ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING:

QUEST FOR THE FATHER

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Dilara Yegenoglu, B.A., M.A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1996
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This dissertation explores Elizabeth Barrett's dependency on the archetypal Victorian patriarch. Chapter I focuses on the psychological effects of this father-daughter relationship on Elizabeth Barrett. Chapter II addresses Barrett's acceptance of the conventional female role, which is suggested by the nature and the situation of the women she chooses to depict. These women are placed in situations where they can reveal their devotion to family, their capacity for passive endurance, and their wish to resist. Almost always, they choose death as an alternative to life where a powerful father figure is present. Chapter III concentrates on the highly sentimental images of women and children whom Barrett places in a divine order, where they exist untouched by the concerns of the social order of which they are a part. Chapter IV shows that the conventional ideologies of the time, society's commitment to the "angel in the house," and the small number of female role models before her increase her difficulty to find herself a place within this order. Chapter V discusses Aurora Leigh's mission to find herself an identity and to maintain the connection with her father or father substitute. Despite
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CHAPTER I

A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

Elizabeth Barrett's poetry displays a strong sense of dependency on the archetypal Victorian patriarch. Despite the poet's desire to break away from her paternal ties and to establish herself as an independent woman and poet, her unconditional loyalty and love towards her father and her tremendous need for his affection, and the security he provides restrain her resistance and surface the child in her. The biographical facts of Barrett's life extend into her poetry in the images and themes concerning women and children. Barrett's acceptance of the conventional female role is suggested by the nature and the situation of the women she depicts. These women are placed in situations where they can reveal their devotion to family, their capacity for passive endurance, and their wish to resist. Almost always, these women choose death as an alternative to life where a powerful father figure is present. In discouragement, Barrett identifies women with children, whom she places in a divine order, where they exist untouched by the concerns of the social order of which they are a part. Outside the boundaries of their angelic existence are physical, emotional and social suffering. Although she furnishes women with the "gift" of motherhood, soon she
dismisses the praise as a "divine duty" to be fulfilled. Instead, she recognizes women as the adult children of mother nature, who, at best, is indifferent to her daughters. The conventional ideologies of the time, society's commitment to the "angel in the house," and the small number of female role models before her increase her difficulty to find herself a place within this order. Thus, she continues a dialogue between her conviction of the unfair treatment of women and her acknowledgement of her inferior position in Victorian society, between the liberationist urge in her and the contrary values which determine success, respect, self-respect, and social status in society. And she seeks a way to prove to herself that "women want to be made to think actively" (Letters of EBB I:261). Yet she loses the vigor of her determination and displays a passive submission. This turn of aggression has reinforced her role as a submissive poet. In resignation, she takes refuge in heaven, where God reigns and where a father figure continues to provide the needs of his daughters.

At the heart of this inner conflict, which leads the poet into resignation, lies the ambiguous relationship of Elizabeth Barrett with her father. Peter Dally in Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait analyzes the circumstances under which Elizabeth Barrett was brought up. Dally's work sheds light on the psychological effects of
this father-daughter relationship on the young poet.
Barrett’s dependence on her father was so excessive that he "held the key to her life," and at the age of ten, she began to perceive "her father and God in much the same light, and she developed an obsessional way of thinking," writes Dally (16, 22). This obsessive attachment to the father appears as the main cause of Barrett’s fluctuations between a passive dependence on a Victorian patriarch, which Edward Barrett embodied, and independence from the patriarchal social order, which denies her a place within as a woman poet.

A brief look at the cause-effect relationship of certain events and the nature of her relationships shows Barrett’s position as a submissive woman. These incidents and relationships display Barrett’s need to depend on powerful men and her conscious efforts to return to childhood or/and to the powerful father figure.

Elizabeth Barrett was born on 8 March 1806 in Durham. As a child, she was stubborn and determined to fulfill her wishes. Soon, she was accepted as an authority figure by her younger brother Bro (Edward), and sister Henrietta. Aware of women’s second class position in the Victorian society, she set on a quest to prove to her father that she was as good as her brother. Father Barrett recognized his daughter’s talent and awarded her ten shillings for the poem she wrote on Virtue at the age of five. When she was eleven, she wrote The Battle of Marathon and dedicated it to her father, "to
him for whom 'I owe the most,' and whose admonitions have guided my youthful muse . . . to the Father whose never failing kindness, whose unwearied affection I can never repay" ("Dedication" Complete Works 2:142-143). Thus, since childhood, father Barrett had been the key figure in her life, and she tried to ensure that his affection never failed, for "acclaim from her father was vital for her peace of mind" (Dally 16).

Elizabeth Barrett always admired heroes, outstanding men and women of fame in literature, politics, war (Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett I:98). Just as she faithfully believed in Napoleon III all her life, her father became an ideal who could do no wrong in her eyes. She loved her mother as well, but she looked down on her "feminine softness" and equated it with lack of strength, the inability to hold her husband's strength. So, she criticized her (L.RB/EBB II:1012). Growing under Elizabeth's domination, her brother Bro lacked drive and persistence, and avoided hard work. Although he was a disappointment for father Barrett, he was the ideal companion for Elizabeth, presenting no competition.

During these childhood years, Elizabeth was a happy child as long as she was the center of her father's attention. As she grew, however, she displayed signs of inner turmoil and experienced intense "anxiety" writes Dally:
Generalized anxiety is too painful to bear for long, and the nervous system has way and means of protecting itself; phobic anxieties and obsessions form and the anxiety becomes displaced on the seemingly harmless objects or situations. The phobic object is terrifying and has to be avoided at all costs, but away from it there is calm. (20)

She also suffered from "Agoraphobia" (21), which is conditioned by a fear of open spaces, meeting people, and of leaving home. The sufferer is liable to panic if she encounters people and tries to avoid them. So many agoraphobics are housebound and unable to leave their homes, or are able to do so under the protective umbrella of night, or when accompanied by a trusted companion. Such an insecure person invariably has a close relative or friend on whom she depends. She becomes ruthlessly demanding of the companion, and expects her own needs to come first. She always dominates the relationship with her companion. (Dally 21)

The effects of this condition on Elizabeth’s life varied, but it certainly "established her central position in the family, and the special relationship with her father" (21). It also ensured that first Bro, then Browning was never far from her side. It allowed her the luxury of time, which would otherwise have been expected to be devoted to domestic matters and social intercourse.

Elizabeth Barrett associated thunder and the power of thunderstorms with her father. She said, "only one person holds the thunder," and when she anticipated her father’s rage, she wrote: "I shall be thundered at; I shall not be reasoned with" (L.RB/EBB I: 318)⁵. Father Barrett had no cause to thunder at Elizabeth, for he saw her as the "purest woman he ever knew" (L.RB/EBB II:1072)⁶. Yet, about her mother who was just as likely to be the target of Edward
Moulton Barrett's rage as the children, Elizabeth wrote: "Her sweet gentle nature" was, like the milk, turned sour by the thunderstorm (L.RB/EBB II:1012). He was a "terrifying Jovian figure," "the king and father," whom Elizabeth worshipped and "dared not upset."7

In the spring of 1821, Elizabeth became increasingly ill. Based on the attendant physician Dr. Coker's description of Barrett's symptoms, Dally observes all the characteristics of acute anxiety in her illness. When extreme anxiety is "prolonged, protective mental mechanisms tend to come into play and the anxiety symptoms are replaced by other psychological conditions" (27). Dally observes this condition as "anorexia nervosa":

The anorexic manifests two very different sides of herself. On the one hand she behaves as a small frightened child, clinging to her parents (or husband), asking to be cared for and protected. She has no will of her own and cannot make the simplest decision for herself. She is terrified of being left alone and pleads her parents to stay continually near her. For a time this was very much the way Elizabeth behaved; the formerly competent, almost cocky, teenage girl, was changed into a wailing infant. (27)

One of the indications of "anorexia nervosa" is starvation. By starving herself, the patient can bring everyone around to agree with her on her terms. Elizabeth knew a girl in the neighborhood of Hope End with anorexia nervosa; thus she was familiar with the disease and its magnitude to magnetize attention. In a letter to Browning, Elizabeth admits that she used starvation as a tool. Although she was seriously
ill for a few months only, she continued to starve herself for her parents' attention; thus, the concerned parents "scarcely ever left me to go anywhere" for "two years" (The Brownings' Correspondence 2:146). Now, she felt completely loved, and in satisfaction, she recalled happily the dream that had recurred during her illness (31):

I used to start out of fragments of dreams, broken from all parts of the universe, with the cry from my own lips, 'Oh, Papa, Papa!' I could not trace it back to the dream behind, yet there it always was very curiously, and touchingly too, to my own heart, seemingly scarcely of me, though it came from me, at once waking me, and welcoming me . . . . (The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836-1854 I:104)

For her peace of mind, she had to see herself as her father's beloved child even if it meant "she had to play the helpless, invalid, although she never allowed herself to look healthy for long" (Dally 31).

In 1826, Elizabeth's poem Essay on Mind attracted the attention of the blind scholar Hugh Stuart Boyd. After corresponding for two years, they finally met, and Boyd became a trustworthy friend. Robert Coles, M.D. emphasizes the fact that Elizabeth's relationship with Hugh Stuart Boyd started "when Elizabeth Barrett was quite without parents." Her mother had died and "her father . . . spent increasing lengths of time away in London" ("Psychoanalytical" Diary xIii) to straighten the family's financial troubles. Thus, "she needed someone, even as she kept her distance from just anyone" (xIii). They loved each other, shared ideas,
exchanged views on literary topics, and inspired one another. As Dr. Coles says,

significant men and women in the history of literature, the arts, and the sciences too, have at critical moments in their lives turned to somebody . . . to find reassurance, support, sanction, the grace that comes when two people speak, when one person listens to another. (xIV)

When Elizabeth Barrett lost her mother on 7 October 1828, she began to regard excessive happiness as "dangerous and wrong," and that it was always succeeded by "grief." Dally observes that Elizabeth regarded becoming too dependent on another person as sinful, "for that dependency was God's right and should be reserved for him" (37). This notion came to be her fallback all her life and was stated repeatedly when she lost loved ones. It was completely at variance with her natural inclination: "It was second nature to her to depend on one or two people; her dependency on Bro, her father, Boyd, Hunter, and later Robert Browning, was extreme in every case" (37).

On 20 September 1830, Elizabeth went to Woodland Lodge to spend three weeks with the Boyds. It is significant that "she had voluntarily left home and her father for the first time" (Dally 40). Edward Barrett never regarded Boyd, this married, older, blind scholar, a threat to him. However, when she returned home, she was nervous, for "she had placed . . . Boyd in front of her father in her mind and thereby been disloyal to her father. She had worshipped other Gods" (41). Her infatuation with Boyd upset her "tranquility and
made her moody and anxious" (41). In 1832, father Barrett, beginning to see Boyd as a danger to Elizabeth’s health and peace of mind, grew antagonistic towards Elizabeth’s visits and forbade her to visit Boyd for a long time. Once again, Elizabeth saw separation as a punishment from God, well deserved because, "I often looked too much for comfort to you--instead of looking higher than you. No help that is merely human, is stronger than a reed" (47). Although her health improved, father Barrett refused her visit to Boyd, and Elizabeth could not "displease the person, who loves me better than any person in the world loves me" (48). Despite her attachment to Boyd, her father remained her priority, and she wrote:

Papa . . . would make any sacrifice for what, he believed, may happen--but . . . he may think it better for me to remain quietly with him than to go to you or any other person. . . . I am not sure that he is not right. (48)

On 24 August 1832, when the family left Hope End for Sidmouth, Elizabeth was no longer infatuated with Boyd. She had returned to family life and involved herself closely with her father. He watched her protectively, for she had a cold which limited her activities. Dally notes that Elizabeth had to know that her father was "at hand and cared for her, and she basked in his concern" (49). During their one year stay in Sidmouth, Elizabeth saw Boyd regularly, but he ceased to be her hero. Boyd recognized this change but still loved her until his death in 1848 and acted as a
"devoted substitute father" (52) to her.

During Boyd's residence in Sidmouth, Elizabeth's friendship with George Barrett Hunter was established. He was the minister of the Marsh Independent Chapel. Soon he became a significant person in Elizabeth's life. Hunter led a lonely life and cared for his daughter by himself after the confinement of his wife into a mental asylum. Elizabeth "admired his fortitude" and saw him as a "tragic" and "heroic figure" (53).

At the time Elizabeth met Hunter, she needed someone whom she could look up to. This person was naturally to be a man, for Elizabeth regarded the male mind as intellectually superior to the female, although not morally, with greater power and depth. All her life she revered strong men and time and again she mistook inadequacy disguised as despotism for real strength. (L.RB/EBB 1:113)

"To be in love with a man on whom she could depend was her greatest wish, even surpassing her need to be a poet" says Peter Dally (54), and the idea of falling in love with Hunter excited her, although Hunter loved Elizabeth and began to treat her as "his." This attitude pleased Elizabeth, and "she encouraged his possessiveness by including their shared experiences in her poems, and writing of themes which she knew would please him" (55).

During this time, neither her father nor Bro was around to provide the support Elizabeth needed. Thus, Hunter became an increasingly important person in her life. For Hunter, however, the friendship was very frustrating; he was
already married and had no reliable income. Elizabeth did not recognize Hunter's feelings, for she could not tolerate self-pity from the man she admired. He had "to rise above all adversity as her father had done (49); on this principle, she would never compromise" (55).

In time, she saw Hunter's "abnormal sensitiveness, his violent temper, and his melancholy and bitterness engendered by long years of failure" (Taplin 53). She was increasingly irritated by his conduct; yet, until his death, she admired him for the high qualities she believed she saw in him. Taplin's observation that both Boyd and Hunter were "unworldly, impractical, and idealistic, and both suffered from severe handicaps, mental or physical," reminds one of Romney in Aurora Leigh. Like Aurora's attachment to Romney, Elizabeth Barrett had "for this blind, middle-aged, limited, ineffectual, and rather helpless man [Boyd] an extraordinary attachment" (40).

In the spring of 1835, after the Barrett family moved to London, John Kenyon, a distant cousin to Edward Moulton Barrett, became a significant person in Elizabeth's life and remained a loved and trusted friend, providing her financial, emotional, and social support all her life.

In January 1838, Elizabeth Barrett lost her uncle, Sam Moulton Barrett who had arranged before his death to transfer to Elizabeth's name his one eighth share of the Moulton Barrett trading ship. The shock of his death
deteriorated Elizabeth’s health. When Dr. Chambers diagnosed her tuberculosis, father Barrett allowed Elizabeth to go to Torquay with George, Bro, and Henrietta. At the prospect of Bro’s returning to London, Elizabeth’s condition worsened, and father Barrett relented, and Bro stayed in Torquay with Elizabeth.

Edward Barrett was greatly concerned about Elizabeth’s health. He wrote that Elizabeth was "an handmaiden of the Lord . . . the most beautiful of characters . . . possessed of the noblest mind," and she assured herself of his love: "He loves me too well" and "I feel how dearly he loves me" (L.MRM I:104). At this time, "her behavior continued to exhibit childlike characteristics of anorexia nervosa; the making of excessive demands, helplessness, reluctance to eat unless encouraged, tearful histrionics and erratic moods" (Dally 67). Her father visited her frequently, and "she clung touchingly to him, always protesting tearfully when the time came for his departure. She longed to be 'tied fast' to him and to be continually with him" (68), and woke from dreams calling out "Papa, Oh Papa!!" (L.MRM I:104). By the summer, she wrote "A Romance of the Ganges," in which paternal love for the daughter proves to be the only love Luti can rely upon. Likewise, the idea of "The Lay of the Brown Rosary," which came to her at this time reveals her feelings for her father:

I wish I were a young dead child and had thy company!
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-year child,  
And wearing only a kiss of thine upon my lips that smiled!  

(2:164-66)

After Boyd and Hunter, Elizabeth took great interest in her physician Dr. de Barry. He had grown fond of Elizabeth as well, and since this was more than just professional interest, he demanded numerous times that Elizabeth change her doctor. In October 1839, when he received Elizabeth's call. Although he was seriously ill at the time, he attended Elizabeth, and his health suffered tremendously resulting with his death. Elizabeth felt responsible for de Barry's death; she refused to eat anything and continuously wept (Dally 69-70).

The news of her second brother Sam's death of yellow fever in April 1839 effected Elizabeth profusely; her health steadily deteriorated. During these days, father Barrett was with her continuously.

How to leave my beloved Ba, I know not. I fear the very mention of it, for she is indeed lamentably weak, and yet it is absolutely necessary I should go; I really know not how to act. (71)¹⁸

Edward Barrett wrote to Sette, a younger son. With concern, father Barrett held Elizabeth's hand and prayed, and "grew gentler," and Elizabeth felt very close. "He let me draw nearer than ever I had done" (L.RB.EBB I:422)¹⁹

During this time when Elizabeth depended on her father completely, she became idealized and more "perfect" in his mind. "Edward Barrett was a man who needed an ideal for his
sense of security. His wife Mary had replaced his mother . . . and now Elizabeth took Mary’s place. Thus, Elizabeth’s position was privileged” (Dally 71).

During the years she saw Boyd and Hunter, Bro had become "less essential" to Elizabeth. Yet, Torquay had re-established their old dependency. "Bro’s good natured tolerance, sociability and lack of ambition paired with Elizabeth’s passionate drive, intolerance, and xenophobia" (72). She assured herself that Bro "loved me better than them all and that he would not leave me . . . until I was well" (L.RB/EBB I:170)²⁰

Barrett’s love for Bro was different from the one she had for her father. She loved her father, but "there was always a nagging fear that she might lose his love if she failed to do what he commanded and follow the path he wanted all his children to pursue. His love demanded perfect obedience. She and Bro . . . loved one another equally and without qualifications" (Dally 72).

On 11 July 1840, when Bro drowned during a storm in Torquay, Elizabeth’s mind wandered in a semi-delirium. To father Barrett, Elizabeth’s state of mind mattered more than the death of Bro, which he regarded as a lesson to be learned; the family had to purify itself or God would afflict them with a third death, Elizabeth’s (Dally 73).

Elizabeth’s thoughts centered on Bro and her part in his death. Had she not kept him in Torquay, he would have
been alive. She had sinned by loving him too much and not trusting God enough. Thus, "the Divine Hand cast me down in the place of graves and struck me terribly in the very life of my heart." Despite her physical collapse, she kept her grief hidden only to be revealed in her poems "De Profundis" and "The Mask."

In the September of 1841, when she returned to London, "her mind was preoccupied with memories of Bro and her part in his death, and her father's tenderness and affection" (Dally 76). "Depression and apathy" remained with her, and opium magnified her unbalanced emotional state (76). It was Boyd, who brought her back to life with his forceful encouragement to return to reading. She devoted almost all her time to reading and writing and allowed no one except Ms. Mary Mitford, John Kenyon, Miss Bayley, Hunter, and Mrs. Jameson to visit her. The painter Benjamin Haydon was almost obsessed with her, which was magnified by her refusal to see him. Haydon's suicide in June 1845 distressed her, and she wondered if she were responsible for Haydon's death too.

During these hard times, "her love for her father sustained her. Anticipating the sound of his footsteps on the steps when he returned from work was a delight" (79); everyday, he brought her flowers and the new edition of the Athenaeum or the Pall Mall Gazette, and they talked, and at night . . . before she went to bed, he came through the communicating door between their rooms and they sat and
talked together before praying" (L.RB/EBB I:226). "Papa is my chaplin--prays with me every night--not out of a book, but simply and warmly at once--with one of my hands held in his and nobody beside him and me in the room. That is dear in him--is it not?" she wrote to Ms. Mitford (L.MRM 2:59). It was a moving experience for both of them.

For her father the ceremony was much more than simply kneeling beside Elizabeth. He prayed with her and for her, and became united with her as he gave thanks for her survival and her returning health. He was gentle and affectionate and no outburst ever disturbed the calm. He kissed her good night. When he left, she was at peace with herself--as he was. It seemed a perfect union. (Dally 79)

Dally’s observation that Elizabeth "both desired and was horrified by passionate involvement with a strong man" is directly related to her nature (81). She admired George Sand but criticized her writing for the "irresistible power she attributes to human passion" and "the disgusting tendency she has towards representing the passion of love under its physical aspect!" Sand’s Lelia made her blush, and she could not read through it "for its vileness" (L.MRM 2:127). For Elizabeth a passionate relationship was "impossible" because she saw no man other than Kenyon and Hunter; it was "horrifying" because it would create a great "conflict" with her father. He thought of her as free of sensuality, and she lived to please him. His smile or a sign of approbation was her reward. His love gave meaning to her life, and she wished only to live for him (82).
The only outlet she could find for her passions was the love poems, but it did not relieve the despair that tortured her mind. The news of the death of her second physician, Dr. Scully in Torquay intensified the memories and thoughts of Bro. Depression overtook her and increased her sense of isolation and loss (Dally 82).

Elizabeth Barrett blamed herself for the silence she lived in. Her fears were too great to allow people into her world. Her father had no objection to men visiting her so long as the visits remained unthreatening to her health and "purity." Yet, Elizabeth chose to remain isolated. Convinced of her weakness, she chose to "sink down in hysterical disorder" and not "act and resist" (Dally 82).

Since "she could not satisfy her growing desires," she chose "to try to appease them" by pushing the clock back and denying her sexuality by starvation (Dally 83). She began to eat only small portions, enough to keep her alive. Her father criticized her for her eating habits, and in 1845, she reported to Browning: "if I pleased to have porter & beefsteak instead, I sh’d be as well as ever I was, in a month!.." (L.RB/EBB I:137). Dally notes that Elizabeth had two reasons for starving herself; satisfying her insecure feelings by attracting the attention of her father, and most importantly diminishing her sexual feelings.

Emaciation would have diminished Elizabeth's sexual feelings and stopped menstruation, or caused it to become infrequent. Her thinness
pushed her backwards and protected from adult instincts. It also helped her feel that, since she was in control of her body, she controlled her life, which reassured and calmed her. (83)

Damp London winters were particularly threatening to her health, but "if I went away . . . I must give up a good deal—my evenings with papa for instance . . . ." she explained and grew to depend on opium for comfort. Her first experience with the drug was at fifteen when she had anorexia nervosa and hysteria. In 1838, she began taking opium again and continued the habit except for a year until her death. Opium kept her "spirits up . . . reduced her hunger" and also "countered any sexual feelings that had survived emaciation" (Dally 87).

Elizabeth Barrett, at this time, was interested in Robert Browning's work. Through their mutual friend Kenyon, she heard about Browning, and their correspondence began on 10 January 1845. She looked at him with idealistic eyes and found the ideal teacher and the ideal man in Browning. Likewise, Browning saw "intellect" and "goodness" in her. She was the kind of woman he could look up to and love (Dally 98).

As in all her relationships, with her father, Bro, Boyd, Hunter, soon she began to show her dependency on Browning. When he mentioned he might travel, she was shaken. She did not want him to go away. Although he assured her that he would not go abroad, and she need have no fear of him, Elizabeth was stubbornly insistent (Dally 99).
At this time, they had not yet seen each other. She was putting off the inevitable, for she had no confidence in herself as a woman. People had responded to her for her achievements. Boyd had admired her intellect; her father loved her, for she was obedient and pleasing. Only Bro and her mother had loved her for herself. Thus, her insecurity about herself stopped her from meeting Browning (Dally 101-3).

For many years, she had loved an ideal, "seen sometimes in a dream and sometimes in a book," the man "who must be above one . . . as far as one can reach with one's eyes(soul-eyes), not reach to touch." Her father was certainly an ideal man with all the heroic qualities she furnished him, and later on, Napoleon III and Cavour were added to the list. And now, in Robert Browning, she found a hero. When they finally met, Elizabeth saw the passionate nature of a man for the first time. Her brothers and sisters kept their courtship a secret. Edward Barrett believed that Robert Browning called every fortnight for an hour and discussed poetry with her. The idea that she could be attracted to a man was outside his comprehension, for he saw her as wholly "pure" and asexual (Dally 105-06).

Shortly afterwards, Elizabeth began to confide in Browning and criticize her father; horrified at what she had written, she wrote other letters and praised him, finding fault with the system and clearing her father (L.RB/EBB
I:421, I:167-69). She felt "uneasy" about her feelings for Browning and "fearful" that her father would discover the nature of their relationship (113). Still, she wanted Browning close for safety's sake, yet she longed to disclose her passion. The mental conflict distorted her perception of her father and she no longer saw him in a reasonable light. He was either a heartless tyrant, or a loving protector, a devil or a god. There seemed no middle condition. (Dally 113)

Yet, in her poems, the will of God and her father are almost identical.35

In the fall of 1845, Elizabeth's physician Dr. Chambers recommended that she should spend the winter in Pisa. Yet, Mr Barrett refused the idea bluntly. Robert Browning felt it was wrong that Elizabeth should obey him, for "the jewel is not being over guarded, but ruined, cast /off/ away" (L.RB/EBB I:212).36 Thus, "he advocated disobedience" (Dally 114) strongly believing that it was wrong for Elizabeth "to blindly adopt his pleasure, and die under it" (L.RB/EBB I:213).37 Browning's passionate responses to this matter raised Elizabeth's spirits, and she expressed her feelings, this time equating Browning with God: "Henceforward I am yours for everything but to do you harm . . . none, except God & your will, shall interpose between you & me . . . " (L.RB/EBB I:216)38. Declaring her allegiance to Browning, she began to have doubts about her father, but her resistance was soon replaced by obedience (Dally 115-16). "He is naturally stern and has exaggerated notions of
authority . . . , but these things go with high and noble qualities . . . . Always he has the greatest power over my heart" she wrote first. Aware of Browning’s puzzlement and irritation, she explained:

I believe, I am certain, I have loved him better than the rest of his children. I have heard the fountain within the rock, & my heart has struggled in towards him through the stones of the rock. (L.RB/EBB I:421)

Her constant praise of her father’s "high qualities . . . so upright and honorable," his character worthy of "esteem & regard" (L.RB/EBB I:408) and her disheartened remarks that "the root of the evil is the miserable misconception of the limits & character of parental rights . . . . And love, he does not conceive of at all" irritated and confused Browning (L.RB/EBB I:514).

At this time, Barrett wanted to leave home and live with Browning; however, her father was never far from her mind:

Despite the pleasure and comfort that Robert gave her, there were moments when she missed her father and was saddened by his absence. The smallest gesture of affection, or hint of reconciliation, both gladdened her and made her feel guilty. She wanted to be loved by him in the old way. But she also wanted Robert, and the two were incompatible. (Dally 120)

Finally, when she agreed to marry Browning. "I will do as you wish" she told him. "I shall not fail you--I do not, I will not, I will act by your decision, and I wish you to decide" she wrote (L.RB/EBB II:1061). On September 12, Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning married in Marylebone
Church. They parted immediately after the service to meet again on September 19 to leave for Paris, en route to Pisa. Barrett was terrified of discovery, and the thought of telling him paralysed her:

'Papa I am married,—I hope you will not be too displeased.' Ah, poor Papa! . . . he will be angry, . . . he will cast me off as far from him . . . We will submit, dearest--I will put myself under his feet, to be forgiven a little, . . . enough to be taken into his arms. I love him--he is my father--he has good & high qualities after all: he is my father above all. And you, because you are so generous & tender to me, will let me . . . & help me to try to win back the alienated affection--Surely I may say to him, too, . . . 'with the exception of this act, I have submitted to the least of your wishes all my life long--Set the life against the act, & forgive me, for the sake of the daughter you once loved' (L.RB/EBB II:1072)

She cried for her father's forgiveness, but at the same time, she loved Browning wholeheartedly. It is, however, significant that she regarded "love" as the duty of wives: "I have a right now to openly to love you, and to hear the people call it a duty, when I do" (L.RB/EBB II:1066).

Edward Barrett was displeased with his daughter for a while at this time. He had been withdrawn from her company, but had avoided direct criticism of her and Browning. Dally points out that this state of affairs continued for so long because of Barrett's changed attitude towards her father. Previously happy and relaxed in his company, Barrett had grown to be anxious and nervous in his presence (Dally 126). Her father must have been deeply hurt and puzzled by this change in his daughter and driven to stay away from her.
Another reason is that he had been much irritated by Elizabeth's insistence to go to Pisa, and his hurt pride expected Elizabeth to give some sign of repentance. Dally speculates on these signs that perhaps he was waiting for her to be ill, "which would bring him post-haste to her bedside, as in the past. He knew that she could make herself ill through starvation. In the event, the opposite happened" (Dally 126-27). Despite her disappointment, Elizabeth relied heavily on Browning's emotional support (Dally 127). She realized that she had to be well to go on seeing Browning, and since it did not agree with her desires now, she rejected anorexia. Instead, she followed Browning's advice to eat more, to take exercise, and to go into the fresh air (119). Thus, Elizabeth Barrett gained weight and grew healthier (127). In the past, anorexia nervosa had attracted her father's attention and concern, and resolved all her problems. Now, "the last thing she wanted was to attract her father's attention," for she well knew that he would immediately end Browning's visits, just as he had done with Boyd when she became anorexic in 1832 (Dally 119).

After Elizabeth Barrett's marriage, Edward Moulton Barrett was enraged; he severed all connection with his daughter. Elizabeth Barrett received her father's condemnatory letter in Orleans. Being cast out of the family and her father's life forever was too heavy for Barrett to bear. She fell ill, and Browning dealt with her as if she
were a small, sick child.

Barrett continued to depend on Browning for the rest of her life. When they were in Pisa, he said that "Ba is fat and rosy," but still he was rarely away from her side. "For one hour only in the daytime was he separated, when he went, protesting, for an energetic walk with Flush" (Dally 132). Thus, for Elizabeth Barrett the marriage did not bring any independence, for she desired dependence.

Furthermore, she could not let go of her father:

I cannot believe that he will forget me, as he says he will, and go on thinking me to be dead rather than alive and happy. So I manage to hope for the best, and all that remains, all my life here, is best already."

She wrote regularly to her father, and although she received no reply, she convinced herself that he read the letters and thought of her, as she thought of him.

In 1847, Elizabeth Barrett had a miscarriage. The thought of pregnancy at first panicked her, but to discover that she could conceive and be a mother was enormously exciting, and she felt complete, a woman in every sense. After her second miscarriage, she was disappointed, but no depression followed (Dally 136). Her remark to Ms. Mitford is rather curious, for it shows that even at this point in life, Elizabeth Barrett preferred to be the daughter of her father than to mother her own child:

There is no use in hoping . . . . Far happier I am than ever I counted on being in this world—& perhaps, after all, if I had to choose between additional comforts, I should choose the smile of
my own father to that of my own child...if I could have either—oh yes I should & would. (L.MRM III:234)\(^{47}\)

On 9 March 1849, they had a son, but Barrett was not ready for motherhood. She refused to breast-feed or nurse her son, Penini. Temperamentally, she was uncertain and anxious. She also feared that she "carried a curse" and was "liable to harm those she loved" (139). So she preferred to look at the baby from a distance.

In general, she was in great health and spirit, "wonderfully improved...and I can do as much, or more, now than at any point of my life since I arrived at woman's estate" (L.MRM III:273)\(^{48}\) she wrote about herself in confidence. Soon, she began to believe in herself, and her fear of harming the baby disappeared.

In 1852, when they visited London for the first time, she hoped for a reconciliation with her father. Edward Barrett refused to see her, and she went with Arabel to Wimpole Street, half hoping and terrified that she might meet her father face to face. She wrote to him again and asked for forgiveness. When there was no reply, Robert Browning wrote to him. Edward Barrett's reply was "a very violent and unsparing"(148-9) letter "accompanied by all the letters she had written to him over the five years, unopened. Some of the envelopes had been sealed with black wax, which could have signified she was dead. The brutality of her father left her miserable" (149).
During the next nine months, Dally reports that Elizabeth Barrett grew more assertive, as though needing to establish her authority in the marriage, perhaps attempting subconsciously to show that she could do without her father (Dally 150). At the same time, she showed interest in politics and Louis Napoleon, but Elizabeth’s distress over her father was never far from the surface, although largely disguised by exaggerated reactions to events, political and personal. As mentioned earlier, her possessiveness of Browning was part of the many traits of her relationship. All this time, Browning was very understanding towards Barrett’s unreasonable dependency on him. In May 1852, when Browning’s cousin and closest friend James Silverthrone died, he wanted to attend his funeral. Elizabeth Barrett "panicked at the thought of his leaving, collapsed breathless and fainting," (156) and led Browning to think that she was too ill to be left alone. Browning cancelled his trip, but he was agitated by his wife’s unreasonable behavior. On another occasion, William Story called Browning for emotional support when the family thought they were losing their second child, Edith Story. Barrett, again, raised various objections, demanding Browning to stay. "The row was angry and noisy," (163) but Browning was determined to go. Barrett castigated Story for his lack of "manliness and fortitude.""

On their second visit to London in 1854, Barrett
visited 50 Wimpole Street and risked encountering her father. One evening, she actually saw her father up the street and avoided meeting him by turning into a side road. Her longing for reconciliation mounted until she could no longer contain herself, and she wrote another pleading note to her father. She received no reply, and once again she banished every hope for reconciliation.

Following her father's rejections, Barrett's interest in the supernatural increased to the point of obsession. Dally points out that "spiritualism attracts people who are unhappy and guilt ridden" (159). Barrett, "from her earliest years, was prone to depression and ready to assume that she was somehow responsible for the misfortunes which befell those she loved, perhaps her mother's death, certainly Bro's. She frequently felt bad and wanted reassurance that she was loved and forgiven" (160). To learn that "her father no longer felt affection for her had had a catastrophic effect on her mood"; thus, she needed "reassurance that she was not thoroughly bad and harmful. Browning could tell her that she was not, that he loved her, but he was not her father and could never speak for him, never fully take his place" (Dally 160).

Spiritualism offered her hope. She contacted her mother and Bro, her uncle Sam, and her grandmother to assure herself that she was loved, and "seek peace and forgiveness through them" (Dally 160). Dally believes that Browning
associated

spiritualism with Edward Moulton Barrett. His outright rejection of his daughter had had a devastating effect, and Elizabeth’s interest in spiritualism had grown steadily from that time. It was unfortunate that Robert never delved into Elizabeth’s mind and her deep need to be at one with her father. (168)

Browning resented bitterly being cut off from an important part of her life and not being able to replace her father in her emotions (168-69).

The news of her father’s accident in 1855 and the thought of her father’s dying before reconciliation left her bitter and depressed. For her peace of mind, she had to know that he loved her, but to her letters and notes to him, she received no answer. She began losing weight again.

The Brownings returned to London on 7 July 1856. As soon as Edward Barrett found out the Brownings were in town, he moved his family to Ventnor in the isle of Wight. Such a decision was the most obvious restatement of Elizabeth Barrett’s "exclusion from the family" (Dally 173). She came to realize that "she was an outsider, and her alienation from her father was absolute" (174). She resorted to opium and "required at least 60 milligrams of morphine a day at this time" (175). Even the success of Aurora Leigh did not help her morale. She had "many sad and heavy thoughts this winter" she wrote to Henrietta, and her thoughts were centered around her father and his reactions to the poem. "I think so much of these things in reference to him, but I
daresay he is absolutely indifferent to me and my writings." It seemed as all hope for the future disappeared and nothing seemed worthwhile while she was in exile. Thus, she continued to seek peace in spiritualism.

The news of her father's death on April 17 1857 shattered Elizabeth Barrett. For days, she lay on her sofa, speechless and unable to cry. When she could cry, tears did little to comfort her. "The knowledge that her father was dead without a reconciliation having been effected was impossible for her fully to grasp" (178). She secluded herself from everyone, and turned to spiritualism.

Spirit communication was the one channel to her father which was still open to her and gave her cause and hope. If she could be in touch with him in the spirit world she might learn that she was forgiven. "My interest," she said of spiritualism, "grows deeper and deeper." She might have to wait for her own death before she and her father were fully reconciled, but to know that he had forgiven her would release her from an intolerable burden of guilt and despair. "In that world," she said hopefully, "spirits learn and grow faster." (Dally 178-9)

Despite her brothers and her sister Arabel's decision to leave Wimpole Street, Elizabeth wanted to keep the family home unchanged, "perhaps envisaging it as a shrine to her father, preserved after his death as her mother's room had been" (Dally 179). Elizabeth Barrett remained weak and preoccupied with the memories of her father and sought peace through her communications with the spirits.

The political events of 1858 aroused her interest, and "she hero-worshipped Cavour . . . the prime minister of
Piedmont, as well as Louis Napoleon" (185). Her care for political matters reflected "passion and feverish obsession," and as Henry James noted it was a "malady and a doom" (II:53). She lost sleep and weight, and talked interminably of Italy's suffering and Napoleon III's greatness. Her 'insistent voice and fixed eye' betrayed her fanatical concern. Italy's freedom was surely identified in her mind with her own escape and freedom and the consequences. Louis Napoleon was the strong man, the substitute for the father for whom she had continually craved. (Dally 186)

On 8 July 1856, when Napoleon III and the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph, agreed on peace, Cavour resigned and Venice remained Austrian. Elizabeth Barrett collapsed (Dally 186). Just as she had found fault with the system towards her father's unreasonable treatment of her children, now she decided that "the fault lay with England" (187): "I will never forgive England the most damnable part she has taken in Italian affairs, never" and Napoleon was not really to blame. She was in rage against all the nations of the earth who forced the hand of Napoleon and truncated his great intentions . . . I was struck, could not sleep, talked too much, and at last this bad attack came on."

Despite all the care and nursing, Elizabeth Barrett's health steadily deteriorated. Her illness brought the couple close together, and she felt safely dependent again on Browning. Since she was too weak and sensitive, he avoided topics as Napoleon III, and spiritualism. Despite the pain caused by her substitute heroes, "none of the old days go
past without a throb of pain in love. There are things too
dear to talk of sometimes—I remember always" she wrote to
Henrietta.

Had Robert been able to unlock the door to these
memories and share them Elizabeth might have
regained a zest for living which had died with her
father. Now, she lived more in the past than the
present, and more for Robert's sake than her
own.55

The death of Cavour on 5 June 1860 affected her
profusely. "The morbid associations that scurried into her
mind on the occasion of death prostrated her, and she
withdrew into herself" (Dally 194). She seemed not to care
about life anymore. Despite her condition and warnings
against the draught, she had tea with the windows open. She
cought cold, and her lungs failed (194). Elizabeth Barrett
died in her husband's arms on 29 June 1861.

For half a century, Elizabeth Barrett lived to obey and
to please her father. Her life prior to her marriage to
Robert Browning was filled with her dominating and loving
father. Her life after her marriage was just as occupied
with her father; this time she was on a quest to regain the
love of a father she had lost forever. Thus she came to
depend on him even more for her tranquility. Only being his
beloved little daughter again would bring her peace of mind.

These biographical facts of Elizabeth Barrett's life
extend into her works concerning women and children. Thus,
it would be an error to seek objectivity in her works; her
relationship with her father is included in her poetry and
in her correspondence, reserving her a status as a child/woman poet among the literary figures of the nineteenth century.
CHAPTER II

DEATH AS AN ALTERNATIVE

In Elizabeth Barrett's submission, outside influences should not be ignored. Her submissive nature is the result of an inner conflict, which afflicted the poet in childhood and coerced the future development of her life and career. At the heart of this conflict lies Barrett's ambiguous relationship with her father. Aware of this problem yet unable to breakaway from it, Barrett sets on a quest to find a path for herself as a daughter, as a woman, and as a poet. As explained in the previous chapter, Barrett remained as the loving daughter of Edward Moulton Barrett all her life. Neither marriage, nor motherhood changed the fact that her attachment to her father was stronger than the other pleasures of life.

When she turned into a woman with sexual, physical, and emotional needs, first she denied her sexuality. To diminish her sexual feelings and to stop menstruation, Barrett chose emaciation; thus, she kept her adult instincts under control. She resorted to opium, and it reduced her hunger and countered any sexual feelings that had survived the emaciation. At this point in her life, Barrett regarded herself as a "weak woman" who can neither "act" nor "resist."
I belong to that pitiful order of weak women who cannot command their bodies with their souls at every moment and who sink down in hysterical disorder when they ought to act and resist. (Dally 82)

Since action and resistance meant stepping outside the role of being Edward Barrett's daughter, she could not risk his love and faith in her. Thus, Elizabeth Barrett suppressed her feminine instincts, disallowed the woman in her to emerge, and remained the "pure" and asexual child of Edward Barrett. Even after her marriage, and the birth of her son, she remained emotionally and mentally overpowered by her father and sought his affection.

Another aspect of Elizabeth Barrett's struggle involved her position in the family and her reconciliation with herself as a woman. At sixteen, Barrett's role in the family was clearly drawn. According to her brothers and sisters, she was the most useless person in the house. As a child, she had become aware that women and men did not have the same rights; in many respects, women were inferior and expected to be submissive, or even subservient to men. Thus, Barrett had to prove to her father, who represented the archetypal Victorian patriarch, that she was just as good as her brother Bro and even better. At fourteen, she had refused the life of domesticity and chosen the masculine world of intellectual achievement for the power and freedom it seemed to offer. She was conscious of her femininity, yet having rejected the conventional female role, she felt
insecure about herself. She was not a firm believer in the feminist causes. Her lack of self-confidence and her sense of inadequacy as a woman were the two significant factors that contributed to her scorn for marriages. Neither Elizabeth Barrett nor her family perceived her as a complete woman; thus, the survivor of such conflict was the child seeking father for affection and safety.

The third factor in Barrett's quest involved society. She disapproved the angelic role of the nineteenth century women, but to take a firm stand against the male dominated society involved more than Barrett could handle. Struggle for equality, for independence begins within the smallest unit of society, at home. By turning against her own femininity to secure her father's love, by overpowering every member of her family on unequal terms, by starvation, by addiction, by seclusion, by hysteria and other neurotic disorders to secure her immediate needs, she exiled herself. By displaying a constant need for powerful male figures in her life, she proved a need for reliance. Despite his unreasonable demands on his children, Edward Moulton Barrett had recognized the talent in Elizabeth Barrett and allowed her to visit male and female friends; Kenyon offered her several opportunities to meet powerful literary figures. Finally, Barrett's financial independence was a tremendous tool for a poet with serious convictions to make herself a name for who she was. It was her decision not to "act and
resist."

As noted, Barrett sought refuge in her father. On the one hand, she was a child with a need to love, to be loved, and to be secure; on the other, she was an adult trying to emerge. Yet, since in the Barrett household, independence of any adult Barrett children meant disassociation from the father and deprivation of his love, Elizabeth Barrett fluctuated between a passive dependence on a Victorian patriarch and independence from the patriarchal social order to find herself a place within as a woman poet. While the child in her longed for childhood, which secured paternal love, the adult in her sought individuality, acceptance, and independence. Thus, she struggled, almost always turning to heaven, where God reigns, and where a powerful father figure provides the needs of a child.

As Elaine Showalter notes, "identification with, and dependence upon the father" is common in the works of the nineteenth century women writers (A Literature 61), and the figure of the father in nineteenth-century literature was seen as "a very persuasive myth of power, knowledge and reliability" (Leighton EBB 25-6) as well as freedom. The daughter sought this myth and all it represents; however, the authority of the father prohibited the daughter from gaining such knowledge and freedom (26). This contradiction prevented the daughter from becoming independent, mature, and emotionally stable.
In Barrett’s poetry which I shall deal with shortly the figure of the father appears as the ideal, and the daughter is on a quest to find the father. Although fatherhood is associated with independence and power, it requires obedience and submission from the daughter (Leighton EBB 26). Thus, the daughter finds submission and powerlessness for herself. For Barrett, the power of the father remained all her life; her own words illustrate this point:

Always he has had the greatest power over my heart because I am one of those weak women who reverence strong men. By a word he might have bound me to him hand and foot. (The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning I:291)

These lines display Barrett’s strong emotional attachment to her father. Despite her happy marriage to Robert Browning, she was ready to return to her father if Edward Moulton Barrett let her. Thus, the emotional power of the father on the daughter went on torturing her, for the lack of it indicated the love she had lost forever.

But still my Father’s looks remain
The best Maecenas of my strain;
My gentlest joy, upon his brow
To read the smile, that meets me now—
(W II:43-6)

writes Elizabeth Barrett in "To My Father on His Birthday." Later on, in her Dedication to Poems (1844), she expresses her wish to be a child again "so as to be sure of one smile . . ." (W II:142-43). After a miscarriage, she writes to Miss Mitford that "perhaps after all . . . I should choose the smile of my own father to that of my own child . . . oh
yes, I should & would" (L.MRM, III, 234). Thus pleasing the father and putting a "smile" on his face have become the ultimate object of Barrett's quest even if it meant unconditional loyalty, powerlessness, and weakness.

In "A Romance of the Ganges," seven maidens, each carrying "a little lamp," "a lily," and "a hope," place their lamps, lilies and hope in their boats. "When the boat hath carried the lamp,/ Unquenched till out of sight,/ The maiden is sure that love will endure" (32-4). Luti's light goes out; since the continuance of the light symbolizes their lovers' fidelity, the loss of Luti's light indicates that her lover has abandoned her. Luti is a strong woman, and she has suffered much in life; first she has lost her father and now her lover. Luti calls Nuleeni, a shy and weak young woman. Nuleeni's symbolic light lasts indicating that the lover chooses this weaker, younger, and more innocent girl.

Luti is the young woman on whom Barrett puts special emphasis. In addition to her charm and beauty, Barrett furnishes Luti with realistic characteristics. She is confident, strong, and assertive. She has a deep voice (155), a "dread" laugh (182), and "wild" eyes (183). She refuses to cry for the lover she has lost, for tears imply weakness. Luti is almost the opposite of the Nuleeni; she is "a powerful and self-assertive woman, but in Barrett Browning's ballads men generally prefer weak ones" notes
Dorothy Mermin ("Barrett Browning’s Stories" 13:102). Since confidence, strength, power, assertiveness are characteristics attributed to male characters, from the beginning Barrett implies that this woman is out of place. As Luti has guessed, her lover has preferred Nuleeni, the weak and more childish Nuleeni.

Revenge is Luti’s only way of release, and she gets her revenge by spoiling Nuleeni’s happiness first by her revelations and then by her suicide. She pressures Nuleeni to vow that once married, she will constantly remind her husband of his unfaithfulness to Luti:

Frail symbols? None are frail enow
For mortal joys to borrow!—
While bright doth float Nuleeni’s boat,
She weepeth dark with sorrow

(XXIII. 209-12)

It is unusual for Barrett Browning to create vindictive female characters. Glennis Stephenson notes that Luti’s vindictiveness is at odds with Barrett Browning’s conception of love; none of her later heroines is ever allowed to exact such tragic vengeance--at least intentionally. . . The rejected woman in Barrett Browning’s poems usually continues to love, but repressed desire inevitably emerges in various contradictory ways. (43)

Yet, as Dorothy Mermin notes, by creating a woman enraged by the indifference of the symbolic world to her emotional needs, Luti has destroyed the effectiveness of the symbols that offer themselves, rather as the poet has revised the symbols--the picture--given her to work with. Writing ballads was a way of presenting herself as one woman poet among others, but she used the opportunity to criticize the conventions in which
she had to work. (EBB: The Origins of a New Poetry 73-4)39

When Mary Russell Mitford had requested Barrett to write a poem for Findens’ Tableaux, she had specific instructions about the content of the poem; it had to illustrate

a very charming group of Hindoo girls floating their lamps upon the Ganges—launching them, I should say. You know that pretty superstition . . . I want a poem in stanzas . . . long enough for two pages . . . within a fortnight or three weeks if possible . . . . (Mitford II:197)

Mitford regarded the subject “the very prettiest subject and, I think, the prettiest plate of the whole twelve” (2:197). Despite Mitford’s expectation of a “pretty” composition to accompany the engraving, the poem deals with vindictiveness, unfaithfulness, and suicide. Once again, Barrett took advantage of the opportunity to reveal, in the silhouette of Nuleeni, the unspoken reality of what constitutes “pretty” in this patriarchal Victorian society—weak, shy, childish, and angelic woman.

Maybe the most significant aspect of the poem is revealed in the ninth stanza:

’I do remember watching
Beside this river-bed,
When on my childish knee was leaned
My father’s head;
I turned mine own to keep the tears
From falling on his face:
What doth it prove when Death and Love
Choose out the self-same place?’
The river floweth on.

(73-81)

When the lover is lost, Luti compares the two significant loves in her life. On the one hand, there is the faithful
paternal love, on the other there is the faithless romantic love (Leighton EBB 37). "'I weep no faithless lover where/ I wept a loving father'" (88-9) cries Luti declaring her choice of the paternal love. However, the choice Luti makes involves a decision of life or death. Since her father is dead, Luti drowns herself to remain faithful to the memory of the father's love which she had known as a child. "It is my fancy, thus to seem to return to a visible personal dependence on you, as if indeed I were a child again" writes Elizabeth Barrett in the "Dedication" to her father (W 2:143). Similarly, "to be a child again" and to return to a permanent childhood sealed by death is the main impulse behind Luti’s suicide and many of Barrett’s poems.

The effective forces present in "A Romance of the Ganges" are father and lover. The father offers faithfulness in death, but only as a child and in her childhood innocence can Luti find the secure paternal love. As Leighton notes

> the father is dead, not by some sad chance, but because the daughter lives. The connection between the father’s death and the daughter’s life is a profoundly suggestive and influential one, which . . . sanctions the suicidal direction of the ending. (EBB 37)

Thus, father offers his faithful paternal love as well as her childhood.

As Leighton notes, "To My Father on His Birthday" (1826) "acknowledges his [Edward M. Barrett’s] power to inspire her [Elizabeth Barrett’s] love and to make all other loves seem poor by comparison" (EBB 24):
. . . when the lyre was scarce awake,
I lov'd its strings for thy lov'd sake;
Woo'd the kind Muses—but the while
Thought only how to win thy smile—

(W I:35-8)

Mr. Barrett's power on the poet was tremendous, but it is
not so uncommon since the father figure in the nineteenth-
century literature was conceived as

a very persuasive myth of power, knowledge and
reliability. It is a myth which the socially
dependent but ambitious daughter has her reasons
to perpetuate. The father's superior education and
freedom of movement are both privileges which she
desires for herself, if not literally, at least
imaginatively. He is the sign of a power to be
envied, courted and gained. However, the social
and moral authority of the father is also a force
which prohibits the daughter from seeking too much
knowledge, freedom or power of her own. While he
is, on the one hand, a sign of what the daughter
desires for herself, he is also, on the other
hand, a sign that restricts her desires. This
contradiction forcefully shapes her attitude to
him.

(Leighton EBB 25-6)

Thus, Barrett's fancy "to return to a visible personal
dependence" ("Dedication" W, II:142-43) on her father is a
recurrent underlying theme of many of her poems and the
objective of her life-long struggle.

"The Lay of the Brown Rosary" has a similar theme.

Onora gives her soul to the devil to ensure that she lives
to be married. As Mermin writes "female self-assertion
alienates--here, kills--the lover: he dies at the altar, and
then she repents and dies too" (EBB 93). The poem deals with
the father/daughter relationship and the grown up daughter's
desire to be a child again.
The poem begins with Onora's mother calling her:

'ONORA, Onora,'—her mother is calling,
She sits at the lattice and hears the dew falling
Drop after drop from the sycamores laden.
With dew as with blossom, and calls the maiden,
'Night cometh, Onora.'

Onora does not respond to her mother's call. She ignores her mother, for she does not recognize her as authority, and she is determined to be a woman and to unite with her lover. In the second part of the poem, the first angel reiterates the loss of childhood by "bartering love;/ God's love for man's" (117). Onora confirms the angel by confessing in her dream that "... I was no child, I was betrothed that day;/ I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not give away" (2.167-8).

To the evil spirit, Onora's dream of her father is a threat: "I only walk among the fields, beneath the autumn-sun,/ With my dead father, hand in hand, as I have often done" (137-8). Onora assures the evil spirit that her thought is "most innocent" (133). This childhood innocence and the natural desire to reach womanhood are the two clashing forces. The evil spirit is not satisfied with Onora's assurance. It realizes that Onora's father is closely associated with God. To Onora, he is still the all-powerful and loving parent, but the evil spirit recognizes the divine qualities assigned to the father. At times, God and the father are almost indistinguishable. As Peter Dally points out, Barrett perceived "her father and God in much
In a letter to Browning, Elizabeth Barrett writes:

the deep, tender, affection and below all those patriarchal ideas of governing grown-up children in the way they must go! and there never was (under the strata) a truer affection in a father's heart--no, not a worthier heart in itself . . . The evil is in the system--and he simply takes it to be his duty to rule . . . . like the Kings of Christendom, by divine right.

\[L.RB/EBB\text{ I:69}\]

Edward Barrett is the "High Priest" (\textit{L.MRM III:127}), and his "principle of passive filial obedience" was drawn from "Scripture" (\textit{L.RB/EBB I:408})\textsuperscript{a}. Thus, just as Barrett attributed Godly qualities to her father, her protagonist Onora furnishes her father with divine powers.

Onora hears her dead father calling: "'Come forth, my daughter, my beloved, and walk the fields with me!'" (144), and the dutiful daughter responds: "'. . . God decreed my death and I shrank back afraid./ Have patience, O dead father mine! I did not fear to die--'" (161-62). Although Onora attributes a Godly quality to her dead father unknowingly, the evil spirit sees that Onora's thought is "too near to heaven" (2.130). Onora desires love and womanhood; thus, she vows to the evil spirit "upon the rosary brown" : "I would not thank God in my weal, nor seek God in my woe" (2: 208). As Leighton points out, "the distribution of moral forces in the poem means that the family is on the side of God's decree that Onora must die, unwed" (\textit{EBB 35}) as a pure and innocent child. Thus, the
father's desire for Onora's death is indicative of his
desire to keep the girl a child and his denial of womanhood
to her. So Onora must die and not live and love and be her
adult self. God intervenes and punishes Onora. Losing her
lover at the altar, Onora cries: "'I surrender to thee/ The
broken vow's pledge, the accursed rosary,—/ I am ready for
dying!'" (28.352-54). And Onora dies. It is the father "who
gives emotional validity to the decree" and "who sides with
God in making her other desires sinful" and who prohibits
her even if it means commanding the daughter's death
(Leighton EBB 37). Since her death takes place before the
marriage is consummated, she joins her father as the
innocent and pure daughter he wanted her to remain. This
reading of the poem is complemented by Mr. Barrett's
fixation about his adult children's affairs:

My own father, if he knew that you had written to
me so, & that I had answered you--so even . .
would not forgive me at the end of ten years--&
this . . . in no disrespect to our name & your
position . . though he does not over-value poetry
even in his daughter, & is apt to take the world's
measures of the means of life . . but for the
singular reason that he never does tolerate in his
family (sons or daughters) the development of one
class of feelings. (L.RB/EBB I:196)

The feeling in reference is love. Since Mr. Barrett had "an
obliquity--an eccentricity, or something beyond--on one
class of subjects," he forbade all his children love and
marriage. And Elizabeth was "the purest woman he ever knew"
because she had not "troubled him with the iniquity of love
affairs, or any impropriety of seeming to think about being
A puzzling factor in "The Lay of the Brown Rosary" is the intense emotion buried in the father's calls. As Leighton notes, the father's call "sounds as emotionally compelling as an earthly lover's. The father calls his daughter, like Solomon calling his 'beloved'" (EBB 35-6). He is offering not only love, but security, dependence, and childhood. Onora's words reinforce this conviction:

Have patience, O dead father mine! I did not fear to die--
I wish I were a young dead child and had thy company!
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-year child,
And wearing only a kiss of thine upon my lips that smiled!

(2.162-166)

Once again, Barrett's fancy in "Dedication" "to return to a visible personal dependence on you, as if indeed I were a child again" surfaces (W II:142-43).

Thus, to put a "smile" on the face of the all-powerful father figure, to belong to him even if it means death, and to access all that he represents, the power, the knowledge, the freedom, and the security, are the incentives that lead many of Barrett's women characters to death.

In both poems, "The Romance of the Ganges," and "The Lay of the Brown Rosary," the daughters are innocent victims of paternal love. According to Angela Leighton, these poems proclaim that to find the "lost plentitude and peace," the daughter must die and not love others, and not write; the
daughter's death while

still a child to the father is to renounce . . . the power of writing also. It is that consciousness of power which is indicatively lacking in these ballads, but which, when it is present, creates a conflict of purpose that lies at the heart of Barrett Browning's father-centered poetics. (EBB 38)

Elizabeth Barrett had to silence her feminine side to keep her father's affection alive. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar declare, "self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative 'I AM' cannot be uttered if the 'I' knows what it is" (17). For Elizabeth Barrett, self-definition came naturally, for she could not conceive herself outside the child role drawn by her father.

... I have been a submissive daughter, & this from no effort, but for love's sake . . . because I loved him tenderly, (& love him). (L.RB/EBB I:248)

If submissiveness signifies obedience, "purity" implies "self-less," then Barrett is acknowledging herself to be "dead" as Gilbert and Gubar write (21, 25), for "having died to her own desires, her own self, her own life," she has led a "posthumous existence" (25). "I had stood blind in this temple I was about to leave . . that I had seen no Human nature . . . . I was a man dying" (L.RB/EBB I:41)

Elizabeth Barrett writes confirming her barren existence. Since she was "pure of wishes" (L.RB/EBB II:686), she expected Robert Browning to forget that she was a woman (L.RB/EBB I:488). Barrett's attempts to suppress her femininity was analogous with death. The Barrett house was
her prison, her father was the prisoner, and she thought she was happy. "I thought I was happier . . happy, I thought, just because I was tranquil unto death" (L.RB/EBB II:581). When she fell in love with Browning, she resisted the feeling:

I have been ashamed & vexed with myself fifty times for being so like a little girl, . . for seeming to have "affections"; & all in vain: 'it was stronger than I,' as the French say. (L.RB/EBB I:296)

Thus, love conquers death ("A Child's Grave at Florence" 89-90) and "Now I know life from death, . . & the unsorrowful life for the first time since I was a woman" (L.RB/EBB II:581). This awakening at the age of forty was pleasant but temporary for Barrett, for she could never free herself emotionally of her father's hold and continue to seek the silent happiness her father offered. As long as she denied womanhood, she was sheltered in his protective custody. Without the security father Barrett provided, Elizabeth Barrett was merely a typical woman in the nineteenth century Victorian society. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, "women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to mere properties, to characters and images imprisoned in male texts" (12). When the Victorian angel in the house was "exorcised from public life, denied the pleasures (though not the pains) of sensual existence . . . [she] held sway over . . . the kingdom of the dead" (26). They were expected to be pure, submissive, and selfless. In
other words, they were prescribed to be dead (25). "In the severity of her selflessness, as well as in the extremity of her alienation from ordinary fleshly life, this nineteenth century angel-woman becomes . . . a memento of otherness" which implies dead (24). As Ann Douglas reminds us, "the tombstone is the sacred emblem in the cult of the overlooked" (202). By surrendering her self, her comfort and desires, she sacrifices her life to "death and to heaven" (Gilbert and Gubar 25). Speaking of death, Elizabeth Barrett resolves many of her female characters' conflicts by death. Luti, Onora, Margaret, the runaway slave, Isobel, the page, Bertha, the Duchess submit to death and accept without resistance the invisibility and silence that come with it.

In "The Romaunt of Margret," Margret's domestic role is clear; she takes care of her brother, her sister, and her father. She is also the mother-figure in the family. Margaret's death is a result of her awakening, not specifically of the loss of her lover as suggested by Taplin; it is the "gradual recognition of the murderous instrumentality of her existence" (Cooper 33-4). The shadow that engages Margaret in dialogue is Margret's own consciousness. As in Tennyson's "The Two Voices," there is the voice of negation imposing the truth on the self. As a woman, Margret is not supposed to "think" (L.RB/EBB I:261). As long as she does not think, she leads a smooth life displaying "subserviency of opinion" (Elizabeth Barrett
Browning: Hitherto Unpublished Poems and Stories with an Inedited Autobiography 24). Her life is filled with mundane chores to satisfy the domestic needs of the family, and she has that "feminine softness" (24). Thus, Margret neatly fits into the image of the Angel in the House; she is the "ideal" woman. The poem depicts what happens to the "angel" when she begins to "think" and see herself through a "thinking," independent mind. Margret had always thought that she was loved unconditionally by her father, brother, and sister regardless of her domestic services at home. As reality, in the shape of a shadow, dooms her, Margret's insignificance, and her meaningless existence overwhelm her and lead her to her death.

Margret's shadowy conscience, which is not allowed to find a clear shape under the committed self's suppression, begins a dialogue with the self, and the self discovers that it lacks the sustenance of life, which is love. Maybe due to the strong prohibition and the absence of an outward love in the Barrett household, Elizabeth Barrett found "love" to be essential for happiness and survival. Mr. Barrett never showed his affection to his children openly. In July 16, 1846 Elizabeth Barrett writes to Browning that her father did not think it "worth while to love me openly enough--." Mr. Barrett had "an obliquity . . an eccentricity . . . on one class of subjects" (L.RB/EBB I:394). He believed Elizabeth to be "the purest woman he ever knew" because she
had not "troubled him with the iniquity of love affairs, or any impropriety of seeming to think about being married" (L.RB/EBB II:1072). In her poem "Love," she defines love as the essential ingredient of life:

    We cannot live, except thus mutually
    We alternate, aware or unaware,
    The reflex of life

(1-3)

It was certainly true for her. Margret’s consciousness brings the self to acknowledge that her life is devoid of love. Since, "Love, strong as Death, shall conquer Death,/ Through struggle made more glorious" ("A Child’s Grave at Florence" 89-90), where there is no Love, Death triumphs, and Margret dies. Margret’s initiation to her realization is "unnatural," for truth will bring dissatisfaction to the angel in the house and will destroy the submissive woman; the result will be the death of the "Angel" in the house and the birth of a "thinking" person with an independent mind. The external nature, likewise, seems to be "in a mystic dream" as Margret "thinketh of a voice,/ Albeit uttering none" (III). As the loves surrounding her are dismissed by the conscience one by one, the physical environment around her withers as well, displaying her colorless, "dull," and "unnatural" existence (Cooper 56).

There is no explanation about where Margret’s mother may be. Barrett’s thoughts of her mother are similar to those of Margret’s after her awakening. In a letter to Browning, Barrett describes her own mother as the "dearest"
person in her life, "very tender," "sweet," and "gentle,"

One of those women who never can resist,—but in
submitting & bowing on themselves, make a mark, a
plait, within,.a sign of suffering. Too womanly
was she—it was her only fault.

(L.RB/EBB 2:1012)

Margret's "fault" was the same; she was too "womanly," and
not equipped to face the "cold" in the "sun" (I). Likewise,
in "Amy's Cruelty," the speaker tortures her lover because
"'He wants my world, my sun, my heaven,/ Soul, body, whole
existence'" (23-24). Amy refuses to be so womanly

'Unless he gives me all in change,
I forfeit all things by him:
The risk is terrible and strange--
I tremble, doubt, . . . deny him.'

(32-36)

Amy is a strong woman; instead of giving "all" to the lover
and losing her "self," she chooses to deny him. However,
this denial brings her little satisfaction because now, she
has to live with a mouse, dog, bee, and cat. Although
Barrett regards being so "womanly" not a quality but a
"fault," as in Amy's case, she is aware that the "fault" is
what Victorian women considered a quality.

The female protagonist of "The Runaway Slave at
Pilgrim's Point" fights back. From the beginning, however,
her struggle is futile. She is a female black slave opposing
traditional and theological values that set the grounds for
her misery. She is raped and impregnated by her white
master. She protests by suffocating her son to be "still and
mute"; then, she awaits her death tied up with ropes "to the
flogging-place" (XXXII). Although she faces death bravely and quietly, without a "shriek" or a "sound," she accomplishes nothing (XXXIII).

Allowing the "white" child to live, mothering him, loving him, and seeing the "master" look on his face would indicate the woman’s passive submission to the white male. So, the black mother watches the son of the "master" race moan and struggle,

. . . beat with his head and feet,
His little feet that never grew;
He struck them out, as it was meet
Against my heart to break it through:

(XIX)

As death takes the "whiteness" of the infant, in her mind she succeeds. By turning the "white" infant into "a dark child in the dark!" she kills the white man in the child and believes she has won her fight against the white male. By killing the child, she claims to have saved him from her "curse" (XXI). "... To save it from my curse," (XXI) is her attempt to justify her killing of the infant. Thus, she believes to actually have done a good deed by suffocating her son.

However, as she herself approaches death by flogging, she announces:

In the name of the white child waiting for me
In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
White men, I leave you all curse-free
In my broken heart’s disdain!

(XXXVI: 5-8)

These lines are significant, for they show her speaking
calmly and rationally, displaying a reversal of faith. Now that the destructive feelings of anger and revenge are replaced, she acknowledges her lack of faith in a pleasant union with her son, the impossibility of undoing the injustice done to her, as well as the ineffectuality of her deed.

In Barrett's poetry, the theme of consolation is almost always accompanied by the assurance of a pleasant reunion after death. In "The Mourning Mother," for instance, the narrator consoles the unhappy mother that her blind son is in Heaven, and one day they will unite:

But thou art now the darkest,  
Thou mother left below--  
Thou, the sole blind,—thou markest,  
Content that it be so, --  
Until ye two have meeting  
Where Heaven's pearl-gate is,  
And he shall lead thy feet in,  
As once thou leddest his.  
Wait on, thou mourning mother! 
(74-82)

The certainty of their pleasant meeting is what consoles the mourning mother. Yet, the slave mother lacks that assurance: "we may kiss and agree" (XXXVI:6) she says displaying her doubt of a pleasant meeting. Now that she realizes she has murdered her son out of rage, there is no assurance for consolation; the possibility that they may not "kiss and agree" remains. Secondly, earlier she had justified the killing of the white child and elevated herself to a savior position. Although she had killed to save the infant from her "curse" (XXI), later, by generously leaving white men
"all curse-free," she lowers herself to the status of a common criminal.

Most important, however, is the fact that she realizes the impossibility of erasing and correcting the harm done to her. Only at the end of the poem, she sees herself powerless and her deed pointless. Upon killing her son, she had said:

All changed to black earth,—nothing white,—  
A dark child in the dark!—ensued  
Some comfort, and my heart grew young;  

(XXVII)

As the child's white skin turned dark as a result of death, the slave mother feels that the "two were reconciled,/ The white child and black mother . . . " (XXVIII). From here on, until the end of the poem, there are only two more references to the child, neither indicating color: "the dead child" and "my very own child." At the end of the poem, however, the "dark child" becomes "the white child waiting for me/ In the death-dark" again. Thus, despite her effort to turn the "white" child into a "dark child," the child waiting for her, she realizes, is still "white." By admitting this fact, she also admits that her protest of the white man's oppression and invasion prove vain. Thus, oppression two-fold in this case brings out the pathetic in the victim. The black woman resents, struggles, rages, and finally dies. Although Cooper says, "unlike her foremothers in Barrett's poetry, this woman is not submissive" (122), the slave woman's acknowledgement of the child as "white" again at the end of the poem, the uncertainty of their
meeting "in the death-dark" to "kiss and agree," and the removal of the curse from white men places her back where she started, a raped and violated female black slave, while the white men remain untouchable.

To Margret in "The Romaunt of Margret," an awakening from her angelic status brings death. The narrator implies the unnatural event that is about to take place: "The sun may shine and we be cold!" (I:7). The chill comes as Margaret sees her life as it is. The Runaway Slave too feels the same chill "—The sun may shine out as much as he will:/ I am cold. . ." (XXIV) after carrying the dead body of her son on her heart for a month until he became a "dark child." Both women react to their status. It is their reaction that proves to be "unnatural," for one prefers death to a loveless life as a "relative" being, the other chooses death to a life of invasion. While women’s "submission to death can be viewed . . . as a rejection of life" (490) as Gilbert and Gubar write, these women’s death of unnatural causes can certainly be viewed as a submissive act.

Another poem that involves a mother and her child is "Isobel’s Child." In the poem, a loving mother desires her sick infant to live, but the infant wishes to die, for earth is full of suffering. Once the child is on the way to recovery, he is no longer a child but has the looks of a "man" uttering words of wisdom. The infant loses his "baby-looks," gains the "earnest gazing deep" of a man and
expresses his desire for death. Since Barrett is committed to the notion of the child-innocent, the loss of the infant's "baby looks" also implies the loss of a child's innocence, and the words spoken voice the viewpoint of an adult, a man of experience preferring death to life.

The mother is put in a position to choose between life and death for her child and for herself. She will either resist the male voice and keep her baby alive, or she will submit to death personified as the child/man. The mother accepts the child/man's death wish happily and easily. For Barrett, speaking through Lady Isobel, a child's health and happiness are what all mothers wish for. Thus, for a mother as devoted and loving as Lady Isobel is, accepting the child's death wish strikes one as unnatural and contradictory. Lady Isobel's submission raises two possibilities: she may be submitting to the male dominancy and being agreeable, or she may simply be sharing a view that prefers death to life. First of all, there is sacrifice and selflessness in Lady Isobel's submission to the child/man's death wish; bereft of the "motherly joy," she remains behind to lead a Death-in-Life existence and longs for the "silence" death will bring (539). Thus, her submission commits her child and herself to death. Secondly, she is in agreement with the fact that life is full of suffering. Then, she is acknowledging that her life is filled with suffering even prior to her child's death. Thus,
the child's death will only add to her suffering while she can console herself with his happiness in the "happy heavenly air" (399). Either way, in Lady Isobel's submission, there is no protest; she yields. In Barrett's depiction of Lady Isobel, there is a woman whose unselfish grace, gentleness, simplicity, nobility, selflessness reveal that she is not only a patternized Victorian lady but almost literally an angel on earth delivering death. As Gilbert and Gubar write, "to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead" (25), and "certainly, imprisoned in the coffin like shape of a death angel, a woman might long demonically for escape" (26) which the silence of death will bring.

Helen Cooper suggests that Barrett's emphasis in the dedication on imagining herself 'a child again' and in the "Preface" to Poems (1844) on her 'lowness' and 'weakness' suggests acceptance of, while in fact rebelling against, the alien tyranny' that defined her as woman-child in both literature and life.

However, in the previous three poems there is no indication of rebellion. On the contrary, all three women do submit. Furthermore, Barrett regards herself as one of the "weak women" who can not "act and resist" when she ought to (Dally 82). Resistance is an inconceivable act for Barrett, for it indicates the loss of her father's affection. So, just as she committed herself to silence and obedience, which meant "death," the female protagonists of her poems passively choose death to action. Margaret dies, for she cannot
continue her domestic life without love; the runaway slave
dies, for she can not accept the violation, and Lady Isobel
longs for the "silence" death will bring (539). At least in
these poems, Elizabeth Barrett endorses women's suppression
by silencing the female characters permanently.

Alethea Hayter finds in Barrett's perception of the
"ideal" woman a "tiresome creature, . . . noble, constant,
self sacrificing, and all blushes, tears and hair down to
the ground" (82-3). Yet, Barrett resents this picture of the
"Ideal Woman" and its endorsement by Victorian England. "The
Romaunt of the Page," for instance, introduces a woman
"who succumbs to an ideal of 'womanly virtues' that the poet
both scorns and shares" (Mermin EBB 91). The heroine
disguises herself as a page and follows her husband to the
Crusades. As the couple ride, the page wants to reveal her
secret to her husband. Instead, she says:

'. . . mine own sister
Was in thy lady's case:
But she laid down the silk she wore
And followed him she wed before,
Disguised as his true servitor,
To the very battle-place'

(184-89)

The knight does not recognize her and utters "a careless
laugh" (191). He believes that women's place is at home and
that his

'. . . love, so please you, shall requite
No woman, whether dark or bright,
Unwomaned if she be.'

(194-96)

He would "forgive, and evermore/ Would love her as my
servitor,/ But little as my wife" (227-29). The page resents all that she hears, but she still warns the knight about the enemy and urges him to ride fast. While fighting in his defense, she takes a fatal wound, and in agony she cries:

'Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifehood unto thee,
. . . . . . . . . . . .
Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have
A lady to thy mind,
More woman-proud and half as true
As one thou leav' st behind!
(276-83)

Through the woods echoes "a dirge for abbess laid in shroud" (341). As Mermin states, the page is a "heroic figure whose denunciation of the knight's womanly ideal the poet evidently approves" (EBB 92): "False page, but truthful woman" (297). Yet she chooses a Victorian woman's fate for the page: "unrecognized, self-sacrificing," and dead (EBB 92).

Another poem that deals with a similar choice is "Bertha in the Lane." The speaker is telling her younger sister Bertha that she overheard Bertha and her lover to discover that he loved Bertha, and not herself. As in the "Romance of Ganges" and other poems, the lover chooses the weaker woman, Bertha, not the assertive, aggressive, strong one (Mermin EBB 92). On her deathbed, their mother had asked the elder daughter "'Child, be mother to this child!'" (V), and "with her last sacrifice she fulfills her promise" (92) to her mother and her duties as a mother to Bertha. She feels her mother's strong presence in the room; her "smile
is bright and bleak/ Like cold waves—I cannot speak,/ I sob
in it, and grow weak" (47-49). To be a mother is sacrificing
everything, and she "has given/ All the gifts required of
me,—" which are

Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,
Love that left me with a wound,
Life itself that turneth round!

(38-42)

She fulfills her promise and furnishes her sister with
"hope," "love," "bliss," and "life itself"; after these
sacrifices, she admits in resentment that she has no reason
left to go on living. As Gilbert and Gubar regard her, she
is a "dying angel" (463).

"Rhyme of the Duchess May" displays "the same double
vision of female self-assertion that the other ballads do"
(Mermin EBB 93). Earl, the Duchess's uncle and ward betroths
her to his son Lord Leigh "for the sake of dowry gold"
(VIII) when she was twelve years old. The Duchess refuses to
marry him, and elopes with Sir Guy of Linteged. The couple
marry in a chapel at midnight and continue their flight.
Months later, the rejected cousin with "five hundred archers
tall stand beside the castle wall/ To recapture Duchess May"
(XXIV). During the course of the battle, Sir Guy of Linteged
realizes that he is losing the battle: "... I could not
sleep in grave, with the faithful and the brave/ Heaped
around and over me" (XLV), and he chooses to "die nobly for
them all" (XLI III). He decides to ride his horse off the top
of the castle tower to kill himself and to end the battle.
The Duchess, he assumes, "'will weep her woman's tears, she will pray her woman's prayers--/ But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will spring again/ By the suntime of her years" (LI). "He, like her uncle and cousin, has a low opinion female fidelity and courage" (Mermin EBB 93). He does not need a woman around when he has to attend work: "'In this hour I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed/ But no more of my noble wife" (LXXIV). She protests his decision to leave her behind: "'Meekly have I done all thy biddings under sun:'/ 'But by all my womanhood, which is proved so, true and good,/ I will never do this one" (LXXV) and "'In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan steed,/ Thou hast also need of me" (LXXVII). The Duchess leaps into the saddle, and goes with him over the castle. "Her behavior . . . is both womanly in the best sense and unsuitable for a woman" (Mermin EBB 93). Although she "asserts the strength of a 'woman's will' (81)," we are continuously reminded of her softness, sweetness, meekness, and her tiny hands (Mermin EBB 93). The narrator meditates on the Duchess's story at the grave of "Maud, a Three-Year Child." "Now, your will is all unwilled; now, your pulses are all stilled;/ Toll slowly./ Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso laid) as Maud the child" (VI). Thus, "the self-assertive woman is as helpless as a little girl, and the narrator turns for comfort to a paternal God" (Mermin EBB 93).
Sue Spaull in "Gynocriticism" examines the relationships in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and concludes that "the women are associated with the innocent, natural world, incapable of combating the power of their male counterparts. Like the heron, their only 'defense was flight, invisibility'" (112). Similarly, Barrett depicts children as "wicked" with "no cure," women as "sobbing out of sight" with "no help" in a patriarchal social order. Both women and children are rendered as the victims of this order, doomed to "darkness." Yet, lacking the power to resist the oppression built into the system, their only alternative is "sobbing out of sight" (Gilbert and Gubar 638) and enduring, if not death. Barrett does realize the male desire to dominate as a feature of all patriarchal societies, and although she reacts to it, the fear and anxiety of coming into sight, that is of resistance, and her submissive nature weaken her protests. Thus, as she herself felt "happy" when she was "tranquil unto death" (*L.RB/EBB* I:581) 82, the female protagonists in many of her poems seek similar tranquility in death and heaven.
CHAPTER III

IMAGES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Death has certainly provided an escape for many Victorian women writers. As for Elizabeth Barrett, it has been the consequence of alienation, submission, and most of all her nature. Besides death, Barrett has used other symbolic narratives as an alternative to life. Sue Spaull in "Gynocriticism" asserts that "the search for self identity is a theme common to much women's writing, and the mirror is constantly used to symbolize this search due to its ability to trap an image of the self" (100). In Barrett's works, the children function as mirrors and reflect the poet's self-image. Since Barrett conceives of childhood and womanhood alike, as passive dependence, suffering, alienation, and weakness, when she identifies with the child, the child lacks individuality and becomes a mirror of the poet's self image. These narratives, Spaull suggests, provide an "escape," for the "good" ladies like Barrett to act out their own protest in the name of children. They also offer a "kind of solution, if not a good one, to women's difficulty in situating themselves within poems" (Mermin Godiva's Ride 75).

As Barrett expresses in "To My Father On His Birthday," her "gentlest joy in life has been "to read the smile" (W
of her father and her ultimate wish has been to be a child again. According to Helen Cooper (57-8), it is this desire to return to childhood, to remain her father's little girl that has reserved her a woman-child status. Barrett never denies "being so like a little girl" (L.RB/EBB I:296), nor is she defensive when her brothers call her "absurdly childish" (L.RB/EBB I:52). Thus, being childlike is merely a fact about Elizabeth Barrett. In consequence, identifying women with children in her poems comes naturally.

Elizabeth Barrett projects upon children the condition of moral innocence derived from Lockean epistemology and Christian commonplaces. Despite Taplin's observation that Barrett's knowledge and extensive studies in Greek was a waste of the talented poet's time, that "her time might have been more profitably employed than in reading Gregory, Basil, Chrysostom, Synesius, and the other Greek Fathers" (51), the influence of the traditional thought, the classics, the Greeks and Romans, and of Christianity can be traced in her poems dealing with women and children. In her poems, children are angelic, fragile, and divine. "Only a Curl," for instance, depicts an emotional scene: a grieving mother is holding "a single gold curl" of her buried child (I:4). The narrator assures the mother that she "knows the secret of Grief" (III:5), for she knows the love of a child. The poem continues to assure that the child is a
gift of God, and "He loves to the end," and when he takes
the child back, "'T is to add to it" (XI:2,4). The child is
depicted as "a sweet piece/ Of the Heaven which men strive
for" (XIII:2-3) and a smiling angel in Heaven. It is in her
notion of childhood and her treatment of the child as
innocent, alienated, and suffering that we find the
influence of Barrett's extensive reading most apparent.

Robert Pattison points out that "the child figure in
English literature generally appears in thematic
surroundings which discuss the Fall of Man, and that the
norm against which we have become accustomed to measure
these discussions is the Christian doctrine of Original Sin" (x). Pattison remarks that

Augustine's doctrine laid the foundation for the
child as a literary image. He had connected
childhood and sin, made the infant an adult of
sorts, and surrounded him with a fallen nature,
which existed in that condition because of man's
fallen will. To this he added the concept of a
second birth in baptism, a true and mysterious
innocence as distinct from the seeming innocence
of the child's weak limbs as the earthly city is
from the city of God. The Pelagians and
Semipelagians had argued for a primary innocence
in the child, an innocence inherent in the flesh.
(19)

In the treatment of children, Elizabeth Barrett constantly
accents this Pelagian heresy that the child is essentially
innocent. In "A Song Against Singing," for example, Barrett
addresses E.J.H, and describes her as a "sweet," "lovely,"
and "pretty" child (III:2; VI:2.3); childhood is "lovelier"
than anytime (VI:2), a "gift" from "new-creating God" with a
heart "without its stain/Of weakness, ignorance, and changing vain—" (V:4-5). The child looks at the world in innocence "with eyes unknowing how tears dim the sight,/And feet all trembling at the new delight/ Treaders of earth to be!" (I:4-6). The child sees the world with "bright uncomprehending eyes" (IV:5), with "eyes unknowing" (I:4) while the adult, with the human heart/Made heavy with accumulated tears/And cross with such amount of weary years" (III:35), has a blurred vision. As "tears dim the sight" (I:4), the childhood innocence, the child's stainless heart immerses in "weakness, ignorance, and changing vain," (V:4-6) and the time of "play" is lost for ever to "toil and tremble" (VII:3).

The song an adult can sing is the "sound of sad humanities," (IV:4), which will only receive the child's "uncomprehending eyes" (IV) and the child will prefer "play," not the song. Unable to recognize "wrath," the child laugh, and sheds "gentle tears not out of grief" ("The Little Friend"). In "A Portrait" the ten-year-old girl's smile is described as "half holy" (34) as if resulting from divine thoughts that the adult world cannot comprehend (36). Thus, neither can the child fully understand the adult world nor can the adult fully conceive the depth of a child's innocence.

Barrett endows her children with the same "visionary gleam." Barrett's children see through the "heart" until
their "childish vision" and "wandering looks" depart with maturity ("The Little Friend" II:5,7). This view of the child resembles Plato's optimistic view in *Phaedo* that the child coming from the realm of Ideas, "possesses the Ideas in their purest form." Similarly, Pelagius had asserted that man was endowed with sufficient grace from birth to lead a perfect life, if he could; that Adam's sin was not binding on his posterity. . . . Pelagius was within the traditions of the early Church as well as those of Greek philosophy in his denial of Original Sin as Augustine conceived it (13-14), and the early Church seemed to favor Pelagius. Pelagius's notion represented a "threat to the mythic and dogmatic unity of the Christian faith" (5), which demanded "a religion joining all mankind in pervasive and original error--error not reasonably committed by rational adults but residing in the will even of infants" (5). The Christian dogma of Original Sin first appears in the Old Testament as the God of Genesis curses Adam for his disobedience. After the flood, God remarks that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21); the psalmist says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (51:5). Yet, the "mixture of sufferance and wrath that the Church visited upon the young is nowhere to be found in the Old Covenant" (Pattison 10). The Augustinian position "brought down upon the child the great weight of Christian dogma, making him a centerpiece" (17). In the Augustinian view, "the child is perhaps subrational", but he is a
"creature of will, a sinner, above, and in this no different from adults" (18). So,

for the Augustinian, the child became an adult figure, his innocence a purely negative phenomenon residing in his lack of bodily development but not in his lack of wilfulness. To the Pelagians . . . Augustine's position seemed both unreasonable and severe . . . and his stress on the corruption of the will, even in childhood, removed reason from the supreme position it had held in the mainstream of Greek and Roman thought. (Pattison 18-19)

Years later, Elizabeth Barrett Browning plays the role of Pelagius, championing thoughts of an older belief. She drops the accent on solitary and innocent children. In "A Child's Grave in Florence,"88 Barrett endows "splendors" that begin with the birth of a child. As the child grows, "splendors" fade and are remembered by the adult, who cannot comprehend the divine thought that put a "half holy" smile on the child's face ("A Portrait" 34, 36). For Barrett, childhood attracts divine powers. "Holy childhood," Barrett writes in "A Child Asleep," has power and dignity. Like a crown, it brings not only power, but brings "overfair" smiles from the child's "ethereal mouth" (VII). Angels "fine down this childish beauty/ To the things it must be made" before the child reaches maturity or dies (XII). During sleep, the child is depicted in terms of a holy being. He is "consecrated," "lifted up and separated/On the hand of God he lies/In a sweetness beyond touching, held in cloistral sanctities" (X 3-6). In "A Portrait," the poet would "sing of her," the painter "would paint her unaware/with a halo
round the hair," the reader would "whisper 'You have done a/
Consecrated little Una'" (38, 41-2, 44-5). To a dreamer, she
would resemble an "angel," in a stranger she would bring a
smile. All hearts pray "God love her!" and ". . . HE DOETH"
(58, 60). Thus, the child in her pure innocence seems to
resemble an unearthly being. In "A Child's Grave at
Florence," for instance, the little girl's death brings the
mother to admit the unworthiness of life: "Saying 'The
Angels have thee, Sweet,/ Because we are not worthy'" (55).
The child is depicted as a gift from God. As God takes the
gift back, on earth, she has with her ". . . the Heaven's
completeness" (108). Not only in death, but also in sleep
the child is described as if he is in Heaven. In "A Child
Asleep," the sleeping boy sees "brighter colors than the
open [eyes] ever do" with his "folded eyes" (II 5-6). The
flowers "mandragore," "nosegays" are dismissed only to be
replaced by the never dying flowers like "Amaranthus," the
"Heaven-flowers" springing under "the palms" indicating the
child's close association with the divine. In the "garden"
under the "summer sun," the child is "darker;" yet in his
dream amongst the "eternal flowers, the "singing spirits,"
the child loses his humanly existence. "Holy childhood"
attracts the divine powers and turns the silence into music,
even the mutest of all objects, the stars, "go in music all
the way" (V 5-6). Before the beauty of the child, adults can
see their "weakness and sense the holiness of the beauty
before their eyes (XI) The child is "harmless," adults are "sinful;" the child is "at ease," adults are "troubled;" the child is "virtuous" and "divine" and "most Godly" that adults may "be blessed by his peace, and go in peace" (XII 5-6). Thus the children, as depicted in these poems, seem separated from an earthly life. They are innocent, angelic, fragile, and powerless.

Elizabeth Barrett’s faith in a God gives the basic structure to most of her poetry. To the religious mind, all nature reveals itself as cosmic sacredness. It is the Power that reveals itself in nature is worshipped. As van der Leeuw points out, worldwide mountains have been regarded as seats of Power; huge trees have been regarded as evidence of the unity of the cosmos, with roots in the underworld, the trunk on earth and branches in the heavens (23-58). Nature is a divine creation filled with religious value: the different modalities of the sacred are manifest in the structure of the world (Eliade 116). John Ruskin describes an account of his own experience regarding Nature as a manifestation of the sacred: "... the joy of nature seemed to me to come from a sort of heart-hunger, satisfied with the presence of a Great and Holy Spirit." The religious experience occurs within the mind, yet the world around us gives its shape as van der Leeuw writes (459). Thus, if sacred power is apprehensible by the human mind through the medium of concrete objects, events, persons, and places,
Elizabeth Barrett's placement of the child and woman in nature that carries God's essence associates them with such sacred power. Elizabeth Barrett's perception of women and children as angelic creatures reinforces Elizabeth Barrett's conviction that women are indeed of secondary status in the Victorian society. Her acceptance of the conventional female role is also strongly suggested by the association of her female characters and child figures with nature.

In *Ethics*, Aristotle categorizes beasts and children together excluding virtue or happiness from them (IIIIB: 967-68; IIIIA: 946) regarding the child an animal for her lack of reason. Vergil's Ascanius "reinforces the Aristotelian concept that the child is important not for himself but for his potential" (Pattison 2). Although Platonic philosophy places more significance on the child, in the *Laws*, Plato refers to the boy as the "most unmanageable" animal, "inasmuch as he has the fountain of reason in him not yet regulated, he is an insidious and sharp-witted animal and the most insubordinate of them all" (808D; 2:245). Classical literature's attitude toward children was not one of indifference. The Roman child was thought to have "dignity" and "potential for glory and perfection . . . within the child's still unreasonable being" (6). On the death of their daughter Timoxena, Plutarch's letter to his wife displays not only the unconditional love of a father but also the traditional
attitude toward the death of children. The loss of the child is "unearthly," thus it is better lost in youth than in maturity (Moral Essays 185). Horace’s Lalage "is not a part of the scene around her because of her lack of reason and sexuality" (Pattison 7); the little girl is dismissed till her maturity: the girl lacks the strength of a woman to assume the duties of a wife or to cope with love. Horace’s girl is placed in nature, among animals; then he looks forward to a time when the child will be mature. The disturbing part of Lalage’s playing with the animals, to Horace, lies in the "incompleteness of the girl’s situation, in her association with the animals which makes her humanity ambiguous" (Pattison 8).

Greek and Roman literature as well as Classical Literature treats children as reasonless animals with the potential to become an actual human being. Likewise, from "yin/yang to the Platonic/Christian tradition through the entire Western metaphysical tradition, woman has always been the animal ‘at one with her life activity’" (Winders 58). If "this animal," as Marx would say, "produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature" (Winders 58), then the "patriarchal culture also reproduces the habit of locating woman in the nature thus produced" (58). Thus, the "cultural alienation--the silence, the marginality, the secondary statuses--of women" (Gilbert "What Do?" 35) force
them to seek an identity for themselves. In her search for self-identity and security, Barrett sees her status reflecting in the state of children, in their "silence . . . marginality" (35), in their "low" "weak" and "relative nature." In "The Soul’s Traveling" the narrator cries: "With a child’s voice I cry,/ Weak, sad, confidingly—/ God, God!" (196-99) clearly identifying with children, whom, Barrett admits in "Casa Guidi Windows" as having no reason "until they are of age" (686). In this association, Barrett identifies the women and children alike with the animal.

It is not uncommon to see children and animals placed together. This feature of women’s poetry is particularly common in Victorian England. Mermin writes that when a woman looked for something to take the same relation to her within a poem that female figures take for male poets, the equation often reads: a male poet is to a woman as a female poet is to a child or an animal. Tennyson, in In Memoriam compares his loss to that of a girl whose lover has died, and calls the girl a "meek, unconscious dove" (vi. 25). Barrett Browning, in contrast, writes about real doves ("My Doves"), which like Tennyson’s young woman are less intellectual and closer to God and nature than the poet is. (Godiva’s Ride 74)

Barrett develops an almost pantheistic relationship with the countryside. In her early works, she places women and children within nature, identifying them with flowers, birds, stars, and other natural objects. This is the primitive, the uncivilized nature, a way of life that is "'not man’" (Spaull 101). The order offered by the natural world shelters the women and children from the social order
in which the male desire to dominate is apparent. The women and children are "associated with the . . . natural world, incapable of combating the power of their male counterparts"; their only defense is "invisibility" (112). As Spauld points out, this "affinity with the natural world" reminds one of Levi-Strauss's "symbolic stress between society and nature" (102). She builds on the two axes of the male/female, culture/nature dichotomy with children placed next to the female. Showalter emphasizes the same idea in her cultural model of gynocritics (101). Nature is always depicted as an intense, sensuous, and emotional experience.

Barrett's bird image contained all her loves and fears, all that she admired and feared in the universe. Even Robert Browning referred to her as "half angel and half bird," and both described her as "a bird with one wing broken, but fluttering desperately at the window to get out, or resigning herself to the wires of the cage since Browning is there to feed her 'green groudsel' through them" (Hayter Mrs. Browning 100). She resembled Petrarch's fountain of Vaucluse to a "green singing-bird," the innocent victim whose wrongs forever haunted her imagination to "some curious bird, through each spread wing/ Nailed high up over a fierce hunter's fire" (100).

Black eagles wheeling, a sparrow tapping its way out through the soft egg, the hawk struggling on a strong man's wrist are the images of passion and tenderness; hope builds clay nests, self-pity covers the past with leaves like a robin, family pride swims like a swan in a reservoir. (Hayter
And the voices of these birds "twitter and warble through her poetry" (Hayter 101).

Many of Elizabeth Barrett’s poems depict children as flowers. These children have no feelings, no personalities; they are either dead, or asleep. Their physical features as well as their relation to the world around them create a sense of fragility. "A Child’s Grave at Florence," is written for Alice A. E. Cottrel, the daughter of Sophia and Henry Cottrel, after the child’s death at the age of one. She is the child of nature, for she "looked such kinship to the flowers" and died before fading. Barrett introduces the child as "LILY," "A Tuscan Lily,—only white," (21). Then she extends this lily metaphor and describes the child in terms of a flower. She "perfumed with pure blossom" the house; she is "—a lovely thing to wear/ Upon a mother’s bosom!" (27–28); she is the "July creature," associating with nature, mimicking the "gnat’s humming" (30, 32). While the child lacks human qualities, the earth is personified. She is the mother with pulsing heart, though too weak, to even miss the child. It is cold and weak that missing the spring or the sun takes tremendous effort. The child is "July shining" and her bright features resemble the "July sun." Throughout the poem, the child is never referred to as Alice; she is either "LILY" (17), or "Sweet" (55). The child is lost among the natural images, and this technique
distances us from the girl and even seems to divorce her from her own activity.

Likewise, in "A Vision of Poets," children are "among the trees" and "morning bright;" their voices "breezy noise." In "A Song Against Singing" the child finds pleasure in nature; the child will "... clap thy tiny hands to hear/ The wind or rain, gay bird or river clear" (IV:2-3). The adult is deaf to nature's songs: the "lark" brings a song from the morning clouds, the "merry river" from its lilies, and the "brisk rain" from the trees, the "luck wind" makes its music partly and finds it partly. In "A Portrait" the child is ten years old, and her age is indicated in terms of "lilies" and "sun" (2,3). Again, she resembles a flower. Her face is "lily-clear" and "lily-shaped" (7,8). Then she continues to compare the children to "young birds" and "early wheat as if waiting to be blown over by the wind." Her voice is low like the murmur of "a silver stream" which feels the sun. All who speak to her soften their voices "As if speaking to a bird" (54). The earth is hard again, yet wherever she passes "fancies yearn to cover" the hardness "With the thyme-scented grasses" (55-7). In "Napoleon III/ In Italy" the child's touch is "as soft as a flower" and his smile is "as clear as a star!" (249). Likewise, in "The Cry of the Children," children are compared to young "lambs," "birds," "fawns," "flowers," and to "little thrushes." So, the regular images in Barrett's
depiction of children are flowers, stars, and birds.

In such nature settings, Barrett’s women and children protagonists encounter and identify with the innocent inhabitants of the natural world. "Hector in the Garden" describes imaginative recreation of an incident that occurred when the poet was nine years old; the speaker reminisces about her childhood days when she was closely connected to Nature. She pours out all her creative energies on a flower-bed that resembles Hector. The poem depicts childhood as a time of pleasure spent "In betwixt the country trees,/ And the sun" (II). Barrett identifies the "nine" years of her childhood with the life of "flowers and bees:"

And the sun and I together
Went a-rushing out of doors:
We our tender spirits drew
Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither
In the footsteps of the showers

The child befriends the sun, which is depicted as a living entity with a "spirit." She embraces nature; "the chestnut dripping," "wet and fair" grass, "laurel on the mound," "the pear-tree" fill the garden of childhood. Yet, despite the pleasing atmosphere of nature and her happiness in this paradise, the child is alienated. She is out of contact with the world outside, and the inhabitants of the civilized social order. The child’s pleasure is threatened when rain interrupts her play. As Hayter points out, Barrett’s poetry
written after the death of her brother by drowning lacks the pleasant images of dew and rain; instead the quality of wetness becomes an image of horror (99). "Since as a child, Elizabeth Barrett had regarded control over nature as a paternal prerogative and was terrified of thunder, it is not surprising that Jovian thunder accompanies Hector's arrival" (Mermin EBB 153). Yet, the sorrow and the horror rain brought faded as the child "said for charm against the rain:" "Rain, rain, come tomorrow," (III). The child believed that if this charm was said long enough, "the rain hummed dimly off,/ And the thrust with his pure Lydian/ Was left only to the ear" (IV). An adult would laugh at such innocent faith which relieved the child of her sorrow.

With her active and vivid imagination, the child likens a spade to Hector, the Trojan champion slain by Achilles. It is interesting that Barrett's imagination creates a character who is regarded as a victim in literature. Into her paradise, she does allow a pacified, victimized male figure. Hector in paradise is a puppet: "Arms and legs were stretched at length/ In a passive giant strength,-" amongst "The fine meadow turf, cut finely," (VII). The child-woman's creation of ideal man in paradise reminds us of Marx's comment on an animal producing only itself. With her rake, the child shapes and produces Hector, a lifeless form and fails to express his "dignity" which is in correlation to his active "giant strength," his intimidations, and his
bullying. The child completes this undignified and symbolic creation which reflects her self-image, the position of women and children in its lifeless form—victimized by the nineteenth-century Victorian society. Still, the creation is the ideal male with "Eyes of gentianellas azure," and "Nose of gilly flowers" with "scented grasses put for locks,"
(IX). She decorates the passive warrior with a "Brazen helm of daffodils," "Purple violets for the mouth" and flashing lilies" for the "sword"

And a breast plate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, leaf on leaf;
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shoot their arrows ......the chief.
(XI)

He lacks the strength, power, and freedom—all the qualities she perceived that only men were allowed and women lacked.

The child is so absorbed in this fancy that she

. . . sometimes started
At a motion or a sound!
Did his mouth speak--
. . . . . . . . .
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daisies tremble round?
(XIV)

She receives pleasure in this fancy as long as it is motionless, harmless, and passive, and as long as it allows her to exercise her creativity. This floral hero, of "passive giant strength" was a combination of threat and charm. "But the power and passivity, magic and threat, of life-in-death, (the eyes stare and wink, the locks wave, the
mouth breathless) were fearfully intensified when she imagined the soul of Hector himself 'Rolling up the thunder-roll' (72) in 'a dreary joy' (70) to inhabit the representation" (Mermin EBB 153). The fear of Hector's coming to life in her sheltered presence, is overwhelming and real. The fear is dismissed as the bold songs of the little birds in the "pear tree green and old" soften her terror by "the courage of their glee" (XV). In her fancy, she can be a child and a woman, and at the same time she can exercise her creativity. From her fear of Hector's coming to life, it is nature that relieves her and establishes the sense of security she finds in the primitive, and sheltered natural scene. Thus, nature at one point is an escape for women and children alike from the patriarchal social order.

In "Hector in the Garden," the narrator reverses the situation and creates a man in nature from nature, which implied silence, marginality, innocence, and passivity. If creation of Hector is one of "childhood's bright romances!" (XVI), then we can assume that Barrett did romanticize about the possibility of pacifying the "giant strength" of the male domination and maintaining an harmonious life with women being allowed to practice their creativity. Otherwise, the life is barren, lifeless, and undignified just like Hector's.

Another factor in Elizabeth Barrett's poetry that creates intense sentimentality is the unrealistic
description of women and children. Barrett's Ideal Women like Rosalind in "The Poet's Vow," or the Duchess May, Lady Geraldine, Bertha, and even Eve in "A Drama of Exile" are all "noble, constant, self-sacrificing, and all blushes, tears and hair down to the ground" (Hayter 82). In the 1840s tears and blushes . . . the reddening or whitening cheek, the loose flowing hair, the falling tears were customary and admired . . . . Lips were preferred dewy, eyes brimming, curls straying, complexions varying, dresses flowing and fluttering. (83)

In the 1838 and 1844 volumes, Elizabeth Barrett depicts women and children in a similar fashion. Reading Barrett's "My Kate," one visualizes the picture of perfection. Kate is the ideal; she is "generous," "quiet," "calm," "meaningful," "graceful;" she "thought well of others," "her tone was soft" (III); she is such a person that "men at her side/ Grew nobler, girls purer, as thorough the whole town/ The children were gladder" (V). Kate certainly is a typical Victorian angel, and like many other women in her poetry, death is a better alternative to life. Duchess May's description is typical: She gazes in the mirror and sees herself "blushed right womanly-/ . . . / She blushed half from her disdain, half her beauty so plain" (XXXV). "Calm" was the Duchess all the time. Her "dark hair . . . fell to her shoe" and when she dropped her head low, "her hair coiled on the floor" (LXVI). Such unrealistic depictions of women serve to display how women were idealized and patterned by Victorian men and women alike as physical and
moral idols. It is not so uncommon that all Barrett's "heroines had quantities of hair, often reaching to their feet and generally golden" (Hayter 83). Barrett's fetish of hair is pretty well known; she had long hair all her life and wore it in ringlets until her death at fifty-five. She pressured her son Pen to wear his hair in "flowing golden curls on his shoulders" (83) until 1861; the child was then twelve years old. She spoilt the child and "forced him into . . . emotionalism over her own interests in politics and spiritualism." Yet, she also kept him "in the trappings of a baby, with long golden curls and lace-edged drawers." When she writes about him, she refers to him in terms of "angels and elves and roses" (Hayter 168).93

Hayter also points out that Barrett is "painful in her descriptions of [Pen] . . . and other children" (168-9). "A Child Asleep," "Sleeping and Watching," "A Song Against Singing," "A Portrait," "The Little Friend," and Marian Erle's baby in Aurora Leigh describe children as moppets with dimples and golden curls and visionary eyes. When she writes about her own childhood, she can remember her fear of darkness, her hopes and her struggle among the brambles vividly. Yet, these descriptions are "rare" (169). Her regular form is children with ringlets, dimples, holy smiles, tiny hands and feet, golden curls, celestial visions (169). This romanticizing of women and children suggests that they were sketches, puppets, fantasies, but they were
not real. Unconsciously or consciously, Barrett was sketching how she perceived the position of women and children in Victorian England by creating characters with no individuality, with no or little human characteristics, with unrealistic physical features. It is not so difficult to sense the poet’s resentment in this placement; however, it is just as easy to see her acceptance and submission.

Mermin writes that "children, animals, and angels have done a lot to discredit women poets," for they seem to induce utmost sentimentality which in turn creates shallow poetry (GR 74). While such excessive depictions may seem too unrealistic and idealized today, I do not believe they ever concerned Elizabeth Barrett then because the public received and even adored Barrett’s moppet children with dimples and ringlets, her female characters, "noble, constant . . . and blushes, tears" made for love (Hayter 82). It seems that these creatures were divorced from the life of experience, put on a high pedestal where only poets, angels, and elves could reach and nature could touch, and this fact merely expressed by the poet, was applauded by her Victorian audience.

Children in women’s poems are "beautiful, innocent, made only for love, and seem most poetical when they are strange, alien, and silent: dying, that is, or dead." As Mermin writes they "serve all the nonerotic functions of women in poems by men" (GR 74). In "A Rhapsody of Life’s
Progress," life is described as "sweet" and "strange," a "mild mystery." Likewise, Eve, upon hearing the infant voices passing by expresses her conception of a woman's life as similar to a child's:

- life like ours--
- Of laughter and wailing, of grave speech,
- Of little plaintive voices innocent,
- Of life in separate courses flowing out
- Like our four rivers to some outward main  
  (1642-46).

Like the child, the woman sees competing values, "paradise" and suffering, "laughter" and "wailing," "plaintive" and "innocent" voices in the lives of both children and women. To see such angelic and beautiful creatures "wailing" instead of "laughing" creates an intense emotional response from the readers, but the lack of action and resolution to such suffering leaves one with a sense of emptiness and shallowness.

Often, like fallen or outcast women, these children are the victims of a heartless society, and their apparent helplessness . . . is their defense. As Barrett Browning says in 'the Cry of the Children,' 'the child's sob in the silence curses deeper/ Than the strong man in his wrath' (159-60). A mother's lament for a dead child is the feminine equivalent of a man's lament for a dead beloved, and maternal visions of angelic children or angels that carry them off to heaven are like men's desolating encounters with beautiful nonhuman women. Purity and uncensorious love make children agents of salvation to prostitutes and unmarried mothers, just as pure women are redemptive objects of worship for men.  
(Mermin GR 74)

Gilbert writes in "What Do Feminist Critics Want?" that "women writers have frequently responded to socio-cultural
constraints by creating symbolic narratives that express their common feelings of constriction, exclusion, dispossession" (35). In creating such symbolic narratives, literary women were revising the world view they had inherited from a society that said women mattered less than men did, a society that thought women barely belonged in the great parade of culture, that defined women as at best marginal and silent tenants of the cosmic mansion and at worst guilty interlopers in that house. (35)

As Gilbert remarked, such poetry that placed women and children together in isolation, in a divine setting, in a dead or death-like state, with heavenly appearances is a reflection of Barrett's view of herself. As such, it is also an affirmation of her child-woman position indicating her lack of hope and strength as well as her reluctance for struggle.

Under the pressure of science, industrialization and new dogmas, most Victorian men and women lost their firm conviction in the religious faith. When the Romantic idea of Nature faded away, nineteenth-century writers lost belief in the benign maternity of nature, and nature became an indifferent mother (Mermin GR 130-34) who is "red in tooth and claw" with her children's blood (Tennyson "In Memoriam"). Likewise, influential men like Carlyle perceived of nature in Past and Present as "the Sphinx . . . of womanly celestial loveliness and tenderness" with "the face and bosom of a goddess, but ending in claws and the body of a lioness" (10:7). Huxley described "nature as the cold,
harsh mother of an unloved child" (GR 133): "Nature's discipline is not even a word and a blow, and the blow first; but the blow without the word. It is left to you to find out why your ears are boxed" ("A Liberal Education, and Where to Find It" 34).

Many Victorian writers continued to conceive of women as part of the mysterious and maternal nature. Men, on the other hand, were the interpreters of Nature as Huxley wrote in "A Liberal Education, and Where to Find It."

That man, I think, has had a liberal education, who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order. . . whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of Nature and of the laws of her operations; one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of Nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

Such an one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education; for he is, as completely as man can be in harmony with Nature. He will make the best of her, and she of him . . . she as his ever beneficent mother; he as her mouth-piece, her conscious self, her minister and interpreter. (35)

So, while this Nature generously provides "a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths" for men, she does not offer much to women (GR 133). Elizabeth Barrett seems to have

consciously or unconsciously felt that if, as woman, she equalled Nature, then both as general and as particular woman she should be Nature, free
and fierce. The lilies—and Daisies of the field
toil not, nor do they spin. (Gilbert and Gubar
646)

However, in Elizabeth Barrett’s works, women and children
associate with this nature and suffer from her indifference;
they are passive, weak, and dependant on patriarchy.

Elizabeth Barrett’s ambition "to be considered an
autoress" began in childhood (Browning’s Correspondence
I:350). As Mermin discusses (EBB 10-1), Barrett wrote in a
prose fragment of the ten-year-old little Beth who desired
to be "the feminine of Homer," "a little taller than Homer
if anything," the greatest woman poet who had ever lived
(I:361). However, a girl who wanted to write poetry would
face numerous limits and barriers. The sense of exclusion
Elizabeth Barrett experienced intensified the doubts and
worries of her own abilities about the place of a woman poet
in the world. She experienced difficulty in finding her a
place within her poems and a relation to her poems. Thus,
the fear of failing as a woman poet, and the need to be
dependent caused her to be uncertain about her convictions.

Elizabeth Barrett’s experience was limited; her mind
was filled with sketches from her own family relationships,
which assumed that a girl’s place was in a loving, happy,
rich, and often isolated household. The gender roles were
made clear. Her mother was of

a sweet, gentle nature, which the thunder a little
turned from its sweetness—as when it turns mild—
One of those women she never can resist,—but, in
submitting & bowing on themselves, make a mark, a
plait, within, . . a sign of suffering. Too
womanly she was--. (L.RB/EBB 2:1012)

Her father was the role model; he had the ability and the
power to create and to rule:

These polished walls, raised by y' tasteful hand,
These smiling shrubs, these tangled walls & hills;
These rising rocks,—hewn by your active band
And drooping flow'rets washed by murmuring rills:
These waters by your hand are taught to glide.
(BC I:19)98

Thus, "a weak maternal earth and a powerful male heaven"
formed the basic structure of her imagination (Mermin EBB
13). Dorothy Mermin also points out that for Barrett "this
structure was formed very early in life: A mother embodies
nurture and love, but also impotence and death; she is the
passive victim of the storm, while the father is allied with
power, safety, and God" (EBB 13-4). Five years later in
1820, Elizabeth Barrett celebrates her father's birthday:

For half her beauties does she owe
To him for whom those pillars rise
Who bade pellucid waters flow
And waving foliage seek the skies!
(BC I:93 17-20)99

Mermin suggests that Barrett's general tendency is to
portray the father as the source of power that judged,
awarded, praised, and blamed (GR 16). It meant freedom and
power. The mother, on the other hand, "represented a
private, inward hidden world of nurture and mystery" (Mermin
EBB 16). When she wrote about Beth again, she voiced her
longing to possess the freedom and power, which she allowed
only her father:
When she [Beth] grew up she would wear men's clothes, & live in a Greek island, the sea melting into turquoises all around it. She would teach the islanders the ancient Greek, & they should all talk there of the old glories in the real Greek sunshine, with the right ais & ois. (BC I:361)

For the women, the difficulties were historical, social, and psychological; also, "they were part of the inherited structure of English poetry, in which woman is not the seer, but the object seen; not the imagination that shapes and is shaped by nature, but nature itself; not the poet who desires, but the object of his desire; not Byron, but Byron's beloved" (Mermin GR 61). In Barrett's "Deserted Garden," for instance, the garden is deserted; in "The Lost Bower," the bower is lost; neither the garden nor the bower contain an object for the speaker's desire (61). In poetry, "gardens and bowers represent the site of female sexuality and the female body itself--" (61). Although, there was nothing for a female poet to discover in these familiar territories, for Elizabeth Barrett it indicated her renouncement of adulthood. Mermin writes in Godiva's Ride that, "the woman poet finds herself in the position of both subject and object, having to play both roles in stories that require two characters" (61). Since Elizabeth Barrett has realized that the roles are irreversible and "that one person cannot fill them both," that is, women cannot be the "subject and object" at the same time, the garden remains deserted, and the bower is lost again (61), and the narrator
remains a child. "The Deserted Garden" links "expulsion from the paradise of childhood with the exclusion of women poets from a poetic tradition of antithetical gender roles, women and poets, damsels and knights" (Mermin EBB 67). As a child, the speaker found an abandoned garden and entered with a knight's "Adventurous joy" (17) but read and dreamed in like a woman. As she read, her "likeness grew" to "'gentle hermit of the dale,'/ And Angelina too" (69-72). Yet, she "shut the book" (76) implying the "impossibility of this double identification" (76). She grew up, and never returned to the garden; instead, she turns "to the God from whom the poet in "The Poet’s Vow" resolutely turned away" (67).

"The Lost Bower," moves in a similar fashion. The poem clearly indicates "a girl’s difficulty in growing up to be a poet and carries the speaker from . . . aspiring childhood to impotence and loss" (Mermin EBB 100). In a way, it is a "retelling" of "The Deserted Garden" (100). The speaker is in a pleasant orchard surrounded by hills, the male world of experience. She climbs from the valley to the crest. The route is a difficult one, but she is determined to succeed, taking courage from the thoughts of the past poets:

Thus I thought of the old singers
And took courage from their song,
Till my little struggling fingers
Tore asunder gyve and thong
Of the brambles which entrapped me, and
the barrier branches strong.

(XVI)

When she finally reaches the bower, she is speechless before
the beauty surrounding her. The bower resembles a palace carpeted with "grass and moss"; "wood ivy like a spirit/
Hovered dimly" round the "tall linden tree" and "the old hawthorne" shaping "thence that bower of beauty" (XX). It is filled with "rose-trees," red and white, and ivy "enwrought with eglantine" and "slanted overhead." In that inspiring silence, she wonders the "secret of the place," appealing to the trees and asks if it is the work of Nature, or "Dryad strong," or "the house of fairies." In this pleasant atmosphere, she feels "a sense of music," so sweet that "Pan or Faunus never bloweth/ So much sweetness, "never lark the sun can waken/ With such sweetness!" "Never nightingale so singeth . . . such music, --or she sings it not to me," "Never blackbirds, never thrushes/ Nor small finches sing as sweet." She gives herself in "exaltation/ And an inward trembling heat,/ And (it seemed) in geste of passion" to this music that "transcends both myth and nature" (Mermin EBB 101). The experience is "quasi-sexual" (101); as she rises up, the music "Like a garment rustling downwards" drops to her feet and "a silence followed it!" as "Heart and head beat through the quiet/ Full and heavily, though slower:" she feels lifted to a different sphere ("Timeless") by the "Mystic Presences of power" and back to the "Hour." She returns to the "green land . . . dimpled close with hill and valley," which represented the male world of experience and furnishes it with praise: "the true mountains," "the
truth of things, with praises/ Of the beauty of the truth;
"Nature's real." The "female body" and "sexuality" she found in the bower are denied, the sensual and spiritual experience she felt is lost forever. She thinks one day she may return to the bower, but now that she knows what is awaiting her in the bower, she cannot be the quester and the object of the quest at the same time (Mermin EBB 61).

Henceforth, I will be the fairy
Of this bower not built by one;
I will go there, sad or merry,
With each morning's benison,
And the bird shall be my harper in the
dream-hall I have won.
(XLIX)

The next morning when she attempts to reach the bower, "all had vanished, or my wandering missed the place" (L).

Day by day, with new desire,
Toward my wood I ran in faith,
Under leaf and over brier,
Through the thickets, out of breath;
Like the prince who rescued Beauty from
the sleep as long as death.
(LX)

She realizes that she is taking the role of the quester like the "prince," but bower contains no object of her desire (Mermin EBB 101).

But for me, I saw no splendor--
All my sword was my child-heart;
And the wood refused surrender
(LVI)

Barrett marks the significance of this loss; she elaborates on her many losses "But the first of all my losses was the losing of the bower" (LX), and

For this loss it did prefigure
Other loss of better good,
When my soul, in spirit-vigor
And in ripened womanhood,
Fell from visions of more beauty than an
    arbor in a wood.

(LIX)

It is the "loss of poetic world and a poetic subject,"
(Mermin EBB 102) which opened to the many male poets of the
past but not to her; since the experience she found in the
bower was one of sexual awakening or growing into womanhood,
she is also excluded from such emotional experience and
power.
CHAPTER IV

STRUGGLE VS. SUBMISSION

The *Seraphim, and Other Poems* (1838), Elizabeth Barrett's first work that received extensive critical response and a wide readership, depicted Barrett's image of Victorian children, childhood, and woman more clearly than her previously published works. Although at the time Barrett was thirty-two, her ambition to become a successful poet began in childhood, and she read and wrote extensively. As a woman poet in a society which committed woman to a domestic role in the house, Barrett had to overcome many social barriers to be read as an artist independent of gender. Barrett's struggle as a female poet reveals her understanding of the status of women and children in Victorian England and voices her resentment towards their inferior status.

However, in most of Barrett's work that deal with women and children, the determined tone of the opening statements is soon replaced with passive submission. This lack of aggression has reinforced her role as a submissive woman poet. Furthermore, her identification of children with women, and her attachment to the father figure reserve her a woman-child poet status in literature.

"Women want to be made to think actively" she wrote
resenting the passive status of Victorian women (L. EBB I:261). Despite the determined tone in this correspondence, she often lost the vigor of her initial determination in her poetic works. In due respect to her childhood, the tyranny of a loving father, her weak health, the middle-class values she was exposed to, society's commitment to the notion of the "angel in the house," and the small number of female writers before her, it is only natural that she continued a dialogue between her conviction of the unfair treatment of women and her acknowledgement of the woman's place in society, between the liberationist urge in her and the contrary values which determined success, respect, self-respect, and social status in society. "It would have been both absurd and presumptuous, young and inexperienced as I am, to have attempted to strike out a path for myself" (W I:9) she wrote in her diary, yet even after gaining the experience and the maturity that came with years, her role still remained vague for several years.

"My mind is naturally independent [sic] and spurns that subserviency of opinion which is generally considered necessary to feminine softness. But this is a subject on which I must always feel strongly, for I feel within me an almost proud consciousness of independence [sic] which prompts me to defend my opinions and to yield them only to conviction!!!!!!!" (Autobiography 24)

"These principles are irrevocable! It is not ...vanity that dictates them! it is not ...an encroachment on Masculine prerogative but it is a proud sentiment which will never, never allow me to be humbled in my own eyes!!" (24). Her
"independent" mind reacts to oppression and to the "subserviency of opinion" expected of Victorian woman. "My friends may differ from me: the world may accuse me but this I am determined never to retract!!" (24).

However, Barrett's position fluctuates between a determined struggle for women's liberation and submission and piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity which many Victorian women writers and those before them endorsed as the virtues of a good woman. Lord Henry Home Kames in *Loose Hints Upon Education* (1781) wrote that women, "destined by nature to be obedient, ought to be disciplined early to bear wrongs without murmuring." The only strong voice of the opposing argument, Mary Wollstonecraft, complained that "all the causes of female weakness as well as depravity... branch out of one grand cause--want of chastity in men!" (150). But the double standard was there. As for piety, women were to have no religious education; only Wollstonecraft pointed out this contradiction, writing that "woman must serve and know herself as well as God and Man, and the ways of God must be justified to her as well as to her husband" (152). As for domesticity, when a woman got interested in anything outside the home, she was labeled unfeminine, a freak of nature. Women were mainly ornaments; many of them considered correspondence and reading of the epistolary novels or memoirs as their only outlet. They could read only light material: "To be perfectly pure, the
female mind. . . had to be perfectly blank," Cunnigton writes (90). Thus, a thinking female mind meant alienation. Elizabeth Barrett prefers losing her "self respect" to the "ridicule of mankind, the scoff of society." Admitting her alienated status for being a "thinking" woman, she fears being "ridiculed" by men and women for being a "thinking" woman (L.EBB I:260-61).

Lynne Agress expands the theme that women writers and intellectuals use their "influence to perpetuate society's biases against women" in the 19th century by viewing "women as subordinates" (9). Agress criticizes Hannah More for "continually reinforcing women's subordinate role: . . . More, like other women writers of the period, was often more reactive against women than supportive or innovative" (48). Agress refers to More as "a kind of self-appointed messiah" (48), whose works stress agreed-upon Christian teachings but differ from other Christian books in that More never defers to God but rather becomes the highest authority herself. She led an active secular life, befriended learned, and influential men of the day. Yet, she complained about the company of women, for "the ladies, with loud vociferation seemed to talk much without thinking at all" (More Memoirs 88). She believed that women (with the exception of herself, of course) could parrot knowledge learned by rote but could not integrate it. She was also against women being trained in the arts, which would lead to their corruption. More also
complained that women were too interested in dress, and that "women who are ruined by seduction in the lower classes, and those who are made miserable by ambitious marriages in the higher, will be more frequently found to owe their misery to an ungoverned passion for dress and show" (More Strictures 336). But she ignores the fact that women are taught to love dress, given nothing to do of more moment than to dress properly to catch a husband. More worked her whole life to prevent other women from becoming financially independent from men. She had a total of 1200 pounds annual income from a legacy and an annuity in addition to the profits of the school she ran at Bristol.

More promotes the notion that "while men must be educated, women should be trained" (Jones 114). She echoes Rousseau’s belief that women’s "honor consists in being unknown;" thus, she should stay at home (254). Education for women, More writes should "train to self-denial" (Coelebs 308) and instill Barbara Welter’s "four cardinal virtues:" "Piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Welter 154). However, in Bristol she and her sisters taught French, reading, writing, and math, and arts which she preaches against in her books.

Ann Taylor (1782-1866), like More, regards the only goal for a woman as marriage. Her sympathies lie with the husband, though, because she believed men superior to women. When a man marries, she says, he stakes "‘the happiness of
his future life' on his choice of a wife (11). Jane West (1758-1852) also stresses male superiority and the necessity of marriage. Women are not suited to making their own choices, for they are, she says, "far less able than men to be the carvers of [their] fortunes," and they "must generally consult more than [their]... own inclinations in order to be happy" (I:67). Furthermore, West is against women's education. She insists that women should not want to be educated because "improved capacity always implies increased responsibility; knowledge is a most precious talent and must pay the highest price" (3:6).

Of all women writers, Hester Stanhope discriminated against her own sex, hated them even, according to her doctor. Also, more than any other women of the time, she rebelled against her prescribed role in society: from her frequent disguises in male attire and her pipe smoking, to her leaving England to live in Eastern Europe, where she 'ruled' over her estate and captivated many visitors. She often invited men of note to dine with her during her travels, but never asked their wives along. She saw women as narrow-minded, trivial, but never made the connection as to why that might be. She claimed that "all sensible men that I have ever heard of take their meals with their wives, and then retire to heir own room to read, write, or do what they have to do, or what pleases them... nobody [no man] is such a fool as to moider away his time in the slip-slop
conversation of a pack of women" (110). She stated that women knew less about motherhood than "the sheep and the asses" (110). Although she liked Charlotte Bury’s works, she chose to praise Bury’s physical attributes instead of her authorship: "She walked so graceful [sic]" (338).

In a letter to Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett writes about marriage:

> A fullness of sympathy, a sharing of life, one with another, . . . is scarcely ever looked for except in a narrow conventional sense. Men like to come home and find a blazing fire and smiling face and an hour of relaxation. Their serious thoughts, and earnest aims in life, they like to keep on one side. And this is the carrying out of love and marriage almost everywhere in the world—and this, the degrading of women by both. (L.RB/EBB 422)

Although Hannah More, Ann Taylor, Jane West, and Hester Stanhope share Barretts’ view on marriage, they also regard men as the victims while Barrett identifies women to be the victims in a marriage; she finds such marriages very "degrading" to women (422).

Although the women of Victorian England suffered from the male dominant ideologies of the time, some women writers and intellectuals either applauded the women’s domination by the male gender or displayed a passive submission to their inferior role; a few protested the inequality. Sarah Stickney Ellis’s comment on women is typical:

> Women, considered in their distinct and abstract nature, as isolated beings, must lose more than half their worth. They are, in fact, from their own constitution, and from the station they occupy in the world, strictly speaking, relative creatures. If, therefore, they are
endowed with only such faculties as render them striking and distinguished in themselves, without the faculty of instrumentality, they are only as dead letters in the volume of human life, filling what would otherwise be a blank space, but doing nothing more. (149-50)

Sarah Ellis was one of the widely read women writers addressing women. Her comments on women as "isolated beings," and "relative creatures" with a "distinct and abstract nature" agree with Barrett’s understanding of the Victorian women’s status. Ellis’s denial of individuality to women was the sentiment of many other female writers. Letitia Landon, for instance, boldly denies women individuality; she places women’s "influence" and "sphere" in the "affections," and asks "what subject can be more fitting than one which is her peculiar province to refine, spiritualize, and exalt?" Felicia Hemans defines women as relative creatures and identifies women’s role by suffering. In "Madeline," Hemans records women’s destiny as being to "suffer and be still" ("Madeline" Records of Women).

While Barrett’s understanding of the woman’s inferior status is similar to that of these female writers, her response is different. She recognizes the "defects" and the "wrongs" in women; in a letter to Robert Browning, she says:

Another truth (to my mind) is, that women, as they are (whatever they may be) have no mental strength any more than they have bodily; have not instruction, capacity, wholeness of intellect enough. To deny that women, as a class, have defects, is as false I think, as to deny that women have wrongs. (L.RB/EBB 282)
Barrett protests to lift up the status of women and struggles to seek a place in the male world of experience. Despite her desire to enter the male territory, the small number of role models fail to provide her with the necessary nurturing:

I read Mary Wolstonecraft when I was thirteen: no twelve!...and, through the whole course of my childhood, I had a steady indignation against Nature who made me a woman, & a determinate resolution to dress up in men's clothes as soon as ever I was free of the nursery, & go into the world 'to seek my fortune.' 'How,' was not decided; but I rather leant towards being poor Lord Byron's PAGE. (L.MRM 2:7)

Barrett refers to Mrs. Hemans and Miss Landon as "the raw bare powers" (L.MRM I:235). She admires Mrs. Hemans' "genius," respects her "piety & high moral tone." Yet, she criticizes her poetry:

She always does seem tome a lady rather than a woman, & so, much rather than a poetess--her refinement . . . enters into her soul. She is polished all over to one smoothness & one level, & is monotonous in her best qualities. (L.MRM II:88)\textsuperscript{105}

Mary Wolstonecraft was the only female English writer Elizabeth Barrett admired without reservations. She had ventured to protest woman's status consistently and stressed woman's role as wife and mother. George Sand was the "shameless" writer who dealt with passion (L.MRM II:85)\textsuperscript{106}. but still Barrett regarded her as "wonderful" in "eloquence & passion" despite Sand's Leila that made me blush in my solitude to the ends of my fingers--blush three blushes in one . . for Her
who c'd be so shameless—for her sex, whose purity
she so disgraced—& for myself in particular, who
c'd hold such a book for five minutes in one hand
while a coal-fire burnt within reach of the other.
(L.MRM II:93) 107

Although she finds in Sand both "good & evil" and regards
her a "brilliant monstrous woman, her admiration for Sand's
courage is notable (L.MRM II:127-28; L.RB/EBB I:113) 108. The
subsequent models and contemporaries like Hemans, Landon,
Ellis merely depicted their assurance of and their
contentment with the woman's inferior status. Also being
reared in a household under her father's "thunder" and her
mother Mary Moulton Barrett's natural submission and
"suffering" (L.RB/EBB 2:1012), Barrett was drawn to the
Victorian notion that women are "Mother of the world," and
therefore

. . . Henceforward, arise, aspire
To all the calms and magnanimities,
The lofty uses and the noble ends,
The sanctified devotion and full work,
To which thou art elect for evermore,
First woman, wife, and mother!
("A Drama of Exile" 1832-37)

Elizabeth Barrett never endorsed feminism. She resented
the position of woman in Victorian England; she disliked
being born a woman during a time when the notion dictated
that women were fit only to be "soft, clinging, submissive
wives with no ideas of their own" (Hayter 184). She was
reading Mary Wollstonecraft at the age of fourteen and
"spurning that subserviency of opinion which is generally
considered necessary to feminine softness" (Autobiography
Yet she had no conviction that a feminist movement was the way to combat such anti-feminist notion.

I am not, as you are perhaps aware, a very strong partisan of the Rights-of-women side of the argument—at least, I have not been, since I was twelve years old. I believe that, considering men and women in the mass, there is an inequality of intellect, and that it is proved by the very state of things of which gifted women complain; and more that proved by the manner in which their complaint is received by their own sisterhood.

(L.MRM III:81)

Barrett wrote. She was one of those women who believed women "were not yet ready to use" these rights if given and therefore "against asking for them: 'the advocacy of a women's rights, also, will at any time disprove the theory of the advocate, by a great cry of horrified woman on all sides'" she said on the subject (Hayter 185). So the rights of woman could be won by showing the world what women were capable of:

A woman cannot do thing she ought,
Which means whatever perfect thing she can,
In life, in art, in science, but she fears
To let the perfect action take her part,
And rest there: she must prove what she can do
Before she does it, prate of women's rights,
Of woman's mission, woman's function, till
The men (who are prating too on their side) cry,
"A woman's function plainly is . . . to talk."

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
But we, we talk!'

(814-22, 846)

Following Gerald Massey's lecture on "'Aurora Leigh' and the Woman's Question, Chorley in the Athenaeum reviewed the poem as a plead for women's rights. The review was enough to annoy Barrett, for she 'did not fancy that this poem would
be so identified as it has been, with that question, which was only a collateral object with my intentions in writing'" (Hayter 186).111

Barrett was a sympathizer of the movement; she lacked the firm conviction that women were equals of men and women were made inferior by men: "there is a natural inferiority of mind in women--of the intellect. . . not by any means, of the moral nature---the history of Art and of Genius testifies to this fact openly," she said clearly identifying women as inferior to men (L.RB/EBB I:113)112. The key word here is "natural inferiority," and Barrett with a disturbing ease and conviction classified women as naturally inferior and betrayed the foundation of the women's rights movement. As Hayter points out, Barrett admired Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor in England, or Josephine Butler or Catherine Gladstone, who helped prostitutes, "rather than the campaigners for women's rights like Miss Martineau or Mrs Norton . . . . Women had to prove by their achievements that they were to be trusted with independence and civil rights," and "those rights would be accorded eventually." Yet, still she did not think "women would make good Members of Parliament," for they "lacked both the physical strength and the mental capacity for such work." Likewise, women, she thought, "lacked many resources of language and intonation," and "they were apt to be loose and unspecific in thought and expression" (L.EBB II:280; Hayter 186-87).
Despite her lack of aggression, she expresses in her poetry a resentment of Victorian women's status and a sense of bitterness for society's denial to her the freedom of creativity. In the unrealistic depiction of women and children, in their innocence and closeness to the divine powers, in their identification with nature, we find her reaction; in her willingness to respond to the calls of her father, in life and death, in her evasion of resolving tensions by escaping into religion, in her acceptance of women as "naturally inferior," and in her passive admission of male ideologies, we find her submission. In due respect to her childhood traumas, her religious convictions, her attachment to her father, her poor health and the lack of feminist women poets before her, it is only natural that her tone fluctuates between women's submission and women's liberation. While the poet in her fights against the order, the woman in her remains Victorian. This inner conflict is ultimately responsible for her status as a child-poet.
CHAPTER V

ON AURORA LEIGH

In many respects, Aurora Leigh is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's master work. The reviews concerning this novel-poem vary from one extreme line of thought to the other. Angela Leighton, for example, has treated it as a revolutionary poem, as "one example of the general cause of women’s emancipation and independence" (Leighton, EBB 115). Cora Kaplan sees it "as contributing to a feminist theory of art which argues that women’s language, precisely because it has been suppressed by patriarchal societies, re-enters discourse with a shattering revolutionary force, speaking all that is repressed and forbidden in human experience" (11). Ellen Moers (60-61) recognizes it as a traditional woman's story, while Rachel Blau DuPlessis regards the ending of the story as a compromise (87). Likewise, Deirdree David reads the poem as "an integrated expression of essentialist and ultimately non-feminist views of sex and gender" (114). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also argue that Aurora has to learn sympathy and service (576-77). Angela Leighton (EBB 117-18) and Virginia Woolf (206) find similar biographical information that leads them to recognize the effect of the poet’s attachment to her father in the story. The two interrelated personalities in the
depiction of the heroine are Aurora, the child and Aurora, the woman poet. What links these two personalities in the character of Aurora is the father, who associates not only with childhood, but also with intellectual superiority. Aurora’s mission is, therefore, to find herself an identity and at the same time maintain the connection with her father or father substitute.

In Aurora Leigh, Elizabeth Barrett Browning sets Aurora on a quest for self-identity. Although her mission for self-identity is actualized by her acceptance as a poet, Aurora is not content. She realizes that the self-identity she has realized through work and success is lacking the love that will make Aurora a complete person. The legacy of Aurora’s father to his daughter was "love":

>'Love, my child, love, love!'—(then he had done with grief)
>'Love, my child.' Ere I answered he was gone, And none was left to love in all the world."
(I:212-214)

Since her father dies before he can explain his legacy, Aurora, who was exposed to only two kinds of love, interprets him as the parental and divine love, which Edward Moulton Barrett had restricted his children to. Since "none was left to love in all the world" (I:214), Aurora faithfully and obediently continues to love her dead father and God whom she sees in the same light. The strength of her faith and love towards her father as well as his association with her childhood happiness would not permit another male
figure, Romney, in her life. Since her dead father continues to be the sole source of her inspiration, creativity, and contentment, Aurora’s identity relies heavily on him. As children, both Aurora and Elizabeth Barrett were accustomed to being inspired and praised by their fathers; thus, lacking that father figure, Aurora obeys her dead father and awaits his praise. Yet, the father remains silent. Aurora returns to Italy, where she had freely felt love. There, in her homeland, the reassurance of her father’s eternal silence comes to Aurora, and Romney, beaten physically and emotionally in the past years, who can no longer see becomes a substitute for the father. In conclusion, Aurora’s recognition of the "silence" and her increasing need for her father’s praise lead her to replace him with Romney. At this point, Aurora clearly returns to the father figure exhibiting Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dependence on the archetypal Victorian patriarch. Angela Leighton argues that the father’s "presence is movingly and anxiously solicited" (EBB 118). Although Leighton contends that Aurora’s decision to marry Romney is indicative of Aurora’s independence of the father "both in fact and imagination" (EBB 116), Aurora only dispossesses her acquired "self," the independent poet, for dependence on the father figure. Thus, the highly romantic "feminist" tones of Aurora Leigh are terminated prematurely as the heroine calls for the father figure to dominate and inspire her.
From the beginning to the end of seventh book in Aurora Leigh, the dominant image is Aurora's father. Upon the death of her mother, Aurora and her father leave Florence to hide among the mountains (I:109-111). Together, with them is the "silent grief" that the father carries after the death of his wife, and upon his sudden death when Aurora is only thirteen. It is significant that Aurora loses her father at the age of awakening to womanhood. This double loss, childhood and father at the same time, recalls Edward Mouton Barrett's restriction to his children to awaken to "full life and life's needs, and agonies" (I:208). His strict prohibition of the subject of love is again reflected when ironically he leaves "Love" as his legacy to Aurora; however, Aurora is not able to find and hold love because of her inability to break away from her father. As Leighton writes, the father also leaves to his daughter "the legacy to hear, behind all the new and varied sounds of her life, his powerful silence" (EBB 123).

When she is taken away from Assunta, Aurora hears her father's "silence" (I:227-28), and when she meets her aunt in England, in her ears, her father's words "Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,/ 'Love, love my child'" (I:317-18). From the beginning, Aurora displays a great dissatisfaction about England, the land her father had deserted for Italy; thus, in her childhood imagination, she associates Italy with her father. Aurora does not have an
alternative, but to "survive in a world which, because of
her father's absence, is all a desert" (Leighton EBB 124).
The ship sails to England "Until it seemed no more that holy
heaven/ To which my father went. All new and strange;/ The
universe turned stranger, for a child" (I:248-50). As the
holy heaven, which accommodates her dead father, disappears,
Aurora faces a new world with skies that "looked low and
positive" (I:262), yet "so far off/ From God's celestial
crystals" (I:264-65). Thus, to the heart-broken child, even
the consolation of a heavenly sky is denied. Aurora's life
in England, is "dull" and "vague" as England is to a child
(I:266). To Aurora, life seems like death, for she lacks
what Elizabeth Barrett regarded as the essential ingredient
of life, love. Her father's books provide Aurora with
knowledge, and inspiration. When she rejects Romney, again
she calls upon the memory of her father: "I too have my
vocation,—work to do,/ The heavens and earth have set me
since I changed/ My father's face for theirs" (II:455-457).
Aurora receives poetic power and inspiration in England,
after she starts reading her father's old books. Since "the
heavens and earth" is the connection between Aurora and her
father who is now in heaven, he will remain to be the source
of Aurora's poetic power throughout the poem.

On her twentieth birthday, as Aurora turns down Romney
and asserts her vocation to be a poet, her thoughts return
to her father, and feeling his absence, in her need she
cries "Oh, alone, alone,—" (II:746). It is also significant that when she is crowning herself, she chooses "ivy," with its "Large leaves, smooth leaves,/ Serrated like my vines, and half as green./ I like such ivy, bold to leap a height/ 'T was strong to climb; as good to grow on graves/ As twist about a thyrsus" (II:48-52). As Leighton suggests, Aurora’s choice of a crown is a plant that will grow on "graves" (EBB 129-30) reminding us that Aurora’s thought at this important moment is with her dead father; his presence in her crowning is also suggested in the "large" and "smooth" leaves of the ivy, which reminds us of "His large man’s hands afraid to touch my curls,/ As if the gold would tarnish" (I:96-97), which in turn symbolize Aurora’s new found creative power. Thus the dead father’s presence is not only felt but also invited by the daughter.

Years later, even after Aurora establishes her reputation as a successful poet, her longing for her parents’ praise fills her poetry. Like a child, she envies those who have loved ones to praise their work (VI:518-540), and her thoughts once again shift to her parents (Leighton EBB 130-31):

Who loves me? Dearest father, --mother sweet,—
I speak the names out sometimes by myself,
And make the silence shiver. They sound strange
As Hindostanee to an Ind-born man
Accustomed many years to English speech;
Or lovely poet-words grown obsolete,
Which will not leave off singing. Up in heaven
I have my father, -- with my mother’s face
Beside him in a blotch of heavenly light;
No more for earth’s familiar, household use,
No more. The best verse written by this hand
Can never reach them where they sit, to seem
Well done to them.

(V:540-52)

Aurora feels her loneliness, and the absence of her parents intensely. The silence left to her upon her father's death seems unbreakable when she calls out her parents' names. Even to Aurora, once familiar Italian words and their associations sound foreign. Her poetry "grows obsolete" without their praise. Aurora feels their absence so strongly that her "poet-words" which she inherited from her father and upon which she has founded her whole existence seem useless. Just as the "silence shivers" when she calls out their names, and her poetry grows "obsolete," we feel the tremor in Aurora's conviction as a poet.

Upon her arrival in Italy, Aurora's thoughts shift to her father again: "And then I did not think, 'My Italy,'/ I thought 'My father!' O my father's house,/ Without his presence!" (VII: 490-492). Years earlier, she had associated this land with her father. Naturally, Aurora does not expect to find her father alive in his house, but she hopes to find a stronger sense of union with him. Her sudden and premature separation from her father and from her home is, of course, another contributing factor in her inability to accept his death. While the absence of his presence hurt her, Aurora's grievance for her father's death has just started. Since Aurora had established earlier that her father is her source of imagination and creativity, Aurora must find a sense of
consolation, a pleasant feeling of her father's presence if she will continue her vocation as a poet. A complete silence, and her father's absolute absence will only indicate the death of Aurora, the child and the poet.

'T is only good to be or here or there,
Because we had a dream on such a stone,
Or this or that, -- but, once being wholly waked
And come back to the stone without the dream,
We trip upon't, -- alas, and hurt ourselves;
Or else it falls on us and grids us flat,
The heaviest gravestone on this burying earth.

(VII:497-503)

These lines display Aurora's new found indifference to the location. What makes the place special is the pleasant memories of her childhood with her father. Again, "stone" has lost its significance, for she has realized that it is just a thing. What makes life and still objects alive is the memories that are associated with them. Since her "dream" is a child's experience shared with her father on "a stone," the lack of it indicates the absence of father and childhood. Once these childhood dreams are gone and grown into harsh realities of life, the location "Italy" and the object "stone" appear as is, but the absence of the loved one intensifies their association with death and desertion.

As Leighton asserts having lost her father and childhood, Aurora feels as if she were dead (EBB 134). This feeling remains with her throughout the poem. Thus, the "stone" turns into "heaviest gravestone" burying Aurora on "earth." As Leighton writes, "it is the absence of his [father's] spirit which characterizes the world of the
daughter" (EBB 134). And Aurora must live without him "in the modern, urbane, materialistic age which is her own" (EBB 134). Yet she is not ready to give up.

Despite Leighton’s conclusive argument that Aurora has lost her father, Aurora still maintains the ability to bring her father into this "deserted ground" simply because Aurora’s childhood memories will continue to have her father in them.

How I heard
My father’s step on that deserted ground,
His voice along that silence, as he told
The name of bird and insect, tree and flower,
And all the presentations of the stars
Across Valderno, interposing still
'My child,' 'my child.' When fathers say 'my child,'
'Tis easier to conceive the universe,
And life’s transitions down the steps of law.
(VII: 1110-1118)

This memory of childhood shows us how Aurora perceived her father. He was the loving teacher who made life simpler to understand for the child; with the loss of childhood, and of her affectionate companion, guide, and teacher, Aurora has to "conceive the universe" and accept life’s cruel "transitions down the steps of law."

There is another significance of this scene. It portrays Aurora as a spectator looking at a picture of the world she once knew. Feeling the distance between herself and the lifeless world before her, Aurora is helpless; she cannot change the fact of her father’s death. Like an outsider to a world that looks "alien" to her now, Aurora
chooses to remain outside the picture: "I rode once to the little mountain-house/ As fast as if to find my father there,/ But, when in sight of 't, within fifty yards,/ I dropped my horse's bridle on his neck/ And paused upon his flank" (VII: 1119-1123). Once again, Aurora cannot face the reality completely by entering the scenes of her past; she chooses to keep her distance as if to protect herself from facing the harsh truth of life. She is not ready to face the picture awaiting her inside the house; thus, she stops refusing to find maybe a void. From that distance, Aurora is able to see that "The house's front/ Was casèd with lingots of ripe Indian corn/ In tessellated order and device/ Of golden patterns, not a stone of wall/ Uncovered, --not an inch off room to grow vine-leaf" (VII: 1123-1128). According to Leighton, "this episode marks the last stage of Barrett Browning's long, hard quest for her beloved first muse," and once Aurora frees herself of her father, she becomes independent (EBB 136). However, in the last two scenes, we see Aurora immobilizing herself with the fear of the changes that she might witness if she goes further. And, willingly she does not enter the house; her expedition ends as she finds the place changed on the outside. The father's garden is barren and "deserted" just like the daughter's life (Leighton EBB 137-38). Seeing such changes is actually her therapy to grieve first then to accept the loss of father. As I mentioned earlier, Aurora was taken away from Italy
before she had time to grieve for her father’s death; to accept his death, Aurora must go through this process to come to terms with her losses. After this trip to her father’s house, Aurora decides: "That was trial enough/ Of graves, I would not visit if I could,/ My father’s, or my mother’s any more,/ To see if stone cutter or lichen beat/ So early in the race, or throw my flowers,/ Which could not out-smell heaven or sweeten earth" (VII:1142-1147). Aurora learns after her painful confrontations with what has become of the possessions that once belonged to her father that the reality of "death" stands before her, and again she realizes "there was none left to love in all the world" (I:214). "My old Assunta, too, was dead, was dead--/ O land of all men’s past! for me alone," (VII:1155-1156). Aurora, the child has to accept that with both parents gone, she is an orphan. At this point, Aurora has two alternatives: she can either accept her "orphaned" (Leighton EBB 136) state and continue her life as a free and independent person, or resign and seek other connections with her father. She chooses the latter one.

She cannot accept a life and be alive without any connection to her father. Since the dead cannot come to her, she has to go them. Thus, she kills herself emotionally, socially, creatively to life on earth. While the quest for the father ends as Leighton writes, for he is found dead, Aurora buries herself alive on earth. "It would not mix its
tenses. I was past,/ It seemed, like others,—only not in 

heaven" (VII:1155-1159) announcing her own death, and 

accepting the fact that her parents 

live too far above, that I should look 
So far below to find them: let me think 
That rather they are visiting my grave, 
Called life here (undeveloped yet to life), 
And that they drop upon me, now and then, 
For token or for solace, some small weed 
Least odorous of the growths of paradise, 
To spare such pungent scents as kill with joy. 
(VII: 1148-1155) 

With her own death, comes the feeling of peace:" 

I'm happy. It is sublime, 
This perfect solitude of foreign lands! 
To be as if you had not been till then, 
And were then, simply that you chose to be: 
(VII: 1193-1196) 

This change in Aurora was pronounced earlier when she saw 

Valderno as a still picture of a deserted plain, and when 

she refused to enter the house; she had chosen to be a 

spectator to life passing by. Just as she had refused any 

close encounter with the changes, with the new order, now 

she refuses "full life and life's needs and agonies" (I:208) 

in this new order. Aurora sees her future as very grim; she 

waits to be dissolved like "salt" and to disappear: 

I did not write, nor read, nor even think, 
But sat absorbed amid the quickening glooms, 
Most like some passive broken lump of salt 
Dropped in by chance to a bowl of enamel, 
To spoil the drink a little and lose itself, 
Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost 
(VII:1305-1311) 

These lines mark the end of Book seven, leaving Aurora as a 

spectator to life. They do, however, recall Book I when this
"Italian child,/ For all her blue eyes and her quiet ways,/ Thrives ill in England: . . .she will die" (I:495-498).

Then, the situation was similar. She was again faced with separation, and death, but as she wrote later, "By something in me, surely not my will,/ I did not die" (I:548-549). At the end of Book VII, Aurora has lost that "something," perhaps the "dream" she had of finding her father's presence in Italy, or her ambition to be a poet and be praised by him. Without him, she can no longer write, read, or think, but die to the world around her. Thus, the end of Book VII also marks the end of Aurora, as a child and poet unless she finds a substitute.

Before proceeding with Book VIII and IX, I will temporarily leave Aurora here as dead to life to explore the factors like the feminist question, Aurora's femininity, and her relation to Romney. The question of how Elizabeth Barrett perceived women is crucial to my point in Aurora Leigh. As Barbara Gelpi points out, with the exception of her Italian mother and servant, Assunta, "there are no attractive women" in the book (38). Of all the female figures in the book, including herself, only her mother and the servant Assunta, who was a neutral caretaker for five years, are depicted as semi-attractive, with a soft touch of love and care. On the other hand, Marian Earle, Kate Ward, Aurora's Aunt, Lady Waldemar, and Lucy Grasham are depicted as harsh, judgmental, unloving, critical, and submissive.
Gelpi's remarks that "no matter what their class, mothers [mother-surrogates] are presented as cold, self-centered, and destructive" (39) makes one wonder if Aurora hated women. Aurora's perception of her mother's portrait does hint us an answer to that question.

The portrait of Aurora's mother in Book I is filled with amazingly contradictory figures. After a brief elaboration on the scene, Gelpi interprets the scene as the description of Aurora's "ambivalence" about being a woman (38). To an extent, this reading is true, and it also explains Elizabeth Barrett's perception of women as "abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,/ Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque," (I:149-150), and she is no exception to that. When Barrett wrote about Beth, she expressed her feelings about womanhood:

Poor Beth had one great misfortune. She was born a woman. Now she despised nearly all women in the world except Ma'me de Stael--She could not abide their littleness called delicacies, their pretty headaches, & soft mincing voices, their nerves & affectations. She thought to herself that no man was vain of being weaker than another man, but rather ashamed. She thought that a woman's weakness, she sh'd not be vain of therefore, but ashamed. One word Beth hated in her soul . . & the word was "feminine". Beth thanked her gods that she was not & never w'd be feminine.

(BC III:361)115

Assunta, the Italian servant, takes over the household duties after Aurora's mother's death and acts as a substitute mother to the orphaned child. "And old Assunta to make up the fire,/ Crossing herself when'e'er a sudden flame/
Which lightened from the firewood, made alive/ That picture of my mother on the wall" (I:124-127), the picture which for many years

... kept the mystic level of all forms, Hates and fears, and admirations, was by turns Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite, A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate, A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love, A still Medusa with mild milky brows

... Our Lady of Passion, stabbed with swords Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her first Moonlighted pallor...

(I: 153-161)

Aurora imagines all these images making a woman. Just as Romney calls her a "witch" (78), and Aurora finds Marian Earle "beautiful" like a "saint" (IX:186, 187), Gelpi thinks Lady Waldemar is a Lamia: "the epithets with which Aurora mentally describes her dwell continually, obsessively, on the image of a Lamia: 'that woman-serpent' (VI:1103); "The Lamia-woman" (VII:152); 'Lamia shut the shutters, bar the doors/ From every glimmer on thy serpent-skin!' (VII:170-71)" (Gelpi 39-40). Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her creation of this wicked and malicious "fiend" (I:155), Lady Waldemar have similar opinions; "some of Lady Waldemar’s attitudes and reactions are uncomfortably and unadmissably close to Aurora’s own" (Gelpi 40) and that Lady Waldemar’s opinion of "male poets" as "preferably, straining less/ And teaching more" (IX:65-66) is "the voice of Aurora’s own self-distrust, the disabling faithlessness of the inner oppressor" (40). Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed her
view on women to Robert Browning in July 1845: "There is a natural inferiority of mind in women—of the intellect... not by any means, of the moral nature" (L.RB/EBB I:113)\textsuperscript{116}. Thus, Barrett's faith on male poets is spoken through Lady Waldemar.\textsuperscript{117} Elizabeth Barrett has a pretty good perception of woman's nature. She simply disapproves, and as Barrett Browning denied her own femininity in the past, she chose the same route for Aurora.

While Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* has been acclaimed as a critical feminist text by critics, it is "an integrated expression of essentialist and ultimately non-feminist views of sex and gender, despite sharp attacks on sexual hypocrisy and devastating satire of women's education" (Deirdree David 114). Undeniably, Aurora is an unusual heroine, but not necessarily a feminist, for she "assumes a role inscribed in and by male-dominated culture and society" (David 114). It is essential to have a brief look at Elizabeth Barrett Browning's views on the feminist question and how she perceived her gender.

First of all, Elizabeth Barrett classified intelligence as male and female. After Margaret Fuller's death, in a letter to Mrs. David Ogilvy, she regarded most of Fuller's work as "quite inferior to what might have been expected from so masculine an intellect" (32). Likewise, she praised Harriet Martineau for the "male" qualities of her mind, and as David reminds us "the following remarks about her fellow-
invalid-addressed to Mrs. Martineau in 1844—betray Barrett Browning’s sanction of the Victorian separation of men and women into categories of strong and weak thinkers” (114):

No case of a weak-minded woman and a nervous affection; but of the most manlike woman in the three kingdoms—in the best sense of man—a woman gifted with admirable fortitude, as well as exercised in high logic, a woman of sensibility and of imagination certainly, but apt to carry her reason unbent wherever she sets her foot; given to utilitarian philosophy and the habit of logical analysis. (L.EBB I:196-197)

In a letter to H.S. Boyd, Barrett Browning referred to Martineau as "the most logical intellect of the age, for a woman" clearly displaying her Victorian conviction that logic was not a female quality (L.EBB I:225). In late June of 1846, Robert Browning regarded Harriet Martineau’s call for female members of Parliament "exquisitely absurd" because "Parliament seems no place for originating, creative minds—but for the second-rate minds influenced by and bent on working out the results of these—and the most efficient qualities for such a purpose are confessedly found oftener with men than with women" (L.EBB II:280). Barrett’s response was a declaration of women’s physical weakness for administrative work as well as their lack of "instruction, capacity, wholeness of intellect enough" to do work in Parliament (II:280). As Deirdree David asserts, such an opinion cannot be of a feminist woman "on her way to confronting patriarchy, nor is it pregnant with the promise of 'speaking all that is repressed and forbidden in human
experience,' which is how Kaplan reads *Aurora Leigh*" (116). As I have attempted to show in the previous chapters, Elizabeth Barrett always regarded women inferior to men intellectually, and she displayed her attitudes in her poetry as well as in her correspondence. In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, she expressed her denial to be a very strong partizan on the Rights-of-Women-side of the argument because she believed that "considering men and women in the mass, there IS an inequality of the intellect, and that it is proved by the very state of things which gifted women complain,---& more than proved by the manner in which their complaint is received by their own sisterhood. *L.MRM III:81*)

These statements clearly exhibit Barrett Browning's conviction of the feminine inferiority. Barrett is indicating that women's inferiority is proved because women have something to complain of. David asserts that "the actual constraints placed upon the lives of Victorian women, the necessity of fitting female desire for intellectual autonomy to the shapes of male cultural authority, tend to be evaded or ignored in Barrett Browning's sexual politics" (115). As a matter of fact, in her correspondence to Robert Browning, Barrett joked about "the Martineau-doctrine of equality" (*L.RB/EBB I:357*). Martineau's conviction of the need to educate women was not Barrett's concern, for she was convinced that women had "minds of quicker movement, but less power and depth" than men (I:113), and so she openly expressed her dislike on issues like "Women and their Mission" and "the Martineau-doctrine of equality" (*L.RB/EBB*
I:347, 113; BC I:361). In the light of Elizabeth Barrett's views on women\textsuperscript{19}, Aurora's attempt to deny her femininity is more or less self-explanatory.

The natural result of Aurora's denial of her femininity would be her "identification with the masculinity" (Gelpi 41). On her twentieth birthday, when Romney finds Aurora amongst ivy leaves in a day dream, first he teases her, then talks lightly of her ambition to be a poet simply because he believes women's poetry cannot be as good as men's poetic work due to women's lack of worldly experience. He, then, clumsily asks Aurora, whom he has offended so deeply, to be his wife and devote her life to helping him. Hurt and insulted, Aurora refuses him and devotes her life to become a good poet. It is this devotion to her art that convinces many critics that the feminist question was a motive in Aurora's decision. If so, why would Elizabeth Barrett be so upset about reviews and write: "I did not fancy that this poem would be so identified as it has been, with that question, which was only a collateral object with my intentions in writing" (L. EBB)\textsuperscript{120}. Nevertheless, the poem was regarded then and is now regarded by many critics as a feminist plea because of its unusual and extraordinary female heroine, leaving us with a character denying her own femininity, looking for masculine associations to fit in a male dominant society\textsuperscript{121}. She cannot quite successfully picture herself as a man, although she tries.
In literature, mountains and hills mostly mean male territories. As Gelpi points out, Aurora "Among the deep hills" plunges herself "as a hunted stag" (I:1071-73);

she compares her situation to that of the young Achilles when his mother, Thetis, the sea-nymph, hid him in woman's clothing among the maidens at the court of Lycomedes so that he might not be called to serve in the Trojan War. He was wrapped in women's garment's through a mother's agency, Aurora in man's through a father's. (42)

And thus, as did the women formerly
By young Achilles, when they pinned a veil
Across the boy's audacious front, and swept
With tuneful laughs the silver-fretted rocks,
He wrapt his little daughter in his large
Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no
(I:723-728)

Prior to this comparison, Aurora speaks of her readings:

I read much. What my father taught before
From many a volume, Love re-emphasized
Upon the self-same pages: Theophrast
Grew tender with the memory of his eyes,
And Alian made mine wet. The trick of Greek
And Latin he had taught me, as he would
Have taught me wrestling or the game of fives
If such he had known,--most like a ship-wrecked man
Who heaps his single platter with goats' cheese
And scarlet berries; or like any man
Who loves but one, so gives all at once,
Because he has it, rather than because
He counts it worthy. Thus, my father gave:
(I:709-722)

As Aurora gives an account of her knowledge, she clearly states that she is indebted to her father for all her learnings. It is knowledge that gives birth to the poet. She further displays that such teachings are extraordinarily unusual for the education of a typical nineteenth-century female, not to mention a child. Thus, knowledge, which is a
male prerogative, is left to Aurora by her father; in that sense, Aurora was led towards a denial of her femininity and an identification with the masculinity by her father’s teachings. Gelpi identifies "doublet" with "learning and poetic power" as well as all male attitudes, including male derogation of the feminine. So the sense of herself as masculine, which she feels in order to think seriously of herself as a poet, becomes the sense also which eats into the flesh of her self-esteem. She is manlike (according to the culture’s associations with masculinity) in some respects but not, after all, a man, just as Achilles was not a woman. Yet through cultural conditioning she shares men’s feelings that men are inherently superior to women. (42)

At this point, I would like to emphasize the fact that it is the father who facilitates the need to be manlike in the child. The poet Aurora recognizes that "her image of her poetic power is the source also of her self-doubt" (EBB Leighton 44). Just as Elizabeth Barrett denied her femininity because she was not allowed to fully be a woman under her father’s oppressive and conditional love, Aurora seeks masculinity because of her father’s generosity, unconditional love, and possibly because of his post-Victorian attitudes. As Aurora says "The path my father’s foot/ Had trod me out ... / ... alone I carried on" (I:729-730). Thus, the father is again partially responsible, although with good intentions this time, for the daughter’s inability to be a complete woman and for the future she has ahead of her as a poet.
Despite her achievements, Aurora, the poet, is not content with her life. Through the years, Aurora has come to realize that independence without love does not bring happiness. As Sutphin argues, "although she asserts her independence, Aurora often seems ambivalent about the life she makes for herself as a writer" (48). Her hunger for love and affection, for a companion continually depresses her but she won’t let another man in her life. When Romney "dropped a sudden hand upon my head/ Bent down on woman’s work, as soft as rain—/ But then I rose and shook it off as fire,/ The stranger’s touch that took my father’s place/ Yet dared seem soft" (543-547). Aurora is not ready and mature enough to allow any other man to take her father’s place, so she chooses to love her father only even if it means denying her own femininity. And she seeks comfort in parental love. "Up in heaven/ I have my father, —with my mother’s face/ Beside him in a blotch of heavenly light/ No more for earth’s familiar, household use,/ No more. The best verse written by this hand/ Can never reach them where they sit, to seem/ Well done to them" (V:546-552). She longs for her parents’ praise. Although she receives praise from her readers, she feels lonely: "To have our books/ Appraised by love, associated with love,/ While we sit loveless!" is it hard you think?" (V:474-476), and imagines

--how, that night,
Some father, issuing from the misty roads
Upon the luminous round of lamp and hearth
And happy children, having caught up first
The youngest there until it shrink and shriek
To feel the cold chin prick its dimples through
With winter from the hills, may throw i’ the lap
Of the eldest (who has learnt to drop her lids
To hide some sweetness newer than last year’s)
Our book and cry, . . . 'Ah, you, you care for
rhymes;
So here be rhymes to pore on under trees,
When April comes to let you! I’ve been told
They are not idle as so many are,
But set hearts beating pure as well as fast.
'T is yours, the book; I’ll write your name in it,
That so you may not lose, however lost
In poet’s lore and charming reverie,
The thought of how your father thought of you
In riding from the town.’

(V:456-474)

These lines are significant, for they display how the child
and the poet integrate. As Aurora sits lonely wishing to
share her success with someone, she imagines "some father"
and not mother and "happy children" in a similar cold winter
night, with the oldest daughter being so fond of poetry.
This is not simple coincidence. While Barrett was writing
Aurora Leigh, Edward Moulton Barrett had broken all ties
with her. Obviously, Elizabeth Barrett is reminiscing
herself again as a child, longing for her father’s approval,
and reassuring herself that he still thinks about her. The
thought of his presence as a loving parent once again
comforts her. This dream of "some father" is significant,
for it explains the significance of this book which appears
again. Aurora sells her father’s books, which she "read for
hope" (I:729), and finances her trip to Paris. It is again
her father who makes this trip possible for Aurora.

Christine Sutphin sees this "action as self-assertive – an
escape from the old scripts of male texts" (45). However, Paris en route to Italy, is the ultimate turning point in Aurora's life. She is not running towards independence, for Aurora, the poet is independent now; she is seeking an emotional reunion, a kind of reconciliation with her father just as Elizabeth Barrett Browning did all her life. So, she keeps one of the books, "Proclus" because "my father chided me" (V:1236) for pressing a flower in its leaves. Sutphin asserts that by this act, Aurora "maintains connection with him" (46)."Ah, blame of love, that's sweeter than all praise/ Of those who love not! 't is so lost me,/ I cannot, in such beggared life, afford/ To lose my Proclus,—not for Florence even" (V:1242-1245). The symbolic significance of this book is great because it is the poetic power, knowledge channelled to Aurora through her father; it is also the book in her dream, which the father gave to his oldest daughter; it is the knowledge Edward Moulton Barrett encouraged Elizabeth to have; it is also the symbolic token of childhood, and love between father and daughter. Just as it gave Elizabeth Barrett Browning comfort to imagine her father reading her poetry while they were parted, the imaginary father's present to his oldest daughter together with his reassurance "... however lost/ In poet's lore and charming reverie,/ The thought of how your father thought of you" comforts Aurora. Thus, the book in its symbolic significance is the integral point in Aurora, the child and
the poet. Thus, neither can Aurora let her father go, nor will her father will give up on his daughter. The last incident clearly establishes Aurora's reluctance to assert her independence from her father and offers partial explanation as to why she rejected Romney.

Barbara Gelpi suggests "the resemblance and relationship" between Aurora and Romney (41). Lady Waldemar's words: "Your droop of eyelid is the same as his" (IX:163), and Marian's comment: "Your cousin--ah, most like you!" (IV. 939) show the physical resemblance between the two characters, also displaying the biological connection between the two. This resemblance also adds significance to Aurora's description of herself as "I am like,/ They tell me, my dear father. Broader brows/ Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth/ Of delicate features, --paler, near grave" (I:198-201). Thus, the natural conclusion of Aurora's resemblance to her father and to Romney would be the resemblance of the two men. Besides their physical features, Romney and her father had similar traits. Barbara C. Gelpi sees Romney as Aurora's "alter ego," whom she has turned into the "most helpless woman in mythology, the maiden Iphigenia sacrificed at Aulis so that the winds might blow her father's ships to Troy" (41). "Ah, self-tied/ By a contract, male Iphigenia bound/ At a fatal Aulis for the winds to change" (II:778-779). Gelpi suggests that Aurora's rejection of Romney whom she has temporarily made feminine
"reiterates her resentment of femininity and all that it represents" (41). While the idea is fascinating, it absolutely requires the context in which Romney was turned into Iphigenia. "I had a father! yes, but long ago—/ How long it seemed that moment. Oh, how far,/ How far and safe, God, dost thou keep thy saints/ When once gone from us!" (II:734-737) cries Aurora in her loneliness, "and not one,/ Not even my father, look from work or play/ To ask, 'Who is it that cries after us,/ Below there, in the dusk?' Yet formerly/ He turned his face upon me quick enough,/ If I said 'father.' Now I might cry loud;" (II:739-744). From the memory and longing for the father, Aurora’s thoughts shift to Romney, "I had lost a friend/ In Romney Leigh" (II:766-67), and compares her loss of Romney to that of her father: "Well, voice and look were now/ More utterly shut out from me, I felt,/ Than even my father’s" (II:771-773). The constant shift of Aurora’s thoughts from one man to another shows that she also does see them almost as one. Up to this point, it is clear that Aurora has come to associate Romney and her father with love. The two men are also Aurora’s losses, and in that they share something. The Iphigenia sacrifice then becomes not only the restatement of her two losses, but also her true revelation as to why she rejected Romney. He seemed "A little cold and dominant in love!" (II:782) unlike her father. Deirdree David writes on the subject that
the principal object of Aurora's contempt is less the male cultural authority which denigrates woman's mind, than it is male inability to feel. The angry woman utters a sentimental attack on male insensitivity. It is not Romney's politics that Aurora really objects to when she refuses his proposal, not his desire to fit women into the convenient social slots of wife, nurse, and helper, but rather that he is emotionally barren, as figuratively blind to Aurora's feelings as he is literally blind to her face at the end of the poem. (129)

Thus, the striking resemblance between the three characters in the poem sheds light to my suggestion that Aurora is not willing to be independent of her father, and she could not allow a Romney who is so different on the subject of love than her father was. Once she begins seeing the two men almost as one, she will no longer need to cling to her art as a substitute for love when in her ears, her father's word "Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,/ 'Love, Love, my child.'" (I:316-318); now she can easily and freely declare "O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but love is more" (IX:649).

At about the same time Aurora admits her love to Romney, comes her recognition of her masculinity. The belief that she is losing Romney to Marian Earle makes her sad; as Marian tells us, "'He loves you, Marian?... in a sort of mild/ Derisive sadness... as a mother asks her babe," (IV:946-47). She runs "head-foremost to the rescue of my soul" (IV:875) during Romney's wedding day riot. Aurora's realization of love allows her also to feel "woman's passion" which she had denied herself before. After hearing Marian's tragic story, she offers herself to Marian as a
friend, and "sister" (VII:117), and a "mother" (VII:124) to Marian's child: "But I, convicted, broken utterly,/ With women's passion clung about her waist/ And kissed her hair and eyes" (VI:778-780). As Gelpi asserts, for the first time in her life, Aurora identifies with another woman as a woman (45). Now that she believes Romney has married Lady Waldemar, Aurora cries for her lost love Romney and despises her tears as womanish: "It seems as if I had a man in me,/ Despising such a woman" (VII:212-213). "Previously, her sense of this internal man's contempt had made all her struggles to act creatively seem petty and useless" (Gelpi 45). Now, with the acknowledgement of the woman, comes the sense of failure: "I thought, 'Now, if I had been a woman, such/ As God made women, to save men by love,—/ By just my love I might have saved this man/ And made a nobler poem for the world/ Than all I have failed in'" (VII:185-189). Thus, Aurora, the poet, reaches the end of her vocation. By admitting failure as a poet after allowing herself to identify with her as a woman, she reiterates her resentment to femininity and reveals her recognition that the poetic power and ability to produce a "nobler poem" is male prerogative. As Gelpi points out, she openly asks the man in her to allow her once more to put Marian's story in writing for Romney to receive before his marriage to Lady Waldemar (45). "Put away/ This weakness. If, as I have just now said,/ A man's within me,—let him act himself,/ Ignoring
the poor conscious trouble of blood/ That's called the woman merely" (VII:228-232). At the same time, she describes the woman in her as weak and regrets her decision to refuse Romney years ago.

O Romney, O my Romney, O my friend,
My cousin and friend! my helper, when I would,
My love, that might be! mine! Why, how one weeps
When one is too weary! Were a witness by,
He'd say some folly . . . that I loved the man,
Who knows? . . . and make me laugh again for scorn.

(VII:194-199)

At this point in her life, both the child and the poet Aurora have experienced the sense of loss. And with this sense of feeling comes a complete resignation from life. As she watches all sorts of women praying for salvation, she feels completely detached from them, for she no longer feels alive. With the absence of her father and the loss of Romney, she finds herself all barren and deserted with no one to love or depend on. With the child and the poet gone, the woman Aurora is merely "weak" and "weary. To release herself from her state of death, Aurora needs to unite with a Romney in the image of her father.

While imagining "a sea-king with a voice of waves,/ And treacherous soft eyes," (XIII:41-42) in her desolation, Romney Leigh appears on Aurora's balcony: "the sea-king! In my ears/ The sound of waters. There he stood, my king!"

(VIII:60-61); "A Greek king coming from a taken Troy" (VIII:171). The image of the king recalls Elizabeth Barrett's letter to Robert Browning describing her father:
"He takes it to be his duty to rule like the Kings of Christendom" (L.RB/EBB I:169). The "treacherous soft eyes" of the king pronounces the change in Romney. As Virginia Steinmetz suggests,

the darkened and absent eye is one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s earliest representations of her father’s tendency to seal himself off from reality and retreat into self-isolation. Later in her letters and poetry, blindness can be creative of knowledge or may signify spiritual ignorance and death. (24)

This view certainly explains Romney’s blindness. Just as Aurora chose to die upon the loss of her father, Romney is in a way dead too. He has lost his vitality; he is heart broken, hurt physically, and beaten. And as dead, he is like Aurora’s father, and naturally with the new father/Romney, Aurora feels again as a child. The sense of childhood that she had lost on a stone comes back to her: "'Alas,' I said, 'I speak I know not what:/ I’m back in childhood, thinking as a child,/ A foolish fancy--will it make you smile?"
(VIII:1025-27). And Romney replacing the father calls out: "Poor child, poor child?--Aurora, my beloved" (VIII:1067).

By returning the feeling of her lost childhood to Aurora, Elizabeth Barrett refurnishes Aurora with the sense and the need of dependency. Both Marian and Aurora view Romney as God, imposing on him the greatest power of all. Marian says: "'I but thank God who made thee what thou art,/ So wholly godlike,'" (IX:285-86). Aurora, also sees him as a man with "a godlike nature" (I:553) years ago, now he is the source
of creative power which she had earlier assessed as Godly.

Then, "he was looking for worms, I for the Gods" (I:552),

now she admits to be the worm Romney sought years ago.

... though as powerless, said I, as a stone,
A stone can still give shelter to a worm,
And it is worth while being a stone for that:
There is hope, Aurora.' 'Is there hope for me?
For me?—and is there room beneath the stone
For such a worm?''

(IX: 5980-603)

With her acceptance to be the worm Romney sought when she
was so idealistic at the age of twenty, Aurora also accepts
Romney's attitudes on women and their mission which she
rejected. Earlier the stone had symbolized her childhood,
and her father, for they had a dream on that "stone," now
that the father and Romney are blended into one person,
Romney assumes the role of the father as he declares himself
to be the "stone" that will shelter this changed, passive,
and submissive Aurora. "So wrong, so proud, so weak, so
unconsold,/ So mere a woman!" (IX:712-713) is her new but
conventional perception of herself now. And as such, women
are to be used. Thus, Aurora offers herself to Romney: "To
use . . . to use! O Romney, O my love,/ I am changed since
then, changed wholly, for indeed/ If now you'd stoop so low
to take my love/ And use it roughly, without stint or
spare,/ As men use common things . . ." (IX: 672-676). As
DuPlessis argues "since Aurora had offered to sacrifice and
to be used, what more aggrandizing way to fulfill her desire
for abasement than to demand that she do twice as often and
twice as intensely what she has already proven she can do very well" (87). Before Romney's arrival Aurora had given up reading, writing, and thinking. And her final assertions that "O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but love is more" (IX:657) and that only perfect women can develop into perfect artists (IX:649) only emphasize that she has chosen to be the typical submissive Victorian woman. These lines recall Elizabeth Barrett Browning's own view of herself: "I belong to that pitiful order of weak women who cannot command their bodies with their souls at every moment and who sink down in hysterical disorder when they ought to act and resist" (Dally 82)."23 Aurora's quest for self-identity ends. She has gained a father substitute who "has had the greatest power over my heart because I am one of those weak women who reverence strong men. By a word he might have bound me to him hand and foot" (L.EBB I:291), and she has found submission and powerlessness for herself at the end of her quest.

2. In this chapter, I have heavily relied on Peter Dally’s psychological analysis of Elizabeth Barrett’s life. The exact events and incidents referred to in this chapter can also be found in other studies. Dally’s account includes significant psychological opinions and analyses. Unfortunately, the book does not indicate the exact sources of the materials directly quoted; therefore, I have cited Dally’s account throughout this chapter. For the bibliographic references in this chapter, please see Peter Dally’s Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait, unless otherwise stated.


5. Letter is dated December 12, 1845.

6. Letter is dated September 14, 1846.

7. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 22.


9. Henceforth cited as L.MRM; letter is dated November 13 [sic for 23?], 1838.

10. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 47.

11. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 48.

12. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 48.

13. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 53-4. Letter is dated July 2-3, 1845.

14. Bro had to have Elizabeth’s consent to go to Jamaica.
Since Boyd and Hunter were around, temporarily she had outgrown the need for Bro.

15. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 67.

16. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 67; letter is dated November 13, [sic for 23?] 1838.

17. In *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora describes her father in a similar fashion. He appears to be the life force, and their consequent separation leads her into a death-in-life state.

18. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 71.

19. Letter is dated January 26, 1846. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 71.

20. Letter is dated August 20, 1845. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 73.

21. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 74. The image of this "divine hand" recurs in her poetry as the hand of her father. See Virginia Steinmetz, "Beyond the Sun: Patriarchal Images in *Aurora Leigh*."

22. Letter is dated October 10-11, 1845. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 79.

23. Letter is dated October 27[-28] 1842. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 79.


25. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 81.

26. Letter is dated December 21, 1842. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 79.

27. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 81.

28. Letter is dated December 21, 1842. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 81.

29. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 87.

30. Although she wanted a passionate relationship, it was not in a sexual sense but the kind she had experienced with Bro.

31. During their marriage, on several occasions, Barrett displays the same fear.
32. Just as she felt inadequate about herself as a woman, she found fault with all the female friends. Even in Aurora Leigh, all eight female characters display a kind of character defect.

33. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 103.

34. Letters are dated January 26, 1846, August 20, 1845. Dally refers to these incidents on pg. 112.

35. In Aurora Leigh, only the divine hand of God and the hand of her father bring Aurora peace.

36. Kintner used / / symbol for "original and altered readings. Used where one word has been super-imposed upon another or the original retraced so as to alter it" (L.RB/EBB I:xviii); letter is dated September 25, 1845.

37. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 114-15.

38. Letter is dated September 26, 1845.


40. Letter is dated January 26, 1846.

41. Letter is dated January 21, 1846. She also writes about her father’s high qualities in L.RB/EBB I:421-22.

42. Letter is dated March 3, 1846.

43. Letter is dated September 10, 1846.

44. Letter is dated September 14, 1846. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 125.

45. Letter is dated September 13, 1846. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 126.

46. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 132.

47. Letter is dated April 15, 1848. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 138.

48. Letter is dated July 18, 1849. Also quoted by Dally without source, pg. 141.

49. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 163.

50. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 176.

51. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 176.
52. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 187.

53. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 187.

54. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 190-91.

55. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 191.

56. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 82.

57. Henceforth cited as L.EBB with volume and page number.

58. Complete Works by Elizabeth Barrett Browning; henceforth cited as W with volume and page number.

59. Henceforth cited as EBB with page number.

60. Angela Leighton also discusses the same issue in EBB, pg. 39.

61. Letter is dated January 21, 1846.

62. Letter is dated September 16, 1845.

63. Letter is dated September 16, 1846.

64. Letter is dated October 24, 1846.

65. Letter is dated March 20, 1845.

66. Letter is dated May 7, 1846.

67. Letter is dated February 23, 1846.

68. Letter is dated April 3, 1846.

69. Letter is dated November 28, 1845.

70. Letter is dated April 3, 1846.

71. Gilbert and Gubar observe that for the Victorian women, "to be selfless is not only to be noble but to be dead" as well (25).


73. Taplin, G. Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 62.

74. "women want to be made to think actively" wrote Elizabeth Barrett, resenting the present passive status of the Victorian women (L.RB/EBB I:261).
75. Henceforth cited as Autobiography.

76. L.RB/EBB I:196; letter is dated September 16, 1845.

77. Letter is dated January 15, 1846.

78. Letter is dated September 14, 1846.

79. previously quoted from L.RB/EBB; March 20, 1845, pg. 41; May 7, 1846, pg. 686; April 3, 1846, pg. 581.


81. Although "Rhyme of the Duchess May" has been regarded one of the best ballads of the poet, she did not like it. In a letter to Mrs. Martin, Barrett implied that "the nonconformist conscience of the poet pricked her a little on account of the signal glorification of suicide implied in the denouncement of the Rhyme" (The Complete Poetical Works of Mrs Browning, ed. Harriet Eaters Preston, p.140).

82. Letter is dated April 3, 1845.

83. Henceforth cited as GR.

84. Letter is dated November 28, 1845.

85. Letter is dated May 1, 1845.

86. Barrett's correspondence and diary provide us with information about her studies in Greek, Latin, and Italian before 1820. She had read enough to have an acquaintance with Homer, Plato, Bion, Anacreon, Horace, Claudian, and Dante. In addition to her work in Greek, Barrett also read "several volumes of philosophy and religion" (Taplin 51-52).


89. See Pattison, pg. 1-2.

90. See Pattison, pg. 6-7.

92. In her *Diary*, Elizabeth Barrett writes about her love and admiration for her father; however, she regards his presence "a thing feared & wished for" (December 8, 1831). Her regard of Hector as the source of her fear and pleasure can hardly be accidental.

93. After Barrett began to show interest in the child, her attitude to Penini became increasingly idiosyncratic. She looked on the boy as perfect, beautiful, intelligent, and artistic, but this natural pride was to become elaborated and magnified into a veritable cult which affected his education, manner of dress, discipline and behavior. She began to see him as an extension of herself, as the "perfect being she had striven to be since childhood." All her ideas about Penini’s upbringing were centered around this fantasy. He was to be the ideal child, neither boy nor girl, allowed to develop freely and without bias, his natural beauty and goodness of spirit controlling his development and never to be lost (Dally 143). The knowledge that Pen must grow up distressed her, for growth meant change and the risk of imperfection, and she tried her utmost to hold him back and to preserve, or at least prolong, his infancy. "The truth is," she confessed to Arabel, "the child is not like a boy. . .he isn’t exactly like a girl either. He’s a sort of neutral creature so far" (143).

94. Rosalind in "The Poet’s Vow" (II:V), Duchess May in the "Rhyme of the Duchess May" (XXXV, LI, LXII, LXVI, LXVII, LXXXIV), Bertha in "Bertha in the Lane" (II, III, IV, XXV, XXXI), Lady Geraldine in "Lady Geraldine’s Courtship" (II, V-VII, XIV, XVII, XXII, XXIV-XXVII, XXXV, XLIV, XLV, LIV, LXV, LXX, LXXI, LXXVI, LXXVIII, LXXXII, LXXXIV, Conclusion: VIII, X, XI) are a few that fit this description neatly.

95. As Hayter writes, "it all seems very stuffy and sickly, but one has to make the necessary effort of imagination to see how right, how true, how moving, it all was to her contemporaries" (83).

96. Also in *Madwoman in the Attic* by Gilbert and Gubar, chapter 2, "Infection in the Sentence."

97. Henceforth cited as BC.

98. From "Elizabeth Barrett Barrett to Edward Moulton Barrett (father), On Papa’s birth day, Hope End—during the improvements there," dated May 28, 1815.
99. From "Elizabeth Barrett Barrett to Edward Moulton Barrett (father) "To my dearest Papa on his welcome birthday, May 28, 1820, Hope End."

100. "The Lost Bower, which appeared in 1844, amplifies and revises "The Deserted Garden" which was first published in 1838.


102. Letter is dated August 13, 1846.

103. From the "preface" to "Venetian Bracelet."

104. Letter is dated July 11, 1846.

105. Letter is dated November 23, 1842.

106. Letter is dated November 21, 1842.

107. Letter is dated November 27, 1842.

108. Letters are dated July 2-3, 1845 to Robert Browning; December 21, 1842 to Ms. Mitford.

109. Also quoted by Hayter without source, pg. 185.


111. Letter is dated May 14, 1857 to M.R. Martin (L.EBB); quoted by Hayter without source, pg. 186.

112. Letter is dated July 2-3, 1845.

113. Most of the time, it is difficult to divorce the actions and thoughts of Aurora from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's. "I have put much of myself in it—I mean to say, of my soul, my thoughts, emotions, opinions" Barrett Browning wrote in her correspondence (The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Frederick G. Kenyon, London, 1897, II:228); thus, the actual events and associations of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life do reflect on Aurora's course of development.

114. Leighton writes that "Aurora greets a world which is no longer a substitute for her father's face and her father's presence. For the first time, her loneliness does not stem from a sense of his lack and absence, but is a 'perfect solitude', desired and willed" (139).

116. Letter is dated July 2-3, 1845.

117. According to Gelpi, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "sentimental depiction of the poor seamstress Marian Earle shows Barrett Browning to be limited by class values which she accepts without question;" thus, the "effectiveness of her feminist vision is thereby tampered both for her own day and for ours" (35).

118. Letter is dated February 19, 1845.

119. Deirdree David discusses these views extensively in "Art's a Service," pg. 114-17.

120. Quoted by Hayter without source, pg. 186. Letter is dated May 14, 1857 to M.R. Martin.

121. This view is discussed by Gelpi, pg. 41-44.

122. "Not that Romney Leigh/ Had loved me coldly. If I thought so once" (IX: 780-81), says Aurora later admitting such as the reason of her rejection of Romney.

123. Quoted by Dally without source, pg. 82.
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