AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

- 2012-2015 Western Graduate Research Scholarship (UWO)
 2013-2015 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (UWO)
 2012-2015 Provost's Entrance Scholarship (UWO)
 2013 Nominated for Graduate Student Teaching Award (UWO)
 2012 Chair's Entrance Scholarship (UWO)
 2009 Recognition of Outstanding Academic Achievement Award (UFV)

TEACHING AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

- 2015-2016 English 1020E Understanding Literature Today (Fall/Winter, UWO)
 2015 English 2210G Contemporary Theory and Criticism (Winter, UWO)
 2014 English 2210F Contemporary Theory and Criticism (Fall, UWO)
 2013-2014 English 1022E Enriched Intro. to English Literature (Fall/Winter, UWO)

- 2013 English 2200G History of Theory and Criticism (Winter, UWO)
- 2012 English 2210F Contemporary Theory and Criticism (Fall, UWO)
- 2011 English 110 Approaches to Literature (Winter, UBC)
- 2010 English 110 Approaches to Literature (Fall, UBC)
- 2010 English 110 Approaches to Literature (Winter, UBC)
- 2009 English 110 Approaches to Literature (Fall, UBC)

Tutoring and Editing

2012-Present Freelance Tutor and Editor

Teaches writing techniques, comprehension fundamentals, study skills, and course planning to students with a wide range of ability. Edits course papers, academic articles, theses, grant applications, resumes, and both academic and fiction books.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

Primary

Writing and Communications

Victorian Literature

Cultural Studies

Feminist Theory and Gender Studies

Secondary

Critical Theory

Popular Culture

Detective Fiction

CONFERENCE PAPERS

Refereed

“Flower Power: Hawaiian Flora and Isabella Bird Bishop’s Reshaping of the Victorian Woman Traveller,” North American Victorian Studies Association, “Victorians and the World,” Honolulu, Hawaii. July 9-12, 2015.

“Ruskin’s Botanical Bodies: The Quest for Human Immortality in *Proserpina*,” Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada, “Victorian Bodies,” Kelowna, BC. April 10-11, 2015.

“Interdisciplinary Cross-Pollination: The Botanical Language of Darwin and Ruskin,” Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Conference, “Speaking Nature,” Pitzer College, Claremont, California. March 31-April 2, 2011.

Non-refereed

“Ruskin’s Botanical Visions,” 19th-Century Animal Sounds and Botanical Visions, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario. February 27, 2014.

“Exploring the Power of Pedagogical Training for GTAs,” The Cultures of University Governance, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario. April 12, 2013.

SERVICE AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

2015-2017 Disability Services Tutor (UWO)

2013-2016 Coordinator, Victorian Reading Group (UWO)

- 2014-2015 Graduate Representative, Visiting Speakers Committee (UWO)
- 2014 Advertising and Promotions Coordinator, NAVSA Conference (UWO)
- 2014 Volunteer Coordinator, NAVSA Conference (UWO)
- 2013-2014 Graduate Representative, Writer-in-Residence Committee (UWO)
- 2012-2013 Graduate Teaching Assistant Union Steward (UWO)
- 2009 Assistant to the Convener, VSAWC-VISAWUS Conference (UFV)

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- 2016 Western Certificate in Teaching and Learning
- In-depth and rigorous multi-year certificate program that required the completion of five components: a TA Training/Microteaching program, a variety of interactive teaching workshops, the Mentor Teaching Program, designing a syllabus, and building a Teaching Portfolio.
- 2013 Advanced Teaching Program
- A six-week hands-on seminar specifically designed to develop the practical skills necessary to teach courses. Topics covered included: universal design instruction, teaching strategically for maximum impact, developing and maintaining a culture of respect in your classroom, dealing with difficult students, and authentically assessing student learning.
- 2013 Mentor Teaching Program

Provided a unique opportunity to be observed in my personal teaching environment and to receive valuable feedback from peers on my instruction methods. Four to five participants were assigned to each Mentor Group. All group members committed to attending an organizational meeting, engaged in reciprocal observations of their colleagues' teaching, and provided written and verbal feedback to their colleagues during a final feedback meeting.

- 2012-2016 Teaching Support Centre Workshops:
- Blended Learning
 - Getting it Done
 - Putting Together a Teaching Dossier
 - Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement
 - The Graduate Game Plan
 - Don't Be Afraid of Student Evaluations
 - Great Ideas for Teaching
 - Leading Tutorials: How to Deal With Problems and How to Generate Discussion
 - Strategies for Teaching Close Reading and Critical Analysis
 - Lecture and Presentation Skills
- 2009 UBC Department of English Teaching Certificate
- A semester-long program of pedagogy workshops that included topics such as: grading effectively, generating classroom discussion, dealing with

plagiarism, and creating lectures.

OTHER RELEVANT LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

1995-2012 Business Owner, Suncor

Responsible for the daily operations of a high-volume gas bar/convenience store servicing over 800 customers per day. Managed a team of 12-16 in areas of sales, customer service, cash management, safety and security, and corporate policy and procedures. Networked with suppliers, head office, and customers on a daily basis. Maintained P&L management, sales forecasting, HR, and backend computer processes.

COMPUTER PROFICIENCIES

Microsoft Office Suite, OWL Sakai, Facebook, Twitter, WordPress