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**The "Sonnets from the Portuguese" as literary autobiography:
A reading of Sonnet 1**

**DeLuise, Dolores, Ph.D.
City University of New York, 1992**

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A

***THE SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE AS LITERARY AUTOBIOGRAPHY:
A READING OF SONNET 1***

by

DOLORES DeLUISE

*A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.*

1992

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract**THE SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE AS LITERARY
AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A READING OF SONNET 1****by****Dolores DeLuise****Advisor: Professor Michael Timko**

The speaker of Sonnet 1 tells a strange, almost incomprehensible story of self-displacement, shocked recognition, and personal unhappiness--the biography of EBB's literary relationship with Hugh Stuart Boyd. The speaker of Sonnet 43, on the other hand, tells of a satisfactory, gloriously self-liberating relationship--the biography of EBB's literary relationship with Robert Browning. In the intervening sonnets, the speaker comes to terms with issues of dominance and submission, unhappiness and joy, dependence and autonomy--the entire literary biography of EBB, which unfolds through a reading of Sonnet 1.

EBB's complex relationship with her mentor Boyd, recounted in her diary (1831-32), cast her as a failed translator, not an artist. She longed for "an equality" with him, but could not even achieve "a reciprocity." In Sonnet 1, Theocritus represents her attachment to Greek language and literature, nostalgia for her study of them, and Boyd himself. In that sonnet, she displaces Theocritus as muse, demonstrating a displacement of Boyd and his influence on her literary life. Sonnet 1 brings up Theocritus's genre, pastoral; in her own pastoral poems (1838-44), EBB dedicates a portion of Theocritus's masculine genre to a unique feminine enterprise: the creation of a feminine literary space where she is free not to create Beauty or to create as Beauty, the subject of the Romantic quest. As a turn occurs at the volta of the sonnet, so does a turn occur in EBB's literary life; her male poet/protagonists give way to a feminized, then feminine, poet/protagonist. The speaker becomes aware of a new and positive influence on her life, just as EBB becomes awakened to the personal and poetic possibilities which might be brought about by "a reciprocity" with the poet Browning.

The act of writing the Sonnets asserts the writing of EBB's own creativity, her autonomy as a poet, and her autonomy as a human being. The Sonnets successfully complete the discourse begun in the Diary, and involve a process of poetic self-scrutiny which permits her to conceive of and write Aurora Leigh. In 1845-46, she writes as both subject and object, Beauty and prince, the basis of poetic unity in the Sonnets.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO

CARL M. PELLMAN, whom I love passionately, and with the "breath, / Smiles, tears, of all my life," and whose love for me got me through the Ph.D. program.

ARIEL PELLMAN, creator and created: wonderful and unique feminine poet and my gift to the world. I much regret (my only regret) that the hours stolen from her by this book will never be able to be replaced.

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THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN BROOKLYN and ALL WOMEN WHO ARE NOT EMPOWERED TO SPEAK

and

LYNN KADISON, of course. My experience here began with meeting her and ends here by saying goodbye: Goodbye, Lynn. **Thanks for everything, Lynn!**

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CHRONOLOGY

<u>An Essay On Mind</u>	published	1826
EBB begins to correspond with Boyd		1827
EBB meets Boyd		1828
<u>Diary</u>		1831-32
First translation of <u>Prometheus Bound</u>		1832
"The Romaunt of Margret"		1836
"The Deserted Garden"		1838
"A Lay of the Early Rose"		1840
"A Vision of Poets"		1843
"The Lost Bower"		1843
"Lady Geraldine's Courtship"		1844
Second translation of <u>Prometheus Bound</u>		1845
EBB begins to correspond with Browning		1845
EBB meets Browning		1846
<u>Sonnets from the Portuguese</u>		1845-46
<u>Aurora Leigh</u>	began	1845
	published	1855

INTRODUCTION

SONNET 1 AS A KEY TO EXPOSITION: THE SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE AS LITERARY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A reader of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese is immediately confronted, in the first poem of the sequence, with a problem. The nature of the problem itself, moreover, is problematic. One seems to step into the midst of an argument that is impossible to fathom by merely reading and comprehending what one has read. While it is difficult

to say (when reading Sonnet 1 as a poem in its own right, or even as the first poem of the sonnet sequence) what the poem is "about," the facts that seem to be important in Sonnet 1 are: the poet Theocritus; the genre in which he wrote; the speakers' avoidance of making a translation of what he wrote; a turn of events precisely at the volta or turn of the poem; and the experience of the effects of a new voice in the life of the speaker. The speaker first interprets the intentions of the new voice as harmful, but then she is able to re-interpret the new voice as life-giving. The dark and peculiar logic of Sonnet 1 is the key to understanding the argument of the rest of the sequence; the source of this logic may be unearthed in EBB's¹ relationship to her role as a literary woman, which she explores at length in her 1838 and 1844 volumes of poems and in her diary (Diary by E.B.B. [1831-32]). This work will discuss each of the important elements in that poem and show how a new reading of the Sonnets from the Portuguese unfolds from a reading of Sonnet 1.

Sonnet 1 criticism has not gone far enough to be useful in providing a tool for understanding this strange poem, nor has it even raised the questions this text ought to be asked. Critics have tended to explain Sonnet 1 in terms of the figure "Love" that unexpectedly asserts itself in the last lines of the poem (notably, Stephenson). Mermin points out, in addition, the unconventional situation in which the speaker finds herself with regard to Love. Even though she is like "a Renaissance lover pierced by Cupid's

arrow . . . she is the object rather than the initiator of courtship" (Origins 131-132). She explains the "apparent unresponsiveness" of the speaker to the love of the listener in the first fifteen sonnets as a reaction to the harm the speaker comes close to experiencing in the first sonnet (131). Focusing on the particularly literary elements of Sonnet 1, Mermin explains that literary allusion is the way EBB generalizes her situation "most clearly and deliberately." She establishes "her credentials as a reader of Greek, a serious, educated person," in the voice of "one who lives familiarly with Greek texts" ("The Female Poet" 360).

Shaakeh S. Agajanian posits five themes of Sonnet 1: Interestingly, he describes the opening of the sonnet sequence as "an Annunciation scene similar in its physical setting to the medieval and early Renaissance paintings of the event" (69); he notices that "the suggestive ambiguity as to the identity of the speaker . . . is one of the central themes" (69-70); he shows how the striving of the protagonist with the "Mystic shape" brings to mind the "Biblical connotations of Jacob wrestling with the Angel," and finds in this dialogue between the master voice and the protagonist "Kierkegaardian existential overtones of the either/or possibilities of the supremacy of 'Death or Love'" (the former title of Sonnet 1) (70); he points out the "contrast between the sad past of the protagonist and the intimation of a happy, joyful future" (70); and explains that the "beloved's resignation to the approach of death" is conveyed through a "Calvinistic belief in predestination" (70).

Thoughtful and creative, this explication, however, strays too far afield; the ideas are too divorced from the facts of the text to be effective in explaining what the poem is "about."

Daniel Karlin finds a correspondence between the Sonnets and the letters EBB exchanged with Browning. In a book that privileges the experiential "fiction" (3) of the letters over EBB's poetry, he finds the Sonnets "a showplace for the images . . . in the letters" (270). The mystic shape of Sonnet 1 "directs our reading" to the "symbolic nature of the coming drama," a drama "which repeats in the more systematic and condensed form of poetic art, the experience which Elizabeth Barrett records in her letters" (269-270).

Angela Leighton comes close to understanding the dynamics of Love and Death in Sonnet 1 when she correctly assesses that the replacement of Death with Love is the replacement of one inspiring male figure for another, but she posits EBB's brother, Edward (Bro), as the figure being replaced. "The memory of Bro," she explains, "runs through these poems like an alternative inspiration that at times rivals the new" (105). There is no evidence anywhere, however, to support the fact that the memory of Bro influenced Sonnet 1 or any of the other sonnets in the sequence.

I hope to raise different kinds of questions about Sonnet 1, and, by doing so, answer questions about the entire work. The questions that stand out are: What is the poem doing in an amatory sonnet sequence? What does

Theocritus have to do with the themes of Love and Death?² I believe I have found answers to these questions in EBB's relationship to her art.

The speaker of Sonnet 1 tells a strange, almost incomprehensible story of self-displacement, shocked recognition, and personal unhappiness--the biography of EBB's literary relationship with Hugh Stuart Boyd. The speaker of Sonnet 43, on the other hand, tells of the satisfactory, gloriously self-liberating literary relationship--the biography of EBB's literary relationship with Robert Browning. Between these two sonnets, the speaker comes to terms with issues of dominance and submission, unhappiness and joy, and dependence and autonomy--the entire literary biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The act of writing the Sonnets asserted the writing of EBB's own creativity, her autonomy as a poet, and her autonomy as a human being. The Sonnets complete the discourse begun in the Diary, and involve a process of poetic self-scrutiny which permits her to conceive of and write Aurora Leigh.³ This process has its origins in her literary relationship with Boyd, which began in 1828.

EBB's obvious passion for Hugh Stuart Boyd, revealed in her diary, is similar in many ways to the desperate infatuation of an adolescent schoolgirl for her middle-aged, married English teacher, except that EBB wrote the diary when she was twenty-six years old. What in part brought my work about was the puzzling fact that critics seem to shrink from what they read in the Diary about her obsession for Boyd. Even Dorothy Mer-

min, who encounters the embarrassment of a twentieth century-reader of Sonnets from the Portuguese head-on ("The Female Poet"), confines herself to a couple of sentences about the painful "love affair" of the Diary.⁴

Poetry ensues from the same part of the human spirit as does love; what, then, was the effect of EBB's relationship with Boyd on her imaginative work? EBB wrote very little poetry at the time she kept her diary. Recognizing in the Diary the rhetoric of a stormy love affair, I wanted to discover what happened to these very strong emotions when she did begin imaginative work once again. Inasmuch as the Diary is an imaginative work, the imaginative poems are a diary.

EBB very much needed the legitimacy that a literary relationship with a male mentor provided her; I hope to demonstrate that, for her, the relationship with a male mentor represented access to the literary tradition. From very early in her career, she had a literary man in her life. Her relationship with Sir Uvedale Price, an elderly classical scholar who contacted her to congratulate her on An Essay on Mind (1826), set the stage for her relationship with Boyd. The beginning of her relationship with Boyd was very much the same. Boyd, who initially wrote to her about her Essay as well, was unknown to her family and was only living temporarily in a rented house in Malvern. He was, however, very much "her" poet (similarly, Forster 41) as Price was not. His proximity to her home, his persistence, and his genuine need of her literary services eventually persuaded her to

visit him. Once she did begin to see him regularly, she appears to have lost control of her personal and poetic autonomy by "falling in love" with him.

In Chapter 3 I propose that their relationship felt like a love affair to her was for the very reason that she needed the relationship at all: She wanted a legitimate place in the literary tradition. A woman has no dominant place she can call her own in the tradition, as Margaret Homans and others have argued. Aware of this on some level, but, at the same time, feeling that she ought to be accorded such a place, EBB applies the model of the female/male literary relationship to her relationship with Boyd, and finds that it adds up to a "love affair"; a teller of tales who has lived her entire life immersed in the conventions of literature, she imagines herself the princess and Boyd the prince. This is a conflicted desire because there is also a part of her which, at the same time, sees herself as a prince in the tradition, like Boyd himself. Her problem (or her salvation, depending upon the way it is viewed) is that Boyd imagines her neither as a princess nor a prince. Ignorant of the emotional trauma their relationship stirred up in his pupil, Boyd, a blind, second-rate classicist, was focussed on his own aspirations. Kind to EBB in ways which occur to him (he gave her an expensive set of Greek books on one occasion, for instance), he gives no thought to the implications of their relationship as it concerns her as a literary woman.

Wounded on two counts of failure--failure to be either an object or a subject--EBB employs poetic strategies that both express and overcome her disappointment. In her pastoral poetry, explored in Chapter 3, she creates a feminine poetic space in which to recognize and think about her dilemma. Chapter 4 explains how she took steps to attain poetic and consequently personal autonomy by removing her libidinous interest from the figure of a male poet/genius⁵ (the imaginative literary embodiment of Boyd) and transferring that interest to a feminine poet/genius in the following way: first, she invests her interest in the male poet/protagonist she was obsessed with writing about, and whom she feminizes; second, she transfers this interest to a particular poet/protagonist whom she feminizes--Browning; third, she invests her interest in a combination of herself and the feminized Browning ("the poet"); and finally, she directs all her concern for the poet-as-protagonist to the feminine poet, Aurora Leigh. This was a process that spanned the years 1838-1855.

When EBB writes the Sonnets from the Portuguese (1845-46; published 1850), she writes from a position of poetic autonomy, both subject and object. Browning loved her poems, he told her in his first letter to her, and, sight unseen, he said he loved her too; in him she acquired a mentor who created her as both princess and prince. Chapter 5 explains the Sonnets in light of this paradox.

* * *

Above all else, EBB is an important poet who remains under-interpreted. Her ideas, and consequently her poetic imagery and expression, are orderly and consistent; as well, most of her poetry shines with a passionate light of personal truth and poetic beauty. Widely read in classical as well as medieval, Renaissance, Augustan, and contemporary literature, she intuitively transformed the nuances of Greek expression into English verse in her second translation of Prometheus Bound (1850) (Taplin 230-232), discussed in Chapter 4.⁶ The "treacly sentimentality" with which critics have regarded her life and which overtakes the criticism of her work prevents a thorough appreciation of just how skillful a poet she was (Peterson ix).⁷ In a cursory reading, the individual sonnets may indeed seem as though they were "rough sketches, thrown off . . . in one or two sittings" (quoted in Taplin 239); however, an examination of their form will illustrate the care, expertise, and poetic ability with which they were created.⁸

EBB is firmly entrenched in the Petrarchan tradition, and a modification of the Petrarchan rhyme scheme, abba abba cdcdcd, is used throughout the sequence. J. W. Lever emphasizes the two rhyme patterns of the quatrains of the Petrarchan sonnet (1-13). In addition to the progressive movement of alternating rhyme (ab, ba), "suggesting the logic of exposition

or narration," there is the "static iteration" of the three couplets formed by the structure of the *abba, abba* pattern ([a] bb a,a bb [a]), asserting the presence of lyric, with the result that "exposition [is] constantly being impinged upon by lyric stress, which is itself absorbed back into the expository process" (Lever 6).

Perhaps, in part, because of the heavy burden the Petrarchan sonnet places on the English poet because of its tight form, EBB employs slant rhyme, close rhyme, and rime riche.⁹ While she looks back to Petrarch for form, she looks forward to modern poets for style because her occasional lapse of proper rhyme adds an element of startling ambiguity to the unique combination of narrative flow and lyric stasis in the sonnet.

In the second quatrain of Sonnet 9,¹⁰ for example, the "b" rhyme words are "*fears*" and "*peers*" while the "a" rhyme words are "*live*" and "*grieve*." The other "a" rhyme words of the poem are "*give*" and "*renunciative*." When one considers the effect of the rhyme scheme in Lever's terms, one can see that the consonantal half rhyme "*grieve*," appearing precisely at the *volta*, obstructs not only the narrative inclinations of the poem, but the lyric quality of the preceding couplets. It is not only lyric that is processed back into the narrative, but an uneasy feeling of disruption. "[g]rieve," occurring where it does at the turn of the sonnet, does not prepare the ground for a perception of truth which the Petrarchan sestet should articulate. The poet does apprehend the truth, but the reader does

not arrive at it by a correlation of the information in the quatrains, as in a Petrarchan sonnet. After questioning and practically denying her right to love the listener ("*Can it be right to give what I can give?*"; "*this can scarce be right*") the poet/speaker resolves "*I will not [. . .] give thee any love,*" but immediately perceives that to do so "*were unjust.*" While the form of her sonnet is taken from Petrarch, the essence of her conclusion arises from a different school: "*Beloved, I only love thee!--let it pass.*" The epigrammatic quality of the last line and a half captures with amazing precision the spirit of early English sonnets, which employed the rhymed couplet to achieve the same effect. The pervasive feeling of ambiguity subliminally evoked by the placement and use of the idea of "grief" is the soul of Sonnet 9. There is harsh alliteration immediately following the half rhyme "*grieve,*" exacerbating the feeling of disruption: "*and I own and grieve / That givers of such gifts as mine [. . .].*" Indeed, by calling such attention to itself, one may perceive that a short moment of "grief" may serve as the title of the poem. These brief illustrations of EBB as a poet of such ability and intuition warrant a study which treats her work as that of a major poetic power in the nineteenth century.

NOTES

¹ I have chosen to refer to Elizabeth Barrett Browning as EBB throughout because first, it was the way she signed herself, and second, it is a name that encompasses her single and married states. Robert Browning observed that even after she married, she would never be known as "E.B.C." (Letters 1.330).

² This dissertation is, in part, a response to these questions asked by Michael Timko.

³ This idea is derived from Laurence Lipking's explanation of the "Book of New Life." Such works, explains Lipking, represent the "circular voyage" of an artist who discovers in his or her own work a "flash of critical insight" (Life of the Poet 15). These books cannot be understood without "principles of interpretation"; in order to read a "Book of New Life," one must be instructed by the work itself (16). The works Lipking explicates as "Books of New Life" have two parts consisting, first, of "an imaginative vision, often challenging and obscure," and, second, a "prose commentary, often rather direct and explicit," supplying both "an autobiographical context and a tissue of higher, allegorical levels of meaning" (17). These two forms "bear the argument between them" (17); furthermore, the "book of New Life" serves as an initiation, containing a "prophecy of greater works to come" (19). A prose reading of the Sonnets can be found in the Diary; these two works, the Sonnets and the Diary, when read together, may be said to comprise the two parts of EBB's "Book of New Life," that is, the imaginative work, "challenging and obscure," and the prose commentary, "direct and explicit." Together, they complete the circular, creative voyage of EBB, who discovered in the act of writing the Sonnets the key to her creativity and autonomy.

⁴ "The diary is filled with visits to him, successful and unsuccessful schemes for visiting him, and suspicious scrutiny of his words and behavior.

She is convinced that his affection is waning and is afraid that he will leave Malvern or that he will not try to find her again when her family moves away" (Mermin, Origins 49).

⁵ Marjorie Stone notes that EBB's "early works are . . . dominated by male figures and perspectives" (103).

⁶ See Dierdre David for a comprehensive summary of EBB's intellectual ability.

⁷ William S. Peterson points out that it has been impossible to have an "intelligent understanding" of EBB's poetry because of the "mythological fog which envelops her life" (Peterson vii). Because of Rudolph Beiser's The Barretts of Wimpole Street, EBB was perceived as the Cinderella-like heroine of a nineteenth century fairy tale. Although it was a myth of popular culture, it infiltrated the academy as well. "Scholars and critics," Peterson continues, "though they are usually not aware of it, are strongly influenced by popular cultural attitudes, and the atmosphere of treacly sentimentality which has surrounded Mrs. Browning's life and works has inevitably had the effect of producing either critical neglect or vigorous (sometimes mindless) debunking" (Peterson ix). Similarly, Shaakeh S. Agajanian points out that "[a]lthough the Sonnets from the Portuguese is the first major love sequence written in English since the Renaissance, and although the concept of love enunciated in it assumes historical importance, the critics almost unanimously have neglected the content and textural structure of the individual sonnets" (9).

⁸ In his "Introduction," Agajanian surveys and evaluates Sonnets criticism. One group of critics "summarily disposed of the sequence by categorizing it as an expression of woman's love and heart" (9). Among these are Houston Peterson, ed. (1929); Felix E. Schelling (1913); and Ellen Moers (1976). Another type of criticism is biographical: "The erroneous assumption of biographical criticism," Agajanian explains, "is the notion that

poets only write love sonnets to 'unlock their hearts'" (10). He identifies these as the biographical critics: Elizabeth Berridge, ed. (1974); Louise Schutz Boas (1930); Osbert Burdett (1936); Isabel C. Clarke (1929); Dormer Creston (1930); Dallas Kenmare (1957); Edmund Gosse (1896); Gertrude Reese Hudson, ed. (1965); P. Kelley, R. Hudson, and R. Coles, eds., (1969); D. G. Loth (1920); James Patton McCormick (1940); W. Robertson Nicoll and Thomas J. Wise, eds. 1896; Lillian Whiting (1900 and 1911); Frances Winwar (1950); David Main (1881); Bruce Clark (1951); Osbert Burdett (1936); Alethea Hayter (1962); Virginia L. Radley (1972); "and others" (11n. 4). A third kind of criticism is "strictly formalistic" (12). These critics "completely ignore the logical interaction of form and content in the textural structure of a poem, its organic unity, and concentrate instead on the mere shell or the scaffolding. With preconceived, dogmatic theories about the bipartite division, rhyme scheme, and metrical patterns of the sonnet, they proceed to lay down rules and regulations for the perfect sonnet" (12). These critics he lists as T.W.H. Crosland The English Sonnet (New York, n.d.); Walter Monch (1955); George Saintsbury (1906-1910); Oliver Elton (1830-1880); Bruce Clark (1951); Fred Manning Smith (1939); Mary Jane Lupton (1979). The final group of critics Agajianian describes are those who "represent . . . a modern trend in their quest for thematic unity and a logical, narrative unfolding of plot in the sequence" (13). He lists Edmund Gosse (1896); Osbert Burdett (1936); Bruce Clark (1951); William Going (1954); and Melvin Goldstein (1958). Agajianian rejects all these approaches and does himself instead an "analysis of the textural structure of the individual sonnets of the sequence" (14).

⁹ Perhaps for the first time, EBB's use of rhyme is seen in an artistic light rather than as careless or deliberately inartistic in Fred Manning Smith's 1939 essay, "Mrs. Browning's Rhymes."

¹⁰ Sonnet 9:

*Can it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years*

*Re-sighing on my lips renunciative,
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are not peers
So to be lovers; and I own and grieve
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!--
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my soul against thy Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love: . . . which were unjust!--
Beloved, I only love thee!--let it pass.*

CHAPTER 1

***THE POET THEOCRITUS: ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT AT
HOPE END, 1831-1832***

I thought once how Theocritus had sung . . .

Up until the period of time during which the Sonnets from the Portuguese were written, EBB found a safe refuge in the past; indeed, her memories were what sustained her existence, particularly in the years immediately preceding their composition.¹ EBB had extreme difficulty giving up her past life as a reclusive "blind poet" (Letters 1.41). Her indulgence in a self-defeating nostalgia was ultimately overturned as she learned to live in

and enjoy the present, an accomplishment documented by the Sonnets. At the same time, the Sonnets are the culmination of the process of her conscious acknowledgment of the fact that she had changed. This work mediated her conflict between past and present so that by the time she was able to write in the present tense "*How do I love thee?*" she had had enough practice to be able to give up her solitude. Before she could write the forthright assertion of love by which she is best remembered, however, she wrote Sonnet 1, a poem of ambivalence, disguise, and mistrust of self. By understanding the disturbing and puzzling ideas of Sonnet 1 as a struggle to claim a place in the literary tradition, one understands clearly the ultimate attainment of the entire sequence in respect to personal and poetic autonomy. By defining and understanding EBB's complex relationship with her mentor Hugh Stuart Boyd and the circumstances surrounding that relationship, an understanding may be gained of who and what Theocritus may represent in Sonnet 1.

We have a need to make sense of the past in order to make sense of the present. We do this, Gayle Green explains, by memory, which she defines as "our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with" (293). We create "enabling fictions" and sometimes even "'disabling' fictions," which are "dysfunctional versions of the past that lock us into repetition" of that past, and which "make a kind of sense" (294). If there is a "disjunction" between

our present reality and the fictions we create "to explain how we got here," we are in a state of "crisis" (294).² EBB confronts just such a crisis as she writes the Sonnets, the fiction she constructs to re-order the past so as to re-order, in turn, the present, and to have both make sense. The past she attempts to re-order includes not only her personal life, for which she finds no precedent in the present, but her literary life as well. Poems like "The Poet's Vow," "The Lay of the Brown Rosary," and "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," in which she imagined a poet as a male protagonist or in which love between a woman and a man was doomed to failure, could not be reconciled to the reality of the present in which she wrote the Sonnets.

In "The Lay of the Brown Rosary" (1840), for example, Onora was supposed to have died; her death, however, should have taken place the day she was betrothed. She makes a bargain with an evil spirit in order to continue living. Anticipating, or perhaps serving as a source for Dante G. Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel,"³ Onora couldn't bear to give up her betrothed, imagining how unhappy she would be while looking down from heaven to see him marry someone else. In a dream, it is revealed that she yearns to be "a young dead child" (163) in order to lie beside the feet of her dead father. After kissing her at the completion of their marriage, her new husband drops down dead.

Originally written for an annual edited by Mary Russell Mitford,⁴ "Brown Rosary" was composed around an illustration that probably re-

minded EBB of Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes";⁵ indeed, the rosary referred to in the first stanza of "St. Agnes" is transmuted into her own poem along with the medieval romance, the threatening nightmarish landscape, the lovers, and the dialectic between dream and reality. The final assertion of "St. Agnes" is the presupposition that "Brown Rosary" ultimately repudiates; "Love in the waking [. . .] is true / As St. Agnes in sleeping" (99-100) is Onora's tragic miscalculation.

In "St. Agnes," there is a smooth transition between dream and reality. Madeline, on first waking to find Porphyro in her room, experiences a "painful change" (300); she accommodates quickly, however, to the differences between her dream of Porphyro and the value of his actual presence: "If thou diest [. . .] I know not where to go" (315). In her revision of "St. Agnes," EBB uses the dream to deflect the issue of the lovers' union to a union that ultimately mediates the vision of love in the poem and in her life: the blissful love between father and innocent child. It is not an either/or proposition; Onora gives up her father and in so doing is forced to relinquish her lover as well. Had Onora been able to unite with the lover at the poem's end, the loss of her father would have been subsumed into the greater scheme of sexual love. Onora's dilemma is consistent with EBB's relationship with her mentor; she imagines sexual or "romantic" love as a prerequisite for a female/male relationship according to the conventions of

literature. Unwilling or unable to achieve such a relationship, she can imagine no fate but death for the heroine of this poem.

In the Sonnets, on the other hand, the speaker explicitly imagines sexual love a great deal like the love between parent and child; the speaker does not have to relinquish either one, finding a way for both to exist in the same relationship. In Sonnet 34, for example, the speaker asks the listener to call her by her "*pet-name*" so that she can "*hear / The sound [she] used to run at, when a child.*" In Sonnet 35, she refines this idea. As a child, she ~~obeyed~~ ^{heeded} the call because of obedience, but when the listener calls her name, she answers "*Not as to good, but as to all [her] good*"; "*No child's foot could run fast as this blood.*" The love of the parent and child in the Sonnets becomes a model for the love of wife and husband that transcends the former, resolving the conflict of "Brown Rosary" in which both kinds of love are defeated. The Sonnets take her past life and work into consideration and then in turn explain and re-order her life and her work to date and provide her with the means to write a future poem, Aurora Leigh.⁶

The history of her personal and professional past re-remembered and re-written in the Sonnets from the Portuguese with the most proficiency was the Diary by E.B.B. Presented with a strikingly similar set of personal and professional situations, EBB made of them a new literature and a new life.⁷

The Diary and Sonnets, prose and imaginative versions of a common argument, share many similar elements: they are both texts which parallel

epistolary texts--letters between EBB and Hugh Stuart Boyd survive; they can both be seen as undercutting or subverting their parallel texts, more particularly so the Diary, however; they both chronicle a "love affair" with a socially inappropriate love object; Edward Moulton-Barrett, EBB's father, was silent and absent, thus inflicting silence and absence on her; during the course of writing the two texts, meetings between EBB and the object of her love, "her" poet, were conducted outside the boundaries of normal social situations, acceptable only because of physical disability; dreams (in the Diary) and dream-like states (in the Sonnets) are important; both texts are documents of personal and professional crises.

In addition to these manifest relationships, there exist relationships that are more symbolic and imagistic linking the texts together in meaning, such as the idea of a footprint, for instance (Diary 156; Sonnet 21). Wolfgang Iser hypothesizes a meaning which is the "product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader's act of comprehension" (9) from which the reader cannot detach him or herself. As the reader and the text "thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies"; meaning, no longer definable, becomes rather "an effect to be experienced (9-10). In these terms, the experience of the reader of the private text of the Diary and the public text of the Sonnets is the same. To give one small but striking example, both texts are filled with what Iser has termed "blanks." These are a "suspended connectability in the text" (198);

they are "nothing in themselves" as empty spaces, yet as "nothing" they are a "vital propellant for initiating communication." Whenever an "abrupt juxtaposition of segments" occurs in a text, "there must automatically be a blank (195). The genre of each of the texts dictates they be punctuated regularly by blanks: the breaks between sonnets in the sonnet sequence and the temporal constraints of diary entries. The "nothing" of the blanks in both texts adds up to a "something," an unarticulated discourse, which the reader experiences in the same manner in each text.

From the very first page, the Diary by E.B.B. is an emotionally charged account of the important motifs in EBB's life by which she defined herself to herself, namely, her relationships with others; her world of literary pursuits, both reading and writing; and the stability of her environment. During the period of time in which she kept her diary, these motifs were all related by overlapping interests and were all focused on one object: Hugh Stuart Boyd, the blind classical scholar who lived a few miles from her home with whom she corresponded, whom she visited regularly, and with whom she was completely and unremittingly preoccupied. All her other relationships at the time, in fact, take their importance from their ability to modify or influence this one. Her chief goal was the exploration of the limits of her intellectual life with Boyd, a published author with whom she could discuss her own thoughts and ideas about the serious books she read in a way she could not with anyone else, and whose friendship and re-

spect emphasized her own status as a published author. She felt as well a sense of importance attached to her role in their relationship; she recorded reading thousands of lines to him in Greek, and of helping him to memorize many. The days she spent with him, she wrote, were her "*happy days*," her "*holidays*" (Diary 107). She looked upon Boyd as her teacher; her attachment to him was passionate.

The Elizabeth Barrett who lived at Hope End in 1831-32 was not the invalid of the courtship and the very last years of her life. While having been ill in adolescence, and still, in some measure, accorded invalid status by her family and friends, she tells in her diary of bounding down hills and walking for miles. These activities, like most other activities she describes in her diary, have one common end: spending time with Boyd. The Diary tells the story of a desperate passion focussed exclusively on him. He taught her, shared his scholarship with her and fed her hungry mind (Forster 58). He treated her with "great intelligence and insight" after her mother's death as no one else in her immediate circle was able to do (Forster 51); she was sentenced otherwise to a life of meaningless socializing that she resented and detested.⁸ Boyd, however, dominated her waking (and dreaming) thoughts in what amounted to an obsession; both her efforts to spend time with Boyd and to evade socializing were documented in the Diary. An attentive reading of it reveals an Elizabeth Barrett with a propensity for an over-

whelming passion, and a furious desperation born of the frustration of her desires.⁹

After attending a party, she described getting home "*tired, & unanimous in every part of me, body mind & heart, that what is called 'going out' should be called 'the greatest bore in the world'*" (Diary 144).¹⁰ She recalled an "*unsatisfactory day*" as one in which she was drawn in two different directions by her "*politeness*" and her "*studiousness*" (Diary 156). Upon learning she was to dine with her family at the home of a neighboring family, EBB wrote, "*I would cry; if crying would keep me at home.*" After she arrived home, she noted that her "*cough was the pleasantest part of the evening*" (Diary 174). She tells over and over again of having to endure the company of people who were constitutionally unlike her. "*I dont admire M^r. Davis as much as either M^{rs}. Cliffe or Eliza does. He does not suit me. He is talkative & forward & pedantic & self complacent. He does not suit me. Slept here,--& kept us up previously in an awful suspence, until nearly two-- Too bad!-- Intensely stupid evening*" (Diary 216).

The light in which she viewed socializing was directly governed by her chief goal: the exploration of the limits of her intellectual life. To do so, she felt, she needed the face-to-face company of Boyd.

To attain her objective, a visit with Boyd, she plotted and manipulated almost constantly. In the evenings, she often calculated which family member was to have the use of the carriage the next day; likewise, she fre-

quently weighed the value of visiting a particular neighbor's home or of attending a specific social function if, by doing so, she would be able to obtain a ride afterward to Boyd's house, Ruby Cottage. Once while driving out with a neighbor, Mrs. Martin, to pay a call on a friend, they rode past Ruby Cottage. Since EBB had been to see Boyd the day before, it did not occur to Mrs. Martin to offer to stop by. *"I never thought it possible that I c^d be made to do such a thing. But as we returned, I c^d refrain no longer, & begged to be allowed to go & see M^r. Boyd for two minutes. Allowed"* (Diary 45).

The stress she experienced at home about whether or not she would be able to spend time with Boyd was reproduced at Ruby Cottage. After being admitted into the house, she was easily frustrated at being kept waiting for any reason to see him. *"I was shown into the dining room, to wait while [a visitor, Miss Heard] read some letters to M^r. Boyd. Annoyed!"* (Diary 14). Even though she was safely within the house, usually as the result of intricate planning, pleading, or cajoling at home, her frustration, nevertheless, was increased. She agonized at having to wait to see him; *"I was kept down stairs at dawdling dinner, for more than an hour & a half--& sate with M^r. Boyd only half an hour afterwards"* (Diary 129).

Although Boyd was a "safe recipient of her affections" (Forster 57), blind and married as well, EBB experienced being in love with him in an unconscious or a preconscious way; her diary contains many expressions of

pain and passion, unmistakably those of one who loves. She describes her "spirits" as "broken, by strokes of pain from every side" (Diary 85). The description of her pain and her sense of loss and deprivation is highlighted quite graphically in a few places when she admonishes herself, "*Tais toi Jean Jacques,*" "taken to refer to the childhood incident recounted by Rousseau" (Diary 20; 20n. 1).¹¹ Her idea of herself as the child-Rousseau nobly suffering in silence with crushed fingers demonstrates the depth and seriousness of her anguish.

The voice of a desperate lover comes through most clearly in her outbursts of jealousy. Save Mrs. Boyd, EBB was resentful and suspicious of every female in the vicinity, even Boyd's own sister. "*I was annoyed today by M^r. Boyd having Miss Boyd in his room so much longer than usual. For annoyed, read pained. I think I am never annoyed simply" (Diary 178). She constantly attempted to measure Boyd's esteem for her through his esteem for other women, on the one hand very confident of him, and on the other, not at all. "*The society of that Miss Hurd [sic] is as much valued as mine--as much! at least, as much! and yet is it probable or possible that her friendship is like my friendship?" (Diary 18). Both she and her friend, Eliza Cliffe, sent notes to Boyd; "*Which will he read first?*" she wondered. "*There is no use in asking questions on this subject. It is unquestionable, that he prefers me to Eliza Cliffe*" (Diary 49). She frequently suffered in this manner about her position in relation to others. "*I am not the favorite***

at this present time. And yet whose regard has been professed & proved as mine?" (Diary 85).

Her jealousy was all-encompassing; the only thing that might have satisfied her was an exclusive relationship with Boyd.¹² In addition to the young women of whom she was overtly jealous, on one occasion she records resentment of Mr. Spowers, a classical scholar and friend of Boyd's. On learning of his impending visit, she wrote: "*M^r. Spowers, M^rs Boyd says, is coming on Tuesday--(provoking M^r. Spowers)" (52). She found a way, however, of keeping Spowers away from Boyd for a short time. "*As I was taking leave of [Boyd], he asked me to tell M^r. Spowers to take the newspaper & read it to him. Is it possible that I sh^d have forgotten this message until I got to South Lodge?" (59).**

By far, the most serious contender for Boyd's esteem and time was his friend Henrietta Mushet, the last in a succession of young women described in the Diary who came to stay at Ruby Cottage. The threat she posed was that she could read Greek and had acted as Boyd's amanuensis. Unlike Nelly Bordman who preceded her and who could read Greek without understanding it, Miss Mushet had a real knowledge of the language. EBB wrote: "*M^rs Boyd says that she has [']invited Miss H M.!!'--I annoyed. I wont go to Ruby Cottage as long as she is there--shant be wanted: & wont be wanted" (Diary 187). She found herself "indisposed" toward Miss Mushet; "*Not that I am 'jealous' as [Boyd's daughter] Annie suggested, of**

her knowledge of Greek," she explained to herself. "If her knowledge were double what it is, I sh^d not be jealous of that; & if it were not at all, I should feel equally indisposèe-- I shall not like going to R[uby] C[ottage] while she is there--I wonder how long she will stay" (Diary 193).

In an attempt to get her to visit him during Miss Mushet's tenure, Boyd goaded her by the cruel suggestion in a letter that the "two rival Queens" should meet (Diary 196).¹³ This unkindness "went to my heart; & when I was in the room by myself, I could not help shedding actual tears. He did not deserve one of them--and yet they were shed!" (Diary 196). Despite her "indisposition," she finally relented and paid Boyd a visit. Her account of her entrance into his room where she observed him reading with Miss Mushet, her usurper, is dramatic and painful:

Went into the house! Nobody in the dining room, or drawing room! Into M^r. Boyd's room! [EBB's sister] A[rabel] made me go! M^r. B and Miss M reading together. She is five feet ten & plain; with an agreeable voice,--but rather an independance & unshrinkingness of manners. Very unaffected tho', and sensible. She did not seem to think of leaving the room. M^r. B said that he was sorry to hear of my having been un-

well--& that he had not expected me today on account of the rain!-- M^{rs} Boyd came in,--& A & I went out with her.

(Diary 198)

Boyd's relationship with Miss Mushet was particularly threatening to EBB because she was not able to allege with certainty, as she was in the case of Eliza Cliffe and others, that he undeniably did value her friendship more than Miss Mushet's. Nothing made her more unhappy than the thought that someone else could mean more to him than she.

It would seem with such a great expenditure of emotional energy concentrated on getting to Ruby Cottage, fending off rival forces once there, and engaging in a constant emotional battle with herself regarding Boyd's feelings toward her, that EBB would be depleted of emotional resources. She was not. She was fighting on two fronts. She had a great deal of passion to spare and it was spent at home. Just as she was torn in two by her tendency to be polite, which felt just as strong to her as her tendency to be studious, she was pulled in the direction of home with a formidable compulsion that conflicted with the force pulling her to Ruby Cottage. Waiting in both directions were scenes of conflict.

Since her mother's death three years earlier, her mother's sister, Arabella Graham-Clarke ("Bummy"), had come to stay at Hope End to look after EBB and her ten younger siblings. EBB was constantly defending

Boyd and his family to Bummy. Although we never hear Bummy's explicit objections to Boyd and his family, Bummy's attitude toward them implied they were socially inferior, but they were not. What Bummy was expressing was a sense of moral superiority because she felt it was inappropriate for EBB to spend time alone with a man. Bummy was probably instinctively aware as well that EBB's feelings for Boyd were in excess of those one scholar usually had for another. EBB, with no self-consciousness or insight whatsoever, wrote: *"I was goose enough to tell Bummy about Miss Boyd's secession from M^r. Boyd's room, on my last visit to him: & she was severe enough to call his conduct 'ungentlemanly & disgusting.' I was lighted up into a passion of course!! But there was no serious breach of the peace. I cannot imagine the quia of Bummy's evident aversion to my dear friend, & everything & body connected with him"* (Diary 92).

What irritated EBB the most about Bummy's attitude toward Boyd was that as a rule, Bummy loved to socialize; she was *"always delighted with anything like a visit--except where the Boyds are either active or passive"* (Diary 181). Bummy and the rest of EBB's family seemed, in part, unable to distinguish the difference between her desire not to socialize with people who were not as "studious," reflective, or informed as she was, carrying on what she considered trivial conversations, and her desire to socialize with Boyd. For her, one was a nuisance, and the other was a kind of work and more than work; she probably experienced it as something like a

professional commitment, a calling, or a vocation, attested to by her discussions of poets and poetry in her poems. She felt as frustrated and as bereft of identity as any scholar engaged in writing and research would if her or his work could not advance in a continuous flow.¹⁴ Probably because EBB's happiness was so obviously contingent on being with Boyd, and because EBB describes many episodes of pleading, attempted coercion, and protracted bouts of crying, and also because she loved her, Bummy often concedes. *"Went to Malvern, tho' Bummy, when I proposed it last night, opposed it. In consequence of the opposition I withdrew my motion; after which, she herself brought it on again; & I went"* (Diary 83).¹⁵

EBB was quite attuned to Bummy's vulnerability and the role her mother's memory played in Bummy's devotion to the family. In one instance, Bummy was faced with a wrenching dilemma. Her sister Charlotte Butler was planning on coming to England from Ireland for a limited period of time. Since the Barrett family was under the stress of moving at any time, Bummy decided not to leave them to be with her sister who was ill. *"I feel, I feel, that not for our sakes, is dear Bummy so kind--but for the sake of one more beloved than the living can be!-- That feeling makes me prize the kindness more. [. . .] Surely we ought to try to do everything most likely to please her"* (Diary 169).¹⁶

During the time EBB kept her diary, important changes were occurring in her family life. Her father's business interests were failing, and it

was becoming increasingly clear that Hope End, the family estate in Herefordshire, would have to be sold. Her father, Edward Moulton-Barrett, was often away, attending to his business and bringing about the sale of the house, and was not forthcoming with information about the family's future. EBB frequently records her and the rest of her family's speculations concerning her father's activities and the sale of the estate.

Much has been written about the relationship between EBB and her father: he was an ogre--he was misunderstood; he was abusive--he was protective.¹⁷ What is important here, however, is how EBB perceived him and what effect that perception had on her life and her work. Margaret Forster describes their relationship at this time as "harmonious" (Forster 54). Moulton-Barrett was palpably absent during the course of the Diary; his absence, however, takes on a life of its own. The entire family was waiting expectantly, seemingly from minute to minute, for a letter from him that would let them know about their future. The rumor of a letter from Papa spread through the house in hushed tones.¹⁸ Had her aunt received a letter? What was the expression on her face after she read it? "Will the house be sold?" was the first most important question. When it seemed clear that the house would be sold, the next question was "When will the house be sold?"

EBB of course loved her father and very much wanted him to return to the family, but was in the peculiar situation of not wanting to hear from him: *"No letter from Papa today!-- whenever I hear 'there is no letter', I*

take breath. It is a respite" (Diary 57). The same kind of ambivalence surfaced in response to a gift of stockings her father had sent her. She writes: "*How I ought to love him!--ought!--how I do!--*" (Diary 27). This strange statement, unconsciously written and consciously amended, does not go on to explore the very real anger she might have had toward the giver of the gift and the spirit in which it was given. Her father had sent her the stockings because, when last home, he had reprimanded her and sent her from the room for having a hole in the stockings she was wearing. The gift was in effect a criticism of her, giving and taking at the same time. Her response to this was ambivalence which she did not know how to manage or even how to recognize. Even years later in Florence, when describing her feelings for her father, she constructed a pair of sentences in a letter that were strikingly similar to the one in her diary; she said that no one has loved him better than she. "Has loved him? Does still love him."¹⁹ Her concurrent longing for him and her desire to repel him are paradigmatic of other events occurring in her life and of her relationship with her father that lasted until 1846. Of primary significance is the object that dominated EBB's relationship with her father at this time--the letter which she dreaded receiving and dreaded equally not receiving--which was the key to her relationship with Boyd. Her happiness or her grief were contained in that communication.

EBB had lived at Hope End most of her life, and was duly attached to it. She expressed a great deal of sorrow and anguish at having to leave "*this fatally dear place*" (Diary 51), and described sensations of depersonalization at the thought of strangers who might walk on the bank of the water "*with other feelings than mine*" (Diary 12). Tied up with her grief over Hope End, however, was her grief over leaving Boyd; invariably, the latter grief soon eclipses the former. She united the prospect of his relocating near her with his regard for her. "*If Mr. Boyd were likely to follow us, the bearing would be a less hard task [. . .] if he cared for me as I care for him, he could speak & act only in one way*" (Diary 17). She was "*annoyed,*" "*discontented,*" and "*disappointed*" by Boyd. "*He talked so coolly about our leaving Hope End--seemed so little disturbed by it--& that little, more on my account than his own. I can bear anything from anybody better than coldness from some people*" (Diary 18).

On one occasion, Boyd had been told that she had been crying over leaving Hope End, and EBB reported that this left him "*much distressed.*" She explained in her diary that her tears "*did not fall then because I was about to leave Hope End; and that he should think so, brought them again into my eyes*" (Diary 15). It caused her great unhappiness that he appeared to have no idea that parting from him was the most painful event she could imagine. EBB wonders endlessly about asking Boyd "*if he will endeavour to go where we go, in the case of our going at all? It w^d be a comfort to me to*

know if he would make the endeavour" (Diary 13). His making "the endeavour" would have been a manifestation of her specialness which she desired so much: "In the case of his caring at all for me, must he not wish for his own sake to live near me, wherever I am?" (Diary 13). She wanted to move "anywhere where there can be a chance of my having at some time, dear M^r. Boyd's society" (Diary 19).

For periods of time, she lived with the constant stress of thinking that the next time she saw Boyd would be the last. Once while she was in his company listening to him recite verses, she began to cry. *"I could not help it. The tears rolled down my cheeks. They should not injure him--not even by blistering his book: so they were wiped away very quickly. Perhaps this was the last time of our being together!" (Diary 77).*

She was even made unhappy when not exactly slighted by his actions, but not singled out for particular favor. She had the idea that Boyd possessed a *"feeling of general benevolence inclusive of me" (Diary 77)*; such inherent good nature belittled her by not recognizing her as unique, but merely including her in its abundance. On one occasion she discussed with him the possibility of her staying at his house for a few days. He only *"seemed to wish" her to do so; "But the 'seeming' might proceed from a general spirit of benevolence--inclusive of me" (Diary 154).* Whatever pleasure she had had from the invitation--it was a thing she wanted most urgently to do--had been obliterated by his attitude which failed her ex-

pectations. He did not indicate that he wanted her, more than anyone else in the world, to be with him. Her unhappiness was a foregone conclusion; in terms of a love affair (which it really wasn't but it felt like one) it was as if she were demanding monogamy from a polygamist.

What then could have been Boyd's point of view on his friendship with Elizabeth Barrett? He initiated a correspondence with her in 1827, after having read *An Essay on Mind*, and, after a year of corresponding, she visited him, and a pattern of visits and letters continued until he left Malvern in 1832.²⁰ From his point of view, EBB represented an alleviation of the boredom and frustration he must have faced. She was someone who could read to him in Greek and could assist him in memorizing many lines of poetry. She was someone whose opinion he seemed to have valued, and who could discuss and debate many topics ranging from Greek literature to current affairs. It is difficult to tell what Boyd's emotional feelings were toward her, but she accused him many times in her diary of being cold, and of not feeling about her the way she felt about him. She wanted to express her feelings toward him, but this desire constituted one part of her problem; her feelings confused and upset her: "*My note to him may be too expressive of regard!! As his letters to me express actually none, I have often resolved to ice mine over also*" (*Diary* 164). She was probably correct when she said, "*The fact is--the greatest regard, far the greatest, is on my side*" (*Diary* 19).²¹

Whatever his feelings might have been, it was necessary for him to measure both his emotional and intellectual responses to her, considering his situation. Blindness can be nothing short of a tragedy to one whose entire existence was devoted to reading and writing. Because of his blindness, he was totally dependent on others, namely his wife, daughter, sister, and anyone happening to be staying at his house. As it was, his wife seems to have had no difficulty with the seemingly endless stream of visitors, including single women, who spent hours at a time alone with her husband in his room.²² If he wished to write a letter to anyone, or communicate in any manner with the rest of the world, it was through her good will. EBB recorded a number of notes and letters written by Boyd via his wife, and, on occasion, even delivered personally by her. If Boyd's response to EBB had been anything but friendly yet emotionally distant, his relationship with his wife might have been disrupted, severing the friendship, which was for him one of a number of accommodations he had made to becoming blind. Nevertheless, EBB was so absorbed with her own feelings that she was blind, so to speak, regarding Boyd's situation.

Even though Mrs. Boyd fostered and facilitated the scholars' relationship, EBB's feelings toward her are ambivalent. "*Certainly I don't care very much for Mrs. Boyd,*" (*Diary* 45) she wrote in response to what she perceived as a cooling off in Mrs. Boyd's regard for her. Although she called Mrs. Boyd "*empty minded, & without real sensibility*" as well as "*frivolous*

& flippant," she concluded that "she is his wife; & therefore I w^d not be inattentive to her on any account" (Diary 48).

From what she reports of Boyd, it seems clear that he always had EBB's best interests at heart. In considering her well-being by making sure that she was not in a compromising situation, however, it frequently seemed to her that he had slighted her. A matter which caused her a great deal of pain and elicited many complaints about Boyd's coldness and unwillingness to show her special favor was that he never wanted her to accompany him when he walked outside the house for his exercise. On one occasion, while she was spending the day with him, she learned that Boyd was going to walk outside with Mr. Spowers, also spending the day at Ruby Cottage and with whom she had socialized only to please Boyd: *"Before dinner, M^r. Boyd had walked out with him up & down the garden. M^r. Boyd said a good deal about leaving me--& begged me to believe that it was not his wish to do so,- -that he went only on account of his health. It was certainly right for him to go. But could he not have asked me to go with him? He evidently dislikes my walking with him. What is the reason? Shall I ask? No!" (Diary 58-59).*

At another time, Mrs. Boyd suggested to EBB that she go outside to accompany Boyd on his walk. She declined, explaining that she thought he didn't like it. In her diary, she deliberated on her refusal. *"Could I help saying, no?" she asks. "Has he not proved to me that he dislikes my walk-*

ing with him? If I had gone out, either he might have been forced to do what he disliked; or I should have been sent back to the drawing room to explain what I did not understand myself about this distaste which seems exclusively to regard me. Painful as it was to me to say 'I think M! Boyd does not like it.' But what c^d I do!? The tears are in my eyes as I am writing. Oh that people sh^d be so kind--& so unkind!" (Diary 84).

Walking with a person who is blind necessitates close bodily contact that would have thrust her into a social grey area. As it was, the reason EBB was permitted to spend so much time alone with Boyd at all was through a combination of her special status as a poet and a scholar and his disability, which afforded them uninterrupted, private time together. The outside of his house, however, was a public place, and walking unchaperoned and arm in arm with a married man who was not a relative, blind or not, was not what a young unmarried woman ought to have been seen doing. Additionally, Boyd had had a taste of the possessiveness and peculiarity of Edward Moulton-Barrett in the early part of her relationship with Boyd when they were still only correspondents.²³ He had a certain obligation to her father in any event, and was probably even more conscious of upholding social propriety since he would have been accountable to so strange an individual. Perhaps he felt that if her family heard that she was in such close physical proximity with him in a public place, they would no longer feel confident about their private actions.

Since Boyd was so very obviously her hero, moreover, he probably did not want to place himself in a situation that might lower himself in EBB's esteem. It is one thing to discuss literary, political, and other intellectual matters with the romantic figure of a blind poet whose worthy precedents include Homer and Milton, but it is quite another to have to lead that figure up and down the garden like a child. By not highlighting his disability, he was preserving his dignity and his status as an intellectual authority to his pupil.

Reading past her subjectivity, it also seems that Boyd was conscious of monopolizing her time, and was concerned that she socialize with others.²⁴ EBB often reported that Boyd had asked another person to solicit her opinion on some matter, without stopping to analyze that he had thus provided her with something he knew she could discuss to her advantage with someone with whom she was not very well acquainted. This tactic of Boyd's served to break the ice for his shy friend while at the same time, it elicited the attention and admiration of an acquaintance, which led, in one case, to a long-term friendship. One morning, Boyd "*desired*" her, she reports "*as soon as the paper came, to go & talk to Miss Boadman [sic]--to go down stairs into the breakfast room, & talk to her*" (*Diary* 76).²⁵

She took his very real concern for her, and, finding it lacking the emotional ardor of hers for him, transformed it into disregard. After being shown into his room on one occasion, "*He said that it was very kind in me*

to come so often, but that he hoped I had not inconvenienced myself. How I do hate those set phrases. I inconvenience myself by going there!" (Diary 30).

She misread his intentions many times. She had walked on one occasion with Mrs. Boyd to Ruby Cottage, tiring herself. She sat in an exhausted state on the sofa waiting to be summoned by Boyd: *"After five or ten minutes, I began meo more [according to my custom] to fidget, & wonder why M^r. Boyd did not send for me. After a quarter of an hour or half an hour, I could have cried--in thinking that I had exposed myself to all this fatigue willingly, & that he seemed to have no will or wish to fatigue himself by talking to me" (Diary 62).* Upon meeting with him, she discovered that he had been similarly waiting for her. It is very possible that he was concerned about her fatigue, not about his own, as she had concluded. Her misunderstanding of his actions lend an air of fiction to the Diary.

Since "all knowing and all telling are subject to the conventions of art" (Scholes and Kellogg 151), it is not surprising that the Diary contains these elements of an organized fiction, a novel. The feature of the Diary that most resembles a novel is the account of the relationships which exist among author, narrator, heroine, and reader. There are "two competing points of view" in a work in which the author is also the narrator (D. Gordon 117). "The writer is both narrator . . . and author . . . not exclusively one or the other." Indeed, in an autobiography, "character and self cannot

be separated from one another" (D. Gordon 116-117; 117). In a diary, not only are author and narrator inseparable, but the reader can not be detached from the author/narrator; that is, the author/narrator of an autobiography performs, in a sense, for an anticipated reader. The writer of a diary, on the other hand, is its only anticipated reader, and the performance is informed by self-reflexivity. Neither writer nor intended reader of a diary are autonomous.

This confluence of concurrent points of view, where autonomy of character, narrator, author, or reader is impossible, places EBB in a position similar to the position of the heroine of a romance novel. A narrative technique frequently employed by the writers of romance novels and described in a manual on how to write such novels is called the "third-person limited point of view." Use of this method enables the author to manipulate the reader through the narrator so that her point of view is focused solely on "one character's perceptions," thereby engaging the reader's sympathies for that single character alone (De Zavala 82). In spite of this, in the so-called "category" romance, since the narrator and heroine are separate, a kind of conspiracy may arise between the narrator and the reader, which works around the third-person limited point of view and excludes the heroine. What often happens is that, even though the narration goes on from a point of view that is completely the heroine's, the reader (despite the narrator's attempts to have her be otherwise), completely autonomous and in complicit-

ity with the narrator, begins to draw conclusions that the heroine is unable to imagine because of her lack of autonomy from the narrator.²⁶

In the "category" romance, Runaway, for example, the heroine, Rowan, escaping from an overwhelming dilemma in her life, seeks refuge with Nathan, with whom she subsequently falls in love. Rather than confess the humiliating details of her troubles, she tells him instead that she has amnesia. Nathan kisses her passionately, and she willingly responds; she is shocked and upset when he pushes her away. "What can I say? . . . That should never have happened. It was terribly wrong of me," is his explanation. Using the third person limited point of view, the narrator explains Rowan's reaction: "It should never have happened because to Nathan it meant nothing at all. It could have been anyone." He apologizes again; she responds again, directly to him: "Don't blame yourself. I understand," she tells him in a "shaken whisper." "You understand?" he asks with "uneven laughter" which has a "rough edge." "Hell and damnation, Rowan, I doubt if you do" (Walker 88). By this time, the reader, who has detached herself from the heroine, understands from the narrator's depiction of the hero that he is in love with her, but it is not until the very last pages of the novel that the heroine understands.

Since EBB is at once author, narrator, heroine, and reader of her own diary, there is no way she can detach herself from the narrator as the reader to form an alliance with the narrator and draw autonomous con-

clusions. The anger of the hero that may occur when a heroine is subjected to danger, even from himself, and that the romance heroine often construes as dislike and not concern, and that the reader clearly perceives as concern if not love, comes through the narrative in the Diary. As a reader who is neither author/narrator nor heroine, one is able to join the narrator and perceive that this anger is engendered by concern; EBB the reader, who was also both narrator and heroine, seems not to have been able to do so.

One morning, after EBB's arrival at Boyd's house, she and Boyd planned the events of the day: the time she would leave, whether or not she would dine there, and so on. She explained that she had ordered her carriage for seven, but she offered to leave earlier if leaving at seven was inconvenient. Boyd told her he did not like the idea of her travelling so late. She repeated her offer to leave earlier, feeling "*impatient & surprised*" as though what he had said had not registered with her (even though she had consciously re-composed the exchange for her diary). He repeated himself: "*I was thinking only of your being late on the road when I said what I did: you know very well whether I like your staying or not*" (Diary 30-31). Despite the elements of organized fiction present, her proposal, his answer, her rephrasing, and his second answer--and despite the fact that she was the author/narrator and heroine, consciously re-imagining the scene--she refused to draw the conclusion that he was concerned for her in a way in which a reader who was not the same as the narrator might have. She could not

learn from the narrator that he disliked seven o'clock because of the danger it posed for her and not the inconvenience to himself.

Boyd told her that he was both unaware of her faults and that by saying the disposition of a visiting friend, Nellie Bordman, resembled hers, he was paying Miss Bordman a great compliment. Like the heroine of a romance novel who continues to overlook what is obvious to the reader who is privileged by the narrator, she observed that, despite what he had said, she was "*convinced*" that he would feel more "*sorrow*" if Miss Bordman were to leave the neighborhood than if she herself were to leave "*forever*" (*Diary* 77-78). Neither as heroine nor as reader could she make the deduction that holding her up as a model to Miss Bordman showed that Boyd held her in high esteem; she was a naive reader who could not enter into a federation with the narrator because she was not autonomous in her role as heroine or reader.

The impression of having been in the company of a heroine of romance and that the *Diary* is indeed organized around the principles of fiction is heightened when EBB, confronted with an objection to romances "*because they lead the mind to expect more in life than can be met in life,*" argued that "*the expectation brings more happiness than any reality. [. . .] Romance of spirit is a far rarer fault than worldliness of spirit*" (*Diary* 220-221).²⁷

Written in the spirit of the "romance of spirit," the Diary is filled with the same kinds of misunderstandings that fill up romance novels. Boyd often waited for her to come to his room; she waited elsewhere in the house for him to send for her. She usually interpreted an event like this as a manifestation of his lack of interest, but the answer was usually more pragmatic (Diary 140-141, eg.), and more easily accessible to a reader of the diary who is not also the narrator. Since there are so many conscious elements of fiction in the Diary, and since EBB attested to having read "thousands" of romances, and since in one sense life for her was the written word, it is not inconceivable that her construction of herself as a heroine of romance, particularly in an account of a "love affair," was entirely a happy coincidence.

As much as EBB was relieved by the "*no letter from Papa*" she noted almost daily in places in her diary, she was disturbed and upset by the letter she did not receive from Boyd. EBB wrote many times in her diary of a pressing need to receive a letter from Boyd in his own hand. She was unreasonable in her expectation that Boyd, blind though he was, write her a letter, acknowledging to herself it was an unwarranted demand, but persisted, nevertheless, in wishing "*to receive from him an undictated letter*" (Diary 14). He was not a very good correspondent; "*I cant help being pained by M^r. Boyd not writing to me, & not sending even a message in M^rs Boyd's note*" (Diary 97). No gesture he made toward corresponding with

her, however, was enough to satisfy her. She records receiving a letter from Boyd, "*a very short one. [. . .] If he cared very much about pleasing me, he w^d write very much oftener*" (Diary 188). On one occasion he presented her with a gift--a twelve volume set of Homer, which she described as "*the most magnificent Greek book I ever looked upon*" (Diary 57). What made it "*better & more valuable*" was the inscription "*for the nearest and dearest*" in Greek on one of the first pages, written in his own hand (Diary 57). "*I shall often look on & think of that writing, when the heart that dictated it, kind & gentle as are its feelings, shall not be dwelling on the thought of my thoughts!*" (Diary 58). Similarly, she talked about the importance of his signature on an otherwise dictated letter. When she received the letter, she "*saw the signature first*" (Diary 101).

EBB's desire for a letter from Boyd may be explained in part by the fact that, because of seclusion and inexperience and her restricted "world of reading and writing," her life was itself a text which in turn became "the source of textual production" (David 82).²⁸ In her relationship with Boyd and elsewhere, she exhibited a heightened ability to enjoy interpersonal communication in the form of a text rather than in the more traditional manner of face-to-face encounter.²⁹ It is common, in fact, for women who are artists to experience their lives and their work as the same; for such an artist, the sense that "she is herself the text means that there is little distance between her life and her art" (Gubar 251). In short, living her life, which

chiefly consisted of reading and writing, for EBB was living a text and then re-duplicating her text/experience in yet another text. She wanted a commitment from Boyd that could only be provided by a text which constituted life as she experienced it--feeling, living, loving--unjustifiable though it seemed, even to her.

The neighbors she wrote about in her diary with whom she reports having to socialize, and with whom, consequently, she had to participate unwillingly in their version of life (Mrs. Martin, for example--they were like "*oil & water together*" [*Diary* 74]), later became lifelong correspondents, close friends, and confidantes after face-to-face encounters were no longer a possibility. Since EBB modelled her "poetic and intellectual career upon traditionally male lines" (David 143), which includes the emphasis on the authority of the written word, which for her was life as well, her friendships with women became more comfortable when she was able to have them conform to the male model of authority and consequently participate with her in her version of living life.³⁰

EBB as a character in her own fiction (which in turn was her life) carried out a function of women characters in novels which Margaret Homans identified as "bearing the word." Homans describes women who want to enter the symbolic order and "bear the word" as well as children (Homans ix). Through various strategies of "literalization," the relatively figurative (associated with the father) becomes the relatively literal

(associated with the mother) (Homans 26).³¹ EBB's work as Boyd's reader and amanuensis caused her to literalize or bear not only Boyd's words, but those of the male authors he studied. EBB's desire to establish a claim in the symbolic order in relation to her mentor was a frustrated one as it related to Boyd.

At this time of her life, Boyd was "her" poet, the male mentor she was predisposed to worship because of her belief that the poet was a male creative genius.³² She was hungry for his opinions just as a good student should have been, recalling his comments and writing down his remarks. Yet like a textbook case of Homans's women who converted the writing they did into versions of the female work of "selfless transmission" (Homans 31), EBB's professional aim, above all, was to facilitate Boyd's own work, which far exceeded the relationship of student and teacher: "*Would I not a thousand & a thousand times rather have his work attended to than mine?*" (Diary 218).

She desperately wanted Boyd to recognize and praise her professionally as well as personally. After reading her poem "Thoughts," he registered his dislike and requested her to write "*something cutting biting shining*" (Diary 32-33). As it turned out, she was not to write anything "cutting biting shining" while under his tutelage. Aside from some poems published in periodicals "all of them imitative and without distinction" (Taplin 30), the only other work she wrote for publication at this time was her translation of

Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound (published 1833).³³ Having written it in thirteen days, she later remembered it as a "frigid, rigid exercise" (quoted in Taplin 48).

Her fascination with Prometheus began as a result of having read it with Boyd; it was an "*exquisite creation*" that she "*quite love[ed]*" (Diary 91). She spoke of spending "*a happy day with [Boyd], hearing him repeat passages*" from it (Diary 160). After reading to Boyd most of the last part of it, she reminisced about her happiness during the time she had read the first scenes, a time earlier in their relationship when she felt Boyd had been more attentive to her (Diary 91). Signifying as it did an idyllic moment of complete happiness, it is not surprising that, in an attempt to re-remember that moment, she translated, or literalized in Homans's terms, the work and consequently the moment.

Shortly before she began the translation of Prometheus, Boyd was working on a translation of an oration of Gregory Nazienzen, a Father of the Church.³⁴ She set up her translation as a reaction to and in competition with his, and the two translations became in some fashion related. At this point in the Diary, there are many lacunae in the text due to the excisions of whole and parts of pages.³⁵ It is clear, however, that from January 23 to January 25, 1832, she read Gregory's "Oration 38" to Boyd. At its completion, she reported that he "*has determined on translating it,*" which she "*begged him to do*" (Diary 210). He then asked her to translate it herself so

that she would be able to supplement what his translation might lack. Her initial response: "*I w^d not do such a thing for ΠΑΣΑΝ ΤΗΝ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΟΥ* [all the inhabited world], & *all the seas & deserts thrown in!*" She did not want it to appear that she was in competition with him; even seeming to do so "*tho' suggested by himself, w^d diminish his regard for me*" (Diary 210).³⁶

On the following day, January 26, her insight became a little muddied: "*Began to read over again Gregory's oration,--& even to translate it*" (Diary 211). She restated her resolve not to mention it to Boyd for fear of competing with him. She did it, she said, to gain "*a clearer idea of parts,*" and to "*save him the trouble of thinking on some points*" (Diary 211). She finished the translation on the twenty-seventh, and decided to take two days more for "*sentencerounding & polishing,*" which promised, in her opinion, a version that was "*not [. . .] a very bad one.*" She speculated that the entire procedure would take her four days, while "*M^r Boyd meant to be a fortnight about it*" (Diary 211). Her translation was duly completed on the twenty-eighth of January.

On February 2, his translation was in progress. According to the pages that remain in the Diary, the next recorded visit to Malvern was on February 9. While working with her that day on Gregory, Boyd "*found that I c^d make my criticisms as I was reading,*" and, indeed, "*he adopted nearly every one of them.*" "*By the way,*" she concluded, "*it is a really beautiful translation*" (Diary 215).

On the same day the Diary notes his translation in progress, five days after she finished her own translation of Gregory, she told Boyd about another translation of her own, seemingly well under way at that point: Prometheus Bound, begun during the intervening time.³⁷ Since she could not very well discuss with Boyd the discrepancy in the differing periods of time taken for their respective translations of Gregory, she managed to tell him her secret another way, eliciting a reaction from him which might have compensated her: "*He seemed pleased, & surprised at my having done so much, & so unparaphrastically*" (Diary 212). When she asked him, however, if he would have "*some part of it*" read to him, he was unenthusiastic (Diary 212-213).

On the days that follow, EBB noted working incessantly on the Prometheus.³⁸ She managed to read some of the translation to Boyd and he made some "*verbal criticism*"; some was beautiful and some poor--not her fault, he said, but Aeschylus's; and the "*lyrical portions*" were "*rather poor,*" which could indeed describe the entire work.³⁹ "*But then,*" quoting his comment which merited particular emphasis, "*the short time you were in writing them!*" (Diary 222). Her translation of Prometheus Bound was clearly a response to her own translation of the Gregory oration. While acknowledging to herself on the one hand that Boyd would sense that her concurrent translation of the oration was competitive with his and intending not to undertake it for that reason, on the other, she was compelled to

translate it not only faster, but better, and to note that he incorporated all her changes with a "really beautiful" outcome. Her sense of competition was about her relationship to language, Boyd's relationship to language, and her relationship to Boyd which encompassed both.⁴⁰

As a creative artist, her principal work was performing acts of representation. While Boyd's pupil, her main creative work was an act of re-presentation, or a translation. Her preoccupation with Boyd blocked her true creative ability, causing her to choose to be a bearer of words, the translator or literalizer Homans describes, and not the creator of a primary text in the male tradition.⁴¹ Just as she was ambivalent, however, toward her father, and even toward God,⁴² she experienced a conflict caused by her deferral to Boyd's scholarship and her coincident resentment and competitiveness. The conflict manifested itself by first, her clandestine translation, which she could not bring to his attention, and second, by her translation of Prometheus Bound, which came to life along with the rush of success (at being more proficient than Boyd) of the Gregory translation, which she could bring to his attention.

EBB reported a letter from Boyd in which he advised her about publication of the Prometheus. She answered with a note in which she told him "*how little inclined I feel to publishing, & how I have wished that I had never done so.*" She rationalized in her diary that if she had never published, she never would have put herself into a situation that caused her

intense pain "*which has been & is oppressing me*" (Diary 217). In other words, if she had never set foot into the male literary establishment, she would never have known Boyd and the pain that seemed to outweigh her pleasure in their relationship.

What she longed for and what she never received from the relationship was the feeling that "*his regard & friendship are equal to mine.*" Acknowledging that this could never be, she would have been happy with "*a reciprocity*" even without "*an equality*" (Diary 118). At a future time, however, she had the opportunity to re-enact and re-direct the events which occurred in the course of the Diary, achieving a reciprocity and an equality that indeed changed her life.⁴³

Her relationship with Robert Browning corrected all that was painful and lacking in her relationship with Boyd. "*The world is the world. I cannot make it Heaven,*" she said on the last extant page of the Diary.⁴⁴ Her attempt failed because she really believed it could be done. Making use of the lost heaven on earth, the speaker of Sonnets from the Portuguese transforms her cynicism to love. In the Sonnets, she undergoes a process of re-memory and re-enactment and is ultimately able to love with the "*passion*" with which she experienced "*old griefs,*" and love "*with the love [she] seemed to lose / With [her] lost Saints*" (Sonnet 43).

The Diary resolved nothing--it ended in personal and professional despair. The Sonnets, the imaginative re-working of the personal and pro-

fessional conflicts introduced in the Diary, achieve a transcendence of time and memory.

Evidence of this transcendence begins during a re-enactment of the problems of the Diary in Sonnet 1. One of the obscure points that poem makes is that Theocritus is an important figure: a poet standing at the head of a self-defining work and who appears to be serving in the capacity of muse; as the poem progresses, he is dislodged from this role, and as the sequence unfolds, he becomes an anti-muse. Very specifically, Theocritus is a Greek poet, and in the context of the Diary, is inextricably enmeshed with Boyd. In her own words, "[t]he Greek language" itself "was a strong intellectual life" (The Greek Christian Poets 11). Very much like Boyd himself, the language they studied together was a universe unto itself, "strongly vital"; Greek was "so lovely a tune," it seemed to her that "nature could not part" with it (13).

Her own separation from the "strong intellectual life" of the Greek language came with reluctance as well. Browning's preface to the 1863 edition of Essays on the Greek Christian Poets and the English Poets, which contained two essays first published in the Athenaeum in 1842, explains how The Greek Christian Poets was "perhaps almost forgotten by [its] author" (10) because "new objects of interest came to delay" intended "corrections" or "additions" (9) which were never made. Nevertheless, she was unable to put down her interest in the "strong intellectual life" of the Greek language

despite her other compelling projects; "some way or other," Browning tells us, "reproduction [of the essay which first appeared in the Athenaeum] was desired" (10).

In Sonnet 1, EBB chose the Greek poet Theocritus to represent her attachment to Greek language and literature, and her nostalgia for the time she spent studying them in the sequestered, protected environments of Hope End and Malvern. Theocritus also represented her obsessive attachment to Boyd who directed her studies. The male, Greek poet who invented the genre of pastoral seems a fitting muse for a poet who seeks an imaginative way to summon up a single figure who could personify all these: her attachment to Greek, the time she spent studying it in a pastoral environment, and the male mentor and director of her Greek studies. Her separation from Boyd is as reluctant as her separation from the universe of Greek she describes in her essay and as emotionally unsettling as the separation and confusion surrounding Theocritus, dramatized in Sonnet 1. As she displaces Theocritus as her muse, she displaces Boyd and his influence from her literary life.

NOTES

¹ Margaret Forster, in describing EBB's life at an earlier period, tells how she was "obsessed" by memory (50), how the "present failed to interest her" (62), and how she consciously "reinforced her innate resistance to change" (51).

² Memory "revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies," and, according to its own requirements, "includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops" (Green 294).

³ Written 1847, published 1850. For an account of EBB's considerable influence on Rossetti, see Mermin, Origins, p. 114.

⁴ Findens' Tableaus: the Iris of Prose, Poetry, and Art for 1840.

⁵ "In the margins around the central picture of two women and a little boy in a chapel are faint representations of a 'brown rosarie,' an 'old convent ruin,' a nun, angels, an 'evil spirit,' the 'bridegroom' and 'Leonora' both on horseback, and 'the priest at the altar' with his 'grave young sacristans'" (Taplin 77).

⁶ Daniel Karlin points out that she re-made her identity in the letters to Browning and likewise wrote a new work, the Sonnets, which "articulated and reflected upon her new identity" (269). Angela Leighton observes the change that love worked on her imagination, evident in the figure of the betrothed as he appears before the Sonnets and in the Sonnets (95). Similarly, Helen M. Cooper notes the transformation the Sonnets brought about in EBB's work, which is evident in the change of gender of her poems' protagonists from male, before the Sonnets, to female, after the Sonnets (110).

⁷ Elizabeth Berridge is tempted to see the period of time chronicled in the Diary "as a preliminary skirmish, a rehearsal almost for the Browning courtship" (27).

⁸ H. M. Cooper explains how difficult it was for EBB to "sustain her commitment to the intellectual life" with the demands placed on her by socializing (16-17).

⁹ Forster assesses the troublesome character of her relationship with Boyd. EBB, she felt, while experiencing "her first love outside the natural love of parents and siblings" (55), was looking, however, "for her own warmth to be reciprocated. She wanted an emotional response, a spiritual recognition that was entirely lacking" (Forster 58). Leighton notes the "tempting" notion of finding in the Diary "an underplot of unrequited love for Mr. Boyd," and evidence of "some emotional disappointment connected with Mr. Boyd" (57). While these observations are undeniably true, they are, however, pale representations of the vast expenditure of emotional energy, and of the passion, desire, and desperation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which leap out from the pages of the Diary.

¹⁰ Forster detects "a good deal of impatience and arrogance in [EBB's] attitude" toward socializing (40). While she appreciates that EBB's fantasy well might have been Madame de Staël's Corrine, who "had broken out of the domestic, subservient role, and gloriously fulfilled herself" (67), Forster seems not to recognize that the smallest part of acting out that fantasy, and indeed the only way to share in that fantasy, aside from writing and becoming a published author, was to refuse (or at least balk at) participating in the domestic/social arrangements.

¹¹ Taken from "Quatrieme Promenade" (Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, suivies des Reveries du Promeneur Solitaire, 2 vols., Geneva, 1782). "As a result of a prank of his young cousin, the tips of two of Rousseau's fingers were trapped and crushed in the rollers of his uncle's mill. Rousseau gave a piercing cry, but his cousin, fearing to be punished, begged him to be silent; conquering his pain, Rousseau obeyed, and told his aunt and uncle that a large stone had fallen on his hand" (Diary 20n. 1).

¹² *"Perhaps it is wrong in me to feel as much annoyed as I really do. I am of an intolerably exclusive disposition; & yet I wish some other people were like me!" (Diary 162).*

¹³ The most likely explanation for Boyd's unkind behavior was his boredom; he probably saw this as a way of having a bit of Greek drama enacted around him.

¹⁴ This interruption in the flow of her work occurred in another way at various times in her life. Following an illness in her sixteenth year, she was advised by her doctors to avoid "excessive reading and writing," which were deemed "too exhausting for her debilitated constitution." Likewise, in 1838, she was forbidden to write by her attending physician (Forster 27; 93).

¹⁵ Bummy "muttered that Elizabeth took more looking after than anyone in the house" (Forster 52).

¹⁶ The phrase, "surely we ought," signals an ambivalence in her feelings about Bummy. EBB expresses ambivalence in similarly structured sentences about both her father and God.

¹⁷ Cora Kaplan ("Wicked Fathers") and Daniel Karlin, for example, express, respectively, these opposing points of view.

¹⁸ *"Bummy had a letter from Papa!! Arabel says it was a letter from him. She went into her own room afterwards, & without mentioning having received it, to one person! Something bad!!--" (Diary 69).*

¹⁹ Quoted in Forster (209).

²⁰ She was never to regain her ardor for him after her move from Hope End. Her family relocated to Sidmouth in 1832 and was followed there some months later by Boyd. "She had decided she had been a ab-

surdly melodramatic in thinking that life without her beloved friend would be insupportable. It had not proved so. Now, when she was once more seeing Boyd regularly again, she decided she had been a little deluded" (Forster 73).

²¹ Berridge explains that "Boyd was a cold fish" (31).

²² She was actually relieved at not having to work with Boyd. Mrs. Boyd "*w^d not read a page of his own translation*" to him. "*She has no taste for anything of that kind.*" "*If she has no taste,*" EBB goes on, "*she might have kindness*" (Diary 240).

²³ Forster explains that in the spring of 1828, EBB begged her father to "let her go and meet her poor, blind, scholar friend" with whom she had been corresponding. "Again and again she asked for reasons why it was not permissible. None were forthcoming, other than the original one she had repeated to Boyd. There was no argument: her father simply refused to discuss the matter" (43).

²⁴ She reports this conversation: Boyd: "*Miss Bordman says that it is a shame for me to pocket you in this manner.*" EBB: "*It w^d be a shame if you did'nt [sic]*" (Diary 99).

²⁵ The friendship of EBB and Nellie Bordman proved to be life-long (Diary 58n. 1). She wrote "The Weakest Thing," published in The Seraphim and Other Poems (1838) at Miss Bordman's request "*with a view to Miss Bordman's album*" (Diary 175).

²⁶ Paul de Man, while explaining the ideas in the criticism of Maurice Blanchot, makes the distinction between "work and reader" and "work and author" (66). "Reading . . . can grow into a genuine interpretation . . . whereas the relationship between author and work would be one of total estrangement, refusal, and forgetting." "The positive assertion" of a work "is not merely the result of a complicity between reader and author"

enabling "the one to ignore what the other is willing to forget." The very will to forget is what enables "the work to exist" (de Man 66). In these terms, EBB was unable to make an interpretation of her reading of her own work; yet had she been able to interpret as an autonomous reader, the "positive assertion" she made in the Diary, that is, that she was in love with Boyd without even being necessarily consciously aware of it, would have been unable to exist.

²⁷ Novel reading "was not primarily a matter of withdrawal from the world for Elizabeth so much as a means of communicating with it" (Forster, 204).

²⁸ Dierdre David points out that EBB employed "metaphors which link the life with a text" (102n. 4). "[Do I] like to write?" EBB asked Browning. "Of course, of course I do. I seem to live while I write--it is life, for me" (Letters 1.42).

²⁹ As she herself explains it to Boyd: "Tho' I can restrain myself and mask myself [. . .] in conversation, yet as soon as I begin to write,--out everything comes" (Elizabeth Barrett to Mr. Boyd 132).

³⁰ David, 143. See the first chapter of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's, The Madwoman in the Attic, pp. 3-44, which begins with the well-put and well-answered question, "Is a pen a metaphor for a penis?" H. M. Cooper points out that the nature of EBB's early publications "demonstrated how centrally she wished to locate herself in the English poetic tradition" (15).

³¹ The translation, in particular, is an example of what Margaret Homans calls "bearing the word," the relationship women have to literature vis-a-vis the words of another author, usually male. She describes "four recurrent literary situations or practices," which are instances of "bearing the word," among them, "the theme of women characters who perform translations from one language into another . . . or who act as amanuenses or as

readers for others, usually men," and "moments when the text itself performs any of these linguistic operations--translations, transmission, copying . . . with respect to the language of another (again usually male) author" (Homans 29-31). See the Preface (xi-xiv) and "Representation, Reproduction, and Women's Place in Language" (1-39).

³² According to Alba H. Warren, one of the "fundamental concepts" of post-romantic theory is the theory of genius: "Poetry is what the genius says or makes" (6). "Criticism . . . found common ground . . . in a basic definition of poetry as the expression of genius" (Warren 22). The poet/genius, however, is always male. EBB's "secret profession of faith" puts forth the superiority of men's intellect: "Let us say & do what we please & can . . . there is a natural inferiority of mind in women--of the intellect" (Letters 1.113). The superior male intellect makes a superior poet. "You are 'masculine' to the height," she tells Browning, "and I, as a woman, have studied some of your gestures of language & intonation wistfully, as a thing beyond me far!" (Letters 1.9). Dorothy Mermin observes that EBB "always refers to poets with the generic 'he,' even in Aurora Leigh" (Origins 242).

³³ Prometheus Bound. Translated from the Greek of Aeschylus. And Miscellaneous Poems, by the translator, author of "An Essay on Mind," with other poems (London: A.J. Valpy, M.A., Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1833).

³⁴ "Oration 38" in Sancti Patris Nostri Gregorii Nazianzeni Theologi, Opera, ed. Jacobus Billius, 2 vols. (Coloniae, 1690), I, 613-624.

³⁵ The excisions were made by EBB's brother George after her death. For the complete description and history of the manuscript, see Kelley and Hudson's notes on pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

³⁶ See Mermin (Origins), pp. 50-51, for an account of the inception of the translation. She notes that "Prometheus gave voice to her own suppressed rebelliousness" (51), a fact similarly noted by Alice Falk.

³⁷ The decision to begin it was most certainly noted in the Diary, but was included in the material in four excised pages.

³⁸ "*Writing--but not in my diary*" (Diary 215) is her complete entry for February 10; even terser is the entry for the thirteenth: "*Writing hard*" (Diary 215). These entries suggest that the Diary did take the place of imaginative work and was a cognate of her imaginative work, and therefore should be read as a component of the Sonnets, which completes it.

³⁹ "Those who adventure in the hazardous lists of poetic translation . . . take warning from the author before us" Athenaeum (8 June 1833):362, review of Prometheus Bound.

⁴⁰ A reference to this relationship is most probably contained in the following lines from "The Wine of Cyprus" (1844), which she wrote about her literary relationship with Boyd:

And we both praised [Gregory] Nazianzen
 For the fervid heart and speech:
 Only I eschewed his glancing
 At the lyre hung out of reach.
 (117-120)

⁴¹ Garner B. Taplin, whose biography of EBB was written without access to the Diary, points out that at this time, all EBB's "energies were chiefly directed to her reading," (30), which indeed would seem to be so, if one had no knowledge of the vast amount emotional energy consumed by the events she discussed in the Diary.

⁴² "Lord gracious and merciful," she prays. "Teach me to think of thee more often and with more love" (Diary 201); "Surely I sh^d trust Him" (Diary 204), uncannily reminiscent of her expressions of ambivalence toward her father.

⁴³ Mermin points this out, adding that the reciprocity between the "poet-lovers [starts] with the assumption that lovers must be peers . . . giving and taking equally" (Origins 135), and that the sonnet sequence ends "with a quiet formulation of the reciprocity that made the poem possible" (Origins 145).

⁴⁴ Diary 241. Eighteen pages were excised (Diary 241n. 1).

CHAPTER 2***THE SPEAKER AVOIDS MAKING A TRANSLATION OF WHAT HE
WROTE: WHY THEOCRITUS? SONNET 1 AND THE MALE LITER-
ARY TRADITION***

I mused it in his antique tongue

From the very beginning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's relationship with Robert Browning afforded her a place as an equal in the tradition; her relationship with Hugh Stuart Boyd, which cast her as a failed translator, could barely even afford her a woman's place. The enigmatic and extraor-

dinary logic of Sonnet 1 is the key to understanding the argument of the rest of the sequence.

The beginning of the Sonnets from the Portuguese is literally haunted by a ghost from the past. EBB had undergone the process of what Paul de Man has called "willing to forget" a previous failure, in her case, the Diary, and on the basis of this presupposition, went forward with the Sonnets in what she assumed was a new origin of the same materials.¹ The allusion to the Greek poet Theocritus in the very first line of the work is an indication of how the Sonnets reflect on their origin; Theocritus is a signpost for the Diary, for the Greek language and its literature, and for Boyd. At the beginning of the work, there is an anteriority of past over present and future. By the end of the work, the past and future are transcended by the present by Sonnet 43 ("*How do I love thee?--Let me count the ways!*"). By asserting a desire to live in the present, by changing her life to allow herself to become intimately involved with Browning (with whom she considered herself equal although she managed to maintain the patriarchal structure that positioned him as a mentor), EBB overcomes the past--not only poems such as "The Poet's Vow," but most particularly the Diary--and moves on to a relationship and to living life in the present.

Just as her relationship with Boyd began with an act that established her claim to a place in the tradition, the publication of her work, An Essay on Mind (1826), her relationship with Browning began as a result of the

publication of "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" (1844). In it, she made particular reference to Browning as a poet whose value and worth she linked to the value and worth of immortal poets she had placed in a poet-heaven in "A Vision of Poets."² In return, she received the teacher she had always wanted, one who could replace Boyd (with whom she still communicated, but in whom she had lost her passionate interest for various reasons), but one who could help her maintain her equilibrium as a major poet working within the tradition.³

By this time, she had exerted her will on her domestic arrangements enough so that socializing was strictly out of the question.⁴ In her diary she had written, "*My love of solitude is growing with my growth*" (155). Fully grown and fully assertive through seeming to be the least assertive of human beings, that is, an invalid, she was able to tell Browning after she had arranged her life exactly the way she wanted it: "Before this seclusion of my illness, I was secluded still" (Letters 1.41). Even in her self-determined solitude, and despite the fact that she had achieved poetic autonomy at the inception of their relationship, however, there still existed her need for a mentor, a dear friend, a male poet/genius whom she could worship and by whom she could be taught. Browning offered his services in a most irresistible way. "How delightful to talk about oneself," she told him in her seventh letter to him, looking forward to the pleasure their correspondence promised to afford her. "You and I seem to meet in a mild contrarious

harmony . . . as in the 'si . . . no . . . si . . . no' of an Italian duet" (Letters 1.42).⁵

Most ironically, the Sonnets end where the letters begin. In her first letter to Browning, she proposed an exchange of sympathy for gratitude, situating herself in the male literary tradition as one who expected a reciprocal relationship. The Sonnets map the process that made a reality of the proposal, ending in a re-assertion of the reciprocity EBB saw as the distinguishing feature of an ideal relationship. The very last sonnet rounds on the letters with a proposal for exchanging her sonnets for his flowers, in effect the figurative for the literal, placing herself alongside Browning in the tradition. Just as she had felt that the only way in which Boyd could not be worthy of her regard, that is, if his regard for her was not reciprocal to hers (Diary 167), she established a reciprocity with Browning in her first letter to him. In her third letter, she said, "You will find me an honest man on the whole" (Letters 1.13), positioning herself as his literary/epistolary equal, and then worked out the emotional details of the love affair, which did this time ensue, in the succeeding year and a half.

The circularity of sonnets and letters is a characteristic of women's fiction, which has "always been circular." A circular structure "represents a return that leads not back but forward . . . allowing repetition in order for there to be escape from repetition in order for there to be change" (Green 307). By the end of the sequence, repetition yields to the compensation and

equality of Sonnet 44, where the speaker effects the exchange of poems for flowers. The Sonnets work through the need for repetition, yet transform through repetition the need of a "'disabling' fiction," which "makes a kind of sense" to a new "enabling fiction," which revises and makes good use of the meaning of the past (Green 294). Repetition, and so memory itself, is the organizing principle of the Sonnets, forty-four fourteen-line poems. Significantly, Sonnet 1 begins with a discussion of memory.

The poet speaker begins Sonnet 1 in a dream-like reverie, joined by memory to the Greek poet Theocritus, who celebrated the tranquility and joy of his youth. The speaker then recollects her own youth; however, the spiritual bond between the two poets disintegrates through the mechanism that brings it about. The process of memory causes the speaker to realize that her own youth, the time she had spent with Boyd and which was brought to mind by her meditation on Theocritus, was neither "*dear*" nor "*wished for*," but rather "*sad*" and "*melancholy*." The musing, which had been calm, pensive, and slightly regretful in tone, suddenly becomes violent, embodying her feelings during the time she wrote her diary. The years of her youth had "*by turns . . . flung / A shadow across [her]*." The "*shadow*" prefigures a "*mystic Shape*" whom the speaker mistakes for "*Death*."

In the reverie state, before the speaker is led to the sorrow of her youth, she sees "*a gradual vision through [her] tears*." The speaker's memory has difficulty with vision because of tears; in reality, memory should be

able to function despite the presence of tears. The tears become transformed from literal tears to a metaphoric shield of the mind, which permits the slow revelation of a painful scene while the poet speaker, the figuratively blind poet overwhelmed by sudden vision, is transfixed, attempting to see the past in a way that will not be painful. According to Homans's description of the literalizing work literary women do compared to the figurative work of literary men, the speaker moves from the feminine plight to the male literary tradition, transforming her literal tears into metaphoric or figurative tears. At the same time, she paradoxically endows blind eyes with overwhelming vision, rejecting Theocritus and his heir, Boyd, consequently restoring her own sight and placing her own autonomous poetic power within her grasp and consequently under her own control.

As her vision clears and the speaker perceives her own years along with those of Theocritus, she turns a sharp corner to find the fleeting moment of love and safety gone. The "*mystic Shape*" had moved behind her, prohibiting eye contact, reenacting the metaphoric blindness that had just permitted her to enter the tradition, and, at the same time, placing her in a submissive position, duplicating her relationship to the Theocritus-poet. The "*Shape*" "*drew [her] backward by the hair,*" as she "*strove*" against confinement, illustrating her challenge to the notion of dominance-submission. A voice speaks to her "*in mastery,*" exerting its dominance over her, "*guess now who holds thee!*" She discovers that the violence she

mistook for death was really love, and it was no longer the shape conjured up by thoughts of Theocritus to whom she was submitting, but a new poet in a new poem, and an entirely different set of assumptions. Beginning the new relationship in a submissive stance feels familiar and correct; however, the possibility of her own autonomy eventually prevails. The rest of the sonnet sequence is devoted to working out the emotional feelings connected with equality with the new poet, a fact on which she had insisted herself at the inception of the relationship by urging Browning to regard her as "an honest man."

Tears and vision, introduced in Sonnet 1, are inter-related themes running forcefully through a countless number of EBB's poems. In the sonnet "Tears" (1844), for example, she advises the listener:

If, as some have done,
 Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place
 And touch but tombs,--look up! those tears will run
 Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
 And leave the vision clear for stars and sun.

The image here is a literal one. The act of looking up will clear the listener's eyes by permitting the tears to fall from the eyes and run down her or his face. In Sonnet 1, on the other hand, this same kind of image is de-

veloped metaphorically so that the tears obscure memory and not actual vision.

In her poetry about children, EBB's imagery of tears and vision approaches the metaphoric intensity of Sonnet 1, interestingly enough, perhaps, because she equates childishness and childlike qualities with the poet.⁶ In "The Cry of the Children" (1844), a poem devoted to the tears of children forced to work in factories, we learn that "Little Alice" who "died last year" (39) no longer cries. If the children who were still alive had been able to see her face, they "should not know her" (47) because "the smile has time for growing in her eyes" (48). Here is the metaphoric suggestion that death, the ultimate blindness, produces an eternal vision and prevents unhappiness.

Speaking directly to the experience of the speaker in Sonnet 1 who becomes blind and is subsequently enlightened, is the similar observation of the speaker who watches a sleeping child ("A Child Asleep" [1844]): "Folded eyes see brighter colours than the open ever do" (10). The idea that blindness causes enlightenment expressed in these two poems prefigures the process of development that enables Romney Leigh to become the kind of man acceptable to Aurora.

Tears and vision serve as important images in a number of sonnets, and in many cases carry on the figurative work of Sonnet 1. The figurative tears of Sonnet 1 remain in the speaker's eyes throughout much of the sonnet sequence; it is easier to count the sonnets that do not contain references

to tears and vision than to cite the ones that do.⁷ The argument of Sonnet 2,⁸ as strangely constructed and as obscure as the argument of Sonnet 1, is bound to the notions of vision and blindness introduced in that sonnet. The speaker begins by saying:

*But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said!*

"*But*" implies that what one has been told is true, and that what one is about to be told is also true, yet these two truths contradict each other. Since the first term is missing from Sonnet 2, it must be taken from the only preceding information in the sequence, which is contained in Sonnet 1. What the listener, who in Sonnet 1 speaks to the poet/speaker, said is that it is "*Love*" who holds the speaker now. After hearing the listener (here again in Sonnet 2 the speaker) say "*this word*" ("*Love*"), God "*replied.*" God's response was to lay

the curse
*So darkly on my eyelids as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee.*

In relation to this statement, follows a conditional clause:

*[T]hat if I had died,
 The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
 Less absolute exclusion*

The speaker says that "*Death*," the nemesis of Sonnet 1, has been replaced by a stronger blinding force. In the hierarchical order which creates God as a father and a male literary mentor as a father-figure, God is here a stronger version of the force called into being by thoughts of the Theocritus-poet of Sonnet 1. A "*Nay*" from God "*is worse [. . .] than from all others*," the speaker explains, and she goes on to recount how "*men*," "*seas*," "*tempests*," and "*mountain-bars*" could not part the lovers; their "*hands would touch*" in any case. Just as the poet speaker could not see the listener in Sonnet 1, she cannot see the listener in Sonnet 2. For all her blindness, however, she is still able to perceive the truth of her situation and to carry forward the truth about blindness she discovered in Sonnet 1: metaphoric blindness causes metaphoric enlightenment. She concludes the poem, making reference to the cause of her blindness and her steadfast belief in the "*word*" of the listener, spoken in Sonnet 1:

*And heaven being rolled between us, at the end,
We should but vow the faster, for the stars.*

In Sonnet 3,⁹ the speaker uses vision to illustrate how different she and the listener are. She first introduces the idea "unlike" in the first two lines, where she repeats the word three times:

*Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!--
Unlike our uses and our destinies!--*

Corresponding to these three instances of dissimilarity are three examples of the differences between the speaker and the listener that use tears and vision to make their points. Each succeeding image is more intimate and more specific, and the conclusion of the poem leads back to the ideas introduced in Sonnet 1.

The first is an image that has always struck me as comic; sometimes I believe EBB wrote this seriously, but more often it reminds me of the way it is possible for her sense of humor to be directed at herself. The speaker imagines the poets' guardian angels bumping into one another as the poets meet:

*Our ministering two angels look surprise
 On one another, as they strike athwart
 Their wings in passing.*

The angels, surprised to be meeting under these circumstances, express that surprise in the look they exchange. This look parallels the astonishment of the speaker in Sonnet 1 when she is asked, " *'Guess now who holds thee?'*" It is the new speaker in the new poem who tests the effect of the new listener on her environment, which, for EBB, did include figurative angels. This image, however, occurs outside the relationship between speaker and listener.

The second image is one in which the speaker calls for a comparison between what can be seen in her own eyes and the eyes of others:

*Thou, bethink thee, art
 A guest for queens to social pageantries,
 With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
 Than tears, even, can make mine, to ply thy part
 Of chief musician!*

The speaker, whose eyes are bright with the tears of Sonnet 1, falls short in her own estimation in the comparison she invites the listener to make.

"Gage," in the chivalric context in which it is used here, indicates a pledge or a formal promise, in this case to "*ply thy part / Of chief musician,*" or poet laureate, a role in which she often casts the listener. Despite the tears in her eyes, which, according to the logic of Sonnet 1, cause an enlightenment, she consequently discriminates between eyes brightened by tears and eyes brightened without tears and fails in her own comparison. She is able, furthermore, through this enlightenment, to visualize the listener, her mentor-become-lover, as the poet laureate, one of the important pieces of work the Sonnets, as literary autobiography, accomplishes.

In the last encounter involving sight in Sonnet 3, the speaker asks:

What hast thou to do,

With looking from the lattice-lights at me

A poor, tired, wandering singer? . . . singing through

The dark, and leaning up a cypress-tree?

The focus shifts to the sight of the listener. Conceived as the poet laureate who spends his time with "*queens*" at "*social pageantries,*" the speaker has him look at her, his antithesis, the "*poor, tired, wandering singer,*" framed by the literary symbol of mourning, the cypress tree. The speaker's position in relation to the listener's position has always been problematic for critics. Arguing against a biographical interpretation of this sonnet (and others),

Shaakeh Agajanian explains this inequity between speaker and listener as evidence of what he calls an "'unworthiness' sonnet" (73), correctly tracing this disparity back to the 1844 volume. Agajanian is correct when he says that this is not intended to be biographical; indeed, it is not strictly biographical in the sense in which critics have interpreted it. It is biographical, however, in the sense that it is an essential part of EBB's literary autobiography; she had replaced "her" poet/mentor, Boyd, with her new poet/mentor, Browning, both of whom served to lend her poetic legitimacy. She always imagined a poet as a heroic, god-like figure, and herself as a privileged woman to be mentored by one. These details are not strictly personal, but are related to her poetic career and are governed by the details in Sonnet 1, a poem that describes the shift in poetic figures prevailing over her professional life.

The powerful force of Sonnets 1 and 2, "Death," returns in Sonnet 3:

*The chrism is on thine head,--on mine, the dew,--
And Death must dig the level where these agree!*

It is only in death that the anointed king and the body mouldering in the grave can achieve equality. If these two states of existence are viewed as literary and not biographical ones, what becomes clear is that the listener is the literary figure of the poet laureate while in relation to him, the speaker,

the literary figure of a spent and exhausted wandering troubadour, is a much inferior poet, and they will never be equal in this life. The two figures do become equal, however, through the imaginative medium of poetry, which permits speculation of this sort in a way other autobiographical material, a diary for instance, would not. In Sonnet 1, death is at first perceived to be a powerful force with the potential for great destruction; however, it miraculously turns into its opposite--love. Similarly, in Sonnet 2, the speaker is able to "see" the listener, despite a blindness more powerful than death. Sonnet 3 describes a death that serves as an equalizer between two unlike literary figures, reinforced by images in other sonnets of tears, vision, and death, as in Sonnet 6, for example, in which the speaker tells the listener:

And when I see

God for myself, He hears that name of thine,

And sees within my eyes, the tears of two.

The speaker links herself with the listener, the poet laureate, through the same tears that provided her with the means to transform the literal to the metaphoric in Sonnet 1, achieving equality with the new poet.¹⁰

We discover, in Sonnet 29, that, upon learning that the listener would visit her in the spring, the speaker "*wept for it,*" presumably for joy.

The speaker, in Sonnet 14, tells the listener not to love her for anything "[e]xcept for love's sake only." She tells him not to love her for "[t]hine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry," or otherwise,

*one might well forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, & lose thy love thereby.*

This picture of the consoling, sympathetic lover, moved by the tears of the speaker to respond favorably to her, is presented again in Sonnet 42 when, upon hearing the sob of the speaker, the listener puts down his own work "[t]o hearken what I said between my tears." The tears of the speaker, which in Sonnet 1 thrust the speaker into the tradition, lose their potential to represent destruction, and become in Sonnet 43 one of the things mentioned when the speaker counts the ways in which she loves the listener ("*I love thee with the breath, / Smiles, tears, of all my life!*"), linking her poetic to her personal autonomy.

In the period of time immediately preceding the initiation of EBB's correspondence with Browning, her reliance on living life (and writing her text) by means of measuring it against her past life (and past text) was an even more firmly entrenched aspect of her personality. Since she had gotten the issue of socializing permanently out of the way, she was free to devote

all her energy to her intellectual life--reading, writing, and corresponding. She had well organized the pattern of her future life on Wimpole Street before she ever left Hope End. "*To whatever place we go,*" she successfully promised herself in her diary, "*I will seclude myself there, & try to know & like nobody,--but live with my books & writings & dear family*" (Diary 103).

The importance she placed on correspondence, which enabled her to live her version of life as an heir to the tradition during the course of her diary, was no less so in 1845-46. In this respect (indeed, as in many others) Browning was Boyd perfected. Since Boyd had been such a "safe recipient of her affections" (Forster 56), in the beginning, it might have seemed to EBB that Browning was safe as well.¹¹ EBB, unsuccessful in establishing a correspondence with Boyd, was thus blocked in her attempt to be determined as his equal in the tradition. In a letter to him, she explained in her diary, she said she told him not to answer it, "*unless he felt inclined to do so,*" and then immediately asked herself, "*will he feel inclined?*" (Diary 190). Browning, very clearly from the inception of their relationship, felt inclined.

Alongside her desire for a reciprocal relationship in the literary tradition, EBB wanted a love affair, in which she perceived a paradigm of a female-male literary relationship. The legitimating relationship and the ensuing love affair were the basis of her passionate and seemingly irrational attachment to Boyd. In an early letter to Browning, commenting on the plea-

sure she was experiencing in having someone like him with whom to correspond, she addressed him with Eve's words to the serpent (Genesis 3:13): "As you 'tempted me and I did eat,' I entreat your longsuffering of my sin." The "sin" was the length of the letter she was in the process of writing him. Just as he had seduced her, she herself became the seductress: "& Ah--if you would but sin back so in turn!--" (Letters 1.42).¹²

The heroine of her diary thus becomes the heroine of her letters to Browning.¹³ In a book on the epistolary novel, Ruth Perry explains how home-bound women were quite apt to carry on relationships by text--a letter was a natural "repository for emotions" (70). She suggests that the "modest woman" used letters as "the place to have skirmishes with lovers and suitors" (69-70). Perry describes collections of letters from the eighteenth century, when the epistolary novel was at its height, chronicling real relationships, which, she suggests, found their models in fiction, citing examples of epistolary courtships that led to failed marriages. The danger of relationships carried on by letter "was that the distance made it easier to imitate the conventions of the fictions which furnished the ideal versions of such love affairs, and to ignore the obvious disparities between novelistic romances and the experiences of life" (Perry 139). One must take into consideration, however, that for EBB, the letter, the text, substituted for the actual experiences of life; literary forms and conventions took the place of social forms and conventions.

Daniel Karlin develops the theme that to both poets the letters were an extension of their identities, and points out that the correspondence between EBB and Browning resembled not a history but a fiction (192-203; 3).¹⁴ The fact that EBB's courtship was carried on primarily by letter probably made it intimate and meaningful in a way that a face-to-face relationship alone could not, just as her face-to-face association with Boyd, while very important, did not completely satisfy all her requirements for a relationship. In fact, her epistolary relationship with Browning was so important (we have a hint of how important it could have been from her desperate desire to have one with Boyd), she told him at one point that she could not "make a unity" of him in person as she did in his letters, and that "the writer of the letters seemed nearer to me [. . .] than did the personal visitor who confounded me" (Letters 1.359-360; 1.372).

EBB, like the heroine of an epistolary novel, was "literate, isolated," and "unhappy," and, like her, "poured out [her] heart on paper," valuing her "individual happiness above social approval" (Perry 166). She was "not blind to the risky resemblance between . . . the highly pitched tone of many of her letters and the life . . . of a typical Romance heroine," as she asks Browning not to mistake her for a "'born heroine of Richardson'" (Hartman 5). Likewise, EBB as poet and reader of novels was the "signifying self" whose life and novels are "intrinsically knotted together," and who under-

stands other women, men, and herself "as characters in novels" (Brownstein xvi; xvi-xvii; xviii).

Just as EBB might have been aware that her position somewhat paralleled that of a heroine of a novel, Browning stepped, unconsciously to be certain, into the role of the hero of the romance novel who uses "sexuality to punish and humiliate women" (Modleski 42).¹⁵ Robert issued a warning to Elizabeth about her previous letter: "Look to be kissed to-morrow till it hurts you,--punished you ought to be for such a letter!" (Letters 2.899). In the romance novel, sexual "punishment" of this sort often "miraculously turns into reward" (Modleski 42). It is common to encounter a heroine of a romance novel, whose roots are in the nineteenth-century gothic novel, who mistakes the hero's intention to kiss her for the intention to harm her. This raises the question of "ideological confusion about male sexuality and male violence"--are they different or are they the same? (Modleski 42-43).

This very controversy surfaces in Sonnet 1, where among all the other complicating issues the speaker sorts out, she has trouble at first identifying the force which pulls her "*backward by the hair*," holding her "*in mastery*" while she "*strove*." This violence with overtones of sexuality could have come straight from the pages of a romance novel, particularly as her initial impression of the force is "*Death*," but learns, like the heroine punished by sex, it is "*Love*." The love she apprehends at the end of Sonnet 1, however, is a new kind of love; it is not predicated on her role of failed,

submissive translator, which she rejects in rejecting the idea of Theocritus, but rather on the fact that she can perform acts of representation autonomously in relation to her mentor after realizing that it is "Love" who "holds" her now. The rest of the sonnet sequence is devoted to contending with "Love," the new poet in her life who seemed so much like the old one, but was not. The image of being pulled backward by the hair reinforces the idea that the new poet is Browning, suggested by his second letter to EBB in which he says, "I who, whenever now and then pulled, by the head and hair, into letter writing [. . .] come down 'flop' upon the sweet haven of page one" (Letters 1.7), which writes over the classical image it also recalls, just as she writes over the old poet on her own "page one," who was recalled by the classical image, with the new one.¹⁶

In Sonnet 43, the speaker experiences the resolution of the problems posed in Sonnet 1 in the triumph of finding her true voice through her reciprocal relationship with the poet Browning.¹⁷ It is an exultation of the self, a cry of conquest of life over death, of present over past, of autonomy over dependence, and the discovery of a thirst for life despite the compelling attraction of solitude (expressed as "*Death*" in Sonnet 1). It and Sonnet 44, in which the speaker achieves equality with the new poet by replacing the dominance-submission of Sonnet 1 with reciprocity, are the only poems in the Sonnets in which love for the poet/character, the listener, is expressed without hesitation or ambivalence. So forceful is her triumph, so clear is

her voice in Sonnet 43, that as time has passed, the other forty-two sonnets, which are process and not product, have been forgotten by the popular imagination, as has been Sonnet 44, leaving in their place Sonnet 43 to stand as a symbol of the entire work, and indeed, of the entire body of work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

As a male heir to the literary tradition, Browning was able to (re)construct EBB's consciousness through her written words. At the very beginning of their correspondence, he sketched a very intimate, almost erotic, portrait of himself in his room, reading her poems. "Your books lie on my table here, at arm's length from me, in this old room where I sit all day: and when my head aches or wanders or strikes work, as it now or then will, I take my chance for either green covered volume, as if it were so much fresh trefoil to feel in one's hands this winter-time,--and round I turn, and, putting a decisive elbow on three or four half-done-with 'Bells' of mine, read, read, read" (Letters 1.10-11). This *mise-en-scène* appealed very much to EBB's sense of entering the tradition herself; her poems were able to constitute her presence in her absence for another, and that other, a poet/genius who had a "decisive elbow" on his own work. She had already established to Browning that she carried on social intercourse through letters (Letters 1.12-13); how much more significant was the thought of her poems taking her place, duplicating her actual presence, in a way in which they had not done in any considerable measure with Boyd. "I hear of the 'old room'

& the "bells" lying about,' with an interest. [. . .] And when you tell me besides, . . . of my poems being there; & of your caring for them so much [. . .] the pleasure rounds itself into a charm, & prevents its own expression" (Letters 1.14). Her response to the thought of her poems in his room, that is, that the "pleasure" of it prevented "its own expression," was very much like what she later described to Browning as her predicament when writing. She explained, for example, how extremely difficult it was for her to "get into expression"; "My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth," she said, as she was writing her 1838 volume (Letters 1.125).¹⁸ This material presented itself to her like poetic material, and indeed, did make its way into the Sonnets.

The duration of the process that resulted in autonomy paralleled the duration of the courtship; when this concomitant structure of autonomy/courtship with interdependent parts, which corresponded, parodied, and finally incorporated one another had run its course, EBB was ready to write a new story. Critical evaluations of which poet's story their courtship played out, because after all, they were "both makers of texts," come down on the side of Browning (Mermin, Origins 118).¹⁹ In view of their past work, Browning's imagination did cast her in the role of Andromeda to his Perseus. Because she was in the process of imagining a change in her own story, of forging a new autonomous personal and poetic identity, she was able to accommodate or at least overlook the first part of Browning's An-

dromeda story.²⁰ Inasmuch as the letters between the poets reveal them as two "makers of texts" organizing their lives like a fiction and placing themselves as characters in that fiction, EBB was in the process of becoming a new character in a new fiction, which included the second part of Browning's story--the lasting relationship between Andromeda and Perseus, their children, and their faithfulness. Andromeda and Perseus, despite their woes, go on to become Aurora and Romney.²¹

In her diary, EBB stated that she would never marry (Diary 111 and 180, eg.). Both her poetic autonomy and her ability to conceive of herself as a woman who could sustain a relationship such as marriage emerge from the same process: the "self-determined and authoritative structure" of the letters (Karlin 3), in which she, the heroine who was not the reader (of her own letters), participated in the process. As a reader of her own fiction, the letters between the two poets, she was both distanced as a reader and drawn into that fiction as a heroine in a way she was not during the course of the Diary, where there is no distance at all between the author/narrator and reader. At the time she was undergoing the process of autonomy, she had in her possession only half the story, Browning's letters, in which the act of representing the heroine was carried out by an author/narrator not the heroine, nor was she, the reader, connected to the author/narrator or heroine in any way; she finally became an autonomous reader of her own fiction.²² As the text of a fiction, the letters in her possession constructed a view of her

that was her own idealized version of herself, professionally and personally, and it was a view, furthermore, which she was able to incorporate into her self-image. As an autonomous reader she was beginning to see herself as the heroine who could.

Just as she perceived herself as Browning's equal and not his dependent in her first letter to him, she was able to re-order her imagination and make good use of her poetic materials. This is illustrated most dramatically in her revision of Prometheus Bound.

In her fifth letter to Browning, EBB told him about her 1833 translation of Prometheus; she "undid it," she said, "into English" (Letters 1.30). She described the haste with which she worked (which we learned from her diary was engendered by her competition with Boyd),²³ feeling it might have accounted for the defects of the translation, but those defects, she explained, had more to do with something other than haste at which she merely hinted: "If my mind had been properly awakened at the time," it would have been a better work (Letters 1.30). She was "resolved to wash away the transgression" (1.30).²⁴

In conjunction with the new version, she considered writing "a monodram[a] [. . .] a monologue of Aeschylus as he sate a blind exile on the flats of Sicily and recounted the past to his own soul" (Letters 1.30).²⁵ She immediately began to describe another poem she had begun, "as completely modern as 'Geraldine's Courtship,' running into the midst of our con-

ventions, & rushing into drawing-rooms & the like 'where angels fear to tread'" (Letters 1.30), which was most certainly Aurora Leigh. She did not know exactly what it was to be about, but was "waiting for a story" (Letters 1.30).

EBB spoke about her 1833 translation as an undoing--an anti-translation or an erasure; it was unable to serve its purpose of providing space for her in the tradition in relation to a male poet, albeit in the feminine role. The second translation of Prometheus she proposed was not a translation in the traditional sense, taking, as it did, as one of its sources her own work which had an autonomous life of its own. By re-translating her own translation, she was translating herself, bearing her own word.

Appended to and associated with her proposed new translation was her thought that she would speak for Aeschylus in a monodrama. The words she intended to put into Aeschylus's mouth were her own; he, in effect, would have been in the position of bearing her words, had she completed the work. Not only did she erase her translation of Prometheus, she erased the influence of Boyd on her work; she was no longer willing to tolerate a mentor with whom she did not have reciprocity. Composing a scene where she was able to manipulate the speech of the forsaken Aeschylus, whom she pictured, it should be noted, as blind, she effectively "undid" her previous translation, not back into Greek, as she "undid" it into English, but back into English. She was attempting to propel herself into the tradition on

her own terms with her own re-born(e) words, in her own version of the feminine role.²⁶

Her jump to the topic of her other new work, Aurora Leigh, is significant. She was without a "story" at the time, but connected her acquisition of a story to her re-translation; her relationship with Browning, to whom the letter was written, associated as it was with poetic and personal autonomy, ultimately did bring her the story she was then in the process of re-imagining. After she resolved her stance on reciprocity with her mentor, a major topic of the Sonnets, she got her new story: the second part of the tale of Andromeda and Perseus, which is a story of domesticity. Sonnet 1 began with two poets and ended with two poets: the sonnet speaker replaced the male poet Theocritus with the poet/listener of the Sonnets, personified in that poem by "*Love*." This is a paradigm for the entire work and for the rest of her life; her mind, "properly awakened," was able to re-imagine the model of dominance-submission that governed the relationship between the two sets of two poets in the first sonnet, and gained the power, by the end of the sequence, to replace it, just as she replaced the first poet, with reciprocity and equality. Just as the speaker in Sonnet 1 is able to transform her life and her work by transferring the focus of her creativity from the Theocritus-poet to "*Love*," EBB was consequently able to imagine the feminine poet/protagonist of her new story, Aurora Leigh, with complete poetic and personal autonomy, who negotiated a reciprocal relationship with Romney

Leigh, only after experiencing herself the process of personal and poetic autonomy and reciprocity, which she wrote about in Sonnets from the Portuguese.

In Sonnet 1, the speaker crosses the boundary from one language to another, English to Greek, by musing the work of Theocritus "*in his antique tongue*." She does not, however, make the opposite journey by making a translation. The intention to keep the two languages separate originates in EBB's Diary (210); Sonnet 1 also discusses the professional consequences EBB experienced from going against her original impulse not to make a translation into Greek, implied by the speaker's mention of the years of her life which had "*flung / A shadow*" across her. The facts of Sonnet 1, that is, that the speaker avoids making a translation and that making one has had an unsatisfactory outcome, resonate with the facts EBB relates about her relationship with Boyd in the Diary; the resolution begins, however, in the very statement of the problem.

NOTES

¹ De Man explains that a poet can only begin a new work because of a willingness to forget that the new work is indeed "the repetition of a previous failure" (66). We may construe a new work as "the assertion of a new origin" when it is, in fact, "the reassertion of a failure to originate" (66). The impulse to write the Sonnets from the Portuguese was just such a "failure to originate"; however, this crisis-induced self dramatization had an entirely different outcome than the crisis-induced self-dramatization, the Diary, in whose failure it originated.

² EBB feminizes Browning in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" as she had the poets in "The Vision of Poets"; the significance of this act is explored in Chapter 4.

³ Following her move from Hope End, EBB began seeing Boyd again regularly, but "decided she had been a little deluded" in her regard for him; he had not been "the perfect friend." She found him "self-centred," "demanding," and "not nearly sensitive enough" (Forster, 73).

⁴ She became totally incapacitated after undergoing the loss of her brother Edward ("Bro"), for whose death in 1840 she blamed herself. His death had the additional result of catapulting her into the total seclusion she desired and entirely beyond the sphere of domesticity, which included socializing.

⁵ After three letters had been exchanged between the two poets, "[s]he had at last the correspondent she had been looking for all her life, a true kindred spirit who was a poet after her own heart, able to understand not just what she was trying to do but how she was trying to do it" (Forster 144-145).

⁶ This idea is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

⁷ Sonnets in which there is no explicit mention of vision, tears, sight, or blindness: 7, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 33, 35, 37, 38.

⁸ Sonnet 2:

*But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said!--Himself, beside
Thee speaking & me listening: and replied
One of us--that was God! . . . and laid the curse
so darkly on my eyelids as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee, . . . that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion-- 'Nay' is worse
From God than from all others, o my friend!--
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,--
Nor the seas, change us, nor the tempests, bend!--
Our hands would touch, for all the mountain-bars:
And heaven being rolled between us, at the end,
We should but vow the faster, for the stars.*

⁹ Sonnet 3:

*Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!--
Unlike our uses and our destinies!--
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears, even, can make mine, to ply thy part
O chief musician!-- What hast thou to do,
With looking from the lattice-lights at me
A poor, tired, wandering singer? . . . singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress-tree?
The chrism is on thine head,--on mine, the dew,--*

And Death must dig the level where these agree!

¹⁰ See Chapter 4, "Becoming 'the poet,'" for explanation of the equality between the two poets.

¹¹ Forster notes that Browning "thought that the letters were the prelude to a meeting and therefore was from the first impatient with them whereas she knew otherwise: the letters were the relationship in themselves" (145).

¹² Seeing herself being seduced with words by Browning is a phenomenon interpreted by Ruth Perry as being related to actual seduction (132).

¹³ Dorothy Mermin makes the observation that, like her poems, by 1845 her letters seemed to be a substitute for life (Origins 125). See Chapter 1 of this work for an explanation of elements of the Diary as fiction.

¹⁴ It unfolded "not as a historical sequence . . . but as a self-determined and authoritative structure, or, in other words, a fiction" (Karlin 3).

¹⁵ Daniel Karlin, in comparing the letters of the two, finds Browning's letters more composed or "dramatic" than EBB's, and feels he dramatized himself in his letters in a way which she did not (60). Browning himself said to EBB, however, "Remember that I write letters to nobody but you, and [. . .] I want method and much more" (Letters 1.50).

¹⁶ The classical image recalled is that of Athena who pulls Achilles backward by the hair in the Iliad.

¹⁷ Like EBB, the two heroines King-Kok Cheung discusses, Celie (The Color Purple) and Maxine (The Woman Warrior), endured a "process of change" that was "excruciating." Their texts convey a "sense of triumph" by having fostered a voice "truly one's own" (Cheung 172).

¹⁸ The Seraphim, and Other Poems. London: Saunders and Otley, 1838.

¹⁹ Mermin reviews this work (Origins 118ff).

²⁰ Adrienne Auslander Munich asserts that while the Prometheus myth "seemed an apt way" for the late Romantic poets to express the "challenge to human oppression," it did not "offer Victorian poets and painters a similarly inspiring plot." They turned, consequently, from Prometheus to Andromeda (10). Munich sees Aurora Leigh's rescue of Marian Erle as a use of the Andromeda myth (12); by laying down Prometheus, EBB, like other Victorians, was able to pick up Andromeda, not as the rescued but as the rescuer.

²¹ Munich points out that Andromeda and Perseus emerge "from a treacherous event into a recognizable, almost anticlimactic domesticity" (32).

²² She records the feeling of being privileged to only one side of the discourse; she wrote to Browning that she could not remember "how" she had answered a particular letter, but could only "hope . . . hope . . . hope . . . that it did not seem unworthy" (Letters 2.781). See Chapter 1 for a consideration of the Diary as a fiction.

²³ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the inception of her translation and the sense of competition that brought it about.

²⁴ Taplin discusses the changes she made in the second version which made it a "great improvement" on the first one. He finds the new version "spirited and readable" (231-232; 231).

²⁵ If this work was completed, it was never published. See Letters 1.31n. 6.

²⁶ Alice Falk notes that EBB's second translation is one in which she "made a Christ . . . with whom she could safely identify" in her "struggle to 'master' the classics without denying her female identity" (82). Helen M. Cooper points out that the "disobedient act of writing resonated to Prometheus's theft of fire from the gods" (15).

CHAPTER 3

***THE GENRE IN WHICH HE WROTE: SPACE AS MEANING IN
THE FEMININE PASTORAL***

*Of the sweet years, the dear and wished for years
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young*

While Elizabeth Barrett Browning's quest for poetic autonomy led her to challenge the authority of Hugh Stuart Boyd, her mentor, by striking out on her own with a counter-translation (Prometheus Bound), it led her as well to an inner search for a personal poetic authority that resulted in the liberty to experience poetic empowerment independent of the need to make a translation. Lines 2-4 of Sonnet 1 fit into the scheme of this explication when they are construed as a reference to pastoral poetry, the genre The-

ocritus invented and for which he is best known. When she describes, in these lines of Sonnet 1, the spirit and tone of Theocritus's pastoral Idylls, which invite us "to indulge ourselves in a daydream of rustic simplicity" (Mills vii), she invokes a genre that she had explored herself many years earlier. In choosing Theocritus as muse of the Sonnet 1, she chooses a poet whose genre she had already appropriated in her pastoral poetry of 1838-1844 to express a kind of love/work melancholy, centered on Boyd. Included in the nostalgia built into pastoral, "the sweet years, the dear and wished for years," is nostalgia for her own work. Telescoped into the fourteen lines of Sonnet 1 is a summary of the problem of a woman's love in a literary life and the problem of a woman's work in a literary life. To understand the significance of EBB's act of placing and then dis-placing Theocritus and his genre, pastoral, in such a prominent position in the Sonnets, one must understand the love and work of her life as she expressed them in her pastoral poems. She managed, through the development of a feminine pastoral in 1838-1844, to establish communication with a poetic tradition, wholly feminine, and totally outside the purview of the male literary tradition. In so doing, she also came to terms with the strange and desperate feelings of love evoked by her relationship with Boyd and recorded in her diary.

The influence of Boyd on the work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning has not been fully explored. The hurricane of emotions she unleashes in the

Diary logically found expression in other work. Boyd was more than a love object; her relationship with him symbolized her worth as an author as well. Her problem with the meaning of this model of professional self-worth was his lack of enthusiasm in validating her status as an author. The greatest sense of loss and failure she relates in her diary is her inability to attain what she terms a reciprocal relationship with Boyd as an intellectual peer, desiring "*an equality*," because she knew "*a reciprocity*" was not possible (Diary 118). It appears that there is truth to her assertion that "*He certainly does not care much for me! not as I care for him!*" (Diary, 56). The poetry that ensued as a result of her relationship with Boyd is self-consciously concerned with making a new space for itself outside the circumscribed space within which the disproportionate relationship she had with him existed.

EBB's relationship with Boyd, while not itself a fiction, took place in the context of literary study and was in some sense defined by the conventions of literature. The reason their relationship felt to her like a love affair was because of those conventions. Beauty and the prince are a model of the female-male literary relationship; as the feminine member of this binary pair, EBB's role was that of Beauty, and a logical response to her relegation to this role was to imagine being both desperately in love with the prince and being loved by the prince in return. Consequently, she constructed a love affair around the literary work they did together. Boyd, however, refused to create her as Beauty by refusing to be the prince on the one hand,

and refusing to allow her the status of prince on the other. By achieving "a reciprocity" with him, she would have transcended issues of gender and become a kind of co-prince for whom legitimacy did not necessarily entail being in love.

Boyd's tutelage proved destructive to EBB's creativity: The scope of her imagination was restricted, and her energy so taken up with emotional events, that she had little time to spare for creative activity.¹ While EBB was guided in her studies by Boyd, she read and analyzed classical literature and the Fathers, the patristic writing of the Church, a literature whose canon was closed (Curtius 259). She excelled as a student of the classics and the Fathers, but her chances to draw upon material from these male-governed genres to create something imaginative were exceedingly limited. During this period, aside from some poems published in periodicals "all of them imitative and without distinction" (Taplin 30), she made the unsuccessful translation of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound, a direct result of Boyd's influence on her.² All this work, the unimaginative poems, the unsuccessful translation, and the critical essay, were not expressions of her true imaginative ability as a creative artist.³ Ironically, Boyd, the source of her artistic failure, was critical of the little bit of imaginative work she did manage to do during the period of time she kept her diary.⁴

EBB did write a few poems about her literary relationship with Boyd. Like the letters she wrote him, however, these poems deny the facts re-

vealed in the Diary. In "The Wine of Cyprus" (1844), an idyllic, intimate retrospective of their relationship, for example, she says that even though Boyd was "older, / And more learnèd, and a man," "both our spirits" ran "to one level" (153-157) because of his blindness. What she wrote in the Diary contradicts this assertion at every point. An account of the conflicts of the relationship more consistent with what she wrote about it in her diary is to be found in her pastoral poetry. The conflicts surrounding her relationship with Boyd, as she related them in the Diary--her relegation to the role of translator and the ensuing rebellion and competition that caused her to fail in that role, both tied up with her "love" for him--must be taken into account in order to understand the landscape and the conventions of her feminine pastoral.

Freed from the emotional trauma of Boyd's proximity, chronicled in the Diary, EBB turned again, in the decade or so following its completion, to imaginative work.⁵ Grieving, she turned to the pastoral poem, identified as it is in the tradition with "unrequited love" (Poggioli 12). It served as a vehicle to express the apparent loss of not only her creative ability but also her literary relationship, which had, for her, the emotional overtones of a lover's relationship.⁶

The last poem in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Poems of 1844 is "The Dead Pan," and, indeed, the last words of that volume are "Pan is dead."⁷ Although she declared Pan dead in that particular poem, sig-

nificantly situated at the end of the volume, she had been writing a number of poems that are pastoral or contain elements of pastoral, and that possess an elegiac, melancholy tone.⁸ An examination of her pastoral poems, however, will show that her interpretation of pastoral does not quite conform to the conventions of classical, medieval, and Renaissance pastoral, all available to her. Just as she explores the chivalric conventions of the Romantic ballad and rejects them, she explores, rejects, and re-orders the conventions of pastoral.⁹

The pastoral terrain, however, is an extremely hostile one for a woman. In the Renaissance tradition, women were only welcome there as shepherdesses, objects to be both pined for and to serve as inspiration for the shepherd-poets. In Andrew Marvell's pastoral poem, "The Garden," in fact, women were not welcome at all.¹⁰ EBB, consequently, does not enter the pastoral landscape as a shepherdess, nor, she insists, is she a shepherd. Rejecting inspiration provided by shepherdesses and refusing to be a shepherdess herself, her focus is not on the creation of characters, but rather on the creation of the actual space itself. EBB recovers the *locus amoenus* of pastoral as a feminine space in poems like "The Lost Bower," "The Deserted Garden," "A Lay of the Early Rose," "An Island," "The Soul's Travelling," and "The House of Clouds."

As Marjorie Stone has suggested, it is possible to make assertions about gender by reworking genre; in her pastoral poems, EBB does just that.

When the Romantic poet enters the pastoral space, he does so as an intruder. The creativity that results from his entering the space is much like a violation of nature, a harvesting of its resources. Consider Wordsworth's poem "Nutting." The boy speaker of Wordsworth's poem enters the wood on a definite mission, armed with an implement that calls to mind the shepherd's crook (a "nutting-crook" [7]). His "motley accoutrement" gives him the "power to smile / At thorns, and brakes, and brambles" (12-13) as, "forcing [his] way" (16), he finds the "virgin scene" (21). When he reaches his destination, he sits among the flowers beneath the trees, and observes the conventions of pastoral by describing the *locus amoenus*. A poet-shepherd of pastoral, he is surrounded by "green stones" that are "fleeced with moss" and scattered around him "like a flock of sheep" (35-37). When the "sweet mood" passes (39-40), he sets about accomplishing what he came to the bower to do. In language that hints at sexual violence, he describes ravishing the nut trees; he "dragged to earth" branches and boughs of the trees "with crash / And merciless ravage" (44-45). He "deformed and sullied" the trees of the bower which "patiently gave up / Their quiet being" (47-48).¹¹ When his task was complete, he "turned / Exulting" from the "mutilated bower" (50-51), feeling a "sense of pain" when afterward he "beheld / The silent trees" (52-53). The speaker comprehends that he has intruded upon a feminine space.¹² He concludes the poem with the acknowledgment that "there is a spirit in the woods" (56). Unlike the speaker

in EBB's feminine pastoral, "The Lost Bower," the speaker in "Nutting" does not find in nature an inspiring aspect of himself, writing as he is "from a position and a perspective that would be impossible for a woman living during the time to take" (Ross 29).¹³

The feminine poet, on the other hand, enters the space without disturbing what she finds there and transforms the material of her own life into a cultural product, a poem. She does not construct herself as an object, a shepherdess, or a figure to be harvested, like a rose, but becomes one with the space; in effect, without becoming an object or an intruder, she disappears into nature itself. It is important to note that she does not leave the terrain of the masculine genre, but rather dedicates a portion of it to a feminine enterprise.¹⁴

This reclamation of nature in EBB's pastoral poems is extremely important in understanding this genre. To place it in a clearer perspective, it should be contrasted to her earlier use of nature. In her ballads, EBB ironically refutes the conventions of patriarchal chivalry and of a woman's place in society.¹⁵ While doing so, however, she is severely critical of nature. In "The Romaunt of Margret" (1838), for instance, the speaker describes nature as an abandoning mother. In this ballad, the reader is constantly informed by the narrator about natural events occurring around Margret and her double, her shadow who rises up from the water to inform her that all

the loves in her life have proven faithless; when Margret realizes she is unloved, she commits suicide.

Like Margret and her double, Margret and nature are mirror images of each other. All of nature "doth seem in a mystic dream, / Absorbed from her living things" (33-34). Margret, sitting at the edge of the water in the midst of nature is nevertheless oblivious to it; she is separate from nature. She has "certes unpartook" in the dream of nature, looking up instead at "the high cold stars" in a dream of her own (37-38). She, like nature, is "absorbed" from "living things," and does not notice that all around her, the leaves are withering on the trees (34). Paradoxically, in ignoring each other, Margret and nature replicate one another. Just as nature abandons Margret, so too does Margret abandon all nature by ending her life.

In EBB's feminine pastoral, on the other hand, the goal of the speaker is to (re)appropriate the role of a redeeming nature. When realizing the self in nature as nature itself in the feminine pastoral, the flight of Daphne is reproduced.¹⁶ The space opened up by Daphne represents the woman's space in the patriarchy; because of her retreat to what Annis Pratt has termed the "green world" (16), she remains "forever unravished" (4) in a space which is "to one side of civilization" (17). EBB makes this green world available to a number of speakers in her pastoral poems after they perform a ritual flight. These speakers progress through a wild forest before reaching the locus amoenus, tearing asunder "gyve and thong" of the en-

trapping brambles and "the barrier branches strong," making their way by "Under-crawling, overleaping / Thorns that prick and boughs that bear" ("The Lost Bower" 79-80; 83-84). Interestingly, just as EBB's feminine pastoral is in some ways a re-enactment of the Daphne story, with respect to the element of flight and the forging of an inviolate space in the wilderness, certain aspects of Wordsworth's "Nutting" may be seen as a re-enactment of Apollo's.¹⁷

This headlong activity through dense growth may be seen as the "dancing of an attitude," a "symbolic action," which contributes meaning to a poem (Burke 9; 8). The activity the speaker describes is directed toward achieving her goal: reaching a location of solitude in the "green world" from which she can meditate on a literary life.¹⁸ The activity and the goal are symbolically linked in these poems with EBB's relationship to Boyd. She describes literally and metaphorically in poetry what she had already described in prose. In her diary, she tells of running through the brush and down hills to achieve a literary goal, a visit with Boyd. The dense growth through which the speakers travel in these poems may also be seen as the resistance the poet herself encounters, both at home and at Boyd's house, when attempting to visit him. The seclusion and consequent freedom to explore the limits of her intellectual life that EBB creates as experience in poems like "The Lost Bower," "The Deserted Garden," "The House of Clouds," and "An Island," approximate the seclusion of the enclosed literary

garden of Boyd's room. The locus amoenus as Boyd's room suggests its antithetical opposite, the accomplishment of these poems. The speakers travel through a wild and impeding landscape to arrive at a feminine literary paradise just as EBB travelled through the landscape of Malvern to a patriarchal literary paradise whose loss and subsequent rejection served as inspiration for the poems.

In the male tradition, pastoral is very much associated with the relationship between the poet and society; so too, in the feminine pastoral, the poet constantly assesses her relation to society as an artist. The shepherd world of pastoral "is set against the real world in an artistic contrast" (H. Cooper 5). The independence of the shepherd of pastoral puts him outside society "as the artist claims to be," and can therefore "be a critic of society" (Empson 16). As both artist and woman, EBB is twice removed from society and expresses this alienation by borrowing the conventions of pastoral poetry and re-working them to express the double alienation of feminine pastoral. EBB's rejection of country society, discussed in her diary, is symbolically represented by her desire to find a secluded spot in her pastoral poetry where she is free to be a critic of the "social fictions" of that society ("The Lost Bower" 316). Pratt describes a dichotomy between "liberation and society," wholly appropriate for young women "moving out of a free space into an enclosure, their 'vision of liberation' intensified by its imminent demise" (37). So too does EBB find an ironic liberation from both

society and a literary career dominated by a mentor who undermines her artistic ability as she discovers in "the enclosed pastoral world of imaginative space" (Schur 5) a place a great deal like the patriarchal space about which she comments as she passes from free space into an ephemeral green world that has all the elements of a prison.¹⁹ Pastoral poetry, indeed, is a means by which a woman poet may represent the isolation she feels when she confronts the alienating exclusion of the literary tradition. She turns this "sterile isolation in which the tradition does not speak to her" (Di Pesa 66) into a productive isolation in which she is free to speak about her relationship to the tradition.

"The Lost Bower" (1844) is the most complete illustration of EBB's rejection of the patriarchal literary space.²⁰ The speaker who discovers the bower is a poet/child. In EBB's work, the figure of the childlike poet has a special capacity for creativity. In an 1842 review for the Athenaeum,²¹ she describes Chaucer: "His senses are open and delicate, like a young child's" ("The Book of the Poets" 128), marginalizing and thus feminizing him, in that he is ultimately connected with the special capacity for creativity of the feminine poet throughout her work.²² In the sonnet "Tears" (1844), she enumerates those who weep: the baby, the bride, and the poet, marginalizing the poet by equating him with the child, and feminizing him by comparing him to a woman. The childlike, crying poet is made more explicit in "The Poet and the Bird" (1844), when a poet is cast out by a society that

preferred the music of a nightingale, here illustrating the antithetical relationship of the Romantic poet and a poet who may be like Chaucer, like a child, and like herself.²³ The poet's relationship to the child, evident in EBB's critical evaluation of Chaucer, bears a relation to the feminine via "To Bettine: The Child-Friend of Goethe" (1838), wherein she relates "maidenhood" to the "glory" (46-47) of the nurturing, feminine, maternal, child-poet Goethe. The poem poses a tension between the childhood that made Bettine like Goethe and the womanhood with which she wanted to apprehend him.²⁴

"The Lost Bower" is specifically situated in the Malvern hills, a location resonant with both William Langland and Hugh Stuart Boyd. It is "the scene of Langland's visions; and thus present[s] the earliest classic ground of English poetry," (*Poems* [1844] 103n.), and, by transposition, according to the conventions of dream-interpretation to which Langland's vision is intimately connected, we recall that Boyd also made his home there, "the earliest English ground of classic poetry."²⁵

Langland begins his poem by transforming his speaker into a shepherd of pastoral: "I shope me into shroudes, as I a shep were," and then assumes the reclining posture of the shepherd-poet of pastoral, "yn a launde [. . .] I lay" (8). He dreams, and sees "a fair feld, ful of folk [. . .] alle manere of men," "mene and the pore, / Worchyng and wandryng as this world asketh" (19-21). These literary conventions fueled his imagination

sufficiently so that his characters work and wander through some 7,000 lines of poetry.

The speaker in the feminine pastoral, "The Lost Bower," is conscious of her affinity with nature in a way the speaker in "The Romaunt of Margret" is not. She describes the geography of her childhood playground in terms of the anatomy of a child and of a woman as well: "dimpled" with "hill and valley" (8). One hill and one wood in particular stand out in her memory of childhood and it is in this wood, on whose border she can see the Malvern hills, "keepers of Piers Plowman's visions" (45) in the distance, that the bower is located. She "little prized" (46) the walk toward the patriarchal hills she describes as brothers and father that foreshadow the Malvern hills, attracted instead to the wood "by a glamour past dispute" (55).²⁶ The walk to the Malvern hills was "up and down--as dull as grammar on the eve of holiday" and in rejecting them, she rejects the language of the Fathers and the rules of that language in which she had made her failed translation. She favors the feminine space to which she is drawn: the wood, "all close and clenching" (51). There are no clearly marked paths; she is embarking on a journey in unmarked territory. This unexplored land with respect to literature is the feminine poem taking shape in the feminine poetic landscape.

One of the most "striking" things about the vernacular pastoral tradition of the Middle Ages, the tradition in which Langland writes, was that

pastoral "is about shepherds," and that the shepherd's first task "is to look after his sheep" (H. Cooper 47n.). The boy/speaker of Wordsworth's "Nutting" embraces that convention by imagining the mossy stones to be a flock of sheep (33-37). By contrast, one of the ways in which EBB's speaker rejects Langland and the traditional conventions of pastoral is by rejecting the role of shepherd. In "The Lost Bower," the sheep try unsuccessfully to make incursions into the thicket, leaving behind them "few and broken paths" strewn with their "snowy wool" "round the thickets." Giving up, "with silly thorn-pricked noses," the sheep "bleated back into the sun" (56-60). "Sheep for sheep-paths!" gloats the speaker, "braver children climb and creep where they would go" (65). The speaker, who thus establishes herself as a childlike poet-not-a-shepherd who is writing pastoral yet rejecting the conventions, triumphs over her victory. Her "heart beat[s] stronger" as she makes her way through the thicket where the sheep could not; "I could pierce them! I could longer / Travel on" (61-63).

The next two verses re-focus the speaker on the literary work she had come to the wood to do in a genre whose "principal subject is language itself" (Schur 5). In verse fourteen, she recalls that "the poets wander [. . .] Over places all as rude." In verse fifteen, the speaker alludes to Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women.²⁷ Had Chaucer not travelled through a forest, he would never have had a dream of "those ladies fair and fell / Who lived smiling without loving" (74-75). There are a number of parallels between

"The Lost Bower" and The Legend of Good Women. Like EBB, Chaucer "lure[s]" his audience in that poem "onto unfamiliar territory" (Frank 20). Chaucer speaks in the Prologue about what "really concerns him, his career as a writer, and the kind of material he wishes to be free to work on," focusing on "what a writer may or should write about" (Frank 27). The legends that follow are stories of women that concern "rape, suicide, abandonment, despair, callous abuse, and cynical seduction," and are "alien to the code of courtly love," posing "an oblique challenge" to that code (Frank 26; 35). EBB, like Chaucer, the childlike poet with whom she feels a deep affinity, explores in "The Lost Bower" her career as a writer and issues that a woman writer "may or should write about," posing a challenge to the conventions of traditional pastoral. She rejects, as does Chaucer, the conventions of courtly love and chivalry, and thinks, instead, of other kinds of heroines.

The speaker in "The Lost Bower" takes courage from these examples of femininity, and makes her way through the dense thicket, emulating the flight of Daphne, "under-crawling, overleaping" (83), until, like the poets of classical antiquity, she looks at a spot where nothing seems to be unusual, then "stood suddenly astonished [. . .] gladdened unaware" (85) by the sight of the bower. Her explanation proceeds in the traditional manner: One tree gives way to many; she looks up, she looks down, and describes the detail of the closely circumscribed locus amoenus.²⁸

Unlike Langland and other poets who wrote traditional pastoral, however, her observations of the conventions are unable to stimulate her imagination to create as they created. She is not standing on traditional ground, and the characters she is able to imagine are ones who self-consciously resist being created. She thinks of a lady who "might have come there," with a book or a lute and a "hope of sweeter talk" (106; 109). This lady, had she been created, would have been "listening less to her own music than for footsteps on the walk" (110). Had the speaker elected to go to the patriarchal hills of Langland and Boyd, she might have created such a lady; she had, in fact, created such ladies in the patriarchal space of her ballads. Here, however, there is no room for a feminine character who cannot pay attention to her own music; the poem is, after all, about paying attention to one's creativity. She waits, instead, for the footsteps that might herald the arrival of a prince who will provide her with the means of becoming an object in the Romantic story. The story, however, never gets a chance to be told. The lady, uncreating, remains uncreated. By avoiding the use of figurative language to create a Romantic heroine, EBB abstains from what Anne K. Mellor describes as "participating in the death of the female" (6).

The speaker, having already fulfilled the classical requirements for the description of the locus amoenus, returns to a detailed description of the bower after rejecting the creation of a patriarchal heroine. The bower, instead, is her creation: the space itself. Embroidered into the fabric of the

bower is the subject of EBB's pastoral--the tension between two kinds of literary women: those who are creating and those who are created--authors and characters.²⁹

"Growing lithe and growing tall" (122) are two rose trees, one on either side of the door of the Bower; one is red and one is white. The roses lean, anthropomorphically "nodding at the wall" (125). The red rose is, of course, the plant/heroine of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun (The Romance of the Rose [1237 and 1277]), the archetype of all romance heroines and the authority providing relative ease for a writer and a reader to equate a flower with a heroine. Like EBB's rose, de Lorris's rose is set on a stalk "straight and upright as a cane [. . .] Not bending or inclined" (7.44-46).³⁰

The red rose, in innumerable stories, is pre-empted by male writers' representations of women; in "The Lost Bower," the white rose remains the blank space, which the feminine poet may appropriate for her own symbol of creativity.³¹ The white rose, the antithesis of the red rose that served as inspiration for male creativity, takes its force from literary convention and primarily from EBB's own creativity. It is the white rose, not inscribed by passion like the red patriarchal rose, with which the child/speaker creates. The affinity of the child/speaker and the white rose is the fact that their sexuality is latent; they are unmarked by secondary sexual characteristics, or

to put it another way, they are premenstrual, and not suitable, therefore, as objects in Romantic quest literature.

To understand the meaning invested in the white rose of the Lost Bower, an examination of the white rose as a symbol and personification of feminine creativity in EBB's other work is necessary. The latent, unrealized creativity of the child/speaker appears in EBB's earlier poem, "The Deserted Garden" (1838), as the white rose tree. In this pastoral poem, in which a patriarchal space is reclaimed as a feminine one, the speaker, like the speaker in "The Lost Bower," tells of a childhood idyll in an abandoned garden. The speaker travels to the garden, a circumscribed space outside the patriarchy, by running with "childish bounds" (3), like the speaker of "The Lost Bower" and like Daphne. "Happy child" (16) could gain entrance to the feminine space, but the trees, "interwoven wild" "spread their boughs enough about / To keep both sheep and shepherd out" (13-15).³² This is again not the pastoral of the tradition, but one that breaks new ground.

The Deserted Garden is "hedged [. . .] in" by rose trees and "bedropt with roses waxen-white" (21-22), which play an important role in the speaker's notions of feminine creativity. The garden is now a "wilderness" (9), but the speaker imagines that some time ago it was possible that it had been cared for by a "grave old gardener" (27). As a patriarchal garden, "all the garden flowers were trim" (26), and of particular pride to the gardener were the white roses (27-28). The speaker imagines a

character who might have visited the garden, very much like the character she imagines who "might have come" to the Lost Bower, "some lady, stately overmuch" (29), who blushed in contrast to the white roses when being compared to them (31-32). The speaker imagines that this tentative and uncreated character-who-might-have-been, the blushing, red rose of the patriarchal garden, "may have plucked and twined" the white roses "to make a diadem" for herself, but thought to herself that "few" observers, viewing her and the white rose-diadem together, "would look at them" (33-36).³³ The blushing patriarchal heroine becomes the red rose as she imagines winning a competition with the white rose, sacrificing feminine creativity and subjectivity in order to become an object. The speaker, the child without secondary sexual characteristics, speculates that the proud lady would never have thought that a child would one day look at the white rose when the lady herself was buried. The irony in this notion is that there would be no red rose with which to compare the white rose at that imagined future time; the red patriarchal rose "when buried lay" (39) would be even lighter in color than the white rose, reminiscent of how Susan Gubar describes the experience of the woman artist who feels herself "killed into art" and "bleeding into print" (248). Like the lady in "The Lost Bower," the lady in "The Deserted Garden" remains uncreated.

According to Mellor, within the phallogocentric writing produced by the "binary mode of thinking that has characterized philosophical discourse

since the ancient Greeks" (5), "the female exists only as the absent or silenced other. For a woman to write in such a language, then, is tantamount to a denial of the female" (6). By imagining the patriarchal rose as whiter in death than the white rose of feminine creativity, EBB is conveying a sense of her own intuitive belief in the association between feminine creativity and death. Gubar asks how women can experience creativity when "mired in stories of our own destruction, stories which we confuse with ourselves," as, for example, in Isak Dinesen's story The Blank Page. In that story, Gubar explains, "the creation of female art feels like the destruction of the female body" (256). Margaret Homans discusses as well the implications of inadvertent feminine complicity in death by creative expression (Chapter 1). In tackling this problem, French feminist theorists have attempted to "decenter existing linguistic structures and to open a space for the female to emerge in discourse" (Mellor 6), which is precisely what EBB was attempting to do in her pastoral poetry.

The white roses in "The Deserted Garden" inspire the speaker with "never a dream" about "love's compliment" (46-47). She spent, nevertheless, her "gladdest hours" "in silence at the rose-tree wall" (57-58). Neither she nor a thrush who "made gladness musical" (59) on the other side of the roses "peck or pluck the blossoms white" (62), blending into the landscape without desecrating it.³⁴ "How should I know," she asks, "but roses might / Lead lives as glad as mine?" (63-64). The white roses of feminine creativity

are unable to inspire her with a patriarchal story in the feminine space; it is the space, after all, about which she is inspired to write. Her silence is that of a woman writer who knows the story of the red rose because she had written it elsewhere, but who could not bring herself to write it in this place. Like the speaker in "The Lost Bower," she recognizes that her imagination does not operate the same way as did the imaginations of writers of traditional pastoral. In the feminine space, the conventions do not work for her; she cannot create as male writers of pastoral created. By imagining the white roses capable of leading lives like her own, she is imagining them as non-patriarchal heroines with an immense power of creativity.

A similar heroine is the one in "A Lay of the Early Rose" (1844), a white rose growing within a garden and who decides to bloom in April, and not wait for summer. The whiteness of this rose is in contrast to the roses she preempted by blooming early, among them, the "maiden-blush" rose (16). The white rose in her "loneness" is "all the fairer for that oneness" (3-4); her "mission" is to "declare the coming vision" (27-28). Like the feminine poet, however, she feels the burden of her uniqueness. She has high expectations of adulation--"worship," "thanks," "praise," and "blessing" (30-33)--from others in her environment: insects, birds, the sky, and other flowers. Like the feminine poet, she is disappointed; her earliness, that is, her affinity with childlike genius and her premenstruality which renders her unsuitable as a Romantic heroine, also caused her demise.³⁵

The white rose's function as a symbol of unique, feminine creativity is made explicit as her petals drop off at the feet of a poet who immediately recognizes her failed attempt at self-expression, which is so much like his own.³⁶ He describes them both:

"Poor rose and poet too,
Who both antedate our mission
In an unprepared season."

(142-145)

Although there is no one to bless them, the poet says, they nevertheless are "blessèd [. . .] and consecrated / In that, rose, we were created" (emphasis added [167-168]). The white rose of feminine creativity in "A Lay of the Early Rose" is a created heroine unlike the "maiden-blush" rose who remains uncreated like the uncreated heroines in "The Lost Bower" and "The Deserted Garden."

These white roses are the heroines the speaker imagines in contrast to the patriarchal heroines, the red roses, in the walls of the Lost Bower.

The speaker of "The Lost Bower" passes through the doorway of antithetical heroines and enters. She takes a seat in a feminine space, a "chair of silence" (130). Even within the feminine space, she has no language of her own; however, she can hear an inner music. She notices that "all the

floor was paved with glory" (131). "Is such a pavement in a palace?" (136) she asks herself.³⁷ As "an answer," the sun shines through the "chalice / Of the red rose" and casts "a red libation" within the bower (138-140). "At the same time," two "white may-leaves" flutter down from the ceiling of the bower onto her lap, "from a blossom, like an angel, out of sight yet blessing well" (141-145). She questions the space about the tension that exists between being created and being a creator; while the space is shadowed with the red light made by patriarchal representations of women because this is the condition under which women writers must create, it is yet blessed by the leaves of a white flower that are like her, like the white roses in "The Deserted Garden" and "A Lay of the Early Rose," and like the potential of her feminine power of creativity.³⁸

Significantly, she makes a silent appeal to the bower to unlock its secret; she appeals to the trees themselves "which surely knew it in partaking of the grace" (150). She finally hears a sound: It is a music sweeter than "Pan or Faunus" had ever blown "from a reed" (183-184). Pan, the genius loci of traditional pastoral about whose death EBB wrote in the same volume (1844), is unable to be an inspiration in the feminine space. She does not find, either, a spirit who "haunts" the woods as does Wordsworth. Rather, it is she who will take over the responsibility of providing inspiration: "Henceforth, I will be the fairy / Of this bower" (241-242). By rejecting Pan just as she rejects the idea of being a shepherd in a pastoral poem, she

repudiates not only the conventions of the Fathers' literature, but the idea of a male mentor as inspiring genius, and asserts her desire to perform autonomous acts of artistic representation.

It is clear, however, that she can not create from within the woman's space of the bower. She is merely able to communicate with a kind of music she has never heard before which suggests to her that a position other than that of Romantic poet is available. The music of which she becomes aware is "a sense of music" that is "rather felt than heard" (175). It is a music that "inwound" her (176), shutting her off from the world. She questions the source of this music, and admits "I know nothing" about it (182). This is not the music of the Romantic poet; the lark could never sing like this, nor could the nightingale "whose poet-song she flingeth / Over pain to victory" (191-194). If the music "were [from] a bird," that bird's music would have to be "[m]ost like Chaucer's" (201-202). Chaucer, whom she had constructed as a childlike poet with a special capacity for creativity, has a special affinity with the child/speaker of "The Lost Bower." Not only did he lead her to the Bower, but his special abilities are perceived by her to be the well-spring of her own inspiration.

After leaving the Lost Bower, the speaker is unable to locate it again, and the story she tells about her efforts to find it reinforces its meaning as feminine space and stands in ironic contrast to this meaning. The quest for the bower takes a patriarchal turn. She tells of repeatedly performing the

ritual run toward the bower, "Under leaf and over briar, / Through the thickets" (268-269); however, she executes this run not as Daphne but as Apollo: "Like the prince who rescued Beauty from the sleep as long as death" (270). Like Apollo, she is thwarted in her search; the feminine space remains unavailable to her. The rescuing prince, the patriarchal re-writing of a successful Apollo, possesses the accoutrements of a masculine chivalric culture to which she does not have access: a sword; a strong arm; and the guidance of the dreaming spirit of the heroine Beauty (whose other name is Briar Rose), who is external to the rescuing prince (271-275). This external spirit is the same spirit perceived by Wordsworth's boy/speaker in his bower, distinctly external and distinctly feminine. Beauty, the patriarchal rose, will never inspire her to re-discover the feminine space. The only implement she has to aid her in this now-patriarchal quest is her "child-heart" (277), or the fragile genius of the premenstrual child; the bower as object of a quest with her in the role of quester is as "safe as Oedipus's grave-place" (280). By creating her speaker a quester like Beauty's prince in "The Lost Bower," EBB tries on the role of Romantic poet and rejects it, realizing that, not only is she a failed Beauty for lack of a prince, she is a failed prince as well, resonant with the fact that Boyd had denied her reciprocal status. What she was left with in both the relationship and the poem about the relationship was anger in addition to frustration at the lack of an alternative role. As the created, she would have to be Beauty; as the creator, she would have

to be the prince. The poem asserts that a Beauty who could create would not be a Beauty at all; she would be full of creative ability but yet would herself be a blank space, the white rose. There is no story in which the white rose can become a Romantic heroine, object of a quest. The white rose is heroine only of the space she occupies within the feminine sphere; that is her only story. What the poem manages to accomplish, however, is a successful de-centering of the Romantic plot which becomes transformed into an after-thought, and is posited as an impossibility.

As the bower vanished, so do the years of the speaker's life. After reciting a litany of her losses that do not rival her greatest loss, the loss of the bower, the feminine space, the speaker becomes transformed into a weak, aging invalid, lying on a couch.³⁹ She can still see the bower, however, "clear as once beneath the sunshine" (345). Although she has grown, the bower has not, but she imagines that her spirit remains in it, praying, much like the spirit that haunts Wordsworth's bower. Having the "green world . . . present in retrospect" is common as a remembered "state of innocence that becomes most poignant as one is initiated into experience." The loss of the green world is remembered by heroines in novels as "submission to the patriarchy" (Pratt 22). So too does EBB recollect the green world of her pastoral in "The Lost Bower" as a creative oasis situated in the depths of the patriarchal literary landscape; she was able, while there, to communicate with her feminine creativity.

This overwhelming sense of loss is the subject of this and other of EBB's pastoral poems, which strongly suggests that it is a loss connected to writing, since the "adventure is conceived in specifically literary terms" (Mermin Origins 101), as is pastoral in general. The loss of the Bower feels like the loss of a literary paradise; so too did the loss she suffered in not being able to achieve "a reciprocity" feel like the loss of a literary paradise. Whereas the Romantic poet realizes some gain in his relationship with nature, as did Wordsworth in "Nutting," the feminine pastoral poet suffers a deprivation, reminiscent of the deprivation suffered by nature in "Nutting."

The speaker searches for the Lost Bower in vain "as Aladdin sought the basements / His fair palace rose upon" (281-282). Just as Aladdin, a character in Scheherazade's narrative, whose power came from the power of a genie who was able to transform himself, was unable to find the site of the patriarchal story, the speaker, a character in EBB's narrative whose power came from her genius/self and depended upon a similar kind of transformation, was neither able to transform herself nor to find the site of the feminine story. As the subject of a quest-romance, she is and must remain a failure; it is a reiteration of EBB's failure to be a creative artist in the area circumscribed by her relationship with Boyd.

The poem ends on a spiritual note as the bower gives way to another locus amoenus: paradise, "God's Eden-land" (367). This is a conventional ending for medieval pastoral, and one that suits the feminized poet, as

"Christianizing the classical tradition in effect feminizes it" (Mermin, Origins 62).

If EBB's speaker had arrived at the Bower and done there what traditional writers of pastoral had done--posed as shepherds, created characters, harvested nature--she would have been in the same position as Wordsworth's speaker: the Romantic poet, creator of an alienated, potentially violated, woman/nature. Instead of re-enacting the Daphne story, she would have re-enacted Apollo's, as in a sense does Wordsworth. By rewriting the literary traditions of pastoral poetry, EBB was able to express not only her grief at the inequity of a system that placed her in a position in which the creation of heroines was a self-annihilating act, but also at the rebellion which was mixed up with that grief. Likewise, while she consciously wanted "a reciprocity" in her relationship with Boyd, there was a part of her that very much resented the authority of both Boyd and the love affair, which she imagined as a model of her relationship with him, according to the patriarchal system of literary conventions. While in the Lost Bower, she is free of both Boyd and the system, transcending the need for reciprocity, a notion that arises out of binary thought, but it is not a place from which she can create art in a language that can be comprehended in the patriarchal space.

"The Lost Bower" asks important questions about women's space that are being asked today by feminist theorists. Sandra Harding, for example, asks, "Where are [feminists] to find the analytical concepts and cate-

gories that are free of the patriarchal flaws?" (648).⁴⁰ EBB's answer to this question in "The Lost Bower" is the assertion of the feminine poetic self: the creating feminine self who hears a music from within, and the autonomous feminine self who undertakes responsibility to be her own muse. She posits a heightened poetic self who understands the betrayal of feminine autonomy practiced by patriarchal poets who create heroines. The problem then, as today, is that this unified feminine poetic self cannot function the same way once outside the circumscribed feminine space, as there are no available "concepts and categories . . . free of patriarchal flaws." At the center of patriarchal ideology, Toril Moi explains, "is the seamlessly unified self," the same kind of self EBB finds in the feminine space. Paradoxically, however, this integrated self is in fact the phallic self; "gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction and ambiguity" (Moi 8). This phallic self cannot exist for a woman poet in the patriarchal space. The Bower, by definition, must always be the Lost Bower.

In "The Lost Bower," EBB addresses as well the lack of a women's poetics, a concern clearly instigated by the unsatisfactory roles of both failed translator and failed Beauty she was forced to assume in her relationship with Boyd as a consequence of the conventions of the male literary tradition. Lawrence Lipking believes that women will never be at the center of "male-created, male-elaborated" theories of poetics. "At best," he postulates, "the process leaves a space of her own to the daughter-disciple-rebel" (Lipking

Abandoned Women 211). In the woman's "space of her own" she creates in the feminine pastoral, EBB can merely summon up non-patriarchal heroines, but, despite the dead Pan, she could not, at that time, write them a new story.

As she writes the Sonnets, however, she writes as a reviser of her own work and her own life. She had already re-translated her own translation of Prometheus Bound, and her obsessive need for Boyd's approval and her irrational love for him were gone along with his inhibiting influence on her creative work. As a consequence, she gave up the love/work melancholy of pastoral. Once she acknowledges Theocritus, his language, and his genre in Sonnet 1, she addresses next the real work of the Sonnets--performing autonomous acts of poetic creativity--she becomes a poet.

NOTES

¹ Gardner B. Taplin, whose biography of EBB does not reflect knowledge of the Diary, was puzzled by her lack of creative work at this time. See Chapter 1, note 38.

² This influence is evident again in her later essay on the Greek poets (1842). EBB re-translated Prometheus Bound successfully at a time when her feelings about her mentor were resolved (1845-46; published 1850). See Chapter 2, "Why Theocritus? Sonnet 1 and the Male Literary Tradition."

³ See Chapter 1, note 28; see Homans's "Preface" and Chapter 1, "Representation, Reproduction, and Women's Place in Language"(xi-xiv; 1-39). For a discussion of the problems that arise because "the act of translating is viewed as something qualitatively different from the original act of writing," that is, it is sexualized, see Lori Chamberlain (455).

⁴ Boyd was critical, for example, of her poem "Kings," expressing his surprise not only that she had written it, but that The Times had published it (Diary 9; 31 May 1981).

⁵ Following her move from Hope End, EBB began seeing Boyd again regularly, but their relationship, from her point of view, seems to have diminished in intensity. She "decided she had been a little deluded" in her regard for him; he had not been "the perfect friend." She found him "self-centred," "demanding," and "not nearly sensitive enough" (Forster 73).

⁶ "The bucolic imagination equates happiness with fulfillment of the passion of love . . . and identifies unhappiness with the rejection or denial of one's heart's desire . . . with unrequited love" (Poggioli 12).

⁷ See Dorothy Mermin, *Origins* 112. While "The Dead Pan" "elaborates the assertion that Christian truth has displaced mythologized nature just as Christ has banished Pan" (*Origins* 89), the poem is also a "repudiation of the literary past" (185). In the context of this study, "The Dead Pan" specifically repudiates Pan as the *genius loci* or inspiring spirit of traditional pastoral.

⁸ From the Middle Ages on, pastoral operates "in its distinctive way as a mode of thought or presentation, a particular optic on the world," which is not "channelled through the eclogue alone but can be drawn on in any literary form" (H. Cooper 48n.).

⁹ "Beneath their apparent conventionality of plot and sentiment," EBB's ballads "add up to a thoroughgoing reassessment--often a total repudiation--of the Victorian ideas about womanliness to which they apparently appeal, and it is in this contradiction that their greatest interest lies" (Mermin, *Origins* 90). Likewise, Helen M. Cooper observes that EBB "moves toward freeing woman . . . from objectification" in the ballads (97).

¹⁰ According to Renato Poggioli, Marvell "proved that the pastoral remains a masculine dreamworld even when it abandons the realm of sex. As the pastoral poet replaces the labors and troubles of love with an exclusive concern for the self, he changes into a new Narcissus, contemplating with passionate interest not his body but his soul" (22). He further points out that, for Goethe, "the pastoral is a private, masculine world, where woman is not a person but a sexual archetype, the eternal Eve" (16).

¹¹ The sentiments of Wordsworth's speaker evoke some lines of EBB's "The Musical Instrument" (1860), and indeed, are related to them. After he cut the reed, Pan "drew the pith, like the heart of a man, / Steadily from the outside ring, / and notched the poor dry empty thing / In holes" (21-24). The story of how Pan fashions a musical instrument out of a reed is told here by EBB from a feminine point of view. As Mermin points out, poets like Shelley and Keats focused on the fact that Pan was left with only a

reed instead of Syrinx whom he pursued (much as poets had told the Daphne/Apollo story). It was EBB who introduced the notion of Pan as a sexually brutal creature, and the idea was commonplace after that (Mermin, Origins 243). Mermin's insightful explication of this poem is on pp. 242-245 of Origins.

¹² In "Nutting," "the boy must ravage the virgin bower before he can discover that 'there is a spirit in the woods.' Such experiences are necessary to the boy's moral and imaginative education, and they are never final because maternal nature always forgives" (Homans 137).

¹³ Romanticism, a "masculine phenomenon," reclaims the self by empowering masculine identity (Ross 29).

¹⁴ Thanks to Barbara Roseman for her insightful observation.

¹⁵ Mermin notices that the ballads "add up to a thoroughgoing re-assessment--often a total repudiation--of the Victorian ideas about womanliness to which they apparently appeal" (Origins 90), while attacking "the destructiveness of chivalric falsehoods" (Origins 95). See Angela Leighton's Chapter 3, "'Ghostly mother, keep aloof': The Daughter's Disaffiliation," in which she explains how the figure of the mother "comes to stand, not so much in a social relation to the daughter, but in the muse to poet." As the daughter/poet looks to the mother/muse for inspiration, she finds only "a figure who merely enjoins on her the principles of generosity and self-sacrifice," antithetical to poetic inspiration (61). In the ballads, "the figure of the ghostly mother is a figure of self-renunciation and . . . despair," not enticing the daughter "with better love," but compelling her "with rigid moral requirements" (65).

¹⁶ The story in which Daphne, attempting to resist Apollo, turns into a laurel tree, is described by Annis Pratt as "one of the most frequent plot structures in women's fiction" (5).

¹⁷ Leighton notices a similarity between the two poems, pointing out that "Whereas Wordsworth's quester is a boy poet who finds a sister 'spirit in the woods' (56), Elizabeth Barrett's is a female quester whose object is uncertain" (70).

¹⁸ Pastoral has tended, since the Renaissance, to be identified "with the literary profession," grounded, as it is, "not only in a vision of life but also in a view of art and literature" (Poggioli 36; 34).

¹⁹ Pratt describes varieties of enclosure in women's novels that range from psychological oppression which emerges in "images of cramping, diminished stature, and psychological 'moods' resulting from the dwarfing of the personality" to a place of safety, an "apatriarchal space" (46-47; 70).

²⁰ Poems like "Catarina to Camoens," "A Vision of Poets," and "The Lost Bower," are those in which EBB's "struggle to find a voice for a woman within the male tradition presses closest to full articulation" (Mermin, Origins 115).

²¹ "The Book of the Poets" (June 4, 1842), pp. 497-499; (June 11), pp. 520-523; (June 25), pp. 558-560; (Aug. 6), pp. 706-708; (Aug. 13), pp. 728-729.

²² "The Book of the Poets," 128. Matthew Arnold describes Chaucer's otherness in The Study of Poetry (1880). Chaucer is a "source of joy and strength . . . flowing still for us" and that will always flow for us (Arnold 316). He finds in Chaucer's poetry a "divine liquidness of diction," and a "divine fluidity of movement" (316), and, quoting Dryden, calls him "'a perpetual fountain of good sense'" (316). He praises Chaucer's "lovely charm of . . . diction," and his "lovely charm of . . . movement" (317), and this "virtue" is "irresistible" (317). In order to demonstrate his virtue, Arnold quotes a line that "is enough to show the charm of Chaucer's verse: 'O martyr soulded [soldered] in virginittee'" (317). He creates a marginal Chaucer, ascribing to him the feminine characteristics of flowing, fluidity,

liquidity, charm, loveliness, and virtue, emblemized by the subject of martyred virginity.

Arnold explains problems with Chaucer's language. While readers have difficulty with it, language is precisely the element in his poetry that produces its "delicate" and "evanescent" "charm" (Arnold 317). He compares some lines of Chaucer's verse in the original and in Wordsworth's translation. The translation is a good one, scholarly and poetical, but, as Arnold points out, "the charm is departed" (317). Chaucer's "free . . . licentious dealing with language," Arnold asserts, is impossible at the present time. According to the French feminists, such use of language renders a work feminine. It is this difference in the use of language that separates Arnold from Chaucer when, while calling Chaucer "the father of our splendid English poetry" (316), it is he, Arnold, who writes as the father of English poetry, defining Chaucer in feminine terms as its mother; with Chaucer "is born our real poetry" (319).

²³ Chaucer is made explicitly like this poet: "Child-like, too. [Chaucer's] tears and smiles lie at the edge of his eyes" ("The Book of the Poets" 128).

²⁴ See Chapter 4, "Becoming 'the Poet,'" for an explanation of the process of feminization of the figure of the poet in the work of EBB.

²⁵ In the Diary, EBB used "Malvern" as a shorthand, almost as a euphemism, to designate Boyd's house.

²⁶ The hills "seemed to represent an exclusively male world" (Mermin, Origins 100).

²⁷ While Charlotte Porter and Helen Clarke ascribe references to Chaucer's travelling through a forest and dreaming of "ladies fair and fell" to a "link" EBB made between the Parlement of Foules and "Chaucer's Dream" (no longer credited to Chaucer, they explain) (361), the references seem as though they could be a conflation of The Parlement of Foules and

the Legend of Good Women. The Parlement of Foules supplies the details of the dream, the wood, and the well, as Porter and Clarke point out. In "Chaucer's Dream" (which Porter and Clarke explain was, at the time of publication, still thought to have been written by Chaucer), the women were "Living at ease, that never with / More perfect jöye have not might" (Porter and Clarke 360). The ladies "fair and fell" in "The Lost Bower" who lived "smiling without loving" seem more like the ladies Chaucer describes in the Legend of Good Women than the ladies in "Chaucer's Dream."

²⁸ Ovid's descriptions of nature, for example, "become bravura interludes" (Curtius 194). He presents an "elegant variation" of the "ideal mixed forest": "the grove is not there from the beginning, it comes into existence before our eyes. First we see a hill entirely without shade. Orpheus appears and begins to play his lyre. Now the trees come hurrying" (Curtius 195).

²⁹ When we learn that the ivy of the Bower is "enwrought with eglantine" (117), it brings to mind a literary woman, Chaucer's, prioress, Eglentyne, since the speaker succeeded in keeping us so close to Chaucer. Eglentyne, herself a creator, has a brooch upon which is written a quotation from Virgil's pastoral poem, the sixty-ninth Eclogue: "Amor vincit omnia" (Canterbury Tales [General Prologue] I.162). In The Canterbury Tales, Eglentyne tells the story of a child who, after being murdered, is enabled for a time by the "mooder mayde" (VII.467), the virgin/mother Mary, to continue to sing: "I syng and syng I moot" (VII.663). Eglentyne, created by the childlike poet, Chaucer, was herself inscribed as a pastoral poem; she writes about the creative, life-giving ability of the virgin/mother paradox who gave life to God who had already given life to all, a parody of the feminine predicament in the literary milieu: That is, when a woman undertakes an act of artistic representation, she finds herself working in a tradition wherein she herself has already been created by another.

In the same stanza, in ironic contrast to Eglentyne, we learn that the arch of the door and the window-mullion of the bower are entwined with

"the large-leaved columbine" (119), a plant that shares a name with a literary woman, the stock figure of the innamorata in the Commedia dell'arte. She was created to be either the wife of the Harlequin, or as the maid of one of the old men. Described as a "happy-go-lucky and successful schemer" who was "intelligent, pretty, small, and skilled in dance and rhetoric" (M. Gordon 61), she was not a principal character in her own right. She figured prominently, however, as an object in the coarse sexual pantomimes and jokes of the Commedia.

³⁰ It is not unusual, in fact, to see a pair of fictional heroines, one a red flower and one white. The beginning of John Fletcher's play, The Wild Goose Chase (1621), for example, finds the patriarchal order threatened by talking women. Two of the heroines, sisters who are indistinguishable except for their names, Rosalura and Lillia-Bianca, have been brought to the brink of manhood, or consciousness, through education, much like EBB, and find they are cultural misfits in a patriarchal society:

What am I better
For all my learning if I love a dunce,
A handsome dunce? To what use serves my reading?

(III.i.55-57)

They learn that their society is not one in which a woman can both talk and have a husband, and they share the same fate: silence and marriage to the "handsome dunce[s]." EBB changed the ending of their story in her own life by marrying someone she considered a (poet/)peer with whom she had "a reciprocity." At the time "The Lost Bower" was written, however, she made it well-known that there could be no one for her to marry. Margaret Forster notes, in fact, that "all her male friends were elderly scholars and her friendships with them conducted mainly on paper"; there were no young men in her life (40).

Likewise, in the folk tale, Snow-White and Rose-Red, the heroines of the title were named after the flowers growing on two rosebushes in front of their mother's cottage. The two sister heroines marry identical heroes, a prince and his brother. The two rosebushes that had stood outside their mother's cottage in the wood, a feminine space, were moved after the marriages to a spot before the princes' palace, reifying feminine submission as the site of the story is permanently transferred to the patriarchal space.

³¹ For a discussion of feminine creativity and woman as a blank page, see Susan Gubar. The model of the "pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and a female as his passive creation--a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with contradictory meaning but denied intentionality" (247). The rose, "traditional symbol for woman as erotic object, is the poet's analogue rather than opposite," which suggests "the doubled role of the woman who wants to write her way into the poetic tradition explicitly as a woman" (Mermin, Origins 100).

³² Similarly, the speaker in "The Soul's Travelling" (1838) attains the "grassy niche" (127) by slipping down "banks too steep / To be o'erbrowsèd by the sheep" (150-151).

³³ The idea that there is no way of looking at oneself without seeing oneself as an object is discussed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in Chapter 1, "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity" (3-44). Likewise, John Berger explains the differences in women's and men's presences. A man's presence is dependent upon the "promise of power which he embodies" (45), while a woman's presence, by contrast, "expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her" (46). Consequently, "she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping . . . so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman" (46). By posing the comparison and then imagining herself a more

compelling sight than the roses which serve as her crown, the lady who might have come to the Deserted Garden illustrates Berger's scheme of feminine self-assessment.

³⁴ By allying herself with the birds as the speaker of "The Romaunt of Margret" did not, the speaker of "The Lost Bower" is forging a bond with nature, and consequently recognizing her affinity with nature, as Margret did not. She acknowledges women's affinity with a redeeming nature in this poem.

³⁵ "The problem is not that the rose is fragile but that the weather is cold. The first woman poet will be, precisely, early" (Mermin, Origins 100).

³⁶ EBB is again expressing her knowledge that speaking in Boyd's Fathers' language is denying her own feminine creativity and can result in a kind of death.

³⁷ The palace is, again, the site of the patriarchal story.

³⁸ The blessing of the white petals also recalls the blessing the poet imagines for himself and the white rose in "A Lay of the Early Rose."

³⁹ Mermin sees the speaker at this point in the poem in the posture of "Sleeping Beauty, weary and waiting, neither a prince herself nor expecting one to come" (Origins 102).

⁴⁰ Toril Moi explains Helene Cixous's position: There is no positive space for women; "Either woman is passive or she doesn't exist" (105). Another way of approaching this problem is to consider E. Ann Kaplan's discussion of dominance and submission. She asks, "When women are in the dominant position, are they in the masculine position?" Dominance is structured according to the unconscious system underlying patriarchy, rendering the ownership and activation of the gaze male (30). As the object of

a man's gaze, a woman becomes the object of his desire. Should a woman usurp the gaze, stating her own desire, she loses the traditional characteristics of femininity (29). Should she return the gaze, she becomes castrating, as does George Cukor's *Camille* (40). In *My Brilliant Career*, a feminist film, the gaze belongs to a woman, but still she is powerless; it is the male hero who is able to act on his will. He is ultimately refused by the heroine because she can only conceive of love as submission; she refuses to give up her career as a creative writer (E. A. Kaplan 29), a conflict very much like the one faced by EBB's *Aurora Leigh*. Women have not been successfully able to assume a dominant position that is not male. If a woman is dominant, the male must assume the female position. There is no dominant position, concludes Kaplan, that can be demonstrated to be inherently feminine, pointing up the fact that there is no positive or dominant space in the patriarchy that is inherently feminine.

CHAPTER 4

A TURN OCCURS: BECOMING "THE POET"

*Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me and drew me backward by the hair*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in writing her pastoral poetry of 1838 and 1844, challenged and rejected the notion of the student/mentor, female/male literary relationship, and, in doing so, transformed her ideas about such a relationship in her life. She was able, through imaginative acts of artistic representation, to rid herself of the need to play the role of Beauty

in relation to a prince. When she entered into a literary relationship with Robert Browning, it is obvious that she bore her former female/male literary relationship in mind. Through her pastoral poems, she had come to terms with the tradition, however, and was ready to assume a different role. No longer content to long for and be refused reciprocity and equality, she asserted her need for and received both.

The section of Sonnet 1 this chapter addresses tells of an alteration in the perception of the poet/speaker about a change in direction. As she writes the Sonnets from the Portuguese, EBB invests her speaker with a new power. Parallel to and in delicate tension with her rejection of the Romantic plot is a change in the voice of the speaker. This segment of her literary autobiography may be easily traced through EBB's uses of a male poet/protagonist.

Up through the time the Sonnets from the Portuguese were written, EBB subscribed without reservation to the notion of the poet as a male genius.¹ The transformation of EBB's ideas about the student/mentor, female/male literary relationship can be followed by following the progress of the figure of the male poet in her work. The male poet/genius she writes about in an obsessive fashion in 1838 and 1844 parallels her obsession with Boyd; the figure of the poet in her work may be understood as an imaginative literary embodiment of the strong influence Boyd's "genius" exerted on

her. Since she could not change Boyd, she changed the nature of the poet in her work and, consequently, her ideas about herself.

The male poet/genius of 1838 and 1844 possesses a flexible identity, but becomes particularized in 1850 in the Sonnets as "the poet," Robert Browning, where he is the courter of the feminine poet/speaker. Subsequently, the figure of the male poet as hero, genius, and lover disappears from the work of EBB and is replaced by the feminine poet/genius, Aurora Leigh, in her most important poem about feminine creativity. By the time Aurora Leigh usurps the role of the male poet/genius, EBB is comfortable with the idea of the poet as an experienced woman because she has feminized him in her earlier poetry; EBB could not herself become a male poet/genius, so she began to create him as the white rose might have created him, had she been able to create: with many of the characteristics of an immensely creative woman.²

EBB held the common nineteenth-century critical attitude that creativity of imagination was linked with the idea of the creative genius, embodied in the figure of a poet/hero;³ she also believed that poetry was the "perfection which the imagination suggests" (Newman 9), consistent with Coleridge's belief that the end of poetry was pleasure (Warren 11). Additionally, she felt that poetry, "dignified, serious, sacred and pure," was "truth" (Forster 34), conformable to Wordsworth's assertion that truth is the end in poetry (Warren 11). This fluctuation may be related to her in-

creasing need for poetic autonomy and growing skepticism about both a male as dominant mentor and a non-reciprocal literary relationship in which she participated with such a mentor.

In an 1842 review for the Athenaeum, for example, she describes Chaucer: "His senses are open and delicate, like a young child's--his sensibilities capacious of supersensual relations, like an experienced thinker's" ("The Book of the Poets" 128). In effect, she combines both views of the poet so that Chaucer can be at once the creative child and the truthful thinker, both female and male in the tradition.⁴ She continues:

And because his imagination is neither too "high fantastical" to refuse proudly the gravitation of the earth, nor too "light of love" to lose it carelessly, he can create as well as dream, and work with clay as well as cloud; and when his men and women stand close by the actual ones, your stop-watch shall reckon no difference in the beating of their hearts.

("The Book of the Poets" 128-129)

Like Chaucer, Robert Browning was creative (his "men and women" were like Chaucer's⁵) but, like Chaucer, not so creative in a "high fantastical" manner as to render his characters unrealistic. As a critic, EBB asserts that a poet like Browning was successful in balancing the best qualities of

both the Baconian and Aristotelian points of view, Coleridge and Wordsworth in one.

She puts forth this theory most strikingly in her letters to Robert Browning, and indeed, supplies him with the very terminology as well as the modifiers he paraphrases in his essay on Shelley. She assesses his ability: "You have in your vision two worlds--or to use the language of the schools of the day, you are both subjective and objective in the habits of your mind" (Letters 1.9).⁶ When one reads both texts side by side, it is clear that Browning paraphrases her evaluations of himself in his "Preface" when describing the objective and subjective poets. Browning's "phrase" of "modern classification" is nothing but EBB's "language of the schools of the day." She goes on:

You can deal both with abstract thought and with human passion in the most passionate sense. Thus, you have an immense grasp in Art; and no one at all accustomed to consider the usual forms of it, could help regarding with reverence and gladness the gradual expansion of your powers.

(Letters 1.9)

Regarding her own poetry, however, not so objective an enterprise, she continued to be predisposed to portray the male as poet/genius because

of her belief that poetic authority, like Boyd's, is the product of male creative genius; compounding this personal belief, in all nineteenth-century poetic theory and criticism, the poet is universally acknowledged to be a man.⁷ EBB's "secret profession of faith" puts forth the superiority of men's intellect: "Let us say & do what we please & can . . . there is a natural inferiority of mind in women--of the intellect" (Letters 1.113). The superior male intellect makes a superior poet. "You are 'masculine' to the height," she tells Browning, "and I, as a woman, have studied some of your gestures of language & intonation wistfully, as a thing beyond me far!" (Letters 1.9). She particularly admires his "high faint notes of the mystics" and "dramatic impersonations"; when these are "thrown into harmony," works such as Pippa Passes result (Letters 1.22). That poem, she feels, is "most exquisite & altogether original," and she expresses the desire to have "been visited with the vision of 'Pippa'" before he had (Letters 1.24). The vision with which she was visited, Sonnets from the Portuguese, took its theme from her admiration of Browning's Pippa, just as her translation of Prometheus Bound was prompted by the influence of Boyd's scholarship, both cases illustrating her attachment to the notion of a male poet/genius who had crossed the boundary from her work to her life.

Sonnet 4, for instance, subtly reflects the weight of Browning's style of expression that EBB so admired. The poet speaker fashions the listener, the courting poet/hero, into a "*most gracious singer of high poems*" whose

"calling" is to "some palace floor." The persona of the poet speaker reveals herself in a sudden shift of landscape as she defines herself as a house whose "casement [is] broken in," a place that has "bats & owlets builders in the roof." "Hush!--" she tells the listener, "call no echo up in further proof / Of desolation!--" The dramatizations of speaker as run-down house and listener as court poet, along with the interplay between the characters insinuated by the admonition of the speaker to "hush [. . .] call no echo up," suggest the techniques of the dramatic monologue.⁸ The use of the house as metaphor, furthermore, is strikingly similar to Browning's use of a house as a metaphor for Luca in Pippa. The house, like Luca, is "mute" (1.20) and "silent as death" (1.24), paralleling EBB's self-description. It has "rough white wood shutters" and "rusty iron bars" (1.23); it is "deserted" (1.107), and as neglected as the house in Sonnet 4.

It is clear, then, that while she still had a need to be tutored by a male mentor, the imaginative work that ensued as a result of his influence attests to her changing view of her own place in the tradition. Instead of being restricted by the relationship, she was afforded productivity and a place in the tradition. The manner in which EBB's poetry both assisted her quest for autonomy and embodied it can be traced through an examination of the changing nature of her personal, libidinal preoccupation with the figure of the male poet as genius.

In "A Vision of Poets" (1844), EBB both sexualizes and feminizes the nature of the poet's work, the challenges of that work, and the poet's reward. It begins as a poet wanders through a wood and meets a lady to discover that her work is "to crown all poets to their worth." She commands the poet to drink from four pools, which, with their attendant emblems, are richly suggestive of the sexual nature of the poet's work. The first is near a dead tree stricken by lightning, "a monumental tree, alone" (133). He drinks from this pool with its phallic guardian. The next pool is set near some "straight flags," whose blade-shaped leaves contrast with some lilies nearby, suggesting both male and female sexuality (144). He drinks from the third pool for "world's love" (154-158). The last pool from which the poet drinks is populated by snakes, toads, and clinging bats, and strikes a chill into the hearts of all who venture there. He falls backward into a dream state "with Life and Death at each extreme" (190), and is wakened as the lady's "slow kiss" crowns his forehead (199). The inexperienced male poet begins his rite of initiation into sexual experience which becomes an explicitly feminine sexual experience.

Together they enter a cathedral presided over by a chief angel, permitted to see God. Poets, male with the exception of Sappho, from all nations and ages enter, and all have a bleeding wound in place of a heart. The chief angel poses to the poets a long and complicated question about their work and worth; they all agree to the premise that suffering is the price po-

ets have to pay for their art. A Christ-like, woman-like suffering accompanies the poet's crown: "all the crowns of earth must wound / With prickings of the thorns He found" (547-548).⁹ Likewise, the questions asked the poets by the chief angel are framed in terms of a woman's life: Is the lack of suffering like the lack of conscience? Should their words, as acts which change the world, "leave their own souls in eclipse?" (529-531). And finally, the angel wants their response to the assertion that they have to be like Christ in his suffering. The poets' unified answer is what a woman's answer was expected to be: "Content," "An affirmation full of pain / And patience" (558; 561-562). The poet learns that knowledge of feminine sexuality is essential for his work.

The vision recedes and "The lady's kiss did fall anew" on the poet's brow (776). That same kiss, previously described as a crowning kiss, "now reversed its own law" by piercing "most subtly" his spirit "with the sense of things / Sensual and present" (779-782), part of his rite of initiation, transforming virginity to experience.¹⁰

In a concluding section of "A Vision of Poets," the narrator walks in the same wood at a later time, and retraces the poet's footsteps. She learns that the poet has died; at his death, he contemplated a lily, studying it "as deep down as a bee had sucked" (888). He was "content to suffer much" (927). It is the sexual nature of his work, and the feminine part of that sexuality, that he recalls as having been the aspect of his work important

enough to stand as an icon of his death.¹¹ He recollects and confirms the vision in which his work had been defined in sexual and feminine terms.

In the volumes of poems published in 1838 and 1844,¹² EBB further marginalizes or in some way feminizes the poet, male genius though he is. The feminization of the male poet is a statement of her desire to perform autonomous poetic acts of representation outside the male literary tradition and away from the influence of her mentor Boyd. It is in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" (1844), however, that EBB feminizes a particular poet/genius: Robert Browning. In the course of the narrative, most of which is a letter written by the male poet/protagonist, the disparity of birth ("She was sprung of English nobles, I was born of English peasants" [15]) is contrasted with the disparity between both male and female, poet/genius and non-poet. The setting for this occurrence, as well as the description of Browning's poetry that follows, is clearly linked with the issues surrounding the work and worth of the poet raised in "A Vision of Poets." The poet, Bertram, relates how Lady Geraldine walked out "among her noble friends" (106) "within this swarded circle, into which the lime-walk brings us" (109). No music will enter this enclosed garden except that pure enough for the "lilies round the basin" to hear (112). The "swarded circle," a woman's space, will only be filled with music pure enough for the lilies, strongly reminiscent of those surrounding the second pool from which the poet drank ("A Vision of Poets"). The entrance to that circle is a "lime-walk." In this poem, and as we

shall see in Aurora Leigh (1855), the lime tree is closely associated with EBB's ideas of the male poet/genius: the emotive, creative, Baconian Coleridge. By allying herself to the male poet via the figure of the lime tree as access to the feminine space, she familiarizes herself with the notion of woman as creative poet/genius.

The poet/speaker of Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" regrets his inability to join his friends as they walk into the woods, fields, and meadows. The bower serves as a gateway, or vestibule, to the place his friends travelled, as he himself had travelled, and where the "Almighty Spirit . . . makes / Spirits perceive his presence" (42-43). He imagines his friend, "struck with deep joy" (38), standing as he himself had stood "silent with swimming sense" (39) in that place. The speaker, however, feels a sudden delight, and becomes as glad as if he himself were there (43-45). Looking around his bower, he perceives the beauty of nature which he had not perceived before, and concludes that it is sometimes "well to be bereft of promis'd good" so that the soul may be lifted and one may "contemplate / With lively joy the joys we cannot share" (64-67). Just as Coleridge is able to resolve the tension of prison versus freedom by having his speaker's very prison become the source of his release, so EBB reconciles the tension between her conception of the poet as male genius (the poet of her poem) and the fact that she is the feminine poet/genius responsible for having written

"Lady Geraldine's Courtship" functions as a model of EBB's relationship with Robert Browning as poet/genius and lover. Five months after the publication of "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," Browning, summoned, as it were, by the two lines of poetry devoted to him, indeed entered EBB's life, becoming her new mentor and role model; "I am inclined to look up to you in many things, & to learn as much of everything you will teach me" (Letters 1.13), she tells him shortly after the initiation of their correspondence. Likewise, he occupied the place previously inhabited by the figure of the male poet/genius in her poetry: "I will reverence you both as 'a poet' and as 'the poet'" (Letters 1.79). In addition to emulating his dramatic style, which she admired in all his work and particularly Pippa Passes, EBB casts Browning in the role of poet/hero of the Sonnets from the Portuguese. She re-imagines him in the Sonnets as she has already imagined a poet in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship." What Bertram writes of himself and Lady Geraldine, "I was only a poor poet, made for singing at her casement," prefigures Sonnet 4 (discussed pp. 98-99) where the speaker herself is the house whose casement is broken in.

If the narrative strategies and points of view of the speakers, poets, and "ladies" (that is, women being courted by men) of "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," The Sonnets from the Portuguese, and Aurora Leigh are examined, it will become clear that these roles are at first discrete, then overlap, and then converge in Aurora Leigh. In "Lady Geraldine," the speaker is a

male poet/genius, the "lady" of the poem is not fully identified with her author, nor is the poem written from Lady Geraldine's point of view, which parallels her idea of her place in the tradition while Boyd was her mentor.¹⁴ In the Sonnets, the speaker is feminine and closely identified with her author; the poet is a male poet/genius; and the "lady," who is also the speaker, is closely identified with her author, a situation that presented itself with the idea of a reciprocal relationship with a male mentor. In Aurora Leigh, all these roles become one: the speaker is feminine, closely identified with her author who is likewise a poet; additionally, she is the poet/genius; she is the "lady" as well, closely identified with her author, which is the direction her life and her work took after Browning was established as the male mentor with whom she had "an equality." EBB, who at first can not conceive of a woman speaker in the role of poet/genius, gradually assigns that role to a feminine speaker and a feminized poet/genius in a number of ways that overlap incrementally, until in Aurora Leigh the role is unconditionally given to a woman.

The poet Browning, narrowly defined in his role of "the poet" in the Sonnets from the Portuguese, possesses many of the qualities of Bertram in "Lady Geraldine"; additionally, the relationship between Lady Geraldine and Bertram complements the relationship between the speaker and the poet/hero in the Sonnets. The poet/hero of the Sonnets, like Bertram, is both noble and rich in a manner befitting a poet. Bertram declares that he is

"worthy as a King" (316), with a sudden flash of self-knowledge; "noble certes," affirms Lady Geraldine, and rich in virtue (Conclusion, 43). In a more explicit manner in the Sonnets, the poet/hero is clothed throughout in purple (Sonnets 9, 16, and 39, for example). In Sonnet 3, the speaker addresses him as "*princely Heart*," and claims that he is a "*guest for queens to social pageantries*," which replicates Bertram's position as a guest in Lady Geraldine's noble household. He is a "*liberal / And princely giver*" (Sonnet 8); he is "*princely & like a king*" (Sonnet 16). Likewise, in Sonnet 4, the speaker says: "*Thou hast thy calling to some palace floor, / Most gracious singer of high poems.*"

While Bertram bears this resemblance to the male poet/hero of the Sonnets, equally striking is the resemblance between Bertram and the feminine speaker of the Sonnets. They both have a sense of loneliness and separateness which marks the poet/genius. Bertram does not always join in with the socializing that goes on around Lady Geraldine; "oft," he relates in the letter that serves as the framing device of the narrative, "I sate apart" (87). The speaker of the Sonnets is likewise alienated, weeping "*alone, . . . aloof*" (Sonnet 4). Before she knew the poet/hero, the speaker "*sate alone here in the snow*" (Sonnet 21).¹⁵ In addition, their self-descriptions are equivalent; Bertram says he is "poor, weak, tost with passion" and dares not love Lady Geraldine to his "grief and [her] dishonor" (318-319), which is comparable to the speaker's assertion that her soul is "*all faint and weak*"

(Sonnet 12), and that she seemed like an "*out of tune / Worn viol*" with which a good singer "*would be wroth / To spoil his song*" (Sonnet 33). Corresponding to the very thesis of the Sonnets from the Portuguese, and to the speaker's representation of herself, Bertram says he is "born to poet-uses, / To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair" (29-30). The speaker of the Sonnets echoes Bertram:

*And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own!--
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint & weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne:
And that I love . . . (O soul, I must be meek!)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.*

(Sonnet 12)

In addition, the responses of Bertram and the speaker of the Sonnets to an intimidating emotion are arrestingly similar. Bertram, exhausted by an "inward flow of passion" (337) "fell, struck down before" Lady Geraldine (349), recalling the speaker who compares herself to an "*acolyte*" who might "*fall flat, with pale insensate brow*" because of an overwhelming emotion (Sonnet 31).

Bertram and the speaker of the Sonnets also have the same approach in contending with the issue of seeming versus reality. Lady Geraldine and Bertram consider a statue of Silence portrayed asleep.¹⁶ Lady Geraldine points out that the Silence has forgotten to say "hush," a paradox (116). One of the statue's hands clutches a rose "held slack" in her fingers, "fallen backward in the basin" (119-120). Lady Geraldine feels that an "essential meaning growing" may "exceed the special symbol" of the rose (121). Illustrating her point, Lady Geraldine says that "our true noblemen will often through right nobleness grow humble, / And assert an inward honour by denying outward show" (123-124). Bertram, on the other hand, points out that even though Silence seems to drop the rose, she yet holds it; he counters Lady Geraldine's assertion by telling her that "substance [. . .] wanes" and "symbol [. . .] exceeds" (130), and "your" nobles "wear their ermine on the outside," or else society brands them "mere ignoble men" (127-128). In this discussion over what is and what seems, Bertram alleges that symbolic representation is paramount and the place meaning is to be found. Similarly, in Sonnet 13 the poet speaker finds herself unequal to the task of bringing "*proof / In words, . . . of the love hid in me out of reach,*" which is the same kind of issue debated by Lady Geraldine and Bertram. She goes on to say she will depend, rather, upon the manifestation or symbol of womanhood, "*silence,*" to "*commend my woman-love to thy belief.*" This poses again the tension between what is and what seems. Like Bertram, she

finds that symbolic representation is more forceful than matter, or "substance wanes, symbol exceeds." While the male poet/hero of the Sonnets resembles the poet/genius in EBB's earlier poetry, it is the feminine poet speaker of the Sonnets who ascribes to herself the qualities and opinions of the male poet/genius.¹⁷

Gender dictates that, while there is a relationship between the speaker of the Sonnets and Bertram, there also be a relationship between the speaker and Lady Geraldine.¹⁸ As the disparity of social status gives way to a re-definition of virtue and nobility in "Lady Geraldine," so this discourse reappears as well in the Sonnets and in the letters of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. It is made clear in "Lady Geraldine" that a poet possesses inherent virtue and a particular kind of wealth. After explicitly stating that she would never marry anyone not noble "ay, and wealthy" (263-264), Lady Geraldine reveals she loves Bertram and would be willing to marry him because he is "very rich [. . .] in virtues--very noble" (Conclusion, 43). This is an idea that EBB imported from her poetry into her own life, and may serve to elucidate a puzzling aspect of her relationship with the poet Browning, and at the same time demonstrate the seriousness of the influence of her male mentors on her life and on her poetry.

EBB obsessively reiterates expressions of gratitude to Browning in both the letters and the Sonnets. In places, in fact, it seems to be her principal feeling (Letters 1.197, e.g.). While it is true that she was six years

older than Browning and an invalid who did have definite doubts about her physical and emotional abilities, the expressions of gratitude in the letters and Sonnets are a continuation of the discourse begun in such poems as "Lady Geraldine" and "A Vision of Poets," wherein the male poet is a noble and virtuous genius, close to God.¹⁹ The topic of professional gratitude discussed by the two poets in their letters emerges in the Sonnets, where what appear to be expressions of personal gratitude are additionally a continuation of the "poetry question" (Karlin 86), explored in a medium which is, itself, what it discusses. With the knowledge that the personal relationship between the poets is so inextricably enmeshed in poetry, one is able to assess the seeming self-abasement of the speaker of the Sonnets in a slightly different light.²⁰

Both Lady Geraldine and the speaker of the Sonnets (feminine speakers created by a woman poet) share EBB's "secret profession of faith" that women have inferior intellectual capacity. Lady Geraldine is an earl's daughter, "proud," "noble," breathing "perfumed air" (3-4). Bertram asks: "What was I that I should love her [. . .] I was only a poor poet" (16-17). As the disparity of birth is resolved through Bertram's intrinsic nobility and wealth of virtue, the italicized "I's" become reversed. Lady Geraldine asks:

"Dost thou Bertram, truly love me? Is not woman far
 above me
 Found more worthy of thy poet-heart than such a one as
 I?"

(Conclusion, 31-32)

It is this question, in which personal feelings are informed by questions of intellectual and spiritual ability, specifically, the capacity to be a poet, that the speaker of the Sonnets asks the poet/hero in many different ways. In Sonnet 11, for example, the speaker, paraphrasing Lady Geraldine, says:

*O beloved, it is plain
 I am not of thy worth nor for thy place.*

In Sonnet 8, likewise, she asks what she can give him in return for his gifts. The gifts are "*gold / And purple of thine heart, unstained . . . untold,*" manifestations of the wealth and nobility of the poetic nature. She asks if she is not cold and "*ungrateful,*"

*that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
Not so--not cold--but very poor instead!*

Her poverty and ingratitude are her lack of worthiness, in Lady Geraldine's terms.

Descending as he does from the earlier poets in EBB's work, the poet/genius of the Sonnets possesses as well the feminine qualities of his predecessors; she had already feminized Browning, "the poet," in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship." In Sonnet 24, the speaker commands him: "*look on me . . . breathe on me!*" ascribing to him the nurturing, feminine qualities of the maternal child-poet, Goethe, who looked on Bettine and breathed on her brow ("To Bettine: The Child-Friend of Goethe" [1838]). In Sonnet 36, the speaker lays out her anxieties about her life with the poet/hero, asking him quite frankly if, when she gives up everything for him, he will be all to her. In particular, she wants to know if he will fill the place close to her made vacant by death "*filled by dead eyes too tender to know change*," which, it may be argued, may be taken to allude to EBB's brother Edward, but is most probably a reference to her mother.²¹ Asking to be nurtured, she says,

*open thine heart wide,
And fold within, the wet wings of thy dove,*

which calls to mind again the image of the child-poet/genius Goethe, and his relationship with the child Bettine: "The poet's arms have wound thee."²²

As Browning resembles the feminized male poet/genius of EBB's earlier poetry, in the Sonnets he usurps his place. In Sonnet 27, the speaker confesses she lived with "*Visions [. . .] instead of men & women,*" that is, she lived with the fictional characters she read about and likewise created.²³ They were "*gentle mates,*" but soon "*their lutes did silent grow.*" "Then," she tells the poet/hero, "*thou didst come . . . to be, / Beloved, what they seemed.*" Just as Browning takes the place of EBB's fictional poets from whom he has descended in her imagination, she gives up her fiction of the male poet/genius and becomes a poet/genius herself by achieving a kind of parity with the poet/hero of the Sonnets; they usurp the place of the poet/genius while joined together in a reciprocal literary relationship.

While the Sonnets are filled with references to her unworthiness and the gratitude she feels she ought to feel, ultimately there is a progression toward acceptance of the poet/hero's love that endows her with a reciprocal worthiness, which reenacts Bertram's recognition of and acceptance of worthiness in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship." In Sonnet 10, fire can burn either a temple or flax; indeed,

an equal light

Leaps in the flame from cedar-raft or weed.

And love is fire.

In Sonnet 23 there is a compensatory equality, seemingly related to the fire which is love:

our two souls stand up erect & strong,

Face to face, silent, drawing nigh & nigher,

Until their lengthening wings break into fire

At either curved point.

Reciprocity, equality, and sexuality are embodied in this image; sexuality, as we have seen, is richly associated with the work and worth of the poet. The womanly silence that was the silence of the speaker alone in Sonnet 13 gives rise in this sonnet to "*our deep dear silence*," encompassing the feminized male poet and the feminine poet/speaker standing face to face as an icon of male sexuality.

In Sonnet 44, the last in the sequence, the speaker, in a gesture of reciprocity, offers the preceding sonnets to the poet/hero in the spirit in which he had brought her bouquets of flowers. She "*withdrew*" her thoughts that "*unfolded*" like flowers from her "*heart's ground*." "*Take them as I*

used to do / Thy flowers," she offers, as personal gratitude replaces professional gratitude, in a resolution of the "poetry question." By offering poems to "the poet," she demonstrates that she has proven herself a poet to her own satisfaction, and is ready to see herself as "the (co-equal) poet." Through her literary relationship with Browning, a poet/genius with whom she came to feel equal, EBB is able to see herself as a poet capable of creating art autonomously in the tradition and on her own terms alongside the tradition.

Paradoxically, the inexperienced male poet/protagonist, unaware of his own worth and crowned by another (and thus initiated into experience), disappears from the work of EBB after the Sonnets from the Portuguese,²⁴ giving way, instead, to Aurora Leigh, the experienced feminine speaker who is the courted "lady" as well as the poet/genius who, knowing her own worth, crowns herself. With the departure of her libidinal preoccupation with the figure of the male poet, gone as well is her dependence on a dominant/submissive, mentor/student relationship. EBB transfers that interest to the possibilities that present themselves to the experienced, self-crowned feminine poet/genius. Symbolizing this rejection is the figure of the lime tree of "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" which surfaces in Aurora Leigh. In Book 1, Aurora describes her compliance with her aunt's instruction; she was placed by her aunt in a chair with her "back against the window" (1.483-485), excluding "The sight of the great lime-tree on the lawn, / Which seems to have come on purpose from the woods / To bring the house

a message" (1.485-487).²⁵ Even though she can not see it, Aurora can yet get a sense of the "message" the lime tree delivers. Having come seemingly of its own volition out of the woods, the solitary tree, like the "monumental tree, alone" of the first pool from which the poet drank ("A Vision of Poets"), conveys the trope of masculine sexuality and masculine genius, one which is very disturbing to Aurora. This fact is made emphatic a short time later in Book 1, as she describes the "little chamber" (1.567), the feminine space which is her own room in the house. It was as "green as any privet hedge" (1.568):

the walls

Were green, the carpet was pure green, the straight

Small bed was curtained greenly, and the folds

Hung green about the window which let in

The out-door world with all its greenery.

(1.570-574)

She is surrounded by the color of the fertility of nature and of inspiration that encompasses everything she can see, extending out into the world from the feminine space in which she creates like the locus amoenus of her pastoral poems. Her view is dominated, however, by the lime, whose bees interfered with her creative process:

I had enough there, of the lime, be sure,--
 My morning-dream was often hummed away
 By the bees in it.

(1.579-581)

Out of context, her discernment of the lime tree, bordering on resentment, is perplexing. If one remembers, however, the circumstances surrounding the lime in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" and "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison," it is clear that she has given up the belief in the male poet as genius, experienced sage, and inspiring genius loci in favor of the female poet/genius, living and working in a fertile feminine environment literally (and literarily) overshadowed by male genius. As EBB was fused to the male genius in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" through the lime trees that led to a feminine space, in Aurora Leigh, the feminine space is distinct from the lime tree, the vestigial remnant of male genius, and she experiences it as a separate, disruptive entity because she has endowed her feminine poet/speaker with autonomy.

While the poet/hero/courter of the "lady"/speaker of the Sonnets is "the poet," Romney Leigh, courter of the "lady"/speaker of Aurora Leigh, clearly is not. In a chiasmic movement, the male figure in Aurora Leigh is transformed from a male poet/genius to one who is not a poet/genius; at the same time, Aurora, the "experienced" poet, takes on the role of "the poet":

Browning himself. As an experienced poet, Aurora appropriates Browning's theories of poetry, as just as Browning had been influenced by EBB when formulating his definition of objective and subjective poets, illustrating the reciprocal literary relationship.

Romney, for instance, accuses Aurora of being irresponsible, like a child playing beside a death-bed (2.180); women, like children, can not understand certain things. It is Romney, however, who does not understand the implications of childishness. He knows nothing about Goethe's nurturing, child-like genius, nor of Goethe's counterparts, the feminized poets, among them, Chaucer and Browning. He does not properly value Aurora's worth as a poet: If she is able to write as well as other women, "what then?" (2.147). If she is able to write "even a little better," "still, what then?" (2.148). "We want the Best in art now, or no art" (2.149), he tells Aurora. From his point of view, her femininity prevents her from becoming a poet; he mistakes, however, femininity for virginity. Unaware of her status as an experienced poet/genius, he advises Aurora to "keep to the green wreath" (2.93), the transformed crown here an image of a woman's space, circumscribed by fertility, and advises her furthermore to maintain her virginal status by avoiding anything that would defile "the clean white morning dresses" (2.96). What he is unable to understand is that the inexperience to which he refers is actually the feminine, childlike genius of the poet; he can neither read nor understand the woman's text of experience.²⁶

Aurora defends herself by saying: "Better far / Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means, / Than a sublime art frivolously" (2.257-259). The poet Aurora's response incorporates Browning's philosophy, embracing ideas to be found in his poetry. In Browning's "The Lost Leader" (1845), for example, those who had made the Leader their "pattern to live and to die" (12) were betrayed by him; he had pursued what Aurora describes as "a sublime art frivolously." In Browning's "The Last Ride Together" (1855), the two lovers are united one last day: "So, one day more am I deified. / Who knows but the world may end to-night?" (21-22). A poet is not "nearer one whit" to his "own sublime" than those who have no artistic ability: "Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride" (75-77). By riding well, or pursuing a "frivolous trade by serious means," the speaker of the poem transcends the sublime work of the poet. Through her symmetrical relationship with the poet Browning, Aurora, EBB's autonomous poet/speaker, is now transformed. The now-autonomous poet as God's "truth-teller" (1.859) has become Browning's poet in "How It Strikes a Contemporary" (1855):

We had among us, not so much a spy,
 As a recording chief-inquisitor,
 The town's true master if the town but knew!

(38-40)²⁷

Both EBB's Aurora Leigh and Robert Browning's closet drama, In a Balcony (1852), further illustrate this relationship when they raise the issues of feminine autonomy, self-assertion, and the possibility of the love of a woman for a man. These texts, in fact, engage one another in a discourse that can be traced to EBB's 1844 volume. The unifying symbol representing this exchange is the crowning of the poet. EBB's inexperienced male poet was crowned by another and thus initiated into experience; her experienced feminine poet, who incorporates Browning's ideas of crowns and crowning, crowns herself, and the two poetic doctrines converge.

Within the first thirty lines of In a Balcony, Norbert and Constance discuss whether or not they should immediately inform the Queen they want to be married. Constance takes offense at the suggestion that they should inform her immediately, shifting the emphasis from that question to herself, invoking a controversy from Aurora Leigh. "I am not yours then?" (19) she asks him, and begins in the next line to discuss Norbert as if he were not there:

I am not his--who change into himself,
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,

Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,
Give all that was of me away to him.

(20-23)

This is the very contention surrounding the sketches that Aurora Leigh's friend Vincent Carrington wants her to assess in Book 3. Vincent describes his sketch of Danae reaching up to Jove, eager to "burn him faster down" (3.124).²⁸ The sketch, as described by Vincent, is a sensuous, emblematic replication of the pose Aurora had assumed in Book 2 when Romney discovered her crowning herself as a poet with an ivy wreath; here, although Danae is in the same posture as the self-crowned Aurora, it is actually Jove who is crowning her with himself. Aurora analyzes the picture:

Surely. Self is put away,
And calm with abdication. She is Jove,
And no more Danae

(3.135-137),

paraphrasing Constance's objection to changing herself into Norbert. Aurora, the experienced poet/genius, concludes:

God says, "Sweat
 For foreheads," men say "crowns," and so we are crowned,
 Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel
 Which snaps with a secret spring.

(3.164-168)

Constance likewise culminates her thoughts about relinquishing her own personality to a man with a cynical assessment of Norbert's potential crowning:

Just that the world may cry "So much for him--
 The man predestined to the heap of crowns:
 There goes his chance of winning one, at least!"

(36-38)

The lesson of reciprocal love taught in Sonnet 44 emerges in Book 4 of Aurora Leigh. Aurora begins to define the meaning of love in a reciprocal context while hearing Marian Erle's story. When learning that Marian thought Romney loved her, Aurora thinks "this perhaps was love" (4.176). Aurora invests this new conception of love with the idea of a circle, "A perfect round of love / Includes [. . .] being loved" (4.179-180), which gives rise immediately to the idea of a crown:

The cataracts of her soul had poured themselves
 And risen self-crowned in rainbow: would she ask
 Who crowned her?--it sufficed that she was crowned.

(4.184-186)

Marian, like Aurora and unlike Danae, is self-crowned in Aurora's new formulation of the reward of the woman, which is now like the reward of the experienced poet. Like the experienced poet free from the artistically inhibiting effects of the female/male, student/mentor relationship as it is configured in the tradition, the woman who loves is autonomous and crowns herself.

Whereas the text of the inexperienced male poet celebrates crowning as the reward of the male genius, likening him to Christ and to women, the text of experience spoken by the transformed feminine poet/genius posits a cynical rejection of that notion. What was a tribute rewarding "all poets to their worth" ("A Vision of Poets"), wounding poets "with prickings of the thorns" of Christ becomes a "tormenting circle of steel" with no compensatory divinity attached. The crowning celebrated in Aurora Leigh is not awarded for virtue; it is the kind one gets for oneself, reminiscent of Browning's "There's many a crown for who can reach" ("The Last Ride To-

gether" [1855], 61). Finally free of the restraints placed on her thinking, creative ability, and personal life by the tradition, EBB's text of experience is one in which the poet is an autonomous, mature woman, a poet-equal to her mentor, "the poet," who recognizes that in order to be crowned, one must crown oneself.

The poems that trace the career of the inexperienced male poet protagonist to the experienced feminine poet protagonist reveal EBB's personal literary history. The change of which the speaker in Sonnet 1 becomes aware signals a turning away from a former experience and a literal thrust into a new one. The speaker turns away from the poet Theocritus, his genre pastoral, and his language, and is literally drawn into discourse with a new poet whose actions revise the classical image of being pulled backward by the hair.²⁹ Her male poet protagonist, in whom she invested her ideas of genius and of poetry itself, is in the process of becoming a feminine poet protagonist; at this point, however, the poet figure is merged with a new poet whom she represents as grasping her physically to himself. The speaker of the Sonnets from the Portuguese becomes empowered by "Love" which occasions the merged subjectivity of the two poets-become-one. It is with this merged subjectivity that the speaker writes the Sonnets from the Portuguese.

NOTES

¹ "The definition of poetry as 'that which is produced by the poet' rests firmly on the concept of original genius, a concept that was formulated in English criticism as early as 1759" (Warren 22). See Chapter 1, note 29.

² Deborah Byrd explains the process by which EBB "began to compose poems in which female characters act assertively and independently" (27).

³ The poet/genius who is the listener in the Sonnets and who is also the courter of the "lady"/speaker will be referred to as the poet/hero to distinguish him from the generic poet/genius.

⁴ When EBB, in effect, feminizes Chaucer by describing him as a creative child, she is not, interestingly enough, the only nineteenth-century critic to do so. See Chapter 2, note 16, for a discussion of Matthew Arnold's description of Chaucer's otherness.

⁵ In a letter to Browning, she finds it "startling and humiliating [. . .] to observe how you combine such large tracts of experience of outer & inner life, of books & men, of the world & the arts of it; curious knowledge as well as general knowledge . . . & deep thinking as well as wide acquisition," (Letters 1.163), which encompasses the Chaucerian dichotomy of the creative child and the truthful thinker.

⁶ The wording in Browning's "Preface" is as follows: "An objective poet, as the phrase now goes"; "The subjective poet of modern classification" (11; 13).

⁷ Dorothy Mermin observes that "Barrett Browning always refers to poets with the generic 'he,' even in Aurora Leigh" (Origins 242).

⁸ Robert Langbaum discusses the problem of classifying poems as dramatic monologues. He posits a narrow definition of a dramatic monologue and a broader one. If the narrow definition is used to classify a poem as a dramatic monologue, such a poem would have to have not only a speaker other than the poet but also a listener, an occasion, and some interplay between speaker and listener. Langbaum points out, however, that "a classification of this sort does not even cover all the dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson, let alone those of other poets," and "inevitably leads to quarrels about which poems are to be admitted to the canon" (76). He suggests, instead, that sympathy and judgment be used as the broader criteria by which to categorize what he calls the poetry of experience, or post-Enlightenment poetry. He asserts that the post-Enlightenment reader's entry into the dramatic monologue is sympathy with the speaker. Taking both the narrow and broad definitions of the dramatic monologue into account, elements of the dramatic monologue may be identified in the Sonnets. The dramatic situations in the Sonnets, characteristically brief, have no real beginnings and no satisfactory resolutions, and are not in the strictest sense dramatic monologues, yet in places meet Langbaum's criteria for dramatic monologues.

⁹ Mermin points out that bleeding is the mark of Christ as well as the mature woman (Origins 102).

¹⁰ In EBB's translation of Bion's "A Lament for Adonis" (1850), the kiss is likewise invested with a lavish sensuality. Cypris says:

"Let me feel thee once more--let me ring thee about
With the clasp of my arms, and press kiss into kiss!
Wait a little Adonis, and kiss me again,
For the last time, beloved,--and but so much of this
That the kiss may learn life from the warmth of
the strain!
--Till thy breath shall exude from thy soul to my
mouth,

To my heart,--and the love-charm I, once more
receiving,
May drink thy love in it, and keep of a truth
That one kiss in the place of Adonis the living."

(48-56)

Hereafter, the kiss itself will represent Adonis and the explicitly sexual nature of their relationship.

¹¹ The lily recalls his initiation from virginity to feminine sexual experience, which was what enabled him to understand the true nature of a poet's work.

¹² The Seraphim, and Other Poems (London, 1838); Poems, 2 vols. (London, 1844).

¹³ Browning's Bells and Pomegranates was published in eight pamphlets between 1841 and 1846.

¹⁴ Glennis Stephenson feels, however, that while Bertram narrates most of the poem "the female voice . . . indirectly control[s] the reader's understanding of the text" (56).

¹⁵ These two speakers who enjoy being alone resemble EBB herself. In her diary, for example, she states: "*My love of solitude is growing with my growth. I am inclined to shun the acquaintance of those whom I do not like & love*" (Diary 155).

¹⁶ See Helen M. Cooper for the genesis of the figure of Silence and for the significance of the rose in EBB's interpretation (93-94).

¹⁷ Carol Christ explains the "feminine mode of verse" described in the nineteenth century. The feminine subject had become increasingly

important to poetry "not only as a subject but as a characteristic of the poetic sensibility" (385). Tennyson, in particular, "identifies the poetical with the feminine" through acts of appropriation or "theft" (386). EBB uses a method of appropriation when she identifies herself with the male poet/genius, but to a different end. She begins able only to imagine creative genius as a male characteristic, but comes to identify her feminine speakers with the feminized male poet until she is able to conjure up Aurora Leigh, an autonomous, feminine poet/genius, who appropriates, in a sense, the characteristics of the feminized male poet.

¹⁸ For example, the argument Lady Geraldine makes to the earl who courts her is much like the argument EBB makes to Browning in the letters and the speaker makes to the poet/hero in the Sonnets. Lady Geraldine tells the earl he could pay his addresses to someone worthier, and then concludes the conversation: "This talk is vain, and we had best eschew it, / And pass on, like friends to other points less easy to decide" (259-260). After their first meeting, Browning wrote EBB a letter, since destroyed, in which he "said some intemperate things"; it is presumed he proposed marriage (see Kintner's note in Letters 1.72). In her next letter to him, she advises him to "not say over again, nor unsay, but forget at once, & for ever, having said at all,--& which (so) will die out between you & me alone, like a misprint between you and the printer" (Letters 1.72). She reinstates herself, as does Lady Geraldine, as the "friend" of the rejected suitor.

¹⁹ Daniel Karlin defines both personal and poetic gratitude in the letters of both poets, and finds a "link between the poetic and the personal" gratitude (92) while tracing an argument in that text between the two poets. As the argument about personal gratitude subsides, the argument about professional gratitude takes its place (78-90). The question of who was a better poet, and hence, who should be the most grateful to whom, had a "central place in the relationship" (86). "In and through" the poetry question, Karlin concludes, the other question of personal gratitude is continued (86).

²⁰ Mermin asserts that even "critics avert their eyes in embarrassment" when reading the *Sonnets* ("The Female Poet" 351). The twentieth-century reader finds them "awkward, mawkish, and indecently personal" (352), and that he or she turns away "from a sight that violates both literary and social decorum" (353). She finds a "blurring of sexual roles" established in the third sonnet, "which imagines the beloved as a glorious court musician 'looking from the lattice-lights' at the speaker, who is just a 'poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through / The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree'" (353). If one reads this and other sonnets, however, with the knowledge that EBB sees herself primarily as a poet in her relationship with Browning, and that she sees him as a superior poet, "the poet," one will see as well that the discrepancy between the "glorious court musician" and the "poor, tired, wandering singer" is a continuation of the question of gratitude begun in the letters the two poets exchanged. The sonnet speaker's feelings of inadequacy are no different than Lady Geraldine's feelings of inadequacy.

²¹ Aurora Leigh describes a portrait of her mother, painted after death. While all eyes are on the painting, the eyes in the portrait are not mentioned, presumably because they are not taken from the model, the dead body. Aurora says that over the years, she "mixed, confused, unconsciously" whatever she happened to be reading with her mother's face, which, nevertheless, remained unchanged (1.128-151), as the dead eyes in Sonnet 36 do not change.

²² EBB feminizes or otherwise marginalizes the figure of the poet in such poems as "Tears" (1844), "The Poet and the Bird" (1844), and "To Bettine: The Child-Friend of Goethe," (1838). See Chapter 2, pp. 61-62, for a discussion of these poems.

²³ Dierdre David suggests these overlap. She points out that because of EBB's seclusion and inexperience and her restricted "world of reading and writing," her life is itself a text "which becomes the source of textual production" (101-102), which seems to be borne out by EBB's heightened ability to enjoy interpersonal communication in the form of a text rather than

in the more traditional manner of face-to-face encounter. It is common, in fact, for women who are artists to experience their lives and their work as the same; the sense that "she is herself the text means that there is little distance between her life and her art" (Gubar 251). In short, living her life, which chiefly consisted of reading and writing, was living a text and then re-duplicating her text/experience in yet another text.

²⁴ In the 1844 volume, there are 80 occurrences of "poet" (poet, poets, poets', poet's). In the Sonnets from the Portuguese, both occurrences (poet, poet's) refer to the poet/hero. In Aurora Leigh, there are 84 occurrences (poet, poets, poet's). As the feminine poet/genius, Aurora Leigh, replaces the male poet/genius, EBB's fascination with the figure of the poet ends; in the 1850 volume there are three occurrences; in Casa Guidi Windows, nine; Poems Before Congress, five; and Last Poems, five.

²⁵ Aurora describes the tasks her aunt set her: learning some religious literature, "the collects and the cathecism [sic], / The creeds" (1.392-393), languages, algebra, history, geography, and music. "And last," Aurora relates, "I learnt cross-stitch" (1.446-447), describing tongue-in-cheek her difficulties with that task, leading her nevertheless to a serious meditation on the notion of women's work. "By the way," she begins, "The works of women are symbolical" (1.455-456). Women "sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight, / Producing what?" They may produce useless items, such as a cover for a stool that a man, presumably a husband, may stumble over and curse (1.457-460). At best, a woman may produce a cushion:

where you lean
And sleep, and dream of something we are not
But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!
(1.461-463)

What "hurts most" is "that, after all, we are paid / The worth of our work, perhaps" (1.464-465).

A poet, like a woman, produces work that is also "symbolical," but a poet's work is valued for its own sake; it is not a useless item one can trip over. Poets are crowned "to their worth" ("A Vision of Poets" [54]), just as women are (ironically) paid the worth of their work. Aurora, the experienced poet and experienced woman, discovers that if she wants to be crowned to her worth, she will have to find a way to crown herself.

In "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity," Chapter 1 of *Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe the first Queen, Snow White's mother, framed by a window while sewing, just as Aurora was. The motifs introduced by this scene, among them, sewing and enclosure, "are associated with key themes in female lives (hence in female writing)" (37). At this point, the Queen is not without prospects; she is able to look out through the window, even though it is only snow that she sees, unlike the second Queen who looks into the patriarchal mirror. Aurora's story revises the story of the first queen in "Snow White," because although she sews with her back to the window, doing women's work while under the influence of her aunt, when she looks from her window when alone in her room, she sees an extended vision of her woman's space, albeit dominated by male genius in the form of the lime tree. She is able, however, to impose both her vision of the feminine space and her ideas of feminine creativity on the world.

²⁶ As Sandra Gilbert points out, it was not until Romney was able to "read" Aurora--literally read her "texts of female desire"--that she was able to accept him as a husband (202).

²⁷ Likewise, the poet whom Aurora describes as a holder of God's "sun-skirts" (1.862-863) may be related to the poet whom Browning calls the "Sun-treader" (*Pauline* [1833] 151; 201; 1020).

²⁸ Danae was visited in prison by Zeus in the form of a golden shower to whom she was reaching in Vincent's sketch. She had been imprisoned in a tower by her father, King Acrisius of Argos, after an oracle

told him that his grandson would cause his death. She conceived Perseus by Zeus, who, many years later, fulfilled the prophecy by accidentally killing his grandfather.

²⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 81.

CHAPTER 5

*THE EFFECTS OF A NEW VOICE: THE POETIC UNITY OF
THE SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE*

*"Guess now who holds thee!"--"Death," I said!: but,
there
The silver answer rang . . . "Not Death, but Love."*

As Dorothy Mermin observes, it is the element of autobiography in the Sonnets from the Portuguese that proves off-putting to readers.¹ As was demonstrated in this reading of Sonnet 1, the Sonnets are not an autobiography of EBB's actual life, but an autobiography of her literary life,

which hinged so powerfully on her relationship with her mentor, evidenced by such issues as in the similarities between the speaker of the Sonnets and characters in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's earlier poetry, like Bertram ("Lady Geraldine's Courtship," discussed in Chapter 3). When "Love" triumphs over "Death" in Sonnet 1, Theocritus--a multi-sided signifier--becomes displaced as muse of that poem, and functions as an anti-muse for the remainder of the sequence, which is spoken in a voice that combines the subjectivities of woman as creator and woman as created.²

The Sonnets are as much about writing poetry and being the writer of poetry as they are about loving and being loved.³ Sonnet 41, for example, establishes EBB's mentor Robert Browning as her most important audience. The speaker is situated self-consciously as an author with a keen sense of audience. She pictures herself a prisoner who thanks all those who "*paused a little near the prison-wall / To hear [her] music,*" then passed along to their ordinary occupations. The poet/hero⁴ appears, drops his "*own instrument,*" his "*divinest Art,*" in order to listen to her music better than anyone else could. This image is an imaginative reproduction of Browning's description of himself while alone in his room, reading her poems. He read her work, he said, with a "decisive elbow" on his own (Letters 1.11).⁵ He was most unlike Hugh Stuart Boyd who was not interested in having EBB's translation of Prometheus Bound read to him; when asked if he would hear a part of it, "*His answer did not please me*" (Diary 213).⁶

Similarly, when the speaker says, in Sonnet 28, that when she contemplates the listener's letters, "*all dead paper, mute and white,*" and she perceives that they are, at the same time, "*alive and quivering,*" it calls to mind the legitimacy in the tradition conferred upon her by her correspondence with Browning, and the sense of failure produced by Boyd's inability to send her on a regular basis "*an undictated letter*" (Diary 14).⁷

In light of the relationship with her mentor Boyd, and the intensity of her poetic response to both him and the student/mentor, female/male relationship the way it was configured in the male tradition, consider the liberating nature of Robert Browning's first communication to EBB: "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett. [. . .] I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart--and I love you too" (Letters 3). The message in this first letter to her provided her with the means to achieve poetic autonomy by providing her with a new story: "Beauty and the White Rose." Unlike Boyd, Browning, approaching the female-male literary relationship from the same perspective EBB viewed hers with Boyd, declared his love, immediately creating her as Beauty; in addition, he acknowledged her place as a prince in the male literary tradition by acknowledging her poetry. She made of these acknowledgments the Sonnets from the Portuguese, wherein she found a way for the white rose, the power of feminine creativity, to merge with the patriarchal heroine, Beauty, and achieve "a reciprocity" with the prince as co-equal creator.

For EBB, Browning was the perfect male mentor; he gave her a place in the tradition and he played the role of prince to perfection. What made him really suitable, however, was the fact that he was no real mentor at all. Despite all the declarations she made in her early letters to him about wanting to learn as much as he would teach, it was she who was in fact his mentor; "His poetry, rather than hers was their subject" in their letters (Mermin, Origins 117).⁸ While she was successful in ridding herself of the need for a male mentor whose unenthusiastic opinion of her work had the power to topple her confidence in her ability and block her creativity, she still needed the structure the relationship afforded in order to feel that her place in the tradition was secure. Her continuing need for a mentor was due in part to her "secret profession of faith" that a woman is intellectually inferior to a man. The inversion of the student/mentor, female/male relationship that she created for herself parallels the tension between the roles of object and subject which the speaker assumes in the Sonnets: Beauty and the white rose.

In the Sonnets, the speaker has a freedom that no other speaker in EBB's previous poems possessed; liberated from the need to worry about her place in the tradition through the acquisition of a male mentor who created her as both princess and prince, she speaks from either position with equal ease. In Sonnet 12, she is crowned by her own love for the poet/hero by a ruby "*large enow / To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost.*" The

redness of the ruby cannot fail to bring to mind the light made by the sun that shone through the "chalice / Of the red rose" and cast "a red libation" into the Lost Bower (138-140), shadowing the space with the red light made by the patriarchal representations of women.⁹ The ruby on the brow of the speaker brings to mind as well the character, imagined but uncreated by the speaker of "The Deserted Garden," "some lady, stately overmuch" (29), who blushed in contrast to the white roses when being compared to them (31-32), positioned by the speaker as a patriarchal heroine, the red rose. She "may have plucked and twined" the white roses "to make a diadem" for herself, but thought to herself she would command all attention since "few" observers, viewing her and the white rose-diadem together, "would look at them" (33-36).¹⁰ The speaker of the Sonnets, in contrast, has a very different attitude toward a patriarchal heroine than the speaker of "The Deserted Garden" does since she becomes one herself, declaring that the love represented by the red ruby, now a crown, is "*the very love which is my boast.*" This aspect of the speaker, Beauty, does not care so much about being understood, but wants, like the object she is, to be seen.

Quite as easily, the speaker affirms the creative capacity of the white rose in Sonnet 20. She imagines herself a chained prisoner, alone and isolated in the snow, a blank, white space, unable to sense the poet/hero's presence in the world before she knew him. The isolation and imprisonment

she describes is her literary solitude before she had a mentor with whom she had a reciprocity:

*What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains.*

She finds it "wonderful" (amazing) that she was never able to feel him "thrill the day or night / With personal act or speech," and equally amazing that she was unable to sense that he looked at and understood the significance of "the blossoms white / [He saw] growing." The speaker is able to communicate with the poet/hero about issues of feminine creativity and, what is of the utmost importance to her, she is certain that he understands the significance of the white flowers. In contrast to the aspect of the speaker in the Sonnets who wants to be seen, the greatest desire of the speaker who performs creative acts from the position of uniquely feminine creator is to be understood.

The above illustrations show the speaker completely divided into these two roles; what is a more common occurrence in the Sonnets, however, is that the speaker assumes both roles at the same time. Just as Aurora Leigh assumes the qualities of "the poet," Browning (Chapter 4), the

speaker of the Sonnets is able to be Beauty and the white rose at the same time. What characterizes this unification is the speaker's desire to be seen on the one hand, and to be heard or understood on the other.

In Sonnet 10, for instance, the speaker first desires to be understood as a poet, and then is resplendent and glorious in her role as object, Beauty. "Love," she says, "*is beautiful indeed,*" and immediately connects this assertion to fire; it is "*bright*":

*Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:
And love is fire.*

These two fires, while made of different materials, burn equally, signifying recognition and a kind of spiritual equality. The fire represents the poets themselves, the male poet/genius, "the poet," and the white rose of feminine creativity, burning independently yet equally, taking part in the "gratitude" discourse of the letters (Karlin 78-90). The speaker is also a kind of mature Lady Geraldine who is assured of her own worth in relation to a poet/genius.¹¹ Speaking next as Beauty, she says:

And when I say at need

I love thee . . . mark! . . . I love thee--in thy sight

I stand transfigured, glorified aright,

With conscience of the new rays that proceed

Out of my face toward thine.

The speaker has moved from being understood as a poet to being seen and appreciated as an object. So strongly does the role of object affect her, that she imagines it as a transfiguration--resurrection and rebirth--the characterizing transformation of the risen Christ, who is a great deal like the feminine poet.¹²

In Sonnet 5, as well, the speaker likens herself and her heart to Electra and her sepulchral urn, proposing to overturn the ashes contained in the urn at the feet of the poet/hero.¹³ She imagines she will do this while "looking in [his] eyes." The two figures are locked in an immobile position by eye contact; the speaker is making certain the poet/hero sees her. The speaker tells the poet/hero: "*Behold and see / What a great heap of grief lay hid in me.*" Her concern then shifts to being understood; the poet/hero, here pictured as a poet with "*laurels on [his] head,*" is charged with understanding the sorrow of her past, the same sorrow of which she spoke in Sonnet 1, elicited there by thoughts of Theocritus.

The strange, dark mood of Sonnet 1, brought about by thoughts of a classical author, permeates Sonnet 5, whose frame, likewise, is provided by a classical author. The speaker tells the poet/hero he has two alternatives: He can tread the ashes "*out to darkness utterly,*" which "*might be well perhaps,*" or he can "*wait beside [her] for the wind to blow / The grey dust up.*" If he chooses to wait, the laurels on his head will not be a sufficient shield against "*all the fires [which may] scorch and shred / The hair beneath.*" She makes the decision for him: "*Stand farther off then! go.*" Sonnet 5 continues the argument of Sonnet 1, except that "*Love*" does not prove to be a force stronger than "*Death.*" The journey from Sonnet 1 to Sonnet 43 does not progress in a straight line; this attempt in Sonnet 5 to picture the speaker as a successful Beauty and/or a successful white rose is a failed one. The choices offered to the poet/hero are understanding and accepting the speaker (which present a risk to him) or having him understand and reject the speaker (which would place the poet at risk of repeating her unsatisfactory relationship with Boyd). To prevent either from occurring, she has the speaker make the decision herself, lacking confidence in her new-found positions of both princess and prince in the tradition.

The two poet/characters of Sonnet 13 stand face to face between a flickering torch. The speaker asks in oblique syntax and archaic diction, demonstrating in its very difficulty of expression the duality of her position:

*And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
 The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
 And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
 Between our faces, to cast light on each?*

Although the two parts of the question are connected by the second "and," they seem quite unrelated. Once we understand, however, that the position of the speaker is different in each, our perception of what it is that is being asked is altered. The first part of the question is being asked by the speaker as white rose; Do you understand the principles of feminine creativity? Do you appreciate that I am a poet? The speaker shifts, in the second part of the question, to her role as Beauty; Can you see my face? Have you not created me as a princess in the tradition as I am now creating myself?

In her 1838 and 1844 volumes, EBB imagines poetic creativity as the extension of male genius. This resulted in both her dependence upon a male mentor and the exploration of the idea of a poet as protagonist in her work. She creates in the poems of those two volumes, moreover, apatriarchal spaces in which the feminine creative genius muses on her plight. Gradually undermining her belief in male genius was her disillusionment with her mentor, which permitted her belief in her own feminine genius. When examined, the male poet protagonist of 1838 and 1844 has many feminine characteristics, becoming more like her and less like her mentor, Hugh Stu-

art Boyd. Poetic creativity, furthermore, came to be associated in those poems with a sexuality that is explicitly feminine. In 1845 when she embarked upon a new literary relationship with Robert Browning, she was able to make of it a reciprocal one, freely giving and taking poetic theory.

It is in the Sonnets from the Portuguese that the poet is not compromised by the speaker as the patriarchal heroines of her ballads come to terms with the white rose of feminine creativity who lurked in the loci amoeni of her pastoral poems. She becomes princess and prince, object and subject, woman and poet.

The Sonnets from the Portuguese are Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Book of New Life."¹⁴ In it, professional and personal autonomy, which underwent a crisis during the writing of the Diary, the first part of the book, reach maturity and resolution. Sonnet 42 discusses the professional crisis and begins with a self-conscious statement by the poet that she is indeed a poet ("'My future will not copy fair my past'-- / *I wrote that once*"). She finds, however, that at the time she wrote it, she did not really know what it meant. After she discovered a reciprocal relationship with Browning, she was able to re-write the poem as well as the poet:

*I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph.*

Her professional future, predicted here, is the story of feminine creativity, Aurora Leigh.

Likewise, she resolves the personal crisis described in the Diary in Sonnet 43 in which hesitation or ambivalence about being able to love disappear; the "Love" and "Death" of Sonnet 1 become transposed. The role of the mentor in her life changed from a source of artistic and personal failure, grounded in the notion of dominance/submission to a well-spring of reciprocity, producing creative inspiration and a loving personal relationship:

How do I love thee?--Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

for the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of everyday's

Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use

In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

*I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.*

NOTES

¹ "Sonnets from the Portuguese has aroused both ardor and revulsion in readers blinded by its aspect as sentimental autobiography to its cunning artistry and its ongoing argument with the tradition of amatory poetry" (Mermin, Origins 5; "The Female Poet").

² Dorothy Mermin points out that the Sonnets are "organized around the . . . discovery that . . . one can be both subject and object of love, both poet and poet's beloved" (Origins 144).

³ I have not encountered any one else with this opinion; in fact, Deirdre David claims, "Barrett Browning's poetry, with the exception of some lyrics and the Sonnets from the Portuguese, urgently addresses . . . the function of the poet in a materialistic society" (100).

⁴ The particular poet/genius, Robert Browning, as he is portrayed in the Sonnets. See chapter 4.

⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁶ See Chapter 1.

⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁸ "He refused invitations to instruct her," even though "she urged him . . . to find fault with her work" (Mermin Origins 117).

⁹ See Chapter 3.

¹⁰ See Chapter 3.

¹¹ See Chapter 4 for explanation of the poet/genius and his role as poet/hero in the Sonnets.

¹² See Chapter 4.

¹³ The figure of Electra in this sonnet is usually explicated as Electra as she appears in Sophocles's drama. Mermin, for example, explains that "[i]n Sophocles's Electra, Electra is given an urn said to contain the ashes of her brother Orestes by a stranger who then reveals that he is Orestes himself. The comparison suggests that the lover is like a brother returned from the dead, and also that if he were to cure the speaker's grief he would be taking the brother's place--which may be why the speaker warns him that the ashes will flare up and burn him" (Origins 139). In Sophocles's Electra, the ashes contained in the urn are not the ashes of the heroine's brother--he is not really dead--which resonates with the tragedy of Edward Barrett's untimely death, for which EBB blamed herself and which plummeted her into a state of despair for many years. By seeing the Electra of Sonnet 5 as Aeschylus's Electra as she appears in The Libation-Bearers, however, a different light may be cast on the explication of this poem; EBB cited Aeschylus as one of the legacies left her by Boyd, recounted in her sonnet "Legacies" (1850). In her diary, she spoke of happiness in her relationship with Boyd, a happiness that centered around reading works of Aeschylus (Diary 91; 160). In The Libation-Bearers, Electra approaches her father's grave with an urn containing wine and is intercepted by her brother Orestes. They join in mourning the death of their father. While a reading of Sophocles's play elicits thoughts about "new love and old grief," because "we cannot help reading in this the poet's sorrow for Bro [Edward]" (Mermin, Origins 139), a reading of Aeschylus's opens the poem up to an interpretation more consistent with the facts of Sonnet 1.

The Sophocles reading prompts Mermin to suggest that "the lover is like a brother returned from the dead," and "that if he were to cure the speaker's grief he would be taking the brother's place" (Origins 139). A reading of Aeschylus would demonstrate a fraternal equality between the speaker and the poet/hero in which she rids herself of a father-figure by

pouring the contents of the urn out onto the ground. This action parallels the contrast of her fraternal relationship with Browning and her father-daughter relationship with Boyd. While the poem states the contents are ashes, consistent with Sophocles, Aeschylus's urn contains wine. In a poem she wrote about her literary relationship with Boyd, ("The Wine of Cyprus" [1844]) wine figures prominently as a metaphor for the fine and rare quality of the relationship itself and the small sips the speaker takes can be seen as the speaker's little bit of knowledge compared to Boyd's. By conflating the wine and the ashes, she rids herself of Boyd's influence under the aegis of her new mentor, Browning.

¹⁴ See note 3 of the Introduction of this work which explains Laurence Lipking's, definition of a "Book of New Life" (The Life of the Poet).

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