A Journey through Elizabeth Barrett Browning's masks

Maria Isadora Quirarte Ruvalcaba

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sussex

July 2021

Table of Contents **2**

Acknowledgements 4

Declaration 5

Abstract 6

Abbreviations 8

Illustrations 9

Introduction 13

Chapter One: A Colourful Counterfeit 39

'My Sweet Unseen' 39

The Making of the 'Poet Laurate of Hope End'..... 54

'A Root fit for the ground and the dark' 68

'A Representation of the most wronged of her sex'..... 75

The Tryst 96

Miss Barrett's Angst..... 104

Byron's Page: The Magic Mirror Gate 115

Chapter Two: The Lady on the Sofa 154

'A Blessed and departed soul' 155

Miss Barrett on the Sofa 164

An Elusive Malady 181

My elixir: this magic draught 196

My hood of poppies 208

Chapter Three: The Poet through the Morphine Glass 239

The blind poet with poppy eyes 239

The opiate pattern 247

'Morphine and Miss Leigh's imagination' 275

Chapter Four: Mrs. Browning's Gospel 303

The Poet-Prophet 303

The Revelation of Aurora 316

Satan Behind the Mask: Temptation, Fall and Redemption... 333

Conclusion 353

Appendix A 361

Appendix B 363

Appendix C 364

Appendix D 366

Bibliography 370

Acknowledgements

I would like to express to my gratitude to my supervisor Lindsay Smith for her constant support, scholarly feedback, as well as her guidance and patience during the whole creation and writing of this thesis, and for her faith and enthusiasm for this project from the beginning.

I would like to thank CONACyT (Mexico) for the funding I received for this project.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Maria Isadora Quirarte Ruvalcaba

Abstract

This thesis explores the creation and perpetuation of the legendary figure of Elizabeth Barrett Browning created initially by the poet herself and by the editor Richard Henghist Horne. This version of the poet was strengthened by her contemporaries and became part of popular imagination by the turn of the century, to reverberate in works of fiction, such as Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1933) and Rudolph Besier's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1930). While this idealised version of Barrett Browning earned her a legendary place in literary history, it overshadowed her poetical work by creating an iconic sanctified version of her as poet. Legend has similarly affected understanding of the figure of Aurora Leigh as an autobiographical character from Barrett Browning's poem of 1856. My discussion re-considers established accounts to reveal different perspectives on *Aurora Leigh*, emerging through the unmasking of the Barrett Browning of legend.

The idealised version of Barrett Browning was partially created through portraits shown to her audience. Chapter One explores the process of selecting and neglecting particular painted and photographic portraits of the author to re-visit the visually constructed image of the poet by Elizabeth and Robert Browning. My approach also traces connections between idealised pictorial versions of the poet and Aurora Leigh, and how an intertwining evolved into a merging of the poet with the character within popular imagination that was reflected in visual representations of Aurora Leigh.

As one of the main questions of the thesis concerns the damage of the legend to the poet and her work, in Chapter Two, I demonstrate ways in which the nature of Barrett Browning's illness, along with her death, have become cornerstones for the development of legend. I postulate that her illness was unlikely to have been fatal, as suggested by most of her biographers, and that it was closely linked to the poet's morphine dependence which has been largely disregarded. My analysis demonstrates how Barrett Browning's morphine dependence is important in itself, both as a biographical fact and as an influence in her poetry. Chapter Three further discusses this influence in her poetry, which appears in what I suggest is 'the opiate pattern working within different layers - the visual aspect, narrative sequence and sensory perception of the speaker. These, I argue, are consolidated in Aurora Leigh who emerges as an *opium eater* heroine.

While Aurora Leigh's poetic development has been acknowledged as an autobiographical reference to Barrett Browning, Aurora was also constructed by Barrett Browning as a poet-prophet, heir to Miltonic tradition. In Chapter Four, I explore the diverse theological views, reinterpreted by Barrett Browning in her revision of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, The New Testament 'Gospels', the 'Book of Revelation' and the theology of Emmanuel Swedenborg. I show how this blend creates a unique spiritual collage which constitutes Barrett Browning's personal theology which earned *Aurora Leigh* the label 'Mrs. Browning's Gospel'.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviation will be used throughout the text:

RB = Robert Browning

For Elizabeth Barrett Barrett I will be using 'EBB' which were her initials for Elizabeth Barrett Barrett.

AL = Aurora Leigh

Illustrations

0.1 Michele Gordigiani, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 1858, oil on canvas, 29 in. x 23 in. (737 mm x 584 mm), London, National Portrait Gallery

0.2 Ruy, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', 1961, cover illustration from *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro

0.3 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro, p. 6, plates 5&6

0.4 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 7, plate 1

0.5 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 11, plates 1&2

0.6 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 16, plates 1&2

0.7 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 14, plates 5&6

0.8 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 19, plate 1

0.9 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator) 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 29, plate 1

0.10 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novarop. 19, plate 4

0.11 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 29, plate 4

0.12 Olga Harmony, Ramón Alonso (illustrator), 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1961, *Mujeres Célebres* no. 4, published in México by Organización Editorial Novaro p. 32, plate 1&2

1.1 'Pinka as Flush', 1933, photograph, frontispiece from *Flush,* published in London by The Hogarth Press

1.2 Elizabeth Barrett Brownig, 'Flush', illustration from the poet's letter to Horne, as published in *The Brownings' Correspondence,* letter no. 1393, 1844

1.3 Vanessa Bell, 'The Back Bedroom', 1933, ink, end-paper, from *Flush,* published in London by The Hogarth Press

1.4 Vanessa Bell, 'At Casa Guidi ' , 1933, ink, end-paper, from *Flush,* published in London by The Hogarth Press

1.5 Matilda Carter, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 35 Torquay*, June 1841, London, Robert Browning Settlement

1.6 William Artaud, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning Aged 12,* Hope End, mid-1818, Pastel drawing (detail), Private Collection

1.7 William Artaud, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 12.* Hope End, mid 1818, oil on canvas, Windsor, Englando, Eton College Library

1.8 Henry William Pickersgill. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning Aged about 20,* ca. 1826, oil on canvas, Private Collection

1.9 Daniel Maclise, 'Letitia Elizabeth Landon (Mrs Maclean)', ca. 1830- 1835, pencil, black chalk and stump

1.10 Robert Cabell Roffe, after Edward Robertson, 'Felicia Dorothea Hemans', ca. 1825- 12835, stipple engraving

1.11 John Opie, *Mary Wollestonecraft*, ca. 1797

1.12 Marshall Wood, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', November 1853, Bas medallion, Florence

1.13 Marshall Wood 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', illustration from 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography' *American Phrenological Journal,* 1861, engraving

1.14 Louis Cyrius Macaire and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', Le Hâvre, 17 September 1858, Ambrotype, Waco, Texas, Armstrong Browning Library

1.15 Mathew Brady from les Macaire Frères. 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', 1859, retouched from ambrotype, New York (location unknown)

1.16 Elliott and Fry from les Frères Macaire, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' (detail), 1858, ambrotype, London, National Portrait Gallery, London

1.17 London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company, after Mayall, 'George Eliot', circa 1881 (1858), albumen print, National Portrait Gallery, London

1.18 Moses Bowness, 'Harriet Martineau', 1855- 1856, albumen carte de visite, National Portrait Gallery, London

1.19 T. O. Barlow, with alterations by D.G. Rossetti. 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', 1859, proof-engraving, 1859, Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

1.20 T.O. Barlow, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' frontispiece for *Aurora Leigh,* 1859, London

1.21 T. O. Barlow, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' frontispiece detail from *Aurora Leigh*, 13th edition, 1873

1.22 Elliott & Fry, after Macaire, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', mid 1860s (September 1858) albumen carte-de-visite, London, National Portrait Gallery

1.23 'EBB' Author's collage of EBB's portraits, 2021

1.24 Arthur Hughes, *Aurora Leigh's dismissal of Romney, ('The Tryst')* 1860, oil on board, support: 394 × 310 mm, frame: 526 × 438 × 42 mm, London, Tate Britain

1.25 Domenico di Michelino, *Dante and the Three Kingdoms*, 1465, oil on canvas , Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

1. 26 Fratelli D' Alessandri, 'Pen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning', early June 1860, photograph, Rome, Windsor, England, Eton College Library

1. 27 Fratelli D' Alessandri, 'Pen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning', early June 1860, photograph, Rome, Windsor, England, Eton College Library

1.28 Unidentified artist, 'Pen Browning aged 9', 12 September 1858, Le Hâvre, 12 September 1858, daguerreotype, Massachusetts, Wellesley College Library, The English Poetry Collection, Wellesley

1.29 Fratelli D'Alessandri 'Pen Aged 11', early June 1860, Rome, photograph, Windsor, England, Eton College Library

1.30 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Self-Portrait aged 47', 9 July 1847, Florence, ink, Linton Park, Kent, England, Camellia Collection

1.31 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Self-portrait aged 44', 7 September 1850, Siena, ink, Linton Park, Kent, England, Camellia Collection

1.32 M. Mc Jamieson, "Aurora Leigh" (detail), illustration from *The Mentor,* vol. 3. No. 8, serial 84, 1915

1.33 M. Mc Jamieson, "Aurora Leigh", Illustration from *The Mentor,* vol. 3. No. 8, serial 84, 1915

1.34 Fratelli D'Alessandri, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 55', 27 May 1861, Rome, photograph, Windsor, England, Eton College Library

1.35 Fratelli D'Alessandri, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 55', 27 May 1861, Rome, photograph, Windsor, England, Eton College Library

1.36 Field Talfourd, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 53,* February 1859, Rome, chalk, 23 3/4 in. x 17 5/8 in. (603 mm x 448 mm), London, National Portrait Gallery

2.1 Harriet Hosmer, *Conjoined Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* 1853, bronze, from a plaster cast, London, National Portrait Gallery, London

3.1 J. M. W. Turner, *Fire at the Grand Storehouse of the Tower of London,* 1841, Watercolour on paper, 235 × 325 mm, Tate Britain, London

3.2 J. M. W. Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed -The Great Western Railway,* 1844, Oil paint on canvas, 910 × 1218 mm, Tate Britain, London

3.3 Sir John Everett Millais, *Mariana,* 1851, Oil paint on mahogany, 597 × 495 × 15 mm, Tate Britain, London

4.1 *Seven Swords Piercing the Sorrowful Heart of Mary,* Church of the Holy Cross, Salamanca, Spain

4.2 Albrecht Dürer, *The Woman of the Apocalypse and the Seven-headed Dragon,* 1498, engraving

Introduction

fig. 0.1

Michele Gordigiani. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* 1858 (*National Portrait Gallery,* London)

Fate proved benevolent to Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) who started her career anonymously and merely as an invisible poetical voice. For within the National Portrait Gallery, two of the most popular portraits of her remain on permanent display. The first one which captures the beholder's eye, due to its size and display, is Michele Gordigiani's portrait of EBB's (fig. 0. 1), executed in 1858 and owned by a close friend of the poet, Sophia Eckley.[1] The portrait underwent several changes, and the

[1] A full recollection and history of the commissioning, development and reception of the Giordigiani portrait is documented in Katherine Gaja's 'Changing Faces: Michele Gordigiani's portrait of Elizabeth Barrett Browning' (2012). Gaja also explores the intense friendship between EBB and Sophia Eckley which became disturbing for Robert and was, along with spiritualism, morphine, politics and their son Pen's upbringing, a major reason for disagreements between the couple.

first person to be discontent with it was Robert Browning, EBB's husband, as he noted to Sophia: 'the nose seems over long, and there are some other errors in the face; also, the whole figure gives the idea of a [much] larger woman than Ba [EBB's pet name]'.[2] His words were echoed by EBB in her words to her sister Arabel: 'Gordigiani made a portrait of me at Florence, … a large buxom, radiant matron, with a torrent of black ringlets at each cheek.'[3] Gordigiani portrays an established author as suggested by the chair and bodily gesture. The hands are no longer employed with tools of writing, but lie resting, showing several rings upon the fingers. Gordigiani captures EBB's gaze: slightly absent, inscrutable, with a mixture of melancholy and detachment. The symbolism within the portrait signifies a solid, established poetical career for its subject, but it also depicts EBB as a woman who is no longer an invalid, but has been 'metamorphosed' by love, as the Brownings' own legend was already constructing her. Close in display to Gordigiani's portrait, but in another part of the gallery, is the chalk portrait of EBB by Field Talfourd, executed in 1859 (fig. 1.36). In opposition to the portrait by Gordigiani, Talfourd's depicts a visibly younger EBB (which in no way corresponds to EBB's real age at the time) in a semi-ethereal likeness. The beholder perhaps then might wonder why the sitter looked younger in her latest portrait.

Strangely enough, the image of a young EBB is the one which seems to haunt the popular imagination. Significantly, it was she herself, and later memoirs and

---

[2] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021), letter 4231 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4592/?rsId=236394&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[3] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4324 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4750/?rsId=236396&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

recollections, that shaped that image which posthumously came to acquire a legendary tint. As I will further demonstrate in this thesis, EBB's portraits were mostly constructed with specific symbolism to depict an image that she wanted to share of herself as a poet, an image which is also reflected within her poetry. Yet much of this poetic self lies buried in popular imagination under the weight of Love which 'metamorphosed' the fragile, weak, close-to-death invalid into the consecrated poet depicted by Gordigiani. In popular culture, that same Love seemed to rejuvenate EBB, and when death inevitably came to her, it embraced her so gracefully that her passing was similar to a spiritual ascension. Indeed, the echoes of that legend had reverberated for so long and made such expansive physical journeys, that precisely a hundred years after EBB's death, in 1961, in another continent, and for a Spanish Latin American speaking audience, EBB's life story became known through a comic, part of the series 'Mujeres Célebres'.[4] The format of the series was important, in aiming to place famous and notorious women within popular culture. The publication was endorsed by the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública), a Mexican government organisation in charge of education and school curricula, providing therefore the comic with an official historical background. Amongst the women depicted in its pages, many writers from diverse nations appear along with EBB: the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (#5), Agatha Christie (#78), Colette (#87), Virginia Woolf (#85), Mexican poet Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (#119) and the Brontë Sisters (#96). Other women artists, such as French painter Berthe Morisot (#11), opera singer Angela Peralta (#52)

[4] Olga Harmony, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 4, *Mujeres Célebres,* Illustrated by Ramón Alonso, (México, 1961).

and actor Sarah Bernhardt (#27), appear along with contemporary celebrities, such as Jackie Kennedy (#64), Princess Margaret (#66), Marilyn Monroe (#68)and Sophia Loren (#119). Historical figures including Mary Queen of Scots (#31 & #32), Charlotte Corday (#108), Queen Victoria (#110) and Chinese Empress Tse-Hsi (#47) appear, as do fictional characters with heavy cultural weight such as 'The Gioconda' (#13) and Scheherazade (#33). In EBB's appearance in one of the first issues, the plot of the comic seems to have been taken from the biographical entry from *The Dictionary of National Biography* (1885)[5]. Furthermore, EBB's case stands out in the series for the stress on facts which can be dramatized to the point of exaggeration. The script for the comic was written by Olga Harmony, Mexican drama critic and teacher and the exaggerated plot of EBB's narrative, corresponds to the dominant perception of her life. The cover illustration shows the miracle (fig. 0. 2) of 'Love', setting the atmospheric tone for the whole story, whose pages contain, as mentioned, some of the most remarkable biographical facts which construct the image of the invalid poet as rescued and transformed by Love. (Fig. 0. 3) depicts the spinal injury, EBB's seclusion and studious life, (fig. 0. 4), Flush, (fig. 0. 5) RB along with their love and courtship, (fig. 0. 6) the miraculous recovery, (fig. 0. 7) the exaggerated tyrant Mr. Barrett (fig. 0. 8), EBB's poetic fame (suggesting that Queen Victoria had personally wanted EBB to become Poet Laureate (fig. 0. 9), their lives in Italy, (fig. 0. 10), EBB's final illness (fig. 0. 11) and death (fig. 0. 12).

[5] Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Leslie Stephen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography,* Macmillan, New Yor, 1885, 78-82.

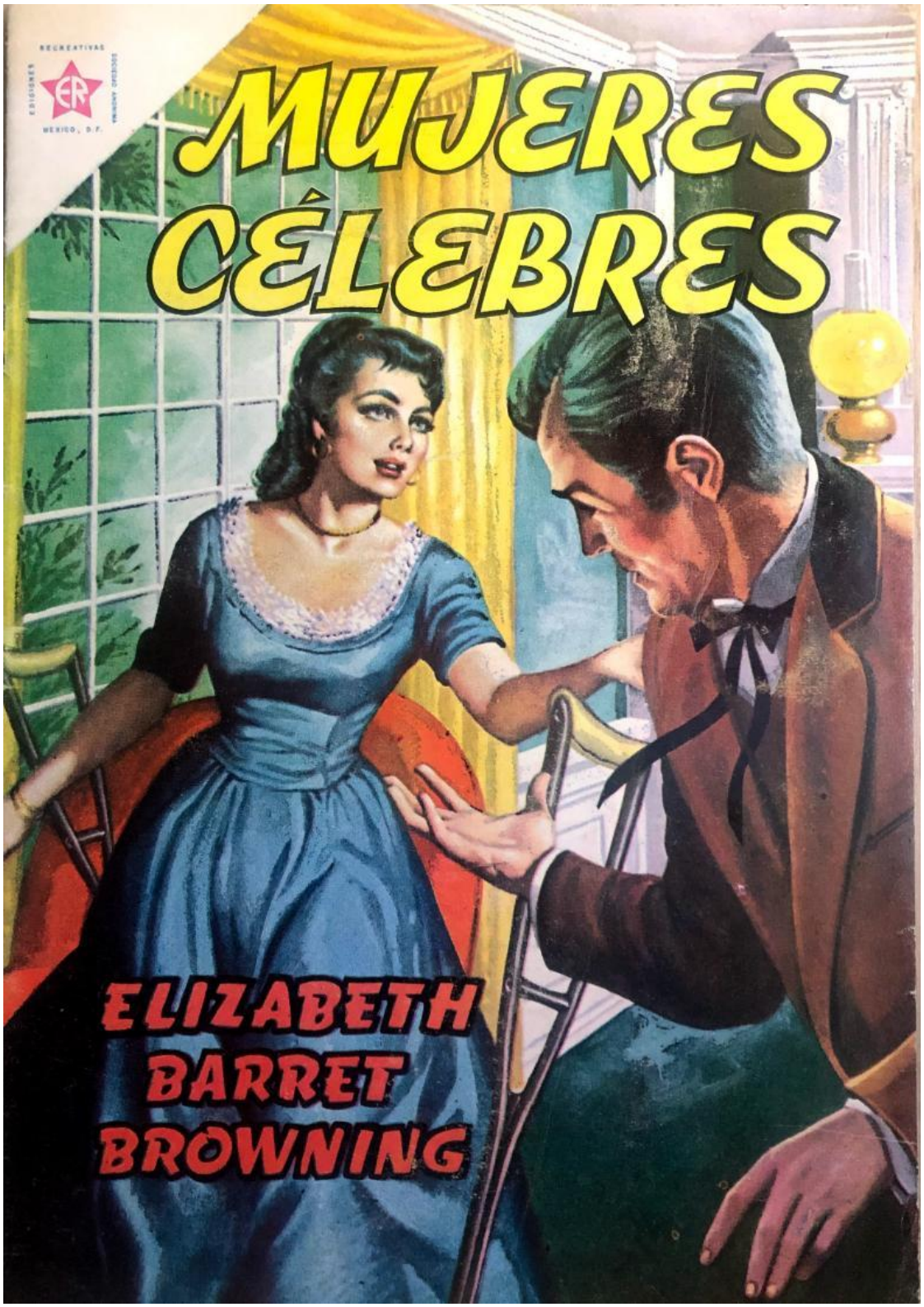

Fig. 0. 2.

Ruy, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. Illustration Cover.[6]

[6] It is amusing to notice how in the cover illustration, Robert Browning is depicted as a Gregory Peck -Hollywood actor- look alike.

Fig. 0. 3.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México, p. 6, plates 5&6.[7]

Fig. 0. 4.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 7, plate 1.[8]

[7] 'Help! Miss Elizabeth fell off the horse!' (Moments later) 'I am afraid it is quite severe.'

[8] (Elizabeth Barrett survived, but her spine was damaged, probably, forever. Her life was fulfilled by books).

Fig. 0. 5.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 11, plates 1&2.[9]

Fig. 0. 6.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 16, plates 1&2.[10]

---

[9] Interestingly, Miss Mitford is portrayed as 'a neighbour -una vecina'. 'I thought it could cheer you up. You need him more than I do. His name is Flush.' 'He is so cute, Miss 'Mitford, thank you so much.' (From that moment, Flush became Elizabeth Barrett's faithful companion. She would not stop writing...)

[10] 'I congratulate you, Elizabeth.' 'I owe it all to you friend, for giving me courage and confidence.' (Then...) 'Would you think it would make you happy to become my wife?' 'Very happy, Robert.'

Fig. 0. 7.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 14, plates 5&6.[11]

Fig. 0. 8.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 19, plate 1.[12]

---

[11] (But, precisely in the room upstairs, something which Mr. Barrett could not stop had begun.) 'Look Betty, I can walk unaided'. 'Thank heavens, Miss!'

[12] 'I am no longer your father! We are estranged!'

Fig. 0. 9.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 29, plate 1.[13]

fig. 0. 10.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 19, plate 4.[14]

---

[13] (Though, Elizabeth was not given such honourable title -Laureate Poet-...) 'I respect your opinion, gentlemen, but Mrs. Browning seemed to me a good candidate.'

[14] (They decided to settle in the Florentine Villa 'Casa Guidi', which would be immortalized in one of Elizabeth's poems.)

fig. 0. 11.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 29, plate 4.[15]

Fig. 0. 12.

Mujeres Célebres, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' No. 4, 1961. Organización Editorial Novaro. México. p. 32. plates 1&2.[16]

[15] (John Kenyon's death was the first blow to harm her health). '(Coughing)'.
[16] (Cavour's death was a mortal blow to the poetess' hampered health. On June 29th, 1861...) 'It's beautiful'.

From the biographical scenes in this comic, it is possible to understand the cultural impact of EBB's life story, enhanced by the popularity of Rudolf Besier's play *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1930). It was later filmed in two versions, in 1934 and 1957 and was staged as a musical entitled *Robert and Elizabeth* (1964), as well as going through several adaptations for television in 1956 and 1982. By the the time the *Mujeres Célebres* series was published, Dorothy Hewlett's biography *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1952)[17] and Gardner Taplin's *The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1957)[18] had also come out. The narrative emphasis upon a dramatized version of EBB's biography responded to later audiences' needs and tastes which seem to have remained quite similar to those of the Victorians who embraced for the first time these legendary aspects of the plot of EBB's life.

While Besier's play had a wide influence upon the popularization of the life story of EBB, another fictional text with a strong influence, though, perhaps, less acknowledged than Besier's, is Virginia Woolf's *Flush: A Biography* (1933).[19] Woolf's fictionalized biography of EBB's spaniel was preceded by her essay on *Aurora Leigh*, published in *The Common Reader, Second Series* (1932).[20] In the opening line to her essay, Woolf reflects upon the matter of the Brownings' popularity at the time: 'By one of those ironies of fashion that might have amused the Brownings themselves, it seems likely that they are now far better known in the flesh than they have ever been in spirit'.[21] Ironically, Woolf herself would prove, with time, partially

[17] Dorothy Hewlett, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Cassell & Co, 1953)
[18] Gardner B. Taplin, *Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).
[19] Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (Vintage Classics: 2018, London).
[20] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader, Second Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1932)
[21] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', *Collected Essays,* Vol. 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 209.

responsible for this problematic situation, through her own fictional account which concerned the significant years of EBB's life with Flush. Humorous, candid and with enthralling narrative, *Flush* in fact conveys two biographies: the one of the canine, and the other of the legendary EBB. If when reading both texts, one has in mind the fact that they could act as complementing each other, the novel lightens with humour and adventurous tints the otherwise melodramatic play. Yet, both texts enhance the bleak atmosphere in which 'Miss Barrett' allegedly used to live, an atmosphere (emotional and physical), which changed after Robert Browning's appearance.

Both plots seem, each in its unique narrative, to concentrate on 'Miss Barrett' the person rather than the poet, transforming her into a character. It is precisely because of this transposition of the biographical into the fictional, moreover that the idea of unmasking occurred to me for my approach to EBB, for the character within the fiction was a reconstruction of EBB by its author. The character, based upon biographical facts, became a mask which presents a fictional EBB: a semi-invalid and secluded woman poet who lived in sadness and darkness. Similar to Tennyson's 'Mariana', as a figure powerful enough to engage the reader, the fictionalized EBB lived with barely any hope, sustained merely by her Christian Faith and her love for poetry.

This image, first constructed in EBB's own lifetime, solidified by popular imagination and supported by Besier and Woolf, had taken root so strongly that, for those acquainted only with the legend, the act of reading EBB's biography leads to an act of discovery, that behind that mask, the poet's life was full of remarkable

moments which had nothing to do with Robert Browning. While Woolf was right in claiming that during her time (1930's) 'nobody reads her [EBB], nobody discusses her, nobody bothers to put her in her place'[22], fortunately, time has proved Woolf wrong. For while the poet's *return into obscurity* lasted for a couple of decades, it was dispelled with the gradual appearance of the first biographies of EBB by Taplin and Hewlett, followed by Alethea Hayter's study *Mrs. Browning: A Poet's Work and its Setting* (1962).[23]

Hayter's study intertwines biography, and poetical analysis of her subject, and while the legendary weight of 'Mrs. Browning' is felt throughout Hayter's text, the book became a fundamental turning point in Barrett Browning studies in questioning some aspects of the EBB legend. Following Hayter's book, EBB gradually emerged as a figure of interest to academics and scholars, with the publication of fundamental studies of her poetry, such as Angela Leighton's *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1986)[24], Marjorie Stone's *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1995)[25] and biographies by Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1988)[26] and Dr. Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait* (1989)[27]. Daniel Karlin's, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett* analyses and deconstructs much of the legendary aspect (1987)[28], while Julia Markus' *Dared and Done: The Marriage of*

---

[22] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 209.
[23] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting. Main edition* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).
[24] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Great Britain: The Harvester Press, 1986).
[25] Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1995).
[26] Margaret Foster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988).
[27] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
[28] Daniel Karlin, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1987).

Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning (1995)[29] provides a deep insight into the poets' ancestry. During that same period, *Aurora Leigh* was rediscovered by feminist scholars, who started, as Woolf would express it, to 'put EBB's poetry in its place', with Cora Kaplan's introduction to *Aurora Leigh* (1978)[30] playing a fundamental role, along with Gilbert and Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979)[31] in bringing *Aurora Leigh* back to light.

Such scholars were also interested in reclaiming the life of EBB and their approach differed in detail from those presenting the impeccable, saint-like figure of the poet created in the poet's lifetime, initially by herself and by the editor Richard Henghist Horne and which continues to find echoes up until the present day. What interests me in exploring such aspects of EBB's image is how the early mysterious, almost anonymous, author behind the verse, who concealed her identity as much as she could while constructing her poetical career, was created mainly by herself. The later hyperbolic treatment by comparison came from others, such as Horne and later Robert Browning. The enhancement of illness and seclusion shifted dramatically once EBB was 'metamorphosed by Love', turning her into a sanctified version of herself.

For the construction of an idealized version of herself as a poet, EBB initially depended only on words. Yet later, she strategically used a series of portraits for that purpose. In the first chapter of my thesis I explore the part of the process of

---

[29] Julia Markus, *Dared And Done: The Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995).
[30] Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Cora Kaplan, *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: The Women's Press, Ltd, 1978).
[31] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literacy Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

constructing her image that involved selecting and neglecting particular portraits. I examine those portraits chosen for, and concealed from her audience. In contrast with the popularity of photographic portraits, photographs of EBB were not considered in themselves for presentation as official likenesses. This process of selection corresponded, at first, to EBB's initial idea of matching her own personal image to what she wanted to show to her audience. Yet, after her marriage to Robert Browning, his influence upon creating an official likeness of EBB resulted in an official portrait derived from a photograph. As I will demonstrate, the image was modified to convey an idealized version of EBB which blended both the poet and the woman. This official portrait appeared in 1859, when it was included in *Aurora Leigh* as a frontispiece to the 4th edition.[32] My research focuses upon the intricate process of creation that resulted in this portrait, and upon the impact it had on the audience. For, within popular imagination, blending EBB and her heroine Aurora Leigh, the portrait reflected a visual representation of the later. When Arthur Hughes depicted the fictional figure of Aurora Leigh in his painting 'The Tryst' (1860), while not shown to the public at this time, he underlined the main physical difference between the character and her creator, namely that of hair colour. Certainly, the blending of Aurora and EBB was rooted initially in the fact that Aurora had been considered as autobiographical, as has been noted by contemporary critics, and considered in several lights by modern scholars and critics, such as Michele Martinez, Charles La Porte, Isobel Armstrong and Marjorie Stone, among others. While EBB's choice of

[32] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 4th edition (London: Chapman & Hall,1859).

Aurora's hair and eye colour might correspond to a disguise to divert the readers' attention from any evident autobiographical links, the difference fails to conceal autobiographical details layered through different levels of the text. Some of them straightforward and obvious, such as the development of Aurora's poetical career, and Leigh Hall which clearly refers to Hope End, where EBB lived during her childhood and youth. These autobiographical aspects have been noted by several scholars, illuminated by the publication of the *Diary of E.B.B.: The Unpublished Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Barrett 1831-32* (1969)[33], complemented by a biographical account about EBB's early years by Barbara Dennis *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years* (1996).[34] My interest inclines towards other autobiographical aspects which remain overlooked, such as the emotional autobiographical undertones as explored in my first chapter, an issue which connects with EBB's life previous to her years of seclusion and her meeting with Robert Browning. My perspective and analysis thereby sustains the strong link between Aurora and the Hope End years, while shedding new light upon emotional traits in EBB which, due to the legendary weight of the author, appear to have made them subject to less attention. I argue that the veiled autobiographical layers in *Aurora Leigh*, become masks with which EBB presents herself from different angles, expressing thus her 'highest convictions upon Life and Art'[35].

---

[33] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Diary by E. B. B: The Unpublished Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, 1831-1832* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).
[34] Barbara Dennis, E*lizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years* (Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Seren Books, 1996).
[35] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 4th edition, dedication.

Whilst a great part of the legend of EBB and her love story with Robert Browning has highlighted the morbid traits in the plot (illness, seclusion, sorrow), I show how a similar obsession appears to have occurred with EBB's portraits (shown mostly once she became 'Mrs. Browning'). The portraits highlight youth as a trademark of the poet and a characteristic which I argue was affected by the fact that Aurora Leigh stays young within EBB's text. After her marriage, youth and a sense of 'resurrection' permeated the figure of EBB which provided the poet with a legendary aura which was broken by her relapse into her final illness and death. EBB's cause of death, which has been recorded and speculated upon in multiple sources, established her sanctified image as a highly spiritual poet and a loving wife to Robert Browning, making her almost flawless.

In a dynamic similar to that in which Aurora Leigh worked as a mask for the poet, the legend *also* became a mask for EBB. As I have noted, initially this version of EBB was controlled mostly by the poet herself. Nevertheless, as time passed, and primarily due to the influence of Robert Browning, the image expanded out of EBB's reach, to the point that during (and after) her final days, that image read more as a work of fiction than as true to life. Who lies behind the mask? At some points, I argue, both EBB and Aurora Leigh seem to find themselves within the same hazardous position, in which their achievements and significance, although rescued and acknowledged, overshadow any unfavourable traits within them. Upon that same question of blindness towards flaw, and in addition to the non-inclusive diagnosis of EBB's

illness and her cause of death, I demonstrate how the idea of illness as a mask emerges.

In this respect, my second chapter explores two issues which went hand in hand in EBB's life: her illness and her morphine habit, the former heavily shadowing the latter. My argument opens with her illness and death as cornerstones for the solidification of the legend over which, by that point, EBB no longer had control. Up until, and including the very recent biography of EBB by Fiona Sampson, *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett* (2021)[36], there has been no conclusive diagnosis of the poet's illness. Through my research I postulate that EBB's illness was not fatal, and that perhaps it was less severe than acknowledged. This position is supported by several factual anecdotes which question the nature of the illness, such as the dormant periods in which it almost disappeared, along with EBB's approximate three-year period of 'miraculous' recovery which started during her courtship and ended after her son Pen's birth. My postulation that EBB suffered a non-fatal, less severe but chronic ailment, supports the idea that the poet *shaped* part of her identity through her illness which was closely linked to her morphine dependence. Prescribed as medical support to treat her illness, morphine as laudanum, never left EBB, as evidenced by her letters and her latest biographers: Forster, Dally and Sampson. While there has been much debate upon the extent to which EBB's addiction was real and whether it had an impact upon her life, I argue that not only was she dependant on the drug, but its intake had a negative impact on her health, both physical and mental, which has

[36] Fiona Sampson, *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Profile Books, 2021).

rarely been acknowledged. As evidenced in my research, Robert Browning was the first person to openly address the issue of opiate dependence for the poet. This position was later supported by his sister Sariana and by EBB's sisters, who, during the later part of EBB's life tried to persuade her, unsuccessfully, to diminish or quit the drug. Their efforts were fruitless, and as my argument suggests, and her biographers have only merely hinted, EBB's death was caused by an overdose of morphine, not by a respiratory ailment.

While scholars such as Alethea Hayter, and biographers - more emphatically the latest ones already mentioned - acknowledge possible addiction and in Hayter's case a minor influence of the substance upon EBB's poetry, I demonstrate that EBB's drug dependence must not be taken merely as factual circumstance. Nor, I argue, should EBB be placed as a victim of the substance. It is clear that EBB's dependence changed once she married and lived abroad. As the years elapsed, her dependence became a rumour spread within literary circles. The poem 'One more word with EBB' (1857)[37] by American Poet Julia Ward Howe, for example, points out that EBB's poetical inspiration came from a 'nameless draught'. Nevertheless, after her death, EBB's morphine dependence was concealed as much as possible, diminished and downplayed. This neglect of EBB's dependence corresponded initially to culturally gendered representations of 'female weaknesses', which would spread to what was later understood as 'Morphinomania' during late nineteenth-century Britain. EBB's

[37] Julia Ward Howe, 'One Word More with E. B. B.', *Words For the Hour* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1857).

relationship with morphine occurred during an interesting time in the development of important changes in the administration and prescription of morphine, for she lived through the discovery of the isolation of morphine, which meant that in addition to laudanum, morphine started to interest medical authorities as a remedy. While, as far as is recorded, EBB never tried injected morphine, the neglect of her addiction in the immediate posthumous biographical recollections corresponds to a wish to hide any possible negative traits of the character of the poet which could mar her sanctified image. At the same time, such neglect also corresponds with protecting Robert Browning's image within the legend. If the scope of EBB's morphine dependence had been known and he had lost the battle against his wife's addiction, Robert Browning's self-constructed image would have crumbled into pieces. Therefore, the underlining of the image of EBB dying of a respiratory ailment, embraced by Robert Browning while fully 'in Love', in peace and in an almost Theresian mystical ecstasy, proved fitting to the legend, in a way that than a coarse and expected fact: that morphine took EBB to the grave would not have. In this sense, my argument demonstrates how EBB's illness itself was used in more than one way during her life. Initially, as Barbara Dennis postulates, illness provided the perfect excuse for the young EBB to avoid household duties, as well as the social expectations of a lady of her position. Yet I show that EBB also used her illness to justify and undermine her morphine dependence and that after her death, the illness was used to mask her cause of death which, was very likely, an overdose.

Part of the sanctification of EBB's image which still holds weight today, in spite of multiple biographies, relies upon downplaying the weight of morphine's influence upon the poet. In this respect, Hayter's study was pioneering, for it was the first to explore the influence of morphine within EBB's poetry. My perspective in chapter three focuses upon the influence of the opiate, not just within EBB's life and in understanding her image, but also within her poetry. In addition to the poem by Ward Howe, Martha Jones, reviewing EBB's *Poems* (1844) for *The British Quarterly Review* for EBB's , suggests the influence of the opiate in the poem 'A Rhapsody of life's Progress' in a negative perspective claiming that 'had it not appeared under a lady's name, [it] might have been conjectured to have been written under the influence of opium!'[38] This negative perspective reflects the prejudice against the idea of the opium realm (and its inspiration) as belonging exclusively to the masculine sphere. Nevertheless, the influence of morphine is very present in EBB's work, beyond Hayter's analysis of 'A True Dream', or the observation about 'A Rhapsody of life's Progress' and can be traced in *Aurora Leigh* within what I term 'the opiate pattern'. This pattern, as I demonstrate, creates a particular structure within *Aurora Leigh,* while, at the same time, working through the visual aspect, the narrative sequence and through the sensory perception of the speaker to suggest that Aurora Leigh stands as *opium eater* heroine, thus linking her to EBB in another autobiographical layer.

---

[38] Martha Jones, for *The British Quarterly Review,* 1 November 1845, pp. 337–352, *The Brownings' Correspondence* <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/87/?rsId=235977&returnPage=1>[accessed 2017-03-23]

While, as this thesis contends, a morphine overdose could have been the cause of EBB's death, it is not from such a contention that I trace the significance of opium in *AL*. The risk of suggesting an overdose as the cause of EBB's death - following the line suggested by Dr. Peter Dally and Margaret Foster - is that it hampers certain nuanced readings of EBB's life and poetry in relation to the drug by placing the poet in a victimised position under the will of the opiate. Mindful of such pitfalls, my aim is to address the role of morphine as occupying a more central, complex and nuanced role in her life and her poetry. To that end, I contextualise EBB's morphine use, and the possibility of an overdose as the accidental outcome of her acknowledged life-long dependence upon the substance. For it took place during a highly significant turning point in the history of opium and morphine when the isolation of the morphine alkaloid 1805 by Friedrich Wilhelm Adam Serturner changed gradually the way in which the substance was prescribed and was consequently, misused.

Morphine dependency, in EBB's case, I argue, may be understood as an integral part of her personality, as important as her illness, relationships and family ties. Yet, the significance of the narcotic as a lifelong and steady companion to EBB, its habitual and disciplined nature and its obvious medical links, have been overlooked and undermined by critics. Since there was no evident trait of excess on EBB's part, nor a hint of the self-destructive and overindulgent nature of some male Romantic poets, discussion of the opium influence in her work appears largely non-existent, apart from in Alethea Hayter's Opium and the Romantic Imagination and Mrs. Browning. Building upon the material evidenced by Hayter and by EBB's

contemporary literary critics and proposing the idea of an 'opiate pattern', my thesis considers the subtle impact of the influence of morphine in EBB's life and poetry. I am not suggesting the presence of an 'opiate pattern' as the only 'filter' through which to read EBB's major work. While in the specific case of *Aurora Leigh* due to the narrative and sensory structure within the poem, the character of Aurora might be considered as a sort of opium eater, I am more interested in ways in which the 'opiate pattern' foregrounds certain moments of intense sensory experience.

AL has been mostly studied as a *Künstlerroman* due to Aurora's artistic development within the narrative, and also because of the more recent revision of EBB from a feminist perspective. Motherhood, the role of the woman poet and the Woman's Question have all become important aspects of EBB's work and Cora Kaplan's introduction has played a major role in this understanding, as well as the understanding of intertextual references that EBB used in *Aurora Leigh,* mostly referring to Madame de Staël's *Corinne or Italy* (1807). This intertextual approach was pursued by Gilbert and Gubar who trace links between *Aurora Leigh* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* and more recently by Sarah Annes Brown who explores Miltonic echoes in '*Paradise Lost* and *Aurora Leigh*' (1997).[39] *Aurora Leigh* has also been studied through EBB's interests in the spiritual, through mesmerism and spiritualism, as Kate Nesbit shows in 'Revising Respiration: Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and the Shared Breath of Poetic Voice in Elizabeth Barrett

[39] Sarah Annes Brown, 'Paradise Lost and Aurora Leigh', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 37.4 (1997), 723–40.

Browning's *Aurora Leigh*' (2018).[40] Aurora has been understood as a pagan prophetess, similar to EBB, as mentioned by Marjorie Stone and explored further by Linda Lewis in her *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (1998)[41]. Lewis rescues and re-evaluates much of EBB's spiritual ideology, illuminating aspects of her poetry, as well as the understanding of EBB's idea of being a prophetess of her own age, embedded into the Victorian tradition of the sage. Deirdre David, in 'Art's a Service': Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and *Aurora Leigh*' (1985)[42] discusses the prophetic Aurora within a canonical masculine tradition, adapting and blending to explore her own discourse and to find and emerge with her own voice as woman artist and prophet. Nevertheless, as Ranen Omer notes in 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Apocalypse: The Unravelling of Poetic Autonomy' (1997)[43], EBB's Christianity seems to have been largely forgotten and generally split off from her other poetic themes. My interest, explored in chapter four, thereby consists in pursuing another key layer of autobiography, namely the construction of Aurora as a prophet, embedded in the Miltonic tradition, as well as echoing John the prophet of Revelation. My analysis explores EBB's revision of *Paradise Lost* for the construction of Aurora the prophet, as well as EBB's revisions to other texts for the same purpose, to postulate some of her theological views: the New Testament 'Gospels', the Book of Revelation and the theology of Emmanuel Swedenborg. My

---

[40] Kate Nesbit, 'Revising Respiration: Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and the Shared Breath of Poetic Voice in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Poetry*, 56. 3 (2018) 213–32.
[41] Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1997).
[42] Deirdre David, 'Art's a Service": Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and *Aurora Leigh*', *Browning Institute Studies*, 13 (1985), 113–36.
[43] Ranen Omer, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Apocalypse: The Unraveling of Poetic Autonomy', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 39.2 (1997), 97–124.

approach demonstrates how such influences blend together to create EBB's unique cosmovision, a spiritual collage which earned *Aurora Leigh* the nickname of 'Mrs. Browning's Gospel'.

Overall, my four chapters explore the relevance of the revision of aspects of EBB's life which have been determinant for the creation of the poet's personal legend, in order to draw out a more nuanced, rounder understanding of the relationship of EBB's life and work. My exploration of the construction of her own image in the first chapter corresponds to the relationship between the poet and her audience, as well as the perception of her within literary circles. As I show, the evolution of this image, initially constructed by herself, was gradually delegated to others, as if, in a sense, the once invisible anonymous EBB recoiled back again into darkness once her poetic fame was established. My second chapter, through my postulation of an hypothetical diagnosis of EBB's illness, aims to explain the nature of her chronic condition which covered a very long period of time and her miraculous recovery between 1846 to 1849 which I claim, was a clear dormant period of her pulmonary condition. At the same time, this illness was favourably used by EBB to construct her career as a poet, for she gained an intellectual and creative freedom which could not have otherwise been achieved. My discussion of EBB's morphine addiction aims to revise this aspect of her life which has been neglected mostly because of the weight of Browning's legend and due to a negative gendered perspective, which could have damaged the poet's image. I argue that this aspect of her life must be considered as important and decisive as her illness, which was used to disguise her drug dependence. In this same respect,

my claim in the third chapter, about the influence of morphine in EBB's poetry leads me to discuss *Aurora Leigh* and other poems from a perspective previously only broached by Alethea Hayter. I further address neglected themes in my discussion of some of EBB's spiritual interests: Christianity and Swedenborgian theology, as well as the poet's revision of the Miltonic figure of the prophet. I aim to study these influences not as separated and individual units, but as part of a whole complex network created by the poet. My claim is that even while, for theologians and for certain academic circles, some of EBB's beliefs might have seemed absurd and have been considered cultural and superstitious curiosities, for the poet they were held as strong beliefs whose impact and importance should be considered as relevant as EBB's Christian background.

Chapter One: A Colourful Counterfeit

This coloured counterfeit that thou beholdest,
Vainglorious with the excellence of art,
Is, in fallacious syllogisms of colour,
Nought but a cunning duppery of sense...[44]

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

'My sweet unseen'

'What damage the art of photography has inflicted upon the art of literature has yet to be reckoned…'.[45] Virginia Woolf's critical observation about photography concerning the Brownings, illuminates the path to one of the most interesting cases of nineteenth-century literary celebrity and legend. The best known portraits of EBB within popular culture, in posthumous editions of her poetry, anthologies and biographies, are mostly painted, engraved and drawn ones, whilst the photographic portraits, a true technological novelty at the time, seem to have fallen into oblivion in spite of being EBB's most faithful likenesses. Yet one of EBB's most well-known portraits, that which appeared on the frontispiece as an official likeness for the 4th edition of *AL* (1859)[46] was derived from a photograph and was modified for the final engraving which differed significantly from the original.

My chapter explores a specific theme within the portraits of EBB. It starts in the dark, when the image of EBB hid invisible in the shadows -when no portrait of the

---

[44] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, 'This coloured counterfeit that thou beholdest', *Mexican Poetry: An Anthology,* trans. by Samuel Beckett (London: Grove Press, 1994) p. 85.
[45] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh' p. 209.
[46] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859).

poet was known- and progresses to the point of the presentation of EBB's official likeness in the frontispiece portrait to *AL* in 1859. The journey through the portraits, constructed to create specific meanings, is filled with symbolism significant to EBB's identity as a poet. Nevertheless, the portraits were not always satisfactory to her. The frontispiece portrait occurred at a moment in EBB's development in which her successful career was solidified, and her personal life seemed fulfilled. *AL,* which had already established its place among readers through its editions, both in Britain and America, acquired a new dimension with the inclusion of the frontispiece. Aurora, as a character, stands as a partial self-portrait, with multiple layers which I will go on to explore gradually. In this chapter however, I will only concentrate upon autobiographical echoes from EBB's youth which, due to the legendary weight of the sacred aura of the poet, tend to be overlooked.

Woolf questions the balance between author and biography, yet ironically she herself helped to shape the myth of the Brownings through her fictional biography *Flush* in which the famous love-story of the poets is narrated through the eyes of the spaniel. A mixture of fact and fiction, *Flush* includes illustrations, some of them real contemporary likenesses, such as the portraits of the Brownings and their friend and contemporary author Mary Russell Mitford. Nevertheless, for the portrait of the dog itself, a fictional recreation was produced, which in new editions is indexed as

'Pinka'.[47] The sitter was Woolf's own spaniel[48] and the model for Mrs. Browning's lap was very likely that of Virginia Woolf herself.[49]

Fig. 1. 1.
'Pinka as Flush', photograph, frontispiece from *Flush*, published in London by The Hogarth Press, 1933

In a humorously odd twist of fate, Pinka appeared as an official source for Flush's likeness in Iain Finlayson's biography of RB. Assumed to be a contemporary Victorian portrait, the dog's likeness romanticizes the life through the notion of a novelesque elopement while becoming a document of literary historical value, in spite of the proven anachronism evident through simple observation, as the clear Omega Workshop-style patterns[50] of the background screen prove. The dog's portrait

[47] Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, frontispiece (London: The Hogarth Press, 1933).
[48] 'The actual photograph used in Flush, is of Pinka, a bitch spaniel given to Woolf by Vita [Sackville-West] in 1926.' Humm, Maggie, 'The 1930s, Photography, and Virginia Woolf's Flush', *Photography and Culture*, 3.1 (2010), 10.
[49] 'The woman's pose resembles photographs of Angelica [Bell] taken by Vanessa [Bell] [...] In addition, Pinka's happy stillness suggests that she is sitting on her own mistress.' Humm, Maggie, 'The 1930s, Photography, and Virginia Woolf's Flush', *Photography and Culture*, 3.1 (2010), 12.
[50] Design enterprise by Bloomsbury artists, founded in 1913. The main figure behind Omega was Roger Fry.

enhances sentiment in EBB's story, while reverberating satirically within EBB's own reply to Richard Henghist Horne in October 4th, 1843: 'Flush's portrait, I need scarcely say; & only fails of being an excellent substitute for mine, through being more worthy than I can be counted'.[51] Horne had asked EBB for a biographical sketch and an official likeness to be published in *The New Spirit of the Age*[52] in 1844: 'Have you a good portrait of yourself which you (or any of your family) would allow to be engraved by the artists of this new work. You will be in 'good company' you know—or I shd never ask you—but I do, and much wish it'.[53]

Fig. 1. 2.
Elizabeth Barrett, 'Flush', from the poet's letter to Horne, 1844

Flush[54] appears slightly humanized by EBB's drawing skills as a satirical self portrait: his ears appear as ringlets, and his large eyes resemble the poet's. Yet, under EBB's humorous remark lies an undermining of her own physical self as set against the significance of her poetry as well as her desire to remain as an effaced author

---

[51] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=235978&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[52] Richard Hengist Horne *A New Spirit of the Age*, *Vol. II*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1844).
[53] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 1392 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1557/?rsId=235984&returnPage=1>[accessed 2017-03-23]
[54] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=235978&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

> In conclusion you see, I both cant & wont send you a picture for such a purpose … it is a superfluity of negation. 'Wont' would have done very well for a woman, .. now would [...] It seems to me an ultraimpossibility to send my portrait to a publisher for introduction to the public—and not even to please.[55]

Before the publication of Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age,* hardly any details were publicly known of EBB's life. Her first contributions to poetry magazines had been anonymous, although later she signed under her initials 'E. B. B.' (Elizabeth Barrett Barrett), until signing her full name in 1838 for *The Seraphim and other Poems*, whose preface reads:

> I assume no power of art, except that power of love towards it which has remained with me from my childhood until now. In the power of such a love, and in the event of my life being prolonged, I would fain hope to write hereafter better verses; but I never can feel more intensely than at this moment –nor can it be needful that any should –the sublime uses of poetry, and the solemn responsibilities of the poet.[56]

This was the first time that the poet addressed her audience directly, claiming that love of art acted as a propelling force, positioning herself humbly, and shielding herself from the critics. EBB's strategy of implying love as the force driving her to creation was an intelligent move: she relied upon emotions as an expected and accepted part of the feminine, and she leant upon her heart without implying an overly emotional display. Study and cultivation would imply hours of commitment, a certain sacrifice, whilst love would signify that most of her poetry - with a mystical vein -

---

[55] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=235978&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[56] Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, *The Seraphim and Other Poems* (London: Saunders & Oatley, 1838) p. xviii.

came from her heart. Moreover, seclusion and feelings added to the idea of a chronic mysterious ailment which threatened her life still made her an elusive and intangible personality.

During this early period of her poetical career, EBB's face remained unknown not only to her audience and editors, but also to her correspondents. One of her correspondents, the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), is particularly interesting in relation to the poet's sense of self. Haydon was born on Plymouth in January 26th, 1786 and studied at the Royal Academy and later briefly at the Louvre. He became interested in the Elgin Marbles and was involved in persuading the purchase of the collection of Greek antiquities by the British Government in 1816. Haydon was extravagant, reckless and fell into debt to the point of being imprisoned for it four times. Although his paintings sold well, the money he earned was not enough to cover all his extravagant expenses. Haydon became a reputable speaker on the fine arts and he published two volumes of his lectures. But in spite of his efforts, Haydon never achieved the success he aimed for. In 1843, when a competition to design frescoes for the Houses of Parliament was opened, he worked hard on a submission, but his work was not selected. After this he became dedicated to 'educating' the British public, but he was ridiculed as presumptuous, by *Punch* and others. He committed suicide on June 22nd 1846, after his final exhibition at the Egyptian Hall failed dramatically, having opened at the same time as the show by the

American midget General Tom Thumb in a nearby chamber, which unluckily attracted much more attention.[57]

Even though EBB never met Haydon in person, her sisters did, and in one of their visits to him they saw an unfinished portrait of Wordsworth which Haydon sent to Wimpole Street for EBB to see and which resulted in her writing a sonnet.[58] EBB and Haydon started corresponding in 1842 and by December, he was clearly considered too familiar with her, addressing her as 'my dear invisible friend'[59], 'ingenious little, darling invisible'[60], 'my sweet unseen'[61] and 'my dream'.[62] It was during the peak of their written correspondence that Haydon asked EBB for a likeness. She declined to give and wrote instead in January 1st, 1843:

> I mean to try to be remembered by my soul rather than by my body, .. which last (in confidence) is not worth much of your enquiry. I would not be engraved for some publishers who asked me the other day,—I am sick of bodies for my part. […] Yet to give scanty data to your fancy,—thus,—I am "little & black" like Sappho, en attendant the immortality—five feet one high,—with the latitudes straight to correspond—eyes of various colours as the sun shines— .. called blue & black, without being accidentally black & blue—affidavit-ed for grey—sworn at for hazel—& set down by myself (according to my 'private

[57] *The Brownings' Correspondence,* Biographical Sketches <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/biographical-sketches/> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[58] The sonnet 'On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon' was first Published in *The Athenaeum* in October 29th, 1842. It was published later in EBB's *Poems* (1844).
[59] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021)letter 1291 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1447/?rsId=235986&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[60] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1205 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1352/?rsId=235988&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[61] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1291 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1447/?rsId=235986&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[62] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1356 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1507/?rsId=235990&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

> view' in the glass) as dark-green-brown—grounded with brown; & green otherwise; what is called "invisible green" in invisible garden-fences .. I shd be particular to you who are a colourist. Not much nose of any kind, .. certes no superfluity of nose; but to make up for it, a mouth suitable to a larger personality—oh, and an extraordinarily little voice, to which Cordelia's was a happy medium. Dark hair & complexion. Small face & sundries.
>
> Whereupon, terrified by the image of a green eyed monster, you start back, & I break off suddenly. Sic periit gloria foeminarum![63]

In this passage, colours are designed to magnify EBB's presence in Haydon's imagination, but only according to what she wants to underline. While the eyes remain as a source of multiplicity of colour, the rest of EBB's body is almost monochromatic: 'little and black'. In spite of the reference to Sappho, the Greek poet, EBB emphasizes her 'dark hair and complexion', not just as countenance, but as a reflection of her emotional self. Similarly the word 'little' is used afterwards to describe her voice, and diminish its presence. The use of darker shades diverts the reader's attention from EBB's physical self towards the rest of her personality through her eyes. The term 'sundries' is used for items which are not important enough to be mentioned, thereby transforming the self-portrait into a mere collection of features: hair, eyes, nose, mouth and complexion. There is no mention of any other details of her body or dress and if Haydon (or any artist) attempted to paint a portrait based on EBB's description of herself, it would result in one of ghostly appearance with the eyes as the only clear features. EBB's written self-portrait within that context, reads

---

[63] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1482 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1244/?rsId=235992&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

as a playful and perhaps not particularly innocent way of capturing attention, resulting in Haydon's clearly becoming obsessed with the poet, to the point of first sending her some of his valuables to keep safe after he had been threatened by debt collectors, and culminating in his final request to EBB to become his executor and edit his unexpurgated diaries after his death. EBB was moved by Haydon's suicide in 1846 as she wrote to RB: 'I cannot help thinking—Could anyone .. could my own hand even—have averted what has happened?… for a year & a half or more perhaps, I scarcely have written or heard from him—until last week when he wrote to ask for a shelter for his boxes & pictures'.[64] Haydon's last wishes were not executed as he had intended, for EBB was rescued from editing his work by Mr. Serjeant Talfourd whose advice came through RB, pointing out that Haydon's materials belonged to his creditors and not to her. Yet, what mostly worried EBB, during this episode was the fate of her own letters to Haydon[65], as in her own words: 'I threw away my thoughts without looking where they fell. Often my sisters have blamed me for writing in that wild way to strangers -& I should like to have the letters back before they have serve to amuse two or three executors'.[66]

The mention of the 'green-eyed monster' in EBB's written self-portrait, apart from making the eyes appear as perhaps the only neatly distinct feature, echoes lines from Shakespeare's *Othello*. This reference might therefore signal jealousy as an

---

[64] *The Brownings' Correspondence,* (2021) letter 243 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/266/?rsId=235994&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[65] This same anxiety recurred in her later life, already as Mrs. Browning, after the rift she had with her close friend Sophia Eckley, as EBB hoped to recuperate the one-hundred and twenty-one letters sent to Sophia. EBB's regret, again, was that she had been too wild and too familiar, to the point of presenting Sophia with a locket with her own hair (which has not been traced) taken from RB's locket.

[66] Julia Markus, *Dared And Done: The Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning,* p. 54.

important component of EBB's personality while also adding an earthly tint to the ethereal qualities of her intentional elusiveness. The horrifying monster belongs to the realm of the nightmare and read in the context of the letter, the image can be understood through duality. On one hand, jealousy is connected to an act of possessiveness, even one of demanding a certain degree of exclusiveness from EBB's correspondent, and on the other, jealousy denotes an unpleasant, perhaps manipulative aspect of her personality which EBB does not want her correspondent to discover.

EBB's attitude towards Haydon, supported by the judgement of her sisters upon her 'indiscretion' in her letter writing, adds an interesting dimension to her relationship to the painter, and to her relationships with other male correspondents. EBB's letters, through which constructed friendships often became very personal, intense, and at times flirtatious. Frequently, such epistolary friendships involved a certain idealization on both sides, allowing the poet to construct an image of herself that stressed her intellectual and cultural traits while diminishing emphasis upon her physical person.

The mysterious halo EBB had sustained for Haydon and her audience continued to surround her persona, even after her name was publicly disclosed. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe felt a great admiration for EBB, as his dedication in *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845) proves: 'To the noblest of her sex- to the author of "The Drama of Exile"- to Miss Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, of England, I dedicate this volume, with the most enthusiastic admiration and with the most sincere esteem'[67]. He borrowed

[67] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven and Other Poems* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1845), p. V.

from EBB's 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' the meter for 'The Raven'.[68] Poe died before EBB's face was known to the world, and one can only wonder whether in his imagination, he would picture her as a sort of Ligeia, who also possessed literary gifts and cultivated sensibility, ideals which added to her exotic beauty: 'The 'strangeness, however, which I found in the eyes, was of nature distinct from the formation or the colour, or the brilliancy of the features, and must after all, be referred to the expression'.[69] The mysterious aura expanded as EBB led a secluded life and received no visitors. When her *Poems* (1844) came out, she was a name attached to her verse, faceless. Such effacement produced the effect of an ethereal and bodiless poet who was close to God through illness, devotion and seclusion. In a sort of spiritual existence, the poet became a phantasmal presence, her voice (that 'little voice' as she described it to Haydon) became the source of her materiality through the written word. Never to be seen, never to be heard, through absence, EBB constructed her presence. In her own words to Horne: 'It seems to me an ultraimpossibility to send my portrait to a publisher for introduction to the public—and not even to please'[70], and through an exaggerated term (ultraimpossibility) EBB defended her standing positions: she would not comply either to publisher or audience for the sake of mere curiosity.

The effaced Miss Barrett was portrayed in a playful vein by Vanessa Bell in the illustrations for *Flush* in which 'Miss Barrett' and then 'Mrs. Browning' are still recognizable in spite of appearing faceless. The illustrations depict interior spaces.

---

[68] William H. Gravely, 'Christopher North and the Genesis of the Raven', *PMLA*, 66. 2 (1951), 149-161 (p. 149).
[69] Edgar Allan Poe, 'Ligeia', *Tales, Poems, Essays* (London: Collins, 1952), p. 153.
[70] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1393
<https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=235974&returnPage=1>

The first one (fig. 1.3) set in Wimpole Street, in which the outer wall of the room and door frame Miss Barrett, who *existed* as an invalid recognized through her ringlets and the objects around her: table, bed, pillow, bookshelves, and busts of poets. Similarly, in the illustration set in Italy (fig. 1. 4), Mrs. Browning does not show her face. Instead she gazes towards the Florentine landscape while giving her back to the audience. In the Wimpole Street illustration, the curved patterns drawn by Vanessa Bell create a claustrophobic atmosphere to the point of suffocation, whereas the Casa Guidi illustration reflects a sense of balance and open space through straight patterns. Bell's illustrations obey the legendary image of EBB, by highlighting the poet's trademarks: her hairstyle and her reclining position characteristic of the 'ill' Miss Barrett/Mrs. Browning. Bell frames her within a constrained biographical construction, heirloom of the Victorian generation, which Leslie Stephen, Anne Thackeray Ritchie and *The Dictionary of National Biography,* official biographical sources, were all part of. Both Bell and Woolf - even while being satirical in *Flush* and questioning the art of biography - fell into the trap set by their immediate predecessors: they became carried away by the romantic plot, perpetuating the legend.

Fig. 1. 3.

Vanessa Bell 'The Back Bedroom', end-paper, *Flush,* published in London by The Hogarth Press, 1933

Fig. 1. 4.

Vanessa Bell 'At Casa Guidi' , end-paper, *Flush,* published in London by The Hogarth Press, 1933

The reluctance of EBB during her early career to show her face to her audience and her correspondents, is almost the polar opposite of the openness -to the point of indiscretion as in the case of Haydon - shown in her letters. Yet, as for many wealthy families, several portraits of EBB existed, for a number of them were commissioned and executed by artists and members of her family recording her childhood and youth. Nevertheless, poetical anonymity served as a tactical strategy for her poetry without the immediate need to justify to her audience her themes, to be questioned about gender and/or social status. Since EBB never had to publish as a necessity to sustain herself or her family, as her close friend Mary Russell Mitford had to do, this privileged position allowed EBB a creative freedom from which she gradually disclosed her personal identity. By 1844, EBB was already an established author, who kept shunning her audience as her own words to Haydon explain that: 'I mean to try to be remembered by my soul rather than my body, .. which last (in confidence) is not worth much of your enquiry'.[71] The message in this statement is similar to the one she sent with the Flush drawing to Horne with the implication: what does it matter *who* is behind the verses? Man, woman, dog, anonymous, initials or full name? Writing, to EBB, came from the soul, and as such, its vehicle, the body, was irrelevant.

In this sense, her previously quoted letter to Haydon is fundamental to understand EBB's position in respect to her own image. Haydon's request, as well as Horne's, occurred during a moment in EBB's life in which her fame was already consolidated.

[71] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1482 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1244/?rsId=236081&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

While to Horne, EBB denies her likeness in a humorous and modest tone, with Haydon, whose romantic undertone in his addressing to EBB can be felt, she uses a more definite and less light tone: 'terrified by the image of a green eyed monster, you start back.'[72] This remark contrasts with the image of the 'little and dark' EBB who, all of a sudden, transforms herself into an intimidating green eyed monster, with force evoked by the blend of 'sundries' which generate a monstrous intimidating persona. The effect is an image of EBB almost as a mythological creature, placing the image of the candid woman behind her while acting as a final statement of refusal to deliver a likeness to Haydon.

EBB's effacement and refusal to provide a likeness to both male correspondents reflects a metaphorical annihilation of her own womanhood in order to provide force, independence and autonomy to her own poetry. In her reply to Horne, her phrase 'not even to please'[73] refers to the fact that she was unwilling to provide a likeness even to satisfy the editor's personal curiosity. Horne's request, placed in a casual tone 'P.S. Oh I had nearly forgotten. Have you a good portrait of yourself which you (or any of your family) would allow to be engraved by the artists of this new work'[74], underlines the real weight and significance of the likeness for his publication, as EBB was a woman poet. Had she been a man, would Horne have required a likeness? Had EBB

---

[72] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1482 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1244/?rsId=236081&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

[73] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1392 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1557/?rsId=236082&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

[74] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence*,(2021) letter 1392 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1557/?rsId=236082&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

led an ordinary life, who published to support her expenses - been asked also for a likeness in such a casual manner? Had she been idealized/idolised by her male audience, editors and fellow poets as Edgar Allan Poe's dedication seemed to hint, or had EBB being a married woman, in her fifties and with several children, instead of a mysterious secluded poet, would she had being asked for her likeness? Her reply to Haydon, along the same line, denies all beauty and attractiveness of womanhood which she had voiced in detail behind the 'green eyed monster' closing her letter. What EBB was struggling against, quite successfully, was the objectification of her own image as a woman poet. Aware, perhaps, of certain, attractive physical traits, EBB undermined those very qualities which she was fully aware would charm her male audience and shadow her verse.

The Making of 'The Poet Laureate of Hope End'

'I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God!'[75]

Michelle Martinez explores in her article 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture' the stories behind some of the portraits of EBB, through the creation of the her own image via transactions and negotiations, denominated by Martinez as 'portrait narratives'[76] which developed EBB's 'evolution of her visual identity as a

[75] *Aurora Leigh*, II:13.
[76] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', *Victorian Review*, 37. 1, (2011) 62–91 (p. 63).

female poet, her ambivalence about women's portraiture in Victorian culture, and her belief that poetry, rather than painting, more vividly captures an individual's soul.'[77] Martinez echoes Woolf's initial question about the 'damage' of photography through her title: perils and damage seem imminent to the creation of the iconic image of the poet, who always seems to stare with a puzzling and sometimes enigmatic subtle smile.

In order to fulfil Horne's request for a likeness of her to his anthology, one portrait was considered by EBB. This domestic miniature portrait (fig. 1.5.), executed by Matilda Carter in 1841, is discussed by Martinez as a negotiation between the domestic and the poetic, for in it, the enhancement of EBB's domestic traits would be underlined[78]. Mourning, domestic retirement - with Flush included in the portrait - were buried underneath any trace of the poet. This portrait is significant because, even thought it was mentioned to Horne as a possibility for *A New Spirit of the Age*, was never shown. EBB's excuse, although the portrait was the most recent at that time, was that it did not achieve a full likeness of her, according to her family, mostly her father: 'although she was so obliging as to paint a very pretty little girl with unexceptionable regularity of features, he [Mr. Edward Barrett] was ungrateful enough to throw it down with a pshaw & deny the likeness altogether.'[79]

---

[77] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 63.
[78] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 70-71.
[79] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=236083&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

Fig. 1. 5.
Matilda Carter, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 35,* 1841
(Robert Browning Settlement, London)

Although she was thirty-five, and by Victorian social standards would have been considered a spinster, EBB appears younger in the portrait by Carter, as if in her early twenties. Flush by her side suggests devotional love for animals – a trace of sentiment which was usually expected from women- as faithful companions. EBB's comments on the portrait as 'a quiet unpretending picture, with the right degree of simplicity in the dress & gesture, to accord with the pale worn cheek'[80] suggest a certain degree of satisfaction with what the artist had achieved: simple, humble, with no intricate symbolism of meaning. This view was that of Mr. Barrett who never liked the portrait by Carter, preferring one of his infant daughter, 'where I appear in the character of a fugitive angel, which Papa swears by all his Gods is very like me to this day; & which perhaps may be like.'[81] The highlighted preference of Mr Barrett for his four year old daughter's portrait to any other suggests that he clung to her childhood, when they were most happy, with no financial distress and when his wife Mary Barrett was still alive. No wonder that Mr. Barrett would consider EBB as the purest of all women; by leading a life as she did, she recoiled not only from marriage, but also from the emotional turmoil of growing up. Carter's portrait never saw the light as an official likeness of EBB perhaps because it was too intimate and personal, with no trace of the poet her audience needed to see.

The earliest portrait of EBB containing an indication of her poetic gift is one painted in 1818, when she was twelve by William Artaud (fig. 1.7), commissioned by

---

[80] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 70-71.
[81] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=236083&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

EBB's grandmother Elizabeth Barrett Moulton. Martinez points out the placing in this portrait of the three children Henrietta, Bro and Ba[82] (EBB), in contrast to EBB being presented a 'budding author'[83], for the young girl appears holding a rolled manuscript in her right hand. In the pastel portrait by Artaud (fig. 1. 6.), details of the poet's young face are revealed. A glimpse of the young EBB's perception of herself as an artist belongs to the same period, through an autobiographical essay entitled, 'My Own Character'[84] (1818), remarkable as an introspection written in a solemn and serious tone by a twelve year old girl, which sounds more mature than the diary, written decades later (1831), when EBB was twenty five, which resembles the writing of a teenager. In 'My Own Character' EBB makes the interesting statement: 'At 11 I wished to be considered an authoress… Poetry and essays were my studies.'[85]

[82] EBB called herself Ba, and that short name was used both by her family and her closest acquaintances (like RB).
[83] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 65.
[84] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'My Own Character' in ' Two Autobiographical Essays by Elizabeth Barrett', *Browning Institute Studies* (1974), 119-134.
[85] Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, 'My Own Character', p. 124.

Fig. 1.6.
William Artaud, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning Aged 12,* Hope End, mid-1818
(Private Collection)

fig. 1. 7

William Artaud *Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 12, holding scroll,* mid 1818

(Eton College Library, Windsor, England)

From the age of six, EBB's father had called her 'The Poet Laureate of Hope End' resulting in her vocational certainty and self-assurance at such young age. Artaud's portraits support this idea of EBB's poetic gift: the rolled scroll represented a manuscript which had already been finished, anticipating the creation of her early epic *The Battle of Marathon* (1820).

The portrait of EBB with the siblings was followed by another one, by Henry William Pickersgill[86] (fig 1.8), circa 1826. Martinez, claims that portrait belongs to the tradition of Romantic portraiture of literary personalities. Unlike other literary women personalities, EBB's portrait was an oil painting, which underlined her wealthy status:

> In Romantic portraiture, an outdoor scene or antique interior might imply the poet's subject matter … and according to Lara Perry, women's portraits rarely ventured beyond the conventions of "genteel femininity" to indicate the poet-sitter's unique interests or character, and only wealthy women were rendered in the "high" academic medium of oil painting.[87]

EBB's portrait by Pickersgill fits Martinez' criteria belonging thus to the 'iconographic tradition of the literary genius'[88]: the quill, the manuscript and EBB's body language reflect the sacredness of the poetic art. Martinez does not draw much attention to EBB's dress nor to the colours, and most of her analysis focuses upon the writing instruments as well as on the dreamy gaze up towards the heavenly muse.

---

[86] Henry William Pickersgill (1782-1875) was pupil of George Arnald, ARA and later attending the Royal Academy. He painted portraits, but also historical, mythological and poetical subjects. He became a prolific exhibitor at the Royal Academy, with up to four hundred paintings shown in succession. He was elected Royal Academician in 1826 and after Thomas Phillips's death, he became the most eminent portrait painter of his time. The National Portrait Gallery currently displays his portraits of Wordsworth, William Godwin, Jeremy Bentham, M. G. Lewis, Hannah More, George Stephenson, and Judge Talfourd.

[87] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 64.

[88] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 67.

Significantly, the Pickersgill portrait echoes a portrait of one of EBB's early literary greatest influences, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), (fig. 1. 11.) painted by John Opie in 1797. The resemblance can be traced not in the countenance or position of the sitter, but in the colours and fabric of their clothing. Wollstonecraft is depicted as a philosophical thinker. The setting is ambiguous, lacks furniture, manuscript or any other item which may hint of a profession and an ethereal quality is suggested by Wollstonecraft emerging from the shadows.

Fig. 1. 8

Henry William Pickersgill *Elizabeth Barrett Browning Aged about 20,* 1826

(Private Collection)

Fig. 1. 9

Daniel Maclise, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon (Mrs Maclean),* ca. 1830-1835

Fig. 1.10

Robert Cabell Roffe, after Edward Robertson *Felicia Dorothea Hemans,* ca. 1825-1835.

Fig. 1. 11
John Opie, *Mary Wollestonecraft,* ca. 1797

However, by paying attention to other portraits of female poets, such as Laetitia E. Landon (fig. 1. 9.) and Felicia Hemans (fig. 1. 10.), it is possible to further understand ways in which this portrait differs from them. Unlike Carter's portrait, which is highly domestic, Pickersgill's signifies and enhances all of that which EBB, her closest of kin and friends thought and felt about her as an artist: 'The Poet Laureate of Hope End' composition underlining her status as a poet and the divinity of her trade. Divine inspiration is hinted at by the gaze towards a higher point, and by the quill, held delicately in her hand and remains in the air, floating above the paper. EBB was about twenty when this portrait was made and it is no coincidence that decades later, EBB's Aurora Leigh would crown herself as a poet on her twentieth birthday, for Aurora's and EBB's coming of age happened through the acknowledgement and recognition of their role as poets. The scroll, presented in the childhood portrait, lies extended in

Pickergill's portrait as a manuscript. EBB's clothes, though typical for young ladies of her age, contrast with her countenance, and her hair style and expression suggest an adolescent genius poet. In resembling her childhood portrait of EBB, the sitter becomes almost sexless, within an innocent state of childhood while creating a sense of artistic development. This androgyny, a sort of 'bodily renunciation' points towards the spiritual dimension in which the poet unfolds. Like Aurora Leigh, who rejects marriage in order to pursue her poetical career, the 'Poet Laureate Hope End' disengages from her body through the title 'Poet Laureate', which at that time, was only meant for male poets, and through her androgynous clothes. This portrait depicts EBB almost as an icon of her own poetic trade, that polarized strongly against the depiction of EBB as daughter of her family. Both representations were in their own ways constricting and limited the boundaries between each other while underlining the author's physical presence. The domestic portrait represents Miss Barrett's physical reality, the portrait by Pickersgill idealizes the poet as a representation of the trade. Furthermore, Aurora's voice reverberates within the iconographic nature of the portrait: 'I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God!' (*AL,* II:13) The countenance, the dreamy, mystical stare, the certainty, the uprightness, the Romantic echoes of EBB's clothing, all correspond with the young, daring, adventurous 'Poet Laureate of Hope End', who, though leading a domestic, conventional young lady's life, had already written an epic at a very young age, and whose dreams of poetic grandeur were budding within her imagination as her verse gained popularity and acceptance. Yet, in

spite of the clear symbolic charge of this portrait, it remained within closed doors, to be admired only by the Barrett household.

In 1844, a review for *The North American Review* of EBB's *An Essay on Mind, Prometheus Bound* and *The Seraphim* notes certain facts of EBB's life while others remain obscure:

> The first three volumes on our list are written by Miss Elizabeth B. Barrett, to whom we give the first place, as due alike to the prerogative of her sex, and to the amount of her contributions. In regard to this lady, it is not in our power to gratify that curiosity which is felt, naturally enough, by readers, to know some personal details of the writer whose works they read. We are ignorant of her lineage, her education, her tastes, and (last not least, where a lady is concerned,) her personal attractions. We know nothing more of her, than can be gathered from her poetry, except the solitary fact, which we have heard on good authority, that her first volume was published when the writer was but seventeen years old; and, as that bears the year eighteen hundred and twenty-five upon the title-page, a shrewd guess may be given as to her age at the present time.[89]

EBB is defined in this series as lady poet. The author considers it relevant to know more about 'her lineage, her education, her tastes and personal attractions'. EBB was well read and cultivated; nevertheless, she tried to conceal facts of her education, upbringing, lineage and wealth, which, if known, would have certainly biased the reception of her poetry at the time. The only disclosed fact here is the publication of an early volume of poetry which enhances the idea that she had been born with a poetic gift. Once her name was known, the admirers and detractors had a tangible

[89] *The North American Review*, (July 1842) 201–218, *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/43/?rsId=236084&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-06]

person to address as well as someone to speculate upon. Yet, EBB had no intention of providing a likeness, remaining in the dark.

'A root, fit for the ground and the dark'

'There is nothing to see in me; nor to hear in me- [...] If my poetry is worth anything to an eye, it is the flower of me. [..] The rest of me is nothing but a root, fit for the ground and the dark.'[90]

EBB to RB, May, 16, 1845.

1845, the year in which EBB became acquainted with RB, was a turning point for her. After their marriage and elopement in 1846, and once their life was settled abroad, the mysterious aura surrounding the poet gave way to the Brownings' love story to capture popular imagination with the same intensity EBB's earlier elusiveness had produced. Daniel Karlin, quoting an early letter from RB's close friend Joseph Arnould to Alfred Dommett, wonders to what an extent the Brownings were responsible for the construction of their own myth[91]; the letter was written two months after the elopement:

> I think the last piece of news I told you of was Browning's marriage to Miss Barrett –which I had then just heard of. She is, you know … our present greatest living English 'poetess'. She has been for some years an invalid, leading a very secluded life in a sick room in the household of one of those tyrannical, arbitrary, puritanical rascals who go sleekly about the world, canting Calvinism abroad, and acting despotism at home. Under the iron rigour of this man's domestic rule she, feeble and invalided, had grown up to eight and thirty years of age in the most absolute and enforced seclusion from society: cultivating her mind to a

[90] Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899) p. 67.
[91] Daniel Karlin, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett,* p. 11.

> wonderful amount of accomplishment, instructing herself in all languages, reading Chrysostom in the original Greek, and publishing the best metrical translation that has yet appeared of the 'Prometheus Bound' –having also found time to write three volumes of poetry, the last of which raised her name to a place second only to that of Browning and Tennyson, amongst all those who are not repelled by eccentricities of external form from penetrating into the soul and quintessential spirit of poetry … Well, this lady so gifted, so secluded, so tyrannised over, fell in love with Browning in the spirit, before she ever saw him in the flesh –in plain English loved the writer before she knew the man. Imagine, you who know him, the effect which his graceful bearing, high demeanour, and noble speech must have had on such a mind when she first saw the man of her visions in the twilight of her darkened room. She was at once in love as a poet-soul only can be and Browning, by contagion or electricity, was no less for the first interview wholly in love with her. This was now some years back; from that time his visits to her have become constant. He of course wished to ask her for her father openly. 'If you do,' was her terrified answer, 'he would immediately throw me out of [the] window or lock me up for life in a darkened room'. There was one thing only to be done, and that Browning did: married her without the father's knowledge, and immediately left England with her for Italy, where they are now living at Pisa in a supreme state of happiness as you can fancy two such people in such a place. The old rascal father of course tore his beard, foamed at the mouth and performed all other feats of impotent rage: luckily his wrath is absolutely idle, for she has a small independence of some £350 per ann., on which they of course will live prosperously. I heard from him a week back … he is a glorious fellow, by God! Oh, I forgot to say that the soi-disante invalid … once emancipated from the paternal despotism, has had a wondrous revival, or rather, a complete metamorphosis; walks, rides, eats, drinks like a young and healthy woman –in fact is a healthy woman, of I believe, some five and thirty –a little old –too old for Browning –but then one word covers all: they are in Love, who lends his own youth to everything.[92]

The Browning's romantic plot becomes hyperbolic. As Karlin notes the information was too specific, too well planned and developed to be mere gossip. Although a prolific letter writer, EBB was very private about her family life, and she exclusively disclosed details of her relationship with her father to RB. While certain aspects of her illness were disclosed to her correspondents and audience, she would never reveal them in full detail. For instance, Mary Russell Mitford published in 1855 her

[92] Robert Browning, *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1906), p. 133-6.

Recollections of a Literary Life[93], in which she made a terrible mistake that would cause irreparable damage to her long friendship with EBB. She narrated the account of EBB's brother's, Edward's, 'Bro''s death, and the grief this produced in EBB. On this matter, EBB wrote from Paris to her brother George Barrett: 'The vultures *should* wait a little till the carrion is ready & not pluck out the living eyes.'[94] EBB was not interested in creating a *personal* legend and her effacement can be explained in these terms, as can her discretion regarding her private life as earlier shown in her discomfort upon Haydon's insistence on demanding a likeness so she could cease to be 'invisible' for him. Yet, Arnould's letter proves an abrupt shift in the subject, for all of a sudden, the whole literary circle *knew* that Mr. Edward Barrett was a domestic tyrant, among other personal details of EBB's life. Karlin underlines how the basis for the legend is found in this letter: the diminishing of EBB's age, the stress on invalidism, the chivalrous attitude of RB and Mr. Barrett's negative personality traits. Much of this information later ended up in obituaries and posthumous biographies of EBB repeated as clichés: 'so gifted, so secluded, so tyrannised over, fell in love with Browning in the spirit before she knew the man ... at once in love as a poet-soul can be ... once emancipated from the paternal despotism, has had a wondrous revival, or rather a complete metamorphosis ... one word covers all: they are in Love.'[95] Karlin analyses Arnould's words, through which EBB becomes 'the heroine of a silly romance.'[96] The poets' love is described as spiritual by Arnauld, the only permitted

---

[93] Mary Russell Mitford, *Recollections of a Literary Life* (New York: Harper, 1855).
[94] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Unpublished correspondence* (London: Maggs Bros, 1937), p. 31.
[95] Robert Browning, *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett*, p. 136.
[96] Daniel Karlin, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett*, p. 5.

corporeality for EBB's is embodied through illness: 'Love', written with a capital L, turns fully spiritual in this account.

Fig. 1. 12

Marshall Wood, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', 1853

Fig. 1. 13

Marshall Wood 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', (Illustration from 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', *American Phrenological Journal*), 1861

The 'completely metamorphosed' poet rejuvenated through 'Love' fitted legend. Once married, the couple sat for several portraits, and while according to EBB she would generally comply to Browning's wishes for sitting, as Martinez mentions, by the mid-1850s EBB's reluctance to show a likeness to her correspondents friends and editors had disappeared, and she was not opposed to the idea of having her likeness distributed.[97] Yet, of all the portraits made, there was one which became problematic, for it was an unflattering portrait of EBB (fig. 1. 13.) which circulated both in *The National Magazine* (1857) and *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*[98]. This likeness was also

[97] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 76.
[98] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 76.

reproduced in September 1861 (after EBB's death) in 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Portrait Character and Biography' for the *American Phrenological Journal.*[99] The engraving was based on a bas relief medallion by the sculptor Marshall Wood (fig. 1.12), and while the original medallion was intended for mass reproduction and sales,[100] fate had other plans, as it was transformed into the unflattering engraving. RB was specially displeased by this portrait as he expressed to Charles Stephen Francis in September 19th, 1858: 'the hideous libel which circulates in England & America as "engraved from a medallion"',[101] and its distribution pointed towards the need to provide an official likeness of EBB.

The phrenological article, which appeared posthumously features several biographical inconsistencies, such as EBB's birth date (which appears as 1812) and a series of statements which would become clichés in the development the legend: 'a companion of the greatest minds of her age in her philosophical powers'[102]. Whereas other facts appear distorted and exaggerated: 'in sight of her window, she beheld the beloved one [her brother Edward] drown'[103], she became 'the very impersonation of womanly devotion and tenderness… an intellectual woman is somewhat unsexed'.[104] The article includes a description of EBB by an 'anonymous gentleman' who became acquainted with EBB in Florence:

---

[99] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', *American Phrenological Journal* (1838-1869), 34. 3 (1861) p. 59.
[100] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p.76
[101] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 4243 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4607/?rsId=236085&returnPage=1> [accessed: 2017-03-23].
[102] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 59.
[103] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 59.
[104] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 59.

> Mrs. Browning I found possessed of a decidedly fine intellectual countenance, the eye black and large, the cheeks at that time very thin, which, with a diminutive chin, gave the lower part a somewhat triangular shape. The features were regular, except the mouth, the upper part of which projected as little too much. If it were not for this defect, and the evident traces of illness, she might have been pronounced handsome. Her black hair was worn in ringlets, falling on either side nearly to the waist, which gave to the delicate figure a strange, sprite-like effect. Her voice had that true Shakespearean quality of excellence in woman -it was low, clear, and sweet. The countenance, upon the whole, wore an intensely calm, melancholic expression, with the manner of one who had long lived a very retired life.[105]

This hyperbolic description grants EBB an ethereal quality: her hair and eyes appear out of proportion and contrast dramatically with the paleness of her skin. Though at the moment of this description she was no longer evidently in the prime of her youth, the blackness of her ringlets appears untouched by time, growing almost to devour her. The facial expression is that of one closer to the grave and, as to her voice, the nature of its 'true Shakespearean quality of excellence'[106] remains unclear. The idea of EBB being *almost* handsome if it were not for illness, contrasts with the dull and ordinary engraved portrait that appeared with it, in which the locks are replaced by lifeless, wavy hair, framing the uninteresting and unattractive profile. The unflattering portrait circulated, threatening to become official, and it was finally in 1859, under RB's supervision,[107] that an official likeness of EBB put an end to the mystery of the face behind *AL.* In its 4th edition, for the American Publisher Chapman and Hall[108], *Aurora Leigh* showed for the first time, a frontispiece engraved portrait of EBB, known by then as Mrs. Browning.

---

[105] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 61.
[106] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 61.
[107] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 60.
Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Margaret Reynolds, *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) p. 99-102.
[108] Elizabeth Barrett Browning *Aurora Leigh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859).

'A Representation of the most wronged of her sex.'

'If only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing!'[109]

Roland Barthes

The frontispiece portrait of EBB has a peculiar story, as it derives from a series of photographs -from which the direct original is missing - and whose closest reference is a close up carte-de-visite which circulated among friends and relatives. This series of photographs was not held in a flattering light by EBB. The popularity of the carte-de-visite format evidences a cult of celebrity which started to establish itself, and which also affected the domestic sphere. This novel type of portraiture gradually replaced painted and engraved portraits, as it provided a likeness which could be subject to mass reproduction. This format was patented by Andre Disderi (1819-90) in 1854, with his idea of replacing the business card with a miniature portrait.[110] While highly constructed with certain symbolic elements, the carte-de-visite opened up for the first time the possibility for an unlimited number of people to possess the portrait of a celebrity or a loved one. It became an extremely popular form, and soon all types of celebrities were depicted, such as royalty, artists and notable people.[111] The carte-de-viste format became one the most mass marketed photographic genres[112]

---

[109] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Classics, 1993), p. 12.
[110] Mervyn Ruggles, 'Paintings on a Photographic Base', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 24. 2 (1985) 92-103 (p. 94).
[111] Mervyn Ruggles, 'Paintings on a Photographic Base', p. 94
[112] Ann Cvetkovich 'Histories of Mass Culture: From Literary to Visual Culture', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27. 2, (1999) 495-499, (p. 497).

from which a frenzy called 'Cartomania' appeared which saw in the general public collecting cartes-de-visites of all kinds of celebrities[113] Roland Barthes notes that 'the painted, drawn, or miniaturized portrait having been, until the spread of Photography, a limited possession, intended moreover to advertise a social and financial status.'[114] In EBB's case, the status of a 'limited possession' of all her previous painted portraits had allowed her to remain faceless, and to keep the portraits strictly within her household. As discussed, even the portrait by Pickersgill, which would have allowed her to *advertise* herself as a poet, remained behind closed doors.

It is clear that EBB understood the impact of the novel contemporary photographic technology as evidenced in this much quoted letter written in December 7th, 1843 to Mary Russell Mitford:

> I long to have such a memorial of every being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases –but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing… the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of the portrait. I think –and it is not all the monstrous in me to say, that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest artist's work ever produced.[115]

EBB here implies a sense of immortality and evocation, as the shadow suggests an idea of a reality which cannot be fully depicted while being clearly perceived. Furthermore, sanctification places photography within the context of the religious icon as a source of reverence that provides this type of portrait with an spiritual

---

[113] Rachel Teukolsky 'Cartomania: Sensation, Celebrity, and the Democratized Portrait', *Victorian Studies,* 57. 3, (2015) 462-475, (p. 465).
[114] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* p. 12.
[115] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1454 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1622/?rsId=236088&returnPage=1> [accessed: 2021-03-24]

quality, for it captures a moment in the present time of the sitter.[116] Yet a photographic portrait shadows the sitter through the lack of diversity in colour provided by the monochrome as opposed to the painted portrait which could reproduce a likeness rich in colour. When EBB was the subject of a photograph, however, her opinion on photography differed: 'the photographic process is really fatal to women. One looks, not merely ugly (which some of us do in the looking-glass) but hard & cross, which is by no means necessary.'[117] EBB's dislike of the results of her own photographic image echoes her dissatisfaction with earlier painted portraits: none of them is able to capture her true essence. While the painted images stood as idealized versions of her that clung to symbolism both in the poetic and domestic sphere, photography acted like a mirror from which there was no possibility of escaping likeness. In this sense, by capturing her likeness, the photograph shattered the image of EBB as being 'forever young', showing instead the passing of time, and arguable traces of illness of her morphine dependence. Ideally, EBB longed for photographic likenesses of her loved ones, while dreading having hers taken.

EBB sat for the first series of photographic portraits, by the Macaire brothers[118], at Le Havre, on the 17th and 18th September 1858, and she wrote to Sophia Eckley on September 15th, 1858 about the experience:

---

[116] Rachel Teukolski notes that 'Cartomania' provided 'a version of secularized star worship that had previously been reserved for notables in the religious sphere' ('Cartomania: Sensation, Celebrity, and the Democratized Portrait', p. 465)

[117] Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Arabella Barrett, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Her Sister Arabella. Vol. II* (Waco, Wedgestone Press, 2002), p. 469.

[118] Louis Cyrus Macaire (1807–71) and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod (né Macaire, 1812–92), the Macaire brothers were known for daguerreotype portraits, interiors and sea scapes. They were pioneers in photographing sea scapes and were the first to photograph waves. The Brownings visted their studio at Le Havre.

> Robert has dragged me by the hair of my head to the Photographist here, & I have been executed duly .. as a gift to Arabel. Annunciata calls the result 'una donna perduta.' Never did you see such concentrated misery as the countenance represses—and I am thinking of offering it as a frontispiece to the 'Woman's Journal' as a representation of the most wronged of the sex– Dreadful. But Robert & Arabel swear it is like–! So much the worse for me One of these portraits derived in the frontispiece illustration for *AL.*[119]

EBB was fifty-two when the photographs were taken. Although a day apart, at first sight they seem to have been taken years apart from each other. The first portrait (fig. 1. 14.) certainly is not flattering in the conventional sense, nevertheless it is perhaps the most accurate likeness up to that date, showing EBB as thin, frail, with consumed looks and a somewhat crooked posture, documenting traces of illness and arguably drug misuse. Martinez points out that EBB referred to this series of photographs as 'tragic, despairing,'[120] a sharply accurate observation.[121] The ringlets, though well formed, have a slight greyish tint which suggests that her hair could have been dyed, for some people who met her found EBB's hair remarkably black[122] for her age. Her frame, thin and small, echoes descriptions which romanticized EBB as being rather a spiritual being, yet in the photograph she lacks a romanticized aura.

The second image (fig 1.15) is from a photograph (original missing) of which RB wrote: 'I keep it myself and only send a copy to Francis. How say you to an

---

[119] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter, 4241 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4602/?rsId=236089&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

[120] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 77.

[121] In the Macaire portrait of September 17, EBB's hands, which clutch the shawl, appear bony and thin. Frederick Locker-Lampson, described EBB as having 'poor little hands -so thin that when she welcomed you she gave you something like the foot of a young bird.' RB called them 'spirit-small hands'. Several other people noted that her appearance was always 'wasted' (Ian Finlaynson, *Browning*, p. 382).

[122] A significant change occurred as time passed concerning the description of EBB's hair. Recollections from youth, such as Miss Mitford's, described EBB's hair as 'dark', enclosing a shade of hues between brown and black, yet 'dark' would suggest dark brown hair. Once in Italy, recollections underline the blackness of the hair, as Nathaniel Hawthorne mentions: 'Her black ringlets clustered down into her neck, making her face look wither by contrast' (Ian Finlaynson, *Browning*, p. 432). The possibility of EBB dying her hair to appear younger is supported by the false birth date (1812) which circulated during her lifetime.

Engraving of it for the next *Aurora Leigh*?'[123] It was retouched by Mathew Brady, as an early draft for the frontispiece illustration for *AL.* This photograph was also the source for the carte-de-visite of EBB which circulated among friends and literary circles, reproduced later by Elliot and Fry (fig 1. 16), with Robert Browning's permission. The dress is the same in both sessions, only the shawl is missing in the second one in which it is exchanged for a coat with fur collar. The white collar is missing in the second portrait, perhaps hidden underneath the coat. Still, the original photograph chosen for the engraving, differed, for instance, from contemporary photographs of George Eliot (fig. 1. 17) and Harriet Martineau (fig. 1. 18). Both portraits, contemporary with those by the Macaires, are quite different in their composition. While the photographs portray professional women writers, both Eliot and Martineau appear sitting in a domestic atmosphere that enhances their womanhood with the obvious omission of their status as writers. While Eliot's hands appear in an intellectual and thoughtful pose, Martineau's seem engaged in what appears to be embroidery. Both women's clothes are similar and Miss Martineau's bonnet echoes that of Carter's miniature painted portrait of EBB earlier discussed.

[123] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 4246 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4606/?rsId=236090&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

Fig. 1. 14.

Louis Cyrius Macaire and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', ambrotype, 17 September 1858

(Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas)

Fig. 1. 15.

Mathew Brady retouched from an ambrotype by les Macaire Frères, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', New York, 1859

(location unknown)

Fig. 1. 16.

Elliott and Fry from les Frères Macaire, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning, of ambrotype' (detail), 1858
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

Fig. 1. 17.

London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company, after Mayall, 'George Eliot', albumen print, circa 1881 (1858)
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

Fig. 1. 18.
Moses Bowness, 'Harriet Martineau', albumen carte de visite, 1855-1856

The choice for the engraving, from a photograph already retouched, as the medium for the official likeness, suggests a layered manipulation of details in the construction of the portrait to obtain a desired meaning. The artist chosen for the modifications was Dante Gabriel Rossetti[124], although the engraving would be produced by T. O. Barlow. Rossetti, was the second artist to modify the image of the poet: 'Rossetti found EBB far less prepossessing than her husband. Rossetti considered himself an authority on feminine beauty, and in his eyes, EBB was 'as unattractive a person as can well be imagined … quite worn out with illness'[125] as he wrote to Walter H. Deverell in August 30th, 1851. As time went on Rossetti grew to think less of EBB's poems than

[124] D. G. Rossetti's relationship to his model Elizabeth Siddal, muse to the PRB is important to note in order to understand some of his aesthetics. To Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal personified beauty and for years he was practically obsessed with her. She modelled for him from 1849 to her death. She also modelled for other PRB painters, appearing in Millais's Ophelia (1851-2). Similarly to EBB, Siddal's artistic achievements have been overshadowed by personal legend. Regardless of her talents, Elizabeth Siddal became a symbol of that everlasting and eternal beauty so close to the grave as to become non-detachable from that morbidity.
[125] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) Letter SD1501 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/supporting-documents/2165/?rsId=236092&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

of her husband's although his positive remarks on *AL* seemed to have been genuine, calling it 'an astounding work surely'[126] to William Allingham and 'almost beyond anything for exhaust-less poetic resource'[127] to Miss Helen Heaton.

The choice by RB of one of the photographs (fig. 1. 14) by the Macaires to become the original for the engraving implies that perhaps both Brownings agreed on one of the pictures as being flattering, in spite of the other one (fig. 1. 15) being less so. In fact RB was the one haunted by the 'unflattering engraving portrait', as he expressed to Edward Chapman: 'You know, or don't know, that there have been certain horrible libels on humanity published as portraits of her in America: and I shall not be sorry to extinguish them—as the Photograph taken yesterday may be expected to do'.[128] He seemed almost obsessed with what seemed unflattering details of his wife's portrait, as detailed to Charles Stephen Francis: 'the corner of the mouth is darkened, and the space between the hair and chin looks more like a white rag of some sort than the mere blank that it should be; the right eye, too, is a black mass—iris and pupil confused—and the hands are undefined'.[129] Initially the portrait was meant to be corrected by William Rossetti to whom RB wrote on May 10th, 1859: 'The extreme angle of the nose might be blunted with advantage. They might also open the eyes a little more; so small in proportion even in the photograph, and here

---

[126] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) Letter SD2023 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/supporting-documents/2984/?rsId=236093&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[127] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter SD1994 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/supporting-documents/2955/?rsId=236094&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[128] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4246 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4606/?rsId=236095&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[129] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4243 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4607/?rsId=236096&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

pig-like. The mistake seems there. Something might be obtained by giving a lash and shade to the under-lid'.[130] The results were not satisfactory; both Rossettis discussed the matter, and the corrections were made to EBB's face:

> My brother, as well as myself, paid a great deal of attention to this matter; and perhaps the notes which he made of the first proof of the engraving may deserve extraction. "The eyebrows more square, as in photograph, and the further eyebrows continued to outline next the hair, instead of stopping short. The hair brought a little more down over the forehead, and the parting-line not left quite so raw. More tone on the forehead, and indeed all over the face. The mouth is considerably in need of correction. This may be done by adding a line of shadow along the top of the upper lip, thus lessening the curve upward at the corner, which gives a sort of smile not in the photograph, and not characteristic of the original. A touch may be added (as I have done) beneath the corner of the mouth, to assist the alteration. The line of the shadow added to the upper lip will also serve to lessen the space between nose and mouth, the cleft in the centre if which space requires also to be more strongly marked. The under lip more positively marked, which is done by slightly raising and darkening the shadow beneath it. The eyes to be made larger, and less looking out of the corners, and the shadow of the nearer eye to be brought slightly close to the nose. The nostril rather to be made larger and deeper. The hair to be darkened all over. The shoulder and back to be slightly lowered, as I have made them.[131]

In these elaborate terms, EBB was objectified by her husband and the commissioned artists who took no notice of her personality. This shift is interesting in the relationship between EBB's effacement and the disclosure of an official portrait. Martinez notes that the Carter miniature portrait, which was concealed from Horne, was denied the opportunity to be reproduced as a lithograph when Miss Mitford suggested this idea to EBB in 1842[132] and by the Autumn of 1846, the portrait

---

[130] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4403 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4801/?rsId=236097&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

[131] William Michael Rossetti, *Ruskin, Rossetti, Preraphaelitism; Papers 1854 to 1862* (Winfield, Kansas: Wentworth Press, 2016) , p. 208-209.

[132] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 73.

belonged to RB.[133] EBB's elusiveness about providing a likeness was dispelled by RB. The 'green eyed monster' presented to Haydon, gave in to the charms of Love, and in a gesture proper to that state, first gave her beloved the portrait by Carter, and subsequently, gave him the authority over her official likeness. It is significant to note as well that, as in the letter quoted to Sophia Eckley, EBB's unwillingness to be photographed is always subdued under RB's power, hinting perhaps at his desire to possess a likeness of his wife, rather than EBB making a personal choice to sit for photographers.

Nevertheless, as time would prove, RB would not be the only one to possess a likeness of EBB, as both portraits of EBB by Gordigiani and Talfourd, were owned by Sophia Eckley and Ellen Heaton respectively. Whereas Mitford, Haydon and Horne had been utterly denied a likeness, Eckley and Heaton each commissioned a portrait of the poet to keep for themselves with no objection from the sitter. Did this shift in perspective have to do with 'Mrs. Browning's happiness' and her resurrection through Love? Or rather, was it a result of her established and solidified fame, consolidated by *AL* and its consecutive editions? My suggestion is that it was a blend of both circumstances: a happy marriage to a poet partner (one who would love both the woman and the poet) and a consolidated career which had seen her greatest work received positively and successfully. Together all these created a safe atmosphere for EBB in which the poet felt no longer vulnerable to the audience and criticism. Yet by placing her entire trust in her husband's judgement to suggest changes and

[133] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 75.

improvements to the frontispiece portrait, EBB once again disengaged herself from her own 'original' image. The 'little and dark' EBB that EBB described to Haydon and that was captured by the lenses of the Macaires, was dissected bit by bit, objectified by RB -who discussed details and corrections within his correspondence- and by artists to fit her legendary and poetic figure. Changes, as read, were made to EBB's mouth enhancing sensuality, while the minute observation of the use of shadow, the curve and outline of the lips indicate the extreme focus of Rossetti upon women's lips. The eyes were made larger, switched from the half-dreamy stare to an alert and open gaze (fig. 1. 19).

Fig. 1. 19

T. O. Barlow, with alterations by D.G. Rossetti, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', Proof-engraving, 1859

(Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas)

Fig. 1. 20
T.O. Barlow, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning' 1859

Fig. 1. 21
Detail from *Aurora Leigh*'s frontispiece, 13th edition, 1873

For the audience (and critics) who had been waiting for years to see the face of their author (figs 1. 20. & 1. 21.), the experience of opening *AL* to find the portrait of the poet must have been deeply significant, as it answered the question of what this mysterious poet (who started her career anonymously, then became E. B. B, followed by Elizabeth Barrett, surrounded by a dark aura of illness and seclusion and later transformed into an apparently healthier, recovered and more social Mrs. Browning) really looked like. But was not the portrait also confusing? Might the audience have expected a matronly looking lady with echoes of the image constructed by Miss Anne Thackeray Ritchie: 'so vivid and complete is the image of her peaceful home, of its fire-side where the logs are burning, and the mistress established on her sofa, with her little boy curled up by her side'[134]. Instead, they met a young, healthy, rather tall and upright woman with a slightly defiant, proud look. By appearing so young, EBB was eluding not only old age and the passing of time, but also illness and any arguable trace of her drug habit. The frontispiece portrait appeared in 1859, with no data included with it. Further editions included credit to Barlow and Macaire[135] so that it was then possible to infer EBB's age from it. But even when such information could be taken into consideration, such as the altered birth date of 1812, the youthful, fresh looks and jet black hair, with its parting line and glossiness, conveyed through the engraving youth and blooming health. The likeness did not fit a forty-seven year old woman (if re-considering 1812 as her birth date), and much less a fifty-three year old who had suffered ill-health for so many years.

---

[134] Anne Thackeray Ritchie, *Dictionary of National Biography,* p.80.
[135] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1873).

Martinez suggests that the frontispiece portrait can be understood as the self-portrait of a painter in the style of those which emulated a mirror, identifying several details which she claims created a

> balance between EBB's feminine and professional identities. It belongs to the tradition of the writing-desk portrait but also to a form of self-portraiture employed by painters. While her dark hair modestly frames a clearly delineated face, the ringlets have been unravelled to suggest the poet's passionate nature. Her dark velvet coat with a glimpse of lace at the wrists and full skirts suggests respectability, but also professionalism, as female painters frequently chose dark clothing to signal their status as workers. To affirm her vocation, EBB stands next to a writing table: her body is turned in profile, facing the table, and her head is turned toward the viewer at a three-quarter angle. The three-quarter length format of the picture and EBB's pose are typical of self-portraits by painters, whose gaze and tools suggest the act of painting one's reflection in a mirror. The writer-as-portrait-artist is an appropriate suggestion, since Aurora Leigh is a fictional autobiography that explicitly begins with a portrait-poem analogy.[136]

In her reading of the image, Martinez claims the autobiographical link between EBB and Aurora Leigh. Rather than considering *AL* as a fictional autobiography, however, which clearly it is not, it can be read as a spiritual/poetical autobiography, as through her main character, EBB constructs and develops her own poetic, artistic and even theological visions of the world and Art. Martinez focuses on the construction of the portrait, analysing the balance between EBB's identities: the woman and the poet. Her perspective suggests the autobiographical trait was perceived by contemporary readers, while ignoring (or perhaps discarding) the fact that the character, in opposition to her creator, is blond. Whereas the frontispiece portrait is EBB, the echoes of Aurora's personality reverberate as well. The desk, upon which EBB's hand

[136] Michele Martinez 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 77-8.

rests, echoes the portrait by Pickersgill as representative of the trade, but the sacred aura is missing. The gaze of the sitter, which before pointed towards heavenly illumination, meets directly into the eye of the beholder - suggesting a slight air of pride - as an immediate successor to 'The Poet Laureate of Hope End'. EBB, the invalid, is not hinted at in the slightest. Instead, the obsession with youth is emphasized through the wildness and pitch blackness of the ringlets, along with the smoothness of EBB's skin. The portrait is not 'gentle' and 'feminine' (as Eliot's and Martineau's) while the standing position signifies a non-subjected womanhood.

Fig. 1. 22

Elliott & Fry, after Macaire, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', albumen carte-de-visite, mid 1860s (September 1858)

(National Portrait Gallery)

A detail from one of the photographs of the series by the Macaires was the one chosen by RB to be distributed as the carte-de-visite likeness (fig. 1.22) of EBB. While not as idealised as the frontispiece portrait, it is possible still to trace some minor changes in EBB's image within the carte-de-visite, mainly produced by sharpening the outlines of EBB's face, as well as adding depth to her gaze and intensifying the dark shadows as well as the highlights and glossiness in her hair to give her a more youthful and healthy appearance, depicting an idealised version of herself. Whose satisfaction did the frontispiece fulfil? The readers'? The critics'? RB? or EBB's own? It is interesting that the discomfort created by the 'unflattering engraving' portrait was felt deeper by RB, and with a similar intensity to his reaction to the poem 'One more word with E.B.B'[137] by Julia Howe Ward in which EBB's morphine habit was suggested. His reaction corresponds to a need to *show* a certain image of EBB, protected from any trace of imperfection which could also affect his reputation. For the *imperfect* EBB from the medallion engraving, does not correspond with the romantic narrative in which EBB was rescued by RB from her father; the hyperbolic plot of 'the Brownings' needed a heroine who was the greatest poet, the purest heart and physically attractive, able to embody the 'spiritual' Love RB had felt for her before meeting. The choice of detail from the Macarie photograph to use for the circulation of a carte-de-visite, with its minor and almost imperceptible corrections, softens EBB's unhealthy countenance, so evident in the other Macaire photograph due to the angle and position of the sitter, as well as the distribution of

[137] Julia Ward Howe, 'One Word More with E. B. B.', pp. 145–46.

light and shadow. While certain hints of grey in EBB's hair can be suggested, they can also be camouflaged as glossy and shiny details of her dark ringlets. The poet's countenance is also softened through the enhancement of her eyes in which the same expression achieved through the Barlow engraving is captured.

The shift in perspective concerning the disclosure of EBB's image is compelling, for, from a zealous and almost secretive effacement, protected so much by EBB, a gradual change occurred, in showing the poet's official likeness, with RB mainly responsible for the distribution, as the carte-de-visite shows. While during her early years of effacement, EBB constructed her career merely through her verse, creating a solid place for her poetry among the audience and the critics, by the time the decision was taken for the official likeness to be shown, her career was fully solidified and *AL*'s reception, though with mixed reviews, had already gone through several consecutive editions. The poet, therefore, no longer had to worry about her image creating bias in relation to her poetry. In addition, within *AL*, a certain autobiographical aspect had been explored which had not occurred with such clarity in the rest of her poetry. While Aurora represented many poetical, ideological and spiritual aspects similar to those of her creator (through hints and traits), not all of them would become evident to an audience unaware of her personal life. Apart from Aurora's poetical development, and perhaps the hints of Leigh Hall as a reconstructed Hope End, other autobiographical hints, such as her interest in Swedenborg or emotional traits, would pass as invisible to her readers.

Fig. 1. 23

Authors's collage of EBB's portraits

The Tryst

Angela Leighton describes Aurora the poet as 'a scarcely disguised representative of Barrett Browning herself'[138], while Marjorie Stone acknowledges Aurora as part of 'three interconnected spiritual autobiographies'[139] and Armstrong notes that EBB claimed to write *AL* 'without a mask'.[140] Before considering the autobiographical aspects of *AL*, I will start by exploring Aurora through a different angle, that of Aurora as subject of pictorial representation through a contemporary painting by

[138] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 117
[139] Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 149.
[140] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 367.

Arthur Hughes' entitled 'Aurora Leigh's dismissal of Romney ('The Tryst)' (fig. 1. 24). Miss Helen Heaton[141] who was a friend to EBB and patron of Rossetti, as well as an avid art collector, mostly of Turner's watercolours and Pre-Raphaelite paintings, commissioned the painting inspired by *AL*. Prior to this, Ruskin tried to persuade Heaton to buy several paintings by Hughes and praised overall his 'superb' colour.[142] There were some debates between artist and buyer about the depicted scene and about Aurora's dress, which Heaton wanted to be white, while Hughes was inclined for it to be a sea-green to match the landscape. The result was a painting which was never exhibited to the public. It was made on board and time has faded the paint, showing over-painting in Romney's hat. The painting was finished in 1860. Apparently Heaton was not entirely satisfied with the final result, but Ruskin differed from Heaton in his opinion, while understanding her position. He blamed the artist's youth and fulfilled life for his lack of understanding of 'the fiery depths of a stormy Sunrise.'[143]

---

[141] Miss Helen Heaton also commissioned a likeness of EBB by Henry Talfourd, which was the only portrait that satisfied EBB.

[142] John Ruskin, *Sublime & Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton* (London : Michael Joseph, 1972), p. 163.

[143] John Ruskin, *Sublime & Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton,* p. 228.

Fig 1. 24.
Arthur Hughes, *Aurora Leigh's dismissal of Romney, ('The Tryst')* 1860
(Tate Britian)

For her commission, Heaton decided upon a scene full of pathos in a Tennysonian vein. For the scene depicted she had the idea of the moment of Aurora's rejection of Romney's marriage proposal (the exact moment while they were talking), yet Hughes decided to represent the immediate moment after their words: 'If I could play with words perhaps I would have painted with them instead, however in as few as possible let me say I think you rather conceive an earlier moment of the interview than I have painted or attempted to paint. I think Aurora's "half petulant, half playful" expression would have lasted only while speaking…'[144] At first, Hughes considered including Aunt Leigh in the picture but decided to leave her out in order to concentrate upon both characters. The composition is clearly divided into light and darkness: Romney's clothes, dull and brown are diluted in the shadow as he is about to turn his back upon Aurora. He stands defeated with a sombre look that matches in an uncanny way Aurora's cold and absent gaze. The tree in the background darkens the landscape marking the abysmal emotional gap between them, opposed to the lilies that stand in front of Romney, that point wide open towards Aurora, covering the book from his sight. Hughes was able to capture not only Romney's disappointment, but the innocent virginal look which reflects his idealized and over enthusiastic endeavours. Aurora, on the contrary, stands in the middle of the picture, highlighted by the colour of her dress and the bright glow of her copper hair. She shelters her book with her hand and at the same time takes hold of her dress in order to raise it a little and walk briskly. The composition echoes a portrait of Dante (fig. 1. 25) as both

[144] John Ruskin, *Sublime & Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton*, p. 228.

characters stand in an open position towards the audience that underlines the spiritual vocation of the poet through undertones of the *Künstlerroman* which becomes a quest through which Aurora experiences spiritual evolution. Aurora, then is placed both by her author and by Hughes within the epic literary tradition which had been mostly dominated by men.

Fig. 1. 25
Domenico di Michelino *Dante and the Three Kingdoms* 1465
(Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence)

Ruskin enquired of Hughes 'but wasn't Aurora tremendously angry'[145] which could be hinted at through out her body language, which is defensive and concealing,

[145] Ruskin, John, *Sublime & Instructive : Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton,* p. 228.

yet is absent from her face, whose expression is bland and unremarkable.[146] Ruskin's observation strikes both at the painter's skill and also shows deep understanding of Aurora as a character; for what hinders the association between Hughes' Aurora and EBB's Aurora is the lack of strength, passion and brave attitude which characterize the heroine.

'The Tryst', refers to a meeting point between lovers, usually a secret one. But it refers to a place as well as to an action. At the moment within the plot of *AL* that is depicted by Hughes, the emotional bond between Aurora and Romney is not sufficiently deep and conscious for them to be considered lovers. Nevertheless, does the 'tryst' of the title refer to Romney's intentions upon meeting Aurora? At that point in the narrative, his intention to marry her would seem quite sudden, yet, Romney had known about the pre-arranged marriage since childhood, hence his proposal to Aurora on her twentieth birthday was no coincidence. In this sense, 'tryst' would refer to the false sense of security Romney had created through his own feelings.[147]

Hughes' interpretation of the novel played a role within the composition by steering viewers towards the development of the plot through setting, colours, and the placing of characters within the frame where Aurora remains in an enlightened spot as a premonition of her successful future as a poet, while Romney remains in the

[146] It is in Book VIII, when Romney and Aurora recall their conversation when he describes her with words that echo Hughes' portrait: "how you lifted your small hand, /and how your white dress and your burnished curls/ went greatening round you in the still blue air (*AL*, VIII: 222-224)," the 'still blue air' effect was achieved by Hughes through the strokes depicting the fabric. Aurora's small and delicate hand is also depicted, as well as her hair which is mentioned several times by Romney and herself throughout the novel.

[147] Romney Leigh had been aware, since childhood, of their arranged marriage as we get to know by the end of the narrative, when both characters are reconciled: 'He had loved me, watched me, watched his soul in mine,/ which in me grew and heightened into love./ For he, a boy still, had been told the tale/ of how a faery bride from Italy/ with smells of oleander in her hair, […] He smiled and loved me for the thing I was, /as every child will love the year's first flower' (AL: 319-320.) Since his childhood, Romney had fallen into a sort of foreign romance, in which he was meant to find his fate along with this Italian young bride. She became a source of exoticism: to be seen almost as a fairy tale exotic bride. Aurora had no right and no room for him in the artistic realm other than the muse. Romney's proposal, full of arrogance and scorn for her art is nothing but the mere jealousy he felt of her poetry: it is his ultimate understanding of coming second in Aurora's affections after her poetry that reconciles them.

shadows in a bleak omen of his future material loss and blindness. Both characters stand mirroring each other, showing the opposition of their enterprises in spite of the common goal to improve and ennoble humanity. Aurora's path understood by her as sacred and closest to God to the point of prophecy is depicted in the composition as the illuminated one. In opposition, the path of darkness and intricate foliage is the one into which Romney fades away. The narrative in the painting succeeds in depicting plot and symbolism, while depicting Aurora almost as a Pre-Raphaelite muse.

Romney's unforgivable mistake in his approach to Aurora is fixed in his memory from a different perspective: 'and how you lifted your small hand,/ and how your white dress and your burnished curls/ when greatening round you in the still blue air,/ of an inspiration from within/ had blown them all out when you spoke the words' (*AL*: 275). The image is set in Hughes' painting: the contrast between Aurora's smallness and the immensity of the landscape is there; the small, almost child-like hand echoes the budding of love and poetry and a shyness expressed through the gentleness with which she holds her book. A white dress would have been excessive in meaning, according to both artist and commissioner. Indeed, Hughes wrote to Miss Heaton about his choice of colour for the dress by which he aimed to give Aurora a sense of expansion while blending her into the garden: 'the dress is not a white one, which I thought would not be agreeable, but a sea green tint: a white could only be very slightly tinted in parts from the landscape near'.[148] The contrast between the 'burnished curls' and the light hues create an effect of Aurora's hair becoming one

[148] Ruskin, John. *Sublime & Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton,* p. 228.

with the crown. In the poem her hair occupies a central space almost as a living part of herself:[149]

> My long loose hair began to burn and creep,
> Alive to the very ends, about my knees:
> I swept it backward as the wind sweeps flame,
> with the passion of my hands. Ah, Romney laughed
> one day (how full the memories come up!)
> 'Your Florence fire-flies live on your hair,'
> He said 'it gleams so'. (*AL*: 180)

Aurora's depiction, both within *AL* and through Hughes' brush appears distinct from EBB in visual aspects: hair colour and clothing are reversed. Aurora's dress is white (with light blue shades) while EBB's usual dress, had undertones of mourning, at least until her courtship and marriage, when she left this aspect behind. By constructing her character with a countenance completely opposite to her own, EBB perhaps tried to divert attention from any autobiographical link which could immediately connect the character to her person. It was instead, as noted by Margaret Reynolds and perhaps evident to all readers acquainted with EBB's likeness - a phenomenon which did not occur to the readers of *AL* until 1859 - Then it was the character of Marian Erle who shared certain physical traits which made her a sort of mirror of EBB, a matter to which I shall return later. Nevertheless, in order to reach that point, it is important to first explore an autobiographical aspect that affects Aurora and that connects her to EBB.

---

[149]Arthur Hughes's description of Elizabeth Siddal is interesting in this context: 'Millais painted her for his Ophelia –wonderfully like her. She was tall and slender, with a red coppery hair and a bright and consumptive complexion, though in these early years she had no striking signs of ill health' (Marsh: 53). Hughes's description resembles that of Aurora Leigh, who though healthy, looks ill: 'While I… it seemed no sun had shone on me,/ So many seasons I had missed my Springs. /My cheeks had pinned and perished from their orbs, /And all the youth-blood in them had grown white/ As dew on autumn cyclamens alone/ My eyes and forehead answered for my face. / He said: 'Aurora, you are changed, you are ill!'' (*AL*: IV: 1141-1146).

Miss Barrett's Angst

Some of the autobiographical traits in Aurora Leigh are reflected in the character's childhood, much based upon EBB's youth. *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*[150] is the diary of the young poet and its reading illuminates this period in the poet's life (1831-2), reconstructed and revisited in *AL*. Robert Coles accurately comments in the preface: 'There she [EBB] was at age twenty-five, very much isolated from the world, nervous, moody, excitable, fearfully attached to her father, and not in the best state of health by any means'.[151] In spite of being in her early twenties, her behaviour and emotional reactions are similar to those of an adolescent. Aurora behaves in a similar way: she is moody and excitable, yet those traits are blamed upon her Italian nature.

By reading EBB's diary, it is possible to trace similarities in routine and action with those of Aurora, though the latter would spend her life within a far more reduced social circle than the former. Hugh Stuart Boyd, with his wife and daughter, stand out in the diary, along with EBB's Aunt Bummy, who lived for eighteen months with the Barretts after Mrs. Barrett's death, and who in her wisdom realised that 'Elizabeth was making herself ill over a man [Boyd] who was not only unattainable but also unworthy of such devotion and most probably unaware of it'.[152] Bummy's clear

---

[150] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Diary by E.B.B.: The Unpublished Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1832-1832* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).
[151] *Diary by E.B.B. : The Unpublished Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1832-1832,* p. xi.
[152] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p.159.

perception helped her to read EBB's heart as an open book in an identical manner to Aunt Leigh in *AL.* Not only did they both perceive the nature of the girls' feelings, but also the source of them. Hugh Stuart Boyd, the blind Greek scholar, first became interested in the young poet after reading her *Essay on Mind* (1826). She started studying with him in 1828, aged twenty two, and though through their relationship it was always clear that Boyd's feelings for EBB where those of a scholar, teacher and friend, the diary points towards a different direction on her side. While her development in Greek happened thanks to Boyd, an emotional entanglement grew inside EBB as she studied with him. Foster remarks that: 'although she may not have been in love with Boyd, in the generally accepted sense of that phrase, love was there'.[153] EBB described Boyd as 'a rather young-looking man than otherwise, moderately tall, and slightly formed. His features are good - his face very pale with an expression of placidity and mildness'[154] which reads rather similar to EBB's description of Aurora, and by extension of Romney's description (as other characters notice their similar features). Furthermore, Romney's solemn personality corresponds to Boyd's expression, matching EBB's remark: 'I did not see him smile once!'[155] EBB tried to make herself relevant (on a personal level) to Boyd, but she never succeeded: she grieved because she felt ignored and that added to her wish to fulfil his intellectual demands. Dr. Peter Dally notices that EBB became jealous of other young

---

[153] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 56.
[154] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1974), p. 21.
[155] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 21.

women surrounding Boyd, mostly of Miss Henrietta Muchet, who, like EBB, read Greek with him.[156]

Boyd's attitude towards EBB (or at least her perception of it) is very similar to that of Romney towards Aurora's verse through Greek references: 'some Greek upon the margin, - a lady's Greek/ without the accents' (*AL*, II: 73-5): 'nobody ever was so ungrammatical in Greek as I am, since Greek was spoken or written in any way'.[157] While Boyd's criticism reads: 'he told me, that he could not see the meaning of the line ending each verse? - & my explanation seemed to get darkness darker. [...] There was one thing which surprised him more than my having written them, tho' that had surprised him. I guessed that one thing to be, my having published them'.[158] In spite of Romney not being a scholar superior to Aurora, he represents the figure whose criticism is vital to the young poet, while simultaneously representing contemporary general male criticism of poetry written by women. The young EBB, infatuated, as her aunt said, would feel that criticism of her work was directed also at her person, giving rise to a series of personal feelings which were completely misplaced. A wider example of Boyd's criticism can be read in one of his letters to EBB:

> I am quite sure that you wish me to say exactly what I think, about your fine poems. I tell you candidly, that they do not please me. With respect to The Cry of the Human, I ought to state that I do not understand it, unless perhaps a few words near the beginning. There is a good deal in the sonnets that I do not understand. I think that the following passage in one of the sonnets is fine. [...] From hence to the end of the sonnet, it appears to me to be fine, in the language and versification; but certainly do not understand its meaning...[159]

---

[156] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 42.
[157] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 20.
[158] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 20.
[159] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Unpublished Correspondence,* p. 40.

The anxiety produced in EBB by her own reactions to Boyd's criticism, spaced out letters or cold replies to her in conversation, is a minor version of Aurora's tormented nature after Romney's silence, in which she counts the days, months and years like Tennyson's Mariana. Barbara Dennis describes accurately the emotional core of the diary as it 'rages with anguished questioning and the torments of jealousy and suspected sights'.[160] Moreover, Dally writes an accurate summary of EBB's unsettling behaviour towards Boyd and his family,[161] along with Bummy's remarks.[162] The blind scholar, whose heart EBB never reached (as she felt it), and to whom, perhaps, EBB's poetry would have never been enough (through her own perception at the time) became the young, tragically blinded failed philanthropist who in the end, not only understands Aurora's poetry, but is illuminated by it, therefore embracing her as a whole in the final fulfilment of a fantastic alternative plot by EBB of her own story with Boyd.

Many of Aurora's bitter complaints against her aunt and her education designed to make her a young Victorian Lady resonate in the diary, while some of Aurora's emotional outbursts 'I spoke,/ spoke veritable words but passionate,/ too passionate perhaps . . ground up with sobs to shapeless endings' (*AL*, II: 720-23) are almost identical to those of the young EBB: '-but my only answer was, - -bursting into tears. Nothing more was said; & I wiped them away as fast as my nature wd. Let me.

---

[160] Barbara Dennis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years* (Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Seren Books, 1996), p. 82.

[161] Dally recollects part of EBB's behaviour towards Boyd: 'She sometimes rose at dawn -when noon was her more usual time- and appeared on Boyd's doorstep at the unearthly hour of seven or eight in the morning. On more than one occasion she arrived when Mrs. Boyd was still in bed, and sat talking to the unfortunate woman in the bedroom while her husband was being shaved and dressed'. (Dally: 45).

[162] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 45-6.

Foolish to cry -but I was nervous & weak & unwell, -& really could not help it'.[163] EBB's temperamental nature is evidenced through the pages of the diary, especially during harsh times for the Barretts, when they had lost Mrs. Barrett suddenly and unexpectedly, and lost Hope End, due to a financial crash of Mr. Barrett. Not only was EBB grieving the future parting from her home, living as an orphan from her mother, but she was also affected by the fact that she would be torn from Boyd by relocating. Whereas the clear references to Boyd in Romney Leigh have been noticed, the significance from an autobiographical perspective has not been widely explored, perhaps due to the legendary weight of EBB in which the only man she would have ever been *in love* with had been RB. This idea fitted the sacred iconic image of poet, mother and wife enclosed within an ailing body. Rather than the secluded, depressed and bleak 'Miss Barrett', the diary shows an intense, passionate, determined, emotional young woman who would then, with no surprise, become 'Mrs. Browning', in Karlin's words, 'the heroine of a silly romance.'[164]

As Blau DuPlessis notes, Aurora in the end fulfils both the happy fate of the hero and the lover[165] for she is acknowledged by the man she loves as poet and as a woman, yet it is necessary to analyse at what point that realization happens. By the end of the narrative Aurora is left as an established poet, creating a perfect circle: 'Of writing many books there is no end;/ And I who have written much in prose and verse/ For other's uses, will write now for mine,-' (*AL*, I: 1-3). While Aurora's poetic

---

[163] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 19.
[164] Daniel Karlin, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett,* p. 5.
[165] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'To "bear my mother's name": Kunstlerroman by women writers', in *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 465

development can be clearly traced, her love story at points becomes difficult for the reader. Alison Case mentions Aurora's incongruous handling of her feelings towards Romney, as they fluctuate between acceptance and denial throughout the narrative,[166] an issue first noted by EBB's contemporary reviewers,[167] with one of Aurora's statements becoming particularly problematic: 'I think I never loved him not, -nor then, nor since,/ Nor ever' (*AL*, II: 714-15) in what seems an absolute misplaced statement when read retrospectively. By the end of Book IX, the certainty of Romney's acknowledging his feelings for Aurora and their intention of joining their lives and work is present: 'Beloved, let us work so well,/ our work shall still be better than our love,/ and still our love be sweeter than our work,/ and both commend, for the sake of each/ By all true workers and true lovers born' (*AL*, IX: 923-928). Yet the narrative ends without any action pursued after this intention. Aurora's statement about not loving Romney points towards another of Aurora's musings in Book II:

> ...If he had loved,
> Ah, loved me, with that retributive face, . . .
> I might have been a common woman now
> And happier, less known and less left alone,
> Perhaps a better woman after all,
> With chubby children hanging on my neck
> To keep me low and wise (*AL*, II: 511-517).

Reynolds has noted that this musing belongs to the narrative present in Book V, and not to the overall narrative retrospective.[168] Nevertheless, while Aurora blames Romney for not truly loving her, it was she who left him through rejection. This opens

---

[166] Alison Case, 'Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh"', *Victorian Poetry*, 29.1 (1991), 17–32, p. 29-30.
[167] Review of 'Aurora Leigh', *North American Review* 85 (1857): 421-42, *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/232/?rsId=236099&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[168] Margaret Reynolds in *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 53.

the remark to the possibility of their final reconciliation remaining as the path to a possible marriage, which in the end, does not happen. Aurora's opening lines: '[I] will write my own story for my better self' (*AL*, I: 4) signifies a shift in the life narrative to a self-portrait, to be cherished as a locket. While this self-portrait becomes a source of growth and evolution for its own artist, in the hands of the friend who contemplates it 'long after he has ceased to love you,/ just to hold together what he was and is (*AL*, I: 7-8)', it becomes a source of memories with mourning undertones. Aurora's 'I never loved him not, -nor then, nor since, Nor ever' reflects Aurora's reality, rounded neatly by her remark 'books succeed,/ And lives fail' (*AL*, VII: 704-5) and acts as an omen of her emotional outcome. Christine Chaney refers to this 'portrait' as becoming a token, an emblem 'both of the female artist and [as] discarded by her lover.'[169] The possibility of a marriage not happening within the margin of the plot becomes plausible as the link to Boyd remains vital to the development of the character. 'I'm still too young, too young, to sit alone' (*AL*, I: 28), seems Aurora's closing statement after starting to write her own life which, though it seems to refer to her narrative past, is clearly rooted in her present. Helen Cooper has noted that by book V, when Aurora starts narrating 'from the present', she is twenty-seven years old.[170] By the present in Book VIII, she is thirty, as she says to Romney that she is initially very sorry for having 'quoted back a ten year's birthday' (*AL*: VIII: 347-8) and then implies the pain by expressing 'ten layers of birthdays on a woman's head/ are apt to fossilise her

---

[169] Christine Chaney 'The "Prophet-Poet's Book"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 48.4, (2008) 791–99 (p. 795).
[170] Helen M. Cooper, 'Structure and narrative in Aurora Leigh' in *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 506-508 (p. 506).

girlish mirth' (*AL*, VIII: 532-3). It is within such haziness of Aurora's perception of time that a period of three years is compressed.

A hint allowing the reader to trace the amount of time elapsed lies in the observation of Marian's child, who is first presented as a 'yearling creature' (*AL*, VI: 567) with 'tiny holdfast hands' (*AL*, VI: 579), to later forming the first words 'Alola'[171] (*AL*, VI: 954) and finally appearing in Book VIII as an 'eager child' (*AL*, VIII: 10), standing and 'crying, 'give me, give me'/ and stamping with imperious baby feet' (*AL*, VIII: 12-13) details which correspond to the natural development of a child. The passing of time is crucial to the plot. For instance, it proves that Marian and Aurora lived together for about three years in a family home. Furthermore, Aurora's perception of her own age is interesting, for, in spite of being 'old' by Victorian feminine standards, she feels otherwise: 'I am still what men call young' (*AL*, I: 9). Romney's final appearance happens in Florence, surrounded by mystery, for he arrives alone, blind, guiding himself through the dark.

Methinks I have plunged, I see it all so clear...
And, O my heart, ... the sea-king!
In my ears the sound of waters. There he stood, my king!
I felt him, rather than beheld him. [...]
He answered in a voice that was not his.
[...] 'I,
Who have waited long and travelled far for that.
Although you thought to have shut a tedious book
And farewell. Ah, you dog-eared such a page,
And here you find me.'
Did he touch my hand,

[171] It is possible to suggest that Aurora pronounces her own name in Italian fashion, as the child's early words evidence through a phonetic 'Alola' which echoes the Italian phonetic 'au·rò·ra', This would make the character remarkably interesting, for her dual nationality would be present within her name by a difference in pronunciation, defining the construction of her personality.

or but my sleeve? I trembled, hand and foot,-
He must have touched me.- (*AL*, VIII: 58- 80).-

Romney seems here to emerge as a presence from another world. Before his appearance, Aurora has been lying with a book in stasis. From her villa, her eyes wander through the city, in a passage apparently depicted through the opium glass. The atmosphere becomes liquefied and her senses blend to meet Romney as in a visionary experience, as if Romney had returned from the dead to conciliate with Aurora: EBB's own alternate metaphor for a spiritual conciliation with Boyd after his death. Boyd died in 1848, so he never read *AL* and whether there are any exact words, concepts or feelings that were expressed by him in and quoted directly by the character of Romney, will remain a mystery. Yet, due to EBB's arguable reconstruction of her feelings towards Boyd, certain traces of him are found in Romney Leigh, for example through his criticism of Aurora's poetry. Part of the characters' final reconciliation can be considered an *alternative spiritual reconciliation* between EBB and the memory of her former professor and mentor, Boyd mostly concerning his acknowledgement of her poetry:

Poet, doubt yourself,
But never doubt that you're a poet to me
From henceforth. You have written poems, sweet.
Which moved me in secret' (*AL*, VIII: 590-3)
[...]
In this last book,
you showed me something separate from yourself,
beyond you, and I bore to take it in
And let it draw to me. You have shown me truths
[...]
Presented by your voice and verse the way
to take them clearest.
Verily I was wrong' (*AL*, VIII: 606-608, 611-12).

Here Romney's acknowledgement reads as a reversal of Boyd's criticism for the sonnets by the young EBB. Emotionally and intellectually insecure, harbouring feelings towards Boyd, the young EBB felt hurt by his criticism to the point of feeling that she was not taken seriously as a poet and as a woman, as evidenced in the diary. In spite of that strain, their friendship continued. EBB and Boyd did not meet for several years and when they met again, she was already an established and recognised poet (acknowledged by Boyd). They finally met again the 30th of June, 1846:

> So, there, I stood at last, at the door of poor Mr Boyd's dark little room, & saw him sitting .. as if he had not moved these seven years .. these seven heavy, changeful years. Seeing him, my heart was too full to speak at first, but I stooped & kissed his poor bent-down forehead, which he never lifts up, his chin being quite buried in his breast.[172]

The tone of the passage in EBB's letter echoes Aurora's emotional undertones when reuniting with Romney in which, surrounded by darkness, the blind vulnerable man appears weakened by the weight of the years. Aurora, like EBB, is touched by her own emotions and by the vulnerable state of her friend. Boyd's 'bent-down forehead [and] chin being quite buried in his breast'[173] resemble Romney's frailty: 'down he sate,/ A little slowly, as a man in doubt' (*AL*, VIII: 81-82). EBB wrote to Boyd 'looking back to that early time, the hours spent with you, appear some of the happiest

[172] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2453 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2395/?rsId=236100&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[173] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2453 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2395/?rsId=236100&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

in my life- [...] just as I call *you* my very dear friend.'[174] In addition to this meeting, EBB visited Boyd after her marriage, as an alibi to distract her sisters. The choice of Boyd's house as a shelter after her secret wedding suggests the degree of trust, protection and understanding EBB felt with her former mentor, feelings which were reciprocated by Boyd. This meeting, right after EBB's wedding, appears as a closure between both friends, in spite of continuing their acquaintance until Boyd's death: 'I will hope that we shall spend together still, many hours of many years -the winter not killing *me,* nor any other cause, *you,* - and your goodness continuing to forgive my various sins, whether in or out of bad verses.'[175] Death, for EBB, would be the only circumstance tearing them apart. In reality, however, it was distance, and EBB's achieved happiness that interposed itself between these two friends. Nevertheless, what links Boyd to Romney in this final recollection are: the acknowledgement of a *past* shared happiness, and the intention of continuity in that respect, along with Boyd's goodness in forgiving EBB's *sins* -perhaps flaws- as a poet. In a similar twist to *AL*'s plot and resolution, all future action will remain as an intention, after a hopeful and apparently fulfilling reconciliation, deceiving with the illusion of a happy ending.

---

[174] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2453 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2395/?rsId=236100&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

[175] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2453 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2395/?rsId=236100&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

Byron's Page: The Magic Mirror Gate

'I had a steady indignation against Nature who made me a woman, & a determinate resolution to dress up in men's clothes as soon as ever I was free of the nursery, & go into the world, 'to seek my fortune'. 'How', was not decided; but rather I leant towards being poor Lord Byron's PAGE'.[176]
EBB to Mary Russell Mitford, July 22nd, 1846.

It was perhaps during this early life crisis, torn between her feelings for Boyd and the imminent loss of her beloved family home, that EBB first read Madame de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), as by June 1832, she had already read it three times and claimed to Boyd: 'It is an immortal book, & deserves to be read three score & ten times, that is, once every year in the life of a man.'[177] The impact of De Staël's book upon EBB was huge and her identification with the heroine would be immediate since Corinne's narrative had the impact of a coming of age artistic exploration of paths to endless possibilities. EBB's similarities to *Corinne* in plot, are those that appear 'repeated' (but modified) in Aurora, as noted by Barbara Dennis[178] and Cora Kaplan in her introduction to *AL.*[179] EBB saw a glimpse of hope in *Corinne;* as Ellen Moers' notes Corinne's story does not stand only as a female *fantasy* (my italics) within the intellectual sphere but as a 'celebration of the rights of intellectual genius and intellectual freedom.'[180] Among the points in common, Moers underlines Italy, Corinne's double nationality and her orphan condition. The 'myth of Corinne' fascinated EBB not just as the achievement of a woman of letters, but also, as Foster

---

[176] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 988 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1108/?rsId=236101&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[177] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 453 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/516/?rsId=236102&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]
[178] Barbara Dennis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years,* p. 58.
[179] Cora Kaplan in *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1998) 5-36 (p. 18).
[180] Ellen Moers, 'The Myth of Corinne' in *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 449-453 (p. 452).

points, and along with Moers and Kaplan, of Corinne, -the character- as a successful poetess: 'Corinne had dared and won [...] and gloriously fulfilled herself and followed her own passionate nature to the bitter end.'[181] Corinne embodied an idea of freedom and achievement while answering to EBB's lack of 'poetic Grandmothers'.[182] Corinne stood for a different and novel type of heroine, whose qualities, as noted by Moers and underlined by Kaplan, are almost supernatural: 'poet, improvisatrice, dancer, actress, translator, musician, painter, singer, lecturer'[183] in what Moers defines as a 'fantasy-transposition' of Madame De Staël herself. For a reader like EBB, the impact of this idea could not have been deeper: 'Books were to her not an end in themselves but a substitute for living'.[184] While Woolf's statement points towards the evident intertextual references interwoven within *AL,* it also depicts the significance and the passion of EBB's engagement with reading. Woolf underlines EBB's physical condition as an invalid as perhaps the strongest reason for the poet to live through books, as *real life* was utterly denied to her: semi invalid and intoxicated, *Corinne* represented a path to realisation through fantasy.

EBB, the reader, fascinated by *Corinne,* found in the book a route of escapism while the book also depicted and clarified an undeniable truth in her life: the impossibility of becoming what she would have wanted to be in her early days -Byron's page- whose path of freedom, adventure and travel had been denied to her for the simple fact of being a woman. As her diary proves, the social engagements and

---

[181] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 67
[182] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1809 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2048/?rsId=236104&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[183] Cora Kaplan in *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems,* p. 17.
[184] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 213.

expectations of a young Victorian Lady were an encumbrance to EBB, and marriage was a dreaded scenario, and while illness proved an unhappy, despairing and depressive state, at least it enabled the intellectual freedom EBB always cherished. By *living* through *Corinne,* EBB engaged with the plot of the woman and artist, partially fulfilling her childhood dream. Corinne became EBB's idealized poetic heroine, the one who could socially achieve all that was denied to her.

In Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*[185] (1979), the main character, Bastian Balthazar Bux, an insignificant, bullied child, recently orphaned after his mother's death, unpopular among his peers and teachers, finds solace in books, *living through* them. He engages in the plot of *The Never-ending story* by intertwining his own plot with the fiction he is reading. In a fantastic meta-fictional twist, Bastian is able to cross the barrier between the world of humans and the fictional realm of Fantasia depicted in the text. Part of the appeal of the heroes Bastian is attracted to is that they achieve all the feats he has been denied due to his condition. Like EBB, his body represents a major barrier to fulfilment. While for EBB 'illness' impeded her experience of a normal life, Bastian's clumsiness, excessive weight and lack of social skills hinder his engaging with the world, to the point where the only escape is literature. A 'meeting' between the two main heroes of this narrative, that is between *our* hero Bastian, and *his* hero Atreyu happens when the latter faces the former during his Quest to cross the Magic Mirror Gate, which will make 'you see yourself. But not as you would in an ordinary mirror. You don't see your outward appearance; what

[185] Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story* (London: Puffin, 2014).

you see is your real innermost nature.'[186] Atreyu sees himself in Bastian through the Magic Mirrot Gate as: 'a little fat boy with a pale face -a boy his own age- and this little boy was sitting on a pile of mats, reading a book. The little boy had large, sad-looking eyes, and he was wrapped in frayed grey blankets.'[187] Through Ende's narrative technique, Bastian the reader, is *seen* by Atreyu, fulfilling the dream of the reader of *living through* books. Ende provides a solution to Bastian's unhappiness by making him the hero of the book he is reading, by merging both dimensional and spatial realities in which Bastian becomes part of the plot by substituting Atreyu as the hero.

Though by the time EBB read *Corinne* she was past her mid twenties, Corinne acted as EBB's Atreyu: an idealised hero who could, *in alternate* circumstances, mirror the fulfilment not just of EBB, but of many other young women readers and aspiring artists. Anticipating the type of experience more recently fictionalized by Ende, EBB's engagement with *Corinne* is transformed into a metaphorical version of the Magic Mirror Gate, showing ideals and possibilities through the character, while enhancing EBB's true condition: the daughter of a wealthy Victorian family and, as time passed, a secluded semi-invalid. Through her imagination and poetic skills, EBB became the hero of her own narrative through Aurora Leigh by revisiting *Corinne.* Aurora Leigh becomes a 'fantasy-transposition' as expressed by Moers, and an emblem of EBB's 'highest convictions upon Life and Art' with something additional:

---

[186] Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story,* p. 113.
[187] Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story,* p. 118.

a *fantastic alternative autobiography* through whom EBB suggests a life plot similar to her own but with different endings and ramifications, as the links between Romney and Boyd suggest. Aurora is less supernatural than Corinne, though her life plot is equally supernatural as she goes through no real hardships other than the natural losses of parents; but she never feels cold, hunger, nor complains of any lack of comfort whilst travelling. The heroine is Byronic and Brontëan, one who would, most of the time, explore life entirely on her own. Her journey (on her own) through the Continent seems masculine not only in its nature and route, but oddly it includes the mapping of places visited by EBB as Mrs. Browning, along with RB.

Aurora springs from EBB's impossibilities. Less perfect and gifted than Corinne (Aurora is just a poet), with fewer social skills than the improvisatrice, Aurora stands as an impeccable spiritual poet convinced of her mission, with the emotional human flaws of a tormented Romantic hero. Her personality turns Rochesterian in its bitterness and scorn for affairs of the heart, as proved in conversation with Lord Howe: 'Love, you say?/ My lord, I cannot love: I only find/ The rhyme for love, -and that's not love, my lord' (*AL,* V: 894-896). Gilbert and Gubar point out in detail the possible similarities between Charlotte Brontë's St. John Rivers and Romney Leigh, as well as the evident blindness which connects Leigh with Rochester.[188] Yet it is Aurora who has similar emotional traits to those of Rochester: guilt, hopelessness (as when she torments herself imagining Romney's wedding), a bitter sense of humour, and a

[188] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literacy Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 575-6.

hardening of heart which is a thin mask for her loneliness: 'Oh heart,/ At last we shall grow hard too, like the rest,/ and call it self-defence because we are soft' (*AL,* V: 1063-5). The emotional repression along with Aurora's social behaviour and choice to become a poet blend with her personality and background, to reverberate within the Gothic tradition through her aristocratic origins mixed with the rebellious, exotic and foreign genes of her mother. Aurora learns to handle her emotions in a masculine way. The absence of tears dries out any trace of sentiment, while giving her deeply hurt, love-sickness, a stoic and hardened tint. Aurora does not suffer her lack of love at a physical level: there is no heart ache, no fainting, no feminine weakness or throwing herself upon her bed in a hopeless state of endless tears. Instead, she becomes bitter, hermetic in heart, contained of tears, and scornful. Her denial of romantic feelings towards Romney is not handled through a meek resignation that their love is impossible, but through a hardness of heart that seeks an alternative output through art and productive isolation.

Unlike other female writers with frail health, such as Harriet Martineau, EBB did not use her illness as a topic for her writing. While at a personal level, EBB's condition as an invalid was profitable as 'such a role was compatible with the Victorian bourgeois ideals of femininity, but also because it was financed privately.'[189] It was not the ideal match for EBB's adventurous and Romantic spirit, whose identity as a poet and a woman was forged within the sick room: 'the figure of the invalid both embodies and signifies stasis and inertia, the sick-room functioned as

[189] Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 24.

its spatial equivalent.'[190] EBB's body therefore functions within stasis and inertia, while her creative endeavours behaved otherwise; she became symbolically annihilated under the spatial weight of illness as a source of bodily identity. By creating Aurora as fit and healthy in an almost supernatural way, EBB recreated her bodily identity through what was absent; health became the ultimate equivalent of freedom. EBB decided to provide her fantastic alternate heroine with an independent, forceful and strong personality opposed to the passive 'Lady on the Sofa'. EBB frames Aurora Leigh within masculine characteristics and personality traits that answer to her own impossible condition as a woman, which (even if healthy) would never allow her to fulfil her own life dreams. The young cross-dressed Byron's page had no way to pursue the world in imitation of George Sand, since EBB's condition as an invalid and as a Victorian Lady would not permit it. Yet, what was impossible for EBB became possible for Aurora. First by being an orphan and later by losing her aunt, Aurora was free from any family ties which could bind her to a family home. Her loneliness works in her favour, making her a sort of poetic female bachelor. Supported by a convenient small inheritance and later by her own writing, Aurora roams through places which for a young woman like her would have been risky and disreputable in the real world. She acts in the world with the independence and countenance of a young bachelor in a metaphorical cross-dressing which affects her whole attitude and engagement with the world.

[190] Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 182.

It was not right after her leaving the nursery, but in 1854, aged forty-eight, that EBB dressed up in men's clothes. But even then she did not go into the world, but paced up and down the square, as recounted by Mrs. Kinney:

> I had a curious escapade with the Brownings, during a visit at Florence of Hattie Hosmer, the American sculptress of Rome! She is well known as something of a 'Tom-boy'; is fond of a boyish scrape, & of getting her friends into scrapes. One day when we met her at Casa Guidi, Mr Browning began talking of some fine old pictures he had seen in a monastery (I forget the name of it now) not far from the Porta Romana of Florence, saying how sorry he was that we & his wife could not see them, as no female person was ever admitted within the gates. Hattie Hosmer jumped up & exclaimed, 'but we will see these pictures!' Then she went on to show how; & this was her proposition: That we three—Mrs Browning, she, & myself—should procure students' suits—composed of full, pleated frocks reaching to the knees, & fastened at the waists by leather belts; with loose trousers, à la Turque, cloth caps, &c, & go as male pupils of Mr Kinney & Mr Browning they to pass for our tutors. 'Good!' cried Mr B. 'I will let my wife do it if Mr K. will let his.' To my utter amazement, Mr Kinney consented, & we were all in for a frolic! We two Elizabeths did not shrink from the fun, so long as our grave husbands approved it. Mr Powers was let into the secret, as we required his aid in getting up our disguises, & he was just one to enjoy the whole thing. Before a week was over we had our uniforms, boys wigs, &c. which were becoming, and a complete disguise for Mrs B. & me;—Mr P. declared that no one would suspect we were not youths, I of about fifteen, & Mrs B. nineteen—but Hattie H. being short & stout, looked like a fat boy, if boy at all, very peculiar! We all met at Casa Guidi to dress, while, not daring to use our own carriage, it was sent home, & our tutors, to be, went out to bring a fiacre, or hack for our conveyance to the monastery. We laughed at one another so, that it was difficult to get dressed; but Mrs B. completed her toilette first & really looked handsome in it. For the first time I saw her without those dark heavy curls she always wore, half concealing her cheeks, & the wig of short straight hair improved her looks: excitement gave her usually pale face a fine color, and her large black eyes an unwonted brightness. But our merriment at Hattie's looks was suddenly checked by a crazy act on Mrs B.'s part that filled us with terror! It had been asked that the carriage should enter the porte-cochère & stop at the foot of the stairs, so that we could enter unseen. What then was our dismay—Hattie's & mine—on glancing out the window, to see Mrs B. walking slowly on the square up & down! It must have been an extra dose of opium that pushed her to such a wild step. 'What shall we do?' I exclaimed. 'Why, go to her![']' answered H. 'We mustn't leave the great Elizabeth alone in such a state!' This was convincing, yet I feared to make bad worse, when Hattie rushed down into the street & took Mrs

> B.'s arm to conduct her back, & I, like one bewildered, needs must follow. By that time, our strange appearance began to attract attention, when, all at once, Mrs B. seemed conscious, of the situation, began to cry, & whisper in my ear, 'O Mrs Kinney, we shall be in the Bargello' (jail) & so ludicrously pitiful was the whole scene, that Hattie & I burst into a laugh! This excited observation still more, & we should have been the centre of a crowd had not our husbands driven up in a hack & taken us in, just in time. But Browning was pale as death with fright, & declared that now he should not venture to carry out our plans as no doubt we had been discovered, &, that the police might follow us & the whole matter be exposed in the papers with our names. Mr Kinney caught at his fears; while Hattie took fire & called him a poltroon, & other hard names; Mrs B. cried, & laughed, & all of us, save Browning, declared that it would be too bad to disappoint us after all! But he refused to visit the monastery; we drove back, & so ended our escapade![191]

The adventure, which seemed at first to amuse RB shifted to potential catastrophe at the moment he realised his wife *could have been recognized* cross-dressed. Mrs. Kinney's observations are interesting: the choice of disguise as young students in a sort of Byronic dress gave the women peculiar looks. While Hattie looked perhaps slightly ridiculous, the disguise suited EBB to perfection. While it was almost impossible to separate EBB from her ringlets, here, for once, it happened. The poet got out of the house before time, pushed by 'an extra dose of opium'[192] which may have plunged her deep into her mind, connecting to her old childhood dreams of becoming Byron's page.[193] The interesting fact about this anecdote is that it happened in 1854, four years before the Macaire photographs. EBB's behaviour through this

---

[191] Ronald A. Bosco, 'The Brownings and Mrs. Kinney: A Record of Their Friendship', *Browning Institute Studies*, 4, (1976) 57-124 (pp. 115-17).

[192] Iain Finlayson notes on this episode: 'opium revived her energies, perhaps also her inhibitions, and allowed her opinions sometimes what were then considered to be the bounds, not only of common sense, but of common decency.' (Iain Finlayson, *Browning,* p. 379). Once again it must be taken into consideration that if what EBB took was morphine, the effects could have been stronger.

[193] Julia Markus reflects upon this episode: 'Disguised as a schoolboy, her hair pulled back as handsome as Bro when they were both young, she wandered dazed, beneath her own window. Did her costume bring her back to that day at Hope End, before her illness, when the brother she loved and whose tutor she had shared was sent away to school, leaving her alone in her study of the classical languages and with her knowledge that the world he entered was fraught with dangers?' (Julia Markus, *Dared and Done,* p. 215)

episode, as the possible result of her drug misuse, as will be discussed in chapter 2, could also reflect her need to fulfil her childhood dreams. On a subconscious level, EBB might also have transferred part of that dream onto her son Pen, whose upbringing and looks, were some of the issues the Brownings strongly disagreed about, and which fascinated EBB:

> Wilson would tell Elizabeth that people turned to look at the child. […] It would have taken more than a casual glance, to tell whether the fantastical Pen was a boy or a girl. […] To Henrietta, on 2 November 1851, she wrote to give a thrilled and particularized account of her own 'fashions' and then of Pen's: 'we have bought him a white felt hat, white satin ribbons and feathers -really the prettiest I ever saw, and he looks lovely in it- with a trimming of blue satin ribbon inside at each cheek. Then he wears trousers now! -that is out of doors. Such ridiculous tiny trousers up to his knees: and long white knee gaiters. It's a beautiful costume, and he is much admired. People stare at him, Wilson says, and turn around to stare again.' […] 'His grace and golden ringlets draw so much attention in the Cascine that Wilson swears she is abashed by it'.[194]

[194] Iain Finlayison, *Browning* (London: Harper, 2005) p. 323-324.

Fig. 1. 26

Fratelli D' Alessandri, 'Pen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning', photograph, early June 1860
(Eton College Library, Windsor, England)

Fig. 1. 27
Fratelli D' Alessandri, 'Pen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning', photograph, early June 1860
(Eton College Library, Windsor, England)

The description of Pen's clothes echoes EBB's and Hattie's choice of disguises to be worn to the monastery. No wonder that Wilson was abashed, to say the least. Not only

are Pen's clothes odd as worn by a nine-year old boy but they seem out of fashion as well. Pen's hairstyle underlines androgyny and the resemblance between mother and child created through clothing and hairstyle highlights the idea that EBB was dressing her son as she wished she had been dressed as a child. If Mrs. Kinney's description is considered along with EBB's short, delicate and tiny frame, it would be possible that, cross-dressed, she would appear as an adolescent young boy. In the photographs taken in Rome in 1860 (figs. 1. 26 & 1. 27) Pen resembles an androgynous mini version of EBB. Not only did he have the same ringlets (it is curious to realise also that like Aurora, he was blond), but their style is almost identical: the shirt/blouse with cuffed laces and collar, the pattern of the jackets and even the slightly oversized fitting of clothes mirror each other. In the photograph, EBB's thin and worn frame is concealed underneath the several layers of garments, yet it shows through the shoulder which protrudes in a sharp and square angle. It if were not for the skirt and for EBB's wasted look, mother and son might be mistaken for twins.

Pen's daguerreotype portrait (fig 1. 28), probably by one of the Macaires, was produced in 1858 in Le Havre, and it is highly likely the one EBB makes reference in her letter to Sophia Eckley on the 15th of September 1858. The child's pose within the portrait, the angle of his face, as well as the combination of tones and the texture of his clothing, resemble EBB's looks in the Macaire portrait and the Barlow engraving: black against white laced cuffs and collar, and the three quarter look which gives the locks an air of lightly dishevelled rebellion. Pen's knitted brows make his expression grumpy and perhaps even more defiant than EBB's expression. While in

the Barlow engraving (fig. 1. 19) EBB stands slightly unfeminine, the boy, in contrast, could, in the daguerreotype, be easily mistaken for a girl: a figure of Aurora Leigh, the child with the continental looks and airs which would later become problematic for her tight English upbringing. Pen stands as the embodied version of Byron's page within EBB's imagination as her choice of clothes would evidence.

Fig. 1. 28
'Pen Browning aged 9', daguerreotype by unidentified artist, 12 September 1858

(Wellesley College Library, The English Poetry Collection, Wellesley, Massachusetts).

Fig. 1. 29
Fratelli D'Alessandri 'Pen Aged 11', photograph, early June 1860
(Eton College Library, Windsor, England)

EBB had made two things clear concerning her poetic career: she religiously believed in her poetic gift and she did not want her image, that is her body, to be transcendent, but her poetry to be the mere work of her spirit. Aurora Leigh, in the first steps of her career, while seeking her voice as a poet, stares at her own image in

the mirror: 'I clenched my brows across/ my blue eyes greatening in the looking glass,/ and said, 'We'll live, Aurora! We'll be strong. / The dogs are on us- but we will not die' (*AL*: I: 1065-66). While the character highlights her eyes as a main feature and mark of her character, the opposite happened when EBB described herself to RB as a 'blind poet' due to her lack of life experience: eyes were metaphorically nullified.

Fig. 1.30
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Self-Portrait aged 41', 9 July 1847
(Camellia Collection, Linton Park, Kent, England)

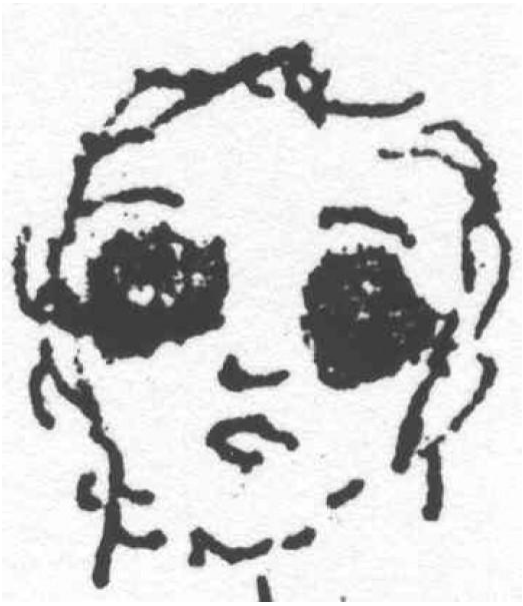

Fig. 1. 31

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Self-portrait aged 44', 7 September, 1850
(Camellia Collection, Linton Park, Kent, England)

In this context two self-portraits drawn by EBB during different periods of her life are interesting in their simplicity and in the fact that in neither of them, are the eyes of the poet drawn which, as we've found, were according to reminiscences her most recognisable features. The first one (fig. 1. 30), presented as a profile, shows the eye as a dark spot in which the eyelashes become the only prominent element. Humorous and candid, it presents EBB in a way that echoes the sketch of Flush she sent to Horne (fig. 1. 2): the wavy hair clearly resembles the spaniel's ears and its expression is recreated in this self-portrait of his mistress. The second one (fig. 1. 31) is disturbingly uncomfortable as instead of eyes, two large black spots stare out in pitch blackness, suggesting the empty and lifeless gaze of a skull. It is clear though, through the eyebrows, that those are large eyes. Yet, are the eyes too black because they are blind? Was EBB trying to suggest metaphorically the opacity of blindness, or

was she trying to capture the hypnotic, dark and deep gaze produced by the opium alteration of the senses? The absence, in the self-portrait of the signature ringlets is covered by what seems to be a bonnet, suggesting a similar composition to that of Carter's miniature portrait of EBB discussed earlier in a disturbing mirroring image. If those ringlets were added 'falling on either side nearly to the waist'[195] as mentioned by the unknown gentleman recorded for *The American Phrenological Journal*, an exaggerated image of EBB would be the result with 'the eye black and large… a diminutive chin… [with] the lower part a somewhat triangular shape.'[196]

In very deed a face
The low brow, the frank space between the eyes,
Which always had the brown pathetic look
Of a dumb creature who had been beaten once,
And never since was easy with the world.
Ah, ah–now I remember perfectly
Those eyes to-day,–how overlarge they seemed
As if some patient passionate despair
(Like a coal dropt and forgot on tapestry,
Which slowly burns a widening circle out)
Had burnt them larger, larger. And those eyes,
To-day, I do remember, saw me too,
As I saw them, with conscious lids a strain
In recognition. Now, a fantasy,
A simple shade or image of the brain,
Is merely passive, does not retro-act,
Is seen, but sees not (*AL*: VI: 308-331).

The 'patient passionate despair' described in Marian connects directly to the 'tragic, despairing'[197] countenance captured through the photographic portraits of EBB by the

[195] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 61.
[196] 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', p. 61.
[197] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 77.

Macaire brothers. The hallucinatory description of this face which appears as through a vision, is identical to that of EBB in to the self-portrait: 'like a coal dropt and forgot on tapestry,/which slowly burns a widening circle out' (*AL,* VI: 317-18). In the text, the visual impact of the face appearing as upon 'moonlit water down a well' produces the effect of a mirror, an eerie effect similar to Atreyu's experience while crossing the Magic Mirror Gate.

The fragment from *AL*, as clear as could be in physically depicting EBB, is not referring to a self-portrait of Aurora Leigh, nor does it belong to a vision experienced by Romney Leigh. It is instead Aurora's vision of Marian Erle[198] during the time of her desperate search after the girl's flight. EBB displayed her intentions in Marian to Arabel on October 4, 1856:

> I admit, it's a horrible situation - but I wanted a horrible situation to prove a beautiful verity. The intention of the poem everywhere is to raise the spiritual above the natural; this is carried out in everything. Marian, subjected to the most hideous of trials, in fact though with an unconsenting will, is made to emerge with a glory of purity & even moral dignity, (increased by her very misfortune) to which, at the end, no reader shall be insensible. You shall feel the virtue of chastity, in her, more even than in Aurora.[199]

The question arising is why did EBB give her own looks to the character who would suffer through horrors instead of giving them to her heroine/alter ego who in the end, achieved all that she cared for? A possible answer lies within EBB's explanation to her sister, along with the disturbing self-portrait (fig. 1. 30) and the long-held

[198] Margaret Reynolds notices that EBB's looks are almost identical to Marian Erle's *AL*: III: 810-25), p. 96.

[199] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3873 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4219/?rsId=236105&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

dissatisfaction she felt more generally for her portraits. In her letter to Arabel EBB mentions that her whole intention was to raise the spiritual above the natural, echoing her attitude towards herself and her poetry. Marian, through her origins, her development and personality represents the natural. Uneducated, reading on her own whatever fragments reach her, and at some points behaving like an uncivilized creature, Marian does not follow either education or social rules, but only lets herself be guided by her own inner voice. In EBB's construction of her, Marian's true nature, in spite of all hardships, shines as noble and pure.

Marian's body, subject first to abuse from her mother and later to rape while being drugged, is metaphorically destroyed. Several times, after Aurora meets her again in Book VI, the girl speaks of having experienced death: 'I wasn't ever as you say, seduced/ but simply murdered' (*AL*, VI: 769-70), 'Marian's dead' (*AL*, VI: 813), 'Nay, since your Marian's dead./ You shall not hang her up, but dig a hole /And bury her in silence, ring no bells' (*AL*, VI: 893-5). It is through this destruction that Marian experiences disembodiment: metaphorical death equals the nullification of the woman. Aurora, privileged, has choice and renounces the flesh by will, while Marian is made to live through an atrocious experience which damages her to the point of disassociation. Marian's exeunt, marked only through the economic and theatrical 'She was gone' (*AL*, IX: 453), after the final dialogue between the three characters, adds to a lack of corporeal presence. Dissociated from her body, Marian's physical Calvary verges upon martyrdom. By immolating Marian, EBB proved her point of the spiritual rising above the natural. Both Marian's face in this scene and EBB's early

written self-portrait to Haydon are constructed with the eyes as the most important, tangible and expressive feature. Marian is also 'little and dark'[200] with 'dark hair & complexion'[201] like the younger EBB as described to Haydon. EBB's withholding of likeness during the 1840s from her editors and friends thereby reflects refusal to be objectified as a woman. She underlines to Haydon that there was nothing interesting in her to see, in a similar vein that in which she expressed herself to Horne and to RB before meeting them in person. Exhausted perhaps by being considered *primordially* as a woman, mother and Mrs. Browning, the poet always in second place EBB gave her looks to an adolescent girl and destroyed her tragically to the point of no return. Marian's blooming youth, marred and ruined, coincides in age with EBB's own period of first illness in 1821 when she was fifteen years old.

One of Aurora's most intense emotions has to do with her search for Marian Erle along with the ultimate finding and 'rescuing' of her. Moreover, Aurora's role within this part of her adventure becomes a masculine one, for she enrols in a sort of knightly quest, as noted by Dorothy Mermin.[202] The echo of the knightly quest is achieved also through the direct relationship between Aurora and Marian, which also echoes previous works by EBB in which she experimented with Mediaevalism, as in 'The Romaunt of the Page' (1839) in which the knight is on a Crusader's quest. Clare Broome Saunders identifies 'EBB's use of medieval chivalric images to demonstrate

---

[200] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1482 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1244/?rsId=236107&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[201] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1482 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1244/?rsId=236107&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[202] Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1989) p. 510.

the hypocritical and unjust gender confines of contemporary life, the expectations and demands of 'feminine' behaviour […] she clearly refutes the gender constructions of chivalry while highlighting contemporary social problems.'[203] Cross-dressing is explored in 'The Romaunt of the Page', as the Lady decides to to follow her Crusader husband disguised as a page. This medieval trope explored, for example by Heldris de Cornualles in *Silence*[204] (in the first half of the thirteenth century), results in a different outcome for EBB's tale which does not belong, for instance, to the Arthurian cycle. Both Silence and the Lady in 'The Romaunt of the Page', conceal their gender, identity and origins to pursue their quest. At the end of EBB's narrative is a fatality, the lady dies in battle receiving the wound meant to kill the knight. The hierarchies are clearly divided, and the final act of sacrifice which leads to the death of the character is the ultimate act of chivalric heroism. The cross-dressing in this poem hints at EBB's idea of assuming and experimenting with roles and typically 'masculine' feelings through a female character. The heroic image of the woman for EBB was inspired very much by Madame de Staël and her Corinne, as I have discussed, but also by Joan of Arc and by George Sand, who is closer to the idea of a Byronic female in EBB's eyes. Aurore Dupin, whose pen name would be George Sand, had aristocratic origins, and her life is interesting not only due to her affairs, but because of the independence with which she conducted it. Aurora chooses 'headaches' identifying with the masculine intellectual tradition. The head intellectual/masculine was a common trope during the nineteenth century, clearly

[203] Clare Broome Saunders, *Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Medievalism* (New York: AIAA, 2009), p. 586.
[204] Heldris De Cornualles, *Le Roman de Silence* (London: W.Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1972).

addressed here in what could seem a mocking tone to Romney: 'The headache is too noble for my sex./ You think the heartache should sound decenter, /since that's the woman's special, proper ache' (*AL*,II:111-12). Aurora here displays a lack of feminine virtues which otherwise would make her easy prey for courting by men. The denial of the heart conveys a rejection of the helpless role of the young maiden, while acting as the core of her independence.

Whereas Angela Leighton suggests the idea of Marian being the ultimate end of Aurora's poetic quest by Aurora taking Marian's story as her own, Deirdre David claims that Aurora embraces Marian as a mother.[205] I would add that Aurora's treatment of Marian as an individual differs from the poet and the poetic quest as stated by previous authors and adds to the masculine role embraced by the character. Leighton also precisely suggests that Aurora's imagination 'marries' Marian the fallen woman,[206] in a metaphorical act of possession: 'Ye are my own from henceforth' (*AL*, VII: 119), while Mermin points out Aurora's knightly quest is as a marriage proposal.[207] David argues that Kaplan's reading of *AL* as a revolutionary feminist text[208] is perhaps different from EBB's sexual poetics, as: 'Aurora joyfully assumes a role inscribed in and by male-dominated culture and society.'[209] David explores EBB's position upon women's rights and intellectual capacities, also pointing out contemporary reception which signalled EBB's style in *AL* as 'masculine' and

---

[205] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), p. 115.
[206] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p.155.
[207] Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry,* p. 193.
[208] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 144
[209] Deirdre David, 'Art's a Service": Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and "Aurora Leigh', *Browning Institute Studies*, 13 (1985), 113-136, p. 114.

‘coarse’. Moreover, David also indicates the establishing of a trademark ‘women’s language’ in *AL,* which underlines the imagery of breasts, highly erotic and nurturing, belonging mainly to the literary masculine tradition.[210] In this sense, Aurora’s use of language and treatment of Lady Waldemar in her final letter, is masculine and Rochesterean through her bitter and hurting phrases: ‘did I ever ink my lips/ By drawing your name through them as a friend’s/ Or touch your hands as lovers do?’ (*AL*, VII: 289-9)’ Aurora’s tone later evolves into one, ‘advising’ her to be a good wife to Romney (*AL*, VII: 340-60), in a bitter and sarcastic expression of what is expected from a Lady, which in the case of Lady Waldemar, can be feigned to perfection, from Aurora’s perspective.

Aurora’s relationship with Marian is constructed from the masculine amorous tradition and evidenced through their hierarchies: Marian’s iconographic holy aspect, and Aurora’s ardent devotion. The ‘knightly quest’ that hints back to medieval tropes also roots Aurora within the tradition of the earlier sonnet, the Petrarchan one, branded by Courtly Love. The ideal of Courtly Love finds undertones in Aurora’s ardent devotion for Marian which shows an awakening and development escalating from their first touch: ‘she touched by hand, with hers, as softly as a strange white bird/ she feared to startle in touching’ (*AL*, IV: 203-5), after what seems a fraternal kiss from Aurora: ‘I kissed the lips that ended.- ‘So indeed/ he loves you, Marian?’ (*AL*, IV: 167-8)”. Aurora’s explicit intensity is later displayed first in words: ‘by thee/ whom still I’ve hungered after more than bread,/ My sister Marian?’ followed by

[210] Deirdre David, ‘Art’s a Service": Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and "Aurora Leigh’, p. 121.

action: 'with woman's passion clung about her waist/ and kissed her hair and eyes, - 'I have been wrong,/ sweet Marian'... (weeping in a tender rage)/ 'Sweet, Holy Marian!' (*AL*, VI: 777-82). The display and handling of Aurora's ardent passion towards a 'Holy Lady' echoes the Marian devotion of the medieval chivalric tradition,[211] as by the late thirteenth century 'the Virgin explicitly became the focus of courtly love, thus gathering the attributes of the desired woman and of the holy mother in a totality as it was inaccessible.'[212] Mary was represented as 'poor, modest, and humble -madonna of humility at the same time as devoted, fond mother'[213] and this idealization explains Aurora's response to an emblematic treatment of the newly rescued Marian. Though a clear ardent passion builds between the characters, as Marian later evidences during their final dialogue, 'catch my hands,/ Miss Leigh, and burn into my eyes with yours,' (*AL*, IX: 356-7), it is also she who underlines the *holiness* of that passion: 'I felt her soul dip through her serious lips in *holy* fire' (*AL*, IV: 940-1). The subtle tone evidenced by Marian explains the undertone of Aurora's emotions. Aurora turns the defiled, abused and fallen woman into a holy presence whose final appearance is depicted through iconographic Marian Ascension.[214] Aurora's imagination 'marries Marian', yet the vein of purity (enhanced by the notion of Marian's holiness), tints the

---

[211] Sir, Gawain, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, embodies much of this Marian cult, as in the inside of his shield, opposed to the exterior in which a pentacle is shown, the image of the Virgin Mary is depicted, as: 'he fittingly had/ On the inner part of his shield her image portrayed,/ That when his look on it lighted, he never lost heart' (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: 648-50); the pentacle represents the five wounds of Christ and stands for the five Chivalric virtues: generosity, courtesy, chastity, chivalry and piety. Like Gawain, Aurora holds Marian close to her heart (metaphorically) while transforming her into the source of inspiration and strength.

[212] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) p. 245

[213] Julia Kristeva *Tales of Love,* p. 246.

[214] Kristeva discusses Mary and the fact that her death does not occur either in biblical or apocryphal narratives: 'the fulfilment under the name of Mary, of a totality made of woman and God is finally accomplished through the avoidance of death. Mary experiences a fate more radiant than her son's: she undergoes Calvary, she has got no tomb, she doesn't die and hence has no need to rise from the dead' (Kristeva, *Tales of Love,* p. 242-3). Marian, through her narrative and symbolism, becomes a mixture of both Christ and Mary through iconographic and theological traits, yet in the end, like Mary, she avoids death through her final appearance, after which she simply vanishes 'She was gone' (*AL,* IX: 453); remaining within the Marian iconography of Ascension.

spiritual passion with Theresian mysticism. Aurora, though apparently fascinated by the individual Marian, is in truth fascinated by the archetypical narrative of what Marian represents, embracing her as the symbol of the purity among the filthy working classes. Initially her fascination seems to spring from Romney's judgement on choosing Marian through his idealism; this idealised version becomes real when, according to Aurora, the girl's beauty equals her spiritual purity. At this stage in the text both Leighs embrace Marian almost as an allegorical figure rather than a flesh and blood equal. Moreover, their imaginative state of idealism corresponds to their privileged background and lack of life experience, added to a family trait treated as heirloom: 'A Leigh, he [Romney] says, gives largesse and gives love [...] with blood trained up along nine centuries' (*AL*, II: 1009, 1012) which implies that they *are meant* to be *naturally* generous (and expected to be so) both in the material and spiritual sense.

By embracing the knightly role to 'save' Marian, Aurora ceases to be the passive subject of Romney's affections (or rather of his dead silence) to embrace a role of active provider for Marian and her child. Aurora's initial intention and proposal are also drawn from the masculine chivalric tradition from which she assumes a masculine role. Her words: 'Come with me, sweetest sister, [...] and sit within my house and do me good/ From henceforth, thou and thine! Ye are my own/ From henceforth' (*AL*, VII: 216-20) echo ironically Romney's words addressed to her during the proposal: 'let me feel your perfume in my home/ to make my sabbath after working days' (*AL*, II: 832-3)". In the same tone, even while emphasizing the sisterly

bond, Aurora treats Marian as she was once treated by Romney: 'A wife... a sister... shall we speak it out?/ A sister of charity' (*AL*, II: 417-18). In doing so, Aurora is clearly emulating Romney, embracing the role in which, apparently he had failed: *She would be the Leigh proved worthy not just poetically but in philanthropy.* While having considered Romney's proposal as an insult to her poetical vocation, Aurora behaves in the same way towards Marian who is below her in hierarchy, for she rather urges Marian to follow her by giving her no choice, rescuing her almost by force.

The assumption of the knightly masculine role by Aurora, allowed EBB to explore a wider emotional and poetical scope for her character. The cross-dressing metaphor idealised through George Sand became possible in Aurora who develops metaphorically cross-dressed both within her fictional poetic career and in actions within the plot. By allowing Aurora and Marian to live in a sort of *marriage fantasy* in Aurora's imagination, EBB leads her character through the exploration of her feelings through a masculine perspective by crossing boundaries between gender roles pointed out by Saunders as a trace of Medievalism in EBB. The period of time in *AL,* as I have noted, is also crucial as it provides Aurora's imagination with a factual frame for her marriage fantasy with Marian, with the ardent passion cooling once they establish a home. Living abroad, likely helping to raise a child (and clearly loved by him) with a caring, devoted and quiet woman to share her home, Aurora falls into emotional and creative stasis, while the 'sweet and Holy Marian' is slowly replaced by a silent and devoted mother, a wife-like figure blending with the background as the Angel in the House, fulfilling the role so despised by Aurora.

During their reconciliation, the physically blind Romney affirms seeing right through Aurora: 'the sadness of your greatness fits you well:/ As if the plum upon a hero's casque/ Should nod a shadow upon his victor's face' (*AL,* VIII: 473-5); Reynolds points out Romney's allusion to Hector from Homer's *Iliad* on his way to war while saying farewell to his wife and child.[215] But oddly, this allusion also places Aurora, not just as the metaphorical husband to Marian but as a father to the child. Aurora's treatment and display of affection to the child resembles her own father's love to her. The assumption of the role, then, is not just assumed by Aurora, as David points out, but also acknowledged by the rest of the characters, or at least, by Romney. The significance for his understanding does not necessarily correspond to a rivalry between them, or a denial of her as a woman, but rather to the acknowledgement of Aurora's ability to provide for Marian in a way Romney is unable to do. The sad, heroic, taciturn, colourless Aurora 'we have shades/ In place of colours' (*AL*, VIII: 343-44), is far from the depiction of young Aurora by Hughes' painting. The Aurora presented by the end of the narrative, resembles instead the engraving of EBB by Barlow in which the poet and character resemble each other in *attitude.*

Virginia Woolf is again pertinent as a critic in her remark which could never have been possible without Woolf the novelist:

> Through the voice of Aurora the character, the circumstances, the idiosyncrasies of Elizabeth Barrett Browning ring in our ears. Mrs. Browning could no more conceal herself than she could control herself, a sign no doubt of imperfection in an artist, but a sign also that life has impinged upon art more than life should.[216]

---

[215] Margaret Reynolds in *Aurora Leigh,* p. 267.
[216] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 212.

As a highly accomplished novelist, Woolf knew to what point the author's own life and ideals could be translated into characters without that transparency that occurs between Aurora and EBB. As my analysis has demonstrated, the autobiographical can be traced through diverse layers of meaning within EBB's heroine, to the point of blurring the boundaries between character and poet. In addition, the construction of Aurora reverberates with such force through the frontispiece portrait of EBB, evoking the character to the point of creating a momentary illusion, that of EBB as being *officially* a healthy, young and adventurous poet. Barlow's engraving of EBB, reconstructed from Macaire's photographs (figs. 1.14 & 1.15) and later corrected by Rossetti (fig. 1.19.) - echoes Aurora in expression and *attitude*: daring, slightly arrogant, solemn with piercing melancholy eyes. The dark hero described by Romney: a sad victor with upright attitude, with defying, scornful, Rochesterian gaze, softened by the gesture of her hand upon the table. The idealization enhances youth and by no means depicts EBB's true sickly, weak and frail countenance evidenced by the rest of the Macaire series and supported by recollections and memoirs.

This fantastic blending of Aurora Leigh and EBB certainly reverberated in popular culture through time, as seen in the 1915 illustration of Aurora Leigh appearing in *The Mentor's* 'Famous Women Writers in England.'[217] The illustration appears with a biographical (and quite clichéd) account of EBB, along with an explanation of the illustration: ' "AURORA LEIGH", the heroine of Mrs. Browning's

[217] *The Mentor -Famous Women Writers of England*, Serial Number 84 - Volume 3, Number 8 (June 1, 1915).

romantic and beautiful novel in verse, is the subject of one of the intaglio-gravure pictures illustrating "Famous Women Writers of England"'. Aurora *as* a heroine is here depicted in a metaphorical representation of her creator.

Fig. 1. 32

M. Mc Jamieson, "Aurora Leigh" (detail) (Illustration from *The Mentor,* vol. 3. No. 8, serial 84, 1915)

While Aurora Leigh is depicted in an attitude from the beginning of book III (figs. 1.31 & 1.32), the illustration refers clearly to the frontispiece of the author. For Aurora's features, her hair style, clothing, reflective gesture, the uprightness of pose while holding firmly the tools of the trade (here the quill, in the frontispiece the hand next to the book, merely caressing it), are all clearly drawn from Barlow. Decades and multiple successive editions of *AL* tell of the portrait's popularity and one in which it would have been impossible for the general reader to miss the fact, edition after edition, of Aurora being blond (with very long hair). Nevertheless, what captured the popular imagination was Barlow's portrait of EBB as intertwined with Aurora, resulting in a blend that depicts her as a brooding, melancholic poet with dark hair and

ringlets, resembling her creator through an alternative spiritual self. Crucial, as Martinez mentions, is the fact that the frontispiece portrait was the official likeness that dissipated the mystery of EBB's elusive face. By giving the audience a reconstructed image of EBB, the legendary romantic heroine *resurrected* by Love was proven true. The illustration of Aurora Leigh proves how EBB was shaped as forever young through health, youth and melancholia within popular imagination, as she had been in the only portrait which satisfied her, the one by Field Talfourd, in which the poet is depicted young and ethereal as her own heroine. The D'Alessandri brothers' photographic portraits of EBB, both on her own and with Pen (figs. 1.26, 1.27, 1.34 & 1. 35), by extreme contrast, reveal the truth of EBB's phantasmal figure. In these photographs, the poet's emaciated body, angular and bony, was discreetly concealed underneath multiple layers of clothing.

Fig. 1. 33

M. Mc Jamieson, "Aurora Leigh" (Illustration from *The Mentor,* vol. 3. No. 8, serial 84, 1915)

Fig. 1. 34

Fratelli D'Alessandri, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 55', photograph, Rome, 27 May 1861
(Eton College Library, Windsor, England)

Fig. 1. 35

Fratelli D'Alessandri, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 55*. Photograph, Rome, 27 May 1861
(Eton College Library, Windsor, England)

Fig. 1. 36
Field Talfourd, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning aged 53', chalk, Rome, February 1859
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

With the unfinished look of a sketch, Talfourd's chalk portrait of EBB (fig. 1. 35) makes her appear enigmatic, youthful, healthy and lively. Executed in 1859, two years before the photographs by D'Alessandri brothers, the portrait excludes the wasted looks captured by the photographs and restores EBB to the freshness of youth: the

heavy circles under her eyes which appear prominent in the photographs are softened, producing a lovelorn almost adolescent look. The angle of the face echoes the frontispiece portrait in which she is not presented from the front, but rather leaning subtly, giving her eyes a candour and sweetness absent in the frontispiece portrait. This chalk portrait was commissioned by Helen Heaton, the same Miss Heaton who owned 'The Tryst', and who kept 'boasting indiscreetly within the Anglo-American circle of her close friendship with Mrs. Browning,'[218] and commissioned a portrait of EBB, in a similar possessive gesture to that of Sophia Eckley.[219] Both women appeared to have had an almost obsessive need to possess an artist's portrait of EBB, ignoring blatantly the photographic likenesses.[220]

EBB, finally, was extremely pleased with this portrait. She wrote to her friend Isa Blagden on May 4th, 1859: 'It's an idealization as far as I am concerned now, but with my soul in it as I dare to feel– Very poetical, very sympathetical to me. The only portrait of myself I could bear to look at in fact.'[221] EBB's satisfaction with the

---

[218] William S. Peterson, '"My Spiritual Face": A Newly Discovered Portrait of Mrs. Browning', *Browning Institute Studies*, 5, (1977) 1-ii (p. 9).

[219] EBB wrote to Arabel on March 29, 1859: "Robert swears that she (Miss Heaton) makes me ridiculous all over Rome, by publishing her 'friendship' with me .. to which the fact of the portrait contributes something! (Peterson, '"My Spiritual Face": A Newly Discovered Portrait of Mrs. Browning', p. 14). It is interesting that EBB seems to underline the fact that RB is the one giving importance to Miss Heaton, disengaging herself of any responsibility. RB indeed found both friendships disturbing, but it was Sophia Eckley to whom he referred as 'devilish' after her rift with EBB.

[220] EBB wrote to Arabel: "She [Miss Heaton] has made herself so unpopular by her… let me whisper it to you, Arabel .. by her singular want of refinement & delicacy -& resolution to "have the only portrait in the world of Mrs. Browning" .. dear Sophia Eckley being really wounded by the slight done to herself and her Gordigiani in Florence" (Peterson, '"My Spiritual Face": A Newly Discovered Portrait of Mrs. Browning', p. 12). EBB's tone, rather than sounding alarming or uncomfortable, in opposition to how she refers to it when describing RB's reaction, reads as rather amused. The idea of 'whispering' to her sister in an almost adolescent confiding tone uncovers that perhaps she was not only amused but pleased by this rivalry and possessiveness from both of her friends.

[221] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4351 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4769/?rsId=236114&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

portrait was also expressed to her sister Arabel 'Perhaps you wont think it like– It is idealized. It may be my spiritual face'[222], going into detail:

> Certainly, it is a most exquisite work - rather a transfiguration than a literal likeness, .. but like, though what once ought to be called flattered, I am well aware. Still people who had seen me only once, exclaim how like it is .. and the general opinion is perfectly in its favour! – There is a certain sadness, but it is quiet .. not despairing like your photograph [likely the Macaire], and a look of the spirit's face in which only a man of genius could give in a chalk drawing -It is only a chalk drawing, observe.[223]

'Transfiguration' is here a rather interesting term not only to describe a portrait, but in EBB's case, to describe what had been achieved through a portrait of herself. For the theological echoes place her upon the same level of illumination as Christ who: 'was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.'[224] The mystical young poetic apprentice earlier depicted by Pickersgill had not only became a strongly established poet, but she had also fulfilled her spiritual task, following the prophet/poet John Milton. EBB seems to be reassured here by telling Arabel that, at last, her spiritual portrait had been achieved. The anxiety which EBB had earlier displayed in relation to both Carter's and Cliffe's portrait has disappeared. The poet's body appears to have become unimportant in the Talfourd portrait. By barely drawing the outline of EBB's white blouse, Talfourd

---

[222] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4370 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4782/?rsId=236115&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[223] William S. Peterson, '"My Spiritual Face": A Newly Discovered Portrait of Mrs. Browning', p. 12.

[224] Matthew. 17. 12. See also Mark 9.2–8, Luke 9.28–36.

achieved, through his technique, the phantasmal look contrasted against the minute details of her face, which also appears gradually concentrated upon the eyes, which become almost haunting with that melancholic tint captured by the Macaires. The hands -ringless-, one drawn delicately while the other is just outlined vaguely, show the 'bird' hands described by Locker-Lampson. Only a man of genius EBB claimed, could have been able to capture her true spiritual self: disembodied, but forever young. Talfourd's EBB was not that frail, wasted, withered woman captured by Fratelli D'Alessandri in the last photographs taken a month before her death. Through simplicity of composition Talfourd captured what EBB had for years longed for: the soul of the poet who during her early career had remained physically elusive to her audience: the young and ethereal Miss Barrett who had once signed her poetry simply as E. B. B.

But, who actually was behind that spiritual mask of ethereal youth drawn by Talfourd? Who stood behind the frontispiece portrait? Had EBB been truly 'resurrected' after her elopement, as legend and rumour said? What sort of illness did she have that seemed to have been wiped miraculously by Love? For, entwined with the idealised EBB depicted in her portraits, lies the mysterious illness which was dispelled and apparently only returned to take the poet to the grave. Was it, like the portraits, a construction, an act of malingering, built by EBB? Or, the other way round, was it a true existing condition around which EBB constructed an aspect of her personality and her poetic image? EBB's legendary sanctified image presents only the heroic, romantic, spotless side of the poet, as does the frontispiece portrait, which

depicts her face partially disclosed with her left side concealed in the shadows. Hiding behind the frame of curls and nose, the monochromatic image shows only the selected illuminated parts, drawn amongst the darkness.

Chapter 2: The Lady on the Sofa

'We all know how Miss Barrett lay on her sofa, how she escaped one September morning, how she met health and happiness, freedom and Robert Browning in the church around the corner.'[225]

Virginia Woolf

It is precisely from the monochromatic legend of EBB that certain questions arise, for the scholar must wonder, who lies behind the mask of the romantic invalid? While chapter one explored the process of creation and significance of some of EBB's portraits, illuminating some aspects of the poet's identity, chapter two explores two fundamental facts in EBB's life and which played a major role in her development as a poet and in her identity, namely illness and the morphine prescribed for it. EBB's illness and her death, have been romanticised ever since her lifetime, and multiple rumours and theories concerning her ailment have arisen since then, most of them focusing on the fact that her illness was 'dispelled' by Love and only appeared again to gradually take the poet's life.

It was precisely the dormant period of the illness, the 'miraculous recovery' that drew my interest in that particular aspect of EBB's malady, for it did not seem to fit the general pattern of progressive chronic pulmonary diseases. That period, of around three years, which started during the Brownings' courtship in 1846 and ended in 1849 after the birth of the Brownings' only child, and during which EBB's health improved so much as to surprise all of those who knew her, along with the nature of that illness and EBB's final relapse into death, became fundamental to the construction of the

[225] Woolf, Virginia, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 209.

legend. Through this chapter, I will explore several of the diagnoses of EBB's illness stated by contemporary and posthumous biographers and other scholars, in order to postulate a new hypothetical diagnosis, which, supported by my research, is hinted at, among other things, by that acknowledged dormant period in which the poet enjoyed better health. My claim is the possibility that EBB's illness was not in fact fatal and arguably did not cause her death, and that instead her death could have been related to the use of morphine. To draw that conclusion, I will discuss and trace the evolution of EBB's morphine habit, which though initially only known to her closest associates, was later known within the Brownings' literary circle, affecting the poet's image. This pattern also shows how the habit affected EBB's life and health. Intrinsically linked to her illness and surrounding her death, morphine shrouds the poet and my aim is to examine its influence, weight and part, through presence and absence, in the creation of the legend.

A blessed and departed soul

The iconic image of Miss Barrett lying on her sofa, dog at her feet and papers on her lap has, through time and literary legend, been able to substitute the figure of the poet in order to present a poetic lady, who was rescued by RB, became Mrs. Browning and lived a happy life, until she was unable to battle against illness, giving up to Death's embrace. The story of the Brownings' marriage and elopement fascinated Victorian audiences and has continued to reverberate up to the present day. That story is one of

a secluded lady whose respiratory ailment has not been clarified, but which, nevertheless, required an secluded and quiet life. EBB was regarded as a gifted poet so sure of her vocation that it became mystical, supported by an unbreakable Christian faith that steered her secluded life within grief and darkness. In the story, she has a father who acted as a tyrant, an ogre from which in the end she was rescued by an ideal lover: a poet, handsome, chivalrous, with moral integrity, a true Red Cross Knight. Together they eloped and lived happily in her beloved Italy, endlessly bathed in sunlight and bliss. While it is true that before meeting RB, EBB led a secluded life and her health was poor, just as in her early years she had created an effaced image of her poetic identity, much of the myth of her metamorphosis, happy marriage and Romantic death has been constructed through the Brownings themselves, as Karlin has suggested,[226] with hyperbolic sanctification of facts that damaged EBB's image as a poet by placing her on a pedestal and making her into an icon.

In 1885, enclosed within the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the basis of the legend was already settled, and has becoming a source for official biographical notes:

> About fifteen…[EBB] tried to saddle her pony… fell with the saddle upon her, in some way injuring her spine…, continued delicacy [of health] kept her for months at a time prisoner to her room, but she was becoming known to the world. [...] Miss Barrett lay on her couch with her dog Flush at her feet; […] very soon after their first acquaintance [with RB] they became engaged and were married in the autumn of the same year, 1846. [...] *The Sonnets from the Portuguese* are among the loveliest sonnets from the English language, and were written in secret by Mrs. Browning before their marriage, although they were not shown to her husband till long afterwards. […] So vivid and complete is the image of her peaceful home, of its fireside where logs are burning, and the mistress established on her sofa, with her little boy curled up at her side. […] We can recall the slight

[226] Daniel Karlin, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett,* p. 3

> figure in its black silk dress, the writing apparatus by the sofa, the tiny inkstand, the quill-nibbed pen-holder, the unpretentious implements of her work. […] Her sweetness of temperance and purity of spirit. […] She seemed even in her life something of a spirit, and her view of life's sorrow and shame, of its beauty and eternal hope, is something like that which one might imagine a spirit's to be. […] It has been said that the news of the death of Cavour, coming when she was very ill, hastened her own.[227]

This text by Anne Thackeray Ritchie included topics which fascinated the audience, such as, the ailing lady on the sofa, grief-stricken and in mourning, as well as highlighting the domesticity and her spiritual ethereal qualities, along with her sudden and quiet death. This text was heavily edited by Leslie Stephen, with important omissions, such as spiritualism, along with more personal memories, as both Anne and her sister Minny Thackeray had socialised with the Brownings, but mostly with EBB.[228] Therefore, what this biographical account presents is interesting precisely in its omissions. Moreover, of all the characters in EBB's life, there is one who is always left standing in the most unpleasant position, EBB's father, Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett (1785-1857). Constructed as a tyrant mostly by his own daughter exclusively in her letters to RB, the image of Mr. Barrett has been left almost untouched since that version. Whether or not the image was exaggerated, it was definitely the case that he was a father who would not let his offspring marry; he later never forgave EBB for her elopement, to the point of considering her dead to him. There was, nevertheless, another face of Mr. Barrett who loved and was loved by his offspring, adored (in mutual affection) by EBB. In turn, EBB acknowledged -as her

---

[227] Anne Thackeray Richie, *Dictionary of National Biography,* pp. 78-82.
[228] Abigail Burnham Bloom, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Anne Thackeray Ritchie', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 19, (1991) 76–83 (p. 76).

early dedications to him within her poetry prove - and appreciated his support and the role he played in her artistic development. Mr. (and Mrs.) Barrett while still alive, supported EBB's poetic career as readers and sponsors, he for instance paying for the private printing of her *Battle of Marathon* (1820). In opposition to what would later happen to the romantic legend of his daughter, Mr. Barrett would remain as villain in the story, a tyrant from whom EBB was liberated.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie's text must have been based upon word of mouth information, previously printed biographical accounts and first hand experience through her own memoirs, along with what she might have known from her father William Makepeace Thackeray, which allowed the entry to become official in spite of certain inaccuracies which shall be discussed later. This short 'official' biographical account comprises facts, mythologies and rumours that had circled around EBB since the 1840s. One of the most interesting features within the text is EBB's death, drawn with Byronic tints, and happening without further explanation: 'It has been said that the news of the death of Cavour, coming when she was very ill, hastened her own'[229] as if the wound to that Patria (Italy) would have sent her to the grave. The transition of EBB into death in such a *spiritual* state of consciousness could only be connected with what EBB's contemporaries described as her 'purity of spirit.'[230] Contemporary nineteenth-century perceptions of EBB often highlight these same traits, as Thomas Trollope, brother of the novelist Anthony Trollope, writes:

---

[229] Anne Thackeray Richie, *Dictionary of National Biography*. p. 82.
[230] Anne Thackeray Richie, *Dictionary of National Biography*. p. 82.

> The immaculate purity of every thought that passed through her pellucid mind, and the indefeasible nobility of her every idea, sentiment, and opinion… I mean the purity of the upper spiritual atmosphere in which she habitually dwelt; the absolute dis-severance of her moral as well as her intellectual nature from all those lower thoughts as well as lower passions which smirch the human soul. In mind and hearth she was White-stainless.[231]

Strangely enough for a woman who had eloped with her husband by personal choice, married for love and true conviction, who would discuss openly in some of her texts sexuality and violence, it was her body which was often nullified by her contemporaries. In this process attention was drawn towards the amorous, social, mystical and political aspects of her poetry, as well as to her social and empathic nature towards the ills of the time.

Margaret Forster points out the lack of a death certificate[232] which constructs EBB's death as an almost spiritual Marian Ascension. It was treated in an almost absurd tone in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*: 'in the summer of 1861 Browning suffered a severe chill and died'.[233] EBB's death, from a mysterious ailment, in which she suffered no pain in RB's arms, has been considered as the ultimate proof of Love between them, and through its narrative EBB's death became a cornerstone in the creation of the legend. The romantic narration - echoing literary deaths such as that of Helen Burns in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and of Catherine Linton in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* – dissociated death from life to sound like fiction. The

---

[231] Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry,* p. 248.

[232] 'The exact cause of EBB's death is not known; there is no extant death certificate or doctor's report. Modern medical opinion holds that, although she may have had a heart attack, it is more likely that the heavy doses of morphine paralysed her breathing (morphine attacks the nerve cells in the brain). It is extremely unlikely that her death was the result of a burst abscess in the lung, as Dr. Wilson diagnosed' (Margaret Foster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 386). It is interesting that Foster adds this opinion in her footnote to the chapter rather than within the corpus of the biography in itself.

[233] Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Barrett-Browning> [accessed 2021-06-16]

closure reads as triumphant, echoing Richard Hengist Horne's text in which the then younger EBB was 'hopeful waiting for the time when this mortal frame "putteth on immortality"'.[234] Elizabeth Lowry[235] suggests that RB murdered EBB and that traces of that murder can be found in his poem 'My Last Duchess' which was, incidentally - and quite conveniently - written in 1849 years before EBB died. Anthony Burgess wrote a short story 'The Devil's Mode'[236] in which one of the characters meets the old Browning, who burdened with guilt confesses the crime. The fictional tint, the elusiveness of the cause of death and RB's morbid fascination with death, as well as the obscurity of his poetry, inflamed readers' and artists' minds to create far-fetched reinterpretations deeply unfair to RB.

RB narrated EBB's last days to his sister Sarianna in full detail:

> I can't even yet say of myself whether I was surprised or not, by this calamity; there is such a balance of reasons for fear, reasons for reassurance as they seemed then that I don't know what I feel nor felt. She had been gravely affected by a series of misfortunes moral and physical, -or united, as they always were [...] she did *nothing* at Rome, took some three or four little drives, never walked two paces out of the room so, could not be in a worse state to meet an illness: yet, on the other hand, her cheerfulness and the quick succeeding of good and quiet looks to the suffering, and the quiet of the last six months, made everyone say "how wonderful she recovers, -she will soon be strong again, another *quiet* summer and *then*." [...] -but Ba said "Oh, the cushion at the back of the chair prevents my suffering." It was her constant way, besides. I came in and we had tea -and then she remarked "I think I have a sore throat." Next day was past just as usual, only she told me she had a cold: at night she coughed much and sate up, restlesstly, a good deal -and next morning took two or three Cooper's pills,[237][...]

---

[234] Richard Henghist Horne, *A New Spirit of the Age*, p. 134.
[235] Elizabeth Lowry, 'Portrait of a Lady', *The Guardian*. 19 July, 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/19/poetry1> [accessed 2017-07-23].
[236] Anthony Burgess, *The Devil's Mode* (New York: Random House Inc, 1989).
[237] The Cooper's Pills referred by RB were allegedly the following: 'medicine without taste or smell. Sir Astley Cooper's pills, antibilious and aperient, are the most unfailing, safe, and generally applicable medicine ever prescribed for removing disorders of the head and stomach, such as giddiness, dimness of sight, headache, nausea, pains in the side, flatulency, habitual costiveness, eruptions of the skin, and the long train of nervous and hypochondriacal affections usually attendant on bad digestion, and generally arising from obstructions of the

toward night she felt so oppressed that she said, "I think you shall go and get me a blister and a little Ipecacuanha wine,[238] to relieve the oppression: I find the medicine has acted inordinately, -she rarely had recourse to it, but had taken this dose before with benefit -this time the effects were beyond her expectation. [...] [Dr.] Wilson prescribed promptly -got two prescriptions made up by two chymists. [...] Wilson examined carefully and reported, with a very serious face, that one lung was condensed (the right) and that he suspected an abscess in it -but he was aware of her long previous experience of the possibility of making shift with damaging lungs, and could not say how it might be- "it would require a long time to get well." I told part of this to Ba who repeatedly answered "It is the old story -they don't know my case- I have been tapped and sounded so, and condemned so, repeatedly: this time it is said the right is the affected lung while the left is free -Dr. Chambers just the contrary. This is only one of my old attacks . I know all about it and shall get better." [...] But Ba never could or would try to take solid nourishment: she had strong brodo (clear soup) but would take nothing else. [...] I observed a tendency to light headedness in all this -as she did- complaining of it to the doctor, and telling me how she had strange thoughts, about the windows which "seemed to be hung in the Hungarian colours"- [...] I sat by her at night- [...] I continued this till half past three in the morning, when the dozing made me very uneasy. She said "You did right not to wait -what a fine steamer- how comfortable! I called Annunziata, bade her get hot water, as the Doctor had done, and sent the porter for himself. I bade her sit up for the water -she did with little help- smiling letting us act and repeating "Well, you do make an exaggerated case of it!" - "My hands too" she said and put them in another basin. I said you know me? "My Robert -my heavens, my beloved -kissing me (but I can't tell you) she said "Our lives are held by God." [...] She put her arms around me "God bless you" repeatedly -kissing me with such vehemence than when I laid her down she continued to kiss the air with her lips, and several times raised her own hands and kissed them; I said "are you comfortable?" "Beautiful." [...] Then she motioned to have her hands *sponged* -some of the jelly annoying her- this was done, and she began to sleep again -the *last*, . . I saw. I felt she must be raised, took her in my arms -I felt the struggle to cough begin, and end unavailingly -no pain, no sigh,- only a quiet *sigh* -her head fell on me. I thought she might have fainted -but presently there was the least knitting of the brows -and A. [Annunziata] cried *"Quest' anima benedetta e passata!"* It was so.

[...]

How she looks now -how perfectly beautiful.[239]

---

biliary secretions or other derangement of the functions of the liver or intestinal canal.' 'Notices To Correspondents', *The British Medical Journal*, 1.541 (1871), p. 520.

[238] Fleeming & Son, chemist; c. 1860-1880, Ipecacuanha Wine Bottle. c 1870's <https://heritage.rcpsg.ac.uk/items/show/784> [accessed 2021-05-06]

[239] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933) pp. 58-63.

RB told his friend William Story after the death of his wife that 'she looked... like a young girl; all her outlines rounded and filled up, all traces of disease effaced, and a smile on her face so living...'[240] echoing the same idea of imperishable beauty expressed to Sarianna. While this idea describes a peaceful and quiet death, the subtext however shows disbelief, broken heartedness, and a denial of death and mourning. Foster goes on to narrate the aftermath of EBB's death and how RB dealt with it: he refused further enquiries into her cause of death. These ideas recur in several letters to different correspondents, and it is repeated over and again that there was no sign of EBB becoming dangerously ill, and that death had not been perceived as a threat, for her illness seemed quite the usual ailment.[241] It is known that RB found it difficult to deal with death, as after his mother's death he sank in sorrow, in spite of his wife's love and support, for 'Elizabeth was urging Robert to visit his father without her, he insistently refused and continued to weep over the letters from Sarianna for weeks [...] He paid less attention to the baby [Pen] than before, though not to the point of neglect'.[242] It must have been almost unbearable for RB in the aftermath of facing death in the face as his wife died *with* him. RB's self-assurance in facing his widowhood might correspond to an attempt to relieve the burden of guilt for his inability to realise that death was imminent, therefore making the mourner cling to the final medical diagnosis by Dr. Wilson.

Whereas to scholars and biographers, the true nature of EBB's illness and cause of death remains a matter of speculation, its elusive nature mystified her husband and

---

[240] Iain Finlayson, *Browning,* p. 488.
[241] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* pp. 396-8.
[242] Iain Finlayson, *Browning*, p. 273.

her Victorian contemporaries, friends, family, medical authorities and biographers as they pursued answers within a medical context still rudimentary in comparison to that of the present. Medical examinations were mostly based upon enquiries on general health, past illnesses and examination of the pulse, general state of the appetite and evacuation.[243] My perspective explores the relationship between EBB's illness and her morphine dependence, and how both not only allowed her to construct her public image, but also shaped her personality and affected her health. The very elusive nature of her illness aided the creation of her public poetic personality as one full of outstanding virtues not only poetical but personal while underlining spiritual integrity. As Linda M. Lewis accurately notes '[Horne's] rather grandiose depiction was apparently influential, augmenting Barrett's fame as idealized woman, combining the fervency of St. Teresa and the long-suffering of a martyr.'[244] Initially shaped by the poet herself and the editor Richard Hengist Horne, and later by RB and posthumously by contemporary reminiscences and biographical sketches, this public personality masked the private EBB, specifically burying her morphine dependence which is more than a mere autobiographical fact, for it stands as a strong influence upon her poetry. Morphine coloured and shaped EBB's style in a unique manner, as I will explore in chapter three: hand in hand with her illness, excused through medical advice, morphine was entwined with EBB through most of her life.

---

[243] A. J. Youngson, *The Scientific Revolution in Victorian Medicine* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979), p. 19.
[244] Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God,* p. 183.

Miss Barrett on the Sofa

By 1843, at the age of thirty-seven, EBB had an established reputation as a poet. In October of the same year, Richard Hengist Horne wrote to her concerning his upcoming *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), for which he suggested both a biographical sketch and a likeness of EBB to be included. As explored in the previous chapter, the likeness was denied. The published text did not satisfy EBB, as she felt that Horne focused on her private life rather than her verse. She wrote to Horne on October 5th, 1843:

> ... I have no biographical sketch; & perhaps if I had...! My dear Mr. Horne, the public do not care for me much as to care at all for my biography. If you say anything of me (and I am not affected enough to pretend to wish you to be absolutely silent if you see any occasion to speak) it must be as a writer & not as the heroine of a biography- [then she writes about her poetry, along with a short factual biography] And then came the failure of my health which never had been strong (at fifteen I nearly died) [...] & then the enforced exile to Torquay,.. With the prophecy in the fear & grief & reluctance of it -a dreadful dream of an exile, which gave me a nightmare to my life for ever, & robbed it of more than I can speak of here -do not speak of that anywhere. Do not speak of that, dear Mr. Horne.[245]

Although she pleaded with Horne not to mention any of these details, he did precisely the opposite:

> Confined entirely to her own apartment, and almost hermetically sealed, in consequence of some extremely delicate state of health, the poetess of whom we write is scarcely seen by any but her own family. But though thus separated from the world –and often, during weeks at a time, in darkness almost as equal to that

[245] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=236123&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

> of night, Miss Barrett has yet found means by extraordinary inherent energies to develop her inward nature; to give vent to the soul in a successful struggle with its destiny while on earth; and to attain and master more knowledge and accomplishments than are usually within the power of those of either sex who possess every adventitious opportunity, as well as health and industry. Six or seven years of this imprisonment she has now endured, not with vain repinings, though deeply conscious of the loss of external nature's beauty; but with resignation, with patience, with cheerfulness, and generous sympathies towards the world without; -with indefatigable "work" by thought, by book, by the pen, and with devout faith, and adoration, and a high and hopeful waiting for the time when this mortal frame "putteth on immortality".[246]

EBB was reasonably upset with Horne:

> You are guilty of certain exaggerations, however, in speaking of me, -against which I shall oppose my D [sic] as you allow me. For instance, I have not been "shut up in one room for six or seven years" -four or five would be nearer; & then, except on one occasion, I have not been for "several weeks together in the dark", during the course of them. And then, there is not a single "elegant Latin verse" in my hand'.[247]

The biographical sketch for *A New Spirit of the Age* was crucial for EBB's career and while she refused to be seen as some kind of (romantic) heroine, she provided a first-hand glimpse into her private life. If, however, EBB had truly wanted the facts to remain secret or as mere rumours, she would never have disclosed them to the editor. What perhaps therefore seemed to bother her, as evidenced in the letter to the editor, was the hyperbolic treatment, the dishonesty, as with the reference to 'latin verse' which she had never produced. EBB writes about her failing health, and grief, as well as bereavement, yet her tone is not victimising. However, Horne's style set the atmospheric tone of the doomed poet who awaits death. Aware of the tone as a

---

[246] Richard Henghist Horne, *A New Spirit of the Age*, p. 134.
[247] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1562 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1768/?rsId=236124&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23].

suitable hook for readers, the editor thereby diverted attention from Miss Barrett's poetry to Miss Barrett the person.

In her reply to Horne, EBB simply mentions 'failing health'. Gossip had stated that she had fallen off a horse, a fact dismissed by Forster who writes:

> But at thirteen, Elizabeth *decided* she had "natural ill health" and when her spring illness of 1821 was followed by measles, she suddenly became obsessed with her health. (There is no mention of any fall from a horse at this point or being kicked by one or of straining to saddle or mount a horse –all cited at one time or another as the reason for her onset invalidism).[248]

Dr. Cocker, consulted during EBB's illness (and quoted later by almost all biographers), provides details about the lack of evidence of a spinal injury:

> Opium at one time relieved the spasms but it has ceased to have that effect –I examined the side, and spinal column as accurately as I could –In the side I should have remarked that she feels the sensation of its being swollen, which by no means appears to be the fact. […] I could make, nor could I detect any thing obviously wrong about the spine […] –I am greatly assisted in this subject, by having witnessed some years since in a young lady, a strikingly similar, though much more aggravated case, which terminated in length in decided affection of the spine –from which she has recovered and is the mother of three children- […] I should recommend, generally, the treating Miss Barrett's case as for diseased spine, upon the plan recommended by Baynton –giving only such medicine as might assist the operation of nature or as its exigencies would require […] –At the same time that I confess, the positive proofs are wanting to the existence of diseased spine, I must say that this is the best inference I could draw of Miss Barrett's from the opportunity I had of enquiring into its nature and of witnessing her sufferings.[249]

In prescribing opium Dr. Cocker makes reference to a similar case which in spite of its initial severity was eventually cured. Another later case, examined by E. C. Skye,

---

[248] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* p. 22.
[249] Robert Browning, *Letters Of The Brownings To George Barrett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), p. 344-6.

published in 1867, 'The Mimicry of Hysteria'[250] presents a young woman with back pain, who, after exhausting revisions, is diagnosed with a spinal disease, treated in the accustomed way: 'The result of your opinions is two or more years confinement to her couch, coupled with the usual concomitants of a restricted diet, alternative and other depletive medicines, leeches, blisters, and issues'.[251] In this case the young woman's illness is never clear and her symptoms are considered to be produced by hysteria. A similar case, presented by Philip Burrowes in 1856[252] details the case of a young woman whose cluster of symptoms could not be explained physiologically and were therefore attributed to hysteria: 'Hysteria so closely simulating heart disease is uncommon, but simple hysterical palpitation is what is met with in every-day practice.'[253] While for most authorities, hysteria originated through some disorder of the womb, others attributed it also to the state of the nervous system, as John Conolly argued about the pathology of hysteria originated from a 'debilitating nervous system': 'thus susceptible by original constitution, or thus enfeebled, feels impressions more keenly, and responds to them more forcibly than is seen in firmer organizations.'[254] For some authorities in England hysteria did not merely originate in some disorder of the womb, but was the source of dozens of other conditions: indigestion, coughing fits, or any sort of unexplained irregularity in the heart action which could not be medically explained, even through minute observation: 'the practitioner's chief

---

[250] Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, editors, *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 193-5.
[251] Jenny Bourne Taylor, and Sally Shuttleworth, editors, *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts,* p. 194.
[252] 'On a case of hysteria, simulating heart disease', *The Lancet*, 68.1723, (Sept. 1856) pp. 273–74.
[253] 'On a case of hysteria, simulating heart disease', p. 274.
[254] 'On a case of Hysteria, simulating heart disease', p. 274.

assistance in the diagnosis of such cases must arise from his observation of the transient and occasional character of the symptoms, and from his knowledge of the patient's constitution.'[255] Under this criteria, almost any malady which could not be fully explained or understood, would be attributed to hysteria. Much of what is described under the entry 'hysterical respiration' and heart irregularities would be explained in our present day as panic and anxiety attacks. In EBB's case, hysteria was never considered a source of illness and only during her stay at Gloucester Spa it was insisted that she should neither read nor write poetry. Perhaps EBB escaped from being diagnosed with hysteria because in spite of her 'nervous system' which was considered frail and shattered, her response to opium was quick, leading to the possible outcome that her nerves were 'under control'. In addition, her lung condition was not considered to be connected with her nerves and medical authorities found that 'her uterine system was not materially affected.'[256] Benjamin Brodie (1783-1862), a renowned authority, attending doctor to Queen Victoria and President of the Royal Society and member of the Royal College of Surgeons writes: 'I do not hesitate to declare that, among the higher classes of society, at least four-fifths of the female patients who are commonly supposed to labour under diseases of the joints, labour under hysteria and nothing else'.[257] The semi-invalidism provided by illness in these cases was equated with wealth and luxury. Barbara Dennis agrees on this point while addressing EBB's first episode of illness:

---

[255] *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine : Comprising Treatises on the Nature and Treatment of Diseases, Materia Medica and Therapeutics, Medical Jurisprudence* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, and Baldwin and Craddock), p. 559.
[256] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 24.
[257] Benjamin, C. Brodie, *Lectures Illustrative of Certain Local Nervous Affections* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1837), p. 37.

> It certainly marked the beginning of Elizabeth Barrett's lifelong concern with her health. It also gave her an excellent, if rarely acknowledged, justification for her reluctance to take part in the obligations of Victorian women of the upper middle classes[258]: she appears to have no household responsibilities, even after her mother's death, other than to teach the little boys Latin. […] Most of the regular social obligations, of visiting and entertaining, which she hated, were delegated to the willing Henrietta.[259]

This first illness has been quoted by medical authorities who have written about EBB, with several hypothetical diagnoses having been made. J. G. Weir, for instance, claims that the symptoms are compatible with poliomyelitis,[260] but nevertheless that suggestion must be discarded due to the sequels produced by that illness which were not present in EBB. Another physician, J. N. Milnes, writing for the same journal, dismisses Weir's diagnosis, claiming that the problem was encephalomyelitis,[261] which while being plausible, is too adventurous due to survival rates at the time, and to subsequent impairments which included memory problems, speech and cognitive sequels (affecting the use of language) and seizures. Fatigue stands as a symptomatic sequel for both infections, and it stands out as one of EBB's chronic ailments, yet its origin was obscure for the doctors.

By the time of this first mysterious illness, in 1821, EBB was fifteen years old, having enjoyed a healthy and active childhood in opposition to Arabel who had been a weak child (and grew up to be a healthy adult). Nevertheless, a fact in EBB's upbringing could have affected her emotional development as an adolescent. Unlike

---

[258] EBB was the eldest of all the Barrett children, therefore, as the eldest daughter, her role as head of the household would have been expected, along and after her mother.
[259] Barbara Dennis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years*, p. 40.
[260] Weir, J. G. Weir, 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6675 (1989), 749-749 (p. 749).
[261] J. N. Milnes, 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning'. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6680, (1989) 1102-1102 (p. 1102).

many a nineteenth-century set of parents, the Barretts had no fixed ideas about the intelligence of girls being inferior to that of boys and Elizabeth shared Edward, 'Bro''s Greek tutor, and they learned together. EBB's parents were aware of her abilities and intelligence which were encouraged but, nevertheless, upon reaching adolescence there was a major change in circumstances. EBB had to remain at home, while Bro was sent to school; her chance to pursue education beyond private tutoring along with her brother was entirely out of the question. Dr. Peter Dally notes that EBB's strong-willed childhood nature gave way in her adolescence to extreme mood swings[262] between an inability to express grief and bursting into tears. It was at this stage, and after her first illness that she was prescribed opium, very likely as Foster[263] and Hayter[264] have suggested, in the form of laudanum. Dally makes an interesting speculation about EBB's personality that shows deep understanding of the emotional turmoil that the young poet went through after realizing that she would not be able to pursue her studies in school: 'She was angry with them both [of her parents]. She was developing from a child to a woman, but she abhorred the idea of learning to become one, of preparing herself for marriage and domesticity. All she wanted was to continue to absorb literature and the classics, and to compose poetry'.[265] Dally continues analysing the adolescent EBB:

> She could not be at ease with men or women of her same age; she had no common interest with them, and their conversation for the most part bored her. Except in literary topics, or in later years, spiritualism and politics, it was never

---

[262] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 25.
[263] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 24.
[264] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 61.
[265] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 24

> easy to talk to Elizabeth. She had what amounted to a social phobia. […] The fear of making a fool of herself was always a hindrance in ordinary social life, a drawback she never overcame.[266]

The EBB described here is an adolescent who does not fit with the age group of her peers; raised among books and poetry, her whole interests belonged to that world. She was uninterested in domestic matters and, as Dennis points out, from the time of her first illness, and after delegating the role to Henrietta, there was no need, nor obligation for EBB to pursue domestic affairs. Illness therefore made her free to read and write. EBB simply was uninterested in society as it took much of her time away from literary pursuits, and with the passing of time it became shameful to her to be seen as ill and to arouse feelings of pity. This trait of personality would stay with EBB for years, as can be read in her diary as a young woman: 'Tuesday, October 11th [1831]:

> My love of solitude is growing with my growth. I am inclined to shun the acquaintance of those whom I do not like & love; on account of the ennui & the acquaintance of those whom I might like & love, -on account of the pain! – Oh the pain attendant on liking & loving, may seem a little cloud, - but it blows from us the light of the sun!!-''.[267]

Before the selling of Hope End in 1832, that is, before Mr. Barrett's financial crisis, marriage might have been contemplated for the Barrett children. Otherwise, why would EBB be constantly concerned with marriage? In her early diary on Thursday, 1st September, 1831, an entry unfolds the horror of dreams of being married and the anxiety of it: 'I dreamt last night that I was married, just married; & in an agony to procure a dissolution of the engagement. Scarcely ever considered my single

---

[266] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 31.
[267] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 196.

state with more satisfaction that then I awoke! –I never will marry: but if I ever were to do such a foolish thing, I hope I may not feel as I did last night!'[268] If anxiety was present, it meant that even when she was considered a semi-invalid, marriage was on the horizon, hand in hand with her recovery. The dread of marriage was therefore not due to a dread of men or of romantic love, but to a dread of the loss of freedom implied through marriage. For a family life would demand setting poetry aside for a long period or perhaps forever.[269] The mysterious illness of 1821 EBB presented came right after Bro was sent to school. EBB, Arabel and Henrietta all contracted measles, yet EBB had a series of further lingering symptoms of the mysterious ailment previously noted, detailed in the following letter from Dr. Cocker to Dr. Nuttal:

> It began with pain in the head, which continued at interludes for several weeks, the pain then attacked various parts of the body, for a considerable period, and for the last month it has permanently seated itself on the right side, that is about the centre of the angle formed by the greatest projection of the ribs, the umbilicous, and the anterior superior spinous process of the oschium. The pain commences here, is carried to the correspondent region on the back, up the side to the point of the right shoulder, and down the arm. The suffering is agony, and the paroxysm continues from a quarter of an hour to an hour or upwards, accompanied by convulsive twitches of the muscles, in which the diaphragm is particularly concerned. The attack seems gradually to approach to its acme, and then suddenly ceases. During the process the mind is for the most part conscious

---

[268] Elizabeth Barrett Browning ,*The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 157.

[269] Mexican poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) one of the greatest literary figures in Mexican literature, often acknowledged as the 'Tenth Muse' and 'Mexico's Phoenix' went through the same dilemma during her early years, avoiding marriage by joining a religious order: 'And so I entered the religious order, knowing that life there entailed certain conditions (I refer to superficial and not fundamental, regards) most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, I deemed convent life as the least unsuitable and the most honourable I could elect if I were to ensure my salvation. Working against that end, first (as finally, the most important) was the matter of all aspects of my nature that nourished my pride, such as wishing to be alone, and wishing to have no obligations, occupations that would inhibit the freedom of my studies, nor the sounds of a community that would intrude upon the peaceful silence of my books.' Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, 'Response to the most Illustrious Poetess Sor Filotea de la Cruz*', Selected Works* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.), p. 17.

> of surrounding objects, but towards its close, there is generally some, and occasionally, very considerable confusion produced by it.[270]

Dally interprets Dr. Cocker's account as a description of a panic attack.[271] Dally's hypothesis fits several points in the criteria for a panic attack, supported through Dr. Cocker's account: palpitations, pounding heart, accelerated heart rate, trembling or shaking, chest or pain discomfort, nausea or abdominal distress, feeling dizzy, unsteady or light headed or faint, chills or heat sensations, de-realization (feelings of unreality) or depersonalisation (being detached from one self).'[272] Furthermore, Dally's diagnosis fits, if the inner emotional turmoil of EBB is considered: as the eldest daughter, EBB might have been expected to enter society earlier than her sisters. But in 1821 and through the rest of her adolescence, EBB was facing the horrors of impending womanhood: going into society, attending futile balls and tea parties, preparing for being a woman and a mother, and simply forgetting that there would ever be a chance for her to receive further education. In this context, Dally's claim for EBB's attacks being emotional rather than physical seems plausible. EBB was able to take the opportunity which life presented to her. By embracing the role of a semi-invalid, solitude, endless hours of reading and writing, would be allowed to her without the stigma of spinsterhood, placing her into an accepted position which was totally supported and accepted by her wealthy family. From EBB as a troubled teenager who might have suffered from anxiety attacks, Dally creates the diagnosis of

---

[270] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Unpublished Correspondence,* p. 11.
[271] For a full list of panic attack symptoms see appendix A.
[272] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM-5) Fifth Edition* (Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), p. 214.

an anorexic[273] young woman, who also suffered from agoraphobia and social phobia.[274] However, agoraphobia must be dismissed, since if that had been the case, EBB would never have ventured to flee to another country with Robert Browning.

The sudden death of EBB's mother, Mary Graham Clarke, in 1828, shook the Barrett's household, affecting the young poet deeply. EBB was plunged into grief, yet was, unlike the rest of her family, unable to weep. The Greek scholar Hugh Stuart Boyd proved a crucial support to EBB during this crisis and she naturally clung to him. Depression took hold of her, affecting her appetite and she lost weight dramatically. Her whole beliefs were put into question and EBB became fatalist:

> She would not be caught off her guard again; from now on she was vigilant, forever weighing happiness against its built-in cost. In addition, it became an absolute rule of hers always to imagine that the worst would happen in any case there was uncertainty. […] Believing that round every corner lurked some tragedy, she refused increasingly to risk going round any corners at all.[275]

EBB's inclination to solitude increased during this period and developed into a dread of making new acquaintances. While this seclusion was advantageous for her development as a poet, it had the reverse impact upon her social skills, in spite of her prolific letter writing. As EBB had no intention of making or need for further acquaintances, or for getting to meet those she only met through letters, her emotions effectively remained those of a teenager up to her late thirties. Although she later exaggerated certain accounts to Browning, having had a lonesome childhood without

---

[273] Dally explores anorexia as a form of control, the anorectic young woman 'is all-powerful. She controls her world by the play of her appetite; to eat is a gesture of love, to abstain is a sign of anger and displeasure, (Dally *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 27-8).

274 It is likely that EBB suffered of a social anxiety disorder (social phobia) with a differential diagnosis of selective mutism: 'Individuals with select mutism may fail to speak to speak of fear of negative evaluation, but they do not fear negative evaluation in social situations where no speaking is required (e.g., non-verbal play).' (American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, p. 207)

[275] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 51.

outings for example, her observations about the impact of her own seclusion upon her poetry are significant: she labelled herself as a 'blind poet' who had 'lived only inwardly; or with *sorrow*, for a strong emotion.'[276] EBB underlined the fact that she had less 'life experience' than Browning, or than many people of her generation: sorrow, seclusion, brooding on the past, and a non-existent future, created a shell that protected her from the world.

> I have only lived inwardly; or with sorrow for a strong emotion. Before this seclusion of my illness, I was secluded still—& there are few of the youngest women in the world who have not seen more, heard more, known more, of society, than I, who am scarcely to be called young now. I grew up in the country .. had no social opportunities, .. had my heart in books & poetry, .. & my experience, in reveries. […] What is to live? Not to eat & drink & breathe, -but to feel life in you down all the fibres of being, passionately and joyfully.[277]

EBB suffered a second episode of severe illness during the winter of 1837-1838 which can be traced through her letters. During this period, she was staying in Torquay -for medical reasons- from where she wrote frequently to Bro, her favourite brother to whom she was very close, and whose opinions on poetic themes were always of the highest importance to her. He seems also to have been the only one of her brothers at that stage to have scolded her about her health, and apparently he might have insisted upon her eating better and not malingering. In was in this period, that EBB wrote the poem 'Verses to my brother',[278] and she included it in her 1833

---

[276] Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett,* p. 43.
[277] Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett,* p. 42-46.
[278] See appendix B.

appendix to the first version of *Prometheus Bound* (1833).[279] The short poem opens with an epigraph from John Milton's 'Lycidas': 'For we were nursed upon the same hill' and explores autobiographical facts such as sharing childhood as playmates and companions in study, before developing into a separated youth in solitude. The final stanza acts like a premonition in its longing, clinging to memories, and refusal of oblivion. The poet praises the addressee mostly as a critic, confirming their literary bond.

As commentators have discussed, Bro was one of the most important people in EBB's life and during her period of recovery in Torquay, 1838-1841, she pleaded with him to stay with her for longer. The main reason for her pleading was that she feared her father would send Bro to Jamaica indefinitely, and she feared the perils of the voyage and the long separation. To her relief, Bro subsequently stayed in Torquay but Fate had other plans, when he went sailing one day with two friends and they were all drowned. This was the second blow of death to strike EBB with without warning and without a chance of saying farewell and her mourning for favourite brother is perhaps one of the most interesting episodes in life. She was plunged into grief, and hoped for death.[280] Being separated from the rest of her family enhanced her feeling of doom and along with silence, she maintained mourning dress for about five years: 'velvet in the winter, silk in the summer. It made her look, she was well aware, like a ghost. Her hair, still glossy and comfortingly thick, hung around her

[279] Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Prometheus Bound, Tr. from Æschylus and Miscellaneous Poems* (London: A. J. Valpy, M.A. 1833).
[280] Dally, Peter. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 74.

face'.[281] In spite of convention stating the length for mourning a brother or sister being six months,[282] EBB mourned Bro in the most formal and regal fashion and it seems no one in her family found her mourning excessive. Perhaps EBB never overcame Bro's death which became a taboo subject for she appears to have felt responsible for his death. In 'Verses to my brother' the unconditional love EBB felt for Bro is depicted, mixed with admiration and respect for his intellectual attributes. The poem closes 'And, in the silence of my evening prayer,/ Thou shalt not be forgot –thy dear name shall be there!' and with these lines the following questions arise: was mourning a way of having him present and keeping his 'dear name' alive? Was it a perpetuation of memory through grief, through everlasting recognition through absence? EBB was devastated by the unfairness of the death of a young man with health, with - perhaps - a promising future, cut off from life in an unpredictable sailing accident, contrasted with her own position as an ailing poet on the edge of death.

EBB clung strongly to her father after Bro's death. The preface to *Poems*[283] (1844) evidences the weight EBB's father had, intellectually and emotionally in her life and work. For a poet who wished to remain obscure as a person, there was no hesitation in showing her emotions for her father to her audience:

> Somewhat more fainthearted than I used to be, it is my fancy thus to seem to return to a visible personal dependence on you, as if indeed I were a child again; to conjure your beloved image between myself and the public, so as to be

[281] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 151.
[282] Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress (Routledge Revivals): A Costume and Social History* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 303.
[283] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems,* (London: Edward Moxon, 1844).

> sure of one smile, -and to satisfy my heart while I sanctify my ambition, by associating with the great pursuit of my life its tenderest and holiest affection.[284]

The EBB writing this preface is thirty-eight years old, yet she acknowledges a wish for dependence upon her father as a helpless child. Faint-heartedness affects her life: and it appears that grief and illness have softened her heart to the point of her becoming a mere infant. EBB places her father's authority as a shield against criticism, and his opinion is the most important of all. By regarding her affection for him as the 'tenderest and holiest'[285] she again places her heart as that of both a child and a devoted Christian who loves her father. Furthermore, in adopting this position, EBB also effaces her womanhood, disengaging herself from her adult female body and stressing her spirituality, based on that state of purity, innocence and bliss implied by childhood. EBB trusted her father entirely on matters of literature, as she did some of her male correspondents, such as in her exchanges upon Greek poetry with Boyd, or her literary project along with Horne which never came to fruition[286]: 'he asked me to write a drama with him on the Greek model, —that is, for me to write the choruses, & for him to do the dialogue. [...] He cut the plan up into scenes. [...] Nothing more was done. It all lies in one sheet—& I have offered to give up my copyright of idea in it—if he likes to use it alone—or I shd not object to work it out alone on my own side'.[287] Was it due to her illness that she felt safe to develop such acquaintances with men? Did she believe that by placing herself as an invalid, she would stop any sort of

---

[284] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems,* (London: Routledge, 1887), p. vi.
[285] Elizabeth Barrett Browning *Poems* (London: Routledge, 1887), p. vi.
[286] The subject was 'Psyche Apocalypté' and during the Spring and Summer of 1841, EBB was keenly interested in it. It was never completed.
[287] *The Brownings' Correspondence* 1(2021) letter 1907 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2147/?rsId=236156&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

romantic advance, if existent, from any of them? As explained in chapter one, Benjamin Robert Haydon had become too familiar and later on, in 1839 Dr. Barry, one of the doctors who treated her at Torquay, was sincerely affectionate to her, to the point of visiting her in the middle of a rainstorm due to illness after she insisted upon needing him rather than the available substitute doctor. In this case, Barry, already in poor health, damaged his health further by visiting EBB and died in October 1839 after a short illness, for which EBB subsequently blamed herself. As Dally writes:

> It was worthy a scene of her French novels. Gratified, Dr. Barry rose from his sick-bed too soon and, despite the rainstorm, immediately called on his patient –with fatal consequences. 'The physician was taken and the patient left –and left …. Deeply affected and shaken.' Elizabeth relapsed […] She held herself responsible for de Barry's death. Had it not been for her, he would have stayed in bed and lived. 'I am useless, helpless person,' she told Miss Mitford.[288]

Dally places EBB almost as a *femme fatale* who, for her reading of French novels would have had certain knowledge of amorous passions and flirting which she emulated. Forster regards EBB as slightly vain and aware of her beauty and charms and constructing her image to enhance her good points and to try to conceal her flaws: 'She liked her own hair, thick and dark, and her eyes, large and brown. But she did not like being quite small and thin and she detested her high, squeaky voice'.[289]

The first period of illness in 1821 was a turning point in EBB's life. As explained by Dennis, it was the start of EBB's 'lifelong concern'[290] with health and that this proved an excellent justification for EBB to avoid her expected household duties.

---

[288] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait*, p. 70.
[289] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 61.
[290] Barbara Dennis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years,* p. 40

Foster adds that EBB *decided* that she had ill health.[291] While both justification and decision imply a deliberate and perhaps elaborate choice, the possibility of a Romantic trait within this choice, embedded in the adolescent EBB arises as well. While EBB was not diagnosed with consumption, many of her symptoms were similar and as Susan Sontag explores, the metaphorical weight of consumption was already part of the cultural and artistic sphere of the time: 'consumption was understood as a manner of appearing'.[292] With a natural artistic vein, so influenced by Lord Byron and the Romantics, EBB would feel inclined towards certain fashions, as adolescents do, while constructing her personality. While Forster suggests that EBB developed an hypochondriac trait during her teens[293], I explore this claim through the possibility that a Romantic understanding of her illness led EBB to explore the creative opportunities that position opened, and once clear of a positive outcome, constructed her career and her image as a poet. At the same time, the excellent justification, as worded by Dennis, excluded EBB from being in charge of any household duties and from complying with certain social rules. Praised and applauded when the audience first read about it, EBB's illness provided the extra glamour the poet needed, while within her household it provided her with a perfect shell against social expectations which, if obliged to fulfil, would hamper her creative flow.

---

[291] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 22.
[292] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), p. 29.
[293] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 22

An Elusive Malady

One of EBB's final remarks already cited concerning her health after decades of an unclear respiratory ailment was: 'It is the old story –they don't know my case –I have been tapped and sounded so, and condemned so, repeatedly; this time it is said the right is the affected lung while the left is free –Dr. Chambers said just the contrary'.[294] Up to the latest biography of EBB by Fiona Sampson, there have continued to emerge several hypotheses on EBB's illness, but none have been definite or conclusive. The difficulty of hypothetical diagnosis persists due to the puzzling nature of EBB's illness which presented a real challenge for Victorian medical authorities who lacked diagnostic technologies from our present day. Dr. Chambers had access to the latest instruments, such as the stethoscope in a very early version which by the mid-nineteenth century was monaural. Since x-rays, blood tests and antibiotics were not yet developed, detailed research and diagnosis of pulmonary diseases was impossible. Tuberculosis, for example, was not acknowledged as a bacterial infection until as late as 1882.[295]

During her period of severe illness between 1837-38, EBB 'broke a blood-vessel upon the lungs which did not heal. If there had been consumption in the family that disease would have intervened'.[296] EBB herself also refers to this incident and quotes Dr. Chambers: 'there is not at present any ulceration of the lungs –only a too great

[294] Dorothy Hewlett, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning.* Cassell, 1953. p. 338.
[295] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), p. 12.
[296] Mary Russell Mitford, *Recollections of a Literary Life,* p. 170

fullness of the blood vessels upon them'.[297] It appeared that the left lung had haemorrhaged in the previous winter (1837-8), but that Dr. Chambers thought it capable of 'recovering itself altogether.'[298] A fact from this episode remained a constant throughout EBB's life: the problem was settled in one lung. However, Dr. Young suggests that 'the ruptured vessel was very likely not in the lungs but in the nose, or probably in the throat or the mouth.'[299] Mary Russell Mitford wrote: 'If there had been consumption in the family that disease would have intervened. There were no seeds of the fatal English malady in her constitution, and she escaped.'[300] Mitford's opinion is crucial for consumption as TB was then known. It was acknowledged as contagious, and although the ways in which the disease spread were not clearly understood, Dr. Chambers (or later Dr. Barry or Dr. Wilson) would have recognised its characteristics and diagnosed it accurately: 'There is no doubt at all that Dr. Chambers, if he used the stethoscope, would have known. But he pronounced his patient's lungs as "affected", not tubercular, and "affected" could mean a much less serious disease'.[301] Dorothy Hewlett quotes a letter from EBB, written later in her life, in 1850, to her friend, Fanny Douglas which is important in this context:

> The stethoscope is not an infallible searcher –that I have 'heard sain' by several medical men who trusted much to it: and I know in my own case beside several others, that differences of opinion have been elicited from the very same instrument. Congestion & tuberculation will equally produce unsatisfactory responses to an ear resting on the stethoscope -& congestion is the much less

[297] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 660 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/762/?rsId=236157&returnPage=1> [2017-03-23]
[298] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 660 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/762/?rsId=236157&returnPage=1> [2017-03-23]
[299] D. A. B. Young,'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6671 (1989) 439-443, p. 422.
[300] Mary Russell Mitford. *Recollections of a Literary Life*, p. 170
[301] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 91.

> serious evil. In my own case, 'extensive tubercular' was declared by one physician while by two or three others the existence of anything beside congestion has been steadfastly denied, positively denied -& circumstances at present seem to confirm the softer judgement.[302]

EBB thereby acknowledges the stethoscope as not infallible for establishing a proper diagnosis, in spite of all the years of following her case. Moreover, a certainty emerges: whatever EBB's illness was, it was never acknowledged as fatal. The only tangible fact to emerge from contemporary nineteenth-century assessments is that her ailment was chronic, which could suggest Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)[303] that groups together certain chronic conditions, the most common being emphysema and bronchitis. The highest risk for developing COPD is smoking, followed by a prolonged exposure to certain substances within dust and chemicals. Exposure is acknowledged as having higher risk if produced by environmental factors such air pollution, or if there is prolonged occurrence in work places. Though a genetic factor is possible, when that appears the disease can be traced in a relative. EBB and her family settled in London in 1833, which was heavily polluted, yet her exposure to air pollution at that time would have been indirect due to her secluded condition. She was a non-smoker and if she had suffered from any of the diseases considered under COPD, her condition would have deteriorated, rather than following a pattern of ups and downs along with dormant periods.

Barbara Dennis writes that EBB's subsequent 'period of ill-health' that took place 'in her early thirties, was quite different from her earlier illness', and claims:

---

[302] Dorothy Hewlett, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 78.
[303] Natalie Terzikhan et al. 'Prevalence and Incidence of COPD in Smokers and Non-Smokers: The Rotterdam Study', *European Journal of Epidemiology*, 31.8 (2016) 785–92.

> It looks as though it was a form of tuberculosis, and has been diagnosed as the beginning of the disease which finally killed her. It was a chronic lung affliction which appeared in an acute form at this period of her life, was dormant for one reason or another for twenty years, and then flared her fatally when she was fifty-three. […] A medical opinion of today which I have taken is that her second illness (1843) was either bronchiectasis following an unresolved pneumonia or tuberculous ulceration of the lungs, and that either condition being toxic, could have produced the paroxysmal tachycardia and actual heart disease.[304]

Dennis acknowledges EBB's illness as chronic. Yet her suggestion of heart disease, also suggested by Hayter as the cause of death,[305] does not match any contemporary diagnosis and it is based upon the existing diagnosis of tachycardia, which, as Dally suggests, could have been during EBB's early years the result of anxiety, and therefore regulated by digitalis and laudanum. A heart condition also seems unlikely, for later in life EBB suffered four miscarriages, one of them severe, and delivered a child at a late age. Ulceration of the lungs occurs mostly due to exposure to coal dust, and in EBB's case exposure to an open fire would not have been enough to cause such damage. During the Victorian period this disease was common to workers in coal mines (and chimney sweepers) who were subjected to prolonged and high exposure. While lung cancer, abscess and pneumonia also produce ulceration, they too would have produced a rapid decline in EBB's health. Dennis underlines the fact that the disease remained 'dormant'[306], which discards COPD, for its progressive nature, whose attacks become increasingly acute until a series of complications make it impossible for the sufferer to survive. Dennis's suggestion of Bronchiectasis: 'a progressive disease characterized by a permanent dilatation of bronchi, retention of

[304] Barbara Dennis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years*, pp. 43, 49.
[305] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 59.
[306] Barbara Dennis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years,* p. 43.

mucus and ciliary clearance impairment',[307] and often associated with asthma and COPD again appears unlikely for EBB's ailment remained dormant for years. Bronchiectasis has clear signs: recurrent localized medium or coarse crepitations, fibrosis, sinusitis ans recurrent infections often triggered by pneumonia. In advances cases, clubbing of fingers develops.[308] The crepitations, most likely, would have been noticed by Dr. Chambers or any other of EBB's attending doctors. EBB gives the following details in July 1846: 'the wind always gives me a sort of strangling sensation, which is the effect, I suppose, of having weak lungs'[309] and referred to her haemorrhagic episode in 26th May, 1841 to her brother George: 'this last haemorrhage which was very bad for some days, proves the weak state of the pulmonary vessels'.[310] The haemorrhagic episode suffered by EBB, which did not recur later in her life, though lasting for days, occurred gradually and was not life threatening: 'Haemoptysis: blood-streaking of the sputum is quite common in classic Bronchiectasis, but every now and then haemoptysis is the only clinical manifestation of the condition'[311] and these haemorrhagic episodes can often require an emergency treatment. In the latest biography of EBB, Sampson suggests asthma[312] as a possible diagnosis. However, if that had been the case, the doctors attending the poet would have diagnosed it, as in EBB's correspondence there is evidence of relatives (Mr.

---

[307] Guillermo Suarez-Cuartin, et al. 'Diagnostic Challenges of Bronchiectasis', *Respiratory Medicine*, 116 (2016) 70-77 (p. 71).
[308] John Crofton, 'Respiratory Tract Disease: Diagnosis And Treatment Of Bronchiectasis: I. Diagnosis', *MBJ,* 1.5489, (Mar. 19, 1966), pp. 721-723.
[309] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2494 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2742/?rsId=236158&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[310] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 815 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/925/?rsId=236164> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[311] John Crofton 'Respiratory Tract Disease: Diagnosis And Treatment Of Bronchiectasis: I. Diagnosis', *British Medical Journal BMJ,* 1.5489 (1966), pp. 721–23.
[312] Fiona Sampson, *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 100.

Barrett and EBB's grandmother), and friends, among them Kenyon,[313] suffering from asthma.

A significant determining sign of many of the chronic and/or progressive pulmonary diseases, including lung cancer, is the clubbing of the fingers which present in almost all cases and also develops gradually. The clubbing of the fingers presents as 'a widening of the terminal phalanges and curvature of the nails both in the transverse and longitudinal directions'[314] producing a gradual deformation in the shape of the fingertips. EBB was deeply aware of the signs and symptoms of her illness which can be found in detail throughout her letters. Had her fingers developed clubbing, EBB would have noticed it, and in her vanity, she would have tried to conceal the fact, just as she concealed her squeaky voice by lowering it almost to a whisper. The clubbed form, a sign which would evidence almost any progressive pulmonary disease, was absent in EBB's fingers. I argue that this absence is proved factually by the cast by Harriet Hosmer in which EBB's hand is held in that of her husband Robert Browning.

---

[313] EBB wrote to Arabel in May 1856: 'I have been very uneasy lately through hearing of Mr Kenyon's illness—you have heard probably. He returned to London & has been very ill since, with spasmodic asthma .. [sic]', *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3776 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4122/?rsId=236165&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[314] M. G. Jacoby,'Finger Clubbing', *The British Medical Journal*, 2.6099 (1977) 1417-1417 (p. 1417).

Fig 2. 1
Harriet Hosmer, *Conjoined Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* 1853, bronze, from a plaster cast
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

The bronze cast, made from the original plaster one, presents EBB's hand at the age of forty-eight. This cast of the poets' hands is the only joint portrait of the couple, which accentuates their poetic partnership: isolated and severed from the rest of their bodies, the Brownings' hands function as separated entities. Marcia Pointon notes that part of the ambiguity of this cast resides in the fact that it is able to communicate different messages, depending on the angle by which the cast is handled.[315] Although they were married, the Brownings' hands appear without rings. This fact enriches the multiple readings the cast can produce. Presented in the 'right position' (fig. 2. 1), the cast presents RB's hand supporting that of EBB in his in a generally open position.

[315] Marcia Pointon 'Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artifacts at the Edge', *The Art Bulletin*, 96. 2 (2014) 170–95, (p. 188).

Whereas, if the cast is seen from a 'reversed' perspective, it shows 'Elizabeth's hand is simply lying, one might say forlornly, and even her husband's fingers, gently curled to enclose his wife's, are exerting no pressure'.[316] Both perspectives are interesting, for while in the first and 'right' one, EBB's hand stands rather free and becomes the central part within the visual aspect of the cast, in the reversed position it stands overshadowed and passive. Pointon also stresses the fact that EBB's hands played a major role in the poet's communication and engagement with the world, as a source of poetical and personal expression.[317] The highlighting of EBB's hands by Pointon suggests that they were a fundamental part of EBB's own personal expression, therefore related as well to her health. Had EBB suffered any of the chronic pulmonary conditions that have been suggested, her fingers would have very likely shown severe clubbing by this date, yet clubbing was absent as Hosmer's cast evidences. Is it possible then, that EBB suffered from a disease - chronic yet not necessarily life threatening, with a non-progressive nature - that was not acknowledged by medical science at the time? During the time EBB lived in London, the pollution levels were at their highest, but she did improve within that setting as her remark to Miss Mitford in July 1845 shows: 'Indeed I am prospering this summer—having no books to write as last year—& the temperature being so mild & moderate. People cry out, to see me growing back again into myself, & able to walk & sit in a chair, & various other difficult works of a like order'.[318] She was never

[316] Marcia Pointon, 'Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artifacts at the Edge', p. 188.
[317] Marcia Pointon, 'Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artifacts at the Edge', p. 190.
[318] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1980 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2226/?rsId=236166&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

completely cured, however, and it was in Italy, where less polluted air and warm weather would have proven beneficial, that she died in the summer of 1861.

As I have discussed, EBB's wealthy position allowed her to consult renowned medical authorities of the time, such as Dr. Chambers, who were unable to determine the nature of her ailment, a frustrating situation, as she wrote to Boyd in October 2nd, 1841: 'I should dread being annoyed by medical speculations [...] after more than fifteen years of suspension of them [her symptoms], their recurrence is scarcely probable'.[319] EBB explained to Julia Martin: 'one lung is very slightly affected and then, without any mortal disease, or any disease of the equivalent seriousness, I am thrown out of life...'[320] Several facts of EBB's case are clear: an elusive ailment, not fatal, not progressive, which for mysterious reasons, remained 'dormant' for long periods of time and settled in *one* lung. Before pursuing my hypothetical suggestion for EBB's lung disease, it is important to go back to the early letter by Dr. Cocker to Dr. Nutall about EBB's first illness, for certain passages might be related to a respiratory ailment, with a minute description of the nature and localization of EBB's pain: 'permanently seated itself on the right side, [in] the angle formed by the greatest projection of the ribs, the umbilicous, and the anterior superior spinous process of the oschium, [...] carried to the correspondent region on the back, up the side to the point of the right shoulder, and down the arm'.[321] While Dr. Cocker was unable to clarify

---

[319] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 858 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/970/?rsId=236167&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[320] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2057 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2294/?rsId=236502&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[321] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Unpublished Correspondence,* p. 18.

the origin of the pain, he decided to treat it as what it *seemed* to be, namely a spinal problem, yet it remained in EBB's record as a mysterious ailment, which Dr. Dally interpreted as a manifestation of anxiety culminating in panic attacks. This pain, nevertheless, recurred during EBB's second illness in 1837-8, as she mentioned to Lady Margaret Cocks: 'the acute pain in the side from which I suffered is diminished to the ghost of a *sensation*'.[322] EBB's symptoms, which puzzled her doctors and made Dr. Dally suggest a panic attack -following perhaps the line of labelling an elusive undefined illness as a product of hysteria- could have a physiological origin. Although recorded more than a century later, a medical case of an adolescent young woman similar to EBB's first illness matches in signs and symptoms: a healthy young patient, with no previous history, presents suddenly an acute, inexplicable and chronic pain which, due to its localization, could be mistaken for a spinal problem.[323] Though located in the right side and starting in the abdomen (umbilicus), EBB's pain extended

---

[322] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 644 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/749/?rsId=236168&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[323] A 15 year old previously healthy female presented to the emergency department with a 1 day history of severe, left sided flank pain and left lateral chest pain. She reported similar pain in the same location intermittently over the prior 3 months that was mild and treated successfully with NSAIDS. Her chest pain was pleuritic and increased with movement. She also reported 1 day of subjective fever. The patient's medical and family histories were unremarkable and she had no prior history of lower respiratory tract infections. Her physical exam was notable for a temp of 100.4, tachycardia to 118 and severe left CVA tenderness to percussion. Her lungs were clear to auscultation bilaterally and her cardiac exam was normal except sinus tachycardia. [...] Pulmonary sequestration is a rare congenital pulmonary malformation in which a mass of non-functioning lung tissue receives systemic arterial blood supply and does not have a demonstrable connection to the tracheobronchial tree. The extralobar variety is less common than the intralobar, accounting for only 15-25% of all sequestrations. ELS is thought to occur as a result of an errorduring embryogenesis during which an extra lung bud arises from the fore gut and migrates caudally. Many cases are also now identified antenatally, making an adolescent presentation of an ELS rather unusual. Sequestrations discovered later in life may be associated with malignant transformation or recurrent infections therefore elective resection is often recommended, even in asymptomatic lesions. ELS are more commonly on the left side and range in size from 0.5 to15 cm.Torsion of an ELS is exceedingly rare with only 7 prior paediatric cases reported in the literature. Our patient presented with chest and flank pain localized to the area of the infarcted sequestration. She had no history of previous lower respiratory tract infections. We hypothesize that her 3 month history of pain may have been due to intermittent torsion, and a very similar case was reported previously in 13 year old girl who had pain for 2 months prior to her torsion being discovered. Although chest pain has been reported as a presenting symptom, abdominal pain has been reported in all prior patients as a hallmark symptom. (Bernard Stover, Laurie, et al., 'Torsion of an Extralobar Pulmonary Sequestration: A Rare Cause of Acute Chest & Flank Pain in an Adolescent', *Journal of Pediatric Surgery Case Reports*, 2.6 (2014) 322–24).

to the flank (anterior superior), covering the whole area of the ribs on that side. The tachycardia in the adolescent patient was also present in EBB, and the clearness of the lungs through the bilateral auscultation correspond to the elusiveness of the malady from the stethoscope. EBB's pain, which happened both during her first illness and as she later mentioned it to Margaret Cocks, was, if not excruciating, always present to the point of a *sensation* as EBB described it. Her case is similar to that of the young patient, coincidental even within the age range. Pulmonary Sequestration is a malformation which has been recorded to affect more men than women, but it is although also present in the latter:

> The PS is divided into two types, intra lobar sequestration (ILS) which is the more common type, where the lesion lies within pleural layer surrounding the lobar lung and extra lobar sequestration (ELS) which has its own pleural covering, maintaining complete anatomic separation from adjacent normal lung. Most patients with ILS present in adolescence or early adulthood with recurrent pneumonias in the affected lobe. Patients with PS can be asymptomatic and the diagnosis achieved incidentally. Other presenting symptoms may include cough, hemoptysis, chest pain and dyspnea. ELS rarely becomes infected because it is separated from the tracheo-bronchial tree by its own pleural investment.[324]

Diagnosis of Pulmonary Sequestration requires several tests, as it cannot be confirmed through mere auscultation: 'CT will typically suffice in most adult cases with some debate still held over the need for angiography'.[325] When pain presents in the patient it is usually located in the affected lung (EBB insisted the problem was settled in one lung, in accordance with both Dr. Chambers and later Dr. Wilson). The

---

[324] Mohammad Alsumrain and Jay H. Ryu. 'Pulmonary Sequestration in Adults: A Retrospective Review of Resected and Unresected Cases', *BMC Pulmonary Medicine*, 18.1, (2018) 97 (p. 97).

[325] Qays Ahmed Hassan Al-Timimy and Hind Fadhil Al-Shamseei. 'Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration in Elderly Woman: A Rare Case Report with Emphasis on Imaging Findings', *Radiology Case Reports*, 11.3, (Sept. 2016), 144-147 (p. 145).

malformation compromises the blood vessels, which suggests what Chambers always hinted as the problem was vascular. As earlier stated the doctor who attended EBB in Italy, during her final illness, Dr. Wilson -also a renowned authority- suggested that EBB had a lung abscess, which could also have been understood as pulmonary sequestration, for it shows as a mass or an opacity in CT and x-rays. According to this analysis, EBB's relapses between dormant periods could have been chest infections triggered by the Pulmonary Sequestration, which due to its lack of progressive nature, would be present during all of her life,[326] mystifying doctors, family and herself. In EBB, haemoptysis was sporadic when it occurred and the amazement of her having survived what was acknowledged as a ruptured blood vessel could also match a characteristic of Pulmonary Sequestration. As recorded by her contemporaries, EBB's weakness (a lack of physical strength) added to her small and thin frame, gave her a spiritual appearance, but nevertheless she had a strong constitution. This fact is proved by her successful survival and recovery from several miscarriages, one of them quite severe during which she had to be immersed in a bath of ice and bled for three days: 'For ten days her condition was critical but afterwards she began to recover rapidly. Dr. Harding, immensely relieved, told Robert he had never seen "such an excessive case'.[327]

---

[326] 'A 51-year-old male from the state of Goiás, Brazil, who lives in a rural area, presented with recurrent episodes of pulmonary infection, which were usually difficult to treat, for approximately 28 years.' Fiorotto, Walter Beneduzzi, et al. 'A Patient with Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration: A Rare Congenital Anomaly', *Revista Brasileira de Cardiologia Invasiva (English Edition)*, 20.1, (2012) 99–102 (p. 99). This evidences the chronic and lifelong condition which can produce recurrent infections without PS being necessarily life threatening.

[327] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 242.

As already noted, part of the romanticizing of the Brownings' story steers towards the idea that EBB was 'saved by Love' and that her health improved miraculously after her elopement with RB. While, indeed, her health started to improve slightly during their courtship, most likely this was a consequence of improving habits, of pursuing different interests, of hope, and a switch in her life goals and the dream of Italy. My suggestion for Pulmonary Sequestration as EBB's hypothetical ailment is supported by her respiratory crisis coming in cycles, between dormant periods, and being triggered by external factors, such as the weather and her general mood. A better (though always frugal) diet following her marriage would also have helped her to strengthen her immune system. All of these circumstances resulted in the general impression that love had healed her, when the truth is that it is highly possible that her ailment had never been life-threatening, but a chronic condition impossible to detect by Victorian medicine. During the last years of her life in Italy, the gap between relapses shortened, to the point of no return during the summer of 1861. EBB's death has been wrapped in a romanticized Byronic aura, with RB's experience of possible anguish and frustration through this closure completely erased by the loving image of their final kiss and embrace.

Through her last period of illness, EBB was also struggling against depression, for she had been estranged from her adoring father to whom she was so devoted and loving. Wilson, her life-long maid and nursing companion, was also no longer part of the household, having been replaced in full by Annunciata who had been working as a housemaid for the Brownings since 1847. During this final period of illness, EBB fell

again into her routine as an invalid, the one she had followed during her old days in Wimpole Street: 'she lay in bed or on a sofa all day, took morphine, ate virtually nothing. [...] She said she did not want a doctor, that there was nothing a doctor could do'.[328] On June 26 1861, RB wrote to his friends, the Storys: 'Ba has been very ill indeed but is better I hope and think, to-day ... but her weakness is extreme'.[329] Risk of death was not perceived by EBB, nor by her long life carer, Wilson, who agreed with her ex-mistress upon the severity of the illness; it was nothing different from what they had lived through, therefore, alarm was unnecessary. It is interesting that while biographical accounts by Forster[330] and Finlayson[331] acknowledge Wilson's final visit and her support for EBB's own diagnosis, RB omits the detail from his letter to Sarianna in which he narrates the last days of his wife. When reading again that letter, several details stand out as important. EBB's lack of will or strength to engage in life 'she did *nothing* at Rome'[332], the extra medications noted by RB, 'Cooper's pills and Ipecacuanha wine'[333] added to the morphine intake, EBB's clear refusal to eat any solid foods added to her insistence upon her own certainty of her case and RB's exaggerated reaction as well as the 'light headedness' and the windows which 'seem to be hung in the Hungarian colours'[334]. These suggest that indeed EBB's state was not the usual one, making RB feel that his wife was drifting away. After a crisis in the middle of that same night, RB called for Dr. Wilson, whose

---

[328] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 363.
[329] Iain Finlaynson, *Browning*, p. 480.
[330] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 363.
[331] Iain Finlayson, *Browning,* p. 481.
[332] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), p. 59.
[333] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning,* p. 60.
[334] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning*, p. 61.

diagnosis was: 'one lung was condensed (the right) and he suspected an abscess in it'[335] and he increased her already large dosage of morphine. EBB died in RB's arms on 29th June 1861. Alethea Hayter suggests EBB's cause of death was a 'heart failure after an attack of bronchitis'.[336] Forster suggests EBB's cause of death in her footnote: 'modern medical opinion holds that, although she might have had a heart attack, it is more likely that the heavy doses of morphine paralysed her breathing (morphine attacks the heavy cells in the brain). It is extremely unlikely that her death was the result of the burst abscess in the lung, as Dr. Wilson diagnosed'.[337] Peter Dally adds accurately: that 'Robert Browning's description of her death, "smiling happily," suggests that she might have died as a result of an overdose',[338] a tragic, yet unsurprising ending, easily mistaken for a respiratory ailment, disguised as a 'severe chill'.[339] Miss Ritchie's closing lines for the biographical sketch of EBB underline emphatically that her illness and a broken-heartedness for Cavour's death tipped her into the grave, in a convenient and very sentimental tone. While Ritchie's mental recollections might give a different version of EBB's death, it is the reconstructed, romanticized death after an undefined illness which closes EBB's life.

As explored earlier in this chapter and following what has been suggested by Dennis and Forster, EBB transformed her life and adapted it around her illness to achieve a poetic creative freedom which would have been impossible had she been

---

[335] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning*, p. 60.
[336] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 59.
[337] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 386.
[338] Peter Dally, 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6678, (1989) 963-963 (p. 298).
[339] Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Barrett-Browning> [accessed 2021-06-16]

the healthy, eldest Barrett daughter. If, as in my hypothesis, EBB's illness was pulmonary sequestration or any other malformation which could have existed without being acknowledged, its severity was never as too difficult for EBB as to push her away from her writing for long periods of her life. For the illness covered a very long period of her life, from 1821 to 1861: forty years with a significant major episode of 'good health'. The elusive nature, the elapsed time, as well as a non-conclusive cause of death lead to the possibility of EBB's death having being caused by other factors rather than a mysterious illness and a broken heart.

My elixir: this magic draught

Forster's suggestion of EBB dying from accidental overdose after the change in prescription by Dr. Wilson[340] portrays the poet as victim of medical negligence, delegating the responsibility for her arguable overdose to an external factor. Alethea Hayter states that EBB's opium intake was most likely not known to her contemporaries as a fact, but as a rumour, for the only open signalling was made by Julia Ward Howe in her poem of 1857 entitled 'One Word more with EBB': 'I shrink before the nameless draught/ That helps to such unearthly things/ And if a drug could lift so high,/ I would not trust its treacherous wings'.[341] While EBB acknowledged the truth in these lines, she did not give importance to them, while RB reacted

[340] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography,* p. 385-6.
[341] Julia Ward Howe, 'One Word More with E. B. B.' pp. 145–46.

differently, as he expressed to their friend Isa Blagden: ‘‘How much I despised… Mrs. Howe who has written a couple of poems to Ba and me beginning “I have heard you do not praise me, Barrett-Browning, high inspired! Nor you, Robert!” etc and ending with saying Ba’s poetry all comes from her use of a “nameless drug” and plenty of similar abuses –because we didn’t praise her!’’[342] Significantly, RB’s emotional reaction, considering the poem as a personal attack on them for not praising Mrs. Howe’s poetry, reveals his feelings concerning his wife’s habit. The poem struck a painful chord as it addressed one of the sources of argument between them: EBB’s habit and RB’s everlasting battle against it. From their courtship until her death he would painfully and unsuccessfully plead with EBB to give it up, succeeding for some years to make her diminish her dosage, until she relapsed finally to the point of no return. Ward Howe was not the only one acknowledging certain aspects in EBB’s poetry which could hint at the use of opium, for in 1844, a reviewer noticed that EBB’s ‘A Rhapsody of Life’s Progress’ ‘had it not appeared under a lady’s name, might have been conjectured to have been written under the influence of opium’.[343] The statement is remarkable, for the reviewer -herself a woman-, places the widest possible distance between EBB (a lady) and opium, simply to place them in irreconcilable opposition: one could never be part of the other, reflecting the idea of opium as a route for artistic expression belonging exclusively to the masculine artistic sphere, a path never to be trod by a lady.

---

[342] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet’s Work and Its Setting* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 68.
[343] Martha Jones, *The British Quarterly Review,* (1 November 1845) 337–352, (p. 342), *The Brownings’ Correspondence* <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/87/?rsId=236169&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Hayter states that EBB was an addict[344], only later to contradict herself in her *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* by claiming the following about EBB and other writers: 'Their strong wills –and moreover the family love, the literary success and sufficient income which they enjoyed –prevented opium habit from getting a permanent foothold in their personalities'.[345] Sadly, love was not enough to guarantee the prevention of substance misuse, and Hayter acknowledges that the use of opium was understood differently during the nineteenth century for its intake was not signalled, misjudged, or understood as being self-indulgent in general terms, and there was a lack of full understanding of its addictive potential.

Opium was usually taken in the form of laudanum: 'an alcoholic tincture of opium, has a weaker opium content than morphine or heroin, and its action is affected by the addition of alcohol'.[346] Since when taking the tincture orally the opium content was weaker, its action and effects were less strong, therefore the path towards addiction could have been subtler and gradual. However, this whole panorama changed dramatically after the discovery of morphine and later with its administration through subcutaneous injection.[347] Richard Pryce, in his novel *An Evil Spirit* (1887)[348], portraits the downfall of Miss Gordon (his character) through morphine addiction. This dark, self-destructive path, would enslave and consume the user in a

---

[344] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 62.
[345] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p, 299.
[346] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 37.
[347] Although the first subcutaneous injections of morphine date from 1836, the panorama changed after the introduction of the 'needle-gun' in the early 1870s during the American Civil War. (Rudolfn Schmitz 'Friedrich Wilhelm Sertürner and the Discovery of Morphine', *Pharmacy in History*, 27.2 (1985), p. 67.
[348] Richard Pryce, *An Evil Spirit* (London: The British Library, 2010).

short period of time, with fatal consequences. Yet Hayter defines a different class of addict -the laudanum addict- able to have control:

> But there is one class of addicts, not a large one, who when they have discovered the dosage which preserves them from the wretchedness of withdrawal symptoms, will restrict themselves to that amount and continue for many years, perhaps for the rest of their lives, taking only so much opium and no more. […] Opium then taken this way leaves you where it found you, if you were a useful member of society before you started taking it, you may remain so; but you will have gained nothing absolutely by the habit, only (at best) not lost by it. These confirmed but moderate addicts are called 'users'.[349]

And it is under this classification that Hayter places EBB, sustaining her argument through the fact that opium imagery is rare in EBB's poetry,[350] as well as the fact (later discarded by Forster and Dally, and supported by EBB's correspondence) that EBB quit opium entirely during her only successful pregnancy. Whereas the understanding of mechanisms of addiction have changed from the nineteenth century to our present day, the substance, its medical uses and its effects remain the same, as does human biology. The core for the physical, emotional and psychological dependence remains untouched by time: 'the addict's lack of direction of purpose creates the need for ritualised escape in the first place, and is in the exacerbated but exclusive involvement with addiction and abandonment of the substance of normal life'.[351] Apart from the influence of opium which can be traced within EBB's poetry and RB's battle against EBB's habit, it is possible to trace through the years evidence

---

[349] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 50.
[350] The influence of opium in EBB's writing can be traced in her poetry further than the example Hayter provides, as explored in Chapter Three.
[351] Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky, *Love and Addiction* (Newbury: Broadrow Publications, 2015), p. 27.

of changes in EBB's behaviour, along with damage to her relationships, and arguably her cause of death from an overdose,[352] which I will go on to explore.

Perhaps Hayter's ambivalence towards EBB's arguable dependence had to do with the fact of the poet, as a woman, being left standing under a very unflattering light. As stated, EBB's habit was much more inclined to the use of morphine than to the single use of laudanum, which certainly led to a difference in effects and discipline of habit. EBB stood in between the important moment of transition in which morphine, after being isolated as an alkaloid for the first time, found its place within medicine (and drug misuse). Unlike the masculine experimentation with opium, led by De Quincey and the Romantics and praised for spiritual grandeur, female intake of morphine (which became mostly injected) became a trait of deceit, immoral, weak character, 'morphinomania'[353] as explored by Richard Pryce through Miss Gordon. Zieger mentions that the trope of a feminine lack of self-control and deception connected to morphinomania was quite popular during the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly through sensational fiction.[354] Though this idea was part of the evolution of morphine as an injected substance, what lies within the statement is a 'female lack of control' against the 'wise' experimentations of the classic 'opium eaters'. Blamed upon gender, the truth is that it was the *means* by which the narcotic entered the body that changed the whole dynamics, for the first

---

[352] For the proper understanding of the harmful impact the opium had within EBB's personality and relationships, the criteria for Opioid Use Disorder stated in the DSM-5 shall be used, a full account can be read in the appendix C.

[353] Susan Zieger, '"How Far Am I Responsible?": Women and Morphinomania in Late-Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 48. 1 (2005), 59–81 (p. 59).

[354] Susan Zieger, '"How Far Am I Responsible?": Women and Morphinomania in Late-Nineteenth-Century Britain', p. 60-1.

fatal victim of 'morphinomania' was Friedrich Wilhelm Adam Sertürner, precisely the man who first isolated it, and who experimented with its dosage. At the moment Hayter was writing about EBB and opium -as she places it-, 'Mrs. Browning' was still standing on a sanctified pedestal, from which any flaw in character would have marred her image. At that time, the mere suggestion of EBB's death having been caused by an overdose would have placed her as weak woman, without self-control and a complete opposite to the sacred invalid, loving wife, devoted mother and poet, of impeccable character.

One of the most difficult things for EBB's biographers has been to determine her precise dosage of morphine, as there was no standard preparation and each chemist differed. Hayter comments that by the time EBB became acquainted with RB she was 'was given both morphine taken by mouth and laudanum […] she was taking forty drops of laudanum a day. […] Mrs. Browning's dose of 1.6 grains a day is mild. But the average dose given for the relief of pain today is only a quarter grain, and half a grain daily would be regarded as quite an advanced addict's dose'.[355] The approximate equivalent dosage would be 103 mg per day. Dally suggests that after EBB left Torquay her dosage, 'probably averaged between three and four grains (180-240mg) (more accurate: 194-259 mg) of morphine, or thirty to forty grains of opium a day'.[356] EBB herself notes the details of her prescription to Mary Russell Mitford:

[355] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 61.
[356] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait*, p. 86.

> The muriate of morphine is what I take –what I call my elixir, and I take it in combination with aether and something else;" this magic draught produced "a sort of ubiquitous influence upon all parts of my system –quiets my mind, calms my pulse … spirits away any strange headache –gives me an appetite –relieves my chest- to say nothing of the bestowment of those sudden pleasant feelings belonging by right to better health...[357]

When Friedrich Wilhelm Adam Serturner (1783-1841) was able to isolate morphine from opium in 1805, he did so:

> By trial and error, through self-administration and dosing three young volunteers, he noticed that one-fourth grain (30 mg) of the drug induced a happy, light-headed sensation, the second dose caused drowsiness and excessive fatigue, while the third caused participants to become confused and somnolent. He suggested that 15 mg of the drug as the optimal dose and named the substance 'Morphium' after the Greek god of sleep and dreams.[358]

Sertruner's search for a safe dosage, along with Dally's and Hayter's calculations, fits a possible medical standard dosage, hinting at the possibility of it being established at its lowest (at this stage in EBB's life) as 180 mg, and its peak as 259 mg, divided between doses through the day, much likely four or five times a day.[359] As I have noted, it is fundamental to the understanding of EBB's relationship with the narcotic, that although at first she was prescribed laudanum, which was the tincture of opium, that was later switched to morphine, one of the alkaloid components found in opium. EBB first mentions morphine to Mary Russell Mitfort in January 20th, 1842, and at this time, morphine was still taken orally. Isolated morphine, by not being a tincture,

---

[357] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 904 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1026/?rsId=236183&returnPage=1> [2017-03-23]
[358] Chandrasekhar Krishnamurti, and SSC Chakra Rao, 'The Isolation of Morphine by Serturner', *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60. 11 (Nov. 2016), 861-862, (p. 861).
[359] A guideline for the use and dosage of morphine can be found in the NHS website.The dosage and times stated must have been similar to those in Victorian times. <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/morphine/> [accessed 2021-02-16]

increases its properties, addictive potential, side effects and risks. It is possible that she was prescribed morphine due to the novelty of the medication, as it was widely popular on the continent.[360] Morphine could have been more expensive than laudanum, as EBB's reference to spending large amounts of money made her, as Dally mentions: 'embarrassed by this extravagance and [she] excused herself in various ways; the doctors insisted she had the drug, and that it was necessary for the good of her lungs'.[361] EBB writes:

> I will tell you what I know– Stormie told me the other day that I had eight thousand pounds in the funds,—of which the interest comes to me quarterly, the money being in two different percents: .. (do you understand better than I do?) & from forty to forty five pounds Papa gives me every three months, the income tax being first deducted. You wonder how I can spend, perhaps, the quarterly forty pounds & upward that come to me? I do spend them. Yet let me hold you from being frightened, & teach you to consider how easy it is to spend money, & not upon oneself. Never in any one year of my life, even when I was well, have my expenses in dress (as I told Mr Kenyon the other day) exceeded twenty pounds– My greatest personal expense lately has been the morphine.[362]

The cost was somewhere between £40 to £50 pounds every three months. If we consider an average of £45, her yearly 'pocket money' would have been approximately £180 per year. Of this, £20 was spent on dress, £16 per year of Wilson's wages,[363] leaving £144 mostly used for morphine which, divided between twelve months, would suggest an approximate expense of £12 a month. The

---

[360] 'By the 1830s, the drug [morphine] was available commercially both in France and Germany and not excessively priced, it was the best selling medicine at the Pharmacie de la Cloche on the left bank of Paris.' Thomas Dormandy, *The Shape of Dreams* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, p. 118).
[361] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 87.
[362] *The Brownings' Correspondence,* (2021) letter 2520 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2767/?rsId=236413&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[363] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 2499 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2747/?rsId=236414&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

equivalent today, would be a monthly expense of £1,260,[364] which is an exorbitant amount of money. This large sum (both then and now) reflects the severity of EBB's intake which must have definitely been seen as exceeding the norm and therefore her embarrassment and her labelling of her necessity as 'an extravagance'[365] make sense.

EBB's morphine habit never left her. This 'elixir', as she called it, had been her long lasting companion through the development of her career, through all her grief and her illnesses. EBB did not discuss the matter openly outside her household as during the 1840s she would only discuss her morphine with RB and Miss Mitford. EBB was fifteen, in 1821 when first prescribed the narcotic and Forster reckons that the dosage was quite low (as opiates are prescribed initially), as it was only meant to aid her sleep.[366] Yet, prescribed for her nerves, it would never let her go. Far away from her home, isolated in Gloucester spa where she spent her sixteenth birthday in 1822, EBB was reached by laudanum precisely at a vulnerable moment of emotional turmoil which included Bro's departure to school and their separation, her anxiety about a lack of formal education, along with the crisis of growing up to fulfil expected domestic and social roles. It was after this first episode of illness that EBB started, gradually, to increasingly enter into seclusion. Although she still went out for rides, visits and walks, little by little her interests would turn inward, enhanced by the effects of laudanum intake.

Hayter thus describes the effects of opium:

---

[364] Historical UK inflation <https://inflation.iamkate.com/> [accessed 2021-03-24]

[365] 'The abuse of morphine, which within a few years had assured great proportions, is, as in a rule, limited to the upper classes.' (Benjamin Ball, *The Morphine Habit (Morphinomania): With Four Lectures on the Border-Land of Insanity, Cerebral Dualism, Prolonged Dreams, Insanity in Twins'* (New York: Fitzgerald, 1887), p. 3.

[366] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 24.

> The more usual effect is that cares, doubts, fears, tedium, inhibitions, sink away and are replaced by a sense of self-assurance, for which there is no objective justification; the opium taker's real situation has not changed in the least, only –and transiently- his feelings about this situation. He is now in a state of listless complacent tranquillity. Nothing worries him, nothing wrongs him; he is at peace with his fellow men because he does not care about them; their sorrows do not move him; their injuries and slights of which he was so conscious now rebound harmlessly off his invulnerable self-esteem.[367]

In addition 'opiates remove memories and worries about unresolved issues and reduce life to a single striving'.[368] The effects of opiates thereby emulate a painkiller for the heart and the mind by placing the user within a peaceful stupor in which there is nothing to worry about: peace, sleep, and momentary oblivion surely came to the user along with emotional tranquillity. When both Bro's and EBB's mother's deaths occurred, she was under the influence of the narcotic and it possibly affected her ability to express grief, as well as accounting for her everlasting silence upon Bro's death. Right after her brother's death in July 1840, EBB was grief stricken and her laudanum dosage was increased to treat her nerves. Between the period of July and October 1840, EBB did not write any letters and her sleep was broken by strange nightmares most likely produced by the increased dosage.[369] This was the period when Miss Mitford, in a sign of friendship and affection, gave EBB the puppy Flush as a gift; he would become her companion for many years, soothing some of the pain in her heart. It was her beloved pet, along with her love for work and poetry, that pulled her through this tragedy, which had plunged her into depression. After the huge emotional blow and grief produced by Bro's death and the acute period of depression,

[367] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 42.
[368] Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky, *Love and Addiction,* p. 5.
[369] Forster, Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 100.

the effects in the change of prescription -which possibly occurred during EBB's stay in Torquay - had an impact on the poet's mind, emotions and creative output:

> I am in a fit of writing—could write all day & night, .. & long to live by myself for three months in a forest of chestnuts & cedars, in an hourly succession of poetical paragraphs & morphine draughts– Not that I do such a thing! 'The flesh is weak.' And … nota bene! you are not to say a word of morphine when you write next.[370]

The fragment of this letter to her brother George reveals of what morphine meant to EBB and how it had become a fundamental part of her life, hand in hand with her poetry. As EBB implies, morphine goes beyond the spiritual, for 'the flesh is weak'.[371] It appears that EBB found comfort not only mentally and emotionally, but reached a state of peace and happiness as if she was in love. Morphine was the perfect partner who would give without asking for something in return: 'every emotional impulse –pious feelings, kindness to others, sexual love –is consummated in thought but may remain unexpressed in action'.[372] Morphine took EBB's pain away, provided physical gratification, a spiritual release, and fulfilled emotionally and physically any need for romantic/sexual attachment.

By the time EBB became acquainted with RB her daily dosage was 40 drops[373] (about 103mg). Weakness (her everlasting weakness) and her lack of appetite could have been side effects of the morphine, for the nature of the illness, as we have read

---

[370] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1323 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1481/?rsId=236184&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[371] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1323 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1481/?rsId=236184&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[372] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 43.

[373] Morphine could have been given as drops as well, for it was presented as a solution of morphine grains as Foster detailed (Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 385).

was never clarified by EBB's doctors.[374] Physical side effects of morphine differ between men and women significantly, for females 'also reported a significantly higher 'heavy sluggish feeling'[375] than did males in the morphine condition which would account for EBB's 'unexplained' weakness suffered continually from the time of her first illness.

The switch from laudanum to morphine suggests that EBB was developing tolerance. Her dependence could be considered as mild during the 1840s as there was no evident interference of the drug with other areas of her life. This dynamic corresponds to Hayter's reasons for maintaining that EBB was a 'user' and not an addict. EBB's diet was poor and her everlasting weakness, was counteracted by caffeine through strong black coffee, fictionalized by Forster, in her novel *Lady's Maid,*[376] through Wilson's eyes: 'She has her coffee, black stuff, evil looking stuff, and sips that all day and otherwise pecks at whatever is sent up'.[377] The tachycardia, lack of sleep and the periods of restlessness might have been produced by excessive caffeine intake acting against the soporific and sluggish side- effects of morphine, allowing her a vigilant and semi-alert state.

---

[374] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 39.
[375] J. P. Zacny, 'Morphine Responses in Humans: A Retrospective Analysis of Sex Differences', *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 63. 1 (June 2001), 23–28, p. 26.
[376] Margaret Forster, *Lady's Maid* (London: Vintage, 2005).
[377] Margaret Forster, *Lady's Maid,* p. 20.

My Hood of Poppies

'Can I be as good for you as morphine is for me, I wonder .. even at the cost of being as bad also?'

EBB to RB, 21 August 1846.
'-and, if God choose,/ I shall love thee better after death.'
EBB, Sonnet XLIII, Sonnets from the Portuguese.

The question I wish to return to is why was RB disturbed by EBB's use of morphine if she had explained to him that she used it under medical supervision? By the time they started corresponding, EBB led mostly a secluded life, with very few visitors among them John Kenyon and Miss Mitford. While Forster states that EBB fitted within the pattern of opium addiction suggested by Hayter, she points out as well the absence of serious side effects in EBB, such as the lack of hallucinations and the poet's excellent memory which seemed unaffected by the opiate.[378] In spite of a possible gradual increase of dosage through the years, EBB's morphine was administered in fixed doses during the day, framing her addiction within a disciplinary routine. As the only obligation EBB had to fulfil was towards her art, illness and morphine helped her to achieve her dream of living between 'poetry and draughts of morphine';[379] her emotions, wrapped within the hood of poppies remained tranquil and the effects of morphine enhanced her introspective nature, giving birth to the poems which consolidated her career. This cycle, unbroken for

[378] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 156.
[379] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1323 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1481/?rsId=236225&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

years, started to be shaken to its core as RB entered increasingly into EBB's emotional and intellectual sphere.

If RB was concerned about EBB's dosage, it was because it was evidently high and above the ordinary administration, or because he was somehow aware of the difference between laudanum and morphine. We know from a letter written on 4th February 1846, that EBB explained to him how 'it would be dangerous to leave off the calming remedy, Mr Jago says, except very slowly & gradually. But slowly & gradually something may be done—& you are to understand that I never increased upon the prescribed quantity .. prescribed in the first instance—no!'[380] Her justification to RB is medically sustained. For after years of taking morphine without barely any rest, giving up would become a threat to her health and mental sanity, due to withdrawal symptoms. While EBB states to RB that she never increased the prescribed quantity, the statement could be ambiguous as 'quantity' may have stood for the *times per day* morphine was taken without specifying its strength and therefore the expense. By 1846, EBB's dependence on the drug was what kept her emotional wounds -still open- buried under its peaceful effects:[381] 'the most intense form of withdrawal, [...] is not chemical at all. It is an agonizing sense of some terrible deficiency in oneself'.[382] EBB's family did not question her habit since it was justified by medical necessity, and their perception addresses a common issue of medical authority being rarely questioned. This point relates to Hayter's interpretation

---

[380] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2197 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2442/?rsId=236227&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[381] Opioid Use Disorder, Diagnostic Criteria, points 6 & 9.

[382] Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky, *Love and Addiction,* p. 33.

of EBB as not being considered an addict because she was surrounded by a loving and safe environment. In addition, misreading addiction very often make those close to the addict realise *only* until the user has reached a point of point of wreckage, when the issue has become difficult to address.

In EBB's case, an important additional fact played a crucial role in her dependence: she paid for the morphine with her own money without unbalancing her finances. Therefore, perhaps the only person apart from the chemist to know the *real* amount of morphine she was taking was her maid, Elizabeth Wilson.[383] Wilson was the one assisting EBB in her everyday routine: dressing, undressing, doing her hair, brewing coffee, remaining silent while Flush ate his mistress' meals and of course, being in charge of buying morphine from the chemist and the punctual administration of the draught. EBB initially expressed in May 7th 1844, her first impression of Wilson's personality -considered too weak and lacking authority- to Miss Mitford: 'Wilson, the new maid, is very willing, very anxious, .. almost too anxious! very gentle, .. almost too gentle! [...] I may take double morphine draughts if I like! I may go to bed as late as I please,—& talk as long'.[384] This notion soon vanished as EBB discovered the most cherished quality in her maid: she was discreet.[385] Forster underlines the childish behaviour of EBB (who was then in her thirties) in relation to her health, for she clearly delegated the whole responsibility to her maid in turn.[386]

---

[383] Wilson was very clever and adaptable. Once in Italy, Wilson found her way quite easily and learnt Italian, becoming fluent. Very likely, she had her own way with the chemists, becoming indispensable to EBB.
[384] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1607 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1813/?rsId=236232&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[385] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 127.
[386] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 126.

While her maid Elizabeth Crow (simply referred to as Crow) had authority, Wilson was soft, and therefore, initially considered unfit for the role. EBB's complaint to Miss Mitford, underlined by Forster, evidences EBB's handling of her drug habit, as not only justifying her morphine intake through medical advice, but also delegating the responsibility for her intake exclusively to her maid Wilson whose lack of character gave her freedom of choice. The combination of Wilson's discretion and EBB's possible need of taking more morphine than required (if Wilson did not harden her authority upon her mistress) fitted perfectly the pattern of EBB's addiction. For it made Wilson indispensable to EBB as a discreet and loyal carer who would never argue about or disclose the unreasonable amount of morphine her mistress was taking. Wilson became absolutely necessary for EBB, to the point of taking her to Italy, as EBB explains to RB:

> Wilson is attached to me, I believe—and, in all the discussions about Italy, she has professed herself willing to 'go anywhere in the world with me'. Indeed I rather fancy that she was disappointed bitterly last year, & that it would not be a pure devotion. She is an expensive servant—she has sixteen pounds a year, .. but she has her utilities besides,—& is very amiable & easily satisfied, & would not add to the expenses, or diminish from the economies, even in the matter of room—— I would manage that for her– Then she would lighten your responsibilities ..[387]

It was from 1843 that EBB's personality started to change noticeably by the continuous use of morphine, and an episode occurred which her brothers found distressing to the point of almost doubting their sister's sanity. While the anecdote

[387] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2499 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2747/?rsId=236233&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

about the cleverness of Flush reads as amusing, since learning to read or count is impossible for a canine, it reveals a dissociation from reality:

> She told Flush, "Kiss A, Flush –and now kiss B." [She intended to teach him to read.] Witnessing this, they [her brothers] almost doubted her sanity. Then there were the arithmetic lessons. She held up a piece of cake, counted to three, and Flush had to take it on three and not sooner. What she wanted was Flush to be competent enough to play dominoes (she had read of a gentleman and his dog doing so and had felt "jealous … I can't help it").[388]

EBB's perception of reality was coloured by morphine, which like opium, alters the senses: 'Sight, like hearing, becomes intensely acute, so that bright lights and pronounced patterns are painful, and the sophisticated opium smokers take drugs in bare undecorated rooms with plain hangings, in order not to excruciate their eyes'.[389] It is well known that as a heavy morphine user EBB spent her days within the dark room of Wimpole Street and Virginia Woolf's description of the room in *Flush* accurately fits the opium necessities: 'Miss Barrett's bedroom - for such it was - must by all accounts have been dark. The light, normally obscured by a curtain of green damask, was in summer further dimmed by the ivy, the scarlet runners, the convolvuluses and the nasturtiums which grew in the window-box'.[390] EBB had an inclination for dark enclosed spaces much before living in Wimpole Street, as stated in a letter to Hugh Stuart Boyd: 'My eyes are not very strong, -but they don't inconvenience me to any unpleasant extent- they only make me like to read in the *dark.* I am sometimes stared at, on account of my drawn curtains, and dusky rooms

---

[388] Margaret Forster *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 119.
[389] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 54.
[390] Virginia Woolf, *Flush,* p. 13.

-and *distant* candle at night'.[391] This dusky room[392] allowed the comfort needed by EBB while she remained day after day, reclined on her sofa or lying in that same semi-prone position in bed.[393] This habit remained unchanged according to recollections of friends both in England and later in Italy whose accounts upon their first meetings with EBB matched in terms of dimly illuminated rooms in which they encountered the poet always leaning on a sofa or chair. EBB's senses were hyper intensified through morphine, as recorded in her own words in May 1846:

> Where do you guess that I was today? In Westminster Abbey!– But we were there at the wrong hour, as the service was near to begin .. & I was so frightened of the organ, that I hurried & besought my companions out of the door after a moment or two. Frightened of the organ!—yes, just exactly that—& you may laugh a little as they did. Through being so disused to music, it affects me quite absurdly–[394]

EBB ventured into the outside world little by little, mostly after RB's influence, and without realising it, she was gently pulled out of her habitual depressed, dark and mournful atmosphere. In a letter to RB dated 11th May 1846, EBB describes subtle changes felt through the interaction between her altered senses and the world as she gradually stepped beyond the door of her room:

> Look what is inside of this letter .. look! I gathered it for you today when I was walking in the Regent's Park. Are you surprised? Arabel & Flush & I were in the carriage—& the sun was shining with that green light through the trees, as if he carried down with him the very essence of the leaves, to the ground, .. & I wished

---

[391] Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Hugh Stuart Boyd, *Elizabeth Barrett to Mr. Boyd; Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Hugh Stuart Boyd* (London: J. Murray, 1955), p. 29.
[392] One side effect of opiates is photo-phobia, hypersensitivity to light.
[393] Opiate users suffer nausea and stomach discomfort if lying down flat, therefore the usual position they adopt is lying in a semi-prone position to relieve the symptoms.
[394] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2516 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2764/?rsId=236234&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

> so much to walk through a half open gate along a shaded path, that we stopped the carriage & got out & walked, & I put both my feet on the grass, .. which was the strangest feeling!.. & gathered this laburnum for you. It hung quite high up on the tree, the little blossom did, and Arabel said that certainly I could not reach it—but you see! It is a too generous return for all your flowers: or, to speak seriously, a proof that I thought of you & wished for you—which it was natural to do, for I never enjoyed any of my excursions as I did today's—the standing under the trees & on the grass, was so delightful. It was like a bit of that Dreamland which is your especial dominion: & I felt joyful enough for the moment, to look round for you, as for the cause. It seemed illogical, not to see you close by. And you were not far after all, if thoughts count as bringers near– Dearest, we shall walk together under the trees some day!–
>
> And all those strange people moving about like phantoms of life– How wonderful it looked to me!—& only you, .. the idea of you .. & myself seemed to be real there! And Flush a little, too!——[395]

EBB's narration in this letter appears surreal, fitting Hayter's description of opium perception: 'all that is seen, heard or felt is faithfully delineated, but the imagination clothes each object in its own fanciful garb. It exaggerates, it multiplies its colours, it gives fantastic shapes; there is a new condition arising out of ordinary perception.'[396] EBB's 'Dreamland', almost becomes tangible: - 'it seemed illogical not to see you [RB] close by'[397] and a detached sensation from Arabel (with the sensation of wider spatial distance between them), is enhanced by the laburnum as the only tangible proof of that experience. Atmosphere and sensory experience recall 'forest of chestnuts and cedars'[398] mentioned to her brother George. While by all accounts the amount of morphine taken by EBB would not lead to the hallucination of 'fantastic

[395] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2355 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2600/?rsId=236235&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[396] Alethea Hayter *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 45.
[397] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2355 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2600/?rsId=236235&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[398] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1323 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1481/?rsId=236236&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

shapes', it would have produced an intensification of vividness of colour, a neat and crisp outline of every single object perceived and the new condition, already experimented with within the darkness of her room, exploded in colour.

Yet, regardless of the appeal this distorted episode described, it shows only one side of EBB's morphine habit: a luminous, dreamy, joyful and pleasant one. For certain, there was another side to this experience, the downside of morphine usage which made EBB put her own person at risk, as well as compromising others' safety. In September 1846 Flush was kidnapped by dog thieves during a walk out and a ransom was asked for him. In an completely irrational impulse, EBB, the 'invalid' took a cab with Wilson, decided to either bring her pet back home or simply to negotiate with the thieves. Her letter to RB, postmarked September 6th 1846 narrates the whole episode.[399] While EBB's overall tone through her letter reads as Dickensian in tone and anecdote, two important facts emerge in consideration of EBB's health and morphine intake. The first important fact is EBB's total lack of awareness of the risks implied for herself and Wilson in engaging in that enterprise:

> I went, you know, .. did I tell you? .. with Wilson in the cab. We got into obscure streets,—& our cabman stopped at a public house to ask his way. Out came two or three men, .. "Oh, you want to find Mr Taylor, I dare say"! (mark that no name had been mentioned!) & instantly an unsolicited philanthropist ran before us to the house, & out again to tell me that the great man "was'nt at home! but would'nt I get out?" Wilson, in an aside of terror, entreated me not to think of such a thing—she believed devoutly in the robbing & murdering, & was not reassured by the gang of benevolent men & boys who "lived but to oblige us" all round the cab– [...] o, in the midst of the politeness, we drove away, & Wilson seemed to be of opinion that we had escaped with our lives barely. Plain enough

[399] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2585 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2834/?rsId=236237&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

> it was, that the gang was strong there. The society .. the "Fancy" .. had their roots in the ground. The faces of those men!–[400]

Wilson, with a realistic insight into the truths of life outside Wimpole Street, was absolutely terrified of accompanying her mistress through that adventure; practical and with common sense, her reaction was felt to be exaggerated in the eyes of her mistress, yet she was correct in the perception of danger. This notion was supported by Arabel: 'She thought I was suddenly siezed with madness, to prepare to walk out of the house in that state of excitement & that hour of the evening'.[401] Wilson's attitude points toward her lack of authority as EBB's carer while fulfilling all of her mistress's whims, regardless of the situation. Arabel's judgement, that her sister had being 'seized with madness' suggests also an impulsive and reckless behaviour, unpredictable and certainly unmanageable by Wilson and herself.

On the surface, this episode can be easily read in the romantic terms as 'Love' working miracles upon EBB. Anticipating her running away with RB, this escapade to attempt to rescue Flush involved both mistress and maid in close confidence. Wilson was faithful and discreet enough to accompany her mistress in spite of any fears for their own safety. Whereas Crow had demonstrated authority, after this episode it was clear in the relationship between Wilson and EBB who was the one subdued by the other's authority. Yet, EBB's behaviour also questions the nature of her illness. Had EBB been truly and fully an invalid -subdued to a debilitating weakness - could she

---

[400] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, 13, 342–344. letter 2585 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2834/?rsId=236237&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[401] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, 13, 342–344. letter 2585 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2834/?rsId=236237&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

have ventured not just out of the room and down three flights of stairs, but out of 50 Wimpole Street in a cab, driving to a non-reputable part of London to engage in an emotionally and mentally draining dialogue in an attempt to recover her pet without no one being physically able to stop her? Did that strength originate in 'Love' and despair, or was the truth as my hypothesis suggests, that EBB suffered no life threatening illness and that her weakness and need for darkness originated with her morphine habit, and that the reckless and irresponsible behaviour corresponded as well to the effects of the drug upon her mental state? The episode stands out not just as a red flag indicating how EBB's personality and behaviour had already changed under the influence of morphine. For while she had always displayed an impulsive nature (as her behaviour with Boyd showed), these fits of impulsiveness were unmanageable by those around her and would increase as time passed and her morphine habit increased.

One of the most important things RB believed he achieved with EBB was the diminishing of her morphine dosage, and while he did not succeed in making her quit, he was able to make her gradually reduce her intake to a third of her usual dosage for about three years. EBB writes to Arabel on 9 March, 1847 that she is: 'gradually diminish[ing] .. to seventeen days for twenty two doses, .. which I used to take in eight days',[402] and to Henrietta on March 31st, 1847: 'I am going to do my very best

[402] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2660 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2921/?rsId=236238&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

to leave off the morphine, but gradually.'[403] Two years later in January 1849 she writes to Arabel again: 'The last morphine ends with the fortieth day.'[404] This period, between 1846-1859 coincided with her courtship, falling in love, marriage and EBB's pregnancies and consecutive miscarriages, in which the side effects of morphine[405] were evident. The appalling physical side-effects damaging EBB's health, added to the poet's dread of the drug harming Pen, and as Forster mentions are evident in a manuscript letter from EBB to Fanny Dowglass in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (University of Texas at Austin), written soon after her son's birth, in which she implies she never did quite give up morphine and declares the 'unspeakable rapture'[406] she felt when her son was pronounced perfect. While at this point, her morphine habit appeared no longer to be hampering EBB as an individual, its potential hazards expanded from her person not only to RB but but to compromising the health of her baby.[407] In this context, it is possible that Pen's allegedly restless character and childhood tantrums could have been sequels to EBB's morphine intake. Pen was born in 9th March 1849 after a long labour, and Dr. Harding was surprised by EBB's strength through the whole process. RB was also apparently amazed that 'she never once cried out or shed a tear, acute as the pains were'.[408] It is possible to infer

---

[403] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2664 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2927/?rsId=236239&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[404] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2768 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3037/?rsId=236240&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[405] Miscarriage and placental abruption (a third trimester complication that results from the haemorrhage and accumulation of blood between the placenta and the wall of the uterus).

[406] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 382.

[407] Opioid Use Disorder, Diagnostic Criteria, points 8 & 9.

[408] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2776 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3046/?rsId=236241&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

that EBB felt less pain due to the morphine within her system, therefore giving the illusion of tolerance of pain. When her first miscarriage happened, the doctor was not summoned until the pains were unbearable (after a couple of days) and it was too late to save the baby.

EBB's innability to quit morphine in spite of her fear of harming her own child evidences the scope of her dependence. By all means her intake was very high before the period of decreasing started, as evidenced through a letter written by EBB to Arabel, on December 1846:

> As to all that story of the morphine, I told it to Nelly Bordman, in consequence of her sapient interest in drugs—it was a passing inconvenience, just proving that I could'nt do without the medicine, with all my arrogance of health,—& not otherwise regarded even by Robert, who if my foot goes to sleep, gets the headache with the fright of it, & who certainly, before the cause was ascertained of that sudden change in me, was seriously uneasy. The right quantity of morphine being restored, I was as well as possible again, & have had no more reason to complain of Italian pharmacy. Oh—do not think, Arabel, of sending any medicines from Bell or elsewhere. I should have asked you if it had been necessary, but it is, in fact, most unnecessary. Our Italian explained afterward, with a multitude of apologies, that the English preparation of morphine being nearly always of an inferior strength to what they are able to procure here, he conscientiously thought it right to make allowances for that difference—! Which was wrong, of course! In every case he shd have explained the matter to Robert! I doubt the motive a little. Still, it has been right ever since, & Dr Cook observed to Mrs Jameson that the people here were in general distinguished for the excellence of their drugs & the fidelity of their attention to prescriptions, & that in his opinion, the man was startled at the quantity in my case.– This quantity I am diminishing gradually—a little interrupted by the late cold, .. when I took more of course to stop the evil symptoms– While there was frost, I did not leave these two rooms, the bedroom opening on the sitting room, & wore the red chinese crape shawl crossed over my chest, undressing & dressing by the fire here. A little languid & uncomfortable in the throat & chest, I felt during that time, .. but it did not last long, ..[409]

[409] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2645 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2905/?rsId=236242&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

The letter is significant in presenting factual information crucial to EBB's habit. For instance, her usual English chemist would provide her with a preparation considered usually strong; a probable error in translation could have produced the mistake in the strength, providing by accident a stronger prescription which produced the undesirable effects. The quantity, which 'startled' the Italian chemist (raising a red flag), was restored to a safe dosage intended to be decreased gradually, which she did. Nevertheless, EBB's lowest dosage would still be considered as unsafe given, for example, her pregnant condition. It is possible that after Pen's birth EBB might have increased her dosage gradually, as there is no further recollection in her letters about quitting or even of keeping up with the lowest dosage recorded in her correspondence after 1849 without quitting. In addition, details of EBB's morphine habit had leaked outside her intimate circle by 1853, implying a possibility of the matter being then out of her hands.

In 1852, in Paris, EBB was finally able to meet George Sand her life-long literary heroine. It happened through a friend of RB who sent a letter of introduction. The French novelist agreed that she could receive them, although she did not promise to be there. While RB was a little offended by this, EBB was simply thrilled to the point of being irrational, as Forster noted, EBB intended to visit Sand 'at the risk of my life'.[410] In spite of the cold and bleak weather, EBB wrapped herself, took her

[410] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3006 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3290/?rsId=236243&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

respirator[411] and rushed in a heated carriage.[412] Forster continues: 'It was true that no conversation of note had taken place and there had been no feeling of rapprochement –in fact the reverse - but Elizabeth chose to interpret the encounter as a success and was glad to have made it.'[413]

It is clear that perhaps her excitement on meeting George Sand, one of EBB's lifetime idols, could have covered the experience with a fanciful garb that idealised Sand and her own life-long desire to meet her. While a certain over-excitement on this occasion was natural, echoing the novel Regent's Park outing with Arabel, it is EBB's behaviour prior to the meeting with Sand which may be read as affected by the poet's intoxicated state and which resembles that displayed in the episode of Flush's kidnapping. In the episode of EBB's attempt to rescue her pet, what becomes significant is EBB's strong will, added to what seemed physical strength, for none of the household members (Wilson, Arabel and Henrietta) seemed able to stop her from such risky enterprise, which contrasts with the idea of the weak invalid. In the case of the meeting with Sand, it is RB who stands helpless against his wife's desire to take risks in spite of the bitter weather which, certainly, represented an imminent risk to her health. Both episodes demonstrate that EBB had a determined personality, while perhaps suggesting the possibility of the risky behaviour as a consequence of opium intoxication.

---

[411] This respirator (an early version of a face-mask), invented in 1835, was "intended to warm inhaled air by passing it through a series of fine metal grids and to protect invalids from inhaling cold dry air. This design was later used by Snow in 1847 who used temperature to control the dosage of administered ether". <https://phisick.com/item/victorian-silver-respirator-by-maw/> [accessed 2021-03-22]

[412] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3007 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3291/?rsId=236244&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[413] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 261.

By 1853, EBB's habit was a rumour within their literary circle. Mr. and Mrs. Kinney became acquainted with the Brownings in Italy in that year and Mrs. Kinney, American poet and journalist, recalls of EBB in "Reminiscences":

> All of her life she had been an invalid with spinal affection; she had now only one lung and spoke with difficulty above a whisper. […] She was of medium height, or would have been had she stood erect; but her spinal trouble caused her shoulders to stoop. She was thin to emaciation, which of course made her look older than her age, then about forty-four. [...] For many years she had been kept alive by opium, and she had to take it at stated intervals a day. This made her unequal in social intercourse; when it had been administered within a short time, she would appear more lively and cheerful than when she had been nearly her full time without it.[414]

Several points stand out from this recollection: rumour and exaggeration intertwine with a fact previously know only within EBB's intimate circle: '*she had been kept alive by opium, and she had to take it at stated intervals a day'*. Furthermore, Mrs. Kinney presents the rumour in an open statement followed by the evident change in EBB's personality under the influence of morphine which she had witnessed personally. It was Mrs. Kinney who related the anecdote I explored in chapter one, in which EBB's behaviour under the morphine was accentuated (when EBB, Hattie Hosmer and Mrs Kinney decided to cross-dress to visit a monastery prohibited to women to see some old pictures). The women never made it to the monastery however, for RB was upset by EBB's disguise, her carelessness, as he feared the story would make it into the papers, and damage EBB's reputation. Mrs. Kinney noted that EBB had 'an extra dose of opium'[415] and the anecdote evidences EBB's morphine

[414] Ronald A. Bosco, 'The Brownings and Mrs. Kinney: A Record of Their Friendship', *Browning Institute Studies*, 4 (1976), 57–124 (p. 62-3).
[415] Ronald A. Bosco, 'The Brownings and Mrs. Kinney: A Record of Their Friendship', p. 62-3.

habit, as beyond control, noticed by their friends and strangers. But it also indicates RB's lost battle against the morphine, for the matter had escaped him. It also appears that EBB no longer cared about being seen under the influence of the drug. Since she was appearing more often in society, EBB's morphine experience was no longer exclusive to isolation. RB often stated that he was surprised that he could never cease to discover aspects of EBB, and while this expression might sound romantic, it might also evidence her unpredictable, or erratic emotional and social behaviour.

EBB's rift with Wilson further exemplifies these changes which affected others. As stated, EBB trusted blindly in her maid and they held a deep mutual affection. During their lives at Wimpole Street, Wilson was fully devoted to her work, caring for EBB. Their lives changed abroad, however, as EBB was no longer 'Miss Barrett', but a married woman who spent most of her time with RB. Wilson adapted quickly to a new country, an entirely different language, culture and social interactions. In late 1846, during the time the Brownings and Wilson were living their new lives, Wilson fell so ill that she could not work. For ten days, the roles were inverted and EBB did her best to look after her maid: she even cooked for Wilson. This sign of generosity demonstrates EBB's kindness and shows how significant Wilson was to her. Wilson also took much of the responsibility for Pen's care and the boy would love her throughout his life, up to her old age. When Wilson met a man with whom she had an affair that never came to fruition, EBB was glad not to lose her. Later, in 1853 when the Brownings hired Ferdinando Romagnoli, a man-servant, not only did he win Pen's

heart, but also Wilson's and EBB and RB were pleased when the couple announced her marriage. However, EBB seems to have have become really cross when she discovered Wilson had been pregnant for four months at the time of her marriage. The Brownings refused to accept the couple living in the household with the child. The whole relationship fractured. Forster reflects:

> Victorian employers thought such magnanimity absurd. Elizabeth was a creature of her time in sharing what they saw as an entirely justifiable viewpoint: her peers would have not expected her to behave in any other way. But the author of *Aurora Leigh*, so concerned with the plight of poor working women, so close to a servant who had proved her loyalty over and over again at considerable personal risk, cannot be judged by conventional standards. Elizabeth failed Wilson as Wilson had never failed her. To take Wilson and her baby to Italy would have been impractical, inconvenient, unreasonably charitable –but it would not have been impossible for people as resourceful and courageous as the Brownings.[416]

Wilson had left her country and family in order to go with her mistress, and EBB, had shown deep affection and trust, even giving her a brooch as an anniversary memorial as a token of her support during her elopement with RB. After being so happy for Wilson on her marriage to Ferdinando, all of a sudden turned her back on her maid. Wilson had not disclosed her pregnancy to her mistress (was she meant to?), nevertheless, she expected the Brownings to accept her and her future husband with their child. That hope was utterly shattered, for EBB had failed Wilson.

For Forster, and perhaps for all of the readers of *Aurora Leigh*, 'Isobel's Child' and 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' along with the deeply emotional 'Sonnets From the Portuguese', their author's behaviour shows a heartless and selfish reaction.

---

[416] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 303.

Where was the 'sweetness of temper and purity of spirit'[417] expressed by Miss Ritchie? EBB understood motherhood, understood love and passion and she knew from first-hand experience of the need to conceal the development of a love affair. EBB was also deeply aware of social problems, especially of the issues faced by women, and yet, she recoiled and judged Wilson, withdrawing the same hand with which she once had provided support. Certainly, as Forster notes, Victorian treatment of a lady and her maid was quite different and in a sense EBB's reaction was completely natural, but then again, EBB was no ordinary Victorian, and their relationship had proved deeper than the ordinary mistress-maid relationship. Plus EBB was an intelligent woman, but she acted as if her judgement was clouded, as if her heart was completely numb towards Wilson's situation.

Wilson, eventually, did not leave the household (she decided to leave her baby in England with her sister) but the wound never healed and things between her and her mistress were never the same. When Wilson asked for a raise in her wage, EBB thought of her as 'greedy and outrageously ungrateful'.[418] Trust was never entirely won again. A similar rift happened with EBB's close friend Miss Mitford. On publishing her *Recollections of a Literary Life*, Miss Mitford made what would be seen as a terrible mistake in disclosing to the public the fact that EBB's brother's death had been a main source of grief to the poet, as explored in the previous chapter. Forster notes: 'Elizabeth was prepared to believe that her friend had had only the best motives but it made no difference: the offence was inexcusable. Miss Mitford,

---

[417] Anne Thackeray Ritchie, *Dictionary of National Biography*, p. 81.
[418] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 272.

distressed and embarrassed and more than a little guilty, wrote explaining, justifying and apologising'.[419] Just as with Wilson, a gap emerged between them which could never be entirely overcome as evidenced in EBB's letter to Miss Mitford in January 1852:

> Oh, I am morbid, I very well know!– But the truth is that I have been miserably upset by your book, & that if I had had the least imagination of your intending to touch upon certain biographical details in relation to me [...] You cannot understand—no, you cannot understand with all your wide sympathy (perhaps because you are not morbid & I am) the sort of susceptibility I have upon one subject.
>
> [...]
>
> There was no need—no need– To show my nervous susceptibility in the length & breadth of it to you, I could not, (when it came to the point), bear to read the passage extracted in the *Athenæum*—notwithstanding my natural anxiety to see exactly what was done– [...] —and if, as I dare say you will, you think me very very foolish, do not on that account think me ungrateful– Ungrateful I never can be to you, my much loved & kindest friend.
>
> I hear your book is considered one of your best productions,—and I do not doubt that the opinion is just. Thank you for giving it to us—thank you.
>
> I dont like to send you a letter from Paris without a word about your hero. "Handsome"!—I fancy not—nor after the imperial type. I have not seen his face distinctly– What do you think about the constitution? Will it work, do you fancy, nowadays in France?[420]

EBB's reply reveals important aspects of how she understood her identity. Bro's death, her grief -which she mentions simply as 'one subject'[421]- and her mourning had been her own, and perhaps were part of the melancholy aura which had surrounded her, but following Mitford's account, they had been disclosed to be read by everyone. The spiritual, ethereal EBB was, suddenly, made flesh through Miss Mitford's pen.

---

[419] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 262.
[420] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2999 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3275/?rsId=236245&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[421] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2999 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3275/?rsId=236245&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Grief and mourning, so suitable for a lady, began to colour the legendary sketch. EBB was no longer a semi-invalid poet who suffered physically, as Horne had put it, but her grief was known to have a tangible source. EBB states how much this disclosure hurt her, even when she would rather have such facts disclosed to her by her friend. However, the subsequent shift in the letter is surprising, for she accepts the praise for the book and is even grateful. But the letter then shifts again, dramatically: 'I don't like to send you a letter from Paris without a word about your hero. "Handsome…"'[422] Not only is there a shift in subject, but also in tone, which is unsettling to the reader, for it reads as a completely different letter. This pattern, of being extremely hurt or distressed by another's actions or circumstances and plunged into her own feelings before shifting tone and theme to absolutely trivial matters can be traced in her correspondence through the years, increasing in depth and intensity as the years went by. During her final years, this pattern will become more evident, along with the shift of blending an entirely personal tragedy or grief to place with a national disaster as in her letters concerning Henrietta's fatal illness.

The emotional pattern of both episodes with Wilson and Miss Mitford is significantly similar. EBB feels hurt, offended, betrayed, and is unable, or unwilling, to place herself in the place of the other to understand their reasoning. She never talked about the matter with Miss Mitford in person and her letters –which had become fewer following her courtship with RB- further waned. In January 1853, when Henrietta wrote to EBB telling her that Miss Mitford was terminally ill and

[422] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2999 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/3275/?rsId=236245&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

since Miss Mitford's letters to herself did not disclose this fact, EBB refused to believe it and simply kept writing to her friend a series of religious letters to provide some comfort. After Miss Mitford died, EBB could not go through her last letters, which remained in a closed box.

This behaviour can be explained through Hayter's words cited earlier, for the opium addict: 'is at peace with his fellow men because he does not care about them; their sorrows do not move him'.[423] The perception of others' sorrows was seen through the narcotic glass. Their problems were not important, as they were not her own: morphine had succeeded in numbing her heart. Flush's death, for instance, was unrecorded in EBB's poetry –he had been subject of several poems- and the event, apparently, was much grieved by Pen, but not so much by her. Evidence of such emotional deterioration is read in EBB's response to Henrietta's terminal womb cancer in 1860, as Forster writes:

> In every letter about Henrietta she followed, without any break, paragraphs and pages expressing her agony with long screeds about the political situation in Italy. […] In her mind, she was making Henrietta's illness a metaphor for Italy's struggle. She could not think of the suffering of her sister without confusing it with the suffering of "her" country.[424]

There is no doubt that EBB lived through her morphine reality. She was unable to face the grief and the horror of the imminent loss of her sister, turning her face away, minimizing, unsuccessfully, her inner suffering while her erratic behaviour increased. Other changes in her behaviour, apparently irrelevant or even comical, also point in

---

[423] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 42.
[424] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 348.

this direction. For instance, during one of their travels, the trunk in which she had placed the manuscript of *Aurora Leigh* along with Pen's clothes was misplaced and did not arrive on time, and EBB was more worried about the garments than about the fate of her manuscript: 'Mrs. Browning's chief concern was not for her manuscripts, but for the loss of her little boy's wardrobe, which had been devised with so much tender motherly care and pride'.[425] While Miss Ritchie's tone in narrating this anecdote constructs EBB as the perfect mother, living only for her child and enhancing the sacredness of motherhood, we might read EBB's response to losing her manuscript in which all her 'highest convictions upon life and Art'[426] as reflecting her lack of care and engagement with situations of high importance.

As is evident in the following extracts, EBB was taking heavy doses of morphine during her writing of *Aurora Leigh,* when she visited London for a short while in 1856:

> One thing which has put me out of sorts since I came, has been a mistake or worse fault of the chymist [sic] here, Twinberrow, through which my indispensable morphine was weaker than usual .. So that I have had the feeling, people have in dreams, of being forced to run, for some great motive or other, & of not being able to move their legs– Now however, Bell, my old man (who told Robert he thought I was dead long ago) has sent me the right proportions, & I am myself & comfortable.[427]
>
> [...]
>
> I am overpowered by work—and morphine has failed me– A London chemist made up the prescription wrong & I was wretched till a last appeal to Bell (quite astonished to hear I was not dead!) reinstated me in this sublunary world.[428]

---

[425] Anne Thackeray Ritchie, *Dictionary of National Biography,* p. 81.
[426] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 4.
[427] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3814 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4162/?rsId=236246&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[428] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3815 [accessed 2017-03-23]. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4163/?rsId=236247&returnPage=1> [accessed

This recollection, that precedes Mrs. Kinney's reminiscences cited earlier, sustains the rumour of EBB having been 'kept alive by opium'.[429] For the chemist's observation, sheds light upon the strength of the medicine, insinuating death as the possible cause of EBB ceasing to buy her medicine, rather than recovering from illness or moving elsewhere. While EBB's tone in her remark about her usual chemist sounds slightly amused, her insistence upon getting in touch with him, as he *knew* the exact amount of EBB's prescription, hints as well that her usual prescription would have caused hesitation or further enquiry on the part of *any other* chemist. A painful truth lies underneath the humour, EBB had developed a high morphine tolerance since had she kept the lowest dosage referred in her 1849 letters, she would not have found the other prescription 'weaker than usual',[430] for her tolerance levels would have lowered as well, making no difference. This episode also reads as a reversal of the earlier cited 'mistake' made by the Italian chemist, who gave EBB a stronger morphine dose by accident when she was decreasing her intake. For, on the occasion in London the error implied a 'weaker' preparation which did not work at all.

By the time she was living in Italy EBB's intoxicated state became evident to all those acquainted with her, for not only the Kinneys noticed it, but William Story -friend to the couple- described EBB's voice as 'insistent' and her eye as 'fixed'.[431] EBB also fell into states of apathy in which she felt that she had no energy, but also as Forster notes: 'The completion of her greatest work had bred a sense of anti-climax

---

[429] Ronald A.Bosco, 'The Brownings and Mrs. Kinney: A Record of Their Friendship', p. 62.
[430] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 3814 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4162/?rsId=236248&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[431] Margaret Foster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 337

which depressed her'. . . and with her poetry 'had no idea where she wanted to go next''.[432] After her father's death, in 1857, once again EBB struggled with grief and tears for several weeks, after having laid 'on her sofa, shocked, incapable at first of crying or even talking'.[433] Apathy and depressive feelings, along with her usual weakness were enhanced by morphine for she was no longer living in the pleasant state between morphine draughts and poetry, but in a numb state in which the only tangible feelings were grief and a lack of direction: 'her letters were littered with pathetic references to being "fit for nothing", "only a rag", "only a shadow" of a person'.[434]

In 1858, a final attempt by RB, Arabel and Sarianna Browning to make EBB quit the morphine bore no fruit. They suggested to her that she *could* try homoeopathic remedies to treat her ailments, since for the three of them homoeopathy had worked successfully. EBB declined their offer, and while a decade earlier she had complied in an attempt to quit, this time her response was entirely negative and her own acknowledgement of her dependence was shown as never before:

> ...Of throwing over my morphine—only I do feel shy of some illness, some sudden breaking down if I did it,—the medecine [sic] having becoming [sic] such a second nature with me after all these years.[435] [...] But I am bound, you see, to my horrible morphine,—without which I fall to pieces, .. & with which, globules are impotent– To leave off the morphine, all agree, would be too great an experiment after this protracted habit–[436]

---

[432] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 318
[433] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait*, p. 178.
[434] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 353.
[435] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4148 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4510/?rsId=236249&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[436] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 4171 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4539/?rsId=236250&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Morphine was no longer pleasant, it had transformed into something 'horrible', yet, it was far too deeply intertwined within her own mind, body and emotions as 'second nature' that she felt it impossible to escape. EBB resented this relapse in her mood, her general health and her poetic production, which declined dramatically after *Aurora Leigh.* Her diet once again became extremely poor and frugal, which corresponds to the 'almost absolute loss of appetite which renders digestion very difficult'[437] produced by oral morphine. The weakness kept her indoors as she grew horribly thin and seemed completely out of spirits and metaphorically, she crawled back into her dark room in Wimpole Street, and this time, RB, with all his love, was unable to drag her out.

By the spring of 1861, there were no signs of EBB improving. She had been writing some poetry but it was scarce. She refused to see any doctor on the grounds that she was perfectly aware of what her symptoms were, and that she was not in pain, just feeling weak, characteristic present in the morphinomaniac who: 'has not enough energy to throw off his torpor, [...] often he has not even force enough to leave his bed'.[438] EBB's decline was gradual. Forster reckons that RB struggled on caring for his wife, for he wanted to believe in her own self-assurance, yet his instinct told him otherwise[439], and his letter to Sarianna after EBB's death underlines having acted under Dr. Wilson's medical instruction.[440] EBB (and Wilson) might have been right:

---

[437] Benjamin Ball, M. D., *The Morphine Habit (Morphinomania): With Four Lectures on the Border-Land of Insanity, Cerebral Dualism, Prolonged Dreams, Insanity in Twins* (New York : Fitzgerald, 1887), p. 6
[438] Benjamin Ball, M. D., *The Morphine Habit (Morphinomania): With Four Lectures on the Border-Land of Insanity, Cerebral Dualism, Prolonged Dreams, Insanity in Twins.* p. 4.
[439] Forster, Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 363.
[440] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning Collected by Thomas J. Wise* (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 58-63.

the *illness* could have been the same as usual. But the extra amount of morphine was starting to build up and RB's instinct sensed this. Unfortunately, Wilson was by 1861 no longer part of their household and she only paid short visits. Had she been there, by her mistress's side, looking after her as in the old days, she might have noticed the alarming signs which would have been slightly different, or more acute than ordinarily. EBB was having hallucinations and had been nourished merely by broth and ass's milk in spite of being prescribed solid nourishment.[441] Morphine overdose crawled gently, until there was nothing to be done:

> But when the patient withstands the direct toxic effect, he falls gradually into a decline, and dies of consumption, unless some incidental disease, sometimes slight, comes to carry him off [...] Acute affections of the respiratory organs, bronchitis, and above all pneumonia, are exceptionally serious among the greater number of those subjects.[442]

As earlier noted RB became alarmed when signs of EBB's illness seemed to worsen. Her hands and feet became icy cold and had to be put in basins of hot water; afterwards she seemed immersed in a hallucinatory state, with her words: 'What a fine steamer –how comfortable!'[443] Morphine overdose has several key signs that match EBB's final hours, appearing gradually after Dr. Wilson prescribed an extra dose of morphine: cold skin, pinpoint pupils, extreme somnolence (sleepiness), severe respiratory depression, slow and shallow breathing and stupor.[444] Sampson pursues

---

[441] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning Collected by Thomas J. Wise,* p. 61.
[442] Benjamin Ball, M. D. *The Morphine Habit (Morphinomania): With Four Lectures on the Border-Land of Insanity, Cerebral Dualism, Prolonged Dreams, Insanity in Twins,* p. 7.
[443] Robert Browning, *Letters of Robert Browning Collected by Thomas J. Wise*, p. 62.
[444] Morphine Overdose Symptoms 'can be associated with serious and sometimes life-threatening side effects within the first 1 to 3 days of taking morphine, or whenever a dose is increased," Anton C. Bizzell, MD, president and CEO of The Bizzell Group in Lanham, Maryland, tells WebMD Connect to Care. "Serious side effects for morphine overdose include agitation, changes in your heartbeat, confusion, drowsiness, extreme sleepiness, fever, hallucinations, loss of appetite, nausea, and significant changes in your mood," Bizzell says. In addition, fainting

the overdose theory along with Forster and Dally, with a slight narrative twist, for she suggests RB's posthumous account as possibly not being fully reliable, hinting that he may have helped EBB cross the passage to life eternal: 'Combine the high doses that result from Elizabeth's lifetime dependency on the drug with the panicky human desire to relieve suffering and this [the overdose] is not inconceivable. And who's to say that it would not even be a kind of pragmatic, if unconscious, compassion?'[445] The overdose was not the result of medical negligence, nor of RB administrating more morphine in full awareness of its effect, nor was the overdose accelerated by illness. EBB's final abandonment can be traced through her own letters: the morphine dosage, increased again through the years to the point of no return, the mourning for her father and Henrietta, EBB's virtually non-existent diet, her relapse into voluntary seclusion, her final mentions of the horrors of morphine to her loved ones, all point to a broken will that simply gave up.

RB's battle against his wife's addiction lasted for years and in the end proved in vain. Arguably, he was not fully aware of the implications of the signs of an overdose, as many friends and relatives of addicts are not. Compassionate and loving he was, but not to the point of giving up his wife to the enemy he had battled against for so long. EBB's overdose was not the instant result of an extra dose of morphine, but an addition of several factors driven by herself. During her final months she absolutely neglected everything which could have acted against morphine, pushing the limits as

---

can occur during an overdose. Less-threatening side effects of a morphine overdose, Bizzell says, can include: cold or clammy skin, bluish fingertips and lips, constricted pupils, blurred vision,vomiting, severe constipation, severely slowed or irregular breathing, limp muscles'. <https://www.webmd.com/connect-to-care/addiction-treatment-recovery/prescription/signs-of-morphine-overdose > [accessed 2021-03-23]

[445] Fiona Sampson, *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 257.

she had never done before. RB's posthumous need to believe that it was a respiratory ailment that eventually killed his wife, corresponds with his frustration at his lost battle against her addiction and his final unawareness or even negation or disbelief at realising an overdose was happening right in front of his eyes. After all, a morphine overdose creeps quietly and sometimes gradually, peacefully, in a cumulative way, and, in cases like that of EBB who also had a respiratory ailment, it could be easily mistaken for a respiratory failure in the eyes of a carer. As I've traced out, EBB's illness provided the perfect mask for her dependence, placing her as a victim of ill health. Hayter's argument, however, that EBB was not an addict was sadly not evidenced by the poet's final years. The ordeal must have been heartbreaking to RB, for EBB had all the happiness and satisfaction possible: a successful career, a loving and artistic partner, a lovely child, friends, Italy, which had sustained her, yet, none of these sufficed. Morphine had been stronger than everything else. RB's embarrassment and shame at allowing his wife's habit to be known outside their intimate circle was transfigured into a respiratory ailment that took her to the grave, a force beyond her to which finally she gave in, thanks to her frailness.

The cause of EBB's death was then Romantic, convenient, ladylike, highly poetical, 'the chill' fitted perfectly into the myth she and RB constructed. Illness was an involuntary force that came between them; morphine, though medically prescribed, became a personal choice. While EBB did not suffer or die of TB, a similar allure surrounding her death caused by a respiratory ailment helped to romanticize even more her sanctified aura: 'death from TB places the emphasis on the perfect

sublimation of feeling'[446] which in EBB's case fits to perfection as she *died* (allegedly) in RB's arms, after kissing him and holding his face between her hands, in a final gesture in which Love and death became one. A morphine overdose was not glamorous and lady-like, rather it would fit within legend as coarse and vulgar. Morphine dependency would have collided too with the purely impeccable spiritual image of EBB as a poet, whose 'angelic frame' reflected her spiritual nature. Addiction would have pointed towards weakness, self-destruction, an excess of self-indulgence ending in death. Moreover, to place EBB as a transitional figure between the 'opium eater' and the 'morphinomanic' would have destroyed not just the image of EBB's womanly spiritual integrity, but shattered that of RB's chivalric strength, placing him as helpless against morphine. In the process, love, spiritual strength, masculinity, heroism, poetry, would crumble into pieces. Love, that force which once drove EBB to elope from Wimpole Street, which inspired some of the most widely quoted love sonnets in the English language, which transformed her life during a short period, showing her a true glimpse of how life *could* be different without seeing through the morphine glass, was not enough. In the end, her heart, divided between her love for RB and morphine, gave in to morphine's final embrace, in which she found no challenge, no reproach, no questioning, but the silent and peaceful comfort of silently wrapping herself in her hood of poppies, where grief and pain subsided.

---

[446] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 26.

While during her lifetime EBB might have delegated some (or much) of the responsibility for the construction of her official likeness to her husband, after her death, the perpetuation of her legend fell entirely in RB and the editors of the contemporary recollections which started to surface. In a manner similar to what had happened with the official portrait included in the frontispiece of *AL*, EBB was objectified and transformed through the masculine gaze into the flawless perfect wife, mother and poet, embodying feminine ideals of the age. The editor Leslie Stephen, was acquainted with the Brownings, and his edits to Miss Ritchie's text which could have reflected what RB had already been circulating on EBB, reverberated far into future generations; this is directly exemplified by Virginia Woolf's *Flush* in which a single mention of a 'glass of medicine'[447] taken by EBB is vaguely presented in the narration. In spite of her playful tone, humour and questioning of the art of biography, Woolf reproduced much of the Victorian legendary construction of EBB, still framing the poet within illness, grief and Love, yet leaving out any link between EBB's illness and her morphine habit. While humorous, definitely less sacred and more human, Woolf's text moved EBB's feet from the pedestal, hinting at a possible falling from it, and has been gradually occurring since the 1960s.

The acknowledgement of the existence of EBB's lifelong dependence on morphine and its impact upon circumstances playing in her life and work widens the perspectives of study, for it places EBB -biographically- within another important moment in Literary History: the shift from the Romantic 'opium eater' to the

[447] Virginia Woolf, *Flush,* p. 27.

fin-de-siecle 'morphinomaniac', from the intake of the opiate first as part of a visionary experience, and later transformed into a trait of weakness and deceit. At the same time, my acknowledgement and re-assessment of the place of morphine in EBB's life draws it out of the shadows to illuminate a part of EBB's life. I have explored the morphine in EBB's life not only as a medical necessity, but also as a personal choice which had echoes in her life, poetry and which shaped, through its concealment, part of the legend of the poet. Her drug dependence should not be seen as a sign of weakness, nor as a path by which to victimise EBB. On the contrary, it should be understood as a biographical fact which discloses different layers of her personality, its influence having echoes within her life and poetry, contrasting with the sanctified flawless legendary figure, making her more human.

Chapter 3: The Poet through the Morphine Glass

The blind poet with poppy eyes

Returning to EBB's letter to RB of March 20, 1845, in which she disclosed her view upon how seclusion and illness had affected her poetry: 'I labour under signal disadvantages -that I am, in a manner, as a blind poet? … But how willingly I would as a poet exchange some of this lumbering, ponderous, helpless knowledge of books, for some experience of life and men.'[448] EBB's metaphorical disability was not one matching her physical self as she did not consider herself an invalid or crippled poet, but one who had been denied access through sight by blindness being equal to lack of life experience: 'I had seen no Human nature, that my brothers and sisters of the earth were names to me.'[449] EBB echoes the Ruskinian notion of sight as means for apprehending the world; from sight -as mere organic function- to contemplation. Sight offers the possibility of silence and detachment by physically disconnecting the viewer through the mechanical act of shutting the eyelids. Of all the possibilities which EBB could have chosen as handicap, she chose sight, which was never affected by her illness and which acted as the medium through which she engaged with the external world, as she relied on her eyes nor only for reading, but for letter writing. Moreover, knowledge through observation of humankind was what she felt was

---

[448] Robert Browning, *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett*, *1845-1846, Volume 2: March 1846 to September 1846* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 43.
[449] Robert Browning, *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett*, *1845-1846, Volume 2: March 1846 to September 1846,* p. 43.

necessary to reach a whole understanding of life. In referring to her blindness as a poet, EBB is referring to the lack of a wide, bird's eye's view which enclosed the whole of her fellow humans as a vast landscape. In contrast, inward observation was utterly familiar to EBB, and it was through that capacity that through she accomplished a deep and multi-layered understanding of the individual.

At the time she made her observations on blindness to RB, EBB remained a mere name to her audience, unseen, as expressed by Horne, readers wondered 'whether such an individual as Miss E. B, Barrett had ever really existed.[450] As I have previously explored, EBB considered her physical person as unimportant, both as likeness and biographical accounts for her audience, as she had expressed it to her brother George Barrett upon Horne's biographical sketch for *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844): 'it strikes me that whether I live in the dark or not or write 'charming notes' or not, is of small importance to the public'.[451] Whereas living in darkness was related to a habit which aided her condition, easily relieved by drawing a curtain, in EBB's case, it also revealed the need of the poet to remain obscure, anonymous, surrounded by mystery. EBB's room in Wimpole Street - was a quiet and dark enclosed space (dimly illuminated when necessarily), with an atmosphere created by medical recommendation. Within its four walls, - practically uninterrupted for six years - EBB produced some of her best poetry, including the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and ideas for *AL*. Yet, medical advice met personal taste: by the time she

---

[450] Richard Hengist Horne, *A New Spirit of the Age*, p. 132-33.
[451] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1393 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1558/?rsId=236251&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

started her correspondence with RB, EBB was more than used to her secluded routine which was sustained by three pillars: darkness, seclusion, and morphine.

I have explored in detail EBB's morphine dependence. Alethea Hayter noted in her *Mrs. Browning: A Poet's work and its Setting*: 'it is curious to see, in Mrs. Browning's case, the effect of what would now be regarded as advanced and chronic addiction on an integrated personality with brilliant imagination'.[452] Hayter considers that a scarce amount of opium imagery within EBB's poetry is too weak to support a remarkable influence of the drug within her aesthetics. In *Mrs. Browning: A Poet's Work and its Setting* Hayter signals the opium influence within EBB's poetry with fluctuating judgement. Initially she asserts the poet's addiction[453] after claiming that the poet had 'few of the moral or mental symptoms of addiction;'[454] then she underplays the poet's dosage, and in spite of mentioning the evident influence of the drug within her poetry, concludes that her addiction was generally not known to her contemporaries.[455] In her 1969 text, she simply mentions 'opium visions'[456] as part of the sources for EBB's imagery. It is in *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1965) Hayter places EBB in the section 'Some writers who took opium occasionally', and shifts from the idea of a stated influence, to a 'possible influence'.[457] Hayter claims that the drug left no wreckage upon the poet's personality,[458] as it produced no

---

[452] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting*, p. 62,
[453] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting*, p. 62.
[454] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 61.
[455] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 67.
[456] Alethea Hayter, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Published for the British Council and the National Book League* (London: Longmans, Green, 1969), p. 21.
[457] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 299.
[458] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 299.

withdrawal symptoms[459] and that the echoes of the drug were not as constant in her poetry as in the work of other authors.

It is significant that Hayter's biographical study *Mrs. Browning* appeared at a historical moment in which EBB's figure was still highly sanctified as the heroine of a romance. Simon Avery acknowledges the importance of Hayter's work at the time as that echo way into the present, as a 'very compelling and astute analysis'.[460] I consider Hayter's work an important turning point in EBB studies, since dealing with 'Mrs. Browning', Hayter lifted the veil from the sanctified iconic legend and shed light upon a subject which had not been addressed before: EBB's morphine dependence, not only as a biographical medical fact, but as a possible source for her aesthetics and spiritual insight. Chronologically, *Mrs. Browning* appeared in 1962, with a chapter devoted to the influence of the drug 'Opium and Imagination', which would evolve into *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968). The title, *Mrs. Browning*, suggests an EBB still shrouded by her own legendary weight. It has been known that laudanum was a common household item, an elixir which many of the women writers and their contemporary fellow humans, took as a medication, exemplified clearly by Mary Russell Mitford, with whom, as mentioned, EBB would openly discuss the medical properties of the brew. Seen from that perspective, EBB's

---

[459] Most of the neurological and biological research on opioid receptors between male and female opioid receptors, is undertaken in mice and rats for ethical reasons, yet, similarities between mice and humans can enlighten certain aspects. For instance, it has been proved that: 'The physical signs of heroin and morphine withdrawal are more pronounced in male mice and rats than in female … male rats experienced longer and more severe spontaneous withdrawal symptoms relative to female rats, irrespective of the method of administration' (Riley, Herpel, Clasen, 'Sex as a biological variable: drug use and abuse', *Physiology & Behavior*, 187 (Apr. 2018), 79–96 (p. 84). The withdrawal symptoms, less prominent in the female mouse, could possibly relate to female humans, thus explaining EBB's 'lack of withdrawal symptoms' as well as the 'traces of addiction', when she diminished her intake.

[460] Stott, Rebecca, and Simon Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Longman, Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 13

intake would have seemed not only harmless, but necessary, ordinary, controlled, and intelligent, fitting perfectly within the 'Mrs. Browning' legendary frame.

In the context of Hayter's work, and by discussing in the previous chapters of the circumstances of EBB's morphine habit, I want now to address the influence of morphine upon her poetry through imagery, structure and narrative. Along with Hayter, I support the existence of the influence, yet I claim that this can be traced beyond the evident, saturated, and hallucinatory imagery in EBB's work. For a subtler influence, which affects sensory perception, mind, and emotions, intertwines with everyday life experience to produce a unique and unexplored discourse. In *AL,* I argue, EBB's most experimental and daring work, the narrative is constructed through an opiate filter evidenced in the use of colour, spatial awareness and a spiritual and theological dimension.[461] For years, EBB's continuous use of morphine was mostly experienced indoors, in a secluded atmosphere which aided reveries, influencing some of her most morbid poetry in which death, darkness and the grave are major tropes. *AL,* by contrast exploded in colour as the natural shift of setting for the morphine experience: outdoor activity, observation of people and the city, social interaction, intertwined with EBB's previous moments of introspection usually within a dim interior.

Hayter claims that the opium presence can be clearly traced within EBB's *Poems* (1844), as well as in the poem 'A True Dream'[462] (1833) with its 'effects of

[461] Some of those spiritual themes in *Aurora Leigh* will be discussed minutely in the following chapter.
[462] About 'A True Dream', Hayter notes in *Mrs. Browning* 'is almost a case-book list of opium-inspired imagery' and 'that is what clearly is, an untouched-up record of a dream experience, with the authentic inconsequence and horror' (Alethea Hayter, *Mrs. Browning* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 65.

hyperaesthesia and synaesthesia, its cosmic infinities, its sudden chills and rotting apparitions, stony faces and cloudy temples, the unexpected juxtaposition of its imagery'.[463] Hayter's approximation is correct, yet fails by concentrating only upon exaggerated imagery and hyper-altered sensory perceptions induced through heavy opioid intoxication. Her approximation, though accurate, is based upon Romantic drug excess and misconceptions of addiction: drug misuse does not necessarily have to be evident and life threatening for its user to signal a problem. George Pickering acknowledges EBB as a 'well-balanced addict'[464] who was perfectly well-adjusted with her addiction,[465] at least during her early years under the Barrett household. Through those years, EBB proved to be a functional addict[466] invisible to those unacquainted with addiction through first-hand experience and masked by medical necessity. As I have shown, EBB's increased intake happened gradually, with certain high pitches traced through changes in her personality and her relationship to others, affecting mostly her intimate circle.[467]

In chapter 1, I have explored how RB might have dealt with EBB's addiction, his battle against it and his near success in getting her to quit. But it is clear that he

---

[463] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 299.

[464] George Pickering, 'Creative Malady. Illness in the Lives and Minds of Charles Darwin, Florence Nightingale, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Medical History*, 19. 3, (July 1975), 313–313 (p. 262).

[465] George Pickering, 'Creative Malady. Illness in the Lives and Minds of Charles Darwin, Florence Nightingale, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, Elizabeth Barrett Browning', p. 265.

[466] Apart from the large amounts of coffee she enjoyed, EBB rarely had wine. In this sense, she was committed to a single substance. EBB perhaps did not mix morphine with other substances simultaneously, as her advice to Isa Blagden reads: 'do you mean that you take blue pill & morphine synchronically? (I hate hard words!)– If you do, there must be war in you, & no sleep,—the calomel hindering the operation of the anodyne, & vice versâ. After you had done with blue pill (in the largest sense) then you might go to morphine for consolation, but certainly not before'. (*The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3775 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4138/?rsId=236252&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[467] EBB had no intention of quitting morphine throughout her life. There were certain times when she diminished her intake, as explored in the previous chapter. She wrote, for instance, to her sister Henrietta: 'Tell Arabel that I have not left my draughts -oh no! I have not been "charmed" up to that point, though gradually I am diminishing it'. (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Letters to Her Sister*, *1846-1859,* (London : John Murray, 1929), p. 9).

understood that morphine was part of EBB. RB's *An Essay on Percy Bysse Shelley*[468] contains a passage which illuminates his understanding of the bond between drug and poet. While referring to Shelley, the text reverberates with EBB:

> The body, in the torture of incurable disease, refusing to give repose to the bewildered soul, tossing in its hot fever of the fancy, -and the laudanum-bottle making but a perilous and pitiful truce between these two. He was constantly subject to 'that state of mind' (I quote his own note to Hellas') in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensation, through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and excess of passion animating the creations of the imagination:' in other words, he was liable to remarkable delusions and hallucinations.[469]

RB's deep understanding of the complex relationships between drug and artist emerges from first-hand experience. The incurable disease and the torture conveyed by drug use becomes a juncture between Shelley and EBB within RB's imagination: body and soul lie in conflict of action and repose, finding a 'truce' and a sense of peace induced by the drug. In an article by Dr. Joseph Crawford from Exeter University, the issue of women writers who indulged in opium comes into debate.[470] Crawford writes about several poets who praised the poppy, notably all of them did it explicitly: Harriet Martineau, Sarah Coleridge, L. E. L., Anna Seward and Mary Robinson. Crawford mentions EBB as a drug dependant, highlighting her brother's attempt to help her quit, and the large sums of money spent on the medicine -a hint to the 'Morphinomaniac' who would lack control. The general understanding of

---

[468] Robert Browning, *An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1888).
[469] Robert Browning, *An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 588.
[470] 'How Did 18th Century's Literary Women Relieve Domestic Distress? With Opiates', *The Guardian*, 11 Mar. 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/11/opiates-literary-women-coleridge-mary-robinson-harriet-martineau> [accessed 2021-07-31]

influence of opium upon their literary work seems to follow Hayter's line.[471] I argue that the influence of morphine in EBB's poetry has to be understood differently, as in Shelley's case, since for EBB, the 'state of mind' was continuous and therefore became natural. She was unlike those other female writers discussed by Crawford, who apparently did not indulge themselves as thoroughly, and whose texts addressed isolated and specific experiences with the drug.

A lack of evident praises for the poppy as well as the scarce hallucinatory qualities normally associated with the influence of opiates in EBB's poetry can be explained both chemically and by personal choice. EBB's explanation of why she would not experiment personally with mesmerism -which had interested her since 1843- to Miss Mitford in September 28th, 1844, illuminates partially her experience with morphine: 'Also I have an indisposition towards this magnetism, & shrink from the idea of subjecting my will as an individual, to the will of another, —of merging my identity (in some strange way which makes my blood creep to think of) in the identity of another'.[472] The act of mesmerism, Kate Nesbit explains, required the mesmerized person to submit completely to the mesmerizer,[473] to become a puppet to an exterior agent. De Quincey's nightmarish descriptions of opium dreams in 'The Pains of Opium' from *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*[474] detail the experience of opiate intoxication, in which visions and dreams appear absolutely out

[471] University of Exeter, <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_645441_en.html.> [accessed 2021-04-05]
[472] As published in *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 1724 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1948/?rsId=236258&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[473] Kate Nesbit, 'Revising Respiration: Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and the Shared Breath of Poetic Voice in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Poetry*, 56. 3 (2018), 213–32 (p. 215).
[474] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868).

of control and escape the user's will. By considering the remark upon mesmerism, EBB's need for control of herself evidences a personality trait, which had been earlier noticed by Dally in his analysis of EBB's anorexia.[475] Contemporary anorexia differs from Victorian in cultural characteristics, yet both are rooted within self-control. For the Victorians, emaciation, slenderness and 'consumptive' looks were considered attractive signs of beauty added to a spiritual dimension: the will was meant to be so strong as to control appetites (hunger, sexual) and elevate the spiritual status of woman who mastered her will.[476] EBB's obsession with herself as more spiritual than earthly, as a voice rather than a flesh and bone author added to the perception others had of her through their memoirs and the final achievement praised by her in her portrait by Talfourd supports the idea of a self-controlled nature acting upon itself.

The Opiate Pattern

I have decided to use 'A True Dream'[477] not only as an example of the evident opium imagery as Hayter has noted, but also as a clear example of what I am calling the opiate pattern in EBB's poetry. This pattern is always experienced by the speaker and involves the sensory perception, mental state, and interaction of the speaker with the setting. Unlike *AL*, which is a narration about life experience, 'A True Dream'

[475] Although the main reason for her anorexia perhaps was a side effect of the opium intake, Dally's analysis explores circumstances in EBB's life which suggest a deeper psychological connection. The cultural differences of anorexia illuminate this notion and round this idea of EBB needing to control certain aspects of her life.
[476] Anna Krugovoy, *Silver Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 27.
[477] For full poem see Appendix D.

belongs to the oneiric sphere and its title and date 'dreamed at Sidmouth, 1833'[478], connect the poem to the medieval tradition of dream vision in which the veracity of the dream was sustained by allegorical content generally enclosing revelation; that same veracity does not just enclose meaning, but the entire experience of the dream in itself. This truth approximates the notion of lucid dreams in which, in spite of not being able to control the dream itself, an awareness of its narrative, along with the full mental capacity of vigil are present to the dreamer.

The opiate pattern occurs as follows: **perception> stasis/mental interaction> awakening> grounding action**. In 'A True Dream', visual **perception** plays a major role. After the speaker opens the vial, her eyes engage with the smoke and a series of images succeed one another, first in a merely descriptive fashion, then **interacting** within the speaker's mind, through responses to perception, that intertwine while the speaker remains almost static. The **awakening** occurs both through the typographical use of '* * * *' and by the sudden change of imagery and setting, while the **grounding action** occurs through the character's awareness of reality and her surroundings through touch. Through this pattern, a claustrophobic atmosphere is created from which the speaker is able to break free once the awakening happens.

Hayter's book features testimonials of opium eaters, such as: 'pleasantly torpid; his legs felt leaden, his arms powerless, his eyelids too heavy to raise. He was not asleep, he was still conscious of the outside world, but sounds like the ticking of a

[478] Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, 'A True Dream', *New Poems by Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914), p. 113.

clock or the rumbling of carriages seemed very distant and mute',[479] as pointing towards the opiate intoxicated state as a possible part of the composition of 'A True Dream'. The perception of the body, its awareness, is altered to the point of becoming almost non-existent, as if corporeality were buried underneath a heavy weight: *consciousness* becomes the self. The only apparent action executed by the speaker is at the very beginning of the poem, when the speaker holds a vial in between her hands and opens it: 'I unsealed the vial mystical,/ I outpoured the liquid thing (5,6)'; and although the speaker remains standing, first trembles, to later on, remain 'unshuddering' in an almost petrified state echoing the torpid, heavy sensation which is later enhanced by her exclamation: 'Then I raised up my burning brow,/ My quiv'ring arms on high (93, 94)'; in an image which adds to the sensation of heaviness that of extreme exhaustion felt by the performer.[480] The awareness of corporeality through its absence. Heaviness and difficulty make the body through what it cannot be, while mental awareness remains intact: 'I looked at it with fixed heart,/ yea -not a pulse did fail (27, 28)'. The heart functions organically, pumping life and emotionally static, fixed with composure. Moreover, the physical sensation described by the opium addict between vigil and sleep is similar to a state of trance achieved through the spiritual route of prayer or meditation in which it is possible to disconnect from the corporeal identity and deliver one's self fully to the spiritual experience: the eye of the mind develops and wanders in reverie.

---

[479] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 45

[480] As mentioned in the previous Chapter, one of the side effects of morphine intake which presents more acutely in women than in men is the 'heavy or sluggish feeling' which fits the physical sensations described by the speaker. Zacny, J. P. 'Morphine Responses in Humans: A Retrospective Analysis of Sex Differences', *Drug and Alcohol Dependence,* 63.1 (2001) 23–28 (p. 27).

The speaker's repetitive voice in the poem reflects a desperate attempt to get hold of reality through language. The nightmarish state of the poet is similar to EBB's reaction after her brother's death in 1840, when she stopped reading and writing for months,[481] falling into a depressive state that worried her family,[482] for the poet lost control over her grief. Although such an example of the pains of opium does not occur again in her poetry with the same intensity of that of 'A True Dream', the influence remained. As the habit took hold of her, it is possible that whatever distortion of perception was created by morphine would cease to be remarkable, becoming instead a permanent state, an everyday experience, intertwined with her affections and poetry. Arguably, opiate and poet became so close that EBB's altered view of the world was translated into her poetry, including *AL.* In such a narrative, I suggest that Aurora may be perceived as an opiate user. While within *AL*, there is no mention of opium in any form and unlike her creator, Aurora's health is robust and her pale, 'consumptive looks' are attributed to heart brokenness, hours of reading and writing, they resemble, as I will argue, opiate intake.[483] Indeed, Aurora's voice is close to that of 'A True Dream', not just through its nightmarish anguish, but through rhythm, pattern, imagery and symbolism.

---

[481] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 100.
[482] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait*, p. 73.
[483] Richard Pryce's *An Evil Spirit* (1887) whose plot is focused on Miss Gordon's addiction to injected morphia (morphine) depicts her addiction from its origins to its downfall, underlining changes in Miss Gordon's personality, along with her mental and physical deterioration ending in fatal overdose. Even when a diary by Miss Gordon is what takes the reader through the whole downfall process, there is no intention of narrating the experience through the narcotic state. The plot depicts moral lesson upon the risks of morphia, as well as on the lack of professionalism from Victorian medical authorities, many times ignorant, or overlooking the risks of addiction, by showing the patient how to inject themselves, giving them complete control upon their dosage. Miss Gordon, unlike Aurora Leigh, is judged as weak and lacking self-control, for another character claims: 'In the thumb is denoted the will. That woman has no control over herself, or I knew nothing of palmistry. Her power of will and self-control are nil'. Richard Pryce, *An Evil Spirit,* (Great Britain: British Library, 2010) p. 25.

While, as noted, there is no evidence in the text to suggest the character of Aurora Leigh is an opium user, my reading of the poem through the opiate filter explores that possibility within the poem's construction, and is drawn out in my analysis of the similarities between Aurora and the speaker in 'A True Dream'. This reading is of course by no means the only route to an understanding of EBB's work. Nevertheless, I consider the morphine influence as an important aspect of the poet's work which operates in different layers and has largely been overlooked or not addressed directly.

Aurora's *Künstlerroman* is not only the journey of the artist but a journey within for this young artist remains within a very enclosed social sphere. Most of her time Aurora spends on her own, and apart from Marian, Romney, and her dead father, she does not create emotional ties further from her room in Kensington. Thus, the journey within at some points reaches emotional claustrophobia. While, for example, most of George Eliot's heroines belong to a family or are part of a community, and Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre seek social integration and approval, Aurora never seeks those. Death becomes the solution for Gaskell's fallen heroine, and Jane Eyre finds a family and a position and wealth. Aurora is, from the moment her aunt dies, completely independent and never faces material scarcity. In Book I, Aurora embodies the Romantic poet, close to nature and living in an ideal world of poetry and greenery, in which there is no further room for human relationships. She is never judged for living on her own or for remaining 'a spinster' as would not have happened in nineteenth-century cultural life. Aurora's life is quite easy and safe. It is instead her inner mental and emotional world which drags her down to passages of

despair and hopelessness in which poetry seems the only anchor. Aurora is not as innocent and as naïve as Ruth, nor as insecure and shy as Jane Eyre, but at moments bitter and self-remorseful, constantly tormented by her own imagination. She is Byronic: foreign, beautiful, cultivated, intelligent, reckless (living on her own, adopting Marian, fleeing to Italy), deeply mystical and spiritually visionary. In a review of *AL* for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1857),[484] Scottish critic William Edmonstoune Aytoun noted that:

> Aurora Leigh is not an attractive character. After making the most liberal allowance for pride, and fanaticism for art, an inflexible independence, she is incongruous and contradictory both in her sentiments and in her actions. She is not a genuine woman; one half of her heart seems bounding with the beat of humanity, while the other half is ossified.[485]

EBB constructed her character with a very human frame enhanced by emotional weakness and Aurora's lack of appeal for Aytoun is due to the traits of personality which correspond more to the masculine sphere rather than to the feminine heroine. Aytoun's criticism resided in the fact that, through Aurora, EBB broke the mould of the Victorian heroine. It was unflattering for a lady to display herself as 'proud, inflexible, fanatic', in short, one dominated by her passions. Not only contemporary critics, however, found Aurora rather faulty, for Hayter's criticism in this sense echoes the Victorian reviewer's words as Aurora emerges as: 'a cold, self-satisfied unsociable woman, high-minded indeed, but unlovable … nobody could fairly say, though many have said, that Aurora is a portrait of Mrs. Browning herself. She is not

---

[484] W. E. Aytoun, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* (January 1857) 23–41. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236261&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[485] W. E. Aytoun, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 32-33. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236261&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

a portrait of anyone; she is only intermittently alive at all.'[486] Hayter's judgement inclines towards Aurora's negative qualities, the 'intermittently alive' quality of Aurora echoes Aytoun's idea of the character possessing an 'ossified heart', a lifelessness and apparent lack of empathy which is the emotional detachment experienced by the opiate addict. Hayter's denial of the autobiographical tint in *AL* corresponds to the denial of any personality trait that could mar 'Mrs. Browning's' *flawless* moral character. Nevertheless Aurora, does have autobiographical tints. Martinez labels Aurora as 'fictional autobiography',[487] Isobel Armstrong claims that EBB had written 'without a mask',[488] and as a 'dramatized version',[489] of herself, while Leighton points to Aurora as 'a scarcely disguised representative'[490] of EBB. Marjorie Stone suggests that Aurora is part of a triad of 'spiritual autobiographies'[491] displayed within *AL* to sustain EBB's Life Philosophy, adding a spiritual dimension which I shall explore deeply in the next chapter. In the obvious layers of anecdote, Aurora shares a poetic career almost identical to that of EBB with her ideas upon Art, Poetry and spiritual understanding. References to Hope End are traced in Leigh Hall and EBB's life in Herefordshire, as well as the links between Romney and Hugh Stuart Boyd which I discussed in chapter 1. Yet, what critics have underlined as the spiritual, fictional, dramatized, disguised and, at the same time, unmasked

---

[486] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 169.
[487] Michele Martinez, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', p. 78.
[488] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics,*p. 367.
[489] Charles LaPorte, 'Aurora Leigh, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900,* 53. 4 (Nov. 2013), 829–51 (p. 382).
[490] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 117.
[491] Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning.* Macmillan, p. 149.

autobiography, is intertwined with a heroine who opposes her author as a fantasized and idealized version of herself.

As part of the autobiographical traits in Aurora, I suggest that, like her creator, her perception of the world is altered by morphine effects. While there is no overt reference within the text to opium in any form, my argument is evidenced by the opiate pattern within *AL,* added to a sensory distortion mostly of vision and hearing and a notorious absence of bodily awareness by Aurora. Visually in the text, colour, light and shade appear as over saturated and intense, affecting the plasticity in landscape (urban and natural) as well as the portrait -painted, as in the case of the mother. The same happens through observation, as in Aurora's description of Marian and Lady Waldermar. The altered state affects all of Aurora's perception, including her spatial and temporal understanding which leads to shifts in narration through a marked division occurring in Book V, making Aurora an unreliable narrator. Virginia Woolf noticed a fault in EBB's use of blank verse in dialogue: 'blank verse has proved itself the most remorseless enemy of living speech … Forced by the nature of her own medium, she [EBB] ignores the slighter, the subtler, the more hidden shades of emotion by which a novelist builds up touch by touch a character in prose.'[492] Woolf's mistake, as pointed by Deirdre David, is a common error of reading *AL* as a *novel* when EBB had no intention of writing a novel in the conventional sense, as she considered it an inferior genre.[493] Aurora is not only the narrator aware of telling her

[492] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 216-7.
[493] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 107.

own (and later Marian's) story, but she is also entirely aware of her technique. In this sense, the choice of blank verse is not just EBB's but Aurora's:

> ...As I spoke, I tore
> the paper up and down, up down and up,
> and crosswise, till it fluttered from my hands
> as forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and rapt
> by a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again
> drop slowly, and strew the melancholy ground
> before the amazed hills… why, so, indeed,
> I'm writing like a poet, somewhat large
> in the type of the image, and exaggerate
> a small thing with a great thing, topping it
> (*AL*, II: 1162-1171).

Margaret Reynolds has noted the Miltonic echo (*Paradise Lost*: 1. 283-230,[494] which is also remarkable for the satirical vein echoing Pope, and for the awareness of her poetic expression with its effect upon the reader. David calls EBB a 'self-referential writer'[495] justifying her point by emphasising the intertextual references to diverse texts which can be traced within *AL* and the characters in this work that stand as 'emblematic sketches'[496] rather than traditional fictional characters. David's remark illuminates the whole dynamic within the plot's construction by Aurora. In the letter from EBB to RB, quoted earlier, discussing 'blindness', the poet states that she had been blind only 'inwardly or with *sorrow*, for a strong emotion',[497] and that inward life in which EBB was highly experienced is reflected structurally in *AL*. Woolf's

---

[494] Margaret Reynolds in *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 70.
[495] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 108.
[496] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 115.
[497] Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899), p. 43.

understanding of *AL*'s gleams of genius, her perception of characters as caricatures and the use of blank verse as an absurdity, come from her expectations, both as novelist and as an experimental writer. Woolf's opinion branches from her own artistic perspective of what she considered stylistic failures. Aytoun insists, similar to Woolf: 'In this poem she [EBB] has wilfully alternated passages of sorry prose with bursts of splendid poetry; and her prose is all the worse because she has been compelled to *dislocate* [my italics] its joints in order to make it read like blank verse'.[498] Dislocation, the lack of smoothness in the use of narrative, is what both writers find problematic and link to Hayter's argument. Moreover there are common neurological reactions produced by opiates which in the end will depend entirely upon the individual.

I have already noted how in 'A True Dream', EBB's morphine experience affects the speaker's voice. One particular effect of opiates is 'a special feeling of being immaterial, ethereal, of having lost or merged one's identity, and to an alteration of the perceptions of time and space, a universal expansion of mind and matter'.[499] If, as suggested, Aurora Leigh is an opiate user, the first evident sign is her lack of bodily awareness, as she is not affected by weather changes, in spite of travelling through diverse latitudes (there is a single passage in which Aurora is affected by weather that I will explore further). Her perception of time and space is evidently altered: it is in the recollection of the immediate past that the plot fills with gaps, sudden changes of narration between past and present, or between observation of the outside world and

[498] W. E. Aytoun, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 35. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236261&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[499] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 48.

introspection which cuts off the narrator from her surroundings. Opiates affect memory: the user is able to remember with minute detail and childhood becomes a usual place for reverie.[500] Books I and II are a recollection of Aurora's childhood, adolescence, and her education and formation as a poet with settings minutely described: Leigh Hall with its surroundings and Aurora's aunt appear in detail. Aunt Leigh is one of the most rounded characters who is not just a 'symbol' and whose presence within the two books obeys the narrative in a coherent way: she appears, develops, interacts, and fades away in a mini-plot with no narrative gaps. These first two books, with their impeccable narrative, capture the reader's attention. Virginia Woolf noticed that once started, reading *AL* becomes almost unstoppable: 'we laugh, we protest, we complain – it is absurd, it is impossible, we cannot tolerate this exaggeration a moment longer – but nevertheless, we read to the end, enthralled'[501] and such absurdities, exaggerations and impossibilities correspond to the opiate distortion of time and space. Even when more than twenty years elapse within the novel –from Aurora's childhood to her late twenties- the whole plot develops through a timeless sensation. The external references to change of seasons are vague; characters are never described as ageing and Aurora's feelings remain static for years. A timeless haze wraps the characters in a surreal atmosphere which gives them more the quality of being emblematic. They become rather allegorical characterizations instead of rounded fictional characters.

---

[500] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning,* p. 62.
[501] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 218.

Nevertheless, in spite of the flaws noticed by Woolf, there is another aspect of *AL* which was highly praised and corresponds to the visual, as expressed by Aytoun who highlights qualities of brilliancy and vividness to the point of considering them extravagant: 'Mrs. Browning possesses in a very high degree the faculty of description, presenting us often with the most vividly coloured pictures. In this respect, if we may be allowed to institute such a comparison, she resembles Turner, being sometimes even extravagant in the vividness of her tints…'[502] The *Hereford Journal* added: 'Mrs. Browning, with all her womanly delicacy, and all her religious faith, is an artist in the Turneresque style; she lays on the colouring of such broad patches, gives such glaring prominence to certain equivocal portions of the picture, and with so little regard for the conventional that the startled beholder is in some doubts whether to admire or reprove'.[503] The Turneresque quality echoes a particular style, a sense of open space, a panoramic view that opposes entirely the notion of the enclosed dark room in which the poet developed: the wide, bird's eye view opened emerging from blindness into a metaphorical explosion of open space and colour.

Aytoun claims of EBB's descriptions: 'she has a decided tendency, not only to multiply, but to intensify images, and occasionally carries this so far as to bewilder the reader'.[504] Multiplication of images corresponds to opium intoxication in which architecture and landscape seem to grow to immense proportions within the mind. Furthermore, David's label of EBB as a highly self-referential writer, is explained by

---

[502] W. E. Aytoun, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 36. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236261&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[503] *Hereford Journal*, (3 December 1856) p. 4. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/4727/?rsId=236269&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[504] W. E. Aytoun, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* p. 36. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236261&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

the poet's own words: 'Do you know what it is to be shut up in a room by oneself, to multiply one's thoughts by one's thoughts -how hard it is to know what "one's thought" is like- how it grows and grows, and spreads and spreads, and ends in taking some supernatural colour.'[505] The multiplication of thought and images in *AL* thus may be read as fitting to a mental architectural structure under the morphine influence. Instead of expanding into landscape, as does Coleridge's *Kubla Kahn*, EBB's mind turned inwards, in a journey of self-discovery and ultimate understanding. Moreover, Aurora's mental process emulates her creator's, affected in tone by her emotions.

I worked the short days out –and watched the sun
On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons
(Like some Druidic idol's fiery brass
With fixed unflickering outline of dead heat,
From which the blood of wretches pent inside
Seems oozing forth to incarnadine the air)
Push out through fog with his dilated disk,
And startle the slant roofs and chimney-pots
With splashes of fierce colour. Or I saw
Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog,
Involve the passive city, strangle it
Alive, and draw it off into the void,
Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as if a sponge
Had wiped out London –or as noon and night
Had clapped together and utterly struck out
The intermediate time, undoing themselves
In the act.
(*AL,* III:170-186).

The multiplication of images suggests the passing of time in a quick succession of 'lurid morns' and 'monstrous afternoons'; the logical sequence of time is broken, as

[505] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning,* p. 19.

different sceneries seem glued together 'noon and night had clapped together'. Aurora remains both active, through work, and passive as static spectator. This stasis of the viewer versus the moving landscape transfixes the view into a succession of living paintings whose colours and light are the only characteristics that change according to time.

Turner's *Fire at the Grand Storehouse of the Tower of London* (1841) resembles Aurora's description in the use of colour, hues and vividness.[506] As I noted earlier, the Turnerian technique suggested in EBB affects the spatial qualities of her description: Aurora is looking through a window, which provides her with a visual frame. Nevertheless the visual field widens to a panoramic view such that the sky opens, the city enlarges itself through Aurora's vantage point reaching an aerial view with 'overcharged' carmine, enhanced by the oozing of blood and transforming London into a tactile landscape, heated by violence as the roofs and chimney tops are 'splashed' by colour as if by blood drops.

[506] Turner, J. M. W., *Fire at the Grand Storehouse of the Tower of London*, 1841. This painting belongs to a series by Turner which depicted the fire of the Old Houses of Parliament.

Fig. 3.1

J. M. W. Turner, *Fire at the Grand Storehouse of the Tower of London* 1841
(Tate Britain)

Though Turner's watercolour (fig. 3.1) depicts a fire, the intensity of colour and its placing within the composition echo Aurora's perception through the window: this view acts like an omen for Lady Waldemar's visit, which will disturb Aurora and play a destructive part in Marian Erle's fate. In *AL,* London, from being the 'strangled city' under the fog, becomes the 'strangler', as after Marian's disappearance Aurora starts feeling suffocated by her own thoughts and emotions. The fog creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, the inability of being able to see beyond what is presented in front of the character's eyes. London becomes hostile to Aurora, as shown in her visit to Marian to the slums, followed by the abortive wedding scene. London becomes organic, passive, strangled, subjected to violence. Synaesthesia makes the city tactile

to Aurora's fingertips, her wording conveys a sensation of being splashed with blood to gradually being covered by it while she remains observant and static.

French landscape in *AL* provides a different atmosphere from that in England, yet it still echoes the Turnerian technique through Aurora's eyes:

So we passed
The liberal open country and the close,
A shot through tunnels, like a lightning-wedge
By great Thor-hammers driven through the rock,
Which, quivering through the intestine blackness, splits,
And lets it in at once: the train swept in
A-throb with effort, trembling with resolve,
The fierce denouncing whistle wailing on
And dying off smothered in the shuddering dark,
While we, self-awed, drew troubled breath, oppressed
As other Titans underneath the pile
And nightmare of the mountains. Out, at last,
To catch the dawns afloat upon the land!
-Hills, slung forth broadly and gauntly everywhere,
Not cramped in their foundations, pushing wide
Rich outspreads of the vineyards and the corn
(As if they entertained i' the name of France),
While, down their straining sides, streamed manifest
A soil as red as Charlemagne's knightly blood,
To consecrate the verdure. Someone said,
'Marseilles!' And lo, the city of Marseilles,
With all her ships behind her, and beyond,
The scimitar of ever-shining sea
For right-hand use, bared blue against the sky!
(*AL*, VII: 429-452)

The continental description is filled with violent images. The train journey also resembles serpent's movements, as the train crosses through tunnels of 'intestine blackness', with 'throbbing' effort and with wailing whistle resembling its hiss. The train moving with its mighty strength, power and intensity evokes *Rain, Steam, and*

Speed -The Great Western Railway by Turner (fig 3. 2) but gives it a nightmarish tint: the passengers on the train become the prey which the serpent has eaten, and it is only the dawn of the new day which seems to show the landscape once again. In *AL* the bloody quality which had permeated London becomes a tangible reality in France through Aurora's sensibility: 'a soil as red as Charlemagne's knightly blood' echoes epic battles, with the scimitar as the instrument of bloodshed and death.

Fig. 3. 2

W. M. J. Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed -The Great Western Railway* 1844
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

John Ruskin, who famously championed Turner was overwhelmed by *AL*:

> Denmark Hill.
> 27th November, 1856.
> My dear Browning

> I think Aurora Leigh the greatest poem in the English language: unsurpassed by anything but Shakespeare—not surpassed by Shakespeare[']s sonnets—& therefore the greatest poem in the language. I write this, you see, very deliberately, straight, or nearly so, which is not common with me, for I am taking pains that you may not think—(nor anybody else) that I am writing in a state of excitement, though there is enough in the poem to put one into such a state. I have not written immediately either, partly because I did not know if you were at Florence yet, partly because I wished to read the poem quite through. I like it all—familiar parts and unfamiliar—passionate and satirical, evil telling and good telling—philosophical and dramatic—all. It has one or two sharp blemishes I think, in words, here & there—chiefly Greek. I think the "Hat aside" a great discord in the opening—it tells on me like a crack in the midst of the sweetest fresco colour. Phalanstery I can't find in Johnson's dictionary, and don't know what it means. Dynastick hurts me like a stick—one or two passages in the art discussion I haven't made out yet. For the rest, I am entirely subdued—or raised—to be Mrs Browning[']s very humble votary & servant; I feel, for the time, as if I could do nothing more in describing—or in saying anything—as if indeed, nobody could say anything more now—without appearing to be saying something weak in thought—and unmelodious in English: so far does her Saying seem to me above present Bests and sweetests. I am better in every way for reading the poem—perhaps not the least because I feel so crushed by it: but also because it is like breathing the purest heavenly air; it makes one healthier through every nerve, & purer through every purpose.
>
> It is also the first perfect poetical expression of the Age, according to her own principles.– But poor Scott! and the sellers of old armour in Wardour St![4] I see Mrs Browning herself has sometimes no compassion.
>
> I will write you again to tell you anything that may interest you of what is doing here: I do not feel inclined to talk of anything but the poem just now, and for that—I should only weaken the true sense I would give you of my admiration of it, if I tried to put it any more into words. Only believe me affectionately Yours & Hers,
> J Ruskin.[507]

In spite of certain themes in *AL* which could have disturbed him, such as the coarseness in violence and the rape of Marian, Ruskin seemed to have overlooked them to focus on other qualities of the poem as he also praised *AL* in *The Elements of*

[507] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3927 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4273/?rsId=236273&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Drawing as an outstanding work of art, a 'genuine work of feeling'.[508] Yet, it is interesting, how the choice of certain words used by EBB in her poem, stand out as faults: 'it tells on me like a crack in the midst of the sweetest fresco colour'. Ruskin had in mind the Medieval period in which this technique was mostly used for representing biblical scenes: pictorial narratives such as the Nativity or Annunciation. By referring to the fresco, Ruskin places *AL* within a biblical context, implying a prophetic and epic tone, while the technique bears the trademark of a distinctive use of colour: bright and very vivid hues. 'The crack' stands as an external factor which mars the fresco involuntarily and which would have appeared as a consequence of time, as if EBB's 'faulty' use of language - a technical fault - echoing an issue severely criticised by some contemporary reviewers: her use of metaphors,[509]

> Irregular lines, extravagant metaphors, jarring combinations, are the occasional *defects*, never the *sign* of genius. … Mrs. Browning greatest failure is in her metaphors: some of them are excellent, but when they are bad –and they are very often bad,- they are very bad. By a single ugly phrase, a single hideous word, dragged in, one would think, from the furthest ends of the earth, she every now and then mars the harmony of a whole page of beauty.[510]

This criticism echoes what Woolf categorizes as the unreal use of everyday language through blank verse. Those considered faults in the use of style, which have affected the perception of the characters in *AL* as mere caricatures of archetypes of Victorian

---

[508] John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing : In Three Letters to Beginners* (London : Smith, Elder, & Co., 1857), p. 376.

[509] This signalling of incorrect use of metaphors has to do with what was expected to be written by women poets. EBB's metaphors are full of a violence subtle, or disturbing. This language, perhaps, was not what was expected to come from the pen of an, until recently, secluded and ill poet who led an unpolluted life. It was much easier to classify as an automatic fault a brand of style .

[510] *The Westminster Review* (October 1857), 399–415. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/233/?rsId=236274&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

society[511], act then as do cracks in the fresco colour as described by Ruskin while referring to a deeper level of the medium: the wall. The crack runs through the whole fresco damaging the architecture of EBB's novel in verse,[512] with Aurora's narrative being full of 'accidents' that unsettle the reader. Yet, would EBB really publish what she considered her major work full of stylistic accidents? Was RB, who read *AL* before it reached the publishers, as blind as EBB to such faults and decided to publish the work as it was?[513] Or were such 'cracks', to use Ruskin's term, deliberate?

Ruskin explored the idea of human perception through sight, with reality subject to interpretation through sensibility and imagination, his argument focusing on the weight of imagination upon the senses, for:

---

[511] Virginia Woolf, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 217-18.

[512] Aytoun mentioned: 'Artists, like architects, must work by rule -not slavishly indeed, but ever keeping in mind that there are certain principles which experience had tested and approved, and that to deviate from these is literally court defeat' (W. E. Aytoun, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* p. 34); like most of the critics, Ayntoun fails to understand the novel structure of *AL*; seen from the outside, through a sober perspective, the architecture fails as it does not correspond to the sober state of mind.

[513] See at this point a letter by RB in which this matter of 'carelessness' can be clarified:
RB to Edward Chapman
'Florence,
Dec. 2. '56.
Dear Chapman,
I receive by to-day's post "Aurora Leigh"—from you or yours, I conjecture—but no word of comment: there is always such a thing to fear in these parts as a letter's miscarrying—has that been so? If not, it's a shame of you, black and burning, not to have been at that trouble. But a letter from Mr Procter comes too, and speaks of your needing to go to press very soon with another edition—and the book we receive may be sent for presumable corrections: in this case, print to-morrow, if you please—there is nothing whatever to correct, that we are able to see at present,[1]—the book having been settled for some time to come when we were in London for that purpose. My wife made up her mind to it as it is,—and for the present, as I say, cannot reconsider the subject: all the "modern" passages, illustrations, are vitally necessary, she thinks,—and I think quite as strongly,—and could not be detached without capital injury to the rest of the poem: & for the rest, there would seem to be no verbal errors to signify—however we will look to that, and let you know or not, as it may seem worth while,—but the principal thing is to pray you not to keep people waiting a moment in waiting for further notice from us– (Us—I am the church-organ-bellows' blower that talked about our playing—but you know what I do in the looking after commas and dots to Is)'. (*The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 3930) <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4278/?rsId=236279&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Browning's letter is definitely clear on the matter of all the stylistic features which were to be the future complaints of reviewers: they were not errors or mistakes which had been released due to hurry or carelessness. EBB was definitely experimenting with both poetic and narrative structures, both poets agreed that AL was a new literary experiment.

> the more sensibility and imagination a man possesses, the more likely he will fall into error; for then we will see whatever he expects, and admire and judge with his heart, and not with his eyes. How many people are misled, by what has been said and sung of the serenity of the Italian skies or of the north, and think that they see them so; whereas the sky of Italy is far more dull and grey in colour than the skies from the north, and is distinguished only by its intense repose of light … And this influence of the imagination over the senses, is peculiarly observable in the perpetual disposition of mankind to suppose that they see what they know, and vice versa in their not seeing what they do not know.[514]

An interesting point stands out from Ruskin's observation: an excess of imagination would inevitably lead to bias in construction and the understanding of what had previously been unknown to the eye. Yet, while imagination (as mental process) can be controlled and constructed through fancy and information, the process is altered through an intoxicated state, for the senses shift *extraordinarily,* subtly or hyperbolically affecting sensory perception, depending on the degree of intoxication. In both examples, sight becomes the medium through which the imagination interprets and recreates through words, painting, or architecture. Sight apprehends the world, while the intellect and the imagination provide meaning. Under the influence of a drug, the perception of what and *how* the world is seen, as well as the process of understanding, changes. Opiates give the sensation of wider distance between objects and far more depth in the third dimension, producing a 'pleasurable dreamy sensation of floating away'.[515] Physical sensation also changes the perception of matter: colours appear more intense with hyper-vivid hues to the point of synaesthetic sensations (colours appeal to the touch, not just to the eye). Aurora's version/ vision of the world

[514] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters: Volume 1. Of General Principles, and of Truth* (London: Routledge), p. 56-7.
[515] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,*p. 48.

is then the result of an altered perception of reality: time, space, plasticity of colour, all seen through the morphine glass.

One of Aurora's main quests in life is the poetic one which has been explored by Leighton[516] and is highlighted in Aurora's finding of Marian after the girl's flight and vanishing. I wish to continue my discussion of the morphine influence from the turning point stated by Leighton, for it has similarities regarding the morphine qualities in 'A True Dream'. After a glimpse of Marian's face in the crowd, Aurora returns to her lodgings, with a headache, and meditates in darkness to be haunted by Marian's face:

That face persists.
It floats up, it turns over in my mind,
As like to Marian, as one dead is like
That same alive. In very deed a face
And not a fancy, though it vanished so;
The small fair face between the darks of hair,
I used to liken, when I saw her first,
To a point of moonlit water down a well:
The low brow, the frank space between the eyes,
Which always had the brown pathetic look
Of a dumb creature who had been beaten once,
And never since was easy with the world.
Ah, ah–now I remember perfectly
Those eyes to-day,–how overlarge they seemed
As if some patient passionate despair
(Like a coal dropt and forgot on tapestry,
Which slowly burns a widening circle out)
Had burnt them larger, larger. And those eyes,
To-day, I do remember, saw me too,
As I saw them, with conscious lids a strain
In recognition. Now, a fantasy,
A simple shade or image of the brain,

[516] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 151.

Is merely passive, does not retro-act,
Is seen, but sees not (*AL,* VI: 308-331).

The image of Marian's face here appears gradually to trap Aurora, echoing De Quincey's experience in his intense pursuit for Anne which resulted in a tortured vision of the girl's face;[517] the vision, uncontrolled by Aurora, appears with supernatural force of mystical revelation. Significantly, both De Quincey and Aurora insist on the maze pattern, spatial (physical) and mental, with the face tyrannizing their dreams. Aurora's last action prior to the vision, was to stare at the maps in order to analyse her travelling route, while possibly sitting in a semi prone position. The face appears floating up, vertiginous. Had the maps, with their excruciating patterns of roads, names and rivers trapped Aurora's vision and led her to a sort of trance in which the face appears? In the passage, the shift between action and vertiginous thought drags the reader to focus entirely on the vision of the face that seems to cross from life to death in a twofold hallucinatory sensation. Aurora, within this vision, is able to communicate with the other, as she claims 'today, I do remember, they saw me too, / as I saw them, with conscious lids a-strain/ In recognition'. Time and space swirl in this passage, blending with the first time she ever saw Marian. Marjorie Stone notes that in this passage Aurora's 'wandering thoughts reflect her own vagueness, not Barrett Browning's, given that her movements through Paris can be very precisely

[517] The sequence of the vision, as well as the enhancement of the face echo De Quincey's narrative in two episodes. For instance, when De Quincey narrates his final separation with Anne and how he kept looking for her during years, echoing Aurora looking for Marian in Paris: 'in the literal and unrethorical use of the word myriad, I may say that on my different visits to London, I have looked into many, many myriads of female faces, in the hope of meeting her. I should know her amongst a thousand, if I saw her for a moment; for though not handsome, she had a sweet expression of countenance, and a peculiar and graceful carriage of the head. [...] For all this, however, I paid a heavy price in distant years, when the human face tyrannized over my dreams, and the perplexities of my steps in London came back and haunted my sleep, with the feeling of perplexities moral or intellectual, that brought confusion to the reason, or anguish and remorse to the conscience'. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868), p. 64, 81.

mapped'[518]. The narrative, in this passage therefore, constructs two simultaneous realities: one physical, clearly mapped, and one mental, vague and in swirls. Recognition is not only a matter of the present, but of a whole identification between the characters since the beginning: Marian and Aurora felt as united in league, through the eyes.

Space in *AL* is affected through colour, from the brightness of the yellow roses, to darkness from which this face emerges, the warm beaming light turns into a morbid paleness. The word 'moonlit' sets the tonality with a silvery glow emulating a mirror and Marian's face echoes far into the distance, reminiscent of EBB's description of her self-portrait to Haydon. Leighton notes of Marian: 'Aurora does not find a sister, she makes a sister of the lost other woman. The moral and political intrepidity of this act is part of the point, not only of Aurora's story, but also of Barrett's Browning new poetics. These are no longer a poetics of the daughter, but of the woman; and of a woman conscious of her imagination's responsibility towards her sex'.[519] The sisterly bond evolves so that the identification between Aurora and Marian moves towards a single unit. Leighton points out Hayter's observation of a connection between Marian's face and the memory of EBB's dead brother Edward, Bro,[520] and she considers this resurfacing of the face obeys EBB's own imagination rather than the character's experience. She claims that the 'confusion between the death and the living -between as it were, the death brother and the living sister -shows how far the

[518] Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 169.
[519] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 154.
[520] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 152; Hayter, Alethea. *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting,* p. 99.

figure of Marian is still a substitute for the old forsaking muses.'[521] Muse or not, the dynamic of the face appearing within the vision, as well as the filial bond between beholder and apparition had already surfaced in 'A True Dream' with 'confusion' corresponding to the opium highly intoxicated state: the face appears in a reversed mode, 'Then paused the smoke, the rainbow's hues/ Did a childish face express-/ the rose in the cheek, the blue in the eyne,/ the yellow in the tress (37-40)'. The face resembles Aurora as a child, rather than Marian's face, followed by an identification. But this apparently beautiful face turns into a nightmare when the speaker gets into close contact with it. As the speaker casts off, the figure of 'a serpent train' takes its place, filling the speaker with horror: the sight, and hearing become *unholy*, unbearable, until the 'pitying brother' comes to her rescue. Identification corresponds with the hero as a force of destruction and a guiding-light through the nightmare. While in 'A True Dream' there is no clear depiction of the brother's face, his importance is underlined by action: 'I will pour on them oil of vitriol,/ and burn their lives away (63-64)', in opposition to the passive silence of Marian's face whose only living feature appears to be the eyes.

In 'A True Dream', the speaker falls into a downward spiral of snakes and hissing that increase to the point of horror when the speaker is able to break free: 'I fled from him with wings of wind,/ with whirlwinds he pursued (107-108).' The setting, from being ambiguous, turns tangible as the objects, such as a door and a key appear, to provide the reader with a sense of reality in a state between slumber and vigil. The

[521] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 153.

vision ends abruptly just as does the poem's closure: 'Mine hand was cold as the key it held,/ Mine heart had an iron weight;/ I saw a gleam, I heard a sound-/ the clock was striking eight (121-24).' The awakening, with its gradual awareness of the body and the sudden realization of the surroundings is repeated structurally in *AL* after Aurora's acknowledgement of the nature of the vision: 'now a fantasy,/ a simple shade or image of the brain,/ Is merely passive, does not retroact,/ is seen, but sees not' (*AL,* VI: 328-331). The abrupt awakening dislocates the reader from the vertiginous state, and Aurora grounds her feet and action and continues immediately: 'My pen fell,/ My hands struck sharp together, as hands do/ which hold at nothing' (*AL,* VI: 334-336). The spatial sense of reality here returns with an awareness of her surrounding: the pen dropping, hands holding each other in a tangible action. This dynamic recurs within *AL* with equal and sometimes less force than in this passage. Marian functions as a portrait, with a plasticity in colour verging upon synaesthesia. The eyes, burning like 'a coal dropt and forgot on tapestry, /Which slowly burns a widening circle out' (*AL,* VI: 323-325) can be felt with a destructive and organic force that consumes Marian and echoes the connection between the young girl and Aurora, later described by Marian while recalling Aurora's kiss: 'I felt her soul /Dip through her serious lips in Holy fire' (*AL*, II: 940-941).

Marian's haunting face, as in De Quincey's vision, originates from a real-life encounter in the text. After having roaming through the streets of Paris, Aurora comes face to face with someone whom she is not able to recognize immediately:

What face is that?

What a face, what a look, what a likeness! Full on mine
The sudden blow of it came down, till all
My blood swam, my eyes dazzled. Then I sprang…

It was as if a meditative man
Were dreaming out of a sunny afternoon
And watching gnats-a-prick upon a pond,
When something floats up suddenly, out there,
Turns over … a dead face, known once alive…
So old, so new! It would be dreadful now
To lose the sight and keep the doubt of this:
He plunges -ha! He has lost it in a splash.

I plunged -I tore the crowd up, either side,
And rushed on, forward, forward, after her.
Her? Whom? (*AL*,VI: 232-244)

The sudden apparition of a familiar face in the middle of a foreign and dense crowd startles Aurora to the point of panic. Recognition fails. In spite of having both Romney and Marian in her mind, Aurora's mind freezes, then jumps into an image from another dimension: crowds disappear, the city turns into a liquid image and the speaker becomes a metaphorical 'he' completely unguarded. The image elapses, slowing down to the point of absurdity: the visual shock is turned into oneiric symbolism which dissociates Aurora from reality and the face's identity. Beyond shock, she 'awakes', and as if plunging into the pond, pushes into the crowds with a swimming motion: 'I could call now Marian, Marian/with the shriek/ of desperate creatures calling for the Dead' (*AL,* VI 255). The opiate pattern, first traced within 'A True Dream' is experienced by Aurora in a vigil state: **perception> physical stasis/mental interaction> awakening> grounding action.** Although no imagery of

serpents here appears as in her shorter poem, the liquefied sensation[522] produced by Aurora's motion and the use of 'stream of folk' produce the effect of people sliding one after another, until a gentleman collides against her, in a violent push towards reality.

Leighton claims that at that point in the plot, 'there is no narrative logic to this sudden and persistent association between Marian and 'the Dead''[523] and that Aurora's reaction to the loss of the girl within the crowds is 'strange, panicky and pessimistic'[524]. I read this as occurring through that broken logic of the morphine state. The association with the Dead discloses Aurora's guilt on failing to protect Marian from Lady Waldemar's schemes. The image haunts not because it is a known likeness, but because it represents all of what Aurora had failed at to that point in the narrative, for she remained, writing poetry which gave her success, putting Marian's flight aside. The visual impact of the haunting face enhanced obsessively with the eyes recalls EBB's self-portrait ink sketch, but also become a near obsession to Aurora, who after seeing the corpse of her aunt felt: 'those eyes that watched me, worried me?/ That dogged me up and down the hours and days,/ a beaten, breathless miserable soul?/ And did I pray, a half-hour back, but so,/ to escape the burden of those eyes… those eyes?' (*AL*, II: 946-950).

---

[522] One of the effects of opiates in sight appears upon fixing the gaze on certain objects, such as carpets, grass, trees, or architectonic geometrical patterns, which seem affected in texture through mirage effect.
[523] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 153.
[524] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 153.

Morphine and Miss Leigh's imagination

While the opiate pattern, the explosion of colour resembling Turneresque technique and the nightmarish opiate atmosphere described by De Quincey are evidenced in the passages of *AL* I have discussed, the influence of morphine permeates the whole of the text, through opiate distortions produced by Aurora's mental and emotional state. While the landscapes described from her London window seem detached from Aurora, a complete blending between landscape and her inner self occurs gradually as she travels on the Continent. This evolution of her perception is opposed to that of her childhood memories which have a different texture and use of colour:

> I had a little chamber in the house,
> As green as any privet-hedge a bird
> Might chose to build in, though the nest itself
> Could show but dead-brown sticks and straws; 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 its greenery.
> You could not push your head out any escape
> A dash from dawn-dew from the honeysuckle,
> But so you were baptized into the grace
> And privilege of seeing… (*AL*, I: 567-578)

The room, small and sheltered is the nest for the poet. Green plays a major role within the composition appealing to textures interwoven into each other: layers of green overlap, resembling the pattern of a shrubbery, the one named here being the privet, whose dark berries are poisonous. This is not the first time in the text in which EBB refers to a poisonous plant in a context of life and nurturing. As earlier discussed, she had picked a laburnum during one of her outings with Arabel and enclosed it within a

letter to RB[525] and though her intention was a romantic one, the laburnum also kept a dark undertone, as the flower is poisonous too. The small, square bed 'curtained' is wrapped with draperies as a chrysalis protecting Aurora in the nest/ chamber. Different textures are achieved through light falling upon objects: 'which let in/The out-door world with all its greenery' (*AL,* I: 574-5) as the world comes to touch her, and not the other way around. Aurora thus becomes a sort of passive spectator, who is unable to break through 'you could not push your head out and escape' (*AL,* I: 575). The action is like that of a helpless chick that is unable to lift the broken piece of shell in order to get out and live. By remaining within the nest -Leigh Hall- Aurora remains enclosed, sheltered, passive, yet with the privilege of contemplation nurturing the poet. Through that exercise of observation, the portrait of Aurora's mother is depicted:

The painter drew it after she was dead,
And when the face was finished, throat and hands,
Her cameriera carried him, in hate
Of the English-fashioned shroud, the last brocade
She dressed in at the Pitti; 'he should paint
No sadder thing than that,' he swore, 'to wrong
Her poor signora.' Therefore very strange
The effect was. I, a little child, would crouch
For hours upon the floor with knees drawn up
And gaze across them, half in terror, half
In adoration, at the picture there-
That swan-like supernatural white life
Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk
Which seemed to have no part in it nor power
To keep it from quite breaking out of bounds.
For hours I sat and stared. Asunta's awe
And my poor father's melancholy eyes
Still pointed that way. That way went my thoughts
When wandering beyond sight. And as I grew

[525] The letter is quoted entirely in Chapter one of this thesis. See foot note 394.

In years, I mixed, confused, unconsciously,
Whatever I had last read or heard or dreamed,
Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,
Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque,
With still that face … which did not therefore change,
But kept the mystic level of all forms,
Hates, fears and admirations, was by turns
Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch and sprite,
A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,
A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,
A still Medusa with mild milky brows
All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes
Whose slime falls fast as sweet will; or anon
Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords
Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her first
Moonlight pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked
And shuddering wriggled down to the unclean;
Or my own mother, leaving her last smile
In her last kiss upon the baby-mouth
My father pushed down on the bed for that-
Or my dead mother, without smile or kiss,
Buried at Florence. All which images,
Concentred on the picture, glassed themselves
Before my meditative childhood, as
The incoherencies of change and death
Are represented fully, mixed and merged,
In the smooth fair mystery of perpetual Life. (*AL*, I: 128-173)

Aurora, having lost her mother at an early age, clings to this portrait transformed into a maternal icon which entwines symbol and imagination within Aurora's mind. The portrait was produced after the sitter's death, creating a temporary and spatial gap between sitter, portrait, and beholder. This scene is preceded by the account of Aurora's father deciding to retreat to the countryside to lead a solitary life. The narrative places Aurora in a passive position –both in narrative and action- crouching in mute adoration at the image's feet. The character's perception makes the portrait emerge from the darkness of the grave, memories, and sadness. Aurora's gaze is

captured and depicted by contrasts: 'The swan-like supernatural white life/ Just sailing upward from the red stiff silks' (*AL*: I: 138-140). In the passage, the character is referring twice to the same painting. In the first reference, we can behold a hyper-detailed realistic portrait by the hand of an Italian master: the lady's throat, face and hands seem perfectly accurate, strangely marred by the choice of dress which contrasts deeply with the vivid colours full of struggle and fury. The swan, reference to Leda, turns majestic until the reference to red silk acquires the force and impetuosity of the sea. The sitter comes violently alive through colour which colour Aurora's mind: all her mythological readings and her mother's face which 'did not therefore change' (*AL,* I: 151) intertwine to create a still, unchangeable visage unaffected by time. Around it, different meanings float: the mystical, folkloric, mythological converge within the meanings Aurora gives to her mother who embodies the archetypical female figure at which the girl stares in 'half terror- half adoration' (*AL,* I: 137-138), relating to mystical ecstasy. The relationship between spectator and the painting, with the portrait creating an entire network of meaning drawn from experience, reading, and understanding, adds a new dimension to the sitter. The mother, unknown to the child Aurora due to her early death, exists as a distant memory. The visual emphasis Aurora puts upon the portrait when referring to the hands, face, and throat and which later on would be compared to a living swan, becomes a source of memories and a symbol of longing. The child remains in **stasis**: her eyes wander through the painting, and her mind **interacts** with it.

The passage evidences Aurora's perception through differences in shape, colour, imagery and mental process. In the first description, detail falls upon face, hands, and garment, surrounded by the beholders' actions: the camareira's anger and the immobile astonishment of Aurora the child. The scene is clear in its setting and the action follows a lineal sequence in which the train of thought is logical and straight forward. Aurora's perception seems altered or simply affected by the painter's technique: 'that swan-like supernatural white life/Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk/ which seemed to have no part in it nor power/ to keep it from quite breaking out of bounds' (*AL,* I:138-140).

Aurora's narration with its temporal jumps is evidenced in this fragment: with its blending of accumulated knowledge, and childhood observations. The narration stops to switch again to Aurora's childhood, in this sense, the **awakening** and the **grounding** occur by the recollection of the action, in which the child lies in front of the painting. The images of what the mother signifies succeed one another and swing between extremes both in meaning and imagery between classical Mythology and Roman Catholic iconography[526] creating a pattern for texts and cultural hints within the novel. Barbara Gelpi[527] notes that all the descriptive phrases add up and enclose

[526] It is important to signal two important figures to whom Aurora's mother is related in this passage. The first one is Our Lady of the Passion in Roman Catholic iconography, a representation of the Virgin Mary and her Sorrows, depicted as seven stabbing swords running through her heart. Roman Catholic iconography traces a path of certain approaches of Aurora to her matters of faith, but also to her natural understanding of Marian's suffering, her own emotional martyrdom (her renunciation of her love for Romney and her further torturing thoughts about it). The second important image is that of Lamia, recovered by Lady Waldemar, who plays an interesting maternal role within Aurora's life not as an example, but as a dreaded figure of authority, who, even when unable to coerce Aurora to do her will, leave her with doubt.

[527] Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, '"Aurora Leigh": The Vocation of the Woman Poet', *Victorian Poetry,* 19.1, (1981) 35–48, (p. 38).

Aurora's ambivalence towards womanhood, and mirroring that of other female characters, will later reverberate in Marian and Lady Waldemar.

Aurora's childhood imagination is deeply influenced by the sight of people's faces, a trait that will remain through time. When Aurora first meets Lady Waldemar, her description has certain disturbing resemblances with the portrait of her deceased mother. Aurora seems, at first, to apprehend the other through her voice, then through her touch accompanied by a gaze which is almost 'felt' as Lady Waldemar 'dropped her eyes on me and let them melt' (*AL,* III: 362). Aurora's later obsession with eyes, their texture and expression goes back to the portrait of the mother as 'a dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,/ A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,/ a still Medusa with mild milky brows/ all curdled and all clothed up with snakes/whose slime falls fast as sweat will' (*AL*, I: 155-58). It also relates to her aunt's description when they first meet: 'eyes of no colour –once they might have smiled,/ But never, never have forgot themselves/ in smiling' (*AL*, I: 282-284). Whereas the aunt possesses a set of lifeless, unremarkable grey eyes which have never shown any sort of passion, the eyes of the mother, in contrast, are intense and iridescent with glances that are loving, nostalgic, and menacing. After Aurora's short conversation with Lady Waldemar, those melting eyes become something similar to those of the mother: 'So, she bent/ Her head, as queens may mock –then lifting up/ Her eyelids with a real grave queenly look,/ Which ruled and would not spare, not even herself-' (*AL*, III: 393-396). Although not mythological, Lady Waldemar is also represented in a higher authoritative rank, as a Muse that rules over Fate, or the Medusa whose terrible curse

would not spare anyone (not even herself, as she falls into it by the mirror). As Lady Waldemar stands face to face with Aurora, entangling her mind, she echoes , in a sense, the gallery of 'glassed' images which keep whirling around the still face of the mother. Aurora is fascinated and repelled at the same time by Lady Waldemar:

> …And all the rooms
> Were full of crinkling silks that swept about
> The fine dust of most subtle courtesies.
> What then? –why then, we come home to be sad.
>
> How lovely, one I love not looked tonight!
> She's very pretty, Lady Waldemar.
> Her maid must use both hands to twist that coil
> Of tresses, then be careful lest the rich
> Bronze rounds should slip –she missed, though, a grey hair
> A single one –I saw it; otherwise
> The woman looked immortal. How they told,
> Those alabaster shoulders and bare breasts,
> On which the pearls, drowned out of sight in milk,
> Were lost, excepting for the ruby-clasp!
> They split the amaranth velvet bodice down
> To the waist or nearly, with the audacious press
> Of full-breathed beauty. If the heart within
> Were half as white! –but if it were, perhaps
> The breasts were closer covered and the sight
> Less acceptable, by half too. (*AL*, V: 602-626)

Aurora's eyes are not captivated by the diversity of colours, but by the texture produced by the wrinkles of the crinolines in a mesmerizing fascination for patterns: in the passage, Aurora focuses her whole attention upon Lady Waldemar's visual aspect. Lady Waldemar's portrait is constructed through pre-Raphaelite aesthetics of colour and Aurora's fixation upon detail. The similarity between this image and the mother's portrait resides in the highlighting of specific physical traits: hair, clothes,

and the upper part of the body. Emphasis occurs through the enhancement of warm colours, an 'overcharged' palette, to borrow Aytoun's term in which bronze, ruby and amaranth colour (purple-pink hue), contrast with the paleness of the skin, resembling the characteristic tone of the light provided by gaslight[528]. There is no pitch dark, just the warm shades of those hues. Aurora's use of bright and intense colour fixates upon a single detail: Lady Waldemar's *single grey hair*. Lady Waldemar's pearls are 'drowned out of sight in milk' (*AL,* V: 620) against the alabaster hue of her bare shoulders and breasts. The velvet amaranth bodice, contrasts with the hard clasp of the ruby which restrains Lady Waldemar's body. Synaesthetic undertones are evident through contrast between textures, as the body of the woman becomes desirable, *felt*, touched, through Aurora's eyes. In the end, Aurora is able to break the sensual trance by assuring herself that inside that astonishing exterior lies a black heart 'if the heart within were as half as white!' (*AL,* V: 624-5) Lady Waldemar, referred to as Lamia, depicted by Marian as 'that woman serpent' (*AL,* VI: 1102), is entwined between Aurora's narcotic perception and the true nature of Lady Waldemar's inner self, minutely described by Aurora and other characters who enhance her seductive qualities in an almost obsessive and openly sensual tone.

Although Aurora is not a painter herself, her words depict as skilfully as the brush of her friend Vincent Carrington, who resembles Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in his aesthetic pursuits (painting classical themes situated in the distant past) and in the

[528] Upon describing Lord Howe's wife, Aurora reckons: 'His wife is gracious, with her glossy braids,/ and even voice, and gorgeous eyeballs, calm/ as her other jewels' (*AL*, V: 581-583). The description is even in tone through light, eyes, jewellery and hair, as even as her voice, creating a slightly warm and calm sensation, similar to that one produced by gaslight.

infatuation ending in marriage with his model and muse, Elizabeth Siddal. Like Siddal, Ward is an artist, or at least, has artistic inclination, as she wants to be depicted as Aurora Leigh. Carrington's aesthetics are closer to Aurora's visual ones. They share the same obsession with people's eyes, and while for Aurora they become the trademark and definite trait of personality in recognition of the other, for Carrington 'a pair of topaz eyes' acknowledged by Aurora as 'Kate Ward's eyes, surely' (*AL,* VII: 583) likely blue, light brown or amber are a source of artistic inspiration and love. EBB's depictions of female eyes in *AL* are related to minerals and gems: Kate Ward's topaz eyes, Lady Waldemar's 'heavy agate eyes' (*AL,* VI: 1077) and Marian's like a 'coal dropt and forgot on tapestry' (*AL,* VI: 323). The mimetic relationship between sight and organic material gives the gazes of the described women an impenetrable quality, at the same time weighing them with power and deeper layers of meaning which could have not been achieved by describing mere colour. Hayter mentions that 'crystals of violet, blue, green, orange-red'[529] recur in imagery in the opium eater poets. In contrast with a crystalline and impenetrable quality, Marian's eyes burn, echoing the girl's words to Aurora: 'Ah well, catch my hands,/ Miss Leigh, and burn into my eyes with yours,-' (*AL*, IX: 355-6), resulting as Carrington describes his portrait:

> …I've painted her
> (I change my style and leave mythologies),
> The whole sweet face; it looks upon my soul
> Like a face on water, to beget itself.
> A half-length portrait, in a hanging cloak
> Like one you wore once; 'tis a little frayed-
> I pressed too for the nude harmonious arm-

[529] Hayter, Alethea. *Mrs Browning*, p. 64.

But she, she'd have her way, and have her cloak;
She said she could be like you only so,
And would not miss her fortune. (*AL*, VII: 590-600)
…
She has your books by heart more than my words,
And quotes you up against me till I'm pushed
Where, three months since, her eyes were: nay, in fact,
Nought satisfied her but to make me paint
Your last book folded in her dimpled hands
Instead of my brown palette as I wished, (*AL*, VII: 603-609)

According to Jan Marsh, general characteristics of the Pre-Raphaelite school of painting include: 'shallow spaces, flat planes, luminous or cinematic colour with clarity of definition, in thinly applied paints. Its content and meanings are heightened and symbolic rather than anecdotal or simply descriptive, conveying intensity of feeling and significance'.[530] Kate Ward wants to be depicted like Aurora and, similarly to Aurora's mother's portrait, the focus lies upon the upper part of the body and the clothes while the background becomes unimportant through its absence. Colours are charged with meaning: the topaz eyes are repeated with their hypnotic quality. If Kate Ward had had a cloak made after Aurora's,[531] it would imitate fabric, design, and colour, in a sort of messianic fashion that embodied the acknowledgement of herself as a direct disciple of Aurora. The book described as held between Kate's hands relates symbolically to Hughes' depiction of the young Aurora discussed in chapter 1: Kate Ward detaches herself from the passive role of the muse and embraces Aurora as a sister in art. The image of the face upon water resembles a mirror and Millais' Ophelia, whose iconic model was Siddal.

---

[530] Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), p. 14.
[531] Kate Ward had borrowed Aurora's cloak and tells the poet that she wants one alike, as expressed at the beginning of Book III.

Whilst in Paris, Aurora glimpses Marian again, as noted in the previous exploration of that episode. But it is also as the Continent that Aurora's interaction with the city shifts, with synaesthesia affecting space through an oddly surreal perception. Aurora roams the city, musing, pacing up and down, observing the landscape, paying attention to light and its reflections upon the fountains. The city feels liquefied and buoyant: 'The city swims in verdure, beautiful/ As Venice on the waters, the sea-swan' (*AL,* VI: 89-90). After Aurora finally finds Marian, a reversal of roles, noted by Margaret Reynolds, occurs between Aurora and Marian: '[Marian] turned round and followed closely where I went,/ as if led by a narrow plank/ across devouring waters, step by step' (*AL,* VI: 481-483), which then reverses to 'Then she led/ the way, and I, as by a narrow plank/across devouring waters, followed her,/ stepping by her footsteps' (*AL,* VI: 500-502). Walking the plank refers to the practice by which pirates punished their prisoners, making them fall into the sea to drown: a sense of doom, led an uncertain future and perdition, as if their lives were forced into the unknown *devouring waters*. In spite of that, Aurora is led by Marian in blind faith and completely unawared of the perils that she, as a Victorian young lady, could be exposed to by joining Marian through the slums of Paris. The liquefied surroundings echo Aurora's lack of bodily awareness as the world, lacking solidity, cannot be held, and escapes logic. During her journey to Italy, a shift occurs in Aurora's perception, adding an extra auditory layer of sensory alteration:

> The next day we took train to Italy
> And fled on southward in the roar of steam.
> The marriage-bells of Romney must be loud,

To sound so clear through all: it was not well,
And truly, though the truth is like a jest,
I could not choose but fancy, half the way,
I stood alone i' the belfry, fifty bells
Of naked iron, mad with merriment
(As one who laughs and cannot stop himself),
All clanking at me, in me, over me,
Until I shrieked a shriek I could not hear,
And swooned with noise –but still, along my swoon,
Was 'ware the baffled changes backward rang,
Prepared, at each emerging sense, to beat
And crash it out with clangour. I was weak;
I struggled for the posture of my soul
In upright consciousness of place and time,
But evermore, 'twixt waking and asleep,
Slipped somehow, staggered, caught at Marian's eyes
A moment (it is very good for strength
To know that someone needs you to be strong),
And so recover what I called myself,
For that time. (*AL*, VII: 395-416)

Here, Aurora's perception and thought intertwine to produce hyperaesthesia while the train pursues its journey at high speed ('fled'), and multiplication occurs with fifty bells[532] for Romney's wedding as an impossible number to hold in a single belfry. The multiplication of images noticed by Aytoun provides the sound with a new meaning: laughter 'as one who laughs and cannot stop himself' pursues Aurora into paranoia 'clanking at me, in me, over me /Until I shrieked a shriek I could not hear, /And swooned with noise,' (*AL,* VII: 404-6). Moreover, the bell's chime turns into a voice reminiscent of Lady Waldemar's 'silver laugh' (*AL,* III: 372), magnified to

[532] St. Giles' Church has eight bells, Westminster has ten and Winchester and York Cathedrals have fourteen bells each, making them the ones with the higher number of bells in England. The Belfry of Bruges has got 47 bells. There are other belfries in England, the most numerous being Bourneville in Birmingham with 48 bells, Loughborough with 47 and York minster with 35 (with a bell system called carillon) yet once again it is unlikely that Aurora would be referring to any of these locations.The number Aurora refers to is an exaggeration, which evidences the multiplication of images notices by Aytoun, which not only occur visually, but also through hearing and correspond to the opiate intoxicated state through one of its main characteristics: the hyper-sensitivity and sometimes intolerance to certain sharp or clinking noises.

horror. The multiplied chimes create an architecture proper of opiate intoxication building up and expanding in circles. Aurora lies in a state between waking and sleep, in which she tries to cling on to spatial and temporal reality. Unbalanced, she encounters Marian's eyes that ground her in reality.

While London had been foggy, Paris watery, Florence stands solid, vivid in colour, sharp in outlines and deep projecting shadows, acting as an omen for Aurora's emotional stability by the end of the narrative. The first glimpse of the city is aerial with a magnificent view from the villa: outlines are neat, trees are presented with minute detail as through a magnifying glass. Florence possesses a mystical holy quality: sunlight becomes the blood of Christ and blue skies are 'as angels garments blanched with God' (*AL,* VII: 528) echoing the New Jerusalem depicted in the Book of Revelation[533]. Aurora's vantage point resembles that of the landscape painter. She describes the house from the distance, detailing the tower on the hill of Bellosguardo, what lies below, and the skies above with clear and sharp outlines as if she were painting Florence using her house as a mere reference to location. Action then shifts from the observation of landscape to the interior of Aurora's villa:

> The noon was hot; the air scorched like the sun
> And was shut out. The closed persiani threw
> Their long-scored shadows on my villa-floor,
> And interlined the golden atmosphere
> Straight, still –across the pictures on the wall,
> The statuette of the console (of young Love
> And Psyche made one marble by a kiss),
> The low couch where I leaned, the table near,
> The vase of lilies Marian pulled last night
> (Each green leaf and each white leaf ruled in black

[533] Revelation, 21.

As if for writing some new text of fate)
And the open letter, rested on my knee,
But there the lines swerved, trembled, thought I sat
Untroubled, plainly, reading it again
And three times (*AL*, VII: 660-675).

This is the one of the two passages in the whole narrative in which Aurora details how weather affects her: a scorching day in which she decides to stay in, with persianis closed, creating a pattern of light and shade upon the floor. Morphine influence enhances both patterns and fixation upon them: 'each green leaf and each white leaf ruled in black/ as if for writing some new text of fate' (*AL,* VII: 670-671), with figures neatly outlined through light and shade, as well as the marble sculpture are minutely detailed, unlike the pictures on the walls. Even the vase, vague, stands mysterious... is it glass, china, earthenware? Aurora leans in a semi prone position, her eyes seem to wander from the page to the surroundings of the room, just to fix on the striped lilies which resemble the letter she reads and rereads[534]. From the aerial view of Florence to the almost microscopic detail of the flowers in a vase, Aurora's vision narrows. This fixation upon close up detail occurs too in her observations of nature. Aurora's eye, as evidenced in Book VII, is captured by flying animals and insects: moths, butterflies, bats and nightingales, described minutely through colours and behaviours. Aurora is particularly intrigued by the lizards, whose observation requires immobility from the spectator: 'I knew them … and kept in mind/ How last I sat among them equally,/ in fellowship and mateship' (*AL,* VII: 1097-99). Mesmerized by their eyes, colour, and movement. Aurora's fascination echoes the common reptilian imagery of morphine

[534] Margaret Reynolds notices that the description of Aurora's room is based upon EBB's own drawing room at Casa Guidi, mentioning that those details can be traced in a painting by George Mignaty. The similarity is significant, adding to the autobiographical references by EBB in the construction of her character.

intoxication in a reversed mode: instead of a distressing nightmarish horror, her eye is entranced by beauty and intense colour.

Fig. 3.3
Sir John Everett Millais, *Mariana* 1851
(Tate Britain, London)

Aurora describes Florence from her spot 'when I sat alone, alone, upon the terrace of my tower' (*AL,* VIII: 1-3), in a Mariana-like fashion, like the poet, who lies secluded, reading, with no trace of producing any verse, her aerial perception is enhanced by hearing:

The heavens were making room to hold the night,
The sevenfold heavens unfolding all their gates
To let the stars out slowly (prophesied
In close-approaching advent, not discerned),
While still the cue-owls from the cypresses
Of the Poggio called and counted every pulse
Of the skyey precipitation. Gradually
The purple and transparent shadows slow
Had filled up the whole valley to the brim,
And flooded all the city, which you saw
As some drowned city in some enchanted sea,
Cut off from nature –drawing you who gaze
With passionate desire, to leap and plunge
And find a sea-king with a voice of waves,
And treacherous soft eyes, and slippery locks
You cannot kiss but you shall bring away
Their salt upon your lips. The duomo-bell
Strikes ten, as if it struck ten fathoms down,
So deep; and twenty churches answer it
The same, with twenty various instances.
Some gaslights tremble along squares and streets;
The Pitti's palace-front is drawn in fire;
And, past the quays, Maria Novella Place,
In which the mystic obelisks stand up
Triangular, pyramidal, each based
Upon its four-square brazen tortoises,
To guard that fair church, Buonarroti's Bride,
That stares out from her large blind dial-eyes
(Her quadrant and armillary dials, black
With rhythms of many suns and moons) in vain
Inquiry so rich of a soul as his.
Methinks I have plunged, I see it so clear… (*AL,* VIII: 28-58)

The chiming of bells again plays a crucial role, although its multiple voices fit logically within the location of Aurora's house: the bells tell time (ten o'clock) and engulf the landscape with panoramic precision. Synaesthesia happens as the sky covering Florence evokes the watery texture felt earlier in Paris and an engulfing tide, with buoyant hypnotic waves, Turneresque in motion and colour, drowns the city. The sky becomes the sea, the air becomes the tide and within that almost psychedelic imagery, 'gaslights tremble' in ethereal patterns. Aurora's longing for the king of sea transforms reality into fancy: 'methinks I have plunged, I see it all so clear…' as she simply surrenders to a suicidal Ophelian resignation. Sound transforms into water: 'a ripple of women's talk/ arose and fell and tossed about a spray/ of English ss, soft as a silent hush' (*AL,* IV: 610-12), the ripple 'ss' with its tidal cadence resembles the voice of the ocean. Water as a trope also appears whilst Aurora is in movement: 'Lord Howe insisting that his friendly arm/ Should oar me across the sparkling brawling stream/ which swept from room to room' (*AL,* V: 984-986).

The kind and embracing buoyant atmosphere created through the liquefied landscape, enhanced by Aurora's bodily awareness, contrasts deeply with the experience Aurora goes through at Romney and Marian's abortive wedding. This scene in Book IV has been read in negative ways, with EBB considered as having a lack of empathy with the working classes. Gardner Taplin claims that EBB 'had no first-hand experience of the working classes in England, but however desperate their condition in the middle of the nineteenth century, only a person with the wildest

imagination would have used this image to describe them.'[535] David follows Taplin's judgement further by wondering how a woman who had lived cut off from the world could refer to the working classes in *such* language, after previous poems had placed her as a 'revered example of female virtue and delicacy'.[536] Yet, although EBB's 'highest convictions upon Life and Art' were translated into *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora is fictional. The wedding scene should not be read as showing ignorance and prejudice, but rather as a terrifying passage, distorted to the point of nightmare through opium. Thierauf notes that 'Many of EBB's ideas about the poor derived from middle-class press reportage, fiction, and parliamentary reports and that she also immersed herself in the 1843 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in Mines and Manufactories*—her correspondent R. H. Horne was one of its authors—'.[537] At the time of the wedding Aurora is an established poet, certain of losing Romney forever, echoing her own future phrase 'books succeed, and lives fail' (*AL,* VII: 704-5). When Aurora met Lady Waldemar and Marian, she distrusted the first one and simply adored the later, and was fascinated by Marian's origins, her unfortunate story and Romney's symbolic breaking of social barriers between classes by intending to marry Marian. While the wedding scene has been criticised due to its apparent unflattering light, the notion of EBB's having 'no first- hand knowledge' of the working classes, might not be entirely true. The tone for the wedding scene, the

---

[535] Gardner B. Taplin, *Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 324.
[536] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 124.
[537] Doreen Thierauf, 'Rescuing the Magdalen: Aurora Leigh as Social Reform Worker', *Women's Writing*, 27. 4, (2020), 448–60 (p. 451).

lens through which Aurora perceives the working classes is set from the moment she visits the slums looking for Marian. As already noted, Aurora falls into a sort of fascination for Marian, yet, her tone is different when describing a stranger:

> ... a woman, rouged
> Upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief torn,
> Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious mouth,
> Cursed at a window both ways, in and out,
> By turns some bed-rid creature and myself,-
> (AL, III: 764-768)

The woman, anonymous, appears within the narrative with Dickensian force, (completely opposed) to Marian, exaggerated in her looks, and later in her speech, the woman seems completely detached from all that had previously being familiar to Aurora. This exaggeration, echoes part of EBB's own first hand experience, as she had the glimpse of a world completely different to the one she was used to when she ventured with Wilson to negotiate Flush's rescue. As explored in chapter two, EBB's account of that episode was tinted with literary fictional undertones and certain similarities with would later reverberate in Aurora's visit to the slums.[538]

The woman from the window in *AL* appears as a coarse version of the 'feminine bandite'[539], the mobs rushing after the coins in *AL:* 'the whole court/ went boiling, bubbling up, from all its doors and windows' (*AL*, III: 784-787) could have been drawn from 'the gang of benevolent men & boys who "lived but to oblige us" all

[538] See footnote 399.
[539] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2585 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2834/?rsId=236280&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

round the cab'[540], while the brave, strong and unshakable EBB remained as impassible and cool-headed as Aurora Leigh. While this 'cool-headedness' was explained and interpreted in EBB's personal case as a result of the morphine intake and its possible production of a lack of self-awareness in the poet of any sort of risk, it worked when translated into her character. For it set an initial tone of Aurora's engagement with a social class different to hers, her full reactions to it, as well as representing her as a brave and daring character.

A month after the meeting, Aurora receives an invitation to the wedding which she clearly attends: 'I was not backward' (*AL*, IV: 338). Unlike the wedding in Jane Eyre which is interrupted and cannot take place due to Rochester being already married to Bertha Mason, the wedding in *AL* does not take place because the bride does not show up, sending a farewell letter instead. In this regard, the wedding scene rather seems like an opiate nightmare:

They clogged the streets, they oozed into the church
In a dark slow stream, like blood. To see that sight,
The noble ladies stood up in their pews,
Some pale for fear, a few as red of hate,
Some simply curious, some just insolent,
And some in wondrous scorn, -'What next? What next?'
These crushed their delicate rose-lips from the smile
That misbecame them in a holy place,
With broidered hems of perfumed handkerchiefs;
Those passed the salts, with confidence of eyes
And simultaneous shiver of moire silk:
While all the aisles, alive and black with heads,
Crawled slowly towards the altar from the street,

[540] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2585 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2834/?rsId=236280&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

As bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of a hole
With shuddering involution, swaying slow
From right to left, and then from left to right,
In pants and pauses. What an ugly crest
Of faces rose upon you everywhere
From the crammed mass! You did not usually
See faces like them in the open day:
They hide in cellars, not to make you mad
As Romney Leigh is. –Faces! O my God,
We call those, faces? men's and women's . . ay,
And children's; -babies, hanging like a rag
Forgotten on their mother's neck, -poor mouths,
Wiped clean of mother's milk by mother's blow
Before they are taught their cursing. Faces? . . phew,
We'll call them vices, festering to despairs,
Or sorrows, petrifying to vices: not
A finger-touch of God left whole on them,
All ruined, lost –the countenance worn out
As the garment, the will dissolute as the act,
The passions loose and draggling in the dirt
To trip a foot up at the first free step!
Those, faces? 'twas as if you had stirred up hell
To heave its lowest dreg-fiends uppermost
In fiery swirls of slime, -such strangled fronts,
Such obdurate jaws were thrown up constantly
To twit you with your race, corrupt your blood,
And grind to devilish colours all your dreams
Henceforth –though, haply, you should drop asleep
By clink of silver waters, in a muse
On Raffael's mild Madonna of the Bird.
I've waked and slept through many night and days
Since then, -but still that day will catch my breath
Like a nightmare. There are fatal days, indeed,
In which the fibrous years have taken root
So deeply, that they quiver to their tops
Whene'er you stir the dust of such day (*AL*, IV: 553-602).

Those familiar to Aurora are described in a neat, clear, and realistic way: the ladies, their handkerchiefs, salts, perfumes, attitudes known to Aurora for a lifetime. What becomes horrifying is the unfamiliar. Why does that happen? Aurora is not an hysteric, nor a classist, nor a weak, bland character. She is brave, determined, and

self-sufficient[541]. Aurora seems to take no part in any crowd, ladies, or mob, in spite of sharing the same space with them. Instead her attention is focused entirely on her perception to the point of the narrator losing bodily awareness. Aurora is in **stasis**, socially paralysed and engaged within her own perception. The horror of the episode is further heightened by Aurora's awareness of the passing of time: 'I've walked and slept through many nights and days/since then, -but still that day will catch my breath/ Like a nightmare' (*AL,* IV: 596-8); trauma, recollection and drug influence magnify the horrors of memory out of proportion.

Reptilian imagery bursts into architectural structure: aisles seem alive with crawling, hissing snakes (the mob's voices) and then, the faces[542] which appear in a violent image 'an ugly crest/ of faces rose upon everywhere/ from the crammed mass!' (*AL,* IV: 569-70) The crest resembles sea waves following a tide, unstoppable and whose strength is always unpredictable. The water appears again rather as a storm Aurora observes from the distance. Traits of the scene in which Aurora looks for Marian multiply to the point of horror, accumulating through unreal, nightmarish, chaotic motion. Aurora momentarily doubts her senses for images of hell swirl, crests that come and go with Hell's Miltonic echoes that transform human faces into fiend ones: 'such obdurate jaws were thrown up constantly/ to twit with your race, corrupt

---

[541] It is important to notice at this point the first real encounter Aurora has with the poor before meeting Marian. What strikes one about passage, is the description of a woman's face she encounters: 'a woman, roughed/ upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief torn,/ Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious mouth,/ cursed out at a window both ways, in and out,/ By turns some bed-rid creature and myself,-' (AL, III: 764-8). The second is Aurora's reference to hell: 'I think I could have walked through hell that day,/ And never flinched'. (AL, III: 779-80) The description of the woman's face anticipates the horror in the church, multiplied and magnified. The similarities between the woman and the faces in the mob are clear: decadence, filth, rags both physical and emotional and an aggressive and defensive attitude.

[542] EBB was also an introvert who perhaps suffered what Dally acknowledged as social phobia. She was never comfortable among strangers and certainly would not enjoy being among crowds. In this sense, Aurora is similar as she is a loner and possibly had a sort of hidden fear of being among people, especially if they behaved menacing.

your blood,/ and grind to devilish colours all your dreams' (*AL*, IV: 590-93). The church ceases to be an earthly space of the spiritual, as if Heaven and Hell were merged together in apocalyptic horror. Aurora is haunted by the faces who mock, mar, and corrupt the landscape with hellish force.

After being placed by Romney with his guests in a safe familiar spot, Aurora's tone switches to an earthly, calm, and less disturbing one. From then on, the scene develops and what we get are scraps of conversation as her attention seems to drift between what people are saying. The sudden change of tone marks the dispelling of visual horrors when Aurora is surrounded by familiar people. In spite of the atmosphere of general expectancy and anguish because of Marian's delay, the hallucinatory quality of the scene is gone. It is the observation of familiar action and characters discussing Marian and Romney that dilutes the horrors. The fraternal figure who comes to the rescue of the speaker in 'A True Dream' bringing her some comfort with his words, presence and action within the poem recurs here in two instances. In *AL,* the familiar is presented initially by the social sphere to which Romney's friends and relatives belong. The second is Lord Howe, who acts first like a bridge for Aurora to connect with the real world and later rescues her from the chaos that breaks loose when Romney receives Marian's letter:

A murmur and a movement drew around,
A naked whisper touched us. Something wrong.
What's wrong? The black crowd, as an overstrained
Cord, quivered in vibration, and I saw . .
Was that his face I saw? . . his . . Romney Leigh's . .
Which tossed a sudden horror like a spunge
Into all eyes, -while himself stood white upon

The topmost altar-stair and tried to speak,
And failed, and lifted higher above his head
A letter, . . as a man who drowns and gasps. (*AL*, IV: 793-803)

Aurora's perception of the crowd switches from seeing a slimy and organic being to an inanimate one capable of creating energy. The whisper stops being merely audible to become a live voice that touches everyone. The setting also seems affected, multiplying itself to gigantic proportions: crowd, altar stair, enlarge while in the middle of that turmoil, Romney is overcome and swallowed by the surroundings. Aurora's eye focuses upon Romney, who seems to stand frozen, tinted with epic Miltonic undertones, a fallen anti-hero whose demise is depicted. The moment of **awakening**, for Aurora, happens when her bodily awareness is activated, ironically through an action that places her into a deathlike state:

The last sight left to me
Was Romney's terrible calm face above
The tumult! The last sound was 'Pull him down!
Strike -kill him!' stretching my unreasoning arms,
As men in dreams who vainly interpose
'Twixt gods and their undoing, with a cry
I struggled to precipitate myself
Head-foremost to the rescue of my soul
In that white face, .. till some one caught me by the back,
And so the world went out, -I felt no more. (*AL,* IV: 868-77)

Awakening occurs violently, as the crowds are clearly back into their solid and human shaped 'tumult'. Aurora's dramatic, sudden motion, is linked by her own speech with the oneiric world, blurring the line between dream and reality. The use of ellipses adds an extra pause into the narration, evoking the exact moment before Aurora's swooning. Lord Howe stands as the grounding factor, for it is he who catches Aurora,

who for the first and only time, falls senseless into the darkness in what is perhaps her only conventional Victorian ladylike gesture.

As I have analysed, the influence of morphine upon EBB *colours* Aurora's perception, providing a particular rhythm, dynamic and pattern to her narrative, which presents an 'overcharged' palette through colour and texture. This influence also affects the character's narrative, shifting from childhood memories to her adulthood in which her voice starts to change into a narrative full of 'accidents' such as sudden shifts in expression, ideas and subject matter. While, as evidenced through my analysis, the morphine influence affects the visual aspect and Aurora's engaging with the world, it also affects time, as pointed by Helen M. Cooper, who underlines what C. Castan claimed about the use of time within *AL*: 'by the end of book 5 the 'youthful confident' Aurora has caught up with a 'sadder' narrator, who … does not know the outcome of her story, and therefore is not fully reliable; in Books 6-9 the story has caught up with the narrator and till the end of the poem they stay together'.[543] Alison Case acknowledges a split narrator, one less melancholic, more 'reliable' who reaches its peak in the first two Books, the other one a "sadder" and "not fully reliable" Aurora who appears as an 'overcharged' version of herself. This shift in narration appears to Case as connected to Aurora's emotional experience, who labels the journal-like narration as 'peculiar'.[544] Case asserts that the fragmented narrative reflects Aurora's lack of control over her feelings for Romney; the confessional journal style, Case believes, diverts Aurora's narrative towards the epistolary, in a

[543] Helen M. Cooper, 'Structure and narrative in Aurora Leigh', in *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 506.
[544] Alison Case, 'Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh"', *Victorian Poetry*, 29. 1, (1991) 17–32 (p. 515).

Richardsonian vein. Nevertheless, Aurora's musings are 'least significant and in many cases, lead nowhere, for she becomes a passive subject, rather than shaping her own fate.[545] This passiveness, along with Aurora's mental association within a constricted frame, repeats the voice's pattern in 'A True Dream': the repetitive echoed phrasing, sudden outbursts of multiplied images, and the blurring of time through mixing immediate past with remote recollection reflect the morphine experience.

In the already quoted letter to RB in which EBB narrates an outing with Arabel and Flush, and in which a laburnum was enclosed, the experience of **perception** and interaction with the world can be clearly traced. EBB's use of language echoes that of Aurora. Nature's 'green light through the trees'[546] reminds the reader of Aurora's green chamber. The sensation of reality is achieved through touch, both by EBB herself holding the flower and through her feet on the grass. Time and space become illogical within her recollection: 'and all those strange people moving about like phantoms of life … the idea of you .. & myself seemed to be real there! And Flush a little, too!'[547] The mental process is like that of Aurora: herself and her own mind, ideas, and projections are real while tangibility ends where she no longer grasps. *Phantoms of life* echo the lack of solidity of EBB's characters in *AL*, through surreal and intangible presence. An immateriality that reflects Aurora's interaction with the

---

[545] Case, Alison. 'Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh"', p. 518.
[546] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2355 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2600/?rsId=236281&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[547] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 2355 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2600/?rsId=236281&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

world, which is traced as sturdy and fluent in ideas and argument by letter, becomes ethereal when addressed face to face.

Aurora Leigh's morphine habit that permeates her perception with autobiographical links to EBB, provides the character with a novelty and uniqueness that differs from other contemporary Victorian heroines. As explored in this chapter, the morphine influence constructs Aurora's narrative through specific aesthetics, which give *AL* a vivid and intricate visual atmosphere. That atmosphere also gives EBB's narrative that 'flash of true genius'[548] noticed by Woolf, which anticipates the Modernist perspective of stream of consciousness, or rather, becomes an *opiated* stream of consciousness. Hand in hand with EBB's perception of the world, morphine acted as a bridge to an alternative apprehension and understanding of life, art and soul. Morphine painted Aurora Leigh with specific traits that broke the constricted boundaries of the Victorian heroine, and made her a sort of Miltonic poet/prophet, whose spiritual autobiographical dimension will be explored in the following chapter.

Perhaps the elusiveness of the 'opiate filter', as well as the difficulty of tracing the 'opiate pattern' within *AL* is based upon the lack of an evidential relation of the character Aurora Leigh to the substance. Pryce's *An Evil Spirit*, for instance, is, in the end, a moral tale which portrays the horrors of addiction, as well as showing criticism of the medical establishment which prescribed morphine indiscriminately, and even showed a patient how to inject the opiate without the assistance of medical staff. In

[548] Woolf, Virginia, 'Aurora Leigh', p. 218.

this sense, Pryce's novel was intended to portray a social horror, while highlighting the gendered and negative perception of the morphinomaniac.

If, as I suggest, Aurora may be read as an opium user, the influence of the drug would by contrast affect her spiritual and visionary status, the 'opiate filter' not being attached to any sort of moral lesson: she is not a morphinomaniac, but a spiritual visionary. The possibility of Aurora reflecting the sensory and spiritual experience of opium use would thereby link the character to another autobiographical trait of EBB which, as I have explored, has been widely undermined. At the same time, Aurora is constructed much as EBB's official likeness: an emblematic and idealized version of the artist, of the woman poet who achieves her major work through independence and engagement with the real world.

Chapter 4: Mrs. Browning's Gospel

The Poet-Prophet

EBB's reputation by 1844, after the first biographical sketch by R. H. Horne was published for his *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), is summarized by Daniel Karlin, with EBB seen as 'an incurable invalid who say nobody [...] a secluded genius'[549]. EBB suffered, lived isolated, committed in heart and soul to poetry and was a devoted Christian, a 'paragon of saintliness', a 'priestess', a 'prophetess'", as Linda Lewis observes, for EBB was acknowledged as 'a prophetess' by *The League*, and 'a priestess' by *The Atlas.* [550] EBB's book *Poems* (1844) contained 'A Drama of Exile' a crucial work which traced the path to EBB's theology, later condensed in *AL*. The poem was well received and was praised in *The Critic* for its 'passages of fine poetry scattered about, and here and there some scenes truly dramatic; moreover, it exhibits power such as we do not remember in any lady's poetry; there is masculine nerve and vigour in it, though the delicacy of the woman peeps out at times.'[551] Such 'nerve and vigour' as well as the 'scattered passages of fine poetry' appeared again in *AL* through Aurora's voice, yet, style would not be the only characteristic of 'A Drama of Exile' which would recur. For instance, it is in the preface of *Poems* that EBB confessed to her critics and readers that her poems had her 'heart and life in them'[552] anticipating in a less emotional and more subtle gesture what she would go on to state in *AL*. Most of the preface is dedicated to explaining the reasons for her composition and

---

[549] Daniel Karlin, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett,* p. 48.
[550] Lewis, Linda M. Lewis *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God,* p. 183
[551] *The Critic,* (1 November 1844), 148–152.
<https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/65/?rsId=236282&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[552] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems* (London: Routledge, 1887), p. xi

technique, as in 'A Drama of Exile' EBB acknowledged Greek and Miltonic influences, referring thus to the major poet: 'I had promised to my own prudence to shut close the gates of Eden between Milton and myself, so that none might say I dared to walk his footsteps.'[553] By 'shutting the gates' EBB created a metaphorical barrier between herself and Milton, which levelled her as well with the fallen parents rather than with the blind poet-prophet. Aware of the daring subject and construction of her drama -which was a Christian theme in the form of a Greek tragedy- EBB expected evident comparisons: 'My subject was the new and strange experience of the fallen humanity, as it went forth from Paradise into the wilderness.'[554] While Milton was totally open and claimed to 'justify the ways of God to men' (*Paradise Lost*, I: 26), EBB stated a different intention by the exploration of the newly experienced human fallen state. In that same preface, EBB made an important statement upon spiritual life: 'the tendency of the present day is to sunder the daily life from the spiritual creed- to separate the worshipping from the acting man, -and by no means to "live by faith".'[555] EBB thus addressed the issue of the rift between soul and body, pointing directly to the problematic exercising of Faith as a mere act of worship within the four walls of the church, while ignoring its exercise in everyday life, through the act of living *by* Faith. Isobel Armstrong writes of Victorian poetry as: 'post-theological and scientific, conceiving beliefs, including those of Christianity, anthropological, in terms of belief system and representations through myth. Simply because of its awareness of theological insecurity, Victorian poetry is arguably the last theological poetry to be written.'[556] 'A Drama of Exile' presents both the belief system and the theological insecurity noted by Armstrong, precisely produced by the

---

[553] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems,* p. viii
[554] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems,* p. vii
[555] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems,* p. ix
[556] Armstrong, Isobel, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics,* p. 3.

rift between mind and spirit expressed by EBB. This same idea would recur in *AL*, with a critical emphasis upon the rift between body and soul. Deirdre David claims that 'A Drama of Exile' presents EBB's voice as passive to both Milton and God's voice,[557] thus presenting EBB hiding behind a poetical mask. This effaced passiveness evolves in Aurora's voice, who acts as an open receptacle of a higher spiritual message. EBB's idea, explored in 'Vision of Poets' -in the same collection- (1844) of the mission of the poet, is embodied in Aurora as 'the self-abnegation implied in it, of the great work involved in it, of the duty and glory of what Balzac has heart-fully and truly called "la patience angelique du genre", and of the obvious truth, above all, that if knowledge is power, suffering should be acceptable as part of knowledge.'[558] The mission of the poet and its requirements echo the monastic life, with self-abnegation and suffering underlining the Roman Catholic idea of suffering as a path to illumination.

EBB's spiritual explorations within her preface and within her poetry, correspond to a unique cosmovision whose roots lie within canonical Christianity, but grow interwoven with alternative spiritual explorations, such as mesmerism and spiritualism. Although EBB never practised mesmerism herself (as explored in Chapter 3), she held a strong belief in its principles and after her marriage she would become equally interested in spiritualist séances[559] - to RB's dismay -, up to the point of experimenting along with Wilson, who 'became' a medium.[560] Dally mentions that spiritualism tends to attract people who 'are unhappy and guilt ridden'[561] and that all they seek is reassurance that they are still loved, remembered and forgiven by their

---

[557] Deirdre David *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 108.
[558] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems,* p. x
[559] In previous Chapters the relationship between EBB and Sophia Eckley has been discussed. Both shared a keen interest on spiritualism, becoming a deep connecting point. One of the hypothetical reasons of the friendship ending was the fact that EBB became aware of Sophia being a charlatan, thus deceiving EBB on spiritualism.
[560] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 289.
[561] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 159.

parted loved one.[562] Dally theorized upon EBB's need of contacting her deceased loved ones, specially her brother Edward 'Bro',[563] yet, due to EBB's natural morbid trait, the séances were harmful, for added to morphine, they dragged the poet down into her own inner world of morbid darkness.[564]

While Dally is correct in mentioning such effects of morphine upon EBB during later years, during her early years of morphine intake, the panorama was different, and the mental effect in the poet was quite opposite, as I have explored in Chapter 2. One issue remained a constant, however; whatever direction morphine took her to, it drew EBB closer to her spiritual side. This coincides with what Hayter evidences as the physical and mental side effects of opium in some individuals which tend to draw them towards the spiritual, plunging the user into an introspective state in which they feel they are spiritually chosen,

> that element in personality which delights in secret rites and hidden fellowships, in being an initiate. ... Those who cannot make a place and a relationship among themselves in the daylight world of humanity persuade themselves that their isolation is a distinction, a setting-apart of the chosen ones, and they join the secret communities of the dark.[565]

Hayter suggests that De Quincey's highly imaginative nature made him prone to vivid opium dreams, and a similar impact, but through the spiritual glass, could be argued for EBB. The poet's curiosity and fascination for alternative spiritual routes, as well as her questioning of Christian dogma, point towards an interesting trait of personality which found its perfect partner in morphine and the spiritual insight as described by Hayter. From a very young age, EBB demonstrated that she had a rebellious spiritual trait, which led her at twelve to be 'in great danger of becoming the founder of a religion of my own ... I revolted at the idea of an established religion. My faith was

---

[562] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 159.
[563] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 160.
[564] Peter Dally, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait,* p. 161.
[565] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 41.

sincere but my religion was founded solely on the imagination. It was not the deep persuasion of the mild Christian but the wild visions of an enthusiast.'[566] Seen from our contemporary perspective, the daring spiritual recollection of the young EBB might seem unimportant and playful, for at present, religion might not have the same cultural weight and impact it had for the Victorians. Yet, for a young Victorian, this behaviour signified a huge act of rebellion. Moreover, this statement did not remain for EBB a mere adolescent whim, for its echoes would reverberate through all of her poetic career, first in 'A Drama of Exile' and later in *AL*, where Aurora would embody a mature version of the visionary adolescent EBB as a poet-prophet figure. As Lewis recapitulates, the idea of EBB as a prophetess has been present ever since its contemporary reception, in a full acknowledgement of her spiritual traits, by admirers and detractors alike.[567] Gardner Taplin supports this idea, as fully expressed by EBB in her preface to *Poems,* stating that EBB 'puts on the robes of a high priestesses and solemnly explains the mystery of her calling.'[568] This attitude, signalled by Taplin as the wearing of a robe and referred by Lewis as an action, is one in which EBB positions herself as 'a spokesperson of God [... and] uses her pedestal to speak out on social issues'.[569] It places EBB's as dressing up momentously or as standing upon a pedestal as if she were putting on a mask. Yet, both her poetic and spiritual careers seemed to develop simultaneously, deeply intertwined. Whereas EBB minded any kind of exaggeration concerning her illness or her grief, she did not seem to mind at all any acknowledgement of her prophetic status or her spiritual vein. Her own religion, founded within the poet's imagination, edified upon morphine

---

[566] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Two Autobiographical Essays by Elizabeth Barrett', p. 126.
[567] Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God,* p. 172.
[568] Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God,* p. 173.
[569] Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God,* p. 173.

foundations, gave EBB the notion that she was spiritually chosen through her poetical mission.

The humble voice from the preface to the 1844 *Poems* resurfaced from a different perspective, transfigured, as read in the short dedication to John Kenyon which enclosed all of what EBB needed to say to her audience. Unhesitating and assertive, written from EBB's maturity, the voice echoes the opening lines in *AL* in which she: 'will write my story for my better self' (*AL*, I: 4). By placing herself as a narrator in an immediate narrative present, the poetic voice asserts that she is writing not only to reconstruct her own past, but also as an established author in the present. In spite of her reputation, EBB herself did not expect *AL* to be that successful, and she was quite surprised and amused by its reception, as expressed to her sister Arabel: 'The extravagant things said about that poem, would make you smile (as they make me)—and there's one sort of compliment which would please you particularly .. people are fond of calling it "a gospel-".'[570] 'Mrs. Browning's gospel', a label which could be considered a sort of satirical blasphemy, hinted at EBB's *AL'*s 'metaphysical intention' which was, according to EBB, ignored by the critics.[571] Behind the mask of amusement and the serious remark of her 'metaphysical intention', the voice of EBB -the poet prophet- was heard. Had EBB, for any reason, experienced any anxiety about the authoritative figure of John Milton both as prophet and poet, she would have not taken with humour a remark which placed her as an author upon the same theological and poetical level as him. Unlike the Miltonic prophetic figure, whose main aim is to 'justify the ways of God to men', Aurora is simply open and receptive to divine message and revelation. The following questions then arise: Does EBB

---

[570] *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) letter 3935 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/4280/?rsId=236283&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

[571] Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 316.

belong to Milton's daughters, like Eliot's Dorothea Casaubon? Or does she belong to the other set of Milton's daughters, those who, in Gilbert and Gubar's words rewrite '*Paradise Lost* so as to make it a more accurate mirror of female experience?'[572] In Aurora, the prophetic voice is far more incipient than the poetic one, blending to allow Aurora to mix her emotions with her *spiritual message*, therefore providing her whole spiritual vision a with deeply personal tone. A tragicomic thread runs through Aurora, interweaving within her narrative, balancing every day moments tinted with misplaced revelation undertones (*AL*, III: 98-100). While in Milton's *PL* the poet-prophet appears as a narrative voice who never interacts as a character within the plot, in *AL*, most of the narrative belongs to the formation of the poet-prophet through Aurora's development. Marjorie Stone reflects upon the narrative chosen by EBB: 'throughout much of the poem [Aurora] speaks not as a sage and prophet, but as a sage-in-formation whose wisdom is in process of revision and often contradicted by her own actions.'[573] Therefore, the severity of the prophetic voice is softened by humorous incidents and the epic undertone becomes an exquisite mock heroic passage: 'The wind and dust/ And sun of the world beat blistering in my face;/ And hope, now for me, now against me, dragged/ my spirits onwards, as some fallen balloon,/ which, whether caught by blossoming tree or bare,/ is torn alike' (*AL*, V: 410-426). *AL* is also a coming of age text of the prophet, not just of the artist and the woman. Stone underlines the fact that *AL* is constructed partially as what Bakhtin labels as the 'novelized epic', in which the depicted world is not one of national tradition, but is brought into the present, and the style reflects a 'multilanguaged consciousness' which will disrupt the epic into parody and self-parody.[574] This satirical turn shows

---

[572] Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literacy Imagination,* p. 220.
[573] Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p. 162.
[574] Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 504.

the clear influence of Alexander Pope, through exaggeration, magnifying proportions of an ordinary action and the hyperbolic emotional displays of Aurora which create humoristic undertones. EBB is therefore not only rewriting *Paradise Lost,* as claimed by Gilbert and Gubar in order to make it more accurate to female experience[575], but goes further, as through her reinterpretation of Satan, Fall and temptation, EBB brings forward to her contemporaries theological anxieties. While she presented herself as a poet-prophet to her audience, in *AL,* EBB also revises Milton's epic by exploring the formation process of the prophetic figure, fitting the sacred role into ordinary human life experience.

As discussed earlier, the effects of morphine within the mind exacerbated EBB's spiritual traits. While Hayter's account of the influence of the opiate in EBB's poetry is focused mostly upon certain imagery and visual structures, Laura Fish, in her novel *Strange Music*[576] explores the use of the opiate from a different perspective, providing insight into a spiritual dimension. *Strange Music* is set during EBB's early years, before Bro's death and EBB's established fame as a poet. Through a first person narrative, Fish recreates EBB's opiate reveries within a claustrophobic atmosphere, coloured by spiritualism, mesmerism and Swedenborgian echoes, playing with different angles of EBB's reality. Part of these visions include a woman, who, even when EBB the character is never able to recognize, is herself in the future:

> The woman in the mirror has returned. ... I've been aware of her moving about my midnight candles and amongst shadows clipped by dawn. I've sensed her creep into my own thoughts, smelt her in lavender-scented sheets. Tonight she stands in shadows on the far side of the room.
>
> She is superstitious. I can tell because the way she stares at me is the way people gaze into a crystal ball, deeply, as I examine my own reflection in the mirror Crow holds before me now. ...

---

[575] Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literacy Imagination,* p. 220.
[576] Laura Fish, *Strange Music* (London: Vintage, 2009).

> Then this small-boned woman with thick ebony ringlets, moving past the window drapes in a dress of magenta-coloured velvet veiled in black lace, vanishes into the wintry wind.[577]

Fish's narrative inclines towards the supernatural, with the boundaries of time and space crossed by the young EBB aided by opium visions, suggesting the influence of the narcotic upon the poet's imagination. Fish's narrative also places the mirror as part of the reveries, both as an idea of visions as mirrors of present and future and also of the self, as the woman in the vision, reverberating with the scene in *AL* in which Aurora recognises Marian, as if in a mirror. The mirror as trope acts as a means of spiritual exploration by multiplying endlessly within an enclosed room the unknown 'small-boned woman with thick ebony ringlets', who, with EBB's emblematic hairstyle, mirrors the young EBB who is unable to recognise herself, yet finds the vision uncanny.

The mirror, as explored in Chapter 1, is fundamental for the construction of Aurora Leigh as a character, who is layered with multiple reflections of EBB: one of these is the poet with a similar poetical career to that of her creator. Yet, it is the spiritual visionary, who would, with time and through the narrative, become a poet-prophet, and whose early spiritual questionings echo the adolescent EBB who almost creates a religion of her own: 'I sate on in my chamber green,/ and lived my life, and thought of my thoughts, and prayed,/ my prayers without the vicar' (*AL*, I: 698-700). The independent act of worship shows the will to separate from the established and constricted dogma and to question its values. A lack of spiritual fulfilment, a possible feeling of not fitting within a spiritual community, disclosed the need for an alternative path of spirituality whose authority would be the free will of its practitioner. This adolescent act, both in Aurora and EBB who could not rebel

[577] Laura Fish, *Strange Music,* p. 15.

physically against the patriarchal authorities embodied both by Aunt Leigh and Mr. Edward Barrett, sought rebellion through unconventional means against the patriarchal authority of the established Church. Isolation as distinction, with its mystical undertones of voluntary confinement *raises* the subject above its peers to a privileged position higher than that of ordinary men; whereas rejection of conventional established religious dogma highlights the individual as chosen, as a separate entity from the spiritual *herd*, enhancing the sense of being an initiate and of illumination.

Morphine mixed with imagination gave to the young poet/prophet Aurora a tint lacking in the Miltonic prophet: an adventurous, inquisitive and self-centred eye -sometimes exaggerated and grotesque-, who delights in exploring her own emotions, mostly grieving ones. Aurora is not just a poet, but a prophet, as David mentions: 'implicitly proclaiming herself as God's new prophet and as God's new inscriber'[578] who lives through a prophetic process, engaged simultaneously within her own human passions (that is, her tormented and denied love for Romney). While Milton's epic addresses the Fall of mankind and Satan's Rebellion, Aurora's epic, dealing with everyday life experience was not very well received in this respect, as H. F. Chorley expressed it in *The Athenaeum* as: 'Milton's organ is put by Mrs. Browning to play polkas in May-Fair drawing-rooms'.[579] Aurora's poetic and prophetic experience is that of the Christian attempting to live by Faith, as EBB expressed it in her preface to *Poems*. Yet, for *AL,* instead of addressing the Fall, Sin, virtues and vices through a theological treaty, EBB makes her heroine experience life in order to explain those spiritual instances. Sarah Annes Brown also notes the relationship between *AL* and

[578] Deirdre David, 'Art's a Service": Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and "Aurora Leigh', *Browning Institute Studies*, 13 (1985), 113–36 (p. 116).
[579] F. H. Chorley for *The Athenæum* (22 November 1856) 1425–27. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/171/?rsId=236284&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Paradise Lost, through the Miltonic echoes of the proposal scene with the Fall of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*: settings, pivotal scene and poetic devices like the leaf simile;[580] Brown also states that the Miltonic echoes should be traced back to 'A Drama of Exile', for EBB, claims Brown, gave Aurora the same qualities which led Eve to the Fall in order to fulfil her path as a woman and a poet.[581] Aurora's language, as pointed by David, was signalled as 'unfeminine', pointed out by Aytoun in *Blackwood's Magazine*, where he accused the heroine of being too intellectual -a then standard masculine trait.[582] The young Aurora is fully aware of her poetic vocation, reassuring herself through her symbolical crowning and her rejection of marriage, practically annihilating the woman under the weight of the poet. In spite of the spiritual certainty, Aurora's poetic production at this stage seems unremarkable. This contradiction between achievement and vocation fits one trait of the opium eater noted by Hayter: 'he feels that he is having brilliant thoughts and doing difficult intellectual feats with extraordinary ease, but the results are not often shown by achievements objectively measurable'.[583]

While all of Aurora's intellectual knowledge and education belongs to her father, it is in her mother's heirloom that Aurora's spiritual existence is rooted and explained. As Barbara Gelpi[584] has shown, the diversity of mythological and religious iconography which derives from the mother's portrait represents much of Aurora's anxiety about her own womanhood. Through the construction of her own archetypical mother, Aurora blends divine (holy and unholy), pagan, saint and fiend within the same frame, providing her own mother with several layers of meaning, power and

---

[580] Sarah Annes Brown, 'Paradise Lost and Aurora Leigh', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 37. 4, (1997), 723–40.
[581] Sarah Annes Brown, 'Paradise Lost and Aurora Leigh', p. 734.
[582] Deirdre David, 'Art's a Service": Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and "Aurora Leigh', p. 118.
[583] Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination,* p. 43.
[584] Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, '"Aurora Leigh": The Vocation of the Woman Poet', 38.

depth which embody the spiritual world. Aurora's mother, through absence, becomes represented in multiple ways by her daughter within her own imagination, echoing what Emmanuel Swedenborg stated as correspondence between the material and the spiritual world: 'that every natural flower which grows on earth/ implies a flower upon the spiritual side,/ substantial, archetypical' (*AL*, VII: 840-843)' through platonic echoes, the physical mother remains material through her portrait representation, while her correspondent spiritual archetype is what Aurora *recreates* through her own imagination.

One of the most prominent figures linked to Aurora's mother is Our Lady of Passion (fig. 4.1). The first glimpse that Aurora's father has of his future wife is during a Roman Catholic procession in which her 'face flashed like a cymbal on his face/ and shook with silent clangour brain and heart,/ transfiguring him to music' (*AL*, I: 88-90). This first glimpse clearly depicts Aurora's mother's spiritual status: the face acts like music with the impact of love at first sight, love as the means for illumination that will transfigure that same woman into 'Our Lady of Passion, stabbed with swords/ where the Babe sucked' (*AL*,I: 158-9). The swords represent the seven sorrows Mary underwent as mother of Christ, prophesied by Luke: 'a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed'.[585] The relationship between religious iconography and Aurora's passive mother is linked through a prophetic statement from which none can escape: sorrow, martyrdom and grief as the path to illumination, experienced through the fate of her offspring. Above all things, Mary had to be a virgin, virtuous and pure to be a vehicle worthy of Divinity and bearing God's son and her righteousness therefore was required as a constant. By placing her mother on the same level to Virgin Mary,

[585] Luke, 2.35.

Aurora is fitting her origins into a divine dimension, in which not only her mother would have been divine, sacred and chosen, but she herself as chosen by God to fulfil a divine mission. Mary's motherhood is sacred intrinsically in itself, but also through the status of her son. In a similar equation, Aurora's mother is sacred, becoming the Lady of Sorrows: mother to the poet-prophet.

Fig. 4. 1

Seven Swords Piercing the Sorrowful Heart of Mary

(Church of the Holy Cross, Salamanca, Spain)

EBB's revision of the Miltonic figure of the prophet, not only as a tint to her own poetic persona, but also as embodied in Aurora as a poet-prophet of her Age, places both character, poet and work within the Miltonic tradition. In an Age in which Faith was shaken, in which people looked for answers in the supernatural to compensate for a lack of answers found within traditional Christian dogma, Aurora Leigh becomes the ultimate spiritual hero for not only does she receive in the end fame and love, but she successfully delivers a divine inspired message with a spiritual teaching, which she seems to have been chosen to deliver.

The Revelation of Aurora

Aurora's upbringing takes place within a sheltered atmosphere surrounded by Nature, far from the urban, industrial towns, where factories, production and technology developed. The increase of materialism and mass production, the rise of technological advances shook the Victorian Era in a way that no earlier period had experienced. The Ruskinian idea of the death of craft through mechanical manufacture would permeate a whole generation: 'It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves.'[586] Ruskin's idea of a vain, incoherent and destructive world added to EBB's interest in Swedenborg's theology and reverberates within *AL*'s theological vision and its relation to Revelation and the Last Judgement.

[586] John Ruskin, *On Art And Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 16

Swedenborg 'claimed to have witnessed this event [Last Judgement] in 1757, a year that marked the beginning of a new spiritual age for humankind.'[587] It is possible to consider then *AL* as an apocalyptic text which would describe and discuss an era which was coming to its end, an era in which chaos and inhumanity act as a mere reflection of the decadent state in which poetry acts as means of salvation, since for EBB 'Christ's religion is essentially poetry - poetry glorified'.[588] *AL*'s links to the Book Of Revelation appear upon different levels, making the biblical text an important inter-textual literary thread. The figure of the prophet, the textual quotes by the characters from Revelation and other biblical sources -minutely traced by Margaret Reynolds in her edition- resonate within a reinterpretation that EBB makes of the biblical texts, but mostly of the Book of Revelation. She places her own prophet within the narrative, to explore life within a narrative frame similar to that of John.

It is during the proposal scene that Aurora's symbolism as a poet is shown, depicted by Arthur Hughes' painting in which, as I explored in Chapter 1, she appears in white in the text. The Book of Revelation reads: 'To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives'.[589] Christina Rossetti's *The Face of the Deep* (1892) gives an impressive account -verse by verse- of her interpretation of the Book of Revelation, and in it Rossetti comments on the same passage: 'For their name shall be inscribed on the stone, which amongst earthly substances excels in durability; and that stone shall be white as lambs, doves, light, are white. And as whiteness is not a colour but rather an absence of tints; so

[587] Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Swedenborg Sampler: Selections from Heaven and Hell, Divine Love and Wisdom, Divine Providence, True Christianity, Secrets of Heaven* (Pensylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 2011), p. xiii.
[588] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, (2021) letter 903 <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/1025/?rsId=236287&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]
[589] Revelation, 12. 12.

innocence is not a virtue, but rather an absence of guilt'.[590] Rossetti implies immortality once the soul has attained redemption, an incorruptible state in which Faith is as hard and unbreakable as a stone which belongs to its bearer. Light, as abstract, is placed side by side with Christ and the Holy Ghost. Whiteness is a characteristic, connected to Aurora's portrait by Hughes, as an 'absence of tints' turns into an impossible representation. EBB's choice of dress colour for her main character during her twentieth birthday, stands for Aurora's spiritual status: dressed almost as a bride -virginity implied- she decides to marry her own vocation and reject a man while underlining her absence of guilt.

The book depicted in Hughes' painting is the one found by Romney, written by Aurora: 'Here's a book I found!/ No name writ on it -poems, by the form;/ Some Greek upon the margin, lady's Greek/ Without the accents. Read it? Not a word./ I saw at once the thing had witchcraft in't,/ Whereof the reading calls up dangerous spirits: I rather bring it to the witch' (*AL*, II: 74-79). Margaret Reynolds points out that Romney's questioning of accents 'must be read as indicative of his scorn for Aurora's attempt to infiltrate the male preserve of the classics'[591], yet what is acknowledged by Romney as magical powers, evokes the oracular and prophetic qualities in Aurora's book which link her to John's visionary experience:

> And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.[592]

---

[590] Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1893. p. 72.
[591] Margaret Reynolds in *Aurora Leigh,* p. 41.
[592] Revelation, 10. 9-11.

Swedenborg interprets the book in Revelation as the Christian doctrine[593] through the Gospel of John: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'.[594] John is the prophet who acts as a precursor of Christ's message without himself being the Messiah. Aurora's book, depicted by Hughes as a small volume which she holds in a maternal fashion, was sweet not only to her lips, but also to her readers. The poems which bring her success and admiration[595] are those about love, yet the sweetness of those verses becomes bitter for Aurora herself, as she claims: 'To have our books/ Appraised by love, associated with love,/ while we sit loveless! It is hard, you think?/ At least 'tis mournful' (*AL*, V: 475-478). Eating her book signifies in this case repression of feeling, the ironic ability to write about love while living loveless; Aurora's gift while bringing fame and recognition, makes her lonely and isolated. Aurora's published book, which showed Romney 'something separated from yourself/ beyond you, and I bore to take it in/ and let it draw me' (*AL*, VIII: 606-8), echoes EBB's idea of 'the most mature of her works' and shows similar criticism to that addressed to *AL*, in Lady Waldemar's words: 'There is some merit in the book;/ and yet the merit in't is thrown away' (*AL*, IX: 56-57).

Gospel is 'the central content of Christian revelation, the glad tidings of redemption'[596], with implications of the message being acquired through revelation. The Christian gospels narrate Christ's life, always in third person; his life experience being subject to the authority of an external voice. While the audience called *AL* 'Mrs.

---

[593] '"Taking the little book," signifies receiving the doctrine concerning the Lord; "eating it up" is signified acknowledging it; by "making the belly bitter" is signified that it will be disagreeable and difficult from falsifications, for "bitter" signifies truth falsified (n. 411); by "being in the mouth sweet as honey" is signified that the beginning of its reception is agreeable and pleasant. These things that are now applied to that doctrine, which is meant by "the little book open in the hand of the angel" (n. 469, 472) signify that reception from acknowledgement that the Lord is the savior and redeemer is agreeable and pleasant; but that the acknowledgement that he alone is the God of heaven and earth, and that his human is Divine, is disagreeable and difficult from falsifications.' Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Revealed* (Pensylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 2011), p. 511.

[594] John 1. 1.

[595] It is interesting to notice that even when her verse brings her praise and admirers even from overseas, it is not what gives her the means for a living. Added to her small inheritance provided by her aunt, Aurora worked anonymously in prose to her own dismay.

[596] Cross, F. L., and E. A. Livingstone, editors. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 697.

Browning's Gospel', its cosmovision, theology and construction belong to John, the author of Revelation. Marjorie Stone notes that 'as the poem closes, Aurora not only speaks the last word; she also speaks in the words of the prophet of Revelation'.[597] The New Jerusalem depicted by John appears almost identical through Aurora's voice: ' 'Jasper first,' I said,/ 'And second, sapphire; third, chalcedony;/ The rest in order, -last, an amethyst''(*AL,* IX: 962-964); 'The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire; the third chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth sardius; the seventh chrysolyte; the eight, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth, the twelfth, an amethyst'.[598] Ranen Omer discusses Christianity in *AL*, first reconsidering David's observation about EBB's poetics being constructed within a masculine tradition, pointing at the same time to the importance of not separating the poet from her Christian faith. Omer identifies the rift which occurred in EBB's case between 'the pious invalid of the religious sonnets and the daring poet of *AL*';[599] this bifurcation, Omer insists, creates a problem for it tends to overlook and ignore the Christian frame of *AL*. As a consequence the poet's vision in *AL* is not apprehended as a whole and tends to focus upon 'the woman poet', pushing aside EBB's prophetic aim[600]. Omer's observation is accurate and must be taken into consideration when studying EBB, for the poet's Christian Faith, plus her mystical interests and spiritual cosmovision stand as equally important as her morphine habit in their influence upon her work. Aurora is as spiritual as her author, and her life experience is meant to fit in what EBB expressed in her 1844 preface about 'living by faith', along with the religious poetic vocation as stated in 'Vision of Poets'. Aurora, in contrast to Milton, delivers a prophetic message of salvation like St.

---

[597] Stone, Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 501.
[598] Revelation, 21.19-20.
[599] Omer, Ranen Omer 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Apocalypse: The Unraveling of Poetic Autonomy', p. 99.
[600] Omer, Ranen Omer 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Apocalypse: The Unraveling of Poetic Autonomy', p. 99.

John. The Book of Revelation belongs to the apocalyptic texts and J.J Collins defines Apocalypse as: 'a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendental reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another supernatural world'.[601] Bauckham states that St. John's apocalypse is distinguished from others through his visual imagery with its particular visionary sequence, with recurring images[602] which becomes a single unit. E. F. Scott notices the disruptive narrative of Revelation, which takes the reader through different planes of time and space, as well as heaven and earth;[603] Aurora's narrative is similar for her narrative voice jumps from past to present within her narrative. The Book of Revelation, like *Paradise Lost*, influences the construction of *AL,* to represent her age: the spiritual becomes part of ordinary every day life, not a detached state of being happening in Heaven or experienced only by saints, pious and holy people. This fitting of a Christian message within EBB's contemporary age aims to show a spiritual Fall and its ways to redemption, therefore placing *AL* within canonical apocalyptic New Testament tradition, as Revelation differs from the Jewish apocalypses through 'the expression of the real experience of a real person […] in an historical situation whose moral aspect the author describes himself as sharing with those whom he is addressing'.[604] Aurora, and EBB herself, like John, depict their historical context, rather than addressing a distant past or writing about a non-existent future, in order to show its social issues and moral and spiritual questionings.

---

[601] J. J. Collins, in Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 6.
[602] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 10.
[603] E. F. Scott, in Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation,* p. 10.
[604] S. H. Hooke S. H., *Alpha and Omega. A Study in the Pattern of Revelation* (London: Nisbet, 1961), p. 99.

Aurora belongs partially to the tradition of early Christian prophecy, as EBB's own concept of the poet is similar to what Bauckham notes: 'oracles, spoken in the name of God or Christ, and reports of visions, in which the prophets had received revelations in order subsequently to pass them on to others'[605], and part of Aurora's revelation is written down and published as her major work, which has been inferred as the contents of Book V. Nevertheless, the significance of Aurora acting as prophet is not exclusive to Book V, as the whole construction of *AL* echoes the effect of John's Revelation upon his readers: 'to expand the reader's world, both spatially (into heaven) and temporarily (into the future), or to put it in another way, to open their world into divine transcendence'.[606] Aurora's intention of showing and proving the divine and transcendent qualities of poetry is implied through the whole narrative and this effect culminates in *AL* through its closure, where the New Jerusalem is depicted through textual quotation.

AL is similar to The Book of Revelation in the multiplicity of biblical references. As prophet, John quotes imagery, passages and symbolisms from the Old Testament, rewriting them in his own language and Margaret Reynolds has pointed out that EBB makes use of the same technique: for Aurora does not quote bible texts directly, rather she takes an image, for instance, placing it with similar vocabulary or imagery and incorporates it into Aurora's or another character's speech in order to create certain effects or meaning. During the proposal scene, while Romney and Aurora are discussing the ivy crown with Romney undermining its importance and emphasizing the fact that Aurora should never aspire to be a poet, she replies: 'I would rather take my part in white/ with God's Dead, who afford to walk in white/ yet spread His glory, than keep quiet here/ and gather up my feet from even a step/ for fear to soil my gown

[605] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation,* p. 3.
[606] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 7.

in so much dust' (*AL,* II:102-105). The reference is clearly to the Book of Revelation and to the white gown worn by those not defiled. Aurora, thus by quoting this, is not only referring to the pureness of her heart and soul, she is also stating that, for her, the poetic vocation is spiritual, with its sacredness and full commitment through the renunciation of the flesh (thus of marriage) in order to pursue her poetic mission.

John's and Aurora's narratives create an effect through this referencing system colouring The Book of Revelation, and as Scott notices: 'the book [of Revelation] resembles one of those ancient buildings which have been constructed with stones collected from many places. […] The stones have been put together in a new building, designed for a special purpose, but they fit awkwardly into each other, and still bear traces of their original use'.[607] This pattern occurs within *AL*, with its apparent carelessness and lack of craft which is nothing but the sum of all the different sources -opposites on the surface- which blend to construct a whole new vision. Aurora is a combination of a highly gifted artist, tormented woman and spiritual visionary. Unlike John's, Aurora's experience as a prophet is closer to ordinary life than to the proper state of visual revelation, under Swedenborg's influence, with his particular idea of Evil and Hell: 'Evil with man is hell with him; for it is the same thing whether we say evil or hell. And as a man is the cause of his own evil, therefore he, and not the Lord, also leads himself into hell'.[608] Hell therefore, corresponds to a spiritual and mental state rather than a place in the afterlife. EBB's reinterpretation of Swedenborgian theology and Christian scripture -the Gospels and the Book of Revelation- represents her own idea of correspondence between the spiritual and earthly world.

This correspondence occurs as well in another important aspect of the Book of Revelation which reverberates in *AL* through the development of its characters, who

---

[607] E. F. Scott, *The Book of Revelation*. SCM, 1939. p. 22-3.
[608] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Collected Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (BiblioBazaar, 2007) p. 276.

in John's narrative appear as emblematic, archetypical and allegorical representations and whose main function is to represent his Age. EBB's characters, as noted by David, possess no 'finely nuanced and registered shades of consciousness'[609] and resemble those of St. John's as allegorical representations of virtues and vices of the prophet's time[610] who are rather universal archetypes which fit any historical time. Lady Waldemar, rather than being noted as a plain and predictable villainess, stands rather as a representation of Vice in the upper middle classes. According to EBB's reading of Swedenborg's correspondence, Lady Waldemar corresponds to an archetypical vision within the Book of Revelation: the Whore of Babylon, who represents the Roman Empire, interpreted by Swedenborg as the Roman Catholic Church:[611]

> So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abomination and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.[612]

Both the child Aurora and the grown-up woman apprehend the world through their eyes. While for the child the emotions and images are hard to explain in her own language, the grown-up woman dissects them in a more ordered train of thought, evidencing similarities between Lady Waldemar and her own mother within her imagination. Lady Waldemar appears at Lord Howe's party with the same force as the Whore of Babylon, awakening ambivalent feelings in Aurora similar to John the

---

[609] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot,* p. 115.
[610] E. F. Scott, *The Book of Revelation,* p. 56.
[611] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Revealed* (Theodore D. Webber, 2012), p. 812.
[612] Revelation, 17. 3-6.

beholder who contemplates with great 'wonder and admiration': surprise, amazement, shock and even marvel.

Motherhood is implied in both representations, Faulk writes on Lady Waldemar that the poet's 'concentration on the breasts, and the use of the word "milk" to describe their shade, suggests she should already be a mother. Her lack of children is surprising, especially considering she is a widow'.[613] While the whore of Babylon is 'Mother of harlots and abominations' and with all her schemes and plots, Lady Waldemar is mother to ruin, a 'devouring anti-mother'[614] who breeds and nurtures her plotting with appealing and dangerous sensuality. Just as the whore of Babylon represents that decadent Empire, Lady Waldemar mirrors a decadent and vicious class in Victorian society: she is the upper class aristocrat who, aware of her attractiveness and its ephemeral nature, having lived through a short marriage, is not content with her wealth, and seeks a source for expanding her income and social status. She looks down on the poor, and in a hypocritical move, assures Romney that she cares for them supporting his enterprises. The biblical woman stands 'drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus' whereas Lady Waldemar is thirsty for luxury, comfort and social status, making Romney Leigh her perfect match.

Christina Rossetti's comment draws attention towards the evil tactics woman symbolically represents: 'she is less astute in counsel, less hardy in war, makes of her own self a trap, a bait, a ruinous prize. She seduces, not coerces. She tyrannizes by influence, not by might. Filthy she is, but she proffers filthiness in a golden cup'.[615] The Whore of Babylon represented as the Roman Empire echoes back to Eve and her status as the first fallen woman, whose filth is symbolised through her offerings, not

---

[613] Laura J. Faulk, 'Desctructive Maternity in Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.1 (2013) 41–54, (p. 46).
[614] Virginia V. Steinmetz, 'Images of "Mother-Want" in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh"', *Victorian Poetry*, 21.4 (1983) 351–67, (p. 354).
[615] Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge), p. 400.

by herself. The cup overflowing blood, drowns the image of the woman in her own filth as the result of the excess of sin: 'I suppose it is no exaggeration to say that every sin, fleshy or spiritual, is a sin of idolatry, inasmuch as if the preference of some object tangible or intangible to God All Good: indeed further reflection recognizes sin as simply the preference of self to God; self-pleasing, self-will, self-indulgence, self in a word, being the universal lure'.[616] Rossetti's comment illuminates Lady Waldemar's sinful nature, with the possibility of wealth as the main source of her moral corruption; what seems to matter more to her is the material, as her lack of understanding of Aurora's poetry proves in the end. After seeing that it is no longer possible to make a profit from Romney, Marian or Aurora, she simply walks away after a final letter to Aurora.

There is another woman who appears in the Book of Revelation with the same force as the Whore of Babylon (fig. 4.2):

> And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travaling in birth, and pained to be delivered [...] And she brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.[617]

[616] Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse,* p. 397.
[617] Revelation, 12. 1-2, 5.

Fig. 4. 2

Albrecht Dürer *The Woman of the Apocalypse and the Seven-headed Dragon* 1498.

Marian, by the end of Book IX, appears with identical iconic force: 'She stood there, still and pallid as a saint,/ Dilated, like a saint in ecstasy,/ As if the floating moonshine interposed/ Betweext the foot and the earth, and raised her up/ To float upon it' (*AL,* IX: 187-91), in a reinterpretation of John's Mary. While Mary is in childbirth and in pain, Marian, a consummated mother, appears ecstatic: illuminated, ethereal, in a sense, unreachable. Marian's voice also changes dramatically: 'The thrilling, solemn voice, so passionless,/ Sustained, yet low, without a rise or fall/ As one who had authority to speak,/ And not as Marian (*AL,* IX: 248-51)'. Voices in Revelation are hardly human, always loud, sometimes they are referred to as a 'trumpet',[618] and generally followed or preceded by images of lightning and thunder. Marian's voice, solemn, sustained and with authority, resembles those of the angels of Revelation.

According to Swedenborg, the woman from Revelation 12 represents the New Church: 'revelation from the Lord concerning his new church in the heavens and on earth, and concerning the difficult reception and resistance to its doctrine. [...] [This new church] will reign upon the New Jerusalem'.[619] Yet, how is this imagery to be connected to *AL*? The woman is with child, but also, she is to be persecuted. Like Marian, she lives under threat, and although Marian does not represent any church, she does stand for purity of soul, which is one of the main virtues of Christianity. The connection to *AL* with this symbol also affects the plot, for after the child of this woman is born, the woman flees:

> And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by

[618] Revelation, 4. 1.
[619] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Revealed,* p. 587.

> the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.[620]

In a similar metaphor to the symbol of the dragon, the flood and the woman, Lady Waldemar corners Marian, flooding her with 'fallacies' in order to convince her to desert Romney. Marian, after the horror of being raped, flees in a mental state very close to madness: 'I, Marian Erle, myself, alone, undone, /Facing a sunset low upon the flats/ As if it were the finish of all time,/ The great red stone upon my sepulchre/ Which angels were too weak to roll away' (*AL,* VI: 1270-1274). Wilderness therefore stands as a reflection of Marian's spiritual and mental state.

Marian remains spiritually pure, and representing characteristics of the Mother of Christ. Christina Rossetti comments on the true Christian spirit in Revelation: 'these are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God'.[621] Although socially fallen, Marian remains pure to the point of almost transfiguring herself into a mere spirit. As the text progresses, Marian seems to lose her bodily force, as her words with Aurora seem to become less frequent and meaningful, until Marian transforms into a mere voice that laughs gently from the distance. In spite of that silence, Marian sees right through Aurora's heart and soul, while understanding her poetic and spiritual message: 'Ah, Miss Leigh,/ You're great and pure; but were you purer still,-/ As if you had walked, we'll say, no other where/ Than up and down the New Jerusalem' (*AL*, VI: 710-13). During their encounter, which culminates in Aurora's redemption and their starting a life together, Marian acts like a prophet guiding Aurora's way

[620] Revelation, 12. 14-16.
[621] Revelation, 14. 4-5.

towards the New Jerusalem. Florence, will become the final point of reconciliation between Aurora and Romney and a self-reconciliation between woman and poet:

I found a house in Florence on the hill
Of Bellosguardo. 'Tis a tower which keeps
A post of double observation o'er
The valley of Arno (holding as a hand
The outspread city), straight toward Fiesole
And Mount Morello and the setting sun,
The Vallombrosan mountains opposite,
Which sunrises fill as full as crystal cups
Turned red to the brim because their wine is red.
No sun could die nor yet be born unseen
By dwellers at my villa: morn and eve
Were magnified before us in the pure
Illimitable space and pause of sky,
Intense as angels' garments blanched with God,
Less blue than radiant. From the outer wall
Of the garden, drops the mystic floating gray
Of olive-trees (with interruptions green
From maize and vine), until 'tis caught and torn
Upon the abrupt black line of cypresses
Which signs the way to Florence. Beautiful
The city lies along the ample vale,
Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and street,
The river trailing like a silver cord
Through all, and curling loosely, both before
And after, over the whole stretch of land
Sown whitely up and down its opposite slopes
With farms and villas. (*AL,* VIII: 540)

It is in Florence that Aurora seems reconciled with the Church as a place of worship (*AL*, VII: 1279-80) instead of her previous adolescent private worship. Florence, as seen from above, is not human, but spiritual; in this description the natural (landscape), the human (the dwellers) and the spiritual (the cathedral, the garden) are present. Florence is an ancient city, which would, for Aurora's poetic purpose, contain everything. In this aerial view all seems in order, inviting, illuminated and harmonious, filled with heavenly imagery and symbolism, such as is evident in the mention of the angel's garments, wine and its underlying meaning of the blood of Christ. The New Jerusalem is not the promised land from Revelation, not the new church stated by Swedenborg, nor the Britain depicted by Blake in 'Jerusalem'; it is

Aurora's own spiritual state. On her return to Italy, Aurora realises several things: Assunta (her nanny) is dead, her father's house is in ruins and her parents only exist in their graves. The promised land, in which she expected to find all of what would feed and fulfil her soul offers nothing but bareness, death, emptiness.

AL's Book IX acts like a closure to the whole narrative in a circular motion. In Revelation a refrain is repeated by Christ both in the beginning and at the end of the narrative: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end'.[622] Swedenborg interprets these words as:

> self-existing and the only from firsts to ultimates, from whom all things are; thus who is love itself and the only love, wisdom itself and the only wisdom, life itself and the only life in himself, and thus the creator himself and the only creator, savior, and enlightener from himself, and thence the all in all of heaven and the church.[623]

Thus, the idea of Christ enclosing the whole meaning, wisdom and revelation of the spiritual through Love and Redemption is the final eschatological meaning of the Book of Revelation and echoes in *AL*. It is through the Word that God can communicate his message to humankind, the Word incarnated in Christ, and the Word being the instrument for poetry. By acknowledging the power and message of her poetry through Romney's acceptance, Aurora is reconciled with her poetical divinity.

Cora Kaplan states that *AL* 'in spite of its conventional happy ending it is possible to see [*AL*] as a contribution to a feminist theory of art',[624] while Rachel Blau DuPlessis discusses the ending in marriage as Aurora's success: 'Aurora is then available to claim both masculine and feminine rewards -the hero's reward of success and the heroine's reward for marriage -in a rescripting of nineteenth-century motifs

---

[622] Revelation, 1,. 8.
[623] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Revealed,* p. 60.
[624] Cora Kaplan in *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems,* p.11.

that joins romantic love to the public sphere of vocation'.[625] Part of Aurora's self-reconciliation between the woman and the poet corresponds to the spiritual realm to which Aurora the prophet belongs. I agree with DuPlessis' claim, which gives a real justification for what seems a conventional happy ending on the surface, but which is much more than a trait of narrative convention, as Kaplan claims. In the Book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem, which embodies the new Church, is presented as a bride: 'coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'.[626] Aurora becomes the bride who will join the man she loves not only in the physical but also in the spiritual realm. Romney, through his physical blindness is able to see Aurora's vision in a Miltonic echo of prophetic revelation. If EBB had in mind Swedenborgian theology as part of the backbone to *AL,* it is plausible to infer that her final decision upon marrying the characters had to do as well with the correspondence between the marriage between earthly and spiritual -Church and God- depicted in the Book of Revelation and embodied in Aurora and Romney:

> The love in marriage is from its origin and correspondence heavenly, spiritual, holy, pure and clean above every other love which the angels of heaven or men of the Church have from the Lord. It is such from its origin, which is the marriage of good and truth; also from its correspondence with the marriage of the Lord and the Church.[627]

Marriage, in *AL*'s plot, therefore signifies the earthly correspondence to the marriage of God and Church, as, after all their inner struggles, both the poet and the philanthropist would be able to join forces and work together. Swedenborg underlines the idea of marriage of 'good and truth' which is, in the end, the basis of Aurora's and Romney's marriage. Truth stands for Aurora's poetry, her message and also her

---

[625] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1985) p. 465.
[626] Revelation, 21. 2.
[627] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Collected Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (BiblioBazaar, 2007), p. 261.

personal support for Romney, who will depend on her as 'his eyes' from then on. Goodness corresponds to Romney and his final understanding upon his true mission and Aurora's divine mission as a poet.

Satan Behind the Mask: Temptation, Fall and Redemption

I therefore want to ask, is the Fall of Humanity a subject in *AL*? C.S. Lewis, on writing about *Paradise Lost* defines the Fall in a simple yet profound way: 'The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience –doing what you have been told not to do, and it results from Pride- from being too big for your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God'.[628] The first disobedience was one of Satan, followed by that of man, as John Milton recapitulates in his epic. Aurora, the woman, is a fallen character who in the end finds redemption. J. M. S. Tompkins refers to Pride as an often overlooked trait in Aurora[629] which was also identified by Aytoun as one of Aurora's faults.[630] Pride, as an important personality trait in Aurora, plays a crucial role to the understanding of her tormented nature. Why, therefore, has Pride been overlooked by many? One possible reason is that Aurora is an attractive heroine: poet and woman, who rescues a fallen girl with her baby. Angela Leighton notes that 'Aurora does in fact, succeed where Romney, the philanthropist, fails'[631] in relation to Marian and that 'the relation between Aurora and Marian constitutes an ideological league of

[628] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 70-71.
[629] J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Fawcett Lecture 1961-62 on Aurora Leigh* (London, Bedford College, University of London, 1961), p. 12.
[630] W. E. Aytoun, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 32. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236298&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23].
[631] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 155.

women defying, both in practice and in word, the divisions of their society'.[632] How then, does that work exactly within the narrative? Is Aurora, like Romney, striving for the salvation of humanity? What is it that incites Aurora to save Marian? Is it love, friendship, sisterhood, philanthropy or remorse? My theory is that Aurora's impulse is driven by remorse, which is nothing but the result of Pride, for as Virginia V. Steinmetz mentions: 'Aurora's iconic "rescue" of Marian and her infant son, in which the poet herself is rescued acts as a kind of messianic rescue fantasy'[633] and functions entirely on Aurora's behalf.

During the years at her aunt's house, Aurora grows up to become a melancholic, nostalgic, young woman, while pursuing her dream of becoming *the poet*. Aurora's knowledge of life had been gathered from books while her dreams and illusions rest upon Italy. Aurora's rejection of Romney evidences her temperamental nature: ''But I am born,' I said with firmness, 'I,/ to walk another way than his, dear aunt''(*AL*; II: 580-81). Aurora makes it clear that being a poet is the most important thing for her and that it defines her life. Her personality unfolds: she is stubborn, determined (perhaps too determined) and self-centred. Aunt Leigh's clinical eye analysed both: she read through Romney's unrealistic vision of the world stating in what seemed almost prophetic statement of the wreckage of Leigh Hall, as she claimed Romney had 'dreams of doing good/ To good-for-nothing people' (*AL*, II: 645-646). Aunt Leigh blamed Aurora's emotional outbursts on her Italian blood, nevertheless, she gave the young girl the choice of a final word to Romney.

The sudden death of the aunt produced a completely different reaction in Aurora compared to that following her parents' deaths[634]: 'I had my wish,/ To read and

---

[632] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 148.
[633] Virginia V. Steinmetz, 'Images of "Mother-Want" in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh"', p. 360.
[634] Another parallel with *Jane Eyre* should be considered: the aunt, in both novels -sister's brother in both cases- blames the downfall and death of the latter on the wife. Mrs. Reed, from *Jane Eyre*, hates Jane and treats her worse

meditate the thing I would,/ To fashion all my life upon my thought,/ And marry or not to marry. Henceforth none/ Could disapprove me, vex me, hamper me' (*AL*, II:955-959). There is no grief, no sentiment, not even the slightest pinch of compassion for the deceased in these lines: Aurora's emotions circle around her own benefit, thoughts and sense of freedom in which she will no longer be disturbed.[635] Aunt Leigh had questioned Aurora, trying to make her acknowledge her feelings for Romney. She knew the stubborn girl so well just as she knew Romney: both of them blinded by the 'sun of youth' (*AL*, II: 643) were meant to follow the paths of their impulsive hearts. Perhaps that impulsive trait was a mark of the Leighs (which made Aurora's father marry abroad) and which ran in both Romney and Aurora, making them both pursue their dreams: Romney failed, and Aurora succeeded while sacrificing her heart.

Aurora's rebellious attitude and courage for later venturing to live in London entirely on her own -with her maid Susan-[636] has been perceived as a daring act which makes her a poet. During the three years of living on her own in Kensington, there is no real commitment to the world and her only worries are her inner struggles. Aurora feels liberated from her aunt's grip, yet unhesitatingly and conveniently accepts the small inheritance. She thinks only of herself, arrogant, ungrateful to her aunt who, after her father's death, provided Aurora with shelter, education and in the end, means to sustain herself. Aurora's proud attitude matches C. S. Lewis' criteria of

---

than a servant, neglecting her in all possible ways, downgrading her and letting her own children mistreat her. In spite of the neglect and mistreatment, Jane decides to visit her on her death bed. Jane, having all reasons for resentment and hatred, behaves according to her Christian moral code of meekness and in the end she forgives her aunt. While Aurora, who in truth has no tangible reason for harbouring bad feelings, behaves in an opposite way as I explore in this chapter.

[635] Aurora, by caring for herself more than for others, is already falling into sin. Christina Rossetti mentions 'sin as simply the preference of self to God' which explains Aurora's conduct.

[636] It is important to underline Aurora's relationship with the working classes. While she seems enthralled and even obsessed with Marian, who even calls her 'sister', Susan, her maid and perhaps closest companion, is paid barely any notice by the character, at one point she is later referred as Susannah in an apparently irrelevant muddling of the names.

a sense of superiority, of 'forgetting your place, thinking that you are God'.[637] Thomas of Aquinas defines Pride[638] as 'wanting to get above oneself […] Pride directly destroys humility, being its direct opposite; but it can corrupt all virtues, by making them excuses for pride [...] Pride is a special sin with a special object: a disordered desire for one's own excellence'[639] and is the root of every sin for: 'in desire to excel, man loves himself, but to love oneself, is the same as to desire some good for oneself. Consequently, it amounts to the same whether we reckon pride or self-love as the beginning of every evil'.[640] Aurora, by not being humble, forgets her place, proving Romney's words right: 'we get no Christ from you' (*AL,* I: 224). Aurora Leigh might hold and develop a prophetic vision of the world enclosing Art and Salvation, nevertheless, at this early stage she is too self-centred: 'I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God!' (*AL,* II:13). In spite of her proud inclination, Aurora is clearly devoted in heart and soul to her poetry, to the point of considering it a sacred vocation. Her renunciation of the flesh and her isolated life echo the vows of a religious order for, in Joyce Zonana's words, Aurora 'continues to see herself as a woman, but as a disembodied spiritual woman -the "heavenly" female whose guises include the Christian muse and the Victorian angel.'[641] Within that ideal spiritual and creative state, temptation seems out of reach. Nevertheless, temptation, sin and Fall will reach Aurora from an external agent. Lady Waldemar's apparition is crucial, for she seems to emerge from nowhere with a cunning and already organized plot that disturbs Aurora's life. On their first meeting, Aurora seems to read through Lady

---

[637] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost,* p. 71.
[638] Pride is the only sin in common between angels and humans.
[639] Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London, Methuen, 1992), p. 437.
[640] Thomas of Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica Of Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 2* (London: William Benton, 1923), p. 191.
[641] Joyce Zonana, 'The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh and Feminist Poetics', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 8. 2 (1989) 241–62, (p. 249).

Waldemar's personality, analysed by Laura Faulk as a 'destructive mother'[642] in spite of her childlessness. While emphasizing Aurora's description of Lady Waldemar in an openly sensual fashion, Faulk, also states that: 'one of Lady Waldemar's actions does suggest a conventional maternal and loving instinct, preventing her complete demonization: she nurses Romney to health after his home burns and develops a fever that leaves him blind. While he is confined to bed, Lady Waldemar cares for him daily'.[643] This act of kindness, nevertheless, is absolutely insincere as it is clearly her way of seducing Romney, for neither her charms or her wealth made her attractive to his eyes, as Lady Waldemar mentions to Aurora: 'The colour of my hair -he cannot tell,/ or answers "dark" at random' (*AL,* III:618). Lady Waldemar is an astute and a minute observer of character, as she plans her seduction differently in turn according to her prey.

As noted, Medusa and Lamia are two figures related to Lady Waldemar and her hair becomes an important feature for it symbolizes an almost imperishable youth 'that coil/of tresses, then be careful lest the rich/ bronze rounds should slip' (*AL,* V:613-15) disrupted by the appearance of a single silver hair. The coil resembles a serpent evoking Medusa. From Romanticism to the Victorian era, there existed a fixation on Medusa, whose hair 'became a popular prototype, serving to characterize not only Medusa herself, but other threatening women too'.[644] Lady Waldemar is a Medusa, whose gaze petrifies the characters, making them unable to move further on by their own will. Aurora does not feel intimidated by Lady Waldemar's beauty, who through flattering and praising the poet tries to win her favour. Aurora's imagination transforms Lady Waldemar, as noticed by Tompkins: 'the snake-image appears. She becomes Lamia, the unhallowed bride, the demonic creature, in Aurora's heated fancy,

---

[642] Laura J. Faulk, 'Destructive Maternity in Aurora Leigh', p. 46-8.
[643] Laura J. Faulk, 'Destructive Maternity in Aurora Leigh', p. 47.
[644] Galia Ofek, R*epresentations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 70.

an infinitely sinister, brilliantly-enameled figure. But in fact, Lady Waldemar never qualifies for such a classification';[645] while Aurora's 'heated fancy' exaggerates Lady Waldemar's villianess qualities, the symbolic traits in the woman connect her to Milton's Satan:

> ...his head,
> Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes;
> With burnishing neck of verdant gold, erect
> Amidst his circling spires, that on the grass
> Floated redundant: pleasing was his shape,
> And lovely (*PL*, IX: 499-505)

Lady Waldemar's movements during her first appearance are slow and sensual: 'She slowly swung/ her heavy ringlets till they touched her smile' (*AL*, III: 443-4), echoed later in Marian's words: 'she looked more and more beautiful/ and spoke more like a flute among green trees (*AL*, VI: 888-9) with 'heavy agate eyes which crushed my will' (*AL*, VI: 1077). Later, as previously noted, at Lord Howe's, Aurora emphasizes Lady Waldemar's sensual beauty through her 'alabaster shoulders' (*AL*, V:619) and the iridescent sight of the ruby-clasp. Satan's circling spires are similar to Lady Waldemar's motion of circling the rest of the characters through speech or action, creating confusion to draw them into her schemes. Their bodies, charged with symbolic meaning through gems and minerals of high value, represent seduction and richness: Satan and Lady Waldemar have gem-like eyes, a trait which signals beauty, majesty and also a non-human, pristine, hard and impenetrable quality which provides a mask for their true intentions.

Like Milton's Satan, Lady Waldemar approaches Aurora through -absolutely insincere- flattery, as later on she would confess to Aurora in the letter her true opinion about her poetry 'There's some merit in the book;/ and yet the merit in't is

[645] J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Fawcett Lecture 1961-62 on Aurora Leigh*, p. 12.

thrown away,/ as chances still with women if we write' (*AL*, IX: 56-59). She also diminishes the poet's merits by acknowledging her true feelings for her: 'A woman who does better than to love,/ I hate; she will do nothing very well:/male poets are preferable, straining less/ and teaching more' (*AL*, IX: 63-66). But in their first ever meeting, Lady Waldemar praises Aurora's talents 'the Muse (*AL*, III:363)', her beauty 'you wear your blue so chiefly in your eyes (*AL*, III:369)' as well as her artistic talents:

> ...You stand outside,
> you artist women, of the common sex;
> you share not with us, and exceed us so
> Perhaps by what you are mulcted in, your hearts
> being starved to make your heads: so run the old
> traditions of you. I can therefore speak
> without the natural shame which creatures feel
> when speaking on their level, to their like (*AL,* III: 405-413)

While by any means the 'empress of this fair world, resplendent Eve (*PL*; IX: 568)', Aurora is treated as superior by Lady Waldemar for her status as a poet and flattered through false humility. This game of seduction which apparently does not affect Aurora is part of the Miltonic satanic undertones Lady Waldemar possesses. In the Gospels, Satan the tempter does not appear in a specific form: 'an angel of light, an aged hermit, or a Pharisee'[646] were some of the possible human forms he could take. Any of those shapes would be familiar to Jesus' historical context. Symbolically, Satan presenting to Aurora in the form of Lady Waldemar in order to tempt not only her, but also Romney and Marian, recreates the temptations of Christ. By reinterpreting in a contemporary fashion the temptations of Christ, EBB would explore her idea of the rift between the body and the soul, and the trials of 'living by faith': in which the Fall becomes part of the eternal struggle between good and evil,

[646] John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: 7 Volume Set* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012), p. 111.

present in her contemporary times, an eternal war against Satan. For within Christian tradition, temptation and sin happen to every human, as part of the life experience. In terms explored by Thomas of Aquinas, the end of temptation is knowledge, put to trial, challenging or questioning in order to obtain knowledge echoing the original Fall and the tree of knowledge. Aquinas comments that the acquisition of knowledge, can be used either to do good, or to deceive and harm.[647] While Lady Waldemar's tempting of Aurora is subtle, it implies the handling of knowledge and the power its possession implies: 'For myself, you err/ supposing power in me to break this match./ I could not do it, to save Romney's life,/and would not, to save mine' (*AL,* III: 727-730).

Satan tempts Jesus into an act of presumption:[648] 'If thou be the son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone'.[649] As the Son of God, Jesus could have used his holy power in order to save himself by falling into egotistical presumption. By *casting* herself metaphorically between Romney and Marian, Aurora would have fulfilled the satanic whim of Lady Waldemar. Was the use of her power intended to disrupt the free will of others, or was it just to satisfy a self challenge? Jesus replies: 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'.[650] His reply to Satan implies that one shall not defy God in order to fulfil one's personal desires or break others' free will. Aurora replies quite intelligently in a similar vein to that of the Messiah: she would not disrupt Romney's wishes, not even if her life or his depended upon it. She would not make use of her power in order to break her neighbours' free will. In spite of this, tempted by curiosity, she decides to visit Marian. After that meeting, and after chaos unleashes, Aurora

---

[647] Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: First Part* (Lulu.com, 2018), p. 506.
[648] John Charles Ryle *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: 7 Volume Set,* p. 111.
[649] Luke, 4. 9-12.
[650] Luke, 4. 12.

remains silent, passive, frozen in a momentary indifference which will lead her to remorse.

Aurora's visit to the slums contains one of the most striking visual images, Hogarthian and unfavourable and in spite of the shock, Aurora stands quite composed:

> ...I looked up;
> I think I could have walked through hell that day,
> and never flinched. 'The dear Christ comfort you,'
> I said, 'you must have been most miserable,
> to be so cruel,' -and emptied out
> my purse upon the stones: when, as I had cast
> the last charm in the cauldron, the whole court
> went boiling, bubbling up, from all its doors
> and windows, with a hideous wail of laughs
> and roar of oaths, and blows perhaps… I passed
> too quickly for distinguishing… (III: 778-788)

In appearance, the nightmarish atmosphere is broken by Aurora's Christian behaviour, as charity and compassion *seem* the main motifs behind her actions and speech. Her preaching tone contrasts with the hideous voices and laughter of the people who hunt after the coins like a hungered pack. Yet, it is not just the atmosphere which makes the reader uneasy, but the lack of empathy Aurora is showing. She claims that, in a symbolic way, she could have walked through Hell without flinching, yet she passes swiftly and almost without looking around the mob. She addresses the poor in evangelical tone, but at all costs avoids touching them, as she casts money onto the ground instead of placing the coins in their hands in a humble and empathic gesture. Without realising, shunning them almost in horror, a proud Aurora despises her neighbour. The image of the purse emptied on the ground appeals to sight and hearing; within the darkness of the place, the coins shine and clink, strike like thunder, simultaneously acting like a barrier between Aurora and the mob. Aurora does not only empty the purse, but *casts* its contents upon the ground.

Significantly, this action reveals Aurora's failure in the exercise of Charity, for she acknowledges their lack of material wealth as the reason behind the poor's cruelty and misery: poor in wealth and poor in spirit go hand in hand. In this sense, money acts as a substitute for prayer, blessing or a word of comfort. Aurora creates a barrier of inequality between the mob and herself, failing thus in one of the root concepts of Charity, defined by Aquinas, as: 'God's friendship. [...] In addition, friendship must be mutual: a mutual goodwill built on what we have in common.'[651] The scene resonates with the biblical context in which Judas, full of regret, returns to the temple to get rid of the money he received in exchange for having betrayed Jesus:

> Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest of the elders, saying, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' And they said. 'What is that to us? See thou to that.' And then he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself .[652]

However, EBB reverses the biblical order in the narration by presenting the coins before the treason and remorse. Although Aurora does not sell Marian to her enemies, her initial misreading of the needs of the poor, her silence to Romney about Lady Waldemar's intention, all contribute to the girl's horrendous Fate. Aurora seems fascinated by Marian and believes instantly in the girl's purity of heart, offering support to the young girl, in the form of empty words. This fascination, though enabling her to embrace the girl as part of her poetic quest, blinds Aurora to her human side, as she overlooks the real perils. Aurora is carried away by her Poetic nature, putting herself above the needs of others. Egotistical, as after her aunt's death, Aurora engages with Marian on her own behalf and terms. This engagement with Marian's story, recreated through Aurora's own poetic language, proves her self-centred nature against the empathic understanding of others as equals. Aurora

---

[651] Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* p. 349.
[652] Matthew, 27, 3-5.

feels drawn to Marian's story as *a plot,* in which the girl stands out as a survivor in spite of peril. By translating that knowledge into poetic form, Aurora's attention is diverted from Marian's actual vulnerability to fulfil instead her own poetical quest. What remains in Aurora is the idealized version of Marian during their first meeting: 'this daughter of the people. Such soft flowers, from such rough roots? The people, under there, can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so… faugh! Yet have such daughters? (*AL,* V: 806-9).'

The purse of coins is also present in both characters -Aurora and Judas- as a main object. As Almut-Barbara Regner points out, there are several iconographic characteristics of Judas' representation: 'yellow robe, money purse, hook nose, gap teeth, red beard, straggly (red) hair, sagging eyelids, deformed head, absent or dull/black halo, peripheral position among the Twelve, Devil by his side.'[653] Further on, in the text of *AL*, in the scene in which Romney and Aurora meet and talk about Marian's disappearance, the image of coins repeats itself, this time through Romney's lips:

> He found she had received her visitors,
> besides himself and Lady Waldemar
> and, that one, me -a dubious woman dressed
> beyond us both; the rings upon her hands
> had dazed the children when she threw them pence;
> to show the crown,' they said, -a scarlet crown
> of roses that had never been in bud' (IV: 1031-1038).

The visual image confuses the reader, as the woman described is almost identical to Aurora in action. It is the extravagance of her dress, as Reynolds points out, that gives the hint that the woman who takes Marian into perdition, may be a prostitute. The visual ambiguity within the narration makes it impossible to know if the woman *is*

[653] Almut-Barbara Renger, 'The Ambiguity of Judas: On the Mythicity of a New Testament Figure', *Literature and Theology,* 27. 1 (2013) 1–17, (p. 11).

Aurora or someone else. This confusion is deliberate, for Marian mentions another woman, one of Lady Waldemar's waiting maids: 'the woman named came then to visit me (*AL*, VI: 1140)'. This passage emphasises the previous relevance EBB had given to the image of the coins, with its evident biblical echoes of selling an innocent person for mere egotistical purposes: an elegant hand is turned into an extravagant and vulgar one through the display of golden rings while Judas' dark halo is suggested by the bonnet and the crown of roses.

Aurora conceals the truth from Marian about Lady Waldemar and Romney's arrival provides the perfect narrative excuse for the heroine to remain silent. But the coins have been cast: Aurora has betrayed herself, Marian and Romney; she might not have run away in order to hang herself like Judas, yet remorse would not let her be:

> I might have held that poor child to my heart
> a little longer! 'twould have hurt me much
> to have hastened by its beats the marriage-day,
> and kept her safe meantime from tampering hands
> or, peradventure, traps. What drew me back
> from telling Romney plainly the designs
> of Lady Waldemar, as spoken out
> to me . . to me? Had I any right , ay, right,
> with womanly compassion and reserve
> to break the fall of woman's impudence?-
> to stand by calmly, knowing what I knew,
> and hear him call her good? (*AL,* IV: 469-479)

Aurora had said to Romney concerning Marian: 'may she come to me,/ Dear Romney, and be married from my house? (*AL*, IV: 364-5)' which, of course, had it happened, would have averted the whole tragedy of the text. Aurora *meant* to help, she *hinted* to Romney (later on) that she had information. Yet, she was never honest and open to them, keeping what she knew. Nor did she stop to think of the real weight of Lady Waldemar's schemes. It was her walking away in Pride, hiding in the shadows, silent, that resembled Judas' excruciating remorse. Yet while Aurora feels entirely

responsible for Marian's fate, she was not the only one responsible. Romney was blind to Lady Waldemar and, in a sense, he was closer to Marian as her future husband. Yet, Aurora, in her self-centred trait, takes the entire responsibility upon herself, and in the end, the satanic Lady Waldemar wins, for Aurora sinned, fell, and became remorseful. In Christina Rossetti's terms, she lost her innocence for: 'innocence is not a virtue, but rather an absence of guilt'.[654]

Referring to the tragic day of the aborted wedding, we find it stands as the ultimate embodiment of Aurora's fears: 'There are fatal days, indeed,/ in which the fibrous years have taken root/ so deeply, that they quiver to their tops/ whene'er you stir the dust of such a day' (AL, IV: 598-602). Aurora's desperation upon trying to find Marian while in Paris has a reason stronger than her sisterly love towards the young girl. For she needs to find her in order to atone for her guilt, restore her mistakes, undo the harm which -she feels- was done by her silence, thus the messianic rescue fantasy. In opposition to the Pride once felt, Aurora stands powerless and heartbroken, regretting every single moment her inaction.

Satan then tempts Jesus through worldly power:[655]

> taking him up to a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power I will give thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.[656]

As son of God, Jesus was the heir to the spiritual kingdom, yet, if persuaded by Satan, he would have also ruled as a man, enjoying thus the delights of power. In a sense, Lady Waldemar tries to seduce Romney in the same way. She is aware that the young man is deeply in love with Aurora and so her beauty and womanly sensuality will not move him at all, as at the same time he seems attracted to Marian, not by her

---

[654] Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse,* p. 72.
[655] John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: 7 Volume Set*, p. 110.
[656] Luke, 4. 5-7.

innocence and beauty, but by her meekness and social status. She therefore offers and provides him with what both Aurora and Marian lack: a working mate for his social causes and later on, during his illness, a nurse. Romney has the monetary means, Lady Waldemar has the position and the authority. Unlike the two women, Romney, perhaps because blind towards the Lady's schemes, does not fall into the trap. During his fever, Romney raves about Aurora and though he is resigned to her not loving him back, clings to her poetry: 'No, she loves me not; Aurora Leigh does better: bring her book and read it softly, Lady Waldemar, until I thank your friendship more for that/ than even for harder service' (*AL*, IX: 45-49). Destitute and blind, he is of no use to the woman who might have only been after his material wealth; nevertheless, through his unconditional love for Aurora, he understands her poetry and spiritual truth.

Lady Waldemar also tempts Marian, as the latter recapitulates to Aurora. The girl is always wary of Lady Waldemar yet she falls into her schemes and accepts not marrying Romney. Satan appeared to Jesus and challenged him: 'If thou be the son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'[657] Both Marian and Aurora are hungry characters, but their hunger has different meanings; Aurora is hungry for art, for love (and her self-inflicted fasting makes her bitter) while Marian is hungry for love in the sense of being nurtured and deserving. Lady Waldemar underlines to Marian that she is not at Romney's economic and social level and that the marriage would only bring him social ruin. As with Aurora, she lies: 'she knew of knowledge,/ that Romney Leigh had loved her formerly./ And she loved him, she might say, now the chance/ was past' (*AL*, VI:1080-1083). With these words, Lady Waldemar steps upon Marian, reassuring her of her worthlessness, to

[657] Luke, 4. 3-4.

immediately offer bread, through the kind promise to 'provide the means/ with instant passage to the colonies/ and full protection (*AL*, VI: 1128-1030)'. Marian, afraid of remaining destitute and perhaps heart broken after knowing the 'truth' by Lady Waldemar, accepts in self-sacrifice.

As Joyce Zonana points out, Marian acts like a mirror to Aurora through her journey of self discovery: 'if Marian teaches anything to Aurora, it is that all individuals must be perceived as subjects, never as objects in other people's social schemes or literary representations'.[658] Indeed, Marian teaches Aurora respect and acting through honesty, including self sacrifice, as well as how to live by Faith. Leighton argues that Marian is the embodiment of all the women who suffered her fate as the rape 'makes Marian, not an individual exception to the rule of vice, but an example of a general cause'.[659] Leighton continues in the vein that Christian charity is not the main end of Marian's teaching to Aurora (claiming that Aurora succeeds in philanthropy where Romney fails), but the fact that the poet must write about those issues.[660] Charity, I agree with Leighton, is not the main teaching of Marian's tale, yet I add that Aurora's failure in exercising that virtue in relation to Marian is where the real spiritual teaching lies. Aquinas defines Virtue as a habit and that its exercise is nothing but the good use of free will.[661] In Christian theology there are seven virtues, three of them theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity; and four cardinal: Justice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude. Swedenborg defines Charity as 'an inward affection, moving man to do what is good, and this without recompense,'[662] opposed to hatred. A lesser form of negative charity is indifference.

---

[658] Joyce Zonana 'The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh and Feminist Poetics', p. 243.
[659] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 147.
[660] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* p. 148.
[661] Thomas of Aquinas *Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), p. 655.
[662] Emanuel Swedenborg*, Collected Works of Emanuel Swedenborg*, p. 259.

The main reason why Aurora becomes almost obsessed with Marian is the fact that she feels guilty about her disappearance. By the time she sees her in Paris, she thinks of a thousand possible reasons for the young girl to have a child, but never ever thinks of the dreadful fate that the girl has suffered. Her inability to imagine at first instance the horrors Marian has experienced underline the idea of EBB wanting to expose those ills, and to open other female readers' eyes. To that Aurora had 'ignored these wrongs' as she had failed even to think about them and while discussing with Romney Marian's flight, she is convinced that the girl's 'purity' will lead her through the right path.

Leslee Thorne-Murphy adds that Marian's life facts are never researched by Aurora or by any other of the characters, while Aurora believes blindly in the young girl's narrative: 'in spite of her self-proclaimed poetic access to divine truth and her resolve to declare that truth unequivocally, Aurora had not had immediate access to the reality of Marian's situation'.[663] For the nineteenth-century charity, it was necessary to rectify the sources of personal history in order to aid a social regeneration. I want to return to the question, why does Aurora believe in the girl straight away? Lady Waldemar, even when perhaps drawing from malice, calls Marian a girl of 'doubtful life' (*AL*, III: 535), an upper class prejudice and also a hesitation due to this lack of evidence to her story. There is no other character who can act as a witness to Marian's narrative, leaving the girl's word as the only source of credibility. Initially, Aurora seems enchanted by Marian's face with some beauty which she would not expect to find in the lower classes:

> She touched me with her face and with her voice,
> This daughter of the people. Such soft flowers,
> From such rough roots? The people, under there,

[663] Leslee Thorne-Murphy, 'Prostitute Rescue, Rape, and Poetic Inspiration in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh', *Women's Writing*, 12. 2 (2005), 241–58 (p. 253).

Can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so … faught!
Yet have such daughters?
No wise beautiful
Was Marian Erle. She was not white nor brown,
But could look either, like a mist that changed
According to being shone on more or less:
The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls
In doubt 'twixt dark and bright, nor left you clear
To name the colour. Too much hair, perhaps
(I'll name a fault here) for so small a head,
Which seemed to droop on that side and on this,
As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight
Though not a wind should trouble it (*AL,* III: 805-819).

Just before meeting, Aurora feels sickened by the conditions in which these people live, yet marvels at Marian, referring to her as part of *such daughters* as if extraordinary. Why is Lady Waldemar so convinced that even Aurora would be shocked by the idea of the marriage? Is it because of these doubtful origins? Marian is also a close friend to Rose, a prostitute (*AL*, IV: 1048-9). Marian's hair is not arranged in coils, like Lady Waldemar's, not tied up as Aurora's. Marian's first description by Aurora emphasizes the 'opulence of curls' in a very loose and even wild fashion. Perhaps during their first meeting, the loose curls were acceptable due to Marian's young age[664]. Later on, when Aurora goes to the police and gives a description, that particular detail has not changed: 'hair in masses (*AL*, VI: 400)'. After becoming an adult, she would have been expected to put it up.[665] As in Pre Raphaelite depictions of women's hair, Marian's hair symbolizes the mark, the brand, the code for her fallen social status.

Aurora does not question Marian's virtuous nature. For her, the girl has simply been a victim of her circumstances. By the moment they reunite in Paris, Marian seems anxious and rather desperate to get away from Aurora. Marian finds a working

[664] The age of consent in Victorian England was twelve. When Marian's mother attempts to sell her, she is referred to as a child, possibly then, under twelve. A year and a month had occurred since that incident, when Marian recapitulates Aurora. It would be possible to infer that Marian could be as young as 12 when engaged to Romney.
[665] Gala Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture,* p. 3.

position as a needlewoman and when she accepts Aurora's offer she makes it clear that she is not accepting it for her sake, but for her child, as she 'took the sleeping child and held it out/ To meet my kiss, as if requiting me/ and trusting me at once' (*AL*, VII: 135-7). Marian had been thrown into prostitution, not by mere social circumstances, but by a woman who took advantage of her. Aurora believes in Marian's innocence as heartily as she believes in Lady Waldemar's evil. Marian acknowledges her fallen circumstances, yet she finds redemption through her child. Yet, unlike Lady Waldemar/Whore of Babylon, she does not revel in filth. In Paris, Aurora tries to make Marian feel ashamed of her illegitimate child, cross-questioning her until the girl narrates the truth with unnecessary detail. Aurora then regrets having judged her lightly and in a sort of religious mania, even dares to call her 'my saint' (*AL*, VII: 126), placing all of Marian's sufferings side by side with Roman Catholic martyrs. Thorne-Murphy points out: 'She has no need to find corroborating witnesses and physical evidence because she is relying on her poetic ability to see and recognize the "real", or divine truth.'[666] This reliance upon her poetical eye has to do with Aurora's ideal of poetry being the vehicle for divine revelation: not only the truth of the world in itself, but the sense of personal truth revealed to her. Just as she *saw* right through Lady Waldemar, she would *see* right through Marian. Nevertheless, this knowledge proves useless when revealed to Aurora who fails to protect Marian.

On her arrival in Paris, Aurora is completely on her own, as there is no longer any mention of Susan with her. She states she is lodging alone in an inn, and a detail confirms it: she changes the water for her heliotropes (*AL*, VI: 294) an action which would, very likely, be otherwise performed by Susan. Afterwards, when Marian joins her, the latter seems to be only looking after her child. They have very scant

[666] Leslee Thorne-Murphy, 'Prostitute Rescue, Rape, and Poetic Inspiration in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh', p. 253.

conversations and actually spend little time together and Marian is the one who fills the vase with lilies (*AL*, VII: 669). This detail, though apparently irrelevant, depicts a lot about their domestic relationship: Marian is the one looking after the house and it is not possible to think that she is doing it as in the metaphorical position of a wife, or a partner on equal terms, as they never engage in any sort of activities together; all of Aurora's important journeys in Italy are made entirely on her own. Marian therefore acts as maid rather than a companion. Perhaps this goes unnoticed by Aurora, but it was natural to Marian, not only as a sign of gratefulness, but also as part of the awareness of their social class difference; Marian *knows* that despite living together, Aurora is alone: 'And you're alone (*AL*; VII: 512)'. Marian's rescue becomes a *messianic rescue fantasy* in which Aurora insists upon acting not just charitably, but heroically, in spite of Marian's being able to restore herself into a respectable position. Aurora's actions thus seem to fulfil indeed a social philanthropic role as stated by Doreen Thierauf for whom 'Aurora rescues Marian from poverty and potential prostitution and sets up a private Italian Magdalen home with two inmates, modelling poetry's wholesome effect on the individual and, via literature's diffusive action, society.'[667]

This notion works for Aurora as a poet in her quest, yet leaves aside Aurora's spiritual failure. Whilst Aurora fails in Charity towards Marian, the existence of Marian's child becomes a source of Hope. Hope, as a theological virtue, is: 'the desire and search for future good, difficult but not impossible in attainment, and like faith it may continue even when charity has been lost by mortal sin. Hope is opposed to both despair and presumption'.[668] Marian describes her child as 'My lamb, my lamb! Although, though such as thou, the most unclean got courage and approach to God'

[667] Doreen Thierauf, 'Rescuing the Magdalen: Aurora Leigh as Social Reform Worker', p. 445.
[668] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* p. 749.

which echoes John's gospel: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'.[669] The child's name is never revealed. Under Aurora's wing, and perhaps under Romney's, the child will never have to face the horrors Marian went through. Aurora finally acknowledges her faults to Romney: 'I'm generous? I'm very vilely proud. Obviously, I'm not a generous woman, never was… I had known the same, except that I was prouder than I knew, and not so honest (*AL*, IX: 617, 620, 626-7)'. The hope of providing a better life to the dispossessed, the hope that Romney might forgive her, the acceptance of both Leighs' love for each other and the acknowledgement of her Pride, all become redeeming for Aurora and her final words are almost identical to those in The Book of Revelation used for the foundations of the New Jerusalem. This closure expresses her achieved state of illumination, which, poet-prophet as she is, does not happen through words, but through her engagement and true empathy. Aurora's understanding of the impossibility of restoring Marian to what she was before the tragic events opens a new window for the child, who, despite its illegitimate origins, will grow up in sheltered home, loved and cared for. The New Jerusalem, envisioned by Aurora and Romney, finds its foundations in the wilderness into which Marian had fled. Milton's shadow disappears as Aurora, the poet-prophet, stands victorious to show that the morning star still shines in the dawn of a new day. EBB's exploration of Pride does not, thereby comprehend the ultimate incarnation of that sin, but rather a more human, every day shade of it. EBB's awareness, like that of most theologians, of the unavoidable nature of sin, explores the exercise of Charity, as well as the failure of this exercise as a non-virtuous action tinted with sin. For it is through the most ordinary actions that the highest of Aurora's trials occur.

---

[669] John, 1. 29.

Conclusion

During my research I became acquainted with many people who would, inevitably, enquire about the subject of my studies. When hearing that I was conducting research on EBB, people's response would generally include the quote 'How do I love thee? let me count the ways' or they would mention that, in spite of their knowledge that EBB had been 'Browning's invalid wife', they had not read a single poem by her. One amusing anecdote, nevertheless, reflects the nature of the popularity of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, and the way in which they have become almost a decorative item. An acquaintance, during one of these conversations about my project, mentioned that although she had never read EBB's poetry, she remembered how for years her mother had kept a copy of the aforementioned sonnets on her bathroom shelf. In this case, she had never bothered to read the volume in spite of the curiosity that the book -as an object- had eventually awoken in her. These general responses are echoes of the impact that EBB's legend has had in the popular imagination. From this perspective, 'Love' is always connected to Robert Browning and becomes the source of EBB's identity, along with the idea of the Lady on the Sofa.

Following my journey through EBB's masks, however, the emerging poet differs from that legendary figure, for she presents herself as more human: with flaws and weaknesses which shed light upon generally dismissed traits of her personality; her 'impeccable' character is rounded through her imperfections. The weight of the legend still lies heavily upon EBB, however, and attempts to remove the sanctified image can themselves lead to a *new* kind of sanctification in which the poet is understood as a proto-feminist and a defender of human freedom, which indeed, she was. Nevertheless, the risk with a literary figure such as that of EBB, who has been

praised almost to sanctity, is to translate that same frame into an *impeccable* poet who stood for the rights of women and for freedom both of nations and of the individual. The clearest example of this is perhaps the episode in *Aurora Leigh* concerning the rescue and restoration of Marian and her son, and its contrast, as Forster mentions and I support, with EBB's rift with Wilson, along with the Brownings' refusal to keep the maid in their employment once she had given birth to a child. It is important to consider such circumstances which give a wider scope and fuller understanding of biographical aspects of EBB while aiding in the quest to remove the sanctified legendary shroud in which the poet continues to be wrapped.

With the case I make for consideration of EBB's arguable morphine addiction, I consider that my perspective opens up a wider study within this sphere. For a deeper exploration of the themes I explore in *Aurora Leigh* can be traced through much of EBB's poetry that links it with that of other contemporary poets, not only English speaking but from other latitudes, who, whether or not they address the drug by name within their poetry, show its influence as EBB does in the structure, visual and auditory aspects, and alterations in the perception of time and space in their work. In exploring biographical aspects of EBB's work, my aim has been to acknowledge the impact of her morphine dependence, not so as to prove any weakness of character, but as a factual circumstance the poet lived through and which inevitably shaped her life. Moreover, the impact this habit had upon EBB's personal life, her relationships, her personality and certain behavioural traits, corresponds to the deconstruction of the legend, dispelling the sanctification, and grounding her instead as a poet made of flesh and bone. To analyse EBB's work through the perspective of drug dependence also illuminates her inexplicable and contradictory behaviour, as the episode of the rift with Wilson, the attempt to rescue Flush, EBB's cross-dressing adventure, as well as

her 'miraculous recovery'. Such a shift in perspective also affects Robert Browning directly. He too subsequently appears less idealised and more human. For instead of being perceived within popular imagination as the heroic saviour of EBB, he becomes a loving husband and poetic partner who struggled against his wife's arguable addiction from their courtship until her death.

In this respect, the relationship between EBB and morphine should not be considered in a negative light, in spite of the arguably fatal consequences it carried. The risk, for certain, in attempting to examine the place of the drug is to transfer some of the victimising aspects of EBB's life, such as chronic illness and the tyrant father, to the morphine, thereby making it appear as the victimizer. I became aware of this risk, when delivering a conference paper 'Portraits of the Invisible: Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata*'.[670] During the discussion about the influence of EBB in Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequence *Monna Innominata,* a question arose after I quoted the following observation by Rossetti:

> Or had the great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the "Portuguese Sonnets," and inimitable "donna innomintata" drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura.[671]

The question was, whether I considered that EBB had been happy or unhappy, to which of course, there is no answer. But what I took from Rossetti's statement, along with the question of happiness, was evidence in EBB's case of the existence of an important issue. For the poet was either living an 'unhappy' or a 'happy' life, in a black and white notion with no shades of grey in between. Furthermore, 'Happiness'

---

[670] The paper was delivered for the colloquium 'Who Shall Deliver me?' *Christina Rossetti and the Illustrated Poetry Book*, December 2018, Watts Gallery & Birkbeck College, University of London.
[671] Christina Rossetti, *Complete Poems* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 294.

in this equation, corresponded to Love and Robert Browning, whereas 'Unhappiness' was generally matched with her illness and her secluded years. The biased and polarised perception of EBB as either fully happy or fully unhappy has also proved the main source or rationale for undermining the poet's morphine habit, and as Alethea Hayter claims, EBB's use of morphine did not become understood as an addiction because the poet led a 'happy' life. As I have shown, however, whether a choice made by medical recommendation or a chosen mechanism by which to cope with her illness, morphine was a perpetual part of EBB's life regardless of her emotional state and must be considered as a fundamental influence upon her poetry as well as in her mental and physical health.

Through my exploration of EBB's illness, I have explored the possibility of her ailment as being less psychosomatic and less romanticized than has been previously claimed and instead much more of a chronic condition which was not yet acknowledged as such in the nineteenth century. By changing our perspective upon her illness I demonstrate how EBB emerges as a stronger and more complex figure than that created by the legend of the genius invalid transformed by love. In the process, the apparently stable categories of 'love' and 'happiness' as represented by RB, and 'unhappiness' in the form of illness, isolation and morphine are brought into question. The implications of my reading of EBB's legacy in her writing and portraits alter and bring complex layers to the dichotomy between body and mind/spirit in EBB's work. As I have demonstrated, to work through the various masks that EBB creates is to understand the subtle ways in which she used illness. While some of her poetry deals with grief, mourning and loss, illness (as physically evident upon the body) is practically absent from her poetry. As suggested by Dorothy Mermin, EBB used her illness to her advantage to construct a basis for intellectual freedom, and

taking up Mermin's claim I have analysed the development of EBB's construction of her own portraits for her audience. That development begins with the obscurity of an elusive, anonymous author who, initially would only present herself as a partial image through her own words as revealed in her correspondence. It extends to the strong, daring and permanently young author of *Aurora Leigh*, who displays no traces of ill health or invalidism. This journey of EBB through the masks of her self-representation as a poet complicates the dichotomy between her body and spirit, and with it those enduring stories about the poet. While, as I have shown, many of her 'official' likenesses, such as that presented in the 1859 edition of Aurora Leigh were influenced by RB, some of the more complex, self-curated, traits of EBB's identity echoed within her major and most well-known heroine, Aurora Leigh.

While EBB as an individual tends to be read and understood through polarised terms, Aurora Leigh, the character, faces a similar problem. Revised and acknowledged by scholars, the character tends to be read strictly in a *positive* light, as displaying qualities which make her appealing, mostly from a feminist perspective. She is read as independent, successful, rebelling against patriarchal conventions to triumph as an artist, and such qualities tend to overshadow any unfavourable aspects. The idealisation of Aurora Leigh corresponds to the enthusiasm her qualities awake in the reader through the *Bildungsroman* plot. I became alert to this through the feedback to my paper 'My journey through Hell: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and the spiritual Fall as a path towards Illumination'[672] in which I partially explore what I here explore more fully in Chapter Four 'Mrs. Browning's Gospel', namely Aurora Leigh as a fallen character. As I have argued, Aurora's fall happens through Pride, and part of her redemption is achieved through Hope as represented by

[672] This paper was presented at the University of Sheffield, for the colloquium *Religion and Victorian Popular Literature and Culture*, Thursday 6- Saturday 8 May 2021.

Marian's child. Although most of my conference paper focused on Aurora's tortured inner journey, the consequence of Pride, the audience was principally drawn to Hope, with the implied 'happy ending' fitting the heroine. My aim, though, by showing Aurora's journey while exploring her flaws of character had been to serve two purposes: initially as in EBB's own case, to remove the sanctified veil retained by the character of Aurora and to provides the character instead with other more nuanced layers of construction and meaning than those with which she is generally perceived. At the same time, I wanted to explore Aurora's self- tormented nature as disclosing interesting inter textual links with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in connecting Aurora to Edward Rochester while echoing Byronic and Romantic traits in the construction of the character. To support my argument and enhance the sense of the experience of Aurora's doomed fallen nature, I developed a multimedia adaptation of some passages in *Aurora Leigh* focused upon visual aspects of the text which precisely enhance Aurora's own sense of doom, as well as representing her failure in the exercise of Charity.

Yet, in spite of these actions and resources, the audience seemed only to want to focus, as I have noted, upon redemption and the nameless Child as the source of spiritual illumination, leaving behind Aurora's flaws, forgetting about them owing to the effect of relief produced by the 'happy' ending. My realization was that Aurora seemed to suffer the same cultural fate as her creator whose flaws, no matter how appalling at times they might be, were overshadowed ironically by her positive and flattering characteristics. Therefore, by the end of *Aurora Leigh's* narrative balance is broken and, unlike her predecessor Corinne (by Madame de Staël) who finds death, Aurora finds fulfilment as a woman and a poet. Yet, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, such an illusion of a happy ending is shattered in the moment that we realise,

as I discuss in Chapter One 'A Colourful Counterfeit', that the marriage between Romney and Aurora might not have happened. This realisation, which changes then the tone of the opening, sheds light upon Aurora's melancholic nature, which would, eventually, lead to the acknowledgement and consideration of other traits of her personality which would accentuate darker and tormented traits which collide with her virtuous and impeccable nature.

EBB is no romantic heroine, and should not be treated as one. What I hope my journey behind her masks has demonstrated is that a full acknowledgement of what have been considered unfavourable aspects of EBB are important to gaining a fuller understanding of the poet and the particular development of the place she occupies in literary history and popular culture. My journey has also been very concerned with the significance of EBB's construction of her own image as a poet which, in many aspects, was well planned and was meant to match her poetry. Ironically, those same unfavourable aspects of EBB which by the time the legend had started to solidify would have been labelled under the unflattering term 'Morphinomaniac', illuminate aspects of her poetry which had previously been neglected owing to the masking of the poet's personal flaws. The opiate may explain the extravagant visual aspects, the odd use of time and the - for instance - liquefied spatial sensations produced by the speaker, while also illuminate aspects of EBB the person, exaggerations, extravagances, pains and joys which coloured her personality. While considered as possibly leading to her decline into death, the story of EBB's arguable addiction might be read as sad and tragic, but the joyous, illuminated and creative side balances the habit. Moreover, had the poet's life circumstances been different, the novel and unique style of poetry in *Aurora Leigh* which subtly explores the limits, boundaries and perception of reality, time and space, and navigates with total freedom, diverse

schools of spiritual thought, would perhaps never have been considered. To take on board EBB's illness, specifically linked to her morphine dependence - that awoke particular mystical/spiritual explorations - is to produce a very different understanding of the larger relationship of her life to her work.

APPENDIX A

Panic Disorder, diagnostic criteria:[673]

A. Recurrent unexpected panic attacks. A panic attack is an abrupt surge of intense fear or intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes, and during which time four (or more) of the following symptoms occur:

Note: The abrupt surge can occur from a calm state or an anxious state.

1. Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate.
2. Sweating.
3. Trembling or shaking.
4. Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering.
5. Feelings of choking.
6. Chest pain or discomfort.
7. Nausea or abdominal distress.
8. Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint.
9. Chills or heat sensations.
10. Paresthesias (numbness or tingling sensations).
11. De-realization (feelings of unreality) or depersonalization (being detached from one-self).
12. Fear of losing control or "going crazy."
13. Fear of dying.

Note: Culture-specific symptoms (e.g., tinnitus, neck soreness, headache, uncontrollable screaming or crying) may be seen. Such symptoms should not count as one of the four required symptoms.

---

[673] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), p. 208.

B. At least one of the attacks has been followed by 1 month (or more) of one or both of the following:

1. Persistent concern or worry about additional panic attacks or their consequences (e.g., losing control, having a heart attack, “going crazy”).

2. A significant maladaptive change in behaviour related to the attacks (e.g., behaviours designed to avoid having panic attacks, such as avoidance of exercise or unfamiliar situations).

C. The disturbance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition (e.g., hyperthyroidism, cardiopulmonary disorders).

D. The disturbance is not better explained by another mental disorder (e.g., the panic attacks do not occur only in response to feared social situations, as in social anxiety disorder: in response to circumscribed phobic objects or situations, as in specific phobia: in response to obsessions, as in obsessive-compulsive disorder: in response to reminders of traumatic events, as in post-traumatic stress disorder: or in response to separation from attachment figures, as in separation anxiety disorder).

APPENDIX B

'Verses to my Brother'[674]

I will write down thy name, and when 'tis writ,
Will turn me from the hum that mortals keep
In the wide world without, and gaze on it!
It telleth of the past –calling from sleep
Such dear, yet mournful thoughts, as make us smile, and weep!

Beloved and best! what thousand feelings start,
As o'er the paper's course my fingers move-
My Brother! Dearest, kindest as thou art!
How can these lips my heart's affliction prove!
I could not speak the words, if words would speak my love.

Together we have passed our infant hours,
Together sported Childhood's spring away,
Together culled young Hope's fast budding flowers,
To wreathe the forehead of each coming day!
Yes! For the present's sun makes e'en the future gay.

And then the laughing mood was nearly o'er,
Together, many a minute did we wile
On Horace' page, or Maro's sweeter lore;
While one young critic, on the classic style,
Would sagely try to frown, and make other smile.

But now alone thou const the ancient tome-
And sometimes thy dear studies, it may be,
Are crossed by dearer dreams of me and home!
Alone I muse on Homer –thoughts are free-
And if mine often stray, they go in search for thee!

I may not praise thee *here* –I will not bless!
Yet all thy goodness doth my memory bear,
Cherished by more than Friendship's tenderness-
And, in the silence of my evening prayer,
Thou shalt not be forgot –thy dear name shall be there!

[674] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 53.

APPENDIX C

Opioid Use Disorder, Diagnostic Criteria:[675]

A. A problematic pattern of opioid use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least two of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

1. Opioids are taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended.
2. There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control opioid use.
3. A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain the opioid, use the opioid, or recover from its effects.
4. Craving, or a strong desire or urge to use opioids.
5. Recurrent opioid use resulting in a failure to fulfil major role obligations at work, school or home.
6. Continued opioid use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of opioids.
7. Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of opioid use.
8. Recurrent opioid use in situations in which is physically hazardous.
9. Continued opioid use despite the knowledge of having a personal or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the substance.
10. Tolerance, as defined by either of the following:

a. A need of markedly increased amounts of opioids to achieve intoxication or desired effect.

b. A markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of an opioid.

Note: This criterion is not considered to be met for those taking opioids solely under appropriate medical supervision.

11. Withdrawal, as manifested by either of the following:

a. The characteristic opioid withdrawal syndrome (refer to Criteria A and B of the criteria set for opioid withdrawal, pp. 547-548).

b. Opioids (or a closely related substance) are taken to relive or avoid withdrawl symptoms.

Note: This criterion is not considered to be met for those individuals taking opioids solely under appropriate medical supervision.

[…]

---

[675] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), p. 541, 546-7.

Specify current severity:

305. 50 (F11. 10) Mild: Presence of 2-3 symptoms.

304. 00 (F11. 20) Moderate: Presence of 4-5 symptoms.

304. 00 (F11. 20) Severe: Presence of six or more symptoms. (DSM-5: 541-2)

Opioid intoxication

Diagnostic criteria

A. Recent use of an opioid.

B. Clinically significant problematic behavioural or psychological (e.g., initial euphoria followed by apathy, dysphoria, psychomotor agitation or retardation, impaired judgement) that developed during or after, opioid use.

C. Pupillary constriction (or pupillary dilation due to anoxia from severe overdose) and one (or more) of the following signs or symptoms during, or shortly after, opioid use:

1. Drowsiness or coma.
2. Slurred speech.
3. Impairment in attention or memory.

D. The signs or symptoms are not attributable to another medical condition and are not better explained by another mental disorder, including intoxication with another substance.

Specify if:

With perceptual disturbances: This specifier may be noted in the rare instance with hallucinations with intact reality testing or auditory, visual or tactile illusions occur in the absence of a delirium. (DSM-5: 456).

APPENDIX D

A TRUE DREAM[676]

(Dreamed at Sidmouth, 1833)

I had not an evil end in view,
Tho' I trod the evil way;
And why I practised the magic art,
My dream it did not say.

I unsealed the vial mystical,
I outpoured the liquid thing,
And while the smoke came wreathing out,
I stood unshuddering.

The smoke came wreathing, wreathing out,
All mute, dark and slow,
Till its cloud was stained with a flashy hue,
And a fleshy form 'gan show.

Then paused the smoke -the fleshy form
Looked steadfast in mine ee,
His beard was black as thundercloud,
But I trembled not to see.

I unsealed the vial mystical,
I outpoured the liquid thing,
And while the smoke came wreathing out,
I stood unshuddering.

The smoke came wreathing, wreathing out,
All mute, dark and slow,
Till its cloud was stained with fleshy-hue,
And a fleshy form 'gan show.

Then paused the smoke -but the mortal form
A garment swart did veil,
I looked on it with fixed heart,
Yea -not a pulse did fail !

I unsealed the vial mystical,
I outpoured the liquid thing,
And while the smoke came wreathing out,
I stood unshuddering.

[676] Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, *New Poems* (London: Smith, Elder & co., 1914), p. 112-118.

The smoke came wreathing, wreathing out,
And now it is faster and lighter,
And it bore on its folds the rainbow's hues,
Heaven could not show them brighter.

Then paused the smoke, the rainbow's hues
Did a childish face express-
The rose in the cheek, the blue in the eyene,
The yellow in the trees.

The fair young child shook back her hair,
And round me her arms did wreathe,
Her lips were hard and cold as stone,
They sucked away my breath.

I cast her off as she clung to me,
With hate and shuddering;
I brake the vials, and foresware
The cursed, cursed thing.

Anon outspake a brother of mine-
' Upon the pavement, see,
Besprent with noisome poison slime,
Those twining serpents three.'

Anon outspake my wildered heart
As I saw the serpent train-
' I have called up three existences
I cannot quench again.

' Alas ! with my unholy company,
My lifetime they will scathe ;
They will hiss in the storm, and on sunny days
Will gleam and thwart my path.'

Outspake that pitying brother of mine-
' Now nay, my sister, nay,
I will pour on them oil of vitriol,
And burn their lives away.'

' Now nay, my brother, torture not,
Now hold thine hand, and spare.'
He poured on them oil of vitriol,
And burn their lives away.'

I saw the drops of torture fall ;
I heard the shriekings rise,
While the serpents writhed in agony
Beneath my dreaming eyes.

And while they shrieked, and while they writhed,
And inward and outward wound,
They waxed larger, and the wail
Assumed a human sound.

And glared their eyes, and their slimy scales
Were roundly and redly bright,
Most like the lidless sun, what time
Thro' the mist he meets your sight.

And larger, larger they waxed still,
And longer still and longer ;
And they shrieked in their pain, 'Come, come to us,
We are stronger, we are stronger.'

Upon the ground I lain mine head,
And heard the wailing sound ;
I did not wail, I did not writhe-
I laid me on the ground.

And larger and larger they waxed still
And longer still and longer ;
And they shrieked in their pangs, 'Come, come to us'
We are stronger, we are stronger.'

Then up I raised my burning brow,
My quiv'ring arms on high ;
I spake in prayer, and I named aloud
The name of sanctify.

And as in my anguish I prayed and named
Aloud the holy name,
The impious mocking serpent voice
Did echo back the same.

And larger and larger they waxed sitll,
And stronger still and longer !
And they shrieked in their pangs, ' Come, come to us,
We are stronger, we are stronger.'

Then out from among them arose a form
In shroud of death indued-
I fled from him with wings of wind,
With whirlwinds he pursued.

* * * *

I stood by the chamber door, and thought
Within its gloom to hide ;

I locked the door, and the while forgot
That I stood in the outer side.

And the knell of mine heart was wildly tolled
While I grasped still the key ;
For I felt beside me the icy breath,
And knew that *that* was *he.*

I heard these words, ‘ Whoe’er doth *taste,*
Will *drink* the magic bowl ;
So her body may do my mission here
Companioned by her soul.’

Mine hand was cold as the key it held,
Mine heart had an iron weight ;
I saw a gleam, and I heard a sound-
The clock was striking eight.

Bibliography

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, *Aurora Leigh* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1857)

---. *Aurora Leigh* (New York: C.S. Francis & Co., 1857)

---. *Aurora Leigh* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859)

---. *Aurora Leigh* (London: Smith, Elder & Co.,1873)

---. *Aurora Leigh,* ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996)

---. *Aurora Leigh,* ed. Kerry McSweeney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

---. and Cora Kaplan, *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1998)

---. *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,* ed. Elizabeth Berridge, (London: John Murray Publishers, 1974)

---. *Diary by E. B. B: The Unpublished Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, 1831-1832,* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969)

---. *Elizabeth Barrett to Miss Mitford: The Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford,* ed. by Betty Miller (London: Murray, 1954)

---. *Elizabeth Barrett to Mr. Boyd: Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Barrett \ Browning to Hugh Stuart Boyd,* Introduced and Edited By Barbara P. McCarthy (Boston: Yale University Press, 1955)

---. *Invisible Friends: The Correspondence of Elizabeth Barrett Barrett and Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1842-1845* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1911)

---. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Her Sister Arabella Vol. II,,* ed. by Scott Lewis, (Waco, Wedgestone Press, 2002)

---. *Letters to Her Sister, 1846-1859* (London: J. Murray, 1929)

---. *Letters to Mrs. David Ogilvy 1849-1861* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973)

---. *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920

---. *Poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1844)

---. *Poems* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1887)

---. *Prometheus Bound, Tr. from Æschylus*, and *Miscellaneous Poems*, by the Translator, Author of 'An Essay on Mind' (London: A. J. Valpy, M.A. 1833)

---. *The Seraphim and other poems* (London: Saunders & Oatley, 1838)

---. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1909)

---. 'Two Autobiographical Essays by Elizabeth Barrett', *Browning Institute Studies*, 2 (1974), 119–34

---. *Unpublished Correspondence, Including Her Letter to Her Brother George, Announcing Her Secret Marriage & Elopement: And, Robert Browning's Letters to His Brother-in-Law George Barrett, with the Letter in Which Browning Gives a Pathetic Account of the Last Hours, Death & Burial of Elizabeth Browning,* London: Maggs Bros., 1937)

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth and Browning, Robert, *New Poems,* ed. Sir Frederic G. Kenyon (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914)

---. *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1899)

---. *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, 1845-1846, Volume 2*: *March 1846 to September 1846* (Harvard University Press, 2020)

Reviews

Stillman Hillard, George, review of *An Essay of Mind; Prometheus Bound;* and *The Seraphim, The North American Review* (July 1842) 201–218, *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/43/?rsId=236084&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-06]

Review of *Poems* (1844), *The Critic,* (1 November 1844), 148–152. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/65/?rsId=236282&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Jones, Martha, Review of *Poems* (1844), *The British Quarterly Review,* 1 November 1845, pp. 337–352, *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/87/?rsId=235977&returnPage=1>[accessed 2017-03-23]

F. H. Chorley, review of *Aurora Leigh, The Athenæum* (22 November 1856) 1425–27. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/171/?rsId=236284&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Review of *Aurora Leigh, Hereford Journal*, (3 December 1856) p. 4. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/4727/?rsId=236269&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Review of *Poems* (New York, 1857) and *Aurora Leigh* (New York, 1857), *North American Review* 85 (1857): 421-42, *The Brownings' Correspondence* (2021) <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/232/?rsId=236099&returnPage=1> [accessed 2021-03-24]

W. E. Aytoun, review of *Aurora Leigh,* from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* (January 1857) 23–41. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/196/?rsId=236261&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

John Nichol, review of *Aurora Leigh, The Westminster Review* (October 1857), 399–415. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/reviews/233/?rsId=236274&returnPage=1> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Adams, Alice, 'Review of Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood ; Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and the Emergence of a Culture of Abundance, 1871-1914, Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America', *Signs,*16.2, (1991), 371–76

Adžić-Vukičević, Tatjana N., et al. 'Pulmonary Sequestration Mimicking Lung Cancer: A Case Report', *Vojnosanitetski Pregled*, 73.11 (2016),1060–63

Alsumrain, Mohammad, and Jay H. Ryu, 'Pulmonary Sequestration in Adults: A Retrospective Review of Resected and Unresected Cases', *BMC Pulmonary Medicine*, 18.1 (2018), 97

Al-Timimy, Qays Ahmed Hassan, and Hind Fadhil Al-Shamseei. 'Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration in Elderly Woman: A Rare Case Report with Emphasis on Imaging Findings', *Radiology Case Reports*, 11.3 (2016), 144–47

An, Young-Ok, 'The Poetics of the "Charmed Cup" in Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon', *Studies in Romanticism*, 53.2 (2014), 217–38

American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)* (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013)

Anderson, Amanda, 'Reproduced in Finer Motions: Encountering the Fallen in Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh', in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces,* ed. by Shari Benstock and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 167–97

Aquinas, Thomas of, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Methuen, 1992)

---. *Summa Theologica*: *First Part* (Lulu.com, 2018) <https://www.lulu.com/en/gb/shop/st-thomas-aquinas/summa-theologica-first-part/hardcover/product-17ewmr9z.html?page=1&pageSize=4>

---. *Summa Theologica: Second Part of the Second Part* (Lulu.com, 2018) <https://www.lulu.com/en/gb/shop/st-thomas-aquinas/summa-theologica-second-part-of-the-second-part/hardcover/product-1vjwdvqd.html?page=1&pageSize=4>

---. *Summa Theologica: Third Part* (Lulu.com, 2018) <https://www.lulu.com/en/gb/shop/st-thomas-aquinas/summa-theologica-third-part/hardcover/product-1rvw9n84.html?page=1&pageSize=4>

---. *Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998)

Armstrong, Isobel, 'D. G. Rossetti and Christina Rossetti as Sonnet Writers', *Victorian Poetry*, 48.4 (2010), 461–73

---. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Auerbach, Nina, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Harvard University Press; Illustrated edition, 1984)

Avery, Simon, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011)

Ayres, Brenda, editor, *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Bailin, Miriam, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Baillif-Couniou, Valérie, et al. 'Hair Testing in Postmortem Diagnosis of Substance Abuse: An Unusual Case of Slow-Release Oral Morphine Abuse in an Adolescent', *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 36 (2015), 172–76

Ball, Benjamin, *The Morphine Habit (Morphinomania): With Four Lectures on the Border-Land of Insanity, Cerebral Dualism, Prolonged Dreams, Insanity in Twins,* (New York: Fitzgerald, 1887)

Bardes, Charles., 'Morphine—by Way of an Explanation', *Agni*, 63 (2006), 241–44

Barrow, Barbara, 'Gender, Language, and the Politics of Disembodiment in Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Poetry*, 53.3 (2015), 243–62

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Classics, 1993)

Batchen, Geoffrey, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass: The Mit Press, 1999)

---. *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006)

Bauckham, Richard, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Becker, Jill B., and Elena Chartoff, 'Sex Differences in Neural Mechanisms Mediating Reward and Addiction', *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 44.1 (Jan. 2019), 166–83

Belloc, Elizabeth, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 37. 145 (1948), 49–58

Bernard Stover, Laurie, et al. 'Torsion of an Extralobar Pulmonary Sequestration: A Rare Cause of Acute Chest & Flank Pain in an Adolescent', *Journal of Pediatric Surgery Case Reports*, 2.6, (2014), 322–24

Berridge, Virginia, 'Opium and Oral History', *Oral History*, 7.2 (1979), 48-58

---. 'Opium Over the Counter in Nineteenth Century England', *Pharmacy in History,* 20.3 (1978) 91–100

---. 'Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England', *Victorian Studies*, 21.4 (1978), 437–61

Billington, Josie, '"In Silence Like to Death": Elizabeth Barrett's Sonnet Turn', *Victorian Poetry*, 39. 4 (2001), 533–50

---. *Little Songs: Women, Silence, and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet* (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2007)

---.'"Thy Woman's Hair, My Sister, All Unshorn": EBB's Sonnets to George Sand', *Victorian Poetry*, 48.4 (2010) 577–93

Blair, Kirstie, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006)

Blake, Kathleen, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth: The Romantic Poet as a Woman', *Victorian Poetry*, 24.4 (1986) 387–98

Bloom, Abigail Burnham, 'ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND ANNE THACKERAY RITCHIE', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 19 (1991) 76–83

Bodnar, Richard J, 'Endogenous Opioid Modulation of Food Intake and Body Weight: Implications for Opioid Influences upon Motivation and Addiction', *Peptides*, 116 (2019) 42–62

Booth, Alison, editor, *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993)

Bosco, Ronald A., 'The Brownings and Mrs. Kinney: A Record of Their Friendship', *Browning Institute Studies*, 4 (1976), 57–124

Brady, Cheyne, editor, 'Womanhood and Its Mission', *Dublin University Magazine*, 53.318 (1859) 696–711

Brauer, Sandra, 'Bronchiectasis', *Journal of Physiotherapy*, 57.3, (2011), 198

Bree, C. R., and Geo. Dickinson, 'DOSE AND PREPARATION OF MORPHIA', *The Lancet*, 31.796 (1838) 384

Brimblecombe, Peter, *The Big Smoke: A History of Air Pollution in London Since Medieval Times* (London: Routledge, 1987)

Bristow, Joseph. ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Brodie, Sir Benjamin, *Lectures Illustrative of Certain Local Nervous Affections* (London: Longman, 1837)

Brown, Sarah Annes, 'Paradise Lost and Aurora Leigh', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 37.4 (1997), 723–40

Brown-Séquard, C. E., 'Lectures ON THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL FORMS OF PARALYSIS OF THE LOWER EXTREMITIES', *The Lancet*, 76.1947 (1860), 605–06

The Brownings' Correspondence | Brownings' Correspondence <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/> [accessed 2017-03-23]

Browning, Robert, *Letters of Robert Browning,* ed. Thurman L. Hood, collected by Thomas J. Wise, (London: John Murray, 1933)

Browning, Robert, *Letters Of The Brownings To George Barrett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958)

Browning, Robert, *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1906)

Browning, Robert, *Letters of Robert Browning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933)

Browning, Robert, W. Tyas Harden, *An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Reeves and Turner, 1888)

Bruce, F. F., 'Alpha and Omega, A Study in the Pattern of Revelation. By S. H. Hooke (Library of Constructive Theology) London: Nisbet, 1961. Pp. Xvi + 304. 21s.', *New Testament Studies*, 10.4 (1964) 522–23

Buchanan, Anne, and Ellen Buchanan Weiss, 'Of Sad and Wished-For Years: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Lifelong Illness', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 54.4 (2011), 479–503

Bullen, *J. B. The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)

Burgess, Anthony, *The Devil's Mode,* (New York: Random House Inc, 1989)

Burrowes Philip, 'ON A CASE OF HYSTERIA, SIMULATING HEART DISEASE', *The Lancet*, 68.1723 (1856), 273–74

Cameron, Ian, and Nigel Bateman, *Respiratory Disorders* (London: Hodder Arnold, 1983)

Carpenter, Mary Wilson, 'Blinding the Hero', *Differences*, 17.3 (2006), 52–68

Carter, Richard, 'Pulmonary Sequestration', *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, 7.1 (1969), 68–88

Case, Alison, 'Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh"', *Victorian Poetry*, 29.1 (1991), 17–32

Casteras, Dr Susan P., *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art,* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, U.S., 1987)

Caughie, Pamela L., '"I Must Not Settle into a Figure": The Woman Artist in Virginia Woolf's Writings', in *Writing the Woman Artist*, ed. Suzanne W. Jones, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 371–97

Chaney, Christine, 'The "Prophet-Poet's Book"', *Studies in English Literature*, *1500-1900,* 48.4 (2008), 791–99

Chapman, Alison, 'Mesmerism and Agency in the Courtship of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26.2 (1998), 303–19

---. 'REVOLUTIONIZING ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING: A REVIEW OF THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39. 2 (2011), 605–11

Chapman, Alison, and Stabler, Jane, editors, *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

Chemist, Fleeming & Son, c 1860-1880, Ipecacuanha Wine Bottle. c 1870s <https://heritage.rcpsg.ac.uk/items/show/784> [accessed 2021-05-06]

Chun, Eun Ju, et al., 'Extralobar Pulmonary Sequestration With Hemorrhagic Infarction in an Adult', *Journal of Thoracic Imaging*, 22.2 (2007), 166–168

Coddington, Ronald S., 'Cardomania!: How the carte de Visite Became the Facebook of the 1860s', *Military Images*, 34.3 (2016), 12–17

Cohen, Gary, et al., 'B2 Nicotinic Acetylcholine Receptor Subunit Modulates Protective Responses to Stress: A Receptor Basis for Sleep-Disordered Breathing after Nicotine Exposure', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 99.20 (2002), 13272–77

Cooper, Helen, 'Mrs. Browning and Miss Evans', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 35.3 (1980), 257–59

---. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman and Artist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Enduring Editions, 1988)

---. 'Structure and narrative in *Aurora Leigh'*, in *Aurora Leigh,* ed. Margaret Reynolds New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996)

Corbett, Harriet J., and Gillian M. E. Humphrey, 'Pulmonary Sequestration', *Paediatric Respiratory Reviews*, 5.1 (2004), 59–68

Cordner, Sheila, 'Radical Education in Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Review*, 40.1 (2014), 233–49

Cosslett, Tess, *Victorian Women Poets* (London: Longman, 1996)

Cousins, A. D., editor, *The Cambridge Companion to The Sonnet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Crofton, John. 'Respiratory Tract Disease: Diagnosis And Treatment Of Bronchiectasis: I. Diagnosis', *The British Medical Journal*, 1.5489 (1966), 721–23

Cross, F. L., and E. A. Livingstone, editors, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Cruz, Juana Inés de La, and Ilan Stavans, *Poems, Protest and a Dream,* trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1997)

Cruz, Juana Inés de La, et al. *Selected Works,* trans. Edith Grossman (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016)

Curran, Kelly A., and Amy B. Middleman, 'An Unusual Etiology of Hypokalemia in a Patient With an Eating Disorder', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 60.1(2017), 124–26

Cvetkovich, Ann, 'Histories of Mass Culture: From Literary to Visual Culture', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 27.2 (1999), 495–99

*The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine: Comprising Treatises on the Nature and Treatment of Diseases, Materia Medica and Therapeutics, Medical Jurisprudence, Etc., Etc.*ed. John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, John Conolly' (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, and Baldwin and Craddock, 1833-35)

Dally, Peter, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

---. 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6678 (1989), 963–963

Dau, Duc, and Shale Preston, *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015)

David, Deirdre, ' "Art's a Service": Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and *Aurora Leigh*', *Browning Institute Studies*, 13 (1985), 113–36

---. *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987)

---. *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995)

Davies, Brian, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2014)

Dawson, Clara, editor, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Critical Heritage* (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2014)

De Cornualles, Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence,* ed. Lewis Thorpe (W.Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1972)

De Quincey, Thomas, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868)

Deeks, Henry, 'Posing for the Carte de Visite Photograph: An Article about Style', *Military Images*, 11.1 (1989), 30–30

Delorme, Shannon, 'Physiology or Psychic Powers? William Carpenter and the Debate over Spiritualism in Victorian Britain', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 48 (2014), 57–66

Dennis, Barbara, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Hope End Years* (Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Seren Books, 1996)

Devereux, Graham, 'Abc Of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease: Definition, Epidemiology, And Risk Factors', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 332.7550 (2006), 1142–44

Dieleman, Karen, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Religious Poetics: Congregationalist Models of Hymnist and Preacher', *Victorian Poetry,* 45.2 (2007), 135–57

'DISEASES OF THE SPINAL SYSTEM', *The Lancet*, 52.1306 (1848), 301–02

Donaldson, Sandra, '"Motherhood's Advent in Power": Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Poems About Motherhood', *Victorian Poetry*, 18.1 (1980), 51–60

Dormandy, Thomas, 'A Salve for All Ailments', in *Opium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 104–12

---. 'Doctors Rule', *Opium,* in *Opium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 161–74

---. 'Romantic Opium', *Opium*, in *Opium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 76–84

---. 'The Opium Eaters', *Opium*, in *Opium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 91–97

---, editor, 'The Shape of Dreams', in *Opium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 115–22

---, editor, 'The Tincture and the Powder', in *Opium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 53–61

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau, 'To "bear my mother's name": Künstlerroman by Women Writers' in, *Aurora Leigh,* ed. Margaret Reynolds, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 463-466

---. *Writing beyond the Ending : Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1985)

Eisner, Eric, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Energies of Fandom', *Victorian Review*, 33.2 (2007), 85–102

'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', Mujeres Célebres, 4, (México: Organización Editorial Novaro)

'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Phrenological Character and Biography', *American Phrenological Journal (1838-1869),* 34.3 (1861), 59

Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/> [accessed 2021-06-16]

Ende, Michael, *The Neverending Story,* trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Puffin Books, 2014)

Erbeznik, Elizabeth, 'City-Craft as Poetic Process in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*', *Victorian Poetry*, 52.4 (2014), 619–36

Falk, Alice, 'LADY'S GREEK WITHOUT THE ACCENTS: AURORA LEIGH AND AUTHORITY', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 19 (1991), 84–92

Faulk, Laura J. 'DESTRUCTIVE MATERNITY IN AURORA LEIGH', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.1 (2013), 41–54

Federico, Annette, ' "Familiar Marriage" & Victorian Fiction: Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920,* 60.3 (2017), 394–98

Finlayson, Iain, *Browning* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005

Fiorotto, Walter Beneduzzi, et al., 'A Patient with Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration: A Rare Congenital Anomaly', *Revista Brasileira de Cardiologia Invasiva (English Edition)*, 20.1 (2012), 99–102

'The First Morphine: "Classic of Science"', *The Science News-Letter*, 22.593 (1932), 120–21

Fish, Arthur, *John Everett Millais; Master-Painters of the World* (Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1923)

Fish, Laura, *Strange Music* (London: Vintage, 2009)

Fleming, J. Dick, 'The Threefold Temptation of Christ: Matt. 4:1-11', *The Biblical World,* 32. 2 (1908), 130–37

Forbes, Litton, 'Malingering', *Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly*; 31.183 (1906), 319–25

Forster, Margaret, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988)

---. *Lady's Maid* (London: Vintage, 2005)

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley, (London: Vintage, 1990)

Francis, Clement, 'Morphine In Status Asthmaticus', *The British Medical Journal*, 1.4667 (1950), 1429–1429

Franko, Jan, et al., 'Intraabdominal Pulmonary Sequestration', *Current Surgery*, 63.1 (2006), 35–38

Frawley, Maria H., *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

Friedman, Susan Stanford, 'Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. as Epic Poets', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 5.2 (1986), 203–28

Gaja, Katerine, 'CHANGING FACES: MICHELE GORDIGIANI'S PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING', *The Journal of Browning Studies*, 3 (2012), 53–63

Galusca, Bogdan, et al., 'Decreased Cerebral Opioid Receptors Availability Related to Hormonal and Psychometric Profile in Restrictive-Type Anorexia Nervosa', *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 118 (2020), 104711

Garrett, Martin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning* (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2001)

Gelpi, Barbara Charlesworth, ' "Aurora Leigh": The Vocation of the Woman Poet', *Victorian Poetry*, 19.1 (1981), 35–48

George, Eric, *The Life and Death of Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1786-1846- Historical Painter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967)

Gezer, Suat, et al., 'Pulmonary Sequestration: A Single-Institutional Series Composed of 27 Cases', *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery,* 133.4 (2007), 955–59

Giebelhausen, Michaela, and Tim Barringer, editors, *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2016)

Gilbert, Sandra M., 'From Patria to Matria: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Risorgimento', *PMLA*, 99.2 (1984), 194–211

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literacy Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)

Gravely, William H., 'Christopher North and the Genesis of the Raven', *PMLA*, 66.2 (1951), 149–61

Greene, Ashley L., and Nicholas R. Eaton, 'Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia: A Direct Comparison of Their Multivariate Comorbidity Patterns', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 190 (2016,) 75–83

Greenfield, Shelly F., Audrey J. Brooks, et al. 'Substance Abuse Treatment Entry, Retention, and Outcome in Women: A Review of the Literature', *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 86.1 (2007), 1–21

Greenfield, Shelly F., Sudie E. Back, et al. 'Substance Abuse in Women', *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 33.2 (2010), 339–55

Grylls, Rosalie Glynn, 'Rossetti and Browning', *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 33.3 (1972), 232–50

H, C. J., 'The Funeral of Mrs. Browning', *The Critic,* 23.591 (1861), 455–455

Hacken, Nick H. T. and Thys van der Molen, 'EASILY MISSED? Bronchiectasis', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 341.7764 (2010), 146–47

Hair, Donald S., *Fresh Strange Music: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Language* (Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015)

'HALF-DRACHM DOSES OF THE SALTS OF MORPHIA', *The Lancet*, 31.804 (1839), 680

Hall, Charles Radclyffe, 'ON THE EFFECTS OF ETHER INHALATION IN REFERENCE TO MESMERISM', *The Lancet*, 49.1234 (1847), 436–37

Hanuš, Lumír, et al., '2-Arachidonyl Glyceryl Ether, An Endogenous Agonist of the Cannabinoid CB1 Receptor', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 98.7 (2001), 3662–65

Harmony, Olga, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Mujeres Célebres,* 4, Illustrated by Ramón Alonso (México: Editorial Novaro, 1961)

Harris, Leigh Coral, 'From "Mythos" to "Logos": Political Aesthetics and Liminal Poetics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Casa Guidi Windows"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28.1 (2000), 109–31

Hassan, Wafaa Ali, et al., 'Role of a Diagnostic Triad in Bronchiectasis', *Egyptian Journal of Chest Diseases and Tuberculosis*, 64.2 (2015), 477–82

Hayter, Alethea, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1969)

---. *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and Its Setting* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011)

---. *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)

Hazemali, David, and Tomaž Onič, 'The Proud Prime Evil of Hell: Characterization of Satan as the Capital Vice of Pride in Milton's Paradise Lost', *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries*, 13.2 (2016), 63–76

Hewlett, Dorothy, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Cassell, 1953)

Hiemstra, Anne, 'Reconstructing Milton's Satan: Meredith's "Lucifer in Starlight"', *Victorian Poetry*, 30.2 (1992), 123–33

Hind, Charles Lewis, editor, 'Mrs. Browning as Prophetess', *The Academy, 1869-1902*, 1536 (1901), 345–46

'Historical UK Inflation Rates and Calculator', *Historical UK Inflation Rates and Calculator*, <http://inflation.iamkate.com/> [2021-03-24]

Hoagwood, Terence Allan, 'Biblical Criticism and Secular Sex: Elizabeth Barrett's A "Drama of Exile" and Jean Ingelow's "A Story of Doom"', *Victorian Poetry*, 42.2 (2004), 165–80

Holmes, Alicia E., 'ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING: CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORITY IN "AURORA LEIGH" BY REWRITING MOTHER, MUSE, AND MIRIAM', *The Centennial Review,* 36.3 (1992), 593–606

Holmes, Martha Stoddard, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2004)

Holy Bible: King James Version (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Hood, Eric, ‘ “Your Fourier’s Failed”: Networks of Affect and Anti-Socialist Meaning in *Aurora Leigh*’ in *Women’s Literary Networks and Romanticism*, ed. Andrew O. Winckles and Angela Rehbein (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 274–97

Hopler, Jay, and Kimberly Johnson, editors, ‘Elizabeth Barrett Browning: (1806–1861)’, *Before the Door of God,* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2013), 247–50

Horne, Richard Henghist, *A New Spirit of the Age* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1844)

---. ‘Recollections of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mary Russell Mitford, and Other Literary Friends’, *The St. James’s Magazine*, vol. n.s. (1874), 466–80

Howe, Julia Ward, ‘One Word More with E. B. B.’ in *Words For the Hour*, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1857)

Humm, Maggie, ‘The 1930s, Photography, and Virginia Woolf’s Flush’, *Photography and Culture*, 3.1 (2010), 7–17

Hunt, Leigh, editor, ‘The Death of Mrs Browning,’ *Examiner,* 2788 (1861), 420–420

Hurst, Isobel, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Inboden, Robin L., ‘Damsels, Dulcimers, and Dreams: Elizabeth Barrett’s Early Response to Coleridge’, *Victorian Poetry*, 46.2 (2008), 129–50

Ives, Ella Gilbert, ‘ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING—"GOD’S PROPHET OF THE BEAUTIFUL"’, *The Journal of Education,* 63.8 (1906), 200–01

Jabłoński, Tomasz, ‘John Milton’s “Chaotic” Satan’, *An International Journal of English Studies*, 26.1(2017), 23–41

Jackson, W. P. U., ‘Significance Of Clubbing Of The Fingers’, *The British Medical Journal*, 1.4596 (1949), 216–17

Jacoby, M. G., ‘Finger Clubbing’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2.6099 (1977), 1417

Jansson, Åsal ‘From Statistics to Diagnostics: Medical Certificates, Melancholia, and “Suicidal Propensities” in Victorian Psychiatry’, *Journal of Social History*, 46.3 (2013), 716–31

Jenkins, Christine R., et al., ‘Improving the Management of COPD in Women’, *Chest,* 151.3 (2017), 686–96

Jephson, John H., ‘HYPODERMIC INJECTION OF MORPHIA’, *The Lancet,* 76.1927 (1860), 122

John, Prester, ‘Milton’s Satan’, *Dublin University Magazine, 1833-1877,* 88.528 (1876), 707–14

Johns-Putra, Adeline, ‘The Nineteenth Century: Epic and the Self’, *The History of the Epic*, ed. Adeline Johns-Putra, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), 114–54

Karlin, Daniel, *The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1987)

Kent, David A., editor, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989)

Kent, Deborah, et al. 'In Search of a Heroine: Images of Women with Disabilities in Fiction and Drama', *Women with Disabilities*, ed. Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 90–110

Kent, Kelley S., 'Apocalyptic Imagery in "Aurora Leigh"', *Inquiries Journal*, 7.03 (2015)

Kenyon, Frederic G., and Elizabeth Barrett Browning Barrett Browning. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Vol. 2*. hansebooks, 2020.

Kest, Benjamin, et al., 'A Comparison of Morphine Analgesic Tolerance in Male and Female Mice', *Brain Research*, 879.1 (2000), 17–22

Knoepflmacher, U. C., 'PROJECTION AND THE FEMALE OTHER: Browning and the Romantics', *Victorians Reading the Romantics*, ed. Linda M. Shires (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2016), 95–117

Knox, Marisa Palacios, 'Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in "Aurora Leigh"', *Victorian Poetry*, 52.2 (2014), 277–300

Kobayashi, Emily V. Epstien, 'Feeling Intellect in "Aurora Leigh" and "The Prelude"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 51.4 (2011), 823–48

Kortsch, Christine Bayles, *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism,* (London: Routledge, 2016)

Krishnamurti, Chandrasekhar, and SSC Chakra Rao, 'The Isolation of Morphine by Serturner', *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60.11 (2016), 861–62

Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992)

---. *Tales of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987)

Labahn, Michael, 'The Book of Revelation − an Early Christian "Search for Meaning" in Critical Conversation with Its Jewish Heritage and Hellenistic-Roman Society', *In Die Skriflig*, 48.1(2014), e1–9

Lacy, Francisco B., et al., 'Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration', *Cirugía Española* (English Edition), 93.7 (2015), e59

Laird, Holly A., 'Aurora Leigh: An Epical Ars Poetica', in *Writing the Woman Artist*, ed. Suzanne W. Jones (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 353–70

Lamont, Peter, 'Reflexivity, the Role of History, and the Case of Mesmerism in Early Victorian Britain', *History of Psychology*, 13.4 (2010), 393–408

Landow, George P., *Aesthetic and Critical Theory of John Ruskin,* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971)

LaPorte, Charles, 'Aurora Leigh, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 53.4, (2013), 829–51

---. '"MRS. BROWNING'S GOSPEL" AND THE ART OF REVELATION', *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 23–66

Laragy, Georgina, '"A Peculiar Species of Felony": Suicide, Medicine, and the Law in Victorian Britain and Ireland', *Journal of Social History*, 46.3 (2013), 732–43

Larson, Cynthia A., and Kate B. Carey, 'Caffeine: Brewing Trouble in Mental Health Settings?' *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice,* 29.4 (1998), 373–76

Lawlor, Clark, 'Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease', *The Modern Language Review,* 103.4 (2008), 1109-1110

Laycock, Thomas, M.D., *A Treatise on the Nervous Diseases of Women ; Comprising an Inquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Treatment of Spinal and Hysterical Disorders* (London: Longman, 1840)

Lee, Paul B., 'The Arrival Motif of Malachi's Eschatological Figures in the Gospel of Luke', *Journal of Early Christian History*, 1.2 (2011), 189–204

Leighton, Angela, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986)

---. *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1992)

---. '"When I Am Dead, My Dearest": The Secret of Christina Rossetti', *Modern Philology*, 87, 4 (1990), 373–88

Leoncini, Giacomo, et al. 'Endovascular Treatment of Pulmonary Sequestration in Adults Using Amplatzer® Vascular Plugs', *Interactive Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery*, 12.1(2011), 98–100

Lewis, C. S., *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961)

Lewis, Linda M., *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1997)

---. 'RAPE AND RESURRECTION IN "AURORA LEIGH"', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 19 (1991), 56–65

Lin, Chih-Hung, et al., 'Pulmonary Sequestration—Differences in Diagnosis and Treatment in a Single Institution', *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association*, 76.7 (2013), 385–89

Loewy, F. E., 'Morphine In Asthma', *The British Medical Journal*, 1.4662 (1950), 1143–1143

Lowry, Elizabeth, 'Portrait of a Lady', *The Guardian,* 19 July 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/19/poetry1> [accessed 2017-07-23]

Lubbock, Percy, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Her Letters* (London: Smith, Elder & co., 1906)

Lysack, Krista, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens, USA: Ohio University Press, 2008)

Mahmodlou, Rahim, et al., 'Pulmonary Sequestration: A Rare Case in a Patient with Acute Chest Pain and Palpitation Mimicking the Acute Coronary Syndrome', *Lung India: Official Organ of Indian Chest Society*, 32.1 (2015), 76–78

Manarin, Karen, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Canon Formation, and the North American Literary Curriculum', *Victorian Review*, 33.2 (2007), 119–31

Manka, Laurie, 'Pulmonary Sequestration: A Congenital Abnormality Seen in the Adult Pulmonologist's Office', *Chest*, 150. 4 (2016), 641A

Markus, Julia, *Dared And Done: The Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning* (Athens, USA: Ohio University Press, 1995)

Marsh, Jan, *Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (London: Quartet Books, 2010)

---. *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987)

Marson, J. F., 'REPORT OF A CASE OF DISEASE OF THE SPINAL CORD, IN WHICH THE SYMPTOMS SUPERVENED UPON A RECENT COLD; SMALL-POX HAD PRECEDED ONE YEAR, AND INJURY TO THE SPINE TWELVE YEARS PREVIOUSLY, BY A FALL FROM A HORSE', *The Lancet*, 58.1478 (1851), 598–600

Martinez, Michele, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture', *Victorian Review*, 37.1 (2011), 62–91

---.'Contexts for Reading Aurora Leigh', Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Aurora Leigh', *A Reading Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012)

Mayoral-Campos, Victoria, et al., 'Pulmonary Sequestration'. *Archivos de Bronconeumología* (English Edition), 49.3 (2013), 129–30

Mazzarella, Gennaro, et al., 'Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration in an Adult Female Patient Mimicking Asthma: A Case Report', *International Journal of Surgery,* 12 (2014), S73–77

McGowan, Pippa, *Crash Course: Respiratory System* (Edinburgh: C.V. Mosby, 2003)

Melnyk, Julie, '"Mighty Victims": Women Writers and the Feminization of Christ', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.1 (2003), 131–57

THE MENTOR - FAMOUS WOMEN WRITERS OF ENGLAND, 84.3. 8 (1915)

Mermin, Dorothy, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago & London: University Of Chicago Press, 1989)

---. 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning through 1844: Becoming a Woman Poet', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 26. 4 (1986), 713–36

---. 'The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets From the Portuguese', *ELH,* 48.2 (1981), 351–67

Meyerbröker, Katharina, and Mark B. Powers, 'Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia Across the Lifespan', *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences,* ed. James D. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 474–81

Milnes, J. N. ,'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6680 (1989), 1102–1102

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost,* ed. by Gordon Teskey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2005)

Mitchell, Rebecca N., 'DEATH BECOMES HER: ON THE PROGRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF VICTORIAN MOURNING', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41(2013), 595–620

Mitford, Mary Russell, *Recollections of a Literary Life* (New York: Harper, 1855)

Mitton, C. Leslie, 'The Apocalypse of John. By Charles C. Torrey', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 12.4 (1959), 437–38

Monteiro, George, 'Poe's Knowledge' in *The Presence of Camões* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 41–50

Moore, Mary, 'Laura's Laurels: Christina Rossetti's "Monna Innominata" 1 and 8 and Petrarch's Rime Sparse 85 and 1', *Victorian Poetry,* 49.4 (2011), 485–508

Moore, Natasha, 'The Encyclopaedic Impulse in Victorian Poetry', *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* 68.3 (2013), 396–422

Morlier, Margaret M., 'The Death of Pan: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Romantic Ego', *Browning Institute Studies*, 18 (1990), 131–55

Morrison, Kevin A., 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Dog Days', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 30.1 (2011), 93–115

Morphine Overdose: Know the Signs <https://www.webmd.com/connect-to-care/addiction-treatment-recovery/prescription/signs-of-morphine-overdose> [accessed 2021-03-23]

'Morphine: Strong Painkiller to Treat Severe Pain', NHS, <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/morphine/> [accessed 2021-03-23]

Mullen, Mary, 'Two Clocks: "Aurora Leigh", Poetic Form, and the Politics of Timeliness'. *Victorian Poetry*, 51.1 (2013), 63–80

Mullins, Edwin B., *The Painted Witch: How Western Artists Have Viewed the Sexuality of Women* (New York: Carroll & Graf Pub, 1985)

Myers, G. Norman, 'The Effects of Morphine, Diacetylmorphine and Some Related Alkaloids upon the Alimentary Tract. Part II. Small Intestine and Ileo-Colic Sphincter', *The Journal of Hygiene*, 39.4 (1939), 391–404

M930.50.3.167 | Commercial Label of Sir Astley Cooper's Aperient Antibilious Pills, London | Engraving | John Henry Walker (1831-1899) | McCord Museum <http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/M930.50.3.167> [accessed 2021-05-06]

Nesbit, Kate, ‘Revising Respiration: Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and the Shared Breath of Poetic Voice in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Aurora Leigh’, *Victorian Poetry,* 56.3 (2018), 213–32

Novak, Julia, ‘The Notable Woman in Fiction: The Afterlives of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’, *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 31.1 (2016), 83–107

Odaka, Akio, et al., ‘Pulmonary Sequestration’, *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, 41.12 (2006), 2096–97

Ofek, Galia, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009)

Omer, Ranen, ‘Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Apocalypse: The Unraveling of Poetic Autonomy’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 39.2 (1997), 97–124

Palmowski, Moritz, et al., ‘Bronchopulmonary Sequestration: A Differential Diagnosis in Young Adults for Recurrent Pneumonia’, *The Lancet*, 369.9569 (2007), 1318

Papini, Giovanni, *The Devil* (New York: Dutton, 1954)

Parris, Leslie, editor, *The Pre-Raphaelite Papers* (London: Tate Gallery, 1984)

Paul, Sarah, ‘Strategic Self-Centering and the Female Narrator: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Sonnets from the Portuguese”’, *Browning Institute Studies*, 17 (1989), 75–91

Paulozzi, Leonard J., et al., ‘A History of Being Prescribed Controlled Substances and Risk of Drug Overdose Death’, *Pain Medicine*, 13.1 (2012), 87–95

Paz, Octavio, editor, *Mexican Poetry: An Anthology,* trans. Samuel Beckett, (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970)

Peele, Stanton, and Archie Brodsky, *Love and Addiction* (Newbury: Broadrow Publications, 2015)

Peterson, William S., ‘“My Spiritual Face”: A Newly Discovered Portrait of Mrs. Browning’, *Browning Institute Studies*, 5 (1977), 1–ii

Phial for ‘Solution of Muriale of Morphia’ | Science Museum Group Collection <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co197515/phial-for-solution-of-muriale-of-morphia-bottle-controlled-drug-morphine> [accessed 2021-02-28]

Pickering, George, *Creative Malady. Illness in the Lives and Minds of Charles Darwin, Florence Nightingale, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1974)

Pinchin, A. J. Scott, et al., ‘Bronchiectasis’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2.3798 (1933), 756–57

Poe, Edgar Allan, *Tales, Poems, Essays,* (London: Collins Publishing, 1952)

---. *The Raven and Other Poems* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1845)

Pointon, Marcia, ‘Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artifacts at the Edge’, *The Art Bulletin*, 96.2 (2014), 170–95

Poovey, Mary, '"Scenes of an Indelicate Character": The Medical "Treatment" of Victorian Women', *Representations*, 14 (1986), 137–68

Pryce, Richard, *An Evil Spirit* (London: The British Library, 2010)

Qian, Xin, et al., 'Pulmonary Sequestration: A Case Report and Literature Review', *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Medicine*, 8.11 (2015), 21822–25

Renger, Almut-Barbara, 'The Ambiguity of Judas: On the Mythicity of a New Testament Figure', *Literature and Theology*, 27.1 (2013), 1–17

Reynolds, Margaret, 'Speaking Un-likeness: The Double Text in Christina Rossetti's "After Death" and "Remember"', *Textual Practice*, 13.1 (1999), 25–41

Riede, David G., 'Elizabeth Barrett: The Poet as Angel', *Victorian Poetry*, 32.2 (1994), 121–39

Riley, Anthony L., et al., 'Sex as a Biological Variable: Drug Use and Abuse', *Physiology & Behavior*, 187 (2018), 79–96

Ritchie, Anne Thackeray, ed. Stephen, Leslie, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Dictionary of National Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1885)

Rosenblum, Dolores, 'Face to Face: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh" and Nineteenth-Century Poetry', *Victorian Studies*, 26.3 (1983), 321–38

Rossetti, Christina, *Complete Poems,* ed. Betty Flowers (London: Penguin Classics, 2001)

---*The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1893)

Rossetti, William, and Ruskin, John, *Preraphaelitism: Papers 1854 to 1862* (Winifred, Kansas: Wentworth, 2006)

Rudoe, Judy, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Taste for Archaeological-Style Jewelry', *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, 83.353 (1986), 22–32

Ruf, Frederick J., *Entangled Voices: Genre and the Religious Construction of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Ruggles, Mervyn, 'Paintings on a Photographic Base', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 24.2 (1985), 92–103

Ruskin, John, *Modern Painters: Volume 1. Of General Principles, and of Truth* (London: Routledge)

---. *On Art And Life* (London: Penguin, 2004)

---. *Sublime & Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton,* ed. Virginia Surtees (London : Michael Joseph, 1972)

---. *The Elements of Drawing: In Three Letters to Beginners* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1857)

Ryall, Anka, 'Medical Body and Lived Experience: The Case of Harriet Martineau'. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 33.4 (2000), 35–53

Ryan, S. M., and S. F. Maier, 'The Estrous Cycle and Estrogen Modulate Stress-Induced Analgesia', *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 102.3 (1988), 371–80

Ryan, William, 'DELIRIUM TREMENS—POISONING BY LAUDANUM—ERYSIPELAS—RECOVERY', *The Lancet*, 46.1157 (1845), 475–77

Ryle, John Charles, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: 7 Volume Set* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012)

S, G. B. 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *The Cornhill Magazine*, ed. Leslie Stephen, 29.172 (1874), 469–91

Sampson, Fiona, *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Profile Books, 2021)

Saunders, Clare Broome, *Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Medievalism* (New York: AIAA, 2009)

Schmidt, P., '(446) Morphine Equivalent Dose and Analgesic Equivalents: Understanding the Difference', *The Journal of Pain,* 17.4 (2016)

Schmitz, Rudolf, 'Friedrich Wilhelm Sertürner and the Discovery of Morphine', *Pharmacy in History*, 27.2 (1985) 61–74

Schwarzbach, F. S., and John Kucich, 'The Victorians and Death', *PMLA*, 95.5 (1980), 875–77

Scott, E. F., *The Book of Revelation* (SCM, 1939)

Serinelli, Serenella, et al., 'Relationship between Opiates and Asthma in the Determination of Death', *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 74 (2020).

Sheldrake, T., and T. Sheldrake, 'TREATMENT OF SPINAL CURVATURE—APPARATUS, AND CASES', *The Lancet*, 12.314 (1829), 711–13

Shenk, Linda, 'AURORA, MARIAN, AND THE DIVIDEDNESS INHERENT IN THE VICTORIAN WOMAN', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 19 (1991), 41–46

Shires, Linda, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Cross-Dwelling and the Reworking of Female Poetic Authority', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30.1 (2002), 327–43

Silva, E., et al., 'Late Onset Congenital Cystic Adenomatous Malformation Associated with Intra-Lobar Pulmonary Sequestration', *Revista Portuguesa de Pneumologia* (English Edition), 21 5 (2015), 282–84

Silver, Anna Krugovoy, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Sklanczenko, Tatiana. 'Review of Sonnets from the Portuguese'. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1958, pp. 159–159.

Smith, Craig, ‘Across the Widest Gulf: Nonhuman Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf’s “Flush”’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 48.3 (2002), 348–61

Smith, Lindsay, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1861)

---. *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009)

Spence, R. M., ‘Notes of Time in Aurora Leigh.’ *Notes and Queries*, s8-XII.303 (1897), 305–305

Squirf, P., et al., ‘BI-MECONATE OF MORPHIA, A NEW PREPARATION OF OPIUM’, *The Lancet*, 32.814 (1839), 81–83

Stammers, Hannah R., ‘The Theological Language of Anorexia: An Argument for Greater Rapprochement between Chaplains and Physicians’, *Feminist Theology*, 28.3, (2020), 282–96

Stauffer, Andrew M., et al. ‘Guide to the Year’s Work’, *Victorian Poetry*, 49.3 (2011), 347–432

Stead, William Thomas, editor, ‘Aurora Leigh: A French Tribute to Mrs. Browning’, *The Review of Reviews,* 6.33 (1892), 251–251

Stefano, George B., et al. ‘Reciprocal Evolution of Opiate Science from Medical and Cultural Perspectives’. *Medical Science Monitor: International Medical Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research*, 23 (2017), 2890–96

Steinmetz, Virginia V. ‘Images of “Mother-Want” in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Aurora Leigh”’, *Victorian Poetry*, 21.4 (1983), 351–67

Stiles, Anne, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Stiles, Cheryl, ‘“Different Planes of Sensuous Form”: American Critical and Popular Responses to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Aurora Leigh and Last Poems: Annotated Bibliography, *American Periodicals, 1856-62*’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 40.3 (2007), 239–55

Stone, Marjorie, ‘Constructing the Archive and the Nation in: “Italy! World’s Italy!”, “My Last Duchess,” Aurora Leigh, and an Unpublished Manuscript by Elizabeth Barrett Browning’, *Victorian Review*, 33. 2 (2007), 35–57

---. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1995)

---. ‘Lyric Tipplers: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Wine of Cyprus,” Emily Dickinson’s “I Taste a Liquor,” and the Transatlantic Anacreontic Tradition’, *Victorian Poetry*, 54.2 (2016), 123–54

---. ‘Sisters in Art: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’, *Victorian Poetry*, 32.3/4 (1994), 339–64

Stone, Marjorie, and Beverly Taylor, ‘“Confirm My Voice”: “My Sisters,” Poetic Audiences, and the Published Voices of EBB’, *Victorian Poetry*, 44.4 (2006), 391–404

Stott, Rebecca, and Simon Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Longman, Pearson Education Ltd 2003)

Stradling, J. R., ‘Recreational Drugs And Sleep’, *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 306.6877 (1993) 573–75

Suarez-Cuartin, Guillermo, et al., ‘Diagnostic Challenges of Bronchiectasis’, *Respiratory Medicine*, 116 (2016), 70–77

Sullivan, Melissa, ‘The Bestseller and the City: Flush, The Barretts of Wimpole Street, and Cultural Hierarchies’, *Woolf and the City,* edi. Elizabeth F. Evans and Sarah E. Cornish (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 112–19

Sutphin, Christine, ‘Revising Old Scripts: The Fusion of Independence and Intimacy in “Aurora Leigh”’, *Browning Institute Studies*, 15 (1987), 43–54

Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Apocalypse Revealed,* (Kindle edition) Theodore D. Webber, 2012.

---. *Collected Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (BiblioBazaar, 2007)

---. *A Swedenborg Sampler: Selections from Heaven and Hell, Divine Love and Wisdom, Divine Providence, True Christianity, Secrets of Heaven* (Swedenborg Foundation, 2011)

---. *The True Christian Religion* (Andesite Press, 2015)

Szreter, Simon, ‘Victorian Britain, 1831–1963: Towards a Social History of Sexuality’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 1.1 (1996), 136–49

Takeuchi, Kayo, et al., ‘Two Adult Cases of Extralobar Pulmonary Sequestration: A Non-Complicated Case and a Necrotic Case with Torsion’, *Polish Journal of Radiology*, 79 (2014), 145–49

Taplin, Gardner B., *Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957)

Taylor, Beverly, ‘EBB among the Nightingales: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Felicia Hemans, and Generative Rivalry in the Poetess Tradition’, *Women’s Writing*, 26.2 (2019), 149–67

---.‘Elizabeth Barrett Browning’, *Victorian Poetry*, 53.3 (2015), 293–99

Taylor, Jenny Bourne, and Sally Shuttleworth, editors, *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Taylor, Lou, *Mourning Dress (Routledge Revivals): A Costume and Social History* (Abindgon: Routledge, 2010

Terzikhan, Natalie, et al., ‘Prevalence and Incidence of COPD in Smokers and Non-Smokers: The Rotterdam Study’, *European Journal of Epidemiology*, 31.8 (2016), 785–92

Teukolsky, Rachel, ‘Cartomania: Sensation, Celebrity, and the Democratized Portrait’, *Victorian Studies*, 57.3 (2015), 462–75

Thieme, Otto Charles, ‘The Art of Dress in the Victorian and Edwardian Eras’, *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 10 (1988), 14–27

Thierauf, Doreen, ‘Rescuing the Magdalen: Aurora Leigh as Social Reform Worker’, *Women’s Writing*, 27.4 (2020), 448–60

Thomson, Patricia, *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal: A Changing Ideal, 1837-1873* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1978)

Thomson, Rosamund Dargan, ‘Review of Sonnets from the Portuguese’, *Books Abroad*, 20.1 (1946), 70–71

Thorne-Murphy, Leslee, ‘Prostitute Rescue, Rape, and Poetic Inspiration in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Aurora Leigh’, *Women’s Writing*, 12.2 (2005), 241–58

Thorpe, Vanessa, ‘How Did 18th Century’s Literary Women Relieve Domestic Distress? With Opiates’, *The Guardian*, 11 Mar. 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/11/opiates-literary-women-coleridge-mary-robinson-harriet-martineau> [accessed 2017-07-23]

Tompkins, J. M. S., ‘The Fawcett Lecture 1961-62 on Aurora Leigh, 28th November 1961’ (Bedford College, University of London, 1961)

Tromp, Marlene, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006)

Troup, Arthur G., and E. Weston Hurst, ‘DISSEMINATED ENCEPHALOMYELITIS FOLLOWING SMALL-POX’, *The Lancet*, 215.5559 (1930), 566–69

University of Exeter <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_645441_en.html> [accessed 2021-07-31]

Valentini, Valentino, et al., ‘Anterolateral Thigh Flap Harvested from Paralytic Lower Extremity in a Patient with Late Polio Sequel’, *Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery*, 40.1 (2012), e5–7

Van Hout, Marie Claire, and Evelyn Hearne, ‘“Vintage Meds”: A Netnographic Study of User Decision-Making, Home Preparation, and Consumptive Patterns of Laudanum’, *Substance Use & Misuse*, 50.5 (2015), 598–608

Van Remoortel, Marianne, ‘(Re)Gendering Petrarch: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Sonnets from the Portuguese”’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 25.2 (2006), 247–66

Verner, I. R., ‘The Development of Opioid Analgesics and Fashions in Their Delivery’. *Current Anaesthesia & Critical Care*, 5.3 (1994) 178–82

Victorian Silver Respirator by Maw - Phisick | Medical Antiques <https://phisick.com/item/victorian-silver-respirator-by-maw/> [2021-03-22]

‘Virginia Woolf Miscellany Archive, Issue 62, Spring 2003 through Issue 83, Spring 2013’, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, (2014)

<https://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com/the-virginia-woolf-miscellany-from-spring-2003-to-spring-2013/ > [accessed 2021-04-14]

'Vital Signs: Overdoses of Prescription Opioid Pain Relievers and Other Drugs Among Women — United States, 1999–2010', *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 62. 26, (2013), 537–42

Waithe, Marcus, '"Another Sort of Writing"?: Invalidism and Poetic Labour in the Letters of Elizabeth Barrett', *Letter Writing Among Poets,* ed. Jonathan Ellis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 126–40

Warner, Marina, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Quartet Books, 1978)

Weiner, M. F., and J. R. Silver, 'Edward Harrison and the Treatment of Spinal Deformities in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 38.3 (2008), 265–71

Weir, J. G., 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298. 6675 (1989), 749–749

Welzen, Huub, 'The Revelatory Text and the Prologue of the Gospel of Luke'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies,* 74.3 (2018)

Wheeler, Michael, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Wiener Katz, Wendy, '"My Story for My Better Self": Love, Loss, and Working Through in the Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 58.3 (2010), 459–87

Williams, Anna, '"The Dramatic Poet and the Unpoetic Multitudes": Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Allegorized Theatrical Commentary in Book IV of Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Poetry*, 55. 3 (2017), 309

---. '"The Dramatic Poet and the Unpoetic Multitudes": Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Allegorized Theatrical Commentary in Book IV of Aurora Leigh', *Victorian Poetry*, 55. 3 (2017), 309–29

Williams, Rhian, '"Our Deep, Dear Silence": Marriage and Lyricism in the Sonnets from the Portuguese', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 37.1 (2009), 85–102

Willis, Paul J., 'Elizabeth Barrett Contemplates the Sonnets from the Portuguese', *Christianity & Literature,* 62.2 (2013), 241–42

Windisch, K. A., and M. J. Kreek, 'Review of Addiction Risk Potential Associated with Adolescent Opioid Use', *Pharmacology Biochemistry and Behavior* (2020)

Woolf, Virginia, 'Aurora Leigh', *Collected Essays*, Vol.1., ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd 1966)

---. *Flush* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1933)

---. *Flush* (London: Vintage Classics, 2018)

---. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 5: 1936-41, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985)

Worboys, Michael, 'Practice and the Science of Medicine in the Nineteenth Century', *Isis,* 102.1 (2011), 109–15

Worster-Drought, Cecil, 'THE NERVOUS SEQUELS OF CEREBRO-SPINAL FEVER', *The Lancet*, 192.4950 (1918), 39–41

Yadav, Amita, et al., 'Intralobar Pulmonary Sequestration in Right Lower Lobe with Secondary Infection in an Adult Male', *Egyptian Journal of Chest Diseases and Tuberculosis*, 63.1,(2014), 273–75

Yang, Lei, and Gang Yang, 'Extralobar Pulmonary Sequestration with a Complication of Torsion: A Case Report and Literature Review', *Medicine,* 99.29, (2020)

Yang, Zi, et al., 'Factors That Predict Poor Outcomes in Patients with Traumatic Vertebral Body Fractures', *Injury*, 41.2 (2010), 226–30

Yepes-Hurtado, Andres, et al., 'Pulmonary Sequestration', *The Southwest Respiratory and Critical Care Chronicles*, 2.5 (2014), 19–20

Yilmaz, A., et al., 'Extralobar Pulmonary Sequestration: A Case Report', *Monaldi Archives for Chest Disease*, 79. 2 (2013)

Young, D. A. B., 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298.6671 (1989), 439–43

---. 'The Illnesses Of Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 298. 6671 (1989), 439–43

Youngson, A. J., *The Scientific Revolution in Victorian Medicine* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979)

Zacny, J. P., 'Morphine Responses in Humans: A Retrospective Analysis of Sex Differences', *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 63.1 (2001), 23–28

Zemka, Sue, *Victorian Testaments: Bible, Christology and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998)

Zieger, Susan, '"How Far Am I Responsible?": Women and Morphinomania in Late-Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 48.1 (2005), 59–81

Zonana, Joyce, 'The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh and Feminist Poetics', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 8.2 (1989), 241–62