

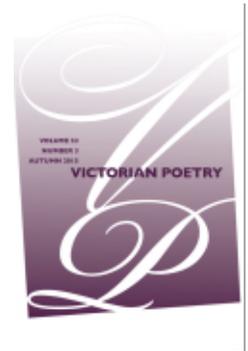


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Gender, Language, and the Politics of Disembodiment in *Aurora Leigh*

BARBARA BARROW

Aurora Leigh is a political poem because it is a physical poem. While feminist critics of the 1970s and 1980s celebrated the work's vividly embodied imagery, a more recent critical interest in the so-called Spasmodic school of poetry, with its focus on sensations, rhythms, and pulses, has further emphasized the central role of women's physical experience in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's epic.¹ Such analyses magnify Aurora's desire to craft a poetry that will express her own "full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age."² And yet this same emphasis on the body also fuels the poem's internal dismissal of women's poetry. In Book II, the central male antagonist, Romney Leigh, points to Aurora's body as an obstacle to political expression. Catching the young Aurora in the act of crowning herself as a poet, Romney insists that women cannot write about contemporary debates over labor or slavery because they understand everything in terms of their own experience: "All's yours and you, / All, coloured with your blood, or otherwise / Just nothing to you" (II.196–198). In a powerfully essentializing gesture, Romney invalidates Aurora's poetry by means of her body. His insult articulates a larger double bind that is at the heart of *Aurora Leigh*: namely, the tension between the work's lively interest in political questions and its commitment to representing these questions in an expressive, physical language.

Aurora Leigh's political poetics, then, turns on the conflict between two kinds of bodies: the larger social body the poet seeks to represent and the distorting presence of her own embodied, feminine sensibility. In what follows, I argue that *Aurora Leigh* responds to this conflict by claiming disembodiment as a poetic and political strategy. While acknowledging the poem's insistently physical idiom, I seek to uncover an alternative subtext of images of abstracted, vanishing, and intangible bodies, and to show how this subtext is equally central to *Aurora Leigh*. Through the associated figures of Aurora and Marian, Barrett Browning's epic presents us with many examples of the body's denial and disappearance. These negations offer a revitalized political poetics even as they disassociate women's language from women's physical experiences.

In focusing on *Aurora Leigh*'s transfigured poetics, I join critics such as Kirstie Blair, Jason Rudy, and Charles LaPorte who underline Barrett Browning's alertness to language as an art of spiritual transformation. While Blair and Rudy analyze the spiritual underpinnings of Barrett Browning's relation between poetics and the body, LaPorte has shown how *Aurora Leigh* "genders prophecy and poetry" in ways reminiscent of related scholarship that foregrounds Aurora's connections to Victorian sage discourse.³ Like these works, this essay sets out from the premise that *Aurora Leigh* bases its poetics on a creative attachment to language's divine potential, one that upholds an incarnational poetics to unite the material and spiritual realms.⁴ Embodiment and disembodiment in *Aurora Leigh* dialectically transform each other, at times informing Aurora's desire for detached contemplation, at other times realizing her eager bodily longing for a Christ to descend and "straighten out / The leathery tongue turned back into the throat" (V.108-109).

However, while these works have convincingly demonstrated the link between the material and the spiritual realms in Barrett Browning's work, I wish to focus on *Aurora Leigh*'s extensive engagement with the subject of earthly political sovereignty. I argue that, if the poem understands a principle of incarnation to animate language, so too does it recognize these principles to be associated with a long tradition of political power. This feudal tradition, or "body politic," underwent shifts in the nineteenth century toward a more inclusive terminology of the "social body" that was said to include the people at large or the lower classes.⁵ This essay demonstrates how *Aurora Leigh* understands this social body bear traces of its roots in an autocratic feudal hierarchy, one symbolized in the poem's representations of the French emperor Napoleon III and of Romney's phalanstery—a structure whose failure some critics have read as indicative of the work's conservatism.⁶ I contend, however, that *Aurora Leigh*'s imagery of disembodiment seeks to create an alternative political poetics that transcends this embodied hierarchy. To demonstrate this claim, I begin by analyzing Barrett Browning's engagement with language and politics by way of John Locke in her early poem, *An Essay on Mind* (1826), going on to show how Barrett Browning articulated the connection between language, sensation, and liberty through her readings of Locke, Robert Chambers, and Thomas Carlyle. I then turn to *Aurora Leigh* to reveal how Aurora's acute sensibility symbolically prevents her from entering into these political discourses, and I demonstrate how the abstracted bodies of Aurora and Marian come to assert an alternative reading of women's language that disentangles the body from *Aurora Leigh*'s complex web of somatic discourses.

By foregrounding Barrett Browning's disembodied poetics, I depart from the focus on the liberatory sensational dimensions of *Aurora Leigh* characteristic

of much recent work on the Spasmodic school of poetry. Aurora Leigh figures prominently in these readings as a female narrator who uses her body to gender this poetic movement. Herbert Tucker, for instance, explores how Barrett Browning's epic, full of "Shudder, pulsation, outburst, and spasm," makes the predominantly male Spasmodic milieu "appear to have been, in its deepest fiber, feminine all along."⁷ By privileging corporeal experience as the foundation for *Aurora Leigh's* political interventions, however, such readings tend to overlook the poem's reservations about the body and its role in communicating poetic language. In so doing, they run the risk of recovering the very gendered notions of sensibility that *Aurora Leigh* contests and subverts in its explorations of disembodiment.⁸ Spasmodic readings, in other words, must also reckon with a darker and less celebratory understanding of the relationship between poetry and the gendered body, one articulated by Edmund Gosse's denunciation of Barrett Browning as a "spasmodic" poet expressing a "Pythian shriek" through her feminine poetics.⁹ A close analysis of *Aurora Leigh's* strategies of disembodiment, then, has two significant implications: it allows for a fuller retrieval of the poem's intervention into political debates about the social body, and it helps us avoid recuperating an essentialism that the poem itself fiercely contests.

I. A "feudal form incarnately": Language and the Social Body in *An Essay on Mind* and *Aurora Leigh*

Aurora Leigh grounds the origins of language in physical experience. "Virtue's in the word! / The maker burnt up the darkness with His, / To inaugurate the use of vocal life" Aurora declares, adding that the poet's word, planted "deep enough / In any man's breast" can help a man more than changes in material conditions (VI.218–220, 221–222). In bringing together the origins of language with poetry's political potential, Aurora uses the doctrine of the incarnation, or the word-become-flesh, to describe the transformative effects of language between the poet and her readers. In so doing, however, she also calls attention to the ambivalent, excluded role the female body plays in this creation of an embodied political poetics.

Barrett Browning's notions of the relationship between politics, language, and the body developed from her youthful engagement with Enlightenment philosophies of language, particularly the sensationalist work of John Locke. Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) grounded human speech in sensory experience, understanding all words to arise from "common sensible ideas."¹⁰ Locke linked this physical experience of language to political agency. Words themselves have no inherently logical signification; rather they stand in arbitrarily for the ideas they represent in the mind of the speaker. Because each

speaker experiences language and the formation of ideas in a distinctive way, based on the speaker's own sensory experience, "every man has so inviolable a liberty to make words stand for what ideas he pleases, that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds." Even Augustus, Locke declares, could not force his own significations on his subjects. Locke's articulation of the relation between physical experience, language, and liberty was crucial for Barrett Browning, who declared, in an ambitious juvenile work, *An Essay on Mind* (1826), that there was no "perfect code transmitted to mankind," while characterizing language itself as a form of "imperfect government."¹¹ Aurora's physical experience, which underwrites and expresses her poetry, reflects Locke's sensationalist emphasis on bodies, politics, and speech.

Locke's sensationalism was central to Barrett Browning's account of the political effects of writing in the years leading up to the composition of *Aurora Leigh*. In an 1844 essay on Thomas Carlyle co-authored with Richard Hengist Horne, for example, Barrett Browning invoked the image of Locke's individual mind, a "prisoner in a dark room, or in a room which would be dark but for the windows of the same, meaning the senses"; for Barrett Browning, Carlyle's language acts on the "general mind" as the senses act on the individual mind, "strick[ing] a window out here, and another there" and awakening readers.¹² Where Locke grounded language in individual sensation and found political liberty to exist in the different perceptions among and between speakers, Barrett Browning further elaborated the effects of language as a visceral means of communication between writers and readers. The politically awakening potential of this language lay in its ability to impact the reader physically, as Aurora suggests in her first youthful encounters with poetry that "burns you through" and "shakes the heart / Of all the men and women in the world" (l.905, 906–907). Locke's writings on language and sensation helped Barrett Browning develop a view of poetry as a means of physically startling readers into new ideas.

If Enlightenment language-philosophy for Barrett Browning influenced her understanding of the relationship between language and physical experience, however, it could also veer dangerously close to a desacralizing linguistic materialism, one at odds with Barrett Browning's belief in the divine character of language and poetry. She would have seen this materialist stance intensified with the 1844 publication of Robert Chambers's controversial, anonymously written *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, a work of popular science associated with liberal reform.¹³ Chambers's account of language-change bore a revolutionary charge in its description, borrowed from the missionary Robert Moffat, of the children of South African villagers who lived far from the regulatory language of public meetings and festivals in the towns and who learned to create a "language of their

own” (qtd. on p. 317). Chambers compares this “infant Babel” to the neologisms of “the children of the Manchester factory workers, left [alone] for a great part of the day” (p. 317). In so doing, Chambers associates class solidarity with forms of linguistic upheaval. Chambers’s political vision of language was also resolutely materialist. His evolutionary account of human speech observed that “there is a great inclination to surmise a miraculous origin for it [language], although there is no proper ground . . . for such an idea in Scripture” (pp. 310–311). For Chambers, language was not a divine gift but a function of the organization of the larynx, trachea, and mouth (p. 312). Such a materialist account of language had early on led Barrett Browning to qualify her reading of Locke in her prologue to *An Essay on Mind*, which states that “Language from its material analogy deteriorates from spiritual meaning” (p. 97); in 1845 Barrett Browning would declare that *Vestiges* was “one of the most melancholy books in the world.”¹⁴ Barrett Browning sought to unite political and physical accounts of speech as Chambers had, but she wished to do so in ways that affirmed language’s sacred power.

In *Aurora Leigh* she resolved these political, physical, and sacred dimensions of speech through her belief in the doctrine of the Incarnation, or the word-become-flesh, a doctrine manifest in the poem’s many references to Christ. By way of incarnational poetics, Aurora gives expression to both a vibrant fleshly aesthetic and a political trope of sovereignty. Concepts of sovereign authority in Britain were historically grounded in readings of Christ’s body. As Ernst Kantorowicz’s classic “two-bodies” thesis asserts, the feudal king was endowed with both a natural, physical body and a royal, immortal super-body. This division had its origin in the consecrated host or the Eucharist, at once the “corpus natural” or natural body and also the “corpus mysticum,” or the social body of the Church. This social body would later evolve into the early modern “body politic,” with the king at its head.¹⁵ This long tradition of political theology is at the heart of Aurora’s observation, as she looks back to England from post-Revolutionary Paris, that freedom’s “self” comes “Fixed in a feudal form incarnately / To suit our ways of thought and reverence, / That special form, with us, being still the thing” (VI.43, 45–47). Despite the ascendancy of liberal politics in Britain during this time period, Aurora understands her adopted country’s political system to rest on the power structures and traditions associated with its monarchical history, traditions that distinguish British subjects from the “light” political abstractions and revolutionary impulses of the French (VI.2).¹⁶ References to incarnation in *Aurora Leigh* are the means by which Aurora both acknowledges the spiritual underpinnings of language and signifies her own entry into contemporary political discourse.

However, if Aurora draws on an incarnational discourse of sovereign authority, so too does she inherit the uneasy deployment of this political rhetoric in

the wake of the French Revolution and on through nineteenth-century revolutions and reforms. As Mary Poovey has noted, the transition to political modernity brought with it a new emphasis on the “social body” as a more inclusive representation of the polity that could include the lower classes.¹⁷ This representation, in turn, extended the incarnational logic of royal sovereignty into the unstable space of social representation in the wake of the democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century, as Claude Lefort demonstrates in his analysis of the ways the members of modern society remain “so captivated by the image of a body that they project it onto their own union.”¹⁸ This projection undermines the plans for reform and reconstruction that inform Romney’s social work in *Aurora Leigh*. Romney’s phalanstery, converted from an ancestral estate and overseen by its designated patriarch, still bears the traces and injustices of its feudal heritage. As Aurora’s aunt reminds her, Romney is the “son who represents our house / And holds the fiefs and manors” (II.636–637). In its tacit replication of ancient power structures, Romney’s phalanstery approximates the “feudal form” Aurora associates with British political life more broadly.

Tropes of embodiment in the writings that inform Romney’s work further underline the lingering presence of incarnational rhetoric in cross-Channel political debates. The notion of society as an incarnated body is prominent in the writing of the theologian Frederick Denison Maurice, who played a leading role in the Christian Socialist movement the guests at Lord Howe’s party associate with Romney in *Aurora Leigh* (V.737). In *The Kingdom of Christ* (1837), Maurice used the body of Christ to propose a vision of harmony among sects: “The Church is a body united in the acknowledgement of a living *Person*. . . . In that *Person* whom the church confesses as the Lord of Man, he recognizes the Being in whom all men are united, out of whom men are necessarily separated.”¹⁹ So too did French thinkers like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Charles Fourier, whom Lady Waldemar reads to ingratiate herself to Romney, draw on a secularized logic of incarnational brotherhood (III.584–585). In *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808), Charles Fourier spoke of the collective impact of economic mishaps upon the “social body.”²⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon characterized modern individualism as the source of the collective’s loss of power, creating a society “like a body in which the particles had ceased to cohere and which would crumble into dust at the slightest shock.”²¹ The presence of these thinkers in *Aurora Leigh* reveals how the work’s political discourse understands the somatic language of the body politic as an ongoing influence on alternative reorganizations of society in the nineteenth century.²²

Aurora Leigh registers this discursive shift in ambivalent terms, using the corporeal idiom of the body politic to describe the transition to a political model of the social body that understood sovereign authority to reside within the people.

As Alison Chapman has recently argued, Barrett Browning's residence in Florence during the Italian *Risorgimento* or unification movement situated her in a dynamic network of expatriate women poets seeking to craft political poetry; Julia F. Saville has also demonstrated how a number of mid-Victorian poets, including Barrett Browning, situated their poetry in a trans-Channel political network of writers in France, Britain, and Italy.²³ This lively context of transcultural exchange also provided Barrett Browning with material for Aurora's meditations on politics as she travels through Paris under the reign of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, who would ascend to the throne as Napoleon III shortly following an 1851 coup later ratified by a controversial national referendum during the Brownings' stay in Paris.²⁴ Aurora's description of Napoleon III describes his body as partly an image of absolute sovereign power and partly the symbol of popular will:

And if at last [France] sighs
 Her great soul up into a great man's face,
 To flush his temples out so gloriously
 That few dare carp at Caesar for being bald,
 What then?—this Caesar represents, not reigns,
 And is no despot, though twice absolute:
 This Head has all the people for a heart;
 This purple's lined with the democracy,—
 Now let him see to it! for a rent within
 Would leave irreparable rags without. (VI.66–75)

Here Aurora softens Napoleon III's potentially absolute body by describing it as underwritten by the intangible collective "soul" of France, a popular approval that allows her to distinguish between the opposed imperatives of reigning and representing. Aurora's image of a democracy grafted onto the investitures of Napoleon III's frame, with the people within his body, underlines the ways the somatic political rhetoric of incarnate authority lingers and continues to shape and define perceptions of sovereign power. Yet this same power, once granted by the people, is exercised by Napoleon III alone, suggesting Aurora's sympathy with potentially more authoritarian ideologies of leadership: "Now let him see to it!" In Aurora's representation, Napoleon's divided body reflects the competing claims of hereditary leadership and popular sovereignty.

Aurora's self-crowning, reminiscent of both Virgil's crowning of Dante in *The Divine Comedy* and the crowning of Germaine de Staël's heroine in *Corinne*, elevates the poet as a political figure who speaks for the collective social body.²⁵ Barrett Browning's unsent 1857 letter to Napoleon III in defense of Victor Hugo,

then in exile in Jersey and openly publishing statements against the emperor, illustrates her belief in the poet's divine role within the polity. The poet should be exempt from punitive measures because the poet contains a "divine love" that justifies any perceived offenses against the state: "Make an exception of him, as God made an exception of him when He gave him genius."²⁶ Barrett Browning's poet is both of and beyond the polity, a central figure in the nation but also one with access to a divinity beyond it. Barrett Browning was also familiar with this politicized role of the poet-figure from her reading of Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), a text she much admired and which situated the poet in a lineage that included that of the king: "the Hero can be Poet, Prophet, King, Priest" (p. 77); Dante and Shakespeare stand out in their "royal solitude. . . . They *are* canonized" (p. 82).²⁷ Aurora aspires to take part in this political tradition of canonized poets. The name of the poet, she declares, "Is royal, and to sign it like a queen, / Is what I dare not,—though some royal blood / Would seem to tingle in me now and then" (I.935–937). In these accounts and in the scene of self-crowning the poet aspires to speak for the social body, using her own body and language to craft a political poetics.

Romney's objections to Aurora's self-crowning, however, bring Aurora's female body into conflict with the social body she seeks to represent. "None of all these things, / Can women understand" declares Romney of women's abilities to write about modern politics and social ills (II.182–83):

'Therefore, this same world
Uncomprehended by you, must remain
Uninfluenced by you.—Women as you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us doating mothers, and perfect wives,
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
We get no Christ from you,—and verily
We shall not get a poet, in my mind'. (II.218–225)

In one sweeping gesture Romney both forecloses the possibility of a woman's political poetics and declares women's writing to be incapable of representing the deeper conceptual underpinnings of political authority—we "get no Christ" from Aurora. In Romney's view the female poet's body distorts her political views, causing her to express instead her own embodied sensibility. A rich strand of feminist criticism has analyzed the ways that *Aurora Leigh* subverts Romney's essentialist pronouncements on women's language by strategies such as intertextuality, bricolage, metalepsis, and satire.²⁸ Building on this criticism, I will now

turn to *Aurora Leigh*'s unacknowledged investment in disembodiment as a political and poetic strategy. Through the transformations and encounters of Aurora and Marian, the poem's second heroine, Barrett Browning's epic advances a desire to escape the female body. This distance, in turn, acts both as a means to transcend gender categories and as a way of better critiquing and understanding the uneasy, contradictory valences of the social body.

II. "This dark of the body": Political Poetics and *Aurora Leigh*

If Aurora's travels among Britain, France, and Italy offer her a vantage point from which to explore broader questions of political sovereignty, the triangulated marriage plot between Aurora, Romney, and Marian extends this corporeal imagery of the social body to the domestic realm. Aurora's representations of Napoleon III reveals the contradictions inherent in the emergent notions of the social body, while Romney's work extends these contradictions to his converted feudal estate. Romney's role in this uneasy entanglement of somatic discourses is most apparent through his participation in the poem's complex symbolic networks of blood. He tells Aurora of his social program that the "common blood / That swings along my veins, is strong enough / To draw me to this duty" (II.322-324), invoking an arterial imagery that suggests that he positions himself within a communal social body.²⁹ Importantly, however, "duty" is also the term Aurora's aunt uses to characterize her undemonstrative caregiving: Aurora remembers that her aunt did "Her duty to me, (I appreciate it / In her own word as spoken to herself) / Her duty, in large measure, well-pressed out" (I.361-363). The poem early on establishes a connection between "duty" and acts of condescending domestic patronage, and Romney's use of the term implicates his own remaking of the feudal estate in similar terms, revealing a haphazard, freighted circulation of sovereign authority in the domestic household. Romney's reference to his own bloodline early establishes the nobility of his lineage: He is a "Leigh, / With blood trained up along nine centuries" (II.1011-1012). His association with ancient property and blood underlines the lingering presence of a body politic with its authority grounded in notions of an innate corporeal nobility.

The persistence of this feudal standard haunts Romney Leigh's social program and undermines his attempt to redistribute his own inheritance among the lower classes. As a consequence, his phalanstery offers not a remaking of the body politic but rather a reinscription of the systems of industrial labor that the new living community was intended to counter. Romney converts the phalanstery from the ancestral estate, and attempts to bring Aurora back into its production of wealth by offering her thirty thousands pounds from its income (II.994-1180). Aurora's response to Romney's proposal, which she remembers as peremptory

commands of payment and exchange, highlights his association with broader exploitative networks of labor: “Come, / sweep my barns and keep my hospitals, / And I will pay thee with a current coin / Which men give women” (II.539–541). The failure of this redistribution, in turn, suggests the failure of social reconstruction when it comes on the basis of a reified feudal economy. The poem suggests that, much as Aurora looks back from Paris on the “feudal form” that continues to shape politics in Britain, Romney’s efforts to detach himself from his position in a traditional hereditary order still bears the “special form” of the body politic that lingers to undermine his social project.

Aurora’s observation, then, that “We cannot be the equal of the male / Who rules his blood a little” (II.705–06) presents the language of political modernity as a confluence of multiple, unstable meanings. On the one hand, to govern one’s blood refers back to the feudal tradition that implicates Romney, with all of his masculinist discourse; on the other hand, it underscores women’s bodies as excessive and ungovernable and, because of this, unsuited to the demands of poetic and political representation. Aurora inherits from this somatic rhetoric not only the instability of corporeal representation that haunts Romney’s social project—the fraught and incomplete transfer of authority from the body politic to the body social—but also the question of how a woman poet, with her gendered body, might best speak for this collective.

Aurora Leigh tacitly merges the possibility of an expressive female poetic body with the communal body of its readers. The many physical descriptions of bodies in *Aurora Leigh* approach a style of ekphrasis, reading the body at once as an intensely visual object and as the means of collective expression and self-definition. The young Aurora tells the reader to

See the earth,
The body of our body, the green earth,
Indubitably human like this flesh
And these articulated veins through which
Our heart drives blood. (V.116–120)

The speaker invokes a communal body and anatomizes it, calling attention to the different elements of “this flesh,” “these . . . veins,” “our heart.” The word “articulated” has two meanings, here designating both physical segments linked by joints and the idea of a distinct utterance, so that the “articulated veins” are simultaneously the subjects of description and the transmitters of poetic language.³⁰ Aurora’s communal body recalls her declaration to Romney that it takes a poet’s individualism to create collective feeling: “It takes a soul, / To move a

body: it takes a high-souled man, / To move the masses" (II.479-481).³¹ Aurora suggests that the poet's language can act as a catalyst for action in the collective social body. In a revised reading of Barrett Browning's earlier remarks on Carlyle's visceral language, the body of the narrating female poet is both the means of her individual expression and a part of her shared sensibility with her readers.

Yet if *Aurora Leigh* invokes a communal, physical sensibility it also subverts this equation of politics, language, and the body through its repeated longings for transcendence, for a poetics that does not have its origins in the body. "Let me think / Of forms less, and the external" cautions Aurora in Book V, in the more subdued lines that follow her celebration of the "double-breasted Age" (V.223-224, 216). Her early, feverish work at improving her poetry likewise expresses not a full habitation of the body but rather a denial of it:

Observe—'I,' means in youth
 Just I, the conscious and eternal soul
 With all its ends, and not the outside life,
 The parcel-man, the doublet of the flesh,
 The so much liver, lung, integument,
 Which make the sum of 'I' hereafter when
 World-talkers talk of doing well or ill. (III.283-289)

Here Aurora divides the "outside life" from the inner life and makes the inner life the mark of her identity: the poet composes one identity or "I" from the inside while the other "I" is created by the "World-talkers" who view her externally. Significantly, Aurora's "doublet of the flesh" recalls the ill-fitting and "large / Man's doublet" of education her father wraps around her in Book III, subtly underlining the connection between exterior forms and constructions of gender (I.727-728). Like the weight of classical learning, and like the masculine sonneteer tradition in which the poet must learn to "stand still," Aurora's doublet of the flesh is a form overlain with the traditions and language of others (V.89).³² In other words, if Aurora must learn to inhabit the ungainly masculine forms of Greek education and of the sonnet, so too must she learn to renounce them physically, to throw off "This dark of the body" in her creation of a distinctive poetic voice (V.23).

Aurora Leigh further imagines as subtext a disembodied relationship that escapes this double inscription of language and the female body through its heroines, constructing two fluctuating readings of women's bodies and their relationship to language through Aurora's and Marian's thematically intertwined but divergent poetic autobiographies. Affinities between the physical experiences of Aurora and

Marian establish their similarities. Both women experience, albeit in different degrees, moments of physical scrutiny and shame: Aurora's discomfort with her aunt's gaze, with the "unscrupulous eyes" that look "body and heart" through Aurora and probe her feelings for Romney (II.686, 687), is brutally intensified in Marian's memory of her cruel French mistress who "'clipped me with her eyes / As if a viper with a pair of tongs'" as she discerns her pregnancy (VII.39-40). As with their exposure to physical shame both women stumble through early encounters with written language: as a girl Aurora "nibbled here and there" at the shut-away books in her aunt's attic (I.838), while the young Marian "weeded out / Her book leaves" and "made a nosegay" of the stray volumes she received from a travelling pedlar (III.987-988, 990). Most significantly, their relationship with Romney brings the two women into homosocial relation, in Marian's vision of her role as Romney's companion. She is "'Much fitter for his handmaid than his wife'" an abject literalization of the reinscribed social inequality Aurora imagines as part of Romney's domestic arrangements (IV.227). Through such affinities, the poem introduces Marian as a central figure in its establishment of a political poetics.

However, if both characters are linked by gender, they are divided by class, and this division is equally central to *Aurora Leigh's* representation of disembodiment as a political strategy. As many scholars have noted, the extremity of Marian's rape and exploitation foreground not the liberation but rather the degradation and the abuse of the female body, aligning Marian with a Christological narrative of fleshly suffering that contrasts with Aurora's more vibrant physiology.³³ Moreover, this very narrative of redemption, along with the codes of sexual fallenness and self-effacement that accompany Marian's story, essentially amount to a negation of Marian's body, one underscored by her abrupt departure from Aurora, Romney, and the poem itself in the concluding Book IX.³⁴ Without disputing this narrative of abjection, however, I contend that Marian's vanishing body, the "ghost of Marian," is equally central to *Aurora Leigh's* politicized fantasy of disembodiment (IX.389). Marian's alignment with Christ, and particularly with imagery of Christ's ascension, enables a symbolic reversal of the exclusionary incarnation associated with Romney's lingering body politic. In her reading of Marian's exploited body Joyce Zonana argues that Marian's body teaches Aurora the grave consequences of dividing flesh and spirit: "For Marian, utter physical abasement results in spiritual elevation, just as Aurora's spiritual elevation, as disembodied muse/artist, requires her descent to the level of her own blood."³⁵ While building on Zonana's characterization of the complementary relationship between the two women, I would qualify this oppositional reading of Marian's abstraction and Aurora's embodiment by underlining Marian's negated form and final elevation as a central strand of the poem's transfigured poetics. Marian bears

Aurora's desire for an abstracted and transcended body, and, in so doing, creates a vantage point from which to critique the injustices of Britain's "feudal form(s)."

In its periodic resistance to language, Marian's body challenges the poem's broadly essentializing somatic networks. In stark contrast to the work's physicalized language of the body politic, Marian is textually marked by obliquity, negations, and absences. When we first encounter Marian we are told that "She was not white nor brown, / But could look either, like a mist that changed" (III.810-811). Aurora, for all of her poet's skill, cannot quite find terms to describe her: her hair is somewhere "twixt dark and bright, not left you clear / To name the colour" (III.814-815). In a poem that repeatedly equates poetic genres with the body, Marian's resistance to Aurora's characterization highlights her disengagement from the epic's formal systems of representation. She eludes Aurora in Paris, where Aurora catches a fleeting glimpse of Marian as "a face / And not a fancy, though it vanished so" (VI.311-312); on their first re-encounter Marian "flattered from me like a cyclamen" (VI.445). Marian resists the powers of Aurora's affirmed poetic language, powers that elsewhere arouse Lady Waldemar's envy and elicit Romney Leigh's declarations of love. Much as Aurora learns to throw off the "doublet" of language, Marian periodically evades it, thereby calling into question the equation of gender, language, and bodies elsewhere in the poem.

In so doing Marian's disembodiment engages with broader cultural discourses of fallenness. Like the disappearing footsteps of Charles Dickens's Little Emily, the language of effacement that characterize Marian work to minimize and diminish her shamed body.³⁶ Yet Marian, unlike Dickens's character, is given a voice in the narrative to represent her own body, and her self-reflexive, demonstrative characterizations of her physical life suggest a degree of formal control over its representation. This self-reflexive distancing is most apparent in Marian's descriptions of motherhood, descriptions that differ from *Aurora Leigh's* opening representations of motherhood in their pointed implications of constructedness. Aurora's mother's physicality is intertwined with her language. Aurora recalls early memories of her mother "kissing full sense into empty words" (I.52); Aurora's formative encounters with language are likewise bound in acts of feminine physical expression that vividly offset the repressed language of her widowed father's household, where "we . . . did not speak too loud" (I.123) and where the absence of maternal physical and linguistic expression is suggested by the "tongue-tied Springs" of Aurora's adolescent home (I.207). In contrast, Marian's physical duties of motherhood are willed corporeal performances. "I'm dead, I say" she insists,

Only for the child
I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and afraid,

And smell the flowers a little and see the sun,
 And speak still, and am silent,—just for him! (VI.824–827)

In a passage that echoes Aurora's own anatomization of her narrating body in Book V, Marian parses out her physical sensations and assigns them an expressive function. Yet where Aurora's body in that passage is united by language and expression—the “articulated” veins of the poet's body naturalized and underwritten by its association with a feminized earth—Marian's is a body integrated by conscious and willed acts of caretaking. Marian's reflexive distance from this maternal function, in other words, highlights mothering as a kind of demonstrative performance, one Marian assumes while insisting on her own status as a detached or disembodied and “dead” figure separate from the naturalized female, expressive body.³⁷

Marian's tacitly acknowledged exclusion from this expressive body and its implicit relationship to language give her a vantage from which to survey the twinned relation of speech and the body in other women. In Book VI, Marian describes Lady Waldemar's treacherous visits to her, and remembers how Lady Waldemar had worked to convince her of her unfitness to be Romney's wife. In this passage, Marian quietly highlights the relation between feminine speech and bodily expression:

‘Did she speak,’
 Mused Marian softly, ‘or did she only sign?
 Or did she put a word into her face
 And look, and so impress you with the word?
 Or leave it in the foldings of her gown,
 Like rosemary smells a movement will shake out
 When no one's conscious? (VI.963–969)

Marian's description of Lady Waldemar questions whether language can be divided from her body. In its muted, sinister impact on the listener, in its act of *impressing* Marian with language, Lady Waldemar's speech is a grotesque revision of Aurora's emphatic poetry of Lockean sensation. Marian's speech implicates the female body and its accoutrements—the folded gown and the rosemary—as an unstable network of signs that highlights language's constructed, gendered relationship to feminine gestures and accessories.

The new life that Marian and Aurora build in Florence represents the establishment of a more democratic household that works in counterpart to the symbolic inequalities of Romney's phalanstery. In the concluding books of the

poem, the two women have relocated from a feudalism that is “still the thing” in Britain to a republican Italy imaginatively transformed into a vantage point for the New Jerusalem. Drawing on the Revelations imagery associated with Owenite and other contemporary socialist movements, Romney offers a vision of “bodies” that are “lightened to redemption” (IX.940, 941) and from which will emerge a new, more equitable, woman-centered poetics.³⁸ Central to this millennial scene is the image of the “woman clothed with the sun” from Revelation 12, an image critics have associated with both Aurora and Marian.³⁹ Building on Romney’s vision of lightened bodies, I would extend this imagery to encompass Marian’s evocative untouchability and its role in the poem’s closing vision of a renewed and reconstructed polity.

From the vantage of the prophet John, the woman clothed with the sun appears as a distant vision, a “great wonder in heaven” with “the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”⁴⁰ Marian’s final apotheosis, in stark counterpoint to her earlier abjection, emphasizes this vision of physical distance. Like the woman with the “moon under her feet,” Marian stands “As if the floating moonshine interposed / Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised her up / To float upon it” (IX.189–191). Marian herself underlines this release and detachment from physical form by characterizing herself in the third person, as “this ghost of Marian” (IX.389); she further performs her intangibility when Romney tries to embrace her, jumping back “with a staglike majesty / Of soft, serene defiance,—as she knew / He could not touch her” (IX.290–292). In escaping the poem’s political narrative of intertwined speech and bodies, such images of disembodiment reveal a transformative subtext, a reading of language that is not physically grounded in feminine somatic response. Through the intertwined experiences of Aurora and Marian, Barrett Browning presents a counterpoint of physical instability, negation, and disembodiment, a poetics that transcends the female form.

One final description of Marian, striking for its unusual imagery in the context of Aurora’s more tentative characterizations, underscores the poem’s investment in disembodiment as a political strategy. Aurora, on her first visit to Marian, observes of Marian’s response to Romney’s love that “The cataracts of her soul had poured themselves, / And risen self-crowned in rainbow: would she ask / Who crowned her? – it sufficed that she was crowned” (IV.184–186). Like the star-crowned woman of Revelation, and like Aurora’s birthday scene, Marian’s act of self-crowning recalls the uneasy relation between bodies, poetry, and gender. Marian’s ascension is the poem’s answer to Romney’s insistence that the world will “never get a Christ” from a female poet. The “Christ” that *Aurora Leigh* ultimately offers is one that escapes the politicized language of physical form.

Retrieving this subtext of disembodiment, in turn, challenges us to revise our own critical approaches towards a feminist poetics. *Aurora Leigh* presents us with a politics of physicality, as has long been recognized—most recently in Tucker’s analysis of the work as a “somatic epic” and a “feminist charter” (p. 378, 379). Yet its even bolder feminist contribution lies in its willingness to suspend and question the relation between language, gender, and the body. Barrett Browning’s epic both underlines the injustices of the lingering body politic associated with Romney’s phalanstery and destabilizes the correlation between poetics and the female form. In so doing, *Aurora Leigh* raises the possibility of a radically politicized disembodiment, a woman-centered poetics that both critiques and transcends the uneasy incarnational imagery of Victorian Britain’s changing social body.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Cora Kaplan’s “Introduction” to *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: The Women’s Press, 1978), pp. 15–16 and Joyce Zonana, “The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1989): 257–258. Marjorie Stone gives a thorough account of the poem’s reception history and its feminist recovery in “Criticism on *Aurora Leigh*: An Overview,” available at www.ebbarchive.org. For recent accounts that link *Aurora Leigh* to the Spasmodic poets, see Herbert Tucker, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse 1790–1910* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 339–384. See also a special issue on the Spasmodics, *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2004); Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); Jason Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2009).
- 2 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), V.216. Hereafter all citations are to this edition and will appear in the text by book and line number.
- 3 Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), p. 153; Rudy, *Electric Meters*, pp. 176–183, LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 50. Marjorie Stone reads Aurora as a sage-figure in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), pp. 134–188; Rebecca Stott explores Aurora’s role as a non-conformist sage in “‘Where Angels Fear to Tread’: *Aurora Leigh*” in Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), pp. 205–209. Linda Lewis approaches Aurora as a “Wisdom” figure in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Spiritual Progress* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 171–211, while Karen Dieleman proposes a reading of Aurora as a “poet-preacher” rather than a prophet in *Religious Imaginaries: The Liturgical and Poetic Practices of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Adelaide Proctor* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 61–99.
- 4 For Aurora’s references to incarnation see Rudy, *Electric Meters*, pp. 170–188 and Corinne Davies, “Aurora, The Morning Star: The Female Poet, Christology, and Revelation in *Aurora Leigh*,” *Studies in Browning and his Circle* 26 (Sep. 2005): 54–61.

- 5 Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 7–8.
- 6 See, for example, Kaplan’s account of Romney’s beliefs as “straw theories” in the poem in her “Introduction,” *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems*, p. 11, and Reynolds’ observation about the ways Barrett Browning’s “condemnation of socialist endeavors” has been “an embarrassment to some twentieth-century readers,” in Margaret Reynolds, “Critical Introduction,” *Aurora Leigh*, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Margaret Reynolds (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1992), p. 16.
- 7 Tucker, *Epic*, p. 380. Tucker, Herbert. “Glandular Omnisim and Beyond: The Victorian Spasmodic Epic,” *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 4 (2004): 443.
- 8 For a discussion of Barrett Browning’s ambivalent stance towards sensibility that pre-dates the recent critical interest in Spasmody, see Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1992), p. 91.
- 9 Qtd. in Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1996), p. 128.
- 10 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 27th ed. (London: T. Tegg, 1836), p. 290, *Google Books*, books.google.com.
- 11 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *An Essay on Mind*, ed. Simon Avery, in Donaldson, ed., *Works 4*: II.656 In tracing Barrett Browning’s language sources I’m indebted to Avery’s introduction and annotations. For more on Barrett Browning’s youthful engagement with Whig liberal thought see also Avery’s “Constructing the Poet Laureate of Hope End: Elizabeth Barrett’s Early Life” and “Audacious Beginnings: Elizabeth Barrett’s Early Writings” in Avery and Stott, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp. 23–42 and pp. 43–64.
- 12 “Thomas Carlyle” in *A New Spirit of the Age*, vol. 2, ed. R. H. Horne (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1844), p. 255, p. 256, *Google Books*, books.google.com. Barrett Browning contributed portions of this essay which include the above-quoted passages; the rest of her contributions are identified in Vol. 8 of *The Brownings’ Correspondence*, ed. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson (Winfield: Wedgestone Press, 1990), pp. 353–359. Hereafter, references to the correspondence will be to this edition unless otherwise noted and will be cited by volume and page number.
- 13 See James A. Secord’s “Introduction” to Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, ed. James Secord (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. ix–xlv.
- 14 EBB to Julia Martin, London, [25] Jan. 1845, in Phillip Kelley and Scott Lewis, ed., *The Brownings’ Correspondence* (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1992), 10: 41.
- 15 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 3–23.
- 16 Jonathan Parry locates the emergence of Liberal dominance in British politics in the period of 1846–1866. See *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), p. 153. Barrett Browning’s early poem “Kings” (1831) likewise registers her skepticism toward monarchical power and her equation of political rule with visions of Christ: See “Kings” and Avery’s headnote to the poem in Donaldson, ed., *Works 4*: 171–173.

- 17 Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, pp. 7–8. Poovey's earlier formulation of an "uneven development" also informs my reading of an uneasy deployment of embodied language in Victorian political rhetoric. Poovey's concept of "unevenness" in mid-Victorian constructions of gender addresses both the contested and unstable workings of gender ideology and the ways in which this instability allowed for the formation of oppositional stances in the 1850s. See *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 1–4. Building on Poovey's term, I would suggest that political notions of the social body and its relation to gender in Victorian Britain were similarly uneven and unstable, thus opening the way for *Aurora Leigh*'s oppositional critique.
- 18 Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" in *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 242.
- 19 Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, vol. 2 (London: Darton and Clark, 1837), p. 338.
- 20 Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), p. 249.
- 21 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, ed. Stuart Edwards, trans. Elizabeth Fraser (New York: Anchor, 1969), p. 113.
- 22 Barrett Browning's well-known remarks on contemporary socialism emphasize her distrust of political systems that, in her view, threatened individual autonomy: "I love liberty so intensely that I hate Socialism. . . . I would rather (for me) live under the absolutism of Nicholas of Russia than in a Fourier machine, with my individuality sucked out of me by a social air-pump." See "To Miss Mitford," 15 June 1850 in *The Brownings' Correspondence* 16: 136–140. Barrett Browning's distrust of Christian Socialism on the one hand and Fourierism on the other is based in part on her belief that both approaches were overly abstract: "What is [Christian Socialism], after all, but an out-of-door extension of the monastic system? The religious principle, more or less apprehended, may bind men together so, absorbing their individualities, and presenting an aim *beyond the world*; but upon merely human and earthly principles no such system can stand. . . ." Of Fourierism she wrote, "If Fourierism could be realised. . . out of a dream, the destinies of our race would shrivel. . . . I do not believe in purification without suffering, in progress without struggle, in virtue without temptation." See "To Isa Blagden," ca. 1850, in *The Brownings' Correspondence* 16: 228–229.
- 23 See Alison Chapman, "Poetry, Network, Nation: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Expatriate Women's Poetry," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 275–285 and Julia F. Saville, "'Soul-Talk': Networks of Political Poetry in a Trans-Channel Literary Triangle," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 299–308.
- 24 For more on Barrett Browning's response to Napoleon III, see Elizabeth Woodworth, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, and Alfred Tennyson on Napoleon III: The Hero-Poet and Carlylean Heroics," *Victorian Poetry* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 543–560.
- 25 For a more extensive discussion of the influence of *Corinne* on *Aurora Leigh*, see Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977), pp. 179–183; Ellen Peel and

- Nanora Sweet, "Corinne and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning," in *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 204–220; Linda M. Lewis, *Germaine de Staël, George Sand, and the Victorian Woman Artist* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 107–116.
- 26 See "To the Emperor Napoleon," April 1857, in *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning Edited with Biographical Additions. Two Volumes in One*, ed. Frederic G. Kenyon (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 2: 261–262. [Google Books. books.google.com](https://books.google.com)
- 27 For more on the influence of Carlyle's *On Heroes* on *Aurora Leigh*, see Woodworth and also Beverly Taylor, "Carlyle, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the Hero as Victorian Poet," in Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 235–246
- 28 See Kaplan's "Introduction" in *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* for an account of how *Aurora Leigh's* language, repressed by patriarchy, "re-enters discourse with a shattering revolutionary force" (p. 11). See also Kaplan's account of *Aurora Leigh's* intertextual relationship to works by William Wordsworth, John Milton, Madame de Staël, Charles Kingsley, and others on pp. 15–36. Margaret Reynolds analyzes the poem's intricate, shifting narrative construction and its strategies of "diffusion and fragmentation" that upend the "'liberal humanist' context within which Barrett Browning wrote" (p. 12). See her "Critical Introduction," in *Aurora Leigh, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Reynolds (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 24–54. Marjorie Stone's "Genre Subversion" article discusses Barrett Browning's strategies of gender and genre inversion: "Setting up a dialogue of genres to reinforce her dialogue of genders, she challenges the 'violent order' of gender and genre hierarchies"; see "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: 'The Princess' and 'Aurora Leigh,'" *Victorian Poetry* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1987): 127. See also Stone's analysis of the work's woman-centered deployment of metalepsis, allusiveness, and narrative irony in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 153–188.
- 29 One prominent example of corporeal imagery in the poem, the wedding scene and the entry of the poor of St. Giles, has often been noted (IV.538–595). For a reading of the poem that emphasizes Aurora's class prejudices, see Kaplan's "Introduction," pp. 11–12 and 31–33; Brent Shannon analyzes Barrett Browning's depictions of the poor as a "sick and sickening mass" in the context of the social body rhetoric used by middle class-reformers in "'A Finished Generation, Dead of Plague': Contagion, the Social Body, and the London Poor in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," *Studies in Browning and His Circle* 27 (Dec. 2006): 42. For a reading that underlines Aurora's fascinated disgust with the poor as one stage in her artistic development, a stage later subject to self-critique and irony, see Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp. 162–171. See also Margaret Reynold's analysis of the poem's narrative structure that presents events that are always subject to revision in her "Critical Introduction," *Aurora Leigh, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp. 28–54, and Rebecca Stott's discussion of the scene's alertness to processes of dehumanization in Avery and Stott, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp. 188–197. I would add to these that the overdetermined, claustrophobic representation

- of the social body in this scene is significant for its location in the church or the *corpus mysticum* of Kantorowicz's account: it returns to the site of the social body's conceptual beginnings in its representation of the poor as noxious invaders.
- 30 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd. ed., s.v. "articulated," accessed 4 January 2014, www.oed.com.
 - 31 Barrett Browning's working notes for *Aurora Leigh* stress this poetic movement from abstract and ideal to the external and practical: "the practical & real . . . is but the external evolution of the ideal & spiritual—that . . . is *from inner to outer*." Quoted in Reynolds, "Editorial Introduction," *Aurora Leigh*, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, p. 85.
 - 32 In 1845 Barrett Browning wrote of the Elizabethan era, "where were the poetesses? The divine breath which seemed to come & go . . . why did it never pass, <even in the lyrical form> over the lips of a woman?" See EBB to Henry Fothergill Chorley, Wimpole Street, 7 Jan. 1845, in Kelley and Lewis, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, 10: 14.
 - 33 See, for example, Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 360.
 - 34 For a discussion of the figure of the fallen woman in Victorian society see Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press), pp. 167–197. See also Angela Leighton's "Because men made the laws': The Fallen Woman and the Woman Poet," *Victorian Poetry* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 109–127.
 - 35 "The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1989): 257–258.
 - 36 See Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987).
 - 37 For an alternate reading of this passage see Laura J. Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41, no. 1 (March 2013): 45. Faulk reads Marian's speech as emblematic of the poem's equation of motherhood and death. I would add, however, that Marian's detachment works in deliberate counterpoint to Romney's notion of an embodied feminine sensibility. For more on motherhood in *Aurora Leigh*, see also Sarah H. Ficke's recent essay, "Crafting Social Criticism: Infanticide in 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' and *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 249–267.
 - 38 Barbara Taylor and Marjorie Stone both note the centrality of Revelation to socialist rhetoric. See Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1983): pp. 157–161 and Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp. 181–182.
 - 39 See Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp. 181–184 and Mary Wilson Carpenter, "The Trouble with Romola," *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990): p. 116.
 - 40 Revelation 12:1.