"AN ISLAND OF NYMPHS:"
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND VICTORIAN WOMEN'S CLASSICAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

“AN ISLAND OF NYMPHS:” ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND VICTORIAN WOMEN’S
CLASSICAL EDUCATION

Jordi Alonso

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This dissertation seeks to frame Elizabeth Barrett Browning as one of the catalysts in favor of tertiary education for women in Victorian England. By examining her poems and activism relating to classical studies, as well as her relationships with Hugh Stuart Boyd, Robert Browning, and Sir Uvedale Price, I argue that it was Barrett Browning’s deep ambition and aptitude for classics, particularly for Greek, that led to the wider social acceptance of women scholars of antiquity, and began to shape nineteenth century depictions of Women of (Greek) Letters in life and nymphs in Victorian poetry.

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Introduction: “Une Vision de la Grèce Antique” / A Vision of Ancient Greece

Writing about a trip to the United States, the winner of the 1909 Nobel Prize for Peace, Paul Henri Benjamin Balluet d'Estournelles de Constant, wrote that he felt distanced from the present on a particular spot near the banks of the Hudson River, unsure whether he was even in America, let alone in the early twentieth century: “Was this America? Was this the year 1911 or 1912? No, it was a vision of Ancient Greece, an island of the Aegean Sea populated by nymphs, in the midst of whom I felt of another time, of another country, of another planet” (d'Estournelles de Constant 314). What was the cause of his temporal and terrestrial transportation; had he, like Socrates on the banks of the Illisos river, become nympholeptic?¹

No, he had wandered onto the campus of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York and seen young women coming and going about their day who were “not quite full-grown, slender, bare-headed” and with “direct gazes... each dressed as she pleased, but all in bright colors” (d'Estournelles de Constant 313). Baron de Constant's equation of collegiate girls and nymphs was not an accident of an overactive classically-educated mind, but rather a window into both nineteenth century attitudes to women's education and the allure of the figure of the nymph, a creature of liminality: neither mortal nor divine, neither girl nor woman, neither powerless nor omnipotent, but always,

¹ Richard Chandler in his 1775 travelogue, *Travels In Greece*, defines *nympholepsy*, a word which had never before been used in English, as a state “characterized as a frenzy which arose from having beheld [the nymphs].”

Chandler, Richard. *Travels in Greece: or an Account of a Tour made at the expense of the Society of Dilletanti*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1776. Google Books. 152.

throughout languages and cultures, a being whose existence in between realms threatened male ideas of hegemony, sexuality, knowledge, and power.

In this dissertation I explore the links between nymphs in the Greek classical world and Victorian women's access to classical knowledge, focusing these links through the lens of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry, particularly her verse novel *Aurora Leigh*, and "Wine of Cyprus," a long autobiographical poem which she dedicated to her Greek tutor Hugh Stuart Boyd. Before arriving at the close readings of those two poems, I will give the necessary background for their re-interpretation by exploring classical attitudes to nymphs as seen in the archaic Greek poetry of Homer and Hesiod, and Victorian attitudes to women classical scholars, who, like Greek nymphs before them, were seen both as a threat and as a curiosity by the men who were astonished by their brazen desires to do as they pleased, not to do as they were told. Like nymphs before them, this new kind of classical scholar bent the accepted rules. Classics was a discipline for young men who had gone to the great Public Schools of England, namely the boarding schools Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Westminster and Winchester and the day schools St Paul's and Merchant Taylors', went the unspoken thought (Shrosbree 18). Classics was not the domain of girls who had been educated at home by governesses and perhaps stolen a glance or two at their brothers' Latin grammars, to say nothing of the materials for learning Greek, which were usually in Latin at any rate. Yet, of course, language acquisition knows no gender, and there were

well-educated girls, like Sara Coleridge, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Agnata Frances Ramsay, who not only used the privileges of their social class to learn Greek and Latin for their own benefit as an amusement, but also actively engaged the wider world through their philology, publishing translations, holding sustained discourse with male classicists, and publishing reading editions of Ionic historians with commentary in order not to reduce the standing of classical studies by making it less élite, but rather to increase access to their chosen field and making it more diverse both in terms of gender and ease of access.

Naturally, the entrance of women to a traditionally male and upperclass field was met with institutional resistance both by academicians and by the popular press, and it is there we will begin our tour of this Island of Nymphs. Let us go, then, not to d'Etournelles' Aegean island in 1911 or 1912, but rather back in time and eastward, to the late nineteenth century and to the multi-day ordeal that was the Classical Tripos at the University of Cambridge, where one seventeen year-old girl's intelligence would have made a certain Nobel laureate believe he had been bewitched by a nymph in academic dress.

In this dissertation, I will argue that the poetry and activism of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, as well as her deep engagement with the field of classical studies began to blaze a trail for women like Agnata Frances Ramsay to explore further. I begin by examining cartoons from the late nineteenth century which are pictorial culminations of

attitudes held in the mid-nineteenth century so that the context of women's achievements in classical studies and the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning which I will closely examine in the second and third chapters of this study may be better understood by my readers. From the late nineteenth century environment of the introduction, we will travel, like Étournelles de Constant, to some islands in the Aegean for the first chapter, which considers nymphs in their Archaic and Classical Greek context, and then return, for the bulk of this study, to the mid-nineteenth century.

The Clarendon Commission of 1864

How does the idea of a classically-educated woman compare to the nymphs that were in vogue during the Victorian era? Like the nymphs themselves, classically-educated women were regarded by men with a mixture of fear, devotion, and desire. The nymph, a classically-pedigreed example of an independent female figure, was used at the fin de siècle era as a metonym and symbol for women who sought equal rights in t on both sides of the Atlantic. ²

Classical studies, though, were still very much a male field. The Commission decreed in their report that "the two classical languages, with a little ancient history and geography, held, indeed, until a short time ago, not only a decided predominance, but

² *Vide* Cordulack, Shelley Wood. "Victorian Caricature and Classicism: Picturing the London Water Crisis." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2003, pp. 535–583. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30224368. Accessed 5 May 2020.

absolute and exclusive possession of the whole course of study" (Villiers *et al.* 13). Of course, even though the reform-oriented Clarendon Commission of 1864 was formed to modernize and streamline education at nine Public Schools of England, those schools were still closed off to more than half of the population of the country on the basis of their gender. Those schools were open only to boys, and wealthy boys at that.

Classical studies being paramount to the aristocratic concept of a well-educated boy, the shock to the establishment when, in the spring of 1887, the only First Class degree went to Agnata Frances Ramsay, a woman of Girton College, Cambridge who had, by accident of her sex, not received a formative education at any of the Public Schools of England, can be imagined. It is in that mindset that we must consider the reaction in the popular imagination of the time, both in print and pictorially; Andrew Lang's poem "Ballade of the Girton Girl," returns often to the idea that "Girton Girls" are conversant in mathematics and in classical scholarship, and George du Maurier's cartoons in the satirical magazine *Punch* often draw their humor from juxtaposing young women with classical knowledge against traditional Victorian markers of femininity. Agnata Frances Ramsay's triumph in the Classical Tripos of 1887, particularly, gave du Maurier material for two of the cartoons below. Ramsay, after all, had not come up into her scholarship through the routes that were traditional for English classical scholars, who, in the popular imagination, were exclusively men, and not "unmaidenly freaks" like the Girton Girls (Lang 10).

Ballade of the Girton Girl

Girton College, one of the constituent colleges of Cambridge University, was founded by Emily Davies after approaching both the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge asking “that local exams be opened to girls, and while Oxford gave a firm ‘no,’ Cambridge capitulated and in 1865 they said yes” (Cerasuolo 161). From that college’s start, there was a focus on classical languages and the study of all branches of Classics. Naturally, the idea of the “Girton Girl” soon was lampooned in novels like Beatrice Harraden’s *Ships That Pass in the Night* as someone who “gave herself up to wisdom and despised everyone who did not know the *Agamemnon* by heart” (Harraden 169). Not only were Girton Girls prodigious memorizers of Aeschylean verse, but they were also skilled in mathematics, as Andrew Lang notes in the refrain of his “Ballade:”

She has just 'put her gown on' at Girton,
She is learned in Latin and Greek,
But lawn tennis she plays with a skirt on
That the prudish remark with a shriek.
In her accents, perhaps, she is weak
 (Ladies are, one observes with a sigh),
And in Algebra -- there she's unique,
 But her forte's to evaluate π .

“Ballade of the Girton Girl” 1-8.

In this first stanza, Lang gives us a jocular glimpse of the stereotypical Girton Girl, whose skills in classical studies, athleticism, and mathematics are what both set her

apart within and without her college and the world; these are themes that will resurface whenever Girton Girls are identified as such. Within the bounds of Emily Davis's institution, their skills may have drawn praise and plaudits from their peers, but beyond the red brick quadrangle at the College, she was seen as a spectacled "mere bundle of nerves" who "in the manner attributed to Ophelia... wandered round muttering snatches from Greek plays" and "cudgeled her wearied brains for solutions to mathematical problems of abstruse kind" (Bell 348) [*sic*]. Lang, too, notes that the Girton Girl wears a skirt while playing tennis, echoing the moment in Harraden's novel where she is described as "carelessly ... dressed" (Harraden 168). Skirts and Aeschylus will resurface as hallmarks of the Girton Girl in George du Maurier's cartoons, as will, later on in the second chapter of this book, the topic of Greek accents (or lack thereof) and gender. Lang continues extolling, or so one hopes, the strengths of his classically-educated protagonist:

She has lectured on Scopas and Myrton,
Coins, vases, mosaics, the antique,
Old tiles with the secular dirt on,
Old marbles with noses to seek.
And her Cobet she quotes by the week,
And she's written on $\kappa\epsilon\nu$ and on $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$,
And her service is swift and oblique,
But her forte's to evaluate π .

"Ballade of the Girton Girl" 17-24.

The Girton Girl Lang's speaker is thinking of finally becomes slightly more than a stereotypical abstraction of all students at the college, perhaps anchored in time by the

vague allusion to lectures on Scopas and Myrton, two Greek painters, the first of whom makes an appearance in Jane Ellen Harrison's book on Greek art. Though a student at Newnham College and not Girton, Jane Ellen Harrison, who would go on to make a living lecturing on Greek art, religion, and archaeology, did in fact lecture on Scopas, writing about him in her book *Introducing Studies in Greek Art* (Harrison 264). Harrison, too, was intensely interested in Greek particles like *κεν* and *καί*, writing on them in *Aspects, Aorists, and the Classical Tripos*. The latter particle, *καί*, means *and*, and the former, *κεν*, is an Epic and Lyric synonym for the modal particle *ἄν* which can mark a statement as some form of condition or express habituality, generality, or irreality depending on the tense with which it is being used. Finally in this stanza, the Girton Girl's formidable tennis skills reappear, as does her mathematical acumen, signified by a Greek letter.

Women of (Greek) Letters would give the writers and artists of *Punch* much material over the years. The magazine, a satirical weekly founded in 1841, boasted such writers and artists as Alfred Tennyson, Andrew Lang, and Coventry Patmore, John Tenniel, Charles Keene, and George du Maurier (Applebaum & Kelly ix). Cerasuolo draws our attention to an early article by Mark Lemon "declaring that *Punch* 'was intended to raise a laugh' and that it would be 'outspoken and irreverent in attacking the usual butts of Radicals'—" "radicals" which included first wave feminists like Emily Davies. The editorial stance of *Punch* in fact, was not one of ardent support for

equal rights, but, “while usually focused on amusing its primarily male readership, sometimes *Punch* simply reports on the academic achievements of Girtonians” (Cerasuolo 161-2) at the same time, of course, as they gleefully publish satirical verses characterizing feminist advocates for equal rights as lacking in “beauty” and fighting for “charm.” (Figs 22). Three classically-adjacent cartoons by du Maurier which appeared in *Punch* between the years 1876-1879: “St. Valentine’s Day at Girton,” “Glory to Agnata Frances Ramsay,” and “A Pardonable Mistake” serve as later Victorian case studies of the intellectual environment in which women who sought to follow Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s path as a Hellenist found themselves.

Each of du Maurier’s cartoons engages with the phenomenon of women being not only competent, but rather consummate classical scholars, and treats that same fact as a surprising source of humor. The second and third cartoons directly reference Agnata Frances Ramsay (later Agnata F. Butler) at the time a Girton Girl who excelled at both classical languages and later, having graduated, published an edition of Book VII of the *Histories* of Herodotus.

“This threatening invasion of the Amazons”

In order for du Maurier’s cartoons to be fully appreciated, more background on the stereotypical “Girton Girl” is necessary. The Girton Girls were seen by at least some male undergraduates at Cambridge as lacking in outward charm, attractiveness,

and youth because of their “masculine” aspirations of studying Classics. This two-panel cartoon from 1894 from the anonymous collection of Cambridge cartoons titled *Types* plays with that assumption by contrasting “A Girton Girl as She Is” with “A Girton Girl as She Might Be.”

“A Girton Girl as She Is” seems matronly. Her dress is formless and bulky, and the suggestion of a déclassé Empire silhouette, high-waisted and with voluminous skirts, is the defining characteristic of her dress. She wears unsightly glasses that obscure her face, and heavy boots that seem more suited to outside labor than to scholarship. Her hairline is receding and she wears no hat, seeming much

older than what surely, most women who entered Girton actually were.

On the other hand, the “Girton Girl as She Might Be” wears more fashionable clothing resembling a riding outfit, and is holding a polo mallet in her left hand more naturally than the first “Girton Girl”.

At Oxford, the idea of women joining the ranks of the student body was cast as a “Battle of the Bluestockings” (Brock and Courthoys 273) where the two opposing camps were cast in militaristic language with a classicizing patina in an article published by an Oxford student publication in 1897, where the writer maintained that he and “at least seven-eighths of” his cohort were “bitterly opposed to this threatening invasion of the Amazons” (Weber 172). By describing female students as invading “Amazons,” the writer of that article in *The Isis* is simultaneously othering potential classmates of his by portraying them as fearsome, uncivilized women from far-off lands, and more importantly, using his audience’s knowledge of classical myth to denote the women as separate from his own band of male undergraduates. Amazons, according to Apollonius

Rhodius, were descended from Harmonia, a naiad nymph who, after having children with Ares, the god of war, became their mother (Ap. Rhod. Arg. II.986 et seq.). The Amazons, half-nymph and half-goddesses, were “lovers of war” (Ap. Rhod. Arg. II.991) who not only were not mortal women, but whose very name was thought by the Greeks to come from ἀμαζός

Figs. 1 and 2. “A Girton Girl as She Is” and “A Girton Girl as She Might Be.” *Views* Cambridge: Redin, 1894 6-7.

amazós, meaning *breastless*, because they were said to have removed one breast in order to be able to better use their bows.³ The implication here is that the fact of “being learned in Latin and Greek,” to use Lang’s phrase, has a detrimental effect on the desirability, youth, and beauty of the women of Cambridge and Oxford—a marked difference from Baron de Constant’s explicit comparison of studious girls with a *thiasos* of nymphs.⁴ Just how studious were these girls? Studious enough to critique classically-themed Valentine’s Day cards from Oxford undergraduates. Du Maurier’s “Valentine’s Day at Girton” satirizes this, as do the other cartoons of his which mention this particular college at Cambridge.

The New Woman: “Smoking cigarettes and reading Sophocles with apparent ease”

These cartoons arrive at one of the truths about the study of classics that is still echoed to some extent in our own time. One must have the leisure to not only undertake the study of these two highly-inflected languages. Those who had that leisure and were on their way to pursuing classical studies at a university—which, as William Young Sellar remarked to his (male) students—implied “leisure and a long preparation for life” (Sellar 3); those who possessed such a thing, tended to belong to the middle or upper middle classes both in Britain and in the United States.

³ For more, see Patou-Mathis, Marylène. *L’homme Préhistorique Est Aussi Une Femme*. Allary Éditions, 2020.

⁴ A *thiasos*, from the Greek *θίασος*, refers to the ecstatic mythical retinue of Dionysus, often including nymphs, fauns, satyrs, and maenads.

Du Maurier's visual send-ups of "Girton Girls" confirm this idea that Classics was not yet truly open to all. Barbara Leigh Bodichon Smith, in her treatise "Women and Work" advocated for girls and young women to learn something other than housework. She wrote, addressing the hypothetical parents of her charges: "It is your duty to give her worthy work, or to allow her to choose it; and certainly she is more likely to be attractive and to get a good husband if she is cheerful and happy in some work, than if she, being miserable and longing for a change, clutches at the first offer made her" (Smith 10). Smith concedes, however, that "daughters may not marry" and that is all the more reason, she argues, for "having had... serious training" in some art (loc. cit.). Girton College, Cambridge was the place to be for unmarried daughters who wanted serious training in philology and mathematics.

Through the humorous pen of George du Maurier which seems at times to be celebrating classically-educated women—inducting them, as Amy Levy (who herself was not a Girton Girl, but rather studied at Newnham) put it, in the "stately mysteries" (along with the men) into which knowledge of Greek and Latin admitted them (Levy 39) The du Maurier first cartoon I'll consider, "St. Valentine's Day at Girton" appeared in the February 26, 1876 issue of *Punch*. It, like many of du Maurier's cartoons, combines a detailed lithograph with a title and a caption. This particular cartoon not only includes a caption indicating dialogue between the two

Fig. 3. "St. Valentine's Day at Girton" George du Maurier, *Punch* February 26, 1876

women, but also reproduces, within that dialogue, part of the actual Valentine being discussed.

The cartoon depicts two women, identified by du Maurier as "First Young Lady" and "Second Young Lady," the first of whom is an example of the kind of woman *The*

Woman's Herald formally dubbed the "New Woman" some years later, in 1893 at which point the trope "was first invented as a fictional icon to represent the political woman of the coming century" (Tusan 169). Though du Maurier's cartoon was published seventeen years prior to the feminist re-claiming of the term, his caricatured Girton Girls show flashes of the intelligence and independence that would come to characterize the later feminist usage of the term. It was in the pages of the periodical for which du Maurier plied his pen, that the visual shorthand for the New Woman was born. Once the iconography of the New Woman became solidified, the predilection for "a practical costume that looked masculine to the paranoid guardianship of gender hegemony" (Collins 311) became a sure way to identify her in the pages of *Punch*. However, the two young women in du Maurier's cartoon still wear stereotypically "feminine" clothing. To be sure, the woman who is holding the valentine, the "First Young Lady," is sitting on a table and has her feet up on a chair as a trail of smoke spirals upward from the lit cigarette she holds in her right hand away from her face and from the card she has just received—behavior that, if not stereotypically "masculine," is at least not befitting a "lady." George Routledge's 1875 *Manual of Etiquette* does not yet mention the nineteenth century equivalent of athleisure wear that *Punch* was fond of lampooning. Routledge does though, enjoin men from using "a classical quotation the presence of ladies without apologizing for, or translating it" (Routledge 42).

Gussie from Oxford then, one would think, knows the recipient of his Valentine's Day missive well, for she can not only read it *viva voce* but also presumably read it with the proper accentuation as the accents are graphically represented in the two lines of the chorus printed by du Maurier in his caption.⁵ The First Young Lady reads the entirety of the chorus, as indicated by the "&c. &c." in the caption, before her friend approvingly comments on the quality of the valentine, correctly identifying it as the "Love Chorus" out of "the Antigone" and declaring it "jollier than those silly English verses fellows used to send."

Yopie Prins reads this cartoon not only as an inversion of the homosocial spaces in which "fellows" would read Greek at Oxford, as these women are "smoking cigarettes and reading Sophocles with apparent ease" but also as an inversion of the original intent of the card, as the "moment of intimacy" desired in the card by the invocation of Eros undefeated in battle is reified by "two women who share the erotic revelation of reading Greek together" (Prins "Maenads" 44). This intimate moment is intended by Gussie from Oxford as a way to show off his own erudition and literally eroticize his relationship with the "First Young Lady." In sharing this moment with her friend, the recipient solidifies her own grasp of what Hugh Macnaghten would call, thirty-five years later, the "tongue of Attic wonderland" which, by that time, was considered proper to be taught to "girls and boys" who, through their appreciation of

⁵ For the fraught question of Greek with and without accents, see the chapter of this study dealing with Book II of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and also Clarke 224 *et seq.*

“the Attic grace, the Spartan creed,” would make the “dead past rise once more” (Macnaghten *Verse* 101).

Du Maurier, who returned often to the theme of higher education for young women, drew other cartoons for *Punch* dealing with the idea, such as “What we hope to see”⁶ and “Real Education.”⁷ It makes sense, then, that he would have reacted to Agnata Ramsay’s First Class marks on the Classical Tripos of 1887.⁸ Students of Classics at Cambridge were, as undergraduates, not expected to master only one or two subfields within their discipline, but rather to be at the same time both Hellenists and Latinists, have a knowledge of epigraphy in both languages, and be familiar with Greek and Roman law, history, and literature through primary sources.

The Classical Tripos at Cambridge: May to June 1887

In order to perceptively read the second cartoon of du Maurier highlighted here first, some background on the Classical Tripos at Cambridge University is in order. On the morning of May 23, 1887, Cambridge students finishing their first year at university sat for the first part of the Classical Tripos (Cambridge Univ. Examination Papers 315).

⁶ Punch 1866

⁷ Punch 1872

⁸ For more on this see Lamberton, L. Jill. “‘A Revelation and a Delight’: Nineteenth-Century Cambridge Women, Academic Collaboration, and the Cultural Work of Extracurricular Writing.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2014, pp. 560–587. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43490873. Accessed 23 Apr. 2020.

The exam must have been an exhausting and exhaustive ordeal for any boy who had been steeped in Classical Studies, including geography, language, and ancient history almost from the time he had learned to read, through a career in any of the Public Schools, and through his years at University. For a girl who had not had the benefit of an education at a Public School, the exam must have appeared as insurmountable as any Herculean labor. Agnata Frances Ramsay must have worn the flayed skin of the Nemean Lion to her exams as a cloak to keep warm, because she was given the only First Class degree in Classics that spring.

From nine in the morning to noon, they translated into Latin the penultimate and ante-penultimate paragraphs of Edmund Burke's speech at the Guildhall in Bristol delivered in 1790 (Burke 256-272) and a section dealing with the "Distresses of the Garrison" of Hernán Cortés from the second chapter of the fifth book of William Hickling Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (Prescott 138-9). Their trial by prose composition having finished, they might have then gone back to their rooms at college for an hour and read and engaged in some last minute studying for the afternoon's exam. From 1:30 to 4:30 p.m., they had to translate Herodotus VI. 89-91; Thucydides IV. 60 and 61; Plato, *Republic* X.iii; and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.ix.1-5 into English "with short marginal notes" (CUEP 316).

The following day, May 24, during the morning session, again from 9 to noon, the candidates were asked to translate a dialogue of twenty two lines from Act II, scene i

of Phillip Massinger's play *The Unnatural Combat* (printed in 1639) between Malefort Senior and Malefort Junior, into Greek iambics, meaning here presumably iambic trimeter. Following that was a translation into elegiacs of an anonymous six line poem beginning "So light is love, in matchless beauty shining" that had been set to music by John Wilbye in 1609 in his "Second Set of Madrigales" (Ellis 131). Part I that year continued apace until Saturday May 28, and candidates for the degree translated into and out of Latin and Greek, both prose and verse, parsing, analyzing, and commenting upon everything from rare uses of conjunctives, with or without particles "in the Augustan period," to being asked to produce a drawing of the "position of the seven hills of Rome, the Tiber, the Velabrum, the vicus Tuscus, the via Sacra, the Velia, the Subura, the great forum and the forum Boarium, the temple of Castor, the theatre of Pompeius and the basilica Julia" (CUEP 325).

Part II, like Part I, involved translation and commentary, although of a less rudimentary nature. Students were asked to translate portions of Livy and of Cicero's *Epistulae ad Atticum*, and to "add a brief note" after rendering Suetonius' *Claudius* XV into English and "explaining the situation" (op. cit. 334). After translating some Lucretius, and eleven lines of Ovid's *Fasti*, they were asked to "explain the subject and the allusions" in a passage ⁹ in the Silver Age poet C. Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. They were also expected to translate a portion of a "Life of Sir Richard Steele" published in

⁹ *Argon.* V.503-508

The Spectator: With Sketches of the Lives of the Authors and Explanatory Notes (Vol. 1 Edinburgh Bell & Bradfute et al. 1816) into Latin prose, as well as a portion of a letter to his father by Thomas Babington Macaulay, author of, among other texts that became part of the *sine qua non* of the classroom, *Lays of Ancient Rome*. Into English on the afternoon of May 31, were written translations with “marginal notes where necessary” of Isocrates¹⁰ Aristotle,¹¹ Theophrastus,¹² Hesiod,¹³ Aeschylus,¹⁴ and Callimachus.¹⁵

Section B of the exam, held from the morning of June 1 to the morning of June 3, involved translations into English of the *Cratylus* of Plato,¹⁶ and the *Politics* (again) of Aristotle.¹⁷ Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum* I.xviii came next and examinands were asked to “criticize this account” and “briefly indicate the true nature of the theological views of these thinkers” which included Xenophanes, Democritus, and Plato (with particular attention on the views in the *Timaeus*). That section of the exam was capped with a translation from Proclus’ *In Platonis Timaeum*.¹⁸ For the rest of Section B, candidates were

¹⁰ *Contra Soph.* XVI

¹¹ *Pol.* III.xvi

¹² *Char.* XXIII

¹³ *Op.* 448-464

¹⁴ *Cho.* 662-681

¹⁵ This epigram was not sourced in the *Examination Papers*, but comes from *Anth. Pal.* VII.525

¹⁶ 432c-433a

¹⁷ This time cited with Bekker numbers on the exam itself. (II.1261^b 10-32)

¹⁸ IV.254 a-c.

given more choices to translate certain passages over others, and they were asked to elaborate more on their translations and branch out from their status of exegetes and lexical commentators and morph into something more akin to cultural and social historians. Among other questions, candidates were asked to “explain the psychology of this passage [Arist. *Eth. Nic.* I.xiii 1102^b 23] and its context” as well as to “compare it carefully with Plato’s theory set forth in the *Timaeus*” (CUEP 341). They could also choose to translate and comment on fragments of the pre-Socratic philosophers Herakleitos and Demokritos, perhaps set on the exam because of the academic interest at the time in collecting pre-Socratic material, a practice that culminated in Hermann Diels’ three volume *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* published in 1903.

Questions of philosophy featured heavily in assessing candidates, as did questions about fascinating lexicographical minutia, familiar to any student of Classics, pertaining to word choice and its implications— “determine the sense in which the term *οὐσία* [being] is used relatively to *ψυχή* [spirit] by Plato and by Aristotle to *σῶμα* [body]” (ibid. 345) Students were asked to inhabit the mind of a philosopher and write a “Platonist reply” to an “objection of Chrysippus” in Plutarch’s *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* 15 while at the same time considering the similarities of “moral sanction[s] in all ancient systems of ethics” (ibid. 345). Before embarking on the penultimate section of their trips and changing their focus to Roman history, students were asked to write one essay on one of five questions of Greek Philosophy ranging in theme from elucidating what the

Greeks thought of “physical science” to “the attitude towards religion of later Greek philosophies” (ibid. 346).

The Roman history portion of the exam focused on the usual historiographers of the period: Livy and Polybius, and the questions asked did not require dates precisely, but rather “as far as possible” as could be ascertained by the examinand. The focus was not on the minutiae here, but mostly on a macro-view of history.¹⁹ Pursuant to the perceived elite status of the classical world, imperialist rhetoric was couched in the classical garb of the chiton or the toga instead of the military full dress of the Georgian and Victorian eras and thereby rendered more palatable by its classical associations. In one of his letters, for example, Sir George Trevelyan, in a letter to Charles Simkins printed in the former’s book *The Competition Wallah*, sanitizes and endows with a classical mandate the presence of English viceroys on the Indian subcontinent by writing, on April 17, 1863, at length about a procession in honor of “the festival of Cali, the goddess of destruction” that he originally thought to be “a battalion of volunteers... in marching order.” Disabused of that notion by his servant who brought him “a tea-tray,” Trevelyan goes on to describe the festival in a feat of *interpretatio graeca* that betrays his and his audience’s classical learning, writing that he “seemed to have been

¹⁹ As C.A. Hagerman notes in *Britain’s Imperial Muse: The Classics, Imperialism, and the Indian Empire, 1784-1914* part of the aims of education in the Classics in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries served to give pupils “the ability to display enough classical knowledge to proclaim their membership of the social elite.” Ch 1 p.3
“The classics have always been more or less the handmaids to the faculties of theology, law, and medicine”
John Massey

transported in a moment over more than twenty centuries to the Athens of Cratinus and Aristophanes. If it had not been for the colour of the faces around, I should have believed myself to be on the main road to Eleusis in the full tide of one of the Dionysiac festivals" (Trevelyan 210).

Students taking the second part of the Classical Tripos in 1887 would have known, had they picked up a copy of Trevelyan's book, that the mention of Dionysiac festivals in conjunction with India was no mere flight of classical fancy on the Baronet's part, but rather an allusion to the journeys of the god to the Indian subcontinent and the exotic traditions, incorporated into mystery cults such as those celebrated at Eleusis. When writing about Greek and Roman law and history for the antepenultimate portion of their exam, candidates were asked to know enough about a number of speeches from a number of both Greek and Roman orators, and enough about historical events surrounding them to evaluate the trustworthiness of the use of those speeches as primary sources. The second part of the Tripos, like the first, placed an importance on the drawing of maps, asking candidates to "draw a sketch map either a) of Syracuse and its neighbourhood, showing the works of the besiegers and the besieged at the time of Demosthenes' arrival," or "of the districts traversed by the Ten Thousand in their march from Cunaxa to the Euxine" (CUEP 351). Spatial questions like this show the outsize importance that Thucydides and Xenophon held in nineteenth century pedagogies of Greek. The all-encompassing nature of a humanistic education allowed

those examined to demonstrate not only their granular knowledge of a particular subfield of Classics, such as Greek verse composition, or Latin epigraphy, but also to be conversant in questions of a more expansive nature, like the similarities between Indo-European languages.

From questions of historical phonology— “take one of the Greek diphthongs... and write its history from the earliest times” to historical morphology—“show the history of Greek dative plural forms, with some discussion on doubtful points” (ibid. 357) students were expected to not only be able to fluently read Greek in its classical dialects, but to hold their own in a discussion on the nascent field of Indo-European studies. While the greater part of the exam focused on Latin and Greek, most of the day’s work for June 7, 1887 focused on Indo-European linguistics, with sections of Romanized Sanskrit²⁰ and a Romanized portion of the then-recently discovered Cypriot inscription on the Idalion Tablet (Hall 45-68). to be translated and commented upon, after which the student was required to “give notes on the language”(CUEP 357), presumably showing how the Cypriot syllabary was used to write what was essentially a geographical variety of the ancient Greek language.

On June 8th, the focus shifted to Latin phonology and historical linguistics, with an emphasis on Latin’s borrowings from and relationship to Etruscan, Oscan, and Umbrian. Students were asked to translate a short excerpt from either the Second

²⁰ The excerpts seem to be from the story of Nala and Damayanti from the Mahabharata.

Resolution of the Tabulae Iguvinae²¹ or from the Tabula Bantina.²² Picking the first example would allow a student to exercise their Umbrian and the second their Sabello-Oscan linguistic skills²³ before returning to the terra firma of Latin epigraphy and grammar, where they explained the “doctrine of the ‘sequence of tenses,’” (ibid. 361) and looked at case endings in Latin to signify the passage of time, with corresponding citations from ancient authors (ibid. 362).

With one final day of exams, and eight essay questions on linguistics between them and a Bachelor’s degree, Cambridge students once again had the choice to focus on topics ranging from Indo-European morphology, reconstructing “the sounds which the Indo-European alphabet probably comprised, giving examples of their usual representation in either Sanskrit or Gothic” (ibid. 363) to the ways of distinguishing between *oratio obliqua* and *oratio recta* in both Greek and Latin, touching upon the introduction of the particle *ὅτι* as a marker of indirect discourse and the use of accusative-infinitive constructions in those languages. The student also had the option of translating single sentences from Greek into Latin, and of rewriting a portion of

²¹ Vide Jansen, H. H., ed. *Oscan and Umbrian Inscriptions with a Latin Translation*. E.J. Brill, 1949. 36

²² Vide Donaldson, John William, *Varronianus: A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Epigraphy of Ancient Italy and to the Philological Study of the Latin Language*. John W. Parker and Son, 1852. 117

²³ Vide Poultney, James Wilson. *The Bronze Tables of Iguvium*. American Philological Association, 1959; Buck, Carl Darling. *A Grammar of Oscan and Umbrian*. Ginn and Co. 1904. 233.

Thucydides (VI.xl) into indirect speech after including a verb of saying. The opposite was to be done with Livy (VI.xxxvii).

The questions on Indo-European are particularly interesting because the student was asked to compose a translation into that proto-language of the sentence “These words the woman speaks: ‘Father Heaven, who gives good and fair gifts to men, thou knowest my desire’” and thereby to “give the evidence” for their choice of forms and their understanding of the rules underpinning the reconstructed language, showing that even languages not studied as thoroughly as Greek and Latin were to be mastered sufficiently for the classicist-in-training to be able to fluidly move between them and their grammatical and temporal peculiarities as if they had been English. Finally, students could focus their last essay on one of three broad themes, all relating to epigraphy: the history of the Greek alphabets; a transcription of certain phrases into the epichoric alphabets of Corinth, Argos, Naxos, and Thera; or the history of Italic alphabets’ “symbols for the guttural tenuis, *f* and *z*” as well as the directionality of early inscriptions and “an account of the Bomarzo vase and the Dvenos inscription” (ibid. 363).

All told, any student receiving a First Class degree in Classics would have had familiarity with an impressive list of ancient languages: Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Gothic, Umbrian, Oscan, Arcado-Cypriot, Etruscan, and Proto-Indo-European; that same student would have had to feel comfortable translating into and out of Greek and Latin

prose and verse, and be deeply familiar with, among other things, the history, customs, and people of two civilizations, and perhaps more glancingly with others. Therefore, when George du Maurier published “Glory To Agnata Frances Ramsay” in the July 2, 1887 issue of *Punch*, he too, like Mr. Punch in the cartoon, may have been bowing his head in recognition that Ramsay was the only undergraduate *in toto*, and not simply the only woman, to achieve a First Class degree in Classics at the University of Cambridge that year.

“Glory To Agnata Frances Ramsay”

This cartoon depicts a train car emblazoned with the words “For Ladies Only,” and “First Class”— outward markers of rail-travel that make sense on the one hand in a literal context, given the expansion of single-sex methods of transportation that arose during the Victorian period in both England and America (Welke 333). Charles Dickens, in his book *American Notes for General Circulation*, writes of the differences between English and American railroads, noting that “there are no first and second class carriages as with us; but there is a gentlemen’s car and a ladies’ car;” (Dickens 43); while he may have been describing the American transportation system, the British public would also be familiar with the concept of a single-sex train car. On the other hand, du Maurier’s train car is marked “First Class,” which, by the academic dress of the principal figures in the cartoon, Mr. Punch (right) and Ramsay

(centre) is associated not only with the affluence and comfort with which one may think of it in the field of travel, but with the rigor and demands of academia that were necessary, as explained above, to leave Cambridge with a First Class degree.

Agnata Frances Ramsay is identifiable not by her face, since she has her back to the audience, but by being mentioned in the title and because of the two signs mentioned above. There is an inherent sexual tension in the cartoon: the aged body and face of Mr Punch contrast against the Grecian poise and youth of Ramsay. Mr Punch, in the guise of a don, doffs his cap and slightly bows in recognition of Ramsay's newfound status as "Senior Classic," the first woman to achieve that position since the inception of the Classical Tripos at Cambridge in 1824 (Galton 299). Mr Punch's upturned eyes and his faint smile, playing on his wrinkled lip suggest a kind of intellectual voyeurism made into a joke, perhaps to lessen the power imbalance between the two human figures, by the inclusion of the little dog Toby, the traditional and oft-depicted mascot of *Punch* seen here standing on his hind legs and wearing an Elizabethan ruff around his neck for the occasion.

Ramsay's scholastic feat would inspire a much more kind and factual notice in *The Saturday Review* which appeared a week before this cartoon, in which Ramsay was heralded as a standard-bearer for Girton College. Not only was Ramsay lauded there, but she was also mentioned in an unsigned paragraph tucked inside a column of *The Educational Times* on July 1, 1887 titled "Educational Notes and Summary" alongside R.M. Hervey, of Newnham College, who was "the only student who attain[ed] to a First Class in the Mediæval and Modern Languages Tripos." The anonymous columnist goes on to remark that both "Miss A.F. Ramsay and Miss R.M. Hervey have each done more than has yet been given to any male to do." Ramsay having begun her Greek studies upon entering Girton, "makes this record still more marvellous" (*The Educational Times* July 1 1887 262). *The Saturday Review* article too, mentions the fact that Ramsay "did not learn Greek until she was sixteen" ("Girton and Newnham" 896). Ramsay's completion of the first part of the Classical Tripos with honors allowed her to sit for the second part some terms later. The second part, too, she completed successfully (Prins LG 15). The writer for *The Saturday Review*, of a more feminist mind than anyone associated with *Punch*, continued: "To have easily distanced in a classical contest all the best Cambridge men of her standing is to have shown, not only singular ability and capacity for work, but also the still more valuable ideals of coolness, judgment, and self-reliance. That girls are less stupid than boys is plain enough to any competent critic" ("Girton and Newnham" 896).

Fig. 4 "Glory To Agnata Frances Ramsay"
George du Maurier, *Punch* July 2, 1887

The writer assures their audience that the trial of verse composition in Part I of the Tripos "remains the most convenient and available test of nicety and delicacy in scholarship;" (op. cit.) yet, by 1889 again through du Maurier's pictorial eyes, *Punch*

had taken a jab at women's achievements in Classics by referencing Ramsay's first post-baccalaureate publication—a Greek edition of the seventh book of Herodotus' *Histories*, and the fact that she was at the time married to George Montagu Butler. The classicist Mary Beard proclaimed Agnata Ramsay to have been “one of the most notorious casualties of the university marriage market” who, “did very little classics... after” her marriage to the then-55 year old Master of Trinity College who himself once remarked that it was Ramsay's “goodness... not her Greek and Latin, which have stolen my heart” (op. cit.). Here, not for the last time, do we see women's classical accomplishments diminished or outright erased by a man.

Fig. 5 “A Pardonable Mistake” George du Maurier, *Punch* December 7, 1889

“A Pardonable Mistake”

The last cartoon of du Maurier's I will consider appeared in *Punch* on December 7, 1889 and, like “St. Valentine's Day at Girton” derives some of its humor from the dialogue printed beneath the image. This cartoon, also like the one previously mentioned, serves as a commentary for the caliber of scholarship that was being encouraged and produced at Girton College. In it, we see a “Young Mother” in a well-furnished parlor sitting at a writing desk in the midst of writing. A nurse stands behind and to her right, holding a swaddled baby. To the viewers' right, on the edge of the cartoon, a woman, identified as the “Fair Friend (not from Girton)” has just arrived and

is attired as if for travel still. She wears a matching hat and coat and a voluminous floor-length skirt. The “Young Mother (lately from Girton)” is in the act of looking over her left shoulder and addresses her friend with these words: “Come in, dear. Excuse me for one moment. I’m just ordering a crib for Herodotus.” To this, her friend replies “Oh, *that’s* what you’re going to call dear Baby, is it?” Since the “Fair Friend” is not from Girton, she misidentifies “a crib for Herodotus” as the item of furniture instead of the meaning of “a written aid used to construe a classical text” as used even into the twentieth century.²⁴ Popular cribs, like “Dr. Giles’ Keys to the Classics,” “Kelly’s Classical Keys” and “Bohn’s Classical Library” “ranged from word-for-word renderings, unreadable as either English or Latin (or Greek) and useful only for help construing” to grammatical commentaries of both philological and pedagogical value to students. (Vandiver 56).

By including the response of the “Fair Friend” and deriving the cartoon’s humor from it, the editors of *Punch* and du Maurier himself were highlighting the fact that many of the male readers of the magazine had doubtlessly ordered “cribs for Herodotus” for their own use when they encountered the Ionic Greek-speaking historian during their own public school days. The juxtaposition between the two women in the cartoon too, one comfortable with Classics, and university educated, and the other not, highlights the male-dominated discipline of philology and the femininity

²⁴ As in Edward Shillito’s poem “A New Iliad” where we read of a boy who “his Homer, crib in hand, had read”(Shillito 56).

expected from a character identified only as a “Young Mother” whose educational pedigree is only parenthetically relayed to readers.

The scholarly efforts of women in classical studies during the nineteenth century, using those of the English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning as case studies, will be the focus of this dissertation. Her deep cache of classical knowledge, particularly her knowledge of Greek, permeated her poetry and prose. Chapter I—“Defining Nymphdom” focuses on two moments of nymphic invocation in Book XIII of Homer’s *Odyssey* in order to explore the interaction between nymphs and humans in archaic Greek poetry. Chapter II— “Reading Greek Under the Trees”: The Democratization of

A PARDONABLE MISTAKE.

Young Mother (lately from Girton). "COME IN, DEAR. EXCUSE ME FOR ONE MOMENT. I'M JUST ORDERING A CRIB FOR HERODOTUS."
Fair Friend (not from Girton). "OH, THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO CALL DEAR BABY, IS IT!"

Classics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and "A Vision of Poets"

explores Barrett Browning's use of the figure of the nymph in those two poems, as well as the groundwork that made possible triumphs such as Agnata Frances Ramsey's in the generation after Barrett Browning's own. Finally, Chapter III, "'The honey of Mount Hymettus:' Embodied Classical Scholarship and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "'Wine of Cyprus'" focuses on Barrett Browning's co-educational classical symposium with her tutor Hugh Stuart Boyd and explores the inclusion of women in a formerly androcentric space, taking the Athenian institution of the symposium as a microcosm of classical education in the nineteenth century.

Chapter I ~ Defining Nymphdom

Abordar el tema de las Ninfas, en un principio, conduce irremisiblemente al estupor. Ante los ojos del estudioso se muestra un colectivo caracterizado por la multiplicidad, la multiformidad y una enorme variedad de aspectos y funciones. El tema se antoja inagotable y la tarea, ardua en extremo, presenta visos de eternizarse. ~ M^a. de Fátima Díez Platas ¹ (1)

Nymphs have been, throughout history and across languages, creatures whose particular nature is difficult to precisely pin down. Just as these creatures are liminal, so too, whether in Greek, Latin or English, is the very term used to refer to these creatures (*νύμφη*, *nympha* or *nymph* respectively) ambiguous; used in the classical languages to refer not only to the goddesses associated with particular natural formations such as woodlands, mountains, rivers, lakes, and clouds, but also to any nubile human female and particularly, one who is on the cusp of marriage, that is to say a bride. Not only confined to the literary sphere, the liminality of this term also appears in certain specialized contexts in both English and Latin: *nymph* and *nympha* refer to larvae of certain insects, since they too, are on the cusp of transformation. The figure of the nymph is liminal throughout, from its name onwards. As deities of nature, nymphs are explicitly tied to cycles of nature, growing, flourishing, and dying with their environment. At times after death, some nymphs reappear in a slightly altered form, much as nature does once it has died. Nymphs too, are nubile themselves, and we see

¹*"To take up the theme of the Nymphs, at first, unforgivably leads to stupor. Before the eyes of the scholar, a collective characterized by multiplicity, multiformity, and an enormous variety of aspects and functions presents itself. The theme seems inexhaustible and the task, arduous in the extreme, has hints of being eternal."*

this connection at the semantic level in the relationship between the word *νύμφη* in Greek, and the Latin *nūbō*, meaning both “I veil myself” and “I marry.” It is this word that gave rise to the English *nubile*. In *νύμφη* too we see *νεφέλη* (cloud) whence the Latin *nūbēs* meaning both “cloud” and “phantom.”

Unlike Pan, for whom we have a Homeric Hymn against which many of the works which feature him can be compared, the very liminality of nymphs arises partly from the lack of such a foundational text. Such an authoritative text being absent from the extant corpus of Greek literature, I will be analyzing some passages from other poetic corpora that are not the Homeric Hymns, namely Hesiod’s Fragment 3 of “The Precepts of Chiron” within which many nymphic qualities are mentioned; lines 96-112 of the thirteenth book of Homer’s *Odyssey*, where we see in an ekphrastic moment the narrator of the poem expounding on the cave of the naiad nymphs who live near Ithaka; the prayer of Odysseus to the nymphs later on in that book (XIII.355-60) where nymphs are treated properly in a religious context after aiding a human male. By considering these texts, and, as Erasmus of Rotterdam exhorted his fellow humanists, by heading to the well-springs of Greek literature, I believe I will have a greater understanding of nymphdom as it was at the beginning of the long nineteenth century, which is where this dissertation, though not this chapter per se will focus.

“We, the nymphs:” a Chorus of Well-coifed Creatures

From antiquity onward, the question of who is a nymph has been taken up by scholarly debates. Indeed, Jennifer Larson's first chapter seeks to define Greek nymphs via a list of attributes reminiscent of the list of thirty two characteristics of the Buddha, known in Sanskrit as the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* (Krishan and Tadikonda 125). Even with such an exhaustive list, the idea of nymphdom and who gets to claim to be a nymph is too nebulous a thing to pin down.

Like xenonyms and autonoms in the real world, the category of who is a nymph is nebulous. Is it an identifier that can only be given to one nymph by another, or by a nymph who speaks of herself as one, or can it be used as a xenonym by humans who are de facto not nymphs themselves? (Matisoff 6) In order to explore an image of what a nymph might be in Greek literature, I have chosen the oldest extant fragment of Greek poetry wherein a group of nymphs speaking as a chorus identifies itself as such, that is to say, as a group of nymphs. The third fragment of Hesiod's *Χείρωνος ὑποθήκαι* or *Precepts of Chiron* is a good starting point when it comes to nymphic autonoms.

ἐννέα τοι ζῶει γενεὰς λακέρυζα κορώη
ἀνδρῶν γεράντων· ἔλαφος δέ τε τετρακόρωνος·
τρεις δ' ἐλάφους ὁ κόραξ γεράσκειται· αὐτὰρ φοῖνιξ
ἐννέα μὲν κόρακας, δέκα φοίνικας δέ τοι ἡμεῖς
Νύμφαι εὐπλόκαμοι, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.

*Croaking crows grow old after nine lives
of old men; and a hart grows old after four crows';
the raven grows old after three harts; however, the phoenix after
nine ravens and after ten phoenixes we,
well-coifed Nymphs, the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus.*

In the fragment above, the speakers explicitly conceive of themselves as a group by speaking of “ἡμεῖς / Νύμφαι εὐπλόκαμοι.” The use of the first person plural pronoun solidifies the authority of the speakers who speak as one, calling to mind the *choregos* of a tragedy, and the epithet εὐπλόκαμοι calls to mind goddesses like Eos and Artemis who themselves are described with that epithet (Hom. *Od.* V.390; XX.80 etc.). The nymphs assure the audience of their longevity and power not only by invoking their ability to outlast animals both real and mythical—men, crows, harts, ravens and phoenixes—but also by claiming divine parentage as the “κούραι Διὸς αἰγίοχοιο”² *the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus*.

The protective image conjured up by Zeus’ epithet and the tenor of the epic masculine genitive singular ending *-οιο* combine to suggest to the listeners of the Hesiodic fragment that nymphs have existed since time immemorial and that they operate in a liminal world between the spaces of mortal and immortal beings. However, this catalogue of respective ages of different beings reveals that the Greek conception of nymphs, unlike the Greek conception of (most) deities, was that nymphs were long-lived, but ultimately mortal. However, the choice of epithet here links the nymphs to Athena and the Muses as Athena is called in *Iliad* X “κούρη τ’ αἰγίοχοιο Διὸς γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη” (*Il.* X 553)³.

² This phrase, “νύμφαι, κούραι Διὸς αἰγίοχοιο” is repeated in *Od.* VI.105

³ “And the daughter of Zeus who holds the aegis, grey-eyed Athena.”

Likewise, the formulaic epithet linking nymphs and goddesses: “κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο” appears in another work of Hesiod. We find an invocation to the muses in the voice of the poet, who implores

νῦν δὲ θεάων φῦλον αἰείσατε, ἡδυέπειαι
Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο”⁴

*and now sing of the grouping of goddesses, sweetly-voiced
Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis*

Hesiod, *Theogony* 965-966

Corrine Ondine Pache dedicates the first chapter of *A Moment's Ornament* to analyzing the passage of the *Theogony* wherein these lines appear in a liminal nymphic context.

Pache remarks that the repetition of a second person imperative, “χαίρετε” in *Theogony* 104-110 and in the same poem between the lines 963-968 is “both a farewell and a new beginning” (Pache 16). I agree with Pache about the liminality of those passages.

However, I assert that not only is the second person imperative a repeated salutation and valediction but also that the repeated identification of the nymphs as the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus means they were seen to be the equals of established goddesses of wisdom and craft. Since this epithet appears both in the Hesiodic tradition and has parallels with other goddesses in the Homeric tradition, it suggests that in the oldest fully-extant Greek epics nymphs as a group were, in human terms, immortal. However, there are many dead nymphs, which means the following question needs to be asked:

⁴ “and now sing of the grouping of goddesses, sweetly-voiced / Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis” *Theogony* 965-66. *Vide etiam* Hes. *Th.* 25 where the line “Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο” is repeated literally.

Are nymphs immortal?

If we take Sophocles, for example, as an old man, (ca. 497- 406 BCE) we arrive at an age of 91 years as suggesting a very old man. By the relationships between creatures indicated in the *Precepts of Chiron*, “Fragment 3”, the value of 91 taken for the life of an old man would make crows old at the age of 819, harts at 3,276, ravens at 9,828, phoenixes at 88,452, and nymphs at 884,520. Since in Greek a myriad (μυριάς) is a unit numbering 10,000, and is related to the word *μυρίος* (which poetically means “infinite”) we can conceive of nymphs as being functionally immortal. This echoes Pindar’s fragment 165, cited above in Plutarch where nymphs are allotted the same years of life as a tree.⁵ Because of numberless accounts of dead nymphs, we know that nymphs are not, strictly speaking, immortal (*ἀθανάτοι*) but rather have the possibility of dying. Yet, Homer, in *Iliad* XX.4-9 has Themis, a titan and the personification of justice, act as the herald who summons all the gods to Olympus for a council, and Homer explicitly mentions that “every one of the nymphs who wander the beautiful groves and the springs that feed the rivers” attended said council.⁶ They are the only liminal beings mentioned in those lines, and are surrounded by the Olympian deities, and a

⁵ For more on nymph ages see *op. cit.* 416c-d.

⁶ “νυμφάων αἶ τ’ ἄλσεα καλὰ νέμονται / καὶ πηγὰς ποταμῶν καὶ πίσεα ποιέεντα.” *Od.* XX.8-9

Note the echo here to the Homeric Hymn to Pan (*Hom. Hymn. Pan.* 2-3) where one of Pan and the nymphs’ habitats is described similarly to this.

description of the nymphs' physical home reinforces this liminality. They thus are neither fully immortal, nor fully mortal, though, given their long life-span and their supernatural powers, they seem as if they were goddesses to mortal eyes. Pausanias himself, in his second century travelogue, says that the poets say that nymphs live for a very long time but can still die (Paus. X.xxxi.10).

Nymphic Habitats

Homer too, in *Odyssey* XIII.96-112, contrasts the ἀθάνατοι (immortals) with the ἄνδρες (mortal men) when discussing the nymph-cave at the harbor of Phorkys.⁷

Complicating the definition of nymphdom, two of the Orphic Hymns mention the youth and spring-like nature of nymphs, leading one to believe that while nymphs are ageless physically, death can befall them.

Not only is the nymphs' longevity part of their liminal nature, so too are their dwellings and even the very point in the *Odyssey* at which the description of the cave of the nymphs comes. The point, ninety-six lines into the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey*, serves to show the liminal space which the nymphs occupy both in the Hellenic world at large and at this particular point in the story. The actions of the characters before reaching the cave of the nymphs, ninety six lines into the thirteenth book, foretell human— nymph relations in the Homeric world, which set the tone for Hellenic and

⁷ For ease of reference I'll be writing of the *Odyssey* as if it were a poem crafted by one poet whose name is Ὅμηρος and whom we call "Homer" in English. May the nymphs preserve me if dispensing with the Homeric Question in a three line footnote is too hubristic.

Hellenistic nymphs and in turn for the Hellenophilic characterization of anglophone nymphs.

The thirteenth book begins right after a speech of Alkinoos, but Homer makes a point to begin the book in silence while emphasizing the enchantment (κηληθμῶ) felt by the mortal characters while they rest beneath the shadowy hall (μέγαρα σκιόεντα) of their host (ll. 1-15).⁸ We then witness a description of the preparations for departure, a sacrifice to Zeus, the ensuing feast, and the postprandial rhapsodic stylings of Demodocus (16-28). Odysseus longs to set sail overnight so he might be closer to returning home and to the closure of *nostos* that he has longed for (29-37) and so he thanks Alkinoos, saying goodbye to him (38-49). Alkinoos then instructs Pontonoos, his herald, to mix a *krater* of wine for everyone who had been at the feast, and Odysseus again speaks, taking his leave of Arete, the queen, and wishing her well until "old age / and death which exist for all mortals" come for her (50-63).⁹ Then the poet dispenses with the final preparations before the ship of Odysseus and his comrades sets sail for the Harbor of Ithaka (64-69). The last twenty seven lines before the description of the cave of the Nymphs are a Homeric simile likening Odysseus' sleep to death, and the movement of his ship to the swiftness of four horses running while yoked together (70-95).

⁸ "ὥς ἔφαθ', οἳ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῇ / κηληθμῶ δ' ἔσχοντο κατὰ μέγαρα σκιόεντα." (Hom. *Od.* XIII.1-2)

⁹ "γῆρας / ἔλθη καὶ θάνατος, τά τ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισι πέλονται." (ibid. 59-60)

At last, the *Odyssey's* audience and the people on Odysseus' ship catch their first glimpse of Ithaka after numerous years away from it. The cave of the Nymphs and its unseen inhabitants serve as a boundary marker between the wider world and the δῆμον Ἰθάκης to which Odysseus longs to return. Note how the furnishings of the cave both echo the cultural values of *xenía* that we see performed by human characters before reaching this point in the narrative, and how the architecture of the cave itself emphasizes the liminality of nymphs.

Φόρκυνος δέ τις ἐστὶ λιμὴν, ἀλίοιο γέροντος,
ἐν δῆμῳ Ἰθάκης: δύο δὲ προβλήτες ἐν αὐτῷ
ἄκται ἀπορρῶγες, λιμένος ποτιπεπτηνῖαι,
αἳ τ' ἀνέμων σκεπώωσι δυσαήων μέγα κῦμα
ἔκτοθεν: ἔντοσθεν δέ τ' ἄνευ δεσμοῖο μένουσι
νῆες ἐϋσσελμοι, ὅτ' ἂν ὄρμου μέτρον ἴκωνται.
αὐτὰρ ἐπὶ κρατὸς λιμένος τανύφυλλος ἐλαίη,
ἀγχόθι δ' αὐτῆς ἄντρον ἐπήρατον ἡεροειδές,
ἱρὸν νυμφῶν αἰ νηϊάδες καλέονται.
ἐν δὲ κρητῆρές τε καὶ ἀμφιφορῆες ἔασιν
λαῖνοι: ἔνθα δ' ἔπειτα τιθαιβώσσουσι μέλισσαι.
ἐν δ' ἴστοι λίθιοι περιμήκεες, ἔνθα τε νύμφαι
φάρε' ὑφαίνουσιν ἀλιπόρφυρα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι:
ἐν δ' ὕδατ' ἀενάοντα. δύο δέ τέ οἱ θύραι εἰσίν,
αἱ μὲν πρὸς βορέαο καταιβαταὶ ἀνθρώποισιν,
αἱ δ' αὖ πρὸς νότου εἰσὶ θεώτεραι: οὐδέ τι κείνη
ἄνδρες ἐσέρχονται, ἀλλ' ἀθανάτων ὁδός ἐστιν.

—Hom. *Od.* XIII.96-112

*There is a certain harbor of Phorkys, the Old Man of the Sea
in the land of Ithaka, and two jutting promontories in it, which
rise sheer against the sea but fall gently towards the harbor,
sheltering it from great winds causing large waves
outside—inside, the good-benched carved ships remain
when they have reached a mooring spot.
However, at the far end of the harbor is an olive tree with long-pointed leaves,*

*and near it is a lovely dark cave,
a holy place consecrated to the nymphs who are called naiads.
In it, are kraters and large two-handled wine-jars
made of stone; within them, bees make honeycombs.
In it also are very tall loom beams standing upright. And there, nymphs
weave salt-purple webs of cloth—wonderful to see:
there is ever-flowing water there, and there are two double-doors to the cave;
one set faces Boreas, through which men go,
the other, Notos, and mortals do not at all
enter that way, for it is the path of the immortals.*

The swiftness of the narrative, like that of Odysseus' ship, is interrupted by the liminal landmark that is the cave of the nymphs. Its description begins broadly, and sharpens its focus line by line, divulging information about nymphs through the shades of their physical presence and through the architectural structures inhabited by them. This ekphrastic passage relies on the audience's mythical knowledge and on their knowledge of contemporary social structures to emphasize the diaphanous nature of nymphs.

The audience is gently unmoored from reality, unlike the human ships that stop there, by the identification of the harbor with Phorkys, the ἄλιος γέρον. Plato tells us that Phorkys was the son of Okeanos, an ocean god and father of the Oceanids, and of Tethys, a Titan (Plat. *Tim.* 40e). He is among many gods called *the old man of the sea* in Greek literature but his invocation in order to set the scene is significant given that he is the father of the Gorgons and of the Graiai: two sets of powerful supernatural

daughters who have power over mankind.¹⁰ The Graiai are described in Hesiod as “καλλιπαρῆους / ἐκ γενετῆς πολιάς” (Hes. *Th.* 270-71). “Beautiful-cheeked and grey-haired from birth,” the Graiai were also said to have only one eye to share between them which Perseus, according to Lycophron, stole from them (Lyc. *Alex.* I.846). Like the Graiai, Medusa, at least, was described as “εὐπαράου Μεδοίσας,” (Pind. *Pyth.* XII.16) *good-cheeked Medusa* and was said to have been beautiful; nymphs in Homer and beyond have attributes that make them, at least to human male perception, beautiful and dangerous.¹¹

Finding ourselves as listeners situated at the harbor of Phorkys, so close to the land of Ithaka that we can almost see it, we are introduced to the twin headlands that serve as a buffer between the open sea and the landmass of Ithaka. These promontories, we are told, shelter the harbor from the large waves that would otherwise disturb it and so they physically isolate the Cave of the Nymphs from the inner harbor and protect it from the open sea, just as the description “of the harbor and the cave gives great emphasis to what is to follow, heightening the audience's anticipation of the continuation of the narrative and at the same time delaying it” (Byre 4), so too does it

¹⁰ *vide* Hes. *Th.* 234.; *ibid.* 1003 *et seq*; Pind. *Pyth.* IX.94-95 *inter alia*.

¹¹ Note the echo of the descriptive epithet of Medusa in Pindar and of the Graiai in Hesiod.

create a feeling of anticipation and delay that is palpable both to the audience and to the characters of the poem.¹²

Playing with boundaries and thresholds, Homer continually stresses the duality inherent in the cave of the nymphs and in the landscape surrounding it. The passage is separated between the first four lines, which describe the outer harbor, and the rest of the passage which describes the inner harbor and the cave proper, by the first word of the fifth line: “ἔκτοθεν:” which itself is followed immediately thereafter by its antonym, that is to say “ἐντοσθεν” marks an antonymic doublet, and a sense that the visible and empirical world and the invisible spiritual world exist simultaneously in the warped and liminal space that forms the domain of the nymphs.

The very vegetation that serves to demarcate the entrance of the cave of the nymphs provides hints to the audience of the *Odyssey* that what lies beyond (or perhaps beneath) the “olive tree with long-pointed leaves,” is partially forbidden to humans who may chance upon it, and the tree also serves to mark a nymphic *temenos*—a ritual boundary demarcating that both the physical space constituting the cave and the inhabitants of the cave itself, the nymphs, are likewise separated from the mortal world. The olive tree at the entrance of the cave of the nymphs strengthens the identification between nymphs and Athena, providing a teleological marker that may help to explain the idea of nympholepsy as a liminal state being characterized by a heightened sense of

¹² A similar stretching of narrative time occurs in two of the other three descriptions of harbors in the *Odyssey*: the island of the Cyclopes IX.136-141 and the island of Aeolus X.87-96.

awareness, aestheticism, and an almost supernatural facility with the spoken word verging on *ex tempore* human production of *époi*, or lines of dactylic hexameter, given that Athena is the goddess of wisdom (Plat. *Phaedr.* 241e).

The erotic unavailability of the nymphs too, inversely echoes that of Athena herself in her manifestation as a virgin goddess as nymphs are often defined, in part, by being erotically pursued, often non-consensually, by gods and mortal men (Holtzmann 111-112).¹³ Nymphs are at times depicted as dwelling in caves and serving nourishing functions, as in the twenty-sixth Homeric Hymn (Hom. *Hymn. Bacch.* XXVI.7). Referred to as “θεαῖ” or “goddesses,” nymphs easily fit into a chthonic nourisher’s role, as they do in the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey* where their dwelling is described as “a lovely dark cave, / a holy place consecrated to the nymphs who are called naiads.” Their

¹³ Charon of Lampsakos, preserved in Felix Jacoby’s *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, tells the story of Rhoikos, a man who comes across a nymph and her tree and, knowing that the nymph will die if the tree falls, orders his children to prop it up (FGrHist 264 F 12). The nymph, thanking him for saving her life, offers him a reward. Rhoikos demands that she have sex with him, and, not refusing immediately, the nymph tells him to wait for a bee to tell him where and when to meet her. Later, as he is gambling, a bee flies away from him, and he goes back to the forest to harass the nymph for asserting her autonomy. At this point the scholiast writes “πικρότερον δὲ τι ἀποφθεγξάμενος εἰς ὀργὴν ἔτρεψε τὴν νύμφην, ὥστε πηρωθῆναι αὐτόν.” *And he, replying sharply, angered the nymph with the result that he was blinded.* The scholiast then cites a fragment of Pindar (fr. 165) to say that hamadryads have been allotted a life expectancy that is “ἰσοδενδρου ... αἰῶνος” *equal to the years of a tree*. There is in this scholion an implicit rebuke of the nymph for asserting her right to deny consent. She “εἰς ὀργὴν ἔτρεψε” or literally “turned towards rage” upon the man, who takes advantage of her offer to reward him for saving her by demanding sex in exchange for her safety. In this anecdote and in others, male characters, when interacting with nymphs in vulnerable positions, such as finding themselves mortally wounded, bathing in a lake, or simply walking in the forest, seek to take advantage of nymphs by virtue of removing the nymphs’ ability to consent. Oftentimes, the stated or unstated catalyst for these actions is an understood assertion on the human’s part that he is compelled to remove consent by the very fact that the nymph’s presence has caused him to become a nympholept.

differentiation from goddesses, Pache contends, hinges on the goddesses' universality and, inversely, the locality of the nymphs. She argues repeatedly that "the distinction between nymphs and goddesses relates to a sphere of influence rather than to an essential difference in status" (Pache 94). Indeed, even in Roman times, the question of the nature of nymphs was debated, as Cicero writes in *De Natura Deorum* (III.xliii) where a hypothetical Sophist poses the question as follows: "'If the gods exist, are the nymphs also goddesses? if the nymphs are, the Pans and Satyrs also are gods, but they are not gods; therefore the nymphs also are not. Yet they possess temples vowed and dedicated to them by the nation; are the other gods also therefore who have had temples dedicated to them not gods either?'"¹⁴ It seems to me and to Pache that, in their own cave, nymphs are in effect, local goddesses, as "on Ithaka, nymphs appear chiefly as objects of worship who have sanctuaries and receive sacrifice and prayer" (Pache 95). Their cave here is typified as a *locus amoenus*, by the adjectives ἐπήρατον, ἡροειδέες, and ἱπὸν —*lovely, dark, and holy* which mark the cave both as secluded and as charged with erotic or restorative possibilities according to the later poetic pastoral tradition.

Nymphs, as localized fertility goddesses, are associated with natural spaces throughout Greece, but particularly with Arcadia, where mountainous terrain and a lack of large cities, as well as a strong tradition of sheep- and goat-herding on the Peloponnesos, to

¹⁴ Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *De Natura Deorum ; Academica*. Trans. Harris Rackham. Vol. XIX. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962. Print. Loeb Classical Library. III.43

"Si di sunt, suntne etiam Nymphae deae? Si Nymphae, Panisci etiam et Satyri; hi autem non sunt; ne Nymphae quidem igitur. At earum templa sunt publice vota et dedicata. Ne ceteri quidem ergo di, quorum templa sunt dedicata."

say nothing of Pan's identification as being close to Kadmos, the first ruler of Arcadia (Nonn. *Dionys.* I.368-370) as well as his role as leader of the nymphs aided the region's later identification with the pastoral genre, an identification that continued well-into the nineteenth century (Hom. *Hymn. Pan.* 20).

Though Odysseus and his companions do not enter the cave of the nymphs, Odysseus himself does, later in Book XIII, stash some belongings of his within the cave, after which he prays to its inhabitants.¹⁵ Yet, the narrator of the *Odyssey* takes their audience into the cave itself before that, describing it and enumerating its contents for eight lines in an ekphrastic passage.¹⁶ While there are no beds or couches described as one might expect in a dwelling, the nymphs do have furniture and possessions. The audience learns that the cave contains “*kraters* and large two-handled wine-jars / made of stone; within them, bees make honeycombs;” the *kraters*, large mixing bowls for ritual consumption of a mix of wine and water, are suggestive of both the nymphs' goddess-like nature, and of their sexuality, given the erotic connotations of *μίγνυμι*, a verb

¹⁵ Vide XIII.345-81 but particularly 355-360, Odysseus' prayer to the nymphs upon reaching Ithaka and Athena's introduction to that episode (345-51) which echoes the structure of the earlier, more extensive description of the cave of the nymphs.

¹⁶ Vide Niels Koopman's *Ancient Greek Ekphrasis: Between Description and Narration Five Linguistic and Narratological Case Studies* pp. 46-53 for a reading of *Od.* XIII.96-112 as an ekphrastic passage.

denoting both the act of mixing wine and water and the act of sexual intercourse thematized as a mixing of bodies regardless of whether or not it is a consensual act.¹⁷

Krateres being essential to both feasts and sacrifices in Homeric poetry, both as the communal vessels from which the leader of the sacrifice or the ritual symposiarch refills the celebrants' individual cups and from which comes the wine that forms the libation ritually offered to the gods, it is striking that there are multiple exemplars of this kind of vessel in the cave, as well as *amphiphorēs* which would serve a similar ritual purpose, whether storing oil, wine, or another liquid, such as the honey we are told the nymphs keep within them (Sherratt) 306).¹⁸ M.L. West notes that in Platonic philosophy "the Demiurge" in the *Timaeus* (35; 41d) "uses a bowl to mix the soul of the firmament and the souls of men" (West *OP* 11).¹⁹ However, I have not seen any text yet other than Porphyry's Platonist close-reading, that specifies what the nymphs here are mixing.

That they not only keep honey in the *amphiphorēs* but that the nymphs who live in the

¹⁷ *Vide* Hom. *Od.* V.121-128 for Kalypso's catalogue where she uses a passive aorist form (μίγη) to characterize Jason and Demeter's sexual relationship. *Vide etiam* Anteia's description of Bellerophon attempting to assault her in *Il.* VI. 165. "μυγήμεναι οὐκ ἔθελούσῃ." *Vide etiam* Agamemnon's promise to Nestor that he, that is to say, Agamemnon, did not have sex with Briseis: "μή ποτε τῆς εὐνῆς ἐπιβήμεναι ἢδὲ μυγήναι" in IX.133

¹⁸ Elderkin recognizes that Porphyry recognized the *amphiphorēs* "as symbols of the nymphs of the waters when made of stone and most appropriate to nymphs presiding over water that issued from rock." The content of those vessels too emphasizes the timeless age of the nymphs by implying they are fermenting honey to make mead, which Kronos drinks because wine did not yet exist (*De. Ant. Nymph.* 16).

Elderkin, G. W. "The Homeric Cave on Ithaca." *Classical Philology*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1940, pp. 52–54. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/264593. Accessed 18 Apr. 2020. 53

¹⁹ West, M. L. *The Orphic Poems*. Oxford University Press, 1983.

12 n29 draws our attention to Plut. *De sera* 566b where such a vessel contains the mixture of truth and falsehood in our dreams.

cave near Ithaka are, in effect, beekeepers is significant because of a story told by Aelian in *Vera Historia* and retold by the classical scholar, epigrapher, and Anglican bishop Christopher Wordsworth in his 1839 volume *Greece: pictorial, descriptive, and historical*. Wordsworth writes, after sketching the *nymphaion* executed by Archedamos of Thera in prose, that

Plato, in early youth, was led by his parents to a grotto on Mount Hymettus that he might present an offering to Pan, the Nymphs, and the Pastoral Apollo to whom it was dedicated, There is good reason to believe that this cave, which, as the above inscriptions still existing on its walls assure us, was consecrated to those very Deities has been trodden by the feet of the great Philosopher of Athens; and that his eye has rested upon the same objects that we now see in this simple pastoral temple which has sustained but little injury from the lapse of years, while the magnificent fanes of the Athenian capital have crumbled to decay.

Wordsworth 124-25.

The liminal powers of the nymphs extend through time, space, and culture, and their sanctuaries, both physical and literary, serve as loci “of contact between past and present” (Pache 11).

Note the “tall loom-beams standing upright” where nymphs “weave salt-purple webs of cloth—wonderful to see.” Clothing plays a sizable role in the Homeric epics as Naoko Yamagata enumerates in a table in “Clothing and Identity in Homer: the Case for Penelope’s Web;” the ritualized manufacture and decoration of textiles in particular, as before the *teichoskopia* in Book III of the *Iliad*, is seen as not only the work of women, but of highborn women who are good at what they do.²⁰ (Yamagata 540) Thus, the formula

²⁰ Antinoos describes Penelope’s weaving in *Od.* II.115-122, and says she has a φρένας ἐσθλὰς and that her work is περικαλλέα.

used to describe the web woven by the nymphs, “θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι” (Hom. *Od.* XIII.108), is unsurprising in its description of the work as “wonderful to see.” In the fifth Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, near a description of a *locus amoenus* complete with nymphs, the goddess’s peplos is described as “καλόν, χρύσειον, παμποίκιον,” “beautiful, golden, variegated” (Hom. *Hymn. Ven.* 87) and as wonderful to see, like the web of the nymphs. Describing the peplos as “παμποίκιον” is important because not only does it indicate that the peplos is variegated throughout its surface, but because its proximity to the *locus amoenus* and the nymphs found there reinforces the nymphs’ own multifaceted nature. The wonder of the web of the nymphs echoes the “μέγαν ἱστὸν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ὕφαινε” (“great loom where she weaves in the chamber”) set up by Penelope in order to thwart the suitors who sought to marry her, conferring upon her the status of a νύμφη on the cusp of change, a liminal woman not yet married but ready for marriage, as soon, of course, as that “large web” has been woven (Hom. *Od.* II.94).²¹

Yamagata proposes that part of the allure of so much weaving in the *Odyssey* pertains to the function of the resulting clothing to “confer or conceal” identity (Yamagata 541). The display then, of a large loom wherein beautiful salt-purple (ἀλιπόρφυρα) cloth is on display and not yet intended to be worn by anybody is Homer’s way of reminding his audience of two key details: the first, that the dye for this particular φάρεα is a rare “pigment not from the mineral universe but from the organic sea world: murex

²¹ Hom. *Od.* II.94; and *Od.* V.62 with Kalypso’s own loom.

purple”(Brecoulaki 9). The scarcity and labor-intensive production process of this particular pigment led it to confer rarity to whichever object it was applied and serve as a shorthand for refinement of character in both the Homeric epics and in the societies who read or otherwise experienced them. “Nymphs and royal women in both epics weave purple tapestries and cloths” (Elliott 179). Odysseus himself is described at one point in the poem in book VIII as concealing his face with his “large purple cloak” (πορφύρεον μέγα φᾶρος) when the singing of the *aoidos* Demodokos brings Odysseus to tears (Hom. *Od.* XIII.109).²² Nymphs and royal women then, are participating in a gender-codified occupation and yet managing to set themselves apart by the product which they weave. Secondly, the “salt-purple” cloth emphasizes the genealogy of the nymphs as naiads—as beings who (as their name suggests) flow (ναόουσιν) between two worlds, the human and the divine.²³

Having described the work of the nymphs, the narrator then moves to the architecture of the ἄντρον itself, which emphasizes the liminality not only of the nymphs but of the place in which they live, as “ἐν δ’ ὕδατ’ ἀενάοντα. δύω δέ τέ οἱ θύραι εἰσίν.”²⁴ The ever-flowing water, indicated by the krasis of the adverb *ἀεὶ* and the

²² “πορφύρεον μέγα φᾶρος ἔλων χερσὶ στιβαρῇσι / κακ κεφαλῆς εἴρυσσε, κάλυψε δὲ καλὰ πρόσωπα: / αἶδετο γὰρ Φαίηκας ὑπ’ ὀφρύσι δάκρυα λείβων. / ἦ τοι ὅτε λήξειεν αἰείδων θεῖος ἀοιδός, / δάκρυ ὁμοξάμενος κεφαλῆς ἄπο φᾶρος ἔλεσκε” Hom. *Od.* VIII.85-89

²³ When it is said that the nymphs are “φάρε’ ὑφαίνουσιν” it seems prudent to note that *φᾶρος* can also be the word for *shroud*, the ritual garment that Penelope weaves during the day and destroys at night, or for *cloak*, such as in the example cited above or as in *Od.* XIV.61 describing the garment of Telemachus.

²⁴ Hom. *Od.* XIII.109

participle *νάοντα* mimics the liminal state of the nymphs, and the movement of beings within the space also has the possibility to be *ἀενάοντα* as there are two doors within the space; through one door, facing north, humans go, and the other facing south, is not only reserved for immortal beings, but also expressly forbidden to *ἄνδρες*, either *men* in particular, or *human beings*, generally speaking.²⁵

I propose that the presence of sympotic paraphernalia and the homosocial atmosphere suggested by bifurcating paths through the *ἰσὸν νυμφάων*—not segregated by gender, as human sympotic spaces were, but rather by the presence or absence of divine status—create a space right before Odysseus and his companions' arrival to Ithaka that is a mirror of the *andrōn* within which only men gathered and symposia were held. Taking a cue from Homer and wishing to be expansive rather than constricting, I propose to call this space the *νυμφάων*. In the *nympháōn* which I have been analyzing here, there is no floor-to-ceiling visualization centered on the *krater* as Jenny Strauss Clay shows there is in the visualization of the *andrōn* readied for a symposium as described in Alkaios fr. 140 or in that described in Xenophanes fr. 1 W. (Strauss 204).²⁶ Rather, Homer's description of the cave of the nymphs uses a selective focus to impressionistically show the layout of this sacred space by first zooming in on

²⁵ There is also cave with two entrances mentioned in the opening of Sophokles' *Philoktetēs*

²⁶ Clay, Jenny Strauss. "How to Construct a Sympotic Space with Words." *The Look of Lyric: Greek Song and the Visual: Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song, Vol. 1*, edited by Vanessa Cazzato and André Lardinois, by Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, Brill, LEIDEN; BOSTON, 2016, pp. 204–216. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h2ct.13. Accessed 20 Feb. 2020. p. 204

certain objects like the *krateres* and *amphiphores* and the loom upon which the salt-purple cloth hangs, and only then describing the space as a whole.

A close look at the *nympháōn*'s accoutrements suggests that in the liminal space of the nymphs as described by Homer is not exclusionary on the basis of gender; the nymphs, outwardly female in form, participate in mirror versions of homosocial male rituals that are, by the presence of the nymphs, warped into a different yet still-recognizable form. Nymphic habitats are places "where societal norms undergo temporary reversal, as in Dionysiac revels" (Larson 9). From epigraphical and archaeological evidence such as the Cave at Pharsalos in Thessaly which was transformed into a sanctuary of nymphs by the nympholept Pantalkes in the fourth century BCE, one can surmise that nymphaea were places where, in theory, all celebrants were welcome, as Pantalkes makes clear in the first three lines of a longer inscription cut into the cave wall that begins "*χαίρετε τοῖ προσιόντες, ἅπας θῆλύς τε καὶ ἄρσιν*" "*Greetings to all who come around here, both female and male*" (Pache 53). By greeting both male and female passersby explicitly, and reinforcing that notion by then using two conjunctive particles simultaneously in the first colon of the next line, "*ἄνδρες τε ἡδὲ γυναῖκες, ὁμῶς παῖδες τε κόραι τε*" *both men and women, and equally boys and girls* Pantalkes denotes his nymphaeon in particular as a place where all, regardless of their gender or age, are welcome.

The Homeric cave of the nymphs does not have any such explicit inscription by virtue of which I might declare it to be a heterosocial space, or at least one within which traditional segregation by gender is not enforced. However, the liminality and reversal of societal norms can be seen by the implements that fill the cave, and no inscription is needed to recognize that it is a space where reversals are common. Unlike the *andrōn* described by Alkaios, this space not only has one, but rather two *krateres*, and they are described as *λάϊνοι*, made of stone, instead of the usual clay, giving them more weight both metaphorically and literarily as ritual objects. Also unlike any *andrōn*, there is a loom beside the *krateres*, highlighting both the subversion of societal norms within the space designated by the *antron* at the same time as the femininity of the nymphs within and without that space.

The description of the cave of the nymphs I have just written about is the earliest and oldest description in extant Greek literature of such a space.²⁷ How does taking a closer look at the cave of the nymphs in Homer shed light on some of the oldest recorded habitats of and shrines to nymphs?

²⁷ In order to learn more about such shrines to nymphs, one must consider both literary evidence and real-world archaeological evidence, like that provided by the seminal essay by W.R Connor "Seized by the Nymphs: Nympholepsy and Symbolic Expression in Classical Greece," or glean information through related studies that not only consider nympholepts, like Alain Pasquier's "Pan et les Nymphes à l'autre corycien," Guy Hedreen's "Silens, Nymphs, and Maenads," and María de Fátima Díez Platas' "Mujeres, Pero Diosas: Las Imágenes De Las Ninfas En La Grecia Arcaica" as well as Díez Platas' doctoral dissertation, *Las Ninfas En La Literatura y En El Arte De La Grecia Arcaica*.

As Díez Platas remarks, the passages in which we learn about naiads in particular in Book XIII of the *Odyssey* can serve as *antonomasia* through which we might extrapolate about “the life of Nymphs” through the “small treatise” concerning them which runs through both this just-examined passage and the following one, where Odysseus prays to the nymphs.

The Locality of Nymph-Worship in *Odyssey* XIII

αὐτίκα δὲ νύμφης ἠρήσατο, χεῖρας ἀνασχών:
 ‘νύμφαι νηϊάδες, κοῦραι Διός, οὐ ποτ’ ἐγώ γε
 ὄψεσθ’ ὕμμι’ ἐφάμην: νῦν δ’ εὐχολῆς ἀγανῆσι
 χαίρετ’: ἀτὰρ καὶ δῶρα διδώσομεν, ὥς τὸ πάρος περ,
 αἳ κεν ἔᾱ πρόφρων με Διὸς θυγάτηρ ἀγελεῖη
 αὐτόν τε ζῶειν καὶ μοι φίλον υἱὸν ἀέξει.’

—Hom. *Od.* XIII.355-360

*Then at once he prayed to the nymphs, raising his hands:
 ‘naiad nymphs, daughters of Zeus, never did I think
 I would see you again, but now, with a gentle prayer,
 hail, and as I once gave gifts, thus again will I
 if the eager daughter of Zeus, the forager, graciously allow me
 to live and my dear son to grow up.’*

This prayer comes after Odysseus, having been counseled by Athena, who shows him where exactly he is, realizes that his *nostos* is almost complete. Lines 345-351 echo the ekphrastic description of the harbor of Phorkys earlier in Book XIII verbatim at times.²⁸ The “τανύφυλλος ἐλαίη” proves to be indeed a harbinger of Athena, as it is by the olive tree with long-pointed leaves that the “Phaecian sailors leave Odysseus’ gifts” (Byre 4), and the nymphs of the cave, again identified as naiads who, as the

²⁸ 96 and 345 are the same line repeated verbatim, as are the pairs 103-104 and 347-348.

“κοῦραι Διός,” are the recipients to whom Odysseus addresses his prayer. In a Homeric-Hesiodic call-back, Zeus is not described as αἰγίοχος in this case, but given that Athena is physically present for Odysseus’ prayer and the aegis is one of her attributes, then there is indeed an αἰγίοχος nearby.

Odysseus’ speech-acts while he is praying, and his physical actions as well, indicate that the nymphs are not minor-goddesses in the sense that they are lesser than Aphrodite, Athena, or Artemis, each of whom had multiple cult-sites throughout the Greek world, but only that their scope is more limited, which makes sense as they are much more localized than the Olympians. The motions through which Odysseus goes are not *ipso facto* indicative of a lesser prayer, but rather it is the personal address to the nymphs as a group, and the fact that his sacrifice takes place at the mouth of their cave, that engenders an intimacy that would not be present in a more public prayer witnessed by multiple people. No matter the place at which one happens to be praying, whether it be “a temple, dwelling place of the deity materially present in the form of their idol, or a simple country shrine, like the cave of the Nymphs in Ithaka” (Aubriot-Sévin 88), a prayer, when intended whole-heartedly and with properly followed protocol, “conforms to stylized and conventionalized patterns” (Depew 230) that are seen in this short prayer to the naiads.

This prayer to the nymphs demonstrates also what (to use a Latin term) a proper prayer that is *fas* as opposed to *nefas* might sound like. Odysseus takes every available

chance to, as it were, maintain proper decorum and secure the consent of the naiads to whom he prays. He signals his intent to pray to the nymphs by raising his hands and addresses them directly, using appropriate titles (νύμφαι νηϊάδες and κοῦραι Διός) that not only specifically identify them as the authority in the space within which Odysseus exists at the moment, but also establish their divinity through a truncated matrilineal line.²⁹ His is a style of prayer that Simon Pulleyn qualifies as common in Homer, for its tripartite structure. This is a prayer of the type called *da-quia-dedi* — “give because I have given” (Pulleyn 16). First, there is an invocation, (lines 56-58, until “χαίρετ’”, or *hail*)

²⁹ In the frequent identification of the nymphs as the daughters of Zeus, I propose that poets like Hesiod and Homer are highlighting the Arcadian birthplace of Zeus and his association with the nymphs from the beginning. The divinely caprine-centric epithet reinforces the connection between themselves, Pan, and Olympus. Amalthea, a nymph, or divine goat, depending on the sources one privileges, nursed Zeus in a cave on Mount Dikte after his mother, the titan Rhea, gave birth to him. (Apollod. Bib. I.4-5). Rhea, of course, went out of her way to get away from Kronos, who had eaten all of the children Rhea had previously had, and therefore Arcadia, a land known chiefly for its natural resources and its rurality rather than its poleis and urbanity, serves as a buffer between a murderous titan and his child. Arcadia was an ideal place for Rhea’s titanic exile. As Kathleen Atlass and James Redfield, the translators of Phillipe Borgeaud’s monograph on the god Pan, write: “A mountainous country, hard to reach, Arcadia was a veritable storehouse of archaism in language, politics, and religion” (Borgeaud 3-4). Therefore, as an old goddess giving birth to the new generation of gods, Rhea is, through her choice of location metaphorically revitalizing the region and linking Zeus with it and with its most visible inhabitants, the nymphs. Callimachus, the Hellenistic poet, in the Hymn to Zeus, calls the god an Arcadian. (Callim. *Hymn*. I.6). “The birth of Zeus on Mount Lykaion was linked to a sanctuary called ‘Rhea’s Cave’” where “only women sacred to the mother of the god had a right to enter,” Borgeaud writes (44). Having yet to find any archaeological evidence of nymphaea with diverging paths like the Homeric cave of the nymphs, the aspiring nympholept might look to literary evidence and there they will find two things that will be of interest to us— that is to say that in the *Metamorphoses* of Antoninus Liberalis, the nymphs who raise Zeus are known as the μέλισσαι, or the *bees* (Ant. Lib. *Met.* XIX.) and it is in their cave, as translated by Atlass and Redfield, that “no one has the right to enter, neither god nor mortal” (Borgeaud 44).

then, a short argument which concludes that line, and finally, a request upon which his repeated gift-giving will be contingent.

As Odysseus is praying, we see that he uses *hypomnêsis* in the middle section of his speech act, reminding the nymphs that he has been kind to them before and as such, the implication goes, they should be kind to him and, he reminds them, that he will again give them gifts if the “gracious daughter of Zeus” (Διὸς θυγάτηρ ἀγελείη) should allow him “to live and [his] son to grow up” (Hom. *Od.* XIII.360).³⁰ Unlike the Orphic hymns to the naiads and to the nymphs, this particular prayer is different because though the nymphs seem to be the nominal *orandae* of Odysseus’ speech act, it is another daughter of Zeus, namely, Athena, who is eventually asked to deliver Odysseus home and Telemachus to adulthood.³¹ Depew remarks that *ῥήσατο*, the verb of speaking that triggers this speech act, “denotes an interactive process of guiding another in assessing one’s status and thus one’s due. The purpose is ... to make a claim on someone in the present, whether in terms of an actual request or of recognition and acknowledgment of status” (Depew 232). It’s fitting then, that Odysseus, that

³⁰ I acknowledge that, per Depew’s article, translating any form of εὐχομαι as “pray” is problematic, given the fact that it denotes a “culturally marked conversational exchange: a speech act in which someone is making a claim on someone else within a social structure very different from our own” (232).

³¹ Thanks to Sean Gurd for introducing me to the concept of the *laudandus* and the *laudator* through Elroy L. Bundy’s *Studia Pindarica*. With this term I aim to hieratize, feminize and pluralize the idea of the *laudandus*.

complicated³² man of many turns whose identity has often been obscured and reinterpreted within the storyline of the poem, often by women seeking to lay some sort of claim on him whether it be giving him garb to mark him as a husband, hero, beggar, or honored *xénos*,³³ should direct his prayer upon reaching Ithaka to not one goddess, but a group of them identified in its opening line, who are known to weave large webs of purple cloth and whose identity and place in the Greek world are as diaphanous and liminal as Odysseus perceives his own standing to be at that time.

By considering this speech act of Odysseus in light of the nature of nymphs we can compare it to the dialogue between the hamadryad and the woodcutter Rhoikos that Charon of Lampsakos relates.³⁴

Whereas there the human *orator* sought to take advantage of his unwitting *oranda*, by demanding sexual favors in exchange for the hamadryad's safety; here, Odysseus makes no such missteps in his own actions. Rather, he, perhaps in atonement for violating the rules of *xenía* in his interactions with Polyphemus in Book IX, and perhaps mindful that Polyphemus once loved the nymph Galatea (Ath. 1.6e), is nothing but decorous in his words and actions towards the nymphs, beseeching them to act as intermediaries between him and Athena, and reminding them obliquely of their own

³² I'm indebted to Emily Wilson's translation of Homer's *Odyssey* (Norton 2017) for a translation of the multivalent *bon mot* that is *πολύτροπος*.

³³ *Vide* Yamagata 540 for more on this.

³⁴ *Vide* p. 48n13.

kind's role as nurses to Zeus. While we do not hear the response of the nymphs themselves, Athena, having been invoked in Odysseus' prayer, does indeed respond, telling him to "take heart" (θάρσει) lest these things trouble him (Hom. *Od.* XIII.362). Then she helps him plan the actions that will take up most of the rest of the poem as he reasserts his presence not only on the island he calls home but at his own house as well.

Nymphs at Play

What can we learn about the nature of nymphs from these two excerpts of the *Odyssey*? As I wrote above, Díez Platas thematizes the Nereids in Homer as representative of nymphs throughout the Greek world, and I think that, regardless of when the Orphic Hymns were written. In lieu of a Homeric Hymn to the Nymphs, it is important to look at one particular line that deepens the complexity of those nymphs. the Nereids in the hymn, I think, continue that function of representing the entirety of nymphdom. The first two lines of the Orphic Hymn to the Nereids are:

Νηρέος εἰναλίου νύμφαι καλυκώπιδες ἄγναί,
σφράγισαι βύθιοι, χοροπαίγμονες, ὕγροκέλευθοι,

*Oh, holy flower-faced nymphs, daughters of Nereus of the sea,
who, leaving a wet path, play at dancing alone in the cave depths,*

Orph. *Hymn.* XXIV. 1-2

Characterizing the Nereids as playful and "dancing alone in the depths," the poet of the *Hymns* introduces a facet of nymphic nature that we have yet to encounter in the texts

examined in this chapter: the concept of nymphs as playful and as creatures that are young at heart. Patricia A. Rosenmeyer points to nymphs playing as part of the *thiasos* of Dionysos in Anacreon's poetry. There, they, and Aphrodite "συμπαίζουσιν" (PMG 357.4).³⁵ Playing together with the goddess of love, and functioning again as the *orandae* along with an unnamed Dionysos, who all are being implored to do something about the narrator's erotic situation, the nymphs represent a kind of youthful subset of part of that group to whom Anacreon's speaker dedicates his poem (Rosenmeyer 165). Playfulness is apt for nymphs, or rather, *νύμφαι* of both the human and mythical kinds, but, since the same noun serves to indicate both the supernatural creatures and marriageable human teenagers, the resonance of having mythical nymphs play, whether in an expressly erotic context as in Anacreon's poem, or separated from everyone in their own home, leaves open the possibility of erotic activity, perhaps hinted at in the Nereids' "delight" at riding on the "backs of Tritons as if they were chariots" (Orph. *Hymn.* XXIV.4). Jeffrey Henderson, in *The Maculate Muse* writes that "*paizein*, to dally amorously, was a common euphemism in Greek poetry and romantic prose" (Henderson 157). While the verb meaning *to play* could be applied to anyone regardless of age and mortal or immortal status, the root of the verb includes the word *παῖς*³⁶ or *child* combined with the verbal suffix *-ίζω*. Thus, the nymphs, who are

³⁵ "play together"

³⁶ this word can be grammatically masculine or feminine depending on the gender of the actual child being referred to.

etymologically liminal in age and in time, are temporarily etymologically infantilized by the participle *χοροπαίγμονες* which itself is composed of the elements *χορέω* (dance) *παίζω* (play) and *μόνη* (alone).³⁷

Though these descriptive phrases were written about the nymphs some one thousand six hundred years before the bulk of the poems with which this study will concern itself, the nature of nymphs as a whole remains rather constant through language, culture, and time, even if the individual nymphs themselves do not. Having examined the texts that I did in this chapter, certain definitions of nymphdom suggest themselves: nymphs are primordial nature spirits that are coeval with nature itself; however, nymphs are corporeal creatures that live alongside mortals and often interact with them while at the same time having, as it were, a stake in the divine realm of gods and goddesses. Nymphs also partake in human pursuits like weaving and wine-

³⁷ This makes me wonder if the temporal progression of a girl in Greece from *παῖς* → *κόρη* → *νύμφα* → *γύνη* → *γῥαῖα* (child → girl → *nymph* —in the 18th century English sense— → woman → old woman) is in a way replicated by the fact that the nymphs that this dissertation is about seem to fall into most of those categories as well, as sometimes nymphs are naïve (especially in the bucolic poets of all languages examined here) sometimes they are more mature, and sometimes, as in the third fragment of Hesiod with which I opened this chapter, they impart a wisdom that would perhaps be unachievable without their speaking as a group. The Graiai, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, could be seen as a continuation of the nymphs, for just as how *νύμφα* means “marriageable girl” and indicates a liminality of status when applied to both mythical creatures and humans, so too is *γῥαῖα* applied to both personifications of old age with almost-divine powers and to human women who are old. There is, I’m sure, a study of femininity in Archaic and Classical Greece waiting to be written that would put this footnote to shame.

drinking³⁸ and the products of their efforts are wondrous. Nymphs are beings that can be both won over and repelled by the giving or taking away of gifts, and, as suggested by the verses of Pantalkes, can be welcoming to all and serve as a soothing presence. The nymphs are keepers of a mystic knowledge revealed only to a select few, and can act as intermediaries between realms. These apophthegmata will be affirmed and contested through the poems examined in the following pages of this dissertation, but the contestation, I argue, gives us space within which to question the proliferation of nymphs in the long nineteenth century that was charged meaning as in previous centuries because of the particular anxieties facing the writers of the period in regards to the changing natural world and the popular championing of industrialization and academic disciplines other than the traditional study of classical authors known at Oxford as *Litterae Humaniores*—"more human literature."

³⁸ Dionysus excepted, Archaic Greek literary evidence, like the assertion in Hom. *Il.* V.542 that the gods do not bleed because they do not eat bread nor drink fiery wine: "οὐ γὰρ σῖτον ἔδουσ', οὐ πίνουσ' αἰθοπα οἶνον," seems to suggest that either the nymphs were mixing something else in their *krateres* or that they do, in fact, bleed. Anglophone nymphs definitely bleed in the 19th and 20th centuries, as in the work of Clark Ashton Smith, perhaps given his bent for the Gothic.

Chapter II ~ “Reading Greek Under the Trees”: The Democratization of Classics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* and “A Vision of Poets”

I intend to give up Greek, when I give up poetry: &,—as Porson said on a case equally decided,—“not till then”. Tho’ I never become a critical scholar, I may continue to enjoy that divine poetical literature, for whose sake I encountered the language. In my quotation from the Antigone, is not the prepositive article in the accusative case? And, in the line you refer me to from the beginning of the Œdipus Tyrannus, does not ἐμὸν,—used with θελοντος,—shew the genitive absolute? The expression equivalent to it in Latin, would be me volente, if I do not mistake. Pray believe that I could not be induced to act so unfairly as to make the answer of another person pass for my own. I have lately been giving some attention to the system of accents. ~ Barrett Browning to Hugh Stuart Boyd, 23 April, 1827 (BC 2, 56).

In this chapter, I will consider works by Elizabeth Barrett Browning that engage directly with Greek-influenced pastoralism through mentions of Arcadia and the reception of nymphs, and argue for the inclusion of women in classical philology through a close reading of lines 710-728 of Book I, and 26-65 of Book II of *Aurora Leigh*, and through a mention of nymphs (10-12) in “A Vision of Poets.”

Unlike Ramsay, who came to learn Greek in her teenage years, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (then just Elizabeth Barrett) saw knowledge of the Classics, Greek particularly, as a key to finding “real delight in poetry” as she tells us in her “Glimpses Into My Own Life and Character” after mentioning how at the age of four, she, by her own account, “first mounted Pegasus but at six I thought myself privileged to show off feats of horsemanship” (Two Autobiographical Essays 124)

For Barrett Browning, not only was the promise of unlocking an ancient way of thinking or a chance at an intimate familiarity with the stories of Greek mythology part of the reason she was drawn to Greek, but also a desire to cultivate a familiarity the

very curve of every zeta, lambda, and omega, which captivated her. Under her brother's tutor, Daniel McSwiney, she found that "to comprehend even the Greek alphabet was delight inexpressible. Under the tuition of Mr Mc Swiney I attained that which I so fervently desired" (op. cit.). The allure of a non-Latin alphabet, Dorothy Mermin argues, gave Barrett Browning's young imagination "the appeal... of a secret language with a magical key or formula ('open sesame') separating those with access to knowledge and power from those outside the charmed, exclusive circle" (Mermin 19) Though she wrote "Glimpses" in 1820, at the age of fourteen, Barrett Browning's love of and aptitude for the classics was evident beforehand, as she composed an ode of her own in "girlish Greek" (Prins *LG* 13). It is this "First Greek Ode" that suggests some of the differences in the methods of instruction in the classical languages between boys and, if not all girls, then a particularly precocious thirteen year old girl who took it upon herself to call a Greek muse to sing in the muse's supposed native language some three years after Elizabeth herself had started learning it.

At the age of thirteen, on May 4, 1819, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, in a shaky hand not yet particularly confident in her omicrons and omegas, or her sigmas and zetas, an "Ode to Summer" (held currently in the Henry W. and Albert A Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library.) These eleven lines are replete with crossings-out and letters super-imposed on one another that suggest this poem to be a rough draft. I won't analyze it here, as Yopie Prins has

already done so more perceptively than I might as an opening to her latest book.

However, this ode, combined with Barrett Browning's self-published epic English poem on the Battle of Marathon, printed by her father in 1820 show her to have been a devotée of Hellenophilia in all its forms.

I want to draw attention to the differences between the academic classicism of Agnata Frances Ramsay in the late 1800s and the exo-academic classicism of Elizabeth Barrett Browning which began in the first part of that century. Barrett Browning herself remarked upon her unorthodox training as a classicist when she wrote to Richard Hengist Horne on October 5, 1843:

All this time, and indeed the greater part of my life, we lived at Hope End, a few miles from Malvern, in a retirement scarcely unbroken to me by books and my own thoughts, and it is a beautiful country, and was a retirement happy in many ways, although the very peace of it troubles the heart as it looks back. There I had my fits of Pope, and Byron, and Coleridge, and read Greek as hard under the trees as some of your Oxonians in the Bodleian; gathered visions from Plato and the dramatists and eat [sic] and drank Greek and made my head ache with it. (*Letters to RHH* 160-161).

Notwithstanding the Dickensian name of the Barrett family home, Hope End, here the young Elizabeth found solace and pleasure in the grounds of the country house which Edward Wedlake Brayley and John Britton called "a small but very pleasant seat" thirty eight years prior to Barrett Browning's reminiscence of her life and studies there (Brayley and Britton 596). The idyllic lonely nature of her surroundings contrasts sharply with the intensity of her prodigious reading. This intensity is reflected even in the words she chooses to describe it. The noun "fit" used in relation to the poets she was

reading at the time suggests a conflict or a struggle, an adversary, and at the same time brings an archaism that Barrett Browning surely relished as a synonym for “portion” or “canto.” After enumerating three canonical English poets, she gets to the main point of her reminiscence. She writes that she “read Greek as hard under the trees as some of your Oxonians in the Bodleian; gathered visions from Plato and the dramatists and eat [sic] and drank Greek and made my head ache with it.”

By equating her natural, organic space under the trees with the neoclassical lines of the Bodleian Library—a space where Oxonians, that is to say men affiliated with Oxford University (from the Latin *Oxonienses*) were permitted to read—Barrett Browning begins to democratize the acquisition of classical literature and thought. She proves in her letter to Richard Hengist Horne, as well as in letters to Boyd, Robert Browning, and other classically-educated men that she needed neither to be an Oxonian, nor at the Bodleian herself to acquire the veneer of being acquainted with the classics, as so many boys and men before her, and even after, were, as evidenced by the Edwardian Eton House Master Hugh V. Macnaghten’s collection *Eton Letters*. That collection is an anonymously-written and privately printed cachet of letters written to former pupils serving overseas during the First World War. These letters “are a fascinating combination of the assumption that” Macnaghten’s “correspondents could competently read Latin (and, to a lesser extent, Greek) and of the admission that many

boys made 'howlers' of a sort that indicated they knew little of the language's grammar or syntax" (Vandiver 56).

Barrett Browning also physicalizes anew the acquisition of a new lexicon and grammar, much as she did when writing her essay "Glimpses into my own thought and character." Contrasting with the "delight inexpressible" of comprehending the Greek alphabet, she writes to Richard Hengist Horne about gathering "visions from Plato and the dramatists" (alluding to the idea of anthologizing in the Greek sense, that is to say gathering a garland of flowers)¹ and physicalizes this acquisition of Greek by noting that she ate "and drank Greek until" her "head ached with it." Barrett Browning would continually reify her attachment to the Greek language and to Greek culture, both in prose and verse throughout her life. She would do this particularly through references to pastoral implements, references to Arcadia and Athens, and claims of belonging in stereotypically masculine circles, whether they be classical studies in her own century or imagined temporal transpositions. One such imagined temporal transposition where she appears in a sympotic space, not as a *hetaira* or courtesan (as may have been apt for someone of her gender to be present in a symposium in Athens in the fifth century BCE), but as a main participant alongside her tutor, Hugh Stuart Boyd, will be the focus of the next chapter. For her, mastery of classics too is tied to physical objects and tangible reminders, a trait her protagonist, Aurora Leigh, will share. In March of 1843, Barrett

¹ From the words ἄνθος (flower) and λέγω (I put in order, I gather.)

Browning wrote to Mary Russell Mitford about a note that she received from Benjamin Robert Haydon, the historical artist and portrait painter who maintained an epistolary friendship with Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Note the physicality with which Barrett Browning responds to the note having received it: “Mr Haydon has put me into a fever by writing a note to me, in which he says that he has dreamt of you & me wearing golden crowns & bearing golden crooks & talking Greek in Arcadia!” (BC 6, 342)

Barrett Browning’s ideal Greek is not the standard one taught mostly to boys in schoolrooms the empire over, an Attic Greek perhaps first embodied in stereotypically masculine passages from Xenophon’s *Anabasis* as a counterpart to the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* of Julius Caesar in Latin, but in the Greek of Arcadia, a much older Greek, not under the martial aegis of an urbane Athena, but under the watch of a pastoral Pan, a rural grazing capripod who, according to Macrobius, is called the lord of the woodland² and the nymphs who are never far from him. Arcadia in the Victorian hellenophile’s imagination, is “the idyllic green world,” the *locus amoenus* of a “space far removed from the complex problems of urban society” where, I argue, Barrett Browning was one among many classicists to give herself a space that was not heavily martial and masculinized (Lawrence 19). This pastoral space, unbound by the strictures of the city

² *vide* Macr. *Sat.* I.xxii.3 “Hunc deum Arcades colunt appellantes τὸν τῆς ὕλης κύριον, non silvarum dominum sed universae substantiae materialis dominatorem significari volentes, cuius materiae vis universorum corporum, seu illa divina sive terrena sint, conponit essentiam.” The neo-Platonic interpretation of Pan and the ways in which the reception of the half-human capriform god made him akin to both the Christian Devil and a pagan prefiguring of Christ is a book waiting to be written. But first, to the task at hand.

and the schoolroom, allowed non-traditional classicists like Barrett Browning and Sara Coleridge, among others, a space to claim as their own.

Philostratus' quip about Cleopatra VII as a queen who saw philologizing (τὸ φιλολογεῖν) as a dainty, or luxurious, even effeminate, act (τροφήν εἶχεν) (Philostr. V.S. I.v.) was no longer current in the nineteenth century classical milieu which Barrett Browning sought to join as a girl and a young woman. Indeed, philologizing had in the intervening centuries come to be seen as a masculine pursuit, as the following lines from Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* shows that the eponymous protagonist learned from her father "the trick of Greek / And Latin" (AL. I.714-715).

"The Trick of Greek and Latin"

Leigh credits her own father, "an austere Englishman" (I.65), with her introduction to and beginning instruction in Classics; it is his "life-time spent at home / In college-learning" (ibid. 66-67) that allows him to impart the knowledge of both Greek and Latin to his daughter:

What my father taught before
From many a volume, Love re-emphasised
Upon the self-same pages: Theophrast
Grew tender with the memory of his eyes,
And Ælian 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 shipwrecked man
Who heaps his single platter with goats' cheese
And scarlet berries; or like any man
Who loves but one, and so gives all at once,
Because he has it rather than because

He counts it worthy. Thus, my father gave;
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.710-28

Her father's approach to classical pedagogy is not one steeped in memorizing case endings and irregular principal parts, but rather a pedagogy of interest and love; for, though he is characterized as austere, his love is demonstrated in unconventional ways (mediated by Greek literature) especially given the gender of his charge, who compares learning the classical languages to learning games or how to wrestle.

Through this characterization, and the classically-tinged description following, Aurora removes the wind from the metaphorical sails of any school novel in the nineteenth century where we read of a schoolboy's travails at deciphering the ancient languages. Leigh's zeal, notwithstanding her gender, would surprise the Squire in *Tom Brown's School-Days*, who bemoans that an inattentive boy cares not "a straw for Greek particles or the digamma no more than does his mother" (Hughes 80). For Aurora, acquiring Greek and Latin was almost as simple as acquiring her English or her Italian from her mother before her death and from her nurse, Assunta. By making Greek and Latin a playful enterprise, Aurora's father helped her assuredly acquire the languages more naturally and be more comfortable in them. She reads Theophrastus' natural history and philosophy in the Lesbian dialect with the same care and emotion as she

does Ælian, perhaps either or both the *Varia Historia* or the *Historia Animalium*, both written in an Atticizing manner by a Roman in Greek. It is interesting that Leigh imbues these works of philosophy and natural history with a pathos that others would ascribe to poets, which leads us to a liminal epic simile that plays with gender. As Achilles, under the guise of a girl named Pyrrha, was hidden at the court of Lycomedes, the king of Skyros, by the nymph Thetis, Achilles' mother, in order to prevent him from dying at Troy, so too is Leigh, as her father's "little daughter" wrapped in a "large / Man's doublet, careless if it fit or no" (AL I.727-28).

For Aurora Leigh, for her creator, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the twin notions of linguistic and poetic mastery have a common point: a facility with languages, particularly with ancient Greek. In the first three books of *Aurora Leigh*, I have counted no fewer than twenty five separate instances of lines tying knowledge with either languages that are not English, or with an otherworldly para-human beings—by "para-human," I mean creatures that share in some human characteristics but are not human themselves, such as witches, fairies, nymphs, fauns, etc. Taking English as the default language and anything other than English as a deviation, or a foreign tongue for a foreign, para-human creature,

I see a link between non-English languages and secret knowledge which allows the para-human creature greater mobility between social strictures. Para-human creatures may express themselves in English but not be bound by that language as their sole

method of communication. Aurora, having shown her love of her mother, takes ten lines to describe her in an expanding volley of para-human creatures; she

was by turn

Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite,—
A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,
A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,
A still Medusa, with mild milky brows
All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes
Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or, anon,
Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords
Where the Babe sucked; or, Lamia in her first
Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked,
And, shuddering, wriggled down to the unclean;
Or, my own mother,

I.153-64

Describing a woman she admires by comparing her to a succession of mythological creatures known for triumphing over men, it is likely that Aurora would take pride if someone were to compare her to a para-human creature that might have caused another woman, perhaps even one raised similarly to Aurora, to take offense. Not only is Aurora comfortable with the otherworldliness that her multicultural upbringing lends her in the eyes of Englishmen, she is also proud of the knowledge which her father gave her. As she is proud of her multi-lingual nature, partly due to her Florentine mother, so too is Aurora proud of that foreignness that her mother's heritage brings her, whether in nationalistic terms, English, and Florentine— or in para-humanistic terms, Psyche, and Medusa. A melancholy English scholar and lawyer before going to Florence and meeting the woman who would become Aurora's mother,

her father nevertheless strives to make his motherless child as happy as circumstances would allow by means of the only games he knows, the Greek and Latin languages. Aside from teaching her much and instilling in her a love of books and of selflessness, showing her that when “plung[ing] / Soul-forward, headlong, into a book’s profound, / Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth— / ’Tis then we get the right good from a book;”³ he encourages her to act liminally and outside the strict confines of gender roles, which we see her perform in a laureateship ceremony at the beginning of the second book of her epic. There, we find a crucial moment in the text that brings together questions of gender, agency, and the possibility, as Prins often writes, that there are varying ways to perform one’s knowledge of Greek. Combined with the above-mentioned excerpt touching on the idea that para-human creatures, such as nymphs, are worthy of a mix of treatments ranging from the worshipful to the abusive, these passages show how women poets like Barrett Browning and her Aurora Leigh could use the classical pedigree of liminality in the figure of the nymph, to function outside of a hierarchical, androcentric power structure, transforming themselves to liminal nymphs in the process and using some of the power traditionally ascribed to nymphs.

Self-Laureateship

³ I.706-09

Barrett Browning became a classicist though she lacked any formal university education, and it was her existence upon the margins of classical scholarship and her philology, taken in the literal sense, her love of words, that made her such a *dévote* of Greek, which, as Prins points out had a “special appeal.” Ancient Greek’s appeal for many amateur philologists in the nineteenth century “was that it remained a dead language, retaining a trace of strangeness that could not be translated into English” (Prins LG 7). Putting Prins’ assertion to the test in *Aurora Leigh* as a decidedly English (and classically-informed) epic may serve as a guide to seeing a dramatization of the appeal and prestige held by Classics in general, and Greek in particular. Just as Leigh crowns herself in a classical gesture at the beginning of Book II, so too might we imagine Barrett Browning acknowledging her liminal standing in the world of Classics through *Aurora Leigh*’s actions when she chooses the leaves for her wreath.⁴

This self-laureateship ceremony serves as the opening of the second book of *Aurora Leigh* and incorporates the poetics of aorist Arcadia which I’ve introduced in the previous chapter. In a nutshell, here Leigh acknowledges the Greek concepts of *kléos* and *húbris*, remarks on the exclusion of women as players in the field of philology, and slyly names herself a Dionysiac maenad-laureate rather than an Apollonian one while commenting on the perception of a male outsider to this deeply personal ceremony.

⁴ Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. *Aurora Leigh*. ed. Margaret Reynolds, W.W. Norton, 1996.

Leading up to the portion excerpted here, Leigh, standing “upon the brink of twenty years” (*AL* II.2), is looking both to her past and to her future, and is considering herself as a “woman and artist” both “incomplete” and “credulous of completion.” (II.3-6). In this Janus-like moment of retro- and prospection, Leigh turns to established traditions and poets to help herself through that liminal moment. She writes that she “hold[s] creation in [her] little cup” (II.6) much as the Demiurge⁵ in Plato’s *Timaeus* does (Plat. *Tim.* 35; 41d). Like Janus too, she will later (in Book V) claim that “every age, / Heroic in proportions, double-faced, / Looks backward and before, expects a morn / And claims an epos.” (*AL* V.152-55). Claiming an ἔπος, the Greek meaning “word” or “line of epic poetry,” is the prerogative of the 1850s, just as it is the prerogative of poets who should “exert a double vision; should have eyes / To see near things as comprehensively / As if afar they took their point of sight, / And distant things as intimately deep / As if they touched them” (ibid. 184-88) to write perceptively. At this point in the narrative in the incipit of Book II, Leigh is working up the courage to attain that double vision, which in her case, just as in Barrett Browning’s, involved a thorough knowledge of classical poetry as well as the poetry of her country in her own age. Leigh smiles “with thirsty lips before I drank” (*AL* II.7) and acknowledges the youthful and generative possibilities that her present moment and her new year bring.

⁵ West, M. L. *The Orphic Poems*. Oxford University Press, 1983.

12 n29 draws our attention to Plut. *De sera* 566b where such a vessel contains the mixture of truth and falsehood in our dreams.

June, she says, is in her “with its multitudes / of nightingales all singing in the dark.”

While the nearer temporal reference most familiar to Barrett Browning and her readers would be to John Keats’ 1819 “Ode to a Nightingale,” the bird has a long and distinguished classical pedigree as well, featuring not only in retellings of the story of Philomela, but also in Aristophanes’ *Birds*, Ovid’s *Heroides* XV, and others. Pliny remarks that the nightingale possesses “tanta vox tam parvo in corpusculo” (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* X.xliii) ⁶ and maintains that the nightingale has perfect musical knowledge. Given Leigh’s classical impulses, by asserting that she has nightingales within her, she is claiming a spot in a musico-poetical pantheon of writers both ancient and modern, such as Homer (*Od.* XIX.518-23), Aeschylus (*Ag.* 1144-1150), Ovid (*Met.* VI.438-674), Geoffrey Chaucer,⁷ Walter Raleigh,⁸ William Shakespeare (Sonnet CII and *Titus Andronicus*), John Milton and John Keats.

Bees as Links to Women’s Education

Aurora decides that it is a good time to “pull / [her] childhood backward in a childish jest / To see the face of 't once more, and farewell!” (*AL* II.16-17) without waiting for her aunt to awake or even for Leigh herself “to snatch” a bonnet and put it on before going

⁶ “What a voice in so small a body.”

⁷ *Vide* Aloni, Gila “Palimpsestic Philomela: Reinscription in Chaucer’s ‘Legend of Good Women’”, *Palimpsests and the Literary Imagination of Medieval England*, eds. Leo Carruthers, Raelen Chai-Elsholz, Tatjana Silec. New York: Palgrave, 2011. 157–73.

⁸ *Vide* “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd”

outside and “brushing a green trail across the lawn / With [her] gown in the dew” (II.20-22) where she intends to spend some time alone to “keep my birthday” (II.25).

Meanwhile I murmured on
As honeyed bees keep humming to themselves,
"The worthiest poets have remained uncrowned
Till death has bleached their foreheads to the bone;
And so with me it must be unless I prove
Unworthy of the grand adversity,
And certainly I would not fail so much.
What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day
In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,
Before my brows be numb as Dante's own
To all the tender pricking of such leaves?
Such leaves! what leaves?"

I pulled the branches down
To choose from.
"Not the bay! I choose no bay,
(The fates deny us if we are overbold)
Nor myrtle—which means chiefly love; and love
Is something awful which one dares not touch
So early o' mornings. This verbena strains
The point of passionate fragrance; and hard by,
This guelder-rose, at far too slight a beck
Of the wind, will toss about her flower-apples.
Ah—there's my choice,—that ivy on the wall,
(That headlong ivy! not a leaf will grow
But thinking of a wreath. Large leaves, smooth leaves,
Serrated like my vines, and half as green.
I like such ivy, bold to leap a height
'Twas strong to climb; as good to grow on graves
As twist about a thyrsus; pretty too,
(And that's not ill) when twisted round a comb."

Aurora Leigh II.27-65

In the idyllic setting of her garden, Leigh murmurs to herself “As honeyed bees keep humming to themselves” and decides to take matters into her own hands, not waiting for a postmortem recognition of her talents by others, but rather by fashioning her own

laureate's crown. The murmuring of bees calls to mind the animals' industrious honey-making activities and their appearances in Greco-Roman literature. Walter Robert Tornow, in a neo-Latin work published in 1893, summarizes the Greco-Roman appearances of bees as follows, saying they appear in Aristotle, the *Georgics* of Virgil, in Columella and in Pliny, just as in Aelian, in Porphyry's "On the Cave of the Nymphs" and other works (Tornow 6). At the same time, the line "'murmuring of innumerable bees'" (*Princess* VII.207) occurs in Canto VII of Tennyson's *The Princess*, a work partly dealing with the formal education of young women at the "Institute," a prototypical women's college where women wear feminized collegiate gowns "that clad [them] like an April daffodilly" (II.303). In the context of Tennyson's poem, the "innumerable bees" occur themselves within a "sweet Idyl" (VII.176) that is sung by a shepherd to a "maid" who is also a shepherd, but fulfills the role of a nymph in the tradition of Raleigh's "Nymph's Reply" urging said maid to "come down... from yonder mountain height" (VII.177) and join him below the mountain "for love is of the valley" (VII.183). The buzzing of the bees in *The Princess* is an aural, perhaps even a tactile reminder of the generative power of nature that the shepherd wishes to channel by tying the erotic implications of the spring season to his pursuit of the maid. I consider the "maid" a nymph given the surfeit of poetically Arcadian imagery in this passage: pines, valleys, stars, and a human presence indicated by the "spirited purple of the vats," (VII.187) the cultivated vines, and the maid's own "shepherd pipe" (VII.203). Her piping, as well as

her voice, are classified as “sweet” sounds by the speaker, who relinquishes the traditional literarily Arcadian male role of playing the pipes, as Pan or Dorko in Longos’ *Daphnis and Chloë* might and here is the one being serenaded by the nymph-analogue. He also asserts that ““every sound is sweet; / Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn / The moan of doves in immemorial elms / And murmuring of innumerable bees,”” situating both the action of that idyll and the opening of the second book of Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* in an aorist Arcadia (VII.204-207). It is the idea of an unbound and atemporal bucolic landscape that I will refer to as an “aorist Arcadia” from the Greek grammatical term *aorist* that usually designates a verb in the simple past tense that has no boundary in regards to its perfective state.

As she runs out into her idyllic garden, Aurora presents her own speech as the hum of honeyed bees, alluding to the line from Tennyson’s poem, and uses that speech act as a reason to crown herself as a worthy poet before “death has bleached [her] forehead to the bone” (*AL* II.29). She is worried about some sort of exile or poetic severing from her home, as she says she will crown herself before her “brows be numb as Dante’s own” (II.35) alluding to the fact that the Florentines began their attempt to recover the exiled poet’s remains starting on December 5, 1378, (Raffa 46) once a cenotaph had been prepared for Florence’s *miglior fabbro* and fulfilled spiritually if not physically by a large-format Florentine-made edition of the *Commedia* featuring

illustrations by Sandro Botticelli and encomia by Marcello Ficino and other neo-Platonist humanists (Raffa 52). To this date, Dante's remains are still in Ravenna.

Leigh's wish to crown herself "in sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it," (AL II.34) as well as her desire to forego the bay—traditionally the material for laureates' wreaths, shows her to be familiar with the Greek *hamartia* of hubris. She remarks: "not the bay! I choose no bay, / (The Fates deny us if we are overbold)" (II.38-39). She therefore, is not overzealous lest she call down a curse upon herself. Having discarded the idea of crowning herself with Apollo's laurel, she also discards "myrtle—which means chiefly love; and love / Is something awful which one dares not touch / So early o' mornings" (II.40-42). Myrtle being one of Aphrodite's symbols is anathema to being considered a worthy poet in a patriarchal system of poetic *kleos*.⁹ The idea of botany as a science was explicitly gendered by John Lindley's *Ladies' Botany: or a Familiar Introduction to the Study of Botany*. This two volume work, published in 1837, had gone through six British editions by 1865, and contrasted with Lindley's 1830 *An Introduction to the Natural History of Botany*. Kate Greenaway's 1884 book *Language of Flowers*, supplies a relatively contemporaneous account of the connotations of the flowers which Aurora considers after a classical turn. Laurel signifies glory (Greenaway 26). Verbena signifies "enchantment" (ibid 42); and the guelder-rose signifies "winter" and "age" (ibid 37). Ivy, however, indicates "fidelity and marriage" if fully grown, and

⁹ Vide Shteir, Ann B. "Gender and 'Modern' Botany in Victorian England." *Osiris*, vol. 12, 1997, pp. 29–38. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/301897. Accessed 16 June 2020.

“assiduousness to please” if it is a sprig of ivy with tendrils (ibid. 23). Marjorie Stone notes that “Ever green ivy, associated by the Victorians with friendship and fidelity in friendship, had been used to crown the victor in early competitions in Greek tragedy.” (Stone n44). Since Leigh seeks a suitable crown that is, to borrow a Latin term, *fas*, she attempts to take fate into her own hands without tempting the Fates, and without stepping too far out into prideful territory. The ivy strikes her as a good choice, a suitable material for a laureate’s crown the symbolism of which, as she herself does at the beginning of Book II, looks, liminally and Janus-like, both to the past and the future, being both the material used to crown the victors at the Isthmian Games in Corinth and seen by her contemporaries as a symbol of friendship as well as loyalty (Broneer 260).

When John Kenyon, to whom *Aurora Leigh* was dedicated, sent Barrett Browning a cutting of ivy, she declared that “there is ivy enough for a thyrsus ... and I almost feel ready to enact a sort of Bacchus triumphalis” (BC 7,138). Two months later, writing to George Goodin Moulton-Barrett on July 13, she characterized her ivy as “fit for Bacchus, or the Isthmian Games” (BC 7, 232). With all these associations of the ivy in mind, Leigh declares that she likes “such ivy; bold to leap a height / ’Twas strong to climb! as good to grow on graves / As twist about a thyrsus; pretty too, / (And that’s not ill) when twisted round a comb” (AL II.53-56). Barrett Browning, speaking through Leigh, praises the multivalence of ivy and winks at her fellow classical amateurs, as surely they recognized that the ivy was Dionysus’ symbol, rather than Apollo’s when standing

alone, but particularly made manifest when twisted “about a thyrsus”. Since a thyrsus is a stand in in Dionysiac imagery for the god’s phallus, one of which was requisite to admission to most English colleges at the time of *Aurora Leigh*’s publication, these lines bolster a reclaiming of classics as a discipline for all genders.

“Classical knowledge ... is absolutely necessary for everybody”

The idea that being ignorant of the two classical languages was tantamount to not being able to hold one’s own in the world as an educated person was current in the late 18th century and can be seen from the didactic letter that the Earl of Chesterfield wrote to his son in 1748.

Classical knowledge, that is, Greek and Latin, is absolutely necessary for everybody; because everybody has agreed to think and to call it so. And the word ILLITERATE, in its common acceptation, means a man who is ignorant of those two languages. You are by this time, I hope, pretty near master of both, so that a small part of the day dedicated to them, for two years more, will make you perfect in that study.

Letter XL (Stanhope 230)

While both Greek and Latin were seen as essential for educated men, they were seen yet as frivolous for (some) educated women. The idea remained that Latin, and Greek somehow were “too masculine for Misses,” as Hester Lynch Piozzi wrote in 1781 that Charles Burney believed, when he kept his daughter Fanny Burney from learning the language with Samuel Jonson who “had offered to teach her for friendship, because then she would have been as wise as himself” (Hayward 342).

The “classical knowledge” which Lord Chesterfield proclaims as “absolutely necessary for “everybody” is the same knowledge called “a mystery” later on by Amy

Levy. Etymologically speaking, and to a woman with limited means, it may very well have been so. We often find the word in Greek in the plural. *Mystery* comes from τὰ μυστήρια, meaning roughly “the secret things”: an initiate into any of the mystery cults, such as that of Demeter at Eleusis, would be known as a μύστης, and the verbs for “I initiate into the mysteries” and “I shut”—*μύω* and *μύω* respectively—differ only by an accent in the first person singular active indicative. It is those very mysteries which Aurora Leigh seeks to dispel by her act of auto-laureateship. By crowning herself with ivy, of which “not a leaf will grow / But thinking of a wreath,” (AL II.47-48) Leigh declares herself many things: a bacchante, a classical scholar, and a poet: a bacchante because she chooses the thyrsus over the laurel, a classical scholar because she sets the stage for her laureateship by claiming space in the traditionally male-dominated world of philology by referencing classical ritual practices and statuary, and a poet because she resolves to laureate herself before it is too late and she is no longer living in order to enjoy the results of the ceremony as happened to Dante.

Thus speaking to myself, half singing it,
 Because some thoughts are fashioned like a bell
 To ring with once being touched, I drew a wreath
 Drenched, blinding me with dew, across my brow,
 And fastening it behind so, turning faced
 · · My public!—cousin Romney—with a mouth
 Twice graver than his eyes.

I stood there fixed,—
 My arms up, like the caryatid, sole
 Of some abolished temple, helplessly
 Persistent in a gesture which derides
 A former purpose. Yet my blush was flame,
 As if from flax, not stone.

Aurora is half speaking to herself and half singing as she prepares her crown of ivy, “because some thoughts are fashioned like a bell / To ring with once being touched”(II.55-56). Blinded momentarily by the dew on her freshly-fastened crown—a momentary connection with the blind poet of Chios: Homer— Aurora “turning faced / ... My public!—cousin Romney—with a mouth / Twice graver than his eyes.” Romney, who disparages any engagement with classics that is anything other than traditional and male, looks down upon Aurora’s private ceremony and causes her to stand “there fixed,— / My arms up, like the caryatid, sole / Of some abolished temple.”(II.60-62).

I read her appearance as a caryatid in these lines as telling given its proximity to the persistent “gesture which derides / A former purpose” (II.63-64). Aurora alludes to the Gestures of Emma Hamilton, and casts herself in the role of a caryatid. She embodies “the figure of an eroticized statue” in her cousin’s eyes, indicative of a zeitgeist where “the female body was treated as an artifact in contemporary studies of ancient traditions”(Boehm 39). She becomes caryatid-like in that she, like a caryatid of a ruined temple, is no longer holding the structure which it was meant to do. Aurora acknowledges that her holy precinct may be abolished, yet her arms remain raised as if to shoulder the weight of the institution of classical studies above her head—her human body becomes a stylized load-bearing column like a Greek caryatid. A popular British

travelogue of the mid-eighteenth century mentions that the eponymous caryatids of the Caryatid Stoa of the Erectheion at the Acropolis represent Pandrosus, one of the daughters of King Kerkops of Athens and identifies said model for the Caryatids as “the Nymph Pandrosa” (Perry 504). Though we see Leigh at this moment through her perception of her cousin’s view of her, she rebounds from his slights by harnessing the energy of her enthusiasm at belonging to a one-woman *thiasos* and, like any nymph, engineering the comeuppance of her incredulous male interlocutor after he has insulted her. She blushes, being caught in this act of hellenophilic roleplay that is derided and outmoded, but, unlike the caryatid whose form she assumes if only for the moment of her persistent gesture, she is not a sculpture, and her “blush was flame, / As if from flax, not stone.” (AL II.64-65). This same subversive energy animates the other nymphs found in Barrett Browning’s other poems.

In fact, Barrett Browning acknowledges that the act of writing poetry is in itself a nympholept’s pursuit. She echoes the words that Plato has Socrates say in the *Phaedrus*: being taken by the nymphs bestows upon the nympholept a facility with words that not only makes the nympholept’s speech acquire a mellifluous sheen, but also becomes a potentially metrical utterance. (Plat. *Phaedr.* 238d) . Dionysus and his attributes, the ivy, the dithyramb, and his proximity to nymphs, as well as an ecstatic enthusiasm all feature not only in *Aurora Leigh*, but in Barrett Browning’s “Wine of Cyprus” as well.

“The Nympholepsy of Poetry” in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s work

“It is no new form of the nympholepsy of poetry,” Barrett Browning wrote in the preface to her 1844 edition of *Poems*, “that my ideal should fly before me: and if I cry out too hopefully at sight of the white vesture receding between the cypresses, let me be blamed gently if justly” (Browning *Poetical Works* 104). While other poets from the Greek world on had conceptualized the idea of poetry as a thing that was divinely blown into them by the muses or by goddesses, Barrett Browning came to associate inspiration particularly with nymphs and the phenomenon of nympholepsy. Indeed, in “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,” a poet, identified as a “Mr. Bertram” writes to his friend, as we learn from the stage directions preceding the poem, and he exclaims, justifying his courtship of an earl’s daughter who : “has halls among the woodlands, has castles by the breakers, / She has farms and she has manors, she can threaten and command / And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her acres. / As they mark upon the blasted heaven the measure of the land” (Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” 9-12). Once Lady Geraldine has been introduced to the narrative, her humanity begins to come into question as she accrues nymphic attributes reminiscent of those of Kalypso in the fifth book of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Lady Geraldine like the Homeric nymphs mentioned in the first chapter of this study, is surrounded by a regal purple, much like Bertram himself, who begins his letter-poem promising to “lean my spirit o’er you: / Down the purple of

this chamber, tears should scarcely run at will: / I am humbled who was humble!"(Lady Geraldine's Courtship 1-3).¹⁰ These purple accoutrements are not connected to nymphdom until Bertram confesses that he

could not choose but love her. I was born to poet-uses,
To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair :
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to call the Muses
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount to star.

"Lady Geraldine's Courtship" 29-32

Here, nympholepsy is explicitly mentioned as a literally exalting phenomenon, where lower altitudes typified by the *λειμωνιάδες*, the nymphs of the valley, are shunned in favor of the oreadic heights with which the Muses are identified. And still yet higher do poets seek to reach "in nympholeptic climbing." Whether this climbing action is in itself occasioned by the nymphs having possessed the spirit of their human vessel, or whether the nympholeptic state results from the heightened aestheticism in which the *Kunstsprache* of poetry is made is not clear from this particular instance, but we might deduce that Barrett Browning envisioned the muses as nymphs from a number of mentions of nymphs and poetry in her work. That is to say that for her, the muses are not necessarily the generators of divine inspiration because they are the goddesses who live on Mount Helicon, but rather, for her the Pierides, who were the nymphs of the spring which bears their name, were the nymphs who, as Ovid says "dirimant certamina nymphae"¹¹ (Ov. Met. 5.314). So, in Barrett Browning, the muses

¹⁰ *ibid.* 1-3

¹¹ "let the nymphs bring the contest to an end."

themselves become nymphs and pastoral goddesses.

In the second book of *Aurora Leigh*, Romney Leigh, Aurora's cousin, decries pastoralism, crying "We want the Best in art now, or no art. / The time is done for facile settings up / Of minnow gods, nymphs here and tritons there" (AL II.149-151). His disdain for pastoral settings, like his disdain for Aurora's "intrusion" into the male-dominated field of classical scholarship is made even more plain by two things; the first is his hypocritical putdown regarding her accentless Greek, and the second is the strongly pejorative and gendered epithet of "witch" that he uses to denigrate Aurora, yet recognizing Aurora as "A witch, a poet, scholar, and the rest... [and] a woman also" (AL II.98-99). His disdain for Aurora's "lady's Greek / Without the accents" (ibid. 76-77) causes him to put Aurora's book down both physically and psychically having read "not a word" of it. Accents were never used in the classical period and were devised by the scholars of the Mouseion of Alexandria in the third century of our era. While it is "not until the early middle ages that the writing of accents becomes a habitual practice," Romney Leigh's categorical putdown of Aurora's accentless Greek as somehow inferior when she was not only engaging more faithfully—if faith, and not period accuracy, can be measured by the presence or lack of diacritical marks—with her material than generations of English schoolboys. (Reynolds and Wilson 4) Romney also notes that there is "no name writ on" the book as if that alone is cause for not reading it.

In declaring Aurora's Greek illegible by its omission of accents, that is to say, diacritical marks, Romney shows himself to be a hypocrite given the fact that graphical accents were not much used in written or printed Greek of the period, even by men and boys educated at Public Schools. Romney's assertion that there is "witchcraft" (ibid. 85) in Aurora's book, especially when considered in conjunction with Aurora's own ideas of poetic mastery as being predominantly tied to mastery of classical matters and languages, shows Romney's fear of an educated woman. His attempted denigration of Aurora as a woman who writes in "lady's Greek / without the accents" (ibid. 76-77) echoes the tenor of Hartley Coleridge's actual remark to his sister Sara that "*Latin & celibacy* go together" (Hurst 61). Both of these remarks tie a supposed non-standard way to access the Classics with remarks that seek to simultaneously highlight and disparage the classicist's femininity. Aurora and her family members' repeated invocations of Chaldean culture and the Chaldee, or Babylonian Aramaic language as a shorthand for obscure and potentially magical things, to say nothing of Aurora's foreignness (being the daughter of an Englishman and a Florentine woman) mark her in Romney's eyes as foreign, liminal, and powerful.¹²

We know from reading both Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning's letters that they did not always accent their Greek, though Elizabeth did accent hers in letters to her tutor and friend Hugh Stuart Boyd. How the Brownings managed to ward off

¹² For Chaldean references in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* see *Chaldaean Oracles* by GRS Mead 1908

confusion between certain words whose meaning differs only by the placement of an accent (as in ἀμύνω and ἀμυνῶ) is unclear, other than perhaps maybe from context, as any classical author might have. I would argue that Romney was accenting his own superior classical education over his cousin's more informal one, in effect underscoring the fact that her Greek is *other* somehow. Barrett Browning was deeply interested in the question of the accentuation of both spoken and written Greek, and exchanged letters with H.S. Boyd, Sir Uvedale Price, and other Hellenist scholars debating the merits of certain systems of accentuation over others.

Her interest in and passion for Greek was such that Boyd publicly praised her in a letter to the editor of *The Classical Journal*, writing that "Miss Barrett, a highly-favoured child of the Muses" (Boyd "Correspondence" 325)¹³ had sent him a work by Sir Uvedale Price on Classical orthoepy. This work, *An Essay on the Modern Pronunciation of the Greek and Latin Languages*, had been unknown to Boyd until Barrett Browning suggested it to him. That suggestion led him to mention her not only once in his letter to the editor, but again later on in the same issue of the journal in the section titled *Adversaria Litteraria* where his "Attempts at Punning in Greek" include the distych "On Miss Barrett, of Hope End, the learned authoress of *An Essay on Mind, A Poem*."

Ορθῶς σειο δομος λεγεται τελος ελπιδος ειναι·
Ποιον δ' ελπιζειν εστιν ὑπερ σε θεμις;

¹³ Boyd, Hugh Stuart. "Correspondence." *The Classical Journal*, XXXVII, 1828, pp. 325-327. *Google Books*

*Rightly, your house is said to be hope's end,
and what hope exists infringing you, justice?"*

Boyd "Attempts at Punning in Greek" 152

Not at the moment lingering too long on this couplet, as it deserves to be considered at length with the others in Boyd's punning distichs, may it suffice to point out the pun on Barrett Browning's house's name and on a possible avenue of the appearance of *θέμις* in the last line, the trans-lingual pun of "Barrett" becoming "Barrister" becoming "*θέμις*" or in my translation, *justice*.¹⁴

I include this distich to show that at the time, this, as well as other examples of typeset Greek, did not have any diacritic marks other than the occasional spiritus asper, casting even more doubt on Romney's claim that "lady's Greek" is unaccented and ergo unreadable. Indeed, M.L. Clarke's monograph *Greek Studies in England* dedicates an appendix to "Greek accents and the pronunciation of Greek." At its opening, Clarke writes that "the modern reader who peruses eighteenth-century works of learning will notice that in some of them the Greek is printed without accents" and that since "in English accent is scarcely distinguishable from quantity" anglophones "pronouncing Greek lengthened the accented syllable and consequently failed to observe the Greek quantities" (Clarke 224).

¹⁴ I am grateful to Alexis Hellmer Villalobos, professor of Latin at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla and founder of the Studium Angelopolitanum, for his help with this epigram.

Nymphs as agents of a feminist poetics in "A Vision of Poets"

Unlike in traditional Greco-Roman and anglophone poetry, where the figure of the muse or a group of muses is invoked near the beginning of the poem to aid the poet in their recollection and with the mellifluous expression of their subject,¹⁵ Barrett Browning does not appeal to the Muses in her dream vision "A Vision of Poets."¹⁶ Rather, the first mythical creatures mentioned in the poem, are wood nymphs in the fourth stanza

To a faint silver, -- pavement fair,
The antique wood-nymphs scarce
 would dare
To footprint o'er, had such been there,

"A Vision of Poets" 10-12

These nymphs are linked to the insomniac poet's exploration of his poetic pedigree and delineate the path which he is to take in order to find the "apparition fair" (27). whose kingdom partly or wholly encompasses this forest and who will in time crown him, as she crowns "all poets to their worth" (57). In said forest, the poet

¹⁵ As in the *Odyssey's* first hemistich: "ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα"; Aeneid I.8 "Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso,"; or the end of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: III.1809-10 "Yee sustren nyne, ek, that by Elicone / In hil Pernaso listen" or Milton's *Paradise Lost* VII.1-5 "Descend from Heav'n Urania, by that name / If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine / Following, above th' Olympian Hill I soare, / Above the flight of Pegasean wing" Though Milton then disavows the Greek muses, saying that he calls "the meaning, not the name" in the following line.

¹⁶ "A Vision of Poets" appeared in Barrett Browning's two-volume *"A Drama of Exile" and Other Poems* (1845) alongside "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," "The Dead Pan," "Wine of Cyprus," and other poems

finds a path with “pavement fair” where nymphs dare not tread, and he is expressly contrasted with the nymphs in his zeal to continue along said path, walking “calmly onward” instead of doing so fearfully as the nymphs may have (21). While the nymphs are introduced in the opening stanzas of the poem, they are presented in a past contrary to fact conditional clause whose apodosis precedes the protasis. The “antique wood-nymphs scarce would dare / To footprint o’er, [the pavement fair] had such been there.” (11-12). The narrator, however, continues their conditional sentence for another stanza lines after line 12, taking up the nymphs as their subject. Instead of walking on that path, these dryads would “rather sit by breathlessly, / With fear in their large eyes, to see / The consecrated sight.”

Though Barrett Browning employs a past contrary to fact condition in order to simultaneously conjure up the wood nymphs and banish them from existence, we see the poet character explicitly moving forward and treading on ground that has been established as being untrod by nymphs. What does this mean, given the fact that the apparition identified as the ruler of the forest (referred to as “the Queen” from here on out) briefly asks the Poet not long after this present contrary to fact condition if he “dost ... pace / Our woods at night, in ghostly chace / / Of some fair Dryad of old tales / Who chaunts between the nightingales / And over sleep by song prevails?” (38-43). The Poet is himself at that point in the poem, about to become as liminal as the nymphs who have crossed his path. Barrett Browning here presents a subversive narrative

arguing for more women's voices by focusing, as Stephanie L. Johnson writes, "its narrative on the death of the male poetic tradition and the survival of the independent female voice" (Johnson 426).

This Dantesque dream vision echoes the fears of Aurora Leigh of not being crowned as a poet in her lifetime; among the named poets who appear in Barrett Browning's "Vision of Poets" Homer,, Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Hesiod, Pindar, Sappho, Theocritus, Aristophanes, Virgil, and a host of other names up to Byron, Keats, and Shelley, there is only one named woman—Sappho; in naming her, the narrator of the poem alludes to the myth inspired by Ovid's fifteenth *Heroides* that Sappho jumped off the Leucadian Cliff. The only named woman in the poem is killed off for the unwritten rejection of some boatman familiar to Ovid's readers with a name reminiscent of light (*φάος*) and mortality (*φῶς*).

Barrett Browning cements the place of nymphs in this dream vision not only by the passage discussed above, but by the epigraph to her poem drawn from *Britannia's Pastorals*, one of the main works of the seventeenth century English poet William Browne. The epigraph, from Book I, Song V, is taken from a section where the human speaker and Echo, addressed as the "Sacred Essence," have a conversation. In it, Echo responds to the human speaker that the means with which to address her may be acquired "in heavens, aye," and "by paine." To this, the human speaker replies: "Show me the paine, it shall be undergone: / I to mine end will still go on" (Browne 152). Here,

the power dynamics of a traditional human—nymph encounter are reversed, and it is the nymph, not the male speaker, who uses their power to urge someone else into an action that may be either nocive or, in Browne's case, the catalyst for a poetic undertaking. The poet-speaker in Browne's "Song V" promises *viva voce* what the poet-speaker in Barrett Browning's "A Vision of Poets," does tacitly, that "thus assured, I ... climb the hill," a stand-in for Mount Parnassus, if it be the will of Echo that he do so. As Browne portrays a male-centric poetic betterment through mountain-climbing, Barrett Browning ensures the survival of the female poetic voice, as explored in *Aurora Leigh* in contrast to "A Vision of Poets" by focusing (in the latter poem) on "the necessary relations of genius to suffering and self sacrifice." (Barrett Browning *Works* 103). The poetic apocalyptic vision of "A Vision of Poets" mentions only one woman in the pantheon met by the speaker, Sappho, as we follow the male poet character through the wood where he sacrifices himself at God's altar as the price of admission to the "brotherhood of the king-poets" (Johnson 428). Barrett Browning, who read Greco-Roman literature both deeply and widely, begins a paradigm change to remove nymphs from a role as mythological eye-candy and prizes for men and begins to cement them nearer the muse-like role previously occupied by the nine daughters of Mnemosyne. She does this by foregrounding the wood-nymphs in the beginning of the poem, as well as by including the epigraph from *Britannia's Pastorals*, which offers to its readers a nymph with agency and a speaking role.

In Barrett Browning's shifting of the nymphic paradigm, the nymphs retain their wildness, sexuality, and role as signifiers of an exo-urban, pastoral milieu, with all the attendant privileges thereof. However, the nymphs are reclaimed as forces and spirits of nature away from the male gaze, as exemplified by Romney Leigh's outburst near the end of Book IV of *Aurora Leigh*, when he accuses Aurora of breaking "the mythic turf where danced the nymphs, / With crooked ploughs of actual life," and letting "in / The axes to the legendary woods / To pay the poll tax"¹⁷ after she has argued that "Art's life,—and where we live, we suffer and toil."¹⁸

Barrett Browning's authorial stand in, *Aurora Leigh*, and Barrett Browning herself have both wandered into their legendary woods not with axes, but with books in hand to read by the shade of the trees. Reading and writing under their shelter, Barrett Browning has denied the traditional identification of woman with muse, and identified herself as the creator not only of her poems but of her academic environment. Isn't *academe*, after all, a grove, sacred to a hero of Athens? Why shouldn't a girl who grew up in the Malvern Hills and became a Hellenist who cast herself in a heroic Hellenophile mold not have her own dedicated grove?

¹⁷ *AL* IV.1161-1164

Vide etiam AL V 95-99

A tree's mere firewood, unless humanised,—
Which well the Greeks knew when they stirred its bark
With close-pressed bosoms of subsiding nymphs,
And made the forest-rivers garrulous
With babble of gods.

¹⁸ *ibid.* IV.1157

Chapter III~ "The honey of Mount Hymettus:" Embodied Classical Scholarship and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Wine of Cyprus"

The 'Vision of Poets['] too, pleased me very much—it is a fine high doctrine, which it preaches—& one, which in these latter days, when our great Poets have not been wont to show themselves over mindful of the responsableness [sic] of their office or the claims it has upon them, surely need be preached. The "Dead Pan" (one of the noblest poems, to my thinking in the whole work), The "Wine of Cyprus," the "Fourfold Aspect," "Sleeping & Watching"—(to say nothing of the old friends, with—somewhat less "familiar faces" than of old) have each & all a claim upon our thankfulness, so that our debt altogether is by no means a light one, though it will be paid with a light heart, believe me.

~Thomas Westwood to Barrett Browning 21 August, 1844 (BC 9 107)

Beth and (Eliza)beth Barrett Browning

In an untitled essay written for her cousin Lizzie (BC 1 360 n27) Barrett Browning writes of a girl named Beth, who, though never identified explicitly within the text as being Barrett Browning herself, happens to share a name with her, be a hellenophile, have a pony whose name, Black Moses, is identical to the name of Barrett Browning's pony, and lives in the Malvern Hills, in Herefordshire, the setting of the Barrett country house, Hope End. Beth aspires to be a great poet:

No woman was ever before such a poet as she [would] be. As Homer was among men, so she [would] be among women—she [would] be the Feminine of Homer. Many persons [would] be obliged to say she was a little taller than Homer if anything. When she grew up she wd wear men's clothes, & live in a Greek island, the sea melting into turquoises all around it. She wd 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 — Or she wd live in a cave on Parnassus mount, and feed upon cresses & Helicon water, & Beth might have said Grace after the sweet diet of that dream. ~ Elizabeth Barrett, "Untitled Essay" *The Brownings' Correspondence*, Vol. I, 361

Notice here, again the preoccupation of the speaker with intoning “the right *ais* and *ois*” of “the ancient Greek.” Barrett Browning writes of Beth wanting to liberate Greece from the Ottoman colonists:

“When she was fifteen she wd arm herself in complete steel (Beth always thought of a suit of armour & never of a red coat) & ride on a steed, along the banks of the Danube, every where by her chanted songs for she was to sing her own poetry all the way she went ... & she wd destroy the Turkish empire, & deliver ‘Greece the glorious,’” (ibid.)

and, that being done, “directly to begin talking old Greek again.” The “*ais* and *ois*”

appear again here, only this time with a more identifiable sense of their strangeness.

Given the imperialistic context of a perceived utopia where a non-Greek girl teaches

“the islanders the ancient Greek—” that is to say the ancient form of their own

language, and the reference to the “real Greek sunshine” and the liberation from the

Ottoman Empire of the Greek nation, the distress in this case comes not from whether *αι*

or *οι* be considered metrically long or short syllables, but rather from the fact that their

pronunciation in Demotic Greek had shifted to [i:] for *οι*, and *αι* had become [ε] instead

of the classical Athenian values as far as can be ascertained [oi] and [ai] for the

diphthongs.¹ By casting her protagonist in this essay as the “Feminine of Homer,”

Barrett Browning resolves her query of the lack of grandmothers in an epic pedigree by

recasting *Homer* not as a Greek masculine noun of the second declension but a feminine

noun of the first. Not as Ὅμηρος, but as a hypothetical Ὅμηρα, Beth has in mind a

¹ Check *Vox Graeca* for historical notes & citation

nationalistic yet feminist project as Adamantios Koraïs did in his anonymous call to arms, the *Σάλλισμα Πολεμιστήριον*. In the voice of a personified Greece, Koraïs writes that “my first children, your ancestors, were the bravest and most enlightened of men. It is in their homeland that the sweeter name of ‘liberty’ was born,” (Koraïs 4).² Beth believes that in order for modern Greeks to be free from the influence of the Ottoman Empire, they must first unlearn the foreignness that has been thrust upon them by the occupation of the Ottomans, and return to an earlier stage of their language that is deliberately archaizing and free from foreign influence, much like the archaizing ethnonationalistic project of Koraïs. By proposing to wear men’s clothes, before she attempts to reverse linguistic change and return to an ancient form of the language then popularly called Romaic, Beth, like Aurora Leigh, is made by Barrett Browning to express the link between knowledge of ancient Greek and the outward trappings of male-identified garb: here, the more vague “men’s clothes” replace the “large / Man’s doublet”³ we see being metaphorically wrapped around the protagonist of *Aurora Leigh*. Interestingly enough, Beth makes no mention of her men’s clothes being too big; perhaps she, unlike Aurora, feels entitled to grow into them as she mentions that “many persons [would] be obliged to say she was a little taller than Homer if anything,” for if Barrett Browning could find no epic grandmothers, she could at least write two of her

² [Κοραΐς, Αδαμάντιος.] *Σάλλισμα Πολεμιστήριον*. Ἑλληνικῆς τυπογραφίας Ἀτρομήτου τοῦ Μαγαθονίου, 1821. 4.

³ AL I.727-28

own, Aurora Leigh and Beth, into existence, thereby positioning herself as their author and inscribing herself in the pantheon of poets for posterity.

Barrett Browning: A Verbal Symposiarch

When Hugh Stuart Boyd gifted Elizabeth Barrett Browning a bottle of wine from Cyprus before June 8, 1844, it may have been simply a gesture of shared hellenophilia and oenophilia between a tutor and his pupil, since they had become very good friends and correspondents. However, Barrett Browning memorialized that exchange in a handful of letters to Boyd (1633, 1662 1670) and in a poem, “Wine of Cyprus” which Marjorie Stone calls a transformation of “Boyd’s gift of honey wine into an expansive metaphor for the pleasure she had experienced in drinking deeply from the Greek poetical tradition” (Stone 124). The poem, twenty-two eight-line stanzas of alternating trochaic tetrameter and trochaic tetrameter catalectic , for a total of 176 lines of verse, is a memorialization of the authors read together by Barrett Browning and Boyd.

Shut out from the institution of classical education and scholarship that would have been afforded to her had she been born male, Barrett Browning nevertheless read a wide-ranging canon of Greek authors, both classical and Christian. In writing a paeon to the “Greek wine, Cyprus wine ... of very great value” that she received from Boyd, (BC 1670) Barrett Browning participated too, in a tradition, more than a dozen centuries removed from her own time, of the symposium— an Athenian institution, also

segregated by gender, where men gathered to drink wine and, according to literary depictions, discuss poetry and ideas. Reading Alcaeus' fr. 140 V, Xenophanes' fr.1 W, and the *Theognidea* 467-96, Jenny Strauss Clay reminds us that these androcentric festivities might have occurred in the *megaron* of a great house as in *Odyssey* XVI.284, or in the *andron* of a rich man, given how similar the description of Alcaeus in the fragment under Clay's consideration is to the panoply on the walls in Herodotus' description of the *andron* of Croesus in I.xxxiv.3 (Clay 206). In participating not as a *hetaira*, a courtesan, appearing in an *andron* but not belonging there, *pari passu*, with the other symposiasts, but as a primary reveler in her own private, literary, mixed gender symposium with Boyd, Barrett Browning claims space⁴ within a tradition in which she would have been barred from participating, had she been an ancient Athenian, because of her gender (Glazebrook 498). Though Barrett Browning and Boyd did not (as far as we know) share actual wine in a recreation of a symposium, the former's poem casts the contents of the *krater* as Greek literature while casting herself and Boyd (included in the poem's first person plural pronouns) in the role of co-symposiarchs. She is by the physical gift of Cyprian wine, the taste of which she describes as reminiscent "of oranges & orange flowers together, to say nothing of the honey of Mount Hymettus" (BC 1670).

⁴ . Following scholarship from the mid 1990s, Kathleen M. Lynch argues that the physical space or room that was known as the *andron* in Athenian houses was a conceptual designation rather than a physical one: "the room may have been the 'men's quarters' on a symposium evening, but at other times, the space had other uses and was not necessarily male gendered" (Lynch 244).

Barrett Browning provides a program in verse that is illustrative of her years spent reading Greek aloud to and with Hugh Stuart Boyd. She invokes “old Bacchus,” (“Wine” 1) “Cyclop” (ibid. 13) and “Titan” (ibid. 15) before finally entering as the speaker of the poem herself in the fifth stanza.

Cristanne Miller associates lyric verse contemporary with Emily Dickinson, in broad terms “with Sappho and the feminine” (Miller 25), while Yopie Prins asserts that classically-educated poets in the nineteenth century of all genders “turned to Sappho to define their lyric vocation” (Prins *Sappho* 3). By participating in the Anacreontic tradition, Barrett Browning stakes out a place for herself in the confluence of the “springs that feed it with Dionysian rites, the ‘divine fury’ of poetic inspiration, the symposium where wine and words flow, and the origins of lyric poetry as we now conceive it” (Stone 128). As Barrett Browning has Aurora Leigh claim her place within the *thiasos* of Dionysus as a maenad by wreathing herself in ivy and with that action becoming a poet, so too does the speaker of “Wine of Cyprus,” more readily identifiable as a version of Barrett Browning given the occasional nature of the poem, identify herself with those bacchantes. While Barrett Browning does not explicitly call Leigh a maenad, her ivy wreath iconographically identifies her as one; Catullus, after all, mentions the “capita ... hederigerae” of the maenads and even up until late antiquity, maenads were said to “adorn their heads” with ivy crowns. (Cat. LXIII.23). The accoutrements of the maenad mark her as a woman who is not to be trifled with, one

who is governed by the passion and power of Bacchus, to inhabit, as Ronald Spiers

translates Friedrich Nietzsche,

a spirit with strange needs, nameless as yet, a memory brimming over with questions, experiences, hidden things to which the name Dionysos had been appended as yet another question mark; here one heard - as people remarked distrustfully - something like the voice of a mystical and almost maenadic soul which stammers in a strange tongue, with great difficulty and capriciously, almost as if undecided whether to communicate or conceal itself.

~Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 6

The theme of the maenad, much like the theme of the nymph, was in vogue in the art of the nineteenth century in Europe. William Adolphe Bouguereau painted a maenad in his *Prêtresse de Bacchus* which shows the titular priestess crowned in ivy, holding an ivy-wrapped thyrsus in her left hand, and perhaps betraying her national origins as a priestess of Bacchus (as opposed to Dionysus) by appearing *capite velato* in the manner of a roman priest or priestess, with their head veiled. The painters Andries Cornelis Lens, William Etty, John Reinhardt Wiegelin, Camille Corot, and the sculptors Elías Martin Riesco, Auguste Rodin, and Frederick William MacMonnies, all took up the subject of maenads during the nineteenth century; the last of the artists mentioned, an American student at the École des Beaux Arts, frequently took up Dionysiac subjects, sculpting a dyadic thiasos with his piece *Bacchante and Infant Faun*,⁵ a bronze modeled in 1893 and currently in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Art Institute of Chicago, and a sculpture of Pan for Rohallion, at the New Jersey estate of

⁵ For a quick yet detailed account of the controversial sculpture see: Rosenbaum, Julia. "Displaying Civic Culture: The Controversy over Frederick MacMonnies' 'Bacchante.'" *American Art*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2000, pp. 41–57. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3109362. Accessed 26 July 2020.

Stanford White. That sculpture depicts Pan standing on a globe and playing an aulos instead of a syrinx.⁶ Bacchantes were seen, contemporaneously, as sexually suggestive, even blatantly erotic, and too risqué for public view. The St. Louis Chronicle on August 7 1896 ran a piece with the headline “No! No!! Say the Modest Hubites to the Priestess of Bacchus”(Dimmick et al. 439) among the reasons for the furor when the *Bacchante and Infant Faun* was installed in the courtyard of the Boston Public Library was “the appropriateness of placing a possibly drunk nude woman with an infant that was perhaps illegitimate in the center of a temple of learning” (ibid. 438).

Barrett Browning was, then, ahead of her time when she cast her authorial stand-in and herself as a maenad in *Aurora Leigh* and in “Wine of Cyprus” respectively. Her temple of learning was, like the maenads of Dionysus, exuberant, passionate, and most importantly, not defined by men. She uses the figures of Naiads and Bacchantes (the latter being another name for maenads) to give form to her joy at experiencing Greek literature together with H.S. Boyd. Writing of the wonders of the Cypriot wine, Barrett Browning remarks that a proper drinking vessel, perhaps “some deep-mouthed Greek exemplar / Would become your Cyprus wine!”

Pan might dip his head so deep in
That his ears alone pricked out,
Fauns around him, pressing, leaping,
Each one pointing to his throat:
While the Naiads like Bacchantes,

⁶ “[Illustration]: Pan Of Rohallion By Frederick W. MacMonnies.” *The American Magazine of Art*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1916, p. 29. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23942354. Accessed 26 July 2020.

Wild, with urns thrown out to waste,
Cry, "O earth, that thou wouldst grant us
Springs to keep, of such a taste!"

"Wine of Cyprus" 17-24

By casting a playful group comprised of Pan, fauns, and Naiads in the guise of Bacchantes crowded around a wine-drinking vessel appropriate to a symposium, the speaker associates her exploration of Greek literature with the wild and idyllic inhabitants of Arcadia, a sylvan, rather than an urbane environment. From the speaker's assertion that "Pan might dip his head so deep in / That his ears alone pricked out" while fauns and Naiads drink around him, we can tease out the vessel shape that Barrett Browning might have had in mind. Certainly the "Greek exemplar" was not a *kylix*, much too wide and shallow for any god to dip his body into. Barrett Browning might have envisioned a deep-bowled *skyphos*, or perhaps a *kantharos*, as it "is the wine-cup of Dionysos and his associates" (Elderkin *Kantharos* 3) and the opening stanzas of "Wine of Cyprus" are certainly depicting a *thiasos* in which Barrett Browning as the speaker, and Boyd as the interlocutor, play a part. While Pan is swimming in his *kantharos*, the fauns "around him, pressing, leaping, / Each" point "to their throat" (Browning "Wine" 19-20). Their silence is countered by the "Naiads like Bacchantes, / Wild, with urns thrown out to waste, / Cry, 'O earth, that thou wouldst grant us / Springs to keep, of such a taste!'" (ibid. 21-25). The presence of the naiads, nymphs of springs and water, in the context of a Dionysiac *thiasos* is telling in various

ways of Barrett Browning's greater project to restore autonomy and agency to both nymphs and women studying Greek.

As they are spirits of water, their presence is suggestive of a metaphorical krater in which the symposiarch would mix the undiluted wine with water in order to temper it and prolong the relative sobriety of the symposiasts. Since this is, however, an Arcadian context, the Naiads, though wild and maenad-like, etymologically suggest the urbanizing presence of the fresh water that would be mixed into the krater at varying proportions (Fournier and D'Onofrio). While the practice of the symposiarch mixing wine and water meant that the "symposiasts could consume up to five kraters of the temperate mixture" upon which the Athenians prided themselves, no such adulteration of the wine happens in this poem (Lynch *et al.* 77) Indeed, Barrett Browning wrote to Boyd on June 18, 1844 to praise the wine: "there *never was* in modern days, such wine! Flush, to whom I offered the last drop in my glass, felt it was supernatural, and ran away. I have an idea that if he had drunk that drop, he [would] have talked afterwards .. either Greek or English" (BC 1633). To dilute the wine that would make her dog not only acquire the powers of speech, but acquire speech in one of two languages, would be anathema. The same is borne out in the poem itself.

The naiads, presented as counterparts to the fauns, speak; while the fauns wordlessly pantomime trying to catch Pan's attention, the naiads cry: "'O earth, that

thou wouldst grant us / Springs to keep, of such a taste!" ("Wine" 23-24) Addressing

Boyd directly, she writes

But for me, I am not worthy
After gods and Greeks to drink;
And my lips are pale and earthy
To go bathing from this brink.
Since you heard them speak the last time,
They have faded from their blooms,
And the laughter of my pastime
Has learnt silence at the tombs.

"Wine of Cyprus" 25-32

The speaker of the poem contrasts herself to the "gods and Greeks" by saying that she is not worthy of drinking the same wine that they have drunk given the fact that she is lacking in practice as far as speaking Greek aloud is concerned. Her lips have "faded from their blooms" of her girlhood when (as we learn later on in the poem) Barrett Browning read Greek aloud in a "girlish voice" ("Wine" 71). As her girlish voice has been quieted, so too has her laughter. Unlike the stern didacticism of Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son which make the acquisition of languages both ancient and modern out to be a sort of prerequisite pain of nobility ⁷ Barrett Browning's recollections of her acquisition of both Greek and Latin, both at the same time, in her 1818 essay "My Own

⁷ Letter XXXVII (Vol. I p. 46) has Chesterfield modeling a letter written by his son to him, remarking in the voice of his son that he "ai fort bien traduit de l'Anglois [sic] au Latin et du Latin en Anglois si bien qu'il a écrit a la fin *Optimè*. J'ai aussi répété un verbe Grec assez bien;" Letter CXVI, in Chesterfield's own voice says (160-61) "I hope you will employ these three or four years so well, as to make yourself capable of being of use to me, if I should continue in it so long. The reading, writing, and speaking the modern languages correctly ... are absolutely necessary."

Character” and in her 1820 essay “Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character,” as well as in later semi-autobiographical settings, imbue language-learning with a sense of amusement and excitement, whereas Chesterfield explicitly contrasts amusement with Greek and Latin.⁸

By exploring her acquisition of the Greek language in verse, and associating her deep exploration of the literature written in this language with a sympotic-themed poem, Barrett Browning explicitly links Greek with both socialization and joy. Marjorie Stone suggests that the vogue for sympotic poems like Barrett Browning’s was partly due to the vogue for classically-themed poems with erotic elements popular in English verse after the publication of Thomas Moore’s *Odes of Anacreon*, a volume published in 1800 and reprinted often (Stone 128). In her contribution to the anacreontic genre, Barrett Browning thematically links the discourse of anglophone Hellenophilia, specifically Boyd’s and her own, with an atmosphere of gender equality and of Greek literature as something that is to be enjoyed and discussed in enjoyment, rather than a labor explicitly contrasted with “plaisirs” as Lord Chesterfield does in a clunky French admonition to his son. Barrett Browning further plays with gender and genre throughout the poem. The form of her catalogue of Greek authors echoes the celebrated form of the Catalogue of Ships section of *Iliad* 2 where the poet surrenders their powers

⁸ CXVII (Vol. I p. 161) “Comme [le français] c’est une langue faite pour l’enjouement et le badinage, je m’y conformerai, et je réserverai mon sérieux pour l’Anglois. Je ne vous parlerai donc pas à présent de votre Grec, votre Latin, votre Droit, soit de la nature ou des Gens, soit public ou particulier; mais parlons plutôt de vos amusemens [sic] et de vos plaisirs, puisqu’aussi il bien en faut avoir. Oserois-je [sic] vous demander quels sont les vôtres?”

of memory to the Muses, trusting the Muses' recollection over the poet's own (Hom. *Il.* II. 85-86) because the Muses are goddesses and know everything.

In the following lines of the *Iliad*, Homer lists in detail the ships of the assembled Danaan fleet and their leaders, often devoting multiple hexameters to the description of a single person (Hom. *Il.* II.494-759). Here, Barrett Browning, serving as both poet and Muse-like recollector, takes a hint from Homer in the structure of her poem while at the same time distancing herself from him by enjoining her readers to "Go!—let others praise the Chian!" ("Wine" 49) while saying that the Cypriot wine "is soft as Muses' string" and as "tawny as Rhea's lion" (ibid. 50-51).

If she does not praise Homer, then her praises are for other writers in the epic tradition. The phrase "tawny as Rhea's lion" makes one recall the description of the shapeshifting Proteus in the incipit of the first book of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* where Proteus (in the shape of Dionysus) optatively suckles at "lion-nourishing" Rhea's breasts (Nonn. *Dionys.* I.20). Barrett Browning did not mask her dislike for most of Nonnus' epic in forty-eight books, mentioning the author in letters to Robert Browning and to Anne Thomson, the editor of the proposed *Classical Album*, a collection of newly-translated exemplars from classical literature "intended to accompany and explain certain engravings after ancient gems" which never came to fruition (BC 10.327). In the letter to Robert, Elizabeth Barrett Browning calls Nonnus "the author of that large (not great) poem in some forty books of the '*Dionysiaca*'" (BC 2004) and she calls him "a very

wordy flowery writer" (ibid. 2008) in the letter to Thomson. Barrett Browning had, even before embarking on the writing of her nine book epic verse novel, *Aurora Leigh*, wondered about the gendering of poetry, in lyric and epic forms, asking "the divine breath... why did it never pass, even in the lyrical form, over the lips of a woman? How strange! I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none" (Cooper 65). If she did not find a Hellenistic epic grandmother in the wordy and arcane verse of Nonnos' epic about Dionysus, then at least she found a way to access that lack of female ancestry through a Dionysiac celebration of her own exploration, asserting her place, first as a girl, and then as a young woman in the predominantly male activity of reading a predominantly male canon in the original language.

Though, as Julia Miele Rodas points out, Barrett Browning's infantilization and de-sexualization of Hugh Stuart Boyd is problematic in regards to his eventual blindness and the almost mythical rapport it gave him in Barrett Browning's mind with Homer, the ur-blind poet in the Greco-Roman tradition, she does not go so far as to make that relationship explicit in "Wine of Cyprus," treating him equitably both in the letters thanking him for and mentioning the vial of wine he sent over, and in the poem itself. If "the poet Boyd's blindness identified him as divinely inspired, exclusive access to this figure could function as a connection with the tradition of inspiration" (Rodas 105-106) If we not only consider Boyd as a surrogate for Homer, but as an imperfect one for Tiresias, the mythical poet who lived as both a man and a woman, given Barrett

Browning's repeated attempts at metaphorically rendering Boyd an asexual being who, writes Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *pace* his "passion" for Greek, "talks like a man of slow mind, which he is, .. & with a child's way of looking at things," and talks "in the most wonderfully childish way!" (BC 2248).

To Boyd in her letters are not afforded the praises Barrett Browning later sings of a number of Greek authors, humanizing them and recognizing their abilities. However, she reminisces about the formative experiences of her young adulthood in her road to the mastery and appreciation of Greek with him with fondness, writing:

And I think of those long mornings
Which my thought goes far to seek,
When, betwixt the folio's turnings,
Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek.
Past the pane, the mountain spreading,
Swept the sheep-bell's tinkling noise,
While a girlish voice was reading,—
Somewhat low for *αἰ*'s and *οἰ*'s.

Then what golden hours were for us!—
While we sate together there,
While the white vests of the chorus
Seemed to wave up a live air!
How the cothurns trod majestic
Down the deep iambic lines;
And the rolling anapæstic
Curled like vapor over shrines!

"Wine of Cyprus" 65-80

The poetic recollections in these two stanzas agree with the information we have about the young Elizabeth Barrett Browning's relationship with Boyd. Her first surviving letter to him is that of March 2, 1827, when Elizabeth Barrett Browning was four days

shy of her twenty-first birthday (BC 253). The last surviving letter, written when Barrett Browning was living in Florence, dates from May 26, twenty years later. Though the year is not mentioned in the header in the body of the letter, the postmark securely dates it to 1847.(BC 2679) In the intervening 271 letters from Barrett Browning to Boyd—we unfortunately lack many of Hugh Stuart Boyd’s replies, as well as what seems to be the letter that began this epistolary relationship—the two of them predominantly discussed their reading habits with an emphasis on Greek literature, both classical and patristic.

Barrett Browning leads up to this reminiscence by assuring Boyd that her praises (for the Cypriot wine) are “very copious” though she “sip it like a fly” (“Wine” 57-58) Sipping, she writes, causes “times and places” to “suddenly” change before her, (ibid. 59-60) which causes her to conflate her present moment of drinking the tawny sweet wine (which the Cyprus Wine Museum identifies as being the dessert wine known as Koumandarka or Commandaria) (Commandaria). with both the nekylia of Odysseus, and with her own experiences with Boyd in an epic simile: “As Ulysses’ old libation / Drew the ghosts from every part, / So your Cyprus wine, dear Grecian, / Stirrs the Hades of my heart” (“Wine” 61-64). From her heart’s Hades, no longer visible but to her mind’s eye, emerges a “pastoral idyll” (Prins LG 64) where long mornings undefined in time set the scene for a convivial scholarly meeting between a young girl and a blind Greek scholar twenty-five years her senior. For the girl who wrote in 1831 about the

“miserable day” spent “putting the verbs in -μι in me” and mentioning that they were a respite from “learning the verb τυπτω!!!” (Barrett Browning *Diary* 21) learning Greek was as much a physical, active process as self-consciously beating thematic verbs into her head. Τύπτω means “I strike,” or “I beat” and Barrett Browning writes of literally putting athematic verbs (the verbs in -μι) into her, punning on the first person singular active indicative ending of athematic verbs being the syllable μι which sounds exactly like the English first person object pronoun *me*.

These stanzas in “Wine of Cyprus” do not show those moments of agony where Elizabeth Barrett Browning berates herself for having been “such & so long an ignoramus about the verbs,” (ibid. 22-23) but rather idealize the experience of reading Greek together with someone in an evocatively Arcadian landscape where “solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek” against a backdrop of a tinkling “sheep bell” and foregrounding the space where “a girlish voice was reading,— / Somewhat low for αἰ’s and οἰ’s” (“Wine” 71-72).

Considering Barrett Browning’s conflicting feelings about Boyd, ranging from intellectual to romantic desire, to pity and almost veneration for his blindness, and the highlighting of the αἰ’s and οἰ’s as the syllables produced by her girlish voice suggests not only Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s unspoken anxieties about Boyd and the “distress or hesitation about how to stress the right pronunciation,” as Prins suggests, (LG 64) but also the idea that just as those two diphthongs in particular are usually metrically long

in lines of verse, depending on their position, they are counted as short when they come at the ends of lines, so too does Barrett Browning feel uncertain about her own position vis à vis Hugh Stuart Boyd. The sounds *αι* and *οι* also form an integral part of *αἰαῖ* and *οἶμοι*, the exclamations of pain, exasperation, and dismay often found in the setting of tragedy to which the poem takes us in the following stanza through its evocative mentions of “the white vests of the chorus,” the “cothurns” worn by the actors, and the predominantly “deep iambic lines” recited by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Hugh Stuart Boyd as they role-played being Greek actors, not in a theatre but nestled in the Malvern Hills of Herefordshire. The “rolling anapæstic” lines too, are evocative of the meter of the *parodos* in tragedy: the expository entrance song sung by the chorus.

The poem references the dyad’s reading about “proud Œdipus” (“Wine” 147) at which point “the reader’s voice dropped lower / When the poet called him blind!” (ibid. 151-152)

This admission on the speaker’s part leads into an important facet of the androcentric camaraderie that formed an important part of the Athenian symposium insofar as sympotic literature is concerned: the relationship between the older *ἐραστής* and the younger *ἐρώμενος*. Barrett Browning would have been well aware of this, and even in the poem she wrestles with her feelings towards Boyd:

Ah, my gossip! you were older,
And more learned, and a man!—
Yet that shadow—the enfolder
Of your quiet eyelids—ran
Both our spirits to one level,

And I turned from hill and lea
And the summer-sun's green revel,—
To your eyes that could not see.

"Wine of Cyprus" 153-160

Acknowledging their age difference spanning a quarter of a century, Barrett Browning comparatively defines Boyd in opposition to herself, leaving her half of the comparisons unsaid. She shows that even though the external world might have read something untoward in her and Hugh Stuart Boyd's many hours spent together, she profited from her tutor and friend's age, gender, and access to traditional classical education, from which she was otherwise excluded, shown here by the tricolon *crescens* ending with an exclamation point: "you were older, / And more learned, and a man!—" contrasting with Barrett Browning's own youth, inexperience, and gender. Experiencing Greek as a discipline differently from men of commensurate status, Barrett Browning still had a similar aim when she devoted her early years to it; for her and for her male contemporaries, "Greek was more than simply a language or a literature" (Falk 70). Equating Boyd's literal blindness and her own ignorance of certain things in their shared program of literature, Barrett Browning uses the "shadow" of her tutor's blindness to foreground herself in the scene of their reading together by making the shadow be the reason "both [their] spirits" run "to one level," from the brightness of the "summer-sun" to Boyd's "eyes that could not see." As if afraid of questions of morality in their mixed-gender symposium, the speaker of the poem turns to apostrophe halfway through the next stanza in order to bring the poem to a close: "Is it not right to

remember / All your kindness, friend of mine, / When we two sate in the chamber /
And the poets poured us wine?" ("Wine" 165-68)

The answer, naturally, is that it is right to remember all of this with a fondness that may at first glance seem improper but is made proper by its couching not only in classical terms, but in a truly hellenophilic milieu. Given the liminality of nymphs, I argue that their facility in traversing the boundaries between humanity and inhumanity, as well as their classical pedigree makes them attractive creatures to include in the art and poetry of the long nineteenth century. Nymphs offer visual and verbal artists of the period a tantalizing, magical, attractive, and sexual creature that allows for the exploration of topics that may have otherwise been off-limits in social discourse. This blurring of boundaries, as it were, as well as an anxiety about the physically changing landscape due to industrialization is one reason so many nymphs appear in nineteenth century literature and art.

David Scobey, notes that the "melding of classicizing form and transgressive theme" of works of art that interweave nymphs into a nineteenth century context offer, as they do in William Adolphe Bouguereau's *Nymphes et un satyre*, a portrayal of a scene of "female erotic domination and masculine curtailment:" a tableau of nymphs encircling a satyr, teasing him, pulling at him, and ecstatically (but also coyly) dragging him down into a stream" (Scobey 44). The nymphs in Bouguereau's painting then have power over both nature and the interlopers that enter into their realm. Though the

painting predates Richard von Krafft-Barrett Browning's *Psychopathia Sexualis* by eighteen years, and as such contemporary audiences might not have had the vocabulary we now do when we call the satyr a submissive participant in that scene, the idea of sexual transgression could be plainly seen in 1873. Scenes in both literature and visual art that couched subversive meanings made use of a classical context in order to allow certain themes, like eroticism, same-sex attraction, and political commentary, among other things, to be disseminated to a select audience; this audience was composed of people who knew how to read through the lexicon of classicism in order to understand the work on a level that someone without a similar education would not have been able to understand. The hellenophilia of the long nineteenth century served then both as a marker of class and a space in which what might otherwise be considered prurient female bodies exerting power over a submissive male form could be passed off as acceptable given its intended erudite and homosocial audience in the saloon of the Hoffman House hotel in New York City where Bouguereau's painting was displayed. Likewise, Barrett Browning's verbal tableaux in "Wine of Cyprus" invert the relationship that is often seen in works by men of this period and of the classical era, in which nymphs are the "prototype of helpless womanhood victimized by masculine power" (Shackford 14-15).

A Gamut of Ganymedes:

“Wine of Cyprus,” though, shows not helpless womanhood victimized, but rather a woman who not only has become a Greek scholar, but also has enough familiarity with her tutor and friend to share ownership of an impressive list of both prose writers and poets. So, thinking back on those “long mornings” (65), the speaker of the poem reflects on “our Æschylus, the thunderous”⁹ (81), “our Sophocles, the royal” (85), “our Euripides, the human” (89), and “our Theocritus, our Bion, / And our Pindar” (93-94) who link the speaker and her interlocutor, serving as their “cup-bearers undying / Of the wine that ’s meant for souls” (95-96). By casting the poets as cup bearers, Barrett Browning effects an unspoken apotheosis of the speaker and her interlocutor lifting them to the role of Zeus and making Euripides, Theocritus, Bion and Pindar a gamut of Ganymedes to serve and entertain them.

This personal relationship of Barrett Browning to the Greek poets—to say nothing of Plato’s identification as “my Plato, the divine one”(97)—shows her deep love and appreciation for these writers with whom she engages both socially, discussing them with her husband, brother, and with classical scholars like H. S. Boyd and Sir Uvedale Price—and professionally.¹⁰ In reading together with Boyd and later on with Robert Browning, she made physical what others considered ink on a page. In her

⁹ Barrett Browning’s verse translation of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* was revised and republished in 1855 after its original publication in 1833. See Drummond for more.

¹⁰ Barrett Browning wrote a series of essays titled *On the Greek Christian Poets and the English Poets* which were published in the *London Athenæum* in 1842 which were then reprinted bound as a book.

Essays on the Greek Christian Poets, she writes about her approach to the Greek language, focusing on it as a spoken, and not only a written tongue: "Pindar rolled his chariots in" Greek, "prolonging the clamor of the games. Sappho's heart beat through it and heaved up the world's" (Barrett Browning *Essays* 12). If, by Barrett Browning's telling, the Greek language was at the beginning of the "Christian era, an antique instrument, somewhat worn, somewhat stiff in the playing, somewhat deficient in notes which it had once, somewhat feeble and uncertain in such as it retained" (ibid. 14-15) then through her enthusiastic and lifelong quest to find delight inexpressible in all things Hellenic, she became a latter-day citharode, taking her instrument down from its dusty peg, tightening its strings, and strumming out a few strains that began tenuously, reading in a "girlish voice" ("Wine" 71) but growing ever more confident so that, by the end, they became invocations of the "wondrous" and varied "creature that was Greek literature" (Barrett Browning *Essays* 13).

Afterword

Barrett Browning's poetic career has two beginnings: a private and a public one. Privately, her career began at the age of fourteen with an epic poem called *The Battle of Marathon* which was printed by her father in 1820. Publicly, it began in earnest the following year with "Stanzas Excited by Reflections on the Present State of Greece" published in May of 1821 in *The New Monthly Magazine* (Karagiorgios 89). Her career ended a year before her death with *Poems Before Congress* (1860). In the final collection published in her lifetime, Barrett Browning still engaged with politics, not the politics, this time, of Greek independence, but of Italian unification. Having lived in Italy for some time with Robert Browning, she addresses their son, Robert "Pen" Browning, in "A Tale of Villafranca" as "my Florentine," echoing Aurora Leigh's conception of herself (1). Posthumously, her career, at the time of this writing, has yet to end. There are more volumes still to appear of *The Brownings' Correspondence*.

At the time of her death on June 29, 1861, George du Maurier, with whose cartoons this book began, was 26 years old and four years away from his debut in *Punch*. Girton College Cambridge, too, was four years away from its founding by Emily Davies. The Cambridge Classical Tripos was still the domain of well-heeled boys, and the Clarendon Commission had yet to write about the fact that the curriculum at the (all-male) Public Schools was focused on classical history and languages to the exclusion of all else.

Barrett Browning's long career in the public eye as a writer, translator, and intellectual normalized, to some extent, the idea that women had a rightful place in Classics. Of course, she did not do this single-handedly. Scholars such as Sara Coleridge before her, and Janet Case, Jane Ellen Harrison, Helen Magill, and Meta Glass after her, among countless others, took up the call of equal education, focusing particularly on Classics.¹¹ Through these scholars' efforts was the triumph of Agnata Ramsay made possible, and because of their trailblazing have people of all genders benefitted when studying Classics. Magill, in 1887, was the first woman in the United States to earn a PhD in any field, with a dissertation at Boston University on the Greek dramatists. Upon finishing a talk on the "Progress of the Education of Women" given at the 1887 meeting of the American Social Science Association, the newly-minted Dr. Magill said to her audience when she finished delivering a paper on the "Progress in the Education of Women" saying "We may have as much [scholarship] now as the men who are admitted. Very well, if enough will not do, let us give them more than enough. καλὸν γάρ τὸ ἄθλον καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς μεγάλη" (Prins LG 24). Whether or not she translated the last sentence of her speech: (*for the prize is beautiful and the hope great*) her passion for classics, as well as Barrett Browning's, Coleridge's, and others, simultaneously achieved the democratization and apotheosis of Classics for people of all genders. Their work

¹¹ Glass (1880-1967) was the third president of Sweet Briar College in Virginia.

conveyed the prize inherent in the fact that when one studies Greek, either the under trees or in a library, one is surely made better.

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