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FLOWERS OF RHETORIC: THE EVOLVING USE OF THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS IN MARGARET FULLER'S DIAL SKETCHES AND POETRY, ELIZABETH STODDARD'S THE MORGESONS, EDITH WHARTON'S SUMMER, MARY AUSTIN'S SANTA LUCIA AND CACTUS THORN, AND SUSAN GLASPELL'S THE VERGE

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FLOWERS OF RHETORIC: THE EVOLVING USE OF THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS IN MARGARET FULLER'S *DIAL* SKETCHES AND POETRY, ELIZABETH STODDARD'S *THE MORGESONS*, EDITH WHARTON'S *SUMMER*, MARY AUSTIN'S *SANTA LUCIA* AND *CACTUS THORN*, AND SUSAN GLASPELL'S *THE VERGE*

by

CORINNE KOPCIK RHYNER

Under the Direction of Dr. Janet Gabler-Hover

ABSTRACT

The language of flowers was a popular phenomenon in the United States in the nineteenth century. This dissertation on American literature looks at several American women authors' use of the language of flowers in their novels. I examine the use of the language of flowers in Margaret Fuller's "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," "Yuca Filamentosa," and poetry such as "To Sarah," Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*, Edith Wharton's *Summer*, Mary Austin's *Santa Lucia: A Common Story* and *Cactus Thorn*, and Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*. Through analysis of language of flowers dictionaries, historical studies of the language of flowers,

feminist history and theory, and close readings of the sketches, poems, novels, and plays themselves, I will show that American women continued to use and be influenced by the language of f lowers for close to a decade. I will also show that these women writers' use of the language of flowers shows evolving social attitudes toward women and standards of femininity in American society during the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

INDEX WORDS: The language of flowers, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stoddard, Edith Wharton, Mary Austin, Susan Glaspell, The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain, Yuca Filamentosa, *The Morgesons*, *Summer*, *Santa Lucia*, *Cactus Thorn*, *The Verge*, Flowers

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by

CORINNE KOPCIK RHYNER

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2012

FLOWERS OF RHETORIC: THE EVOLVING USE OF THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS IN MARGARET FULLER'S *DIAL* SKETCHES AND POETRY, ELIZABETH STODDARD'S *THE MORGESONS*, EDITH WHARTON'S *SUMMER*, MARY AUSTIN'S *SANTA LUCIA* AND *CACTUS THORN*, AND SUSAN GLASPELL'S *THE VERGE*

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INTRODUCTION

In language of flowers dictionary author Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's preface to her 1829 *Flora's Dictionary*, she writes of her purpose in creating an American language of flowers. She notes the language of flowers' sentimental, expressionistic, and exotic origins. Wirt states, "Travelers, however, assure us that the people of the East see something more in [flowers] than mere objects of admiration. In the hands of these primitive and interesting people, they become flowers of rhetoric and speak their feelings with far more tenderness and force than words can impart" (3). Wirt's explanation purports the power of flowers to speak human emotions. The language of flowers was used by other women to speak for women in a time when women often were discouraged from speaking for themselves in society.

In the United States, the language of flowers was a popular phenomenon during the nineteenth century and was traditionally associated with True Womanhood ideals for women to be pious, pure, domestic, and submissive to their husbands.[1] Historian Barbara Welter explains the cult of domesticity's expectation that women embody virtue. Believers in True Womanhood were frequently white, protestant, and from New England. Followers of the cult of True Womanhood expected women to study and teach Christianity, to maintain their virginity until marriage, and to never act as sensual beings in society. In addition, women must obey their husbands, and create a refuge for their husbands and children in the home by doing feminine activities such as needlepoint and tending flowers. During the same time that the cult of True

[1] These are Barbara Welter's terms. For complete historical study of the cult of True Womanhood see Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" (1966).

Womanhood was popular in the United States, the language of flowers became popular and could be associated with the cult of True Womanhood.[2]

American women authors Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stoddard, Edith Wharton, Mary Austin, and Susan Glaspell use the language of flowers in their writing; however, their use of the language of flowers departs from the roots of the language of flowers in the United States as a tradition associated with True Womanhood. Some of these authors begin to create their own meanings for flowers to express different views on the changing social roles of women.[3] These female authors used the language of flowers symbolically in fiction, poetry, and personal correspondence to express feelings and ideas that they did not wish to put into words. From the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in America, women were not supposed to talk about sex or express physical desires. In the early-twentieth century, later female authors began to be more empowered and to express their opinions about women's place in society, but they continued to use derivatives of the language of flowers to symbolize women's sexuality, a still taboo subject. Finally, twentieth-century authors referenced the language of flowers as a Victorian custom which embodied the womanhood of the past. These authors saw the language of flowers as a tradition to remember but also to move beyond. The language of flowers influenced the writing of women authors concerned with the changing roles of women in American society for close to seventy years. This influence can be seen in the continued use of the language of flowers and the connection of flowers and women in the writing of these women authors.

The language of flowers was first brought to the Western world by noted German Orientalist Joseph Hammer-Purcell. He examined the precursor to the language of flowers during

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[2] Language of flowers historian Beverly Seaton notes that while the first language of flowers dictionary was published in the United States in 1829 the height of the popularity of the language of flowers was the 1840 and 1850s (87).

[3] While the use of the language of flowers was not restricted to female authors, this dissertation will focus on only female authors.

a study of Turkey, and he brought his knowledge of the eastern tradition of sélams to Western Europe.[4] Sélams were a form of covert communication in which the exchange of symbolic objects, including but not limited to flowers, allowed cloistered harem girls to communicate with love interests outside of their walls. In fact, as Hammer-Purcell later discovered, sélams were not a language used to communicate between men and women but instead a "language known only to women, who invented them as a game to take part in the leisure of their lonely life, and who employed it as an amusement, or as a code for lesbian attachments" (Hammer-Purcell 549). While sélams consisted of packets with small token symbolic objects, which each had a predetermined meaning and could convey messages when placed together, Europeans altered this idea to speak entirely with flowers and mostly associated the language with heterosexual courtship. The idea of a secret language captivated many people in Europe who created dictionaries with lists of flowers and corresponding lists of meanings.

Language of flowers dictionaries derived many of their specific flower meanings from symbolism used in the Bible, Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology, folklore, and poetry. In looking at European and American flower culture and the language of flowers, historian Jack Goody acknowledges "interrelated sets of meanings: firstly, the significance that flowers have in the variety of symbolic contexts in which they appear in any culture; secondly, the specific form this took in numerous nineteenth-century books that attempted to analyze the language of flowers" (232). My dissertation examines this second meaning and its application in literature.

To begin to understand the tradition of the language of flowers, one must look at its use in the country that first popularized it: France. Most historians consider France to have been at

[4] Other historians attribute the appearance of the language of flowers to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who wrote of the custom of sélam from Turkey in the early eighteenth century. Montagu was a friend of Alexander Pope and of significant social importance to have made an impact in the spread of the early forms of the language of flowers (See Goody 233).

the forefront of spreading the popularity of the language of flowers in Europe. Before language of flowers dictionaries were published, French authors used flowers symbolically, especially in flower poetry such as *Guirlande de Julie* (1634). This poetry made use of emblematic flowers and gave those flowers meanings which persist today, such as the modest violet or noble lily (Goody 240). These symbolic meanings influenced language of flowers authors and were passed from generation to generation, from country to country shifting along the way to reflect cultures, time periods, and locations.

Two historians have shaped our understanding of the context of the language of flowers in the nineteenth century: Jack Goody and Beverly Seaton. Goody focuses on the use and importance of flowers in various cultures ranging from ancient Africa and Asia to Renaissance Europe to modern America in his historical and ethnographic study published in 1993. He charts the use of flowers in various cultures and time periods including chapters on the language of flowers in Europe and America. In his study, he comments on the language of flower's widespread appeal, its lasting impact, and its importance for society in the form of various social customs that evolved from the language of flowers. Goody also points out that people gave flowers symbolic meanings throughout time and across cultures including ancient India and China, Renaissance Europe, and twentieth-century America. Writing about late twentieth-century people's understanding of the meaning of flowers, Goody states, "An interesting feature of people's knowledge of flowers is that a large number [still] think there exists a 'code', perhaps not in the highly structured way of the language of flowers, but nevertheless a systematic use of which they are ignorant" (Goody 253). This quotation shows the continuing cultural acceptance, especially in America and Europe, that there is a hidden code for the meaning of flowers. The acceptance that a flower must be more than just a flower grants authors a willing audience ready

to accept new and evolving floral meanings over time. People's desire to be let in on the secret of flowers has kept them guessing plants' meanings for centuries and keeps them interested in the topic even today. This interest explains the fact that several of the authors examined in this study use flower meanings long after the language of flowers fell out of fashion. For centuries people have turned given symbolic meanings to flowers.

To appreciate these particular authors' understanding and application of the language of flowers, one needs to comprehend the development of this phenomenon in Europe and America as well as its importance to nineteenth-century American culture. In her historical study of the language of flowers, Beverly Seaton traces the emergence of this phenomenon to Napoleonic France, with the publication of B. Delachénaye's 1811 flower almanac, *Abededaire de Flower ou Language des Fleurs*.[5] However, Delachénaye's text remained in only the hands of a select elite few. It took a woman writer to popularize the language of flowers. The most recognized and influential of the language of flowers dictionaries was first published in 1819 by a woman in France who went by the pen name Charlotte de Latour. Most dictionaries organize flowers alphabetically and dedicated a whole page to each flower including illustrations, botanical and gardening information, and poetic excerpts related to the meanings and sentiment of a particular flower. Latour's dictionary establishes this presentation of material but organizes flowers by season. Latour included flowers from each season and wrote about their appearance, growing tendencies, significance in mythology, and symbolic meaning. The language of flowers books, such as Latour's, became popular gift annuals given to women to mark the new year and were status symbols adorning drawing rooms and thus connected with women's domestic sphere.

[5] In all three countries, the literary almanac was a common New Year's gift. The flower book evolved from these almanacs.

English and American language of flowers books soon followed the French books, mixing flower meanings with practical gardening information and religious overtones. By the time the language of flowers reached America, an upper-class fad had become a transnational phenomenon. American Catherine Waterman's 1839 language of flowers dictionary *Flora's Lexicon* begins with an advertisement that states, "The language of flowers has recently attracted so much attention, that an acquaintance with it seems to be deemed, if not an essential part of a polite education, at least a graceful and elegant accomplishment" (5). Clearly symbolic flowers held great appeal, and the influence of the language of flowers was wide spread.

The English were the first to develop a "moral" flower book, censoring French meanings which conflicted with religious conservatism. Once the phenomenon became popular in America, an even more marked moral cast was given to the language of flowers meanings by American authors. The two major voices in developing and spreading the language of flowers in America were Sarah Josepha Hale who published *Flora's Interpreter* in 1832 and Elizabeth Gamble Wirt, the wife of the attorney general of the United States (Seaton 85). Wirt wrote under the pen name "a lady" to maintain her modesty since women were not supposed to have professional careers. Wirt describes her language of flowers in her preface using the words "sanctity," "rite," and "devotion" in connection with the flowers, further giving the language a religious tone. She writes in her preface that "there is something sacred in this mode of communication. It is a kind of religious worship—an offering of the fruits of the earth" (3). Wirt implies that a woman can improve both her morality and her level of refinement by possessing the knowledge of the language of flowers, but she does not restrict her audience to women, expressing that men must buy the dictionary in order to select flower bouquets with appropriate meanings for their female companions. Wirt goes on to state that she derives meaning for flowers

from various sources such as "allusions in poetry, the flower's biological or common name, [or] properties peculiar to it" including "hue, form, odour, place and manner of growth, sensibility, medicinal value, or circumstances connected with its history or character" (19). She also mentions occasionally copying from other language of flowers books or manuscripts. She equates flowers with words as "signs of ideas to which they are applied" (20). The deliberate and reasoned selection of meanings links Wirt's dictionary to the customs and traditions of her country and time period. These reasoned meanings went on to influence the use of flowers by writers for a generation to come.

Proof of the widespread appeal of the language of flowers is evident in many aspects of nineteenth-century culture. People followed social custom and used flowers to mark significant moments, including worship, courtship, marriage, mourning, and celebration. The language of flowers even developed into a game-like pastime such as Sarah Josepha Hale's *Flora's Fortuna*, which could be used to forecast personal traits as well as his or her destiny based on the flowers associated with the day of his or her birth. This book lists each day of the year in order and names a patron flower and certain traits about a person born on that day. The rich wore flowers as status symbols. As a cultural phenomenon, the language of flowers was a motif employed by many American literary texts ranging from Fanny Fern's *Fern Leaves* to Herman Melville's *Mardi*. Notwithstanding this broad practice, the language of flowers was primarily associated with women's domestic fiction.

Although the connection between women and flowers has existed for centuries in mythology, the Bible, literature, and folk tales, the cultural ideal of women as domestic figures began in the nineteenth century. Beverly Seaton notes that "flowers, in fact, were seen as the most suitable aspect of nature to represent women, or to interact with them, reflecting as they

[did] certain stereotypical qualities of the female being: smallness of stature, frailty of mind and body, and impermanence of beauty" (17). The connection of women to flowers is not surprising in a culture concerned with creating a restrictive role for women by assigning them the cardinal virtues of godliness, wholesomeness, domesticity, and obedience. Some women writers reclaim the language of flowers to make it a liberating language to empower women in expressing themselves. In this way, American women authors, like Fuller, Austin, and Glaspell, take a conventional language which many women embraced in a socially conservative past and change it into an alternative language of resistance.

For some nineteenth and early twentieth-century American women writers, the language of flowers became alternately an empowering voice and a heritage to embrace as part of the past but sometimes also to modify or reject as they saw fit. Margaret Fuller implies in her writing that flowers can be a symbol for feminist possibility and a voice for women that expresses the very best traits of womanhood: grace and strength. Elizabeth Stoddard uses flowers to show women's art and culture. For Stoddard, flowers are empowering but to a point; ultimately she implied that society must change before women can achieve equality. Later authors such as Edith Wharton see women's association with flowers as an outdated tradition which differentiated women from men and could link women to conventional feminine social roles. Mary Austin sees flowers as empowering symbols for women as long as they escape the male dominated society. Finally, Susan Glaspell later bridges these divergent views of flowers implying that women are complex beings who must embrace the best of their past while still moving forward and redefining womanhood in the future.

Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stoddard, Edith Wharton, Mary Austin, and Susan Glaspell use the language of flowers in their writing in different ways. Through the influence of male

literary companions who respected and advised their work, these writers seemed positioned to break barriers between the sentimental mode of women's writing and the less sentimental mode ascribed to male writers. These writers were members of traditionally male artistic communities and exemplified women ahead of their time: Fuller in her feminism and politics, Stoddard in her use of literary realism and modernist style of discourse, Wharton in her questioning flowers as symbols for women, Austin in her conviction that strength, independence, and marriage were not mutually exclusive, and Glaspell in her understanding of 1920s feminism.

Over the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, American women authors evolved their use of the language of flowers to reflect changing attitudes toward women in society. For Margaret Fuller, the language of flowers provides a conventional, rhetorically safe, and socially acceptable communication to embed in her writing a type of early feminist discourse. In my first chapter, "Margaret Fuller's Anthropomorphic Language of Flowers as Early Feminism," I examine Fuller's changing use of the language of flowers in her writing. Fuller began by using the language of flowers conventionally, as an expression of female friendship, to compliment her companion in her poem "To Sarah". Fuller's use of the language of flowers evolves in her 1841 *Dial* sketch "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" in which it functions as an empowering voice for women. A magnolia tree represents the strong and solitary woman of the future. Because Fuller's main character in the sketch is a personified flower, which is removed from the drudgery of servitude to men and is placed in a lonely but empowering wilderness environment, Fuller suggests that nature can be an escape from female servitude. Fuller's anthropomorphic flower character does not uphold all of the standard associations of women with flowers, such as those Beverly Seaton notes modern Western society has imposed on women. Seaton writes that flowers were considered "the aspects of nature most suitable to

represent women or to interact with them... [because of the believed shared traits of] smallness in stature, fragility of mind and body, and impermanence of beauty" (17). Instead of repeating those traits, Fuller expresses great potential for feminist ideology and language existent in flower language in "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain." Fuller later eschews the language of flowers convention for more direct and less sentimental form of writing in her next text, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, which does not reference flowers. The language of flowers served Fuller as a bridge to this more outspoken feminist writing.

Fuller writes about women's connection to nature as potentially empowering, rather than degrading. For example in her 1841 *Dial* sketch "Yuca Filamentosa" Fuller describes a flower which is not used in the language of flowers as a new and empowering symbol for women's strength. In Fuller's fiction, flowers express the presence of women's bodies and act in opposition to the social erasure of white woman's bodies in the nineteenth century.[6] In the face of this convention, the language of flowers becomes a method of exploring and entering into discussion of women's bodies and thus conveying their language later described by Hélène Cixous. In my chapter, I will compare Cixous's call for women to write their bodies to Fuller's use of flowers to write women's bodies.[7] Fuller introduces women to the idea of using the language of flowers in innovative ways to create a new form of women's discourse. Fuller's flower images become an anthropomorphic possibility for female empowerment, which create re-envisioned American social roles for women, and a mode of expression allowing the development of female agency. The use of the language of flowers becomes an alternative

[6] Many texts by African American women during the same time do mention flowers (though perhaps not the language of flowers) while others leave flowers noticeably absent. Given the limitations of my choice of texts, I do not examine this topic.

[7] Cixous's theory on female language came as a response to Jacques Lacan's phallic order of the word that explains human's development of language as a reaction to the fear of castration, a fear which could be seen as precluding women from language and makes language an essentially male enterprise.

discourse at work in Fuller's texts, in one sense a recognizable convention and in another a new possibility for feminist discourse.

While Fuller's sketch takes place in a realm of magic in order to create a space to empower women, Stoddard's 1862 novel *The Morgesons* takes place in a more realistic environment and confronts many social issues that blocked women's progress toward social equality. Fuller uses the language of flowers to express the emerging feminist words that she could not yet articulate. She uses these representational flowers as a female alternative for the dominant male symbolic order. In this way, her purpose for the language of flowers is similar to the purpose of the Turkish sélam—to subvert traditional language in order to express hidden feelings and desires.

In my second chapter, "Elizabeth Stoddard's Use of the American Language of Flowers as an Expression of Women's Artistry and Rebellion in *The Morgesons,"* I examine the way in which Stoddard begins her novel using flowers as the mode in which women can represent and express themselves but eventually concludes that a female rebellion though flowers will not be enough to see social change. Not all of Stoddard's characters find expression in the language of flowers. Her main character Cassandra embraces words, and she eventually uses words instead of flowers to tell women's story as she sits to write the story of her life at the end of the novel. In *The Morgesons,* Stoddard limits her use of symbolic flowers since she seems to imply that they convey socially loaded and limited symbols of feminism without potential for actual social change. Stoddard creates a realistic nineteenth-century setting and restricts her acceptance of utopian and feminist possibilities for women in the nineteenth century. Until social change is achieved, women remain in a confining relationship with flowers, one that embodies empowering potential but is rooted in the boundaries of separate sphere ideology. For Fuller and

Stoddard, the language of flowers acts as a necessary bridge to communicating feminist discourse, but ultimately it is a convention that they cross and move beyond.

Edith Wharton's 1917 novel *Summer* links the language of flowers to courtship, a connection which persisted long after the popularity of language of flowers books had declined. In my third chapter, "Something Old and Something New: The Language of Flowers in Edith Wharton's *Summer,"* I contribute to the understanding of Wharton's views on the way that society limited women's options outside of marriage. Wharton's heroine Charity lets her emotions override practicality and is carried away by the emotions of love among the intoxicating beauty of New England countryside in the summer. She becomes pregnant by her lover who leaves her and marries a more socially suitable girl. Wharton uses flowers whose meanings correspond with the French language of flowers symbolism to highlight Charity's passion and sexuality; however, instead of finding empowerment in her connection to nature, Wharton shows that her character's believed empowerment is naive and short-lived. When the reality of an unwed pregnancy in a small town hits her, she realizes the desperation of her situation and succumbs to a marriage to her stepfather--a man she does not love. Wharton uses the language of flowers, but her use only reinforces the novel's theme that romantic notions will limit women's options beyond marriage. Wharton implies that the only way for women to advance in society is by education and understanding of and integration into the male dominated world.

Mary Austin's use of the language of flowers in *Santa Lucia* (1908) and *Cactus Thorn* (1927) contributes to the critical understanding of her work since it examines her evolving use of the language of flowers to represent women. In my fourth chapter, "Rooted in the Past and Blooming in the Future: the Language of Flowers in Mary Austin's *Santa Lucia: A Common*

Story and *Cactus Thorn",* I show that Austin finds the possibility of feminism in the use of a modified version of the language of flowers. Like Wharton, Austin writes about women who act outside of social custom and have affairs. In *Santa Lucia* Austin associates the language of flowers with the most conventional and confined of these women. One of these women even kills herself rather than face the shame of having the people in the town know about her affair outside marriage. Later in her career, Austin changes her use of the language of flowers. In a plot similar to Wharton's novel *Summer*, a man loves and abandons Austin's heroine in *Cactus Thorn*. However, instead of being a helpless victim, Austin's heroine seeks violent revenge, murders her lover, and then escapes into the safety of the empowering natural world. In Austin's *Santa Lucia*, the author uses the language of flowers as representative of a quaint and outdated domestic past for women, but in her *Cactus Thorn* Austin creates her own meaning for the title flower and uses it in a way that conveys the power of her female character.

Susan Glaspell contributes to the modern interpretation of the language of flowers by using symbolic flowers in her 1921 modernist play *The Verge*. In my fifth chapter, "Beyond the Language of Flowers: Representing the Woman of the Past, Present, and Future with Symbolic Flowers in Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*", I show that Glaspell advocates that modern women maintain a connection to traditions from women's past through her references to the language of flowers. In the play, her main character breeds and engineers her own flowers, creating new varieties different from any that have come before. In accordance with this focus on evolution, Glaspell alludes to the past language of flowers somewhat but also creates her own meanings for these new breeds of flowers. Glaspell's symbolic flowers reflect on women of the past, present, and future. While she, like her female scientist main character, hopes to see women evolve beyond a domestic life, she also advocates maintaining a connection with women's past. Glaspell

advocates sustaining a link to women's past with a flower called Reminiscence, a fragrant flower that recalls the sentimental purpose of the language of flowers.[8] The main character in the play hopes to give Breath of Life, her groundbreaking floral creation, the scent of Reminiscence, another flower she creates by crossbreeding several fragrant flowers. However, she does not accomplish the task before Breath of Life blooms. Shortly after the flower blooms, the main character escapes into madness, which represents the danger of radical feminism without any tie to the past. This character's life becomes a disaster; she kills her lover and is left alone and alienated. Glaspell shows her reader the need to push boundaries of social structures for women and to break from molds of the past; however, she also shows women the danger of straying too far and losing a valuable part of their history in the process. Looking at the flower symbolism in Glaspell's play gives her readers a new understanding of the language of flowers as a link to women's past.

This study of nineteenth and early twentieth-century American women's literature will illustrate that Fuller's and Stoddard's use of the language of flowers served as a transition in nineteenth-century women's writing which paved the way for later, more overtly outspoken American feminists such as Mary Austin and Susan Glaspell. The language of flowers provided a rhetorically safe space for these women to remain within acceptable limits of decorum while challenging the limitations on women in society. Their use of the language of flowers shows an appreciation for contemporary culture and a possibility for the language of flowers to stand for more than traditional representations of womanhood. This dissertation will examine an important step in the evolution of the language of flowers in relation to American feminism in literature. It

[8] Glaspell brings female American authors' use of the language of flowers full circle, and like Margaret Fuller, Glaspell emphasizes the fragrance of plants--an important component of the language of flowers that indicates a flower represents morality. Both Fuller and Glaspell create new plants with old fragrances as a way to remember the past. For example, Fuller gives her magnolia tree the fragrance of an orange blossom in her sketch "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain".

will give nineteenth-century scholars a better understanding of the language of flowers and the role that it played in the development of feminism in America. It will examine the way certain American women authors use the language of flowers to adhere to and to depart from the feminine ideal posited in domestic women's fiction. In addition, this study will add another dimension to the long cultural history of flower meanings and will critically examine the cultural association of women with flowers. By understanding the way that women through their writing make language of flowers motifs their own and the way they shape the meanings of flowers in their texts, we can better understand the development of a unique form of feminist writing in American literature.

The examination of the evolution of the language of flowers in the work of these American women authors' fiction, poetry, and drama will provide a glimpse into the changing social perceptions of womanhood and the evolving use of flowers as symbols for women from the 1840s to the 1920s. This study shows how the popularity of the language of flowers as a trend grew and then declined; yet, the legacy of the language of flowers persisted and influenced female authors in the writing of different forms of feminist literature for close to a century.

CHAPTER ONE: MARGARET FULLER'S ANTHROPOMORPHIC LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS AS EARLY FEMINISM

Before writing *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1845, Margaret Fuller tested the waters of feminist idealism though her use of the language of flowers. The tradition of using flowers symbolically, a favorite of polite society, was typically used to represent True Womanhood. However, Fuller uses coded symbolic language of flower meanings to advocate greater independence for women while also charming and disarming her readers with a system of flower symbolism with which her readers were familiar. Fuller's use of the language of flowers in her texts provides a starting point for her later, more overt feminist writing. Fuller's childhood laid the groundwork for her use of the language of flowers as a dualistic type of writing, which combines masculine ideology and allusion to classical myths with feminine flower language.

Sarah Margaret Fuller was born in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts in 1810 and was the eldest of the surviving Fuller children by five years. Her next younger sister died before age two. According to Fuller biographer Donna Dickinson, in her early years, since her lawyer father had no son, he directed his efforts to schooling Margaret, his bright daughter. Evidence of this effort was that she wrote in Latin by age nine (Dickinson 54). Strictly taught by her father, Fuller's rigorous classical education was unusual for a woman during this time. While his training was often long and difficult to endure, Timothy Fuller having read Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* believed that his daughter's mind should be developed (Dickinson 55). While the young Fuller loved her reading of Greek and Roman myths and imagined herself a mythic hero, she had trouble coming to terms with her father's incessant intellectual training in her childhood. She blamed this training for her migraine headaches

(Dickinson 59). Women's literary scholar Elaine Showalter writes that Fuller's childhood consisted of a "rigorous education in reason, self-mastery, and self-restraint" (55). Later, Fuller had five younger brothers, so her connection to women was limited. Her mother provided the only female role model in her childhood. Since her mother was often ill or pregnant, Fuller regularly cared for her young siblings, and she struggled to balance intellectual pursuits with domestic duties. In her March 1835 journal, Fuller writes of herself that "Had she grown up an unmolested flower by the side of some secret stream she had been a thing [sic] all natural life, soft bloom and fragrance" (Houghton box 1). Fuller identifies herself as a flower and views her rigid education as unnatural, if mind opening. Her feminine-self emerged from her mother's garden, while her masculine-self from her father's library as she writes in her 1852 "Autobiographical Romance."

Margaret Fuller's mother was a bearer of the feminine artistic legacy of gardens. In *Autobiographical Romance,* Fuller states that her mother was "one of those fair and flower-like natures, which sometimes sprang up even beside the most dusty highways of life" (25). As a child, Fuller loved to spend time behind the house in her mother's garden, "full of choice flowers and fruit-trees, which was my mother's delight, and was carefully kept" (31). Fuller's attention to the way that her mother "carefully kept" her garden demonstrates the way that Fuller appreciates the garden as her mother's canvas. This love of flowers becomes her mother's mode of self-expression just as a man might express himself though the traditionally masculine academic disciplines.

Perhaps because of her early academic exposure and oft acknowledged brilliance, Fuller continued in education and writing for the rest of her life. In 1824 Fuller attended seminary in Groton, MA where Timothy Fuller later moved the family. She went on to teach at Bronson

Alcott's Temple School in Boston and the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island. Fuller published articles, joined the transcendentalist club (1837), and Ralph Waldo Emerson appointed her editor of *The Dial* (1839). In 1839, she began to lecture in her "Conversations" (1839-1844) in which she discussed a variety of issues with a female audience. Her writings and lectures attracted the attention of male writers such as Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, for whom Fuller inspired several characters, such as Zenobia of *A Blithedale Romance* and Beatrice Rappaccini in "Rappaccini's Daughter," a short story about a young woman cloistered among her father's experimental plants who becomes poisonous to the touch.[9] Fuller was well respected by her mostly male transcendentalist peers, forming an artistic community available to few women at the time. Despite this community, Fuller felt isolated as an educated woman and as her comparison to Hawthorne's Beatrice implied her education had a poisonous effect on her ability to fulfill the usual social expectations for a woman.

While Fuller's romantic life may have been stunted, her intellectual life blossomed. Fuller's first book, *Summer on the Lakes,* was published in 1843. In 1844, she moved to New York City and took a position as a newspaper writer for the *New York Tribune*. After a failed romance with James Nathan, a severed mentorship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, and opportunity to write travel letters for the *New York Tribune*, she moved to Europe and became involved in the Italian revolution. In Italy she married Giovanni Angelo Ossoli and had a son. During their return to the United States in 1850, Fuller, her husband, and son all perished in a shipwreck.

[9] Thomas Mitchell was the first to connect Margaret Fuller to Hawthorne's characters. The possibility that Fuller was the inspiration for Hawthorne's Beatrice is especially interesting for this project because he connects Beatrice to flowers. In describing Beatrice, Hawthorne writes, "That flower in her hair is a talisman. If you were to snatch it away, she would vanish, or be transformed into something else"(qtd. in Dickenson). This line bears similarity to Fuller's transformed magnolia in the "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain". In addition, Donna Dickenson mentions that in Hawthorne's journal he comments that Fuller was "better off dead," which she links to the drowning of his character Zenobia (19). Society had no place for women of such independence and strength.

Throughout her career, Fuller became known as a proponent of outspoken feminism. Some of her writing, such as *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, made its way into the literary canon, while other lesser-known works, such as "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," "Yuca Filamentosa," (both 1840) and her poetry, which was unpublished in her lifetime, have not received the same critical attention. Fuller was hesitant to publish her flower sketches, as she did not want her writing to appear traditionally feminine. Fuller scholar Jeffrey Steele writes, "Up to this moment, her public writing had been marked by an almost exclusive attention to male writers and images of masculine 'genius', but in 1840 she began to shift attention to issues of *female* creativity" (vx). In these sketches, Fuller uses the language of flowers which authors often marketed to women, specifically in reference to their creativity, alternative language, and intellectual growth. However, this feminine writing style was unusual for Fuller. Critic Elaine Showalter states that Fuller attributed her lack of comfort in existing literary genres to her gender. She writes that if Fuller "followed her womanhood, her heart, she had to keep her feelings private. If she followed her intellect, her writing would seem stiff, artificial, and cold. As Fuller perceived it, the essential problem for women writers was finding, or inventing, a suitable form" (54). When using the language of flowers in her texts, Fuller retains a tradition popular with female readers and writers while also challenging conventional domestic roles for women. My chapter will examine Fuller's use of the language of flowers as a simultaneously conventional and subversive method for questioning the social roles of women. This chapter examines Fuller's poetry, flower sketches she wrote when editor for *The Dial*, letters, and journal entries to show how Fuller uses the language of flowers in a unique way and that this usage was instrumental in developing her feminist voice in her later writing. Fuller's use of the language of

flowers serves as a voice for suppressed female desires and as a stepping-stone to her more overt feminism and to the feminism of later women writers.

Speaking with Flowers: the Language of Flowers in American Culture

The language of flowers, a coded system of meanings given to flowers, was a major cultural phenomenon in the United States in the 1840s when Fuller composed "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain". While the tradition of using flowers symbolically can be traced back to classical and medieval times, the language of flowers builds on those older associations and creates its own system of denotation, which captures the meanings of certain flowers at this cultural moment.[10] Decoding this system of flower meanings by using books containing illustrations and glossaries of meanings became a popular pastime in nineteenth-century America, especially for American women to whom many of the language of flowers dictionaries were marketed. These dictionaries were often sold as gift books or annuals to be kept in a parlor. Authors of language of flowers dictionaries dedicate a page to each flower, giving the flower's meanings and sentiment, botanical attributes, and many lush illustrations. Often authors of this style of dictionary include poetry or prose excerpts to reflect specific sentiments. Meanings ascribed to flowers often derived from this poetry. In addition, the language of flowers authors frequently found meaning in classical mythology's references to particular flowers. According to language of flowers historian Beverly Seaton, "there were a number of studies of flowers in the classics published for a slightly more learned audience" (25). In addition to mythology, language of flowers authors also often took their flower meanings from flowers used symbolically in the Bible. However, not all language of flowers meanings came from earlier symbolism. Most often, language of flowers authors found their flower meanings by considering some physical

[10] This past is evidenced by the mention of specific flowers in recorded myths and painter's metaphorical use of flowers in medieval paintings (Seaton 49).

characteristic of the blooms: their color, shape, or fragrance in addition to historical, mythological, or religious allusions.

American language of flowers dictionaries in the nineteenth century tended to focus on moral concerns. The paradigm of True Womanhood was to be a dutiful wife and mother, putting the needs of her family first. The American language of flowers books include flowers with meanings that reflect the interests of women, who at that time, strove to be religious and domestic. During Fuller's time, the language of flowers had a range of devotees including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott, both of whom often equate a morally sound woman with a beautiful flower.[11] This American tendency to impart religious or moral significance to flowers is interesting since not all countries stressed a moral interpretation of flowers.

The language of flowers was not originally an American tradition but, instead, began in seventeenth-century France and was a derivative of the oriental sèlam. The sèlam was a code of symbolic objects, which was observed by travelers to Turkey and stories of it were brought back to Europe. Sèlams allowed harem women to communicate with the outside world by passing significant objects in secret in order to convey messages to their lovers (Seaton 63). The term "the language of flowers" was well known in Europe since the early nineteenth century as evidenced by an influential essay on the history of the language of flowers by the German Orientalist, Joseph Hammer-Purgstall (Seaton 61). By the time Fuller was composing her flower sketches for *The Dial*, the language of flowers had traveled from France to the United States. It reached the height of popularity between the 1820s and 1840s with the publication of Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary* (1829) and Sarah Josepha Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* (1832)

[11] See Stowe's short story "The Tea Rose" and Alcott's illustrated *Flower Fables*.

which remained in print until 1860.[12] Hale's book was likely available to Fuller. Steele notes that Hale's work was a possible reference text for Margaret Fuller's "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" (*Transfiguring* 72). In addition to being a language of flowers author, Hale was the acclaimed editor of the well-read magazine *Godey's Lady's Book, w*hich "was one of the most popular lady's books of the 19th century. Each issue contained poetry, beautiful engraving and articles by some of the most well-known authors in America".[13] Hale's language of flowers book culled meanings and poetry from many different sources, including Charlotte Latour's *Le Langage des Fleurs* (Seaton 84). Latour influenced American authors Wirt and Hale though the American authors censored many of her meanings. Latour's dictionary organized flowers by season and allowed readers a guide to "love's truest language". Latour often derived her meanings from ancient sources such as Greek and Roman mythology or from folklore about the flowers. She also considered the characteristics of a flower, such as its color, shape, smell, growth, and longevity when constructing a meaning for it. However, Latour's frank discussion of sex was censored by the more puritanical American language of flowers authors, who gave certain flowers meanings which were more in line with their culture and society.

In America in the 1840s, the language of flowers was a fashionable mode of communication during courtship as well as a feminine pastime. This domestic association with the language of flowers makes it an unusual choice for Fuller, who is remembered by many critics as a pioneer of women's rights, an intellectual, and a transcendentalist. The language of flowers is rooted in religion, myth, and botany, which were interests of Fuller, who used this established flower language in her own unique way, not as a way to link women to their

[12] The language of flowers was also popular in England, but since Fuller was writing in America at the time, I have chosen to focus on American texts.
[13] See the University of Rochester's online site dedicated to the book. Since Fuller was the editor of *The Dial*, she would have been aware of this cornerstone of women's print media in the early nineteenth century.

domestic past but as a way to transport them to a new future.[14] The writing of Margaret Fuller, noted editor, reporter, German scholar, and social activist, is an unexpected bed in which to find the language of flowers sprouting. Unlike other feminist writers, Fuller does not see the language of flowers as a detriment to women's progress but as a tool to further it. [15]

Fuller references the language of flowers in a number of her essays, letters, and journals. It is important to note the frequency with which Fuller connected her writing to flowers; for example, she titled a notebook found in the Houghton Collection of her personal documents that contains copies of her poems and letters "S.M. Fuller's bouquet". In the same notebook, she also referred to her ideas as "blooming in her head". In an entry in her 1840 journal titled "New Fragment," Fuller writes, "The sun, the moon, the waters, and the air, the hopeful, holy, terrible, and fair, flower alphabets, love letters from the wave, All mysteries which flatter… love. All that is ever speaking, never spoken. Spells that are ever breaking, never broken. Have played upon my soul and every string confessed the touch which once could make it sing."[16] Fuller states that flowers speak nature's language and inspire her. For Fuller, flowers are more than living objects; they are the physical form of ideas.

Fuller believed that flowers awakened the spirit. In her *Summer on the Lakes* (1843), Fuller complained about privileged children's lack of connection with nature, and mourned that western women wanted their children to emulate the wealthy east coast children. She writes that

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[14] The tradition of flower imagery in poetry and fiction is a long one. Goethe greatly influenced Fuller and his folktales and poetry often contained flowers. Certainly many English and French women used flowers in their poetry. In this study, I will limit my examination to certain American women authors and the effect their flower language had on developing American literary feminism. I will consider their writing in light of the American language of flowers authors as these are on the most contemporary and would have been widely available to them with the exception of Edith Wharton who was living in France at the time.

[15] Carolyn Merchant asserts, "an organically oriented mentality in which female principals played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principals in an exploitive manner" (quoted in Alaimo 2). Thus the idea that women were connected to nature, once a source of women's social strength, became a tool for oppression. Even early feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir suggest that one of the reasons women became "the second sex" in the eyes of society is their interchangeability with the natural world (Alaimo 3).

[16] This fragment is contained in Harvard University's Houghton library's collection of Fuller's personal papers.

these east coast children, “talk French, but know nothing of the language of flowers, neither in childhood were allowed to cultivate them, lest they should tan their complexions. Accustomed to the pavement of Broadway, they dare not tread the wild wood paths” (76). Fuller feels deep dismay at these children’s lack of connection to flowers and the out of doors; she regrets their ignorance of the lessons she feels that nature teaches. Additionally, in her *Papers on Literature and Art* (1846), Fuller calls attention to the way that art, especially music, can awaken knowledge and appreciation of the natural world. She saw the language of flowers as hidden messages from the earth, and she writes, “the wandering minstrel with his lighter but beautiful office calls the attention of men to the meaning of the flowers, which is also hidden from the careless eye, though they have grown and bloomed in full sight of all those who chose to look” (151). Here Fuller equates women with flowers, not in a way that shows them as passive or submissive, but simply as overlooked and taken for granted by many members of a male-dominated society. However, like flowers, these women have their own message to convey.

Fuller’s views on the hidden meaning of flowers reflect her opinion of how women have been viewed in her society. She implies that women possess great ability and potential if only men would recognize those abilities. Dickinson supports this view in her analysis of Fuller’s later feminist work, “The Great Lawsuit” (1843), and states, “The real clash, to Fuller, is between the true nature of woman and the shabby imitation thereof in individual women’s lives, lived in society as we know it” (118). Fuller was not stating that women’s dissatisfaction resulted from a clash with men, but rather from a clash with the imposed roles of the patriarchal social order, enacted by both men and women. In “The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain” the only way for the main character to escape those roles is for her to withdraw from society. Critic Julie Ellison states that Fuller’s *Woman of the Nineteenth Century* “suggests that feminist ambition

desires refuge as much as glory" (262). In a philosophy begun in the Magnolia sketch and realized in *Woman of the Nineteenth Century,* Fuller's feminism developed. She calls for women to "retire within themselves, and explore the groundwork of life until they find their own particular secret" (Fuller qtd in Ellison 270). Fuller discovered the secret to her feminine strength, a refuge in the natural world and finds a way to symbolize it in the Vestal Magnolia. This innovative use of the language of flowers evolved from Fuller's more traditional first experiments with the language of flowers.

Fuller's Use of the Language of Flowers in her Poetry

Fuller uses the language of flowers to connect with friends and to express her feelings toward them. In her 1844 poem, "To Sarah," which Fuller wrote for her friend Sarah Freeman Clarke, she examines female friendship by using the language of flowers.[17] Sarah Clarke was the sister of James Freeman Clarke, a cousin with whom Fuller corresponded often. Sarah Clarke taught with Fuller in Boston and was her traveling companion on the trip that was the basis for *Summer on the Lakes*.[18] In "To Sarah," Fuller uses the language of flowers meanings of several plants to compliment and praise her friend. She does not play with the meanings or use them in ways that convey a unique message as she does in her sketches for *The Dial*. Here, the language of flowers is Fuller's method for honoring female friendship and encouraging her friend to preserve her chastity.

Fuller begins "To Sarah" with the lines, "Our friend has likened thee to a sweet fern. / Which with no flower salutes the ardent day, / Yet, as the wanderer pursues his way / While dews fall, & hues of sunset burn, / Sheds forth a fragrance from the deep green brake / Sweeter

[17] Both poems are from the Houghton collection and are published in *The Essential Margaret Fuller* edited by Jeffrey Steele.
[18] For more on Fuller's friendship with James and Sarah Clarke see *Margaret Fuller: Wandering Pilgrim* by Meg McGavren Murray page 126.

than the rich scents that gardens make" (lines 1-6, Fuller 230). Likely the friend was Sarah's brother James Freeman. Clarke and Fuller often engaged in intellectual quarrels, and Sarah, the mediator, helped settle these quarrels, which is evident in their letters (Fuller "My Heart"). Dickinson characterizes Sarah Clarke as a soft-spoken peacemaker. The poem complements this description. While a fern produces no showy flower, according to the poem's speaker, the sweet woodsy fragrance it emits outshines any flower. The praise Fuller imparts to her friend comes in the form of the language of flowers. According to a contemporary of Hale and Wirt, American language of flowers author Catherine Waterman, the fern means "sincerity" (83). Waterman reinforces this meaning in her dictionary by including a poem by Louisa Anne Twamley written in 1836. The untitled poem ends with the lines, "Those *Fern* leaves dear and wild / Bring back to my delighted breast-- / I am once more a child" (83). The sincerity conveyed in the fern is a reminder of youthful innocence. While Sarah might not grab attention with showy looks the way someone likened to a rose might, her beauty comes forward in her down-to-earth truthfulness shown in the fern's earthy fragrance and earnestness. This openness was a quality highly valued by Fuller. Clarke writes that Fuller's eyes "pierced through your disguises. Your outworks fell before her first assault, and you were at her mercy. And then began the delight of true intercourse" (qtd Dickinson 96). If Fuller insisted on this honesty from her friends, Sarah's sincerity surely made her precious. By using the language of flowers to praise her friend, Fuller uses this restrained language to emphasize the subtleness of her friend's personality. It was in her quiet sincerity that Sarah Clarke was a true friend to Fuller.

Fuller reveres female friendship, connection to nature, and seclusion from male-dominated society in her description of Sarah as a fern in her poem. The speaker states, "Like thee, the fern loves well the hallowed shade / of trees that quietly aspire on high" (lines 7-8).

These lines speak to the way that Sarah, like the fern, loves the wilderness to the point of seeming like a part of it, especially peaceful forests. The forest holds a sacred significance for Sarah. Fuller writes, "Amid such groves was consecration made / Of vestals tranquil as the vestal sky" (lines 9-10). The sacred space of the fern is connected with the mythological Vestal Virgins, whom Fuller also mentions in her 1841 sketch "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain." The Vestal Virgins, like the fern, represent true and lasting female friendship and female empowerment away from the society of men.[19] In the poem, much emphasis is given to the fern's botanical preference for shady places in the forest. This preference for calmness could reflect the life of seclusion from men practiced by the Vestal Virgins and later advocated by Fuller for women's intellectual growth. The fern's seclusion also connects Sarah to a preference for tranquil spaces and for remaining under the shadow of the lofty trees which "aspire on high." In her poem, Fuller states that, like the fern, Sarah hides beneath the more vocal in her community. The theme of sincerity is carried on in the next lines which state, "Like thee, the fern doth better love to hide / Beneath the leaf the treasure of its seed / Than to display it, with an idle pride" (lines 11-13). Since Sarah is linked with the fern it can be assumed that she is modest in her interactions with men and like the fern conceals the "treasure of its seed" or her body's capacity for reproduction until marriage. Sarah does not flaunt herself as one with "idle pride" might do.

The poem's botanical focus shifts in line eighteen with a statement in which Fuller gives her own analysis of which flower is the most fitting to Sarah's personality. She states, "But I will liken thee to the sweet bay." Sarah Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* gives bay leaves the meaning "I change but in dying" (30). In comparing Sarah to a bay, Fuller compliments her friend's

[19] Fuller's use of the allegory of the Vestal Virgins could be considered an archetypal pattern in her fiction. A study of archetypes in women's literature can be found in Annis Pratt's *Archetypical Patterns in Women's Fiction.* Pratt's classifications include chapters on singleness and solitude as well as love and friendship between Women; Fuller's use of the vestal virgin mythology could be considered in light of both chapters. This could be the work of a future study.

consistency and resolve, to accompany the earlier praise of her sincerity through the fern. According to Hale the bay means, “I change but in dying” (30). Surely, Fuller selected this floral emblem to represent her friend Sarah’s steady constitution and to praise her granting her reward for her noble nature. The unadorned bay is a constant and sincere form of loveliness. Fuller expresses a sentiment about her friend very similar to the sentiment Hale chose to include on her page for the bay leaf. Hale includes a poem by G.W. Doane who writes that the bay is superior to, “many a cherished flower / Whose beauty fades, whose fragrance flits / Within the flitting hour” (qtd Hale 30). Sarah is true and constant unlike more enticing flowers, whose bright flowers fade quickly. Both Fuller and the language of flowers descriptions of the bay praise the evergreen leaves, which persist while flowers fade.

Fuller’s education in Greek mythology, a source for the language of flowers, is also displayed in “To Sarah”. In a Greek myth, Daphne is transformed into a laurel, which is another name for a bay tree, in order to preserve her honor when Apollo comes to rape her. The language of flowers meaning for the bay tree, as opposed to its leaves, comes from this myth in Greek history. Hale’s meaning “I change but in dying” also cites this myth (30). Her description of the laurel notes the Greek fable from which the plant derives meaning. Fuller uses the meaning of the flower along with its language of flowers history to praise her friend’s consistency and virginity symbolized by the bay tree.

“To Sarah” describes Fuller’s friend as a comfort and panacea to the pains of the world. Fuller hopes to express her gratitude for the consolation her friend provides her. The speaker in Fuller’s poem endures rough conditions next to the sea and turns away from the dunes and sand to the forest, which “seemed to welcome me with timid smile / That said, ‘We’d like to soothe you for a while, / You seem to have been treated by the sea / In the same way that long ago were

we" (lines 38-43). Here nature, especially flowers and plants of the forest, have a soothing effect on the speaker. Lulled by the comforts of the bay leaves, the speaker passes "an hour of pure tranquility" (line 54). However, the approach of night awakens her. The speaker states, "Rising from my kind bed of thick-strewn leaves, / A fragrance that astonished sense receives / Ambrosial, searching, yet untiring mild / Of that soft scene the soul was it, or child? / T'was the sweet bay, I had unwitting spread / A pillow for my senseless throbbing head" (lines 63-68). Fuller's reference to her throbbing head was likely an autobiographical reference to her migraines (Dickinson 67). This connection between the bay and relief from pain is fitting since bay leaves were used as an herbal treatment for migraine headaches (Mills 50). As a cure for her aching head, Fuller's speaker describes the bay's fragrance as "ambrosial," which is a reference to the food of the gods, a life force in mythology.

Fuller's friendship with Sarah Clarke was an enduring and invigorating aspect of her life. She expresses this in the poem when she states, "All that this scene did in that moment tell/ I since have read, O wise mild friend, in thee…Grudge not the green leaves ravished from thy stem/ Their music should I live, muse-like to tell/ Thou wilt, in fresher green forgetting them, / Send others to console me for farewell" (lines 71-72). Fuller's use of the word "ravished" is significant in its meaning "to seize and carry off by force" which recalls the myth of Daphne. The fact that many women were forced into marriage at a young age was an aspect of society that Fuller wrote about. However, Fuller writes "grudge not" which indicates that she wants Sarah to give of her leaves to share her beautiful fragrance, that Fuller calls "their music," with the world. While it would be a stretch to state that Fuller's meaning of "ravished" in "To Sarah" was sexual, she did adopt viewpoints that supported a more liberal attitude toward sex in her later life in Europe. During her early years, Fuller's "mixture of sexual honesty and prudery"

baffled her boyfriend James Nathan, to whom she wrote love letters that were later published in 1903 by Julia Ward Howe (Fuller, *Love Letters* 8). Fuller seems to have had a very complex attitude toward sex: discouraging it for its enslavement of women in marriage and because of her puritanical upbringing, but also wishing for greater honesty about sex to free both men and women from limiting social confines. Perhaps Fuller was encouraging her friend to experience life and to know that if Clarke "loses her leaves" Fuller will always be her friend. Fuller cherishes her enduring female friendship with Sarah Clarke who always offers Fuller sympathy just as the bay plant offers leaves to soothe her. While she had lost many friends to marriage, Fuller seems to say that she believes her friendship with Sarah is stronger.

In addition to using the language of flowers to describe female friendship, Fuller uses flower imagery to express embracing life and desire. In another short untitled poem, Fuller equates the temporality of life and the budding of desire with the image of a blooming flower. The poem begins, "Let me gather from the Earth, one full grown fragrant flower, / Let it bloom within my bosom through its one blooming hour. / Let it die within my bosom and to its parting breath / Mine shall answer, having lived, I shrink not now from death" (227). Fuller through her speaker expresses her wish to partake in the whole of life and to feel bliss in relishing a moment. Fuller seems to imply that she is missing something in life with the line, "'Tis the cup seen, not tasted, that makes the infant moan" (227). Given the association with romantic love and reproduction that is implied in the image of a blooming flower, Fuller might be mourning her lack of physical intimacy or experiencing romance in life. Hence, flowers with their chaste and domestic implications become a safe space for Fuller to express her longing in a socially acceptable way. By discussing the blooming of flowers, she can discreetly allude to sexuality without being sexual at all. Fuller uses the language of flowers beyond the normal pale of the

domestic convention and gives them a meaning of sensuality. Flowers become the symbolic way to communicate Fuller's speaker's intimate desires. For Fuller, flower language is both a way to communicate female friendship and a way to express forbidden feelings and desires.

Feminism and the Language of Flowers in "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain"

In her sketch "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," Fuller's use of the language of flowers evolves further from the tradition's domestic origins. Instead of mimicking conventional sentimental motifs of the flower as a symbol of a generous but passive female, she alights upon new meanings that inspire women's independence and development of self. The traditional language of flowers was frequently used to attribute delicate and dependent qualities to women. Seaton writes that American nineteenth-century authors use the language of flowers to represent women "reflecting … fragility of mind and body" (17). Fuller's complex use of the language of flowers in her *Dial* sketch, "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," exemplifies her status as an author existing between the domestic and transcendental styles of writing. While she was trained in the masculine intellectual and philosophical tradition, she did not deny her femininity.[20] Critic Julie Ellison states that while Fuller's feminism was more pronounced than in most women of her time, Fuller also expressed these ideas with moderation. Ellison writes, "The theme of protest never enters into Fuller's writing without the insistence on self-restraint, the acceptance of existing social judgments. Fuller's sympathy extends to rebels, but she regards them…as being incapable of founding a new era" (265). In order to change a system, Fuller believes one must work within it. By using the traditionally feminine language of flowers, Fuller expresses feminist viewpoints on a domestic institution. In Fuller's writing the language of flowers appeals to traditional women readers but also conveys the need for their independence and education.

[20] Fuller also uses the language of flowers in her other *Dial* essay, "Yuca Filamentosa," and in several of her love letters to James Nathan.

Fuller wrote two flower sketches, “The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain” and “Yuca Filamentosa,” in 1840 for *The Dial* during the period she edited the journal. The genre of these pieces of writing reveals much about Fuller’s search for the creation of a feminine space in the world of writing. Even the form, a sketch, implies something freeform and different from established genres. Her editorship of *The Dial* and the need to fill its pages allowed her great freedom in publishing her works. *The Dial* was announced as a journal on May 4, 1840, in a prospectus written by George Ripley,

> The purpose of this work is to furnish a medium for the freest expression of thought on the questions which interest earnest minds in every community […] Its contents will embrace a wide and varied range of subjects, and combining the characteristics of a Magazine and Review […] It may be proper to add, that in literature, it will strive to exercise a just and catholic criticism, and to recognize every sincere production of genius…

This liberal attitude toward publishable text allowed for sketches, or unfinished and unpolished work, to be circulated in an intellectual community. Fuller remained attached to her flower pieces, which in their draft-like nature could certainly represent early stages of feminist criticism in fictional form. In 1844, she wrote to William Henry Channing:

> You often tell me what to do when you are gone. If you survive me, will you not collect my little flower pieces, even the insignificant ones, I feel as if from mother I had received a connection with the flowers. She has the love. I the interpretation. My writings about flowers are no fancies but whispers from beyond. I am deeply taught by the constant presence of any growing thing. This apple tree before my window I shall mourn to leave. Seeing fruit trees in a garden is entirely another

> thing from having this one before my eyes constantly so that I can't help seeing all that happens to it…" (Fuller, *My Heart* 131).

Fuller's flower sketches were a way of connecting with her mother's spirit and understanding the struggles and desires of women.

To understand Fuller's use of flowers as symbols for a new type of woman, we must first examine her sketch and the language of flowers meanings of the flowers that appear in it. In the Magnolia sketch, a traveling male narrator has a conversation with an enchanting, solitary, and feminine Magnolia.[21] The plot of the sketch is as follows. A male stranger to the South is riding along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana. He is thinking about nobleness and the fulfillment of nobleness. Then, he is distracted by a fragrance, "beyond anything he had ever known" (44). He decides to abandon his original purpose and find the flower with the sweet scent. He finds the magnolia alone and then muses on how flowers are God's gift and how when people are pure, they understand flowers better. He decides that this magnolia's fragrance is different from any known magnolia, and he leaves his horse to investigate it. The magnolia speaks to him, inviting him to listen to her tale and saying that they have met before in the past. The magnolia reveals "I dwelt once in the orange tree" (47). It was in this previous form that he encountered the tree. Then she asks him how he is content if his life "bears no golden fruit" (47). He answers that he searched within himself. The Magnolia states that in her previous life as the orange she was happy, at first, to produce fruit, but then as the years of giving wore on her, she found no time for herself. Many men saw her bounteous reproduction as a blessing and not as the burden it was. Then, wishing for a break, a cold wind came upon her. To the men, as they

[21] Fuller capitalizes the word Magnolia, as it is the name of her main character, in her sketch. I have retained Fuller's capitalization, and when referring to the character of Magnolia from the sketch, I have, likewise, capitalized the name. When I refer to a magnolia tree as a plant, in its scientific and cultural context, I have not capitalized. The same holds true for Orange tree/orange tree, which I also refer to both as a character and a plant.

"cast her out", she appeared to be dead; however, she was conscious. She then appeared before "the queen and guardian of the flowers" who told her that she must "become a vestal priestess and bide [her] time in the magnolia" (49). Since she is transformed into a magnolia which carries a unique smell that lingered from her past incarnation as an orange tree, the male narrator identifies her as the orange tree. In this detail, Fuller evokes the importance of fragrance in the language of flowers as a characteristic that often contributed to the meaning of a flower. The possession of a sweet scent was instrumental in giving a flower a moral meaning in the language of flowers. Seaton writes, "A flower's scent…has long been a standard emblem of the human soul" (118). Thus, Fuller indicates that the magnolia is a positive symbol in the eyes of her audience, and the sweet scent of the orange blossom remains with this flower as a way to convey virtue.

The Magnolia tells the stranger that she will not tell her tale again, and she states that they will meet again "in prayer, in destiny, in harmony, and in elemental power" (49). Fuller's tale aims to inform men that women also desire to attain a greater spiritual and intellectual knowledge, and in order to do that, they must remain in solitude and removed from domestic life. The magnolia represents a woman leaving the domestic setting, symbolized by her former life as an orange tree, and heading toward an unknown form.

Fuller's choice to use flowers as the embodiment of the social options for women emphasizes the importance of flowers in nineteenth-century America and the values they were believed to represent. The sketch's narrator, musing on the effect the Magnolia has over him, states, "As we [humans] grow beautiful and pure, we understand them [flowers] better" (45). Flowers were seen as representations of moral truths and aspirations. Fuller refers directly to the language of flowers as an expression of human emotions in the narrator's statement that he is

comforted by "the loveliest dialect of the divine language. 'Flowers,' it has been truly said, 'are the only positive present made us by nature.' Man has not been ungrateful, but consecrated the gift to adorn the darkest and brightest hours" (45). The custom of giving or decorating with flowers has been especially important at weddings and funerals from the nineteenth century to today. Flowers are further connected to women in that "the primary associations of flowers, developed in the sentimental flower book based on traditional flower personifications, are love and death, both of which are intimately involved with the nineteenth-century woman" (Seaton 17). A woman's fate was marriage, which brought love and children, and all too often brought death. For Fuller, the cult of mourning associated with flowers was particularly resonant because of the loss of several of her younger siblings, as well as her father's death in 1835.

Fuller returns to this connection people have to flowers at the close of the sketch. For nineteenth-century readers, symbolic flowers and the myths in which they are immortalized often evoke a moral lesson. Employing the language of flowers, the Magnolia tree reminds the narrator that he has also met "the religious lily, the lonely dahlia, fearless decking the cold autumn […] the narcissus, wrapped in self-contemplation" (49). Each of these flowers has been used to convey an important life lesson. The lily, which signifies "purity and sweetness" according to Wirt, was often associated with the Virgin Mary and teaches trust in God and religious pureness (Wirt 320, Hale 114). All flower dictionary authors give the narcissus the meaning "egoism" (Wirt 154, Hale 132). The flower's name and meaning are derived from the myth in which Narcissus falls in love with his reflection and is changed into the flower that grows next to ponds; it teaches the lesson of avoiding vanity, self-centeredness, and self-love. According to Wirt, the dahlia means "forever thine" (84). Fuller's Magnolia follows in the tradition of these other significant flowers that have taught mankind great lessons. Fuller mentions this brief

chronicle of the highlights of mythological and biblical flower references to validate her floral analogies and thereby root her new addition to this historical form in the prestige of the long-standing tradition of lessons learned from flowers.[22] However, Fuller goes beyond traditional associations of flowers with love and death to make flowers her symbol of independent womanhood.

Fuller's "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" begins with the statement "the stars tell their secrets to the flowers" (44). The narrator implies that studying the mysteries of the cosmos is a wasted endeavor because every great secret is revealed in the splendor of nature on the earth. This focus on immediate nature as a path to spiritual transcendence is a typical transcendental motif of finding enlightenment from the immediate world around oneself. Flowers are the great bearers of celestial knowledge. Next, Fuller writes in the sketch "man is a plant of slow growth" (44). Given horticultural knowledge, this is a striking statement since the sketch creates a direct contrast between the male narrator and the southern magnolia, a remarkably fast growing tree (44). Since the Magnolia becomes Fuller's embodiment of a new type of woman, she comments on the slowness of change in favor of women's rights in a male dominated society.[23] While looking for answers from above, this male narrator overlooks the cosmic message and natural gift at his feet. As Fuller's narrator is slow to see the gifts of the natural world around him, her male contemporaries fail to see the power and ability of the female; they are slow to understand woman at her full potential. Yet she, like a flower, is right before them at their feet. Fuller does not choose any flower; she specifically and intentionally writes about the magnolia as her main character, a transitional woman on her way to greater enlightenment.

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[22] See Beverly Seaton *The Language of Flowers: A History* for a fascinating history of Biblical and mythological flower references.

While it is tempting to believe that the southern location of Fuller's sketch has regionalist implications, Fuller is not making a statement about the south in her choice to represent the Southern magnolia, the symbol of feminist freedom. Fuller never visited the South, but she heard about the variety of tree from a family friend who had visited the region near New Orleans and was so impressed by its beauty and stature he regaled Fuller's family with a description (Steele "Lunar" 83). A symbol of grace, beauty, and strength, the magnolia has come to be regarded as largely a southern flower variety. (However, it does bloom smaller in the North). Fuller gives clues to her reasoning in the choice of a Southern tree, when the narrator explains that "sickness and sorrow" indicate his separation from his "kind". The cause for his voyage to the South could be based on the common trend to visit the South to recuperate from illnesses like tuberculosis, as Emerson did. Fuller's emphasis on the magnolia's isolation in a natural, wild space does hold significance. Fuller makes the point to describe the magnolia as removed from the influence of existing culture.

The magnolia represents a woman alone in nature. Critic Stacy Alaimo writes about other American women authors such as Catherine Sedgwick's use of a natural setting as an "undomesticated" space in their work. According to Alaimo, for these authors, similar to Fuller, "Nature, then, is undomesticated both in the sense that it figures as a space apart from the domestic and in the sense that it is untamed and thus serves as a model for female insurgency" (16). Fuller uses the setting of the wilderness as an untouched space in which the magnolia, her symbol of womanhood, can live undisturbed by social expectations.

In the language of flowers, according to *Flora's Interpreter* author Sarah Hale, the magnolia means, "love of nature" (123). Quoting a passage from William Cullen Bryant, Hale derives the sentiment of the magnolia's meaning from one line of Bryant's poetry that reads, "thy

maiden love of flowers" (qtd Hale 123). Hale marks the connection between women and flowers and stresses the expectation for women to love lovers. Hale derives "love of nature" from the lines "When our wide woods and mighty lawns / Bloom to the April skies, / The earth hath no more glorious sight / To show to human eyes" (123). Bryant's poem clearly conveys a reverence for nature; in addition, later in the excerpt, Bryant echoes another of Fuller's themes—the loneliness and isolation felt in the magnolia's natural retreat but the freeing nature of its removal from society. Bryant reflects this theme in the lines "The night-sparrow trills his song, / All night, with none to hear" (qtd. in Hale 123). A part of nature itself, the magnolia becomes a symbol for the love and connection women have with the natural world. In the Bryant poem, the speaker finds the space for inner reflection alone in nature. This solitude leads to reflection and the type of intellectual growth Fuller advocates for women.

In another cotemporary language of flowers dictionary, magnolias also represent determination. Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's language of flowers dictionary gives magnolias the meaning "perseverance" (149). [24,25] This meaning is reflected in Fuller's theme of her flower having to endure the hardships of her social role as a generous producer of fruit during her past life as an orange tree. While Wirt gives no textual reference to support her association of the magnolia with perseverance, the physical characteristics of the tree and its ability to withstand severe weather may have contributed to this meaning. Next to her meaning, Wirt quotes a 1717 poem by the Earl of Roscommon (Wentworth Dillon Roscommon) stating, "urge your success,

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[24] The Magnolia family is an American tree, growing large, fragrant, and evergreen in the south, but stunted in the north. It is known for its large white flowers with prominent reproductive features. According to William Cook, "The species GLAUCA is a small tree at the North, but quite a large one at the South. Leaves scattered, oblong-oval, thick, yellowish-green above, pale and glaucous beneath, silky-white beneath when young. Flowers large, creamy white, very fragrant, two to three inches broad; stamens numerous. Cone about an inch long. Most common along the sea-coast, but much cultivated in all parts of the country." (Cook. *The Physiomedical Dispensatory* 1869).

[25] Elizabeth Wirt was the second wife of popular antebellum hero William Wirt, an author and attorney general of the United States (Seaton 85).

deserve a lasting name, / She'll crown a grateful and a constant flame" (149). This quote reinforces the positive attributes of a person who perseveres. Wirt's meaning shows that the magnolia as a symbol for women perseveres over many obstacles. This meaning also signifies that the magnolia perseveres in her independence and rejection of typical social expectations and values. The perseverance of the Magnolia character is further emphasized by Fuller's note that the tree proudly bears no fruit, grows beautiful, and exists for the sake of her own enrichment.[26] One point Fuller advocated for the independence of women was for them to refrain from bearing children until they had developed their intellectual freedom. In order to avoid marriage and childbirth, women must foster independence and persevere in a society that does not accept such self-sufficient women. In addition to its lack of fruit, Fuller's choice of the magnolia as a flowering tree that represents womanhood is also notable because this blossom is a native, American flower. The magnolia is a tree associated with great strength and fortitude, making it appropriate for Fuller to select the species as the embodiment of her hopes for the future of womanhood. As Fuller was attempting to create distinct American literature, she was also creating a distinct vision of American womanhood well ahead of her time.

Fuller's choice of the southern species of the flowering magnolia tree shows she is as well versed in botany as in language of flowers. The southern American magnolia variety, unlike the northern one with which Fuller would have been more familiar, is renowned for its height and strength as well as showy blossoms. This creates an interesting visual metaphor for Fuller's new vision of a woman. This new woman is not modest or shy, nor weak or frail. This particular

[26] In fact, the Magnolia tree does bear small pods of fruit, which surround its seed, although not edible. According to Cook' s "The Magnolia family…is characterized by having the calyx three-sepaled, corolla six to nine-petaled, the receptacle elongated, and the pistils with their ovaries forming a cone-like fruit. When ripe, each carpel opens on the back; and from this fall one or two large, red, berry-like seeds, which hang suspended from one to several inches on extensile threads." The bark and root of the tree have been used in medicine to calm the nerves and soothe an upset stomach.

flower is a symbol of female uplift and transformation. The Magnolia, not a typical dainty and frail flower but instead a "stately tower of verdure, each cup, an imperial vestal" transfixes the narrator (Fuller 45). Magnolia trees are tall, strong, and durable, and trees can grow as large as ninety feet tall and twelve feet in diameter. Since Fuller's flower represents a woman, this is the symbol of a strong female.

The narrator's description of the Magnolia tree's physical form is very powerful and creates an image of Fuller's mystical feminine figure, both in her stately coat of green and her ties to ancient mythical figures. In describing the tree, Fuller invokes the sacred virgins of Rome who were consecrated to the goddess Vesta and whose job it was to tend the sacred fire on her altar. The Vestal Virgins are women with great education, power, and privileges; in fact, Vestal Virgins were the only female priests in Rome. These priestesses were sworn to celibacy; after thirty years, once they left the office, they could "return to the world and even enter into the marriage state. Few, however, availed themselves of these privileges; those who did were said to have lived in sorrow and remorse […] the priestesses for the most part died as they had lived in the service of the goddess" (Smith 78). Many Vestals found it difficult to leave their power and privilege to serve a man in marriage.

During the time Fuller wrote "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," she struggled to accept her friends' choice to marry. Steele notes that preceding Fuller's writing of "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," Fuller was believed to be distraught over the 1840 marriage of two of her closest friends, Anna Barker and Samuel Gray Ward, which, coupled with lingering grief due to her father's recent death, brought about an "emotional crisis and an 'era of illumination in [Fuller's] mental life'" (xi). According to Dickenson, the marriage of Barker and Ward "is usually blamed for Fuller's depression and ill-health throughout 1840" (106). Steele claims that

the marriage and death led Fuller to shift her writing's focus from emulating distinguished male writers reminiscent of her father's image to a newfound inner "female creativity." Fuller felt the need to break free from the psychological dependence of women on patriarchal values (Steel, "Introduction" xv). After hearing of their engagement, Fuller wrote several impassioned letters to both Ward and Barker. Most express her feelings of abandonment and unreturned love; however, it is unclear which member of the couple she loved and feared losing most, though the "Magnolia" sketch implies it was Barker. The link to Barker is emphasized by placing the site of the mythical encounter in which a Magnolia explains her transformation from a domesticated orange tree at Lake Pontchartrain near Barker's native New Orleans (Steele "Lunar" 66). The Magnolia may represent the way in which Fuller saw herself during this difficult period in her life. The Orange tree, the Magnolia's past life, was miserable in her servitude to men and could represent Barker. These two trees come to embody the two available options which Fuller saw open to women at the time—a confining marriage or a life of solitude.

Fuller's repeated description of the magnolia as a lone Vestal Virgin suggests Fuller's feelings about the loss of good friends to marriage. As intellectual colleagues and companions, Fuller likely saw herself and Barker as bonded Vestal priestesses, able to achieve what few women in society could; however, when Barker separated herself from Fuller, essentially breaking up the circle of similarly minded intellectuals for which Fuller longed, she saw Barker as a Vestal priestess giving up her office for service to a man. Fuller became the lonely and isolated remaining Vestal, the Magnolia. As Fuller points out in her sketch, this magnolia tree Vestal has been separated from her sisters, emphasizing the lack of a community and social acceptance for this strong, feminine character in Fuller's society.

Fuller's use of Roman mythology adds a new dimension to her portrait of the Magnolia. By referring to the Vestal Virgins, Fuller finds figures within the male-centered classical ideology to reflect her strength as a woman. The Vestal Virgins become potential role models for Fuller's conception of independent nineteenth-century women, inspiring some women to follow a different path, not marriage and children but scholarship and self-reflective spirituality. She sets out this path in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller does not simply retell the male tradition of mythology; she adds the feminine influence of the language of flowers to make her own mythic tradition.

In addition to women's need for solitude and ancient feminine power, Fuller's sketch draws attention to different modes of language and communication. These alternate forms of language at play in the sketch are first exemplified by the Magnolia tree's power over the narrator through a non-verbal (non-masculine) command. The narrator calls the tree the "Poet of the lake which could utter such a voice" (Fuller 44). When the stranger first detects the flower, she does not speak in a conventional form but communicates by her fragrance, for which the man is lost for words: "[t]here is no word for it; exquisite and delicious have lost all meaning now" (Fuller 44). Before he even sees the magnolia he is drawn toward her by her smell. Fragrance, a sensual understanding, was a large part of the language of flowers, and scents were thought to communicate emotions on a level beyond words. Fuller implies that where male language fails the body takes over.

The idea that women's writing (symbolized by the flower's poetic smell) could be tied to sensual experience (and to her sexual body, especially its distinctive odor) is conveyed in Hèléne Cixous's 1971 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." Cixous wrote her feminist response to Jacques Lacan's idea that humans gain identification with their acquisition of language. Lacan believed

that the drive to symbolize objects through language came from the Oedipus complex of Sigmund Freud and the linguistics theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. Lacan used Freud's castration complex to explain why men are moved to language as a stage of becoming an adult. A young man feels desire for his mother, which is thwarted by a fear that his father will castrate him as punishment. His mother has no phallus, so he assumes that his father must have castrated her. The young boy learns to give up his mother and identify with his father especially through his law and language. The male fear of castration forces him to use language to signify and create a sense of self apart from his mother. Cixous argues that if Lacan's theory were true, then women, with their lack of phalluses, would be unaccounted for in speech. Cixous instead sees women's speech and writing as a distinct sexual act that she compares with the lips of the vagina, which, like the petals of a flower, are in constant contact. Cixous states, "Write! And your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed" (358). Here Cixous crafts women's language after the model of their bodies. Fuller believes women's bodies have remained unacknowledged in a male dominated society. In Fuller's sketch, masculine language has failed and has been replaced by fragrance before the male narrator has even seen the tree, the true poet in this scene, who communicates with feminine sensual experience instead of masculine language. However, Fuller succeeds in evoking a feminine language, which predates Cixous. She uses the language of flowers to articulate the woman's body.

In Fuller's sketch an overworked domestic orange tree is transformed into a wild magnolia. In this transformation, the orange tree loses value to men and can finally find the peace and solitude to practice her own reflections. Yet the Magnolia is also separated from her

sisters in the beginning of the sketch and faces herself in lonely solitude. While Emerson would have tremendously valued the solitude and self-reflection the Magnolia lives in, Fuller seems to have conflicted feelings. While the absence of a husband and children constantly demanding her attention frees both Fuller and Magnolia to write, think, and explore themselves, Fuller also seems to point out that this is an emotionally difficult choice. A woman, as opposed to a man, must give up a family in order to pursue intellectual endeavors. Steele points out that Fuller's philosophy of transcendentalism had a decidedly more communal bent, finding value in friendships and community rather than solitude ("Lunar" 75). In her former life, the Orange tree gave continually but never had the time or space to come to understand herself. Fuller in the voice of the Orange tree writes "How happy I was in the 'spirit's dower when first it was wed... But after a while I grew weary of that fullness of speech…I was never silent. I was never alone" (47). The Orange speaks through her production of fruit and flowers in endless cycles. Finally after years of production and in a half-dead state, the Orange overhears the men for whom she has so generously provided plan to cut her down so another fruitful tree can replace her. As Cixous observes about women's sexuality, "she might find pleasure in that role […] but such pleasure is above all masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man" (364). Since the Orange tree ceases to provide any economic gain or aesthetic appeal, she is worthless in the eyes of these men. No attempt at healing the tree is made by the men, and she is cast away.

In Fuller's text, the female figure (and body) becomes the Magnolia. When reading the sketch we know that Fuller is speaking of women when she talks about the trees, yet Fuller has chosen to represent female bodies symbolically in flowers and trees instead of addressing them directly. The bodies of women, especially white, upper-class women in nineteenth-century

America, were restrained by clothing and were often not discussed for the sake of modesty. According to Cixous, women's bodies needed to be addressed in order to gain autonomy and freedom, but in the nineteenth century those bodies needed to be addressed without compromising virtue and alienating readers of the time. The language of flowers provides Fuller a medium for talking about women's bodies, sexuality, and cerebral selves without having to actually name them. Cixous later calls for women to write their bodies. Fuller does write women's bodies but in a subtle way- through flowers. The flower queen transforms the Magnolia from an orange tree. The Orange tree's transformation represents women changing from belonging to and for the sake of others to existing for themselves. In addition, the Magnolia in the sketch has been pollinated and exhibits copious sensual flowers, which hints at sexual freedom. Yet the tree produces no fruit, so the act of pollination (a "birds and bees" metaphor for copulation) has not taken place in order to produce edible offspring for men. Fuller does write women's bodies but through the convention of flower language.

When the spirit of the orange tree meets the Flower Queen, a comparison between the orange tree's abandonment of her mostly dead trunk (a metaphor for the female mind escaping the confines of her sexualized body) is echoed in the way in which Cixous describes the situation of women lacking the castration fear. Cixous claims, "unlike man, who holds so dearly to his title … woman couldn't care less about the fear of decapitation (or castration), adventuring, without the masculine timidity into anonymity, which she can merge with, without annihilating herself: because she's a giver" (357). The Orange tree, like Cixous' woman, is certainly a giver. Upon being freed of her body, she feels relief, not fear, at the death of her ability to give fruit. Instead of dying, the mythical tree merges and like Daphne takes a new form, safe from men, in

the Magnolia tree.[27] This evolution leads women away from their bodies to disassociate themselves with the production of children. Fuller wants women to employ their sensuality but not their sexuality. Through her flower sketches she hopes women will embrace their bodies but will also become more than only their bodies.

The topic of women's bodies was a difficult one for Fuller. Women's bodies were often, in her view, what enslaved them to marriage and motherhood. The possible servitude of motherhood and drudgery of caretaking is further emphasized in the Magnolia's past as the Orange tree. The orange is a flower with deep connections to domestic life. Fuller's choice of the orange tree uses the language of flowers meaning of the orange blossom and the orange tree to convey that the magnolia's past life was one of domesticity. The language of flowers presents linked meanings for the orange blossom and the orange tree. The blossom reflects a woman's duty as a bride, to marry and conceive children and then to be a generous, caring, and selfless mother- the socially expected role. According to Wirt, the orange blossom represents "purity" (162). Many poets use the symbol of the orange blossom in their poems, especially to denote the purity that a woman should have until marriage.[28] The orange blossom was a traditional bridal flower, which may have influenced this meaning. According to historians Ernst and Johanna Lehner, the connection of the orange to marriage dates back to the Greek myth of the "golden apple," or the gift which Gaea, the goddess of the earth and fertility. Gaea gave this fruit to Hera

[27] Daphne referenced the Greek myth in which Apollo is struck by Eros's arrow and made to fall in love with Daphne. At the same time the maiden, Daphne, is struck by one of Eros's arrows tipped in lead that makes her abhor love. She remains devoted to the goddess Artemis and upholds her vow to remain "unmarried" (Pratt 1). Apollo chases down Daphne, desperate for her love, but she ran from him. Soon, she grew weary in her running, and fearful that Apollo would ultimately catch her, she called out to her father for help. He transformed his daughter into a laurel (bay) tree to protect her from Apollo. (see Bulfinch "Daphne").

[28] One notable example of this use of the orange blossom is Lord Alfred Tennyson's "In Memoriam" which uses the image of the orange blossom in section 84 to represent the bliss of a wedding day. "For now the day was drawing on, / When thou should'st link thy life with one / Of mine own house, and boys of thine / Had babbled 'Uncle' on my knee; / But that remorseless iron hour / Made cypress of her orange flower, / Despair of Hope, and earth of thee" (1258). Tennyson wrote the poem for Arthur Hallam, a good friend and his sister's fiancé. In several language of flowers books authors give cypress the meanings of death and despair. In this section, the bride's orange blossoms turn to the funeral cypress representing despair, loss, and grief.

on the day of her wedding to Zeus. These orange blossoms represented an appeal to the gods that the bride not be barren (75). This tradition endured and an orange blossom was a commonly used flower in nineteenth-century weddings. As Fuller mentions, the Magnolia recalling her days as an orange states, "the bride looked to me for her garland" (47). Seaton notes that brides often wore orange blossoms on their wedding day (110). Fuller's use of the connection between the orange blossom and weddings could be a veiled reference to Anna Barker and many women like her who abandoned their intellectual pursuits and instead devoted their lives to their families after marriage.

Fuller also chooses the orange because in the language of flowers the meanings are synonymous with the virtues of the True Woman, whose cardinal traits were piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.[29] While we have previously mentioned the meaning of purity given to the bridal orange blossom (Wirt 162), Hale gives the orange blossom the meaning "woman's worth" implying that motherhood and domesticity in addition are a woman's value. Hale implies that a woman's value to her husband is as an "Angel of the House" or True Woman.[30] In her entry on the orange, she cites Goethe, a favorite author of Fuller, who states that a lover retires to the orange grove to repair among its blossoms. Hale then quotes George P. Morris's reflection on the sentiment of the orange blossom in the lines, "Ah woman… what gift can be compared to thee? / How slow would drag life's weary hours /… If destined to exist alone, / And ne're call woman's heart his own" (qtd. in Hale 139). Fuller's use of the orange blossom is emblematic of the True Woman, bound to serve man.

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[29] The True Woman was a pinnacle of nineteenth-century American womanhood. The term comes from the "Cult of True Womanhood" described in Barbara Welter's *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

[30] "The Angel of the House" refers to a poem by Coventry Patmore, first published in 1854 in which he describes his very domestic wife as the perfect woman.

The language of flowers takes into consideration the fact that the blossoming of the orange tree is followed by the production of fruit, just like many hope for children to result from a marriage. The orange tree, a prolific fruit bearer, represents "generosity", according to Catherine Waterman in her 1836 *Flora's Lexicon*. The generous nature of the orange tree is also expressed in Fuller's sketch (153). In Fuller's "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," the Orange tree gives continuously; she recounts her purity when in blossom and her generosity when in fruit. The Magnolia recounts, "On me the merchant counted, the bride looked to me for her garland, the nobleman for the chief ornament of his princely hall, and the poor man for his wealth" (47). While the tree helped many people, she lacked rest and a sense of oneness. She states, "I had no mine or thine, I belonged to all, I could never rest, I was never at one. … With every bud I implored an answer, but each bud only produced—an orange" (47). Through the Magnolia, Fuller comments that women seek understanding from their lives as mothers but only find exhausting, self-less drudgery. In her journal, Fuller reflects on the state of women as servants of men. She writes, "Woman is the flower, man the bee. She sighs out melodious fragrance, and invites the winged laborer. He drains her cup, and carries off the honey. She dies on the stalk; he returns to the hive, well fed…" (qtd Showalter 56). Perhaps Fuller is even recalling her own mother, who bore eight children, sacrificing her own body in the process. In an early narrative talking about her mother's depression after the death of a child, she states, "her whole life was in her children, for her marriage was the not uncommon one of a lovely young girl ignorant of her capacities for feeling, to a man of suitable age and position because he chose her" (Box 1 Houghton Collection). Fuller seems to tell the story of so many young brides excited to marry but soon consumed by the needs of their families.

Fuller‘s sketch emphasizes the need for women to have time in which they can pursue their interests.[31] This need is emphasized in the Magnolia’s solitude, a difficult but necessary trial to endure. Magnolias do grow in solitude and are often found by the banks of lakes in the wild. The flower can endure beetles and other insects, which could injure it but also aid in its pollination. Its seeds are carried great distances by animals. Since a magnolia can grow to ninety feet, they often do not cluster together since they would block each other’s light (Nelson 17). Fuller’s Magnolia is a deliberately solitary tree. In Fuller’s sketch, as in Emerson’s “Nature,” solitude is the pathway to spiritual awakening and necessary self-reliance. However, as Steele observes, “While Emerson had promoted personal independence and a sense of moral and intellectual superiority, Fuller began to advocate ideals of friendship and community” (Introduction xvii). This difference demonstrates Emerson and Fuller thinking in masculine and feminine patterns respectively.[32]

Fuller’s visions of solitude seem more like a trial to be endured than a pleasurable intellectual challenge. Fuller describes the Magnolia as the “Queen of the South, singing to herself in her lonely bower” (45). As a lonely, beautiful figure, the Magnolia calls to mind a fairy princess locked away in a castle, but this isolation is in some ways self-imposed and in some ways culturally enforced. As a nineteenth-century woman who received a “male” education, Fuller held scholarly literary ambitions but also had practical domestic responsibilities. It is likely that Fuller would have felt exiled and isolated. As Dickinson points out, “her deeper acquaintance with Emerson, Thoreau, [Bronson] Alcott, the three Channings, and other members of her Boston intellectual circle only ratified her sense of difference” (114).

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[31] A similar claim was made by Virginia Woolf in her “ A Room of One’s Own”

[32] See Mary Belenky et al.’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing* for a description of the differences in masculine and feminine thinking.

While Fuller connected with these male members of the transcendentalist group, she also never felt she had her full time to devote to her work. After her father's death, the responsibility for caring for her mother and siblings fell to Fuller, a chore she elaborates on in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Dickinson writes that "Fuller had a great many more domestic duties than the male Transcendentalists, without the stable home life in which to perform them" (115). This responsibility took away from her involvement in an intellectual community. After Fuller's death, Emerson published the following quotation that he attributed to her in his biography of Fuller. It highlights her deeply felt difference: "'I know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own'" (4). This quotation illustrates Fuller's feeling that she lacked much in the way of a female (or a male) intellectual community at the time.

Given the examination of the expression of female desires in "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," it is unusual that Fuller chose to narrate her sketch from the point of view of a traveling man. The voice of the male narrator foregrounds the dominance of male discourse in society and attempts to bring men into the understanding of a need for change in women's social roles. The choice of a male narrator, according to Steele, represents Fuller's masculine side. He states "Fuller constructs a dialogue between the masculinized consciousness she absorbed from her father and an emerging mother tongue" (Introduction xix). Fuller's masculine influences come from her father's extensive tutoring and Ralph Waldo Emerson's mentorship of her writing.[33] These two influences are embodied in the narrator, but are perhaps embellished to fulfill her wish for a captive male audience transfixed by what she has to say, as the narrator is

[33] For a more thorough examination of Fuller's relationship with Emerson and the influence of her father, see Jeffrey Steele's *Transfiguring America: Myth, Ideology, and Mourning in Margaret Fuller's Writing*.

with the Magnolia. Fuller may have felt her male audience wished to transform her speech into theirs.

But in addition to these well known men, Fuller also had often overlooked women who shaped her outlook on life. Fuller's feminine influences, which are personified as flowers in the sketch, come from her mother and her close friend, Anna Barker. Fuller's mother was a dedicated wife and mother and a lover of gardens.[34] Fuller's sketch is set in the vicinity of New Orleans, the home of her close friend Anna Barker. Fuller admired Barker greatly for her beauty and feminine demeanor. These womanly influences are represented in the sketch by the orange and magnolia trees and the Flower Queen. While Steele states that Fuller's Magnolia sketch creates a symbolic conversation between her masculine and feminine influences, Fuller's choice of a male narrator could also be a tactic for gaining a male audience for the very feminine discourse of this work. Since the publication was in *The Dial*, Fuller sought to address an audience pursuing the love of intellectual freedom and the future of social progress. This included men who, upon reading Fuller's sketch, might be transformed in their opinion of women's situation much like the narrator of the sketch. While female readers would have a natural relation to the feminine floral characters of the text, the male narrator provided male readers with a point of entry into the transformative experience Fuller describes.

In Fuller's sketch, the Magnolia tells the traveler that she was commanded by the flower queen to "[o]bey the gradations of nature, nor seek to retire at once into her utmost purity of silence" (49). While the Magnolia tree wishes to remain silent in her own thoughts, the queen insists she share them with the traveler. The narrator begins to tell the sketch, but once he encounters the Magnolia and she begins to tell her story, his voice disappears and her story is told only through her voice, which takes over narration of the sketch. The narrator returns with

[34] Fuller gives a more extensive tribute to her mother in her "Autobiographical Romance."

one fleeting final line. In allowing the Magnolia's voice to take over narration, Fuller functions, as Cixous argues, "'within' the discourse of man" but "dislocate[s] this 'within' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers […] to invent a language to get inside of" (356). Fuller must let her message and her body be heard, even if she must use masculine language to accomplish the task. Fuller's sensual and almost pagan images turn the traditional and moral associations of the language of flowers on its head. Fuller gets inside the masculine discourse and explodes it, thereby creating her own form of feminine discourse with which to convey her message.

Fuller, at home in neither a wholly feminine nor masculine self, searches for something outside of the known expectations for women and outside of the known male dominated symbolic order. As Steele points out, the Magnolia rejects "patriarchal terminology: 'nor shall I again subject myself to be questioned by an alien spirit to tell the tale of my being in words that divide it from itself'"(Introduction xx). Here the Magnolia tree seems frustrated by the narrator's lack of understanding of her transformation. In addition, Fuller could be frustrated with her own difficulty in translating her feeling of transformation into traditional words on the page, using masculine discourse. While Fuller's sketch is certainly unique among contemporary work by men or women of the time, it possesses traits of both male quests and mythology and female floral interests; these bind her writing to both traditions and locate it somewhere in between.

In describing her communication with the Flower Queen, the language that the Magnolia tree uses is transcendent of the forms of communication available to Fuller and her readers. It seems to mimic the type of communication Fuller attempts to create in her text. The Magnolia tree states, "of this being I cannot speak to thee in any language now possible betwixt us. For this is a being of another order from thee, an order whose presence thou mayest feel, nay, approach

step by step, but which cannot be known till thou art it, nor seen nor spoken of till thou hast passed through it" (Fuller 48). This passage emphasizes that the Magnolia possesses no current vocabulary or language with which to sufficiently convey the presence of the flower queen to the male narrator. The evolution of female language comes with the evolution of the female role in society. As long as women are socially repressed their language will be as well.

At the end of the sketch, Fuller's Magnolia and female language retreat into solitary self-reflection much in the way that Fuller in her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* suggests that women remain outside of marriage and develop themselves in preparation for further female empowerment. Fuller states, "men do not look at both sides, and women must leave off asking them and being influenced by them, but retire within themselves […] grant her, then, for a while, the armor and the javelin. Let her put from her the press of other minds and meditate in virginal loneliness" (313). In this call to isolation, Fuller states that until society can fully see women and imagine women's language as something different from but equally valuable to men's she must remain a solitary magnolia tree, unappreciated and idle in a society not quite ready to accept or understand her. As Cixous wrote about women speaking, "her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (351). This statement calls attention to the misunderstanding that often happens between women and men when women's desires were concerned. While the unusual being that the narrator encounters confounds him, he does attempt to listen and is so touched that he "must abide forever in the thought to which the clue was found in the margin of that lake of the South" (49). Given the fragmented and mysterious understanding of the encounter by the narrator, the Magnolia seems to have been unable to convey her full message to him. In the transformation of the orange tree is the transformation of Fuller's feminism beliefs. Fuller's foray into creative

female mythmaking provides her a space of imaginative exploration to test possibilities for female images, ideologies, and language through flowers.

Fuller constructs her symbolic female flower characters from autobiographical influences, classical mythology, and the language of flowers. A look at the contemporary cultural meanings of the magnolia and orange flowers reveals that Fuller's choice of flowers is rooted in the language of flowers. The orange tree is emblematic of purity and generosity (turned into servitude by Fuller) and could be seen as a symbol of the True Woman, and the magnolia represents strength, beauty, and independence. Fuller purposefully selects the orange and magnolia trees in order to symbolize the limited options for women in her society and to contrast the life of the women of the past with the difficult but necessary changes she believes that women must make in their social roles. Fuller's flower images become anthropomorphic possibilities for female empowerment, which create re-envisioned American myths and a mode of expression for the development of greater female agency in society.

Fuller's Creation of her own Feminine Language of Flowers in "Yuca Filamentosa"

Margaret Fuller wrote a second flower sketch entitled, "Yuca Filamentosa" for the *Dial*. This sketch followed her "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" and also used flower language and imagery to examine and challenge women's roles in society. The flower, now commonly spelled Yucca Filamentosa, is widely known as Adam's Needle or Soapweed Yucca and is a member of the agave family and does not appear in the language of flowers. According to Joan Barker's *A Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of North America*, "although it grows in such inhospitable areas [as the American Southwest], Soapweed Yucca is a large plant, with basal rosette of long, linear, sword-like, gray-green leaves with sharply-pointed tips and hairy edges" (160). The image of a virgin warrior goddess, which enlightens Fuller's flower sketches, is present in the look of the

plant. Again, Fuller chooses a robust plant to represent women. By distancing her symbols from the familiar terrain of her fellow transcendentalists, Fuller uses undomesticated nature as an alternative space for women to explore gender roles.

At its heart, Fuller's yucca sketch explores the social roles of men and women: how they are drawn to each other, how they can destroy each other, how they speak different languages, and how they occupy the same space but understand it differently. Fuller began her second flower sketch with the epigraph "The Spirit builds his house, in the least flowers, - / A beautiful mansion" (50). The yucca filamentosa, which appears in no language of flowers dictionary, becomes Fuller's instrument for creating her own language of flowers. Instead of following the tradition of the language of flowers, Fuller breaks away, preserving part of the tradition by still using flowers as a symbol for women, but she gives the flowers new meanings, her own, which help develop her philosophy of feminism and clarify her ideas of how women could best advance in their current society. Fuller mentions the name of a specific flower, imparts its meaning, and conveys a message in her sketch.

The sketch's narrator states, "For several years I have kept in my garden two plants of the Yuca Filamentosa, and bestowed upon them every care without being repaid by a single blossom. Last June, I observed with pleasure that one was preparing to flower. From that time I watched it eagerly, thought provoked at the slowness with which it unfolded its buds" (51). The yucca act similarly to the way Fuller calls for women to delay reproduction in order to establish themselves.

Early in "Yuca Filamentosa," Fuller continues the theme of retained virginity by asking her reader which flower would be an emblem of Diana, the Roman virgin goddess, whom she connects to the moon. Fuller then answers her question with the yucca. She writes, "In the world

of gems, the pearl and opal answered to the moonbeam, but where was the Diana-flower?" (51). Diana is a Roman goddess mentioned in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to Steele she was a "dangerous and vengeful virgin goddess" (441). The goddess Diana is a mythical emblem of chastity, a lesson Fuller wished to convey to her reader as a way to advance women.[35] Diana is one of a triumvirate of virgin goddesses who swore never to marry (Smith 82). Fuller references all three of these goddesses in her work: Vesta in the "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," Minerva in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and Diana in "Yuca Filamentosa". While the goddess Diana is known for her virginity, the Romans also saw her as the safe guarder of childbirth. The topic of childbirth is also addressed in the yucca sketch.

The differences between men's and women's understanding of the world is highlighted in the reactions of the two characters in "Yuca Filamentosa". In the sketch a female narrator calls for her male companion, Alcmeon, to see her blooming flowers. This name is a version of Alcmaeon, which is the name of a character in Greek mythology and also a Greek philosopher. According to Greek scholar W. Guthrie, Alcmaeon of Croton was a philosopher, astronomer, and medical theorist.[36] He was a pioneer of dissection. He first suggested that health was a state of equilibrium between opposing humors and that illnesses were caused by problems in environment and lifestyle. He contributed to the study of medicine by establishing the connection between the brain and the sense organs (Guthrie 98). Fuller's Alcmeon is unable to comprehend the presence of the spiritual flower because he, like his namesake, is preoccupied with science and sensory observation instead of spiritual matters. In Fuller's sketch the narrator's male companion Alcmeon struggles to grasp the significance and to understand the bloom of the yucca

[35] Interestingly, Dianic Wicca, a largely feminist form of the practice of witchcraft, is named for this goddess.
[36] Homer also mentions an Alcmaeon, who, in Greek legend, was a warrior for Argos in the war against Thebes. It is unlikely that this character was the one Fuller had in mind.

the way the narrator does but cannot. Ultimately, Fuller wants to show that a man cannot connect in the same way as a woman with the blooming flower.

Fuller describes her blooming yucca as a night creature. The narrator states, "The flower brooded on her own heart; the moon never wearied to fill her urn, for those she could not love as children. Had the eagle waited for her, she would have smiled on him as serenely as on the nightingale" (52) The flower does not appear to be anything special in the daylight, but in the moon light, the "dull gray color" was "silvery white" and the filaments "seemed a robe, also of silver, but as soft and light as gossamer" (Fuller 51). The beauty of this redeemed flower, this emblem of womanhood allowed the chance to express herself in the veil of night, once the duties of the day are over, reminds Fuller of an incident where she observed a birth.

Fuller connects a flower emblem to a virginal goddess in order to empower women and to protect them. In an episode that she writes about in a letter in 1840, the same year she started "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" and "Yuca Filamentosa," she expresses that women are often placed in dangerous and compromising positions due to their role in reproduction. In the sketch, the narrator states "Once, when I saw in woman what is most womanly, the love of a seraph shining though death [sic]. I expected to see my flower pass and melt as she did in the celestial tenderness of its smile" (51). About this line, Steele includes an explanatory footnote stating that Fuller recalls here "watching at the death-bed of a 'wretched girl' dying from a botched self-abortion. Fuller had the experience of perceiving 'a star…mirrored from the very blackness of the yawning gulf" (Fuller *Letters* 168 qtd in Steele 441). The girl is at once tragic and beautiful.

This abortion is mentioned in Fuller's 1840 letter to Caroline Sturgis. Fuller writes, "I had passed the night in the sick chamber of a wretched girl in the last stage of consumption. It was said that she had profaned her maiden state and that the means she took to evade the

consequences of her stain had destroyed her health and placed her on this bed of death. The room was full of poverty, base thoughts, and fragments of destiny. As I raised her dying head it rested against my bosom like a clod that should never have been taken from the valley" (Fuller *My Heart* 128). Fuller places the blame for this girl's premature death on her loss of virginity and the extreme that she must go to in order to avoid having a child. Fuller angrily implies that a man should not have taken this virginity from her, just as earth (a clod) should not be removed from a field. By comparing this girl not to a virginal flower but to the dirt from which a flower rises, Fuller states that each woman possesses the ability to bloom, not reproductively but intellectually, and her life choices will allow success or failure. Fuller does not advocate the self-administered abortion, which the "wretched girl" attempted in order to escape the demands of motherhood and the shame of a bastard child. However, she does seem to sympathize with the fact that having a child means a completely different life for a woman, a change that did not affect a man of the time with the same magnitude. Fuller promotes celibacy as a way to avoid conception and to find time to enhance the mind, but she seems to acknowledge the struggle and loneliness of this choice in the same letter to Caroline Sturgis. Fuller writes, "Still I perceive this love of realizing is here in the desire I feel for nun like dedication" (129). Fuller states that she must be alone, nun-like, in order to live a life of the mind. She goes on to write, "No only one soul is there that can lead me up to womanhood and baptize me to gentlest May. Is it not ready? I have strength to wait as a smooth bare tree forever, but ask no more my friends for leaves and flowers of a bird haunted bower" (129). Fuller desires to know the sexual aspect of womanhood, but she is willing to wait as a bare tree, reminiscent of the magnolia, to avoid the dependence marriage and children place on women.

The narrator returns again to the image of the "wretched girl" at the end of the sketch contrasting the yuca filamentosa with herself. "There is an hour of joy for every form of being, an hour of rapture for those who wait patiently--Queen of Night!—Humble Flower!—how patient were ye, the one in the loneliness of bounty,--the other in the loneliness of poverty" (Fuller 52). Fuller states that every person will have his or her own hour of realization, like she did when she witnessed the birth and also when she saw the yucca bloom. While the blooming can be beautiful and powerful it should not be rushed. She writes that women must be patient for their own blooming because if they are not disaster will follow.

Fuller believed that flowers represent a message from nature to all people, but especially to women, with whom Fuller seems to believe the connection is strongest. In "Yuca Filamentosa" the narrator states, "Admirable are the compensations of nature. As that flower, in its own season, imparted a dearer joy than all my lilies and roses, so does the aloe in its concentrated bliss know all that has been diffused over the hundred summers through which it kept silent" – flowers are nature's speech. Near the end of the sketch Fuller states that the narrator finds her yucca filamentosa more valuable than all her "lilies and roses" (52) because she imparts her own meaning to the flower. Fuller mentions the value of the yucca filamentosa compared to roses and lilies because these flowers were used in mythology, religion, and the language of flowers were often symbols of the True Woman. Fuller is stating that her yucca is just as valid a symbol to represent women as these other flowers.

Like "the Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," Fuller's "Yuca Filamentosa" is meant to teach her readers to learn from nature in order to redefine society. She beseeches women to preserve their chastity, not for the cultivation of True Womanhood, but as a way to cultivate the

precursor to the New Woman- an educated independent female who celebrates strength in femininity but also is a social equal to men.

The magnolia and the yucca sketches become for Fuller a theoretical planting bed for her nascent feminism to take root. Like the flowers in the sketch, she is detained until she is able to sort out her feelings and move on to another stage of her developing feminism. Dickinson points out that, "As Bell Chevigny suggests Fuller's feminism was a way-station but nonetheless an important staging point" (113). The image of womanhood embodied in the magnolia tree, just like the writing of the sketch of the Magnolia, becomes for Fuller a means to define purpose and self-understanding on the way to other greater but unnamed things. The flower queen says to the newly transformed Magnolia, "take a step inward, forget a voice […] bide thy time in the Magnolia" (Fuller 49). From a literary standpoint, Fuller would next synthesize her ideas about the position of women and the need for reform in her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* by taking the lessons begun in her sketches and developing them into more complex and detailed instructions for the uplift of the female community. As her sketches demonstrate, Fuller saw women's solitary isolation (at least from marriage and male companionship) as the only available means to gaining independence and advancing intellectually and socially.

Fuller makes a distinction between male and female language through her use of the language of flowers. Her orange blossom and magnolia are figuratively significant flowers with implications about the restrictive social position of women at that time. The flowers' contemporary meanings, taken from the immensely popular phenomenon of flower language books, reflect interesting insights into Fuller's use of flowers in relation to women. The orange represents women's limited social options and the need to change in order to find fulfillment. The magnolia represents advancement and feminist possibilities for women but an advancement

that comes with sacrifice. In her yucca Fuller creates her own symbolism for the flower imparting a dichotomy of meanings: the struggles women face and their ability to rise above them. In Fuller's attempt to create a uniquely female language in her sketches, she begins a tradition, later called for by Cixous, to write women's bodies and actual life experiences. Fuller imagines her new woman in a mythical and rhetorically safe way that is clearly feminine—through symbolic flowers.

CHAPTER TWO: ELIZABETH STODDARD'S USE OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS AS AN EXPRESSION OF WOMEN'S ARTISTRY AND REBELLION IN *THE MORGESONS*

In Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862), flowers, and the gardens in which they grow, function as an outlet for women's artistic expressions in a society with limited options for women's development of female agency.[37] For some of Stoddard's characters, flower gardens provide an outlet for expression from within the domestic sphere. These women express themselves through their gardens. In this way, Stoddard documents the language of flower's impact on her culture, uses this popular medium to attract female readers, finds an alternative voice for female desire and challenges the capacity of that voice to speak for all women. Some of Stoddard's female characters use this socially accepted female form of art to connect with the influence of their ancestral models and to build an artistic heritage for the next generation,[38] while others discredit it as a dated link to women's oppressed past.

Elizabeth Drew Barstow Stoddard was always one to challenge conventions. In 1823, she was born the eldest child of five to prominent shipbuilder Wilson Barstow in the coastal town of Mattapoisett, Massachusetts. According to her husband Richard Stoddard, she was a precocious child, who "had a passion for reading but a great disinclination for Study" (qtd Buell and Zagarell) xii), and she attended Wheaton Seminary in Norton, Massachusetts. At age twenty-six,

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[37] Some consider *the Morgesons*, Stoddard's first novel, to be partially autobiographical as its story centers around a spirited young girl's maturation into an independent woman in New England. Due to its wartime publication, the novel received little attention but was rediscovered and acclaimed in the twentieth century for its realism, feminism, modernist language, and unconventional heroine, who seeks fulfillment outside the roles conventionally prescribed for women of the era. See Sandra Zagarell and Lawrence Buell's introduction to the republication of the text for more information.

[38] Several critics have drawn connections between Elizabeth Stoddard's writing, especially *The Morgesons*, and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Bronte uses flower images and actual references to flowers throughout her text, which surely influenced some of Stoddard's use of flowers. An analysis of the parallels in the language of flowersand references in these two texts would make a fascinating future study.

Stoddard faced tragedy when her mother and sister died a year apart in 1848 and 1849. Perhaps because of a lack of female companionship growing up, female friendships were particularly difficult for Stoddard, whose brash demeanor alienated her closest companions. Critics Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell describe her as "extroverted, venturesome, and aggressive" (x). Stoddard shared another New England writer Margaret Fuller's "strong identification with romantic individualism…aggressiveness and intensity in the cultivation of personal relationships regardless of sex, [and]… resistance to the nineteenth-century ideological division of life into separate spheres for men and women" (Buell and Zagarell xvii). In 1852, she published her first work, "Phases," which like the *Morgesons* and much of her work is set in Mattapoisett. Shortly after, she married Richard Henry Stoddard, a poet and a great supporter of her writing whom she met during a previous trip to New York City. His literary circle of poets, including Bayard Taylor and Edmund Clarence Stedman, became their close personal advisors and friends. With a literary community in place, she began to write columns for the *Daily Alta California* as well as poems, some of which are published. Personally things did not go as well; her first son was born in 1855 and died in 1861. She did not have another surviving child until her second son's birth in 1863. Her novels, *The Morgesons, Two Men (1865),* and *Temple House (1867),* met critical success, but they never earned much profit. She continued to write essays, stories and poems. Her work experienced a brief revival in 1901 but then faded to oblivion. Stoddard outlived her son, dying of pneumonia shortly after him in 1902.

To understand the significance that the language of flowers played in Stoddard's view of nineteenth-century American society, it is helpful to look at the cultural phenomenon of the language of flowers books with respect to Stoddard's writing. While authors wrote about flowers symbolically and metaphorically for centuries, according to historian Beverly Seaton the term

"the language of flowers" in mid nineteenth-century America referred to a specific practice of "communicating with flowers" by using flowers to represent unspoken feelings (61). As mentioned in the introduction, the language of flowers began in France in the 1750s. The first critical reference to the language of flowers is in an 1809 essay on the language of flowers written by Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, a well-known German Orientalist. Hammer-Purgstall suggests the language of flowers derived from the sélam tradition in which feelings were communicated by using representative objects (Seaton 61). For example, when communication between men and women was restricted, a harem girl might communicate using sélam by passing a handkerchief filled with objects to her lover. Her lover would understand the significance of the objects and decode the girl's sentiments. In the oriental tradition, often the objects' meanings correspond with words, which rhymed with the names of the objects. Europeans altered this oriental tradition by disregarding other sélam objects and only using flowers to carry meaning. Instead of rhymed meanings a flower's meaning would often come from the characteristics of that particular flower.

While it helps to explain the tradition's origins, academic oriental scholarship did not spread the language of flowers among the masses. The most popular and influential of the French language of flowers books was Charlotte de Latour's *Le Langage des Fleurs* (1819) (Seaton 67). Soon, British authors followed in Latour's footsteps. The language of flowers books became popular in England in the 1820s beginning with Henry Phillips's *Floral Emblems* (1825) and Fredric Shoberl's translation of Latour (1834). The language of flowers dictionaries were often given as gift books and joined with almanacs (collections of poetry and engravings) as popular New Year's gifts. This type of book was an essential furnishing for a lady's parlor. Once only available to French nobility, mass printing enabled cheap versions of flower dictionaries to

become popular among the lower class. Later, the movement spread to America taking a Christian bent. Flowers often conveyed Christian virtues in American dictionaries. In America, the popularity of the language of flowers began with Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary* (1829), which she compiled from several imported British and French books. In addition, Sarah Josepha Hale, the highly influential editor of *Godey's Ladies Book* and *Woman's Record*, wrote *Flora's Interpreter* (1832), which was wildly popular and remained in print from 1832-1860 making it available to Stoddard. Lastly, Catherine Waterman also compiled a language of flowers dictionary in print from 1836 to 1860.

Stoddard had a close connection to the language of flowers. Her niece, Susan Barstow Skelding, was an artist, botanical illustrator, and author who published a series of books in which she collected, arranged and illustrated flower poems by prominent late nineteenth-century authors.[39] One such author was Helen Hunt Jackson, whose poem "Easter Bells" appeared in the series. In 1883, Skelding wrote her aunt asking for a poem to add to her latest collection.[40] Stoddard wrote back enclosing her poem, "August" and discussed flower poems. Stoddard seems reluctant to include her work in the collection. She writes. "I ought not to have written so that you took my words seriously. I have written no *flower* **…** strictly poems. Have you collected any by Mary Bradley. [sic] She has written the most exquisite flower poem *we* think of anybody. For the *most part* they are weak and sentimental merely."[41] Stoddard's opinion that most flower poems are "weak and sentimental" expresses her displeasure with the connotations that the

[39] A listing of Skelding's publications, called the Flower-Song Series, can be found in the 1885 edition of the *Dial*, under "Illustrated Gift Books". Titles include, *Flowers from Sunlight and Shade, Flowers from Here and There, Heartsease: Poems of Pansie*s, and *Flowers from Glade and Garden*.
[40] Skelding and Stoddard's correspondence can be found in the archives of the Pennsylvania State University library.
[41] Likely the pronoun we is used to convey Stoddard and her husband, a frequent intellectual collaborator. She refers to Richard Henry Stoddard earlier in the letter. All underlined words are as Stoddard wrote them in the handwritten letter.

women who wrote flower poems were, likewise, weak with the exception of Bradley. [42] However, Stoddard, seemingly, contradicts herself by going on to use the form she calls weak when she writes her poem "August," which was written in Mattapoisett and earlier published in *Harper's* (1871 and republished in *Poems* 1895). In spite of her critique of flower poems, Stoddard's poem also uses flower language. Stoddard writes, "Learn by the wayside- learn by the brook / That thy's the passion of the year / Look at the fields, look at the woods / Look upon me, *and* draw near**! /** Just as these days are, so is my heart / Lilies are flaming, berries are ripe!"[43] The lily Stoddard refers to as "flaming" is the superb lily, which has a bright orange bloom and grows up to six feet tall. Waterman gives this lily the meaning "splendor" (123). Stoddard returns to the lily in *The Morgesons*, but instead uses a white lily to symbolize purity (Hale 138). Using the language of flowers, Stoddard conveys that through these signs nature is displaying its bounty just as a woman might appeal to her lover. In the final stanza, Stoddard states, "Yes, true as August- as the bird's song, / The sweet fern's scent, the gay weeded shore".[44] The fern means "sincerity" according to Catherine Waterman, which reinforces Stoddard's line "true as" in her poem. Stoddard uses the language of flowers conventionally to fit with and emphasize her speaker's emotions in the poem. In her 1862 novel, *The Morgesons,* Stoddard uses the popular language of flowers in a more complex way. Just as Stoddard mocks and makes use of the popular format of women's fiction, she mocks and makes use of the language of flowers.[45]

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[42] While male authors frequently wrote about flowers, for example William Wordsworth's poem, "Dandelions", they are often viewed as separate observers of nature and are seldom considered weak like the flowers they write about. A woman, however, was so often linked to a flower that for her to write about a flower implied a connection between the author and subject that a male author was not subject to.

[43] I have printed the poem as it appears in Stoddard's letter to Skelding. Several changes from the published version of the poem are noted. For example, "Learn" is "Read" in the published version

[44] "the weedy, blue shore" in the published version

[45] The term woman's fiction comes from Nina Baym's 1978 study *Woman's Fiction*. This term refers to a specific genre of writing by and for women in which the heroine undergoes a process of maturation and assimilation into a domestic role. Before Baym's study, these novels were often referred to as Sentimental novels because of their emotional content and language.

According to Zagarell and Buell's introduction of *The Morgesons*, "Stoddard professes much interest in the best-selling 'woman's fiction' of the day, whose cleverness she grudgingly praises, whose commercial success she envies, even as she herself aspires to surpass such formulas" (xiii). Women authors employed the American language of flowers to suggest a character's virtue or to allow the author a discreet way to express desire in matters of courtship.[46] An example of a writer of women's fiction who uses the language of flowers to emphasize the virtue of her main characters is E.D.E.N. Southworth in *The Hidden Hand* and possibly several of her other novels. In addition, flowers were used to convey emotion beyond the realm of domestic fiction. Critic Elizabeth Petrino notes Emily Dickinson used flowers in a way that corresponds with the language of flowers in her poems and letters to express feeling she did not want to write explicitly (129). As we shall see, Stoddard's conflicted attitude toward the language of flowers will appear again in *The Morgesons*.

Just as flower dictionaries and poems were an acceptable medium for a woman's writing in the nineteenth century, flower gardening was also a pastime and art form entrenched in the domestic tradition. Women had the option to use gardens for artistic expression within the domestic sphere; however, in Stoddard's fiction, gardens have the potential to be a form of empowerment for women. Depending on the purpose for which women plant flowers, gardens can either imprison women, upholding convention and domesticity, or can liberate them allowing self-fulfillment and artistic expression. Even when gardens enable expression, that freedom is mediated within conventionality and the socially regulated domestic sphere. Stoddard's view of gardens and the language of flowers implies that flowers can be useful and rewarding for women, but that they are still a limited form of agency in that women's identity through gardens

[46] Beverly Seaton examines the differences between the American language of flowers and the French, which is more "frank in sexual matters" (128). Whereas the French view the love affair as a passionate and intimate matter, American convention tends to make it a social affair linked to marriage and propriety.

is formed from within the confines of imprisoning domesticity. Using the language of flowers to voice women's desires for greater social freedom is surely an ancestral heritage to build on, but it is also a legacy to move beyond.

Stoddard's *The Morgesons* is a female bildüngsroman, which traces a young woman's search for self-definition and independence and her sister's failed quest all the while using the language of flowers to express their desires in a socially acceptable way. Set in mid nineteenth-century Massachusetts, Stoddard's novel challenges the religious and social norms of the middle class during this period. The main protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson, makes several journeys in her youth which each bring her to a different stage in her development.[47] Cassandra and her sister, Veronica, are born in Surrey, Massachusetts, an isolated coastal town, which makes them restless for adventure and experience. When Cassandra is thirteen, her parents attempt to stymie her social unconventionality by sending her to live with her dogmatically religious grandfather and spinster domestic caretaker, Aunt Merce, in nearby Barmouth, Massachusetts, where she is intellectually and emotionally starved. Confined to home, school, and church, she learns the harmful impact of the domestic lifestyle. When Cassandra turns eighteen, she moves to the home of her married cousin Charles in Rosville, Massachusetts, a more urban environment. During this period, Cassandra's sexuality is awakened by Charles's desire to possess her, and they nearly begin a love affair. Their affair is preempted by a carriage accident that costs Charles his life.

Meanwhile, Cassandra's sister Veronica remains in her parents' home and illness confines her to bed, where she dreams of flower gardens and creates an isolated yet liberated female identity through her relationship with wilderness. Veronica has limited social interaction, especially with men. Eventually, her path rejoins her sister's when Veronica meets Cassandra's

[47] Journeys from home are a typical component of the bildüngsroman's plotline. For a reading of Stoddard's work as a bildüngsroman see Stacy Alaimo and for a description of the role the female bildüngsroman played in women's writing in the nineteenth century see Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction*.

school-friend Ben Somers. Ben has been in love with Cassandra until he meets her ephemeral sister. Ben proposes to Veronica, but they decide that Cassandra would be the best representative to travel to the wealthy city of Belem, Massachusetts and meet his high society family. In Belam, Cassandra falls in love with Ben's brother Desmond, who under Cassandra's influence goes to Spain to reform his alcoholism. Cassandra returns to Surrey and discovers that her mother has died. As the eldest and most capable daughter, she becomes responsible for managing the household, a task she resents. Her sister, Veronica, marries Ben, who dies two years later of alcoholism. Veronica is entirely bereft of her creative isolation when after Ben's death she is the sole guardian of their child, a developmentally delayed girl. On the other hand, Cassandra marries the reformed Desmond and actively defines herself by writing her life story in the form of the novel, *The Morgesons*.

In Stoddard's text, women's vacillating reactions to flowers follow three paths. Flowers allow women to associate sympathetically with nature against the male oppression of nature, providing women limited empowerment and opportunities for artistic expression. However, flowers also bind women to socially prescribed conventionally feminine roles. Lastly, since women's connection to nature in terms of maternity and nurturing has been used by some men to make the argument that women are less evolved and less fit for life outside domestic roles, women's rejection of flowers shows a rebuff of nature as a way to cast off conventional femininity and claim patriarchal agency. Stoddard examines these different responses to flowers through Veronica Morgeson, a dreamer who fails to escape the pull of the patriarchy, Cassandra Morgeson, the bildüngsroman's robust, spirited protagonist, and Aunt Merce, the maternal aunt who dutifully performs domestic responsibilities. Despite her domesticity, Aunt Merce most adequately reflects Fuller's vision of the potential for flowers. Merce begins the novel in a

typical domestic role, caring for her aging father. Her relationship to flowers reflects her conventional role; however, once she is freed of her domestic caretaker responsibilities, Stoddard associates Aunt Merce with symbolically empowering flowers. Eventually, Aunt Merce's connection to flowers provides her greater fulfillment and feminist agency.

Veronica and Cassandra are more problematic characters in terms of their relationships with flowers. Neither Morgeson sister ultimately becomes fully empowered through flowers; however, they engage with flowers in opposite ways. Veronica's failure to achieve independence provides a counterpoint to Cassandra's process of maturation and induction into patriarchal society.[48] In the beginning of the book, Veronica finds empowerment through her identification with flowers but eventually that connection to flowers gives way to a confining model of domesticity. Veronica is reluctant to abandon her dreams of gardening but does so to care for her husband and child. On the other hand, Cassandra begins the text by rejecting flowers, briefly feels sympathy for them, but ultimately distances herself from them in order to avoid imprisonment in woman's domestic conventionality. She learns to disassociate herself from nature in favor of the marketplace. In doing so, she finds patriarchal agency. These women's interactions with flowers and gardens are attempts to create identity and to understand their social positions as women.

When addressing the potential for women's liberation found in gardens, it is important to consider that gardens contain domesticated plants which Stoddard's character Veronica responds against through her preference for wilderness. While her association with her gardens and the flowers in them characterizes Aunt Merce, Veronica begins with an affinity for wild flowers, begins to study botany, and eventually makes plans to cultivate flowers. As Veronica becomes

[48] Critics such as Stacy Alaimo, Robert McClure Smith, and Sybil Weir have contributed greatly to the study of Stoddard's novels as a bildüngsroman.

more entrenched in the conventional female role and finally becomes devoted to her husband, her connection to nature becomes more domesticated and eventually is replaced altogether by domestic responsibilities. Veronica's situation demonstrates that flowers can hold potential for uninhibited feminism in the wilderness but not in society. In Fuller's sketch the orange tree was taken out of domestic servitude and allowed freedom in the wilderness, a feminist space. Stoddard, likewise, seems to acknowledge the wilderness as a site of potential feminism and strength; however, it is not an entirely realistic one since these women, unlike trees, must live in society. To further her separation from an empowerment found in flowers, Veronica only dreams of gardens; she never grows one. Her connection to plants takes place in books and from within the domestic sphere, which is perhaps why she does not succeed in creating feminist agency as her sister Cassandra does.

Cassandra, the woman who finds the greatest degree of freedom and agency, moves beyond flowers and artistically expresses herself through writing. Cassandra's lack of association with flowers, fear of being compared to flowers, violent destruction of flowers, as well as her eventual association and fascination with man-made goods and the craft of writing demonstrate Cassandra as a model of a woman who has moved beyond the early stages of feminist agency found in the strength derived from flowers. She is an example of a woman who inherits the legacy of her mother's garden but finds a new form through which to communicate the woman's story—her pen.

Merce: Practicing Woman's Art through Flowers

Women find expression and agency in the *Morgesons* in a variety of ways. Cassandra, and Veronica's Aunt Merce never marries and cares for their conservative and controlling grandfather. Her only escape comes from her cultivation of gardens as her form of agency.

Cassandra is sent to live with her aunt to provide the girl with a stable domestic influence. Aunt Merce maintains a garden at her father's home, and, after he dies, she brings a potted garden to the Morgeson home. Even once she is freed of her oppressive and conventional life as a caretaker, Merce continues to garden in order to express herself. Her garden becomes her art, which was typical for many generations of women who found expression through this domestic act. However, Stoddard shows feminist development in Merce; once she moves to the Morgeson home, she gardens for herself for the first time. While she may have always enjoyed the activity, the meaning behind maintaining her own garden, which contains her own selection of plants, reflects her artistic expression and personal agency.

Stoddard tracks this evolution carefully in her development of Merce. For the nineteenth-century reader, the presence of a well-maintained garden signaled a woman as a moral leader in the home; "In America flowers often symbolized the very civilization of the wilderness" (Seaton 6). This moral influence is one reason Cassandra is sent to her relatives' home in Barmouth, Massachusetts. A "good woman" is exactly how Stoddard describes Aunt Merce; Cassandra explains that "she frequented the church oftener than mother, sang more hymns […] but she had no dreams, no enthusiasm. Her religion had leveled all needs, all aspirations" (26). There is no mention of a welcoming rose bush in front of the Morgeson home, but Aunt Merce's garden contains many flowers, herbs, and fruits. The association of a well-kept garden with a pious woman is emphasized. Cassandra goes on to say that her aunt has moments of laughter during which her personality shines through. However, Stoddard implies that Cassandra is skeptical that religion and gardening can be adequate outlets for female creativity, happiness, and agency.

Stoddard calls attention to some of the plants in Aunt Merce's garden at her father's home in Barmouth, including chamomile, sage, and plums. During the time period, sage

signified the respect given the True Woman who upheld domestic traditions and morals.[49] Hale and Wirt attribute the meaning "domestic virtues" to sage (Wirt 213, Hale 194). The presence of sage in the garden evokes the virtues of the True Woman, represented in Aunt Merce, who places her family and community first and upholds the domestic tradition. The position of Aunt Merce as a guardian for her home's domestic virtues is reflected in the meaning of her garden's plants. The sage suggests the situation of Aunt Merce, a spinster who is domestically accomplished and who is devoted to caring for her father.

Cassandra sees the danger in such a controlled domestic role. Speaking of Aunt Merce's relationship with her grandfather, Cassandra states, "Aunt Merce was not the Aunt Mercy I had known at home. She wore a mask before her father. There was a constraint between them […] The result of this relation was a formal, petrifying, unyielding system,—a system which from the fact of its satisfying neither, was kept up the more rigidly" (28). [50] Cassandra concludes that this devastatingly unequal relationship derives from her aunt's "respect and timidity" toward her controlling father. Aunt Merce places the priorities of her father above her own and is trampled in the process.

As well as cultivating the outdoor plants in the garden, Aunt Merce keeps flowers in the parlor. The custom of keeping potted plants indoors was becoming increasingly popular in the nineteenth century. Women were the nurturers of flowers both indoors and out, as the popularity of houseplants was on the rise. Cassandra describes her aunt's nightly ritual of watering and

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[49] Here True Woman refers to the "Cult of True Womanhood." For more information see Barbara Welter's *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. This ideal of womanhood had essentially four parts—four characteristics any good and proper young woman should cultivate: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.

[50] An interesting textual note: Stoddard varies the use of the name Merce. Another variation of the name appearing in the text is Mercy, a nickname for the character. I have used the spelling Merce when I refer to her but have preserved Stoddard's spelling in the individual quotes. This spelling further emphasizes Stoddard's desire to convey the domesticity and piety of this character. She is more often Mercy when serving her father emphasizing the mercy of her selfless act of care.

pruning her "rose geranium and monthly rose, which flourished wonderfully in that fluffy atmosphere" (30). She calls attention to the way in which the rose flourished in the "fluffy" feminine domestic atmosphere. The choice of a geranium for the parlor was not unusual. The geranium was one of the most popular flowering houseplants in the 1860s; it was widely available and not very expensive (Seaton 7). The rose geranium, according to Wirt, means "preference" (98, Hale 72). The monthly rose, also called the China rose, is a pink climbing flower that according to Hale means, "grace" (178). Hale adds a quote about the rose "Whose virgin blush of chastened dye / Enchants so much our mental eye" to emphasize that grace is born of the innocence and beauty implied by its pink color. The combination of the two flowers in the immaculately maintained parlor, a stark contrast to Cassandra's previous home with its flurry of guests, haphazard belongings, and domestically disabled mother, seems to signify the True Woman's preference for beautiful flowers reflected in her aunt's domestic devotion, creating a representation of an idealized feminine domestic setting.

However, Aunt Merce evolves. Once Aunt Merce moves to Cassandra's home, the pride of her garden becomes her cacti—telling plants. The cactus symbolizes Aunt Merce's virginal unwed marital status, her protecting of her selfhood, and her desire to escape the expectations traditionally associated with being a woman. The cactus is not usually associated with the True Woman. Stoddard creates her own meaning for this plant. Aunt Merce's cacti defy the stereotypical expectation that a woman gardener would only grow pretty flowers in her garden. Before moving to the Morgeson home, Merce devoted her life to caring for her father. While in his home, she grew roses and geraniums. Those flowers reflected the cult of True Womanhood while the cactus gives the connotation of a defiance of the social norm. Much like Aunt Merce, cacti live through harsh conditions and are true cases of survival. The cactus garden implies

some potential for plants that represent independent women, so perhaps in her independence from her father Aunt Merce moves from a conventional form of womanhood to a form with feminist potential. The cactus symbolizes Aunt Merce moving into the phase of her life where she, like Fuller's magnolia, ceases her eternal sacrifice and can find reflection and peace in her virginal solitude, even if society viewed this choice for a woman to remain independent as unusual.

Veronica: The Garden of her Dreams

In addition to Merce, another woman who connects with flowers is Veronica Morgeson. Since childhood, Veronica suffers from an unidentified illness and is confined to bed for much of the novel. According to Cassandra, a young "Veronica was taken ill, and was not convalescent till spring. Delicacy of constitution the doctor called her disorder. She had no strength, no appetite, and looked more elfish than ever" (26). Through the novel other characters describe Veronica using flower terms, creating an association with frailty in women that reflects a typical patriarchal construction of femininity often connected with flowers.[51] Veronica unwittingly conforms to the patriarchal expectation that women will connect with weakness, symbolically represented in Stoddard's text through weak flowers, unlike the hardy evergreen magnolia Fuller describes.[52]

As a child, Veronica does not see a connection to flowers as prohibitive to her agency; in fact, she finds it physically rejuvenating. Veronica's connection to nature takes on mythological significance. Similar to Margaret Fuller in "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," Stoddard uses mythology and nature to explore the situation of women. Cassandra explains that her sister,

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[51] This motif of frailty can be found in many contemporary nineteenth-century novels including Susan Warner's *Wide Wide World*.

[52] Joanne Dobson compares representations of 19th century domesticity in Stoddard's *the Morgesons* with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World*.

Veronica, "liked the view of the north windows, even when the boughs were bare and the fields barren. When the grass came, she ordered handfuls to be brought her and put in saucers of water. With the coming of the blossoms she began to mend" (Stoddard 27). Stoddard could be referencing the ancient myth of Persephone who spends part of the year in the underworld and returns in the spring when the earth flowers.[53] Like Fuller, Stoddard applies her knowledge of Greek mythology to create parallels between the ancient myth and modern women's experience. Both authors connect mythological references to female characters' isolation. Stoddard connects Veronica's infirmity to Persephone's separation from Demeter during the winters spent in Hades, and Fuller connects the struggle of the educated woman to the lonely Vestal priestess embodied in the magnolia tree. Talking to Cassandra, Temperance, Veronica's nurse, says "It is the winter that kills little Verry […] God's breath is cold over the world, and my life goes. But the spring is coming; it will come back" (Stoddard 147). This comparison equates Veronica to the earth, especially to the seasonal nature of some flowers. This passage connects the healing of Veronica's sick body with the regeneration of the earth blossoming into springtime. Veronica seems as if she is part of the earth, dying and being reborn each yearly season. This solidifies her connection to flowers and reinforces the conventional association of weak women with flowers. While Veronica finds some personal strength in this comparison, there is a social connotation that when women are compared directly to flowers, they are not the gardeners, or artists of flowers, but they are objectified as the weak flowers.

Veronica's identification with flowers is furthered by the fact that she relates to other women through flowers. For example, after the death of their grandfather when Aunt Merce

[53] It is clear that Stoddard was aware of Greek mythology. She names her main character Cassandra, who is to an extent an "entangler of men"(Bulfinch). In Rosville, Ben Somers explicitly refers to the Greek history of her name as King Priam's daughter, but Cassandra, unlike the prophetic Cassandra of myth, remains unaware of her name's legacy.

comes to live with the Morgesons, Veronica, who usually is difficult and does not converse with company, is so delighted with the plants her aunt brings to the house, that she "made amicable overtures to Aunt Merce, and never quarreled with her afterwards except when she was ill" (Stoddard 58).[54] Much to the delight of Veronica, Merce was renowned for having "*such* a faculty for raising plants!" (58). Veronica accepts and values her aunt for her ability to raise flowers. As Aunt Merce develops female agency through the feminine tradition of gardening, Veronica embraces this tradition and shows potential for finding her own self-expression though gardening. They connect based on their mutual appreciation for flowers. Veronica feels drawn to Aunt Merce's houseplants. Her connection to these domesticated plants indicates her acquiescence to social conventions. While growing flowers has the potential for women's artistic expression within the domestic sphere, the traditional associations of house flowers here indicate that Veronica is moving away from the liberating feminism found in wild flowers and towards a restrained socially acceptable form of female expression that reflects domestic virtues.

Veronica begins to explore the idea of a garden as an outlet for her creativity and independence. In finding her passion in nature, Veronica acts in the manner that ecofeminist critic Stacy Alaimo lays out for later female writers. Alaimo claims that the wilderness became a third space in which certain women writers "interrogated the grounds of female social construction. Imagining a place in which women could be untamed, unruly, and unregenerate critiques the 'unnatural' social forces that have constructed women as obedient subjects" (16). Alaimo points out later women writers "turn toward nature to condemn the *social* 'manufacturing' of females, arguing it's oppressive because it is 'unnatural'" (16). In *The*

[54] In the novel, Aunt Merce's plants were placed on a new revolving stand on the landing beneath the stair window. Seaton mentions this type of stand was one of several nineteenth–century innovations in furniture for indoor plants, making the Morgesons in tune with the fashion of the day (7). Veronica's admiration of the new plants perhaps reflects a conventionally feminine connection to nature reflective of the "true" woman. The indoor flowers become domesticated.

Morgesons, this ordering of a separate female space is confined to the space of the domestic, so it does not materialize as the third space of wilderness Alaimo describes which allows for women's freedom from social restriction. By imagining herself as part of the wilderness, Veronica creates a separate sphere, albeit an imaginary sphere, in which she can build her artistic expression. As Veronica studies plants she dreams of shaping wilderness into a cultivated space. She cannot break out of the conventions of her society.

Veronica seems to be embracing gardening, the liberating- although limited - form of women's artistry. Gardening allows women some sphere of influence and some degree of control. In her plans for a garden, Veronica identifies with and finds strength in flowers, and she dreams of creating the sort of feminist agency that her aunt realizes through gardening. This dream of gardening is still a positive outlet of artistic expression for women, including Veronica. She dreams of this liberation, but she is unable to achieve it in reality.

Veronica studies books of plants while she is confined to bed with illness and advances greatly in the subjects of geography and botany. While scientific study is largely considered male terrain, botany was an accepted form of study for women, as flowers were socially seen as delicate and suitable aspects of nature with which women should interact.[55] Cassandra explains that one of Veronica's endeavors while she is "educated by illness" is to spend her time "devising a plan for raising trees and flowers in the garret, so that she might realize a picture of tropical wilderness […] though she had as little practical talent as any person I ever knew" (Stoddard 60). In order to create a tropical wilderness in Massachusetts a great deal of human

[55] Emanuel D. Rudolph's 1973 study of women in the field of botany during the nineteenth century explains that the scientific community believed that the delicate nature of women best fit with the study of botanical science. His article "How It Developed that Botany Was the Science thought Most Suitable for Victorian Young Ladies" shows that in English finishing schools girls were taught botany. This form of education was carried over to the United States for the academic instruction of women limiting their knowledge of reproduction to nothing more explicit than the "birds and the bees".

intervention would need to take place, altering the natural wilderness to create a new creation. Devising a plan for a fantasy "tropical paradise" shows Veronica fostering an intense interest in the earth while remaining utterly separated from a practical and physical connection to it.

Later in the novel, Veronica comprehends that she will never realize her dream garden or find agency when she is faced with the possibility of her time being dominated by a relationship with a man. In a scene filled with mourning which reads like a ceremonial good bye, Veronica spends final moments before her wedding looking longingly out over her family's acreage which would have become her planned garden. From the point that Ben Somers proposes to Veronica, she becomes withdrawn, feeling grief at the upcoming wedding and seeing it as a loss of her independence. Cassandra finds Veronica shut up in her room looking through the wicket. This is the last mention of Veronica escaping to her dream world that she imagines in nature. Veronica tells Cassandra, "the buds are beginning to swell […] I should hear small voices breaking out from the earth" (Stoddard 161). In this scene, Veronica hears the unarticulated voices from nature, which mimic her own unarticulated desire.

Stoddard predates several feminist theories that establish a kindred spirit between nature and women. In *The Morgesons* Stoddard's connection of women to nature is conveyed by using the language of flowers. Her use of the language of flowers is a form of *écriture féminine*—which through flowers allows woman's unarticulated voice to cry out. Stoddard predates the theories of French feminist critic Hélène Cixous, who in her 1971 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," describes the need for women to write in order to find a mode of expression outside of the existing symbolic order that has been established by the patriarchy. Cixous states that woman must "write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensible ruptures and

transformations in her history" (350). Cixous implies that existing language cannot express woman's desires because it negates women. Similarly, Stacy Alaimo's critical study of women's fiction (2000) examines the wilderness as an "undomesticated ground" on which women had greater potential for feminism. Alaimo shows that some female authors place their female characters in a wild setting to create a space for them to imagine a life outside the domestic. Alaimo writes, "Women entered the wilderness, literally, or imaginatively, precisely in order to throw off—or complement, subvert, or bracket—their domestic roles. Many women have, in fact, invoked nature in order to critique cultural roles, norms, and assumptions and to escape from the confines of the domestic" (15). If the existing patriarchal language excludes women and the existing patriarchal society oppresses them, then a new form of women's communication could be created by fusing the wild and the unarticulated through the language of flowers in an unusual way that does not uphold the conventional reflection of the True Woman ideal but, instead, emphasizes flowers as a freeing female form of art and expression.

Cixous wrote her theory on women's language in response to theorist Jacques Lacan's idea of the symbolic order, which he derived from Sigmund Freud's "Oedipus Complex" (Cixous xxix). According to Kari Weil in her study of French Feminism, Lacan saw the symbolic order as the domain of culture, which is dominated by men, as opposed to the imaginary order, which is the domain of nature, and which is the realm of women who are more linked to nature through reproduction. Weil states that Lacan's rereading of Freud shows that "the child's ability to establish the separateness from the mother that is necessary for subjectivity coincides with what Lacan will call his/her 'entry into' language"(158). Weil goes on to say that French feminists rejected Lacan's emphasis of the rejection of the mother and the need for a phallus as a way to enable the child to gain language. They believe that Lacan's theory leaves women at a

disadvantage "and reveals how [women] are born into patriarchy since language is its primary tool of subjugation" (158). Lacan explains the need for people to create signifiers and law as a component of their language as a way to regulate desire. In Lacan's definition of the symbolic, he states that man comes to language as a system of representation for fear of losing the phallus. Language is a way to put distance between himself and the thing represented in order to mediate loss.

In response to this exclusion of women (who clearly have no phallus to fear losing) from the symbolic order, Cixous calls for women to write in their own unique style that breaks established rules of syntax and structure. She states that female language "will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatisms" (353). The language of flowers was once used to support the established structures limiting the freedoms and opportunities of women. However, Stoddard subverts its original purpose and uses this language to communicate women's physical, emotional, and social desires for change. Thus, Stoddard creates her own *écriture féminine*. Veronica provides an example of the marginalized woman able to escape subjugation due to her remaining on the periphery of the dominant culture. She was able to find expression though her imaginary escapes into nature; however, once she is married she abandons her *écriture féminine* in the form of flowers, and Veronica's dreams go unrealized.

While Veronica's dreams of a wild garden might indicate her desire for life beyond the domestic, she seems torn between these imaginary gardens and her future domestic role as wife. Veronica's final acts in this scene are to shut the wicket which looks out on her yard and to go downstairs to play piano for her husband-to-be. She assumes the role of a pleasing wife.

Stoddard seems to be saying that devotion to flowers and wilderness cannot coexist with Veronica's domestic marriage commitments. In this scene, she must choose to love the man and fulfill his desires or love the garden and fulfill hers—she chooses the man. As the novel progresses, Veronica seems to have no more connection with flowers. There is no mention of flowers at her wedding. Her husband, Ben, eventually dies of alcoholism, and Veronica becomes a single parent raising her child with Cassandra's help. The novel closes with a description of Veronica consumed with caring for her child as the oppressive sole focus of her attention.

Early in the novel, Veronica attempts to connect to nature as a place of strength. However, she is compromised in this attempt because she finds herself only able to do so from within the domestic sphere. She began to make this shift even before she got married. Veronica's separation from the wilderness marks her gradual surrender to a domestic female social role. After meeting Ben, she consents to marriage and devotes her life to her child. She no longer has a passion for the wilderness or dreams of gardens as her form of artistic expression. Veronica began the novel as a woman removed from society and social expectations, similar to the Magnolia in Margaret Fuller's "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" that was transformed from an overworked orange tree that must continually produce fruit for men. In Fuller's sketch the language of flowers creates a compelling analogy for women's empowerment through the magnolia's resistance to female expectations. Veronica takes an opposite and more typical journey; she begins as a magnolia and changes into an orange. Stoddard implies that until social changes occur empowerment through flowers will not improve the social situation of women. Agency and independence will remain a flower-filled fantasy. Even the empowerment that women like Aunt Merce find is contained within domestic conventional roles and behaviors for women. Veronica ultimately is unable to succeed in finding her own happiness and agency, even

within the domestic sphere. The needs of her husband and child consume her and cause her to abandon her dream of gardening. This development parallels Fuller's sketch in which the wilderness acts as a space of women's agency—if she withdraws from the domestic realm and lives in solitude in the wilderness. Veronica dreams of gardens like Fuller's, but she does not see them realized. Instead, she never makes it out of the house.

Cassandra: Her Flowering Words

While Veronica rarely leaves her family's home, her sister, Cassandra Morgeson, ventures from home several times. Cassandra, the female narrator of Stoddard's novel, learns from the women in her life. She briefly sympathizes with flowers but ultimately rejects gardens as a form of expression altogether. Instead, Cassandra finds agency by distancing herself from flowers. She rejects nature to focus on socially constructed female performativity, such as dating and fashion concerns.[56] Cassandra seems to recognize the futility of closeness to nature for her advancement as a woman in male society; however, it is paradoxical that her rebellion allows her to indulge in an equally shallow and patriarchal construction of female behavior: shopping. As Lori Merish astutely observes of Theodore Dreiser's protagonist in *Sister Carrie*, her interactions with the "consumer public sphere, with its conventionally heterosexist erotic economy," make her into a "desirable (because appropriately desirous and tasteful) 'woman'" (320). Merish's observations could be applied to Stoddard's Cassandra. Merish goes on to note the practice of "compulsory self-scrutiny that feminists have seen to be endemic to consumer culture" which Cassandra clearly imitates as she observes her classmates and alters her dress to suit their style (320). Finally, Cassandra finds agency by taking up writing, which is often considered masculine

[56] Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity can be found as the central thesis of her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. Essentially, Butler argues that women are taught to act like a woman and that they are not intrinsically male or female but instead learn socially constructed patterns of behavior, that are complicated by class, ethnicity, and sexuality.

but which Cassandra appropriates in a seemingly feminist way. For some nineteenth-century American women, writing was seen as a transgression against conventional femininity, but this transgression could be liberating in a feminist sense.[57] Like her main character, Stoddard makes her writing feminist by subverting conventionally feminine genre and stylistic expectations.[58] She is able to create agency outside of conventional female activities.

Cassandra has a complex and unusual relationship to flowers. From a young age, Cassandra defies expected female decorum. In the novel's opening lines, Cassandra scales a chest of drawers, causing her Aunt Merce to call her "possessed". Because of this, Cassandra's parents send her to live with her conventional Aunt Merce and her domineering grandfather in Barmouth to correct her unfeminine and undisciplined behavior, such as fighting in school. Her aunt's garden is often the setting in this stage of the novel. Veronica expects the garden to provide Cassandra with feminist agency women achieve through gardening. When she hears that Cassandra is going to live with their grandfather, Veronica says that her sister will be "stifled" but that "the plums in his garden were good" (27). In reality, this garden does play a role in Cassandra's development. It shows her the confined role of women in society: a role she rejects.

Cassandra struggles with the repressive and controlling atmosphere of her grandfather's home, and the garden becomes a means for her to express her frustration with her lack of power and agency. Whereas some women, like Aunt Merce, might turn to a garden as a creative outlet, Cassandra uses the garden as an outlet for her aggression. When Cassandra moves to Barmouth, her aggression toward nature deepens. Her aggression is apparent earlier when she smashes her sister's prized butterfly collection and pinches her aunt's cat. Cassandra abuses nature to gain

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[57] While Cassandra found being a woman author empowering, many women authors of the time did saw writing as masculine and felt guilt about being authors. Joan Hedrick wrote a biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe in which she states that Stowe claimed that she did not write her books—that they came from God—so as to retain her lady status.
[58] For a great source on Stoddard's defiance of feminine writing conventions see Sabrina Matter-Seibel's "Subverting the Sentimental: Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's The *Morgesons*."

agency when others discipline her. In her frustration with her lack of social power, she assumes the role of oppressor over the animals and garden plants that are weaker than her. In order to gain mastery, Cassandra feels that she must dominate nature in order to advance herself.

Cassandra's next violent action against nature furthers this impression. Visiting Aunt Merce are the unwed seamstresses, the Aikin sisters. After her aunt scolds her for hurting the cat, Cassandra promptly "rush[es] to the garden and trampl[es] the chamomile bed" (Stoddard 31). As she does this she reflects, "I thought of the two women I had just seen while I crushed the spongy plants. Had *they* been trampled upon? A feeling of pity stung me" (31). Although Cassandra feels pity, she also associates the chamomile plant she crushes with the Aikin sisters. In this scene, Cassandra views the imprisonment of women like her aunt and the Aikin sisters and connects this social weakness to nature. Therefore, Cassandra rejects nature and attempts to assume the role of patriarchal society that crushes the weak flower. Cassandra crushes the flower just as society crushes the Aikin sisters. Since these women are neither successful in finding a marriage nor able to thrive on their own, they are forced into the low-paying, painstaking work of seamstresses, which according to Mary Poovey, was one of the few careers, besides domestic servant, governess, or wife that was available to women at the time (105).[59] However, Cassandra does not feel remorse perhaps because she fears becoming a similar victim of society. Instead of resolving to better the situation of such women or repenting her violent actions, she seems intent on making sure that she does not become a woman in that situation.

The meaning of chamomile in the language of flowers reflects Cassandra's association of the plant with the spinster sisters. In the language of flowers, chamomile conveys a struggle with adversity. Hale's study *Flora's Interpreter* (1832), a text contemporary to Stoddard's, refers to

[59] Mary Poovey's 1989 critical study *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* looked at the social role of women in Victorian England, which was not very different from the United States in the 1860s. Poovey discusses the work of seamstresses and the difficulty of their lives as working women.

chamomile as expressing "energy in adversity" which clearly fits Stoddard's use of the flower as connected to women who face great struggles (43). Hale derives her meaning for the plant from a poem by J.W. Eastburne which reads, "Like the meek *Chamomile,* it grew / Luxuriant from the bruise anew" (qtd. Hale 43).[60] Cassandra acts out against the flower, which signals her dominance over the "meek" flower. Stoddard uses the language of flowers to show that while most women are oppressed, Cassandra takes on the roles of the oppressor and hurts the flower, which is weaker than she is. Her bullying gives her patriarchal agency.

After several months in Barmouth, Cassandra begins to feel trapped in conventional woman's surroundings. She longs for the mercantile world, but she is expected to conform to the restricted space appropriate for a "true" woman—the domestic and the cultivated garden landscape. Once Cassandra adjusts to her social isolation, she attempts to identify with the creatures in her aunt's garden. She states that:

> The street, in Aunt Mercy's estimation, was not the place for an idle promenade. My exercise, therefore, was confined to the garden—a pleasant spot, now that midsummer had come, and inhabited with winged and crawling creatures, with whom I claimed companionship, especially with the red, furry caterpillars, that have, alas, nearly passed away and given place to a variegated, fantastic tribe, which gentleman farmers are fond of writing about. (Stoddard 42)

Confined by the conventional beliefs of her grandfather and aunt about appropriate spheres for young women, Cassandra claims companionship with the natural creatures she would have previously trampled. Yet, she is still far from the True Woman

[60] Rev. JW Eastburne was an evangelical poet from New York who died in 1819. Information on the poet can be found in Joseph Belcher's *Hymns, Their Writers and Their Influence*. Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1859. Eastburne's emphasis on the virtue of the "meek" chamomile clearly reflected the Christian ideal quality of acceptance and passivity.

comparing herself to a frail flower. Even with all this time spent in the garden, Cassandra does not develop the typically female affinity for flowers, the symbol of femininity. She chooses to connect with insects and caterpillars, which feed off of and destroy flowers. This emphasizes Cassandra's violent attitudes towards the social construction of women as domesticated flowers.

Cassandra also struggles in her relationship with flowers in her education, specifically in botany and geology. As previously mentioned, botany was a popular science for the education of female students in the mid-nineteenth century. Before this time the science of botany had been a male field. In Emanuel Rudolph's study of women in botany, professors mention the "infiltration" of female students into their botany classes. While many women studied botany, they never pursued careers in it. Ultimately the professionalization of this science helped to maintain its masculine image.

Society allowed women to study botany by the justification that women possessed a connection to the natural world, as opposed to the spiritual and intellectual worlds of men, which was supported by Christian religion. In her school in Barmouth, Cassandra's teacher, Ms. Black, tells her "you had better study Geology. It is important, for it will lead your mind up from nature to nature's God" (Stoddard 37). The expectation for women to study nature in order to find God exemplifies the socially dominant belief that nature is subordinate to religion, an institution created by and heavily controlled by men, which privileges a male God-figure. The exclusion of women from roles in Christian religion because of their gender has long been attributed to the reproductive abilities of women's bodies. Ecofeminst critics such as Carolyn Merchant point out that Christian ideology, such as the declarations of the Cathedral School of Chartres, are derived from ancient Greek origin. Merchant writes that "in both Platonic and Neoplatonic symbolism,

therefore, nature and matter were feminine, while the ideas were masculine" (10). This association of women with nature is translated into the educational system by implying that women are closer to nature and must study the natural world in order to find access to the typically male sphere of moral thought. Cassandra's instructor believes that the purpose for women in studying the earth is to become closer to God, the spiritual symbol of patriarchal control, which Cassandra resists. Ms. Black, Cassandra's schoolteacher, recommends that she attend the botany lessons in which girls are taken on excursions into the fields and woods outside Barmouth. Cassandra admits she made little progress in the "dissection of flowers, the disruption of rocks, or the graces of composition" (Stoddard 38). She stops attending the excursions, because she is more interested in recognition from her peers and the fashion of the day than in the ecology around her. Cassandra fails to see any advantage in studying botany, and she feels that this study further isolates women in the domestic sphere. Eventually, Cassandra leaves Barmouth and returns home to her parents and sister. She is not the typical True Woman, but she has learned the expectations society holds for women.

Cassandra travels from home for a second time to live with her married cousin, and eventual love interest, Charles. This marks her entrance into becoming involved in power-conscious romances with men, engaging in social events, and connecting to the marketplace (a force in opposition to nature). Charles visits the Morgeson home and offers Cassandra the opportunity to engage in the educational and social opportunities in his hometown, Rosville. He offers to house Cassandra in his home with his wife and young children. During his visit, Aunt Merce points out that "He is fond of flowers […] he examined all my plants, and knew all their botanical names" (Stoddard 63). This sets the stage for Charles's fascination with flowers. Later when Cassandra arrives in Rosville, Alice, Charles's wife, states that he cares more for flowers

than for his children. She says, "You must know Cassandra that his heart is with his horses and his flowers. He is more interested in them than he is in his children" (76). Charles's obsession with flowers will further influence Cassandra to distance herself from them. Men associate with the female world of flowers through the technique of scientific exploration, which gives them control over flowers in order to escape emasculation.

Once Cassandra moves to Charles's home in Rosville, one of the first things she notices is his well-maintained flowers and his desire to control her. Cassandra picks up a flower-filled vase in his house, and Charles takes it from her saying, "It will hardly bear touching […] by tomorrow these little white bells will be dead" (69). [61] Cassandra notes the contrast between Charles's strength and the graceful room (and presumably the delicate flowers). Cassandra states, "What a contrast…here, in this room, and in you" (69). Charles's next statement connects his relationship with Cassandra to his relationship to the flowers. He replies, "and between you and me" (69). Charles implies that Cassandra, like the flower, is weak, and he has control over her. However, Charles underestimates Cassandra; she is not as delicate as the flower.[62]

In the scenes that follow, Charles's use of flowers in his courtship of Cassandra shows that he views both flowers and women as dominated objects. Charles manipulates a social custom by using flowers to exert his power and control; Charles gives Cassandra flowers. According to Seaton, "the giving of flowers to women during courtship became particularly elaborate during the nineteenth century" (10). If a man were to give a woman a flower, it was the woman's choice to carry his flower, over another man's. This choice signified his chances of romance with that woman. By giving Cassandra a flower, Charles is offering his affections and

[61] The name of the town, Rosville, suggests roses, a romantic flower associated with beauty.
[62] Cassandra's strength and endurance are later tested in a carriage accident that kills Charles and leaves her with a concussion and facial scar. Cassandra refers to this scar as her wound received "in battle." This first scene sets the stage for the power struggle that is their relationship.

attempting to win her romantically. This situation is complicated because Cassandra and Charles's flirtation takes place in front of his wife and children. Charles's wife Alice embodies the virtues of the True Woman. Charles fantasizes Cassandra within the socially confined definitions of nature, trying to subordinate her as he does his wife

Charles again assumes an attitude of domination over Cassandra by comparing her to a flower a second time. Charles tells her, "I am a generous man and very strong; do you know that, you little fool? Here, will you take this flower? There will be no more this year […] I love these frail flowers best […] where I have to protect them from my own touch, even" (Stoddard 81). Charles states his capacity to crush the "pink, faintly odious blossom" which reflects his sadistic, patriarchal fantasy of Cassandra as a vulnerable and domesticated flower that he keeps and manipulates. Cassandra accepts his flower only to offer it to another man, Mr. Perkins. When Charles sees her offer the pink flower, he "struck it out of my hand and stepped on it" (Stoddard 84). By giving away Charles's flower, not only is Cassandra rejecting him, but she is usurping a traditionally male role by giving a flower to a man of her choice.

The color of the flower mentioned in this scene is especially significant. Color was an important indicator of meaning in the language of flowers as "the strength of passion and love seem to diminish as one goes from red to pink to white" (Seaton 118). Pink flowers also represent youth (Goody 23). The pink flower Cassandra gives away represents Cassandra's young flirtatiousness as well as her level of passion. For Charles, the flower becomes representative of Cassandra herself. Charles deems that Cassandra (personified in the flower) will be under his control or will be destroyed. When Cassandra commandeers the power in determining the course of her affection, Charles threatens her by saying, "Like many women, you will continue to do something to keep in continual pain. If Nature [sic] does not endow your

constitution with suffering, you will make up the loss by some fatal trifling" (Stoddard 84). She objects that she is in perfect health, but Charles persists in his controlling attempts to compare her with weak flowers. The same definitions Cassandra works to reject during the whole novel are the ones that Charles uses to describe her.

Shortly after this exchange, Charles leaves at night to meet an employee at his textile mill and brings along Cassandra. During the encounter, Charles makes a third comparison between women and flowers. Charles tells the employee, who is leaving his employment to marry a girl, "You will get over the affair. We all do. Is she handsome?" When the employee replies "beautiful," Charles states, "that [female beauty] goes, like the flowers; but they [new beautiful women] come every year again" (Stoddard 83). The disposability of women and the connection with the fleeting beauty of flowers adds to Charles's attempted objectification of Cassandra.

After Cassandra and Charles return from their nighttime trip to the mill, Cassandra speaks with Alice and expresses her conflicted feelings of discomfort with Charles's controlling nature and her attraction to him. Cassandra admits to Alice that Charles influences her strongly and that she influences him. Alice sharply tells Cassandra that her youthful beauty influences Charles because she is handsome. Cassandra responds to Alice by saying, "So are flowers" (Stoddard 85). Repeating Charles's earlier words about flowers, Cassandra acknowledges the patriarchy's objectification of her appearance. This statement indicates that she knows that she can use her looks to try to attract Charles, but must acknowledge the fleeting nature of his affection. Here, she identifies the danger of associating herself with the potted, hot house flowers under his complete control and contemplates the consequence of being another flower in Charles's collection.

After Cassandra replies, "so are flowers" to Alice, she thinks of her sister Veronica and states that her "image appeared to me, pale, delicate, unyielding. I seemed to wash like a weed at her base" (Stoddard 85). Here, Veronica becomes the flower, attractive to men but also weak and disposable, while Cassandra becomes a weed sucking her sister's strength but also finding her own nourishment. This description of Cassandra as predatory and existing at the expense of a flower is reminiscent of her trampling the chamomile plant and identifying with the flower-eating caterpillar. She absorbs the patriarchy's survivalist "kill or be killed" mentality.[63] Cassandra's description of Veronica paints her sister as a domesticated flower, trapped in her pot, surviving only in captivity. Cassandra decides that if anyone is a flower it is Veronica. Cassandra realizes that she is not a True Woman like Veronica. Cassandra's analysis of herself as a weed shows her avaricious nature. She acknowledges her sister and Alice's abilities to bloom in a socially accepted way, but she does not desire that ability for herself. In Cassandra's eyes, Veronica and Alice signify weakness and surrender. Instead, her near affair with Charles makes her see herself as a vicious weed draining the flower, Alice, of domestic nourishment.

Later in the novel, after Charles is killed in a carriage accident and Cassandra returns home. Stoddard's novel addresses gender roles and social power struggles in this family of women, and she continues to use flowers symbolically to do so. Cassandra talks with Aunt Merce, who lives with the Morgesons after her father's death, about her flowers and plants. Aunt Merce states, "I have a poor lot of roses […] but some splendid cactuses." Cassandra replies," I do not love roses" (Stoddard 131). Roses, which are associated with love, possibly remind Cassandra of Charles, for whom Cassandra both mourns and feels free in escaping his controlling influence.

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[63] For a description of Cassandra's violent tendencies see Feldman, Jessica. "A Talent for the Disagreeable: Elizabeth Stoddard Writes the *Morgesons.*"

Cassandra's displeasure with roses is mentioned again later when Cassandra travels to visit the Somers family in place of Veronica who will marry Ben Somers. There, Cassandra has a vision of the dead Charles in which he says, "I am glad you are here, my darling, do you smell the roses?" (189). Charles's association of roses with Cassandra and his desire to control her make her dislike the flower. In the language of flowers, each of the many popular varieties of roses has its own connotation. Roses can be therefore defined in a plethora of ways. The basic red rose carries the meaning of "beauty" in most books, including Wirt's (205). Color is very important in determining the various meanings of roses. For example the deep red rose means bashful shame (Wirt 197). Thus, Cassandra expresses distaste for roses, the flowers typical of femininity and beauty but also the shame and modesty that women are expected to feel.

Veronica acts as a counter-point to Cassandra throughout the novel. Thus, her taste in flowers is mentioned to contrast with her sister's taste. Aunt Merce states, "But Verry does not care so much for them [roses], either. Lilies are her favorites" (Stoddard 131). Veronica's favorite flower, the lily, is typically associated with "purity and sweetness" (Wirt 138). Veronica's preference for the lily could be a reference to her virginal innocence and her eventual willingness to sweetly serve her husband through her domesticity.[64] Recall from Stoddard's poem "August" that the lily is an ancient, deeply symbolic flower meaning "purity" and is often connected to the Virgin Mary (Hale 114). This meaning fits with the image of Veronica, the sister who suggests the "True Woman" and a good, pure Christian. Also, this flower penchant indicates Veronica's preference for virginity over marriage, which she goes into but with a hesitation. Later in the novel, Veronica is again tied to a lily. Shortly before her eventual wedding to Ben Somers, Cassandra comments that Veronica looks "as fair as a lily, as serene as

[64] Veronica's husband, Ben Somers, dies of alcoholism leaving Veronica to raise her possibly developmentally delayed daughter alone.

the lake on which it floats" (Stoddard 229). Using the lily to describe Veronica's pale complexion adds a religious allusion to the rich levels of meaning present in Stoddard's text. Veronica represents virginal purity, and she faces death both physically and emotionally on her wedding day. She gives up her dreams of finding feminist agency in flowers and settles for the unsatisfying life of a True Woman.

The final scene in which flowers play a significant role (since they remain unconventionally absent from Mrs. Morgeson's funeral and Veronica's wedding) is the scene in which Desmond, Ben Somers's brother and Cassandra's passionate love and eventual husband, departs and gives flowers to Cassandra as she leaves the Somers' home. Stoddard does not mention which type of flowers they are, as this becomes peripheral to the function that the flowers play and the symbolism inherent in their arrangement. The flowers are given to her in a box and are tied with a stolen ribbon from Cassandra's dress. Charles would have represented Cassandra through flowers, but Desmond represents her through material fabric. He steals a piece of her clothing, an intimate act akin to possessing a part of her. Cassandra prefers being compared to material goods instead of to natural things, and she recognizes and focuses on her stolen ribbon, ignoring the flowers. Placing the flowers in a box evokes a coffin; the flowers, which often act as personifications, are shut off from light and water, the necessities of life. In addition, since flowers are often meant to convey the giver's feelings for the recipient, closing the flowers in a box, as Desmond does, signifies that he has compartmentalized his feelings for Cassandra. If flowers were commonly accepted as symbols of love, then Cassandra also compartmentalizes Desmond's affection in order to live her life independently and care for her family. To possess strength, Cassandra must not dwell on past romances but must accept her independent role. She leaves the flowers closed in the box.

Several months after she leaves the Somer's home, Cassandra's mother dies, and she assumes the role of director of the Morgeson house. During her assumption of this role, she destroys Desmond's now dried flowers which she saved in the box and detaches herself from her passion for him. Cassandra states, "The box with Desmond's flowers I threw into the fire, without opening it, ribbon and all, for I could not endure the sight of them" (Stoddard 217). The memories and sentiments that the flowers carry express Desmond's passionate feelings. Cassandra now possesses her house and assumes responsibility for her aunt and sister, who is with child and widowed by an alcoholic Ben. The right to property was a privilege that few women in her time experienced. Burning the flowers relieves Cassandra from the nostalgia of her romance with Desmond. This signifies her breaking the sentimental attachments she holds to an absent lover and gaining her independence.

Later, once Cassandra has successfully run her household, Desmond returns to her, and they marry. It is in this period of calm that she turns to writing a woman's story: her own. Once she possesses her home, has space, and has no children, Cassandra has the freedom to join the patriarchal sphere and write. By 1850 Cassandra Morgeson would have had company as a woman writer; however, it is unlikely she would have followed the domestic tradition of most female writers of that time. The domestic writers advocated Christian values and social compliance. In the *Morgesons*, the startling final disclosure that Cassandra is not only the narrator but also the author of her novel shows that she has found her art and expression through writing, not gardening. This choice of craft signifies her taking a new direction in women's artistic expression. She follows her foremothers, past female writers, but also, like Stoddard herself, takes women's writing in a direction it has not previously been.

Throughout *The Morgesons*, the female characters express their discontent with the

confines of the domestic sphere but still never manage to escape it. As Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell observe, Stoddard's domestic sphere is "a place of social, economic, and psychic imprisonment for women" (2). Cassandra attempts to resist the patriarchy's conventional expectations by leaving home and engaging in the marketplace within the dominant male culture. Cassandra rejects the typical female role of embracing flowers in order to assert her independence and dominance. As Cassandra evolves, Stoddard downplays the language of flowers in her text. Cassandra never becomes fully immersed in feminine culture and finds independence by taking over the management of a household along with its finances. On the other hand, Veronica opts to remain outside the public sphere for as long as possible enabling her to connect with a fantasy utopia, similar to the magical magnolia in Fuller's sketch. Veronica finds solace in her mental connection to nature but rarely ventures out to engage with the natural environment. As she begins to embrace domestic and conventional female roles, her connections to nature become increasingly conventional and solidify her in the unfulfilling role of wife. At the end of the novel, we see her as a defeated domestic woman without even a dream of "something beyond."

Aunt Merce's, Veronica's, and Cassandra's relationships with flowers demonstrate the extent to which they embrace or reject social constructs; Stoddard shows that no woman in her text is capable of realizing a fully independent and fulfilling life while living in the framework of nineteenth-century society. Depending on the woman's social position and relationship to men, Stoddard's use of flowers takes different shapes and meanings: reinforcing convention as seen in Charles's courtship of Cassandra or providing feminist agency as seen in Aunt Merce's gardens. Stoddard complexly structures her expectations for the use of flowers in women's writing. Then, she figuratively throws her box of flowers in the fire by connecting the language of flowers to

conventional women's novels and avoiding connecting flowers with women's empowerment. Stoddard's flower references illustrate the complex social situation of American women in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER THREE: SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW: THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS IN EDITH WHARTON'S *SUMMER*

> "It is not in the heart of the city, but in the countryside, surrounded by flowers, that love has all of its power; it is there that a heart truly in love raises itself to its Creator; it is there that eternal hopes come to mix with transitory sentiments, transfiguring the lovers, and giving to their looks, to their attitudes, those celestial expressions which touch even the indifferent. It is thus especially for those who know love and who live in the country, far from the tumult of the world, that we have collected some syllables from the language of flowers" (Charlotte Latour, introduction to *Le Langage des Fleurs*).

Surrounded by the devastation of war in the summer of 1916 in France, Edith Wharton took a respite from caring for wounded soldiers serving in the first World War to write her tragic romance *Summer* set in the beautiful, calm New England countryside. In her use of the bucolic setting and her employment of the language of flowers, Wharton echoes the voice of French language of flowers author Charlotte Latour who claimed that the language of flowers' purpose was to voice the longing of love, especially the pure and hopeful love that transpired between youths in the country. In *Summer*, Wharton uses language of flowers meanings that bear a striking similarity to those given in Latour's French language of flowers dictionary. Wharton also uses the language of flowers to express the transfigurative power of first love, especially first love in rural New England. However, Wharton was skeptical of the language of flowers, especially its sentimental connotations; In *Summer*, she shows how the outdated representation of womanhood shown through the language of flowers comes into conflict with modern feminist

ideals such as sexual liberation. Wharton chronicles the destruction of her naive young American heroine who chases romantic love at the cost of her self-preservation.

Wharton's heroine, Charity Royall, grows from a girl to a woman, but this change is not for the better. Instead of the young orphaned heroine transforming the wayward male into a moral husband, as was the plot of the typical sentimental novel of the mid-nineteenth century, Charity's lover leaves her pregnant and abandoned, and she is forced to marry her adoptive father or face social exile as an unwed mother. In *Summer*, Wharton comments on the emerging social phenomenon of the New Woman in America, and shows that for an urban, educated woman the ideals of the New Woman were possible, but when an uneducated, rural girl tries to adopt them disaster ensues.[65] Wharton uses flower symbolism in her text, which closely resembles the meanings given in the nineteenth-century French language of flowers, a sentimental tradition. She combines this sentimental tradition with real world circumstances in order to depict her heroine's naive attempt to step away from the ideal of the True Woman. Charity attempts to embrace some of the personal freedoms that were being practiced by the New Woman, but she confronts the reality that life in rural America provided limited social options for a woman.[66]

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[65] According to Martha Patterson, scholars disagree about the origin of the term New Woman. However, Patterson points to the 1894 exchange between British writers Sarah Grand and Ouida in the *North American Review* as its first use in print. The New Woman movement, if it could be called that, describes an observable change in the attitudes and ambitions of British and American women during the period between the 1890s and 1920s. Patterson states that, "by the turn of the century, as increasing numbers of women demanded a public voice and private fulfillment through work, education, and political engagement, women, like their male counterparts, seemed to be evolving" (1). Wharton's Charity does not strive for education or political involvement. Instead she desires personal freedom. The personal freedoms of women, such as sexual liberation and a life outside marriage, occupied some New Women.

[66] The True Woman is Nina Baym's term for a woman in the nineteenth century who upheld the cardinal virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. See Baym's 1978 book *Woman's Fiction*.

Edith Wharton, like Elizabeth Stoddard, uses flowers to represent femininity and connects flowers to romantic love, but she does not limit flowers to that function.[67] According to language of flowers historian Beverly Seaton, "the Victorian language of flowers was a language of love" (44). In *Summer*, Wharton links flowers to her main character's physical desires, which demonstrates Wharton's revolutionary use of the language of flowers as a covert female discourse similar to that described by Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*. However, while Cixous sees women's need to embrace sexual liberation as essential to feminist development, Wharton implies in *Summer* that while sexual liberation is valuable for women's selfhood, it is also socially destructive in the current society. This chapter will look at Wharton's paradoxical use of the language of flowers in *Summer*. Wharton is simultaneously stressing the importance for women to assimilate into male culture by way of profession and culture, while also appealing to traditional women through her symbolic flowers.

The language of flowers is a collection of emotional meanings and sentiments associated with certain flowers, which stems from seventeenth-century France and was immensely popular in the form of flower dictionary gift books in nineteenth-century America and Europe.[68] Wharton uses many flowers in *Summer* that had widely known religious symbolism, such as the rose and lily; however, she also uses flowers that had particular French cultural symbolism. Wharton's use often corresponds with meanings given to the flowers in Charlotte Latour's language of flowers. Although by Wharton's time the trend of buying dictionaries had passed, many flower meanings had become common cultural knowledge. These flower meanings were passed on through generations and came from traits of the flowers. These traits, such as sweetness, modesty

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[67] As a link between this chapter and the previous one, it is worth noting that Wharton had a copy of the *Morgesons* by Elizabeth Stoddard in her library at the Mount. Wharton may have been inspired by Stoddard's female bildüngsroman, which was also set in Massachusetts.

[68] For a complete history of the language of flowers see language of flowers scholars Beverly Seaton's or Jack Goody's studies.

or frailty often reflect qualities society deemed appropriate for women in that culture. Wharton certainly knew the characteristics and cultural meanings of these flowers well.

Wharton uses flowers in both a conventional way, to convey the sentimental tradition associated with the language of flowers and the True Woman, and also in a naturalist way, to show her character engaging with the wild and attempting to escape the limiting social structures that the patriarchy imposes on her, an attempt Wharton shows will fail. For Charity, especially in the beginning of the novel, flowers signify an escape and a method of expressing her revolution. Eventually, this revolution fails, and she ends up more confined than before. Wharton's use of flowers in *Summer* is emblematic of a transitional period in the way that women viewed themselves in society bridging the True Woman and the New Woman. This evolution shows a change in the way that some women viewed flowers, once the ideal symbol for a woman but then a possible detriment to feminism. Ultimately, Wharton shows that the idealism of her main character, a woman who embraces nature and free love, is foolish. She says that women can't escape convention and that sentimental notions of women as flowers do not mesh with modern feminism.

Wharton's love of gardening led her to collect many books on the topic in both French and English. In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*. Wharton mentions that she was an avid reader of seventeenth-century French literature and later French texts. She states that the inspiration for her own "polite locutions" came from France, where the language of flowers began and continued into the nineteenth century (124). In addition, several texts in her library, which are on display at the Mount, show her knowledge of horticulture, but currently there are no language of flowers dictionaries.[69] It is important to note that half of Wharton's library was

[69] George Ramsden's catalogue in the Mount mentions Wharton owned a copy of *The Horticulturalist's Rule-Book, Botany for Young People and Common Schools,* as well as several practical gardening guides. These guides do not

destroyed in a blitz in London after her death, so we may never know if she owned a language of flowers dictionary. While it cannot definitely be proven that Wharton had a specific language of flowers dictionary in her library or used a dictionary to find meanings for flowers in *Summer*, the meanings of flowers were so culturally embedded in her time that she is very likely to have been aware of and capable of referring to popular language of flowers meanings.[70] I have chosen to highlight flowers that Wharton mentions which carry meaning beyond merely being fertile examples of nature. Considering which dictionaries would have been available to Wharton at the time of her writing *Summer* as well as her reading preferences, I have chosen to consider the language of flowers meanings which were given to flowers by the nineteenth-century French author Charlotte de Latour, whose 1819 dictionary was reprinted in America and France in 1854. Latour's dictionary was immensely popular and was widely reprinted for many decades. Many American language of flowers authors were influenced by Latour's dictionary, and of those authors Catherine Waterman's dictionary remains the closest to Latour's. However, American authors changed some meanings so that they could convey a greater sense of feminine morality and True Womanhood in the meanings of flowers. The symbolic meanings that Wharton gives flowers in her text resemble the meanings in Latour's dictionary more closely than any American language of flowers text. Latour was less concerned with giving flowers meanings that reflected women's fidelity and religiousness than American authors. This frank discussion of women's sexuality corresponds with Wharton's use of flowers to portray Charity's unbridled sexuality.

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contain coded flower meanings the way Latour's dictionary did. Their presence indicates that Wharton's illustrated language of flowers dictionaries might have been kept with her art books, which were lost in the blitz.

[70] Critic Sharon Dean believes that Wharton knew of the language of flowers. When speaking of Wharton and Constance Fennimore Woolson, Dean writes that while there is no proof either author read a language of flowers book, however, "the way they use vegetation in their fiction indicates that they were well aware of this type of flower symbolism that permeated nineteenth-century woman's culture" (155). Dean also makes the point that just because Wharton knew of the language of flowers, not every flower that she mentions in the text aligns with a language of flower meaning. Often Wharton mentions specific flowers in *Summer* to set the scene or time of year in western New England.

There are several hints that point to a likelihood that Wharton would choose Latour's meanings over other authors. The scientific nature of Latour's text blended with the romantic covert nature of the language of flowers may have appealed to Wharton, who insisted on being in step with the latest advancements in horticulture. While Latour's text would not have been considered innovative for Wharton's time, it still is more scientifically based than many flower dictionaries. In addition, since Wharton was living in France and read and wrote in French, she had the opportunity and means to become familiar with Latour's dictionary. During the time Wharton wrote *Summer,* she was honing her use of the French language. According to Wharton biographer Hermione Lee, *Ethan Frome,* written before *Summer,* was originally written in French and was constructed as an exercise for a French tutor (378). Even if Wharton did not know Latour's dictionary, she would have heard her meanings while discussing flowers in France since Latour captured the meanings of flowers that dominated in France for over a century. Wharton scholar Sharon Dean states that Wharton knew of the tradition of using flowers to express sentiments. In Dean's fascinating study of Constance Fenimore Woolson and Edith Wharton's use of landscape in their fiction, she writes, "Wharton drew on [flower] symbolism to make a statement about the social order" (155). Dean looks at Sarah Josepha Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* in her study and uses this text to provide context for flowers meanings in several of Wharton's texts including *Summer*. Hale's dictionary along with Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary* were the most popular American language of flowers books. While Wharton was likely aware of the American language of flowers, it seems she chose to use the French. Therefore, it is important to consider Latour's language of flowers book, which had a greater impact on Wharton.

Further evidence that Wharton may have preferred French meanings for her symbolic flowers can be found in Wharton's essay "French Ways and their Meanings". Wharton states that French women are superior to American women in their maturity, business sense, and social standing. Wharton writes "the reason why American women are not really 'grown up' in comparison with the women of the most highly civilized countries –such as France- is that all their semblance of freedom, activity and authority bears not much more likeness to real living than the exercises of the Montessori infant" (*Abroad* 178). Wharton credits French women with being their husbands' business partners, with interacting with other men after marriage, and with being the artists of living. This concept of artful living implies that deliberate consideration should be given to even the most daily activities, such as which flowers they should give or display. Wharton criticizes the American women for whom other women are "their only audience, and to a great extent each other's only companions" and finds fault in the fact that once American women are married they are "withdrawn from circulation" (178; 185). Wharton saw value in women interacting with "the stronger masculine individuality," which would help women develop their individuality. The French language of flowers reflects this individuality instead of depicting demure femininity in connecting women with flowers. Wharton states "the two sexes complete each other mentally as well as physiologically" and for a great culture to exist it must be based on the "recognized interaction of influences between men and women" (178). Wharton states that women in America are free to have such interactions with the male sex when they are young, although once they are married, have had children, and have "rounded out their experiences," when they might contribute to society, they "cease to be an influence in the lives of the men in the community in which she belongs" (185). Wharton endorses the French belief that women should not oppose themselves to the patriarchy but should instead advance

within it. She rejects the idea that advancement for the American feminist comes from female groups and causes.

The difference between French women's roles in society and American women's are reflected in Latour's dictionary.[71] While the language of flowers is a language of love and a part of courtship in both American and French cultures, Seaton notes that "love and marriage were not necessarily related in nineteenth-century France" (127). American language of flowers dictionaries replaced the more liberal French attitude toward passion outside of marriage with meanings that tend toward female virtue. American dictionaries censored female sexuality and reinforced the True Woman ideology, while the French prized female passion. This prizing of the sexually and spiritually pure yet socially excluded American woman may have influenced Wharton to use the French meanings for her story of summertime passion instead of the American since Wharton's main character Charity engages in an affair outside of marriage.

In her use of flowers, Wharton presents a dichotomy. She uses flowers that many readers would recognize from a traditional language of heterosexual courtship in which the passive female is pursued by a male and moves toward the goal of matrimony and maternity. Conversely, she also writes about flowers serving her main character as a means to express herself with an alternative to conventional discourse. Her writing uses flowers to state passionate bodily feelings in a socially proper way. Like her predecessors, Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Stoddard, Wharton sees expression through symbolic flowers as a potential medium for a woman to simultaneously remain within the respectable confines of traditional patriarchal society while being able to communicate her desires and to rebel against restrictive social norms. But unlike Fuller, she does not show her character as ultimately empowered by flowers.

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[71] One American text worth noting that replicates Latour's meanings is Catherine Waterman's *Flora's Lexicon*

The interchange between sentimentalism and realism in Wharton's fiction is a topic explored by Hildegard Hoeller in her critical reading *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimental Fiction*. Although Hoeller does not examine *Summer* in her study, *Summer* provides a wonderful example of Wharton's embrace of both genres. *Summer* clearly shows the danger of liberated sexuality in a repressed society in a realistic manner and focuses on the effect the environment has on her character: a hallmark of Realism. Wharton chronicles Charity's journey from home, to Nettleton and to the Mountain, and ends the novel with a marriage to a father-like figure. These aspects of the plot are typical of sentimental novels such as *The Lamplighter* by Maria S. Cummins, which pioneered the genre. The influence of the language of flowers in Wharton's novel shows her retaining another sentimental tradition in the novel, while still striving to be counted among the Realists. Hoeller states, "Wharton's decision to master the realist voice and publically denounce the sentimental tradition speaks to her awareness of the critical preferences of her time. But in light of these choices, her fiction's critique of realism and her affinity to sentimental writing become even more interesting and compelling" (10). If sentimental writing, often associated with women writers and with the language of flowers, is characterized by excess of emotion and words, then realist writing is praised for its more masculine economy. In response to the question about why Wharton would seek inspiration in a genre that she publically discredits, Hoeller argues, "Wharton articulates all the stains and obstacles a female writer must deal with when she enters a literary market mostly run by male editors, publishers, and critics and when she writes in and against a critically approved, mostly male literary tradition" (19). Hoeller rightly reasons that Wharton saw a potential audience in female readers and appropriately appealed to that audience with aspects of the sentimental in her writing. Hoeller does not examine the possible influence of the language of flowers, even though

it could be considered a sentimental technique. In *Summer*, Wharton blends flowers, an iconography referencing conventional marriage and dependent domesticity, with a woman's desire for independence and liberated sexuality. Wharton's references to flowers present a female voice on the verge of moving from masked rebelliousness in the form of a system of flower signification to straightforward discussion of a modern woman's needs and desires. Wharton dramatizes the conflict of those desires with surviving in a male dominated society.

Summer chronicles a summer in the life of Charity Royall, who is born in a remote mountain village of social outcasts, described by Wharton as immigrants, criminals, and prostitutes. She is adopted as a young child and raised by a lawyer and his wife in the rural town of North Dormer, Massachusetts. The plot of *Summer* begins years later; Royall's wife has died, and Charity gives up boarding school to live with Lawyer Royall out of guilt even though she despises him. The teenage girl has good reason to be wary of her guardian. One night he drunkenly expresses his sexual interest in her, but Charity stops his advances.

Charity craves adventure and a life away from the confines of North Dormer, but she is naive and uneducated. In the early summer a young, urbane architecture student, Lucius Harney, comes to stay with his old maiden cousin in town and to research a book on New England architecture.[72] Much to Lawyer Royall's chagrin, Charity and Harney start a friendship that turns into a love affair. They meet for many secret rendezvous in an abandoned cabin half way to the mountain of her birth. After they have become intimate, Charity finds out that Harney is engaged to the rich and cultured Annabel Balch. Charity also discovers that she is pregnant with Harney's child. After considering whether to force Harney to marry her, have an abortion, or become a prostitute, Charity travels up the mountain to go live with her kin in the outlaw colony. On her

[72] Wharton refers to this character simply as Harney in her novel. I will do the same in this chapter. It should be noted that Harney's interest in architecture is a direct opposition to Charity's fondness and connection to the wild earth. As an architect, Harney's profession is based on human interference with and taming of wild spaces.

way to the mountain Charity finds out that her mother has died in poverty and depravity and goes to witness her grotesque funeral. Subsequently Charity decides that she cannot endure the harsh, uncivilized life of her mother. She attempts to leave the mountain and then is "rescued" by Royall. Exhausted, starving and ill, she passively marries Lawyer Royall. Charity's final act is to buy back the blue brooch Harney gave her from the abortion doctor she visited. She returns to North Dormer as Royall's wife, with child, and with no chance of escape.

In *Summer*, Wharton references flowers at significant times in Charity's maturation. She uses four types of flower references, which often correspond with language of flower meanings. First, she mentions specific flowers in the plot and setting of scenes, often scenes depicting the developing romance between Harney and Charity. Correspondingly, the language of flowers meanings of these flowers reflect and highlight the romance plot while also giving insight into Charity's feelings. Second, Wharton shows the naive love Charity feels for flowers and highlights those flowers' meanings. This love, given flowers' frequent symbolic association with women, connects to Charity's desire for feminine culture, which temporarily liberates Charity but ultimately holds her under the control of the patriarchy. She certainly does not advance within it. Charity often thinks of flowers as she contemplates her love for Harney. Whereas English and American women used the language of flowers for moral and religious pursuits to "purify [their] soul", the French woman's "goal was to further feminize herself, making herself more attractive for her lover(s)" (Seaton 18). Charity's love of flowers follows the model of the French woman. Third, Wharton describes Charity as a flower. These direct references to the heroine in floral terms emphasize Wharton's use of flowers to stand in for Charity's corporal sexuality. Her description of Charity's female sexuality uses both the symbolic concept of a flower as well as particular flowers with corresponding language of flowers meanings to describe

Charity's physical and sexual body. While later feminist such as Cixous will claim that the "[female] libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think" (352), Wharton, instead, shows the female libido as the subject of social ridicule, not as an instrument of social change which lead to her fourth way of using the language of flowers, as a type of *écriture féminine*.

Wharton uses flowers conventionally to express romantic desire in heterosexual courtship and to explore unconventional themes such as free love and women's independence. This duality demonstrates her complex attitude toward feminism at the turn of the century. This complex attitude toward feminism was not Wharton's alone. Many women wanted to both cling to feminine traditions, customs, and images of femininity, which made women distinct from men, and to repeal those traditions and to break away from limiting social expectations. For example, women sought to find strength in feminine traditions such as motherhood, but they also wanted to be seen as more than a mother. This conundrum demonstrates the evolving place of flowers and the language of flowers as a voice for feminism.

Wharton's Use of the Language of Flowers as Setting and Convention in *Summer*

Wharton's extensive research and plans for her gardens demonstrate her familiarity with a wide variety of plant life. When speaking of her gardens at The Mount, her home in Lenox, Massachusetts in 1911, Wharton said, "I'm a better landscape gardener than novelist, and this place every line of which is my own work, far surpasses *The House of Mirth*" (Dwight 117). Edith Wharton's great passion for garden design is an example of the immense cultural importance of flowers in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. In America, women were often the ones who planted and tended flower gardens. American women were expected to keep a garden, and "flower gardening, whether gardenesque or naturalistic, was seen as an important

aspect of domestic life in the nineteenth century. Flower gardens were allied with the arts, literature, and other civilizing and cultured pursuits" (Seaton 7). Nurturing and growing gardens was an activity deemed appropriate for women (and men) to engage in, as it was an art form that took place in the domestic realm. Wealthy white women, like Wharton, rarely did any of the labor themselves, but they selected, designed, and supervised the creation of these floral masterpieces. Wharton was so interested in the subject of garden design that she compiled a book on Italian villa garden design. It is not a great leap that such a great lover of flowers would include multitudinous detailed flower references in her text and would be aware of the language of flowers.

Wharton's gardens at the Mount contained many wildflowers, collected from her automobile journeys into the New England countryside (Dwight 117). The gardens at the Mount capture Wharton's conflicting desire to create a cultivated space, which is infused with classical form while staying true to the wilderness of the New England setting. Wharton honors these New England flowers in her regional novel, *Summer*, in which she highlights the stark beginnings and intense flower growth in New England's growing season. As plants in a part of the nation with distinct seasons and ample rainfall, New England flowers tend to bloom later than those flowers in other areas of the country and have a shorter growing season; however, the New England flowers that grow are bright and intense. This intensity can be seen in the passion that blooms along with the flowers in *Summer*.

Early in the novel, Charity escapes the confines of the dusty library, a symbol of patriarchal language, to lie in the grass and to think of her love Harney.[73] In this scene, Wharton mentions a variety of plants with significant meanings. The passage reads, "Just beyond, a tuft of

[73] For further discussion of the library as a symbol of Charity's linguistic difference from Harney see Dianne L. Chambers' chapter 5 "Seduction and Language in *Summer*" from her book *Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton*.

sweet-fern uncurled between the beaded shoots of grass…Every leaf and bud and blade seemed to contribute its exhalation to the pervading sweetness in which the pungency of pine sap prevailed over the spice of thyme and the subtle perfume of fern" (34-35). Thyme is a significant herb since it is mentioned several times in the novel. Archival research of Wharton's handwritten *Summer* manuscript reveals that in this passage she crossed out herbs and wrote "thyme." This change shows her deliberate and intentional use of this plant. Latour gives thyme the meaning "activity" because bees and bugs are often buzzing busily around this fragrant plant (319). This meaning conveys Charity's active pursuit of Harney and her preference for the activity of being out-of-doors over the inactivity of the library. The other flower mentioned in the passage is a fern. Wharton studied ferns as indicated by her possession of Frances Parson's book, *How to Know Ferns*. Also, she planted ferns around the Mount. The wild fern in the scene is a symbol of "sincerity" and conveys that Charity is sincere in her love for Harney (Latour 309). Charity finds sincerity in her interactions with the wild, unlike her interactions with the townspeople. The delicate and beautiful fern is also a hardy plant that thrives in undomesticated conditions. Similarly, Charity prefers the outdoors. In this passage, the flowers represent Charity and Harney's relationship and Charity's characteristics.

Wharton writes about Charity's bliss after first meeting Harney in a way that makes her seem as if she is one of the flowers. Charity is lying on the ground surrounded by significant flowers, thyme and fern, that seem to mimic her emergence into womanhood. Wharton writes, "They were all merged in a moist earth-smell … (Wharton 35). The pronoun "they" includes Charity as one of the flowers. This sensual description of the summer landscape, its musky odor and its pulses of life, reflects Charity's own sexual awakening. The inception of love and of

sexuality has made Charity feel as alive as the blossoming flowers that unfurl their petals around her. Charity's habitat in the grass seems like a paradise.

In *Summer*, Wharton mentions many specific flowers and gives these flowers meanings that have similarities to the French language of flowers. An example of Wharton's use of meanings similar to the meanings given in the language of flowers is when Charity encounters a clump of lilies in a neighbors' yard. She has snuck out of her home on the night after she met Harney to secretly watch him through his window.[74] Language of flowers authors give lilies different meanings in French and American books. In the American language of flowers, lilies mean "purity" and are often associated with the Virgin Mary (Wirt 132).[75] The French meaning has a different connotation.

In the French language of flowers, Latour states that lilies symbolize "majesty," which could emphasize the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven or could imply regality and splendor (111). Charity stands in the flower filled garden on a summer evening to spy on Harney. This scene is the opposite of the typical male pursuing the female model of courtship. In light of this interpretation, either meaning for a lily would make this flower an ironic choice to be in front of the home of Julia Hawes, since she ran away from North Dormer and became a prostitute in Nettleton. Charity's illicit and voyeuristic action demonstrates the extent to which Charity is actively pursuing Harney, the opposite of traditional courtship. The white lilies would call to mind virginal purity for most nineteenth and early twentieth-century readers and would highlight Charity's risk of losing that purity. However, the lilies in their splendor could serve as a reminder

[74] The lily is a flower that appears in many of Wharton's fictions. In *The House of Mirth* the main character is named Lily Bart and is compared to a cultivated hothouse flower "grown for exhibition."
[75] Dean interprets Wharton's mention of this flower in this scene as a possible indication that Charity is about to lose the innocence the flower represents (156).

that, at this time, Charity begins to explore her physical desires with her attraction to Harney. Her attraction blooms in splendor as she pursues Harney.

In the same scene, Wharton mentions clematis growing on the trellis outside of Harney's window (Wharton 66). Charity, an uncultured young woman, often expresses interest in uncultivated and native New England flowers, such as clematis, ferns, and blackberries.[76] Several of the blooms mentioned in *Summer* are flowers that Wharton requested for her garden in France, which indicates she had a particular fondness for these flowers. Wharton's personal papers include extensive plans and plant lists for the gardens at St. Claire and Pavillon Colombe in France, and her gardens there contained many plants that she used significantly in her fiction, including roses and clematis. In fact, Wharton's correspondences with garden companies indicate that she special ordered clematis for her French garden.[77] Wharton describes Charity hiding behind a veil of clematis, hanging from the garden trellis outside Harney's window. Then, Charity pushes the flower away so that she can get a better view of him. Even though she has a clear view of the room, her view is in many ways obscured by her own failure to recognize the mental anguish he is enduring as he decides to pursue Charity or his betrothed, Annabel Balch. In Latour's floral language dictionary, clematis conveys the sentiment "artifice" (308). By pushing the clematis aside, Charity is effectively pushing aside the pretense and social expectations that a boy must pursue her and that she must remain passive and sexually disinterested. She later admits that she does not care if neighbors saw her in Harney's yard. Her lack of concern about social expectations shows Charity in an act of sexual voyeurism that seems

[76] For an extended discussion of Charity as one of Wharton's "poor, uneducated, unsophisticated dwellers in rural and rustic locales" see Pasha Stevenson's article on Charity as a "Noble Savage" page 1.
[77] This references a note to a garden supplier and bill of sale for flowers found in Wharton's personal documents from the Edith Wharton collection at the Yale Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

to excite her. She passes the lilies by and pushes aside the clematis, favoring the forward approach to female sexuality.

Wharton uses the language of flowers to foreshadow the plot in *Summer* by including a religious allusion.[78] If the nature surrounding North Dormer is Eden, then Nettleton, the site of Royall's public shaming of Charity and her eventual marriage to him, is Hell. Wharton's choice of name for the fictional town of Nettleton is significant. In the language of flowers, Latour gives nettles the meaning of "cruelty" (315). The sharp spiky but easily conveys this negative meaning. Eventually, the cruelty of others does bring Charity's downfall and forces her into a marriage to Royall. When Charity visits Nettleton with Harney for the Fourth of July celebrations, she encounters a drunken Royall who calls her a whore. This encounter with Royall destroys Harney's image of Charity as a pure woman, precipitating her downfall.[79] To complement this idea of Nettleton as Hell, Wharton refers to Nettleton's trains as serpents (94). This telling Biblical allusion hints at Charity's sexual temptation that begins there. Once Charity engages in sex with Harney, she eventually travels back to Nettleton to try to procure an abortion and then to marry Royall. Wharton's choice of the flower in naming the town uses the language of flowers to convey the dangerous feeling of the place.

Wharton mentions flowers in several of the scenes describing the budding sexual relationship between Harney and Charity. When Harney takes Charity to Nettleton for the fourth of July, they dine at a French restaurant under "a big elm bending over from the next yard" (88). The French restaurant, filled with a volume of people, is a far cry from her remote town of North

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[78] For further discussions of Eden symbols in the novel see Kathy Grafton.

[79] Kathy Grafton's Freudian analysis of the novel sees the allure of degradation and forbidden actions as respective motivations for Harney and Charity's sexual behaviors. Grafton argues that Charity's lack of innocence makes her fail to acknowledge that she is Harney's sexual conquest. Grafton's article calls to mind the concept of men viewing women through the lens of the virgin/whore mentality. Harney seems to want the virgin, Annabel, and the whore, who after Nettleton Charity becomes in his mind.

Dormer. Charity may want independence from her guardian, but she is not fully a New Woman comfortable with making her own way in the world. Charity gravitates to the natural elements in the scene in order to feel comfortable in the strange new environment. According to Latour, elm means "vigor" (315). This tree, like the thyme, reflects Charity's active pursuit of Harney.

In the scene in which Charity realizes that Harney is engaged to Annabel, flowers play a significant role. Charity, one of several young women from town participating in the Old Home Week celebration, is ironically attired in a white gown to highlight her supposed virginal purity. The young women have prepared garlands of hemlock for the ceremony, which takes place in the home of Miss Hatchard, Harney's cousin. Wharton was familiar with the plant since she had scrubs of hemlock surrounding her gardens at the Mount. In the language of flowers, hemlock means, "you will be my death." This accepted association for the plant came from the fact that it is poisonous (Seaton 178). The hemlock Charity is working with foreshadows Harney's impact on her life. When Miss Hatchard "dropped an allusion to her young cousin, the architect, the effect was the same on Charity. The hemlock garland she was wearing fell to her knees and she sat in a kind of trance" (114). A death-like state overcomes Charity as she is surrounded by hemlock, a symbol of death.

The hemlock is also connected to Lawyer Royall, who gives an address at the Old Home Week Ceremony while standing behind hemlock garlands. Wharton earlier mentions hemlock in the first paragraph of the novel as Charity emerges from Lawyer Royall's house connecting him to the deadly plant from the start. Hemlock grows in his front yard and sets an ominous tone.

Wharton's final reference to hemlock reinforces its menacing meaning. Charity's friend Ally Hawes is sewing a blouse for Annabel Balch, Harney's fiancée. Charity destroys the blouse by ripping it up. After Charity's destructive act, a rainstorm begins and brings with it cold fall

weather. Wharton describes the fall leaves and the "black hemlock turned to indigo against the incandescence of the forest" (143). Against the backdrop of nature's autumn spectacle the hemlock, Lawyer Royall's emblem, looms darkly.

The Old Home Week Ceremony is ripe with symbolic language of flowers meanings. Upon returning to his seat after his speech, Lawyer Royall knocks down a maple branch, which has obscured Charity's view of the crowd revealing that Harney is sitting familiarly with Annabel (127). Charity's attire for the Old Home Week Ceremony is a white veil and a wreath of asters worn on her head that recalls the pagan practices involving virgins. Latour states that asters symbolize "mental reservations" (306). When Charity is wearing this crown of asters, she reflects on the idea that Harney might not be loyal to her. Charity represents a diversion from his proper engagement to Annabel. The heat of the room, her pregnancy, and the revelation of Harney's betrayal cause Charity to faint. She falls at the feet of Lawyer Royall, near the foreboding hemlock garlands. Her pregnancy is responsible for this literal and metaphoric fall.

After the Old Home Week Ceremony, Harney assures Charity he will end his engagement to Annabel. They meet again in the abandoned cabin that Charity decorates with flowers to simulate a home. Charity's brazen behavior, in engaging in sexual activity with Harney, shows that the consequences of her actions are an afterthought and that she does not seriously consider the impact of these lustful moments. Without the education or birth control advocated by the New Woman, Charity is faced with few options once she has given up her virginity. She must marry or be deemed a whore.

Wharton's Emphasis on Charity's Love of Flowers and her Naiveté

Wharton's use of the by now quaint language of flowers is unexpected given the historical changes in women's rights which were about to occur. In the 1920s, women were

fighting for the right to birth control. Feminists rebelled from associating women with nature in order for women to appear more similar to men and thus equally deserving of the same rights. In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir would make the argument that women are (unfairly) held back by their role in "reproductive slavery" and connection to nature in that both women and nature create life (70). "What a curse to be a woman!" de Beauvoir writes, "And yet the very worst curse when one is a woman is, in fact, not to understand that it is one" (75). In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir states that motherhood left woman "riveted to her body" like an animal and made it possible for men to dominate her and Nature (79). Later, she describes man's gradual domination of women, citing ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras who wrote, "There is a good principle that created order, light and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness and woman "(89). Wharton's novel and the outcome of Charity's life, as a girl devoted to nature, is similar to de Beauvoir's view of the need for women to distance themselves from nature.

Similarly, Carolyn Merchant, an ecofeminist critic of the 1970s, states that European cultures have depicted nature as a mother and bride who "sooth[es] the anxiety of men distraught by the demands of the urban world… with their subordinate and essentially passive female natures" (Merchant 20). This simplification of women as primitive secondary citizens needing to be controlled by men has led some feminists to resist connecting women with nature.[80] However her ecofeminist book of criticism, *Undomesticated Ground*, Stacy Alaimo cites Luce Irigaray as a feminist who does not demand that women be distanced from nature in order to gain authority and independence in the eyes of society. Alaimo states that Irigaray "shows that women, by their very 'closeness' to nature, are necessary for the culture that erects itself upon them."(6). Later feminist writers such as Mary Austin saw nature as an escape and a liberating voice for women's

[80] Pasha Stevenson's reading of Charity as a "Noble Savage" calls to mind the interpretation of Charity's connection to nature as an impediment to her progress as a feminist woman.

progress, but Wharton refuses to accept nature as a liberating element in women's lives, beyond finding artistic fulfillment in designing a garden. Wharton, like de Beauvoir, implies that too much of a connection to nature can hold women back in the eyes of men.

Wharton's feelings about women's relationships to nature and the imitations such a connection imposes are expressed in *Summer*. In her 1934 autobiography *A Backward Glance*, Wharton expresses her early inherent connection to the natural world, something that seemed to bring her a sense of companionship and a form of expression as a young girl. However, a connection with nature seemed something that Wharton felt a woman must put aside as she grew into maturity.[81] As a child, flowers served Wharton as a way to give voice to a longing for which she had no words, especially her developing sexuality. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton remembers visiting a lake when she was in her early teens. She states, "What I recall is …my secret sensitiveness to the landscape…I was in deep and solitary communion whenever I was alone with nature. It was the same tremor that had stirred in me in the spring woods of Mamaroneck, when I heard the whisper of the arbutus and the starry choir of the dogwood; and it has never since been still" (Wharton *BG* 31). Wharton builds the connection Charity feels for nature on her own experiences with nature as a young girl. Perhaps this childlike connection to nature also indicates the level of immaturity Wharton wants her reader to identify in her character Charity.

Wharton's inspiration for Charity seems to have sprung from Latour's seventeenth-century French flower dictionary preface in which she states, "happy the young girl who ignores the foolish joys of the world and knows no sweeter occupation than the study of plants! Simple and naive, she demands from the fields her most affecting finery: each spring brings her new

[81] Several critics have discussed Wharton's lack of sexual knowledge prior to her wedding night. Wharton blamed her mother for giving her no sexual education. See Eleanor Dwight, Josephine Donovan, Cynthia Griffin Wolff.

delights, and each morning a harvest of flowers repays her cares with new pleasure" (trans Seaton 18). Wharton's heroine certainly fits this mold. She eschews her job at the library to roll on the sunny hillside. In Charity's society, her sexuality holds her back to fulfill traditional women's roles. Wharton seems to indicate that too much submersion in the natural world creates naïveté. Wharton states in *French Ways and Their Meaning* (1919), "the woman whose mind is attuned to men's minds has a much larger view of the world and attaches much less importance to trifles…American women are like children" (45). Once Charity is in the desperate situation of unwed pregnancy, she is dependent on Royall and is frequently described as a child in her obedience and submission. Thus, Wharton's *Summer* comments on the limited options available to women who are isolated from the world of commerce, uneducated, and without contraception. Wharton's hesitancy to find the solution to women's problems in a connection to the natural world, or in the language of flowers, indicates that she felt that a connection to nature might be empowering for some women, but without equal rights it can add to their subservience.

Charity exemplifies a woman whose connection to nature makes her seem unrefined and base in the eyes of Harney, possibly influencing his decision to carry on an affair with her outside of marriage. In the eyes of Harney, an educated young man, Charity is not an acceptable girl to consider marrying. In Nettleton on the fourth of July, Harney takes Charity into a jewelry store. He asks her to select something she likes. Charity prefers a lily of the valley pin, but she later reconsiders when Harney suggests that she should pick a more sophisticated brooch (Wharton 87). The lily of the valley is a wild flower in New England that Latour states means the "return of happiness" (54). Instead of allowing Charity to have the lily of the valley brooch, symbolic of her return to happiness, Harney buys a brooch with a blue stone. The blue stone brooch is described "as blue as a mountain Lake", which critic Candace Waid sees as a reference

to Charity's mountain heritage. Instead, it is important to consider that the stone is cold, polished, and not in its natural form. In Harney's eyes, Charity's preference for a flower pin indicates that she lacks the refinement of Harney's other love, Annabel. [82]

Wharton uses flower references to point out Charity's primitive connection to nature and to contrast it with other characters in *Summer*. For example, Charity is associated with the wildflowers that grow along the road and up the trail to the mountain, and Annabel is associated with the cultivated garden flowers at the garden parties she attends (62). Charity has never been to such a party. She is far from cultivated in social graces.

Wharton's Description of Charity as a Flower

Often in *Summer*, Edith Wharton uses references to flowers in place of discussing a woman's body. In the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, it would be inappropriate to discuss a woman's body or desires in writing. Wharton's references to flowers and plant life in *Summer* are representative of Charity's sexual awakening and coming of age. By describing Charity as a flower, Wharton is able to discuss the young girl's sexual awakening in a veiled and poetic way. Wharton's references to flowers bear a similarity to Latour's language of flowers meanings, both of which convey women's desires and emotions.

For a look at flower's ability to reflect feelings, it is important to return to the scene in the beginning of *Summer* after Charity's first meeting with Harney. She escapes the confining damp library to act as a flower lying on the earth and basking in the sun. Wharton writes, "She was blind and insensible to many things, and dimly knew it; but to all that was light and air, perfume and colour, every drop of blood in her responded. She loved the roughness of the dry mountain grass under her palms, the smell of thyme into which she crushed her face, the fingering of the

[82] Sharon Dean notes the frequency with which Wharton uses lilies of the valley in her fictions including references in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, but she does not consider the meaning of the lily of the valley in the language of flowers. Wharton also wore lilies of the valley in her own wedding (Dean 156-57)

wind in her hair and through her cotton blouse, and the creak of the larches as they swayed to it…Generally at such times she did not think of anything, but lay in an inarticulate well-being "(12). Charity's wild and rebellious act is made more socially acceptable by Wharton's description of the young woman as a flower instead of as a woman. Wharton emphasizes that Charity acts and feels but her mind is empty. This statement is implied criticism from the well-read author.

However, Wharton goes beyond the conventional woman as flower description and connects Charity with language of flower meanings that reveal Wharton is questioning Charity's liberated sexuality. An uneducated woman like Charity, who is excluded from the freedoms that the New Woman ideology promised, contrasts the urban, educated New Woman. Wharton makes a point to associate Charity with wildflowers, not cultivated flowers, since wildflowers reproduce actively, freely, and without human intervention.[83] Wharton stresses that Charity does not think but only feels. Recall that the herb thyme is associated with the meaning "activity" in Latour (70). Thyme emphasizes the corporal nature of Charity's connection to nature and active pursuit of sexual gratification. It also grounds her as a physical and sexual being, quite the opposite of the stationary and chaste Victorian lady. Charity's image as a wildflower contrasts with the cultivation and domesticity valued by Victorian society.[84]

Charity shows more than affection for flowers; she shows empathy. In such, she becomes more than a woman who is described as a flower, but she associates herself with flowers in order to form her identity. Wharton goes on describing Charity's afternoon of revel in the wilderness:

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[83] Betsy Anderson's article, "Edith Wharton's Literary Garden" points out Wharton's floral symbolism in several of her novels. Anderson addresses the contrast between Wharton's use of wildflowers in *Summer* and her use of cultivated "hothouse" flowers such as the lily in *The House of Mirth*. Anderson emphasizes Charity's ability to survive, like a wildflower, despite harsh conditions.

[84] Charity's affection for wild flowers is similar to Elizabeth Stoddard's character Veronica who also loves wild flowers. While both characters find temporary escape in the freedom of an ungoverned wilderness, they are both eventually made to conform to a domestic lifestyle because of the demands of motherhood.

"Charity Royall lay on a ridge above a sunlit hollow, her face pressed to the earth and the warm currents of the grass running through her. Directly in her line of vision a blackberry branch laid its frail white flowers and blue-green leaves against the sky" (Wharton 35). Suddenly, this idyllic scene is interrupted when Liff Hyatt, a mountain resident, breaks her connection to the earth by clumsily walking over the flowers she was admiring, trampling a branch of bramble flowers.[85] Charity exclaims, "Don't stamp on those bramble flowers, you dolt!" (Wharton 35). Charity sympathizes with the flowers and feels remorse for the careless crushing of a beautiful flower. Latour gives bramble flowers the meaning "remorse" (132). Charity feels remorse at their being crushed. Liff represents men trampling nature for progress and capitalism. (He is a lumberjack). Charity's connections to the earth are sensual and animalistic in nature, for example Wharton describes the "moist earth" and "sun-warmed animal." Therefore when Liff stomps on the bramble flowers, which are equivalent to Charity, he is symbolically trampling a woman's sexuality into patriarchal submission. Thus, Charity may also feel regret and remorse that the flowers, like her sexuality, have had to submit to patriarchal authority. In addition, since it is Liff, Charity's one tie to the mountain, who interrupts Charity's day dreaming and kills the flowers, the trampling symbolizes Charity's heritage destroying her chances for a life with Harney. In a capitalist world, Harney is influenced to marry within his class. Charity seems to believe that Harney loves her more than Annabel, but her inferior breeding and lower social status make her unfit for marriage in his eyes.

The scene of Liff trampling the flowers recalls a similar scene in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*. As a young girl the novel's protagonist Cassandra Morgeson runs to her Aunt's garden and tramples the chamomile after her Aunt admonishes her for pulling the cat's tail. As Cassandra is smashing the flowers into the ground, she feels a fleeting sympathy as she thinks

[85] For a reading of Liff's boot as a symbol of patriarchal domination see Donovan 74.

she has been trampled on. She also connects the chamomile to two poor seamstresses, one of the only available professions for women and a hard life. Cassandra thinks, "Had *they* been trampled on?" Stoddard, like Wharton, connects the destruction of flowers to the oppression of women; however, Stoddard's female protagonist perpetuates this violence as a way of mimicking the patriarchy. Wharton's protagonist attempts to stop the patriarchal male from trampling but does not succeed.

Later in *Summer*, Charity recalls Liff's trampling of the bramble flowers when she feels she has been trampled by Lawyer Royall's decree that she cannot continue to see Harney. Lawyer Royall has discovered Charity's relationship with Harney, has forbid her to see him, and has proposed marriage to Charity. Royall claims if she marries him he will take Charity to a city to live "where there's men, and business, and things doing" (Wharton 75). After she refuses his proposal, Lawyer Royall says that he will force Harney to marry her instead of allowing them to carry on seeing each other out of marriage. Wharton states, "as she listened, there flitted through her mind the vision of Liff Hyatt's muddy boots coming down on the white bramble-flowers. The same thing happened now, something transient and exquisite had flowered in her, and she had stood by and seen it trampled to earth" (76). Charity connects the growing feelings of freedom, passion, and desire with what she experiences with Harney. She does not want to marry either man. She wants to make her own choices. The flowers represent her freedom and passion trampled by men in the form of Lawyer Royall's attempt to barter her off as chattel to Harney and then his eventual capture of Charity in marriage.

Charity's unique connection to the natural environment is reminiscent of French feminist critic Hélène Cixous's description of women's secret world of sensation in her "Laugh of the Medusa". Cixous writes, "I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave

me of a world all her own which she has been secretly haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity" (247). Cixous's description echoes a woman's exploration of her body and calls to mind the exploration and invigoration Charity feels while lying on the ground and running her hands over the petals of flowers. Wharton replaces her description of Charity's body with description of flowers. She uses Charity's interactions with flowers to stand in for her blossoming sexuality and sexual exploration.

Other critics have noted the implied sexuality in Wharton's use of flower imagery. As Susan Hall points out, Wharton finds voice for Charity's sexuality in her use of flower imagery. Wharton states, "Under his touch things deep down in [Charity] struggled to the light and sprang up like flowers in the sunshine"(119). Hall states, "Harney's 'touch' initiates Charity's sexual awakening, an awakening that is metaphorically equated to flowers blooming though the natural influence of the sun…Wharton presents feminine sexuality as a latent force that comes alive when stimulated by a man" (11). Hall's analysis focuses on Charity's lack of language and Wharton's use of varied setting (North Dormer, the cabin, the mountain) to demonstrate that Harney and Charity's relationship was formed outside of the social order. In the end, this unconventional relationship proves unsustainable, and Charity succumbs to marriage to Royall. Hall concludes, "it is extremely hard for women to resist male domination" (16). Wharton's description of Charity as a flower shows both rebellion and domination. For example, Harney desires to be close to Charity, but also to keep his distance so that he does not ruin her allure the way one might crush a delicate flower. Wharton's description states, "It seemed to be enough for him to breathe her nearness like a flower's; and since his pleasure at being with her, and his

sense of her youth and grace, perpetually shone in his eyes and softened the inflections of his voice his reserve did not suggest coldness, but the deference due to a girl of his own class" (84). Charity's sexuality and the embodiment of that sexuality in flower imagery and fragrance characterizes Charity as sexual and corporal. Whereas Harney expects to maintain a modest distance from a woman, Charity lures him in.

Flowers function in *Summer* as a covert way to express sexuality. By describing Charity as a flower rather than describing her womanly body, Wharton remains modest while still expressing feminine sexuality. When Charity remembers Harney, she thinks of "his warm breath on her cheek as he bent her head back like a flower" (150). Wharton describes the passion between the two lovers in terms of flower symbolism. This description of Charity as a flower shows her in the throes of sexual ecstasy, but it also highlights her passivity as she submits to Harney's touch as if he was picking a flower.

In addition to describing her physicality in terms of flowers, Wharton uses flowers to convey Charity's beauty. Charity believes that her ornamental beauty, like a flower, is an asset that will lure Harney. She looks in the mirror to reaffirm her power, her beauty, and sees that "her small face, usually so darkly pale, glowed like a rose in the faint orb of light" (24). Many language of flowers dictionaries including Latour's give roses the meaning "beauty" (317). The type, color, and stage of maturity of the rose convey more specific meanings. This rose image references a rose in full bloom, signaling love. As her romance progresses, Charity changes from associating with wildflowers which are strong and active to becoming more and more like a cultivated one which is fragile and ornamental. Charity defies the expectation for women to cover up their sexuality. Instead, she displays it. As Charity's relationship with Harney progresses, Wharton's use of flowers changes. Wharton uses flowers less as a mode to assert

Charity's independence and more as a means to show Charity's helplessness and dependence on men.

Wharton writes that Charity has a temporal beauty like a rose. Harney enjoys Charity's beauty and sexual pleasure but does not cultivate a secure future with her through marriage. Wharton shows her reader the danger of a girl relying on a male to marry her.[86] In her psychoanalytic reading of *Summer*, Rhonda Skillern classifies Charity as a "resisting feminine" who is drawn into the masculine symbolic order by taking part in four social rituals: the fourth of July celebration in Nettleton, the Old Homes Week Ceremony, her mother's funeral, and her own wedding to Royall. Skillern uses Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women," Jacque Lacan's idea of the symbolic order, and Luce Irigaray's idea of "jouissance" to state that while Charity attempts to resist becoming drawn into the symbolic order by experiencing her sexuality and attempting to discover her mother on the mountain, Royall eventually brings Charity into the symbolic order (Skillern 123). Charity communicates outside of the symbolic order and her blossoming sexuality is a key to her finding her self; however, it is neither her body nor her mother that give her voice but her connection to and representation through flowers that becomes a textual stand-in for her, words, body, and feelings. She loses all connection to flowers once she becomes dependent on Royall.

Wharton shows Charity's increasing conventionality through her choice of a rose to represent her later in the novel. Charity's friend Ally Hawes, the sister of their town's disgraced woman who became a prostitute in Nettleton, sews the red roses on Charity's white hat for the Fourth of July parade in Nettleton. In her hat, Charity feels beautiful. As previously stated, roses traditionally mean "beauty" in the language of flowers. By mentioning that it is red roses Charity

[86] Candace Waid and Rhonda Skillern have both elaborated on the imagery of Charity's red rose brimmed white hat being a symbol for her budding sexuality, especially in light of the fact that she loses her hat at the Fourth of July celebration in Nettleton with Harney causing Lawyer Royall to call her "a damn bare-headed whore" (Wharton 98).

wears on her hat, Wharton is using the implied meaning of love and attraction and shows that on an unconscious level Charity feels power in her ability to sexually attract Harney. Charity asks Ally if she ever desires to go to Nettleton, presumably to see her sister. Ally replies that she does not because she associates the city with her taking her sister to see an abortion doctor. This is the same doctor that Charity later visits. Charity is so absorbed in admiring her rose adorned hat and her image in the mirror that she fails to hear Ally's subtle warning. Charity is lost in her physical appearance and finds consolation in her mirrored reflection. Charity feels her flower-like beauty will bring her power and the ability to attract Harney. Charity is so caught up in her ornamental beauty that she fails to consider Ally's implications that Charity's trip to Nettleton could result in the same fate that Ally's sister, Julia, faced —becoming a whore. Wharton indicates that a young woman's beauty, without that woman achieving proper education, can be a dangerous thing. While Cixous's call for women to find sexual pleasure and express themselves with their bodies may be idealistic, in Wharton's reality, Charity does so and finds temporary freedom but eventual oppression. Society prefers nature to give way to civilization and women to give way to the patriarchy's symbolic order and sexual mores.

Flowers as Charity's Écriture Féminine

Charity Royall seems to have her own way of communicating. Wharton makes it clear that this communication is not through speech or writing, since throughout the novel Charity's struggle with patriarchal language increases. Candace Waid states, "Wharton gives Charity a 'private language' indeed, her unspoken words and feelings constitute some of the most lyrical passages in the novel. Charity is inarticulate in spoken and written language" (124). While critics such as Waid and Skillern state that Charity's communication is physical, they overlook her other form of communicating which Wharton includes in the text: using flowers and her natural

surroundings to speak her character's feelings.[87] While Charity lacks patriarchal speech, she finds voice in the natural world. She expresses her concern about the possibility of marriage to Harney in terms of a flower losing its strength and vitality. For example, when Charity considers marrying Harney she worries that "instead of remaining separate and absolute, she would be compared with other people…she was too proud to be afraid, but the freedom of her spirit drooped…(138). Wharton writes of her character's spirit drooping like a dying flower.

Wharton uses flower imagery so vividly in her text that when she is in love Charity begins to see the world in terms of flowers. For example, when Charity is awestruck by the spectacle of fireworks in Nettleton, her heart "throbbed with delight." In order to convey the beauty of the fireworks, Charity describes them as flowers. Wharton, through the eyes of Charity, writes, "The whole night broke into flower. From every point of the horizon, gold and silver arches sprang up and crossed each other, sky-orchards broke into blossom, shed their flaming petals and hung their branches with golden fruit" (95). The description of the fireworks as flowers has a sexual connotation.[88] The fireworks shoot into the sky implying a phallic image. Fireworks are man-made and represent masculine technology and industrialization while the sky is natural and represents the female receiving the male. Charity finds words for the fireworks in terms of a sexual climax, but she expresses this climax in terms of the blossoming of flowers and trees. During the fireworks, Charity crushes her red rose trimmed hat in her hands to "restrain her rapture" (95). The fireworks display foreshadows her pleasure in sex. Since flowers were socially respectable, using flower metaphors in her text, even in a text that examined liberated

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[87] Susan Hall states that Wharton expresses Charity's sexuality through flower imagery (but does not make a connection to the language of flowers). Hall does not explore Charity's use of flowers as a form of expression beyond her sexuality. I agree with Hall that Wharton uses flowers and assert that Wharton uses these flower metaphors as representative of female sexuality in order for her writing to remain socially acceptable.

[88] For further reading of the significance of the fireworks and Charity's attraction to the forbidden in her romance with Harney see Kathy Grafton 2.

female sexuality, was not likely to draw criticism from Wharton's audience. In addition to flower images, Wharton takes the use of flowers a step further using the language of flowers meanings as a coded dialect to bring another level of sexual meaning to her text.

Wharton reflects Charity's feelings in the landscape. Charity cannot vocalize these feelings, but the meanings from the language of flowers provide the key to understanding her emotions. Later when she realizes that her romance with Harney is over, instead of mourning, Charity looks out onto the symbolic landscape. Charity has also just found out that she is pregnant. She sits looking out her window over "the dark and empty scene; the ashen houses with shuttered windows, the grey road climbing the slope to the hemlock belt above the cemetery, and the heavy mass of the mountain black against a rainy sky" (Wharton 153). Wharton mentions the hemlock, which means, "You will cause my death" according to Latour to emphasize how the pregnancy brings Charity's symbolic death (215).

Another significant use of the language of flowers occurs when Charity is on the mountain before Royall scoops her up and takes her to Nettleton to be married.[89] Charity is tired and hungry; she is described as rootless as "thistledown." Thistle, according to Latour, means "austerity" (246). The austere circumstances seem dire for Charity; Charity's survival is achieved by her surrender to Royall. Wharton ends the novella by focusing on Charity's weakness and helplessness in her present state, demonstrating to her readers the danger of unrestricted passion in a world with few options beyond marriage for uneducated women. Wharton's heroine does not at last find empowerment through her connection to flowers. In fact, her romantic notions of passion perpetuated by the flower imagery in Wharton's text emphasize the role the immature romanticism played in her downfall.

[89] See Donovan for a reading of Royall as a Hades figure 75.

While flowers may seem a conventional symbol for romance, the fact that Wharton emphasizes the fleeting nature of happiness through love shows that she does not believe it is an enduring possibility for women. Charity's symbolic death in her marriage to Lawyer Royall occurs as winter sets in alluding to the death of the summer's wildflowers mentioned in the start of the novel. Wharton intimates to her reader that it is unlikely women can be independent and emotionally satisfied in love and also be financially and socially secure. In *Summer*, marriage brings women both an end to childhood and a symbolic death of the independent spirit.

Summer expresses Wharton's frustration with the sentimentalized trap that she felt marriage created for women. Susan Goodman states that Wharton resembles Mary Austin when Wharton states that "there is no democracy between men and women, women must be responsible for saying no…" (82). Wharton sees society as essentially fixed in that her heroine faces dire social consequences for not "saying no" to passion, marriage, and desire. Wharton seems to value egalitarian marriage and individual empowerment but sees them as clashing and unachievable in her current society. A lack of the necessary knowledge to succeed in a man's world leaves women with few options beyond the domestic. Ultimately, Goodman states that Charity's "failure to leave home thwarts [her] growth of identity" (83). In her skeptical view of the possibility for uneducated women to live as a New Woman, Wharton implies that freedom to love outside of marriage is a possibility but not one that is currently plausible for the uneducated woman. *Summer* is an expression of the tragedy of women's situation, not a plan for the future.

Wharton uses the language of flowers to balance the emerging philosophies of the New Woman with the old tradition of the True Woman. In *Summer*, Wharton suggests that they must either be wise in their choice of marriage or be well educated and able to support themselves in a man's world. Certainly they must not become pregnant. Wharton's desire for women to achieve

assimilation in male culture and liberation from the economic and social dependence on men while still maintaining the feminine art of "civilized living" ("French Ways" 182) is seen in her complex use of the language of flowers in *Summer*. Wharton's writing plays a very important part in bridging women writer's use of flowers in their texts as representative of the True Woman's purity and as representative of the New Woman's sexuality. Wharton's *Summer* uses flowers to express women's contradictory desire for both freedom and wildness while facing the need for security and social order. This contradictory desire is similar to Elizabeth Stoddard's use of the language of flowers in *The Morgesons* to show the potential of an empowering relationship between women and flowers, but at the same time show that associations with flowers will confine women within the traditional domestic role until social changes can be achieved. Flowers can allow Wharton's main character some momentary feelings of freedom, but these feelings are not the instruments of social change. In *Summer* Wharton positions Charity between romantic notions of passion and love in the country and the hard reality of unwed motherhood. Wharton uses flowers in the text to represent an outdated mode of courtship and romantic idealism--a stark contrast to the practical situations this woman faces in the modern world. Ultimately, later writers, such as Mary Austin, take up the use of flowers in women's fiction and will reach different feminist conclusions.

CHAPTER FOUR: ROOTED IN THE PAST AND BLOOMING IN THE FUTURE: THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS IN MARY AUSTIN'S *SANTA LUCIA: A COMMON STORY* AND *CACTUS THORN*

Mary Hunter Austin (1868-1934) was a naturalist and a feminist, so it is no surprise that she combined these interests in her writing. However, it is surprising that this modern woman joined her love of the earth with her passion for women's rights in her literal and symbolic use of flowers in her writing, first employing the Victorian language of flowers in her early writing and then moving on to her own flower symbolism in her later writing. Austin's use of the language of flowers allows her to appeal to both revolutionary feminists and conservative female readers.

Flowers represent many things in Austin's writing. As a woman well-versed in biology and the western landscape, she uses flowers literally to describe the setting, specifically its geographic space and time of year. In addition, her characters employ flowers as tokens in their heterosexual courtships, social customs, and female friendships. Finally, Austin uses flowers symbolically in her novels to reflect her characters' feelings and to speak emotions and passions that those characters do not articulate themselves. In her early work, Austin uses the language of flowers. However, unlike previous female authors, such as Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Stoddard who speak all of their characters' revolutionary thoughts through flowers, Austin also gives some of her characters' thoughts voice, showing her female characters moving toward a feminist future and away from the necessity to speak though flower codes. Austin both upholds the sentimental link of flowers to femininity associated with the language of flowers and challenges those traditional conventions for flower language by involving them with characters that defy tradition and question conventional social roles for women.

Four of Austin's female characters show this progression from traditional woman to feminist woman. Three of the characters are from *Santa Lucia: A Common Story (1908)* and the fourth is from her novella *Cactus Thorn*.[90] Since *Santa Lucia* was set during the turn of the twentieth century, the female characters follow customs that prevailed through the end of the nineteenth century such as giving and wearing flowers. While Austin does not give every flower she mentions special meaning or symbolism, by comparing the meaning Austin gives to certain symbolic flowers in her text to the meanings these flowers possess in the language of flowers, one finds that the meanings are strikingly similar.

The language of flowers is a tradition of using flowers symbolically according to defined codes as mentioned in chapter one. According to flower culture historian Jack Goody, flowers' meanings often came from poetry or mythology, and language of flowers books would often include excerpts to demonstrate the sentiment (238). By referencing symbolic flowers, Austin is engaging in a tradition of symbolism practiced by many American women. The language of flowers became popular in the United States with language of flowers gift books becoming a popular phenomenon through the 1860s. American language of flower authors such as *Godey's Lady's Book* editor Sarah Josepha Hale, socialite Elizabeth Gamble Wirt, and Catherine Waterman published dictionaries in the 1830s which remained in print until the end of the century and which Americanized the language by using flowers to embody desired characteristics for moral women. The American language of flowers in its original purpose focused on puritanical piousness and domesticity and reflected American social values (*Goody* 275). Long after these books fell out of popularity society retained the meaning of the flowers in popular culture. In *Santa Lucia* Austin uses the language of flowers to demonstrate moral values,

[90] *Cactus Thorn* was never published in Austin's lifetime. Although it was written in 1927, publishers found it too "radical" according to Melody Graulich in the afterword to the novella (188). It was eventually published posthumously in 1988.

courtship, and femininity, but in the later *Cactus Thorn* she uses it in her own way and morphs the conservative representation of women usually found in the language of flowers into her own radical vision of womanhood.[91]

Austin states that she was aware of Victorian flower customs such as the language of flowers in her autobiography *Earth Horizon* (1932). She mentions sending flowers to friends as tokens in letters. Austin mentions writing letters to a woman who became a surrogate mother to her; "I did not fail to send her clippings; and sometimes a flower, a personal reminder" (317). The inclusion of a flower with a letter was a practice that many Victorian women, including Emily Dickinson and Margaret Fuller, carried out. Often the flower contained a special significance and meaning according to the language of flowers. This traditional use of flowers shows that Austin connected with the flower traditions of generations of women that preceded her.

Mary Hunter Austin's life compelled her to balance conventional social practices like the language of flowers with unconventional beliefs about the position of women in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American society. Mary Hunter was born in Carlinville, Illinois in 1868. According to American Regionalism scholars Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, Austin's intelligence advanced her to the third grade during her first year of school, which left her feeling isolated and out of place with her older schoolmates (564). This early alienation shaped her nonconformist attitude. Another major influence came when she was ten years old and her father and younger sister both died, leaving Austin with her emotionally unsupportive mother. During her difficult childhood, Austin developed her imagination and found an inward presence she named "Beauty-in-the-wild, yearning to be made human" or "I-Mary" (*Earth*

[91] *Santa Lucia: A Common Story* is a regionalist novel set in the actual rural California town of Santa Lucia in the first decade of the 1900s. *Cactus Thorn* is set in the Southern California desert in the 1920s.

Horizon 47). Her imaginative spirit gave Austin a connection with the natural environment on a spiritual and symbolic level.[92] She later channeled this love of nature into conservationism. In addition, Austin's early life shaped her feminism. Her belief in equal rights for women was fueled by the fact that her mother favored her older brother Jim and made him the head of the household after her father died. Austin resented this gender-based hierarchy, which she later spoke out against.

In her early adulthood, Austin attended Blackburn College and earned a degree in science. Her knowledge of biology is evident in her writing as her scientific observations of nature get recorded in her fiction (*Earth* 167). In 1888, Austin, her mother, and her younger brother moved from the Midwest to the southern San Joaquin Valley, California to claim a homestead with her older brother Jim (Fetterley and Pryse 564). Mary married Stanford Wallace Austin, though his inability to provide a stable income for the family led to their separation in 1903 and divorce in 1914. A similar situation with a different outcome occurs in *Santa Lucia*, when Serena's husband proves to be in inept provider. In 1892, Austin gave birth to her mentally disabled daughter named Ruth, and she eventually had to place her daughter in an institution (Fetterley and Pryse 565). Her difficult marriage and home life shaped her feminist views on marriage and gender equality.

Many of Austin's characters are women struggling against or coming to terms with living lives controlled by men. Though scholars disagree about her first feminist involvement, most state that Austin became active in feminism in New York City after 1910 when she returned from England and had just published *Santa Lucia*. Living in Greenwich Village, she joined the suffrage association, Mable Dodge's salon, and a group of forward thinking women called the

[92] Another isolated and educated young woman, Margaret Fuller, also connected with the environment on a spiritual level and used flowers as symbols for women's strength.

Heterodoxy club (Stout 87).[93] Austin was a member of the feminist movement along with Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Emma Goldman. An advocate at heart, she also lobbied presidents for environmental and Native American reforms, becoming friends with Herbert Hoover and Theodore Roosevelt. She met philanthropist and arts patron Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos, New Mexico, and was introduced to Dodge's famous friends such as D.H. Lawrence, Willa Cather, and Georgia O'Keeffe.[94] In her autobiography *Earth Horizon,* Austin describes Luhan's home as a place where 'one met people of interest and distinction." Austin mentions meeting O'Keeffe and Lawrence in Luhan's home (Austin *Earth* 354). As another woman who was greatly inspired by both flowers and the West in relation to womanhood, Georgia O'Keeffe's painting would be interesting to study alongside Austin's writing. Due to the artistic community and natural beauty of the landscape Austin built a home in Santa Fe in 1924. She died there in 1934 (Stineman 258). Austin's writing gained her a place among the great women regionalists and nature writers of American literature, and she conveys her love of the West in that writing.

Austin combined feminist ideas, natural descriptions of the California wilderness, and three romance plotlines in her novel *Santa Lucia*. She began the novel in 1904 returning to it several times over a period of four years; during that time, Austin questioned how to achieve financial success. She may have found it difficult to impart feminist messages to her female audience while also giving them what sold well--a romance. *Santa Lucia* may have been an attempt on Austin's part to write a popularly successful novel in the style of many female authors of the late nineteenth century who also used the language of flowers.[95] After completing this

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[93] Susan Glaspell, another writer who uses flowers in feminism, was also a member of the Heterodoxy Club. I write about her play *The Verge* in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

[94] There are many interesting similarities between O'Keeffe's and Austin's description of the desert as female and their use of flowers as symbols for women's advancement which could be the focus of future study.

[95] *Santa Lucia* was inspired by Austin's trip through Southern California to leave her daughter Ruth in an institution. Austin writes "Well do you wonder when the material for it was drawn [sic] either from my early memories or from slight observations made in half yearly visits of a few days each to San Jose where I go on the saddest errand in the

novel, Austin wrote in a letter to her friend Grace Ellery Channing that she would not write another romance since she "cannot make [her]self believe that what is not life is art" (Mary Austin letters, Houghton Library Special Collections). Austin continues her skepticism about the possibility that she would write a romance in her reflections about writing *Santa Lucia* in her autobiography *Earth Horizon.* She writes in the third person that after completing *Lost Borders*, "She had begun a novel called 'Santa Lucia,' but was not getting on well with it" (307). While Austin's intention was to explore three different marriages in her "romance," she spends two thirds of the novel critiquing the institution. On the surface *Santa Lucia* appears to be a romance, since in the course of the novel two of her three main characters mature and marry and the third is newly married; however, Austin also addresses birth control, divorce, and attitudes toward women contributing to the financial stability of a household.

In another letter to Channing dated 1909 from Paris, Austin complains about not knowing how to balance being an artist and a woman. She writes, "I have come to realize during the last three years that I am never to be a great artist...no woman can become a really great artist and remain such as you and I…I keep hoping in every book I write somehow to escape the inevitable and see it rise to the high plane of artistry and so must continue. I write and write as so many women do, and wonder how many others know the truth…Mrs. Wharton knows and turns her knowledge into service, whether she will find a way out interests me to see" (Mary Austin letters Houghton Library Special Collections). Austin seems frustrated by the requirements for a female writes to balance being a woman and a writer. Her letter implies that during this time

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world- oh much sadder than to visit a grave!" (Channing letters, Harvard University). Austin was also worried about her health during this time because she was mistakenly diagnosed with a fatal condition. She writes that she is determined to make money from the novel since she needs to save $15,000 for Ruth to be taken care of should she die, which may have influenced her to write about love and romance, a topic about which she was skeptical but which sold books.

these two roles were considered mutually exclusive. Whereas a male writer could be both a male and an artist, a woman had to choose. The implied social requirement for women writers to push away trappings of sentimentality, such as the language of flowers, in order to achieve literary standing was not something that Austin embraces.

Austin was a woman writer in a modernist era who faced the struggle of balancing being a woman, with feminine sexual desires and body, while also being an artist, typically a masculine career. In the nineteenth century, as critic Elizabeth Ammons points out in her chapter on Austin in *Conflicting Stories*, women writers had to decide between identifying themselves as "women writers" or "male artists," the latter emphasizing creativity and artistic inspiration and the former practical income (95). Austin believed that Edith Wharton was able to achieve both. Critic Anna Carew-Miller discusses Austin as a woman writer in a modernist era who faces the struggle of living in a society that shunned feminine sexual desires and implied that a career was a masculine occupation. Miller states that Austin explores androgyny or "the space between genders" (105). Austin saw herself as marginalized and found that separation as necessary for artistic creation. Miller writes, "Austin transforms marginality into liminality in order to envision a way for her roles as woman and artist to coexist" (106). She goes on to state, "by situating artists in this space between genders, Austin eliminates the barriers that prevented her from claiming her authority as a writer" (107). These escapes from social expectations often come as a result of her female character's life in the West. Whereas Miller argues that in Austin's writing gender classification can become ambiguous, "allowing women to elude the social impediments that would silence or diminish her voice" (107), she does not address the extent to which Austin retains traditions of women's past, such as the language of flowers. Miller does admit that Austin's character (here she refers to Olivia from *A Woman of Genius*) "is not quite ready for the

revolutionary future envisioned by the Bolsheviks, free-lovers, and other radicals of the 1910s, yet she is not satisfied with women's options of the past" (109). Austin may have believed in similar values, demonstrated by her creation of characters that both uphold aspects of tradition and also reject it. Her use of the language of flowers reflects this duality of opinion. While Austin knew her share of radicals, Mabel Dodge Luhan and Margaret Sanger included, she also did not feel comfortable advocating a radical lifestyle that included abortion and women expressing their sexual freedom outside of marriage. Ammons writes, "turn-of-the-century women writers found themselves, often in deep subtle ways, emotionally stranded between worlds. They floated between a past they wished to leave…and a future they had not yet gained. They were full members neither of their mothers' world, at the one extreme, nor that of the privileged white male artist, at the other" (110). The language of flowers represents the bridge Austin needed to connect to the women's culture of the past while pushing her feminist ideas into the future.

This chapter addresses the various critical views of Mary Austin as a feminist and ecologist. While many critics look at Austin's feminism and her environmental connections, no previous readings have looked at Austin's use of specific flower references and her later anthropomorphizing flowers in such a way that they become symbols for women living in the West. Many critics have addressed Austin's feelings about and descriptions of nature in general, but none have focused specifically on her use of flowers as cultural, social, and natural elements. The language of flowers represents a nineteenth-century social custom that Austin uses in her writing to demonstrate the rigidity of nineteenth-century society's ideal of True Womanhood. As an outdated social custom, the language of flowers brought with it the social expectation for women to be Christian, virginal, male dominated, and for women not to work outside of the

home. Austin reflects this expectation in her female characters in *Santa Lucia* but later moves away from this expectation in *Cactus Thorn* (for a fuller definition of the True Woman see Welter 67). Given the vast departure Austin took from the attitudes and actions of most of her female peers and the complexity of her ideas and feelings toward the limited roles available to women in her society, my chapter's study in this area--especially in a light that demonstrates Austin's conventional inclination to use flowers to appeal to female readers--will prove fruitful.

Austin's Geographical and Botanical Evolution of the Language of Flowers

In addition to her knowledge of the language of flowers, Austin uses her knowledge of botany in her novels. Austin's biographer Helen MacKnight Doyle mentions in *Mary Austin: Woman of Genius* that Austin knew a great number of plant names, and she had a great passion for understanding the specific characteristics of plants (201). Since she had a degree in botany, she employed that knowledge in her references to flowers in her writing. Austin knew and could identify many flowers, especially flowers of the West, but she was not a gardener.[96] Austin preferred to observe flowers in nature and not to interrupt their natural occurrence unless by collecting them for food or medicine as farmers and Native Americans did.[97] Austin's familiarity with the language of flowers could have come from her extensive study of botany, since some plant books at the turn of the century also included popular flower meanings with the biological descriptions, as seen in Catherine Waterman's language of flowers dictionary. In *Earth Horizon* she writes about her knowledge of botany. "There was Mary's effort to interest Wallace in botany, always a consuming interest for her, which he was never able to carry to more than a collector's accent, the mere naming and classifying of kinds and orders, avoiding her concern

[96] Austin's interest in flowers makes an interesting contrast to Edith Wharton's, who uses flowers to create the art of her cultivated spaces. Austin preferred to enjoy flowers in their natural environment rather than in a garden, and would have been considered a naturalist instead of a gardener.
[97] Austin uses flower description and floral imagery in her book *The Land of Little Rain.*

with adaptations and local variations…but he escaped her inquiries as to the strange adjustments of desertness and drought and *redivivamentes*" (288). This passage shows that Austin was deliberately selecting regional plants for use in her novels and would consider biological aspects of these plants which complement her plot when deciding to use them. Due to her knowledge of biology, Austin was very interested in contrasting native flowers with non-native ones. In Austin's novels the presence of non-native flowers signifies the process of civilization which disrupts nature, and the native flowers represent the earth as it was meant to be. As a conservationist who believed that while human should enjoy nature, they should not disturb it, Austin preferred native flowers.

Her knowledge of botany can be seen in Austin's work, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903). While Austin mentions many specific flower varieties, she does not seem to use flowers symbolically in a way that corresponds with the language of flowers. Instead in *The Land of Little Rain* flowers are mentioned to accurately depict the natural habitat. Many critics, including Helen McKnight Doyle in her 1939 study of Austin, *Mary Austin: Woman of Genius*, classify Austin's work as nature writing, which draws in observation and interaction with the natural world. The author's relationship with nature becomes the subject of much of her writing. In *The Land of Little Rain*, Austin's nature writing discuses flowers in a botanical not symbolic method; she does not use the language of flowers meanings in *The Land of Little Rain*. However, Austin also alludes to the flowers as representations of her vision of womanhood. The flowers of the West become her symbol for the western woman, a hard working, conservationist, and persistent female. For both women and flowers, value is found not in their decorative or poetic attributes but in their utility. Austin spends part of her narrative detailing the use of flowers by native tribes for medicinal purposes. For example in the chapter "Shoshone Land," Austin describes a

medicine man who gathers herbs to combat pneumonia and other illnesses. In this chapter, she explains the use of mesquite as a food and also describes the physical characteristics of the plant. She writes "the mesquite is God's best thought in all desertness. It grows in the open, is thorny, stocky, close grown, and iron rooted" (38). Austin's botanical observations indicate why this plant is so suitable for desert growth. In addition to Austin also writes about a flower's ability to come back from struggle and to lay dormant until rains finally come to the arid climate when they bloom. Austin's use of descriptions of flowers as metaphors for women shows her anthropomorphizing nature and also brings some of her feminist ideas subtly into her fiction and her nature writing, while still upholding the expectation for women to write about and associate with flowers. Austin writes in "A Woman Alone", "But my generation still lacked even a vocabulary by which measures of escape could be intelligently discussed" (Showalter 245). The language of flowers served as a step towards Austin's more outspoken feminist vocabulary.

In the title essay "The Land of Little Rain", Austin describes the desert that is her main character by focusing on several shrubs and flowers in depth. For example, she writes, "the desert begins with the cresoste. This immortal shrub spreads down into Death Valley and up into the lower timberline, odorous and medicinal as you might guess from the name, wand-like, with shining fretted foliage. Its vivid green is grateful to the eye in a wilderness of gray and greenish white shrubs" (9). In the introduction to *The Land of Little Rain*, Austin explains that the Native Americans use flowers for medicinal purposes, instead of for conveying messages as in the language of flowers. Austin writes, "Trust Indians not to miss any virtues of the plant world!" (9). The botanical characteristics and medicinal uses of flowers are of greater importance to Austin in *The Land of Little Rain*, than the metaphoric uses in the language of flowers.

One exception is the amaranth, which is given a meaning in the language of flowers that is the same as the meaning that Austin emphasizes. Austin writes, “The desert floras shame us with their cheerful adaptations to the seasonal limitations. Their whole duty is to flower and fruit, and they do it hardly, or with tropical luxuriance, as the rain admits. It is recorded in the report of the Death Valley expedition that after a year of abundant rains, on the Colorado Desert was found a specimen of Amaranthus ten feet high. A year later the same species in the same place matured in the drought at four inches. One hopes that land may breed like qualities in her human offspring, not tritely to “try”, but to do.” (Austin Land 3). Both Wirt and Hale give Amaranth the meaning “immortality” (31,17). This meaning likely derived from the flower’s unfading color and the reference of the flower as “immortal Amaranth” in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* which Wirt references (231). Austin again mentions the difficulty of growing in the desert when she writes, “nothing the desert produces expresses it better than the unhappy growth of the tree yuccas. Tormented, thin forests of it stalk drearily in the high mesas” (10). The yucca appears in no language of flowers dictionary, but, interestingly, was used by Margaret Fuller in her flower sketch “Yuca Filamentosa” for the *Dial* to represent a flower that evokes Diana in a moon garden. Austin similarly evokes Diana, but with the use of the sage plant.

In other sketches, Austin refers to flowers and nature as feminine and nurturing but does not employ the specific meanings found in the language of flowers for the herb sage. In “The Pocket Hunter,” Austin writes “… in the level mesa nothing taller showed than Diana’s sage.” (63). This description of the natural setting highlights one plant, the sage, which Austin associates with the Roman goddess Diana to overshadow everything else in the landscape. The man uses the sage as he is “making a dry camp in the friendly shrub” (63). He is in the desert to exploit it in search of gold deposits, also called pockets, so the sage is incidental. The scientific

name for the genus from which sage derives is Artemisia, which takes its name from the Greek equivalent of the goddess Diana, a goddess important to the hunt and to women. In the language of flowers, sage means "domestic virtues" in Wirt's and Hale's dictionaries (197 and 194). This meaning does not seem to be present in Austin' sketch, as the camp of the pocket hunter is uncivilized and although the land provides sustenance for the hunter, it could hardly be considered domestic. Eventually the miner leaves and returns to England. Austin comments that the woman misses him, but "the land seemed not to miss him any more than it had minded him" (79). Austin restricts her use of the language of flowers to novels that deal with women's roles in society, since this tradition was a practice of nineteenth-century society.

In *Santa Lucia*, Austin's interest in flowers includes both the typically female sentimental interest in the language of flowers and also the scientific interest in botany. Since Austin uses language of flowers meaning as well as scientific references to flowers, she is fusing the two. The importance of flowers to the study of botany is a point in her novel. Austin's character Dr. Antrim Stairs, a biologist, "began to understand that his science had no value except in its relativity to the wants of men" (84). Antrim Stairs's political feelings reflect those of the author. Austin even advocates the increased study of botany by writing a scene about a field study in *Santa Lucia*, in order to interest some of her readers in conservation. This scene also connects the young biologist to the women in the town. Austin gently mocks these women for their lack of attention to the flowers on the wilderness lecture walks. By writing about the study, Austin makes the observation that biology was an acceptable science for women to study, which she would have known as a science major herself. According to horticultural historian Emanuel Rudolph in his study of women in botany, American women at the turn of the century were frequently students of botany; however, few were professional botanists (90). Botany was one of

the only scientific fields that allowed women to study, and while Austin gives the field its deserved attention, she also mocks those who would not treat it as a science-the women in her book. Male scientists thought horticulture was a fitting science for women since a flower's delicate qualities were deemed most appropriate for similarly "delicate" females (Rudolph 92).

Austin satirizes the women who purport to study botany but fail to take the responsibility of collecting specimens seriously. When the women of the town go on the lecture walk, Serena is the only one who pays any attention. Austin writes, "The women paid hardly any attention to him [Stairs]. They were treading daintily, with lifted skirts, about the damp grass and among the rooted rocks gathering wild flowers, conning over the names with bits of old Spanish or Indian lore hidden in a word or a phrase" (32). Austin's tone conveys her distaste for the superficial concerns of the women who are more occupied with keeping their dresses clean than with observing the wonders of nature around them. Since the language of flowers was associated with the True Woman ideal of femininity, Austin suggests that these women seem only interested in the folk lore and the language of flowers associated with the plants and not the plants themselves. Austin suggests that it would be wrong to only view the botany of the desert in terms of the language of flower with both its traditional implications for women and also it narrow view of the natural world.

As a woman interested in the environment she saw greater meanings and reasons for knowing the flowers in a person's environment. Austin often comments on the physical characteristics or the edible or medicinal values of a plant, but she also addresses the spiritual value connection with the natural environment can bring. In this scene, Serena voices this attitude and attempts to bridge the interest of science with the undefined spiritual value of nature. When Stairs comments that the wind seems both ancient and fresh he remarks that the wonder of

nature is so great that people can easily be swept off with romantic notions. He states, “No wonder we get into the way of believing there is something in it” (33). Serena responds, “Don’t be a devotee of science all the time… The whole country here is sentient with something–I hardly know what—but it cannot be shadowed forth in Greek imaginings, they are not big enough” (33). Serena defends the mythology as a method for explaining the wonder of nature, but she also says that tradition cannot be the only sentiment used. She goes on to mention the beauty of the American West, which no myth captures. “If we had a mythology here, it would be full of tall-flame-colored creatures that fill the heavens with their shining wings. Do you know, we pride ourselves in the West on our material excellences; but it seems to me that there is a hint all through of the great fancies that make the beginning of new religions and new arts” (34). Serena makes the call for a new Western mythology which emerges from the influence of the West’s landscape. Since the American language of flowers was written by women in the North East many decades before her novel is set, Austin implies that clinging to that tradition is unsuitable to express the story of the West. Austin saw flowers as carriers of meaning beyond scientific or past mythological traditions such as those used in botany or in the language of flowers. She felt a spiritual connection to them as well as a scientific interest in them and wished to convey that to her readers. The flowers of the West become her symbols for women who like the phoenix rising can grow from ash and can thrive in the desert. Austin both expresses the sentiments of the language of flowers and also creates her own meanings for flowers building on the scientific observations her background afforded her. However, she also comments on her own inability to create the modern myth of the West. Serena states, “The thing I have in mind must come from the children born here, the children’s children” (34). While Austin addresses the need for an original mythology of the West, she feels that only a Westerner with deep roots can

connect with the land on a level to create it. For the meantime, many, including Austin's characters, cling to the inadequate language of flowers to speak the story of the West.

In addition to scientific study and sentimental emotion, Austin mentions flowers in *Santa Lucia* to set the scene, providing descriptive details of place and season. Austin mentions specific flower names ten times in the first twelve pages of the book, thoroughly planting in the readers' minds images of various flowers coming into bloom in spring. Austin mentions apricots, Caramine and Banksia roses, lilacs, elderflowers, Chinese lilies, Virburnum, English primrose, and Beauty of Glazenwood all in the gardens around her character William's home. The abundance of these flowers symbolizes the nurturing home that William has grown up in, but Austin does not call on the language of flowers meanings for these flowers. There is a difference between the flowers she mentions to set the scene and the ones she uses symbolically. The ten flowers mentioned in the beginning of the novel describe the setting of the town of Santa Lucia and the floral imagery of California. The flowers Austin mentions also convey the idea of the cultivation of the wilderness, as many of these plants had been imported from the east coast. Describing William's lawn Austin writes, "Beyond it was the Viburnum the Doctor's wife had brought from Back East" (9). Next to the front door of William's house is a rose, a signal that a good woman lived there. This planting of a rose represents the taming of uncivilized wild by the removal of native plants and the cultivation of "refined" non –native species. "William stopped at the front door to look out to the Banksia rose and the great arch of the Beauty of Glazenwood coming into fullest bud wet and twinkling in the sun" (5). According to flower historian Elizabeth Seaton, the planting of roses in a rural yard has long signaled the presence of a good woman in the home. Seaton writes, "In America flowers often symbolized the very civilization of the wilderness. It was commonplace in nineteenth-century popular literature that if a character

rode through rude frontier regions and arrived at a cabin with a rose bush by the door, he knew before he got off his horse that a good woman lived there" (Seaton 6). Austin establishes the California of *Santa Lucia* as a civilized place in the wild of the West by her exhibiting flower-related social customs common in the East.

In *Santa Lucia*, the flower-filled landscape influences and reflects the moods of the female characters. Blossoms establish the setting of springtime and instill the possibility of a new beginning. Austin writes, "Overhead the springing boughs crossed and recrossed- delicate arches, with a mist of rosy blossoms. Bees hummed in it with the sharp crescendo of the morning hours…Gazing upward from the ground, the blossoming branches seemed to extend themselves infinitely into the warm sky, and uplifted the sense to the expectation of beauty on every side" (12). The possibility for new experiences emanates from the wilderness landscape bursting with flowers. The trees are "blossom haunted" as if souls from the past hand on their braches (13). In this passage, Austin shows that humans are intertwined with the environment in which they live beyond a superficial level. "It was such a day as lent itself to the expression of growing competency and power: opulent, bursting foliage, crowding the sod with wild bloom that flared along the fences and the road border that broke up riotously from the cracks in the pavement…" (103). The flowers overtake the civilization that the town has attempted to install by bursting from the sidewalk. The natural environment seems to mimic the heroine's emotional feelings of possibility, unconstrained by convention. These emotions prove both nourishing and destructive. Just as the man-made pavement cannot quell the "riotous" flowers, the passions of the female characters cannot be controlled by the male-dominated society they live in. Austin picks specific flowers to represent her four female characters. Two of the heroines in *Santa Lucia* follow conventional paths for women and are unsatisfied with their marriages, and both of these women

are described using the language of flowers.

Serena: A True Woman and a True Flower

In addition to using the flowers to set a mood in the landscape, Austin represents her female characters by comparing them significantly to specific flowers. Serena Lindley is the closest character in the novel to the True Woman.[98] She marries, has a child, and makes her family her top priority. Thus, Serena's story follows the traditional plotline of the women's novel.[99] She is an orphan who has prepared to teach school but is dismissed from teaching when she marries a dull lawyer, Evan Lindley. Eventually, they have a son and move into her husband's family home. There are many similarities between Austin and her character Serena: both women are pushed toward teaching while craving artistic endeavors, both receive little support, both have lost parents, and both have incompetent husbands who get the family into debt and fail to tell their wives. However, unlike Austin, Serena convinces her husband to allow her to take over managing the family's finances such as paying bills and managing investments, a job at which she shows superior abilities. She eventually begins to study biology for her own edification, briefly entertains an attraction to a young professor but remains loyal to her husband. The story ends with Serena compromising her dreams in order to be a good mother and wife.

While Austin argues that women should be equals in a marriage partnership and should have the ability to look for meaningful work outside of the home, in *Santa Lucia* she strongly advocates women seeking the comfort and protection of marriage. A critic who looks at Austin's

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[98] The term "True Woman" comes from Barbara Welter's *Dimity's Convictions*. A True Woman of the nineteenth century possessed the cardinal virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Serena possesses all of these virtues except submissiveness. While Serena begins the novel submissive, she realizes that the good in her self and her family suffer as long as she is submissive, and she abandons this virtue to become an equal force in the home with her husband.

[99] Nina Baym describes the Woman's Novel in her critical examination, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-1870* (1993). Often the Woman's Novel begins with an orphan girl who is forced to leave home and faces trials. She gradually adjusts to the social expectation and ends the novel by marrying a man who is reformed by her good morals.

unusual combination of convention and rebellion is Janice Stout.[100] Stout reassesses and examines Austin's feminism, and she concludes that several of Austin's novels encompass "complex duality in which both freedom of movement and security of place were valued, symbolizing a reconciliation of traditional values of masculine liberty and feminine homing, but with the two polarized values distributed according to less rigid gender lines" (96). Stout implies that Austin was not the feminist many critics have made her out to be; she also looks at the author's view of marriage. Stout states that in Austin's *Santa Lucia*, "Two out of the three marriages, it seems, are likely to be unhappy- a point made by the novel's subtitle, *A Common Story*" (Stout 85). Austin tries out many different possible outcomes for power dynamics in male and female relationships but concludes that the only enduring union is one with "equality and harmony in relations between men and women" (Stout 96). Stout sees Austin's portrayal of her character Serena's marriage as unhappy because Serena is so focused on "her husband's comfort" that she ignores her own (81) and goes on to say that "Serena's realization at the end that her husband knows best and masculine occupations are, after all, superior is a distinctly counter –feminist note" (85). I argue that Austin presents Serena's marriage as a successful one, in terms of security and attempted, though limited, equality. Austin's early use of the language of flowers shows Serena finding success in her situation and working in her marriage as a partner. This is shown in Serena's taking over of the household finances. Austin's later use of flowers shows that her feminism evolved even more away from conventional marriage as a lifestyle for women, and as it did, her use of the language of flowers also became less conventional.

Serena faces her share of challenges, and, to some extent, the landscape becomes her salvation. Due to their poorly managed finances and his failed business ventures, she and her

[100] Stout is also the only critic to bring up Austin's use of flower symbolism; however, she does not look at flower symbolism in *Santa Lucia*. She points out that Austin describes the character Ellis in her novel *The Ford* as a flower.

husband move into his childhood home in the town of Santa Lucia. The plants in the Lindley's yard hint at their success. Unlike a wealthier residence, which would import eastern plants, their property is home to oaks, a "wild lawn," poplars, and a toyon-tree. Having one of the only successful marriages in the story, the Lindleys learn to overcome difficulty and to find creative solutions. The Lindleys show this creativity in their yard which not only answers Austin's calls for people to grow native plants which will not be invasive to domestic varieties but also shows the couple's strength in the plants' language of flowers meanings. The yard contains poplars that mean "courage" and oaks mean "bravery" in the language of flowers (Wirt 159 and 157). Austin states a similar meaning for the trees when she writes, "The house appeared to have run in among the sprawly oaks in a fit of shyness" as if the trees were the home's protectors (214). Austin emphasizes her support of using native plants when Evan Lindley tells Serena that they should go search for "wild roots" to plant. He proposes, "We will open up this side of the yard a little, and plant ferns and things—sort of sylvan retreat idea. There will be nothing like it in Santa Lucia; show people what can be done with native shrubs" (218). The interest in collecting ferns was a popular female pastime in the nineteenth century. The fern is another symbolic plant that represents Serena's character. The fern was a wild species and in the language of flowers it means "sincerity" (Waterman 83). Correspondingly, Serena is sincere in her commitment to her family and rides out tough times in her marriage. Her modesty is reflected in the fern's lack of blossoms and tendency to grow low to the ground. Similarly, Serena initially submits to her husband. In addition to the fern's meaning of sincerity representing Serena, this use of flowers, especially native varieties, reflects the natural and environmental principles that Austin advocates. At first, Serena, who was born on the East coast, "expect[s] to maintain in Santa Lucia the ideals of Bloombury, Connecticut" (177), but she comes around to adopt the West as

her home, as seen in her choice of native flowers for her yard.

Serena's potential to fall for the temptation of passion is described through the environment in which she lives. Austin writes, "Pools of leafage caught in hallows of the country roads were whirled up by the wind, shining as they turned in air like conjurer's gold, dropping now as orchard litter, sear and brown" (83). Austin's description of the leaves changing with the seasons reflects her character's acceptance of her loss of zeal and her domesticated life. Austin goes on to write, "[the leaves] turned before her as the days of her life, now colored by her dreams, now fading and tattered at the edges, her passion too virginal to gild them with romance, her purpose too aimless to keep them up and whirling. Serena's young elastic mind ached in the cushion of her environment" (83). The environment provides the opportunity for passion and freedom, but Serena does not embrace this freedom. She recognizes that her own dreams have lodged in the tattered and wilted leaves, which drift past her. Her thoughts are too "virginal" to be colored by romance. Serena's passion is described in terms of the natural landscape. The flowers of the orchard provide a safe language for Austin to describe women's sexuality. Bored by her marriage, Serena feels passion for Antrim Stairs, a young biology professor, who teaches her and other women in the town about plants in informal lectures and for whom she develops feelings. However, as the most conventional of Austin's characters and as a True Woman, Serena denies her desires and remains loyal to her husband.

In accordance with nineteenth-century custom, flowers are worn by female characters and displayed in the home in *Santa Lucia*. Serena significantly displays and wears flowers at a dinner party, and the flowers that Austin places in the scene again reflect her character. When describing the dinner party at the Lindley home, Austin writes, "A branch of blossoming plum was stuck in a tall vase beside [Serena], and two or three daffodils were clasped in her belt" (39).

In the American book *The Language of Flowers*, the author of which is unknown, the domesticated plum tree means "fidelity" (19). Since this is a fruit-bearing tree and reproduction is associated with marriage in the American language of flowers, it is fitting that this tree carries a meaning connected to marriage though fidelity. Notably, Serena's fidelity is jeopardized by her attraction to Stairs, but as a True Woman she suppresses her desires. Serena reflects the meaning since she is loyal to her husband and she, like the plum, is domesticated. Similarly, the daffodils clasped to her belt, a common fashion statement of the time, also hold symbolic meaning. Daffodils mean "chivalry" according to Wirt (83). The concept of chivalry designates valor, courtesy, and honor. Hence, Austin uses daffodils to symbolize Serena's honor as a wife and her courtesy as a host. Austin's selection of daffodils and evocation of their meaning in the language of flowers ties Serena to the domestic culture.

In addition to marital loyalty, a wife's devotion to domestic responsibility often meant having children. Serena shows her evolution into a domesticated woman in a conversation with her aunt who asks her, "What better work can a woman do to help the world onward than by being a noble wife and mother?" Austin's heroine is markedly disturbed and frets: "She thought of many things she might say to that, but tears choked her" (82). Serena does not want to have children but accepts that it is now her duty as a wife. Then her aunt asks her why she does not have a baby, since she has been married long enough. Austin writes, "The question shattered Serena like a slap in the face…the offense lay in being expected to make an end of what was merely the perquisite of living, and rankled all the more, as it was instinctive and incoherent" (82). Serena struggles to maintain her independence but also feels the pressure of society to conform to expectations for a wife and mother. Eventually, she conforms to motherhood.

In *Santa Lucia,* Austin gives flowers the ability to have differing physical effects on her female characters. Depending on the way that Austin uses them, the type, and the location, flowers signify either oppression or uplift. When Serena goes to see Julia after finding out about the scandal of Julia's affair, she is described as having her "strength given back from the elastic earth" (315). This mention of the power of nature over this woman shows the uplifting quality it can imbue. However, Serena encounters Julia in the act of gardening—a task that usually represents female art but here is a metaphor for creating an exterior façade while masking her inner sorrow. Julia's garden is a cultivated space, the type of space that Austin was skeptical of because flowers are manipulated there instead of being left as they appear naturally in the wild. Serena begins to say how well the chrysanthemums looked, but Julia, who was finished with "trying to be a perfect wife, gathered up her gloves and shears and went into the house" (333). The presence of chrysanthemums signals the arrival of fall and also foreshadows the impending winter of Julia and Antrim's relationship as well as her death. Austin chooses this flower very carefully. In the language of flowers chrysanthemums mean "cheerfulness under adversity" (Wirt 74). While Serena is able to be cheerful and survive in her unhappy marriage, conversely, Julia cannot and abandons her care of the flower. Serena, like a good housewife, complements the flowers; Julia has 'given up trying' and retreats indoors, eschewing all formality and politeness. The language of flowers meaning of the flower demonstrates the reaction of the True Woman to adversity--cheerful acceptance. When Julia walks away from the chrysanthemums, she not only abandons her visitor and the flowers, she abandons the expectation for her to cheerfully persevere and deny her desires as a True Woman would. As opposed to the compromising placidity of Serena, a character whose name even conveys her calm acceptance of her fate, Julia shows what can happen if a woman refuses to submit. Austin also uses flower language in

connections to both of these characters making direct allusions to these women as flowers. Still their endings are very different. Serena accepts her place in society, and Julia, fearful of society's judgment of her since she has violated its rules, kills herself.

Julia: A Cultivated Rose that Wilts on the Vine

Through her heroine Julia Hayward, Austin demonstrates the confining nature of marriage in the early twentieth century. Through the story of Julia, Austin takes issue with the tendency for women to be valued by their physical appearance, the social exclusion of women who follow passions outside of marriage, the denial of women's sexuality, and the social pressure to be a wife and mother. Julia is beautiful and attracts the attention of a newcomer to the town, a young biology professor at the local college, Antrim Stairs. She marries him but quickly grows bored and unhappy with married life in the small town. Julia becomes pregnant, and Austin hints that the purpose of her trip to San Francisco is to procure an abortion.[101] While in the city, she runs into an old boyfriend, Jim Halford, who has a business that allows him to travel the world--a prospect that appeals to her greatly. They begin an affair. When a member of her town discovers their affair, Julia considers divorce but instead kills herself.

Austin wrote *Santa Lucia* during a transitional time for American women marked by the emergence of the New Woman. In her journalism, Austin acknowledges that her generation saw great advancements for women, especially in access to birth control and political representation. She wrote in her article "A Forward Turn" for the *Nation* that "Not only did the current phases of birth-control and contraceptives not come into use until the women of the pioneer suffrage generations were past being interested in them, but nobody, positively nobody, has yet suggested that women are passionately endowed even as men are… my generation still lacked even a

[101] While this reference to Julia's "lost child" remains veiled, Austin did know Margret Sanger during her years in New York and would likely have had sympathetic views toward a woman having the right to choose if she would have a child.

vocabulary by which measures of escape [from motherhood] could be intelligently discussed" (58). Serena and Julia, who are both described as flowers, learn that they must quell or kill their desires rather than express their passion. However, Austin does suggest that Julia "escapes motherhood" by returning home not pregnant from a trip to San Francisco. While some of Austin's flowers are used traditionally though the language of flowers, many of the topics addressed in the novel are quite modern.

Austin writes about flowers in her novel as part of heterosexual courting rituals especially when discussing how Julia is "bought" with flowers and other items by the men who court her. Austin writes, "For the favor of [Julia's] society they had paid in opera tickets, theater suppers, and flowers out of season… [One of her suitors] sent her jonquils in December to sit out dances with him on the stairs" (94). The purchase of these flowers, which are not native to the area and not in season, shows this man displaying his wealth. In addition the meaning of jonquils in the language of flowers bears a similarity to the meaning Austin gives the flower in her text. According to Wirt, jonquils mean, "I desire a return of affection" (125). The jonquils' connection to desire is due to their potent fragrance, which was highly sought after. In accordance with their meaning, this suitor is looking to buy Julia's favor and affection.

Later in the novel another suitor, Jim Halford, courts now-married Julia with flowers. Austin writes, "Halford insisted on buying half a dozen bunches of violets of a street-flower vender ... 'Don't I always buy violets for you' he urged to Julia's protestation" (237). The buying of flowers becomes a symbol for Halford's buying Julia. Ironically the meaning of a violet is modesty. Language of flowers author Catherine Waterman attributes this meaning to the flower's Greek name, *Ion.* Waterman writes that *Ion* was "traced by some etymologists to Io, the daughter of Midas, who was betrothed to Atys, and changed by Diana into a violet to hide her

from Apollo. The beautiful, modest flower retains the bashful timidity of the nymph, partially concealing itself amidst foliage from the garish gaze of the sun" (216). Since violets were associated with modesty in poetry and song long after the popularity of the language of flowers, it is ironic that Julia's lover buys her violets. As a beautiful woman, Julia often used her physical appearance to attract attention- unlike a violet, which though beautiful hides in shadowy places. Jim may be buying her these flowers because she was once modest and reluctant in their relationship. Austin describes an encounter between Julia and Jim during which they recall their youthful romance "when Jim had been engaged to her and she had not been engaged to Jim" in terms of flowers. Recalling their romance, they are "touching remembered gladness, to find it glow again like pressed flowers from a book, reviving color and perfume in the light and air" (243) and are using the metaphor of flowers to describe their feelings coming alive again after so long. Just as flowers that have long been tucked away retain their smell, the feelings of passion retain their potency and recall Julia's life that was once so vibrant. Austin associates preserved flowers with capturing a fleeting moment.

Julia is described in terms of flowers during her romance with her husband-to-be Antrim Stairs. Austin describes Julia wearing "a white tailored-gown and [her] color like a La France rose, showed a becoming deference to the distinguished young professor which kept him at her side the whole of the afternoon" (41). The 'La France' rose is legendary as it was the first Hybrid Tea Rose introduced by Guillot & Fils in 1867. These roses did not seem to thrive in Europe and were white or creamy pink instead of full red. Growers began to prize their delicate nature. This rose is known for both its color and scent, which is reminiscent of tea. This flower was developed after most language of flowers books were written so it was not given a coded meaning. However, Austin, recognizing the rose's history and botany inscribes her symbolic

meaning of cultivation and fragility. By describing Julia (through her fair color or complexion) as a tea rose, Austin is highlighting the way that she is a cultivated specimen which brings esteem to the professor by being by his side. Here, Julia is not an empowered wild flower but an oppressed domestic one. By concentrating on Julia's physical beauty, Austin conveys her lack of strength and similarity to flowers in that both are considered to be delicate and attractive.

Ironically, while Stairs states that Julia inspired his study of the native botany and she enjoys the attention of "being the fountain-head of a world-wondering work," she does not want to read the book. She states that she is practicing an "avoidance of being bored" (99). Here, Austin emphasizes her lack of intellectual curiosity, a major fault in the author's eyes. To be an object of admiration without purpose puts Julia in a dangerous position in Austin's view. Hence, Julia is described in terms of a conventional flower, which is a symbol for feminine beauty, a rose. Austin makes the comparison between Julia and a rose a second time when she writes, "Julia Maybury was full-bosomed and had slender hips, and a fine, steady color, like a La France rose" (100). Roses, which signify love and beauty, are usually part of a happy fairy tale for a young woman; however, in Austin's text, the rose becomes a symbol of misery and death.

After the town discovers Julia's affair with Halford, Stairs refuses to grant her a divorce. While discussing Julia and Antrim, Evan Lindley voices Austin's feelings that women should be able to leave a marriage if it is not working. He says "'if Julia can escape into a happy marriage – if they both could—it would save them from the feeling that they had marred each other's lives. As it is, they are spoiling two good marriages in the effort to patch a bad one'" (304). This advocacy of divorce shows Austin's feminist viewpoint that women can be better off without men than in a bad marriage.

Since Antrim will not grant her a divorce after she asks for one, Julia resolves to kill herself with poison to escape the shame of being an adulteress and the drudgery of a loveless marriage. As she walks to her husband's office to say good-bye, flowers again set the scene creating a nostalgic aura. Austin writes, "The window behind him was open, and the smell of the late roses, steeped in the afternoon sun, was like a sweet flavor to the winey tang of the autumnal air" (337). The late rose withering on the vine is a foreboding symbol of Julia's suicide. According to Hale a withered white rose means, "sadness" (186). Hale derives her meaning from a passage she quotes from Byron: "A single rose is shedding / Its lovely luster meek and pale: / It looks as planted by despair--" (Hale 186). Julia is so weakened by despair that she, like the rose, withers. The once beautiful flower represents the once beautiful girl. The rose symbolizes the death of beauty and innocence in the novel and despair over that loss. Austin also points out that the summer is coming to an end and autumn approaches. The autumn signals the death of flowers as well as Julia's death. She falls to Stairs' knees and then dies.

The white rose also represents Julia in her death. According to Hale, when a white rose is wilted it means "sadness" (185), and when it is alive it means "silence" (184). The flower emphasizes the sadness that comes from her failed marriage and the silence in which she must contain her melancholy. After Julia's suicide, Serena honors Julia by tending to her grave. Serena tells Antrim, "I thought only today that I should take something from her garden to plant there" (342). Stairs responds that Julia did not care much for gardening; however, he believes that she liked "the white rose by the east window, she often wore it in her hair" (342). The white rose is a highly symbolic choice. Roses are universally symbols of beauty, but the color and type of rose also conveys meaning. To this day people associate red roses with love and pink with friendship. Along the same lines as Hale, Waterman states that the white rose means "silence"

(180). Both meanings convey the unhappiness and confinement that Julia feels in her marriage. Austin is clearly emphasizing this flower as an emblem for Julia since Serena picks this flower for Julia's grave to remain a living symbol of her for her mourners.

Austin ends her novel with a closing image of a flower with symbolism and meaning in the language of flowers. The final image is of Serena in her home picking and tossing away a rose, which has bloomed late in the season (Austin 346). In Hale's dictionary a late rose means, "I am in despair" (186). By throwing this rose away into the wind, Serena casts off her despair and resigns herself to domestic life. She thinks, "…underneath the primal tides drove fast, she saw herself and all women moving on them by the way of colorless, unimpassioned marriages, by fatigues and homely contrivances, by childbirth and sorrow and denial—oh, a common story!" (Austin 345). Serena thinks of William's daring and happiness in marriage and of Julia's passion and misery in marriage. She contemplates the place of women and the possibility of happiness in marriage. Through a symbolic final act, she says goodbye to her passionate friend and her own dreams of passion which she lets go. Serena "leaned from the sill to gather a late chilled rose that bloomed hardily on a climbing vine. She kissed it once and threw it far from her; it was her greeting to life and the land" (345). By tossing away the flower that represents despair, Serena is confirming her vitality but also is throwing away the dream that her life could be different. She resolves to find happiness in her life, however confining it may be. Throwing away the rose of despair shows that Serena, unlike Julia, resolves to survive.

William: A Pure Flower and a Modern Woman

The most admirable heroine in *Santa Lucia* and the one whom Austin most wished to emulate is William Caldwell. William's unusual name for a woman reflects her equally unusual confidence and independence. William is the only child of the town doctor who treats her as a

son and named her after his brave relative who died in a war. She is a self-assured and strong-willed amateur scientist, who blooms into adulthood along with the fruit trees in her parents' orchard at the start of the novel. William at first seems childish and fanciful, but she evolves into a self-reliant and brave woman. As an only child, she accompanies her father on his house visits and acts as a son would act. This relationship is a wish fulfillment for Austin, who never got a chance to be close to her father. When William's father, Doctor Caldwell, falls ill, a young physician, Doctor Rhewold, is called in to care for his patients. Though not typically beautiful, William is courageous and caring; those qualities enchant the young doctor. He and William fall in love. After discovering the young couple's affection for each other, William's father's assistant, Jap, reveals his obsessive love for William and attempts to kill Rhewold in a staged carriage accident. William rescues him, and she and Rhewold marry. Together they take over her father's practice. She serves as a model of equitable marriage. Ultimately, through all three characters, Austin proves that women must search for their own fulfillment, with or without children, and should engage in a marriage with a man as an equal partner, emotionally, financially, and physically.

As opposed to Serena and Julia, William Caldwell is Austin's female character who is most successful at marriage in *Santa Lucia.* William's unusual name separated her from conventional womanhood from the start, so it is fitting that William also is the woman who defies traditional social expectations for the institution of marriage. Austin writes about William during the time she moves from girlhood to womanhood and marriage. However, unlike typical female coming of age tales, this plotline of the novel rarely uses the language of flowers. While Austin often mentions nature and wild flowers in connection to William, there are few flowers

that contain language of flowers meanings. The significant exceptions come at points in the plot where William is entering womanhood.

Austin's first mention of William is of her waking to the call of the birds and "the pale storm of blossoms among the apricots" (1). William seems to be attuned to Nature. Connecting William to an apricot blossom is logical. William's father plants fruit trees as many other land-owning country residents of southern California did as well. Austin also uses the apricots metaphorically, though they do not have a language of flowers meaning. She represents this woman's coming of age with the blooming of the fruit tree. The progression of the tree coming into fruit mimics the transition from a beautiful blossoming girl to a fertile fruit-bearing woman. Austin highlights this transition for her coming of age character by literally surrounding her with blooming fruit trees.

William's transition into womanhood is marked by her use of flowers in one particular scene in *Santa Lucia*. The Caldwell home has a room that is William's scientific laboratory, known as "William's heart". However, despite her passion for science, she moves away from this enthusiasm for study as her romantic interest in a man begins. She redecorates her laboratory by removing her scientific equipment and furnishing it all in white and as a traditional woman's drawing room complete with white lilies. According to Wirt, this flower means "sweetness and purity" in the language of flowers (138). Christianity has long associated white lilies with the Virgin Mary, which gives them their meaning of purity. Austin uses the color white to represent William's purity in the décor as well. She transforms this space after her first romantic encounter with Dr. Rhewold taking out all of her equipment and adding white curtains and white coverings for the furniture. Finally, she adds the flowers. Austin writes, "She went slowly and brought a tall vase, and tall white lilies from the garden, and, when she had set them on the table in the

middle of the room, said to herself that she could not imagine why she had done such a thing" (142). William is puzzled by this feminine instinct. Austin writes she cannot imagine "why she has done such a[n] [uncharacteristic] thing". The girl who did not care to do her hair or please male suitors has domesticated her sacred space. Her addition of flowers reflects a tradition passed through generations for women to domesticate a space. Austin further explains her use of the white lilies, which mean purity, to represent William's feelings of love in a conversation between Serena and Evan. Serena wonders if the chapel-like room that William has created means that she is "going to turn religious" (145). But the Lindleys posit that there could be another reason for William to redecorate. Evan Lindley states, "Unless she is in love," and Serena responds, "Of course, a nice girl always feels like that" (145). Since William's love is pure, the lily conveys the meaning that her love is innocent.

Another flower associated with William is the lilac. Lilacs also mean innocence. The lilac hedge in front of William's home plays a part in the plot. William hides behind it and overhears Jap's plot to harm her future husband. According to Wirt, the lilac means, "emotion of first love" (138). The lilacs run from her house to the road and provide a screen for William to observe Jap. Austin writes, "If one kept along the hedge it was possible to escape observation from the house or barn, according as one went one side or another of the lilacs" (152). William sees Jap hitch up a team of horses "with evil intent" (153). Intent on knowing his errand, William climbs into the back of his wagon and hides under a canvas cover. William interrupts Jap as he is about to run Dr. Rhewold off a cliff. The two men struggle; once Rhewold gains the upper hand, he shouts to William, "Marry me."

The evil action of Jap is foreshadowed by the language of flowers early in the novel when William plants a white rose under the window of the room Jap rents from her father. William

planted this flower innocently; however, the white rose means “sadness” in the language of flowers and appears around characters who meet with unfortunate circumstances and who suffer in silence in Austin’s novel (185). Nineteenth-century language of flowers author Catherine Waterman gives the white rose the meaning “Silence” (180). The white rose may also signal that Jap is silent in his intention to marry William and murder Rhewold. Waterman writes that Byron renders the white rose akin to the silence of the tomb in his “Bride of Abydos”. The meaning of silence is also supported by Waterman’s statement explaining that the white rose was an ancient symbol often carved into the wood above the doors to festival halls to remind guests to keep the things they heard there silent. Even though William’s intentions when planting it were innocent, the presence of the white rose remains foreboding.

After saving Rhewold from Jap’s murder attempt, William marries Rhewold by the Beauty of Glazenwood rose shrub in her parents’ garden. The Beauty of Glazenwood is a species developed after the language of flowers and is typical for warm environments (Ondra 219). By mentioning this salmon-colored rose, Austin reminds the reader that this wedding is one of love, but it is not a conventional union. A conventional union would have red roses. Austin calls attention to William’s age, which is older than usual for marriage, by implying that the girl and the shrub are alike in that both are late bloomers. Austin writes, “[the climbing vigorous rose shrub was] ready to shed its petals bright and soft as blessings by the time William was ready to be married under it” (267). Austin further connects William to nature, by saying that “she could not be married anywhere else besides outdoors” (267). William declares that the surrounding colors and scents are “the Voice that breathed o’er Eden” (268). The wedding is complete with decorations of flowers, especially roses (277). This union is in a domesticated garden, and the union is happy because both William and her husband treat each other as equals and engage in

meaningful work. However, even for a strong unconventional character like William, flowers in *Santa Lucia* signal typical rituals of femininity and womanhood such as marriage.

Dulcie: A Dangerous Cactus Flower

Austin's use of symbolic flowers and her views of feminism change from *Santa Lucia* (1909) to the later *Cactus Thorn* (1927). She portrays both flowers and women as more powerful and, like nature, potentially dangerous. Her attitude toward romantic love is much more cynical and her belief in the strength of women is more prominent.[102] Dulcie Adelaid, Austin's heroine from *Cactus Thorn*, is a western woman who lives in the desert. She is symbolized by the cactus flower, which means "satire" in the language of flowers (Hale 165). However, Austin does not use this meaning to describe her character. Austin's departure from the formalized language of flowers corresponds with her progression toward a more radical feminism. Austin moves beyond only using the traditional language of flowers meanings and creates unique meanings. Instead of using the cactus to say that her character, Dulcie, is a satire of a woman, Austin turns the cactus into an emblem of strength. Austin makes an analogy between the survival of the cactus in a harsh climate and the survival of her main character, who endures a forced marriage as well as abandonment by her lover. To show her character's strength, Austin links Dulcie to the dangerous beauty of the cactus flower that is surrounded by sharp thorns. Dulcie carries a dagger, which Austin likens to a cactus thorn, and which she eventually uses to kill her lover in revenge for his abandonment of her. Austin's abandonment of the traditional language of flowers reflects her progression toward a more radical feminist view of heterosexual relationships--one in which a woman's murder of her lecherous lover is justified. Austin's heroine willingly engages in sex outside marriage, protects her inept lover from the harsh landscape, and refuses to accept

[102] Austin wrote *Cactus Thorn* after her 1911 break up with Lincoln Steffens, an author and political reformer on whom the novel's character Grant Arliss may be based.

his decision to end their relationship. Austin exposes the corruption of men who would use women and, in *Cactus Thorn*, gives women the power to control their destiny.

Cactus Thorn is a story of love, betrayal, and revenge in which the desert home of Dulcie is juxtaposed with the city home of her lover. The novella does not explore marriage like *Santa Lucia*. Instead, *Cactus Thorn* is about a passionate affair between a man and woman outside of marriage. Austin's unconventional plot satirizes the typical narrative of a helpless woman saved by a man. In a drastic change from Julia's story in *Santa Lucia*, the female character in this novella refuses to be the victim. In addition, *Cactus Thorn* presents a very different West than the one presented in *Santa Lucia*. This West is wild and dangerous, much like the heroine of the novella.

The plot of *Cactus Thorn* emphasizes the heroine's strength and her connection to the desert wilderness. During a stop at a remote western train station on his way to Los Angeles, a New York City politician named Grant Arliss meets a local woman, Dulcie Adelaid who was raised in the desert by her pioneer father. Knowing nothing of the desert, Arliss is cared for by Dulcie who waits with him for his train and keeps him safe and hydrated. Arliss reveals that he wants to escape the pressures of his life in New York politics; this wish for escape includes a pending marriage to a political supporter's daughter, Alida Rittenhouse, whom he does not love but whose father would provide him with career advancement. Dulcie suggests he stay in the desert if he truly wants to find himself, but he dismisses the idea. After reaching Los Angeles, Arliss changes his mind and returns to the desert town of Hiwainda. He hires a guide and ventures out to an abandoned European-style villa in Sweetwater that Dulcie mentioned to set up camp. Dulcie joins him at the villa, and they begin an affair. In a dramatic sandstorm, the lovers try to save Dulcie's drunken husband; they survive, but he does not. Dulcie mourns but also

realizes that she is now free. Nevertheless, Arliss returns to New York, forgetting Dulcie as his career takes off. When Dulcie appears in New York to be with him, he tells her that he plans to marry Alida Rittenhouse. Dulcie stabs Arliss with her dagger, but, since Arliss had kept his affair with her a secret, she returns to the West without getting caught.

The cactus flower and its thorn are repeatedly used as symbols for Dulcie throughout the novella.[103] In *Cactus Thorn* the cactus flower represents survival, strength, danger, and beauty. The American barrel cactus is an interesting and amazingly versatile plant, which produces both food and water in the desert. This versatility reflects Dulcie's practical survival skills and hard work ethic. The cactus is native to South America and grows in the American Southwest (Barker 161). Its flowers are bright red and are surrounded by many sharp thorns. They have a long life cycle of fifty to one hundred years and can grow to ten feet high (Barker 161). Austin's Dulcie also possesses a rugged beauty and ability to survive harsh climates. Austin's choice of the cactus as a symbol for her heroine defies the typical characterization of a woman as a delicate flower. (165). Since cactuses are not conventionally delicate or beautiful, giving a woman a cactus as an emblem would be considered a satire in the language of flowers. Hale includes the following quote in her entry on the cactus to express the sentiment of the flower.

"And can young Beauty's tender heart

Nurse thoughts of scorn

As on the cactus's greenest leaves

Protrudes the thorn" – Anon

This quote recalls the adage, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." However, Austin's use means more than Hale's language of flowers meaning of "satire". For Austin, the

[103] It is important to note that Austin also used the image of a thorn as a precedent for Dulcie in her 1905 novel *Isidro*, in which she wrote about a female character that dressed as a male, sought justice, and called herself *El Zarzo* (the thorn).

cactus conveys that a flower (and a woman) can be both beautiful and strong, surviving in harsh climates. While it is beautiful, it is also dangerous. In her novella, Austin emphasizes the unusual and unexpected beauty of a cactus flower appearing in a desolate landscape but also its thorn lurking beneath ready to harm anyone who might jeopardize the blossom. Dulcie, a stalwart, competent, independent woman whose beauty comes from her strength and intelligence, is perfectly reflected by the cactus.

Austin's freedom to explore the limits of the definitions of womanhood and the possibility of unconventional social roles is expressed by setting her novels in the American West. For Austin, the rural West provided a freeing environment and was not as locked into convention as the Northeast. The West's expansive land represented freedom to Austin and allowed her the possibility of creating her own meanings for flowers and her own roles for women. Critic Stacy Alaimo emphasizes the feminist freedom of her rural Western setting in an article on Austin's progressive conservation ethic. Alaimo discusses Austin's use of a western landscape in *Cactus Thorn* stating, "The novella insists on the desert as a place of feminist possibility, a space beyond social structures" (80). Likewise in *Santa Lucia*, the women most closely identified with the language of flowers (Serena and Julia) are the ones with roots in the East coast. These women are also the most conventional. However, Austin's "Western" women (William and Dulcie) defy convention. They are connected to flowers, but Austin does not feel bound to use flower imagery to describe them in a way that corresponds with language of flowers meanings. Austin's descriptions of the West convey a sense of the desert as an unspoiled Eden, an innocent environment that lacks the harmfully restrictive mandates of society. The western flowers Austin describes become synonymous with her female characters' struggles for rights, opportunities, and chances to succeed in a male-dominated world.

Austin stated in her essay "Regionalism in American Literature" that in "a true regional literature place itself should be 'the instigator of plot'" (qtd Stout 81). Her affection for the West is clear when she goes on to write "the Southwest provides, on a grand scale, the space needed for people to pursue 'starry adventures'" (82). In *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience in the American Frontiers 1630-1860,* Annette Kolodny writes that women's experiences and discussion of the American frontier was first a narrative of captivity and then a process of bringing the unfamiliar wild landscape into more familiar domestic order. Whereas male pioneers had a tendency to conquer and exploit the frontier, women, in general, lived in harmony with the land yet still modified it to reflect a more well-known, civilized existence. Kolodny notes that women's exclusion from wilderness narratives encouraged a different sort of creativity among the female pioneers which was "focused on the spaces that were truly and unequivocally theirs: the home and the small cultivated gardens" (123). Austin reflects women like those that Kolodny describes in *Santa Lucia,* as many of the women tend gardens and even import flowers from back east. However, Austin believed in the need for change in women's lives beyond the garden; she writes, "Feminism is the inherent hope of women to be esteemed for something over and above their femininity" (Austin qtd Stout 82). In her western landscapes, Austin develops complex, multi-dimensional women, such as William and Dulcie, who are strong and independent but not unaffected by the injustice of the power balance in male-female relationships.

In looking at the freeing nature of women in the western wilderness, this chapter builds on the scholarship of critic Stacy Alaimo. In her chapter on Austin, she links Austin's support of unconventional gender roles to her life in the western desert and examines Austin's challenges to the women's conservation movement of her time. These female conservationists made the

argument that women needed to protect the environment because of their "domestic skills" and the resources the earth provided the home (Alaimo 64). While Austin certainly saw a connection between women and the earth, she instead "takes the historically entrenched image of a feminine nature and turns it against itself, contesting discourses that position women and nature as resources for exploitation" (Alaimo 64). Austin fought against the domestication of nature. According to Alaimo, Austin argued that nature was an "undomesticated, potentially feminist space" (63). Unlike the domestic, nature was not designated a female space so it allowed women to construct their own ideas of feminism beyond the household. As this chapter examines, Austin applies and uses the language of flowers for those characters who are most bound to the home as in *Santa Lucia*. In nature women could escape social expectations as the main character in *Cactus Thorn* does. While the women in *Santa Lucia* seem to reflect the pioneer women settling the West as described by Annette Kolodny, Dulcie in *Cactus Thorn* makes few attempts to domesticate the wild and finds freedom in the absence of domestication. This desire to live in the wild reflects a different evolution of women in the West. In accordance, the in her earlier novel have not reached the same level of freedom as Dulcie, and the language of flowers was a crucial factor in Austin's transitional thinking about women and nature. Thus, this chapter looks at Austin's use of flower culture and the language of flowers to bridge her acceptance of the traditions of earlier generations of women with her evolving ideas about women's roles in society.

As a woman who wrote about the oppression of nature and women, many critics view Austin as an early ecofeminist. An ecofeminist believes in advocacy for women and the environment and sees similarities in the way the patriarchy oppresses both; they also tend to view women as more inherently connected to the environment than men (Eaton 20). Austin often

describes her desert landscape with feminine characteristics, directly linking the environment to women. One critic to study this connection is Beverly Hume, who concentrates on Austin's use of ecofeminist rhetoric in *Stories from the Country of Lost Borders* (1909). Hume states that Austin writes about men and women who leave society in favor of the wilderness and freedom of the West, which offers unique opportunities to women as they are able to escape the bounds of traditional society. Hume argues that in Austin's stories a woman's escape from society often "leads to spiritual insight, emotional health, self-reliance, and a self-appreciation…" (413). The wilderness space of the West provided a personal and psychological space of freedom for women. Similar to Hume, Alaimo writes, "Austin delights in the desert as a place to cast off constricting domestic values" (75). While this statement is true of Austin's later work, it was not always the case in her earlier work. Austin's use of the language of flowers demonstrates her comparing women to the environment through flowers in such a way as to characterize them as domestic before she became ecofeminist.

The desert is a character in *Cactus Thorn* from the first pages. After stepping off the train, Arliss appears lost and helpless, knowing little about how to survive in the harsh climate. Dulcie prepares a kettle of tea for him. When Arliss attempts to gather fuel for the fire, he encounters the story's first of several highly significant cactus flowers. Austin writes, "He found the thin flame-colored film of a cactus flower almost under his fingers. Before the girl's sharp, deterring exclamation reached him, he drew back his inexperienced hand, wounded by the cactus thorn" (9). She tells him "there's only one way to admire a cactus" and spears the flower on the end of her dagger. This painful encounter with a natural and beautiful desert flower foreshadows Dulcie's eventual murder of Arliss. He goes on to say, "that this is a typical desert experience; to admire and be stung" (9). He has the attitude that "the desert lays hold on a man and never lets

go." To which Dulcie agrees "'Oh yes, it gets them. It seems to *want* people.' She considered the wide, untenanted spaces, the rich promise of the soil. 'It wants them too much' she concluded. 'It is like a woman, you know—that has only one man or child: she loves it to death'" (9). Here the danger of the desert and its flower represents the power of a woman's desire, wanting her lover to the point of consuming him. While women such as Dulcie might love a man to the point of destruction, they are able to live without a companion. In Austin's opinion this separates females from males.

Cactus Thorn does not mock the consuming female desire, but rather the male dependence on women in marriage. Austin ridicules men's tendency to try to find fulfillment in marriage, and points out that the institution does not limit them as it does women. This idea of male dependence on women is demonstrated in *Cactus Thorn* in Arliss's immediate dependence on Dulcie and his acquiescence to marry his supporter's daughter to save his career. As a man struggling to balance personal morals with the requirement of his sacrificing his beliefs for ascension in politics, Arliss battles with a lost sense of self. He attempts to resolve his confusion by "thinking of marriage for himself as a possible way out of his present state of spiritual insufficiency. If only he could find a woman who could be counted on to kindle a flame and keep it going" (13). Austin states that Arliss wishes to find a woman to care for him and to inspire him. She mocks his idea that women are the tenders of the hearth and must live for families and not themselves when it is really men who cannot survive without women. When Arliss is stopped at the train station it is in fact Dulcie who makes a fire—a task Arliss does not know how to do.

Austin reminds her readers that perpetual pressure to care for others drains women and holds them back. Dulcie voices Austin's opinion when she tells Arliss "That's one of the ways in which women got sidetracked. They didn't *have* to keep making up the fire all the time, the way

men do. They *lived* in the flame until men got to think of them as being makers of the flame" (14). Austin implies that men's dependence on women puts out the very same inner flame that makes men desire them. While the language of flowers revered women as keepers of the family, Austin resists this characterization stating that it depletes women. Dulcie does not seek marriage, as Austin's earlier female characters did. However, Dulcie does want companionship and does demand respect and honesty from Arliss, which he cannot provide. In addition, Dulcie does not reflect meanings of flowers from the language of flowers. By eschewing the language of flowers and feminine traditions related to flowers, Austin rejects the sort of traditionalism that the language of flowers perpetuates.

Grant Arliss uses women. He wants the comfort of a woman to "warm" him intellectually, morally, and possibly physically but is chilled by the women he encounters in New York. He seems put off that women want him either for marriage or for the opportunity to express themselves though his career, instead of only wanting to inspire him. Austin's subtle mocking of his self-centered desires allows her readers to feel justified when Dulcie seeks her revenge. After meeting Dulcie, Arliss feels inspired and refreshed that she seemed not to need him or want anything from him. This selfish man misinterprets her independence and self-sufficiency. Arliss feels that he needs Dulcie, like a man needs water. While Austin's heroine is self-reliant, her male character is dependent and ultimately devours the strength Dulcie possesses.

The reader knows from the start that Dulcie is not a timid or placid woman. She is familiar with the wilderness trail. In much of Austin's fiction the Western wilderness trail, typically a symbol of male self-reliance, strength, and autonomy, becomes the emblem of independence for women. Critic Janice Stout writes that, in Austin's fiction, trails served as "an

emblem of movement along paths of discovery and freedom, and thus an expression of feminism" (79). Austin's radically feminist character, Dulcie Adelaide, lives on the wilderness trail and the movement and freedom this provides her allows her to escape the confines of gender roles for women.

However, Austin does not completely depart from her past use of the language of flowers in *Cactus Thorn*. She maintains flowers as a part of heterosexual courtship. Dulcie and Arliss meet at an abandoned Italian-style villa in the desert, which foreshadows their failed romance. Arliss inhabits this lonesome place during his stay in the desert. Like water in the desert, Dulcie is necessary for Arliss to survive.[104] The abandoned house seems to come to life as Arliss and Dulcie begin their romance there.[105]

Flowers are the first sign of life Arliss encounters in the villa. He sees a rose near the well fed by its water. Austin writes, "The trickle of water that ran from the open hydrant was finding its way along a well-defined channel to the roots of the rose. It had not yet reached the end of its channel, but the soil around the rose stem was dark with damp. It had every appearance of having been watered well and recently" (31). Arliss concludes from this that Dulcie has been tending to the flower. He hopes to see her again. As previously mentioned, a rose in the desert signals the presence of a good woman. Next, he walks to the ruined garden in which there is a table with a dish with "half a dozen of the red flowers of the barrel cactus. He recalled where he had first seen and admired them, and on a sudden impulse bent to examine the thick top of the

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[104] The villa has a spring fed well, so the area of the villa is called Sweetwater. Dulcie is linked to the earth since her name means sweet in Spanish and "agua dulce" (sweet water) was a common term used by travelers in the arid desert.

[105] The abandoned rural cabin in Edith Wharton's novel *Summer* (1916) in which Charity Royall and Lucius Harney meet and being a sexual affair outside of marriage is very similar to the deserted desert villa that Arliss and Dulcie use for the same purpose. Ultimately both men abandon these women. Unlike Dulcie, Charity becomes pregnant and is forced to marry her adoptive father--the only man who will have her in her state of social disgrace. Both affairs take place out of the civilized space of the town and in the wilderness location that seems to allow for the sexual freedom of the women.

disk which had been neatly sliced off with its flowering cluster…he quoted to himself, 'There's only one way to admire a cactus'" (31). The necessity of slicing the flower from the stem to avoid being impaled by the thorn mimics the necessity for Dulcie, the cactus flower, to exact her revenge using the dagger to kill Arliss in order to save herself.

Flowers in nature continue to be an important part of the romance, however, not in the typical way. In terms of nature and flowers, Dulcie teaches Arliss a great deal. Dulcie learned to appreciate nature by spending time getting to know the earth with the Native America women. Austin's description of learning to use the available materials and shape them in a way which is in line with their original design reflects Austin's own creative process. She uses the setting surrounding her to build and to complement her plot and characters. When describing working with the Native American women, Dulcie states, "'When I'm out with the Indian women,' she said, 'gathering roots and materials for basket making, it's not that I expect to make baskets or drink their medicine, it's the things you sort of soak up from the earth while you're with them, the things that make women wise. I don't know how to explain—it's not as if they learned about willows and grasses in order to make baskets, but as if they learned to make baskets by knowing willows…learned to make bows by knowing junipers" (41). Austin follows a similar philosophy when writing. She lets the characters actions grow naturally from their place. Austin does not use the language of flowers meaning of juniper, which is "think of me" according to Hale (42). Instead, flowers are used in a practical way as an essential part of survival and a link to the earth. Austin abandons her romantic language of flowers sentiments in favor of realist practicality and function.

Dulcie seems to be an early ecofeminist. By seeing a connection between the oppression and suffering of women and the earth, she acknowledges that the nature of women's work puts

them in contact with the earth. Dulcie believes that a woman has the ability to understand the earth to a greater extent than man can. Austin writes that Dulcie exemplified "the nature of women, as closer always to the moulding realities of earth" (42). Predating ecofeminist criticism, Austin makes the statement that Dulcie and all women at heart are closer to the earth. This closeness to the earth becomes a valuable asset in the novella. Dulcie shows Arliss the wonders of the desert, and on a hike to an abandoned mine, she saves him from a rattlesnake (50). In the desert, Arliss is helpless, and the stronger Dulcie, more competent with the desert ecology, takes on the traditionally masculine role of protector.

Austin blurs the lines of gender roles with her strong heroine. She also satirizes the idea of needing a male hero in a story. Dulcie takes action at the end of the novella and seeks justice for her abandonment. Once Arliss leaves Sweetwater, Dulcie follows him to New York. After finding out that Arliss intends to marry another woman, Dulcie suggests that she should be able to talk to this other woman about what has happened. Dulcie questions Arliss about his beliefs and moral code. She believes that he should be truthful and should live by the principles that he espouses. Dulcie states, "I thought it was just the point you made that there wasn't to be any difference between what was social and what was personal, not any difference in rightness" (97). Dulcie satirizes the pompous, blathering, and insincere politician who preached high ideals but does not live them. Arliss does not believe in following his heart over what will be socially advantageous. The illusion of their romance was only temporary. Once this truth is revealed to her, Dulcie decides she must extract her revenge for Arliss's selfishness and insincerity. In a satirical take on the marriage plot of nineteenth century novels, Austin's heroine murders her lover.

Before she leaves New York to return to Sweetwater, Dulcie visits Arliss one last time. As she says good-bye to him, Austin writes, "He felt her arms go about him and a sudden surprising pain in his side like a thorn" (98). The murder weapon is her knife which has been described as a thorn, the protective implement of the cactus flower. Traditionally, a woman might be killed or kill herself in a novel for the transgression of sex before marriage. Austin followed this traditional plot line in *Santa Lucia* by having Julia commit suicide; however, Dulcie does not die. The police and press assume "a professional gangster who had made himself the toll of the political ring, whose peace and profits Arliss had so successfully disturbed" murdered him (99). Austin's mocking tone suggests that few would suspect a woman was actually the murderer. The police find her knife plunged deep into Arliss's heart. Austin describes it as "a thorn shaped dagger of foreign workmanship, the ivory handle mended with bone." Dulcie is able to escape to the anonymity of the open land from which she emerged. No one connects the dagger with Dulcie, who "was staring blindly at the fleeting of Western landscape past the windows of the Overland Flier, her face slowly setting in the torpor of relief after great shock and pain" (99). Austin shows Dulcie getting revenge for her broken heart and moving on in independence.

Dulcie returns to the land that created her as a fearless and powerful woman-- the desert. Anna-Carew Miller writes "Dulcie's morality, then, is not constructed but natural, in Austin's' view, for it is based not on human notions of correctness, but on the natural justice of the desert…Dulcie is spurned by a lover who chooses marriage with a conventional woman over his unlicensed relationship with her" (117). Similar to Edith Wharton's character Charity Royall in *Summer*, who has an affair with a young urbane architect who spends the summer in her remote town in Massachusetts, Dulcie is passed over for a more socially sanctioned match. Both writers

imply that these men should consider the impact these relationships have on the women which far outweighs the impact on men, but while Wharton's story could be seen as a warning to girls about the danger of engaging in free love, Austin's can be seen as a warning to men. Early in her career, Austin wrote about a woman who kills herself while consumed by passion and is symbolized by a white rose. Later in her career, she wrote about another woman consumed by passion who kills the lover that abandons her and is symbolized by a cactus flower. Austin deliberately uses particular flowers to symbolize particular women; however, as her feminist voice grew she felt less bound to the convention of portraying a woman as a delicate, ephemeral, and beautiful flower.

By the time she wrote *Cactus Thorn*, Austin had moved her writing further from the traditional language of flowers toward her own ecological brand of feminism in *Cactus Thorn*. Austin does not use the traditional language of flowers but rather imparts flowers with her own meanings. Austin's innovative style uses flowers in combination with overt feminism to convey the struggles of women in their oppressive situations.

CHAPTER FIVE: BEYOND THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS: REPRESENTING THE WOMEN OF THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE WITH SYMBOLIC FLOWERS IN SUSAN GLASPELL'S *THE VERGE*

With the nineteenth-century tradition of the language of flowers in mind, early-twentieth century playwright Susan Glaspell uses flowers symbolically to represent the struggle to properly balance women's cultural past, present, and the radical possibilities for the future of womanhood in her play *The Verge.* Glaspell symbolically employs three flowers in her play to convey that while women must continue to evolve socially and strive toward greater freedoms and equality they must also maintain a connection to the traditions and morality of women in the past. Glaspell implies that a connection to the past is needed to keep modern women from falling over the edge of sanity. In *The Verge*, her female main character, Claire Archer, creates three new varieties of flowers: Reminiscence, which symbolizes the sentimental language of flowers and traditional female gender roles of generations of women past; the Edge Vine, which symbolizes the current New Woman who clings to comfortable sameness; and Breath of Life, which symbolizes escape from women's limiting social roles as well as the excitement, danger, and loneliness that goes with breaking from tradition. By using symbolic flowers to represent stages of women's social evolution, Glaspell adds her own modernist twist to the traditional language of flowers, with its connections to the cult of True Womanhood which gave flowers meanings of feminine characteristics such as submissiveness, frailty, and piety. Glaspell's play examines women's evolution from True Woman to New Woman and beyond. In *The Verge*, Glaspell uses her main character's symbolic flowers to examine the past female sentimental traditions, the current stalemate of the ideology of the New Woman, and the possible implications of radical

feminism. She expands and modernizes the Victorian custom of the language of flowers in her play by constructing three highly symbolic original flowers that represent the past, present, and future of womanhood.

Glaspell's pioneering use of flowers as symbols of womanhood (both past and future) builds on the tradition of American women writers, some of whom include Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Stoddard, who use the language of flowers in their writings to symbolize the female self, female artistry, strength, and independence as mentioned in previous chapters. The language of flowers refers to a coded set of meanings attributed to flowers, which authors compiled into dictionaries that became popular in the mid-nineteenth century in America. Language of flowers dictionaries remained in print through the turn of the century, and many of the flower meanings in them carry such social currency that they are widely known today. *The Verge* is a modern representation of the by then century-old language of flowers. The women who shaped the custom of the language of flowers in America were writers Elizabeth Gamble Wirt (*Flora's Dictionary* 1829) and Sarah Josepha Hale (*Flora's Interpreter* 1832). These writers had a lingering impact on the culture of flowers in the United States, which may have influenced Glaspell.

Glaspell creates her own version of the typically feminine language of flowers. During the 1920s, the language of flowers was no longer a major cultural phenomenon; however, the idea that flowers contained hidden meanings or sentiments was a part of the popular consciousness in Glaspell's time and remains so even today. Perhaps because of the traditional associations with the language of flowers, Glaspell departs from the formalized system of language of flowers meanings and instead creates her own meanings and her own original flower species. Glaspell's play crosses the bridge begun by her predecessors in the transition from True

Woman to New Woman and then beyond.[106] However, Glaspell does not cross over this bridge without trepidation. Her views of radical feminism contain both endorsements and questions about the sacrifices demanded of a woman who ventures outside the accepted parameters of womanhood. Women's movement historian Sharon Friedman writes that "Feminism as theme should not be understood as simply a call for women's rights on the part of the playwright or her characters. Rather, it may be a statement about a feminine consciousness, the feelings and perceptions associated with a female character's identity as a woman" (70). The influence of feminist theory, especially the principles of Mina Loy's radical 1914 "Feminist Manifesto," the ideology of the New Woman, and the Cult of True Womanhood from sentimental fiction are evident in Glaspell's use of flowers to symbolize the social evolution of women.

Susan Glaspell's life shaped her tendency to blend feminine tradition with feminist radicalism. She was born in Davenport, Iowa in 1876 (Ben-Zvi 4). Much like her character Claire Archer, Glaspell's ancestors came from New England, and she took great pride in their history as colonists, pioneers, and farmers. In fact, her grandfather's experiments with different types of crops were the inspiration for her plays *The Inheritors* and *The Verge*. According to one of Glaspell's biographers, Linda Ben-Zvi, during the time that Glaspell was coming of age, Davenport was an oasis of culture and progressiveness in the otherwise conservative and rural Midwest (15). Glaspell's feelings for the traditional roles recommended for women were strained at best. As a young girl, she seemed to bond with her father, an accepting man, more than with her religious mother. According to Ben-Zvi, her mother was ambitious but was thwarted by her

[106] The True Woman refers to the ideal of nineteenth-century American womanhood. The term comes from the "cult of True Womanhood" described in Barbara Welter's *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. According to Martha Patterson, the term The New Woman describes a group of women living in Europe and America between 1890 and 1930. During this time there was an observable change in the attitudes and ambitions of European and American women. Patterson states that, "by the turn of the century, as increasing numbers of women demanded a public voice and private fulfillment through work, education, and political engagement, women, like their male counterparts, seemed to be evolving" (1).

conventional domesticity and her tendency to "hew closely to…Midwestern models of social behavior" (23). Glaspell's difficulty with her mother is reflected in the troubled relationship between mother and daughter presented in *The Verge*.

In her life, Susan Glaspell broke many female conventions. Unlike many women of her day, Glaspell was college educated and graduated from Drake University with a degree in philosophy (Ben-Zvi 37). She began a career in journalism with the *Des Moines Daily News*, and later she took courses in literature at the University of Chicago. Then, she returned to Davenport to concentrate on her writing; there she met George Cram "Jig" Cook, a fellow Davenport native who gave up a professorship to farm and write poetry. Jig's botanical knowledge was considerable; combined with Glaspell's family's legacy of farming, she became quite well versed in botany. Jig was also twice divorced, and Glaspell and Cook grew close while he was still married to his second wife, a scandal at the time. In 1913, they married and moved to Greenwich Village, New York, where they were an active part of the bohemian artistic community. In 1915 they began summering in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and in 1916 they formed the Provincetown Players, which they later moved to Greenwich Village. The amateur theater company produced plays that dealt with contemporary social issues by American playwrights.

The Provincetown players grew out of the efforts of a group of progressive liberal-minded friends who wanted to push the boundaries of American theater. On July 15th 1915, Glaspell's husband George Cram Cook decided to stage a play he wrote with Glaspell called *Suppressed Desires* on the front porch of their friends Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce's rented cottage (Miller 9). The Provincetown players were born ("History"). The Provincetown players were inspired by the Washington Square Players, one of the "little- theater groups" that

rose to acclaim in 1915 (Miller 11). Cook assembled a group of his playwright and actor friends from Greenwich Village, New York in Provincetown, Massachusetts (Ben-Zvi 154). There this group of talented artists staged plays in a make-shift theatre on Lewis Wharf. During the summer of 1916, playwright Eugene O'Neill became a member of the group. The Provincetown Players staged O'Neill's play *Bound East for Cardiff*, which critics and theater historians Jordan Miller and Winifred Frazer site as "representing what the Provincetown Players felt they were all about" (Miller 9). This idealism set the tone for Modern American drama, which aimed to use minimal props and sets and still evoke great emotion in the style of expressionism. At the end of the 1916 summer, many of the Players moved back to Greenwich Village and began a theater first at 139 and then at 133 MacDougal Street (Miller 10). Throughout the 1920s the group produced new and experimental American plays instead of performing European works or well-known plays. As difficulties arose over ideology, the group began to change. For example, Cook began to become "distressed over the growing professionalism and commercialism" of the group (Miller 10). The Provincetown Players were known for presenting innovative expressionistic dramatic works by up-and-coming American playwrights, and became known as one of the founders of the Little Theatre movement in America, a movement for small independent theater companies which wrote, acted, and produced their own plays giving them complete creative control and forever altering modern American drama.

The Verge was one of the Provincetown Players' productions which challenged cultural norms with innovative theater. The period during which Glaspell wrote *The Verge* spanned an important era in feminist history, a social issue that dominates the play. During this time, many women had abandoned the Victorian customs of the past, such as the language of flowers, and they had become "liberated" New Women. According to Glaspell critic and biographer Barbara

Ozieblo, "But Glaspell was assuredly a New Woman; she had been the first in Provincetown to bob her hair, and even before that act of rebellion, she had the courage to leave home, head off to college, have affairs, and marry a divorced visionary—all of which placed her quite outside the pale in Iowa in 1900" (140). Ozieblo points out that Glaspell also made the modern decision to keep her maiden name, which was not the norm for a wife at the time. Glaspell's relationship with Jig Cook was complex. While she remained independent in some ways, she was also devoted and very codependent in others. Ozieblo notes that Glaspell "devoted herself to [Cook] and expected—and largely gained—satisfaction from the knowledge that she kept him going in the world" (140). While many saw Glaspell as revolutionary due to her modernist drama, unlike some more radical feminists, she clung to some of the feminine traditions of the past and saw value in preserving them. Glaspell learned that being a conventional woman and a caretaker was not without its difficulties, especially when trying to write a play.

During the summer of 1921, Glaspell felt pressure to perform both as a surrogate mother and as a playwright. Glaspell wrote *The Verge* while living in Truro, her home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. [107] The Provincetown Players typically opened their season with a play by Eugene O'Neill; following the success of *The Emperor Jones,* his next play was widely anticipated. However, O'Neill asked for more time, so Cook looked to Glaspell to write the first play of the season. Jig Cook was managing the touring production of *The Emperor Jones*. While writing her play, Glaspell faced, as Ben-Zvi describes it, "a summer of interruptions" since Glaspell was caring for Cook's son from his second marriage, Harl (237). She resented this forced responsibility. According to Ben-Zvi, "Jig was so occupied by the *Jones* tour that he had

[107] After Glaspell left the Provincetown Players, *The Verge* was studied by critic Arthur E. Waterman in 1966 in his scholarly book on Susan Glaspell. The play was not less produced after that but received a surge of new interest in the 1987 when Christopher Bigsby published a collection of Susan Glaspell's plays including *The Verge*. The strength of the Susan Glaspell Society and the numerous papers presented at conferences about Glaspell and her works demonstrate her sustained relevance as a playwright in the modern day.

little time for his son; and once he left for New York at the end of August, the full responsibility for the boy's care and entertainment fell on Susan" (237). Glaspell never had her own children and felt that childcare interfered with her ability to be creative. Glaspell's play reflects some of her feelings about the social expectations for women to be natural nurturing mothers and not creators or innovators. Claire would rather focus on her flowers than her daughter or husband. Therefore, *The Verge* exemplifies a political play following feminism's tenet that the personal is political.[108] Ben-Zvi goes on to write, "In *The Verge*, however, [Glaspell] allows herself to display the frustration she must have felt at having to minister to Jig and the theater, putting both before her own creative and personal needs and her fiction, which she continued to see as her main form of expression" (237). This resentment of the demands of family is seen in Glaspell's staging and dialogue. For example, the main character Claire rejects and strikes her daughter who returns home, disrespects her work, and invades her space. In addition, Claire's work is continually interrupted by her husband, lover, and sister; this plight is one with which Glaspell certainly felt empathy.

The play opens in Claire's greenhouse where she had redirected all the heat in the house, much to her husband Harry's displeasure. Glaspell describes the setting of the first scene in her stage directions as "*not a greenhouse where plants are displayed, nor the usual workshop for the growing of them, but a place for experiment with plants, a laboratory*" (58). The sterile and scientific atmosphere makes Claire's husband's appearance with his breakfast seems all the more out of place. Harry, a pilot, invites guests to eat breakfast with him in the laboratory. His guests are Tom Edgeworthy, Claire's spiritual partner who she later kills, and the appropriately named Richard (Dick) Demming, a modern artist and her lover. This trio of Tom, Dick, and Harry acts

[108] This idea existed in feminism long before it was popularized as a slogan of the feminist movement in 1970s. Carol Hanisch's essay, "The Personal is Political" is often credited with popularizing this belief

as male foils to Glaspell's female lead.[109] Next, Claire's seventeen-year-old daughter Elizabeth returns from school. Elizabeth is a satirical representation of the New Woman; she is educated but conventional. Her self-sacrificing and religious Aunt Adelaide, Claire's sister who is better "fitted to rear children," represents the Victorian woman and also arrives to speak to Claire about her daughter (75). Elizabeth offers to help her mother "do some useful beautiful thing" (75), but she doesn't understand what Claire hopes to accomplish with her flowers. Outraged by her daughter's conformity and lack of independent vision, Claire uproots her botanical creation, the Edge Vine, which represents the failure of the New Woman to enact real change on society's view of women. Claire tries to strike Elizabeth with the Edge Vine because she, like the failed experiment, "isn't -over the edge" (77). Claire's disapproval of her daughter reflects the disappointment of the previous generation of women with the current generation's lack of activism since women gained the right to vote.

The play's second act takes place in Claire's tower, her other private retreat.[110] Claire's solitude is interrupted by the arrival of her sister and husband, who debate Claire's strange behavior. Harry asks Claire to see a psychiatrist who he had invited to dinner. Claire calls to Tom to rescue her from her family, and once they leave, she proposes sex with him. In a moment of Claire's weakness, the audience learns that she lost her son with Harry, whom she loved greatly. Feeling rejected by Tom, Claire interrupts the dinner downstairs and reveals her adulterous relationship with Dick. Her unabashed sexuality reflects Glaspell's mixed views on

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[109] Glaspell wittily names her three male characters Tom, Dick, and Harry, an expression which states common male names in place of unnamed individuals. These names make the men into caricatures. The earliest citation for "Tom, Dick, and Harry" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1734: "Farewell, Tom, Dick, and Harry, Farewell, Moll, Nell, and Sue." This phrase was well known by the time Glaspell uses it.

[110] Glaspell's setting cannot help but evoke the fairy tale princess imprisoned in a tower. However, Claire is far from the demure princess, and she locks herself away to escape rather than being imprisoned. Glaspell's sardonic wit once again mocks traditional images of women.

liberated women's ability to act passionately, to embrace their bodies' physicality, and even to practice free love.

In addition to advocating personal time and space and questioning women's activism and increased sexuality, Glaspell's play deals largely with Claire's struggle with sanity in a world that does not accept her radicalism. In the third act, the scene returns to Claire's greenhouse. Anthony prepares for Claire's masterpiece of floriculture's evolution, the blossoming of her Breath of Life.[111] Claire witnesses her creation become "what hasn't been" (97). Moved by seeing her reaction to the blossom, Tom admits his love for her and protectively tells her that he will not leave for his planned trip to India. Claire, incensed by what she views as an attempt by Tom to "pull me down into what I wanted?" (97), strangles him in order to achieve her own freedom. Claire claims her action of killing Tom was a "gift" for Breath of Life. Glaspell concludes that continued conflict with patriarchal society leaves the independent woman incoherent and insane. The line between assertive woman and monster can easily be crossed. Claire's three flower creations, Reminiscence, the Edge Vine, and Breath of Life, symbolize the past, present, and possibility for the future of women. She conveys the struggle of a woman trapped between desire for a different life and the reality of a society that imprisons her in the conventional roles of wife, mistress, and mother: a struggle with which Glaspell was well acquainted.

The Provincetown Players performed *The Verge* in Greenwich Village on November 14, 1921, during their sixth season. Glaspell describes the play's theme in her working notes by saying it is "The story of a woman's adventure out of forms molded for us. In her experiments

[111] Most productions have continued to obscure the audience's view of Breath of Life. Most reviews overlook the staging of the plants, instead focusing on the acting style and unconventional actions and speech of the main character, so little detail about the original productions' staging and no photographs remain.

with plants she sees that they sometimes break themselves up, because something in them knows they can't go farther…she sees life with a clarity that leaves no satisfaction in which to rest. Like her plants, she is on the verge—perhaps insane—perhaps saner than we dare to be" (qtd Ben-Zvi 239). Glaspell did not have the title of the play decided from the start. According to Ben-Zvi, an undated typescript of *The Verge* shows Glaspell reworking the dialogue and the progression of the main character's madness; before settling on *The Verge*, a title which addresses the brink of madness to which modern independent women are sometimes forced, "Glaspell considered 'Breath of Life' as the play's title and 'Rose of the Rainbow' appears as an early name for her final plant experiment" (246). Perhaps Glaspell considered the traditional implications of the rose, as a symbol of beauty and love in the language of flowers, and decided against including the specific flower in her play. Glaspell's title, *The Verge,* also indicates the possibility that women are on the verge of a social evolution that would separate them from existing limitations and establish new behaviors and public roles. The play's title indicates danger, excitement, opportunity, but it also hints at impending doom which could come leaping (or not leaping) beyond "what has been." Women in the United States in the 1920s were truly on the verge of reaching new social opportunities and equality.

The Verge's opening setting, in a greenhouse, evokes a domestic space sacred to the female botanist of the house. The audience soon learns that the heroine Claire Archer is not an average gardener or florist but a groundbreaking amateur scientist whose flower experiments become a means for her to escape what she feels is a stifling world. By focusing on a woman who studies and manipulates flowers, Glaspell is calling to mind a long association of women with the study of plants. Historically, botany was one of the first fields of science to admit female students. Whereas interacting with machines or with chemistry equipment would have

been considered unladylike, flowers were considered the most appropriate outlet with which proper women could interact. According to British horticultural historian Emanuel Rudolph in his study of women in botany, many American women at the turn of the century were involved in botany through personal gardens or garden design; however, few were professional botanists (90). Many girls' schools offered courses in botany. Rudolph points out that botany was the only science American girls were allowed to study since a flower's delicate qualities were deemed most appropriate for similarly "delicate" females (92). Leading language of flowers historian Beverly Seaton notes that whereas men often gardened in Europe, "In America the flower garden has, from earliest time, been the ladies' province" (25). Considering this tradition of linking flowers to domesticity and submission in women, Glaspell's *The Verge* seems unusual in its use of flowers as the form of experimentation of the main character and as a symbol for feminism. Claire rejects typical expectations for women: selfless devotion to motherhood, being a caring faithful wife, and being a gracious entertainer. However, Glaspell's character chooses flowers as Claire's means of artistic expression- a typical medium, even if she uses them for an unconventional purpose. Instead of nurturing or cultivating known species, Claire attempts to create flowers that escape the bounds of what has been. However, not all of her flowers do.

Even though the women's movement encourages women to move from the private sphere (the home) to the public sphere (the market), *The Verge's* highly symbolic setting is within the main character's home- a typical setting of stories about women. Jane Tompkins comments that sentimental novels almost always take place within the home (594). In this way, Glaspell connects to the sentimental tradition of women writers from the past, yet she gives this tradition her own spin. Each scene in the play takes place in either the greenhouse or the tower. Within the unseen rest of the house, she feels that the duties of a wife and the confines of the home are her

prison. However, in these two rooms she has claimed her space, apart from the womanly demands placed on her. Ozieblo calls the tower and the greenhouse a "womb-like habitat where [Claire] takes refuge from family and social duties in her urge to escape all patterning of life" (76). However, this womb is not isolated. The other characters violate Claire's space and get in the way of her work.[112] Not all critics agree that the greenhouse is a domestic space. Monica Stufft sees Claire's tower and greenhouse as non-domestic spaces, "occupying the outer perimeters of the domestic space…separated from the main house, making even more evident Claire's (and Glaspell's) desire to explore alternatives to the domestic roles and environments to which women are traditionally relegated" (89). While Glaspell certainly questions women's roles, she cannot be equated with Claire, and it is worth noting that the greenhouse and tower are part of the home, continuing the traditional setting for women's stories of the sentimental tradition. In act two of the Provincetown Players original production, the audience views the play through windows set up in front of the stage, which has a voyeuristic affect and which highlight the intrusion on Claire's private space.

While her story is told from within her home, Claire refuses to define herself as a wife, mother, and mistress, the typical social roles for women at the time. Instead, she follows her own path: one the men around her cannot understand. From the first scene of the play we see that Claire abandons her husband and family. Anthony, Claire's assistant, tells Harry, her husband, that Claire thought it would be better for the flowers to have the heat directed from the house to the greenhouse. Harry asks, "I'm not a flower- true, but I need a little attention- and a little heat (59). Claire is showing more concern for her flowers than for her husband. The double meaning of heat is that Claire acts in a frigid manner toward her husband by telling him that he cannot

[112] In "A Room of One's Own", Virginia Woolf states that women need their own space to live fulfilled and productive lives. Glaspell creates a similar premise in her play.

have breakfast with her and that he should endure the cold so her flowers can have heat. Since her flowers are her vocation, she rejects the typical expectation that a wife will make her husband her foremost concern. Anthony seems to understand that Harry feels rejected. He explains, "Why, Miss Claire would never have done what she has if she hadn't looked out for her plants in just such ways as this. Have you forgotten Breath of Life is about to flower?" (59) In the stage directions the flowers are personified. Harry "*looks minutely at two of the plants* (60). Harry seems to be searching for an explanation of his wife in her life's work. As her husband, he fails to understand what she wants and needs. Similarly, an attempted romantic liaison with Tom and a mothering relationship with Elizabeth are equally unrewarding for Claire, and she chooses her unusual flowers over both of them.

Several critics have responded to Claire's attempts to create flowers that are not examples of their species but instead break traditional classifications and create something new as a statement about art, feminism, and modernism. Critic Kristina Hinz-Bode sees Claire's attempts at freeing creative expression and social expectations as being universal to all humans, not just women. She views the central issue as identity, not feminism (153). Similarly, theater scholar Liza Nelligan writes that women in the early twentieth century "were questioning the essentialist notion that "woman' was a unified subject with biologically determined characteristics. Many feminists turned to Enlightenment ideals of individualism, long considered the province of men, to shape their politics, their activities, and their concepts of self" (86). Women confronted the challenge of achieving a healthy sense of individualism and progressive feminism without losing some of the valuable qualities of womanhood, such as nurturing. Critic Marcia Noe asserts, "Claire strives to transcend all limits, all bounds, not only for her plants but for herself. Claire is trying to oppose the rationality of a patriarchal system by seeking out madness, by embracing

'otherness,' by breaking through old structures to create new ones" (134). Noe's analysis of *The Verge* states that Claire's fragmented, poetic, and repetitive speech at the end of the play shows Glaspell creating *écriture féminine* or feminine writing. This is the uniquely female style of writing which French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray encouraged women to create in the 1970s. *Écriture féminine* encouraged women to break existing rules of speech and writing in order to create a new language (Noe 133). Noe does not mention that Glaspell's Claire also uses her flower creations, in addition to her language, to embrace the otherness of women and the movements of women in society.[113] This chapter will explore Glaspell's conflicted attitude toward women as radical feminists and show how Glaspell evolves the tradition of the language of flowers to represent women.

In *The Verge*, Glaspell expresses many views about feminism, a cause with which she was involved. For example, Glaspell was a member of the Heterodoxy Club in New York, where she met theater guild member Margret Wycherly, who played Claire with intensity and passion (Ben-Zvi 246). The Heterodoxy Club was an instrumental part of shaping the women's movement in Glaspell's time. Beginning in 1917, the club consisted of twenty-five progressive and "unorthodox" women who gathered frequently for discussion of women's matters and "taboo topics". Glaspell's membership in the Heterodoxy Club exposed her to many women struggling to "fulfill their potential in male-dominated arenas" (39). The club encouraged many feminist causes, and members were major supporters of Glaspell's work. In fact, Ozieblo notes that the women of the Heterodoxy celebrated *The Verge* with "religious fervor" (189). Ozieblo quotes Hutchins Hapgood's account of Heterodoxy member and dancer Elise Durfour's

[113] The term "Otherness" is used in reference to Gayatri Spivak's "Three Woman's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985). Spivak describes the other in postcolonial terms as "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern. Those people marginalized by the ruling culture. Here I refer to women who do not fit the social profile of femininity.

description of the meeting following the premier of the play, "It seemed to me, while these women were talking about *The Verge*, that I was in church, that they were worshiping at some holy shrine; their voices and their eyes were full of religious excitement" (185). In *The Verge,* Glaspell was able to express a female desire for change. However, while she does favor social change to further advance equality and the place of women in society, Glaspell's attitude toward feminism is not simple. She does not endorse any and all actions in the name of feminism. Critic Arthur E. Waterman notes that in *The Verge* Glaspell "turns melodrama into farce" mocking both the inept men as well as the tyrannical feminist woman (24).[114] Her examination of the possibilities and dangers of extreme feminism, an expressionistic rendering of the possibility of women to fight for their desires and to defy society certainly connected with an audience of educated and progressive women, if not with the society on a whole.

Like a newly bred flower struggles to adapt to its environment, the women of the 1920s were evolving as well. Glaspell had long been an observer of women's roles in society and had long used flowers symbolically to reflect the unfair demands placed on women. While writing for the society column in the *Weekly Outlook* in Davenport Iowa, Glaspell wrote, "A society girl with very pink cheeks and a big plumed hat' seriously attempts to ponder her situation: 'I am like the flowers in the hot-house, a forced production. Two-thirds of me has been made to die out, and the other third abnormally developed" (*Weekly Outlook 3* July 3, 1897). The unnatural and cultivated nature of women's beauty is captured in her image of a flower evolved beyond its usual course for human pleasure. Similarly, Glaspell would later express her multifaceted view

[114] Waterman also notes that Glaspell's writing expressed a similar tone in her early local color short stories (24). Glaspell examined similar themes to those in *The Verge* in her 1909 novel *The Glory of the Conquered* in which a woman artist falls in love with a male scientist and they find a way to bind their two passions. This female character of Glaspell's reveals another very different view on love and marriage that a woman can find "victory" in her defeat by submitting to a relationship (Waterman 34). However, in her 1915 novel *Fidelity,* a woman has an affair with a married man, and when he offers to marry her, she moves to New York to join the New Woman movement.

of women's role in society through Claire's horticultural creations. Claire hopes to make her flowers unlike any that have existed before for the sake of innovation not amusement. Glaspell makes these flowers central to the play and in her staging of them shows that these unique and unusual flowers are symbols for the women of the past (Reminiscence), present (Edge Vine) and future (Breath of Life).

Clinging to the Known: The Edge Vine

The Edge Vine, a clinging vine that represents women in Glaspell's present, is the first of Claire's plants to contribute a major function in the play. The first time the Edge Vine is mentioned in the play is after Harry commands Hattie, the maid, to prepare breakfast for him and his guests in Claire's greenhouse. Anthony, Claire's helper, questions Hattie about how she could consider preparing eggs in this sacred space. He states, "There's a million people like you—and like Mr. Archer. In all the world there is only one Edge Vine" (60). Unimpressed with this plant, which does not seem typically beautiful, Hattie states, "Maybe one's enough. It don't look like nothin' anyhow" (60). Anthony replies, "and you've not got the wit to know that that's why it's the Edge Vine" (60). Hattie, a conventional woman, fails to see the value in something that is not conventionally beautiful or useful. Glaspell's stage directions describe the Edge Vine: "*At the back [of the set] grows a strange vine. It is arresting rather than beautiful. It creeps along the low wall, and one branch gets a little way up the glass. You might see the form of a cross in it, if you happen to think it that way. The leaves of this vine are not the form that leaves have been. They are at once repellent and significant*" (58). The mention of the cross in its form links the Edge Vine to religion, a convention that often helped to continue submissive roles for women. Later the audience learns that the Edge Vine has thorns, similar to Jesus' Crown of thorns. That detail and its cross-like shape indicate that destroying this religion-linked plant is

part of Claire's path to otherness. Flowers were a symbol frequently used in the Bible and by making this connection, even in her borderline blasphemous way, Glaspell bridges the conservative past with the radical future.

Continuing Glaspell's appreciation of the modernist and unbeautiful, she also describes the unusual modern architecture of the greenhouse in her stage directions. The Edge Vine seems to interact with this architecture, as both are innovations that break conventional forms. In her stage directions, Glaspell describes the leaves of the Edge Vine reaching the domed glass ceiling, which is painted with abstract patterns of frost. She writes that Claire, " *puts the toasters under the strange vine at the back, whose leaves lift up against the glass which has frost leaves on the outer side*" (60). The leaves are mirrored by the moisture patterns from and heat they produce against the cold glass. The impressions left on the glass by the plants draw the audience's attention to them as symbols in the play. Commenting on the play's symbolism, critic Rytch Barber states that *The Verge* is an early example of American expressionism which derived from European expressionism. While American expressionism was unique from European, it still focused on the "objectification of the subjective and externalization of the internal" (Barber 98). The fragmentation of the lines represents Claire's fragmented mind and the conflict between her "fire within," (59) as her husband puts it, and the freeze of the social forces working against her.

Glaspell's choice of a vine to represent her character's failed attempt to create a new type of flower recalls a well-known clinging plant--ivy. The meaning Glaspell gives the Edge Vine bears similarity to the language of flowers meaning of ivy. Wirt gives ivy the meaning "matrimony" (126), and Hale gives it the meaning "Bridal Favor" (74). Ivy developed this meaning of fidelity because the climbing vine is dependent on something else on which to grow. According to Sheila Pickles, a flower culture historian, ivy also carries this meaning because

once it adheres to something it does not separate (52). Pickles mentions that a Welch superstition states that if ivy prospers then a house was safe, and if it fails then "disaster was anticipated" (52). While Glaspell may not have known these particular bridal flower meanings, she was certainly familiar with botany, which was taught to her by her husband and grandfather, and would have considered the clinging nature of the plant when selecting a vine for her play. She emphasizes vines' tendency to cling to another structure in her symbolism of the Edge Vine. Considering the meaning of "dependence" which ivy carries in the language of flowers, it is fitting that Glaspell uses a similar vine to represent the clinging to the past and a failure of otherness. Claire's destruction of the vine might also reflect the belief that failed ivy brings disaster, and in that case, the plant's death foreshadows Tom's death at Claire's hands. According to critic Karen Malpede, Claire kills Tom because "he represents to her the false ideal of romantic love that has slain women's independent creative selves since romantic love began" (125). By picking a plant similar to one that represents matrimony, Glaspell changes the clinging aspect of the vine from a positive in the language of flowers (matrimony) to a negative in her play since it thwarts independent women who are often trapped in traditional roles in matrimony. Marriage meant dependency and confinement in the accepted social position for a woman- a wife. In Glaspell's play, Claire views marriage as a limiting factor, which hinders her creativity and independence. By destroying the Edge Vine because it does not break from what vines have been, Claire is symbolically destroying marriage and the dependency it often forces on women. In the scene, Claire also strikes her daughter with the vine, rejecting her role as mother and expressing her dissatisfaction with the New Woman's and her conventional daughter's inability to "break from what has been" (77). Claire must sacrifice her relationship with her daughter for

her experiments. This makes a powerful statement about the duties of women to their children and how these duties can hold women back from success in other areas.[115]

Glaspell defines Claire's daughter, Elizabeth, as a New Woman but one who is bound to conventional gender roles. One example of Elizabeth's closed-minded understanding of gender roles is when she mentions that Tom gave her an exotic miniature religious idol when she was a young girl. She dressed the idol in doll's clothes, displaying her tendency toward traditional female play. Claire, displeased by her daughter's actions, "tore the clothes getting them off" (73). Claire does not approve of her daughter's tendency to mother. Failing to get Elizabeth to stray from conventional roles, Claire abandons her. Dick asks Anthony about Claire's relationship with Elizabeth, questioning "But isn't her daughter one of her experiments?" Anthony answers, "Her daughter is finished" (72). Since Claire experiments with flowers, Elizabeth is likened to a flower. However, Elizabeth does not seem to belong in Claire's greenhouse, as she does not break from convention. Since she is grown, Claire can shape her daughter no further. Another example comes when Elizabeth enters the greenhouse; Claire scolds her for "Stepping on the plants" (75). She accuses her daughter of killing them with her ignorance and conventionality. Therefore, the symbolism of Claire's destruction of the Edge Vine reflects her rejection of Elizabeth. Glaspell comments on the New Woman movement though the character of Elizabeth.

Claire is not only rejecting her daughter, but also rejecting the generation of New Women of which she is a part. Ben-Zvi points out that during the time Glaspell wrote the play the New Woman was a term which "began to appear in the media as the generic label for this younger generation of post suffrage women, in many ways more conservative than their mothers or grandmothers" (242). It is fitting that Glaspell echoes the knowledge of flower language with

[115] Margaret Fuller's lonely vestal magnolia, a symbol for the independent woman, in "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain" also shows readers that a woman's cost for an intellectual life is isolation and separation from family.

one of Elizabeth's first lines, "Does mother grow beautiful roses now?" (74). The rose, traditionally a symbol of feminine beauty, is the opposite of the plants that Claire grows. Her daughter's hope is to be able to link her mother to a traditional female flower, a hope that Claire smashes. When Claire enters the scene her daughter rushes to hug her only to be told, "Careful Elizabeth, we mustn't upset the lice" (74). Claire eschews her motherly response to her daughter in favor of the pursuit of her work, in this case breeding lice to use in her plant experiments. Even though Elizabeth and women of her generation were labeled New Women, Claire believes that they are trapped in convention.

The New Woman is a term used to describe urban, educated, unmarried women living in America and Europe after the turn of the century. Women began to change their roles and positions in society during this time. These new roles in turn changed women to become more independent and assertive. Drama scholar Keith Newlin states "from 1900 to 1920 the enrollment of women increased 1000 percent in public universities and colleges" (1). Women also entered the workforce in increasing numbers finding positions in clerical work, sales, medicine and nursing, teaching, journalism and law (Newlin 1). But the New Woman movement was about more than degrees and jobs. According to historian Martha H. Patterson, the New Woman describes a woman fighting for social upheaval or personal freedom, political reform or self-expression, a woman who, like a man, desired meaningful work or one that felt inherently altruistic (1). The role and position of women in society was definitely changing, but there were many conflicting views of how that role should evolve: to be like men? To emphasize their difference from men? To freely express sexuality or to repress it in order to escape being defined by it? These struggles are the ones that Glaspell wrestles with in her play. Is it enough to simply imitate men, in careers, education, and social involvement? Is something essentially feminine not

lost? In *The Verge*, the tragic fall of the main character, a female unlike the classical tradition, proves that a life beyond the known social limits may be a lofty goal but is not without suffering and sacrifice. In *The Verge*, Glaspell is undoubtedly voicing the difficulties and struggles facing the New Woman of the 1920s in a world that was still very much a man's world. As late as 1916, women in America could not vote, divorce abusive husbands, have bank accounts, or control the number of children they had (Planned Parenthood). Yet in the face of this injustice, the New Woman seemed to have given up her quest to change women's roles and was largely content to live a traditional life after gaining the right to education and the vote. Progressive women hoped to change this evolving conservatism in the New Woman and called for changes in the way women saw themselves, their roles, and their actions in society. However, by the time Glaspell wrote *The Verge* the women's movement risked losing the surge of intensity it gained from the suffrage movement.

Claire links the Edge Vine with her daughter, a New Woman, who while part of the modern movement in her education, holds no ambition to break with traditions from women of years past. Claire violently uproots the Edge Vine and attempts to strike her daughter with it. This emotional scene in which she rejects two of her creations, her vine and her daughter, for not being "over the edge" is conveyed with emotional stage directions. Claire concludes that she should be rid of the Edge Vine because, while different in form, it will not continue its evolution. She tells Dick, "You think I will stop with that? Be shut in—with different life—that can't creep on (*after trying to put destroying hands on upon it*)" (77). Claire reaches for the Edge Vine, "*(grasping it as we grasp what we would kill, is trying to pull it up)"* (78). Claire's murderous intent is conveyed in a way that is far more emotional than typical for a woman uprooting a plant, a usually benign action. Glaspell wants her stage directions to convey the severity of the

action, and the link between the Edge Vine and Elizabeth. By personifying the Edge Vine during its "murder," Glaspell foreshadows Claire's later murder of Tom and adds emotional complexity to the scene. The Studio Theater of Glasgow University's 1996 production of *The Verge*, directed by Stephen J. Bottoms, took the idea of the flowers as characters literally and cast a "female movement performer" as the Edge Vine to add emotion to the struggle Claire has to destroy her creation. The casting of a female performer also adds to the allusion of the flowers as symbols for women. Bottoms made this change "suggesting women's desire for a different life form/pattern…a powerful image of a thwarted female desire for breaking out" (Ozieblo 85). Claire succeeds in pulling up the Edge Vine, and the stage directions emphasize the strength needed for the action. They state, "*With a long tremendous pull for deep roots, she has it up. As she holds the torn roots*." Claire struggles saying, "Why did I make you? To get past you!" but also adding "Oh, I have loved you so!" (78). The symbolic significance of the "mighty roots" is the deep and strong connection the Edge Vine, as well as Elizabeth, has to the past. The Edge Vine's turning back threatens to drag Claire back with it. As she struggles to uproot and kill the Edge Vine, Claire says, "You think I too will die on the edge? … Oh Yes, I know you have thorns. The Edge Vine should have thorns" (78). Claire is genuinely hurt by the lack of originality in her daughter and feels it like the prick of thorns. It is clear that Claire is speaking both of the vine and of her conventional daughter. When Elizabeth sees her mother upset, she comments that it is better not to go "where it hadn't been" (78). At this comment, Claire "knows what [the Edge Vine] is for", and she uses it to strike her daughter.

On the surface, Claire's relationship with her daughter shows an un-nurturing mother, but Elizabeth clearly misses the point of her mother's experimentation with plants and feminism. Claire's objective was not to become better in the man's sphere, but to aim to become a woman

outside of it. Elizabeth thinks her mother is attempting to "create a better kind of plant." Claire retorts "they may be new. I don't give a damn whether they're better… These plants - perhaps they are less beautiful- less sound- than the plants from which they diverged, but they have found otherness" (52). Claire cries that her experiments are "my own thing" (76). For Claire the flowers have become a representation of her self, something that she can be outside of a mother, wife or mistress. The flowers provide her a sense of self that many men who work in rewarding careers take for granted.

Claire reiterates her daughter's absorption into patriarchal society by describing Elizabeth in the most conventionally feminine way, as a flower. "Do you know it is you—world of which you're so true a flower—makes me have to leave?" (77). Elizabeth, the flower of the patriarchy, thrives in the confines of the existent society. Claire is not a flower. While the men in the play attempt to compare her with one, calling her the "flower of New England", she rejects this label. When Tom calls her "brave flower of all our knowing", she replies, "I am not a flower. I am too torn" (88). Here Glaspell shows that the flowers in the play do not represent Claire, but rather they represent women who have remained attached to the past. Like her connection to reality, she has lost her connection to flowers and is like the flowers she creates that are unlike any that existed before.

Claire's flowers cannot be judged as better because a comparison cannot be drawn between the plants and what has come before. *The Verge* is centrally concerned with a woman's quest for independence and autonomy and the lengths to which this quest pushes her. The feminist movement's battle for women's suffrage was fresh in the minds of many in the nation. One feminist who may have influenced Glaspell was feminist Mina Loy, a futurist poet,

playwright, novelist, and artist living in Greenwich Village at the same time as Glaspell.[116] Loy's radical ideas about the oppression of women and the need for freedom and unrepressed sexuality, as well as her commitment to art and futurism, a movement she identified with until it aligned with fascism (Modernism 258), could well have influenced Glaspell's writing. In Loy's 1914 "Feminist Manifesto" she says that the "rubbish heap" of tradition cannot be reworked or saved; it must be destroyed. "Nothing short of Absolute Demolition will bring reform" (259). Similarly, Claire concludes that she should destroy the Edge Vine because "It isn't - over the edge... You are out, but you are not alive…" (77). The Edge Vine represents a form that borders on the new, but still is rooted in the traditional. Thus, Claire believes that nothing short of absolute destruction rids her experiment of the burden of the past in order to advance to what she sees as the future. Glaspell seems to have a different view.

A New Form: Claire's Breath of Life

The next flower is Claire's truly original creation--Breath of Life.[117] This name conveys the meaning of the flower which provides its creator a glimpse of freedom and otherness in an otherwise suffocating world of convention. Breath of Life represents women in the future. There are no existing pictures of the prop used for this flower in the original production, but most subsequent productions use transparent papers to create a flower like form with a solid red core and to capture Glaspell's stage directions for "*a plant like caught motion, and of a greater*

[116] Another possible influence for Glaspell's play was her fellow Greenwich Villager and Heterodoxy member, Margaret Sanger, whose campaign for birth control and women's reproductive rights changed the social options for women in the early twentieth century. Several of Glaspell's works have dealt with social issues such as birth control as seen in *Chains of Dew*, which was written before *The Verge* but was brought to the stage following it.

[117] Since the climax of Glaspell's play comes at the blooming of the flower, Monica Strufft draws similarities between *The Verge* and Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, which is an expressionistic play that also shows a symbolic blooming of a flower. In Strindberg's play, a god's daughter descends into the earth. Strufft sees Glaspell as reconfiguring Strindberg's use of a flower connected to a female character. She sees the flowers as symbols for Claire Archer who wishes to escape the patriarchal oppression by creating new forms. She does not establish any link with the past in Glaspell's use of flowers. For further analysis see Monica Stufft's chapter in *Disclosing Intertextualities*.

transparency than plants have had. Its leaves like waves that curl, close around a heart that is not seen" (62). The connection of the plant to motion and light fit it within the modernist aesthetic which values technology and motion. However, while Glaspell's stage directions describing the plant create an emotional feeling to be evoked by it, they leave much in the way of physical description. Likely, the audience would never see Breath of Life until the end of the play. Glaspell wisely did not place a non-existing plant in the view of the audience. Her stage directions state, "*because of the arrangement of things about it, is a hidden place. But nothing is between it and the light*" (62). This obscured view of Breath of Life allows the audience to imagine its new and unique form without having it represented by a physical prop that is in full view. Light is a crucial visual metaphor for Breath of Life, which seems to glow from within signifying a life force. The plant seems to be so light that it is barely part of the earthly. The idea of the power within the plant reverses the usual growth cycle of photosynthesis. Instead of the plant passively capturing the power of light with its outer skin and turning that light into solid matter, Breath of Life produces light from within. The ethereal qualities of Breath of Life have been touched on in Monica Stufft's comparison of Glaspell's play with Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. Stufft examines only this one of Claire's flowers and sees the "outness" of Claire's experiment as a way for her to break from earthly physicality and "to escape her own patriarchal genealogy" (83). Stufft states that Glaspell's flower imagery is a method of expressing her main character's desire to break from tradition instead of a representation of various forms of womanhood. Stufft's examination of Glaspell's flower imagery can be expanded to look at the other flowers in the play as well as the references to feminine tradition and sentiment which present a much more complex vision of Glaspell's feminist viewpoint.

The staging of the Breath of Life indicates a level of importance that implies that Glaspell wished to evoke emotion and presence from this flower. The stage directions at the start of the first act begin by describing Breath of Life. It is the only thing visible on the stage and is lit from below: "*This [a beam of light] slants up and strikes the long leaves and the huge brilliant blossom of a strange plant whose twisted stem projects from right front. Nothing is seen except for this plant and its shadow*" (58). The Breath of Life was lit from the bottom allowing the audience to see its shadow, which towered much larger than the plant itself and was shadowed on the circular dome, symbolizing its powerful meaning and importance. Existing photographs do not show the plant in detail, but do show some shadows possibly of the plant. The presence of Breath of Life indicates that Claire will go to any length for her creation to succeed.

Glaspell's stage directions describe the inner-room in the greenhouse, which contains Breath of Life: "*because of intervening plants they do not see what is seen from the front"* (62). Neither the audience nor the characters of the play are shown the flower, which allows them to imagine this new form for themselves. The meaning of the flower is an aspect of the play on which Glaspell spends much time, using a variety of theatrical techniques, including lighting, props, staging, and the characters' descriptions of and interactions with the flower. In this flower, Glaspell creates her own language of flowers, by creating a new flower with a wholly new meaning, which sums up the desires of a woman searching for a new life in a modern world. Breath of life is an invented plant, which has a meaning that does not exist in any flower dictionary. Yet like conventional plants, it is used in a tragic situation to soothe a person. Claire seems to rely on her plants for support. When Claire is troubled by her husband's conventional demands on her, Glaspell's stage directions indicate that she draws support from her creations.

She writes, "*again this troubled thing turns her to the plant*" (63). The hope that the flowers can escape what is expected provides her reassurance.

Breath of Life represents the possibility for women to be more than their current station in society enables them to be. At the end of the play, Claire asks that Anthony bring her Breath of Life, which is about to flower. Glaspell's stage directions state, "*he is seen very carefully to lift the plant which glows from within. As he brings it in, no one looks at it*" (95). In the final scene, the men shy away from looking into the symbolic truth that emanates from the heart of Breath of Life. Claire is the only one to look at it. Perhaps this truth is what drives her over the edge. She breaks into free verse poetry directed toward her floral creation. "Breath of the uncaptured? / You are a novelty. / Out? / You have been brought in. / A thousand years from now, when you are but a form too long repeated / Perhaps the madness that gave you birth will burst again," (96). Once Breath of Life is able to break from the past, Claire acknowledges that this innovation is a short-lived success. Something is new for only a momentary time. Longing for this moment of originality she gently caresses the plant. Glaspell's stage direction state that she "*With her breath, and by the gentle moving of her hand, she fans it to fuller openness*" (97). By opening the flower of the plant, Claire exposes the glowing inner-heart of the flower, a symbol for her self-examination.

Another woman who takes her vision to extremes was Mina Loy. A fellow modernist, Loy calls for women to begin a destructive and violent uprising against male-dominated society. Glaspell's play addresses many of the same issues as Loy's manifesto including sexual liberation, freedom from the demands of motherhood, and a search for female expression and identity. In Glaspell's play, Claire does not try to take one kind of plant and make it more like another type of plant. In fact, that would run contrary to her entire mission. Breath of Life is like

nothing that has existed before. Likewise, Loy criticized the movement of women into the male professional sphere by saying, "*is that all you want*?" For a woman, a definition of the self in terms of a man does not accomplish much. Loy urges women to reject the "pathetic, clap-trap war cry, 'woman is the equal of man.'" Instead, she argues, "She is not" (260). In *The Verge*, Claire wants her creations to remain separate from the cultural norm, to not be assimilated into it. She is creating them not for the world, but for herself as her own form of expression.

Similar to Glaspell's Claire, Loy advocates the "absolute demolition" of all traditional, political, and social codes for women. She writes, "there is no half-measure, no scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition" (259). Loy resists the idea that women should try to be the economic and educational equal of men. Instead of impersonating the values that male society propagates, she suggests women look to become an alternative, new form, based on their own feminine standards. She writes, "The woman who adapts herself to a theoretical valuation of her sex as a *relative impersonality* is not yet feminine" (259). Loy believed that the new feminist would be completely new and would be self-sufficient. Claire likewise detaches from all she knows in order to move into unknown territory, which may cause her madness.

Claire acknowledges that she might love Tom more than her work and that that love could destroy her creation. Therefore, Claire's final act of putting her work above everything in her life is when she kills Tom. As she strangles him, she says "never was loving strong as my loving you… Breath of Life - my gift - to you" (99). Before killing him, Claire proposes a physical encounter with Tom, but he rejects her. Claire's attitude toward sex is that it will be a new experience. She does not attach the same emotional strings to the act as Tom. Similarly, Loy takes issue with relationships when a female possesses the "desire for comfortable protection rather than intellectual curiosity and courage in meeting and resisting the presence of sex (or so-

called love)" (260). She goes on to write that "Honor, grief, sentimentality, pride, and consequently jealousy must be detached from sex… destroy the impurity of sex- for the sake of her self-respect" (260). In other words, women must become able to see sex as a physical act and stop connecting emotion, guilt, and self worth with the sexual act. Only when sex has become purely physical can woman get past the oppression sex has imposed on them through social connotations and become liberated people, not bound to gender roles.

Some critics see Claire's flower as a symbol for what Claire herself hopes to become, a woman of the future disconnected from the roots that tie her to women's past. For example, Karen Malpede calls Breath of Life a "metaphor for self-creation. If Claire could create a new species she would have made a new woman—one capable of life on life's own terms, a free, unfettered being… [Claire] struggles to liberate herself from the two thousand years or more of the prohibition against the female creative self" (124). However, Breath of Life might also represent the extremes of feminism, which venture into unknown territory for women, presenting new opportunities, but also making them a new form, which has little connection to the past.

A Scent to Remember: Reminiscence

The third flower, Reminiscence, represents women of the past and feminine traditions associated with the True Woman, such as the language of flowers. The first mention of the flower comes in the beginning of the play when Anthony is tending to the plant life. Glaspell writes in her stage directions, "*He then looks minutely at two of the plants—one is a rose, the other a flower without a name because it has not long enough been a flower. Peers into the hearts of them*" (60). The flower, which has not long enough been a flower to have a name, is Reminiscence. Glaspell personifies this flower with her phrase "*peers into the hearts*". During the play, Claire works on developing this flower to cross with Breath of Life to give it a unique

fragrance because as she explains, "what has gone out should bring fragrance from what it has left" (62). In order to create this fragrance, she grows Reminiscence, a flower with a sweet lingering smell.

Scent was an especially important factor in attributing meaning to flowers. Scent is the sense most closely associated with memory. When someone smells something from their past a memory is instantly called to mind. Also, the possession of a sweet scent was instrumental in giving a flower a moral meaning in the language of flowers. Seaton writes, "A flower's scent--invisible yet real--has long been a standard emblem of the human soul" (118). Seaton goes on to state that a flower with no scent "seldom represents good aspects of a human being" (Seaton 119). Glaspell, similarly, establishes the link between floral fragrance and morality. Flowers without scent are often given meanings of negative human qualities in the language of flowers. Since Breath of Life has not been crossed with Reminiscence, it has no scent. This shows that the radical woman Breath of Life represents lacks moral influence, as implied though the absence of scent.

Glaspell implies that feminism should bring with it the best of past womanhood. Reminiscence, which represents the past, is a cross of the rose, the lily, and the arbutus.[118] Two of the three flowers from which Claire creates Reminiscence are flowers that derive their meanings from very old sources that predate the language of flowers. The rose and lily carry their symbolic meanings into popular culture today. One does not have to be a language of flowers scholar to know that a rose frequently is associated with beauty and love. Wirt gives the rose the meaning "beauty" in her language of flowers dictionary (200). The lily represents "purity and sweetness" in Wirt (138). The white lily is often the symbol of the Virgin Mary and

[118] Bigsby's edition of *The Verge* glosses arbutus as a genus of evergreen tree, but Wirt's floral dictionary labels this plant a type of strawberry tree. Wirt makes a common mistake, as the flowers of the arbutus and strawberry look very similar; however, the arbutus is evergreen and produces inedible orange berries.

frequently indicates innocence and purity. The third flower, the arbutus, is a more unusual choice. In the language of flowers the arbutus means "esteem and love" in Wirt's dictionary (221). Wirt quotes eighteenth-century English poet Samuel Johnson who states that, "'Friendship, when we ask for love, is like the fragrance of remote flowers, that faintly touches the senses, or like the beams of the chaste moon that gives us light, but yields not warmth'" (221). The ephemeral feeling of this sentiment is reflected in Reminiscence.

Reminiscence was meant to capture the beauty and sweetness of femininity, which should be retained from the past. In the stage directions, Glaspell emphasizes the care that her main character takes with Reminiscence and also the unusual nature and appearance of the plant. She writes, "*CLAIRE, who has uncovered the plants and is looking intently into the flowers...very carefully gives the rose pollen to an unfamiliar flower- wistfully unfamiliar*" (63). This attempt to join Breath of Life to Reminiscence, which will give the Breath of Life fragrance, will also connect it to the flowers of the past. This flower represents women of the past and shows that some influence of women who came before can bring beauty to feminism. When asked by Harry why she cross-pollinates, Claire states, "I want to give fragrance to Breath of Life-the flower that I have created that is outside what flowers have been. What has gone out should bring fragrance from what is left. But no definite fragrance, no limiting enclosing thing. I call the fragrance I am trying to create Reminiscence. (*Her hand on the pot of the wistful little flower she has just given pollen*)" (63). Further explaining her reasons for her experiment, Claire states, "Breath of Life may be lonely out in what hasn't been. Perhaps some day I can give it reminiscence" (64). In her stage directions, Glaspell calls this creation of Claire's the "*wistful flower*" implying that it is something longed for. The importance of fragrance for defining meaning in the language of flowers is key to this aspect of Glaspell's play, since, as previously

mentioned, fragrance often conveyed morality. Since Claire never achieves combining Reminiscence with Breath of Life, her creation remains severed from the morality and "favorable human qualities" associated with floral scent (Seaton 119). Since Breath of Life represents modern womanhood and the plant lacks a connection to the past, Glaspell implies that modern women risk losing their connection to the True Womanhood of the past. Some contemporary feminists called for women to break from the legacy of womanhood and reject the lives of their mothers, which might have influenced Glaspell to write this detail into the play. As we see, complete rejection of the past is not always the best option.

The fact that Glaspell names this flower Reminiscence means that she wished to express a connection to the cultural history of women. The idea of preserving the past is captured in the memory of being given a gift book, which were part of popular culture of American women. Language of flowers books were a type of gift book or memory book that were part of the sentimental tradition of the nineteenth century. According to the Library of Congress, gift books often contained moral and religious stories and served as gifts for middle-class women. A Library of Congress article on gift books describes [the] "highly fanciful, romantic nature of the stories, [the] delicate flower illustrations, and the sentimental poetry". The article suggests that women and girls were the primary audience for these books. It goes on to state "great care was taken in both the text and illustrations to adhere to the purest of sentiments. Nothing within the leather-bound covers would offend the most delicate sensibilities. Intended as a 'family keepsake,' 'gift book for all seasons,' or 'bridal gift,' these ornamental works adorned drawing-room tables and provided entertainment for the whole year." The giving of these books to mark special occasions links the language of flowers books to the idea of preserving a memory of a significant event. As a tradition of the past, the language of flowers preserved and often served as

a gift to commemorate special occasions, solidifying its link to the remembrance of the past.

Reminiscence further recalls the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment, as it was a trait of the sentimental tradition, which shaped the circuitry of women. Modern critic Jane Tompkin's afterword to the 1850 sentimental classic *The Wide, Wide World* by Susan Warner, explains the prominence of sentiment in the culture of women. The Victorian era valued an "ideology of duty, humility, and submission to circumstances, and insiste[d] on the imperative of self-sacrifice" for women (585). Claire abandons all of these values and, instead, is assertive and dominant placing her own pursuits above the comforts and interest of her family. By failing to maintain any reminiscence of this feminine past, Claire loses all of the morality that went along with this ideology. The sentimental novel was assertively moral and that morality was presented as black and white. Tompkins writes in her afterword that "the novel's didacticism, combined with its emotional drawing power, compels the reader to make certain choices, and thus to recognize contradictions, such as those between an ideal of service and an ideal of self-actualization, that literary modernism with its fetishization of complexity has left untouched" (586). Glaspell's thoroughly modernist play leaves the ideal of service behind in pursuit of actualization and escape from limiting social roles for women, but not without saying that something is lost, the reminiscence for a simpler time when ideals of family and morality influence the character of women to a greater extent than they do for Claire Archer. Like the heroines of sentimental fiction, Claire shares the "belief that all true action is not material but spiritual"; however, instead of attaining this spiritual action through prayer, her psychological escape comes through madness. Glaspell does reinforce the idea of spiritual escape by having Claire close the play by singing the hymn "Nearer My God to Thee," a traditional Christian song, which she earlier mocked her Puritan ancestors for singing. According to Tompkins, sentimental novels "teach

their readers that the only way to overcome adversity is though overcoming the enemy within" (593). However, Glaspell's play shows her readers the danger of surrendering to this enemy completely. By failing to give Breath of Life the scent of Reminiscence, Glaspell symbolically represents Claire's complete loss of a moral compass with which to suppress her desires as women of the past did. Glaspell is certainly not advocating a complete suppression of desire, but she does hint that in order to remain a sane and functioning part of society people must suppress some.

Claire's loss of morality is again linked with the flower Reminiscence at the end of the play. As she slips into madness, she repeats the name of the plant with the scent and link to the past that she has lost. After Breath of Life's flowers, she embraces Tom. Glaspell intersperses her dialogue with stage directions conveying emotion: "*they kiss—but deep in her is sobbing* Reminiscence. *Her hand feeling his arm as we touch what we would remember* Reminiscence" (98). Then she abruptly moves away from Tom and calls out, "Breath of Life—you here? Are you lonely—Breath of Life?" (98). Claire disconnects with her male companion in the scene and chooses to connect with her plants alone. Claire strangles Tom and calls the act her "gift" to Breath of Life. She fires a gun which brings Anthony and Harry to the scene. She again asks for her flower representing the past. Glaspell writes "Reminiscence? *Speaking the word as if she has left even that, but smiles a little. Anthony takes Reminiscence, the flower she was breeding for fragrance for Breath of Life—holds it out to her, But she has taken a step forward, past them all*" (100). Like Breath of Life, which has ventured forward without the reminiscence of past morality, Claire also steps forward without her connection to the past. [119]

[119] Memory and flowers are again introduced in the play when Tom says to Dick, "I had an odd feeling that you and I sat here once before, long ago, and that we were plants. And you were a beautiful plant, and I—I was a very ugly plant. I confess it surprised me—finding myself so ugly a plant" (73). Glaspell is using plants symbolically in the play to connect people with a lost past.

Claire's Flowers: a Struggle with the Past and the Future

While on the one hand Glaspell seems to advocate a more radical approach to feminism than the New Women were taking, on the other she presents a cautionary tale in *The Verge* that reveals Glaspell's own hesitations and reservations about radical feminism. Through Claire's manipulation of flowers, Glaspell conveys a connection to the past with a progression toward the future. It is only when Claire's experiment breaks from all known floriculture and all moral propriety that she passes to the verge of insanity.[120] Through Claire Archer, Glaspell explores how high modernism and the manipulation of nature by man alienates Claire from the life around her and separates her from normal society. Breath of Life's lack of fragrance symbolizes its creator's lack of a connection to the past and to morality. In reference to the way that the play explores ideals of modernism, Glaspell critic Veronica Makowsky points out "Claire also lacks connection to the legacy of the past as represented in human community" (63). Claire's isolation from the past makes her modernist but not human. In this tragic play, Glaspell states that without holding on to some reminder of the past (in the form of roles, codes, or scents) a new creation could be too experimental and theoretical and could be swept away easily. A connection to the past is a grounding force. While history is something to move past, it must not be thrown completely away without great risk. Just as Claire expresses disdain for her Puritanical ancestors, her disdain for the past roles of women leaves her without a forbearer, which is dangerous territory.

Through Claire in *The Verge*, Glaspell satirizes, sympathizes, and problematizes a radical vision of the feminist woman. According to critic Liza Nelligan, "*The Verge* explores the shifting

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[120] Glaspell was a fan of Emerson, and she believed his tenant that "Poets are thus liberating gods". Her interest in Emerson might also indicate that Glaspell was familiar with Fuller. Certainly there are similarities between *The Verge* and Fuller's own botanical account of the sacrifices that women make to achieve freedom in their society in "The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain".

dimensions of feminism in the 1920s, exploring it to its furthest limits, just as Claire attempts to push her plants (and herself) as far as they can go" (98). While Glaspell explores extreme feminism the author does not condone it. Similarly in the introduction to Glaspell's *Plays by Susan Glaspell,* C.W.E Bigsby writes, "[Elizabeth's] language is self-mocking, her social visions mere caricatures; and it is, moreover, one thing for Claire to feel contempt for her husband and daughter but quite another for Glaspell to do so" (23). Through the character of Elizabeth, Glaspell mocks women of the day and their trivial concerns, but she also shows the madness of Claire's extremism. Bigsby points out that Glaspell does not necessarily feel the same as her characters but nonetheless it is clear that Claire hates her daughter's empty speech, desire for social acceptance, and shallow ambitions. But perhaps it is not the husband and daughter but what they stand for that Glaspell's character Claire despises: the husband's antiquated views towards women's place in society and the daughter's misled attempts at reform. Through Claire and her experiments Glaspell makes her own social statement about the extremes of feminism and the need to remain linked to women's past. In a section on *The Verge* in their book about theater in the 1920s Arthur Gewirtz and James J. Kolb state that "By viewing the play in expressionistic terms, Claire can be read more representationally, as an emblem of the Woman Artist struggling against the forces of patriarchal oppression and the limiting artistic forms it engenders" (126). According to Gewirtz and Kolb, Claire's flowers are her artwork. By escaping the bounds of her biology, she escapes the patriarchal society's limits on women, especially on women artists. It should also be noted that Glaspell as a playwright uses flowers as expressionistic elements. She addresses political issues of feminism through the traditionally female art of raising flowers.

The Verge is both a feminist work and a feminist warning of the danger of extremes. The desire to be something new in a restrictive world pushes Claire to madness. Glaspell acknowledges that there is a price to pay for feminism. Lovers, especially those with controlling impulses, must be done away with, old roles for women must be thrown aside, and conventional symbolism must be abandoned. However, Glaspell's play ultimately makes the point that extreme feminism when put into practice could lead to an isolating and alienated existence. There is great danger in pushing women to radical social extremes such as those Loy proposes and Claire tragically embodies. The frontier is a lonely, harsh, and desolate place. Foraging new ground is not an easy task and does not come devoid of pain and sacrifice. As other female authors such as Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stoddard, Edith Wharton, and Mary Austin did before her, Glaspell uses flowers symbolically to examine the limits of feminism. Her woman creates a groundbreaking flower-- a metaphor both traditional and revolutionary. While women must ultimately move beyond flowers, they must keep a part of them to connect to the past.

CONCLUSION

As this dissertation argues, the language of flowers was a fashionable trend especially popular among women in the United States from the early 1830s until the late 1850s, but its influence reaches far beyond that time period. The language of flowers possessed great appeal during a socially conservative time as a way for men or women to express themselves with a secret language of love. Many female authors use the language of flowers in their texts to emphasize female frailty and submission to men in romantic courtship and domestic life. This use of the language of flowers reinforces conventional social expectations for women, including the True Woman ideal of female piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.

Despite the traditional associations of the language of flowers with True Womanhood, some women authors began to evolve the way the language of flowers tradition was applied in their fiction. Writers such as Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Stoddard use the typically traditional language of flowers in a revolutionary way. Fuller employs the existing flower meanings to hint at the need for greater freedoms for women in society and less social pressure for women to live domestic lives in her sketches for *The Dial*. Stoddard uses the language of flowers in her text as a means of female empowerment for some of her characters in *The Morgesons*, but she also notes that those women find no advancement in male society. This development of the language of flowers in fiction led Mary Austin to create original meanings for flowers in her texts *Santa Lucia* and *Cactus Thorn*. Austin furthers the feminist possibilities of the language of flowers and shows nature as an alternative space in which women find equality. For Austin, the language of flowers is no longer only a link to the past of the True Woman but is a way to take a familiar emblem, the flower as a symbol for women, and apply it in a new way to represent a new woman. Not all women view women's connection to flowers as liberating. Another American

author, Edith Wharton, uses the language of flowers in her novel *Summer* as an antiquated tradition, believing that its connections to the True Woman will hold women back. Finally, a resurgence of the language of flowers occurs in the early-twentieth century when Susan Glaspell reflects on the tradition of generations past while also looking to the future in her play *The Verge*. Glaspell shows how the past notions of womanhood contained in the language of flowers are no longer appropriate, but she also creates new flowers and new meanings as a symbol for the modern woman. She implies that the past's values of womanhood should also be remembered and celebrated but not clung to. As social attitudes toward women changed to reflect greater degrees of social freedom and as women became more overtly feminist in their speech and actions, the language of flowers declined in its popularity but was still used as a covert feminist rhetoric in literature by certain women. This study contributes to the understanding of the language of flowers as a cultural phenomenon and examines its impact on society as recorded by American authors. It also studies the individual use of the language of flowers in the writing of select American women.

In this dissertation I have considered the writing of Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stoddard, Edith Wharton, Mary Austin, and Susan Glaspell because they demonstrate an evolution in the use of the language of flowers. This evolution corresponds with the changing attitudes of society toward women. Several critics have examined the language of flowers in the work of American women writers, and there remain many opportunities for other critics to continue this study. The examination of the language of flowers in literature has been taken up by critics such as Elizabeth Petrino, who has done substantial work on Emily Dickinson's use of the language of flowers in her poetry. Petrino also examined the use of the language of flowers in the poetry of Dickinson's contemporaries Helen Hunt Jackson, Louisa May Alcott, and Lydia Sigourney.

Sigourney wrote a collection of verse called *The Voice of Flowers*. Alcott's *Flower Fables* explores the mythical nature of the language of flowers. The study of the language of flowers in these women's work is not confined to the past. Interestingly, in 2010 the New York botanical garden reconstructed Dickinson's garden and presented her poetry alongside her plants. This type of cross-disciplinary examination of the history and legacy of the language of flowers keeps its impact alive today.

Many possibilities for future examinations of women authors' use of the language of flowers abound. I have selected only five female authors to discuss in this dissertation because their unique use of the language of flowers tradition is exemplary of the way that this convention evolved over time as a changing tradition connected to feminism.[121] This changing tradition reflects the distinct issues facing women in their respective times. Other nineteenth and twentieth-century female authors' fiction and poetry would benefit from the critical study of their work considering their use of the language of flowers.[122]

For example, research should be done on the use of the language of flowers in a cornerstone of the mid-nineteenth-century Woman's Novel--Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*. This bestselling novel is about the journey into maturity of Ellen, a young girl who must overcome hardships and eventually marry. *The Wide, Wide World* exemplifies the sentimental tradition which was popular in 1850, the novel's original date of publication. In the text, the American language of flowers is used as a tool to teach morality, selflessness, and anti-

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[121] The study of the langue of flowers in fiction has not been limited to female authors and should not be limited in the future. Critic Jacqueline F. Eastman writes about James Joyce's use of the language of flowers in *Ulysses* in her article "The Language of Flowers: A New Source for 'Lotus Easter'". In the "Lotus Eaters" chapter of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom receives a letter from Martha Clifford with a yellow flower pressed in it with meaning in the language of flowers (Eastman, 379). Other works that could benefit from an examination of the language of flowers are John Steinbeck's "Chrysanthemums" in which a sheltered woman gives away a prized flower as she is sexual awakened by the visit of a peddler and Henry James's "Daisy Miller" in which the main character reflects qualities of a daisy in the language of flowers.

[122] In addition to American authors, British men and women also wrote about flowers and used the language of flowers in their texts. This provides another possible avenue of exploration for this topic.

materialism. Warner connects the beauty and purity of a flower with the purity of the soul that her main character Ellen must strive for as she matures. In one scene, Ellen admires a white camellia in the Humphrey's garden, and says that it is the most beautiful of all the flowers. When John Humphrey asks her what the flower makes her think of, she says that she can't think of it as "anything but itself" (324). John tells her it is a symbol of "what I ought to be—and of what I shall be if I ever see heaven; it seems to me the emblem of a sinless pure spirit—looking up in fearless spotlessness" (325). John reinforces the flower as a symbol of purity and excellence of spirit which Ellen must strive to express in herself. Ellen is then given a bouquet of the camellia flowers by the old gardener, and she takes them to John's sister Alice so that Alice might have adornment for the party at Ventnor. Since Alice is a pure and sinless woman in the novel and a role model for Ellen, it is fitting that Ellen gives this floral symbol to her. Appropriately, the language of flowers meaning that Hale gives the camellia is "unpretending excellence" (38). Thus, Warner uses a symbolic flower and its meaning in the language of flowers as a part of the True Woman ideal. In the novel, Alice is a sincere and excellent example of True Womanhood. Further study of the language of flowers in the text would provide scholars with a wonderful resource for how the American language of flowers was associated with spiritual purity and True Womanhood.

Another keystone of women's fiction which could be studied for its use of the language of flowers is Catherine Maria Sedgwick's 1827 novel *Hope Leslie*. This novel is about two orphaned sisters who travel to the American Colonies. After their mother dies on the journey, they are sent to live with their mother's former love. One of the sisters, the newly christened Faith, is abducted in a Native American attack. Hope, the other sister, is raised among the white settlers of Massachusetts. Much of the novel deals with interactions between the white settlers

and the Native Americans. In one such encounter an elderly Native American servant compares a baby to a flower, linking the purity of a newborn with the purity of a flower. She says, "The baby is like a flower just opened to the sun, with no stain upon it; he better to pass to the Great Spirit…this world is all a rough place—all sharp stones, and deep waters, and black clouds" (49). Later in the novel, her adoptive parents arrange a marriage for Hope with Sir Philip, who demonstrates he is part of the European white culture by mentioning the language of flowers. Sir Philip presents Mrs. Grafton a rose with a damaged stem, but then he asks her to not let "her knowledge of the language of flowers prescript his expression of regard for her" (59). He then offers her another rose, one would assume with a cleaner stem. This scene demonstrates the reference to the language of flowers as a part of social interaction and establishes this character as part of the European social tradition. Further study of the way that Sedgwick uses the language of flowers could illustrate the customs of the time and the role of the language of flowers in courtship and daily life.

Another woman writer who often wrote about flowers and uses the language of flowers in her texts is Sarah Orne Jewett. Jewett's work attracted the ire of Edith Wharton, who attacked the language of flowers in the writing of her adversaries, including Jewett. In Wharton's autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, she mocks the writing of the local color writers Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman calling their work, "rose and lavender pages." Here, Wharton references their use of the language of flowers to state that they paint too rosy a picture of New England. She felt that Jewett's and Wilkins's portrayal cannot be trusted. In her book on Wharton's fiction, *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld,* critic Candace Waid states, "Wharton's argument with the work of the local colorist is presented as an argument about realism and the proper realist view of New England" (94). Wharton saw the regionalist writers as

composing "failures of realism" (Waid 93). It would be interesting to explore just how much flowers are used to paint the picture of New England is in Jewett's text.

Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) is a local color novel narrated by an unmarried and educated woman writer much like Jewett herself. The woman narrator travels to a small isolated fishing town on the coast of Maine to finish writing her novel. She takes a room with Mrs. Todd, the town's herbalist, who tells her stories and teaches her about flowers and plants. Critic Ted Eden explores the flowers and herbs mentioned in *The Country of Pointed Firs* in his article "Jewett's Pharmacopeia;" however, he does not look at the correspondence of these herbs to the language of flowers. There certainly are many flowers and herbs mentioned in the text which correspond with the language of flowers. For example, toward the end of the story Jewett's narrator mentions rosemary an herb that means "remembrance" (Hale 191). In the home of Mrs. Todd's friend Mrs. Tilley the narrator says, "I looked at the unworn carpet, the glass vases on the mantelpiece with their prim bunches of swamp grass and dusty marsh rosemary, I could read the history of Mrs. Tilley's best room from its very beginning" (199). The meaning of the rosemary as a remembrance is twofold; the narrator is able to possess a remembrance of the history of this room as she sees the symbol of remembrance, rosemary, and she also is about to leave the town making this room part of her own memories. It is easy for a modern reader to skip over the mention of the herb rosemary but a reader in Jewett's time might have considered the choice of that particular herb with greater depth. An examination of the language of flowers meaning of the flowers that Jewett mentions in the text would give a new understanding to the text and the way it was read by its initial audience in its culture.

The final female author whose work I suggest for further study of the language of flowers in American women author's texts is Willa Cather. Her novels are studded with flower

references. It would be interesting to study these flower references and their connection to the language of flowers. Her 1913 novel *O Pioneers!* is about the lives of settlers of the American West. It chronicles the traditions and customs these pioneers brought with them to the frontier, including the language of flowers. One example of a significant use of the language of flowers in Cather's novel is the white mulberry tree which is mentioned as the setting of the reunited romance between childhood lovers Emil and Marie (Cather 101). Later this white mulberry tree is the name of the title of a section of the book in which the character Marie passionately embraces her true love Emil under the tree and is later shot dead there by her husband Frank. White mulberry means "wisdom" in Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary* (139). The meaning of wisdom complements this scene in which their love is revealed and the truth of their passionate affair is made known. Like the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, this tree brings the burden of understanding upon the lovers. Other flowers mentioned in the text are: wild roses which mean simplicity (Wirt 191), Zinnias which mean absence (Wirt 226), Larkspur which mean fickleness (Hale 104), and Marigolds which mean cruelty (Wirt 138). An examination of Cather's novel would provide a captivating study of an author who was influenced by Mary Austin. The study of Cather's use of the language of flowers would be interesting to compare to Austin's.

Admittedly, my study only looks at the work of American white women authors. Many other cultures use flowers significantly and even use the European/ American language of flowers. For example, Latina writer Isabelle Allende directly names the language of flowers in her 1998 novel *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses*. She elucidates the history of the language of flowers and explains people's sentimental connection to flowers. She tells her story of taking dirt with her as she and her family were exiled from Chile in order to plant forget-me-nots in the Caribbean (183). A forget-me-not, also called a mouse's ear or heart's ease, is a flower which

means remembrance (Wirt 92). Allende's floral tribute to her homeland dies in the tropical climate. While Allende wanted to carry the forget-me-nots to her new home as a reminder of her old home, the dissimilar growing conditions made the cultivation of forget-me-not impossible in her new location. These flowers remained a part of her childhood in Chile unable to be transplanted and to flourish. Thus, the dead flowers are a fitting symbol of the violent disruption exile was for the author.

In addition, critics could continue to explore twenty-first century authors' use of flowers. An example of a contemporary work prime for examination is Vanessa Diffenbaugh's *The Language of Flowers: A Novel*. Diffenbaugh's 2011 novel is about a homeless girl who studies nineteenth-century language of flowers books and finds a voice working in a flower shop arranging flowers according to the language of flowers for distressed customers. The main character, Victoria, even uses the language of flowers to express herself instead of using words when communicating with her love interest, who also knows the language of flowers. She begins the novel by using flowers to ward off his advances, but then realizes that he is connected to her past. Victoria undertakes a project to create her own language of flowers dictionary, which takes a modern look at the reinvention of an old tradition, stating that women need not follow a set system as they did in the past but can find their own individual voices while still using the method of the language of flowers. Examination of the specific flowers mentioned in this novel as well as the sentimental and moral implication of the language of flowers in a modern novel would demonstrate the continued evolution of this tradition and could prove quite interesting.

Flowers continue to fascinate and delight people. While flowers have certainly been used symbolically and cultivated and enjoyed by both sexes, a special connection is often written about between women and flowers. Even today, women are often linked to flowers. By

examining the changing application of the language of flowers in the fiction of American women, language of flowers scholars gain a better understanding of the contemporary social expectations, limitations, and pressures that coincide with certain women's use of the language of flowers in their literary texts.

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