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“A brilliant burst of botanical imagination”:
Proserpina and the Nineteenth-Century Evolution of Myth

Phyllis Joyce Catsikis
Ph.D.
University of Glasgow
Faculty of Arts
Department of English Literature
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With popular interest in Linnaean botany thriving at the turn of the century, the Proserpina myth and its central focus on flowers and the feminine support nineteenth-century approaches to nature as an object of both scientific study and a source of spiritual or moral contemplation and guidance. The mythological figure of Proserpina with her dual nature of innocence and sexuality, is easily transposed into or appropriated as a flower-woman who can be identified with the moral typology or teaching of a mother's botany – whether it be the maternal ideology of the “Linnaean years” or the Wordsworthian nature philosophy of Victorian Romantics – or the scientific knowledge of the “sexual system” and its link to industrial, technological science.

Drawing upon historicist myth criticism, I trace the nineteenth-century evolution of the Proserpina myth into botanical discourse within contemporary views of myth's organic quality and enduring aesthetic significance as a product of the imagination. Like modern critics of myth, nineteenth-century writers valued myth as literature or art and as adaptable and evolving. I follow the botanical evolution of the Proserpina myth, as a historical, literary construct, from its reception in the late eighteenth-century botanical poetry of Catherine Maria Fanshawe and Erasmus Darwin through the Romantic poetry of William Wordsworth and into its Victorian evolution as a narrative of change in the fiction of George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell and the prose of John Ruskin. Language, form and structure, morality and science, are concerns which literature, botany and myth all share in the nineteenth century, as the Victorians attempt to articulate their relationship to a changing natural world.

The myth's reception by my nominated writers reveals three readings of female sexuality as passive, active or ambivalent, based upon the identification of girl and flower as a contested site between conflicting sides of a maternal or sexual nature. Proserpina's coming-of-age highlights the tension within nature and indicates predominant attitudes toward or preferences for moral nature, scientific nature or ambivalence, which ultimately signify corresponding perceptions of social change. Nature is sacred, violated by industrialism and in need of preservation and protection, or nature is ripe and ready for scientific exploration and industrial development.

The Victorian preoccupation with myth, flowers and the feminine is evident in the appropriation and interpretation of the popular myth of Proserpina as a narrative of change capturing an ambivalence toward industrial society: a fractured consciousness caught between nostalgia and progress that is in keeping with the narrative's double cast, looking backward to childhood and forward to romance or marriage. An innocent female protagonist and daughter figure, nurtured by a rural, maternal nature, is threatened by the entrance or intrusion of a male seducer/suitor figure associated with the industrial, scientific world. The heroine exists as a contested site of innocence, threatened like the landscape itself.

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Introduction
 Botanizing Myth: Proserpina, Myth Reception and
 the Nineteenth-Century Evolution of Myth

Have ye not heard how Ceres' child,
 Proserpina, in evil hour,
 Gathering plants and flow'rets wild,
 Herself a fairer flow'r,
 By gloomy Dis was cropt, as poets tell,
 Torn from Sicilian plains with him to dwell,
 A hapless Bride, reluctant Queen of Hell.
 Or have ye read that classic story,
 Unmindful of the allegory?
 Examine well the moral tale,
 Unravel each mysterious part,
 Divest it of the Muse's veil,
 And bid it speak devoid of art.¹

Addressing the issue of women's participation in botany, Catherine Maria Fanshawe (1765-1834) questions her readers about reading myth in her late-eighteenth century botanical poem "Epistle on the Subjects of Botany." Fanshawe exhorts her readers to treat the mythological story of Proserpina with the same scientific scrutiny they apply to their botanical subjects. She claims that a careful reading of the classical myth of Proserpina yields a cautionary tale with a contemporary warning about female botanizing at the turn of the nineteenth century. Fanshawe's allegory of the myth, the moral of the story which she contemporizes or historicizes, forms the centre of the poem which is framed by a contemporary address to female readers to exercise caution in their botanical pursuits. It is of course Fanshawe's own version of the myth her readers should attend to and what she presents in the lines that follow is her contemporary rewriting of the myth. Fanshawe suggests a reading of myth within a specific historical, cultural moment and

¹ Catherine Maria Fanshawe, "Epistle on the Subjects of Botany, Containing A Tale and Much Good Advice. By A Lover of Botanists," lines 53-65; *The Literary Remains of Catherine Maria Fanshawe*, With notes by the Late Rev. William Harness (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1876) 17-25. This verse epistle was privately printed in two posthumous collections of Fanshawe's poetry: *Memorials of Miss Catherine Maria Fanshawe* compiled and edited by the Revd William Harness in 1865, and *The Literary Remains*, Pickering's reprint of Harness's volume issued in 1876. Internal evidence within the poem suggests a composition date of c.1785-1795.

in so doing prompts larger questions about myth interpretation, the universality and origins of myth, and the significance of historical context in the explanation of myth.

Myth Criticism and The Reception of Myth: Archetypal or Historicist

Fanshawe's poem draws attention to two different critical approaches within twentieth-century criticism of myth as literature: is myth part of a universal archetype or pattern rising out of an ancient origin, or is it a historical construct separable from its origin and equally important in its reinterpretation? According to Hans Blumenberg, it is precisely because myths are subject to historical (re)interpretation that they are worth studying. The myth that is "varied and transformed by its receptions, in the forms in which it is related to [...] history, deserves to be made a subject of study if only because such a study also takes in the historical situations and needs that were affected by the myth and were disposed to 'work' on it." ² Drawing primarily upon the myth criticism of Blumenberg in his *Work on Myth*, Anthony John Harding asserts Blumenberg's claim that "the 'receptions' of myth, and the associated 'historical situations and needs' " provide not only the context but "the very form in which 'the myth' becomes an object of knowledge."³ In his study of the English Romantic poets, Harding emphasizes the historical circumstances surrounding the reception and interpretation of myth during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (including the poets' engagement with Milton's works and hence his own representations of myth): "All the poets were critical readers, that is, they realized that a myth only exists and lives as it is transposed and translated."⁴ Here Harding echoes the terminology of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Blumenberg, among others, that "the very existence of a myth depends on its being transposed or translated."⁵

² Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge MIT P, 1985) 174. Also quoted in Harding 2.

³ Anthony John Harding, *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* (London: U of Missouri P, 1995) 2.

⁴ Harding 15.

⁵ Harding 2. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Brighton: Harvester P, 1980).

Such criticism, which addresses myth as a historical construct, ultimately unknowable except through its “transposition” or “reception” as a reinterpretation, counters the dominant twentieth-century criticism of myth as archetypal established by Northrop Frye.⁶ For Frye, a myth is a type of story seldom located in history, its action taking place “in a world above or prior to ordinary time.”⁷ As a story, myth “belongs to the world of art,” and “the things that happen in myth are things that happen only in a self-contained literary world.”⁸ An abstract story-pattern, myth presents the writer with a “ready-made framework.”⁹ Therefore, “while myths themselves are seldom historical, they seem to provide a kind of containing form of tradition.”¹⁰ Myth exists as an “archetype” or a universal story, divorced from any system of belief and increasingly more sophisticated and “literary” as literary history progresses from an original primitive culture.¹¹ As “a unifying category of criticism” and “part of a total form” of literary criticism, the myth as archetype allows us to “glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture.”¹²

Harding stresses instead the importance of myth’s historical reception in a given period, including contemporary views and perceptions of myth and “the mythic” and writers’ interpretations or the “work” done on myths (to use Blumenberg’s terminology). Myths are important as “the transformations and reinterpretations of something whose origins are ultimately indefinable. It is the process of transformation and reinterpretation

⁶ See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1957) and *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963). For a review of the major twentieth-century schools of myth interpretation (including archetypal, psychological and structural approaches) see William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: The University of Alabama P, 1986). See also Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Myth: A Symposium* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1958) and Lillian Feder, *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1971).

⁷ Frye, *Fables of Identity* 30.

⁸ Frye, *Fables of Identity* 31.

⁹ Frye, *Fables of Identity* 31.

¹⁰ Frye, *Fables of Identity* 31.

¹¹ Frye, *Fables of Identity* 12.

¹² Frye, *Fables of Identity* 12.

that repays study, not the ‘original myth,’ which, inevitably, we can only ‘know’ as a reconstruction [...].”¹³ He argues that the Jung-Frye approach of searching for an archetypal pattern in literary history, underestimates the “ ‘work’ done on the myth – the strategies, questionings, ironies, and framing devices with which the author has transmuted and modified the allegedly primitive story [...].”¹⁴

In his concentration on a unified or systematic theory of literary criticism, Frye appears less concerned with history in his approach. However, Harding does appear to recognize and concede that archetypal criticism which looks for mythic patterns in literary history is also concerned with historicising myth. As Harding explains, “Frye did not ignore the obvious truth that any concretization of a myth or of an ‘archetypal pattern’ takes place at a particular juncture in time, and can be seen in relation to events and trends of that time”; however, Frye’s statement about literary history “has its own history.”¹⁵ As Harding comments, “The danger is that the extent to which ‘myth’ is already a historical construct, and always in process, will be ignored. In other words, we will anachronistically apply a modernist, archetypalist concept of myth as forming a ‘total mythological structure’ to a period that had its own very different conceptions of myth.”¹⁶ An overarching formula may overlook specific historical contributions to myth reception. Accordingly, every modern assertion we make about myth is essentially historical or historicisable, even when our ideas about myth coincide with those of another period.¹⁷

¹³ Harding 2.

¹⁴ Harding 8. See C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, vol. 9 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959). *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerald Adler, translated by R. F. Hull, 18 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953-78).

¹⁵ Harding 7. Harding also acknowledges the attention to history in Frye’s *Study of English Romanticism*.

¹⁶ Harding 4.

¹⁷ In his discussion of modern mythmaking during the nineteenth century, Chris Baldick acknowledges the critical divide between myth and history within twentieth-century culture. He stresses both the importance of myth’s historical conditions and its openness to interpretation: “The vitality of myths lie precisely in their capacity for change, their adaptability and openness to new combinations of meaning. That series of adaptations, allusions, accretions, analogues, parodies, and plain misreadings [...] is the myth.” Baldick

Drawing upon historicist myth criticism, I trace the nineteenth-century evolution of the Proserpina myth into botanical discourse within contemporary views of myth's organic quality and enduring aesthetic significance as a product of the imagination. Like modern critics of myth, nineteenth-century writers valued myth for being literature or art and adaptable and evolving. Their views anticipate modern concepts of myth such as Richard Chase's interpretation of myth as "story" or "narrative" and "a matter of aesthetic experience and the imagination."¹⁸

My critical methodology draws upon the work of recent myth criticism towards a historicist study of the Ceres-Proserpina myth's literary "transposition" and "reception" within the botanical discourse of specific late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts in a consideration of the myth's Victorian reception in the fiction of George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. My critical enquiry focuses on the reception of a particular myth tradition within a particular cultural discourse (rather than a general or comprehensive historicist myth criticism for the Victorian period). My analysis of the Proserpina myth's reception within these texts draws upon the Blumenberg-Harding understanding of myth as a historical construct, as well as Ann Suter's recent literary analysis of the Proserpina myth as a coming-of-age story.

The Myth of Proserpina and Three Readings

In Fanshawe's reception of the myth, she acknowledges poets' (re)tellings of the Rape of Proserpina myth throughout history and draws

emphasizes "study of that process of adaptation, allusion, and revision" by which a modern myth is born and sustains life. See Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1987) 4, 9.

¹⁸ See Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University P, 1949) 11, vi. The emphasis, in Doty's comprehensive definition of myth, on myth's capacity to tell a story: "the primary shaping of the materials is in narrative. A story is told, whether or not the outward shape of the story is prose or poetry [...]." See Doty 16. Myth demonstrates what Lillian Feder describes as "a remarkable capacity to evolve and adapt." In her discussion of modern poetry, she emphasizes "the vitality of myth as a means of expressing a variety of contemporary approaches." As she claims, "one fact about myth is clear: it survives because it functions in the present." See Feder 3-4.

upon Milton and the classical poets.¹⁹ She refers to Milton's famous allusion to Proserpina in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*:

Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gather'd, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world [...]²⁰

Fanshawe engages with Milton's "work" on myth and, like him, makes her own version of the myth.

Mythological references in *Paradise Lost* not only indicate a classical tradition which Milton seeks to address and surpass, but also reveal Milton (re)making myth in his own poetic image, as in his description of Satan's Plutonian ascent to Eden in Book 9. When he arrives, Satan discovers the virgin Eve tending the Garden alone, Proserpina-like amidst her flowers:

Beyond his hope, *Eve* separate he spies,
Veil'd in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood,
Half spi'd, so thick the Roses bushing round
About her glow'd, oft stooping to support
Each Flow'r of slender stalk, whose head though gay
Carnation, Purple, Azure, or speckt with Gold,
Hung drooping unsustain'd, them she upstays
Gently with Myrtle band, mindless the while,
Herself, though fairest unsupported Flow'r,

¹⁹ Sources for the myth within classical tradition include primarily the ancient Greek account in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (c. 7th century BC), and the Roman version in *The Metamorphoses*. See Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric Apocrypha*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinemann, 1914) and Ovid, 5.341-569; *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983) 118-125. Ovid's account differs mainly in his omission of Ceres' interlude (in which she travels the earth in disguise, finally coming to stay with a family at Eleusis), changes the messenger to Arethusa (rather than Helios), and recounts the metamorphoses of Cyane the water nymph, a boy into a lizard, and Ascalaphus into an owl. See also Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1955, 1960) 89-96, and Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (New York: Mentor, 1940, 1942, 1969) 47-54, for twentieth-century accounts of the myth.

²⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4.268-272; *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (London: Macmillan, 1957) 284.

From her best prop so far, and storm so high.²¹

Rewriting the myth in a pastoral context, Milton goes on to compare Satan's entrance into Eden to a seventeenth-century citydweller's excursion to the countryside:

Much he the Place admir'd, the Person more.
As one who long in populous City pent,
Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Air,
Forth issuing on a Summer's Morn to breathe
Among the pleasant Villages and Farms
Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight,
The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine,
Or Dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound [...]²²

As Harding acknowledges, Milton serves as an important mediator of classical myth, and the reworking of such allusions is particularly significant for nineteenth-century writers including Wordsworth and novelists George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, both of whom draw upon the pastoral opposition of rural and urban in their representations of the myth.²³

The received version of the myth tells the story of Proserpina's abduction by Pluto, king of the Underworld, to live with him as his wife and queen. Persephone/Proserpina leaves the presence of her mother Demeter/Ceres, goddess of grain or corn.²⁴ Proserpina wanders into the meadows gathering wildflowers. Korè or Core/Cora ("the Girl") is represented as a flower herself.²⁵ When she reaches to pick a particularly

²¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9. 424-433.

²² Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9. 444-451.

²³ For criticism including Eliot, Gaskell and the pastoral tradition, see Shelagh Hunter, *Victorian Idyllic Fiction: Pastoral Strategies* (New Jersey: Humanities P, 1984) and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973). For Victorian pastoral, see also Owen Schur, *Victorian Pastoral: Tennyson, Hardy, and the Subversion of Forms* (London and Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1989).

²⁴ I will use the Roman names of the mythological gods and goddesses for simplification and due to the fact that this is the primary mode of reference made by the writers in this study. I will use the Greek names when they pertain to a specific source, such as the *Homeric Hymn*.

²⁵ In the Greek, "Persephone is the blossom itself [...] coming herself from the earth in springtime. The narcissus "certainly is Persephone [...] she is called 'sweet shoot' [...] 'flower-eyed maiden' [...] 'blooming bedmate.'" See Ann Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2002) 26, 55; 238.

beautiful flower, the earth suddenly opens, Hades/Pluto, god of the Underworld, flies out in his chariot and takes Proserpina back into the earth to be his wife.²⁶ Grief-stricken, her mother searches the earth for her daughter, thereby neglecting the harvest and allowing famine to blight the land. Zeus/Jupiter must intervene to arrange an agreement with Pluto for Proserpina's return and reunion with her mother. However, because she has eaten at least one pomegranate seed while in the Underworld (either secretly given to her by Pluto or by her own choice), she must return there for part of every year. A compromise is reached in which she must spend a part of the seasons of every year in the Underworld with her husband, returning to her mother on earth with the flowers of spring.

Historical receptions of the Proserpina myth which centre around the identification of girl and flower reveal three readings of female sexuality.²⁷ In reading one of the Rape, Proserpina is passive. She is a victim of rape and under the control of Jupiter who creates the flower and snares her. She is "given away" to Pluto in patriarchal fashion. He secretly gives her the

²⁶ The flower is variously described in classical tradition: as a narcissus in the *Hymn*, a violet or lily in Ovid and a violet in Pausanias. Proserpina is picking flowers in a meadow with her friends when she is abducted by Pluto, god of the Underworld. The Homeric poet describes Persephone as "apart from Demeter," "playing" with other nymphs and "gathering flowers over a soft meadow, roses and crocuses and beautiful violets, irises also and hyacinths and the narcissus, which Earth made to grow at the will of Zeus and to please the Host of Many [Hades], to be a snare for the bloom-like girl – a marvellous radiant flower [...] from its roots grew a hundred blooms and it smelled most sweetly [...]" Amazed, the girl reaches out with both hands "to take the lovely toy," but the earth yawns and out springs Hades. Later in Persephone's own account of her rape to Demeter, she lists her twenty-three companions by name and explains, "All we were playing in a lovely meadow [...] and gathering sweet flowers in our hands, soft crocuses mingled with irises and hyacinths, and rose-blooms and lilies, marvellous to see, and the narcissus which the wide earth caused to grow as yellow as a crocus. That I plucked in my joy; but the earth parted beneath, and there the strong lord, the Host of Many, sprang forth and in his golden chariot he bore me away, all unwilling, beneath the earth [...]" Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and HomERICA* 289, 319. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, "Proserpina was playing, gathering flowers,/Violets, or white lilies, and so many the basket would not hold them all, but still/She was so eager – the other girls must never/Beat her at picking blossoms! So, in one moment,/Or almost one, she was seen and loved, and taken/In Pluto's rush of love [...] The loosened flowers fell, and she, poor darling,/In simple innocence, grieved as much for them/As for her other loss." Ovid 5. 390-96, 399-401.

²⁷ I draw upon Ann Suter's recent literary analysis of the Homeric version of the myth as a coming-of-age story to indicate three readings of female sexuality I find in the texts of my nominated writers. Suter uses a variety of modern methodological approaches in addition to literary analysis, including psychoanalysis, anthropology and the contextual approaches of linguistics, archaeology and the history of Greek religion in her analysis of the myth.

pomegranate seed, which she eats unwillingly or unknowingly.²⁸ Proserpina longs to return to her childhood home and relationship with her mother. This interpretation is consistent with traditional feminist readings of the myth which describe it as placing women under the oppression of patriarchal culture.²⁹

In reading two of the myth, Proserpina is active. She is an agent and reaches for the flower from an impulse of her own.³⁰ Her impulse to pick the flower indicates her readiness to mature. She eats the pomegranate seed of

²⁸ In Suter's literary analysis of the myth in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the female "maturation story" contrasts with "a male-dominant Olympian frame." She argues that the coming-of-age story "represents an earlier form of traditional materials and that the Olympian frame is a later assertion of control by Zeus over the goddesses of the core story." In the earlier story, "women control events," whereas in the later version, "Zeus is said to will the events of the narrative." The poem is "a 'work in progress' toward the goal of a Panhellenic, patriarchal worldview, with Zeus as the supreme authority." Suter 25, 10-11.

²⁹ Josephine Donovan provides a feminist psychoanalytical reading of the Demeter-Persephone myth as a narrative of patriarchal captivity within the writing of women realists of the early twentieth century. She argues that women were complicit (with their male captors) and willingly ate the pomegranate seed, not as a means of asserting independence and consent, but as a passive acceptance of and submission to patriarchal captivity. Donovan's feminist analysis interprets myth using archetypal-psychoanalytical criticism though she does emphasize the ideological environment of her writers and "their historical relationship with their mothers' generation" as contributing to her writers' interest in myth: "Each writer focused on different phases of the myth at different times [...] Nevertheless, each came to a realization of the inadequacy, indeed the destructiveness, of male-supremacist ideology, embracing in its stead a healing, matriarchal vision." See Josephine Donovan, *After the Fall: The Demeter-Persephone Myth in Wharton, Cather, Glasgow* (London and University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1989) 6. For nineteenth-century feminist myth criticism of classical mythology – as oppressive and placing women under the control of patriarchal culture – see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985) and Joseph A. Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting* (Madison and London: The U of Wisconsin P, 1989).

³⁰ For nineteenth-century myth criticism of classical mythology – as empowering, showing women's potential to actively challenge social convention – see Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (London: Harvard UP, 1982); Dinah Birch, "The Ethics of the Dust: Ruskin's Authorities," *Prose Studies* 12 (1989): 147-58; and to a lesser extent, Adrienne Munich, *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (Oxford and New York: Columbia UP, 1989). Munich argues that myth used by male writers shows a reinforcement of the patriarchal system but also a discomfort with it as she explores "the power and the passion" given to the Andromeda myth by male writers. Weltman's feminist poststructural analysis examines mythic discourse as a tool for gender subversion within nineteenth-century literature, specifically in the work of John Ruskin. She observes that mythology was "one area of culture always available to Victorian writers and artists as a vehicle to undermine strict sexual dichotomy: schooled in the classics, Victorians often turned to myth when seeking ways to express gender or sexual possibilities that their own time or culture or religion disallowed." See Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1998) 4.

her own volition. This reading of the myth emphasizes the story of a girl's sexual maturation, coming-of-age and entrance into marriage.³¹ Proserpina shows her readiness for an adult relationship with Pluto. This interpretation of the myth also focuses on the rivalry between Ceres and Proserpina and highlights the constant power struggle or confrontation between the two female figures (mother and daughter) and between the male figures who want to control them.³²

A third reading of the myth suggests Proserpina's ambivalent feelings about growing up and her conflicting desires about childhood. When she reaches for the flower, she wants to preserve her childhood but she also wants to affirm her sexuality. The flower represents Proserpina's childhood "which she seems to want to maintain. But her reaching for it is also [...] a metaphor for her acceptance and affirmation of her burgeoning sexuality. This double significance suggests a young girl's typical ambivalence toward maturation."³³ "Despite this step toward maturity," Proserpina is "not completely committed to growing up: as she is carried off, she shrieks for help. Whereas the impulse to pick the narcissus is a narrative reflection of her wish to put childhood behind her, the shout for help reflects the conflicting desire to remain a child."³⁴

The first reading emphasizes maternal protection, nostalgia for childhood and preservation of girlhood innocence. The second reading stresses independence from the mother, sexual maturity and readiness for

³¹ Suter pursues the psychological implications of this reading of the myth based upon interpretations of the symbolism of the narcissus flower and the pomegranate seed (which indicate Persephone's readiness to mature and her consent to a relationship with Hades respectively). In her psychoanalytical reading of the Homeric version of the myth, Suter explains how her interpretation of Persephone's abduction – an event "precipitated by her own readiness to mature" and in which she "joined happily on her own conditions" – differs from the abduction's (traditional or accepted) depiction as "an involuntary, brutal, and psychologically devastating 'rape.'" Suter 22; 54, 58.

³² Suter argues that the goddesses may not always have been a mother-daughter pair as scholarship on the *Hymn* has assumed: "the concern of the *Hymn* is Demeter's takeover of Persephone's powers as a fertility goddess. On another level its concern is Zeus's effort to take over Persephone and her powers, which Demeter is already in the process of assimilating. The *Hymn* has preserved elements of both of these confrontations – Demeter's with Persephone and Zeus's with Demeter over Persephone." See Suter 7.

³³ Suter 56.

³⁴ Suter 56.

marriage. The third reading reveals ambiguity and feelings of ambivalence about maturation, a state of conflicting desires, wanting to mature but also wanting to remain a child.

The Cerean, pre-Plutonic world emphasizes the parallel between the female and the earth's fertility. This maternal realm is "a woman's world where men are marginal"; the "prevailing image is that of vegetal growth: Demeter is the bringer of timely blooming" literally the "bringer of seasons" and "of the splendid fruit," processes she threatens to stop, "fade" or "wilt," after Proserpina's abduction.³⁵ Pluto's arrival upon Proserpina's maturity necessarily alters the previous harmony between mother and daughter within the female world, and, in so doing, alters the cycles of growth, resulting in a famine leading to a barren landscape in which grain is no longer allowed to grow.³⁶ Paradoxically, the arrival of a new (patriarchal) mode of fertility results in the loss of an old (matriarchal) mode of fertility. The myth's compromise or division of time in which Proserpina spends part of the year with her husband and part of the year with her mother can be read as reflecting not only her "new erotic focus" on Pluto and her continuous "emotional commitment" to Ceres but also the yearly cycle of crops and vegetation in what can be considered a confounding of the coming-of-age myth and the myth of seasonal cycles.³⁷

Proserpina's innocence and sexual maturity are conflated with the natural world. Just as Proserpina is both innocent young girl or daughter and sexually mature woman or wife, so flowers are both moral emblems and signs of sexuality. In the texts I examine, readings of Proserpina's sexuality are conjoint with readings of nature as benevolent and maternally nurturing, aggressive and sexually possessive, or both.

³⁵ Suter 26.

³⁶ As Suter points out, "The means by which the wish to separate and mature is accomplished is the intrusion into the totally female world of the male 'other' [...] Hades, the would-be bedmate." See Suter 54.

³⁷ Suter 59.

Myth into Botany: The Nineteenth-Century Evolution of the Proserpina Myth and the Binaries of Morality and Science

It grieves your Poet much to see

What perils wait on Botany³⁸

What Beaux and Beauties croud the gaudy groves,

And woo and win their vegetable Loves.³⁹

The Proserpina myth's binaries of maternal love and sexual love are the binaries of Linnaean botany. At the turn of the century, the "loves of the plants" are shaped by the "familiar format" of maternal educators. Botany between the 1760s-1830s was based mainly on the Linnaean "sexual system" of classification which identified plants according to their reproductive parts and gave taxonomic centrality to the flower's role in plant reproduction.⁴⁰ Plants were categorized into classes based upon their number of stamens, or male reproductive parts, and then into orders based upon their number of pistils, or female reproductive parts. Early botany books by women writers often combined introductory science with moral instruction: "Using letters and conversations as narrative forms, they featured families, home-based informal settings, and maternal teachers."⁴¹ Botany books in the familiar format "featured mothers teaching botany to their children and using botany to teach broader cultural lessons"; writers of books in the familiar format "promoted botany as a teaching tool and as part of a mother's responsibilities in early childhood education."⁴²

With popular interest in Linnaean botany thriving at the turn of the century, the Proserpina myth and its central focus on flowers and the feminine support nineteenth-century approaches to nature as an object of

³⁸ Fanshawe lines 44-45.

³⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) 1. 7-20.

⁴⁰ For studies of Linnaeus, see Patricia Fara, *Sex, Botany and Empire: The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks* (Cambridge: Icon, 2003); Lisbet Koerner, "Linnaeus's Floral Transplants," *Representations* 47 (1994): 144-69 and "Carl Linnaeus in his time and place," *Cultures of Natural History*, eds. N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 145-162.

⁴¹ Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760-1860* (London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 81.

⁴² Shteir 83.

both scientific study and a source of spiritual or moral contemplation and guidance. The mythological figure of Proserpina with her dual nature of innocence and sexuality, is easily transposed into or appropriated as a flower-woman who can be identified with the moral typology or teaching of a mother's botany – whether it be the maternal ideology of the “Linnaean years” or the Wordsworthian nature philosophy of Victorian Romantics – or the scientific knowledge of the “sexual system” and its link to industrial, technological science.

Botany was more than just science for many Victorians.⁴³ Victorian botanists were concerned with wedding a religious-moral dimension to the scientific study of nature. The study of plants represented interest in both religious and scientific thought and, for many, reflected religious belief in a divinely-ordered nature. Natural theology deepened the religious significance of nature study (in the first half of the nineteenth century), so that it was not simply the morally edifying rational amusement of the Enlightenment but tantamount to religious contemplation.⁴⁴ Botanizing, “the pursuit of science and taste, could be combined with wonder at God's handiwork by old and young together.”⁴⁵

As the study of botany became more professionalized between 1830-1860, the Victorian “romance” of natural history, with its principles of direct observation and attention to detail, distinguished itself as an “aesthetic science” that appealed to the emotions and the imagination. “Literary” botany diverged from “scientific” botany during the 1840s, as the natural system

⁴³ For studies of Victorian botany and natural history, see David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 1976); Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980); Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (Oxford: OUP, 1989); and Nicolette Scourse, *Victorians and Their Flowers* (London: Croom Helm, 1983). See also N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary, eds., *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); and David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996). For scientific histories of botany see A. G. Morton, *History of Botanical Science* (London: Academic P, 1981); Robert Down, *Landmarks in Science* (1982); and for women and the history of botany see Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*.

⁴⁴ William Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802). See Merrill 42.

⁴⁵ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, revised edn. (London: Routledge, 1987, 2002) 360.

based on plant morphology superseded the Linnaean system.⁴⁶ The study of plants became part of the “rich soil of Victorian flower culture” which “nourished abundant discourses of nature” including the technical, sentimental and typological consideration of flowers.⁴⁷

Botany continued to fulfil middle-class ideologies of the moral and the useful. Shteir writes that “by the 1850s a new generation of middle-class ‘zealots’ [...] moved into natural history culture in keen pursuit of fashion and respectability.”⁴⁸ She explains how an interest in plants and flowers particularly suited Victorian cultural attitudes, satisfying diverse social, moral, religious, literary, and economic purposes; botanical avocations were congruent with Victorian values of industriousness, a sense of awe and spiritual wonder, and the demands of evangelical ideology.⁴⁹

“Natural” typologists studied plant life to find spiritual truths (a habit of typological thinking important to both Evangelicals and Tractarians).⁵⁰ Botany was “considered an important part of flower appreciation, and science lessons mixed freely with all sorts of personified, sentimental, spiritual teachings, serving as the touchstone in the material world of the higher values being delineated.”⁵¹ “Botanical moralizing” became part of Victorian popular culture.⁵² Victorian botanists often combined moral typology (with its appeal of permanence in nature and fixed moral truths) with scientific interest (by which nature and flowers were subject to change and various systems of classification and theories of evolution, origins and development).

The Proserpina myth enters into botanical culture and surfaces in the tension between morality and science. Written into this botanical context, the myth of Proserpina reflects cultural attitudes about nature and corresponding

⁴⁶ Shteir 155, 158.

⁴⁷ Shteir 158.

⁴⁸ Shteir 151.

⁴⁹ Shteir 153.

⁵⁰ See Beverley Seaton, “Considering the Lilies: Ruskin’s ‘Proserpina’ and Other Victorian Flower Books,” *Victorian Studies* 28.2 (1985): 262; and George P. Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (Boston, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁵¹ Seaton, “Considering the Lilies” 263.

⁵² Shteir 158.

social changes due to the industrialization of the rural landscape. The myth reveals the period's ambivalent attitude toward nature as nurturer or predator or both.⁵³ Nature could be a benevolent, maternal healing force (a source of moral truths or lessons) and/or an aggressive competitor in the struggle for survival (evolutionary science). The myth also reflects the period's ambivalence regarding industrial progress (including urban development and steam travel); change can be beneficial but "progress" has advantages and disadvantages.⁵⁴ The Victorian Proserpina develops within this central tension between nature as maternal and moral or sexual and scientific.

The myth's reception by my nominated writers reveals different interpretations of female sexuality based upon the identification of girl and flower as a contested site between conflicting sides of a maternal or sexual nature. Proserpina's coming-of-age highlights the tension within nature and indicates predominant attitudes toward or preferences for moral nature, sexual nature or ambivalence about nature, which ultimately reveal perceptions of social change represented conjointly with her story of maturation. The "Proserpina narrative" identifies girl and flower within a changing society, during the historical transition from a rural to an industrialized landscape.

⁵³ See Frank M. Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late-Victorian England* (London: Yale UP, 1974); U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson, eds., *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (London: U of California P, 1977); Susan E. Lorsch, *Where Nature Ends: Literary Responses to the Designification of Landscape* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1983); Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983); Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986); David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

⁵⁴ See Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Stephen G. Brush, *The Temperature of History: Phases of Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin and Co., Inc., 1978); William E. Buckler, *The Victorian Imagination: Essays in Aesthetic Exploration* (Sussex: The Harvester P, 1980); Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence* (London: Oxford UP, 1967); J.A.V. Chapple, *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1986).

In registering perceptions or attitudes toward nature, the Proserpina myth's reception depicts social change as positive, negative or ambiguous within nineteenth-century society. Different readings of the myth result in an "allegory" of change as beneficial, disadvantageous or ambiguous. If Proserpina is forced into a relationship with Pluto, change is seen as rapid, forced and unwanted. If she is ready to mature, change is more acceptable. Nature is sacred, violated by industrialization and in need of preservation and protection, or ripe and ready for scientific exploration and industrial development. In these positive or negative models for change, change (experimentation, technology, expansion) is viewed as progressive or regressive. Ambivalent models show a preference for gradual, organic change, like the processes of natural growth, rather than the fear or threat of violent change.

Victorian Myth into Botany (I): The Nineteenth-Century Evolution of the Proserpina Myth as Nature's Moral/Spiritual Code

For the Victorians, the relationship between myth and botany is not as unusual as it first appears. Myth and botany were both concerned with nature and morality in their own ways, and both could provide a model of moralistic concern regarding the close observation of nature. Myth could have a religious-moral function as well as offer a basic explanation regarding natural phenomena. These allegorical and aetiological aspects were two of the various theories of myth interpretation during the Victorian period, and part of the tripartite or three-fold view of myth (physical, personal, moral) forwarded by John Ruskin and shared by other Victorian interpreters of myth in the 1860s and 1870s.⁵⁵

The Victorians valued myth's adaptability and capacity for change within contemporary culture.⁵⁶ As Kissane explains, "At a time when

⁵⁵ Other views included the "historical" theory of myth as history (euhemerism), the "poetic" theory of George Grote, and the "etymological" theory of Max Müller's philological school. See James Kissane, "Victorian Mythology," *Victorian Studies* 6.1 (1962) 7. See also Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (London: Yale UP, 1981).

⁵⁶ For a review of early nineteenth-century approaches to myth (including linguistic and anthropological) see Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (London and Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972).

evolution was becoming recognized as the fundamental principle in natural science and human affairs, mythology was looked upon as a stage in man's intellectual development and also as a phenomenon which in itself underwent an evolutionary process."⁵⁷ Myth's evolutionary aspect or property was used by those with anthropological interest to explain the development of the human mind from "primitive" ancient times to the modern "advanced" present. As Janet Burstein has shown, Victorian mythographers' ambivalence toward myth reflects ambivalence toward the "progress" of the mind particularly through the progress of language, as language "advanced from the mode of myth to that of rational discourse."⁵⁸ The progress of language, like the progress of the mind, "seemed to offer decided advantages with respect to scientific inquiry, but simultaneously deprived human beings of the ability to articulate the felt value of their experiences."⁵⁹ As myth declined, it "yielded [...] to more rational modes of thought [...] in ways that were not altogether advantageous."⁶⁰

Burstein concludes that "the feeling of isolation and fragmentation that accompanied industrial development and the decline of rural society and values also inheres in the ambivalence the Victorians seemed to have felt toward primitive, mythic ways of knowing."⁶¹ Myth could appear "to represent a world and way of thinking that seemed at once attractive—by virtue of its wholeness and vitality [...]"⁶² The Victorians' use of myth reveals ambivalence toward industrial society through its invocation of a pre-scientific, less rational mode of thought.⁶³ Victorian cultural nostalgia for a mythological past may be the more generally acknowledged appeal of myth, however, the aesthetic view of myth as evolutionary—its highest form as art

⁵⁷ Kissane 11.

⁵⁸ Janet Burstein, "Victorian Mythography and the Progress of the Intellect," *Victorian Studies* 18.3 (1975): 321.

⁵⁹ Burstein 321.

⁶⁰ Burstein 309.

⁶¹ Burstein 324.

⁶² Burstein 324.

⁶³ The Victorians' cultural nostalgia for a historical or mythical past and alternative, pre-industrial models of history has been recognised. See, for example, J. B. Bullen, *The myth of the renaissance in nineteenth-century writing* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994).

and a “flowering of human imagination” — as well as organic, a form which “lives and grows,” is significant, given the connections between myth and botany during the period.⁶⁴

In the specific context of botanical discourse, the Victorian reception of myth is consistent with contemporary views of myth as organic, and as offering a physical explanation and moral interpretation of nature as well as an ambivalent sign of “progress.” In *The Queen of the Air* (1869), Ruskin explains his tripartite or three-fold approach to mythological interpretation: “in nearly every myth of importance [...] you have to discern these three structural parts — the root and the two branches: the root, in physical existence, sun, or sky, or cloud, or sea: then the personal incarnation of that; becoming a trustful and companionable deity [...] and, lastly, the moral significance of the image [...]”⁶⁵ A myth is like a plant, having a “physical” root (in its natural object) and “personal” and “moral” branches. As Kissane points out, “the dominant mid-Victorian conception of mythology was nothing if not organic,” a view which Ruskin helped to shape in the 1860s and 1870s and one that was shared by other key Victorian interpreters of myth, including John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater.⁶⁶ Myths were organic and plant-like, growing like “splendid flowers [...] [that] expressed in form and colour to the natural eye the thought and aspirations of whole races.”⁶⁷ They were “ ‘gradual, half-conscious, half-unconscious growth[s]’ ” adapting or evolving through three phases of development.⁶⁸

In his 1876 essay, “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone,” Walter Pater uses the myth to elaborate his model of mythological interpretation in which a story evolves through three phases, from its impression of natural phenomena, to its poetical or literary phase and its ethical or moral phase:

In the story of Demeter, as in all Greek myths, we may trace the

⁶⁴ Kissane 12-13.

⁶⁵ John Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 19 (London: George Allen, 1903-12) 300.

⁶⁶ Kissane 11.

⁶⁷ John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, vol. 1, 3rd edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893) 2. First edition published in 1873. Also quoted in Kissane 15.

⁶⁸ J. S. Blackie, *Horae Hellenicae* (1874), quoted in Kissane 11.

action of three different influences [...] in three successive phases of its development. There is first its half-conscious, instinctive, or mystical phase, in which [...] there lie certain primitive impressions of the phenomena of the natural world. We may trace it next in its conscious, poetical or literary phase, in which the poets handle it with a purely literary interest, fixing its outlines, and simplifying or developing its situations. Thirdly, the myth passes into the ethical phase, in which the persons and the incidents of the poetical narrative are realised as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral and spiritual conditions.⁶⁹

Pater, like Ruskin, was a key interpreter of myth to Victorian culture and Pater's essay echoes Ruskin's views about mythological interpretation, given in *The Queen of the Air* in 1869.

In *Proserpina* (1875-1886), Ruskin reiterates this method of mythological interpretation in his treatment of the myth of Daphne and Apollo in a chapter on the leaf, one of four chapters on plant structure (including root, flower and stem). In Ruskin's moral code, nature's physical traits lead to moral analysis and mythical interpretation or significance, resulting, in this chapter, in Ruskin's names for types of leaves: the Apolline land leaves and Arethusan water leaves. He explains the myth's physical and personal meanings: "whenever the rocks protect the mist from the sunbeam, and suffer it to water the earth, there the laurel and other richest vegetation fill the hollows, giving

⁶⁹ Walter Pater, *Greek Studies* (1876; London: Macmillan and Co., 1975) 80. Wickens considers Hardy's *Tess* according to the "aesthetic mythography" put forward by Pater. The three phases of Tess's life resemble the three phases of the myth of Demeter and Persephone given by Pater. In the first or natural phase in which the divine mother and Kore are one, Hardy found a mythological parallel to Tess's unity of being. In the second phase's contrasting identities of Kore and Persephone and the figure of Demeter mourning the loss of her daughter, he found an image for Tess's divided self. In the third phase, the reunion of Demeter and Persephone is analogous to the ideal wholeness Tess never regains. See C. Glen Wickens, "Hardy and the Aesthetic Mythographers: The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53.1 (1983): 91.

a better glory to the sun itself.”⁷⁰ More generally, “Where warmth is, and moisture – there, also the leaf.” Daphne is “the daughter of the mountain river, the mist of it filling the valley; the Sun, pursuing, and effacing it, from dell to dell, is, literally, Apollo pursuing Daphne, and adverse to her [...]”⁷¹ Daphne “thus hunted, cries to her mother, the Earth, which opens, and receives her, causing the laurel to spring up in her stead.”⁷² Ruskin then gives the myth’s moral interpretation:

And farther, the leaf, in its connection with the river, is typically expressive [...] of the perpetual flow and renewal of human mind and thought [...] and the laurel leaf became the reward or crown of all beneficent and enduring work of man – work of inspiration, born of the strength of the earth, and of the dew of heaven, and which can never pass away.⁷³

Victorian Myth into Botany (II): The Nineteenth-Century Evolution of the Proserpina Myth as Narrative of Change

I wonder how many people, nowadays, whose bread and butter was cut too thin for them, would think of comparing the slices to poppy leaves? But this was in the old days of travelling, when people did not whirl themselves past corn-fields, that they might have more time to walk on paving-stones; and understood that poppies did not mingle their scarlet among the gold, without some purpose of the poppy-Maker that they should be looked at.⁷⁴

In his discussion of the poppy in *Proserpina*, John Ruskin laments the rapid pace of modern life brought about by the railway and the loss of slower modes of transport that allowed the traveller time to appreciate the landscape

⁷⁰ John Ruskin, *Proserpina. Studies of Wayside Flowers, While the Air was Yet Pure Among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which My Father Knew; Love’s Meine and Proserpina*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 25 (1875-1886; London: George Allen, 1906) 245.

⁷¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 244.

⁷² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 244-5.

⁷³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 245.

⁷⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 266.

and enabled him or her to take in flower study along the way. As he explains in a later chapter on the milkwort, “Among the losses, all the more fatal in being unfelt, brought upon us by the fury and vulgarity of modern life, I count for one of the saddest, the loss of the wish to gather a flower in travelling.”⁷⁵ One of Ruskin’s objectives in writing *Proserpina* was to preserve interest in what he saw as a vanishing, disregarded nature by rekindling and fostering an appreciation for wildflowers in their natural habitats through the development of a new system of botanical nomenclature based upon familiar associations from mythology, literature, art and religion, rather than scientific principles. For Ruskin, a “true” botany includes not only the study of a flower’s physical traits, such as form and color, but also the acknowledgement of a divine spirit within nature imparting moral lessons and mythological or spiritual truths to the student-botanist through the interpretation of plant life.

Ruskin compares the railroad journey from Paris to Geneva with the journey by carriage. He describes in detail the “discomforts of a modern cheap excursion train” and the difficulty of taking in views of the surrounding countryside:

The banging and bumping of the carriages over the turn-tables wakes me up [...] and the trilling and thrilling of the little telegraph bell establishes itself in my ears, and stays there, trilling me at last into a shivering, suspicious sort of sleep [...] I get a turn on the platform and perhaps a glimpse of the stars [...] and so generally keep awake [...] remembering the happy walks one used to have [...] and thence watching, if perchance, from the mouth of the high tunnel, any film of moonlight may show the far undulating masses of the hills of Citeaux. But most likely one knows the place where the great old view used to be only by the sensible quickening of the pace as the train turns down the incline, and crashes through the trenched cliffs

⁷⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 451.

into the confusion and high clattering vault of the station at Dijon.⁷⁶

Arriving at his destination “covered with dust,” Ruskin staggers down a hill to find a new industrial perspective, “the dirtied Rhone, with its new iron bridge, and the smoke of a new factory exactly dividing the line of the aiguilles of Chamoni.”⁷⁷

By contrast, Ruskin remembers the journey taken with his parents in the “old-fashioned light two-horse carriage” when there was time for walking and gathering spring wildflowers. Leaving Paris “in the bright spring morning” when the trees were “mere pyramids of purple bloom round Villeneuve-St.-Georges, one had an afternoon walk among the rocks at Fontainebleau,” and the next day at Sens, “the first saunter among the budding vines of the coteaux.”⁷⁸ Then the same afternoon, he recounts, “we gathered the first milkwort for that year; and on Tuesday, [...] the wild lily of the valley; and on Wednesday [...] gentians.” The importance of childhood memories and personal associations within the “*Systema Proserpinæ*” of Ruskin’s mythological and moral botany serves to highlight the retrospective cast to his work and epitomizes Victorian nostalgia for a pre-industrial landscape, for a time within living memory before the railways and steam power, before the industrialization and pollution of the countryside.

Ruskin uses the word “whirl” to set up this opposition between past and present, rural and urban. Referring to the fast pace of the modern steam train, the verb “to whirl” also suggests the confused bustle of city streets in contrast to the slower pace of the carriage and contemplative walks through the countryside, as exemplified by Ruskin’s meditations on the poppy:

I have in my hand a small red poppy, which I gathered on Whit Sunday on the palace of the Cæsars. It is an intensely simple, intensely floral, flower. All silk and flame: a scarlet cup, perfect-edged all round, seen among the wild grass far away,

⁷⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 452, 453.

⁷⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 454.

⁷⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 454-455.

like a burning coal from Heaven's altars [...] robed in the purple of the Cæsars.⁷⁹

Ruskin singles out the poppy's "pure *cup*" as an example of the simplest and "truest" flower form.⁸⁰ Here the noun "whirl" in Ruskin's sense is also equivalent to the botanical "whorl" or corolla, the flower cup of petals or leaves "successive around the base of the urn they form," its "*revolute* form" coming from or suggestive of the (whirling) way in which it grows, like a clay cup on a potter's wheel:

The botanists call it a corolla, which means a garland, or a kind of crown; and the word is a very good one because it indicates that the flower-cup is made, as our clay cups are, on a potter's wheel; that it is essentially a *revolute* form—a whirl or (botanically) "whorl" of leaves; in reality successive around the base of the urn they form.⁸¹

Ruskin's admonishment to the reader that if you "whirl" past the corn fields, you will miss the poppy "whirl" (but if you travel at a slower pace, you can consider the flower whirl or whorl) applies to the student of botany: if you read carefully, you will recognize the naming of plant parts—this paragraph from chapter 5 on the poppy coming just after Ruskin has established the parts of the flower in chapter 4 (using the poppy as an example). In Ruskin's circuitous, twisting, tendril-like prose, the word "whirl" comes at the centre of the paragraph, just as the whorl comes at the centre of the flower and chapter 5 on the poppy comes at the centre of the first ten-chapter serial publication of Ruskin's work. Language, form and structure, morality and science, are concerns which literature, botany and myth all share in the nineteenth century, as the Victorians attempt to articulate their relationship to a changing natural world.

Ruskin's use of myth as the basis for botanical study and flower classification may appear unusual, even given the period's cultural

⁷⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 253-4.

⁸⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 254.

⁸¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 254.

fascination with the mythological figure of Proserpina, but his work makes up part of a larger reception of the Proserpina myth within the botanical discourse of literary responses to nature and social change during the mid to late nineteenth century.⁸² The Victorian preoccupation with myth, flowers and the feminine is evident in the appropriation and interpretation of the popular myth of Proserpina as a narrative of change capturing an ambivalence toward industrial society: a fractured consciousness caught between nostalgia and progress that is in keeping with the narrative's double cast, looking backward to childhood and forward to romance, marriage or otherwise altered social relations. An innocent female protagonist and daughter figure, nurtured by a rural, maternal nature, is threatened by the

⁸² Ruskin shares his interest in the myth of Proserpina with many late Victorian writers and artists. Critics have noted the popularity of the myth in the poetry, art and fiction of the period, most notably in Algernon Charles Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" (1866) and "The Garden of Proserpine" (1866), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Proserpine (For a Picture)" (1874), Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Demeter and Persephone" (1889), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and in the aesthetic criticism of Walter Pater's "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" (1876). Paintings of the myth include those by Edward Burne-Jones, Frederic Leighton (1891), Frederick Sandys, Edward Poynter, Arthur Hacker (1889), Walter Crane, John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, William Etty and Frederick Richard Pickersgill. Other poems include John Byrne Leicester Warren's "Proserpine at Enna" from *Ballads and metrical sketches* (1860), Richard Watson Dixon's "Proserpine" from *Christ's Company and Other Poems* (1861), Edward Carpenter's "Persephone" from *Narcissus* (1873), Walter Thornbury's "The Search of Ceres for Proserpine" from *Historical and Legendary Ballads and Songs* (1876), John Todhunter's "A Fruit Piece" from *Laurella, and other poems* (1876), Richard Henry Stoddard's "The Search for Persephone" from *The poems* (1880), Aubrey De Vere's "The Search After Proserpine. A Masque" from *The Poetical Works* (1884) and also H. D. Rawnsley's elegiac treatment of the myth in "Dante Gabriel Rossetti" from *Valete: Tennyson [etc.]* (1893). Female poetic treatments of the subject include Elizabeth Barrett Browning's translation of "Psyche and Proserpine" from her *Poetical Works* (1897), Jean Ingelow's "Persephone" (c. 1862) from *Poems* (1888), Dora Greenwell's "The Garden of Proserpine" in *Carmina crucis* (1869) and Sara Helen Whitman's "Proserpine to Pluto in Hades" from *Poems* (1879). For twentieth-century criticism, see Margot K. Louis, "Proserpine and Pessimism: Goddesses of Death, Life, and Language from Swinburne to Wharton," *Modern Philology* 96.3 (1999): 312-46; C. Glen Wickens, "Hardy and the Aesthetic Mythographers: The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53.1 (1983): 85-106; and more generally, see Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny* and Munich, *Andromeda's Chains*. For twenty-first century criticism, Andrew Radford, "Lost Girls in Hardy and Lawrence," *SHR: Southern Humanities Review* 38.3 (Summer 2004): 217-243; "The Making of a Goddess: Hardy, Lawrence and Persephone," *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 12.2-3 (2004): 202-232; "Gone to Earth: Hardy's *Tess*, Mary Webb and the Persephone myth," *The Thomas Hardy Yearbook* 35 (Spring 2006): 55-72; "Defending Nature's Holy Shrine: Mary Butts, Englishness and the Persephone Myth," *The Journal of Modern Literature* 29.3 (Summer 2006): 126-149; and finally *The Lost Girls: Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850-1930*, Textxet: *Studies in Comparative Literature* 53 (New York: Rodopi Editions, 2007) which due to its very recent publication I have been unable to consult for this study.

entrance or intrusion of a male seducer/suitor figure associated with the industrial, scientific world. The heroine exists as a contested site of innocence, threatened like the landscape itself.⁸³ Just as Ruskin's botany attempts to systematize the beautiful and the moral in *Proserpina*, so the Victorian reception of myth and industrial mythmaking show concern for the place of beauty and morality within the technological development of the natural world.

The Proserpina myth's reception unites two of the Victorians' greatest fears: the violation of female innocence (coupled with an assertion of female sexuality) and the rapid, unsympathetic industrialization of the countryside. This reading of the Proserpina myth as a loss of innocence and a virginal sacrifice to progress is particularly relevant given what Peter Ackroyd describes as the Victorian obsession with lost innocence and its inevitability in the face of urban development: "the obsessive interest in innocence, particularly in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, was based upon the understanding that it would be destroyed [...] Innocence has to be destroyed if the city itself is to survive and prosper."⁸⁴

In the Victorians' "botanizing" of myth, the Proserpina myth is used to register particular responses toward environmental and social change due to industrialization. This particular Victorian reception of myth emphasizes historical context or moment. The reception of the myth of Proserpina addresses the importance of the myth in aligning personal memory and nostalgia for the past with larger cultural retrospection about the changing countryside; and it does so often as much to particularize, as well as to universalize, these experiences. This Victorian reception shows the historical importance of the myth as the intersection of the personal and cultural experiences of industrialization, experiences which George Eliot and

⁸³ In this evolution of the myth, the conflation of Proserpina's coming-of-age with the industrializing or mechanizing of the landscape makes up the myth's "physical root" in natural phenomena. It not only signifies the passage of seasons but also the shift from a kind of agrarian "summer" to an industrial "winter" exemplified by the conservatory's technological control over nature in Chapter 3.

⁸⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003) 621. See also Celina Fox, *Londoners*, Museum of London Exhibition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987) 165.

Elizabeth Gaskell fictionalize. Nature as it had been known since classical times was industrializing: in *The Mill on the Floss*, a town linked to classical tragedy and the legend of St. Oggs is changed by the application of steam power and technology; in *Cousin Phillis*, a landscape linked to Virgil is changed by the laying of the railway network. Ruskin's contemporaries (in their identification with a female consciousness and the heroine in fiction) make up a Proserpinian generation, experiencing the changes due to industrialization as part of their own transition from childhood to adulthood. Returning home, in the manner of Proserpina, can never be the same because the memory of an "industrial" death has changed things irrevocably.

The Victorian botanizing of myth incorporates and uses the Proserpina myth's narrative or mythological story as an imaginative unification of moral and "scientific" observations of nature. To "botanize" myth into realism by appropriating it into discourses of nature and flowers allowed novelists George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell to negotiate approaches to nature and register their ambivalence toward industrial change. In their treatments of the myth, Victorian realists botanize the myth to place it into a realist agenda. Not only do the texts use the myth as a means of contemporary cultural commentary (as Jenkins and Kestner point out in relation to Eliot), but the Victorian reception of myth places it within the cultural discourse of nineteenth-century botany (as novelists recontextualize the myth's elements into botanical discourse), bringing the organic form of myth back into thinking about processes of nature.

Myth reception within these (conservatively optimistic) texts reveals the appropriation of a form rooted within history but not attached to a specific origin, a historically-evolving form with an organic quality framing these writers' ambivalence toward contemporary science and the industrialization of the rural world. Mythological narrative is enacted on a botanical level in which plants are both traditional and modern, both moral and scientific. Plant history and tradition coexist with botanical realism and the practicalities of working rural communities.

With parts of it written as early as 1868, *Proserpina's* publication in serial form from 1875-1886 marked a culmination of Ruskin's own studies in botany, begun in 1842, as well as those of the last hundred years, circling back to address a century of botanical study from the 1780s-1880s spanning the Linnaean and natural systems through to Darwinian science and placing his work within the tradition of conservative botanical works. My study follows the Proserpina myth's reception and use by writers to register (opposing) attitudes toward nature within the historical context of the development of nineteenth-century botany (and its role within popular natural history) during the industrialization of the English countryside. I trace the Proserpina myth's evolution within the botanical discourse of the following late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century texts (during the rise of Linnaean botany and its enduring popularity and significance in culture and literature): Catherine Maria Fanshawe's "Epistle on the Subjects of Botany" (c. 1785-1795), Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791), William Wordsworth's "Three Years She Grew" (1800), Shirley Hibberd's *Brambles and Bay-Leaves: Essays on the Homely and the Beautiful* (1855), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* (1865), and John Ruskin's *Proserpina* (1875-1886). The main focus of my study concerns how the Proserpina myth is woven into discourses of nature and flowers within nineteenth-century botanical culture and appropriated as a narrative of change within the Victorian realism of George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell.

Each of the texts in my study references the myth within a botanical discourse of morality and science. The moral impulse toward nature is emotional and symbolic, attempting to read truths in natural phenomena; it concerns the close, sympathetic observation and recording of moral lessons. The scientific impulse toward nature is factual, attempting to order and classify natural phenomena; it concerns the practical observation of the physical world and recording of physical truths or laws.

My nominated writers share concerns about the changing relationship between humans and the natural world, concerns related specifically to the

developing science of botany and different ways of reading or interpreting nature as moral or sexual – twin approaches which were increasingly opposed during the industrialization of the English countryside. Myth reception within these texts reveals a shared expression or vehicle for the perception of social change. Within these “associated historical situations and needs,” the Proserpina myth takes the “form” of a narrative which places a (predominantly early nineteenth-century) rural childhood in opposition to (mid to late nineteenth-century) modern science and technology.

My methodological approach for texts in this study, based upon three readings of the Proserpina myth’s reception within nineteenth-century botanical discourse, concerns the following points of analysis. First, I will examine the state of the landscape as “Cerean”: maternal and “domestic,” nurturing and protective. Secondly, I will explore the representation of the Proserpina figure’s innocence and the identification of girl and wildflower epitomizing girlhood innocence and beauty. Third, I will look at the representation of the Proserpina figure’s maturation or “coming-of-age” (in the “flower-picking” scene) and her encounter with a “Plutonic” sexual nature (of Linnaean botany and industrial science). The entrance or intrusion of a “Plutonic” sexual nature and the threat of change into the maternal landscape is linked to what is unstable, aggressive in nature and associated with developing science and technology. In fiction, the representation of the figure of Pluto takes the form of a male suitor/husband figure and an agent of change who enters or intrudes upon the maternal landscape; he is the representative of the new order (or system of industrialism) in opposition to a traditional rural way of life.

I will study the Proserpina figure’s response as passive, active, or ambivalent. If she is passive, or under patriarchal control, she is reluctant and hesitant, longing for a return to mother and childhood. If her response is active, she is sexually mature and ready for an adult relationship with her Pluto (who recognises her maturity and wants her as a wife), resulting in a potential rivalry with Ceres (who also recognise her maturity and potential

power as a goddess in her own right). If her response is ambivalent, she reveals a conflicting desire to put childhood behind her while also wishing to remain a child.

Finally, I will examine the changes (or the outcome) resulting from the Proserpina figure's encounter with her Pluto. Based upon Proserpina's flower-picking, changes are seen as positive, negative or ambiguous. If she is unwilling, changes are forced and unsympathetic, but if she shows readiness to mature, changes are more acceptable.

Focusing on the late eighteenth-century botanical poetry of Catherine Maria Fanshawe and Erasmus Darwin, chapter one establishes conflicting attitudes toward nature as moral and domestic or sexual and progressive registered through contrasting uses or receptions of the myth. Both poems are concerned with Linnaean botany and women's participation in botany as a popular science. Fanshawe forwards a cautionary moral tale limiting female involvement in Linnaean botany within the context of the "familiar format" of female botanists (also used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau). Alternatively Darwin champions Linnaeus's sexual system by offering a science lesson to promote and stimulate women's association with botany.

Chapter two focuses on William Wordsworth's ambiguous treatment of nature in which the moral and sexual coexist at a time before emphasis is given to the maternal and moral subordination of the sexual in his poetry. Myth reception within Wordsworth's Romantic nature philosophy also draws upon Linnaean botany, as mediated by the works of Erasmus Darwin and William Withering. Shirley Hibberd's popularization of Victorian Wordsworthianism in his familiar essays of the 1850s is typical of Victorian flower writing's blend of botanical moralizing with the sentimental and horticultural. Hibberd's myth reception celebrates flowers as purely moral and places Wordsworth's moral, maternal nature within the context of mid-Victorian flower culture.

As one of the writers "working on" and providing a historical treatment of myth, Wordsworth provides a more immediate historical context

for the Victorian reception of the Proserpina myth, particularly for George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, both of whom draw upon a Wordsworthian moral nature sanctioned by childhood memories and personal associations. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the ambiguous treatment of nature in the fiction of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* (1865). The Proserpina figure reveals conflicting desires of childhood and adulthood, caught between a Wordsworthian maternal landscape and an aggressive scientific-industrial nature.

My analysis is based upon a reading of natural and social change through the myth's interpretation of female sexuality and structured around scenes of woman and flower. Changes in the landscape are linked to changes in the girl (her sexual maturation or desirability and attraction). The myth concerns the identification of girlhood innocence and wildflowers within a maternal, fertile nature threatened by masculine intrusion. The moment of the flower picking signals and parallels the moment of transition from childhood-adolescence to sexual maturity. The Proserpina myth's reception into a botanical context means that stages in the myth correspond to plants: the "green world" of Ceres, the wildflowers of Korè/Proserpina, the sexualized nature of Pluto and the resulting landscape.

These issues are inter-related and part of a larger pattern or cultural mode of perception (and representation), i.e., a Victorian cultural narrative in which certain responses to change are traceable in specific texts and in this study through different genres. Because Proserpina's (coming-of-age) story determines the myth's outcome, her transition from girlhood to adulthood links the issues of familial, social and natural change, changes which depend upon the outcome of her story. These levels of change are important in Victorian writers' conceptions and representations of change (what I call the "Proserpina narrative") in texts concerned with the nature of social-industrial change and its impact on a rural way of life. The focus of these texts on the identification of girl and flower provides the basis for an analysis of this social

change in which the girl is caught between a maternal-agrarian world and a male-dominated industrial world.

Myth reception in the novels is two-fold: concerning the Proserpina figure's coming-of-age and her potential union with her Plutonic suitor in a romantic plot and changes to the landscape in a nature plot resulting from the Plutonic intrusion of a masculine sexual force of change. The potential union between daughter and suitor impacts upon maternal nature by forcing a negotiation or compromise between the rural countryside and encroaching science and industry. The question of whether Proserpina is in some sense responsible for eliciting the changes, going in search of flowers, depends on the writer's myth reception. The fact that "flower picking" scenes in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Cousin Phillis* occur after the Plutonic suitor's arrival may indicate the writers' views of the inevitability of change. The main focus of my study addresses these Victorian realists' concern with social change and concerns how the Proserpina myth is woven into nineteenth-century botany and appropriated by Victorian realism.

In Chapters three and four, girl-flower readings reflect ambivalent attitudes toward nature, as these novelists attempt to balance views of nostalgia and progress in their conservative approaches to change.⁸⁵ In George Eliot's critique of industrial (scientific) progress, advances in technology clash with Mr. Tulliver's tenacious allegiance to family tradition. Eliot considers his resistance to technological advances in irrigation and the application of steam power in *The Mill on the Floss*, as well as a more general questioning of "Nature" and social progress in light of Darwinian evolution and the theory of sexual selection. The Dodson family line, including the Deanes, is represented as the more successful and adaptable. Maggie Tulliver's Proserpinian coming-of-age and her relationships with male

⁸⁵ In her study of early twentieth-century women realists, Josephine Donovan recognizes the Demeter-Persephone myth as "relevant to the historical transition that occurred in middle-class women's culture" in the late nineteenth century in the Western world. It allegorizes the transformation from "a matricentric preindustrial culture" to a "male-dominated capitalist-industrialist ethos, characterized by growing professionalism and bureaucracy"; the transition from the "world of the mothers" to the patriarchal captivity of the "world of the fathers." See Donovan 2, 4.

characters or “Plutonic suitors” of the novel dramatize her feelings of ambivalence toward change and an ultimate inability to accept or successfully adapt to these changes. George Eliot’s discourse of botanical morality in *The Mill on the Floss* draws upon Wordsworthian nature, a religious context of evangelical typology and parable and a context of botanical science and natural history. The novel’s main botanical opposition between the straight (wheat) and twisted (tare) is intertwined with the moral opposition between innocent flowers and sexual flowers which pertain to Maggie specifically. Critics have argued that Maggie is tied to the past to the point of death and becomes part of her childhood landscape in the manner of Wordsworth’s Lucy.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s critique of industrial change in *Cousin Phillis* focuses on the building of the railroads. In a clash of ancients and moderns, the new railway system intrudes upon the traditional agrarian way of life at Hope Farm. Phillis’s Proserpinian coming-of-age and her relationships with male characters or Plutonic suitors dramatize an ambivalence toward change resulting in a measured acceptance of these changes and a (more) positive balancing of old and new. Although Phillis is compared to Wordsworth’s Lucy and characterized as having a close affinity with nature by the novel’s male narrator, she recovers from illness and near death and expresses a hopeful outlook for the future. Elizabeth Gaskell’s botanical discourse in *Cousin Phillis* draws upon Wordsworthian nature, the Bible and the classics, with these traditional sources of moral authority (Christian responsibility, classical pastoral) coming into conflict with modern industrial science and engineering. A botanical opposition exists within language itself, in the naming of plants; and Gaskell’s discourse of botanical morality turns upon this attempt to balance readings of the landscape. In this novel of education, the educating of different perspectives or perceptions (seeing and reading), the conflict between old and new, ancient and modern is told through books as well as attempts to read and manage the landscape.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ See Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

For John Ruskin, these traditional associations and beliefs make up the basis of botanical classification. In Chapter five, I show how Ruskin circles back to turn-of-the-century botanical works in order to rewrite nineteenth-century botany in *Proserpina* (1875-1886). Though he expresses selective praise for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Lindley and Louis Figuier, Ruskin remains critical of nineteenth-century botanists, singling out Charles Darwin for attack. In his prose myth reception, nature is predominantly moral, with any sexual threat contained. There is no conflicting desire for the Proserpina figure herself, no real consideration of her as wife, as she either stays a child or merges with her mother as the ruling Spirit in nature. In Ruskin's botanical discourse, moral nature is based upon his belief in a ruling Spirit in nature (Ceres/Proserpina) which judges and rewards both plants and humans. Myth is identified with spiritual truth and provides the basis for his botany in which myth brings the physical aspects of natural forms into focus in order to provide a spiritual lesson.

Ruskin in particular combines interests in aesthetic realism, myth and typology. In his more extreme resistance to industrial change, there is a direct exclusion of the sexual (which is written out of his botanical classification in *Proserpina*) and an emphasis upon girlhood (innocence, goodness, morality and beauty). If Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791) revels in Linnaeus's "sexual system" and heralds scientific investigation and industrial progress with an enthusiasm and optimism, then John Ruskin's *Proserpina* (1875-1886) develops a botanical classification based on a moral, nonsexual view of flowers, resists change, and reveals a deep cynicism about the scientific exploitation and industrialization of the natural world.

Chapter 1
 “The little botanizing beauty”:
 Catherine Maria Fanshawe and Erasmus Darwin

Catherine Maria Fanshawe: Myth as Morality

Sad is the instance that’s afforded,
 By the first Female Botanist recorded.⁸⁷

In her poem, “Epistle on the Subjects of Botany, Containing A Tale and Much Good Advice. By A Lover of Botanists” (c. 1785-1795), Fanshawe addresses the issue of women’s participation in Linnaean botany through a historical treatment of the Proserpina myth. Her work on the myth of Proserpina as a botanical moral for female botanists provides an example of historical myth reception within a contemporary botanical discourse or context at the turn of the nineteenth century. Fanshawe seeks to balance the tension between women’s pursuit of scientific knowledge and the potential for overstepping the boundaries of social decorum, between botany as a science and botany as a polite accomplishment.

Fanshawe’s poem is addressed to a female audience and advocates a fashionable pursuit of botany in keeping with Enlightenment advocacy of female improvement while preserving female modesty and decorum. As Shteir explains, during 1760-1830, botany was “constructed as both a fashionable and an ‘improving’ pursuit in line with social and cultural values.”⁸⁸ During the later eighteenth century, botany became “part of the social construction of femininity for girls across the middle and upper ranks of society” and was “congruent with ideas about both gender and class and was linked to other polite activities in the lives of girls and women”:

They studied plants as a fashionable form of leisure and as an intellectual pursuit rewarding in itself. This included collecting plants, creating herbaria, learning some botanical Latin, reading handbooks about Linnaean systematics, taking lessons

⁸⁷ Fanshawe lines 51-52. See Appendix for the full text of the poem.

⁸⁸ Shteir 4.

in botanical illustration, using microscopes to study plant physiology, and writing introductory botany books.⁸⁹

Young women's pursuit of botany is encouraged as a "rational amusement" to be kept within certain limits. Fanshawe suggests that without proper guidance and supervision, girls can go too far in pursuit of botanical study. If they acquire too much knowledge, they risk loss of innocence and respectability. She echoes contemporary views that female knowledge should be kept within specific bounds. A "fear of female learnedness was a leitmotif in much eighteenth-century writing about women and science. Writers cautioned against women's learning or knowing too much – too much reading, too many languages, too much science."⁹⁰ Writers "applauded female knowledge that was harnessed to maternal and other family responsibilities and distinguished between appropriate kinds and degrees of female knowledge and excesses of female learnedness."⁹¹ The poem's conservatism is in keeping with didactic works on botany addressing the issue of female learnedness during the "Linnaean years" of British botany.

The poem opens with Fanshawe's approval for a female interest in botany in line with the polite culture of botanical art and fashion which is geared toward female amusement and recreation together with instruction and a rational use of time. In this context, botany is a conventional activity for girls "Who, skill'd to vary each successive hour,/ Embroider now, and now dissect a flower,/ And scientifically know/ To pull to pieces all that blow."⁹² Flowers exist as scientific as well as aesthetic or decorative objects of interest, and the poet commends female knowledge of the Linnaean system of botanical classification which makes young women "with the more precision able/ To name their genus, class, and order."⁹³

Fanshawe celebrates the age's increased opportunities for female participation in scientific study which allow women to "share the pleasure" in

⁸⁹ Shteir 36. See also Scourse 1-7.

⁹⁰ Shteir 56.

⁹¹ Shteir 57.

⁹² Fanshawe lines 5-8.

⁹³ Fanshawe lines 11-12.

"Unclosing Nature's folio treasure."⁹⁴ Botanical pursuits allow for physical and emotional well-being, including outdoor exercise, the development of good taste (in attention to local flora), the use of special equipment (such as the vasculum or collector's box and the microscope), and an enthusiasm which takes them "Under bush, and under briar,/ Thro' the bog, and in the mire [...]."⁹⁵ However, Fanshawe's appeal to "Examine well the moral tale,/ Unravel each mysterious part,/ Divest it of the Muse's veil,/ And bid it speak devoid of art" makes claim for nature as a source of moral truths, a traditional "Book of Nature" or "folio" communicating moral instruction not to be overlooked.⁹⁶ According to Fanshawe, a reading of myth "devoid of art" contains a basic moral lesson and this truth within nature is directly apprehensible to the astute reader and careful observer.⁹⁷

Fanshawe's emphasis on knowledge, its strengths and limitations, highlights the debate concerning the place of female learnedness and the role of women in science, as she writes the Proserpina myth into late eighteenth-century botanical discourse. For Fanshawe's contemporary female botanists, there is a lesson to be learned from Proserpina's story.

Daughters of Britain, persevere,
 Secure your envied places,
 To science and to Nature dear,
 As Muses and as Graces.
 But ah! let Caution be your guide,
 Be her's the devious path to trace,
 Conform to her's your sprightly pace,
 Nor quit her venerable side,
 Nor feed rude mirth and giddy laughter,
 By leaving her to hobble after.
 It grieves your Poet much to see

⁹⁴ Fanshawe lines 16, 14.

⁹⁵ Fanshawe lines 28-29.

⁹⁶ Fanshawe lines 62-65, 14.

⁹⁷ Fanshawe line 65.

What perils wait on Botany,
 What dangers lurk in berries blue,
 In berries black, or red, or yellow,
 Rough or glossy, bright or sallow,
 Berries of ev'ry shade and hue,
 To those who *taste* as well as view.⁹⁸

Women's botanical studies must be circumscribed, literally within the domestic sphere close to home and figuratively under the supervision of a maternal teacher. Fanshawe personifies "Caution" as a Ceres-like matron, a maternal guardian, protector and teacher. This Ceres's venerability and botanical, horticultural expertise and authority link her to a female herbal tradition and medicinal knowledge of plants in which shrewd, practical "wise women" applied their knowledge of plants to herbal remedies, midwifery, and medical cookery: "Long before the Enlightenment, knowledge of plants had been part of women's traditional work as healers [...] Their skills in plant lore, developed through experience and passed on in oral traditions, are examples of gynocentric science."⁹⁹

The poet's cautionary stance and mentorial voice advocating maternal instruction relate the poem to the "familiar format" of late eighteenth and early-nineteenth women's botanical writing which gave prominence to mothers, maternal figures as educators, and a familial context for teaching science at home. Shteir explains the maternal ideology of the period, including the female mentorial tradition, in which authority was given to the maternal figure, a mother or mother surrogate to teach botany to the young.¹⁰⁰ Employing letters and conversation or dialogue, the familiar format became the conventional form for most botany writing by women from the 1790s-1820s. The poem's epistolary frame and allusion to the traditional opening of children's stories, "once upon a time, 'tis said," invoke a fabular tradition of didactic literature with moral lessons for children also in keeping with the

⁹⁸ Fanshawe lines 34-50.

⁹⁹ Shteir 37.

¹⁰⁰ Shteir 81-3.

narrative forms and familial context of late eighteenth and early-nineteenth century women's botanical writing.¹⁰¹

Fanshawe casts female readers and botanists in the role of Proserpina-like "daughters." She represents Proserpina as a figure of girlhood innocence associated with wildflowers linking her to childhood. Like this "first female botanist," contemporary female botanists should show care and attention to overlooked violets and primroses rather than showy cultivated flowers:

"Benignly bending as ye pass/To raise the violet's drooping head,/Or pale-faced primrose from her lowly bed [...] With honest pride despise/ A tasteless gardener's pamper'd care,/Those gaudy monsters of the gay parterre."¹⁰²

The Proserpinian botanist is "honest" like the humble, unpretentious wildflowers. The primrose, that "first flower" of spring, symbolizes her youth and childhood, and the violet her modesty.¹⁰³

Fanshawe's reference to the gardener suggests that a female botanist's place is close to home, within a carefully circumscribed domestic sphere, where "The dear pursuit may still be new,/ And still be innocent."¹⁰⁴ The poet cautions her female readers about the dangers of taking botanizing too far and going to extremes in the pursuit of knowledge, overstepping what the author sees as the proper boundaries of female social decorum:

With harmless buds, and wholesome roots,
While Nature decks your bowers;
Why should ye taste forbidden fruits
Or touch pernicious flowers?
[.....]
Nor the extreme of bliss attain,
But where their boundaries meet;
With many a safe but glorious wound

¹⁰¹ Fanshawe line 66.

¹⁰² Fanshawe lines 19-21, 23-25.

¹⁰³ Beverley Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* (London: U of Virginia P, 1995) 188-9, 196-7. See also Geoffrey Grigson, *The Englishman's Flora* (Oxford: Helicon, 1996) 266; and Richard Mabey, *Flora Britannica* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996) 164.

¹⁰⁴ Fanshawe lines 162-3.

Your flowery toils may yet be crown'd¹⁰⁵

Limiting female education and learnedness within traditional female roles "as Muses and as Graces," Fanshawe suggests that they hold inspirational, ornamental roles rather than actively contribute to knowledge, roles identified by Shteir as supplemental and supportive but not initiatory.

Fanshawe's particular (re)telling of the myth constructs a tale of "filial duty" in which Proserpina risks exposure to danger in order to help her sick mother. According to Fanshawe, Proserpina's excursion to the fields has the important, serious motive of her mother's welfare rather than girlish pleasure or curiosity or frivolity with friends: "Dame Ceres, once upon a time, 'tis said,/Was indispos'd and kept her bed [...] So, rather than bestow a fee/On any neighbouring M.D./She sent her daughter out to find/Cheap med'cines of the rural kind."¹⁰⁶ Proserpina goes in search of medicinal plants rather than beautiful flowers: "Less fraught with skill than filial duty,/The little botanizing beauty/Went simpling to the fields of Enna,/In quest of rhubarb, bark, or sienna."¹⁰⁷ Proserpina's errand is the kind expected of the "proper" woman in keeping with conventional gender ideology.¹⁰⁸ Fanshawe also emphasizes Ceres's maternal selflessness going in search of her lost daughter despite her illness.¹⁰⁹ Both mother and daughter exhibit the selfless motives and traits of the "proper" woman of the period.

Like a contemporary female botanist who goes looking for medicinal plants but lacks the proper knowledge and guidance needed to distinguish the beneficial ones from the harmful ones, Proserpina is in danger of picking the wrong simples or of being swayed by the blossoms and berries of

¹⁰⁵ Fanshawe lines 156-9, 166-9.

¹⁰⁶ Fanshawe lines 66-67, 70-73.

¹⁰⁷ Fanshawe lines 74-77.

¹⁰⁸ See Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (London: The U of Chicago P, 1984) and *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: U of Chicago P, 1988); Davidoff and Hall; Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860* (London: Macmillan, 1985); and F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980).

¹⁰⁹ Fanshawe lines 82-87.

poisonous plants. Young, impressionable and without the appropriate knowledge, she may wander alone where poisonous plants grow.

Ill-fated Nymph, 'twas thine, perchance, to stray
Where poisonous weeds and deadly berries grow,
These closed thine eyelids on the cheerful day,
And sent thee struggling to the shades below"¹¹⁰

Not sufficiently knowledgeable to distinguish the harmful plants from the helpful ones, a girl should know her place at home and leave such tasks to those better qualified, to older maternal figures of authority and male botanists.

The difficulty of being confronted with unfamiliar plants is enacted by a shift in language from common plant names earlier in the poem (violet, primrose, rhubarb, senna) to Latin nomenclature used in the Linnaean system:

The baleful *Luridæ*, with wizard powers,
Haply entic'd thee to their 'insane root;
Allur'd thee to explore their specious flowers,
Or rashly taste their fatal, fatal fruit!
Datura there her purple blossoms shed,
Or sad *Solanum* hung his murky head;
Or fell *Atropa*, who presumes to claim
Of lovely woman the attractive name;
Or *Daphne* there her sickly visage shows,
Whose pale corolla murd'rous fruits enclose.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Fanshawe lines 128-131.

¹¹¹ Fanshawe lines 132-141. Notes refer the reader to Rousseau and Withering. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letters on the Elements of Botany, Addressed to A Lady*, translated into English, with notes and Twenty-Four Additional Letters, Fully Explaining the System of Linnaeus by Thomas Martyn, 5th ed (London: B and J. White, 1796); William Withering, *A Botanical Arrangement of All the Vegetables Naturally Growing in Great Britain*, 2 vols., 1st edn. (London: 1776). A note refers the reader to Rousseau's Letter 16, Class Pentandria, order Monogynia (plants with five stamens and one pistil). There is a misreferencing of volume numbers for Withering; the page numbers given refer to the first volume of the first edition of Withering's botany, rather than the second volume as cited. It is this citing of Withering's first edition in 1776 rather than his authoritative third edition published in 1796 as well as the reference to the Rousseau-Martyn *Letters* first published in English in 1785 which specifically

This sudden maze of scientific names confuses the reader inexperienced with botanical terminology just as it threatens the female botanist unfamiliar with certain plants.

The order *Luridæ*, as explained by Martyn in his translation of Rousseau's *Letters on the Elements of Botany*, is a group of poisonous plants known for their "lurid" appearance:

I am almost afraid to present you with a set of plants, which from their lurid, dusky, dismal, gloomy appearance, are kept together under the title of *Luridæ* [...] Indeed I would not wish her [our young cousin] to be too busy with some of these *insane roots that take the reason prisoner*, and which I can never collect and examine myself, without their affecting my head [...] some of these *Lurid* plants are highly poisonous; most of them are so in some degree [...].¹¹²

This order includes the family *Solanaceae* which contains the genus *Solanum*, the poisonous woody shrubs called nightshades with their narcotic, hallucinatory properties (caused by alkaloid toxins): *Datura stramonium*, the thorn apple (with purple or white flowers and conker-like seed cases); *Solanum nigrum*, the black nightshade (with white flowers and black berries); *Solanum dulcamara*, the bitter or woody nightshade (with purple flowers and red berries); and *Atropa belladonna* (hence "presumes to claim/Of lovely woman the attractive name), the deadly nightshade (with brownish purplish flowers and black berries). *Daphne mezereum*, the spruce olive, a woodland shrub of the family *Thymelaeaceae*, has fragrant purplish or rose-coloured flowers and scarlet berries. A flower of coquetry, the *Daphne* hints that these plants disguise their poisonousness.¹¹³ With their beautiful flowers and shiny berries, appealing fragrance or deceptive names (such as the *belladonna*), these plants are not what they seem.

suggest the date of composition between c. 1785-1795. For modern botanical accounts see Grigson, *The Englishman's Flora*; Richard Mabey, *Flora Britannica*; and Clive Stace, *New Flora of the British Isles* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: CUP, 1997).

¹¹² Rousseau-Martyn 190-191.

¹¹³ See Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 176-7.

Proserpina is sent out to look for medicinal bark and plants including rhubarb and senna. The common bladder-senna, *Colutea arborescens*, is a yellow-flowered woody shrub.¹¹⁴ Mabey distinguishes this shrub, popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a cheap substitute for “true senna,” *Cassia acutifolia*, whose leaves and fruit pods were used as a purgative.¹¹⁵ For the young, inexperienced girl, easily distracted by beautiful flowers and bright berries, there may be difficulty in distinguishing between shrubs. She may pick the wrong plants. The deadly nightshade’s local name of “Devil’s Rhubarb” strikingly conveys the potential for confusion and danger resulting from such a mistake.¹¹⁶

Fanshawe emphasizes Proserpina’s innocence during the flower-picking scene. Proserpina is seduced by poisonous plants while searching for medicinal ones. She is not actively seeking flowers. Fanshawe does not associate her with a sexualized flower during the Plutonic encounter (in contrast to representations of nature as ambiguous in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of my study which reflect Proserpina’s sexual maturity and readiness for marriage).

In Fanshawe’s representation of the threat of a masculine Plutonic intrusion into the maternal Cerean world, she emphasizes Proserpina’s straying too far, putting herself in harm’s way. The threat of change comes in the form of a seduction by poisonous (Plutonian) plants and an enticement toward the masculine realm of learning (represented by botanical science) involving an assertion of female learning and sexuality but also risking a loss of innocence and modesty.¹¹⁷ Her attraction to these harmful plants and seduction by their “charms” causes her death.

¹¹⁴ Rousseau-Martin 360.

¹¹⁵ Mabey 219.

¹¹⁶ Grigson 290. Both Martyn and Withering mention the deaths of children from *Atropa*: Martyn mentions its “tempting, cherry-like berries” and Withering laments that “children, allured by the beautiful berries, have too often experienced their fatal effects.” Rousseau-Martin 300; Withering, *A Botanical Arrangement of All the Vegetables Naturally Growing in Great Britain*, vol. 1, 1st edn. (London: 1776) 126 and Withering, *An Arrangement of British Plants; According to the latest Improvements of the Linnaean System*, vol. 1, 3rd edn. (London: 1796) 253.

¹¹⁷ Fanshawe line 163.

Solanum, described by Martyn as “lurid, dusky, dismal, gloomy,” and “forbidding,” is personified as male by Fanshawe (“sad *Solanum* hung his murky head”) and is synonymous with her description of “gloomy Dis” and suggestive of the “grisly” Pluto “entering the Stygian shade.”¹¹⁸ Martyn also writes that the deadly nightshade “skulks in gloomy lanes.”¹¹⁹ If Pluto were a plant, surely he would be one of these “lurids.” The connection is further emphasized by use of the word “shade”: the *Solanum* or nightshade will cause Proserpina’s death by sending her to the “shades” below and forcing her to remain in the “Stygian shade.”

In addition to the harmful effects of such plants, Withering also explains their potential healing benefits and properties when handled by doctors with the proper training, qualification, and expertise, the male botanists and “Cerean” maternal figures of authority that young female botanists should entrust themselves to. An ointment prepared from the leaves of *Datura* “gives ease in external inflammations.”¹²⁰ A topical application of fresh *Atropa* leaves is used for tumours of the breast, and Withering records that “a tea-cup full of an infusion of the dried leaves” cured a woman of breast cancer.¹²¹ Concerning the twigs and bark of the *Solanum dulcamara*: “Linnaeus says an infusion of the young twigs is an admirable medicine in acute rheumatisms, inflammations, fevers, and suppression of the lochia. Dr. Hill says he has found it very efficacious in the asthma.”¹²² An ointment prepared from the bark or berries of the *Daphne* has been “successfully applied to ill-conditioned ulcers,” and Withering mentions Dr. Russel’s decoction made from boiling part of the root.¹²³ If Proserpina is likened to the botanizing girl who went too far and, attracted by the blossoms of poisonous plants, ate their “deadly fruit” and died, then Jupiter is the male

¹¹⁸ Fanshawe lines 137, 57, 100, 101.

¹¹⁹ Martyn 190, 197.

¹²⁰ Withering, 1st edn., vol. 1, 118. In the 3rd edn. this is made more specific with the mention of particular doctors, in this case, Dr. Fowler.

¹²¹ Withering, 1st edn., vol. 1, 126. In the 3rd edn., Dr. Graham.

¹²² Withering, 1st edn., vol. 1, 124. In the 3rd edn., Dr. Hallenberg.

¹²³ Withering, 1st edn., vol. 1, 232.

doctor, the “renown’d physician,” who (like Withering) offers his “patient” hope for recovery.¹²⁴

Modern botanists confirm these plants’ medicinal qualities. Grigson explains that the leaves and flowering tops of the thorn apple (*Datura*) “give the stramonium of the British Pharmacopeia.”¹²⁵ The stalks of the bitter or woody nightshade (*S. dulcamara*) are used against rheumatism, skin diseases and as a purgative, and nineteenth-century specialists turn the deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) into a drug for the eye.¹²⁶ *Daphne mezereum*, the woody spurge olive shrub, is also known as the “Paradise plant” from its being planted outside cottages for its scent; used by cottage people as a cure for cancer and as a folk-medicine, “Mezereon Bark once had its place in the British Pharmacopoeia.”¹²⁷ These poisonous, potentially fatal plants (bark, leaves, even berries) may be medicinal when used by the properly-trained, qualified male doctor or scientist.

In Fanshawe’s poem, Ceres’s long and fruitless search for her daughter comes to an end after a stranger finally tells her of Proserpina’s abduction to the underworld “in grisly Pluto’s ebon car” where her eating of at least six pomegranate seeds has sealed her fate.¹²⁸ Just as Proserpina’s eating of the pomegranate seeds compromises her sexually and keeps her bound to Pluto and the underworld for part of every year, so the contemporary female botanist’s taking things too far compromises her socially by suggesting her symbolic defloration and loss of innocence, female virtue and modesty. Her loss of discretion reveals a sensual self-indulgence at odds with botanical study as a rational amusement and contrary to conventional gender ideologies and the constructions of femininity as selfless or putting others first.

Fanshawe’s “allegory” about female botanizing urges an appropriate degree of female learnedness within the domestic sphere. To go beyond that

¹²⁴ Fanshawe lines 107, 113.

¹²⁵ Grigson 294.

¹²⁶ Grigson 291.

¹²⁷ Mabey 194.

¹²⁸ Fanshawe line 100.

in pursuit of excess knowledge is to risk loss of innocence, exposure to danger, and to jeopardize female virtue, the equivalent of Proserpina's abduction, rape and sentencing to the underworld. Literally, Fanshawe warns, if the female botanist wanders far from home, alone, she could find and eat poisonous berries; figuratively, if she pursues knowledge beyond socially-acceptable boundaries, she could compromise her female modesty, virtue, innocence and be labelled masculine (or worse, die a social death as a "fallen woman").

Linnaean Botany: Conservative Views

The poem's references to the Rousseau-Martyn *Letters* and Withering's *Botanical Arrangement* indicate Fanshawe's conservative views on botany. Rousseau writes in the epistolary "familiar" format, instructing a mother how to teach botany to her daughter, by "amusing" her with the study of nature as an improving pursuit.¹²⁹ Letter I explains the basic Linnaean terms for the parts of a plant. The author urges the mother to observe what Martyn notes as a "fundamental lesson of education" that the daughter be taught in stages appropriate to female learning: "You will not begin by telling your daughter all this at once; and you will be even more cautious, when [...] you shall be initiated in the mysteries of vegetation; but you will unveil to her by degrees no more than is suitable to her age and sex [...]."¹³⁰ Too much knowledge is an affront to female modesty, especially given the sexual explicitness of Linnaean botany.

If too much female learnedness in general is considered detrimental then the sexual content of Linnaean botany is particularly objectionable for women. Botany between the 1760s-1830s, based mainly on the Linnaean system of classification which identified plants according to their reproductive parts, gave taxonomic centrality to the flower's role in plant reproduction.¹³¹ Plants were categorized into classes based upon their number of stamens, or male reproductive parts, and then into orders based

¹²⁹ Rousseau-Martyn 19.

¹³⁰ Rousseau-Martyn 26.

¹³¹ Shteir 11-32.

upon their number of pistils, or female reproductive parts, with priority given to maleness over femaleness in classification. Botany's focus on flowers, a subject traditionally within the sphere of women's activity, became problematic when flower study emerged as a science in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which was traditionally considered out of women's depths, and particularly as a science based on the study of sexual reproduction, which was considered inappropriate for the genteel Victorian woman. As Shteir explains: "Soon after Linnaean ideas were disseminated to general audiences in England, the conjunction of women readers and botany books created difficulties that were textual/sexual."¹³²

The Linnaean Controversy

Within the English reception and adaptation of Linnaeus, the controversy over translating Linnaeus into English centred around William Withering and Erasmus Darwin, both members of the Lunar Society.¹³³ Withering's *Botanical Arrangement*, like the Rousseau-Martyn *Letters*, specifically addresses a female readership, and Withering expresses concern over the appropriateness of Linnaean terms for the reproductive parts of plants. Withering's first edition on botany highlights the controversy over how to translate Linnaean terms and technical language into English and how to present plant sexuality to female readers; this bowdlerized version gives different names for reproductive parts, such as "chives" for stamens and "pointals" for pistils, masking their sexual explicitness.¹³⁴ Coming in response to Withering, Darwin pushes for a more literal translation of Linnaeus. In the 1780s, while Withering was working on the second edition of his *Arrangement*, Darwin was planning his own translations and "setting out to build a new botanic language, creating vernacular compounds in English as Linnaeus had done in Latin."¹³⁵ The Botanical Society of Lichfield, founded by Darwin, published translations of two reference books by

¹³² Shteir 21.

¹³³ See Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends who made the Future, 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

¹³⁴ See Withering, 1st edn., vol. 1, xviii and Shteir 21-5.

¹³⁵ Uglow, *The Lunar Men* 380.

Linnaeus, *Species Plantarum* (1753) and *Genera Plantarum* (1737), issued as *A System of Vegetables* (1783) and *The Families of Plants* (1787).¹³⁶

Erasmus Darwin and The Botanic Garden: Myth as Science

Darwin's works established the technical language of botany as a sexualized and Latinized nomenclature. Concurrent with the Lichfield translations, Darwin was also at work on *The Loves of the Plants*, a poetic "reaffirmation" of Linnaean plant sexuality specifically directed to women readers.¹³⁷ While Fanshawe advocates a certain distance between female botanists and their subject, Darwin enjoys the associations between women and flowers in Linnaean botany to the fullest and revels in an extended account of human sexual behaviour. Part II of Darwin's science poem *The Botanic Garden* (1791), *The Loves of the Plants* is a versification of the Linnaean sexual system in which flowers' stamens and pistils are represented as male and female.¹³⁸

As Darwin states in the poem's Advertisement, *The Botanic Garden's* purpose is to cultivate an interest in botany through knowledge of Linnaeus. Darwin's address to the reader in the Proem invokes the polite botany of the French aristocracy as a hobby for the boudoir among women of leisure: "if thou art perfectly at leisure for such trivial amusement, walk in, and view the wonders of my INCHANTED GARDEN [...] Which thou may'st contemplate as diverse little pictures suspended over the chimney of a Lady's dressing-room, connected only by a slight festoon of ribbons."¹³⁹ Darwin provides a prose account of the sexual system prefacing the poem. A poem in four

¹³⁶ Darwin served as the Botanical Society's primary member; a society of only three, it also included two Lichfield men, Brooke Boothby and William Jackson, a cathedral proctor. See Uglow, *The Lunar Men* 379 and Desmond King-Hele, *Doctor of Revolution: The Life and Genius of Erasmus Darwin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977).

¹³⁷ Janet Browne, "Botany for Gentlemen: Erasmus Darwin and *The Loves of the Plants*," *ISIS* 80.4 (1989): 601-2.

¹³⁸ Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden* (1791) (London: Johnson, 1791; facsimile reprint, Menston, Yorkshire: The Scholar P, 1973). The work was originally published anonymously and in two separate parts, *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) and *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791). In order of publication the poems are *The Botanic Garden, Part II; Containing The Loves of the Plants, A Poem; With Philosophical Notes* (Lichfield, 1789) and *The Botanic Garden; A Poem, in Two Parts; Part I, Containing The Economy of Vegetation* (London, 1791).

¹³⁹ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* v-vi.

cantos, it follows a “Botanic Muse” who gives a tour of plant species, including examples of all the Linnaean classes and orders, and even pauses midway to take tea.¹⁴⁰ The hugely successful *Loves of the Plants* did much to popularize botany in the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth century and to further the association between flowers and upper and middle-class women, who were the target audience for much flower literature of the period.

The fact that botany came to focus essentially on plant sexuality contributed to its polemical role in the debate concerning women and flower study, arenas of sex and knowledge that elicited politically charged reactions concerning women’s education from writers (during the 1790s) including Mary Wollstonecraft and Richard Polwhele.¹⁴¹ Conservative writers challenged the “radical” botany growing up around Darwin. Cultural tensions about women, gender, sexuality, and politics clustered around the study of plants.¹⁴² Women’s botanical activities “were configured by gendered beliefs about women as students and readers, teachers and writers.”¹⁴³ Although Darwin held progressive views about female education and gave a voice to female sexuality in his versification of Linnaean botany, his poem reflected eighteenth-century conventions about gender relations (and the sexual politics of eighteenth-century England) and the representation

¹⁴⁰ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* 2. 469-80

¹⁴¹ See Alan Bewell, “Jacobin Plants: Botany as Social Theory in the 1790s,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 20.3 (1989): 132-9; and Luisa Calè, “‘A Female Band despising Nature’s Law’: Botany, Gender and Revolution in the 1790s,” *Romanticism on the Net* 17 (February 2000). Vivien Jones, “Advice and Enlightenment: Mary Wollstonecraft and Sex Education,” *Work in Progress*. See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol H. Poston, 2nd edn. (1792; London: Norton, 1988/1975) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, eds. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (1790, 1792; Hadleigh, Essex: Broadview Literary Texts, 1997); and Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex’d Females: A Poem Addressed to the Author of The Pursuits of Literature* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798).

¹⁴² Schiebinger examines the sexual politics at work in eighteenth-century science. She has shown how Linnaeus’s sexualization of plants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which formed the basis of his botanical taxonomy came to recapitulate the sexual hierarchy of Western Europe. See Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon P, 1993); “Gender and Natural History,” *Cultures of Natural History*, eds. N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 163-177; and “The Private Life of Plants: Sexual Politics in Carl Linnaeus and Erasmus Darwin,” *Science and Sensibility: Gender and Scientific Inquiry, 1780-1945* ed. Marina Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). For sexual politics in Victorian science, see Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (London: Harvard UP, 1989).

¹⁴³ Shteir 4.

of women.¹⁴⁴ As Browne has shown, Darwin's metaphor of personification served several functions in his poetry, among them his defence of Linnaeus, his commitment to evolutionary transformism, his views on progress and society, especially the role of women.¹⁴⁵ She claims that despite Darwin's progressive views, his "botany for gentlemen" perpetuated female stereotypes:

Deliberately directed to 'lady readers,' *The Loves of the Plants* elaborated a series of views designed to reinforce women's roles as sexual partner, friend, wife, and mother, promoting the view that these stereotypes were in some sense 'natural,' built into the physiology or structure of women. Intentionally or not, the poem conveys a masculine view of what was considered appropriate feminine behavior.¹⁴⁶

With women "plainly seen as 'natural' beings, their function being primarily reproductive, their behavior seen through a wide range of stereotypes that themselves were presented as 'natural' roles," Darwin's "classification of women" emerges from his classification of plants.¹⁴⁷

The Loves of the Plants

In *The Loves of the Plants*, mythological allusions provide poetic motifs for personifications illustrating plants according to the Linnaean sexual system. Darwin's motifs often draw upon classical allusions familiar to eighteenth-century readers including his female audience.¹⁴⁸ Darwin's flower personifications, based on classical learning, reverse the usual human-to-plant metamorphosis of classical myth. Whereas Ovid "did by art poetic transmute Men, Women, and even Gods and Goddesses, into Trees and Flowers," Darwin "undertake[s] by similar art to restore some of them to their original animality, after having remained prisoners so long in their respective

¹⁴⁴ See Shteir 26-27. In 1797, Darwin published *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (which included botany as a subject for girls).

¹⁴⁵ Janet Browne, "Botany for Gentlemen: Erasmus Darwin and *The Loves of the Plants*," *ISIS* 80.4 (1989): 593-621.

¹⁴⁶ Browne 619.

¹⁴⁷ Browne 621, 620.

¹⁴⁸ Browne 607.

vegetable mansions.”¹⁴⁹ As Browne has noted, Darwin’s mythological allusions draw upon those in Linnaeus’s own writings:

To a large extent, Linnaeus’s nomenclature [...] reflected the ancient myths that had emerged around each species. Erasmus Darwin, naturally enough, used the Linnaean names freely in his verses. More often than not, the classical allusions enshrined in Linnaeus’s names were the motif on which Darwin’s personifications were embroidered.¹⁵⁰

As she points out, “Even in manuscript notes Linnaeus framed his identifications in terms of classical allusions.”¹⁵¹ Classical myth, therefore, is not just part of Darwin’s Neoclassical poetry but literally embodied in Linnaean botany.¹⁵²

Proserpinaca palustris provides an interesting example of the relationship between myth and botany and particularly Linnaeus’s desire to retain mythic names in botany. In his *Species Plantarum* (1753), Linnaeus uses the name to classify an aquatic plant of North America (in Class Triandria, Order Trigynia), drawing upon Pliny’s name for the plant. For the Roman natural historian, the resemblance between goddess and plant resulted in the name, *Proserpinaca*, meaning “pertaining to Proserpina.” In Pliny’s *Natural History*, the *Proserpinaca* is identified with the polygonus plant.¹⁵³ Fée identifies the third variety of this plant with the *Hippuris vulgaris*, or Mare’s-tail, of Linnaeus.¹⁵⁴ In *Species Plantarum*, Linnaeus distinguishes *Proserpinaca palustris* which has its habitat in the Virginia marshes of North America from

¹⁴⁹ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* vi.

¹⁵⁰ Browne 607.

¹⁵¹ Browne 45n.

¹⁵² See John L. Heller, “Classical Poetry in the *Systema Naturae* of Linnaeus,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 102 (1971): 183-216; and Stuart Harris, “The Poet as Pathologist: Myth and Medicine in Erasmus Darwin’s Epic Poetry,” *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, eds. C. U. M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 321-335.

¹⁵³ See Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, vol. 5., trans. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. and H. T. Riley, Esq., B.A. (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1856) 264.

¹⁵⁴ See Pliny 259n56. The French botanist Antoine Laurent Apollinaire Fée re-edited Linnaeus’s *Systema naturae* in 1830 and produced a commentary on Pliny’s botany in 1833.

the mare's-tail, which has a habitat in Europe.¹⁵⁵ Linnaeus puts Pliny's ancient Roman name for the plant into the eighteenth and nineteenth-century context of his sexual system of botanical classification, as does Darwin in his translation of Linnaeus's *Species Plantarum*, *A System of Vegetables* (1783).¹⁵⁶

Modern botanical guides identify *Proserpinaca* as the common mermaid-weed, an aquatic plant of marshes, swamps and shores.¹⁵⁷ A guide to Alabama plants explains that the name was transferred to the present genus because of its ability to adapt to different habitat conditions. These "flowering waterweed[s]" or water plants with their dimorphic states (above and below water) resemble the goddess Proserpina's duality.¹⁵⁸ The "emergent aquatic plant *Proserpinaca* is like Proserpine, a being of two worlds, in that the lower part of the plant is typically submersed and the upper part emersed in the air, and the two parts are morphologically different."¹⁵⁹

In *The Loves of the Plants*, Darwin's poetic motif for the poppy is also based on the resemblance between goddess and flower. Darwin draws upon the myth of Proserpina for his depiction of the poppy as a mythic flower of death and eternal sleep: "Sopha'd on silk, amid her charm-built towers,/Her meads of asphodel, and amaranth bowers,/Where Sleep and Silence guard the soft abodes, In sullen apathy PAPAVER nods."¹⁶⁰ Darwin explains that plants of the poppy class are mostly poisonous and in "small quantities" its opium "exhilarates the mind, raises the passions, and invigorates the body; in large ones it is succeeded by intoxication, languor, stupor and death."¹⁶¹ He describes the alternating opium-induced states of the flower's "many males"

¹⁵⁵ See Carl Linnaeus, *Species Plantarum*, A Facsimile of the first edition 1753, vol.1 (London: Ray Society, 1957) 4, 88.

¹⁵⁶ Carl Linnaeus, *A System of Vegetables*, trans., Botanical Society of Lichfield (1783) 109.

¹⁵⁷ See for example, the Robert W. Freckmann Herbarium at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.

¹⁵⁸ See Mabey 13 and W. Lippert and D. Podlech, *Wildflowers of Britain and Europe*, translated and adapted by Martin Walters, Collins Nature Guide (London: Harper Collins, 1994) 226.

¹⁵⁹ W.H. III and E.J. Farnsworth, *Floerkea proserpinacoides* Willd. (False mermaid-weed), Conservation and Research Plan for New England (Framingham, Massachusetts: New England Wild Flower Society, 2004) 5.

¹⁶⁰ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* 2. 265-8. Darwin draws upon the mythic tradition of Proserpina's underworld garden of ever-blooming flowers found in Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*, a tradition upon which Swinburne also draws in his poetic reception of the myth.

¹⁶¹ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* 2. 268n.

and “many females” which simulate the drug’s effect and so are subject to constant change: “Froze by enchantment on the velvet ground/Fair youths and beauteous ladies glitter round;/On crystal pedestals they seem to sigh,/Bend the stiff knee, and lift the unmoving eye.”¹⁶² Then suddenly, “Fill’d with new life descending statues talk” until once again “fresh horrors seize/Their stiffening limbs, their vital currents freeze” like “the imprison’d dead” of the underworld.¹⁶³ In Darwin’s poem, the poppy’s two opium-induced states resemble Proserpina’s duality. This dual state with which Proserpina, “Sorceress” or Queen of the Underworld, toys with her subjects here, is the same state to which she herself is bound to: eternal rotation and alternation between states of “life” and “death” as she moves between two worlds.

His personification of the poppy provides a metaphor for the work of the artist Emma Crewe, designer of the volume’s frontispiece. Just as Proserpina, Queen of the Underworld, “circles thrice in air her ebon wand” to control subjects, so “with her waving pencil Crewe commands/The realms of Taste, and Fancy’s fairy Lands.”¹⁶⁴ So too Darwin the poet “releases” gods and goddesses from their respective plants and brings them to life, before returning them to their botanical forms again.

The Economy of Vegetation

Darwin alludes to the Proserpina myth in Canto 4 of *The Economy of Vegetation*, Part 1 of his popular science poem *The Botanic Garden* (1791). Unlike the light verse on the “Sexual System of Linnaeus” in Part 2, Part 1 functions as a more serious scientific study, offering an explanation of plant physiology and “the operation of the Elements” as they affect vegetable growth.¹⁶⁵ In his reception of the Proserpina myth, Erasmus Darwin specifically addresses the issue of mythology’s relationship to science. Like

¹⁶² Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* 2. 271-4.

¹⁶³ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* 2. 277, 283-4, 288.

¹⁶⁴ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* 2. 276, 291-2. The poppy belongs to Class 13, *Polyandria monogynia*, many males, one female. Darwin considers the poppies (different poppy species) as a group, so that the “many males” and “one female” become “many males” and “many females.”

¹⁶⁵ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* v.

Fanshawe, he believes that when myth is “devoid of art” Nature speaks. However, according to Darwin, when art is removed we have a science lesson (however “primitive” or pre-rational), an early, ancient attempt to explain (the causes of) natural phenomena (an aetiology).¹⁶⁶ Darwin claims that chemical and scientific knowledge existed with the ancients, originally expressed in hieroglyphics and then passed down through the ages in the form of mythological stories: “Allusions to those fables were therefore thought proper ornaments to a philosophical poem.”¹⁶⁷ He uses myth in similar ways, as the poetic illustration of scientific theories, and in keeping with the poem’s design in his Advertisement, “to inlist Imagination under the banner of Science” and apply the looser “imagery of poetry” to the stricter “ratiocination of philosophy.”¹⁶⁸ Darwin uses the pattern of introducing scientific information that is followed by mythological comparisons throughout the poem, as for instance when comparing the multiple power of the steam-engine to the Labours of Hercules, as both capable of exercising their strength over the natural world.¹⁶⁹ Just as Fanshawe rewrites myth into a contemporary moral allegory, so Darwin rewrites the old mythology into a new industrial science.

In *The Economy of Vegetation*, Darwin covers the four elements (Fire, Earth, Water and Air) in four cantos and adopts a mythological frame in which the Goddess of Botany addresses each of the elements’ respective ruling figures. In Canto 1, as the following examples illustrate, Darwin reflects the excitement and thrill of the scientist’s exploration of a “Cerean” nature as the masculine power of steam delves forcefully into the maternal, fertile earth:

The Giant-Power from earth’s remotest caves
Lifts with strong arm her dark reluctant waves;
Each cavern’d rock, and hidden den explores,

¹⁶⁶ For eighteenth-century views on myth, see Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959); and Feldman and Burstein.

¹⁶⁷ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* viii.

¹⁶⁸ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* v.

¹⁶⁹ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 297-312.

Drags her dark coals, and digs her shining ores.---¹⁷⁰

Fresh through a thousand pipes the wave distils,
And thirty cities drink the exuberant rills.---
There the vast mill-stone with inebriate whirl
On trembling floors his forceful fingers twirl.¹⁷¹

Now his hard hands on Mona's rifted crest,
Bosom'd in rock, her azure ores arrest;
With iron lips his rapid rollers seize
The lengthening bars, in thin expansion squeeze [...]¹⁷²

Steam literally forges a new wealth of capitalist society based on the power of industrial machinery. As the "economy" of the poem's title suggests, the poem reveals not only nature's riches, but the commercial potential in harnessing the earth's resources for scientific and technological advances.¹⁷³

Treating the Proserpina myth in Canto 4, which is addressed to the presiding Sylphs of the Air, Darwin invokes Milton's Proserpina in his portrayal of the virgin daughter forcefully separated from her mother earth. As a naïve, foolish child of nature, she displays a botanical curiosity of her own:

So in Sicilia's ever-blooming shade
When playful Proserpine from Ceres stray'd,

¹⁷⁰ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 263-66.

¹⁷¹ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 273-76.

¹⁷² Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 279-82.

¹⁷³ In *The Economy of Vegetation*, "progress emerged as the dominant mode of nature's activities." See Maureen McNeil, *Under the banner of science: Erasmus Darwin and his age* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987) 90. No stranger to the scientific spirit of the age, Darwin, in addition to his career as a doctor, extended his wide-ranging interests beyond his medical practice to technology, botany, geology, physical science and gases, meteorology, cosmology, animal biology and evolution, plant physiology, agriculture, and education. In his study of Erasmus Darwin's influence on the Romantic poets, King-Hele discusses Darwin's achievements as physician, inventor and technologist, man of science, and writer: "His remarkable scientific insight into the functioning of nature led him to many discoveries, and he was keen on exploiting advances in science and technology to improve the quality of human life." See Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan P, 1986) 4.

Led with unwary step her virgin trains
 O'er Etna's steeps, and Enna's golden plains;
 Pluck'd with fair hand the silver-blossom'd bower,
 And purpled mead, — herself a fairer flower;
 Sudden, unseen amid the twilight glade,
 Rush'd gloomy Dis, and seized the trembling maid.---¹⁷⁴

Wandering away from her mother, she goes in search of wildflowers until she herself is plucked from the meadows like the flowers she gathers. The lily is a flower of candor, purity and sweetness; the violet of modesty, prudery and love.¹⁷⁵

In Proserpina's maturation or "coming-of-age" during the flower-picking scene, Darwin emphasizes her duality all the more: the same flowers (the lily and the violet) that represent her innocence become the flowers of her sexual maturity, unlike Fanshawe's poem, where separate flowers represent her innocence and maturity. Fanshawe emphasizes Proserpina's innocence as she goes in search of simples and so risks distraction or seduction by poisonous plants. Fanshawe makes Proserpina's passivity clear by stressing her haplessness as a bride and reluctance to be Queen, her ill-fatedness to be "entic'd" and "allur'd" by "specious flowers." Separation from her mother and union with Pluto is against her will.

Even if Proserpina appears one of the more reluctant brides in *The Botanic Garden*, the myth's reception reflects the work's overriding attitude of inevitability in biology and botany, with sexual reproduction as the driving force of life (anticipating the theory of evolutionary development).¹⁷⁶ Darwin suggests that the union between Proserpina and Pluto is a "fit" one. Pluto will be a good husband for her. Proserpina readily plucks flowers, and Darwin suggests that on some level she is actively pursuing an adult

¹⁷⁴ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 177-184.

¹⁷⁵ Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 182-3, 196-7.

¹⁷⁶ For sources that discuss Darwin's views of evolution and the relationship of *The Botanic Garden* to other works, see Smith and Arnott; Uglow, *The Lunar Men*; King-Hele. According to McNeil, Darwin entertained "the idea of nature operating progressively, within a poem constructed on the premises that sexual reproduction was one of nature's most interesting and important features [...]." See McNeil 88.

relationship. Pluto tries to reassure her: "Pleased as he grasps her in his iron arms,/Frights with soft sighs, with tender words alarms."¹⁷⁷ In Darwin's "botany for gentlemen," Pluto seizes the "trembling maid" Proserpina for her own good. She is sexually mature, ready for marriage and in need of a husband, just as the flowers are in bloom and ready to be picked. In this "gentleman's reading," Proserpina is secretly swept off her feet by Pluto.

Representing or personifying the process of oxidation, their sexual union is a fact of science, a matter of scientific principle. According to Darwin, the "fable" of Proserpina exists as an "ancient chemical emblem" referred to by Bacon as signifying "the combination or marriage of ethereal spirit with earthly materials."¹⁷⁸ This explanation refers to the process of oxidation in which the exposure of minerals to air results in their dual composition as mineral oxides, located at the earth's surface and containing a combination of "pure air" or oxygen and mineral essence or "calces." Darwin gives an explanation of this process in a footnote: "metals when exposed to the atmosphere attract the pure air from it, and become calces by its combination, as zinc, lead, iron."¹⁷⁹

Pluto's coming up through the earth is linked to the exposure of mineral ores to air and equated with the fissures of exposed mineral ores. This connection is made literal in Darwin's description of fissures filled with nodules of iron ore in Note XVIII on Iron (in a section on the Modern Production of Iron): "There is a fissure eight or ten feet wide, in a gravel-bed on the eastern side of the hollow road ascending the hill about a mile from Trentham in Staffordshire, leading toward Drayton in Shropshire, which is filled up with nodules of iron-ore."¹⁸⁰ As Darwin explains, "Though some metallic bodies [such as] iron [...] are found near the surface of the earth; yet as the other metals are found only in fissures of rocks, which penetrate to unknown depths [...]" they must be mined.¹⁸¹ Pluto is identified with steam

¹⁷⁷ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 189-190.

¹⁷⁸ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 178n.

¹⁷⁹ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 166n3.

¹⁸⁰ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation*, Additional Notes 38.

¹⁸¹ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation*, Additional Notes 39.

power and its use by industrial machinery to mine the earth and to extract minerals and metals. In turn, these minerals mined for industrial use are associated with Pluto, god of the underworld (the mine), who, like an industrial scientist, lays claim to them. In Darwin's reception of the myth, Pluto's intrusion into a Cerean nature leads to the "discovery" of Proserpina, that is of mineral oxides and the process of oxidation, in which minerals combine with oxygen.

This process is one of many discoveries pertaining to gases made by Joseph Priestley and mentioned by Darwin; he includes Priestley's most famous, the discovery of oxygen, or "dephlogisticated air," in 1774 by the heating of mercuric oxide, as well as the discovery of oxygen as a by-product of photosynthesis, a process specified by Darwin himself. Priestley's experiments with gases are described as amorous flirtations with the Sylphs of the Air who are addressed by the Goddess of Botany: "YOU, retiring to sequester'd bowers,/Where oft your Priestley woos your airy powers [...] To his charm'd eye in gay undress appear,/Or pour your secrets on his raptured ear."¹⁸² Like the god of the underworld who woos Proserpina, Priestley woos the Sylphs of the Air with "raptured ear."¹⁸³ Just as Priestley is likened to a "Plutonian" scientist, so women readers and botanists are like Proserpina and flowers in *The Loves of the Plants*, they are "natural" beings, closely associated with the natural world and therefore open to observation, exploration and classification by male scientists. Finally the marriage of Proserpina and Pluto emblemizes the scientific explanation of oxidation (in which oxygen from the air combines with exposed minerals): "The crystal floods phlogistic ores calcine,/And the pure ETHER marries with the MINE."¹⁸⁴

In his representation of the Rape of Proserpina, Darwin transposes Plutonic nature onto late eighteenth-century industrial development, particularly in the use of steam power for mining and the excavation of minerals. A champion of science and technology, Darwin presents an

¹⁸² Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 165-66, 169-70.

¹⁸³ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 170.

¹⁸⁴ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 175-6.

industrially-charged image of Hadean power in which the appearance of the god of the underworld in his chariot emblemizes a masculine mechanical mastery over nature:

The wheels descending roll'd in smoky rings,
Infernal Cupids flapp'd their demon wings;
Earth with deep yawn received the Fair, amaz'd,
And far in Night celestial Beauty blaz'd.¹⁸⁵

This image of Pluto is consistent with the poem's gendering of a masculine steam power applied underground for mining the raw materials used for industrial machinery, such as coal and iron ore. The grouping of Nymphs of fire (Canto 1), Nymphs of water (Canto 3) and Sylphs of air (Canto 4) contrasts with the Gnomes of earth (Canto 2). Darwin explores this Plutonic energy contained within the underworld in relation to the earth's geological processes.

In Canto 1 (Fire), Darwin personifies steam as a masculine force as he pays homage to the mechanism of the steam-engine, its inventors Thomas Savery, Thomas Newcomen and its improvers James Watt and Matthew Boulton.¹⁸⁶ He describes the steam-engine's application to a range of industrial machinery, including pumps for supplying water and draining mines, bellows for melting mineral ores, and engines for operating corn mills and coining machines:

NYMPHS! YOU erewhile on simmering cauldrons played,
And call'd delighted SAVERY to your aid;
Bade round the youth explosive STEAM aspire
In gathering clouds, and wing'd the wave with fire;

¹⁸⁵ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 191-194.

¹⁸⁶ In Darwin's later claim for industrial success based on evolutionary progress, the "accomplishments of the industrialists and scientists which he celebrated" would become "the social face of nature's progressive ways." See McNeil 123. In his discussion of Darwin's desire to ensure industrial progress, Seligo notes the use of botanical terminology to describe industry in the eighteenth century and adds that Darwin "antho-morphised people in *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791) when he compared the 'lateral reproduction' of buds and bulbs in vegetation to the relations of production in industry (note XIV and XXXVIII)." Carlos Seligo, "The Monsters of Botany and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Science Fiction, Critical Frontiers*, eds. Karen Sayer and John Moore (London: Macmillan P, 2000) 74.

Bade with cold streams the quick expansion stop,
 And sunk the immense of vapour to a drop.---
 Press'd by the ponderous air the Piston falls
 Resistless, sliding through it's iron walls;
 Quick moves the balanced beam, of giant-birth,
 Wields his large limbs, and nodding shakes the earth.¹⁸⁷

In his predictions of future technological advances such as cars and aircraft, Darwin again personifies steam as a masculine, Plutonic force, evoking the god of the underworld flying in his chariot to snatch Proserpina from other fields of air:

Soon shall thy arm, UNCONQUER'D STEAM! Afar
 Drag the slow barge, or drive the rapid car;
 Or on wide-waving wings expanded bear
 The flying-chariot through the fields of air.¹⁸⁸

Darwin himself conducted early experiments with steam engines which led to his first scientific paper in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1757, and he was busy with inventions in the 1760s, offering to work with Boulton in manufacturing a steam-carriage.¹⁸⁹ He became friends with both Boulton and Watt and many other scientific and technical luminaries of the age including the pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood, the geologist James Hutton, and the chemist Joseph Priestley. Together they formed the "Lunar Society of Birmingham" which "by their enthusiasm and enterprise did more than any other group to drive forward the Industrial Revolution in Britain."¹⁹⁰ As the "chief energizer" of the group, Darwin helped to foster technological revolution; as King-Hele explains:

Technology took a great leap forward in the late eighteenth century, with the Boulton and Watt steam engine as one of its

¹⁸⁷ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 253-262.

¹⁸⁸ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 289-92.

¹⁸⁹ King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* 5-6.

¹⁹⁰ King-Hele 18. See Smith and Arnott; Uglow, *The Lunar Men* and "But What About the Women? The Lunar Society's Attitude to Women and Science, and to the Education of Girls," *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, eds. C. U. M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 163-177; McNeil.

main driving forces; and no single group was more influential than the Lunar Society in promoting these advances [...] All in all, the Lunar group was a remarkable self-activating machine for technological advance.¹⁹¹

Pluto is essentially an industrial scientist, one of the Lunar Men, like Priestley, like Darwin himself: botanist, technologist, engineer, geologist, mineralogist and “air man.” As King-Hele explains, “Air was the longest-lasting and strongest of his interests in physical science: air hot or cold, dry or damp, compressed or rarefied, in the sky or a steam engine, as the breath of life or as a medium for travel.”¹⁹² Darwin was “enthralled by the new ‘airs’ (or ‘gases’ as we call them) discovered in his own lifetime [...] In short, he was an air man *par excellence* [...]”¹⁹³

In Darwin’s myth reception, the myth of Proserpina approximates a scientific principle in which the personalities of Proserpina and Pluto are equated with oxygen and mineral ore. He approves the accuracy of ancient scientific knowledge, noting that “The fable of Proserpine’s being seized by Pluto as she was gathering flowers [...] signi[fying] the combination or marriage of ethereal spirit with earthly materials” is “still more curiously exact, from the late discovery of pure air being given up from vegetables, and that then in its unmixed state it more readily combines with metallic of inflammable bodies.”¹⁹⁴

In his *Apology to The Botanic Garden*, Darwin acknowledges the importance of myths such as the “Rape of Proserpine” in prefiguring modern scientific explanations: “Many of the important operations of Nature were shadowed or allegorized in the heathen mythology [...]”¹⁹⁵ Although Darwin’s use of the word “heathen” emphasizes the pre-Christian, pagan religion which coexisted with ancient science and reflects to a degree the

¹⁹¹ King-Hele 18.

¹⁹² Desmond King-Hele, “The Air Man,” *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, eds. C. U. M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 273.

¹⁹³ King-Hele, “The Air Man” 273.

¹⁹⁴ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 4. 178n.

¹⁹⁵ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* vii.

possibility for scientific explanations of the natural world to coexist with religious beliefs, his focus is clearly on myth in the service of science:

It may be proper here to apologize for many of the subsequent conjectures on some articles of natural philosophy, as not being supported by accurate investigation or conclusive experiments. Extravagant theories however in those parts of philosophy, where our knowledge is yet imperfect, are not without their use; as they encourage the execution of laborious experiments, or the investigation of ingenious deductions, to confirm or refute them. And since natural objects are allied to each other by many affinities, every kind of theoretic distribution of them adds to our knowledge by developing some of their analogies.¹⁹⁶

Darwin's observation of the "many affinities" allying "natural objects" bears comparison with Milton's reflection in an early letter that "many are the shapes of things divine." The two statements provide a contrast of the conflicting approaches to nature dominant during the nineteenth century:

What besides God has resolved concerning me I know not, but this at least: He has instilled into me, if into anyone, a vehement love of the beautiful. Not with so much labour, as the fables have it, is Ceres said to have sought her daughter Proserpina as it is my habit day and night to seek for this idea of the beautiful, as for a certain image of supreme beauty, through all the forms and faces of things (for many are the shapes of things divine) and to follow it as it leads me on by some sure traces which I seem to recognize.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* vii. Darwin reflects the eighteenth-century's scepticism of myth and its attack on myth via its attack on Christianity. See Burton and Feldman.

¹⁹⁷ John Milton to Charles Diodati, 23 September 1637. David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, vol. 1, 1608-1639 (London: Macmillan, 1881) 644-45. Also quoted in Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1957) 248.

Like Fanshawe, Milton acknowledges a moral, typological significance of nature and in which he himself, guided by a divine will for his art, has a part to play within a divine order of Creation. For Milton, then, myth is associated with a Christian world view and in *Paradise Lost*, classical mythology (including Proserpina as a figure for Eve) is mapped onto Christian tradition, as part of Milton's epic project.

By contrast, the myth's "scientific" transposition by Darwin lessens its religious aspect and heightens its function as a precursor to scientific explanation. The work as a whole points not to "What God has resolved" but to the perfection of human knowledge ("our knowledge") and scientific achievement. An acknowledgement of "divine benevolence" is marginalized to a brief note and to a large extent is written out of the picture of nature.¹⁹⁸ In this respect, natural things exist within an evolutionary rather than a divine order (in which the human is an extension of the natural).¹⁹⁹ For Darwin, sexuality and competition in the loves of plants are just a step away from progressive evolution.

¹⁹⁸ Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation* 1. 278.

¹⁹⁹ These ideas are more fully developed in Darwin's later works where he established his analogy or parallel between natural and industrial progress. According to McNeil, "Darwin biologised the concept of progress, primarily in *Zoonomia* and *Pytologia*." Darwin "projected his aspirations for change onto the natural world," and through his "ideological transposition, progress became a guaranteed feature of nature." See McNeil 123. As Seligo explains, Darwin first posed the question of evolution in a footnote to *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), then he subsequently elaborated his theory in *Zoonomia* (1794, 1801) and *The Temple of Nature* (1803), concluding that "man's own desire for progress was both a consequence and cause of evolutionary progress." Darwin "tried to guarantee that the Industrial Revolution would be progressive, by claiming that it was a natural outgrowth of evolutionary progress." Seligo 72.

Chapter 2
 “In the bud” of girlhood: William Wordsworth and Shirley Hibberd

Three years she grew in sun and shower,
 Then Nature said, ‘A lovelier flower
 On earth was never sown;
 This Child I to myself will take,
 She shall be mine, and I will make
 A Lady of my own.²⁰⁰

If for Catherine Maria Fanshawe and Erasmus Darwin, the myth of Proserpina registers a nature that is clearly divided between a maternal nurturing side and a masculine threatening side (a maternal morality and a masculine sexuality, a maternal impulse and a scientific impulse), Wordsworth’s use of the myth in *Lyrical Ballads* highlights tensions within a more ambiguous nature. This representation of nature in Wordsworth’s early poetry may appear at odds with his noted celebration of a sacred, benevolent nature, and readers of Romantic poetry expecting Wordsworth’s treatment of the myth to depict nature solely as “Sacred Goddess, Mother Earth” (like that of Shelley in his “Song of Proserpine”) find instead a convergence of morality and science, nurture and aggression, the maternal and the erotic, the sacred and the sexual.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ William Wordsworth, “Three years she grew in sun and shower,” lines 1-6; *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, revised by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: OUP, 1904; 1936).

²⁰¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Song of Proserpine While Gathering Flowers on the Plain of Enna,” *The Complete Poetical Works* (1904).

Sacred Goddess, Mother Earth,
 Thou from whose immortal bosom
 Gods, and men, and beasts have birth,
 Leaf and blade, and bud and blossom,
 Breathe thine influence most divine
 On thine own child, Proserpine.

If with mists of evening dew
 Thou dost nourish these young flowers
 Till they grow, in scent and hue,
 Fairest children of the Hours,
 Breathe thine influence most divine
 On thine own child, Proserpine.

For maternal ideology in Shelley’s poetry, see Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York: OUP, 1992).

In this chapter, I examine William Wordsworth's ambiguous treatment of nature in which the moral and the sexual coexist before emphasis is given to the maternal, moral and typological and to the subordination of the sexual. Written in 1799 and gathered in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth's "Lucy" poem "Three years she grew in sun and shower" reveals an ambiguous nature, both maternal and sexual, both mother and lover.²⁰² In *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807), Wordsworth's "daisy" poems stress nature as moral and maternal, suppressing the sexual and providing a healing, benevolent influence. Poet and nature share an emotional bond in which natural objects such as flowers are domestic companions in a Romantic kinship or kindredness with nature. Finally, in the "Primrose of the Rock" (1835), Wordsworth reveals a typological, Christian nature and the hierarchy of natural theology so important to the evangelical viewpoint of Victorian natural history and narratives of nature.

Shirley Hibberd's familiar essays, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves: Essays on the Homely and the Beautiful* (1855), draw upon this Wordsworthian nature typology and place it within the broad context of a Victorian flower culture dominated by the sentimental consideration of flowers. The essays of this prolific Victorian flower writer and popular horticulturalist combine a Wordsworthian botanical morality with practical advice for suburban gardeners. His myth reception reflects the contemporary attitude toward maternal nature based upon Wordsworthian nature philosophy and the threat of science to nature specifically associated with the processes of industrialization and urbanization.

²⁰² The "Lucy poems" or "Goslar poems," written during Wordsworth's stay in Germany during the winter of 1798-9, are generally considered by critics as a group of five poems including "Strange fits of passion have I known", "She dwelt among the untrodden ways", "I travelled among unknown men", "Three years she grew in sun and shower", and "A slumber did my spirit seal." However Wordsworth did not group them as such and they continue to be a source of much critical speculation, especially in regard to the figure of Lucy. I am less interested in how the poems work together as a group than with how their treatments of flowers and the feminine engage with the Proserpina myth and contrast with other "flower" poems by Wordsworth. For discussions of the Lucy or Goslar poems, see John F. Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems, 1797-1807* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); and C. C. Clarke, *Romantic Paradox: An Essay on the Poetry of Wordsworth* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1962, 1979).

William Wordsworth: Myth and Nature

Wordsworth alludes to the Proserpina myth in his "Lucy" poem "Three years she grew in sun and shower."²⁰³ Like Fanshawe and Darwin, Wordsworth refers to Milton's treatment of the myth. As Harding acknowledges, Milton serves as an important mediator of classical myth for the English Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth: "Wordsworthian pastoral is modeled not so much on classical sources as on those sources as mediated by Milton, Thomson, and the topographical writers of the eighteenth century [...]."²⁰⁴ Wordsworth's Lucy poem not only draws upon the Miltonic tradition of pastoral elegy in *Lycidas*, but also "clearly alludes to Persephone, as Milton represents her" in book four of *Paradise Lost*.²⁰⁵

In addition to Milton's version of Proserpina, Wordsworth's interpretation of the myth draws upon his reading of Erasmus Darwin, particularly *The Botanic Garden*. Darwin, the great populariser of Linnaean botany for nineteenth-century audiences, serves as an important mediator of the Proserpina myth for Romantic and Victorian writers with his "work on" the Miltonic representation of the Proserpina myth during the late eighteenth century. In tracing Darwin's general influence on Wordsworth, King-Hele observes stylistic and philosophical influences, including poetic parallels and ideas, such as the importance of natural objects and the notion that plants can feel.²⁰⁶ But according to King-Hele, however much Wordsworth may have applied Darwin's ideas about nature to his own poetic creed or "faith," he "never followed Darwin into the sex life of plants."²⁰⁷

However, as Nicola Trott has shown, Wordsworth's poetry engages with the work of Erasmus Darwin to reveal a botanical awareness of nature's sexual undercurrent.²⁰⁸ According to Trott, Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*

²⁰³ Critics have recognized the mythic structure of this poem as stemming from the Rape of Proserpina.

²⁰⁴ Harding 91-2.

²⁰⁵ Harding 9.

²⁰⁶ King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* 64, 84.

²⁰⁷ King-Hele 64.

²⁰⁸ Nicola Trott, "Wordsworth's Loves of the Plants," *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads*, eds. Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 141-168.

register the tension between a “sacred” and a “sexual” nature. She locates “Three years she grew” (along with “Nutting” and “Ruth”) in lyrical ballads of a sexualized nature which contrast with later poems when Wordsworth tends toward the suppression of the sexual and aligns nature with a maternal ideology or “creed.” If Coleridgean theology is evident in the context of *The Recluse*, during the composition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth proves to be “a floraphile through Darwin as well as through Coleridge.”²⁰⁹ The ambiguous sexual nature of “Three years she grew” places the poem in the context of other *Lyrical Ballads* which show Wordsworth’s botanical awareness and Darwinian floraphila.

“A Lady of my own”: Nature’s Claiming of Lucy

In Wordsworth’s Lucy poem, Nature initially makes what appears a maternal gesture, offering to nurture and educate Lucy. However, this same gesture is entangled with a lover’s overtures: “This Child I to myself will take;/She shall be mine, and I will make/A Lady of my own.”²¹⁰ A possessive Plutonic Nature threatens the Proserpinian flower in a Cerean Nature. Just as Darwin locates masculine nature underground (Pluto) and feminine nature aboveground (Ceres), so Wordsworth transposes the myth onto two natures, but in Wordsworth’s poem these two natures remain in conflict: a Ceres-like maternal nature taking care of Lucy-Proserpina and a Plutonic masculine nature taking possession of Lucy-Proserpina. The language of the poem shifts from that of a proud, doting mother to that of a possessive lover who addresses Lucy at age three and whose uncontrollable passion will claim Lucy once she has reached womanhood and sexual maturity. As Trott concludes, “Nature” in the Lucy poem is “both nurturing and death-dealing, combining in one ambiguous figure the masculine ravisher Dis and the fertility-goddess Ceres, mother of Proserpina.”²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Trott 155.

²¹⁰ Wordsworth, “Three years” lines 4-6.

²¹¹ Trott 157. Critics of the poem remain divided in their interpretation of Wordsworth’s nature as feminine and maternal or masculine and aggressive, or both. While Trott, Harding, Ferguson and Ross recognize a masculine presence, Claridge sees a type of “phallic mother,” and Chayes, Watson and Homans identify only a female presence in nature. See Harding, *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism*; Frances Ferguson, “The Lucy Poems: Wordsworth’s

Lucy's lifespan is abruptly cut short by Nature's desire. Her life-cycle is determined by "an eerie convergence of Wordsworth's sacred and sexual natures."²¹² The change in wording from "Child" to "Lady" disturbingly suggests the enactment of Nature's aggressive desire. Like Pluto's abduction of Proserpina, Nature will wed Lucy and she will be "A Lady of [his] own" by "both law and [according to his] impulse."²¹³ The language of the poem suggests their union within marriage and their roles as husband and wife: "with me" Lucy will feel "an overseeing power."²¹⁴ Lucy appears one of many things within Nature's domain, under Nature's command or control. The wording in line 11 suggests that joint rule shared by mother and daughter is possible with both acting as ruling goddesses of nature or fertility goddesses (in keeping with traditional iconography which sees the two goddesses as a close pair, almost as one). The words appear almost as a threat, however, rather than an expression of a mother's love, "hers the silence [...] of mute, insensate things."²¹⁵ The ambiguous intention expressed by Nature in the poem's opening lines is re-emphasized in its concluding phrases: "And vital feelings of delight/Shall rear her form to stately height,/Her virgin bosom swell [...]"²¹⁶ Nature will raise and care for Lucy with a mother's love until she has reached sexual maturity and can then serve as the object of her suitor's attraction.

Proserpinian Childhood, Proserpinian Coming-of-Age: Lucy and Flowers

In "Three years she grew," an ambiguously-personified "Nature" describes the Lucy of the poem as a lovely flower (for the taking). As

Quest for a Poetic Object," *ELH* 40 (1973): 532-48; Marlon B. Ross, "Naturalizing Gender: Woman's Place in Wordsworth's Ideological Landscape," *ELH* 53.2 (1986): 391-410; Laura Claridge, *Romantic Potency: The Paradox of Desire* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1992); Irene H. Chayes, "Little Girls Lost: Problems of a Romantic Archetype," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 67 (1963): 579-92; J. R. Watson, "Lucy and the Earth-Mother," *Essays in Criticism* 27 (1977): 187-202; Margaret Homans, "Eliot, Wordsworth, and the Scenes of the Sisters' Instruction," *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (London: U of Chicago P, 1986).

²¹² Trott 157.

²¹³ Wordsworth, "Three years" lines 6, 8.

²¹⁴ Wordsworth, "Three years" line 11.

²¹⁵ Wordsworth, "Three years" lines 17-18.

²¹⁶ Wordsworth, "Three years" lines 31-33.

Ferguson remarks, when Lucy is “given corporeal form, it is a flower form and not a human form [...]”²¹⁷ Watson also notes that Lucy is “nature’s creature”; she has “the same kind of natural existence as a flower [...]”²¹⁸ She is generally interpreted as a passive figure associated with flowers but never represented as an active agent. Her motives and intentions remain ambivalent or unknown. As Harding observes, the “ancient metaphor, woman-as-flower, reveals here its violent underside. Woman is a thing grown, and something therefore to be harvested, plucked, or gathered [...]”²¹⁹ At her sexual maturation, Nature claims Lucy like a flower plucked, and like a child among flowers, she appears to have no choice in the matter.

In “Three years she grew,” Lucy is not represented in her own right or given her own voice. We have only the poet-narrator’s lament, his impression of events. According to his account, the reader knows only that she is a passive “lovely flower.” We do not know whether she is totally passive or ready for marriage. Her status remains ambiguous. Although Lucy may not have control over her choice of husband, the poem suggests that she may be happy with her choice, and that if her suitor is possessive, he also wants to make her happy. Nature will be both “law” and “impulse,” but she will be “wild with glee,” the stars will be “dear” to her and “for her the willow [will] bend.”²²⁰

Both elegiac and erotic, the willow serves as an appropriate image for Lucy’s ambivalence and her union with an ambiguous Nature. As Grigson writes of the bay willow, *Salix pentandra*, “Willows are bitter, and implied the bitterness of grief.”²²¹ It signifies the imagery of grief and the sadness in not wanting to part with her mother. A plant of docility, it suggests her passive longing to remain in childhood and submissiveness in being forcefully taken from her mother.²²² Mabey describes the maternal-like, nurturing aspect of

²¹⁷ Ferguson 533.

²¹⁸ Watson 191.

²¹⁹ Harding 110.

²²⁰ Wordsworth, “Three years” lines 8, 14, 25, 20.

²²¹ Grigson 256.

²²² Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 196-7.

ancient willows that provide a habitat for other plant species in hollow centres and crowns full of holes.²²³ A plant of melancholy and mourning, the willow is also the symbol of the forsaken lover and associated with the poet-narrator's desolation and grief for his lost love. The roots of the Crack willow, *Salix fragilis*, growing down into the water "like a tangle of red veins" suggest the close association between plants and people.²²⁴ Mabey mentions the willow as an erotic image associated with May fertility rites such as the "willow-stripping" ceremony (Osier, *S. viminalis*, the willow of traditional basket-making).²²⁵ The willow stresses the association between death and sex: Proserpina's sexual union with Pluto occurs at her death, and sexual consummation seals her fate in the Underworld. Proserpina's disappearance into the earth is "appropriately ambiguous" as Suter points out: "at the same time, she is, first, merged with the mother (the mythic concept of the earth as mother, with whom she can revert to infancy) and, second, taken to the land of her abductor (the mythic concept of the land of the dead, where she can become an adult woman as Hades' mate)." ²²⁶

Through an alliance with Nature, Lucy may gain a shared power and become privy to Nature's secrets, just as Proserpina becomes Queen of the Underworld after her union with Pluto. However, for Lucy, the price of unity or fusion with Nature is death and the "silence and calm/Of mute insensate things."²²⁷ Hers is a "silent sympathy."²²⁸ As Harding observes, Lucy's power is more limited than that of Proserpina, and Ferguson points out that Lucy is never allowed a voice. Ultimately beauty appears to serve the creative power and inspiration of a masculine Nature while Lucy remains silent. Critics generally agree that for female figures in Wordsworth's poems,

²²³ Mabey 140.

²²⁴ Grigson 256.

²²⁵ Mabey 141.

²²⁶ Suter 57.

²²⁷ Wordsworth, "Three years" lines 17-18.

²²⁸ Wordsworth, "Three years" line 24.

unity with nature results in death and silence, rather than in the kind of self-awareness and assertion of identity granted to the male poet.²²⁹

The poet-narrator is also a rival for Lucy. A sacred Mother Earth claims Lucy as her own and Lucy dies. A Plutonic Earth lover claims Lucy as his own and Lucy dies. Now finally the human poet-narrator claims Lucy for his own too, "my Lucy," and she dies.²³⁰ In keeping with the poem as pastoral elegy mourning the death of Lucy, he laments this change, and his desolation has a double significance: the land is uninhabited and barren now just as he is sad and alone. The narrator-poet is left behind like Ceres and Pluto. Proserpina must "die" to both at different times of the year, but here the change is more final; there is no hope she will visit him again or that he will see her again.

Proserpina and the Lucy poems

Although "Three years she grew" is perhaps the most obvious in its treatment of a Proserpinian flower-woman, the Lucy poems continue to link flowers and the feminine, often with mythic associations, within a continuous rivalry for Lucy between love and death, between the poet-narrator's love and Nature's desire to (re)claim her. In "Strange fits of passion I have known," a possessive, passionate lover again pursues a "floral" Lucy, a young and beautiful "rose."²³¹ In this poem, the relationship between the poet-narrator and Lucy is more specific with her status as lover explicitly stated. The traditional flower of love and beauty, the rose is appropriate to the poem's context, identified by Ferguson as that of romance and the questing knight.²³² "Kind Nature" may grant the narrator restful dreams during his journey, but if his thoughts of Lucy's death are true, Nature is not so kind and the poet reveals naïvety in his suit.²³³

²²⁹ See Harding, Homans and Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford : OUP, 1992).

²³⁰ Wordsworth, "Three years" line 38.

²³¹ Wordsworth, "Strange fits of passion I have known" line 6.

²³² Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 190-1.

²³³ Wordsworth, "Strange fits of passion" line 18.

In "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," the narrator again laments the death of Lucy and the "difference" it makes to him.²³⁴ Although she may have lived in seclusion with "none to praise,/ And very few to love [her]," the natural world has been an appreciative audience and companion.²³⁵ The poet describes Lucy as "A violet by a mossy stone."²³⁶ Wordsworth also mentions the flower in "Nutting" in regard to the hazel bower, where again it signifies a secluded beauty: "Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves/The violets of five seasons re-appear/ And fade, unseen by any human eye."²³⁷ Significantly however, violets are one of the flowers picked by Proserpina in Ovid's version of the myth.²³⁸ This Proserpinian flower not only symbolizes her childhood innocence, but as a classical "plant of sex" also represents her sexual maturity.²³⁹ Death has claimed Lucy again.

Although these conventional flowers are mentioned specifically by Wordsworth, the daisy, with its traditional associations of girlish innocence and beauty and its cyclical imagery as the "day's eye" (opening and closing in the presence and absence of light), is a flower continually evoked in the Lucy poems but not named.²⁴⁰ In "I travelled among unknown men," Lucy is again equated with the landscape and, like a daisy in a "green field," she is regulated by a daily rhythm in which "mornings showed" and "nights concealed."²⁴¹ Lucy seems completely fused with nature, existing as a part of the earth in "A slumber did my spirit seal." "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course," her once human "motion" and "force" is now part of the cycles of nature and regulates the poet like "rocks and stones and trees."²⁴² Lucy's participation in nature's daily cycle, like the daisy, also suggests Proserpina's

²³⁴ Wordsworth, "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" line 12.

²³⁵ Wordsworth, "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" lines 3-4.

²³⁶ Wordsworth, "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" line 5.

²³⁷ Wordsworth, "Nutting" lines 29-31.

²³⁸ See Ovid 5. 391.

²³⁹ See Grigson 70. He mentions the sweet violet, *Viola odorata*, as one of the various "plants of sex": "Scent suggested sex, so the violet was a flower of Aphrodite and also of her son Priapus, the deity of gardens and generation."

²⁴⁰ Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 176-7.

²⁴¹ Wordsworth, "I travelled among unknown men" line 13.

²⁴² Wordsworth, "A slumber did my spirit seal" lines 7, 5, 8.

recurrent course to and from the underworld which regulates the cyclical change of seasons.

In "Strange fits of passion I have known," Nature may be "kind" to the narrator-lover but the relationship between Lucy and Nature is again one of death. In this case, the cycles of Nature parallel the cycles of human life, as the moon's cycle is linked to Lucy's life-cycle by the narrator. The moment of the moon's descent suggests Lucy's death. As Ward observes, the Latin root for Lucy's name, *lux* meaning "light," heightens the associations between moon, woman, and flower.²⁴³ Just as the daisy closes at night, so Lucy's light goes out as the descent of the moon results in her "closing" or death.²⁴⁴ Both the daisy and the mythical Proserpina serve as harbingers of life and death; like the flower's symbolic "death" at night and "rebirth" in the morning, Proserpina "dies" every winter when she must leave earth for the underworld, but returns to life every spring. As has been noted, however, Lucy remains in a continuum or death-like union with nature without hope of a separate, future existence.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ John Powell Ward, "'Will no one tell me why she sings?': Women and gender in the poetry of William Wordsworth," *Studies in Romanticism* 36.4 (1997): 611-633.

²⁴⁴ Harding also points out the importance of "light" and "shade" in relation to Wordsworth's early poetics in *Lyrical Ballads*. In an early version of "Nutting" (1798), Wordsworth "more explicitly described Nature's powers or presences as being of two kinds: those who took particular charge of the poet's inspiration, stimulating his imagination even in the full sunlight, and those who restored and refreshed his mind in the shelter of 'groves' and 'shades.'" See Harding 103.

²⁴⁵ In a later poem "Once I Could Hail (Howe'er Serene the Sky)" (written 1826, published 1827), nature also regulates and informs the poet's vision as his reverie mingles the image of the new moon with the figure of Proserpina in her capacity as queen of the dead. Wordsworth muses on the shapes of the waxing new moon, personified as feminine in reference to Diana, goddess of the moon: "Young, like the Crescent that above me shone,/ [...] All that appeared was suitable to One/Whose fancy had a thousand fields to skim" (ll. 7, 9-10). The moon's changing shape is here a source of poetic inspiration and imaginative pleasure, as he tries to interpret the light and dark forms of the moon as it waxes and wanes. He alternately sees a "silver boat" and Diana's "pearly crest" but "no sign/Fit for the glimmering brow of Proserpine" (ll. 14-15, 17-18). The moon provides an object for the poet's thoughts and feelings, a natural object through which Wordsworth can read his own mind through such imaginative visions, yet Nature also offers a corrective to the poet's vision and teaches him to appreciate the wonders of the natural world without feeling the need to explain everything (as in "To the Daisy"): "And when I learned to mark the spectral Shape/As each new Moon obeyed the call of Time,/ [...] To see or not to see, as best may please/A buoyant Spirit, and a heart at ease" (ll. 25-6, 29-30).

Wordsworth's Daisy Poems

That the daisy was an important flower for Wordsworth as a symbol of the sympathetic union existing between human life and nature (a flower of life and death) is evident from four poems written on the flower, including a poem in memory of his brother. In "To the Daisy" (1815), one of the "Elegies Written for John Wordsworth" who drowned in 1805, the wildflower has a personal association with the brothers' childhood haunt.²⁴⁶ When on shore, the sailor enjoyed returning to his favourite spot on the hills: "when call'd ashore [...] / To your abodes, Sweet Daisy Flowers! / He oft would steal at leisure hours."²⁴⁷ Following his death, the place should have been his burial ground: "That neighbourhood of Wood and Field / To him a resting-place should yield, / A meek Man and a brave!"²⁴⁸ The daisy serves as a memorial to his lost vitality, a reminder of his time spent there: "And Thou sweet Flower! shalt sleep and wake / Upon his senseless Grave."²⁴⁹

Wordsworth writes about the daisy in a group of poems written prior to this elegy and a few years after the Lucy poems.²⁵⁰ In one of three poems on the daisy, Wordsworth invokes references to the daisy as the "day's eye." This common expression for the daisy originates from the word's Old English etymology "*dages eage*" and indicates the flower's characteristic of opening in the morning and closing in the evening and on dull or wet days. Grigson describes it as that "universal favourite of the cropped meadow."²⁵¹ This perennial plant with its white, reddish or purplish florets grows close to the ground and flowers prolifically between March-October. The flower is traditionally associated with beauty (from its Latin name, *Bellis perennis*,

²⁴⁶ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy," *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: New York: Cornell UP, 1983). The poem was composed in 1805 and published in *Poems* (1815). Cf. "When to the Attractions of the Busy World" (1815), originally composed as "When first I journeyed hither" (1800-4), in Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* 119.

²⁴⁷ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1815) lines 22, 25-26.

²⁴⁸ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1815) lines 50-52.

²⁴⁹ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1815) lines 55-56.

²⁵⁰ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*. The poems were composed in 1802 and originally published in 1807 as "To the Daisy," "To the Daisy," and "To the Same Flower." In 1836, Wordsworth swapped the titles of poems two and three.

²⁵¹ Grigson 374. See also Mabey 367-8.

“always beautiful”) and with innocence and childhood, as its choice for a girl’s name makes evident. Kear explains the popularity of the name Daisy during the nineteenth-century: “A young woman with this name was thought to aspire to modesty as a reflection of the flower’s humble growing habitat, quietly tucked away and very unassuming.”²⁵²

Wordsworth’s daisy poems continue the pattern of selecting or singling out a natural object as a subject and then presenting the poet’s reveries upon it. In “To the Daisy” (1807), the poet experiences a change of heart toward the flower and hence a change in his perception of and attention to nature. He now notices and values the small, seemingly insignificant flower:

In youth from rock to rock I went,
From hill to hill in discontent
Of pleasure high and turbulent,
Most pleased when most uneasy;
But now my own delights I make,—
My thirst at every rill can slake,
And gladly Nature’s love partake
Of Thee, sweet Daisy!²⁵³

The flower’s opening and closing regulates the poet’s feelings and reveals a Romantic sensitivity and emotional sensibility in response to nature:

Fresh-smitten by the morning ray,
When thou art up, alert and gay,

²⁵² Katherine Kear, *Flower Wisdom: The Definitive Guidebook to the Myth, Magic and Mystery of Flowers* (London: Thorsons, 2000) 10. See also Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* (1995).

²⁵³ Wordsworth, “To the Daisy” (1807) lines 1-8. The revised version from 1815 makes the flower’s connection with the poet stronger; the earlier version, however, suggests more of a typological meaning within nature. Lines 61-64 originally read:

At dusk, I’ve seldom mark’d thee press
The ground, as if in thankfulness,
Without some feeling, more or less,
Of true devotion. (1802)

The typological meaning is however present in *Poems* (1815), in the epigram from G. Withers, specifically the lines: “from every thing I saw/I could some instruction draw” (ll. 2-3) and “By a Daisy whose leaves spread/Shut when Titan goes to bed [...] /She [his Muse] could more infuse in me/Than all Nature’s beauties can [...]” (ll. 8-9, 11-12).

Then, cheerful Flower! my spirits play
 With kindred gladness:
 And when, at dusk, by dews opprest
 Thou sink'st, the image of thy rest
 Hath often eased my pensive breast
 Of careful sadness.²⁵⁴

A perennial, present all year round, it experiences the best and endures the worst of the year and changing seasons. The poet personifies the flower as "Child of the Year" and associates it with modesty and humility.²⁵⁵ In contrast to conventional poetic flowers, such as the "Violets" and the "Rose," the daisy is "less ambitious"; yet it is the "Poet's darling."²⁵⁶ The daisy has a "sweet power" to modify or temper "passions" to "humbler," "lowlier pleasure."²⁵⁷ "The homely sympathy that heeds/The common life our nature breeds" not only regulates but heals the poet's ills: "a friend at hand, to scare/His melancholy" with "Some steady love; some brief delight;/Some memory that had taken flight."²⁵⁸

In a second poem, "To the Same Flower" (1807), Wordsworth continues to identify the daisy as the poet's companion, an "unassuming Common-place/Of Nature, with that homely face" yet in tune with the great forces of nature.²⁵⁹ As in the Lucy poems, he identifies woman with flower. The sympathetic bond or kindred "gladness" shared with nature lulls Wordsworth into reveries in which he muses on the flower's characteristics, imagining different female personifications and contrasting spiritual and earthly, rich and poor:

A nun demure of lowly port;
 Or sprightly maiden, of Love's court,
 In thy simplicity the sport

²⁵⁴ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1807) lines 57-64.

²⁵⁵ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" 1807) lines 73.

²⁵⁶ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1807) lines 25, 27, 29; 32.

²⁵⁷ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1807) lines 43, 51, 52.

²⁵⁸ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1807) lines 53-54, 39-40, 45-46.

²⁵⁹ Wordsworth, "To the Same Flower" (1807) lines 5-6.

Of all temptations;
 A queen in crown of rubies drest;
 A starveling in a scanty vest;
 Are all, as seems to suit thee best,
 Thy appellations.²⁶⁰

Each personification suggests a different attribute: the “nun” indicates its lowliness, humility and purity suggested by its white colour; the “maiden” suggests its attractiveness; “queen” its moral authority and perennial growth, “ruling” everywhere and present throughout the year; its “rubies” perhaps suggestive of red-tips; “starveling” its smallness and fragility suggestive of its danger in being mown down and also the vulnerability of the “Daisies” selling flowers on city streets.²⁶¹ The “sprightly maiden” and “queen” might hint at a Proserpinian “fallen” flower, like that of the “starveling,” but here the threat of a Plutonic or sexual nature is subdued, even laughed at, in the form of the daisy itself: “little Cyclops, with one eye/Staring to threaten and defy.”²⁶²

The poet’s bond with the flower, in which both are creatures or children of nature, again leads to a healing power:

Bright Flower! for by that name at last,
 When all my reveries are past,
 I call thee, and to that cleave fast,
 Sweet silent creature!
 That breath’st with me in sun and air,
 Do thou, as thou art wont, repair

²⁶⁰ Wordsworth, “To the Same Flower” (1807) lines 47, 17-24.

²⁶¹ For a description of the life of a London flower girl in the nineteenth century, see Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and The London Poor*, vol. 1, *The London Street-Folk* (London: Strand, 1851) 130-7. According to Mayhew, the “street-sellers of cut flowers” were mostly girls in a traffic that ranked “among the lowest grades of the street-trade, being pursued only by the very poor, or the very young.” See Mayhew 130. An excerpt from a late nineteenth-century source, *The Silver Vase*, tells the story of Daisy, a flower seller saved from destitution when her older sister Nelly brings her to the Sisterhood guild of the London flower-girls’ mission. See *The Silver Vase: or, The Gathered Posy*, intro. by Lady Savory (London: Morgan and Scott, 1891) 36-7. As I will address in the Epilogue, flower-girl missions were begun in the 1860s to aid flower sellers in the increasing traffic in cut flowers.

²⁶² Wordsworth, “To the Same Flower” (1807) lines 25-26.

My heart with gladness, and a share
Of thy meek nature!²⁶³

In this poem, an emphasis is placed on the poet's harmonious relationship with a feminine nature, in contrast to the poet's earlier objectification of Lucy as a flower-woman; here there is no concern over woman's place in nature and no rivalry between nature and the poet. The poet is not lover or rival to nature as in the Lucy poems, but a companion or friend. The "Daisy" poems reveal Wordsworth's identification of a nature where the sexual is subdued.

In a third poem, "To the Daisy" (1807), the flower's self-sacrificing humility "Unchecked by pride or scrupulous doubt" and "Meek, yielding to the occasion's call," leads to a climax in which comfort and domestic security contribute to the strong bond of sympathy between nature and humanity and result in the healing power of a benevolent nature:

Bright Flower! whose home is everywhere,
Bold in maternal Nature's care,
And all the long year through the heir
Of joy and sorrow;
Methinks that there abides with thee
Some concord with humanity,
Given to no other flower I see
The forest thorough!²⁶⁴

As this third poem demonstrates, flowers are reserved for a moral rather than a sexual interpretation. The poet's relationship with nature is dominated by a maternal ideology and a "kindred independence."²⁶⁵

The poet's musings on the "Loose types of Things" associated with the daisy in the second poem foreshadow the typological emphasis on nature in later poems such as the proto-Victorian "The Primrose of the Rock" written in

²⁶³ Wordsworth, "To the Same Flower" (1807) lines 41-48.

²⁶⁴ Wordsworth, "To the Daisy" (1807) 18, 21, 1-8. Line 2, which underwent extensive revision, makes the connection explicit: the flower "teach[es] him" as "A Pilgrim bold in [maternal] Nature's care," MS change 1836/45 – 2nd revision adopted 1840.

²⁶⁵ See Ralph Pite, "Wordsworth and the natural world," *Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

1831 and published in 1835.²⁶⁶ Here the mutual fellowship between poet and nature is more explicitly Christian, with an emphasis on faith, God's love and the promise of salvation for the "reasoning Sons of men."²⁶⁷ Praising the humble flower as "A lasting link in Nature's chain/From highest heaven let down," Wordsworth makes an analogy between plant life and human life in which the physical prefigures the spiritual.²⁶⁸ This association also shows the link with earlier poetry by asserting a "chain of being" which makes even a daisy equal to godhead. Just as "God's redeeming love" revives the perennial flowers from an "annual funeral" and seasonal dormancy, so "That love which changed" their "moral element" to "types beneficent" will recall humanity from an "oblivious winter" of sin and death to spiritual rebirth and "eternal summer."²⁶⁹ Poems such as this one which reveal Wordsworth's religious conviction provided validation for Victorians who applied Romantic nature philosophy to an evangelical or "sacramental" nature.²⁷⁰

Early Victorian Botany

Botany after 1830 was increasingly split between scientific botany and literary botany, between botanists and botanophiles, as scientists pursued plants with a purely factual interest while lovers of nature and flower culture combined an enthusiasm for natural history with religious, moral, typological and sentimental interests. According to Shteir, "distinctions were emerging and being established during the years 1830-60 between those with a more aesthetic, moral, and spiritual orientation to nature study and those with a more utilitarian or scientific approach."²⁷¹ By the mid-1840s, "the language of flowers and the language of botany diverged, and literary and scientific botany became distinct discourses."²⁷² As Seaton explains, flower books form an important aspect of Victorian popular culture, helping to illuminate

²⁶⁶ Wordsworth "To the Same Flower" (1807) line 11.

²⁶⁷ Wordsworth, "The Primrose of the Rock," line 44; *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, revised by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: OUP, 1904; 1936).

²⁶⁸ Wordsworth, "The Primrose of the Rock" lines 11-12.

²⁶⁹ Wordsworth, "The Primrose of the Rock" lines 36, 24, 37, 40, 42, 45, 47.

²⁷⁰ See G.B. Tennyson, "The Sacramental Imagination," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, eds. U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (London: U of California P, 1977).

²⁷¹ Shteir 153.

²⁷² Shteir 158.

nineteenth-century attitudes toward nature, and the reading matter of the middle classes reflected this interest in flowers: “While [...] botany and gardening, the scientific and the practical, may seem unrelated to the sentimental flower books, they form an important part of the context in which the latter developed.”²⁷³ As literary and scientific botany diverged, botanical moralizing became part of Victorian popular culture in varieties of sentimental flower writing, including the Language of Flowers books, flower poetry and religious-moral flower works.

The popular romantic Language of Flowers, involving a detailed knowledge of flower identification, functions as an integral part of love and life for many fashionable ladies. Each flower had a meaning: “Dreamy thoughts of the heart speaking through the beauty of flowers were not far from amateur musings in verse, of which there was a profusion in personal albums, diaries and published books.”²⁷⁴ In her account of the Victorian floricultural craze, Shteir explains that such writers treated flowers as a poetic language, “a constructed knowledge system with a universal code of meaning”; writers used floral alphabets and flower language dictionaries to attach sentiments to individual plants and develop a floral vocabulary for talking about emotions.²⁷⁵

Gift albums and emblem books with flower poetry also sentimentalised the relationship between flowers and the feminine.²⁷⁶ The consecutive editions of *Flowers of loveliness, female figures, emblematic of flowers, by various artists, with poetical illustrations* in 1837 and in 1838, respectively, by Thomas Haynes Bayly and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, both extremely popular poets in their day, exemplify production of the “flower books for mass consumption [...] combining literary and visual material in a poetic and

²⁷³ Seaton, “Considering the Lilies” 255, 256.

²⁷⁴ Scourse 6, 9-10.

²⁷⁵ Shteir 158-9.

²⁷⁶ Gift books and annuals competed with periodicals during the 1830s-50s and, as Matthew Kutcher has shown, carried their own ideological significance in the configuration of a polite middle-class audience within nineteenth-century gift culture. See Matthew Lawrence Kutcher, “Flowers of Friendship: Gift Books and Polite Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain,” diss., The University of Michigan, 1998, (DAI 59/10, 1999): 3830A.

artistic mélange.”²⁷⁷ The earlier book opens with a promise to match women and floral meanings to illustrate particular abstract “Emblems of Woman’s virtues and her grace.” Bayly’s introduction provides the basis for both books’ woman-flower analogies, particularly emphasising physical traits:

Praise Flora’s court as highly as you please;
 No Flowers of Loveliness can match with these.
 [.]
 Girls, fancifully grouped, should represent
 The fairest flowers, or those in which we meet
 Some exquisitely touching sentiment [...]²⁷⁸

The illustration and accompanying verses for the Jessamine offer a typical example of this well-known kind of symbolic floral vocabulary:

There lurks a hidden sentiment,
 In every Leaf and Flower,
 And he who studies well, may read
 Sweet words in every Bower:
 And Blossoms, artfully combin’d,
 May eloquently tell
 A thousand things, that faltering lips
 Ne’er utter half so well.²⁷⁹

A woman has received the gift of a Jessamine wreath and appeals to her female confidante to interpret the gesture and its floral significance; she explains:

It is an emblem of thyself,
 Dear girl, thy Lover sends;
 A wreath where pure Simplicity,
 With perfect Beauty blends:
 A type of all that’s fair and good,

²⁷⁷ Shteir 152.

²⁷⁸ Thomas Haynes Bayley, *Flowers of Loveliness; Twelve Groups of Female Figures, Emblematic of Flowers: Designed by Various Artists; with Poetical Illustrations* (London: Ackermann and Co., 1837) 27-28, 34-36.

²⁷⁹ Bayley 1-8.

In this sweet flower is seen;
 What Woman's mind should ever be;
 What thine hath ever been.²⁸⁰

Just like her token flower, the woman should grace the "proper sphere" of the man she loves whether "the palace of a prince" or "transplanted to a meaner home."²⁸¹

The sentimental consideration of flowers in a less specifically romantic and more typological language reveals the shared province of botanical science and moral emblems. Writers such as Shirley Hibberd linked botanical study with a maternal ideology of nature. His mid-Victorian typological emphasis interprets nature as moral and maternal, revealing religious messages or lessons in systems of figuration reflecting the love of God.

Shirley Hibberd: Myth and Victorian Flower Sentiment

Flowers blend by association of ideas the experiences with the pleasures of life; they refresh the worn mind with waters from the untainted fountain of pure feeling, which flows from the emerald meadows of childhood [...].²⁸²

Shirley Hibberd's *Brambles and Bay-Leaves: Essays on the Homely and the Beautiful* (1855) exemplifies the Victorian Wordsworthianism and botanical moralizing found in sentimental flower writing popular in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁸³ Hibberd's myth reception includes a maternal, Cerean and Wordsworthian nature. The figure of Proserpina is implicitly written into the construction of Victorian childhood innocence, and Plutonic nature is

²⁸⁰ Bayley 17-24. Similarly in Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp," jasmine and myrtle celebrate his love for his future wife: "white-flowered jasmin, and the broad-leaved myrtle, / (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works*, ed., H.J. Jackson (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 4-5.

²⁸¹ Bayley 34, 33, 35.

²⁸² Shirley Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves: Essays on Things Homely and Beautiful*, 2nd edn. corrected and revised (London: Groomsbridge and Sons, 1862) 310.

²⁸³ Hibberd's titlepage quotations from Keats and Coleridge in editions one and two, respectively, epitomize this Romantic attitude or approach toward nature throughout the work. See Shirley Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves: Essays on the Homely and the Beautiful*, 1st edn. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855); and *Brambles and Bay-Leaves: Essays on Things Homely and Beautiful*, 2nd edn. corrected and revised (London: Groomsbridge and Sons, 1862).

implicitly linked to the industrialization and urbanization of a rural childhood home held within living memory. As Seaton observes, Hibberd's essays explore "the cultural and spiritual meanings of flowers and gardens" and his "depiction of the place of flowers in the scheme of things" is "perfectly representative, in both style and content, of the majority of Victorian flower writers."²⁸⁴

The works of moral and religious writers, "illustrat[ing] through floral examples 'lessons of wisdom pure,' make up one of three major classifications of middle-class reading material that involve the "sentimental consideration of flowers" in addition to flower poetry and the language of flowers.²⁸⁵ Flowers are used "to communicate various moral and spiritual truths, as well as emotions connected with home, family, and romance."²⁸⁶ Seaton explains the typological emphasis given to nature in Victorian flower books: "In nature, many Victorian thinkers read messages about Christ and the Christian experience in the same way that they read their Bibles."²⁸⁷ She terms this process of finding religious truths in nature 'natural typology.'²⁸⁸ Seaton mentions Hibberd as one of the many Victorian floral typologists looking for religious truths in nature, "bring[ing] together nature and culture, nature and human life, nature and scripture, and nature and the Trinity in various casual correspondences."²⁸⁹ In Hibberd's floral typology, "We must hear the voice of God in the elements [...] We must see His face in every flower [...]."²⁹⁰

Like Wordsworth, Hibberd emphasizes a moral hierarchy within nature and an analogical relationship between plants and humans in which the physical prefigures the spiritual. Hibberd's essays express a "love of Nature," a love of "green things" which embodies "a thousand suggestions of their relations to the life of man" and enables him "to perceive, both by reason

²⁸⁴ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 269.

²⁸⁵ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 259, 256.

²⁸⁶ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 255.

²⁸⁷ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 260. See also Landow.

²⁸⁸ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 260.

²⁸⁹ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 269.

²⁹⁰ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 303.

and analogy, his position in the general scheme of creation.”²⁹¹ In his chapter on “The Soul in Nature,” Hibberd writes of the sympathetic bond and spiritual union between humans and the natural world: “Man, too, is a part of this; his soul is a part of the great soul which pervades nature; and to every beat of his heart the great heart of the universe answers with a kindred throb.”²⁹² Hibberd emphasizes the place of man in the moral hierarchy of natural theology: “If the ‘clodded earth,’ sending up its breath in flowers, has a soul by which it is united to all the links of diversified being [...] then by all these links of causation he shall trace up his relation to God, the first link in this trembling chain of spiritual impulses.”²⁹³ Hibberd’s typological thinking and his emphasis on the need for the strict observation of nature exemplify the approach of Victorian natural history.²⁹⁴

Cerean Nature

In his myth reception, Hibberd represents Cerean “Nature” as spiritual and sacred, maternal and moral, and specifically Wordsworthian, expressing “her” love through “green things.” In his preface, Hibberd writes that the “ministration” of Nature “teaches him [man] the lessons of his moral life” and his essays provide countless examples of Nature as maternal and moral teacher.²⁹⁵ In Chapter 1, “Grass and Other Green Things,” he writes that the “lovely green hue” of grass “overspreads the earth like the laughter of Nature herself” and “mingl[es] alike with the outpourings of the human heart, the voices and harmonies of nature in her teachings of poetic love.”²⁹⁶ Hibberd’s natural typology includes “the spiritual essences of green leaves and the embodied voices of living nature.”²⁹⁷ There is “a moral beauty about green things which renders them mute teachers of the noblest lessons.”²⁹⁸ And again, there is “a moral beauty and a teaching for the spirit in all the budding

²⁹¹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. iii.

²⁹² Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 46.

²⁹³ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 47-8.

²⁹⁴ Seaton, “Considering the Lilies” 270. See also Merrill.

²⁹⁵ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. iv.

²⁹⁶ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 2.

²⁹⁷ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 17.

²⁹⁸ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 18.

things of the green out-door world, which to the wise man afford inward satisfaction, and never fail to renew his hope."²⁹⁹ Green things indicate human evanescence but also show promise of a spiritual afterlife: "their growth with each return of spring symbolises the spring season to which we shall awake in another world."³⁰⁰ Hibberd concludes: "These are the teachings of the grass, these the lessons of its verdurous beauty."³⁰¹

Demeter is depicted among the grass that makes up part of her iconography:

Hence, too, the patriarchs and poets of the olden times painted Damater [sic], the mother of the gods [...] as sitting amid green grass, and surrounded with fragrant flowers. On the oldest coins of Syria she sits beside the hive, with ears of corn in her hands, to denote the return of the seasons and their exuberance of fruits; while at her feet the grasses grow and wave, to typify the seasonal renewals of green beauty on the earth.³⁰²

In a chapter on "Floral Customs, Superstitions, and Histories," Hibberd describes the relationship between Ceres's classical iconography and the harvest. She is associated with the poppy and ears of corn, symbols dedicated to her as goddess of the harvest and tributes offered by the reapers in thanksgiving for their crop.³⁰³ The history of an ancient Greek floral custom mingles with Hibberd's own reception of the myth within Victorian botanical discourse (the Cerean grass, the Proserpinian wildflower). In telling one of the grasses' "stories of the ages," Hibberd highlights the historical importance of ancient Greek mythology while he indicates the myth's contemporary significance as a Victorian image of domesticity and home.

Grass, associated by Hibberd with Demeter/Ceres, is maternal and domestic, providing a sanctified home for flowers and children. Ceres and Proserpina are harmoniously joined as mother and daughter in this "green

²⁹⁹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 18.

³⁰⁰ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 18.

³⁰¹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 19.

³⁰² Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 15.

³⁰³ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 215-6.

world." Grass provides a sacred home for children and nurtures their physical and spiritual growth:

grass is the play-ground of the dear children [...]
Who would not bless the ground whereon the foot of
childhood loves to tread, where it loves to gambol and exult in
the exuberance of its happy heart? [...] plucking the daisies [...]
like the grass, fresh, fervent, and joyful, and knowing no other
tears which vanish with the first ray of sunshine [...] we must
let hearts expand amongst the flowers, and their limbs gain
strength upon the turf.³⁰⁴

The grass ensures domestic harmony: "Let us live beside the grass [...] wherever grass grows and beautifies the earth [...] wherever its tender shoots pierce through the clods, there is home, there is society, there is love."³⁰⁵

Hibberd repeatedly extols the sacredness of grass: "The love of green things is so universal and indestructible a passion of man's heart, that no spot of earth where verdure grows, be it ever so wild and dreary in its aspect, but wears for him the semblance of a home."³⁰⁶ Like the mythological, universal Earth Mother, the grass embraces us with "flowery meadows folding us in their grassy arms."³⁰⁷

Proserpinian Girlhood: Children and Wildflowers

Although not explicitly referred to, Proserpinian girlhood, identified with flowers and epitomizing girlhood innocence, is implicitly written into Hibberd's Victorian construction of childhood and reveals Victorian flower culture's sentimental emphasis on childhood. In Hibberd's association of children with wildflowers based upon memories of a rural childhood, flowers serve as moral emblems of innocence in a typological context. Hibberd stresses the Wordsworthian association of childhood memory and nature: "the great truth, that with greenness and natural beauty, childhood survives

³⁰⁴ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 11.

³⁰⁵ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 12.

³⁰⁶ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 17-18.

³⁰⁷ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 18.

as long as man remains.”³⁰⁸ Memories evoked by flowers contain a Wordsworthian, transformative power of healing. Hibberd repeatedly constructs Victorian childhood innocence through associations with wildflowers and in scenes of flower gathering.³⁰⁹ The return of these flowers every spring symbolizes a figurative return to childhood.

In “The Love of Flowers,” Hibberd repeatedly associates flowers with childhood. They are part of the sacredness of childhood memories: “The love of flowers is one of the universal sentiments. In childhood, we roam through lanes and fields [...] to hold communion with them [...].”³¹⁰ As symbols of childhood, flowers “lead us back to the scenes made dear by recollections of home [...].”³¹¹ Hibberd makes an analogy between childhood and spring wildflowers, and associates flowers with memories of a childhood home: “We think of the time when, long, long ago, we were ourselves in the budding spring-time of life, and when our childish hopes were all confined within the old house [...].”³¹²

In his association of wildflowers with memories of a rural childhood, Hibberd expresses the popular Victorian preference for wildflowers and the countryside:

The flowers of the wild have ever a greater hold upon the affections than the nurtured beauties of the garden or conservatory. Wild flowers form a chief part of the love of country, they are our associates in early life, and recall, in after years, the scenes and recollections of our youth [...] their generous and smiling faces give us kindly greetings and sweet memories of the first impulses of love and friendship.³¹³

In addition to serving as moral emblems, flowers become symbols of an idyllic rural childhood for a generation transplanted from country to city due

³⁰⁸ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 18.

³⁰⁹ See Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 11, 21, 36, 187-8.

³¹⁰ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 301.

³¹¹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 302.

³¹² Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 187.

³¹³ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 305-6.

to the industrial revolution. The consoling presence of a flower cherished in childhood recalls memories of a youth spent in the country. For those with a rural childhood still within living memory, flowers evoke an idealized, nostalgic image of the country life they left behind. Memories suggest an idealized vision of the countryside redolent of health and abundance.

In "The Season of Buttercups," spring is the figurative return to or revisiting of childhood when "Nature and Man come back again to childhood."³¹⁴ Spring is the time of childhood wildflower gatherings and spring wildflowers associated with childhood:

When the dear children go with hearts full of springtime, and hopes yet in the folding bud, — searching for the snowflakes and the spangles, the daisies and the buttercups [...] laden with their flowery spoils, to lie and dream all night of worlds made of flowers, and people with yellow faces and white daisy eyes, and yellow hair, walking upon yellow ground, on which there is not room to tread without crushing the buttercups.³¹⁵

Although spring is "everywhere the season of rapid change," flowers are associated with a universal, constant love of nature; they are "friends that change not."³¹⁶ Every year brings the return of spring flowers and a figurative return to childhood.

Hibberd's Cerean "Nature" or earth mother watching over her Proserpinian "flower" evokes the maternal "Nature" of Wordsworth's "Three Years She Grew" who gives Lucy joint authority over the natural world and provides for her moral instruction:

It is because flowers are emblems of innocence, so like the merry face of childhood, that they have a large place in our best affections. They remind us [...] when Nature, our fond mother sat upon the hills, clapping her hands with joy, and giving us all the earth, with its landscapes and rocks, and hills and forests,

³¹⁴ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 21.

³¹⁵ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 21.

³¹⁶ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 27, 2nd edn. 302.

for our school and play-ground [...] when all things were clothed with beauty, and were worshipped with a veneration beyond utterance [...] when we picked up lessons of love by river sides, and hawthorn paths, in quiet glens and in green fields, and inhaled, from every passing breeze, health, intelligence, and joy [...].³¹⁷

Hibberd does not pursue it but comes closest here to a Proserpinian coming-of-age and readiness for an independent adult relationship. However, according to Hibberd, picking the flower is a mistake. His passive Proserpina – in need of the supervision of a parental figure who is associated with maternal nature and offers instruction in botanical activities (such as those in chapters 18 and 20, “Uses of Wild Plants” and “On the Formation of an Herbarium”) – recalls Fanshawe’s “first Female Botanist” under maternal care:

Then, too, the holy memories which they embalm in their folded buds and undewed chalices [...] [provide] Tender recollections, perchance, of parents now sleeping in flowery graves, no longer controlling our actions with a judicious watchfulness and care; no longer checking us as we are about to pluck the fatal weeds of folly and to inhale the breath of the sinful blossoms which pleasure scatters in our path – beautiful and fragrant [...].³¹⁸

As “ministers” of nature, the purpose of flowers is moral guidance rather than sexual reproduction. The “great duty of flowers” is “to teach us to be always children, to be ever fresh, and budding into new beauty [...].”³¹⁹ In his floral typology, flowers are “antetypes of the angelic, tokens of the perfect, the peaceful, and the just.”³²⁰ Hibberd concludes: “The physical history of our world teaches us that flowers were created for spiritual, rather than material purposes. They were sent by God to give us constant revelations of the

³¹⁷ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 309.

³¹⁸ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 310.

³¹⁹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 303-4.

³²⁰ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 311.

beautiful, and to keep us in the perpetual presence of innocence and virtue."³²¹

Hibberd's myth reception is at odds with a Proserpina narrative initiating sexual maturation. Proserpina should never pick the flower but stay as a child. For Hibberd, gathering flowers indicates the pursuit of childhood innocence. His reception of the Proserpina myth highlights the construction of Victorian childhood innocence based upon scenes of flower gathering. Scenes of children gathering flowers focus on a time of pre-adolescence; just as the flower itself wilts and dies once plucked, so flower picking in the myth leads to the death of childhood and a new phase of adolescence and sexual maturity. The moment of flower picking, which Hibberd wants to avoid, is the moment of change and transition, the coming-of-age from childhood to adolescence and sexual maturity.

Plutonic Forces: Industrialism, Urbanism and the Threat of Change

The industrialization of the countryside is represented as a Plutonic threat of change and an intrusion into Hibberd's green world of innocence and beauty. Grass's "winning tenderness, seems planted here to make the soul contented with its earthly lot," and its "abundant and universal growth" expresses "the poetic spirit of the world" as it hides "with a delicious verdure, the grim realities of nature, and clothes the sordid facts of earth and iron with a garment of life and beauty."³²² Hibberd contrasts the natural wealth of the fields with the metals of industry: "Buttercups! [...] that haunt every meadow, and roadside, and sunny bank, and, with the white daisies make the gold and silver of the fields, — a gold and silver more precious than the dirt men dig from mines, because appealing to their highest faculties [...]."³²³

In contrasting the rural with the urban and industrial, Hibberd stresses country living not just for purposes of physical health but also for moral improvement. He promotes the preservation of the countryside and its

³²¹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 2nd edn. 311.

³²² Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 2. For the application of Wordsworth's poetry to the healing of industrial society, see Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998).

³²³ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 21.

benefits: "If the grass is so beautiful, then, and mingled with so many associations of story and song, why not have it always beside us, and pass our lives amongst its green? Why pine away in smoky towns in jarring discord [...]?"³²⁴ Hibberd expresses the popular view of nature as beneficial to the soul, in which being close to nature brings one closer to God: "Who would not leave the crowded city, with its eternal dust and din, and black walls and sooty atmosphere, for such lovely scenes as these? [...] A walled city is a prison for the human heart, and to shut ourselves up from beholding the beauty with which the hand of God has clothed the earth, an iniquity and a moral death."³²⁵ Hibberd again contrasts rural with urban in stressing that in the city, the change of seasons is lost:

In a great city, the true character of the soul is lost, and nature becomes a dumb, unmeaning phantasy [...] How wretched the monotony of brick walls, compared with the blue uplands, the green meadows, the clustering woods, and the light fleecy clouds, flinging their shadows upon the smiling landscape. How painful the eternal roar, and dust, and traffic in the narrow streets, compared with the sweet voices, the sunny glades, the green canopies, the solemn solitudes, and the life-inspiring breezes of nature!³²⁶

Hibberd devotes one chapter in his essays to nature's relationship to science and technology. In "A Glance at the Progress of Discovery and Science during the past half century," he displays a critical ambivalence about industrial "progress," claiming that "No previous era in the world has exhibited so glorious a spectacle of man conquering brute matter, and rendering its most obdurate elements obedient to his desires. For a penny a mile, the poor man may be winged by the Pegasus of iron into the green fields, and join with nature in her carnival of beauty."³²⁷

³²⁴ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 12.

³²⁵ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 154.

³²⁶ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 184.

³²⁷ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 171.

Proserpinian Memories

Hibberd describes his own childhood memories of gathering wildflowers before the coming of industrialization. The “crowning joys of all were ‘buttercupping’ and ‘blackberrying’ [and] [...] away we went [...] in parties of six or eight, to gather buttercups and daisies in Bow-common fields. Alas! that spot is now a busy town, covered with houses, factories, and railway stations.”³²⁸ Writing of his childhood home in Stepney, Hibberd expresses the typical Victorian lament for a rural childhood home urbanized within living memory: “it was a green village with meadows and windmills when we were young.”³²⁹ As John Sales explains, “Stepney was a village on the eastern outskirts of London. The years in which he grew to manhood saw an explosion of the population of London, and suburbs were thrown out from the City, engulfing many villages.”³³⁰ A plant of remorse, the bramble of Hibberd’s title fittingly evokes a nostalgic lament for the lost world of his rural childhood.³³¹

In “Memories of Mischief,” Hibberd reminisces about childhood events. He looks back “with fond pleasure to the days of [...] boyhood” to bring back from “that garden of green memories some fruits so refreshing [...]”³³² He singles out for remembrance the story of an orchard-robbing during his schooldays:

We remember old ‘Captain King’ [...] a retired sea captain [...] [who] spent his whole time in the culture of his garden. As we passed his garden-wall every day from school, we were always attracted by a large pear-tree which loomed above the wall [...] The evening came and at last the hour [...] Choosing a spot where the bricks were loose, we at last gained the top of the wall, and looked down in the moonlight on the old gentleman’s

³²⁸ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 36.

³²⁹ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 36.

³³⁰ John Sales, introduction, *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste, And Recreations for Town Folk in the Study and Imitation of Nature*, by Shirley Hibberd (1856; London: Century in Association with the National Trust, 1987) v.

³³¹ Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 170-1.

³³² Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 34.

garden. We paused a moment, and then down we both dropped. We stole along the garden, treading on strawberry-beds and breaking the flower-laden branches of the rose-bushes. There were grapes in one place, nectarines in another; the walls all around were hung with unripe fruit, and presented stronger temptations than the chosen pear-tree. We were treading in the thick of a strawberry-bed, in order to get at some green peaches, when there was a noise at the garden door [...]."³³³

Hibberd's orchard-robbing episode recalls Wordsworth's "Nutting" and contains a similar boyhood rite of passage. In Wordsworth's poem, the boy pillages nature and releases or satisfies his sexual energy, yet the action is painful and immediately regretted. As Trott has noted, sexualizations are in play between nature's innocence and nature's passion. In Hibberd's story, as in Wordsworth's poem, the boy pillages nature, stepping on strawberry-beds and breaking rose branches. Here however, the sexual impulse within nature is contained. In Hibberd's orchard-robbing scene, the fruit is unripe and green, and the theft never actually takes place. The boys are caught by a servant, brought before the Captain, and given a lecture on theft before being freed.

Hibberd's final reflections on boyhood and girlhood reveal Victorian conventions about gender relations (including the sexual politics of nineteenth-century England) and the representation of women. Concluding his reminiscence, Hibberd reflects that the boy's natural rite of passage is like a fruit: "So life passes phase after phase, and manhood comes by a slow growth, and continues to ripen until we have so grown out of the boy-skin that we look down upon it, almost doubting that it was ever ours [...]."³³⁴ In contrast to the boy's coming-of-age, the girl's maturation is like a flower:

Boyhood! [...] how suggestive of impulsive generosity – of hearty abandonment – of wild, hilarious joy – so brimful and excessive, that it scruples at no mischief so its mood be served,

³³³ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 36-7.

³³⁴ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 40.

and will dare anything to gratify its individuality. How unlike girlhood, too – how contrasted with the quiet refinement which marks the woman even in the bud. Noise, confusion, nonsense, and unbounded laughter, with an innate love of mischief [...] form the elementary traits of boy-life: but the girl steals away to her beads, her doll, and her skipping rope [...].³³⁵

Like the poet's silent female companions in nature in Wordsworth's poems, the "dearest maiden" in "Nutting" or Lucy, the girl appears quiet, more passive or static, confined to the home or domestic activities where she can be given instruction.³³⁶ Hibberd's social construction of woman and flower invokes the Victorian gender ideology of separate spheres in which men are active in the public sphere of business and politics and women passive in the private sphere of domesticity.³³⁷ Victorian notions of woman's "natural" or inherent affinities with nature, specifically flowers, her moral authority and her capacity for sympathy, exist within a larger debate over the role of woman.³³⁸

Flowers and the Feminine: Gardening and Victorian Gender Ideology

Hibberd's ideological link between woman and flower also pertains to women readers of gardening books directed toward reshaping their domestic sphere. The Victorian middle-class woman at home became the audience for books on suburban gardening, like those by Hibberd. He published the first edition of his essays in 1855 and a practical gardening book, *The Town Garden: A Manual for the Management of City and Suburban Gardens*, the same year.

³³⁵ Hibberd, *Brambles and Bay-Leaves* 1st edn. 35.

³³⁶ For criticism concerning Wordsworth and gender, see Homans, "Eliot, Wordsworth, and the Scenes of the Sisters' Instruction," and Judith W. Page, *Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women* (London: U of California P, 1994). See also Susan M. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* (London: Rutgers, The State U, 1987).

³³⁷ See Davidoff and Hall; Schor; and Michael Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988).

³³⁸ Modern scholarship has analysed the social construction of Victorian gender ideology: see Poovey, *Uneven Developments*; Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter, (New York: Monthly Review P, 1975); and Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (London: Harvard UP, 1982). For sexual politics in Victorian science, see Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (London: Harvard UP, 1989).

Hibberd's horticultural works concerned with women and middle-class suburban domesticity draw upon the domestic ideologies established or put in place during the previous decades of the 1830s and 1840s (including the doctrine of separate spheres) by John Claudius Loudon.³³⁹ The arbiter of middle-class suburban gardening, Loudon based his views upon the identification of or affinity between women and flowers (both "natural") and the relation between women and good taste. The flower garden reflected Loudon's notion of good taste based upon the beauty of the female form, a delicate femininity expressing moral virtue. The translation of Loudon's vision of beauty into material form could be achieved by the use of supports, columns, undulations and smoothness, ornaments and colours: "Loudon's definition of beauty, which he intended to be literally built into his designs for homes and gardens, thus rested ultimately on morality as exemplified through women." Like many other major protagonists of domesticity, Loudon "both elevated the status of women and contained them in a relative sphere": "Women's virtuosity lay in containment, like the plant in the pot, limited and domesticated, sexually controlled, not spilling out into spheres in which she did not belong nor being overpowered by 'weeds' of social disorder."³⁴⁰

"As envisioned by John and Jane Loudon and many of their contemporaries," the English garden "became an extension of the private sphere, a sheltered place for women and children."³⁴¹ As the opening to Mrs. Loudon's chapter on "The Flower Garden and the Culture of Flowers" confirms, the predominant socio-cultural link between women of the

³³⁹ Davidoff and Catherine Hall 191. For critical sources on women/gender and Victorian gardening, see Heath Schenker, "Women, Gardens, and the English Middle Class in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002): 337-360; Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature* and "The Conservatory in Victorian Literature." *Journal of Garden History* 2.3 (1982): 273-84; and Robert B. Riley, "Flowers, Power, and Sex," *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*, eds. Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester, Jr. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT P, 1990).

³⁴⁰ Davidoff and Hall 191-2.

³⁴¹ Schenker 353-4. As Schenker has shown, early nineteenth-century gardening reflected ideologies of gender and class, particularly the doctrine of separate spheres.

dominant social classes and nineteenth-century gardening concerns flowers, the maintenance of which, as “the lightest possible kind of garden labour,” requires less physical effort: “Whatever doubts may be entertained as to the practicability of a lady attending to the culture of culinary vegetables and fruit trees, none can exist respecting her management of the flower-garden, as that is pre-eminently a woman’s department.”³⁴²

The Victorian fascination with flowers operated within contemporary practices in nineteenth-century horticulture. The shift from eighteenth-century to nineteenth-century gardening was a shift from the picturesque to the “gardenesque”, from aesthetics to botanics: “the growing of plants became the dominant concern.”³⁴³ The botanic emphasis of the gardenesque focused on flowers and exotic species as gardening became the art of growing and of displaying a collection of plants distinguishable from the native landscape. In *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*, Turner defines “gardenesque style” according to John Claudius Loudon’s usage as “a style of planting design in which each individual plant is allowed to develop its natural character as fully as possible”; as he explains, Loudon proposed the scheme of using foreign instead of native plants to achieve this distinction between the garden as a work of art and the rurality of picturesque landscape.³⁴⁴ In contrast to the picturesque conditions preferred earlier in the century, Turner points out that the conditions favoured by the Victorians, “were only likely to be found in a garden.”³⁴⁵

The shift in garden history during the early nineteenth century from the picturesque to the gardenesque is well documented by garden historians. Christopher Thacker notes in his chapter on “Gardens in the Nineteenth Century” the exchange of the sublime and picturesque for the gardenesque, that is “those qualities which are ‘calculated for displaying the art of the

³⁴² Jane Loudon, *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* (London: Stewart and Murray, 1840) 244.

³⁴³ Scott Smiley, “Musing the Garden: A Poetics of Place and Emplacement,” diss., Louisiana State U, Baton Rouge (1999) 92.

³⁴⁴ T.H.D. Turner, “Gardenesque style,” *The Oxford Companion to Gardens* (Oxford: OUP, 1986) 211.

³⁴⁵ Turner 211.

gardener.’ ”³⁴⁶ Brent Elliott confirms that the 1850s were the years of the dominance of the flower garden.³⁴⁷ In addition to garden designs featuring floral borders and carpet bedding, flower shows and annual competitions, the enthusiasm for horticulture, floriculture and botany included albums of pressed flowers in front parlours, breakfast rooms and drawing rooms, next to glass cases; wax, knitted, paper, and shell flowers; floral fabric and tile designs; naturalistic wallpapers.³⁴⁸

As arbiters of middle-class taste, the Loudons not only educated the population about gardening, but also shaped social attitudes about gender. John Claudius Loudon’s emphasis upon the importance of education for labourers is also directed at amateur gardeners assumed to have no specialised knowledge, including ladies, respectable upper to middle-class women who would be involved in the planning, layout, and maintenance of the garden: “The enjoyments to be derived from a suburban residence depend principally on a knowledge of the resources which a garden, however small, is capable of affording [...] For these reasons, it is our intention to give our readers a more intimate knowledge of the subjects treated of, than has hitherto been attempted.”³⁴⁹ In her *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* (1840), Jane Loudon, wife of the famous nineteenth-century horticultural pioneer, discusses the uses of digging and the ways in which they are applicable to lady gardeners, thereby addressing contemporary assumptions about the (un)suitability of certain kinds of physical activity to the “natural” constitution of middle and upper-class women:

The first point to be attended to, in order to render the operation of digging less laborious, is to provide a suitable spade [...] For this purpose, the blade of what is called a lady’s spade is made of not more than half the usual breadth [...] The handle is about the usual length but quite smooth and sufficiently slender for a

³⁴⁶ Christopher Thacker, *The History of Gardens* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) 228.

³⁴⁷ Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986) 135.

³⁴⁸ Shteir 152.

³⁴⁹ John Claudius Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener* (1838): 1-2.

lady's hand to grasp it [...] [The lady] should also have a pair of stiff thick leathern gloves, or gauntlets, to protect her hands
[...] ³⁵⁰

Gardening literature focusing on the physical act of cultivation showcases the period's fascination with its figurative connotations of intellectual and moral improvement, particularly as they relate to both contemporary working-class ethics of self-help and middle-class efforts for social reform.

The rise in popular forms of garden literature corresponded with the emerging middle-class interest in cultivating a bourgeois respectability, culturally equivalent to their economic status and achievement. Scourse observes that the Industrial Revolution resulted in a new, prosperous urban middle-class eager to better themselves: "Writers, journalists, and entrepreneurs fed the popular taste for publications about gardening" and "gardening magazines proliferated, in weekly or monthly numbers, cheaply done."³⁵¹ Thacker links botanical innovations in the first half of the nineteenth century with the rise of the urban and educated middle classes.³⁵² Smiley confirms that the rise of the middle class, along with the urbanisation and suburbanization of the population, profoundly affected the English garden; lacking traditional tastes and sources of wealth, they aspired to cultural and intellectual as well as economical and social improvement.³⁵³ As Sales points out, Hibberd's suburban horticulture (mid-nineteenth century middle-class suburbs) was intended "for this prosperous new middle class of Victorian England, occupiers of modest suburban villas whose status was determined by material considerations – locality, houses, number of servants, furnishings, garden":

The need to display beauty, refinement and 'taste' was high in the priorities of the time. Shirley Hibberd provided reassurance by propounding the idea that Taste is definable and constant,

³⁵⁰ Jane Loudon 7, 9-11.

³⁵¹ Scourse 14.

³⁵² Thacker 229.

³⁵³ Smiley 94.

and that ethics and morality are keys to the recognition of the Beautiful. He recommended the study of art and nature as a means of refining morality; simple hobbies of the rustic kind 'that breathe purity and quiet and peace.'³⁵⁴

Writing for the market of advice books and gardening manuals of the era, his status as "a leader of middle-class fashionable taste" is evident in publications such as *Rustic Adornments, and Recreations for Town Folk, in the Study and Imitation of Nature* (1856).³⁵⁵ Hibberd's addition of a new coloured plate frontispiece and quotation from Wordsworth in the third edition of *Rustic Adornments* (1870) shows the nature of Hibberd's myth reception and epitomizes the kind of Victorian homages to Wordsworth which reveal a celebration of and longing for a safe and benevolent maternal natural world.³⁵⁶ The female figures are depicted in the domestic sphere, within the confines of the suburban home and garden. "Cerean" nature is specifically linked to a separate spheres ideology and woman's circumscribed role. Hibberd's essays highlight the maternal, Wordsworthian nature associated with his Demeter and in turn, with the Cerean nature of Eliot and Gaskell.

³⁵⁴ Sales, Introduction, *Rustic Adornments* v.

³⁵⁵ Oxford DNB vol. 26, 990. See Hibberd, *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste, and Recreations for Town Folk, in the Study and Imitation of Nature*, 1st edn. (London: Groomsbridge and Sons, 1856). Reprinted as a 2nd edn. in 1857.

³⁵⁶ The quotation is taken from Wordsworth's sonnet (XXIV), "From the Italian of Michael Angelo. I." (1807):

His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
With beauty, which is varying every hour;
But, in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the power
Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower,
That breathes on earth the air of paradise. (ll. 10-14)

See Hibberd, *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste*, With coloured plates from drawings by H. Briscoe, 3rd edn. (London: Groomsbridge and Sons, 1870).

Chapter 3
The Rose, the Conservatory and Proserpina's Arm:
George Eliot and *The Mill on the Floss*

‘It's poor work, changing your country side.’³⁵⁷

Organicism, Myth and Narrative

After completing her first work of fiction in 1857, George Eliot records “a deep sense of satisfaction in having done a bit of faithful work that will remain like a primrose root in the hedgerow and gladden and chasten human hearts in years to come.”³⁵⁸ She likens the process of writing fiction to a primrose root growing in the hedge, to a plant, like that “first rose” of the year and sign of hope, which continues to flower.³⁵⁹ Writing a novel is like a wildflower taking root. Both are organic parts or forms of history. Her entry reveals the importance of striking a balance between the past and the present, the present and the future, and in her fiction, between historical preservation and measured change that takes the past into account.

George Eliot's diary entry in which the novel form is equated to a wildflower reveals her interest in organic forms and organic processes of growth, development and change.³⁶⁰ For nineteenth-century aesthetic interpreters of mythology, myth itself is also organic and plant-like. Fiction and myth share imaginative, nonscientific aspects of language. As Burstein observes, the decline of myth signals the decline of a more emotive, imaginative dimension in language and the rise of rational, scientific discourse: “George Eliot, for one, was sensitive to both the scientific benefits

³⁵⁷ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon Haight, introduction by Dinah Birch (Oxford: OUP, 1998) 264.

³⁵⁸ December 19, 1857. Eliot, “Diary 1854-1861,” *The Journals of George Eliot*, eds. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 71. George Eliot wrote most of her first fictional work, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, while travelling off the coast of England with George Henry Lewes during the summer months of 1856-57. While he was writing *Sea-Side Studies*, she was finishing “Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story” throughout the first two months of their trip to the Scilly Isles, beginning “Janet's Repentance” there and continuing it at Jersey before completing it in London.

³⁵⁹ Grigson 266; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 188-9.

³⁶⁰ For criticism on George Eliot and organicism, see David Carroll, “‘Janet's Repentance’ and the Myth of the Organic,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35.3 (Dec 1980): 331-348; and Karen B. Mann, “George Eliot's Language of Nature: Production and Consumption,” *ELH* 48.1 (1981 Spring): 190-216.

and the emotional deprivation that accompanied linguistic progress.”³⁶¹ With the parting of “the anomalies and inconveniences of historical language,” is the loss of “everything that gives it power over the imagination.”³⁶² This is particularly evident in botany as the field specialized and professionalized into a science in the nineteenth century, and “literary” and “scientific” botany diverged. Alert to historical process and the appeal of the past as well as scientific progress and modern technology, George Eliot’s myth reception is a way of negotiating change. Ultimately, it is a way of using myth—itsself a historical form, a part of a historical language, as well as an organic form and so part of an organic process of change—in the service of historical preservation or appreciation.

George Eliot uses the organic form of myth to articulate or express changes to the natural world due to industrialization.³⁶³ Both in the reworking of myth and in the creation of new myth, the Victorian use of the classical register of mythology to talk about nature makes sense given that nature was changing irrevocably in the nineteenth century.³⁶⁴ Nature as it had been known since classical times was now industrializing. Myth reception within *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) reveals the appropriation of a form rooted within history but not attached to a specific origin, historically evolving with an organic quality which frames the writer’s ambivalence toward contemporary science and the industrialization of the rural world.

³⁶¹ Burstein 321.

³⁶² George Eliot, “The Natural History of German Life,” *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) 288. Also quoted in Burstein (321-2).

³⁶³ For criticism on George Eliot and myth, see Wisenfarth, *George Eliot’s Mythmaking* and *Browning Institute Studies* 10 (1982): 91-104; Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: the Central Myths of George Eliot’s Poetic Imagination* (New York: New York UP, 1979); and Brian Swann, “*Silas Marner* and the New Mythus,” *Criticism* 18 (1976).

³⁶⁴ Wisenfarth argues that George Eliot creates a humanist mythology. See Joseph Wisenfarth, *George Eliot’s Mythmaking* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977). In his introduction, he provides evidence of her knowledge of classical myth. For an analysis of botanical discourse in contemporary nineteenth-century American fiction, see Hoyer’s study of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1859 novel, *The Minister’s Wooing*. Mark T. Hoyer, “Cultivating Desire, Tending Piety”: Botanical Discourse in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The Minister’s Wooing*,” *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, eds. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (London: UP of Virginia, 2001) 111-125.

Myth into Botany: The Proserpina Narrative and The Mill on the Floss

The Proserpina myth is written into a historical context of nineteenth-century botanical discourse that informs the text and contributes to a specific reading. George Eliot's myth reception invokes a botanical version of the narrative in which the story is told at a botanical level, both moral and scientific. Eliot's use of the myth highlights tensions within an ambiguous nature. Mythological narrative is enacted on a botanical level in which plants are both traditional and modern, moral and scientific. Plant history and traditional associations and beliefs coexist with botanical realism and the practicalities of working rural communities. The Proserpina myth's reception into a botanical context means that specific plants correspond to stages in the myth: Ceres's "green world" of trees and corn, the "innocent" daisy of the young Proserpina or Korè and the sexualized hothouse rose of her Plutonic encounters. While the novel itself retains a rural setting, this botanical narrative is historically accurate for a particular generation transplanted from rural surroundings to an urban, industrial location.

In Chapter three, girl-flower readings reflect an ambivalent attitude toward nature, as George Eliot attempts to balance views of nostalgia and progress in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). In Eliot's critique of scientific and industrial progress, advances in technology clash with the Tullivers' tenacious allegiance to family tradition. Eliot considers Mr. Tulliver's resistance to technological advances in irrigation and the application of steam power within a more general questioning of "Nature" and social progress in light of Darwinian evolution and the theory of sexual selection. Ambiguous, "Nature" may offer moral insights as well as scientific advancement. Botanical moralizing goes hand-in-hand with her botanical accuracy as Eliot balances an emblematic and scientific interpretation of plants and flowers. George Eliot's discourse of botanical morality in *The Mill on the Floss* draws upon Wordsworthian nature, a religious context of evangelical typology and Biblical parable alongside a context of natural history and botanical science.

Maggie Tulliver's Proserpinian coming-of-age and her relationships with male characters or "Plutonic suitors" of the novel dramatize her ambivalent feelings about change and her ultimate inability to accept or successfully adapt to these changes. Maggie's feelings of ambivalence are consistent with nineteenth-century gender conventions and separate spheres ideology depicting women as passive and under patriarchal control. Critics have argued that Maggie is bound by the past to the point of death and becomes part of her childhood landscape in the manner of Wordsworth's Lucy. George Eliot's reference to the classical sculpture of Proserpina during the conservatory "flower-picking" scene not only highlights the contrast between the ancient world and the modern but also the struggle between nostalgia and progress, as Maggie is caught between the two worlds of Dorlcote Mill and Guest and Co.

Natural History and Novel Writing

In George Eliot's organic realist vision, natural science and the observation of human life are interconnected.³⁶⁵ Like an ancient tree, the community of St. Ogg's is represented as an object of natural history, "one of those old, old towns, which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature as much as the nests of the bower birds or the winding galleries of the

³⁶⁵ As critics have noted, George Eliot's early fiction is born out of her natural history expeditions with George Henry Lewes. See Mary Ellen Bellanca, "Recollecting Nature: George Eliot's 'Ilfracombe Journal' and Victorian Women's Natural History Writing," *Modern Language Studies* 27.3/4 (1997): 19-36. As Eliot's fictional strategy develops alongside botanical and zoological pursuits, her writings correspond and engage with Lewes's natural history, reflecting their shared experience. Their writing on marine fauna and flora registers a botanical discourse, with competing impulses and approaches toward nature.

In "Recollections of Ilfracombe" (1856), Eliot recounts the amateur zoological expeditions and botanizing undertaken by the couple during the 1850s. She dwells on the need for a powerful descriptive language: "I have talked of Ilfracombe lanes without describing them, for to describe them one ought to know the names of all the lovely wild flowers that cluster on their banks. Almost every yard of these banks is a 'Hunt' picture—a delicious crowding of mosses and delicate trefoil, and wild strawberries, and ferns great and small." Her hunts come closer to another kind of 'Hunt'—the Pre-Raphaelite painter, William Holman Hunt. The "quick female eyes" that secure "one of the loveliest of sea-charmers" also view and interpret the natural world in an imaginative, artistic way that reveals the budding novelist. In her perception and interpretation of the surroundings, George Eliot is "plant-Hunting" for "Scenes" of a different nature that would feed into her fictional art. See Eliot, "Recollections of Ilfracombe," *The Journals of George Eliot* 272 and George Henry Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, The Scilly Isles, & Jersey* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1858) 25.

white ants [...].”³⁶⁶ George Eliot gently satirizes Mr. Glegg’s gardening and natural history pursuits. In his characterization as amateur natural historian, she counters in a comic way the serious associations of plants and their relation to tragic events within the main narrative:

he surprised himself by his discoveries in natural history [...] and he noticed remarkable coincidences between these zoological phenomena and the great events of that time, — as, for example, that before the burning of York Minster there had been mysterious serpentine marks on the leaves of the rose-trees [...] which he had been puzzled to know the meaning of, until it flashed upon him with this melancholy conflagration.³⁶⁷

Eliot satirizes the typological emphasis given to nature by Victorian evangelicals. However, Mr. Glegg’s misdirected attempts to read meaning into nature point to the fact that the close observation of nature does hold significant meaning not only in scientific terms but also in terms of history and society, and that roses in particular are significant in George Eliot’s myth reception.

Cerean Nature: The Maternal Landscape of the River Floss and Dorlcote Mill

Throughout the novel, Maggie Tulliver continually seeks solace in “[a]ll the favourite outdoor nooks about home, which seem to have done their part with her parents in nurturing and cherishing her [...].”³⁶⁸ Depicted as feminine in its “green banks,” the river Floss is part of a Cerean “green” world, associated with maternal personality and symbolized by the Blessed Virgin of the legend of St. Oggs, the spiritual mother of the town who gives protection to those on the water. The landscape of the river and the mill, including corn or grain and trees such as the ash, chestnut and willow, makes up the novel’s maternal Cerean “Nature.” It is a fecund, agrarian world in

³⁶⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 115. See Rosemary Ashton, *The Mill on the Floss: A Natural History* (Boston: Twayne, 1990) and George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (London: U of Chicago P, 1981).

³⁶⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 120.

³⁶⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 285.

sync with the cycles of nature and seasonal changes, as Eliot's rhythmic, alliterative and assonantal prose indicates:

the town of St. Ogg's [...] shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures and the patches of dark earth, made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn. There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of bee-hive ricks rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees [...].³⁶⁹

The river gives birth to a rich, fruitful land and a prosperous farming community, a pre-industrial life that revolves around the agricultural seasons of planting, cultivating and harvesting. This "Cerean" nature can be interpreted symbolically or emblematically as a source of spiritual-moral truths, and in the construction of her botanical morality, George Eliot draws upon a religious context of Biblical parable and evangelical typological thinking as well as a context of Wordsworthian nature. I will examine the novel's Cerean nature in the following five sections: Wheat and Tares, Light Grain and Dark Grain, Trees, and Wordsworthian Nature.

Wheat and Tares

Book 5, entitled "Wheat and Tares," alludes to Christ's parable in the Gospel of Matthew.³⁷⁰ The parable concerns harvesting a good crop, which is

³⁶⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 7.

³⁷⁰ "Here is another parable He gave them: 'The kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed his field with good seed; but while everyone was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel among the wheat, and made off. When the corn sprouted and began to fill out, the darnel could be seen among it. The farmer's men went to their master and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? So where has the darnel come from?" "This is an enemy's doing," he replied. "Well, then," they said, "shall we go and gather the darnel?" "No," he answered; "in gathering it you might pull up the wheat at the same time. Let them both grow together till harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the darnel first, and tie it in bundles for burning; then collect the wheat into my barn.' " " " Matthew 13: 24-30. KJV Bible. Biblical parables that give moral lessons often make up a Victorian botanical context. Discourses on weeds were especially relevant given their moral ambiguity. See Shteir,

made difficult by tares or weeds amongst the grain. These vetches are climbing plants with tendrils and numerous pairs of opposite leaflets. In Britain, this tare has been identified as the Hairy Tare, *Vicia hirsuta*, "the first of the vetches the Englishman needed to know and recognize. It strangled his corn as an old weed of cultivation."³⁷¹ Grigson distinguishes the tare or seed from the plant or Tine-tare and the verb "Tine," "to suffer loss or deprivation, which the farmer indeed suffered from the Tine-tare clinging by its tendrils to his oats, his barley, or his wheat." As he concludes, "Farmers, when they listened to St. Matthew xiii. 30 [...] would well understand the parable of the tares and the good seed." The weeds amongst the young grain are difficult to separate and the two are left to grow together until harvest time when the "prosperous" wheat can be separated from these weeds of "vice."³⁷² And so God allows good and evil to co-exist together until the end of human history.

George Eliot draws upon the moral lesson of the Biblical parable of wheat and tares to depict the straight wheat as good and the twisting, climbing tares as bad or intrusive in the context of the novel's botanical morality. In Book 5, George Eliot applies her own parable reading of "straight" and "crooked," right and wrong, just and unjust to Maggie's meetings with Philip and their discovery, Tom's anger and the family honor of Tulliver against Wakem. As the son of the Tulliver family's arch-enemy, Philip Wakem is part of the new way of doing things that intrudes upon the mill. Wakem, a lawyer representing the new professional classes and the introduction of modern technology into the Cerean landscape through the irrigation system, is associated with the "crookedness" of water.

A rivalry results between Tom and Philip over Philip's intrusion into the Tulliver family. In Eliot's depiction, it is the tall brother against the feeble "deformed" Philip. Tom criticizes what he calls Philip's "crooked notion of

Landow and Seaton for the evangelical typological emphasis in Victorian fiction and the search for moral-religious truths in nature. See also Wisenfarth 41: "The Bible was to provide George Eliot other models of human conduct [...]."

³⁷¹ Grigson 139.

³⁷² Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 196-7, 194-5.

honour.”³⁷³ When Tom earns the money to repay his father’s debts, Tulliver exclaims, “ ‘Ah! Wakem ’ud be fine and glad to have a son like mine – a fine straight fellow – i’stead o’ that poor crooked creatur!’ ”³⁷⁴ After Tulliver beats Wakem, the narrator concludes: “Sad ending to the day that had risen on them all like a beginning of better times! But mingled seed must bear a mingled crop.”³⁷⁵ It is the human condition that good and bad are intermingled. It is difficult to tell right from wrong, the “straight” from the “crooked,” just as it is difficult to separate the wheat from the tare: “Apparently the mingled thread in the web of their life was so curiously twisted together that there could be no joy without a sorrow coming close upon it. Tom was dejected by the thought that his exemplary effort must always be baffled by the wrong-doing of others.”³⁷⁶ Ironically, Maggie’s “wrong-doing” (in seeing Philip) is responsible for the Tullivers’ opportunity to buy the mill back, rather than Tom’s “goodness.” Wakem’s willingness to part with the mill is due to Philip’s persuasion because of his love for Maggie. *Light Grain and Dark Grain (I): Dodson and Tulliver*

Drawing upon this context of Biblical parable and typological thinking, George Eliot constructs her own botanical parable. The novel’s “tender-bladed autumn-sown corn” holds a moral lesson. George Eliot’s botanical moralizing demonstrates another way of using an analogy between plants and people to comment on human behaviour. Mr. Tulliver uses types of wheat to signify different complexions: “ ‘There’s red wheat as well as white, for that matter, and some like the dark grain best.’ ”³⁷⁷ His metaphor for colouring contrasts Maggie’s dark hair and brown skin with Lucy’s blond hair and fair skin, the Tulliver complexion with the Dodson complexion.

Complexion is a family trait and indicates patterns of inheritance within the Tulliver and Dodson families. Within the scientific context of evolution, it reveals the concern for ensuring survival. Aunt Pullet’s remark

³⁷³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 345.

³⁷⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 352.

³⁷⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 357.

³⁷⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 357.

³⁷⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 62.

that “Tom had the Dodson skin” indicates his success in business as he is in the position to work off the price of the mill, bought from Wakem by Guest and Co.³⁷⁸ The Dodson family line, including the Deanes, is represented as the more successful and adaptable. While the Dodsons with their light complexion appear successful, the Tullivers with their dark coloring appear unsuccessful and unable to adapt to change: “it was agreed by the sisters in Mrs. Tulliver’s absence that the Tulliver blood did not mix well with the Dodson blood, that, in fact, poor Bessy’s children were Tullivers, and that Tom, notwithstanding he had the Dodson complexion, was likely to be as ‘contrairy’ as his father.”³⁷⁹ Significantly, Luke’s complexion resembles that of the Tullivers, and, like Maggie, he is compared to a flower: “Luke, the head miller, a tall broad-shouldered man of forty, black-eyed and black-haired, [was] subdued by a general mealiness, like an auricula.”³⁸⁰ His comparison to the primrose reveals a fitness for the landscape of the mill and an attachment to tradition and the past.³⁸¹

In an early chapter, “Tom Comes Home,” Nature is feminine, ambiguous and cunning (like that of Wordsworth’s “Three years she grew”). George Eliot suggests that Tom, rather than Maggie, is best suited for “survival,” as she highlights the Tulliver complexion over the Dodson complexion. However, Tom is still a Tulliver and so ultimately tied to the past and the mill:

He was one of those lads that grow everywhere in England [...] a lad of light brown hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips, indeterminate nose and eyebrows – a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the generic character of boyhood; as different as possible from poor Maggie’s phiz, which Nature seemed to have moulded and coloured with the

³⁷⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 455.

³⁷⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 60.

³⁸⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 29.

³⁸¹ In Luke the miller, George Eliot shows her approval of the working man and his closeness to nature, ideas she had written on in her translation of von Riehl’s “Natural History of German Life.”

most decided intention. But that same Nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness [...] Under these average boyish physiognomies that she seems to turn off by the gross, she conceals some of her most rigid inflexible purposes, some of her most unmodifiable characters, and the dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink and white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features.³⁸²

“Nature” would seem to have made things clear, but they are never what they seem. Nature is always ambiguous, making it hard to tell one thing from another – in this case, the rigid, harsher personality from the gentler passive one. Light and dark complexions would seem an indicator but are not exact. In the intermingling of good and bad and the ambiguity of Nature, only time will tell the outcome.

Trees

The symbolism of trees in *The Mill on the Floss* links together community, family and individual. The narrator describes the town of St. Ogg's as “a millennial tree” that “carries the traces of its long growth and history” and has “sprung up and developed in the same spot between the river and the low hill.”³⁸³ Thomas explains the importance of trees as symbols of human society: “In England trees were increasingly cherished, not just for their use, not even just for their beauty, but because of their human meaning, what they symbolized to the community in terms of continuity and association.”³⁸⁴ Trees which grew alongside the community and had a shared history were “older than any of the inhabitants; and they symbolized the community's continued existence.”³⁸⁵ Trees making up the big woodland tree families of Britain, including oaks, willows and ashes “have size, longevity, economic usefulness and a profound impact on the landscape – which means

³⁸² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 33.

³⁸³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 115.

³⁸⁴ Thomas 219, 214.

³⁸⁵ Thomas 216-7.

that they have entered our culture more thoroughly than most small flowering plants.”³⁸⁶ Maintained by the generational practice of cropping branches, pollards can “attain great ages” and become “landmark trees, symbols of continuity in the landscape that can outlive whole dynasties of humans.”³⁸⁷ Mabey points out the importance of trees as landmarks locating ancient boundaries and meeting places, and just as trees in *The Mill on the Floss* indicate the history of the town of St. Ogg’s, they mark distinct phases in the Tulliver family history as well as particular stages of growth in Maggie’s life.

Dorlocote Mill and its treed landscape symbolize the Tulliver family history (which is literally and figuratively a part of it). Trees represent the continuity of generations.³⁸⁸ The family’s history is literally built into the mill, Tulliver’s grandfather having rebuilt the mill after the last great floods. The narrator stresses Mr. Tulliver’s love for the old mill:

But the strongest influence of all was the love of the old premises where he had run about when he was a boy, just as Tom had done after him. The Tullivers had lived on this spot for generations [...] He couldn’t bear to think of himself living on any other spot than this, where he knew the sound of every gate and door, and felt that the shape and colour of every roof and weather stain and broken hillock was good, because his growing senses had been fed on them.³⁸⁹

Just as the mill shares its history with that of the Tulliver family, trees planted by Mr. Tulliver’s father represent family members. Trees are associated with personalities, and, as Tulliver attests to, the apple trees are memorials to his father who planted them just as trees come to symbolize Tulliver himself: “ ‘Ay, Luke,’ he said, one afternoon, as he stood looking over the orchard gate, ‘I remember the day they planted those apple trees. My

³⁸⁶ Mabey 71.

³⁸⁷ Mabey 71.

³⁸⁸ Thomas 217-18.

³⁸⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 263.

father was a huge man for planting – it was like a merry-making to him to get a cart full o’ young trees [...].’ ”³⁹⁰ Such a tree exists as a personal memorial, as “a kind of family monument” and “a bid for personal immortality.”³⁹¹ Trees “provided a link with eternity” and to “fell such a monument was to extinguish the planter’s name.”³⁹² As Thomas concludes, people “wanted trees preserved not just for the sake of their appearance, but because of what they stood for. They cherished their associations, their antiquity, their link with the past. A hankering for continuity, a bid for family immortality and a tendency to invest trees with human attributes were all important.”³⁹³ Following the loss of his lawsuit against Pivart and subsequent bankruptcy, Tulliver loses the mill and its land to Wakem. No longer the owner of the mill, he laments, “ ‘I’m a tree as is broke – a tree as is broke,’ ” (highlighting the importance of trees in the landscape of Dorlcote Mill).³⁹⁴ Like a broken tree, dead and severed from the land, he is uprooted, his connection to the formative landscape of his childhood and adult life now lost. A broken man, he must agree to stay on as Wakem’s manager.

The maternal nurturing aspect of the mill’s landscape is made explicit in the memory of Maggie’s paternal grandmother. In the Tulliver family for generations, the mill is part of Maggie’s inheritance. Tulliver remembers the building of the malt house forty years ago and the memories of a mother’s love that remain intertwined with the building of the mill:

‘It’s just as if it was yesterday, now,’ Mr. Tulliver went on, ‘when my father began the malting. I remember, the day they finished the malt house, I thought summat great was to come out of it; for we’d a plum-pudding that day and a bit of a feast, and I said to my mother – she was a fine dark eyed woman, my mother was – the little wench ‘ull be as like her as two peas’ [...] ‘and so I said to her, “Mother,” I said, “shall we have plum-

³⁹⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 263.

³⁹¹ Thomas 218.

³⁹² Thomas 217, 218.

³⁹³ Thomas 222-3.

³⁹⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 266.

pudding every day because o' the malthouse?"³⁹⁵

The old familiar things of the mill that make up Tulliver's memories will foster Tom and Maggie.

Maggie's relationship with the mill essentially dominates the novel. The mill and the river make up the formative landscape of her childhood. Maggie inherits this bond with and fitness for the mill from the Tulliver family line:

Maggie loved to linger in the great spaces of the mill, and often came out with her black hair powdered to a soft whiteness that made her dark eyes flash out with new fire. The resolute din, the unresting motion of the great stones giving her a dim delicious awe as at the presence of an uncontrollable force, the meal for ever pouring, pouring, the fine white powder softening all surfaces and making the very spider-nets look like faery lace-work, the sweet pure scent of the meal – all helped to make Maggie feel that the mill was a little world apart from her outside everyday life [...] But the part of the mill she liked best was the topmost story – the corn hutch where there were the great heaps of grain which she could sit on and slide down continually.³⁹⁶

Maggie's attachment to this early world reveals her attraction to the power of the mill, her fascination with water power, strong currents, with the river and rowing as well as her latent power and link to mythological figures such as the Pythoness and Medusa as well as Proserpina.³⁹⁷ She is in sync with primeval forces and mythical energy: the turning of ancient stones driven by the power of water and the ancient associations of harvesting grain. Like Wordsworth's Lucy, she is in tune with the great forces of nature but unable to share in them; rather, she is overwhelmed and controlled by them.

³⁹⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 264.

³⁹⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 29.

³⁹⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 29, 8. See Auerbach for Maggie's Gothic fascination with the mill. Nina Auerbach, "The Power of Hunger: Demonism and Maggie Tulliver," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 30.2 (September 1975): 150-7.

“Nature” has already decided that to be a Tulliver is to be caught up in the slippery fate of the mill.

The same landscape which “fed” Mr. Tulliver in his childhood now “nurtures” Tom and Maggie. The continuity of this formative landscape is important, especially as conveyed through trees. Mr. Tulliver sees his relationship with his sister living on in Tom and Maggie. Tom will take his father’s place eventually becoming master of the mill and also replicating the brother-sister relationship he had with his sister Gritty. But of course, things are not the same, the landscape is always changing however subtly and Tom and Maggie are not the same as their parents. At the end of Book 2, Maggie and Tom merge with the landmarks of the hedgerow, as they leave Tom’s school together:

The two slight youthful figures soon grew indistinct on the distant road – were soon lost behind the projecting hedgerow.

They had gone forth together into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them.³⁹⁸

Trees here mark the end of Maggie and Tom’s childhood. Serving as boundary markers in the landscape and in the lives of Tom and Maggie, trees continue to mark important phases in the siblings’ growth and development. *Wordsworthian Nature and the Memory of Childhood*

Childhood experience, particularly the childhood love of nature, gives meaning to the natural world. Nature is infused with memories and those memories then speak back to us through the same nature, a nature “sanctified by loving memory.”³⁹⁹ Childhood is linked to spring and wildflowers. George Eliot emphasizes the cyclic return of the seasons in which the old and familiar is preferred to the new:

Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not

³⁹⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 191.

³⁹⁹ Birch, introduction, *The Mill on the Floss*, by George Eliot (Oxford: OUP, 1998) viii.

wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it, – if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass – the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows [...] What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known and *loved* because it is known?⁴⁰⁰

George Eliot gives a botanical moral and manifesto concerning Tom and Maggie's childhood landscape in which she articulates meaning through the landscape's flowering plants, as both moralist and natural scientist:

The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet – what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home-scene? These familiar flowers [...] each with a sort of personality [...] such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass to-day, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us and transform our perception into love.⁴⁰¹

The natural world carries specific meanings and associations from childhood; in this example of Wordsworthian memory, nature heals, ministers and has the power to transform.

⁴⁰⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 41.

⁴⁰¹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 41-2.

Accounts of childhood memories and nostalgia go hand-in-hand with her botanical accuracy as Eliot balances a scientific and emblematic interpretation of plants and flowers. Plants in the novel's ambiguous nature hold both moral lessons and scientific explanations. They reveal the tension between a pre-industrial Cerean landscape associated with rural childhood and a pro-industrial Plutonic landscape developed for trade.

"This little withy plantation": Nature's ambiguity and the Mythic Landscape of St. Oggs

The willows and reeds of the Round Pool make up a favorite haunt in the landscape of Maggie and Tom's childhood:

They were on their way to the Round Pool — that wonderful pool, which the floods had made a long while ago: no one knew how deep it was; and it was mysterious too that it should be almost perfect round, framed in with willows and tall reeds, so that the water was only to be seen when you got close to the brink.⁴⁰²

A plant of docility, the water willow suggests passive contentment to remain in childhood.⁴⁰³ Mabey describes the maternal, nurturing aspect of ancient willows that provide a habitat for other plant species in hollow centres and crowns full of holes.⁴⁰⁴

The landscape nurtures a sense of timelessness that childhood ways will endure forever:

It was one of their happy mornings. They trotted along and sat down together with no thought that life would ever change much for them: they would only get bigger and not go to school, and it would always be like the holidays; they would always live together and be fond of each other, and the mill with its booming — the great chestnut-tree under which they played at houses, their own little river, the Ripple, where the banks

⁴⁰² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 40.

⁴⁰³ Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 196-7.

⁴⁰⁴ Mabey 140.

seemed like home, and Tom was always seeing the water-rats, while Maggie gathered the purple plummy tops of the reeds which she forgot and dropped afterwards, above all, the great Floss along which they wandered with a sense of travel, to see the rushing spring tide – the awful Eagre [wave] – come up like a hungry monster, or to see the Great Ash which had once wailed and groaned like a man – these things would always be just the same to them.⁴⁰⁵

Mabey explains that the Sweet chestnut, *Castanea sativa*, is well-established in ancient woods and has an exceptionally broad trunk.⁴⁰⁶ The Horse chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, is “a symbol of village peacefulness” with its large spreading branches.⁴⁰⁷ Grigson explains that the ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, is a tree of birth and healing.⁴⁰⁸ It is a tree against evil. The ash and human birth are linked: sap was given to a baby after burning a green stick as “a way of giving the child the strength of the ash” and protecting it from evil.⁴⁰⁹ As Mabey concludes, “a species that has been a congenial domestic workhorse as well as a refuge for ancient spirits.”⁴¹⁰

In *The Mill on the Floss*, willows signal the novel’s ambiguous watery landscape. Water nurtures and destroys, fueling the novel’s cycle of change. Willows mark the Round Pool, formed by the great flood in the past. Although a sight of childhood wonder, its mystery and treacherousness foreshadow the siblings’ deaths by drowning.⁴¹¹ Willows are linked to Tom and Maggie’s drowning in a (re)union which blends and intertwines elegiac and erotic elements.⁴¹² As in Wordsworth’s “Three years she grew,” in which

⁴⁰⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 40-1.

⁴⁰⁶ Mabey 81.

⁴⁰⁷ Mabey 260, 262.

⁴⁰⁸ Grigson 271.

⁴⁰⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 29, 98. As a child, Maggie exhibits a devilish energy and rebelliousness that link her to mythological figures like the Pythoness (who is possessed by a spirit) and Medusa. See Auerbach, “The Power of Hunger.”

⁴¹⁰ Mabey 329.

⁴¹¹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 93, 103.

⁴¹² See David Smith, “Incest Patterns in Two Victorian Novels,” *Literature and Psychology* 15.3 (1965): 135-62.

the willow signifies Lucy's union with an ambiguous Nature, the willow, both maternal and sexual, nurturing and death-dealing, is again a key image in Eliot's myth reception.⁴¹³

The opening chapter sets up the conflicts to come in the novel. The narrative is presented as the reminiscence of an older narrator dreaming of a February afternoon, but the reality of the conflicts in nature shows through the narrator's nostalgic tone and idyllic picture-making. In this ambiguous scene everything appears in harmony, but modern trade and industry have crept into the town. George Eliot sets up the dominant narrative concerning Dorlcote Mill and the river Floss, the struggle between the feminine river and the masculine tide in an opening scene of fertility and sexual union.

Tension within nature is dramatized as a love scene between river and tide, land and seed. In the scene's sexual imagery, the Floss is feminine, fertile and fluid in its green banks and the tide is masculine:

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous warm embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships – laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal – are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures and the patches of dark earth, made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn. There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of bee-hive ricks rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees: the distant ships seem to be

⁴¹³ The willow wand's rapping is an omen of death linked to Thias Bede's drowning in *Adam Bede*. See George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Stephen Gill (London: Penguin, 1985) 51-3.

lifting their masts and stretching their red-brown sails close
among the branches of the spreading ash.⁴¹⁴

Trade conducted on the river seems a natural progression, as the ships are “borne along”, yet this harmonious scene is deceptive as the ships intrude upon and invade the maternal space. From out of the river and sea’s “amorous embrace” come “emblems of sexual, commercial and technological penetration” which will alter forever the characters’ lives.⁴¹⁵ The Floss, associated with Maggie, is represented as maternal and Cerean. The tide, associated with Maggie’s Plutonic lover Stephen Guest, is represented as masculine. Maggie’s repeated identification with the river and Stephen’s with the tide re-affirm their roles as fertility goddess and consort who approximate the processes of nature.⁴¹⁶

Nature echoes the human drama and human drama plays out the changes in nature. George Eliot gives historical perspective to the struggle between Maggie and Stephen. The characters of Maggie and Stephen – in Ruskin’s mythic code, the “personal” root or incarnation of the myth – provide a nineteenth-century dramatization of the flood cycle (an ancient struggle between the river and the tide). In this contemporizing of the myth, the tide is linked to advancing industry.

Just as a love scene exists between river and tide, so there is another love scene between the narrator and water. The stream running to the mill is personified as feminine and associated with Maggie:

Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the little river is with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to the low placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 7.

⁴¹⁵ Jules Law, “Water Rights and the ‘crossing o’breeds’,” *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, ed. Linda M. Shires (New York: Routledge, 1992) 55.

⁴¹⁶ See Suter.

⁴¹⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 7.

The narrator is like an older Maggie, reminiscing: "I am in love with moistness."⁴¹⁸ The full stream "half drowns" the grassy fringe, and the rushing water and booming mill sets him or her apart from the world beyond, just as they do for Maggie.⁴¹⁹ Yet the gender of the narrative voice is uncertain, dream-like, and later shifts to a masculine persona.⁴²⁰ The narrator appears to give voice to "Nature" (like the Nature in Wordsworth's "Three years") and is ambiguously fond of Maggie, maternal or parental, but also attracted to the scene, lamenting in an elegiac tone the loss of a loved one among the willows. Like Eliot's personification of "Nature" in the novel, the narrator is ambiguous, both male and female, mother and lover, shifting in response to Maggie like the ever-changing currents of the river and tide.

Plutonic Nature: Technology, Guest and Co. and the Industrialization of St. Oggs

The Plutonic threat of change is associated with the tide and so part of the cycle of nature. The tide's ebb and flow emblemizes the force of change in the novel. The river gives birth to the town of St. Oggs, just as it later gives death by flooding. It is this ambiguous watery nature that nurtures the land and drives the mill but then destroys them by flood. River and tide create and nourish a rich, fertile, farm land but at the same time foster trade by transporting raw materials that fuel industry and so forward the processes of change related to advancing technology. The novel's overlapping of "sexual, social and economic narratives of destruction is accomplished through the dominant, ubiquitous symbol of water."⁴²¹

With the coming of the "masculine" tide, virility and sexuality are linked to industrial technology. "Plutonic" nature is identified with what is sexual, intrusive, aggressive and "death-dealing." It is associated with trade and developing technology, epitomized by the business of Guest and Co. The novel concerns the application of science to industrial technology and the harnessing of natural resources to fuel energy in a conflict over water power.

⁴¹⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 8.

⁴¹⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 7.

⁴²⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 66.

⁴²¹ Law 55.

There is masculine competition for control of the river, just as male characters in the novel struggle for Maggie.

Insisting on his “right to water-power,” Mr. Tulliver uses a circular, slippery logic in his complaints about Pivart’s irrigation scheme up river that is affecting the mill.⁴²² Pivart’s plans for irrigation “either were or would be or were bound to be (on the principle that water was water) an infringement on Mr. Tulliver’s legitimate share of water-power.”⁴²³ The fluidity or slipperiness of language, changing from name to noun to verb, reveals the Tulliver affinity with water but at the same time their inability to control it or adjust to the changing landscape and advancing technology:

‘New name? Yes—I should think it *is* a new name,’ said Mr. Tulliver with angry emphasis. ‘Dorlcote Mill’s been in our family a hundred year and better, and nobody ever heard of a Pivart meddling with the river, till this fellow came and bought Bincome’s farm out of hand, before anybody else could so much as say ‘snap.’ But I’ll *Pivart* him!’ ”⁴²⁴

In this clash between old ways and new technology, it is hard for Tulliver to accept the changes that impact upon the mill:

‘It’s plain enough what’s the rights and wrongs of water, if you look at it straight forrard; for a river’s a river, and if you’ve got a mill, you must have water to turn it; and it’s no use telling me, Pivart’s erigation and nonsense won’t stop my wheel: I know what belongs to water better than that. Talk to me o’ what th’ engineers say! I say it’s common sense, as Pivart’s dykes must do me an injury. But if that’s their engineering, I’ll put Tom to it by and by, and he shall see if he can’t find a bit more sense in th’ engineering business than what *that* comes to.’⁴²⁵

⁴²² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 11.

⁴²³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 154.

⁴²⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 155.

⁴²⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 155-6.

His reasoning turns out to be ineffectual, even flawed and Tulliver's circular logic turns back on itself causing his regression.

Doubling and family rivalry exist between the Tullivers and the Deanes who are advancing apace with social and industrial change. Mr. Deane becomes the anti-Tulliver. Reflecting the success of the firm, Deane is given a share in the business for his services as manager, his social ascent making him the type of the middle-class man of industry: "There was no knowing where a man would stop, who had got his foot into a great mill-owning, ship-owning business like that of Guest & Co."⁴²⁶ An example of the "true Dodson spirit," Deane "had been advancing in the world as rapidly as Mr. Tulliver going down in it."⁴²⁷

Mr. Deane's rapid success in business makes him the novel's proponent of industrialization and steam power, increased trade and commerce contrary to Tulliver who is unable to change with the times, appears regressive and resists technology. During the sale of Dorlcote Mill, the application of steam power is considered as a way of modernizing the mill: "For uncle Deane had been induced to interest himself in this stage of the business, which was a good one, and might be increased by the addition of steam power: in which case Tulliver might be retained as manager."⁴²⁸ However, like Maggie, he is trapped in the world of the mill, and in a cyclical way repeats himself, like the turning of the mill wheel itself. Tied to the past, he is unable to progress, and, in his mind, the future is only a perpetuation of the past in which Tom and Maggie will repeat the relationship he had with his sister.

Deane "fathers" Tom in the business, ironically providing him with the practical education his father has denied him by not keeping him on at the mill. Deane gives Tom the very knowledge he needs to manage the mill and so succeed his father: " 'It's this steam, you see, that has made the difference — it drives on every wheel double pace and the wheel of Fortune along with

⁴²⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 63.

⁴²⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 206.

⁴²⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 243.

'em, as our Mr. Stephen Guest said [...] I don't find fault with the change, as some people do. Trade, sir, opens a man's eyes [...]' "⁴²⁹ Inheritance, always questioned in the novel, will have its way eventually. Tulliver tries to thwart fate by sending Tom to be schooled but this decision suggests his lack of foresight in making provision for the mill. In the novel's shift from an agrarian to an industrialized way of life, the long history of the Tulliver family operating the water-mill gives way to the oil-mill of Guest and Co.

Proserpinian Childhood: Maggie and the Daisy

Maggie Tulliver's representation as the young Proserpina, Korè or Kora, focuses on her identification with wildflowers and her childhood innocence as daughter and sister. (Maggie is linked to the landscape in different ways; she is associated with trees, the river and flowers. As critics have noted, Maggie has a Wordsworthian affinity or kindredness with nature; like Wordsworth's Lucy, she is a female figure who is identified with the natural world to the point of her death and union with nature.⁴³⁰) Following a rebuke from Tom, Maggie is characterized as a "girl of no startling appearance" who may "hold forces within her as the living-seed plant does, which will make a way for themselves, often in a shattering, violent

⁴²⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 395-6. The narrator, however, reveals ironic scepticism regarding progress "even in our present advanced stage of morality."

But good society [...] is of very expensive production; requiring nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories, cramping itself in mines, sweating at furnaces, grinding, hammering, weaving under more or less oppression of carbonic acid [...] This wide national life is based entirely on emphasis – the emphasis of want, which urges it into all the activities necessary for the maintenance of good society and light irony [...].

For the narrator, the notion of "progress" is always tempered. Eliot 27, 291-2.

⁴³⁰ For Victorian Wordsworthians, the relationship between flowers and the feminine endures in a Romantic view of women as closely identifiable with nature or landscape, consistent with the predominant domestic ideology and particular gender characteristics of the time in which women are typed as self-sacrificing and nurturing. For criticism addressing the Victorian novelist's treatment of the Romantic heritage and the place of women in relation to the natural world, see Donald D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (London: Harvard UP, 1980); Homans, "Eliot, Wordsworth, and the Scenes of the Sisters' Instruction"; Rosemary Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (London: Cornell UP, 1988); and Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*.

manner.”⁴³¹ Eliot suggests that conflict is inevitable; the seeds of change are always growing. These “forces” are inevitably dependent on her feelings for her brother and her need for his love.

In a chapter entitled “Brother and Sister,” Maggie’s relationship with Tom is characterized by wildflowers, which are associated with childhood and innocence. After harsh remarks from Tom regarding Philip: “She was obliged to be childish – the tears would come. When Maggie was not angry, she was as dependent on kind or cold words as a daisy on the sunshine or the cloud: the need of being loved would always subdue her [...]”⁴³² The flower indicates her emotional, moral climatization; it is a simile for her emotional state and her need for her brother’s love. His warmth or coldness acts as a controlling force. The name Margaret means daisy, a wildflower that is regulated by the sun which (by its rotation) regulates the cycle of day and night and of the seasons. Like a flower or natural object, Maggie is in sync with the great processes of nature (as is Wordsworth’s “Lucy”). Sun and shade regulate the daisy flower just as Tom attempts to regulate Maggie.

George Eliot continues to use the imagery of Maggie as the daisy and Tom as the sun, the regulator of his sister’s moral and emotional growth and well-being: “To have no cloud between herself and Tom was still a perpetual yearning in her, that had its root deeper than all change.”⁴³³ Her childhood association with the daisy characterizes her relationship with Tom throughout the novel from “the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.”⁴³⁴ Although Maggie has the potential to be a powerful figure, or, in the context of the novel’s myth reception the dominant or ruling goddess, she is ironically more like a passive flower than a growing plant, more led by others than forcing her own way. Maggie’s

⁴³¹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 235. This sentence appears undeleted in the manuscript but is omitted in the first edition: “A girl of no startling appearance, and who will never be a Sappho or a Madame Roland or anything else that the world takes wide note of, may still hold forces within her as the living-seed plant does, which will make a way for themselves, often in a shattering, violent manner.” See Birch, Explanatory note 235 and Byatt, Textual note 320a. *The Mill on the Floss*, introduction and notes by A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin, 1979).

⁴³² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 392.

⁴³³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 454.

⁴³⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 521.

passivity reveals her ambivalent feelings about growing up and her reluctance to move forward.

Although Maggie is tied to childhood associations, she is also linked to queenship throughout the novel. Nature imagery indicates her regality and queenliness during her coming-of-age scenes with Philip in the Red Deeps, which I will address in the next section. Signs of Maggie's sexual maturity and "queenship" reveal her potential as a rival to both her mother and Lucy, but rather than assume a hierarchical position, she exists in a continuum with the maternal world of the mill.

Maggie's feelings of ambivalence are consistent with nineteenth-century gender conventions and separate spheres ideology depicting women as passive and under patriarchal control. While criticism of myth and nineteenth-century literature interprets myth as either empowering or oppressive, George Eliot shows myth's potential to challenge gender conventions but does not allow Maggie to realise that potential. As I shall discuss, Maggie may be like the Scotch fir, but she is also like the hamadryad, a nymph bound to the tree for life and death.

Proserpinian Coming-of-age: Maggie, Roses and Plutonic Encounters

Characterized as a flower herself, Maggie's relationships with "Plutonic" male characters are given a botanical, floral representation. Her sexual maturity is revealed in the change of flower. Just as the daisy symbolizing her childhood innocence characterizes Maggie's relationship with Tom, so roses signal her developing sexuality as reflected in her relationships with Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest. While Maggie's relationship with Philip Wakem is associated with the wild dogroses in the Red Deeps, her relationship with Stephen is linked to the hothouse rose.

Maggie's Proserpinian "coming of-age" occurs in the "flower-picking" scenes of the Red Deeps and the Guests' conservatory. This representation of Maggie as Proserpina focuses on her sexual maturation and her capacity as wife and "queen." In these Plutonic encounters, the figure of Pluto and the threat of change are dramatized as the entrance or intrusion of the male suitor

into the maternal landscape. Maggie displays feelings of ambivalence about relationships with Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest and harbors conflicting desires about retaining childhood attachments and putting these behind her.

To some extent Maggie accepts both of her suitors and refuses them both. The flowers reveal her ambivalent feelings about a romantic suitor and her reluctance to agree to a relationship. They are moral and attached to childhood but also sexual and representative of her maturity. In choosing the wild dogrose and Philip, she wants to choose the past but cannot; in choosing the hothouse rose and Stephen, she wants to choose the future but cannot. Ultimately Tom rivals both men as the novel's ending suggests, when he becomes her "Plutonic" partner during their reunion in the flood.

Searching for Dogroses: Maggie and Philip in the Red Deeps

The "Red Deeps" make up the landscape of Maggie's first romance, her first "Plutonic" encounter. A frequent childhood haunt with Tom, the landscape has this precedence and attachment to the maternal landscape of her childhood. However, as Maggie approaches the "capricious hollows and mounds," the broken, unpredictable landscape already hints at signs of an ambiguous nature:

In her childish days Maggie held this place, called the Red Deeps, in very great awe, and needed all her confidence in Tom's bravery to reconcile her to an excursion thither, visions of robbers and fierce animals haunting every hollow. But now it had the charm for her which any broken ground [...] ha[s] for the eyes that rest habitually on the level, especially in summer, when she could sit under the shadow of a branching ash [...] see the sunlight piercing the distant boughs, as if to chase and drive home the truant heavenly blue of the wild hyacinths.⁴³⁵

The shadow of the branching ash offers reassurance and symbolizes her links with the past, like "the branches of the spreading ash" in the opening scene and the Great Ash of the children's Round Pool. However, although the

⁴³⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 298-9.

former presents a scene of apparent integration, this picture of organic unity is deceptive, as “the distant ships seem to be lifting their masts and stretching their red-brown sails” close among its branches, threatening and intrusive.⁴³⁶ As I have already discussed, the latter Ash “which had once wailed and groaned like a man” marks the Round Pool, formed by the great flood in the past; a sight of childhood wonder, its mystery and treacherousness also foreshadow the siblings’ deaths by drowning.⁴³⁷

The wild hyacinth’s mythological associations stress Maggie’s heightened potential, power and maturity. The bluebell or *Endymion nonscriptus* was named to distinguish it from the classical hyacinth, a flower of death and grief. This hyacinth is “not inscribed with AI, AI on the petals, not the flower which sprang from the blood of Hyacinthus, carrying those letters of grief.”⁴³⁸ As Grigson points out, “for early botanists it was a plant with no history and no warrant from Greece and Rome. They attempted [...] to make it into a hyacinth, but it was *hyacinthus nonscriptus* [...]”⁴³⁹ For Maggie, too, this flower is unwritten; it is not the fatal flower, however its associations with sex and “water” signify her heightened maturity and anticipate her coming-of-age. Grigson explains its folk relationship with the early purple orchid: “Possibly both these juicy plants of springtime [...] symbolized generation and sexual power.”⁴⁴⁰ He notes that “it had raised its wet blue in the oak forests of Great Britain” for centuries, and Mabey also remarks upon its “water-like” aspect.⁴⁴¹

Maggie goes in search of dogroses, and as this ambiguous wildflower reveals, she goes in search of the past and a reliving of childhood memories as well as for love. She goes in search of love unawares but ultimately a love that connects her to the past: “In this June time too, the dogroses were in their glory, and this was an additional reason why Maggie should direct her walk

⁴³⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 7.

⁴³⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 41.

⁴³⁸ Grigson 407.

⁴³⁹ Grigson 406.

⁴⁴⁰ Grigson 408.

⁴⁴¹ Grigson 407; Mabey 412.

to the Red Deeps" when "she was free to wander at her will [...]"⁴⁴² The landscape, specifically the Scotch fir, now represents Maggie's sexual maturity:

One would certainly suppose her to be farther on in life than her seventeenth year [...] perhaps because her broad-chested figure has the mould of early womanhood [...] the eyes are liquid, the brown cheek is firm and rounded, the full lips are red. With her dark colouring and jet crown surmounting her tall figure, she seems to have a sort of kinship with the grand Scotch firs, at which she is looking up as if she loved them well.⁴⁴³

Nature now indicates her regality and "queenliness."

Just as Philip enters the landscape and intrudes upon Maggie's solitude, so he threatens to intrude upon her relationship with Tom and disrupt the Tulliver family. While "her eyes were still turned upward," she "became conscious of a moving shadow cast by the evening sun on the grassy path before her, and looked down with a startled gesture to see Philip Wakem, who first raised his hat, and then blushing deeply, came forward to her and put out his hand [...]"⁴⁴⁴ Yet during her encounter with Philip, Maggie "felt herself a child again."⁴⁴⁵ Foreshadowing her feelings of ambivalence about their relationship, she sees him only as the same childhood companion. "Surrounded by an amphitheatre of pale pink dogroses," Maggie is "almost as frank and unconstrained towards him as when she was a child."⁴⁴⁶ That "he might become her lover [...] had not occurred to her," and "Philip saw the absence clearly enough [...]"⁴⁴⁷ When they return to the hollow and pause "under the charm of the faery evening light, reflected from the pale-pink clusters," these flowers are more ethereal than sexual.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 299.

⁴⁴³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 299.

⁴⁴⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 299-300.

⁴⁴⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 300.

⁴⁴⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 301, 304.

⁴⁴⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 304.

⁴⁴⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 306.

Philip's sketch of Maggie among the Scotch firs indicates her potential power yet also highlights her vulnerability. Sitting at the roots of the slanting ash, the "full lustrous face, with the bright black coronet, looked down like that of a divinity well pleased to be worshipped, on the pale-hued, small-featured face that was turned up to it."⁴⁴⁹ Philip tells her that in his intended oil painting she " 'will look like a tall Hamadryad, dark and strong and noble, just issued from one of the fir-trees, when the stems are casting their afternoon shadows on the grass.' "⁴⁵⁰ In Greek mythology, the Hamadryad is a tree nymph (a female divinity associated with natural objects) who inhabited a tree and whose life began and ended with a particular tree.⁴⁵¹ Although the fir symbolizes Maggie's sexual maturity and potential power, it is a potential she is never able to realize, as she is figuratively bound to death. Like the Hamadryad, Maggie is bound to the Scotch fir, marked as a product of industry.

Native to Highland forests, it was much planted all over the country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for picturesque effect and aesthetic purpose.⁴⁵² In the novel's opening, the narrator describes the masculine tide with its black ships loaded with fir planks, oil-bearing seed and coal, the raw products of industry. The fir tree is introduced as an item of trade exported by these ships to St. Oggs and so associated with the business of Guest and Co. Maggie herself is later "borne along" by the tide in the boat with Stephen Guest, like the fir planks carried by the ships. Maggie's identification with the

⁴⁴⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 326.

⁴⁵⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 326-7.

⁴⁵¹ Mary Ann Evans published "A Little Fable with a Great Moral" in 1847 in the *Coventry Herald*. In this early prose piece, she writes that the Hamadryads are "a race of nymphs that inhabit the forests. Whenever a little acorn, or a beech nut, or any other seed of a forest tree, begins to sprout, a little Hamadryad is born, and grows up, and lives and dies with the tree. See George Eliot, "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of An Eccentric," *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963) 21-22. In this account of two Hamadryads, Idione and Hieria, daughters of the trees, she contrasts vain, self-contemplation with an unself-conscious yearning toward a greater good and appreciation of natural environment. In her argument that George Eliot uses paired heroines to contrast selfish egotism with sympathetic altruism in scenes and patterns reworked throughout her fiction, Fulmer traces Eliot's interest in and depiction of contrasting heroines to one of her first prose pieces. See Constance M. Fulmer, "Contrasting Pairs of Heroines in George Eliot's Fiction," *Studies in the Novel* 6.3 (1974): 288-94.

⁴⁵² Grigson 23.

fir tree as a product exported by Guest and Co. and threatened by the industrial development of the natural world is clear. The fir is a tree associated with a particular kind of industrial exploitation, ransacked from the Highlands to provide charcoal for lowland iron foundries; with its disappearance from its local habitat, it is a kind of endangered species of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵³

The fir tree is significant in its association with Maggie's childhood landscape and the conflict involving the export of the tree is also significant, given the threat that industrial development poses to Maggie's world. As an endangered species, it foreshadows Maggie's death. It is an example of a sympathetic transplant, and hence of positive organic change. As a landmark tree, it becomes a personal memorial to Maggie for Philip.

In order to reaffirm Maggie's strength and fortitude, George Eliot explores and undermines Victorian gender conventions that use botanical imagery to link masculinity to straight plants and femininity to entwining plants.⁴⁵⁴ Philip's amorous entreaties foreshadow those of Stephen: " 'Don't think of the past now, Maggie: think only of our love. If you can really cling to me with all your heart, every obstacle will be overcome in time – we need only wait [...] Don't look away from me to that cloven tree – it is a bad omen.' " ⁴⁵⁵ In fact, the botanical imagery suggests they are mismatched; he is the cloven tree, she the straight tree. Typically, the feminine imagery of the clinging plant contrasts with the masculine imagery of the strong, sturdy tree:

A good marriage rested on the man and woman bringing to it their complementary characteristics. The man would be the 'lofty pine,' the woman the 'slender vine,' the man would take responsibility for the stormy world of business and politics, the woman would cast her sunbeams over the murky clouds he had to contend with and 'sweetly smile' the cares of the world away.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ Mabey 21.

⁴⁵⁴ See for example, Davidoff and Hall.

⁴⁵⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 335.

George Eliot uses the Language of Flowers convention herself in her letters of 1840, with flowers linked to specific character types or traits.⁴⁵⁷ She uses the codes in the conventional sense referring to her friend Martha Jackson's courtship and future marriage, humorously stressing the cultural assumptions and traits of woman's nature:

So some lord of the forest, some giant oak or elm, has
discovered that Ivy has just the qualifications to make wedded
bliss more than a dream! I perfectly agree with his oakship – for
what could a wife be if not faithful, devoted, clinging to the last,
even when the rich boughs that made the oak's beauty in the
eyes of all beside, are leafless and withered? And what
moreover if not of vigorous and fibrous mental conjecture,
conjoined with apparent fragility, lightness, and elegance? Shall
I not do to write your epithalamium?⁴⁵⁸

In *The Mill on the Floss*, spring flowers associated with Maggie now signal her developing sexuality. Springtime (the time of Proserpina's abduction) is the time of her sexual awakening, "desire and longing." At the Guests' home, Lucy places "the very finest bouquet of spring flowers on her table."⁴⁵⁹ Maggie "could see the sunshine falling on the rich clumps of spring

⁴⁵⁶ Davidoff and Hall 179.

⁴⁵⁷ In a letter to her school friend Martha Jackson on 30 July 1840, Mary Ann Evans employs the conventional "language of flowers" using coded flower names and a floral vocabulary. Martha takes the name "Ivy" for constancy and Mary Ann "Clematis" for mental beauty. Similarly, she writes to Maria Lewis in September, promising her that "I will send your Floral name in my next, when I have received my Dictionary." Mary Ann's letter to Martha, addressed from "The Bower of Clematis," begins:

My Dear Ivy,

If you knew how the tendrils of your Clematis have been twisted out of their natural *inclination*, you would not wonder that she should concentrate all of her own support under this rack-like process, and thus become stunted instead of stretching out a branch to clasp even her Ivy. At length, however, she invites her fellow creeper (rather humbling by the bye that they must both be called *parasitic* plants) to try whether the same soil and air will suit the constitution of each.

See George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon Haight, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-78) 67, 60.

⁴⁵⁸ Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters* 60-1.

⁴⁵⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 370.

flowers and on the long hedge of laurels [...] The sweet fresh garden scent came through the open window [...]."⁴⁶⁰ In Book 6, Chapter 6, entitled "Illustrating the Laws of Attraction," continues the use of spring imagery to represent the beginning of a new life for Maggie and the novelty of experiences from a "new sense of leisure and unchecked enjoyment amidst the soft-breathing airs and garden scents of advancing spring [...]."⁴⁶¹ She is a beautiful woman now, sexually attractive and admired by men: "it was very pleasant [...] to feel that she was one of the beautiful things of this spring time."⁴⁶²

The "Large Half-Opened Rose": Maggie and Stephen in the Conservatory

In Book 6, chapter 6, "Illustrating the Laws of Attraction," a pre-conservatory encounter emphasizes the theme of intrusion and temptation when Stephen Guest visits Maggie secretly and asks her into the Deanes' garden. The son of the businessman advancing trade and industrial development in St. Ogg's, Stephen is the Plutonic intruder into the garden, the ideal world of Maggie's childhood home, family and community.⁴⁶³ Stephen Guest is the outsider to the novel's organic community, who, as his name implies, is not rooted in Maggie's past but comes in and out of her life, ultimately "martyred" for her cause. His first appearance in the novel with a "diamond ring" and "attar of roses" shows his character as one born into wealth, leisure and privilege; with a successful business to inherit, his life of ease as a gentleman is essentially alien to the novel.⁴⁶⁴ According to Eagleton, he is "an overbred product of the predatory capitalism which is ousting the old world of her [Maggie's] father."⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 374.

⁴⁶¹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 401.

⁴⁶² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 401.

⁴⁶³ George Eliot alludes to Milton's Eden in *Paradise Lost*. Book 6 sets up the representation of Stephen Guest as the tempter figure. The opening of Book 6, "The Great Temptation," already suggests the Edenic myth and the title of the first chapter, "A Duet in Paradise," continues this Edenic imagery. Critics have recognized the novel's Edenic imagery. See David Smith, "Incest Patterns in Two Victorian Novels."

⁴⁶⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 363.

⁴⁶⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976) 115.

In this pre-conservatory scene, Maggie is open to the danger of Plutonic encounters in a sexualized nature of desire and mutual attraction:

‘Won’t you come out a little way into the garden?’ said Stephen [...]

‘Do take my arm,’ he said, in a low tone, as if it were a secret.

There is something strangely winning to most women in that offer of the firm arm: the help is not wanted physically at that moment, but the sense of help – the presence of strength that is outside them and yet theirs, meets a continual want of imagination [...] Maggie took the arm. And they walked together round the grassplot and under the drooping green of the laburnums, in the same dim dreamy state [...].”⁴⁶⁶

As Grigson points out, laburnums are small trees with long pendulous racemes of bright yellow flowers followed by pods of poisonous seeds.⁴⁶⁷ This plant of “pensive beauty” is seductive but deadly, attractive but fatal.⁴⁶⁸ Later Maggie is “abducted” by Stephen from the garden and “borne along by the tide”: “Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the roses, being helped with firm tender care into the boat [...] all by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will [...] and she felt nothing else. Memory was excluded.”⁴⁶⁹ This dream-state threatens her loss of reality, risking her sense of self and so her ties to the past and family indicated throughout the novel. The river’s continual association with past ties reveals Maggie’s ambivalent feelings about change and her reluctance to break old attachments in order to make new ones, even when she is with Stephen: “her eyes were too full of the old banks that she knew so well.” However, “the rhythmic movement of the oars attracted her, and she thought she should like to learn how to row.”⁴⁷⁰ Maggie’s destiny is like the

⁴⁶⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 407-8.

⁴⁶⁷ Grigson 227.

⁴⁶⁸ Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 180-1.

⁴⁶⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 464.

⁴⁷⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 382.

river, as she is driven and overwhelmed by strong currents, including her attraction to Stephen.

Stephen “abducts” Maggie from the charity-ball into the separate “world” of the Guests’ Park House conservatory. It is “an enchanting world in every way ‘different’ from the world of more routine social affairs.”⁴⁷¹ Maggie recognizes it as a foreign place: “‘How strange and unreal the flowers look with the trees and lights among them,’ said Maggie, in a low voice. ‘They look as if they belong to an enchanted land, and would never fade away:—I could fancy they were all made of jewels.’”⁴⁷² The conservatory appears a fantasy world with a realm of possibilities, “strange” and “unreal,” an “enchanted land” akin to Proserpina’s garden in the Underworld, with flowers that “never fade.” These “forced” plants are not in the real world, but in a world out of time, a hothouse fantasy world.

The conservatory scene is mythical and magical, an otherworldly setting beyond everyday experience and outside convention. This sense of unreality and enchantment suggests the potential for deception; things are not what they seem, and with the arrival of Maggie’s Plutonic suitor, nature is threatening and seductive, “entrancing” and “toxic.”⁴⁷³ In her dream-like attraction to Stephen, Maggie appears passive and helpless, not totally in control of her actions:

She was looking at the tier of geraniums as she spoke, and
Stephen made no answer; but he was looking at her . . .
Something strangely powerful there was in the light of

⁴⁷¹ Waters discusses the Victorian conservatory as a setting for romance and “social encounters of the more intimate kind.” See Waters, “The Conservatory in Victorian Literature” 273-4.

⁴⁷² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 441. George Eliot also mentions the conservatory in *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) in order to highlight the social realities that she wishes to address in the novel: “Even in that conservatory existence where the fair Camelia is sighed for by the noble young Pineapple, neither of them needing to care about the frost or rain outside, there is a nether apparatus of hot-water pipes liable to cool down on a strike of the gardeners or a scarcity of coal. And the lives we are about to look back upon do not belong to those conservatory species; they are rooted in the common earth, having to endure all the ordinary chances of past and present weather.” George Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (1866; London: Penguin, 1995) 50.

⁴⁷³ *The Dictionary of Architecture* 1853. Quoted in Darby 168.

Stephen's long gaze, for it made Maggie's face turn towards it and look upward at it – slowly, like a flower at the ascending brightness. And they walked unsteadily on, without feeling that they were walking – without feeling anything but that long grave mutual gaze which has the solemnity belonging to all deep human passion.⁴⁷⁴

Passionately drawn to Stephen, Maggie is like a flower turning toward the light, and as this tacit allusion to the daisy makes clear, Stephen threatens to replace Tom as the love of Maggie's life.

The couple's passion is displaced onto the hothouse flowers, and the rose reveals their mutual desire. As they reach the end of the conservatory, they must pause and turn.

The change of movement brought a new consciousness to Maggie: she blushed deeply, turned away her head and drew her arm from Stephen's, going up to some flowers to smell them. Stephen stood motionless and still pale.

'O may I get this rose?' said Maggie, making a great effort to say something, and dissipate the burning sense of irretrievable confession. 'I think I am quite wicked with roses – I like to gather them and smell them till they have no scent left.'⁴⁷⁵

Maggie "bent her arm a little upward towards the large half-opened rose that had attracted her."⁴⁷⁶ Maggie's reaching for the rose indicates her sensuality and readiness for an adult sexual relationship. She is like the opening flower, the blossoming rose.

Maggie again functions like a flower within the forces of an emotional climate and an environment of controlled growth, this time from her attraction to Stephen. Attached as an occasional cool retreat, the conservatory's hot and cold imagery reveals the conflicting emotions of love, but also the climatization of Maggie's desire, in contrast to that of her feelings

⁴⁷⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 441.

⁴⁷⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 441.

⁴⁷⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 441.

for Tom.⁴⁷⁷ Botanically, she is most like a flower here, and the sexual imagery of the half-open, fertile rose blossom contrasts with the closed daisy, shut from lack of love. In contrast to the imagery of the daisy, the flower in bloom is a metaphor for Maggie's sexual maturity and her attraction to Stephen. In this moment of climax and transition, "her eyes and cheeks had that fire of young joy in them which will flame out if it can find the least breath to fan it."⁴⁷⁸ Like a flower, "This one, this last night, she might expand unrestrainedly in the warmth of the present, without those chill eating thoughts of the past and future."⁴⁷⁹

The myth brings together both these elements in one narrative about coming-of-age. Maggie's emotional, moral attachment to childhood relationships and her brother's love is symbolized by the wildflower. In contrast, her craving for intellectual stimulation and physical attraction showing her readiness for an adult relationship is symbolized by the cultivated hothouse flower that indicates her sexual maturity.

In the moment of "flower-picking," Maggie's gesture to get the flower, the "large half-opened rose," indicates her ambiguous status, revealing both her budding sexuality and readiness to mature yet also her hesitation and resistance to change. When Maggie reaches for the rose, Stephen seizes her arm and kisses it. Sexualized in the conservatory scene, the female arm, with its "unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow" and "varied gently lessening curves down to the delicate wrist," is a synecdoche for the female body throughout the novel.⁴⁸⁰ Maggie refuses him here "like a wounded war-goddess."⁴⁸¹ George Eliot sets the climatic moment of Maggie's feelings of ambivalence about maturity and change in this "ambiguous threshold location."⁴⁸² Spatially and morphologically

⁴⁷⁷ Waters explains "the polarities and apparent contradictions which the conservatory world combines, exhibits, and exploits," including hot-cool, green-gold and reality-fantasy. See Waters, "The Conservatory in Victorian Literature" 278.

⁴⁷⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 439.

⁴⁷⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 440.

⁴⁸⁰ See Margaret Homans, "Dinah's Blush, Maggie's Arm: Sexuality in George Eliot's Early Novels," *Victorian Studies* 36.2 (1993): 155-78.

⁴⁸¹ Eliot 442.

⁴⁸² Waters, "The Conservatory in Victorian Literature" 279.

ambiguous, the conservatory “straddle[s] the boundary zones between garden and house.”⁴⁸³

“Who has not felt the beauty of a woman’s arm?”: Maggie, Proserpina and the Struggle between Two Worlds

George Eliot’s reference to the classical sculpture of Proserpina during the conservatory scene not only highlights the contrast between the ancient world and the modern but also the struggle between nostalgia and progress, as Maggie is caught between the two worlds of Dorlcote Mill and Guest and Co.: “A woman’s arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the time-worn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie’s was such an arm as that – and it had the warm tints of life.”⁴⁸⁴ George Eliot refers to the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, specifically to two sculptures from the east pediment of the Parthenon known as the Demeter group and usually identified as the mother-daughter pair of goddesses.⁴⁸⁵ Proserpina’s arm clasps her mother; Maggie’s arm is clasped by her lover. A daughter’s arm clasps her mother, and, at the same time, a daughter’s arm is clasped by her lover. Maggie’s arm, like Proserpina’s arm, is beautiful, and like the

⁴⁸³ Waters, “The Conservatory in Victorian Literature” 278.

⁴⁸⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 441-2. The classical reference contrasts the past with the present, as in *Middlemarch*, where antique sculpture contrasts with the “eager pulse of the modern world.” See Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 127. See also Wisenfarth 22: “Myth is deeply embedded in the integument of her works so as to make it more complex and universal at the very moment that her novel is highly individualized in its place and time.”

⁴⁸⁵ Cook describes the “two female figures, carved from a single block. Each wears a long tunic of fine, crinkly material under an outer garment of heavier stuff [...] which falls in broad, sweeping folds. They are seated on rectangular wooden chests, set at different angles, their tops padded with folded drapery [...] They are usually thought to represent Demeter and Persephone, the mother and daughter worshipped as fertility goddesses at Eleusis, but [...] there is no agreement about which is which.” See B. F. Cook, *The Elgin Marbles* (London: British Museum P, 1984, 1997) 63. Their depiction as seated side by side is consistent with ancient representations of the two goddesses. Zuntz explains that “most frequently Mother and Daughter are worshipped together” as “a pair of mature women often hardly distinguishable in age, or even identical, as in the most ancient (seventh century) types [...] of terracotta figurines representing the two goddesses wrapped in a cloak, or seated on a chariot [...]” See Günther Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971) 77-8.

goddess, she is caught between two worlds in a struggle between childhood and adulthood.

Reaching for the Future

Just as Stephen literally leads Maggie away from the ballroom into the conservatory, so his romantic attentions lead her away from familial and childhood ties in a conflict of past and present in which the conservatory itself serves as an emblem of technological triumph over nature.⁴⁸⁶ The sexualized hothouse flower is representative of their mutual desire, but the conservatory indicates the masculine dominance of nature. As a symbol of the Guests' industrial wealth, the conservatory represents the technological triumph of man over nature, just as male characters vie for control of the river. As the heir to Guest and Co., Stephen is a representative figure for this industry, literally controlling the tide during the "abduction" scene on the river and as the (patriarchal) "Plutonic" owner of the hothouse, controlling Maggie like a flower and "mastering" her like a part of nature.⁴⁸⁷ Writers have noted the cultural identification of women with flowers within the patriarchal hothouse of a society that grows women like flowering plants.⁴⁸⁸ Darby argues for the

⁴⁸⁶ Waters discusses the conservatory as as a constructed artificial landscape (equated with wealth and built on wealth): "The scenery and props are typically both green and gold – the metonyms of natural and social wealth [...] the natural constituents appear commercialized [...] and the man-made features are given botanical characteristics [...] which serve to naturalize them and the wealth they signify." He notes "the enthusiasm for dream-world glass-palaces among the very classes devoted to the accumulation of wealth in the cut-throat world of commercial reality." For many Victorians, the "application of newly-invented" and "miraculous engineering techniques to garden architecture served as both the vindication and the celebration of modern science and 'modern' wealth." The conservatory was "a testimony to the control which the Victorians had achieved over the natural environment." See Waters, "The Conservatory in Victorian Literature" 274, 276.

⁴⁸⁷ According to Darby: "New glasshouse technology in the second half of the nineteenth century made possible horticultural paradoxes [...] especially those concerning femininity as defined in an androcentric world: here nature is also artifice, nurture is also control, the exotic is also the familiar, protection is imprisonment, sickness is health, fantasy is reality." See Darby, "The Conservatory in St. John's Wood" 162.

⁴⁸⁸ Modern feminist criticism has established the conservatory as a cultural emblem of patriarchal dominance over women and a metaphor for sexual politics. For a contemporary example, see John Stuart Mill's 1869 essay in "The Subjection of Women," *Three Essays: On Liberty, Representative Government, The Subjection of Women* (Oxford: OUP, 1975) 451-2:

What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others [. . .] in the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has always been carried on of some of the capabilities of their nature, for the benefit and pleasure of their

conservatory as an “emblem of patriarchy, exposing the way in which Victorian culture organized both plants and women in terms of its impulse toward power and control over nature.”⁴⁸⁹ As a “highly artificial, fragile balance of natural growth and cultural control” the conservatory “interrogates the ideologies of domesticity” placing pressure on the “tenuous stasis of the contradictions in the ongoing cultural debate over the essential nature of womanhood.”⁴⁹⁰

New technological innovations, particularly with glass in the 1840s and 50s, contributed to changes in nineteenth-century gardening and the association of women and flowers within indoor, winter gardens. The widespread use of flowers and exotics was enabled by the introduction of the Wardian case and the greenhouse. These inventions allowed the foreign introduction of botanical specimens from overseas trade of the Empire to reach English gardens: the Wardian case was a sealed glass case with a self-contained ecology and, like the greenhouse on a larger scale, allowed for the cultivation of plants in the English climate.⁴⁹¹ Plant hunters, motivated by financial as well as scientific gains, provided England’s wealthy landowners with valuable exotic flowers to grow in their glasshouses. Their spoils spawned competitive races between expert gardeners and botanists, like that

masters. Then, because certain products of the general vital force sprout luxuriantly and reach a great development in this heated atmosphere and under this active nurture and watering, while other shoots from the same root, which are left outside in the wintry air, with ice purposely heaped all round them, have a stunted growth, and some are burnt off with fire and disappear; men, with that inability to recognize their own work which distinguishes the unanalytic mind, indolently believe that the tree grows of itself in the way they have made it grow, and that it would die if one half of it were not kept in a vapour bath and the other half in the snow.

For modern critical accounts see Waters, “The Conservatory in Victorian Literature” and *The Garden in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988); Margaret Flanders Darby, “The Conservatory in St. John’s Wood,” *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot*, ed. Katharine Lochnan (London: Yale UP, 1995) 160-184 and “Joseph Paxton’s Water Lily,” *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002) 255-283.

⁴⁸⁹ Darby, “The Conservatory in St. John’s Wood” 170.

⁴⁹⁰ Darby 172.

⁴⁹¹ Smiley 93-4.

involving specimens of the royal water lily, *Victoria regia*, housed at both Chatsworth and Kew Gardens:

As with palms, orchids, and other desirable exotic species, the lily's early history in England is also an account of aristocratic and scientific competition. In the race to be first to flower it, the Duke of Devonshire's most eminent rivals were W. J. Hooker, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and the Duke of Northumberland at Syon.⁴⁹²

Joseph Paxton's original design for the lily house at Chatsworth climaxed in his idea for the Crystal Palace to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, a design which according to Darby emblemized man's control over nature for some and patriarchal oppression for others.

Holding onto the Past

George Eliot's reference to the Elgin marbles (ironically) reveals a mother-daughter pair, not a sculpture of romantic lovers.⁴⁹³ Here the mother interrupts the lovers' world rather than vice versa, either to claim her daughter or compete with her daughter. This image of Proserpina and Ceres together in which one "clasps" the other's arm "lovingly" suggests domestic and familial harmony. Both are seated side by side, and there is no distinction obvious between the two. They appear as one persona, interchangeable. This image of the mother-daughter goddesses, described by the narrator in loving embrace, highlights the bond between mother and daughter in opposition to Maggie's union with her lover. The fact that the moment of her encounter and potential union with Stephen is blurred with this moment of mother-daughter unity emphasizes the strength of her attachment to family and the past. The scene suggests Maggie's complex attitude toward change: part of her is ready to mature and part of her is tied to the past and to childhood.

However, the scene may also suggest a possible tension between the two with either having the potential to dominate. Rivalry may exist between

⁴⁹² Darby, "Joseph Paxton's Water Lily" 259.

⁴⁹³ Zuntz remarks on the uniqueness of the mother-daughter pairing in Greek mythology. See Zuntz 75.

the two goddesses, as there is ambiguity as to which is which and whose arm it is that grasps the other. In the close identification between them, it is unclear who rules, if both are vying for power and competing as fertility goddesses.⁴⁹⁴ The moment of flower picking is a moment of tension and ambivalence: will Proserpina join with her lover, take over and become a ruling goddess in her own right or will she side with her mother?

Maggie's association with grain and the feminine spaces of the mill and river is consistent with the novel's myth reception in which a potential rivalry may exist between Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver to be mistress of the mill, just as Proserpina rivals Ceres to be the more powerful nature goddess. Maggie's "reluctant black crop" of hair, like Stephen's short dark-brown hair "standing erect, with a slight wave at the end, like a thick crop of corn," suggests her fertility and Stephen's suitability as her mate in the novel's botanical and scientific contexts (of evolution and the theory of sexual selection).⁴⁹⁵ The novel points to them as the most physically-suited couple and indicates the fitness of their union. Their association with the straight wheat suggests their status as fertility goddess and consort or partner within the reception of the Proserpina narrative.

Maggie is set to take her mother's place as mistress of the mill, potentially as Stephen's wife through Guest and Co.'s ownership of the mill, as Philip's wife through Wakem's ownership, or with Tom as he works off the price of Dorlcote Mill. Ultimately in the final scene Maggie does take control when she is the sole female presence at the mill. She and Tom are reunited and reconciled. In terms of the botanical discourse of the novel's myth reception, it is clear that Maggie is associated with the strong, straight wheat.

Light Grain and Dark Grain (II): Lucy and Maggie

George Eliot's reference to the Elgin Marbles contrasts the sculpture's whiteness with Maggie's "brownness." As Jenkyns explains, "The whiteness

⁴⁹⁴ According to Suter, Demeter assimilates the powers of an earlier goddess and this story is hierarchized into a mother-daughter relationship to balance the tension that exists between the two.

⁴⁹⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 27, 364.

of sculpture was a[n] [...] attraction; 'brown' is an epithet of dispraise in the Victorian vocabulary."⁴⁹⁶ The visual effect of the white sculpture contrasts with the brownness of Maggie's colouring or complexion, which, together with roses, makes up her Proserpinian "iconography" in the novel's reception of the Proserpina myth. As Mrs. Tulliver remarks, " 'Maggie's arms *are* a pretty shape [...] They're like mine used to be; only mine was never brown: I wish she'd had *our* family skin [...] when I was young a brown skin wasn't thought well on among respectable folks.' "⁴⁹⁷ Described as the "flower of her family," Mrs. Tulliver's "withered beauty" now contrasts with Maggie's budding sexuality or bloom.⁴⁹⁸

Although Maggie has the potential to rival her mother as mistress of the mill, it is Lucy who has inherited the Dodson complexion, and it is she, rather than Mrs. Tulliver, who serves as Maggie's rival. Conspicuous since childhood, the contrast between the cousins "was very much to the disadvantage of Maggie [...] it was like the contrast between a rough, dark, overgrown puppy and a white kitten."⁴⁹⁹ Their complexions and appearance being so much alike, Lucy is like the daughter Mrs. Tulliver never had. Maggie "was the picture of her aunt Moss, Mr. Tulliver's sister" and "it was quite unaccountable that Mrs. Deane, the thinnest and sallowest of all the Miss Dodsons, should have had this child who might have been taken for Mrs. Tulliver's any day. And Maggie always looked twice as dark as usual when she was by the side of Lucy."⁵⁰⁰

A light complexion indicates "literary" success and the heroine's marriage to the hero. Typical of nineteenth-century fiction, the "light-complexioned girl" in *Corinne* triumphs and the "dark woman" does not. Dark women fail and light women succeed. Maggie complains to Philip: " 'I'm determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness [...] I want to avenge [...] all the rest of the dark

⁴⁹⁶ Jenkyns 146.

⁴⁹⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 383-4.

⁴⁹⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 14, 339.

⁴⁹⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 61.

⁵⁰⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 60.

unhappy ones.’ ”⁵⁰¹ Ironically, like the fictional heroines she reads about, Maggie does not marry and Lucy does.

In the botanical discourse of the novel’s myth reception, George Eliot uses Mr. Tulliver’s metaphor of white and red wheat to depict light and dark paired heroines, as she divides the Proserpina narrative into a narrative of childhood and a narrative of adulthood and marriage. Light and dark complexions indicate George Eliot’s use of paired heroines or doubles, with Maggie, the dark heroine, as Proserpina Kore-daughter and Lucy, the light heroine, as Proserpina Queen-wife.⁵⁰² This doubling is confirmed by names: Lucy as the “light” and Maggie (Marguerite) as the Daisy, regulated by light. The Proserpina narrative splits between the “dark” Maggie and the “light” Lucy, with the childhood narrative (looking backward) pertaining to Maggie and the marriage plot (looking forward) pertaining to Lucy.⁵⁰³ Maggie is linked to “Nature” and a union with death, Lucy to marriage and a union with Stephen. In Eliot’s myth reception, death and marriage appear unlinked. She writes a different sort of union in death, a brother-sister reconciliation, rather than marriage between husband and wife. In this ending, marriage is transposed onto the “light” Proserpina, and Maggie, the “dark” Proserpina, is joined with death and reunited with Tom.

⁵⁰¹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 332.

⁵⁰² “Queenship,” applied to both Lucy and Maggie, also suggests the rivalry between them and their doubling. At the charity ball, Lucy is described as the “acknowledged queen of the occasion.” As a child, Maggie dreams of being queen in Lucy’s form:

Maggie always looked at Lucy with delight. She was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy with a little crown on her head and a little sceptre in her hand [...] only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy’s form.

Stephen’s first sight of Maggie as a “tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair” immediately indicates her queenliness and regality. Significantly Stephen recognizes Maggie’s duality and imagines her as a wife “full of delicious opposites”: defying and deprecating, contradicting and clinging, imperious and beseeching. Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 439, 61, 376, 409.

⁵⁰³ See Welsh, chapter 3, for a discussion of character and topography and Scott’s influence on George Eliot. Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 40-62. Eliot rewrites Scott’s dualisms of nature and civilization represented by brunette and blonde heroines into the dualisms of nature/childhood and “progress”/adulthood.

St. Oggs: The Final Landscape

If Stephen Guest and Philip Wakem are characterized as “Plutonic” suitors, Tom Tulliver is also linked to a mythological ruler and judge of the dead.⁵⁰⁴ Tom is identified with Rhadamanthys, son of Zeus and Europa who, in afterlife, becomes ruler and judge of dead in Greek mythology: “Tom, you perceive, was rather a Rhadamanthine personage, having more than the usual share of boys’ justice in him [...]”⁵⁰⁵ Tom is not a Plutonic aggressor but problematically Maggie’s suitors are modelled on and merged with her brother so that she cannot break with the past. Even though he is her brother and shares her Cerean childhood, he is nevertheless the type for her suitors. Her relationship with Tom is based on a continuous need of his love and moral approval. Within the springtime of Maggie’s sexual awakening, the narrative circles back to Maggie and Tom’s attachment to one another and Maggie’s longing for Tom’s love and approval. In Book 6, Chapters 4 and 5 on brother and sister and Tom’s business success literally come between chapters 2 and 6, Maggie and Stephen’s attraction to one another; similarly chapter 12 on Tom’s success comes between chapters 11 and 13 on Maggie and Stephen’s passion.

The novel opens in the beginning of the year. It is February, late in the afternoon; winter is over, spring is coming, and the time is “ripe” for Proserpina. It is a time of transition. The action in the final chapter, “The Last Conflict,” takes place in September, during the night and toward the end of the year; winter is coming and it is the time for Proserpina’s death. And so the narrative comes full circle: spring is coming at the beginning of the novel and it is time for Proserpina’s “birth”; winter is coming at end of the novel and it is time for Proserpina’s “death.” Trees of birth and death, the ash and

⁵⁰⁴ All three male characters, Stephen, Philip and Tom, are “rivals” for Maggie’s love, signified through flowers as well as their competition to control the river. As Uglow points out in her analysis of *Cousin Phillis*, the male will is continually imposed upon a female world. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the river represents that feminine domain contested by men, as they vie for control of the river. Male characters are also associated with areas of water: Tom and the Round Pool, Philip and the “watery” hyacinths of the Red “Deeps,” Stephen and the tide. See Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 541.

⁵⁰⁵ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 52-3.

the elm of the landscape signify the cycle of life. The flood at the end of the novel finally merges Maggie with the feminine personality of the river:

Ah, now she knew which way to look for the first glimpse of the well-known trees – the grey willows, the now yellowing chestnuts [...] Colour was beginning to awake now, and as she approached the Dorlcote fields, she could discern the tints of the trees – could see the old Scotch firs far to the right, and the home chestnuts – Oh! how deep they lay in the water: deeper than the trees on this side the hill.⁵⁰⁶

The narrative circles back to reunite Maggie and Tom: “brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted – living through in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.”⁵⁰⁷

Maggie’s memory lives on and endures in connection with the landscape. The opening scene foreshadows her drowning and the merging of her identity with the watery landscape. An overall harmony exists within the organic, agrarian community but there is an opposition between the mill as part of the age-old landscape (“as old as elms and chestnuts”) and the town and its developing trade. Reconciliation to change is never without question, and hers is not an uncritical acceptance. Changes are not without hardship and loss, yet George Eliot suggests that over time change can be positive and human society can regain harmony with the natural world.

⁵⁰⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 518, 519.

⁵⁰⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 521.

Chapter 4
The Nosegay, The Railroad and A Sketch of Ceres:
Elizabeth Gaskell and *Cousin Phillis*

So “out yonder” I went; out on to a broad upland common, full of red sand-banks, and sweeps and hollows; bordered by dark firs, purple in the coming shadows, but near at hand all ablaze with flowering gorse, or, as we call it in the south, furze-bushes, which, seen against the belt of distant trees, appeared brilliantly golden. On this heath, a little way from the field-gate, I saw the three. I counted their heads, joined together in an eager group over Holdsworth’s theodolite. He was teaching the minister the practical art of surveying and taking a level.⁵⁰⁸

If in *The Mill on the Floss*, the conflict is over water, how to negotiate “the rights and wrongs of water” and how to control the ambiguous watery landscape, in *Cousin Phillis*, the conflict is over land and how to interpret and manage the ambiguous “shaking, uncertain” landscape.⁵⁰⁹ The problem is one of reading or perception (whether it be through myth, Virgil or Wordsworth, religion, superstition or industrial science, such as engineering or mechanics). Returning to Hope Farm during the summer hay-making, the narrator Paul Manning finds the railway engineer Holdsworth with both the Reverend Holman and Phillis out on the common. In his demonstration of the theodolite, Holdsworth literally shows the Holmans a new way to look at the land. The contrasting landscape of banks and hollows, shadows and light, echoes the group’s differing perceptions and the conflict between different ways of seeing and naming.

Paul’s distinction between the flower’s Midlands name, “gorse,” and “furze,” “as we call it in the south,” highlights the novel’s different ways of reading the land. Grigson explains the different names for the plant:

The three most general names are Gorse (OE *gorst*), Furze (OE *fȳrs*), and Whin, which may have originally been a Scandinavian word. Gorse is more general in the Midlands, sometimes in the

⁵⁰⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cousin Phillis*, ed. Peter Keating (London: Penguin, 1976) 269.

⁵⁰⁹ Gaskell 223.

old form of Gorst; Furze (often Fuzz or Vuzz) is commonly used in the south-west and in Ireland, and Whin is used more in eastern and northern counties, Scotland, and Ireland.⁵¹⁰

Different approaches to nature are alternately associated with the Reverend, Holdsworth, Paul and Phillis: the Reverend and Virgil's *Georgics*, Phillis and the classics and Dante, Holdsworth and surveying, Paul and engineering but also Wordsworth's Romantic poetry.

In Chapter four, girl-flower readings again reflect an ambivalent attitude toward nature, as Gaskell, like Eliot, attempts to balance views of nostalgia and progress.⁵¹¹ Elizabeth Gaskell's critique of industrial change in *Cousin Phillis* focuses on the building of the railroads. In a clash of ancients and moderns, the new railway system intrudes upon the traditional agrarian way of life at Hope Farm. While the Holmans' rely upon age-old seasonal rhythms in a rural world imbued by classical literature, the railroad engineers, Paul Manning and Edward Holdsworth, apply the latest technology in an attempt to master the laying of track on the difficult terrain. Ambiguous, "Nature" may offer spiritual and moral inspiration as well as scientific advancement.

Elizabeth Gaskell's botanical discourse in *Cousin Phillis* draws upon Wordsworthian nature, the Bible and the classics, with these traditional sources of moral authority coming into conflict with modern industrial science and engineering. A botanical opposition exists within language itself, in the naming of plants; and Gaskell's discourse of botanical morality turns upon this attempt to balance readings of the landscape. In this novel of education, the educating of different perspectives and perceptions and the

⁵¹⁰ Grigson 126.

⁵¹¹ For criticism on Gaskell and the Condition of England novel, the novel of social crisis and industrial fiction, see John Lucas, *The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel* (Sussex: The Harvester P, 1977, 1980); Joseph Kestner, *Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women 1827-67* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985); Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (London: U of Chicago P, 1985); and Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Paul Elek, 1975).

conflict between old and new, ancient and modern is told through books as well as attempts to read and manage the landscape.⁵¹²

In *Cousin Phillis*, a novel with a more overt context of myth and elements of counter-realism, Phillis is linked to grain and the harvest through the text's reception of the Ceres-Proserpina myth.⁵¹³ As the title suggests, the novel's eponymous heroine recalls the stock personality or female character of Phillis from classical pastoral. Phillis, taken from the Greek *Phullis* meaning foliage, and *phullon* (f.), leaf, is the name for a pretty country girl or a sweetheart, and after Milton, for a pretty, neat, or dexterous female servant (OED). Accordingly, Gaskell's Phillis appears as a passive, static female beauty linked to the natural world and identified by her association with natural objects, foliage as well as flowers, like Wordsworth's silent female figures and the "Lucy" of "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," to whom she is directly compared by the narrator Paul Manning.⁵¹⁴ Cousin Phillis's Ovidian "warbling, and replying to the notes of different birds" demonstrate her closeness to natural objects and creatures.⁵¹⁵ Gaskell plays upon Cousin Phillis's pastoral, Miltonic associations but undercuts them to show that a perfect pastoral world does not exist and that rural adaptation to industrial change is not only necessary but can be beneficial to both sides.

⁵¹² Uglow describes *Cousin Phillis* as a tale in which "conflicts of feelings are related specifically to language and form." Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993) 540. See also Philip Rogers, "The Education of Cousin Phillis," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.1 (1995): 27-50.

⁵¹³ For studies of Gaskell and myth, see Thomas E. Recchio, "A Victorian Version of the Fall: Mrs. Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* and the Domestication of Myth," *Gaskell Society Journal* 5 (1991): 37-50. For criticism of *Cousin Phillis* as part of Gaskell's later fiction and of the novella form, both as less bound to realist conventions of earlier works and more mythical and experimental, see John Lucas, *The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel* (Sussex: The Harvester P, 1977, 1980).

⁵¹⁴ For Gaskell and Romantic nature, see Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998); Donald D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (London: Harvard UP, 1980); Rosemary Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (London: Cornell UP, 1988); and Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: OUP, 1992). Schor argues that Gaskell is trying to "write woman into nature," to give her a voice.

⁵¹⁵ Gaskell 289. Stephen Gill and others have mentioned the novel's highly literary construction of realism (including its drawing upon Ovid and Wordsworth). For the Holmans, reality is mediated through books and literature.

Phillis's Proserpinian coming-of-age and her relationships with male characters or Plutonic suitors dramatize her ambivalent feelings toward change resulting in a measured acceptance of these changes and a more positive balancing of old and new. Although Phillis is compared to Wordsworth's Lucy and characterized as having a close affinity with nature by the novel's male narrator, she recovers from illness and near death and expresses a hopeful outlook for the future.

Cerean Nature: The Maternal Landscape of Hope Farm

The agrarian world of Hope Farm in Heathbridge, with its rural activities of hay making, the corn harvest, and apple gathering, makes up the novel's maternal "Cerean" nature and is established by Gaskell in Part I. This formative landscape of Hope Farm includes the garden, farmhouse and fields (the five-acre, Ashfield and the stubblefield). The first view of Hope Farm from the inn, framed by hollyhocks and damson-trees in the orchard, suggests its link to the past as a static picture, as part of the surrounding landscape. As the innkeeper remarks, " 'it's an old place, though Holman keeps it in order.' " ⁵¹⁶ A flower of fecundity and maternity, the hollyhock frames an idyllic picture of life on Hope Farm. ⁵¹⁷

While the minister manages the fields, the mistress of the farm "reigns" in the domestic garden known as "the court." As the narrator, Paul Manning, describes:

There was a garden between the house and the shady, grassy lane; I afterwards found that this garden was called the court; perhaps because there was a low wall round it, with an iron railing on top of the wall, and two great gates between pillars crowned with stone balls for a state entrance to the flagged path leading up to the front door. [...] I had to go round by a side-path lightly worn on a broad grassy way, which led past the court-wall, past a horse-mount, half covered with stone-crop and the little wild yellow fumitory, to another door — 'the

⁵¹⁶ Gaskell 224.

⁵¹⁷ Seaton 180-1.

curate,' as I found it was termed by the master of the house,
while the front door [...] was termed the 'rector.'⁵¹⁸

Grigson and Mabey describe *Sedum acre* or Golden moss of the stone-crop family as a mosslike plant with bright yellow flowers.⁵¹⁹ In Paul's first view of the farm, nature appears tranquil, mossy and sedentary, a harmonious blend of yellows and golds.

Paul's first visit to Hope Farm occurs in August during harvest time when the minister is in the five-acre field beginning to cut the corn. Paul's memory of Mrs. Holman, "as she stood at the curate-door, shading her eyes from the sinking sun with her hand," reveals a convention of nostalgia used by Gaskell in two other works, *Wives and Daughters* (1866) and *The Moorland Cottage* (1850).⁵²⁰ In this "domestic mode of nostalgia," Gaskell "places before the dwellings a comforting mother clutching ripe damsons in her apron and a wistful mother standing in the doorway of her moorland cottage."⁵²¹ As Colley explains, the figure of the mother in the nineteenth-century nostalgic imagination, particularly the mother in the doorway, indicates a desire for permanence in a changing world: "At the center of [Gaskell's] idyllic interludes and natural scenes are maternal figures who, in the context of the nostalgic moment, provide the desired stability."⁵²² In *Cousin Phillis*, Hope Farm makes up a Cerean "green" world overseen by Mrs. Holman, herself the former "Phillis Green."

Paul's second visit to Hope Farm occurs in September. The vine leaves are yellow, the hedges scorched and browned, but these gradual seasonal changes are almost as imperceptible as the passage of time indoors, according to Paul's idyllic picture-making and rustic interpretation of the scene:

I found the 'curate' open to admit the soft September air, so
tempered by the warmth of the sun [...] The vine-leaves over the

⁵¹⁸ Gaskell 225-6.

⁵¹⁹ Grigson 180, 182; Mabey 177.

⁵²⁰ Gaskell 228.

⁵²¹ Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (London: Macmillan P, 1998) 80.

⁵²² Colley 77.

window had a tinge more yellow, their hedges were here and there scorched and browned [...] Phillis was at her knitting indoors: it seemed as if she had been at it all the week. The many-speckled fowls were pecking about in the farmyard beyond, and the milk-cans glittered with brightness, hung out to sweeten.⁵²³

During this visit, Paul remarks on the abundant, sweet-smelling flowers:

The court was so full of flowers that they crept out upon the low-covered wall and horse-mount, and were even to be found self-sown upon the turf that bordered the path to the back of the house. I fancied that my Sunday coat was scented for days afterwards by the bushes of sweetbriar and the fraxinella that perfumed the air.⁵²⁴

The fragrant leaves and pink flowers of the wild rose or eglantine have an apple-scent especially fragrant after rain, and the tall fraxinella plant, also with pink flowers, smells of cinnamon, filling the air on hot days.⁵²⁵

Paul first sees Reverend Holman in the Ashfield through the leaves of the ash trees growing in the hedge. As in *The Mill on the Floss*, trees represent the continuity of generations. "As social change accelerated, the desire to preserve such visible symbols of continuity grew stronger," and the "analogy between great families and great trees" was well established.⁵²⁶ With his fair, ruddy complexion, large build and yellow, sandy hair, the Reverend is not what Paul expects:

We only saw him through the leaves of the ash-trees growing in the hedge and I thought I must be confusing the figures, or mistaken: that man still looked like a very powerful labourer, and had none of the precise demureness of appearance which I had always imagined was the characteristic of a minister. It was

⁵²³ Gaskell 229.

⁵²⁴ Gaskell 229.

⁵²⁵ Mabey 192; Collins 122.

⁵²⁶ Thomas 217-8.

the Reverend Ebenezer Holman, however.⁵²⁷

A “farmer’s wood,” and so like the Reverend himself, the ash indicates Reverend Holman’s natural fitness, his bond or kinship with nature and his blending with the yellows and reds of the autumn landscape.⁵²⁸ His ash field shows that he is an intelligent farmer. A fortuitous tree, lightning runs to the ash (like a lightning rod).⁵²⁹ According to Gaskell’s botanical discourse, if Holdsworth strikes the farm like a bolt of lightning, the Reverend, like the ash, can channel it and so will ultimately be able to adjust to change. His physicality emphasizes his practical experience in running the farm and overseeing the harvest.

In keeping with the novel’s myth reception, the Reverend is a Jupiter-like, larger-than life figure. Continuing associations with the ancient world, both classical and Biblical, suggest a timeless existence and the continuity of life on the farm. Following a day’s work in the fields, Reverend Holman leads the labourers in the singing of a psalm:

There we five stood, bareheaded, excepting Phillis, in the tawny stubblefield, from which all the shocks of corn had not yet been carried – a dark wood on one side, where the woodpigeons were cooing; blue distance seen through the ash-trees on the other. Somehow, I think that if I had known the words, and could have sung, my throat would have been choked up by the feeling of the unaccustomed scene.⁵³⁰

In a “burst of the tawny, ruddy-evening landscape,” Reverend Holman quotes Virgil’s *Georgics* in the Latin: “ ‘It’s wonderful,’ said he, ‘ how exactly Virgil has hit the enduring epithets, nearly two thousand years ago, and in Italy; and yet how it describes to a T what is now lying before us in the parish of Heathbridge, county — , England.’ ”⁵³¹

⁵²⁷ Gaskell 231.

⁵²⁸ Used in carts, wagons and fencing, it is “an indispensable timber, close-grained and smooth to the hand.” Grigson 271.

⁵²⁹ Grigson 271.

⁵³⁰ Gaskell 232.

⁵³¹ Gaskell 233.

Like the Ashfield, the holly field, with its “two holly-bushes in the middle,” makes up part of Hope Farm’s Cerean landscape.⁵³² One of the “plants with power,” the holly, or *Ilex aquifolium*, has a complex and paradoxical history.⁵³³ Cutting down whole holly trees brings bad luck, and ancient gigantic holly trees maintain their associations with an ancient landscape: “where gnarled pollards stand in a landscape of Celtic fields and ancient stones.”⁵³⁴ A trusted boundary tree, “Across Britain, in every kind of landscape, hollies are looked on as constants in the landscape.”⁵³⁵ Holly is “widely regarded as capable of outliving changes in ownership and farming practice, and of echoing the contours of ancient estates.”⁵³⁶ The Reverend’s respect for and knowledge of the landscape indicates his understanding of the link between past and present, and so the potential for positive relations between the old order and the new, between rural traditions and industrial progress.

Proserpinian Girlhood: Phillis and Wildflowers

Phillis Holman’s representation as the young Proserpina, the girl Korè or Kora, focuses on her identification with wildflowers, epitomizing girlhood innocence. Parts I and II of the novel concentrate on her role as daughter, in harmony with her parents and the maternal nature of Hope Farm. This representation of Phillis includes her association with the garden-court flowers.

Paul’s visions of Phillis in the sunlight show her blending with the landscape, nurtured by the sun like other flowers and plants in the Cerean nature of Hope Farm. On his first visit to the farm, Paul’s first impression of the fair, blonde Phillis is as a vision of light harmonizing with the golden stone-crop and yellow fumitory of the garden:

I see her now – cousin Phillis. The westering sun shone full upon her, and made a slanting stream of light into the room

⁵³² Gaskell 268.

⁵³³ Grigson 116; Mabey 244.

⁵³⁴ Mabey 245, 248.

⁵³⁵ Mabey 249.

⁵³⁶ Mabey 250.

within. She was dressed in dark blue cotton of some kind; up to her throat, down to her wrists, with a little frill of the same wherever it touched her white skin. And such a white skin it was! I have never seen the like. She had light hair, nearer yellow than any other colour.⁵³⁷

Phillis's golden hair and luminescent complexion "light up" the vine-shadowed room just as her hair blends with the yellow foliage in the garden outside the window.⁵³⁸ Later during the same visit, Paul again sees the sun shining on Phillis and notices "the bright colour of Phillis's hair, as the afternoon sun fell on her bending head."⁵³⁹ The sun shining on Phillis suggests transcendence, intensity and domestic enshrinement.

Paul's first meeting with Phillis coincides with the corn harvest in August. In the Ashfield, he immediately notices Phillis's height, "wishing that [...] [she] were not quite so tall; for she was above me in height."⁵⁴⁰ Physically, Phillis takes after her father, being tall and blonde: "I could see that Phillis was built more after his type than her mother's. He, like his daughter, was largely made, and of a fair, ruddy complexion, whereas hers was brilliant and delicate. His hair had been yellow or sandy, but now was grizzled."⁵⁴¹

Classical and Biblical references place Phillis in harmony with her parents, particularly her father. Phillis's books show her interest in learning.⁵⁴² Her reading daunts Paul but not Holdsworth, suggesting the unsuitability of the former as a match for Phillis and the suitability of the latter. Phillis's books are "used for reading, and not for propping up a beaupot of flowers":

Virgil, Caesar, a Greek grammar — oh, dear! ah, me! and Phillis Holman's name in each of them! [...] Yes, and I gave my cousin

⁵³⁷ Gaskell 226.

⁵³⁸ Gaskell 228, 229.

⁵³⁹ Gaskell 242.

⁵⁴⁰ Gaskell 230.

⁵⁴¹ Gaskell 231.

⁵⁴² See Rogers.

Phillis a wide berth, although she was sitting at her work quietly enough, and her hair was looking more golden, her dark eyelashes longer, her round pillar of a throat whiter than ever [...]⁵⁴³

Although Phillis appears more feminine and mythical than ever to Paul, looks can be deceptive, like the landscape itself. This simple country girl has an extensive knowledge of the classics. Paul's practical knowledge of the railroads and lack of Latin provide a contrast to Phillis's classical studies and grasp of languages. Phillis is like her father in mental constitution as well as in physical appearance. Paul observes the Reverend's intelligent perception and notices that Phillis is "so like" her father "both in body and mind."⁵⁴⁴ Her face "mutely gave him back the sympathetic appreciation" that Paul in his ignorance "could not bestow."⁵⁴⁵

When he first arrives, Paul identifies Phillis with Biblical figures. He refers to Phillis as the "handmaiden," alluding to Mary's song in the Gospel of Luke.⁵⁴⁶ He also alludes to a story in Genesis:

I felt as if I were somebody in the Old Testament – who, I could not recollect – being served and waited upon by the daughter of the host. Was I like Abraham's steward, when Rebekah gave him to drink at the well? I thought Isaac had not gone the pleasantest way to work in winning him a wife. But Phillis never thought about such things. She was a stately, gracious young woman, in the dress and with the simplicity of a child.⁵⁴⁷

Paul reveals a lack of perception and critical judgement; he does not know how she feels about marriage, and ironically, he does provide Phillis with a potential husband. Continuing associations with the ancient world, Biblical

⁵⁴³ Gaskell 235.

⁵⁴⁴ Gaskell 236.

⁵⁴⁵ Gaskell 234.

⁵⁴⁶ "And Mary said, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.' " Luke 1.46-48. KJV Bible.

⁵⁴⁷ Genesis 24. Gaskell 228.

and classical, reveal Paul's impression of Phillis as a woman-child, in accord with the seemingly timeless existence of life on the farm.

The Holmans' only child, Phillis is kept under her mother's watchful eye during the Sunday walk to chapel. The death of an elder brother in infancy accentuates her parents' overprotectiveness and their wish to keep Phillis in a prolonged state of childhood. As the group nears town, Mrs. Holman's maternal protectiveness and possessiveness of her daughter's beauty is evident:

As we drew near the town, I could see some of the young fellows we met cast admiring looks on Phillis; and that made me look too. She had on a white gown, and a short black silk cloak, according to the fashion of the day. A straw bonnet with brown ribbon strings; that was all. But what her dress wanted in colour, her sweet bonny face had. The walk made her cheeks bloom like the rose; the very whites of her eyes had a blue tinge on them, and her dark eyelashes brought out the depths of the blue eyes themselves. Her yellow hair was put away as straight as its natural curliness would allow. If she did not perceive the admiration she excited, I am sure cousin Holman did; for she looked as fierce and as proud as ever her quiet face could look, guarding her treasure, and yet glad to perceive that others could see that it was a treasure.⁵⁴⁸

In a white dress, her cheeks blooming like a rose, Phillis is now an ambiguous vision of white and red, both in need of protection but also sexually mature.

Proserpinian Coming-of-age: Phillis, Flowers and Plutonic Encounters

May Day

Phillis's birthday on the first of May links her to the hawthorn blossom coming into flower at the beginning of May. A white flower of hope and prudence, the tree has Christian associations, and it is one of the trees that may have been used as the tree of Christ.⁵⁴⁹ As Mabey explains, "its

⁵⁴⁸ Gaskell 246.

⁵⁴⁹ Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 178-9; Grigson 170.

combination of thorns and red berries suggests a tree associated with protection and sacrifice, perhaps even the source of Christ's crown of thorns."⁵⁵⁰ Grigson explains that the hawthorn's white blossoms in May symbolize the change from spring to summer, and Mabey describes the blossoming as "mark[ing] the cusp between spring and summer."⁵⁵¹ Just as the tree's flowering marks this seasonal change, and the tree itself serves as a distinctive boundary marker or boundary tree, so the hawthorn suggests the boundaries and transitions in Phillis's growth.⁵⁵²

Born on the first of May, Phillis's growth and coming-of-age are in sync with the coming of summer and the traditional May Day celebration of fertility rites and their mythic associations. The minister expresses a disapproval of its pagan associations that is in keeping with the Puritan dislike of May Day.⁵⁵³ When Mrs. Holman tells Paul Phillis's age, she explains, " 'Seventeen last May-day; but the minister does not like to hear me calling it May-day,' said she, checking herself with a little awe. 'Phillis was seventeen on the first day of May last,' she repeated in an amended edition."⁵⁵⁴ The May festival of vegetation and farming, with its traditional May Queen, celebrates the arrival of summer.⁵⁵⁵ The hawthorn is one of the plants put around the Maypole carried in from the woods: "Hawthorn spoke of sex and fertility which needed protection."⁵⁵⁶ As Jack Goody points out: "The hawthorn or may was the special object of attention at May Day ceremonies that centred on the woods, the maypole and the May queen [...] it

⁵⁵⁰ Mabey 209.

⁵⁵¹ Grigson 167; Mabey 209.

⁵⁵² Grigson 169; Mabey 209.

⁵⁵³ Grigson 168.

⁵⁵⁴ Gaskell 227.

⁵⁵⁵ Flowers and trees are important moral symbols of female character on May Day, as Gaskell describes in a letter from 1838, which gives insight into her own botanical morality: "In early Victorian Cheshire the villagers used trees as moral symbols, hanging up branches outside other people's houses on May Day to show how the householders were regarded by their neighbours: oak meant a good woman; birch meant a pretty girl; alder meant a scold [...] If gorse, nettles, sycamore or sawdust are placed at the door, they cast the worst imputation on a woman's character, and vary according as she be girl, wife, or widow." See Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, eds. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966) 28-33.

⁵⁵⁶ Grigson 167.

is a plant kept outdoors, associated with unregulated love in the fields rather than conjugal love in the bed.”⁵⁵⁷ It has a preference for open country, for heaths and rocky places.⁵⁵⁸ Like the gorse, it is a flower of open spaces, a flower of seduction (not of matrimony).

According to Grigson, the flowers’ “stale, sweet scent” makes them suggestive of sex.⁵⁵⁹ Mabey explains that the triethylamine responsible for the hawthorn’s stale scent is “one of the first chemicals produced when living tissue starts to decay.”⁵⁶⁰ Hence the May flower’s scent is the smell of a corpse, the smell of death as well as the scent of sex; it is a Proserpinian flower of death and sex. However, it is not only the smell of the flowers which signify death, but as Mabey explains, the “white flowers with their red anthers and incipient red berries suggest blood and pallor of corpses.”⁵⁶¹ There is also superstition about bringing the blossoms inside.⁵⁶² They are unlucky indoors and “likely to presage death (of the mother).”⁵⁶³ This ambiguous flower of the May Queen suggests Phillis’s Proserpinian duality: a white flower of prudence, it is also a flower of sex and power, in need of protection but also the omen of a mother’s death.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁵⁷ Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 212.

⁵⁵⁸ Mabey 212.

⁵⁵⁹ Grigson 168.

⁵⁶⁰ Mabey 212.

⁵⁶¹ Mabey 211.

⁵⁶² Grigson 169; Mabey 209.

⁵⁶³ Mabey 211.

⁵⁶⁴ In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), Thomas Hardy employs the mythical associations of Proserpina in the characterisation of his heroine and his study of “fallen” womanhood. As Hardy’s May Queen, Tess appears as the victim of larger deterministic forces within a pagan and ritualistic Nature. Participating in the village’s traditional May dance, Tess walks in the procession wearing her white gown, carrying white flowers and a peeled willow wand, yet she is distinguished from the other girls by her “peony mouth” and red ribbon. As Alvarez points out, later in the novel when Tess encounters Angel Clare in the Talbothays’ garden, “it is as though the vegetation itself contained all the secret smells and juices of the act of physical passion.” Tess makes her way through the garden’s confusing mass of the cultivated and the uncultivated:

The outskirt of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells – weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers [...]

See Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, ed. David Skilton, with an introduction by A. Alvarez (London: Penguin, 1978) 51, 17, 178.

Phillis is like the hawthorn flower which, as a symbol of fertility, needs protection but is also sexual. While May and May Day are propitious for engagements, they are not fortunate for marriage itself.⁵⁶⁵ However, as a flower of hope, the may is also powerful against lightning, which is associated with Holdsworth throughout the novel.⁵⁶⁶ Even though Phillis may suffer from Holdsworth, as if she were struck by lightning, she will recover.

Phillis's growth to sexual maturity has gone unnoticed during her life within the Cerean landscape of Hope Farm, but it has been there all along, as the plants attest. The landscape's representation of Phillis includes her association with the garden-court flowers (stone-crop, fumitory, vines); the season from May Day to early summer (hawthorn and plants of the rose family) and autumn crops (ripe golden corn, a sign of her maturity).

In the novel's myth reception, Phillis is characterized by the iconography of Ceres as well as Proserpina, including grain and the harvest. Ceres's iconography suggests Phillis's potential to be a "ruling goddess" in her own right and manage the farm herself (as in Gaskell's original ending to the novel.)⁵⁶⁷ Phillis Holman's "coming-of-age" focuses on her representation as Proserpina and her capacity as wife and "queen," highlighting the rivalry between mother and daughter. Parts II and III of the novel address the issues of Phillis's potential and the resulting tension with her parents and maternal nature (after her Plutonic encounters). Phillis displays ambivalent feelings about a relationship with her Plutonic suitor, Holdsworth, and harbours conflicting desires about retaining childhood attachments and putting these behind her. Although the peak of Holdsworth's attraction to Phillis is registered in the sketching scene during the harvest, the ripening of their feelings follows an initial budding-time earlier in the summer in the garden and during the hay-making scene.

⁵⁶⁵ Grigson 168.

⁵⁶⁶ Grigson 169.

⁵⁶⁷ See J.A.V. Chapple, "Elizabeth Gaskell: Two Unpublished Letters to George Smith," *Etudes Anglaises* 33 (1980): 183-87.

The "First Promise" of Summer: Phillis and Holdsworth in the Garden

Holdsworth's first view of Phillis in the kitchen garden indicates her sexual maturity and fertility and emphasizes her readiness for an adult relationship. Gathering peas in the garden, Phillis is surrounded by flowers, fruit trees, strawberry and raspberry bushes and is again enshrined by sunlight. This scene is typical of the woman-in-the-garden motif "particularly associated with first encounters with a wife or lover-to-be."⁵⁶⁸ As Waters explains, the "fixing of a female subject" as a "static, visually delightful element of a garden scene" is "a principal effect of the garden picture."⁵⁶⁹ The kitchen garden is "in the first promise of a summer profuse in vegetables and fruits":

There were borders of flowers along each side of the gravel walks; and there was an old sheltering wall on the north side covered with tolerably choice fruit-trees; there was a slope down to the fish-pond at the end, where there were great strawberry-beds; and raspberry bushes and rose-bushes grew wherever there was a space; it seemed a chance which had been planted. Long rows of peas stretched at right angles from the main walk, and I saw Phillis stooping down among them, before she saw us. As soon as she heard our cranching [sic] steps on the gravel, she stood up, and shading her eyes from the sun, recognized us. She was quite still for a moment, and then came slowly towards us, blushing a little from evident shyness. I had never seen Phillis shy before.⁵⁷⁰

Another plant with mythological associations, the strawberry is the fruit of Venus and, like the rose, these garden plants of love indicate Phillis's attraction to Holdsworth.⁵⁷¹ Phillis's blushing shows her awareness of her sexuality for the first time. Her relationship with Holdsworth is always

⁵⁶⁸ Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature* 246.

⁵⁶⁹ Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature* 247.

⁵⁷⁰ Gaskell 258-9.

⁵⁷¹ Grigson 152.

defined in terms of their physical attraction. As he helps to gather the peas, he assures her: “ ‘I know the exact fulness [sic] at which peas should be gathered. I take great care not to pluck them when they are unripe. I will not be turned off, as unfit for my work.’ ”⁵⁷² His skill in gathering peas suggests his sexual prowess, and as this scene demonstrates, Holdsworth’s sexual maturity and experience indicate his fitness as a partner for Phillis.

However, the scene’s botanical discourse also cautions the reader as to Holdsworth’s suitability and reliability as a potential husband for Phillis. The plant is both a link to the past, reminding Holdsworth of his grandfather’s garden, and a sign of the future. In keeping with the novel’s Edenic context and mythic imagery, Holdsworth is the intruder in the garden. As he takes off his hat and bows to Phillis, it is clear that from the beginning he is completely at odds with life on the farm, as “such manners had never been seen at Hope Farm before.”⁵⁷³ Gathering peas in the Hope Farm garden brings back Holdsworth’s memory of his grandfather’s garden: “ ‘It will carry me back twenty years of my life, when I used to gather peas in my grandfather’s garden.’ ”⁵⁷⁴ But as Holdsworth tires quickly and must “strike work,” the plant’s link to the past is countered by a signal of the future.⁵⁷⁵

Holdsworth is the first to see Phillis as a grown woman, who is sexually mature, but as the novel indicates, she has been growing up and changing all along. Although Phillis’s growth to sexual maturity has gone unnoticed by her parents during her life within the Cerean landscape of Hope Farm, the flowers reveal her coming-of-age (including the hollyhock, stonecrop, sweetbriar, fraxinella and hawthorn). In Paul’s first view of the farm, nature appears tranquil and sedentary, a harmonious blend of yellow and pink on the surface. However, as the plants indicate, there is clearly a landscape of change below the surface, and just as the yellow-haired, pink-cheeked Phillis appears in harmony within this “maternal” landscape, she too is changing.

⁵⁷² Gaskell 259.

⁵⁷³ Gaskell 259.

⁵⁷⁴ Gaskell 259.

⁵⁷⁵ Gaskell 260.

The wildflowers of the “court” garden also hold different meanings. The stone-crop family, including the *Sedum acre* or Golden moss, also contains *Sedum telephium*, a divinatory plant used on Midsummer’s Eve (the summer solstice, 23 June) to predict the progress of romance.⁵⁷⁶ Like the May-flower, the stone-crop is a plant with mythical, magical associations and is connected with the rites of summer. Nature is always dynamic in ways that are implicit even in Paul’s impression during his second visit to the farm and his idyllic, rustic interpretation of the sweetbriar and fraxinella: “The court was so full of flowers that they crept out upon the low-covered wall and horse-mount, and were even to be found self-sown upon the turf that bordered the path to the back of the house.”⁵⁷⁷ Time passes even here.

The rose is also an ambiguous flower. Paul identifies it with Phillis’s girlhood innocence, but it is also a flower of love and, given its place in the garden, it is associated with her budding sexuality. As I will discuss, when Phillis gives the rose to Paul rather than to Holdsworth at the apple-gathering, she shows her confusion and ambivalent feelings about a romantic suitor. Plants give indications of age, continuity, permanence, solidity, but they also reveal that change is inevitable. Although Holdsworth may see Phillis as a grown woman, Paul still has a childlike image of her: “Woman! beautiful woman! I had thought of Phillis as a comely but awkward girl; and I could not banish the pinafore from my mind’s eye when I tried to picture her to myself.”⁵⁷⁸

“Ablaze with Flowering Gorse”: Phillis and Holdsworth during the Hay-Making

On his return to the farm during the summer hay-making, Paul finds Holdsworth with both the Reverend Holman and Phillis out on the common. Caught in a storm, all four take shelter under the overhanging sand banks:

So we went on, the dark clouds still gathering, for perhaps five minutes after my arrival. Then came the blinding lightning and the rumble and quick-following peal of thunder right over our

⁵⁷⁶ Mabey 177.

⁵⁷⁷ Gaskell 229.

⁵⁷⁸ Gaskell 261.

heads. It came sooner than I expected, sooner than they had looked for: the rain delayed not; it came pouring down; and what were we to do for shelter? Phillis had nothing on but her indoor things – no bonnet, no shawl. Quick as the darting lightning around us, Holdsworth took off his coat and wrapped it around her neck and shoulders, and almost without a word, hurried us all into such poor shelter as one of the overhanging sand-banks could give.⁵⁷⁹

Holdsworth is like the lightning and associated with sudden, rapid change. Phillis is literally and physically caught in a storm, unprepared for the passion that catches her unawares.

Phillis saves Holdsworth's apparatus from the rain in an unwitting gesture of love which he appreciates and acknowledges, but her confusion and feelings of ambivalence about accepting a romantic suitor are evident. Holdsworth's words to Phillis make her blush, revealing an awareness of her sexuality. As Paul recounts:

[...] he said something gravely, and in too low a tone for me to hear, which made her all at once become silent, and called out her blushes [...] but I name the little events of that evening now because I wondered at the time what he had said in that low voice to silence Phillis so effectually, and because, in thinking of their intercourse by the light of future events, that evening stands out with some prominence.⁵⁸⁰

The sensual gorse, "all ablaze" and "brilliantly golden," affirms Phillis's sexuality and heightened physicality, "her long lovely hair floating and dripping, her eyes glad and bright, and her colour freshened to a glow of health by the exercise and the rain."⁵⁸¹ As Mabey explains, the golden flowering gorse or furze, *Ulex europaeus*, is "one of the great signature plants of commonland and rough open space, places where lovers can meet, walk

⁵⁷⁹ Gaskell 269.

⁵⁸⁰ Gaskell 270.

⁵⁸¹ Gaskell 269, 270.

freely and lose themselves, if need be, in its dense thickets."⁵⁸² More succinctly, the saying does, "When gorse is in bloom, kissing's in season."⁵⁸³ This flower of romance is part of a traditional match-making dance and one of the most sensual of plants with flowers smelling of coconut and vanilla and seed-pods cracking in the hot sunshine.⁵⁸⁴

Sketching Ceres: Phillis and Holdsworth at Harvest Time

'You would like a portrait of your daughter as Ceres, would you not, ma'am?'⁵⁸⁵

At harvest time, Holdsworth offers Mrs. Holman a portrait of Phillis as Ceres. The goddess Ceres is already suggested by the novel's classical images of the harvest. Holdsworth's sketches, including "ears of corn" and "carts drawn by bullocks and laden with grapes," reveal classical associations and images of ripeness, fertility and abundance. Like his drawings of Italian stone-pines and his travels in Italy, they give life to the classics. Holdsworth's sketch of Phillis's loosely flowing hair arranged with ears of wheat is consistent with the goddess's iconography as the "blonde Demeter."⁵⁸⁶ Classical depictions of the goddess's "corn-ripe yellow hair" with ears of grain suggest an obvious identification with Phillis, whose golden hair is continually emphasized and linked to plants in the landscape.⁵⁸⁷ Ceres and Bacchus were often worshipped together as the two gods of the harvest, the goddess of grain and the god of wine.⁵⁸⁸ His sketches are suggestive: if he chooses Phillis as Ceres, then he is her male counterpart, the foreign, "Italianate" male of the novel.

⁵⁸² Mabey 230.

⁵⁸³ Mabey 230.

⁵⁸⁴ Mabey 233.

⁵⁸⁵ Gaskell 272.

⁵⁸⁶ "As when along the hallowed threshing floors the wind scatters the chaff, among men winnowing, and fair-haired Demeter in the leaning wind discriminates the chaff and the true grain and the piling chaff whitens beneath it [...]." *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richard Lattimore (London and Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951) 5. 499-502.

⁵⁸⁷ Hamilton 48.

⁵⁸⁸ Hamilton 47-62.

Phillis Holman or Phillis Green: Mother and Daughter Rivalry

Just as his sketches of present-day Italy are a way of modernizing the Holmans' revered classics, so Holdsworth's choice of Phillis as Ceres, the primary figure, makes the daughter the more powerful nature goddess and so suggests a shift in power to the next generation. Mrs. Holman agrees to the picture but differs in her perception. Her check on Holdsworth's choice of portrait indicates rivalry on her part that is designed to maintain the primary relationship with the Reverend. Yet at times, he and Phillis seem closer, and she appears to be taking over as the more influential or powerful female at the farm (the "mistress of the grain"). As a suitor and potential husband, Holdsworth prefers to put Phillis in this position of power, sexual maturity and readiness for marriage and so contradicts Mrs. Holman. Phillis, however, is unsure about Holdsworth's attentions and is unable to sustain the pose. "Discomposed by his stare, with its force of physical possession," she is "unable to meet his gaze."⁵⁸⁹ Agitated, she leaves the house and goes to her father, showing her confusion. (In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie is also drawn to the men in her family rather than to a potential husband.⁵⁹⁰) This scene reveals a culmination of the growing tension between mother and daughter and disharmony within the Holman family.⁵⁹¹

Although Phillis resembles her father's side of the family, it is not appearances but names that signal the mother-daughter tension of the myth's reception. Both are simultaneously Phillis Holman. Mrs. Holman's maiden name of Green suggests her maternal role and identification with the fertility goddess Ceres, in control of the novel's "green world" of vegetal growth. A flower of both maternity and female ambition, the once idyllic hollyhock now signifies the rising tension between Mrs. Holman and Phillis.⁵⁹²

The first sign of tension between Phillis and her parents foreshadows the sketching scene with Holdsworth. The Reverend Holman does not

⁵⁸⁹ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 548.

⁵⁹⁰ Suter mentions this response by Proserpina in her interpretation of the myth.

⁵⁹¹ cf. Gaskell 245, 247, 250, 271.

⁵⁹² Seaton 180-1.

understand Phillis as well as he thinks he does. Father and daughter are not totally of one mind as Paul had suggested earlier:

‘Phillis, I am thankful thou dost not care for the vanities of dress!’

Phillis reddened a little as she said, in a low humble voice —

‘But I do, father, I’m afraid. I often wish I could wear pretty-coloured ribbons round my throat like the squire’s daughters.’

‘It’s but natural, minister!’ said his wife; ‘I’m not above liking a silk gown better than a cotton one myself!’

‘The love of dress is a temptation and a snare,’ said he, gravely. ‘The true adornment is a meek and quiet spirit.’⁵⁹³

It is Phillis’s change of dress that foreshadows the change in her relationship with her parents. Phillis stops wearing pinafores and replaces the pinafore with an apron. Paul recounts that “Phillis had left off wearing the pinafores that had always been so obnoxious to me [...] [and] on one of my visits I found them replaced by pretty linen aprons in the morning, and a black silk one in the afternoon.”⁵⁹⁴ Although initially a sign of Phillis’s childlike simplicity, dress becomes a sign of her maturity. Paul’s earlier remarks note the incongruity of her dress and her age: “I thought it was odd that so old, so full-grown as she was, she should wear a pinafore over her gown.”⁵⁹⁵ Dress reveals her ambiguity as a woman-child coming of age without her parents and, to some extent herself, realizing it.

Paul again remarks on the tension between Mrs. Holman and Phillis when the mother appears jealous of the closeness between father and daughter:

I was rather sorry for cousin Holman; I had been so once or twice before; for do what she would, she was completely unable even to understand the pleasure her husband and daughter took in intellectual pursuits, much less to care in the least herself for

⁵⁹³ Gaskell 245.

⁵⁹⁴ Gaskell 247.

⁵⁹⁵ Gaskell 226.

the pursuits themselves, and was thus unavoidably thrown out of some of their interests. I had once or twice thought she was a little jealous of her own child, as a fitter companion for her husband than she was herself [...]⁵⁹⁶

Tension arising between mother and suitor also indicates Mrs. Holman's jealousy of Phillis:

After Mr. Holdsworth regained his health, he too often talked above her head in intellectual matters, and too often in his light bantering tone for her to feel quite at ease with him [...] I had noticed before that she had fleeting shadows of jealousy even of Phillis, when her daughter and her husband appeared to have strong interests and sympathies in things which were quite beyond her comprehension.⁵⁹⁷

The "Last Show of Flowers": Phillis and Holdsworth at the Apple-Gathering

Cousin Phillis's maturation or "coming-of-age" in the moment of "flower-picking" occurs in the apple-gathering scene of Part III. Paul gives an idyllic picture of life on the farm:

So all things went on, at least as far as my observation reached at the time, or memory can recall now, till the great apple-gathering of the year [...] both of us being on the line near Heathbridge, and knowing that they were gathering apples at the farm, we resolved to spend the men's dinner-hour in going over there. We found the great clothes-baskets full of apples, scenting the house, and stopping up the way; and an universal air of merry contentment with this the final produce of the year. The yellow leaves hung on the trees ready to flutter down at the slightest puff of air; the great bushes of Michaelmas daisies in the kitchen-garden were making their last show of flowers.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁶ Gaskell 249.

⁵⁹⁷ Gaskell 271.

⁵⁹⁸ Gaskell 273.

This flower-picking scene indicates Phillis's ambivalent feelings about her maturity and sexuality. Phillis brings Holdsworth a nosegay of an old-fashioned flower, significantly linked to his boyhood, then shrinks from his "look of love" in confusion. She then gives China roses to Paul. The fact that she picks this old-fashioned flower associated with childhood for Holdsworth and gives the rose, the flower of love, to Paul, suggests her confusion and feelings of ambivalence about wanting to retain childhood ties but also wanting to move forward; she is caught between past and present.

The flower associated with Holdsworth's boyhood shows Phillis's passivity, her inability to respond to change and her desire to retain ties with the past. She brings him the flower of his childhood and so she herself becomes associated with his past. Significantly, the flower is unnamed, suggesting that the idea of it is more important than the thing itself, and in this sense rather like Holdsworth's feelings for Phillis: as Uglow suggests he "loves an image of innocence, not a living woman."⁵⁹⁹ His preference for the flower also shows that even Holdsworth, the epitome of modern, industrial man in the story, has an appreciation of and value for the past, which is seen too in his memory of his grandfather's garden and in his fond remembrance of the Holmans on meeting the Ventadours. However, there is still a need for balance on his part and a better preservation of past associations, while for their part the Holmans need to balance their traditional ways with the reality of new technological changes brought about by the building of the railways.

Phillis's relationships with the novel's two Plutonic characters are given a botanical, floral representation, showing her ambivalent feelings about childhood and maturity in both cases. This representation is both moral and sexual: a garden rose and later primroses are given to Paul, sexualized garden plants and a special nosegay are picked for Holdsworth. The wildflowers associated with Paul indicate his and Phillis's familial relationship, in contrast to the sexualized plants that characterize her relationship with Holdsworth.

⁵⁹⁹ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 548.

Plutonic Nature, Plutonic Forces: Technology, The Railroad and the Smoky, Shaking Ground

‘[...] and now that railroads are coming so near us, it behoves us to know something about them.’⁶⁰⁰

“Plutonic” nature in the novel, epitomized by the railroad, is linked to that which is unstable and aggressive, or associated with developing science and industrial technology. The railroad workers Paul Manning and Mr. Holdsworth are the two male characters who serve as “Plutonic” figures coming from outside of the community. Arriving in Hornby for the completion of the line, they must move where the railway work takes them; Holdsworth particularly has no precise roots and is associated with constant change. The entrance or intrusion of these potential suitors or husband figures into the maternal landscape threatens to alter the established rural way of life. In this clash between the new order and the old, the intrusion of the “Plutonic” into the (seemingly) harmonious “Cerean” landscape, a conflict arises between the Reverend and the railroad, Virgil and engineering, the ancients (the classics and the Bible) and the moderns (industrial mechanics and technology).

Elizabeth Gaskell uses Phillis’s relationships with Paul Manning and Holdsworth to dramatize two different models or patterns of change. Paul’s easy assimilation to life on the farm indicates a smooth transition in contrast to Holdsworth’s dramatic rupture of life on the farm. In the first case, change is gradual and less perceptible like the creeping fumitory, and in the second case, change is more cataclysmic and disruptive, jolting like the lightning bolt (as with the tide and Stephen Guest in *The Mill on the Floss*). The novel’s overriding sense of “smooth, rhythmic time is complicated by violent undercurrents, disruptions that are also connected to the rhythms of nature.”⁶⁰¹

The isolated Heathbridge countryside is deceptively stable. Ambiguous throughout the novel, an initially maternal and tranquil nature

⁶⁰⁰ Gaskell 239.

⁶⁰¹ Recchio 45.

reveals a landscape of change. In a letter home, Paul describes the instability of the wetlands near Heathbridge:

I told my father of the bogs, all over wild myrtle and soft moss, and shaking ground over which we had to carry our line [...] the shaking, uncertain ground was puzzling our engineers – one end of the line going up as soon as the other was weighted down [...] we had to make a new line on firmer ground before the junction railway was completed.⁶⁰²

As he later explains, “I was [...] full of the difficulties which beset me just then, owing to our not being able to find a steady bottom on the Heathbridge moss, over which we wished to carry our line.”⁶⁰³ The unstable ground of Heathbridge moss reveals a landscape different from its surface appearance; this land is volatile and in flux.⁶⁰⁴

The land upon which the railroad engineers must build their line and lay their track is itself “smoky” and “shaking.” In this context, even the pastoral plants of the farm reveal an unexpected link with industrial process. The wild yellow fumitory grows at the doorstep of Hope Farm. A common weed, its name comes from the Latin meaning “smoke of the earth.”⁶⁰⁵ Both Grigson and Mabey describe the smoky appearance of *Fumaria officinalis*. As Grigson explains, the yellow-flowered plant with its pale blue-green leaves has “a smell of fumosity, a look of fumosity, and an effect of fumosity.”⁶⁰⁶ Mabey also describes the plant’s grey-green leaves as having a “slightly

⁶⁰² Gaskell 223.

⁶⁰³ Gaskell 235-6.

⁶⁰⁴ Ruskin describes the (wet, spongy ground) “unsafe ground” of the moorlands in detail in *Proserpina*: “If you have walked moorlands enough to know the look of them, you know well those flat spaces or causeways of bright green or golden ground between the heathy rock masses; which signify winding pools and inlets of stagnant water caught among the rocks; – pools which the deep moss that covers them – *blanched*, not black, at the root, – is slowly filling and making firm; whence generally the unsafe ground in the moorland gets known by being *mossy* instead of heathy; and is at last called by its riders, briefly, ‘the Moss’: and as it is mainly at these same mossy places that the riding is difficult, and brings out the gifts of horse and rider [...] the skilled crosser of them got his name, naturally, of ‘moss-rider,’ or moss-trooper.” See Ruskin, *Proserpina* 213.

⁶⁰⁵ Mabey 57.

⁶⁰⁶ Grigson 52.

smoky appearance.”⁶⁰⁷ This “smoky” weed is already present in the remote landscape of Hope Farm, giving an appearance of smoking ground before the presence of the railroad.

Paul Manning

A railroad worker, Paul Manning is an outsider to the community, even though he is a relative of the Holmans. The novel tells the story of his maturation and coming-of-age, paralleling that of Phillis. Paul is growing up and learning about life, partly under the influence of Holdsworth, whose “authority, or influence” he “never thought of resisting.”⁶⁰⁸ Although Paul initially serves as a potential suitor to Cousin Phillis, he quickly becomes a brother figure. After an initial ambiguity or confusion about Paul’s relationship to Phillis, it becomes clear that Paul is part of Phillis’s family associations and the world of her childhood. Their relationship is characterized by wildflowers (particularly the primrose). Like Phillis, he is a kind of Wordsworthian solitary.

From the beginning, Gaskell’s narrative is about maturation and coming-of-age for Paul as well as for Phillis. Although he claims, “It is about cousin Phillis that I am going to write [...],” his story is very much a part of hers, and they experience a similar process of education and disillusionment.⁶⁰⁹ *Cousin Phillis* is a novel about shifting positions and perspectives and learning to cope with and accept change, as the surveying scene and the portrait scene demonstrate; it is an education of perspective and perception. At the beginning of the novel, Paul Manning moves into independent lodgings in Eltham at age seventeen as he starts his first job as clerk under the engineer making the branch line from Eltham to Hornby (a position above his father’s). Phillis is also age seventeen when Paul meets her and her story begins. Like his socially mobile father, Paul takes a job in the railroad profession that necessitates his living away from home. Paul is thirty-seven at the time of telling the story, leaving a twenty-year gap

⁶⁰⁷ Mabey 57.

⁶⁰⁸ Gaskell 225.

⁶⁰⁹ Gaskell 221.

between the time of narration and a retrospective first person narrative that is largely restricted to his perception at age seventeen. Paul meets Phillis when the railway line is over half finished; as he explains, “when I was nearly nineteen [...] I came to know cousin Phillis, whose very existence had been unknown to me till then [...] Heathbridge was near Hornby, for our line of railway was above half finished.”⁶¹⁰ The story of *Cousin Phillis* as told by Paul Manning is set against the building of the railroad and literally measured by the laying of track, a different sort of measurement from the seasonal rhythms that regulate life on Hope Farm.⁶¹¹

Paul’s desire to prove himself as a man and worthy suitor reveals the novel’s opposition between the ancients and the moderns and its concern with the value of knowledge, as it sets up a contrast between Paul and Holdsworth, the true “Plutonic” suitor. Paul imagines: “ ‘She shall see I know something worth knowing, though it mayn’t be her dead-and-gone languages,’ thought I.”⁶¹² Paul’s dream reveals his unconscious rivalry with Holdsworth and his unsuitability as a romantic suitor for Phillis:

I went to bed, and dreamed that I was as tall as cousin Phillis, and had a sudden and miraculous growth of whisker, and a still more miraculous acquaintance with Latin and Greek. Alas! I wakened up still a short, beardless lad, with ‘*tempus fugit*’ for my sole remembrance of the little Latin I had once learnt.”⁶¹³

By contrast, when Phillis experiences difficulty in reading Dante, it is Holdsworth who can help her. Having worked as head engineer on the railway through the Piedmont in Italy, his knowledge of Italian indicates his suitability for Phillis.

⁶¹⁰ Gaskell 222.

⁶¹¹ Gaskell 267. The coming-of-age of boy and girl is linked to the pastoral contrast between town and country, as “style and tone imply the difference between town and country, boy and girl.” As Paul remarks about Hope Farm, “Many a time, indeed, we would fain have stayed longer – the open air, the fresh and pleasant country, made so agreeable a contrast to the close town lodgings which I shared with Mr. Holdsworth.” Uglow 542.

⁶¹² Gaskell 236.

⁶¹³ Gaskell 240.

Paul's remembrances date from agrarian activities in sync with the seasonal cycles of nature and indicate his assimilation to life on the farm:

The remembrance of many a happy day, and of several little scenes, comes back upon me as I think of that summer. They rise like pictures to my memory, and in this way I can date their succession; for I know that corn harvest must have come after hay-making, apple-gathering after corn harvest.⁶¹⁴

The tranquil monotony of farm life seems unchanging to Paul, who fits easily into the scene now; he has bonded with Phillis over the farm-yard animals and learned about rural ways of life:

Cousin Holman gave me the weekly county newspaper to read aloud to her, while she mended stockings out of a high piled-up basket, Phillis helping her mother. I read and read, unregardful of the words I was uttering, thinking of all manner of other things; of the bright colour of Phillis's hair, as the afternoon sun fell on her bending head; of the silence of the house, which enabled me to hear the double tick of the old clock which stood halfway up the stairs; of the variety of inarticulate noises which cousin Holman made while I read, to show her sympathy, wonder, or horror at the newspaper intelligence. The tranquil monotony of that hour made me feel as I had lived for ever, and should live for ever droning out paragraphs in that warm sunny room, with my two quiet hearers, and the curled-up pussy cat sleeping on the hearth-rug, and the clock on the house-stairs perpetually clicking out the passage of the moments.⁶¹⁵

Ironically, he does not pay attention to the newspaper as Mrs. Holman does, just as he thinks that his coming will not impact on life at the farm: "The ways of life were too simple at the Hope Farm for my coming to them to make the slightest disturbance [...] I knew the regular course of their days, and that I

⁶¹⁴ Gaskell 267.

⁶¹⁵ Gaskell 242.

was expected to fall into it, like one of the family.”⁶¹⁶ Nevertheless, however seamless his own entrance into Hope Farm may appear, Paul does initiate changes and shares responsibility for the change in Phillis. Paul’s gradual assimilation to life on the farm indicates the possibility of a smooth transition from the old ways to the new in a manner realised by his father’s visit.

Mr. Manning

Mr. Manning’s visit brings another “modern” man into the world of Hope Farm. Paul’s father was “raising himself every year in men’s consideration and respect” and with “some inventive genius, and a great deal of perseverance,” he had “devised several valuable improvements in railway machinery.”⁶¹⁷ Paul and his father travel the new railway line to visit Hope Farm. The meeting between Manning and Reverend Holman shows the potential for good social relations and a positive model for social change: “It was odd and yet pleasant to me to perceive how these two men, each having led up to this point such totally dissimilar lives, seemed to come together by instinct, after one quiet straight look into each other’s faces.”⁶¹⁸ This exchange contrasts with the meeting between Holdsworth and the Reverend, as Holdsworth’s praise for Mr. Manning reveals:

‘Here’s a Birmingham workman, self-educated, one may say [...] working out his own thoughts into steel and iron, making a scientific name for himself – a fortune, if it pleases him to work for money – and keeping his singleness of heart, his perfect simplicity of manner; it puts me out of patience to think of my expensive schooling, my travels hither and thither, my heaps of scientific books, and I have done nothing to speak of.’⁶¹⁹

A Birmingham man, Mr. Manning is made a partner in the business. As his social mobility indicates, for some, life is changing and moving with the times.

⁶¹⁶ Gaskell 291-2.

⁶¹⁷ Gaskell 219.

⁶¹⁸ Gaskell 248.

⁶¹⁹ Gaskell 254.

Holdsworth

If Paul is more easily “domesticated” to life on the farm, Holdsworth turns it upside down and forces Phillis and the Holmans to adjust to changing times. Entering the Cerean Hope Farm on a steam train rather than a chariot, it is Edward Holdsworth, the head railroad engineer, who becomes the agent of change within the rural community, the Holman family and in Phillis’s life specifically. Holdsworth’s arrival precipitates change and forces everyone to mature and move into the present. With his knowledge of Italian, he becomes Phillis’s guide to Dante’s *Inferno* or underworld.⁶²⁰ He awakens Phillis into passion like a Dantean soul and so causes her “death” to childhood.⁶²¹ His association with storms, lightning and thunder, confirms his role as the novel’s Plutonic suitor wooing the daughter of Ceres. Like Paul, he is linked to the smoky fumitory weed of the bogs, but he is also associated with the foreign, Italian firs. Holdsworth’s dramatic rupture of life on the farm is cataclysmic and disruptive, jolting like the lightning bolt and the steam train itself.

Paul describes Holdsworth’s foreign aspect and the two men’s railway work in a “wild” countryside as yet untouched by industrialization:

The afternoon work was more uncertain than the mornings; it might be the same, or it might be that I had to accompany Mr. Holdsworth, the managing engineer, to some point on the line between Eltham and Hornby. This I always enjoyed, because of the variety, and because of the country we traversed (which was very wild and pretty), and because I was thrown into the companionship of Mr. Holdsworth, who held the position of hero in my boyish mind. He was a young man of five-and-twenty or so, and was in a station above mine, both by birth and education; and he had travelled on the Continent, and wore mustachios and whiskers of a somewhat foreign fashion. I was

⁶²⁰ See Recchio 47.

⁶²¹ Gaskell 262.

proud of being seen with him.⁶²²

With his foreign ways, Holdsworth does not blend in. Phillis immediately recognizes his foreignness and sees him as an outsider which, as Uglow suggests, makes up part of his attraction: "He brings that aura of a different sphere that is such a seductive charge for Gaskell heroines."⁶²³ There is an initial clash between Phillis and Holdsworth, between her Englishness and his foreignness. As she tells Paul, " 'But is not he very like a foreigner? [...] I like an Englishman to look like an Englishman.' " ⁶²⁴ In her recognition that Holdsworth is not exactly what he seems, Phillis shows more critical awareness than does Paul in his boyish hero-worship.

The inaccuracy of Paul's expectations and Holdsworth's carelessness (seen in his mistake between a parson and a minister) reveal that from the beginning, they are both out-of-sync with Hope Farm. Holdsworth's superficial interest is quick to change. Due to his impatience, their timing is off, and he and Paul arrive at the farm too early:

The morrow was blue and sunny, and beautiful; the very perfection of an early summer's day. Mr. Holdsworth was all impatience to be off into the country; morning had brought back his freshness and strength, and consequent eagerness to be doing. I was afraid we were going to my cousin's farm rather too early, before they would expect us; but what could I do with such a restless vehement man as Holdsworth was that morning? We came down upon the Hope Farm before the dew was off the grass on the shady side of the lane [...].⁶²⁵

Holdsworth's earlier trip to the "Valley," a "dark overshadowed dale, where the sun seemed to set behind the hills before four o'clock on midsummer afternoon," results in his fever (from January to May) and subsequent visit to the farm. Paul observes a change in Holdsworth, and in a case of

⁶²² Gaskell 221.

⁶²³ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 546-7.

⁶²⁴ Gaskell 260.

⁶²⁵ Gaskell 257.

foreshadowing, Paul misrepresents Holdsworth's condition to the Holmans, just as he later misrepresents Holdsworth to Phillis: "Of course, it was but the natural state of slow convalescence, after so sharp an illness; but, at the time, I did not know this, and perhaps I represented his state as more serious than it was to my kind relations at Hope Farm."⁶²⁶

Paul anxiously anticipates the meeting between Holdsworth and the Hope Farm family, sensing a clash between them: " 'I think you are good; but I don't know if you are quite of their kind of goodness.' "⁶²⁷

I grew a little nervous, as the time drew near, and wondered how the brilliant Holdsworth would agree with the quiet quaint family of the minister; how they would like him, and many of his half-foreign ways. I tried to prepare him, by telling him from time to time little things about the goings-on at Hope Farm.⁶²⁸

There is a clash of opinions between Holdsworth and Reverend Holman, as each is to each "a specimen of an unknown class."⁶²⁹

After Paul's absence from Hope Farm, he finds Holdsworth improved upon his return. Holdsworth is changed by life at Hope Farm just as he changes life there. In giving Phillis a novel to read, Holdsworth undermines the Reverend and initiates a conflict between suitor and parent. Holdsworth writes in Phillis's book — an act of possession: "So he took her book and the paper back to the little round table, and employed himself in writing explanations and definitions of the words which had troubled her. I was not sure if he was not taking a liberty: it did not quite please me, and yet I did not know why."⁶³⁰

Holdsworth initially shows curiosity about the farmer-minister, and they later exhibit mutual fascination for one another, the old ways coming into contact with the new. Although *Holdsworth's* magnetic personality makes the Reverend feel the same threat of losing his judgement as Paul does,

⁶²⁶ Gaskell 255-6.

⁶²⁷ Gaskell 257.

⁶²⁸ Gaskell 256.

⁶²⁹ Gaskell 263.

⁶³⁰ Gaskell 262.

ironically, he is surprised by Phillis's feelings for Holdsworth later. He tells Paul, " 'he takes hold of me, as it were; and I have almost been afraid lest he carries me away, in spite of my judgment.' " ⁶³¹ A tenuous relationship exists between Holdsworth and the Reverend: "The minister had at more than one time spoken of him to me with slight distrust [...] But it was more as a protest against the fascination which the younger man evidently exercised over the elder one – more as it were to strengthen himself against yielding to this fascination." ⁶³² The Reverend exclaims, "[...] it is wonderful to listen to him! He makes Horace and Virgil living instead of dead, by the stories he tells me of his sojourn in the very countries where they lived [...] I listen to him till I forget my duties, and am carried off my feet." ⁶³³ In the novel's clash of past and present, the Holmans are associated with the ancients (the Romans) and Holdsworth with the moderns (present-day Italy). The relationship between Holdsworth and the Holmans, like the meeting between Manning and the Reverend, reveals that a mutual exchange between agricultural and industrial men is possible, but not without difficulties, as Holdsworth's relationship with Phillis dramatizes.

After receiving a letter with a job offer in Canada, Holdsworth springs into action, planning to take the night train. As he explains to Paul, " 'I only wish I had received this letter a day sooner. Every hour is of consequence, for Greathed says they are threatening a rival line [...] I will go to-night. Activity and readiness go a long way in our profession [...] If I can gain half an hour [...] so much the better.' " ⁶³⁴ Holdsworth's abrupt departure is typical of his "Plutonic" energy and changeable nature. The "scream and whistle of the engine" signal Holdsworth's departure. He leaves on the Saturday steamer, taking his nosegay with him, and later explaining in a letter to Paul, " 'My nosegay goes with me to Canada; but I do not need it to remind me of Hope Farm.' " ⁶³⁵ Holdsworth travels by the faster mode of transport, the steamer

⁶³¹ Gaskell 265.

⁶³² Gaskell 271.

⁶³³ Gaskell 266.

⁶³⁴ Gaskell 275.

⁶³⁵ Gaskell 277.

rather than the sailing vessel, and for him the passage of time moves very quickly. He writes in his letter: " 'It seems a year since I left Hornby. Longer since I was at the farm. I have got my nosegay safe. Remember me to the Holmans.' " ⁶³⁶ The flower symbolic of Holdsworth's childhood just as quickly becomes symbolic of his visit to Hope Farm, revealing how quickly he moves on and the present becomes the past for him. The nosegay becomes a memento rather than a symbol of future love and marriage. These fragrant and vibrant flowers will wither and die.

Gaskell suggests that no place is exempt from change, even the remote farm near "the shaking, uncertain ground." Gaskell's nostalgia "demands alteration." ⁶³⁷ The location of the Plutonic, sexual "threat" in nature, the force of change, is key to Gaskell's ambiguous attitude toward nature and social change within the text's myth reception. The ambiguous landscape foreshadows the process of change and the education of Paul and Phillis. Change is inevitable, inherent, part of the cycle of life, and Gaskell's characters must find ways of negotiating or making the transition between old and new.

Phillis and Hope Farm: The Final Landscape

After Holdsworth's sudden departure and Paul's subsequent indiscretion, the end of Part III and Part IV of the novel consider the impact of change upon Phillis, and on Paul, the Holman family, the farm and the community. Phillis is kept in a secluded, unchanging state of rural life, but ultimately she demonstrates a capacity to adapt when industrial life intrudes upon the rural community in the form of the railway engineers Paul Manning and Mr. Holdsworth. Phillis's changes are in sync with the changing landscape. Her parents remain blind to her coming-of-age and growth into adulthood until she is forced to admit her feelings for Holdsworth. In the changes that follow Holdsworth's departure, plants within the novel's botanical discourse attest to Phillis's ambivalence, and so to Gaskell's ambiguity, about change. Gaskell suggests the need for measured change in a

⁶³⁶ Gaskell 280.

⁶³⁷ Colley 82.

balance between old and new, past and present. Gathering primroses with Paul, Phillis tries to revert to childhood ways. However, after her recovery from illness, she is poised for change like the golden landscape that surrounds her at autumn.

As in *The Mill on the Floss*, so in *Cousin Phillis* there is uncertainty about change and reconciliation. Both Phillis and Maggie appear to fade away into the landscape. At the beginning of the novel, nature is essentially nurturing and maternal, but everyone is tied to the past. Holdsworth's arrival precipitates change and forces everyone to mature and move into the present. Timeless cycles of nature are balanced with social changes implemented by the industrial revolution. Change is painful but necessary; it is not without cost but it can be positive. However, Gaskell reassures us from the outset that there is hope for a better future at Hope Farm. Gaskell offers a more positive sense of exchange and resolution than George Eliot's sober, conciliatory view in *The Mill on the Floss*, in which the Tullivers are shown to be ultimately unadaptable to change and caught in a cycle of the past.

Cousin Phillis's changes correspond with the changing landscape. After learning of Holdsworth's hurried departure, Phillis's face is "white and set": "She was as pale as could be, like one who has received some shock."⁶³⁸ In November, Paul notices a change in Phillis. Holdsworth's departure has made her ill, by contrast with Holdsworth's regaining his health on the farm: "looking so pale and weary, and with a sort of aching tone (if I may call it so) in her voice. She was doing all the accustomed things – fulfilling small household duties, but somehow differently."⁶³⁹ In December, at Christmas time, Phillis has changed again. She is taller, thinner, and pale. Proserpina-like, she is dying with the coming of winter, in sync with the changing seasons: "a great deal of snow had come down, but not all, they said, though the ground was covered deep with the white fall."⁶⁴⁰ Paul remarks on Phillis's paleness, "Her grey eyes looked hollow and sad; her complexion was

⁶³⁸ Gaskell 278.

⁶³⁹ Gaskell 279.

⁶⁴⁰ Gaskell 282.

of a dead white."⁶⁴¹ Like Proserpina, she has been "pulled from the bright surface of the earth by desire."⁶⁴²

Gaskell draws upon a Wordsworthian emphasis on childhood associations and memories and the power of nature to minister and heal. Phillis hides in the wood stack and tries to seek shelter in her childhood refuge. She reveals ambivalence toward an adult relationship, as she tries to return to her childhood ways:

The snow was lying on the ground; I could track her feet by the marks they had made [...] I followed on till I came on to a great stack of wood in the orchard [...] and I recollected then how Phillis had told me [...] that underneath this stack had been her hermitage, her sanctuary, when she was a child [...] and she had evidently gone back to this quiet retreat of her childhood, forgetful of the clue given me by her footmarks on the new-fallen snow. The stack was built up very high; but through the interstices of sticks I could see her figure [...] She was making a low moan, like an animal in pain, or perhaps more like the sobbing of the wind.⁶⁴³

There is a sympathetic correspondence between Phillis and the "lonely, leafless orchard."⁶⁴⁴ Phillis approximates nature, like Wordsworth's "Lucy." However, it is impossible to return to childhood. She can be found now, and she must accept and face the changes in her life.

When Paul tells Phillis that Holdsworth loves her: "Such a look! Her eyes, glittering with tears as they were, expressed an almost heavenly happiness; her tender mouth was curved with rapture — her colour vivid and blushing."⁶⁴⁵ Phillis's "blooming looks" on Easter Day (Christ's Rising) show that she is again in sync with the season.⁶⁴⁶ However, her "renewed life and

⁶⁴¹ Gaskell 282.

⁶⁴² Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 549.

⁶⁴³ Gaskell 284.

⁶⁴⁴ Gaskell 284.

⁶⁴⁵ Gaskell 285.

⁶⁴⁶ Gaskell 287.

vigour" from thoughts of Holdsworth's love are a false alarm, just as Paul has been "deceived" by a previous "flush of colour on her face," and Phillis is soon "snatched" from this flowery spring by illness after news of Holdsworth's wedding.⁶⁴⁷

Phillis's sisterly relationship with Paul continues a Wordsworthian representation of nature and childhood. Like children, they are associated with the primrose, the "first rose" of the year and a flower of first youth, hope, and childhood.⁶⁴⁸ Paul recounts their spring walk and flower gathering:

And then we strolled on into the wood beyond the ash-meadow,
and both of us sought for early primroses, and the fresh green
crinkled leaves [...] I never saw her so lovely, or so happy [...] I
can see her now, standing under the budding branches of the
gray trees, over which a tinge of green seemed to be deepening
day after day, her sun-bonnet fallen back on her neck, her hands
full of delicate wood-flowers, quite unconscious of my gaze, but
intent on sweet mockery of some bird in neighbourhood bush or
tree.⁶⁴⁹

Paul also has a particular perception of Phillis as a rose and associates her with Wordsworth's "Lucy" poem, "She dwelt among the untrodden ways":

My cousin Phillis was like a rose that had come to full bloom on
the sunny side of a lonely house, sheltered from storms. I have
read in some book of poetry –

A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.

And somehow those lines always reminded me of Phillis; yet
they were not true of her either.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁷ Gaskell 281, 287.

⁶⁴⁸ Grigson 266; Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* 188-9.

⁶⁴⁹ Gaskell 289.

⁶⁵⁰ Gaskell 289-90.

Her association with the rose reveals her relationship to the landscape and plants of the Rose family (Rosaceae) mentioned throughout the novel.

An ambiguous flower, the rose is both moral and sexual, a flower of purity and sexuality suggesting the contrast between the Wordsworthian female solitary as poetic, passive, secluded and pure and associations with sexual awareness and maturity. The rose reveals both the moral typing of poetry and the sexual typing of botany. Paul identifies it with Phillis's girlhood innocence, but it is also a flower of love and, given its place in the garden, it is also associated with her budding sexuality. When Phillis gives the rose to Paul rather than to Holdsworth, she shows her confusion and feelings of ambivalence about childhood and maturity.

After a letter from Holdsworth, Phillis changes again and is suddenly happy, but her parents remain unaware of her fluctuating behaviour. Holdsworth writes of his friendship with the French Canadian family, the Ventadours, which remind him of the Holmans just as they reminded him of earlier memories: " 'the foreign element retained in their characteristics and manner of living reminds me of some of the happiest days of my life. Lucille, the second daughter, is curiously like Phillis Holman.' " ⁶⁵¹ Paul worries about repeating Holdsworth's words to Phillis:

Her vivid state of happiness this summer was markedly different to the peaceful serenity of former days [...] And yet I considered again, and comforted myself by the reflection that, if this change had been anything more than my silly fancy, her father or her mother would have perceived it. But they went on in tranquil unconsciousness and undisturbed peace.⁶⁵²

The letter telling of Holdsworth's marriage arrives in June. The context of the letter reading occurs after the return from hay making. Holdsworth, now married to Lucille Ventadour, expects everyone to change with him:

It seemed to me as if I had read its contents before, and knew exactly what he had got to say. I knew he was going to be

⁶⁵¹ Gaskell 291.

⁶⁵² Gaskell 291.

married to Lucille Ventadour; nay, that he was married; for this was the 5th of July, and he wrote word that his marriage was fixed to take place on the 29th of June. I knew all the reasons he gave, all the raptures he went into. I held the letter loosely in my hands, and looked into vacancy, yet I saw a chaffinch's nest on the lichen-covered trunk of an old apple-tree opposite my window, and saw the mother-bird come fluttering in to feed her brood, — and yet I did not see it, although it seemed to me afterwards as if I could have drawn every fibre, every feather [...] Phillis had faded away to one among several 'kind friends.'⁶⁵³

During the summer afternoon, Paul seeks Wordsworthian solitude and reflection, but nature has changed. After receiving the letter about Holdsworth's marriage, Paul walks to the moorlands beyond the familiar gorse-covered common (he adopts the flower's Midlands name): "At first I must have tried to stun reflection by rapid walking, for I had lost myself on the high moorlands far beyond the familiar gorse-covered common [...] I kept wishing — oh! how fervently wishing that I had never committed that blunder; that the one little half-hour's indiscretion could be blotted out."⁶⁵⁴

Momentous social change is counterpointed by scenes in nature and life is regulated by farm work:

Here and there the bubbling, brawling brook circled round a great stone, or the root of an old tree, and made a pool; otherwise it coursed brightly over the gravel and stones. I stood by one of these for more than half an hour, or, indeed, longer, throwing bits of wood or pebbles into the water, and wondering what I could do to remedy the present state of things. Of course all my meditation was of no use; and at length the distant sound of the horn employed to tell the men far afield to leave off work, warned me that it was six o'clock, and time for me to go

⁶⁵³ Gaskell 293.

⁶⁵⁴ Gaskell 293.

home.⁶⁵⁵

Gaskell contrasts the scene of Phillis's letter-reading with the previous hay-making scene, emphasizing a Romantic correspondence between the human mind and emotion and the natural world. A thunderstorm occurs during this hay making too: "the dark storm came dashing down, and the thunder-cloud broke right above the house, as it seemed."⁶⁵⁶ Phillis's passion for Holdsworth is bound by storms, as if she were struck by lightning. Holdsworth's influence is always linked to lightning, coming and going in a flash but leaving devastating changes behind him.

The servant Betty recognizes the Holmans' blindness to Phillis's adulthood. Phillis's blush is now a sign of illness, a "fever-flush," rather than a flush of health or a sign of love as before. She tells Paul:

'Poor lad! you're but a big child after all; and you've likely never heard of a fever-flush [...] so don't think for me to be put off wi' blooms and blossoms and such-like talk [...] If yon friend o' yours has played her false, he's a deal for t' answer for; she's a lass who's as sweet and as sound as a nut, and the very apple of her father's eye, and of her mother's too [...] They've called her "the child" so long – "the child" is always their name for her when they talk on her between themselves [...] that she's grown up to be a woman under their very eyes, and they look on her still as if she were in her long clothes.'⁶⁵⁷

Holdsworth's visit to the farm has changed everyone but causes a physical change in Phillis, as Uglow remarks he "translates her" into another state of existence, and now she is feverish and restless because of her unrequited love for him.⁶⁵⁸ If he was like the lightning before, now she is like one struck by lightning – shocked and dramatically changed.

⁶⁵⁵ Gaskell 303-4.

⁶⁵⁶ Gaskell 295.

⁶⁵⁷ Gaskell 298.

⁶⁵⁸ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 546.

From the outset, Reverend Holman recognizes the need to understand the changes to the landscape and the farm caused by the coming of the railroads. The Reverend tries to understand the change impacting upon the farm: "The minister went on asking me questions respecting Holdsworth's future plans; and brought out a large old-fashioned atlas, that he might find out the exact places between which the new railroad was to run."⁶⁵⁹ The Reverend's study and his books show that he is an educated man with an interest in learning. Ironically, his openness to change regarding the farm but not his daughter shows his limited perspective. Reverend Holman's views are well-informed but not completely up-to-date. He is more in tune with the ancients than with the moderns. The Reverend's interest in and reliance on the classic pastoral text of Virgil's *Georgics* as the "living truth in these days" show his appreciation for the Roman knowledge of agricultural customs, but how relevant is the work to the nineteenth-century English countryside? Does it really prepare him to deal with the coming railroad?

The Holmans take notice of dead trees (quince and apple) on the farm but remain blind to Phillis's suffering. They fail her on a botanical as well as a social level; in their attentiveness to all of the plants in the Rose family, they overlook their own rose. After Holdsworth's first letter from Halifax arrives, Mrs. Holman describes how the quince-tree is blown down on the night of the minister's prayer for those drowned at sea. This ominous sign foreshadows that Holdsworth is not coming back as well as indicating painful changes to life on the farm. If the tree is a symbol of continuity in the Cerean landscape, its damage indicates that things do change, and nothing is for certain. As Mrs. Holman remarks: " 'Many is the time we have thought of him when the wind was blowing so hard; the old quince-tree is blown down, Paul, that on the right-hand of the great pear-tree.' "⁶⁶⁰ (An old tree down is unlucky, like the "broken tree" in *The Mill on the Floss*). Reverend Holman dismisses the farmhand Timothy Cooper after he kills a rare variety of apple tree: " 'He has killed the Ribstone pippin at the corner of the orchard; gone and piled

⁶⁵⁹ Gaskell 278.

⁶⁶⁰ Gaskell 279.

quicklime for the mortar for the new stable wall against the trunk of the tree – stupid fellow! killed the tree outright – and it loaded with apples!’ ”⁶⁶¹ The tree dies in its prime, and like the tree, Phillis is in danger of dying at her peak of maturity.

Phillis’s parents remain blind to her progress towards adulthood until Phillis admits her feelings for Holdsworth. The novel’s Plutonic figure continues to disrupt the order of life on the farm, and Holdsworth essentially causes a separation between Phillis and her parents. Her father exclaims, “ ‘And yet you would have left us, left your home, left your father and mother, and gone away with this stranger, wandering over the world.’ ”⁶⁶² Paul observes that at that moment, “Probably the father and daughter were never so far apart in their lives, so unsympathetic.”⁶⁶³ Phillis becomes unconscious and contracts brain fever.⁶⁶⁴ Her illness overshadows the Farm: “Every person (I had almost said every creature, for all the dumb beasts seemed to know and love Phillis) about the place went grieving and sad, as though a cloud was over the sun.”⁶⁶⁵ The change in Phillis affects the “perfect harmony” of the family. It is not so much guilt or shame on her part, as Recchio has suggested, as the fact that her feelings for Holdsworth are those of a sexually-mature adult woman and so jar with her parents’ treatment of her as a child.⁶⁶⁶ Though “her pretty golden hair had been cut off long before,” this symbol linking her to the landscape will grow back again.⁶⁶⁷

Phillis’s recovery comes in August, the time of apple-gathering and of the flower-picking scene. Recurrent seasons and their rural activities show the nature of change for the worse (as in hay-making) and for the better (as in apple-gathering). Paul recognizes “the slight return of delicate colour into the

⁶⁶¹ Gaskell 305.

⁶⁶² Gaskell 309.

⁶⁶³ Gaskell 309.

⁶⁶⁴ See Clare Pettitt, “ ‘Cousin Holman’s Dresser’: Science, Social Change, and the Pathologized Female in Gaskell’s ‘Cousin Phillis,’ *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52.4 (1998): 471-489.

⁶⁶⁵ Gaskell 310.

⁶⁶⁶ Recchio 44.

⁶⁶⁷ Gaskell 311.

pale, wan lips.”⁶⁶⁸ Phillis slowly improves, but “she seemed always the same, gentle, quiet, and sad. Her energy did not return with her bodily strength.”⁶⁶⁹ However reluctantly, Phillis is now willing to accept the possibility of change:

She blushed a little as she faltered out her wish for change of thought and scene.

‘Only for a short time, Paul. Then — we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can, and I will!’

In this final scene, she expresses an ambivalent wish for change: blushing and faltering at the “turning point which all Gaskell heroines reach,” with “recourse” only to “their own will.”⁶⁷⁰ Her blush is significant, like her awareness of her sexuality and attraction to Holdsworth, it suggests here that she retains her adult sense of self.⁶⁷¹ If, as Uglow suggests, Gaskell’s heroines are attracted to men of different realms, perhaps this makes up a large part of Phillis’s attraction to Holdsworth.⁶⁷² Similarly, Holdsworth seems attracted more to an idea of Phillis until he marries the French Canadian Lucille Ventadour who “curiously” reminds him of Phillis Holman, his “English Lucy.”⁶⁷³ Phillis’s suggestion to visit Paul’s parents shows that she has internalized a desire for change and is in a position to initiate and act on that change.

Uglow describes the novel as ending “at that poignant moment of poise.”⁶⁷⁴ Phillis’s recovery during the autumn months of August and September links her once again to the golden landscape of the apple-gathering when yellow leaves are “ready to flutter down at the slightest puff of air.”⁶⁷⁵ In one of his Notes to *Proserpina*, Ruskin describes “colour in vegetation” as “green in life, and golden in death”: “Golden in death, or in the pause of perfect state which precedes it. The ripe ear of corn is the best type of

⁶⁶⁸ Gaskell 314.

⁶⁶⁹ Gaskell 317.

⁶⁷⁰ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 551.

⁶⁷¹ See Mary Anne O’Farrell, *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century Novel and the Blush* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997).

⁶⁷² Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 546-7.

⁶⁷³ Gaskell 291, 295.

⁶⁷⁴ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 352.

⁶⁷⁵ Gaskell 273.

this pause in perfectness: it will keep in its golden sheath for centuries."⁶⁷⁶ Ripe corn is the symbol of Ceres, and in Proserpina's comings and goings between earth and the underworld, autumn is the time just after her "birth" to the earth above and just before her "death" to the earth below. Like the novel's ending, Phillis is "perfectly poised" within the novel's myth reception.

⁶⁷⁶ Ruskin 547. For studies on Gaskell and Ruskin, see Josie Billington, "Faithful Realism: Ruskin and Gaskell," *Gaskell Society Journal* 13 (1999): 1-14; and Anna Unsworth, "Ruskin and Cousin Phillis," *Gaskell Society Journal* 10 (1996): 77-82.

Chapter 5

“Unbind[ing] our bouquet”: John Ruskin and *Proserpina*

[I]t is certainly time to take some order with the partly false, partly useless, and partly forgotten literature of the Fields.⁶⁷⁷

In his prose botanical work *Proserpina* (1875-1886), John Ruskin draws upon the myth of Ceres and Proserpina for his system of flower classification and botanical nomenclature.⁶⁷⁸ The references made in the main title and subtitle introduce the nature of Ruskin's myth reception and the focus of a study that is bounded geographically, retrospectively and personally. The work's full title, *Proserpina. Studies of Wayside Flowers, While the Air was Yet Pure Among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which My Father Knew*, indicates the geographical focus of Ruskin's studies of wildflowers along the roads and paths of Scotland and England as well as the Alps.⁶⁷⁹ The title also retrospectively pays tribute to his father's memory. Ruskin writes in the capacity of son with a childhood perspective about or child-like approach to nature during his father's lifetime. This personal note reveals the importance of his father's influence and his father's death upon Ruskin's writing.⁶⁸⁰ Like Proserpina (the child) he longs for childhood and grieves a parent and a parent's nature that is lost to him. Ruskin is nostalgic for a time past, a rural

⁶⁷⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 340.

⁶⁷⁸ For studies of Ruskin and myth, see Dinah Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988). For Ruskin, myth and gender, see “*The Ethics of the Dust: Ruskin's Authorities*,” *Prose Studies* 12 (1989): 147-58; and Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1998). For studies of Ruskin, myth and science, see Birch, “*Proserpina: Myth and Science (1875-1888)*,” *Ruskin's Myths* (1988) 172-194; and “*Ruskin and the Science of Proserpina*,” *New Approaches to Ruskin*, ed. Robert Hewison (London: Routledge, 1981) 142-156; Frederick Kirchhoff, “*A Science against Sciences: Ruskin's Floral Mythology*,” *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (London: University of California P, 1977). For Ruskin, myth, science and gender, see Weltman, “*Myth and Gender in Ruskin's Science*,” *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern* (Oxford: OUP, 1999) 153-173.

⁶⁷⁹ Ruskin began his study of Alpine botany in 1842, it became a principal study in 1866, and he wrote what became the first chapter of *Proserpina*. In a letter from 1869, he mentions his earlier plan for a botany book solely on Alpine flowers (and his original choice of title): “I write every day, if possible [...] a little of my botany....It is to be called *Cora Nivalis* ‘Snowy Proserpine’: an introduction for young people to the study of Alpine and Arctic wild flowers.” See E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, introduction, *Love's Meine and Proserpina*, by John Ruskin, vol. 25 (1875-1886; London: George Allen, 1906) xxviii.

⁶⁸⁰ See Birch, *Ruskin's Myths*.

world before the railways and steam travel. The word “Wayside” places emphasis on modes of transport that enable one to take in flower study by the roadway and during a time when the “Air” was “Yet Pure.” The importance of childhood memories and personal associations within the “Systema Proserpinæ” of Ruskin’s mythological and moral botany highlights the retrospective cast to his work and epitomizes Victorian nostalgia for a pre-industrial landscape, a time within living memory before the industrialization and pollution of the British countryside.⁶⁸¹ Flower studies undertaken in the past constitute an effort to preserve a wild nature that is vanishing with the spread of industrial development.

The subtitle continues to emphasize the work’s personal significance. It draws attention to wildflowers which fell by the “wayside” when Proserpina was abducted by Pluto in his chariot: “Oh—Proserpina!/For the flowers now, which frightened, thou let’st fall/From Dis’s waggon.”⁶⁸² These flowers left behind by Proserpina upon her “death” and abduction to the Underworld provide the focus for Ruskin’s botanical studies. His botany is dedicated to Proserpina and concerned with the flowers sacred to her. These flowers are sacred to Proserpina and reveal the elegiac cast to Ruskin’s botany in its concern with the death of a young girl. Like Wordsworth’s pastoral elegy mourning the death of Lucy and the poet’s consolation in the natural scene left behind, Ruskin’s botany can be read as a kind of elegy for the death of a young girl and his search for solace in the flowers sacred to her (especially the rose). However, whereas Wordsworth’s Lucy remains unidentified, Ruskin’s “Lucy” or Proserpina can be matched to the real girl Rose LaTouche.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 473.

⁶⁸² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 190.

⁶⁸³ See Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* 175; Weltman, *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* 176n25; and Ruskin, *Præterita* 479–80. As Rosenberg explains: “Ruskin had always been drawn to the innocence and sexually unchallenging beauty of girlhood. As Rose grew into maturity, more and more alienated from Ruskin and from reality, she became fixed in his mind as the untroubled child who had once gathered flowers in his garden at Herne Hill, the ageless little girl whom we meet in the closing pages of *Præterita*.” See John D. Rosenberg, *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings* (London and Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1964/1998) 315–6.

As Ruskin's title suggests, nature is polluted both literally and figuratively. Just as modern science and industry have polluted the land, modern scientists or the "men of science" have polluted the language of botany. Ruskin wants to purify the study of flowers from science's emphasis on plant reproduction by rewriting botanical nomenclature and basing it in myth, literature, art and religion. For Ruskin, it is possible to purge nature and flower study of impurity and "reclaim" botany "for Proserpina" by returning to a Cerean nature "yet pure" before the coming of Pluto. As Seaton explains, "Ruskin's vision of the union of science and morality, of the useful and beautiful, is a vision of nature purged of evil."⁶⁸⁴ It is through language, "as Ruskin reorders the families of plants," that he is also remaking human nature and attempting to establish "a moral England, an idealized England."⁶⁸⁵ Ruskin seeks to "bring together art, flowers, morality, fruitfulness, economy, and 'wise government' " by a method stronger than association, "relating them systematically to botanical forms."⁶⁸⁶

Ruskin's botany is not scientific then but mythic and moral. One of Ruskin's objectives in writing *Proserpina* was to preserve interest in what he saw as a vanishing, disregarded nature by rekindling and fostering an appreciation for wildflowers in their natural habitats by developing a new system of botanical nomenclature based upon familiar associations rather than scientific principles. As Ruskin's editors point out, his dedication to *Proserpina* in the title indicates his reverence for a living spirit within nature, especially in the type of the perfect flower, his concern with the beauty of flowers and their mysteries, and the association of flower study with mythology, literature (such as Shakespeare's use in the classification of the violet), art and religion.⁶⁸⁷

As the compositional history of the work shows, Ruskin's writing was continually interrupted by illness. *Proserpina* was published between 1875

⁶⁸⁴ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 279.

⁶⁸⁵ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 275, 279.

⁶⁸⁶ Seaton, "Considering the Lilies" 279.

⁶⁸⁷ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol. 25, xlvii-xlviii.

and 1886.⁶⁸⁸ The first 4 parts (volume 1, chapters 1-10) were published before his (first) illness in 1878; part 5 in January 1879; and part 6, completing volume 1, in April 1879. In February 1879, he began work on volume 2. His second illness followed in 1881, the first two parts of volume 2 were published in 1882, and then two parts followed in 1885 and 1886. The work is thus divided into two volumes, the second unfinished. Volume 1 focuses mainly on the four principal parts of the plant (root, leaf, flower and stem) and on processes of growth (sap, bark, seed and husk, and fruit). Volume 2 focuses on the naming of specific groups of flowers and explains their classification in detail.

Ruskin's Plan

In *Proserpina*, Ruskin criticizes the scientific nomenclature of scholarly botany based upon plant reproduction and (what he refers to as) the “ugly mysteries” of science, which he explicitly links to industrialization and modernity. In an assertion of language, he proposes his own “Systema Proserpinæ” of botanical nomenclature based upon “familiar” associations from mythology, literature, art and religion. However, Ruskin himself acknowledges that no system can capture the wonders of a maternal, moral nature. Ruskin describes his approach to this Cerean nature in the reading of plant forms for spiritual or mythological truths and moral lessons.

In volume I chapters 1-8, Ruskin places plant forms, both moral and immoral, within Ceres's nature and under her control. Ceres is “the earth-mother- at once the origin of all life, and ‘the receiver of all things back at last into silence.’ ”⁶⁸⁹ Identifying Proserpina with her mother, “the Spirit in nature,” Ruskin discusses flowers specifically in chapter 4 and their classification or categorization in chapter 11 with Proserpina representative of the flower itself. Flowers are personified as female and classified or ranked as types according to the moral and the beautiful. In volume II, Ruskin focuses on Proserpina as the female botanist applying his method of classification in an exercise in botanical classification and locating flowers in their proper

⁶⁸⁸ See Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol. 25, xix.

⁶⁸⁹ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xlvii.

orders. Ruskin attempts to contain the sexual threat within nature and channel change within a harmonious recurrence of Ceres and Proserpina as coexistent in the cycle of life and death. This cyclical pattern pertains to Ruskin's work as a whole as the final concerns of his botany circle back to their beginning.

Plutonic Nature: Modern Science, Plant Sexuality and Those "modern London writers"

Ruskin's treatments of Plutonic and Cerean nature bring together his attack on modern science with his response to it, namely a moral botany. There are only indications of the sexual nature of the ancient myths because this is what Ruskin wants to leave out of his reactionary botany. In his myth reception, nature is predominantly moral, with any sexual threat contained. There is no conflicting desire for the Proserpina figure herself, no real consideration of her as wife, as she either stays a child or merges with her mother as the ruling Spirit in nature.

Ruskin's "Plutonic" nature concerns those aspects of modern science that are based upon the studies of plant sexuality which he dislikes and their impact upon a feminine, maternal nature when manipulated by "men of science" epitomized by Charles Darwin and "his school."⁶⁹⁰ Ruskin distinguishes between "imperfect" natural forms (made by God) and natural forms manipulated by scientists, the latter of which are truly abominable to him, as opposed to the former (weeds for example) which serve a purpose under the ruling Spirit in nature (as part of Ceres' judgement or under the "rule" of the Dark Kora of the lower world). The evil in nature is linked to what is sexual in nature (in that it is associated with the plant's need for propagation and reproduction), which forms the basis of modern scientific investigation.

Clearly opposed to the scientists of the day who base their theories and systems on the sexual aspects of nature he abhors, Ruskin makes his attack on

⁶⁹⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 268.

modern science and proposes his alternative or “counter-science.”⁶⁹¹ He explains the moral basis for his botany in its opposition to the sexual nature of modern scientists. Ruskin begins by addressing the scientific threat to moral nature because he wants to dismiss it, to write it out of his botany (or contain it by placing moral “imperfections” under Ceres and Proserpina).

The “barbarous nomenclature of the botanists”: Three Problems with Plant Names

We can’t let the rude Latin stand [...] ⁶⁹²

In opening his work, Ruskin expresses his dissatisfaction with botanical books and botanical science in general and existing scientific nomenclature in particular.⁶⁹³ Referring to his first botany book, a volume of the monthly Curtis’s *Botanical Magazine* from 1795, Ruskin complains that there are too many non-specific names for flowers, listing the eight names given for his favourite lily.⁶⁹⁴ He explains his objection to the number of scientific names for flowers and their basis upon sexual reproduction; there are too many names for plants and current names are based on unclean associations (mainly to do with sexual reproduction). The “men of science” have intruded upon the beauty of nature in egotistically naming plants after themselves and so producing too many names and the associations of certain names he considers immoral, bringing out what is “Plutonic” in nature. Ruskin concludes he must take it upon himself to give his own names to plants.

In explaining the main purpose of the book, Ruskin aims “to interpret, for young English readers, the necessary European Latin or Greek names of

⁶⁹¹ See Frederick Kirchhoff, “A Science against Sciences: Ruskin’s Floral Mythology,” *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (London: University of California P, 1977).

⁶⁹² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 327.

⁶⁹³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 197. Botany book references listed and abbreviations given include: Curtis’s *Magazine*, *Flora Danica*, Figuer, Sibthorp’s *Flora Graeca*, Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* and *Flora Suecica*, William Curtis’s *Flora Londinensis*, Sowerby’s *English Wild Flowers*. See Ruskin, *Proserpina* 441.

⁶⁹⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 198; cf. 201. William Curtis founded the *Botanical Magazine* in 1787, an illustrated journal later renamed *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine*; this “immensely popular and frequently reprinted” magazine appeared on the first day of the month and featured “hand-coloured engravings of plants with Linnaean names and information about cultivation.” See Shteir 19.

flowers, and to make them vivid and vital to their understandings. But two great difficulties occur in doing this”:

The first, that there are generally from three or four, up to two dozen, Latin names current for every flower; and every new botanist thinks his eminence only to be properly asserted by adding another.

The second, and a much more serious one is [...] that the most current and authoritative names are apt to be founded on some unclean or debasing association, so that to interpret them is to defile the reader’s mind.”

[...] there is only one other course open to me, namely, to substitute boldly, to my own pupils, other generic names for the plants thus faultfully hitherto titled.

As I do not do this for my own pride, but honestly for my readers’ service, I neither question nor care how far the emendations I propose may be now or hereafter adopted.⁶⁹⁵

The practical result will be that “the children who learn botany on the system adopted in this book will know the useful and beautiful names of plants hitherto given, in all languages; the useless and ugly ones they will not know.”⁶⁹⁶ Children will learn one Latin name and “the pretty English one.”⁶⁹⁷ As Ruskin explains, “I have said elsewhere, and can scarcely repeat too often, that a day will come when men of science will think their names disgraced, instead of honoured, by being used to barbarise nomenclature.”⁶⁹⁸

Ruskin’s artistic sense, as a master in the art of language, is offended by the “barbarous nomenclature of the botanists,” a scientific language involving Latin and Greek translations.⁶⁹⁹ In his chapter on “The Stem,” Ruskin claims:

I believe we have now got through the stiffest piece of etymology we shall have to master in the course of our botany;

⁶⁹⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 201.

⁶⁹⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 202.

⁶⁹⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 202.

⁶⁹⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 202.

⁶⁹⁹ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xlv.

but I am certain that young readers will find patient work, in this kind, well rewarded by the groups of connected thoughts which will thus attach themselves to familiar names; and their grasp of every language they learn must only be esteemed by them secure when they recognize its derivatives in these homely associations, and are as much at ease with the Latin or French syllables of a word as with the English ones; this familiarity being above all things needful to cure our young students of their present ludicrous impression that what is simple, in English, is knowing, in Greek [...].⁷⁰⁰

Ruskin objects to “unscholarly nomenclature” involving the literalization of plant names, that is the literal translation of English plant names into Latin or Greek: “books, whether scientific or not, ought to be written either in Latin, or English; and not in a doggish mixture of the refuse of both.”⁷⁰¹ In “The Seed and Husk,” he complains about “confusions brought on by unscholarly botanists, blundering into foreign languages, when they do not know how to use their own.”⁷⁰²

Ruskin explains to his readers the way to establish a “true botany” in contrast to the false botany of the men of science: “even if you only ascertain the history of one plant, so that you know that accurately, you will have helped to lay the foundation of a true science of botany, from which the mass of useless nomenclature, now mistaken for science, will fall away, as the husk of a poppy falls from the bursting flower.”⁷⁰³ Setting himself in opposition to the “men of science” and their botany books, Ruskin aligns himself with promoting the beautiful and the moral in nature:

Which said book was therefore undertaken, to put, if it might be, some elements of the science of botany into a form more tenable by ordinary human and childish faculties [as opposed to

⁷⁰⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 317-8.

⁷⁰¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 200.

⁷⁰² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 372.

⁷⁰³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 228.

the “bat-like” faculties of scientists like Darwin]; or – for I can scarcely say I have yet any tenure of it myself – to make the paths of approach to it more pleasant. In fact, I only know, of it, the pleasant distant effects, which it bears to simple eyes; and some pretty mists and mysteries, which I invite my young readers to pierce, as they may, for themselves, – my power of guiding them being only for a little way.

Pretty mysteries, I say, as opposed to the vulgar and ugly mysteries of the so-called science of botany, – exemplified sufficiently in this chosen page.⁷⁰⁴

In a letter to Dean Liddell, Ruskin explains how his botanical system is to be separate from the “technical formalities” of modern science:

My new botanical names of the great Floral Families are all to be Greek derivatives [...] nor do I myself look for the slightest effect upon the scientific world while I live; but [...] the collation of what I have systematized [...] with what I had learned of natural science in pure love of it, and not in ambition of discovery, will form a code of school teaching entirely separate from the technical formalities of each several branch of science as now pursued [...].⁷⁰⁵

Ruskin’s method of renaming plants involves “attach[ing] to their known forms such simple names as may be utterable by children, and memorable by old people, with more ease and benefit than [...] the like, of modern botany.”⁷⁰⁶

“All this bad English”: Ruskin and Language

According to Ruskin, London is home to the “Plutonic” men of science and their impure, inaccurate language. He reasserts the “purity” of his

⁷⁰⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 200.

⁷⁰⁵ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xl.

⁷⁰⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 472.

language against the “insolence” and “slang” of modern London writers.⁷⁰⁷

Writing on the Pinguicula or butterwort, he complains:

What simple school-children, sensible school-masters, are to do in this atmosphere of Egyptian marsh [...] I can no more with any hope or patience conceive; – but this finally I repeat, concerning my own books, that they are written in honest English, of good Johnsonian lineage [...] and accurate, to a degree which the accepted methods of modern science cannot, in my own particular fields, approach.⁷⁰⁸

Ironically, Ruskin admits that he himself finds it hard to use his terms, to adapt to changes in botanical classification: “I find much more difficulty, myself, being old, in using my altered names for species than my young scholars will.”⁷⁰⁹

As his editors point out, “Ruskin’s criticism of botanical systems of classification has [...] this amount of scientific authority, that no such systems can be anything more than tentative and arbitrary.”⁷¹⁰ He himself admits, “No single classification can possibly be perfect, or anything *like* perfect.”⁷¹¹ Any system of classification is only arbitrary because it cannot capture the wonders of nature:

But through all the defeats by which insolent endeavours to sum the orders of Creation must be reproved, and in the midst of the successes by which patient insight will be surprised, the fact of the *confirmation* of species in plants and animals must remain always a miraculous one.⁷¹²

Proserpina is as much a critique of language (and the means of language to convey truth) as it is a botany book. However, no system or science is a

⁷⁰⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 429.

⁷⁰⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 430.

⁷⁰⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 438.

⁷¹⁰ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xlvi.

⁷¹¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 360.

⁷¹² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 361.

complete knowledge of things; true understanding exists within a childlike love of them:⁷¹³

Now, at last, I see my way to useful summary of the whole [...] and will try in future to do the preliminary work [...] above shown, in its process, to the reader, without making so much fuss about it. But, I think in this case, it was desirable that the floods of pros-, par-, peri, dia-, and circumlocution, through which one has to wade towards any emergent crag of fact in modern scientific books, should for once be seen in the wasteful tide of them; that so I might finally pray the younger students who feel, or remember, their disastrous sway, to cure themselves for ever of the fatal habit of imagining that they know more of anything after naming it unintelligibly, and thinking about it impudently, than they did by loving sight of its nameless being, and in wise confession of its boundless mystery.⁷¹⁴

Ruskin concludes: "For indeed we are all of us yet but schoolboys [...] but few have reached, and those dimly, the first level of science, – wonder."⁷¹⁵

Cerean Nature: Mythology, Botanical Morality and the "perfect spring of Coniston"
Mythological Associations and Myth Interpretation

Ruskin's articulation of myth serves as a moral basis for his system of botanical classification. Ruskin bases his system of botanical nomenclature on the beautiful in art and nature as interpreted through mythological associations. Myth provides interpretive access to spiritual truths in nature.⁷¹⁶ Ruskin's method of botanical classification gives emphasis to familiar associations and reveals the importance of myth as the basis for analysing forms of nature and reading spiritual truths:

But my own method, so far as hitherto developed, consists

⁷¹³ Ruskin asserts a Romantic, Wordsworthian view of women and children as closer to nature; cf. 361, 378 for awe, wonder at nature.

⁷¹⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 497-8.

⁷¹⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 318.

⁷¹⁶ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 13.

essentially in fastening the thoughts of the pupil on the special character of the plant, in the place where he is likely to see it; and therefore, in expressing the power of its race and order in the wider world, rather by reference to mythological associations than to botanical structure.⁷¹⁷

Ruskin refers to his three-fold approach to mythological interpretation given in *The Queen of the Air* (1869): “in nearly every myth of importance [...] you have to discern these three structural parts – the root and the two branches: the root, in physical existence, sun, or sky, or cloud, or sea: then the personal incarnation of that; [...] and, lastly, the moral significance of the image [...].”⁷¹⁸ “All great myths” are founded “partly on physical, partly on moral fact.”⁷¹⁹

For Ruskin, a “true” botany not only includes the study of a flower’s physical traits, such as form and color, but also involves the acknowledgement of a divine spirit within nature imparting moral lessons and mythological or spiritual truths to the student-botanist through the interpretation of plant life. The poppy is “*Papaver Rhoeas*,” a pure or perfect cup “robed in the purple of the Caesars” and “all silk and flame” like “a burning coal from Heaven’s altars,” but it also signifies impatient “luxury-loving youth” as well as the goddesses Ceres and Proserpina, his beloved Rose LaTouche and ultimately Ruskin himself.⁷²⁰

Drawing upon a context of Biblical typology and parable and reverence for the natural world, Ruskin becomes a moral prophet of nature’s truths. According to Birch: “The natural truths of creation, not the dogmas of Evangelical religion or the classics of Oxford, increasingly seemed appropriate texts for the writer who wished, as Ruskin always did, to follow Wordsworth in finding his own spiritual growth in promoting that of others.”⁷²¹ Nature would provide the texts and “the writer, as preacher,

⁷¹⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 340.

⁷¹⁸ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air* 300.

⁷¹⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 415.

⁷²⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 254, 260.

⁷²¹ Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* 9.

would expound them to readers" eager for moral influence.⁷²² Birch concludes that "the obscurities of mythology were to be seen as interpretive expressions of these texts [of nature], expressions which themselves stood *in need of moral elucidation* amid the corruptions of the nineteenth century."⁷²³

Ruskin's depiction of a "Cerean" nature is more explicitly mythic than previous texts in this study (as is his general myth reception); as a mythographer himself, he rewrites myth in *Proserpina* in accordance with his late views on mythology.⁷²⁴ Generally, the Alps, Scotland and England provide the geographical focus of Ruskin's Cerean nature. Specifically, Ruskin's own garden at Brantwood in Coniston, the Lake District, makes up his Cerean nature and "Proserpina's" visit to Coniston hills: "Here, round Coniston, the oxalis, primrose, wood hyacinth, violet, and wood anemone, reign together in the perfect spring."⁷²⁵

If "Nature" is the greatest artist, "the greatest of sculptors and painters," then "her" works offer us the best models for instruction.⁷²⁶ The reader is to associate Ruskin's study of botany with that of painting and the author's art-lessons were to be in companionship with his school-book on flowers. As Ruskin's editors point out, "Nothing was too small or too common to attract the artist's eye in him," and *Proserpina* is very much an artist's botany, the botany of the poet-painter rather than the man of science.⁷²⁷ There is much of the painter in *Proserpina*, and Ruskin admits that one of the few areas with which he felt satisfaction was in the woodcut engravings which he planned to use in a guide to drawing. Associating one study with another is one of Ruskin's leading principles of education – "*Proserpina* may, in one aspect of it, be described as a series of drawing-

⁷²² Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 9.

⁷²³ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 13.

⁷²⁴ For example, Ruskin disagreed with Max Müller's solar theory of myth interpretation. See Birch and Weltman.

⁷²⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 528.

⁷²⁶ Ruskin *Proserpina* 388.

⁷²⁷ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xxxiv, xlix.

lessons in flowers."⁷²⁸ In this respect, Ruskin's botany links back to early nineteenth-century botany of polite female accomplishments.

A Proserpinian Wonder of Nature

In a chapter all about the capricious, circular nature of plant growth, Ruskin describes a Proserpina-like approach to nature as both child and adult evident throughout his work.⁷²⁹ Proserpina's double-consciousness of awe and inquisitiveness is the model for human life, and Ruskin's readers should observe and follow Nature's lessons:

Why the powers of nature should try to deceive us, is not our business to ask [...] but it is a fact that she does, and that our life, when healthy, is a balanced state between a childish submission to her deceits, and a faithful and reverent investigation of her laws. We are to live happily, like children under a dome of blue glass, with pretty glittering gems in it, that rise and set. And we are also to know, like grown men, and to endure in humility, the sorrowful knowledge, that the dome is immeasurable [...].⁷³⁰

Significantly, the adult investigation of nature has nothing to do with its sexual side. The Ruskinian botanist has the delicacy to avoid issues of plant reproduction. Rather the adult study of nature concerns the making of moral distinctions and the observation of its moral lessons. Just as Ruskin is on a beginner or child's level, it is as a child, with child-like wonder, that his readers should approach the study of flowers and natural forms.

The circumstances and surroundings in which *Proserpina* was written, and its incomplete, fragmentary state reveal this impulse toward inquisitiveness and wonder, its desire to ask questions rather than to answer them. Ruskin's editors point out the work's status as tentative rather than authoritative, its intention for the beginner at botany and classification and its aim for a "better foundation for knowledge of flowers in the minds of young

⁷²⁸ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xlix.

⁷²⁹ See also Ruskin, *Proserpina* 207, 317, 361, 407.

⁷³⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 531.

people.”⁷³¹ Ruskin’s wonder and excitement about nature are evident in his chapter on the leaf. As he looks for a definition of sap in his botanical books, he becomes rhapsodic, describing the tree as a fountain:

And the tree becomes literally a fountain, of which the springing streamlets are clothed with new-woven garments of green tissue, and of which the silver spray stays in the sky, – a spray now, of leaves. [...] The secret and subtle descent--the violent and exulting resilience of the tree’s blood,--what guides it? – what compels it? [...] Fountain without supply--playing by its own force, for ever rising and falling all through the days of Spring, spending itself at last in gathered clouds of leaves, and [...] blossom.⁷³²

In a chapter entitled “The Fruit Gift,” Ruskin explains that seeds are not a matter of plant survival but rather of aesthetic bounty. Fruit is a moral end, a consolation or gift for the death of the flower: “the powers of Nature consult quite other ends than the mere continuance of oaks and plum trees on the earth; and must be regarded always with gratitude more deep than wonder, when they are indeed seen with human eyes and human intellect.”⁷³³ As the composition history of the work shows, Ruskin’s writing was continually interrupted by illness. If work on his botany book serves as a recuperative act or process, it is because nature is a moral, maternal, spiritual guide, healing and teaching him.

Mother and Giver of Life: Ceres and Lessons from Plant Forms

Moss

The opening to chapter 1, “Moss,” provides an example of Ruskin’s fresh approach and his study of natural forms with child-like wonder:

Going out to the garden, I bring in a bit of old brick, emerald green on its rugged surface, and a thick piece of mossy turf.

First for the old brick: To think of the quantity of pleasure one

⁷³¹ Cook and Wedderburn, vol. XXV, xlv.

⁷³² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 237. Ruskin consults Dresser, Figuier, Balfour and Lindley.

⁷³³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 378.

has had in one's life from that emerald green velvet,--and yet that for the first time to-day I am verily going to look at it! [...] I find the velvet to be composed of small star-like groups of smooth, strong, oval leaves,--intensely green [...] and they all have a long brown spike, like a sting, at their ends.⁷³⁴

In Ruskin's typological approach, the close observation of natural form yields a spiritual or "mythic" truth. Ruskin gives a moral elucidation of the moss's natural form and its teaching of the "Humility of Death." He explains that its "immortality is the first thing we ought to take note of in the mosses [...] Those minute green leaves of theirs do not decay, nor fall."⁷³⁵ The moss provides Ruskin's first example of botanical moralizing and natural typology, the search for truths in nature and the application of nature's lessons to human life: "If we think honestly, our thoughts will not only live usefully, but even perish usefully--like the moss--and become dark, not without due service. But if we think dishonestly, or malignantly, our thoughts will die like evil fungi,--dripping corrupt dew."⁷³⁶ He concludes: "So much for the human meaning of that decay of the leaves."⁷³⁷

Root

Chapter 2 on "The Root" makes up one of four chapters on plant structure. Ruskin explains his order of discussion for plant parts, with root, leaf, and flower in chapters 2, 3, 4, and stem last in chapter 8:

Plants in their perfect form consist of four principal parts,--the Root, Stem, Leaf, and Flower [...] Only, because the character of the stem depends on the nature of the leaf and flower, we must put it last in order of examination; and trace the development of the plant first in root and leaf; then in the flower and its fruit;

⁷³⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 208. Ruskin explicitly places moss within Ceres's nature, classifying it in his "Order Demetridae" along with grasses, sedges, lichens and the sundew: "[I]t seems to me the mosses and lichens belong no less definitely to Demeter, in being the first gatherers of earth on rock, and the first coverers of its sterile surface, than the grass which at last prepares it to the foot and to the food of man." Ruskin, *Proserpina* 358.

⁷³⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 208.

⁷³⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 213. As in Victorian natural history, Ruskin shares the conventions of "natural typologists." See Seaton, "Considering the Lilies."

⁷³⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 213.

and lastly in the stem.⁷³⁸

The very nature and structure of a plant, divided between darkness and light by root and stem, reflects Proserpina herself who is emblematic of growing things and the cycle of life and death:

Every plant is divided, as I just said, in the main, into two parts, and these have opposite natures. One part seeks the light; the other hates it.

The part that loves the light is called the Leaf.

The part that hates the light is called the Root.⁷³⁹

As Queen of the Underworld, Proserpina rules over the darkness.

Ruskin praises the root for its fixity and preservation in his moral interpretation of its form: "They are--at least, all the noblest of them--rooted to their spot. Their honour and use are in giving immovable shelter,--in remaining landmarks, or lovemarks, when all else is changed."⁷⁴⁰ Like good parents, roots provide for their children in root-like "storehouses." Ruskin then gives the interpretation of the root's moral meaning and its significance for human behaviour:

There is a pretty example of patience for us in this; and it would be well for young people to set themselves to grow in a carrotty or turnippy manner, and lay up secret store, not caring to exhibit it until the time comes for fruitful display. But they must not, in after-life imitate the spendthrift vegetable, and blossom only in the strength of what they learned long ago; else they soon come to a contemptible end. Wise people live like laurels and cedars, and go on mining in the earth, while they adorn and embalm the air.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 218.

⁷³⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 218. Ruskin notes the root's condition of "degradation": "In thus contriving access for itself where it chooses, a root contorts itself into more serpent-like writhing than branches can." "Also the disorderliness of the root is to be noted for a condition of its degradation, no less than its love, and need, of Darkness." See Ruskin, *Proserpina* 221, 484. See Weltman for the importance of the serpent image to Ruskin.

⁷⁴⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 219-20.

⁷⁴¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 225.

Leaf

In Chapter 3, "The Leaf," Ruskin works out his method of mythic association for natural forms and plant names. Ruskin's extensive etymological study of key words in each chapter, such as the leaf, stresses that his study of plants begins with a study of word history (and is as much a study and critique of language). Leaf in the Latin is "folium" (the basis for flower, floscule, flosculous) and in the Greek, "phyllon":

It is 'the springing thing'; this thin film of life; rising, with its *edge* out of the ground--infinitely feeble, infinitely fair. With Folium, in Latin, is rightly associated the word Flos; for the flower is only a group of singularly happy leaves. From these two roots come foglio, feuille, feuillage, and fleur;-- blume, blossom, and bloom; our foliage, and the borrowed foil, and the connected technical groups of words in architecture and the sciences.

This thin film, I said. That is the essential character of a leaf; to be thin,--widely spread out in proportion to its mass. It is the opening of the substance of the earth to the air, which is the giver of life. The Greeks called it, therefore, not only the born or blooming thing, but the spread or expanded thing -- 'πεταλον' [petalon].⁷⁴²

Ruskin acknowledges the importance of origins in historical study, whether classical or Biblical or even within personal memory, yet he also feels free to establish his own versions of myth in keeping with contemporary views of myth's adaptability and evolutionary aspect. An understanding of classical myth is important for the student of botany yet does not bind him or her to a particular reading; it provides a starting point rather than a conclusive way of reading, just as the Proserpina myth provides a starting point for his own "work" on Proserpina as a kind of Victorian botanical or nature goddess.

⁷⁴² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 230.

Chapter 3 reveals that for Ruskin the importance of science is in understanding myth, not, as in Erasmus Darwin's *Botanical Garden*, the other way round. In Ruskin's (three-fold) moral code to nature, physical traits lead to moral analysis and mythical interpretation or significance, in his names for types of leaves: the Apolline land leaves and Arethusan water leaves. For Ruskin, an understanding of myth and the perception of spiritual truths in nature are more important than botanical facts and botanical study:

So that you must not attach any great botanical importance to the characters of contrasted aspects in leaves, which I wish you to express by the words 'Apolline' and 'Arethusan'; but their mythic importance is very great, and your careful observance of it will help you completely to understand the beautiful Greek fable of Apollo and Daphne.⁷⁴³

In his reading of spiritual, sacred truths in nature, Ruskin, making a Biblical reference to Revelations, interprets the leaf as a symbol of human life and of life fulfilled or condemned as good or evil:

Is it among these leaves of the perpetual Spring,--helpful leaves for the healing of the nations,--that we mean to have our part and place [...]? [...]

For other leaves there are, and other streams that water them,--not water of life, but water of Acheron. [...]

Portion in one or other name we must choose, all of us--with the living olive, by the living fountains of waters, or with the wild fig trees, whose leafage of human soul is strewed along the brooks of death, in the eternal Vallombrosa.⁷⁴⁴

This is a botanical lesson with a moral teaching. According to Ruskin, a knowledge of nature informs human moral choices and offers a spiritual wisdom or understanding.

⁷⁴³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 242.

⁷⁴⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 247, 248.

Flower

In Chapter 4 on “The Flower,” Ruskin’s pattern or process of personal memory and association is linked to a moral-religious-mythic association that defines the object for him. In a decidedly different frame of reference for his botany book and system of flower classification, Ruskin chooses the religious holiday of Whit Sunday (Pentecost) as the starting point for his chapter on the flower. Ruskin makes his case for the flower as an object of moral beauty, rather than of sexual reproduction, for beauty rather than begetting, in which the fruit serves as consolation following the death of the flower. Ruskin praises the flower’s value as a fixed image of beauty.

Ruskin introduces the poppy as a complete type of the perfect flower form and gives the basic parts of the flower. The poppy is the most “complete” and “stainless” type of “flower absolute,” with its “pure” scarlet “cup.”⁷⁴⁵ According to Ruskin, form and colour make up the central being of the flower: “In these two qualities, the accurately balanced form, and the perfectly infused colour of the petals, you have, as I said, the central being of the flower.”⁷⁴⁶ Ruskin gives the Linnaean terms for flower parts and then his own names for them. As he complains, “This is a great mess of language [...] And I will venture therefore, for my own pupils, to put the four names altogether into English.”⁷⁴⁷ The pistil containing ovary, style and stigma become the “pillar” containing “treasury, shaft, volute.” The stamens with filament and anther stay the same.

As part of a moral, maternal nature, flowers guide men and women how and where to live: “And the practical lesson which I wish to leave with the reader is, that lovely flowers, and green trees growing in the open air, are the proper guides of men to the places which their Maker intended them to inhabit [...].”⁷⁴⁸ Lessons exist in the death of the flower:

The grouping given to the various states of form between

⁷⁴⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 254.

⁷⁴⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 258.

⁷⁴⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 259.

⁷⁴⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 265.

bud and flower is always the most important part of the design of the plant; and in the modes of its death are some of the most touching lessons, or symbolisms, connected with its existence. The utter loss and far-scattered ruin of the cistus and wild rose,--the dishonoured and dark contortion of the convolvulus,--the pale wasting of the crimson heath of Apennine, are strangely opposed by the quiet closing of the brown bells of the ling, each making themselves a little cross as they die; and so enduring the days of winter.⁷⁴⁹

"Herb, Thorn or Thistle": The Poppy, the Weed and the Judgement of Ceres

Ruskin's approach to a maternal "Cerean" nature concerns the observation and application of nature's moral lessons, his mythic representation of Ceres (and her joint rule with Proserpina) and his basis for moral distinctions and oppositions between perfect and imperfect forms. Because Ruskin wants to exclude sexual nature from his botany and contain the evil or sexual in nature within certain categories, he places aspects of it under the ruling Spirit in nature, including weeds under the judgement of Ceres and flowers specifically under the "Dark Kora."⁷⁵⁰

While chapters 1-4 generally focus on Ceres as mother and giver of life, chapters 5-8 consider Ceres as judge with recognition of an immoral or sinister side to nature. Ceres judges good and evil accordingly. Sexual nature is contained or categorised within Ceres's nature. In chapters 5-8, weeds provide the main focus for a discussion of moral distinctions and readings of plant life, reflecting Ceres as mother and judge-- both the giver of life and receiver of all things back (in death), awarding or condemning humans (with herb or thorn and thistle). Ruskin explains Ceres's role as presiding Spirit in nature, as he cautions the reader about "wild growth":

Of which things you will find it good to consider otherwise than

⁷⁴⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 253.

⁷⁵⁰ The poppy belongs to the "Dark Kora of the lower world." Ruskin places the poppy in Order Moiridæ, the last of his twenty-eight orders, along with hemlock, nightshade, cuckoo-pint and oleander. See Ruskin, *Proserpina* 358.

botanically. For all these lower organisms suffer and perish, or are gladdened and flourish, under conditions which are in utter precision symbolical, and in utter fidelity representative, of the kingdoms which induce adversity and prosperity in the kingdoms of men: and the Eternal Demeter,--Mother, and Judge,--brings forth, as the herb yielding seed, so also the thorn and the thistle, not to herself, but *to thee*.⁷⁵¹

The poppy

Chapter 5, "Papaver Rhoeas," focuses on the poppy as a type of weed in the cornfields, "weedy, and ungracious, and mingled of good and evil," (the emblem of Demeter) and gives its moral and mythological significance.⁷⁵² There is a moral sense or dimension to language which provides the basis for Ruskin's system of botanical classification: "the perception of beauty, and the power of defining physical character are based on moral instinct, and on the power of defining animal or human character."⁷⁵³ Consideration of only the physical aspect of a plant ignores moral distinctions and inherent moral quality. In Ruskin's classification of the poppy family, the physical aspects of the poppy's form and colour are followed by its mythological significance as "the type at once of power, or pride, and of its loss."⁷⁵⁴ Ruskin's reference to a higher spiritual authority reveals a moral hierarchy, the basis of moral judgement: "Nor is it possible to say that one flower is more highly developed [...] than another without the assumption of a divine law of perfection to which the one more conforms than the other."⁷⁵⁵ Ruskin invests himself with the authority to interpret these truths.

Weeds

The complex discussion of weeds exemplifies Ruskin's botanical moralizing in which plants are analogous to people. In Chapter 6, "The

⁷⁵¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 292; 294. His allusion is to Genesis i.11 (God brings forth growing things on the earth for Adam and Eve) and to Genesis iii. 18 (God's judgment on Adam and Eve): "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field."

⁷⁵² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 271.

⁷⁵³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 268.

⁷⁵⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 277.

⁷⁵⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 268-9.

Parable of Joash" Ruskin refers to Margaret Gatty's well-known definition of a weed as "a plant in the wrong place."⁷⁵⁶ Ruskin amends her definition to a plant "which has an innate disposition to *get* into the wrong place":

This, you will find, nevertheless, to be the very essence of weed character--in plants, as in men. If you glance through your botanical books, you will see often added after certain names--'a troublesome weed.' It is not its being venomous, or ugly, but its being impertinent--thrusting itself where it has no business, and hinders other people's business--that makes a weed of it.⁷⁵⁷

Ruskin examines the truly "evil" weeds, distinguishing between those which are unintentional and those which are intentional or wilful. Biblical parables provide a common reference for moral interpretation. Ruskin uses a Biblical context for typological readings of nature, revealing an evangelical viewpoint shared by George Eliot.⁷⁵⁸

Ruskin describes two conditions of leaves: "The character of strength which gives prevalence over others to any common plant, is more or less consistently dependent on woody fibre in the leaves; giving them strong ribs and great expanding extent; or spinous edges, and wrinkled or gathered extent."⁷⁵⁹ The "beautiful work" of the extending ribs, "like a Gothic roof," or the wrinkles in their "crimped frill" provide a source of study for the botanist. Weeds can be admired for their endurance and orderliness: "these, in their sturdy growth and enduring life, we are bound to honour" but not when their condition becomes extreme, "if the spinous nature of it become too cruel to provoke and offend."⁷⁶⁰ In this case they provoke or bring upon themselves God's judgment, as in the parable of Joash to Amaziah, 2 Kings 14:8-14: " 'A thistle in Lebanon sent to a cedar in Lebanon to say, "Give me your daughter

⁷⁵⁶ Mrs. Alfred (Margaret) Gatty, *Aunt Judy's Tales* (1859).

⁷⁵⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 283, 284.

⁷⁵⁸ For Ruskin and typology, see George P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971); Beverly Seaton, "Considering the Lilies"; and Herbert Sussman, *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1979.

⁷⁵⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 287.

⁷⁶⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 288.

in marriage to my son." But a wild beast in Lebanon, passing by, trampled on the thistle.' " If a weed has no use or beauty, then it is void and linked to death, a state of nonbeing.

Then, lastly, if this rudeness and insensitivity of nature be gifted with no redeeming beauty [...] if service be perverted as beauty is lost, and the honied tube, and medicinal leaf, change into mere swollen emptiness [...] at last the separation between the two natures is as great as between the fruitful earth and fruitless ocean [...]⁷⁶¹

As with moss, root, leaf, flower and poppy, Ruskin follows a pattern of mythological interpretation in the reading or study of plant forms giving their physical, personal, moral and spiritual meanings. In the two parable chapters, Ruskin gives his own moral message, using the parable as frame or context. In Chapter 7, Ruskin explains his intention to work out the meaning of the parable of Jotham in relation to the thorny ground at Brantwood, where, as in the parable, the bramble is "king over all the trees of the wood," Ruskin's bramble has taken over the other trees.⁷⁶²

Stem

Chapter 8 concludes Ruskin's discussion of plant parts. Following his examination of weeds, he continues to assess the "opposition of states which seem best to fit a weed for a weed's work": stubbornness or flaccidity.⁷⁶³ In the first state, "a sternness and a coarseness of structure [...] changes its stem into a stake, and its leaf into a spine," while in the second state, "an utter flaccidity and ventosity of structure [...] changes its stem into a riband, and its leaf into a bubble."⁷⁶⁴ In his attempt to ascertain "what a Stem proper is," Ruskin arrives at four different kinds of stem and gives the simple names for

⁷⁶¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 288.

⁷⁶² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 299. Ruskin refers to Judges ix for the curse of Jotham, son of Jerubbab (Gideon).

⁷⁶³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 300.

⁷⁶⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 300.

them in both Latin and English: Petiolus, Cymba, Stemma, and Truncus; Stalk, Leaf-stalk, Stem, and Trunk.⁷⁶⁵

Proserpinian Childhood: Girl and Wildflower

Ruskin's young Proserpina, or Cora, is identified with flowers and epitomizes girlhood innocence. The identification of girl and flower in the representation of Proserpina can be seen as one of many Victorian "flower women" and part of the Victorian cultural phenomenon of making women into flowers which Ruskin himself was largely responsible for shaping in *Modern Painters*, *Sesames and Lilies*, *Ethics of the Dust* and *Proserpina*. In "Of Queen's Gardens," the feminine is famously linked to the domestic sphere of home and garden as an expression of Victorian gender ideology and the doctrine of "separate spheres."⁷⁶⁶

The Flower as the Image of Proserpina, daughter

The myth of Proserpina symbolizes nature's cycle of life and death with Proserpina representative of the flower itself. Ruskin identifies Proserpina with her mother, "the Spirit in nature," and the goddesses are merged in this cycle of life and death. Ceres is both mother and judge, giver of life and receiver of things back in death. Proserpina is both daughter to Ceres and queen of the underworld/ wife of Pluto (both Cora and Dark Cora) symbolized by the life of the flower and vegetation above and below ground. As Ruskin's editors explain:

The myth of Demeter and her daughter Proserpina (or Cora) is a symbol of the earth-mother- at once the origin of all life, and 'the receiver of all things back at last into silence. And, therefore, as the most tender image of this appearing and fading life, in the birth and fall of flowers, her daughter Proserpine plays in the fields of Sicily, and thence is torn away into darkness;' returning, however, in each year from the under-world, and

⁷⁶⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 300, 311.

⁷⁶⁶ See Birch, "Ruskin's 'Womanly Mind.'" *Essays in Criticism* 38.4 (1988): 308-324. Ruskin identifies with his female persona(s) and shares a female perspective. Proserpina is the female student of botany, Rose LaTouche but also Ruskin himself.

thus becoming a symbol of the miracle of Spring. Hence in his connexion of various flowers with Greek mythology, Ruskin gives the fleur-de-lys to Cora, 'its being quite the most lovely expression among plants of the floral power hidden in the grass, and bursting into luxuriance in the spring.'⁷⁶⁷

The image of the flower personified by Proserpina symbolizes this cycle of life and death specifically, her abduction and return symbolizing the coming of Spring. Ruskin emphasizes lightness and darkness as inherent in the very form of the plant, in root and leaf, as the physical properties of plant growth are linked to moral oppositions.

In a chapter entitled "Cora and Kronos," Ruskin makes an explicit connection between the flower and Proserpina. The only time the physicality of the female body (of Proserpina herself) is referred to is in death. In this elegiac aspect of Ruskin's myth reception, death is associated with the sacred in nature or the sacredness of nature rather than sexual union with Pluto. That we learn about the beauty and goodness of nature from the death of a young innocent girl makes up a basic premise of Ruskin's work. Just as the death of the blossom has lessons for us, so too does the death of Proserpina:

And now I must go out and see and think--and for the first time in my life--what becomes of all these fallen blossoms, and where my own mountain Cora hides herself in winter; and where her sweet body is laid in its death.

I must go and look, and can write no more to-day; nor to-morrow neither. I must gather slowly what I see, and remember [...].⁷⁶⁸

Proserpina is the mythological "type" for flowers nurtured within the natural world by her Earth Mother, representative of seasonal changes and the cycle of life and death.

⁷⁶⁷ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xlvii.

⁷⁶⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 371.

"Like a girl of the period's fancy": Ruskin's Wildflowers

For Ruskin, Proserpina is both the Spirit within nature and the young female student of botany gathering flowers like "every maid that sets flowers on brow or breast."⁷⁶⁹ Written for children, particularly for girls, Ruskin's botany continually identifies (innocent, pure) country girls as wildflowers and (innocent, pure) wildflowers as country girls. Ruskin personifies and anthropomorphizes flowers throughout his work.⁷⁷⁰ In describing the violet, Ruskin remarks:

But that a violet, who has her stalk to herself, and might grow straight up, if she pleased, should be pleased to do nothing of the sort, but gratuitously bend her stalk down at the top, and fasten herself to it by her waist, as it were,--this is so much more like a girl of the period's fancy than a violet's, that I never gather one separately but with renewed astonishment at it.⁷⁷¹

The Coniston oxalis is "meant to be by kindly warmth expanded into its perfect cinquefoil, and by rain and cold closed into a bell which droops, and shrinks like an abashed maid."⁷⁷² If the flower is moral in meaning and exists for its beauty, then Ruskin equates the flower with a pretty, good girl.

With the sexual contained or written out of Ruskin's nature, the flower's physical aspects are related to the decorative beauty of a girl's dress rather than to her physical attributes and sexuality. In a piece dated May 1875, he describes the white hawthorn blossom of the season: "And in all the ways of it the lovely thing is more like the spring frock of some prudent little maid of fourteen, than a flower;--frock with some spotty pattern on it to keep it from showing an unintended and inadvertent spot--if Fate should ever inflict such a thing!"⁷⁷³ In classifying the pimpernels and oxalids, he explains: "These flowers agree in one character of extreme interest -- the simplicity and

⁷⁶⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 436.

⁷⁷⁰ See also Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," *Poetics Today* 10.4 (1989): 679-701.

⁷⁷¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 388.

⁷⁷² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 528.

⁷⁷³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 301.

purity gained by the delicate veining of their petals, which is just like the stripe of a country girl's print gown." This character leads us "to trace to their deepest sources [...] our sensations of modesty and propriety."⁷⁷⁴ The flower colour is "not merely pale pink, but watery pink, as it were--or as if the print was of a dear old frock that had been nearly washed out."⁷⁷⁵ Describing calices, he writes:

Recollect generally that a calyx is the part of the flower in which the pretty leaves are packed to be kept safe; and that a flower budding is very like a pretty dress being taken out of a carpet bag and unfolded. When it is packed up quite close, and the mouth of the bag shut, we call it a bud. When the calyx opens a little you may generally see the folds of the silken or satin dress inside looking as if they never would shake right. But they grow out and shake or shape themselves all right [...].⁷⁷⁶

Emphasizing girlhood innocence, Ruskin omits reference to Proserpina's developing sexuality and refers to dress instead.

"Perfectly pretty and perfectly good": Girls, Flowers and Systema Proserpinae

Ruskin explains his plan to rewrite botanical nomenclature in more detail in Chapter 11, "Genealogy": "[I]n finishing this first volume of my School Botany, I must try to give the reader some notion of the plan of the book" and "the grounds on which I venture here to reject many of the received names of plants; and to substitute others for them, relating to entirely different attributes from those on which their present nomenclature is confusedly edified."⁷⁷⁷

Ruskin clarifies the terms of his botanical "genealogy." His system of classification uses "Ordines" (Orders), "Gentes" (Genera), and "Familiae" (Families). In relation to modern botany, "Order" comes instead of class and

⁷⁷⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 543.

⁷⁷⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 544.

⁷⁷⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 548.

⁷⁷⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 338.

"Gens" is second instead of order; "family" stays as the third division "if farther subdivision be necessary," however, "no farther subdivision will ever be admitted" and "species" is avoided altogether.⁷⁷⁸ "Order" is used for the widest group, "Gens" for the second group or subdivision with the "Greek Master-name" of the order always followed by the Latin generic name.⁷⁷⁹ Using the orchids as an example, Ruskin adopts "Ophryds" for the order and the gentes ("family" or group) names "Contorta," "Satyrium" and "Aeria."⁷⁸⁰

Ruskin applies his views of nature to flowers for the purpose of naming and grouping them providing a moral basis for his nomenclature and the separation of good and evil. In his flower classification, Ruskin makes gender distinctions based upon moral and social associations not sexual function. He gives the rules and conditions for his Latin names, explaining their terminations and relevant gender associations. Terminations are masculine, feminine or neuter. Masculine endings "us," "er" or "il" indicate "real masculine strength," majesty, force or hardship "softened" into beneficence: laurus, acer and basil.⁷⁸¹ In regard to feminine endings, Ruskin explains:

Names with the feminine termination 'a,' if they are real names of girls, will always mean flowers that are perfectly pretty and perfectly good (Lucia, Viola, Margarita, Clarissa). Names terminating in 'a' which are not also accepted names of girls, may sometimes be none the less honourable (Primula, Campanula), but for the most part will signify either plants that are only good and worthy in a nursy sort of way (Salvia), or that are good without being pretty (Lavandula), or pretty without being good (Kalmia). But no name terminating in 'a' will be attached to a plant that is neither good nor pretty. [...]

Names terminating in 'is' and 'e,' if definitely names of women

⁷⁷⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 349.

⁷⁷⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 348.

⁷⁸⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 341, 342-3.

⁷⁸¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 344.

(Iris, Amaryllis, Alceste, Daphne) will always signify flowers of great beauty, and noble historic association. If not definitely names of women, they will yet indicate some special sensitiveness, or association with legend (Berberis, Clematis).⁷⁸²

Neuter names terminating in "um," such as Solanum or Satyrium, indicate "some power either of active or suggestive evil" or a relation to death. Neuter names ending in "en," such as Cyclamen, will be considered "indeterminate if good or bad" until explained.⁷⁸³

In every gens, a representative flower is chosen to express the "divine" or unchangeable character of the plant. This representative flower "will always be a wild one, and of the simplest form which completely expresses the character of the plant; existing divinely and unchangeably from age to age, ungrieved by man's neglect, and inflexible by his power."⁷⁸⁴ The Linnaean system, the natural system and Darwinian science are all based on changeable forms, rather than fixed associations. Truth in nature "had, for Ruskin, a reassuringly permanent quality"; it was "exempt from change and constituted by God."⁷⁸⁵ As Birch explains: "Only a religion built on nature, a religion such as Ruskin discovered in mythology, could offer a fixed body of spiritual truth."⁷⁸⁶ It is "this sense of a concealed fixity of meaning in mythology" that is "central to Ruskin's celebration of its power to sustain the spirit in a world of threat."⁷⁸⁷

Moral hierarchy is based upon the representative flower as "sacred" or "blessed." In choosing the name for this flower, "Sacred" and "Benedicta" or "Benedictus" denote flowers with masculine or neuter names, while "Queen" or "Donna" signify female names:

Among the gentes of flowers bearing girls' names, the dominant one will be simply called the Queen, 'Rosa Regina,' 'Rose the

⁷⁸² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 344-5.

⁷⁸³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 345.

⁷⁸⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 351.

⁷⁸⁵ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 11-12.

⁷⁸⁶ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 12.

⁷⁸⁷ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* 12.

Queen' (the English wild rose); 'Clarissa Regina,' 'Clarissa the Queen' (Mountain Pink); 'Lucia Regina,' 'Lucy the Queen' (Spring Gentian), or in simpler English, 'Lucy of Teesdale,' as 'Harry of Monmouth.' The ruling flowers of groups which bear names not yet accepted for names of girls, will be called simply 'Domina,' or shortly 'Donna.' 'Rubra domina' (wild raspberry): the wild strawberry, because of her use in heraldry, will bear a name of her own, exceptional, 'Cora coronalis.'⁷⁸⁸

Ruskin arranges the greater orders of land plants in a group of twelve, showing the order names in Greek, English and French, and the Gentes names in Latin.⁷⁸⁹ Ruskin lists the twelve orders, explaining "Proserpina's name" for each and the meaning of the order name as well as his reasons for any changes to the names of the Gentes. In Ruskin's classification, the Uranides, for example, are blue, sacred to Urania and include the "convoluta" instead of the "convolvulus."⁷⁹⁰ Ruskin then describes sixteen further groups of flowers for a subsequent study, suggesting a supplement of Orders 13-28 to his list of Twelve Orders.

Proserpinian Coming-of-age: Flowers and Plutonic Encounters

[H]ow will my young Proserpina arrange her bouquet, and rank the family relations to their contentment?⁷⁹¹

Within Ruskin's work, Proserpina's "coming-of-age" and encounter with a (Plutonic) sexual nature focuses specifically on the education of the female botanist. Proserpina is the female botanist applying Ruskin's method in an exercise in botanical classification, focusing on specific orders of flowers in Volume 2. Using Ruskin's system of classification to separate good from evil, the botanizing girl can preserve her innocence and purity, and in terms of the myth reception, her passivity and the link to her mother. Botany is biographical, and the "coming of age" story about the life and death of the

⁷⁸⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 351-2.

⁷⁸⁹ See Ruskin, *Proserpina* 353.

⁷⁹⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 354.

⁷⁹¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 436.

blossom makes for a colourful romance: “real botany is not so much the description of plants as their biography [...] the life and death of the blossom *itself* is always an eventful romance, which must be completely told, if well.”⁷⁹² In Ruskin’s reception of the Proserpina myth into his botany, emphasis is on the flower’s moral being rather than its role in plant reproduction (as with Linnaeus and Darwin). By extension, Proserpina’s story, interpreted through myth, is not one of sexual maturation leading to marriage, but rather it is the story of a girl’s moral education and guidance.⁷⁹³

“In all purity and peace of thought”: Naming the Cytherides

We will unbind our bouquet, then, and putting all the rest of its flowers aside, examine the range and nature of the little blue cluster only.⁷⁹⁴

In volume 2, Ruskin looks first at the Cytherides order, including the (gens) violet, butterwort, speedwell and milkwort, or Viola, Pinguicula, Veronica and Giuletta.⁷⁹⁵ In explaining the meaning of the violet family’s Order of Cytherides, Ruskin reiterates his method of myth interpretation, again teaching the reader to look closely at physical facts or aspects of nature to understand their moral truths or spiritual meaning on a personal level. Its physical meaning comes from the Cytherides’ “altered blue” (in contrast to the “pure blue of the sky” of the Order Uranides).⁷⁹⁶ Its personal meaning comes from the name Cytherea or Venus taken from Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Act iv, scene 4: “violets dim,/ But sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes/Or Cytherea’s breath.” Ruskin explains:

Naming the Greek Gods [...] you have first to think of the physical power they represent [...] when Homer speaks of

⁷⁹² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 253.

⁷⁹³ In contrast to the “bloom” narrative of the eighteenth-century courtship novel which follows the heroine’s sexual maturity and insertion into the marriage plot. See Amy M. King, “Linnaeus’s Blooms: Botany and the Novel of Courtship,” *Eighteenth-Century Novel* 1 (2001): 127-60.

⁷⁹⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 436.

⁷⁹⁵ Ruskin describes the violet as Proserpina’s flower specifically in Notes on Educational Series 112. See John Ruskin, *The Ruskin Art Collection at Oxford; Catalogues, Notes, and Instructions* vol. 21 (London: George Allen, 1906).

⁷⁹⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 414.

Juno's dark eyes, you have to remember that she is the softer form of the rain power, and to think of the fringes of the rain-cloud across the light of the horizon. Gradually the idea becomes personal and human [...].⁷⁹⁷

So "the two thoughts of softest glance, and softest kiss" are "thus together associated with the flower."⁷⁹⁸ Its moral meaning comes from its being "the most sacred of all flowers to earthly and daily Love, both in its scent and glow."⁷⁹⁹

Three "Ugly Mysteries" of Modern Botany: A Warning for Girl-Readers

In examination of the *Viola Rupestris* or Craig Violet, Ruskin expresses revulsion at the relations of insects to flowers. He addresses his female readers specifically, warning "girl-readers against all study of floral genesis and digestion": "How far flowers invite, or require, flies to interfere in their family affairs--which of them are carnivorous--and what forms of pestilence or infection are most favourable to some vegetable and animal growths--let them leave the people to settle [...]."⁸⁰⁰ Ruskin draws attention to a paper "announcing for a discovery patent to all mankind that the colours of flowers were made 'to attract insects!'"⁸⁰¹ In Darwinian science, the flower's colour is linked to the attraction of insects and the sexual reproduction of the plant.⁸⁰² As Ruskin notes:

I observe, among the speculations of modern science, several [...] on the subject of the relation of colour in flowers, to insects – to selective development, etc., etc. There *are* such relations, of course. So also, the blush of a girl, when she first

⁷⁹⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 415.

⁷⁹⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 416.

⁷⁹⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 416.

⁸⁰⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 413-414.

⁸⁰¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 414. Ruskin refers to *The Relation of Insects to Flowers* by Dr. Asa Gray, in the *Contemporary Review*, April 1882.

⁸⁰² See Smith 144. In publications such as *Insectivorous Plants* (1875), Darwin's "work on the relations between insects and plants was [...] concerned with plant sexuality, showing that the colors, scents, and markings of flowers attract the insects, often flies and midges, that insure cross-fertilization." See Jonathan Smith, "Une Fleur du Mal? Swinburne's 'The Sundew' and Darwin's *Insectivorous Plants*," *Victorian Poetry* 41.1 (2003): 131-150.

perceives the faltering in her lover's step as he draws near, is related essentially to the existing state of her stomach [...]
Nevertheless, neither love, chastity, nor blushing, are merely exponents of digestion.

All these materialisms, in their unclean stupidity, are essentially the work of human bats; men of semi-faculty or semi-education, who are more or less incapable of so much as seeing, much less thinking about, colour; among whom, for one-sided intensity, even Mr. Darwin must often be ranked, as in his vespertilian treatise [...].⁸⁰³

Ruskin explains his moral basis for colour:

Putting all these vespertilian speculations out of our way, the human facts concerning colour are briefly these. Wherever men are noble, they love bright colour; and wherever they can live healthily, bright colour is given them--in sky, sea, flowers, and living creatures.

On the other hand, wherever men are ignoble and sensual, they endure without pain, and at last even come to like (especially if artists) mud-colour and black, and to dislike rose-colour and white. And wherever it is unhealthy for them to live, the poisonousness of the place is marked by some ghastly colour in air, earth, or flowers.⁸⁰⁴

Ruskin also expresses abhorrence at artificial cultivation and the cross-breeding of plants. In a discussion of the Viola Psyche, or Ophelia's Pansy, Ruskin complains that "one of the most lovely things that Heaven has made" is "only degraded and distorted by any human interference; the swollen varieties of it produced by cultivation being all gross in outline and coarse in colour by comparison."⁸⁰⁵ The veronica (speedwell) is "*wild*, of the wildest,

⁸⁰³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 263.

⁸⁰⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 264. Landow examines the "spiritual value of colour" for Ruskin. See Landow 112.

⁸⁰⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 407.

and proud in pure descent of race; submitting itself to no follies of the cur-breeding florist" and never "provoked to glare into any gigantic impudence at a flower show."⁸⁰⁶

Ruskin objects to what he sees as the exploitative scientific botany of "modern scientists" (especially Darwin). The Plutonic threat from male scientists subjects "innocent" and beautiful flowers to microscopic scrutiny and exposes things "invisible unless by vexatious and vicious peeping."⁸⁰⁷ As he explains in his discussion of the Viola or violet:

It is very possible, indeed, that the recent frenzy for the investigation of digestive and reproductive operations in plants may by this time have furnished the microscopic malice of botanists with providentially disgusting reasons or demoniacally nasty necessities, for every possible spur, spike, jag, stint, rent, blotch, flaw, freckle, filth, or venom, which can be detected in the construction, or distilled from the dissolution, of vegetable organism. But with these obscene processes and prurient apparitions the gentle and happy scholar of flowers has nothing whatever to do. I am amazed and saddened, more than I care to say, by finding how much that is abominable may be discovered by an ill-taught curiosity, in the purest of things that earth is allowed to produce for us;--perhaps if we were less reprobate in our own ways, the grass which is our type might conduct itself better [...] healthy human eyes and thoughts are to be set on the lovely laws of its growth and habitation, and not on the mean mysteries of its birth.⁸⁰⁸

Ruskin concludes, "You are to think of a violet only in its green leaves, and purple or golden petals;--you are to know the varieties of form in both, proper to common species; and in what kind of places they all most fondly live, and

⁸⁰⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 439.

⁸⁰⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 391.

⁸⁰⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 390-1.

most deeply live.”⁸⁰⁹ In examining the *Giulietta* or milkwort, he explains, “I feel every hour more and more the necessity of separating the treatment of subjects in *Proserpina* from the microscopic curiosities of recent botanic illustration [...].”⁸¹⁰ He urges, “We must never lose hold of the principle that every flower is meant to be seen by human creatures with human eyes, as by spiders with spider eyes.”⁸¹¹

“A Confused and Straggling Crowd”: The Industrialized Forms of Nature

Old England must seek new images for her loves from gas and electric sparks,--not to say furnace fire.⁸¹²

In Ruskin’s discussion of the poppy in Volume 1, the connection is made and opposition put in place between plant form and growth and industrial development, but in Volume 2, the link between plant forms and industrialization is explicitly evil. Disorderly forms of nature, disruptive of the rural harmony that is associated with maternal nature, are now directly compared to industrially manufactured works, and hence are for Ruskin inferior. He remarks in describing the pansy that “this disorderly flower is lifted on a lanky, awkward, springless, and yet stiff flower-stalk; which is not round, as a flower-stalk ought to be, but obstinately square, and fluted, with projecting edges, like a pillar run thin out of an iron-foundry for a cheap railway station.”⁸¹³

In his discussion of the *Viola Regina*, the Queen or Sweet Violet, Ruskin suggests that a flower’s scent, like its colour, is a property which has a moral rather than a scientific purpose. Modern science and industry have polluted the land:

[...] I should like the scholar [...] to consider what a grotesquely warped and gnarled thing the modern scientific mind is, which fiercely busies itself in venomous chemistries that blast every leaf from forests ten miles round; and yet cannot tell us, nor

⁸⁰⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 391.

⁸¹⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 465.

⁸¹¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 469.

⁸¹² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 420

⁸¹³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 396.

even think of telling us [...] how a violet throws off her perfume!--far less, whether it might not be more wholesome to 'treat' the air which men are to breathe in masses, by administration of vale-lilies and violets, instead of charcoal and sulphur!⁸¹⁴

Similarly, in his earlier discussion of the colour of leaves, Ruskin explains its social and moral significance rather than provide a scientific explanation:

Secondly, think awhile of its dark clear green, and the good of it to you. Scientifically, you know green in leaves is owing to 'chlorophyll', or, in English, to 'green leaf.' It may be very fine to know that; but my advice to you, on the whole, is to rest content with the general fact that leaves are green when they do not grow in or near smoky towns; and not by any means to rest content with the fact that very soon there will be not a green leaf in England, but only greenish-black ones. And thereon resolve that you will yourself endeavour to promote the growing of the green wood, rather than of the black.⁸¹⁵

Ruskin reaffirms the that basis for his botanical nomenclature will not be on "ugly" scientific facts but on the beautiful in art and nature, unlike Linnaean botany's basis on plant reproduction or Darwinian science's investigation of plants' relationship with insects. The botanist has a moral responsibility and to inquire into plant reproduction is to take human curiosity too far and become morally culpable; (like Fanshawe) the botanist is overstepping the bounds of decorum and (according to Ruskin) risking the extremes of moral detriment. In Volume 2 Chapter 2, *Pinguicula* or *Butterwort*, Ruskin echoes the tradition of conservative botanical works by Rousseau and Fanshawe which are aimed particularly at female readers and urging them to stay close to home and not risk learning too much, restricting themselves to plants that are easily seen and keeping their experience circumscribed:

⁸¹⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 406.

⁸¹⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 232.

[In *Proserpina*] every statement and every principle is only to be understood as true or tenable, respecting the plants which the writer has seen, and which he is sure that the reader can easily see: liable to modification to any extent by wider experience; but better first learned securely within a narrow fence, and afterwards trained or fructified, along more complex trellises.⁸¹⁶

Arranging Proserpina's Bouquet

[I]f any pretty young Proserpina, escaped from the Plutonic durance of London, and carried over by the tubular process, which replaces Charon's boat, over the Lune at Lancaster, cares to come and walk on the Coniston hills in a summer morning, when the eyebright is out on the high fields, she may gather, with a little help from Brantwood garden, a bouquet of the entire Foxglove tribe in flower, as it is at present defined, and may see what they are like, altogether.⁸¹⁷

As part of Proserpina's exercise in classification, Ruskin arranges and groups the flowers of the foxglove "tribe." According to Lindley's botany, the foxglove belongs to the figwort family *Scrophulariaceae* along with eight more plants gathered in Proserpina's bouquet: eyebright, Germander speedwell, Spiked speedwell, snapdragon, mullein, monkey flower, toadflax and figwort.⁸¹⁸ However, critical of the current system, Ruskin suggests a different grouping, placing the foxglove and the speedwell into two separate orders. He places the speedwell in Order 8, the Cytherides, with the violet, milkwort and butterwort, and the foxglove in Order 27, Draconidæ, with the dwale and linaria.

In working with the foxglove tribe, Ruskin's female botanist encounters the darker aspects of botany. Order 27 of the Draconidæ belongs to "the Dark Kora of the lower world" along with Orders 26 and 28,

⁸¹⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 427-8.

⁸¹⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 435.

⁸¹⁸ John Lindley, *Ladies' Botany: or, A Familiar Introduction to the Study of the Natural System of Botany* (1834-1837). Dr. Lindley became the first Professor of Botany at London University in 1828. See Shteir 153-158, 162-165.

Dionysidæ and Moiridæ (containing the ivy, vine and Liana and the hemlock, poppy, nightshade, cuckoo-pint and oleander, respectively). These flowers have “the power of death, if not its terror” as well as “offices of comfort and healing in sleep” and strengthening action “on the nervous power of life.”⁸¹⁹

Associated with degradation and pollution, the “strange” order of the orchids makes up a connecting link with the orders of the Dark Kora.⁸²⁰ The stalk of the Contorta, or Wreath-wort, is “always twisted once and a half round, as if somebody had been trying to ring the blossom off.”⁸²¹ The Satyrium orchids, “in the habit of dressing in livid and unpleasant colours,” are distinguished by “twisting, not only their stalks, but one of their petals [...] two or three times round” in a “grotesque mimicry” that is “definitely degraded” and “malicious.”⁸²² Ruskin claims that the Latin name exactly suits “the entire group of ugly blossoms of which the characteristic is the spiral curve and protraction of their central petal.”⁸²³

Exhibiting their “parallel aspects,” the Draconids are “stamped” with a “serpentine” or “dragon-like” character, spotted and swollen “as if they had been touched by poison.”⁸²⁴ The “spirit of these Draconidæ” enters other flowers “like an evil spirit” and changes them with “serpent charm” or “evil serpentry” into “poisonous”, “corrupted”, “darkened” and “fretted” forms.⁸²⁵ As Ruskin explains, if the petals of a flower “still retain their perfect petal form” and “remain clearly *leaves*,” the flower “though injured, is not to be thought of as corrupted or misled.” However, Ruskin cautions:

But if any of the petals lose their definite character [...] become swollen, solidified, stiffened, or strained into any other form or function than that of petals, the flower is said to be looked upon as affected by some kind of constant evil influence; and, so far as we conceive of any spiritual power being concerned in the

⁸¹⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 358.

⁸²⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 358.

⁸²¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 342.

⁸²² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 342-343.

⁸²³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 343.

⁸²⁴ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air* 376.

⁸²⁵ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air* 376, 377.

protection or affliction of the inferior orders of creatures, it will be felt to bear the aspect of possession by, or pollution by, a more or less degraded Spirit.⁸²⁶

Proserpina is always represented as an innocent young girl who must be protected from the “ugly” mysteries of science. The sexual side of botany is to be written out of Ruskin’s system (into specific categories) and so his female students ideally choose the study of nature he outlines without considering these other aspects. Ruskin orients his study toward young girls but the sense remains that there is either mother or pre-adolescent girl but no place for the sexually maturing young woman. Ruskin categorizes sexual nature, including “swollen” petals “corrupted” or “misled” by evil influence, within the moral context of the Dark Kora for flowers specifically. Even the *Veronica Spicata*’s “tendency to arrange itself into spikes” is “to be noted as a degradation of the veronic character.”⁸²⁷ As the organs of plant reproduction, blossoms taking on any particularly overt sexual or priapic appearance are condemned by Ruskin.⁸²⁸

Ruskin separates the speedwell and foxglove into different orders, the *Cytherides* and the *Draconidæ*, as part of Proserpina’s exercise in classification. However, Ruskin’s effort to contain and classify sexual nature by making distinct categories is not always easy. Ruskin has trouble placing flowers and finalizing categories. In his attempt to define “the subtle relations between the *Veronicas* and *Draconidæ*, and again between these and the present called *labiate*,” he explains his grouping of the order *Vestales* which includes the herbs:

The group they form is an entirely distinct one, exactly intermediate between the *Vestals* and *Draconids*, and cannot be rightly attached to either [...] and I don’t see how to get the connection of the three families rightly expressed without taking the *Draconidæ* out of the groups belonging to the dark Kora,

⁸²⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 466.

⁸²⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 445.

⁸²⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 466.

and placing them next the Vestals, with the Monachæ between; for indeed Linaria and several other Draconid forms are entirely innocent and beautiful, and even the Foxglove never does any real mischief like hemlock, while decoratively it is one of the most precious of mountain flowers. I find myself also embarrassed by my name of Vestals, because of the masculine groups of Basil and Thymus, and I think it will be better to call them simply Menthæ, and to place them with the other cottage-garden plants not yet classed, taking the easily remembered names *Mentha*, *Monacha*, *Draconida*.⁸²⁹

Ultimately, Ruskin returns to his original plan.⁸³⁰ The Draconids “easily recognizable by their aspect, are botanically indefinable with any clearness or simplicity [...] Thus licentious in structure, they are also doubtful in disposition. None that I know of are fragrant, few useful, many more or less malignant, and some parasitic.”⁸³¹ Ruskin’s botany is always a matter of aesthetics and morals (the beautiful is good), and structure is an indication of a plant’s “degraded” moral state.

Ruskin wants any changes to be as seamless and organic as possible so Proserpina’s death is looked upon in relation to her reunion with her mother earth. Springtime is emphasized rather than wintertime. Proserpina’s death and union with Pluto may make her a fertility goddess in her own right (as Suter emphasizes) and so the equal of Ceres. Ruskin, however, focuses on their joint status as goddesses rather than on any tension between them resulting from Proserpina’s marriage.⁸³² The only “changes” pertain to Proserpina’s coming and going, the change of the seasons and the cycle of life and death.

⁸²⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 475, 479.

⁸³⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 498.

⁸³¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 481.

⁸³² See also Suter 21.

Proserpina: Ruskin's "Revolute" Blossom

Steady progress with *Proserpina* was impossible because of other tasks, but Ruskin resumed it at intervals during the next eight years (1879-1886), keeping note-book passages, observations, and pieces for future use. As Ruskin's editors comment, "From a work thus written in snatches, and at long intervals of time, nothing very systematic or complete must be expected."⁸³³ But what does result from the cyclical nature of his botanical study and work on *Proserpina*, continuing throughout his lifetime, is a recurring event and a Proserpina-like account. Illness interrupted the composition of *Proserpina* in 1878, but after he was able to resume his " 'plant work' " again, Ruskin claimed that "the spring flowers were to be his models of behaviour" and wrote in a letter to a friend: " 'I [...] propose to follow their good example as I best can.' "⁸³⁴

Ruskin pauses and resumes work, taking the flower itself as his personal model. Flowers are examples of good behaviour; they are moral guides (like the floral typology of Hibberd and the moral emphasis given to botany by Fanshawe). To imitate the flower is to be Proserpina herself, recovering from darkness and death each year, returning to life each spring. Ruskin makes this personal connection explicit (in 1879) upon resumption of the work following his illness in 1878: "Returning, after more than a year's sorrowful interval to my Sicilian fields,--not incognizant, now, of some of the darker realms of Proserpina [...]."⁸³⁵ Ruskin's times of illness are like a "darkness" away from work contrasting with his return to work and the spring flowers of his "Sicilian fields."

This convolute, intricate pattern also pertains to the complex nature of Ruskin's myth reception.⁸³⁶ The myth addresses external or outward concerns about nature itself: wildflowers, their representation and

⁸³³ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xviii.

⁸³⁴ Cook and Wedderburn, introduction, vol.25, xxxix.

⁸³⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 338.

⁸³⁶ See Lindsay Smith for the importance of "involute" imagery to Ruskin's work in "The Foxglove and the Rose: Ruskin's Involute of Childhood," *Ruskin and Gender*, eds. Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 47-63.

classification or organization according to physical traits such as form and color as well as their symbolic associations and moral significance. But the myth also has to do with internal or “inward” concerns (what Birch calls “Ruskin’s obsessive inward language”), including the tribute to his father and his lost love Rose La Touche (she is the girl pROSErpina).⁸³⁷ Ultimately the myth is a reflection of the self and the search for Ruskin’s own (spiritual) identity (she is himself), as his personal history is written into the myth.

Ruskin circles back to some of the earliest botany books in use at the turn of the nineteenth century, including those by Linnaeus, Rousseau, Curtis and Loudon. Ruskin makes references to Rousseau’s “Letters on Botany.” He shows interest in “Rousseau’s Botanique” and praises it as the “best elementary botany.” In consulting his childhood botany books, Ruskin shows a systematic approach in which he evaluates things from a historical perspective, looking at the history of things including his own childhood (in a biographical process of self reflection and discovery). In this Proserpina-like pattern, Ruskin continually circles back and returns to childhood things in what becomes a process or journey of the self as much as a renaming of plants and rewriting of botanical systems of classification and a process important in itself, not only for its conclusions. In a self-referential way the work continues to circle back upon itself, revealing a cyclical recurrent process or pattern of investigation and discovery of nature, language and self. Ruskin shows himself as artist- critic-prophet and offers his Wordsworthian experience and spiritual growth to inspire and teach.

Ruskin’s compositional pattern is both unintentional (due to illness) as well as intentional (to show process). Writing about his first botany book, a volume of Curtis’s *Botanical Magazine*, he explains:

[...] although I know my good father and mother did the best they could for me in buying this beautiful book; and though the admirable plates of it did their work, and taught me much, I cannot wonder that neither my infantine nor boyish mind was

⁸³⁷ Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* 175.

irresistibly attracted by the text, of which this page is one of the most favourable specimens; nor, in consequence, that my botanical studies were--when I had attained the age of fifty--no farther advanced than the reader will find them in the opening chapter of this book.⁸³⁸

Ruskin's *Proserpina*-like composition is based upon memories of flowers from childhood onward:

Unhappily, during all the earliest and usefulest years of such travelling, I had no thought of ever taking up botany as a study [...] It has only been the later discovery of the uselessness of old scientific botany, and the abominableness of new, as an element of education for youth;--and my certainty that a true knowledge of their native Flora was meant by Heaven to be one of the first heart-possessiones of every happy boy and girl in flower-bearing lands, that have compelled me to gather into system my fading memories, and wandering thoughts.⁸³⁹

In his chapter on the *Giulietta* or *Milkwort*, Ruskin acknowledges *Proserpina*'s fragmentary composition: "In the meantime, everything being again thrown out of gear by the aforesaid illness, I must let this piece of *Proserpina* break off, as most of my work does [...] leaving only suggestion for the happier research of the students who trust me thus far."⁸⁴⁰ Ruskin's aim is not for scientific accuracy so much as broad (humanistic) understanding.⁸⁴¹ His cyclical approach has the direct intention of showing the reader the process of flower study and the relationship between ideas and issues.⁸⁴² As he remarks in chapter 1, "let the reader see process and progress":

Before puzzling myself any farther in examination either of

⁸³⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 198.

⁸³⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 455-6.

⁸⁴⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 457.

⁸⁴¹ Ruskin's work was intended as a textbook for young school children. See O'Gorman on Ruskin and science education (and Ruskin's anticipation of interdisciplinary studies) in Francis O'Gorman, "Ruskin's Science of the 1870s: Science, Education and the Nation," *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*, ed. Birch (Oxford: OUP, 1999) 35-55.

⁸⁴² cf. Ruskin, *Proserpina* 317.

moss or any other grander vegetable, I had better define these primal forms of all vegetation, as well as I can--or rather begin the definition of them, for future completion and correction. For, as my reader must already perceive, this book is literally to be one of studies--not of statements.⁸⁴³

Ruskin's Proserpina-like process of circling or "wandering" reveals a cyclical pattern inherent in the flower form itself: the corolla or "whirl" or whorl of petals. Ruskin explains: "Whereas now, it will rather put things more forcibly in the reader's mind to have them retouched and corrected as we go on; and our natural and honest mistakes will often be suggestive of things we could not have discovered but by wandering."⁸⁴⁴ Chapter 6, "Monacha," the Lousewort or Red Rattle, provides an example of the kind of circular reading strategy necessary to Ruskin's botany, looking ahead and looking back at the text to arrive at its meaning, as Ruskin continually makes changes or amendments to his work:

These retouchings and changes are inevitable in a work confessedly tentative and suggestive only; but in whatever state of the imperfection I may be forced to leave *Proserpina*, it will assuredly be found, up to the point reached, a better foundation for the knowledge of flowers in the minds of young people than any hitherto adopted system of nomenclature.⁸⁴⁵

There is a final irony (and poignancy) that someone so resistant to change creates such a fluctuating, unstable work, especially in a work written to counter certain scientific systems with "unalterable" flower groups.⁸⁴⁶

Take a spray of ling [common heath] (Frontispiece) [...] it is difficult to give the accuracy of attention necessary to see their beauty without drawing them; and still more difficult to draw them in any approximation to the truth before they change. This

⁸⁴³ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 216.

⁸⁴⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 217.

⁸⁴⁵ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 480 ; cf. 498.

⁸⁴⁶ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 347.

is indeed the fatallest obstacle to all good botanical work.
 Flower, or leaves [...] can only be rightly drawn as they grow.
 And even then, in their loveliest spring action, they grow as you
 draw them, and will not stay quite the same creatures for half-
 an-hour.⁸⁴⁷

Ruskin praises the flower's value as a fixed image of beauty; the flower "Queen" is a "representative flower [...] existing divinely and unchangeably from age to age [...]." ⁸⁴⁸ Yet even as he attempts to classify flowers into "unalterable groups" according to fixed types or categories of beauty and morality, Ruskin laments the transience of flowers.

For Ruskin, *Papaver Rhoeas* is the purest example of the flower form, the most "complete" and "stainless" type of "flower absolute": "inside and outside, *all* flower."⁸⁴⁹ In Darwin's account of the poppy in *The Loves of the Plants*, alternating opium-induced states subject *Papaver's* "many males" and "many females" to constant change. In *Proserpina*, however the poppy is "painted glass" and in its fixed beauty, "warms the wind like a blown ruby."⁸⁵⁰ According to Ruskin: "A flower is to the vegetable substance what a crystal is to the mineral [...] each bud more beautiful, itself, than perfectest jewel [...] It is because of its beauty that its continuance is worth Heaven's while."⁸⁵¹ In contrast to the fluctuating loves of the plants in the sexual system, the "glory" of the flower in Ruskin's system is "in being,--not in begetting; and in the spirit and the substance,--not the change."⁸⁵²

⁸⁴⁷ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 252-3.

⁸⁴⁸ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 351.

⁸⁴⁹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 254.

⁸⁵⁰ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 258.

⁸⁵¹ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 250.

⁸⁵² Ruskin, *Proserpina* 250.

Epilogue: "Through all the forms and faces of things"

Poet. [...] As in the gardens of a Scicilian [sic] nobleman [...] there are said to be six hundred statues of imaginary monsters; which so disgust the spectators, that the state had once a serious design of destroying them; and yet the very improbable monsters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have entertained the world for many centuries.

Bookseller. The monsters in your Botanic Garden, I hope are of the latter kind?⁸⁵³

As a hybrid form, myth could be both universal (in its evolutionary potential and its moral or spiritual truths) and yet historically specific (in its "organic" forms). Like the plants that serve as analogues to the Demeter-Proserpina myth, myths themselves are capable of being appreciated for their uniqueness as well as for their classification within a larger system. As combinations of art and nature and as imaginative human responses to the task of explaining natural phenomena, myths are like the floral hybrids or "monsters" so valued by Erasmus Darwin yet so dreaded by Ruskin.

The authors in my study generally agreed on the universal, evolutionary quality of myth (whether they credited it with any serious religious meaning) and its enduring aesthetic significance as a product of the human imagination – with new imaginative "species" in mythological forms and functions. Myth as art, specifically literary art, could serve a purpose within an imaginative work of literature as poetic dressing to scientific ideas in *The Botanic Garden*, as allegory in Fanshawe's "Epistle," as part of pastoral elegy in Wordsworth "Three Years," as a narrative structure or paradigm in the realist fiction of George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, as well as in prose – in Ruskin's case, as "natural art" to form the basis of a new mythological moral-aesthetic botany.

My study follows the Proserpina myth's reception and use by writers to register (opposing) attitudes toward nature within the historical context of the development of nineteenth-century botany (and its role within popular natural history) during the industrialization of the English countryside.

⁸⁵³ Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants*, Interlude 50.

A cultural fascination for identifying women with flowers reveals not only a tradition of poetic allusion that runs throughout classical, Biblical and Miltonic traditions, but also contemporary versions or expressions within the nineteenth-century world of botany, natural history and floriculture. An introductory chapter explains my historicist approach to myth in relation to historical myth criticism and my critical methodology based upon three readings of the Proserpina myth's reception. These readings, in which nature is predominantly moral, sexual, or ambiguous, are examined in the poetry of Catherine Maria Fanshawe, Erasmus Darwin and William Wordsworth respectively.

Chapter 1 establishes conflicting attitudes toward nature--as maternal/moral or sexual/scientific--in the myth's reception in the late eighteenth-century poetry of Catherine Maria Fanshawe and Erasmus Darwin. In Fanshawe's predominantly moral nature the sexual threat is containable, in Darwin's sexual nature the maternal nature is left behind. Chapter 2 considers the ambivalence toward nature and, specifically, William Wordsworth's late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poetry in relation to Shirley Hibberd's mid-century essays and the context of Victorian sentimental flower culture. In Wordsworth's ambiguous nature, complicated by the poet-narrator's sole point of view, a maternal, moral nature maintains an uneasy coexistence with a sexual, scientific nature and reflects Proserpina's apparent ambivalence in desiring both childhood and maturity. In chapters 3 and 4, the Proserpina myth's reception in the later nineteenth-century fiction of George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell registers ambivalence toward nature as well as to the corresponding social changes due to industrialization. Chapter 5 concludes with myth reception in John Ruskin's late nineteenth-century reactionary botany countering industrial change.

With its emphasis upon nomenclature and order, retrospection and memory, and a spiritual investment in nature, Ruskin's *Proserpina* (1875-1886) responds to the late nineteenth-century debate over Proserpina and highlights central issues of botany and nineteenth-century Proserpinian mythography

concerning morality and science, paganism and Christianity, language and form, and nostalgia and gender. Having discovered “the uselessness of old scientific botany” and “the abominableness of new,” Ruskin “gather[s] into system” his “fading memories, and wandering thoughts” to challenge the sexual basis of Linnaean classification and Darwinian plant theory.⁸⁵⁴

Darwin’s *Insectivorous Plants* (1875), preceded by Swinburne’s poem on the carnivorous sundew in *Poems and Ballads* (1866), shaped a late nineteenth-century climate of botanical controversy. Charles Darwin’s experiments in plant physiology and his “application of natural selection to botanical questions” contributed to “a revolution in botany, especially in England,” with work on plants and insects blurring “the seemingly firm boundary between plants and animals” as well as containing “obvious implications for human sexuality.”⁸⁵⁵ Connections between Darwinian botany and Swinburne’s poetry resulted in disturbing cross-readings: “Like the femme fatales of *Poems and Ballads*, insect-eaters lure their victims with enticing looks and tempting fragrances and empty promises of nectar, only to drown, dissolve, and dismember them.”⁸⁵⁶ According to Smith, “the writings of both Darwin and Swinburne” were represented “as morally, religiously, and politically dangerous.”⁸⁵⁷

In his sexually-charged *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne’s Proserpine becomes a pagan goddess of death, darkness, sleep and oblivion in ways that challenge Christianity and orthodox belief. As Louis has shown, Swinburne “uses the figure of Proserpine to explore death, language, and the relevance of pagan myth to Christianity.”⁸⁵⁸ In “Hymn to Proserpine” (1866), Proserpine’s worshipper refuses to accept the Christian faith and asks only for sleep and death, “For there is no God found stronger than death; and death is sleep.”⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁴ Ruskin, *Proserpina* 455-6.

⁸⁵⁵ Smith 141, 143.

⁸⁵⁶ Smith 144.

⁸⁵⁷ Smith 143.

⁸⁵⁸ Louis 313, 315.

⁸⁵⁹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Hymn to Proserpine,” line 110; *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, vol. 1 (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925).

In "The Garden of Proserpine" (1866), the goddess's garden is a barren, timeless world of "sleep eternal/In an eternal night."⁸⁶⁰ In her endless waiting, Proserpine forgets "the earth her mother" and "the life of fruits and corn."⁸⁶¹ No hope exists for a future life of love or reunion, only thanks "That no life lives for ever;/That dead men rise up never."⁸⁶²

Within the late nineteenth-century debate over Proserpina, Pater and Tennyson respond to Swinburne's nihilistic version of the goddess by retaining elements of hope in their rewritings of the myth, giving particular attention to the maternal figure of Demeter. In "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" (1876), Pater interprets Demeter as a type of sorrow and Persephone as a type of awe and a symbol of death and life with the hope of immortality. In the myth's third or ethical phase, Demeter "is become the divine sorrowing mother; she "cannot but seem the type of divine grief."⁸⁶³ As the subject of the Homeric hymn, she is "our Lady of Sorrows, the *mater dolorosa* of the ancient world."⁸⁶⁴ "Kore, the goddess of summer" becomes "Persephone, the goddess of death, still associated with the forms and odours of flowers and fruit, yet as one risen from the dead also, presenting one side of her ambiguous nature to men's gloomier fancies."⁸⁶⁵ A "two-fold goddess" with an inherent duality in her very conception, Persephone symbolises death "yet with a promise of life to come."⁸⁶⁶ As "a *revenant*, who [...] bears always the secret of decay in her, of return to the grave," her emblems are dually significant: pomegranate seeds symbolise her death and poppy seeds, her resurrection.⁸⁶⁷ In "Demeter and Persephone" (1889), Tennyson explores Demeter as the type or "heart of motherhood" and Persephone as a life-affirming figure.⁸⁶⁸ Following her desolation and grief, Demeter expresses

⁸⁶⁰ Swinburne, "The Garden of Proserpine," lines 95-6.

⁸⁶¹ Swinburne, "The Garden of Proserpine," lines 59, 60.

⁸⁶² Swinburne, "The Garden of Proserpine," lines 85-6.

⁸⁶³ Pater 139; 91-2.

⁸⁶⁴ Pater 115.

⁸⁶⁵ Pater 139.

⁸⁶⁶ Pater 110, 91-2.

⁸⁶⁷ Pater 152.

⁸⁶⁸ Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Demeter and Persephone," line 41; *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969).

hope that Persephone has “risen from out the dead” and dreams of a future when her daughter can dwell with her “the whole bright year” and exchange a “worship which is Fear” for a “worship which is Love.”⁸⁶⁹

If these writers share a prevailing view of “Victorian sentimentalism,” the writers in my study refrain from depicting a sentimental view of motherhood.⁸⁷⁰ Proserpinian nostalgia acknowledges the inevitability and reality of change, just as Proserpinian memory is itself adulterated and fraught with change, looking back from a position of knowledge and acceptance about the realities of loss. Ruskin and his Victorian contemporaries make up a Proserpinian generation who have experienced the changes due to industrialization as part of their own personal transitions. Gaskell in particular plays upon the figure of the mother as a convention of nostalgia and Cousin Phillis’s pastoral associations but undercuts them to show that a perfect pastoral world does not exist and that rural adaptation to industrial change is not only necessary but can be beneficial to both sides.

Gaskell’s tightly structured novel and search for a meaningful language within fiction contrast with Swinburne’s poetic meters. As Louis claims, “To challenge the value and significance of life inevitably also calls into question the concept of significance itself, and therefore the status of language.”⁸⁷¹ She concludes: “Whether amid the tidal flow of the ‘Hymn’ ’s hexameters, or the subtler trickle of the trimesters in ‘The Garden,’ the goddess hauntingly evokes the absence of rhythm, the insubstantiality of ‘meaning,’ and the eternal frustrations of language itself.”⁸⁷² Published just after Gaskell’s *Cousin Phillis* (1865), Swinburne’s poems deny the kind of hope expressed in Gaskell’s novel. Drawing upon Milton, Gaskell characterises Phillis as a Proserpinian Eve and a Christ-like figure for life to come.

Milton’s quotation discussed at the end of Chapter 1 and used as a heading for this section, compares his search for the beautiful to Demeter’s

⁸⁶⁹ Tennyson lines 142, 137, 141, 147.

⁸⁷⁰ Kissane 26.

⁸⁷¹ Louis 317.

⁸⁷² Louis 318.

search for her daughter “through all the forms and faces of things” and highlights aesthetic-moral concerns about the place of beauty in the face of science and technology. Milton’s alignment of Proserpina with the beautiful is important given the nineteenth-century’s reception of the myth, Milton’s importance within that reception and the myth’s interpretation in Victorian industrial society. Just as Ruskin’s botany attempts to systematize the beautiful and the moral in *Proserpina*, so the Victorian reception of myth and industrial mythmaking show concern for the place of beauty and morality within the technological development of the natural world.

The writers in my study focus on Proserpina as daughter and her precarious position between two realms. There is further work to be done on exploring the figure of Proserpina as wife, queen, or “fallen” country girl, as in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), and her survival in the “underworld” of an urban or mechanized environment. In addition, the Proserpina figure’s representation as Christ-like is consistent with Victorian conceptions of feminine gender as self-sacrificing and holding the responsibility for society’s moral redemption, conceptions which themselves bear further examination. Literature concerning the flower missions of the 1870s and 1880s, the flower-girl missions of the 1890s, and the reform work of Octavia Hill also contributes to the cultural discourse concerning the Proserpina myth and Victorian flower culture within late nineteenth-century debates on the role of women and the social manifestations of identifying flowers with the feminine.⁸⁷³ The flower mission’s sympathetic act of women

⁸⁷³ Flower missions, aiming to bring flowers from the country to the urban poor and sick, came as a direct response to aiding victims of the nineteenth-century industrial crisis as concern for a vanishing rural way of life and agrarian ties to the natural world escalated in Britain due to increased industrialism and urbanisation resulting from the development of the railways and rapid social changes during the 1830s-1840s. Flower girls became the subject of flower-mission literature, including journal articles, pamphlets and books, during the 1870s and 1880s and flower-girl mission literature in the 1890s. My primary sources for information about flower missions include Constance O’Brien’s article published in the *Garden* (1877), reprinted and sold as a pamphlet; Dean Stanley’s history written as a pamphlet for the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (1879); Ruth Lynn’s religious tract story, *Penfold: A Story of the Flower Mission*, published in book form (1880); and Anna E. Ashby’s manual for Bible Flower Missions, *Wonderful Words of Life: A Manual for Flower Missions* (1882). O’Brien claims that the first flower missions were begun in Hull and in London, the latter by a Miss Stanley, date from 1873. In critical sources, Beverly Seaton mentions the flower mission

and children giving country flowers to urban recipients associates nature and femininity with a nostalgic vision of a rural past. Scenes in which children and women or childlike “flower women” care for the sick through the gesture of visiting and bringing flowers to the unfortunate share in Victorian conceptualisations of sympathy as an idealised image of femininity embodying or representing a benevolent, maternal nature able to heal the ills of industrial society.⁸⁷⁴ Octavia Hill’s reform work also shares in this Victorian cultivation of social sympathy, extending nature as a practical panacea for working-class ills in her program to reform the housing conditions of the London poor. Her charity work, decorative philanthropy and aesthetically-driven reforms attempt to beautify working-class homes and improve working-class morals with gardens, flowers, and natural objects.⁸⁷⁵

in her article “Considering the Lilies” (1985) and in her book-length study *The Language of Flowers* (1995); Jane Brown attributes the origin of the Scottish flower mission to Frances Jane Hope in *The Pursuit of Paradise: A Social History of Gardens and Gardening* (London: HarperCollins, 1999) 122. *The Silver Vase: or, The Gathered Posy* (1891), an account of a flower-girls’ mission, relates the hardships endured by young women struggling to earn their livelihood by selling flowers on the streets of London. Begun in 1866 to aid flower sellers in the increasing traffic in cut flowers, the Christian mission provided for the establishment of a girls’ club-room to provide shelter from the weather, breakfast, and a place to arrange their baskets. The mission also organised retreats to “flower villages” in the country to give girls time away from their jobs selling flowers in London and as in flower mission literature, the emphasis is again on an opposition between town and country.

⁸⁷⁴ Ruth Lynn’s *Penfold* (1880) tells the story of a mother and daughter reunion brought about through the gift of flowers. Rescued from a London workhouse by her Aunt Mary, Daisy’s return to the country foreshadows her mother Catherine Penfold’s physical and spiritual restoration. Chapter ten depicts the flower mission undertaken by the two girls, Daisy and Elsie, to bring flowers from a country farm to a London workhouse infirmary.

⁸⁷⁵ See Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875); “Colour, Space, and Music for the People,” *Nineteenth Century* 15 (May 1884): 741-752; and “More Air for London,” *Nineteenth Century* 23 (February 1888): 181-188. See also E. Moberly Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, with a foreword by Sir Reginald Rowe (London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1942); Nancy Boyd, *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale: Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World* (London: Macmillan, 1982); William Thomson Hill, *Octavia Hill: Pioneer of the National Trust and Housing Reformer*, with a foreword by Lionel Curtis (London: Hutchinson, 1956); Amice Lee, “Recollections of Octavia Hill,” *Cornhill Magazine* 154 (September 1936): 313-326; Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Gower House, Croft Road, Aldershot, Hants: Edward Elgar, 1991); Diana Maltz, “Beauty at Home or Not? Octavia Hill and the Aesthetics of Tenement Reform,” Murray Baumgarten and H. M. Daleski, eds., *Homes and Homelessness in the Victorian Imagination* (New York: AMS Press, 1998); Robert Whelan, ed., *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate: Essays and Letters by Octavia Hill* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1998); and A. S. Wohl, “Octavia Hill and the Homes of the London Poor.” *Journal of British Studies* 10.2 (May 1971): 105-131.

Historical cases illustrate the Victorian conception of women as flowers ministering to and nurturing others. However, as the author of *The Silver Vase* suggests, Victorian society retains an ambivalent attitude toward women and flowers. Questioning whether the flower seller, like her flowers, embodies the past and a feminine ministry of nature, the author makes the social reality clear: "There is poetry in flowers wherever they are found; but alas! in the lot of the flower-girl herself there is no poetry [...] With what force do the temptations of the streets confront a girl under such conditions, and such surroundings?"⁸⁷⁶ Victorian attempts to mythologize womanhood as a seductive goddess or socialise woman as a saintly ideal expose the problematic nature of Victorian attitudes toward the feminine, exemplified by the Proserpinian images of the innocent, childlike flower mission girls and the "fallen" flower sellers of the flower-girls' missions.

⁸⁷⁶ *The Silver Vase* 14.

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Appendix

Epistle on the Subjects of Botany,
Containing A Tale and Much Good Advice.
By A Lover of Botanists.

Ye Fair! who in this favour'd clime
Are taught t'employ, not murder, Time;
And see his reverend figure pass,
Without a wish to break his glass;
Who, skill'd to vary each successive hour,
Embroider now, and now dissect a flower,
And scientifically know
To pull to pieces all that blow;
And, as they lie in sad disorder,
Piecemeal, and litt'ring on the table,
Are with the more precision able
To name their genus, class, and order;
I joy to see this gen'rous age
Unclosing Nature's folio treasure,
Confine not to their sons the page,
But bid their daughters share the pleasure.
I joy to see your light feet tread
The dew-bespangled grass,
Benignly bending as ye pass
To raise the violet's drooping head,
Or pale-faced primrose from her lowly bed;
While your philosophic eyes
With honest pride despise
A tasteless gardener's pamper'd care,
Those gaudy monsters of the gay parterre.
I joy to see you fondly grope,
With vasculum and microscope,
Under bush, and under briar,
Thro' the bog, and in the mire;
Or, on the river's slippery bank,
Outstretch'd upon its utmost verge,
Struggle to grasp aquatics dank
That from its oozy wave emerge.

Daughters of Britain, persevere,
 Secure your envied places,
 To science and to Nature dear,
 As Muses and as Graces.
 But ah! let Caution be your guide,
 Be her's the devious path to trace,
 Conform to her's your sprightly pace,
 Nor quit her venerable side,
 Nor feed rude mirth and giddy laughter,
 By leaving her to hobble after.
 It grieves your Poet much to see
 What perils wait on Botany,
 What dangers lurk in berries blue,
 In berries black, or red, or yellow,
 Rough or glossy, bright or sallow,
 Berries of ev'ry shade and hue,
 To those who *taste* as well as view.
 Sad is the instance that's afforded,
 By the first Female Botanist recorded.

Have ye not heard how Ceres' child,
 Proserpina, in evil hour,
 Gathering plants and flow'rets wild,
 Herself a fairer flow'r,
 By gloomy Dis was cropt, as poets tell,
 Torn from Sicilian plains with him to dwell,
 A hapless Bride, reluctant Queen of Hell.
 Or have ye read that classic story,
 Unmindful of the allegory?
 Examine well the moral tale,
 Unravel each mysterious part,
 Divest it of the Muse's veil,
 And bid it speak devoid of art.
 Dames Ceres, once upon a time, 'tis said,
 Was indispos'd and kept her bed;
 Had caught, perhaps, as thought by some,
 A surfeit at her harvest-home.
 So, rather than bestow a fee
 On any neighbouring M.D.,
 She sent her daughter out to find
 Cheap med'cines of the rural kind.
 Less fraught with skill than filial duty,
 The little botanizing beauty
 Went simpling to the fields of Enna,
 In quest of rhubarb, bark, or senna.
 Long waited the impatient Dame,

Nor Proserpine, nor Physic came,
 Nor could the tongue of comfort tell
 That Proserpine was safe and well.
 New pains the mother's bosom fill,
 She has not leisure to be ill;
 For fear has power to impart
 Th' acuter sickness of the heart.

Binding up her aching head,
 She springs all frantic from her bed,
 And seeks each mossy dell or tangled grove,
 Where haply Proserpine might chance to rove.
 Wand'ring now by gushing fountains,
 Fast flowing as her tears;
 Now traversing volcanic mountains,
 Less hideous than her fears;
 Vainly she sought her thro' the land,
 The livelong day and tedious night,
 With two wax candles in her hand,
 When Phoebus had withdrawn his light.
 At length a stranger comes from far,
 Who tells how he had seen the maid,
 In grisly Pluto's ebon car,
 Just entering the Stygian shade.
 In our time he would have said,
 "Poor little Proserpine is dead."
 The hapless parent, on the wings of love,
 To high Olympus flies, and seeks redress of Jove.
 If one might risk a supposition,
 Said Jove was some renown'd physician.
 Touch'd with the eloquence of sorrow,
 He bids her call again to-morrow:
 "And if," says he, "we can discover,"
 And prove beyond dispute,
 She has not eat of deadly fruit
 The patient may recover.
 Poor Ceres' hopes were soon appall'd
 By the first witness that was call'd;
 Ascalaphus, a surly wight,
 The son of Acheron and Night,
 Who did depose, he saw her feed
 On the pomegranate's spicy seed.
 "To his belief," he swore by Styx,
 "He saw her swallow number six:-
 "Six grains at least, then died upon the spot,
 "And further this deponent sayeth not."

Sans perjury, a man may make,
 Tho' upon oath, some small mistake.
 This evidence, tho' not complete.
 Yet went to prove the girl *had eat*.

Ill-fated Nymph, 'twas thine, perchance, to stray,
 Where poisonous weeds and deadly berries grow,
 These closed thine eyelids on the cheerful day,
 And sent thee struggling to the shades below;
 The baleful *Luridæ*, with wizard powers,
 Haply entic'd thee to their 'insane root';
 Allur'd thee to explore their specious flowers,
 Or rashly taste their fatal, fatal fruit!
Datura there her purple blossoms shed,
 Or sad *Solanum* hung his murky head;
 Or fell *Atropa*, who presumes to claim
 Of lovely woman the attractive name;
 Or *Daphne* there her sickly visage shows,
 Whose pale corolla murd'rous fruits enclose.
 Alas! if these she ate,
 Too certain was her fate;
 For Withering--immortal sage
 Whose name shall never die,
 But wither on in his perennial page,
 Still flourishing, tho' dry--
 Asserts that if a wolf shall be inclin'd,
 Driven by hunger's pinching pain,
 To eat six berries of the *Daphne* kind,
 He'd never eat again.
 It grieves your Poet then to see
 The perils that environ
 This dang'rous branch of Botany,
 More fatal than cold iron.

With harmless buds, and wholesome roots,
 While Nature decks your bowers;
 Why should ye taste forbidden fruits
 Or touch pernicious flowers?
 Such various perfume, growth and hue,
 Her blooming scenes present;
 The dear pursuit may still be new,
 And still be innocent.

Or, if ye must experience pain,
To render pleasure sweet,
Nor the extreme of bliss attain,
But where their boundaries meet;
With many a safe but glorious wound
Your flowery toils may yet be crown'd;
Ere all that sting, and all that prick us,
Be numbered in your Hortus Siccus.