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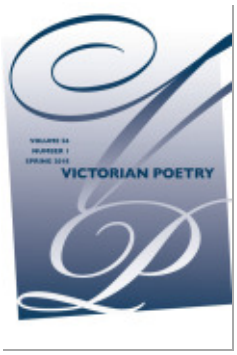

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"Half-Poets" and "Whole Democrats": The Politics of Poetic Aggregation in *Aurora Leigh*

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In a climactic discussion from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's verse novel *Aurora Leigh*, Romney Leigh, Aurora's cousin, acknowledges that the English "talk by aggregates, / And think by systems, and, being used to face / Our evils in statistics, are inclined / to cap them with unreal remedies / Drawn out in haste on the other side of the slate" (8.801–805).[1] Although Romney had earlier criticized Aurora for failing to "generalise" (2.183), by book 8, he has learned his lesson: thinking of people as general groups is a failing proposition. Here he uses the term "aggregation" to mean the troubling political absorption of individuals into masses and recommends instead that "each individual man / Remains an Adam to the general race" (8.854–855). Romney's understanding of aggregation is initially that of the emerging social sciences he studies and practices.[2] Later, however, he reimagines the nation instead as a "loud sum" of many individual "silent units" and as the collective "expression of single men's lives":

> "Genuine government
> Is but the expression of a nation, good
> Or less good,—even as all society,
> Howe'er unequal, monstrous, crazed and cursed,
> Is but the expression of single men's lives,
> The loud sum of the silent units. What,
> We'd change the aggregate and yet retain
> Each separate figure? whom do we cheat by that?
> Now, not even Romney." (8.873–881)

If dangerous aggregates flatten and homogenize, by the end of the poem, Romney offers a productive, alternative kind of aggregation: the model of loose collections.

Mathematicians likewise distinguish between these two models of aggregation: collection and fusion. Since the late nineteenth century, theories of collection have predominated in mathematics. While experiencing popularity in the early half of the twentieth century among mathematicians, fusion was rapidly overturned as a logical model. Michael Potter confirms that "the collection-theoretic way of thinking is so entrenched among mathematicians that it is easy for them to forget how natural it is to think of a line, say, as the sum of its points rather than as a collection of them."[3] I am not attempting to establish that Barrett Browning was "doing" math or that she was even familiar with contemporary mathematical thought, although we do know that she had some awareness of developments in statistics.[4] Instead, I claim that she understands how important counting and massing are to the politics of nationhood, social class, and gender and that she uses poetry to interrogate their assumptions and implications.

Like mathematicians, Barrett Browning recognizes aggregative collections as "metaphysically problematic entities" but problematic in a productive and challenging fashion (Potter, p. 22). The poet's visionary plan for *Aurora Leigh* was that even the social commentary would offer "an amount of spiritual truth," grounded in her formal "experiment" with "modern effects."[5] She wrote in a 4 October 1856 letter to Arabella Barrett, "The intention of the poem *everywhere* is to raise the spiritual above the natural; this is carried out in everything" (Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, p. 334; emphasis in original). Although the poem's aggregations are akin to those of mathematical aggregation as collection, Barrett Browning's aggregates formally exploit poetry's inherent ability to quantify in ways that retain plurality and categories without flattening, smoothing, or fusing. In *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning refuses a model of absorption that produces uniform wholes because this would homogenize heterogeneous elements into a single category, which can then become the basis on which incorrect or even dangerous social responses are made; absorption risks silencing individual voices, the poet suggests, by transforming them into a single, fused voice.[6]

The absorptive potential of social aggregation was precisely what Barrett Browning found most troubling about French socialism. Her concern is evident in the references to French socialist Charles Fourier in *Aurora Leigh*. For example, Aurora tells Romney that his "Fourier's failed" because his socialist ideals lack poetry's ability to aggregate while respecting the individual (2.484). Fourier advocated organizing society around communal associations of producers, called "phalanges" or "phalanxes." The poem implies that

Romney attempts to build such a community, "the famed phalanstery / At Leigh Hall," and we learn during one of Lord Howe's parties that Lady Waldemar is likely financing the project, which is patterned on "Fourier's own" (5.784–785). When Lady Waldemar earlier visits Aurora to tell her about Romney's impending marriage, she admits reading "half Fourier through, / Proudhon, Considerant, and Louis Blanc" in an effort to impress Romney, but she struggled to "make them sound half rational" (3.584–586, 590). Yet critiquing socialism was not Barrett Browning's only goal, as is most often assumed; she was also addressing social science thinking in English politics in the era—Romney's books of "mere statistics" (1.525)—through differing models of aggregation in the poem. As Audrey Jaffe has observed, statisticians sought to "consolidate numerous distinct elements within single categories, in doing so creating new social objects."[7] *Aurora Leigh* refuses statistical smoothness in favor of a mathematical form of aggregation characterized by internal divisions, one that prefers collection to fusion. What is more, attention to *Aurora Leigh*'s poetic aggregates divulges that the political power of forms resides in their ability to be divided and made whole again.[8]

I argue here that Barrett Browning's verse novel is committed to Romney's later sense of aggregation as collection because loosely gathered, heterogeneous wholes affirm the value of political inclusion. I am by no means the first scholar to identify a combinatory logic in *Aurora Leigh*, one that unites disparate pieces in order to do its political work. Natasha Moore, Donald Hair, and Monique Morgan are among those who have explored the ways that *Aurora Leigh* aggregates genres, such as epic, *Kunstlerroman*, and sage discourse.[9] And, indeed, the poet constructed a generic aggregate, but she also crafted aggregates in the language and prosody that I draw on as examples in this article. Each form enables the poet to experiment with the combinatory logics of literary form, gender, and social class. My larger claim, then, is that the substantial critical discourse identifying fractures, discrepancies, and hybridity in *Aurora Leigh* has really been pointing us to Barrett Browning's aggregative poetics all along.[10] Barrett Browning's forms and language show her refusing statistics and other large-scale social counting popular in the period[11] in favor of social aggregation as eclectic and heterogeneous collection. These inclusive aggregations enable her to avoid the limitations of statistical methods—the incorporation of individuals into categories. Poetry, by contrast, captures "the world's necessities" (8.543) in their variety and sheer number in ways that do not reduce or flatten their value. And yet poetry is quantitative in its own way, committed to measure and distribution, pattern and wholeness. *Aurora Leigh*

thus employs poetic forms to investigate what I call *social math*, alternate political models that accurately reflect the particulate quality of class and gendered divisions.[12]

This article demonstrates how *Aurora Leigh* seeks to redress the divisive work of democratic political representation by way of poetic aggregates to ask whether women and the poor must always be regarded as partial citizens. Resisting a deceptively easy social math of halves and wholes, Barrett Browning examines fractional forms of self that are assumed to be whole in order to interrogate politic models of gender and class. Put differently, *Aurora Leigh* is a poem that attempts to think how women and the lower classes "counted" socially and politically in the nineteenth century. The concept of social counting, in its quantitative register, belongs at once to the statistical imagination that supports the actual counting of bodies and populations and to how citizens matter. To ask "who counts" is to ask who counts as human, whose lives count as lives, and who is doing the counting, a point made by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life*.[13] Barrett Browning's verse novel, in allowing the divisions of women to be repeatedly broken and aggregated, prefigures this dual register of counting as demographic method and as democratic legibility, inclusion, and significance. To ask "who counts" is also to consider how counting occurs in a democracy, who is divided, and who has the power to divide.

To provide a conceptual frame on political rights and gendered differences, I employ the work of Jacques Rancière, who notes how a formative division, or "splitting in two" between the individual and the citizen, creates an additional bifurcation for women and their participation in the democratic process. For Rancière, politics involves the exercise of citizen's rights by those who are refused such rights under the law—or, in other words, the act of claiming rights one does not technically have, thus aggregating the "have nots" with the "haves."[14] In *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning constructs a model of inclusion that integrates the always already divided social status of women and the poor to mobilize a form of political action. By foregrounding social measurement into her poem's language and prosody, Barrett Browning signals that political representation depends on the identification and inclusion of members of society marked by an inherently fractional nature, such as lower classes and women.

The poem deploys aggregates to make the point that being counted politically has always involved a divided self for men and women alike. Men were counted as units: individual and (if propertied) citizen.[15] By contrast, women not only lacked the rights of citizens but were further split by the very fact of their gendered difference.[16] For nineteenth-century women, Barrett Browning

knew, writing and producing children were two viable paths to become "whole." That is to say that *poiesis* itself, as acts of making and generativity, was a supplement that enabled women to participate and be counted in democratic processes. Certainly, there were other forms of creative participation and social contribution available to women in the nineteenth century that involved neither writing nor reproduction.[17] In this instance, however, writing and reproduction are the forms that the poet chose in her verse novel to think about new methods of social counting, women's divided positions in society, and social pressures toward wholeness.

In part 1 of this essay, I begin by making a theoretical case for understanding Barrett Browning's poetic aggregates as a means of collective political representation. Part 2 then explores Aurora's and Marian Earle's halfness to illustrate that the divided sense of self that women experience from sexual assault, gendered discourse, and marriage need not be a resolution or an ending—it can instead be the beginning of a new way of social counting. Through the trope of halfness, Barrett Browning formulates a corrective political relationship between women's halfness and generativity. She does so by establishing connections among the violent divisions of women's bodies, the ideological divisions of women's identities, and women's ability to create supplements with writing and reproduction. Part 3 scales upward from the forms of political aggregation affecting individual women to the aggregations of social class in Marian and Romney's wedding scene. My scansion of this passage suggests that not all poetry was a democratic form capable of easily constructing a collective English body. Violent images of the "crammed mass" (4.571) in St. James's Church work together with the meter in this moment to reveal how the poetic directly measures forms of political representation for different social classes. Metrically, Barrett Browning's verse novel links its central insight about particular manifestations of social science thinking in English politics to the socioeconomic conditions of Marian and Romney's failed marriage plot.

I. Supplement and Aggregate

Conventional wholeness—the unitary person or the single nation—is never actually the goal for Barrett Browning, because society is always dissevering women and the poor even as it perpetuates a discourse of wholeness. As Caroline Levine discusses in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, many critics decry wholeness as a freighted aesthetic term, "pernicious on political grounds" (p. 24). However, cohesion is not the only way of thinking political wholeness. *Aurora Leigh* is a poem invested in creating "a meaningful unity

out of multiplicity" (Levine, p. 46). Barrett Browning's poetic aggregates are a potential strategy for attaining an alternative kind of composite wholeness—never quite "whole" in an originary sense but nonetheless an aspirational and positive drive. Marian's rape, where divisions are explicitly traumatic, is a telling example: despite its very real violence, new forms of beneficial unity emerge from such ruptures. I am not suggesting that the poem makes rape palatable by asserting motherhood as a salve, to "fix" this broken woman through reproduction or to mitigate her trauma through mere biology. Quite the contrary: paralleling the violence of rape to the discursive and identity divisions experienced by women, the poem simultaneously gives voice to a rape victim and, in fact, magnifies and reifies the horror of sexual assault by scaling our awareness of its effects from the whole individual to the atomized self that remains. At the same time, nonredemptive forms of divisiveness also emerge in *Aurora Leigh*, such as the divisiveness of gendered discourse and socioeconomic status. Marian's son and Aurora's writing, however, become vehicles through which the two women attain not homogeneous wholeness but a kind of aggregation that unites and reconstitutes out of social divisions.

Barrett Browning sets up quantitative divisions between her two major female characters: Aurora's authorial divisions emerge alongside Marian's violent divisions as a way of training the reader to ask who is divided politically and who does the dividing. The pervasive figuration of division in Barrett Browning's text is a product of the historical period, in which women writers in particular were demarcated by "sexual difference and other discursive structures."[18] When Lady Waldemar visits Aurora, she claims that Aurora exceeds other women as a poet only by being a partial woman. The intelligent woman is "mulcted" or deprived of full womanhood because, Lady Waldemar claims, women poets' hearts must be "starved to make [their] heads" (3.409–410). And her perspective is entirely in keeping with the consensus about women writers in the nineteenth century.

It was not only considered improper for women to waste time writing, but entering the public sphere was not her "business," as the home was. Consider, for example, Robert Southey's famous statement to Charlotte Brontë: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation."[19] Women writers were so positioned by a discourse that constructed a "limiting definition of femininity," one reflected by W. E. Aytoun's criticism of Aurora Leigh as not a "genuine woman" in his review of the poem for *Blackwood's* in January 1857.[20] Aytoun identifies Aurora as not "genuine" because she is divided: "one half of her heart seems bounding

with the beat of humanity, while the other half is ossified" (pp. 32–33). However, it is Barrett Browning's point that all women, and especially women writers, are divided, although the forms of division are not necessarily those that Aytoun describes.[21] Aurora's heart is not at all "ossified"; no, hers is a "bosom [that] seems to beat still" in time with the "full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age" (5.221, 5.216).[22]

That is, Aurora's possessing a heart that keeps time with the spirit of her age means having a divided self, as a poet and a woman. To be a woman is to be divided, but to be a woman writer is to be divided yet further. Indeed, the woman writer's divisions seem to propagate to include her gender, her vocation, her historicity, her citizenship, and her nationality. As a poet, Aurora has to occupy a Janus-faced position in history; she must

> Exert a double vision; should have eyes
> To see near things as comprehensively
> As if afar they took their point of sight,
> And distant things as intimately deep
> As if [she] touched them. (5.184–188)

Forever caught "'Twixt two incessant fires," the poet lives a "twofold life" of a private individual and a public writer (5.376, 5.381). The poet is ever divided between these two projects:

> The artist's part is both to be and do,
> Transfixing with a special, central power
> The flat experience of the common man,
> And turning outward, with a sudden wrench,
> Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
> He feels inmost,—never felt the less
> Because he sings it. (5.367–373)

Barrett Browning's language of halfness is no accident here, as it emphasizes the fractional ontological position a poet takes up. The poet must "be and do," at once existing as an individual and "turning outward" to engage with the "flat experience of the common man." Yet there are many ways of being divided as a woman as well. Barrett Browning's emphasis on halfness and division animates and troubles what Angela Leighton aptly describes as a woman writer "split, not only between woman and poet, life and works, but also, in some ways, between one aspect of the author's psyche and another" (p. 4).

Therefore, to be a "genuine woman" is to be characterized by a plurality of divisions, contrary to Aytoun's estimation that being divided in halves results in the merest simulacrum of womanhood.

The poem adds a third kind of split, too: Aurora is politically divided as a citizen of Italy, on her mother's side, and of England, on her father's. Her national division matters for two reasons here. First, Aurora's identity is an aggregate of both nationalities. "Italy / is one thing, England one" (1.626–627); the two countries are vastly different "ones." Rather than saying they are two things, she forces them apart syntactically by listing them each as "one." To even place them under the word "two" is to place them as one under a single word, but they are so different that Barrett Browning forces the two nations apart with syntax and numerical specificity. Whereas Italy is sensual, wild, and liberated, England is restricted, tamed, and domesticated, not unlike the distinctions between Aurora and her aunt. What is more, Barrett Browning characterizes England itself as a space of social fragmentation and division, in which "the ground seemed cut up from the fellowship / Of verdure, field from field, as man from man" (11.260–261).

The second reason why Aurora's dual citizenship matters is that it offers a productive political aggregate, one that simultaneously unseats the hegemony of the English poetess as English and equips Aurora with an outsider's viewpoint, a powerful perspective that Barrett Browning brings to bear in her poem's critique of socialist systems. "Just as the woman poet signifies domestic character and privacy," Alison Chapman explains, "she also discloses a repressed national hybridity," one "predicated on [the] foreignness" of historical poetesses, such as Sappho and Corinne.[23] Aurora is divided once between her Italian and English heritage, and then she is divided yet again by her inherent national hybridity as a poetess.[24] In assigning dual nationality to Aurora, Barrett Browning embraced the figure of the poetess as "an unstable and transgressive conceit, signifying both home and restlessness, stability and flight, the nation and its others. Furthermore, it is the mobility of the figure of the poetess that allows her lyric poetry a political agency" (Chapman, "Expatriate Poetess," pp. 66). While mobility is a conduit for political agency, the very fact of the poetess's national hybridity also enables productive political supplementation for those who are forced outside of active citizenship. Despite Aurora's association with Italy, her aggregated self enables her to claim England as her nation too, thereby wielding political agency in multiple spheres. Indeed, she affirms, "A poet's heart / Can swell to a pair of nationalities, / However, ill-lodged in a woman's breast" (6.50–52). Ultimately, Barrett Browning asserts that poets like herself, and Aurora, can aggregate a divided self within a soul

uniquely fitted to speak "a pair of nationalities." One need not be either a poet or a woman, Italian or English; instead, a divided, aggregated, dual national identity emerges as the preferred avenue for the woman poet entering the public sphere.

Not only were women writers subjected to many "limiting" definitions of femininity; they were separated from the public sphere politically because they lacked the right to vote. Women writers, therefore, sought other ways to claim the rights of citizens. Rancière's understanding of politics involves the exercise of citizen's rights, such as access to the public sphere, by those who are refused such rights under the law. He affirms that "[w]omen were excluded from the benefits of having citizens' rights in the name of a division between the public and the private spheres" (p. 60). Despite Aurora's success as a writer, as a woman she is supposed to belong to the private sphere (Michie, p. 4). She has the power to take a discursive position because she writes; nevertheless, she remains divided by gendered discourses about women and women writers. The act of publishing one's writing dismantles the distinction between domestic life and political life, enabling women to "claim rights as women and as citizens, an identical right that, however, can only be asserted in the form of a supplement" (Rancière, p. 60). Rancière provides the example of a woman's ability to be sentenced to death: even when she does not have the rights of a citizen, she may still be held accountable to the laws regulating the conduct of citizens. Politically the supplement involves an outside force or event that erases the boundaries between public and private, creating a bridge between the woman and the citizenship from which she is excluded.

In *Aurora Leigh*, writing as a supplement for speech becomes a political supplement for action by those who are excluded from democratic discourse. While a woman's body may be objectified, rejected, questioned, and even assaulted, her words retain a political efficacy that her body does not have. Barrett Browning's verse novel actuates the supplement by constructing poetic aggregates formally and thematically; such aggregates enable political action to ramify through the violence of division and exclusion, as well as through the promises of wholeness and inclusion. By offering multiple models of aggregation, focused variously on women, women writers, and class divisions, Barrett Browning foregrounds her poem's definition of aggregation as a redemptive political possibility that brings the fragmentary within the whole. Even as a women writer is a "half-poet," writing is a supplement through which she can make herself count as a "whole democrat."

Although Aurora's claim that "[h]alf poets even, are still whole democrats" might not on the surface seem to be about gender (4.315), the context for

the claim ties it closely to the relations between and the social expectations for women and men. She makes the statement while affirming her acceptance of Marian as Romney's bride. Immediately prior to this line is a poetic aside:

> How arrogant men are!—Even philanthropists,
> Who try to take a wife up in the way
> They put down a subscription-cheque, . . .
> . . . feel ill at ease
> As though she had wronged them somehow. I suppose
> We women should remember what we are
> And not throw back an obolus inscribed
> With Caesar's image, lightly. (4.300–310)

Only after this exasperated glimpse into her actual feeling on the marriage does she continue on, telling Romney, "I comprehend your choice, I justify / Your right in choosing" (4.319–320). Having just thought, "We women should remember what we are," the implication is nevertheless that women are objects of economic exchange like a "subscription-cheque" or cheap coin ("obolus"). In this moment, Aurora's complaint about being a "[h]alf-poet" is in fact deeply gendered. She says, "We women," not "women like Marian" or "women who are marrying" but "We women," thereby aligning herself with the instruction that women should know their place, whether as economic object or as a poet who is not considered whole because of her womanhood. As she is casting back and forth between her fondness for Marian and her rejection of Romney's male privilege, divided between acceptance and resistance, Aurora is also grappling with her own place in social structures that caution her to "remember" what she is.

A woman might only ever be a "half-poet," but what is a "whole democrat"? Would it be someone who believed that every person counted and had the right to vote? Aurora is still condescending toward Marian and the working-class crowds at this stage of the narrative, but even if we read her as slowly developing her democratic ideals, by this point, Aurora herself believes she is already a "whole democrat." Technically, this is impossible, since her nation denies her full citizenship; it does not count her as one who votes. While others consider her half a woman or half a poet, and democracy nullifies her altogether, nevertheless, she sees herself as whole. By crafting halves and wholes in a context where women really cannot be whole citizens, Barrett Browning frustrates such attempts to count and critiques democracy. Her emphasis on halfness and her forms of aggregation challenge us to ask whether

anyone can be wholly engaged in a democracy when democratic participation is foreclosed to them.

Because Barrett Browning's aggregates allow for both division and wholeness, they offer a solution to the paradox of democratic societies in which everyone wants to belong but also to be separate, to be part of the whole but also to claim individual rights.[25] One might add that Barrett Browning seems to value what John Stuart Mill terms "individuality" as one of the elements of well-being in *On Liberty*. She theorizes this tension by connecting women to the social through writing and reproduction. At the same time that a woman might be separated from the political whole by gender norms or divided from what is socially acceptable due to discursive or bodily violence, the supplements of writing and reproduction can gather her back into the social. Consequently, *Aurora Leigh* suggests that women can be not only half and whole but also part of the whole by becoming more than one, in producing supplements. Women are never quite units or individuals but are halves, wholes, parts of wholes, and generators of supplements. Barrett Browning's aggregative model is so combinatory, in fact, that it absorbs other social models rather than simply ranking above them; hers is no hierarchy where wholeness is best. She attenuates formal models in which, to be politically counted, women must aspire to wholeness while acknowledging that division will always condition the appearance of such social units. Although her contemporaries often imagined women becoming whole through union in marriage, Barrett Browning's poem shows that when a woman is bonded to a husband, to a child, or to her work, she remains a complex and uncountable aggregate.

II. Marian's Halfness

In book 6, Marian tells Aurora that she knows rape is not a subject to be openly discussed but instead is one at which "we must scrupulously hint / With half-words, delicate reserves, the thing / Which no one scrupled we should feel" (6.1222–1224). To speak in "half-words" is to avoid saying what you want to say or to name an act for what it is—rape. Marian's "half-words" are the result of social silencing about sexual assault. But this is a very different sort of "half-words" from the many images of torn words and paper elsewhere in the verse novel, each of which represents a deliberate act of self-silencing. Aurora's earlier claim that "[h]alf-poets even, are still whole democrats" implies that her poetry is only half of what a man might produce, presumably both qualitatively and quantitatively; so a woman's writing also constitutes "half-words" even when she longs politically to have a "whole" voice. By this logic, the "half-words" that society uses to whisper about sexual assault become aligned with,

though are not completely identical to, the "half-words" that a woman poet produces. While one form of violence is metaphorical and the other horrific and very real, both ask readers to consider who has the power to create such divisions and whether each type of division works in precisely the same way. At the same time, Barrett Browning constructs poetic models to investigate whether forms of women's halfness can be redemptive and, if so, by what means.

Marian signals her social and gendered divisions when detailing her sexual assault by repeatedly speaking of herself in halves. When Lady Waldemar chastises Marian for doubting the scheme to send her abroad, Marian obeys her "half in trust, and half in scorn" by writing the letter to Romney to say that she will not marry him (6.1164). She does not say whom she trusts and whom she scorns; one might assume that both apply to Lady Waldemar. However, another reading is that she only half trusts herself and half scorns herself for not having the strength to resist Lady Waldemar's machinations. Lady Waldemar's judgment that Marian is a "[f]oolish girl" causes Marian to doubt her own judgment and, accordingly, divides her mentally (6.1161). Furthermore, Marian's sense of being "half alive" when she departs for France echoes the moment after she awakes next to "him who stinks since Friday," realizing she has been sexually violated; she is also then "half dead, half alive" (6.1200, 1198). And the half of Marian that remains alive after this assault divides further in madness, "[h]alf gibbering and half raving on the floor," so that she increasingly shatters into smaller and smaller fractional selves (6.1232). Much as a document can only be honored if it is intact, Marian's body is shredded during rape and is no longer socially accepted.[26] What is whole, or "intact" in the case of a woman's virginity, was honorable in the nineteenth century (and, for some people, remains so today).

Wholeness was always the avowed ideal for a woman's body. Yet Barrett Browning emphasizes the impossibility of wholeness for women by portraying Marian as an aggregate composed of so many parts: partly alive, partly mad, partly social, partly outcast. The model of aggregation as collection allows us to see this kind of wholeness: Marian is not a single smooth unit but rather an aggregate composed of multiple "halves." And, in fact, divisions consistently configure Marian's narrative: among them are her socioeconomic insider-outsider status as Romney's fiancée, the proliferating halfness resulting from her sexual assault, her role in the quadrilateral relationship that links her to Lady Waldemar, Aurora, and Romney, and ultimately, the pairing of Marian with her child. As Barrett Browning endeavors to work out this particulate model of womanhood, the potential to divide an aggregate into multiple types of halves refuses to allow a category such as the "fallen woman" to suggest a

new wholeness, a single clear identity.[27] One might also consider the "redundant woman," a category of especial import to statistical studies in the 1850s.[28] Approximately a decade after the publication of *Aurora Leigh*, a debate about "redundant" women developed due to statistical findings. Authors offered alternative solutions to the "problem" of redundant women who had not married because there were more women in England than men. Unmarried women, be they fallen or redundant, presented a numerical problem that *Aurora Leigh* endeavors to address.

Marian's tale of poverty, sexual assault, and motherhood illustrates the destructive and redemptive power of aggregation in *Aurora Leigh*. There is obviously a vast difference between the forms of division a woman endures from sexual assault and those that a woman writer experiences. While the raped woman's body can no longer be intact, being physically and psychologically undone by sexual assault, a woman poet and her poetry are also not considered whole because, for centuries, men have imprisoned her violently within the discourse that marks her as an outsider. Rape's "half-words" do not function in precisely the same way as the splintering of women's writing, and the bracing reality of that distinction foregrounds how scrupulously the poem maintains focus on the manifestations of the halfness that defines each. Compare Marian's "[h]alf gibbering and half raving," for example, to Aurora's earlier flirtations with Romney, which are "half petulant, half playful" (2.117). To be half mad or half alive is decidedly different from being half petulant and half playful, yet each woman is still experiencing forms of halfness. However, as Leighton recognizes, Marian's and Aurora's respective divisions also connect them with each other in an "implicit sisterhood of women who . . . are drawn to each other from a common bond of sexual powerlessness" (*Victorian Women Poets*, p. 229). Consequently, the trope of halfness at once marks the social positions of Aurora and Marian, encourages the reader to think about women as perpetually divided, and unites the women in mutual gendered vulnerability.[29]

Although Marian's rape tears her into fragments, having her child ultimately enables her redemption, as she is made whole through pairing with him. Having her son does not eliminate the halfness, but it does hold out the hope of redemption in which her self is united in a new way. Indeed, she must, after a fashion, remain fractional in order to be paired with her child. When Aurora first meets the child, he is also described in language of halfness as he wakes up from his dreams and see his mother: "So happy (half with her and half with heaven)" (6.593). The half of him that belongs to the earth is capable of making whole all of the halves that Marian's trauma has produced.

Again, this social math remains troubling as a single male infant seems like his mother in being half; however, he also appears to be the fractured remainders of his mother, because he is a supplement, and he is united with her in a new whole. It is my claim here that it is not Barrett Browning's goal to satisfy such formulas by reconciling them into tidy wholes, new conceptual unities.[30]

This refusal of smooth categorization is one of the most important lessons Aurora learns. She initially grapples with how to classify Marian and, in so doing, divides her into types that fail to amount to a mother. Much as "wife" is a cohesive whole, unmarked by particularity, the title "mother" signifies a similar categorical wholeness for Aurora. Assuming Marian has turned to prostitution[31] and become pregnant as a result, Aurora can no longer class her with proper ladies, wives, or mothers: "Small business has a cast-away / Like Marian with that crown of prosperous wives / At which the gentlest she grows arrogant / And says, 'my child'" (6.345–347). Her accusation is that Marian "stole" her child because Aurora believes "a child was given to sanctify / A woman" and be her "crown" (6.632, 728–729). For Aurora, a woman becomes a mother in order to make her more mindful of God and embody her as one who trains future generations in faith. Since she understands the role of mother to be a holy office, a woman who becomes pregnant through prostitution—a sin—has stolen a gift "given to sanctify" one not intended for her. Thus justified in her self-righteousness, Aurora levels the charge of "thief" against Marian, but she does not stop there (6.633).

Aurora wants to correct Marian's categorization of herself as "mother" and her child as her "son," a desire that stems from Aurora's adherence to social math that aggregates and divides based on socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior.[32] Conforming to social expectations allows one to be aggregated into the group, while violating social mores culls the individual from the herd and diminishes one to an outsider, less than one. At the same time, for reformers and statisticians of the period, the refusal to fit the norm might produce a new category, a new wholeness, such as the fallen woman. But Barrett Browning suggests that this process of dividing people into individuals or groups was not nearly as tidy as scholars of Victorian poetry have made it seem.[33] Because Aurora's initial method of aggregation is spiritual, Marian cannot be swept under the umbrella of holy or pure women's roles. Spiritual aggregation seems to demand a sort of fusion or flatness of categorization, while poetic thinking enables Barrett Browning to develop collections that will reintegrate Marian into society. Aurora's first impulse, though, is that Marian is damned because of her sexual activity to remain an outlier, an "extreme" example unworthy of the spiritual categorization of "wife" and "mother."

Aurora's initial assumptions lay the groundwork for a powerful critique of smooth categories. Yet, in trying to categorize Marian, Aurora only succeeds in troubling why one might divide another into specific types at all. Marian's alleged sin leaves her divided as all women are who are not covered by the categorical concentration of "wife" or "mother," categories that imply the wholeness that unmarried and childless women lack. Marian, then, "is no mother but a kidnapper, / And he's a dismal orphan, not a son" (6.637–638). More than mere name-calling, Aurora is grappling with classificatory schemes that social quantification underpins. Marian and her son are not this but that. In fact, Marian's sexual assault instantiates the classificatory schism with which Aurora contends. Is she a "thief" or "kidnapper," "woman" or "mother"? Is she "alive" or "dead," sane or "raving"? Barrett Browning deploys the trope of halfness throughout Marian's narrative to reinforce the impossibility of oneness as fusion and to encourage the reader to think of the plurality of ways a woman's body can be divided. Indeed, Barrett Browning shows that this divisive logic is exponentially much more damaging for women—categorically and physically—than for men.

III. Wedding Mass

This final section takes my argument about aggregates a step further to examine Barrett Browning's attempt to represent large social groups. Here I consider the famous wedding scene, which is packed with two crowds, one rich and one poor. The poet's metrical choices in the wedding scene suggest that the rich are just one more "crammed mass," who are in reality not all that different from the crowds of the poor. Indeed, both are not single categories but rather dynamic, aggregated collections.

Perhaps more than any other part of *Aurora Leigh*, the wedding scene offers evidence of the poem's formal models of social math. The narrative and formal collisions of social classes in St. James Church reveal the poet's meditation on anxieties about the social body as spliced, a process involving both disruption and massing. The social aggregation of rich and poor in the wedding scene at once threatens the "dismembering of society" and imagines a "contract . . . twixt the extremes" (4.677, 4.691–693); it weds the violent divisiveness of the French Revolution with the marriage, the suturing of a new union through a legal context. While the Chartist uprisings or the Reform Act might offer more immediate historical context for Barrett Browning's concerns about clashes between socioeconomic groups, the poet uses images of decapitated and "disrupted" bodies from the French Revolution to think about social divisions and aggregations of the body politic.

The wedding scene's meter performs the collision of social groups as they are forced together, but within that massing is also a desire for separation that emerges paradoxically as an anxiety about social disruption. In other words, the social classes want to remain separate because their coming together risks the type of fragmentation that results in chaos. There are different types of fragmentation in play for the two social groups in the church: one acceptable and the other dangerous. The combination of social classes happens as the poet begins to integrate more and more experimental metrical lines into the pattern. Here I will venture some actual math. Taking the first 140 lines of the wedding scene, which focus primarily on the combination of the rich and poor flooding into the church, certain features recur with decreasing frequency over the course of the scene. Specifically, the traditional forms represented by perfect iambic pentameter gradually bleed off as the poor arrive, causing the meter to reflect the social disruption under consideration by the poet.

Scansion of the wedding scene reveals how the traditional, constrained form of iambic pentameter—the lines that reflect the rich, "St. James in cloth of gold"—are gradually overrun by the lines representing the bodies of the poor, "Half St. Giles in frieze" (4.538–539).[34] The prosodic elements perform the social aggregation of the two groups merging together in the church. Counting the lines of ideal iambic pentameter in this scene and comparing them to other metrical options throughout book 4 reveals that the traditional lines of iambic pentameter are less than half of the total. For instance, "They clogged the streets, they oozed into the church" is exactly ten syllables following an unstressed-stressed pattern (4.553). Of the sixty-four lines in the opening of the wedding scene (4.538–601), only twenty-six are ideal iambic pentameter. That amounts to roughly 41 percent of the lines being reserved for traditional, perfect form.[35] In line 4.608, when the rich begin their discussion of the poor in earnest, "We waited. It was early; there was time," the numbers further decline.

By 4.654, the instances of perfect iambic pentameter have dropped to 28 percent, as only thirteen of these forty-seven lines are ideal iambic pentameter. In lines 658–678, as the rich discuss the "dismembering of society," only four of twenty lines in the entire passage are ideal iambic pentameter, which is 20 percent. The four lines specifically relate to Romney's lineage, as the rich observe that he is "[h]is father's uncle's cousin's second son," or to their judgment on his behavior (calling him "stark," as in raving mad), his familiarity with lower social classes ("To shake a common fellow by the fist"), and the wedding of rich with poor ("a hideous sight, a most indecent sight") (4.660,

4.662, 4.668, 4.672). The application of iambic pentameter in these lines implies that the metrical form remains appropriate for established tradition, for representing both Romney's genealogy and the poetic genealogy with which the poet engages, as well as for the attitudes surrounding those traditions. Although the passage does not offer a substantial decline in traditional form, it is a decline nevertheless and a measurable one—a 21 percent bleeding off of traditional forms since the poor streamed into the church and infected it with the "humours of the peccant social wound" (4.544). This primitive data analysis stands to show the poem's investment, across its content and form, in the diverse methods of social counting. Barrett Browning's metrical choices imply that the rich can neither avoid increasing interaction with other social classes nor overlook that socialization necessitates such mixing. In order to depict a moment of social aggregation in which many voices come together and overlap, the meter is forced to depart from a regular rhythm, becoming increasingly the rhythms of common speech.[36] As the bodies combine with each other, so do the voices until, eventually, the sound of the lower class overwhelms that of the upper crust. The rich, the meter suggests, will have to mix with the poor, the old with the new; this is a truth of modernity, one that Barrett Browning's readers and the wedding attendants alike must learn to accept.

The aristocrats present for the wedding express great distress at being forced into the same space as the poor, revealing social and political concerns about what a marriage between social classes might mean. Consider the description of the poor entering the church:

> What an ugly crest
> Of faces, rose upon you everywhere
> From that crammed mass! you did not usually
> See faces like them in the open day:
> They hide in cellars, not to make you mad
> As Romney Leigh is.—Faces?—O my God,
> We call those, faces? (4.569–575)

The poor are not individuals but "faces" in a "crammed mass," an aggregation too closely crowded together. "[A]ll the aisles" of the church are "alive and black with heads," we are told (4.565). Similarly, Lord Howe responds, "The bride has lost her head," when asked why the wedding is taking so long to begin (4.701). To lose one's head, as Lord Howe claims Marian has, is at once to lack identity (for being faceless) and to be a subject of social judgment, to lose

face, as one's reputation, honor, or good name. On the one hand, he means this in the idiomatic sense that Marian is behaving irrationally, much as Romney has "turned quite lunatic" in choosing to marry her (4.662). On the other hand, the phrasing links Marian with the other poor faces and heads in the church. Later, when Aurora encounters Marian in France, the poet, echoing the rich in the church, stutters, "What face is that? / . . . What face is that? What a face, what a look, what a likeness!" (6.231–232). Marian, like the poor in church, is synecdochically reduced to only her face, which rises up from a mass of other faces and heads, as though Aurora is seeing the face of a dead woman in a pond: "When something floats up suddenly, . . . / a dead face, known once alive" (6.238–239). Faces and disconnected heads at once mark the specificity of a single poor individual and the massing that the categorization of "the poor" accomplishes.[37]

There is also a revolutionary association between the heads, faces, or headlessness in play, one directly aligned with Barrett Browning's commentary on inequality and fusion of the poor into a single category. For instance, the aristocrats present compare the scene in the church explicitly with prerevolutionary France:

> "By heaven, sir, when poor Damiens' trunk and limbs
> Were torn by horses, women of the court
> Stood by and stared, exactly as to-day
> On this dismembering of society,
> With pretty troubled faces." (4.674–678)

Barrett Browning's reference to Damiens, a failed assassin condemned to die by being drawn and quartered (i.e., "disrupted") for a plot to kill King Louis XV of France in 1757, is a metaphor for the social body in modernity as that which has to be disrupted in order to achieve a new form of integrity. The speakers compare this revolutionary disruption to the "dismembering of society" that Romney's marriage to Marian constitutes. Although dismemberment is literally the act of dividing limbs from body, it is figuratively the division of pieces or parts from a whole; in this instance, it specifically entails dividing Marian and Romney from their respective social groups. However, in that process, each would become spliced onto a new aggregated form. Much as a body is a complex system of parts that can be separated from the whole, Barrett Browning's innovative epic acknowledges that democracy is a political system demanding both diversity and wholeness, and sometimes disruption, in order to accomplish new collectives.

Barrett Browning figuratively disaggregates bodies in order to reimagine large-scale social groups in reality. Damiens's "trunk and limbs" evoke Romney's earlier claims that Aurora overlooks the "formless, nameless trunk of every man," another image of social disruption (2.388). The wedding attendants likewise use Damiens's particular case as a metaphor for their collective experience. But Barrett Browning also inverts the assignment of "faces" and "heads" only to the poor, for in this metaphor, the rich are akin to the "women of the court" who "stood by and stared," witnessing the event as Damiens was dismembered. The "pretty troubled faces" become the faces of the "noble women" in church, expressing their anxiety, a quite different form of "disruption," over the unwashed masses sharing the same holy space. There is an awareness in the text that the wealthy were typically the ones losing their heads in the French Revolution. The meter exposes this parity as "faces" takes the same trochaic meter regardless of which faces are being described. Consequently, the church "alive and black with heads" marks the dangers, violence, and anxieties of the mob, reflects Victorian anxieties about mobs stemming from the French Revolution, and flips the script on the ways that heads and bodies are parceled out and quantified throughout the verse novel.

The wedding scene is not the only time in *Aurora Leigh* when Barrett Browning imagines damaged or disembodied heads as a way to think about social parts and wholes. In book 2, during Romney's first proposal to Aurora, he says, "You look down coldly on the arena-heaps / Of headless bodies, shapeless, indistinct!" (2.380–381). He means that Aurora, in her high position as a poet removed from "such a heap of generalised distress," is like an empress in Rome watching gladiators from above. His reference to disconnected heads, unlike those of the congregation on his wedding day, intends for Aurora to recognize the poor as individuals, "one by one," rather than "indistinct." Romney claims he wants to take Aurora where she can

> touch
> These victims, one by one! till, one by one,
> The formless, nameless trunk of every man
> Shall seem to wear a head with hair you know,
> And every woman catch your mother's face
> To melt you into passion. (2.386–391)

In asking Aurora to abstract from one generalized, headless victim (headless and so lacking identity) to a specific case—her mother's face—Romney wants her to extrapolate her sympathy for the poor to a more recognizable form closer

to home. But he raises her mother's specter only in the hope that Aurora will then generalize her empathy from that particular example to the poor that he views as "victims."

References to the faces in the crowd can, therefore, be read as a continuation of Romney's earlier argument regarding generalization. Whether the poor are represented by "[t]he formless, nameless trunk of every man" or "faces," people in higher social classes seem to consistently dissect them into parts, while also viewing them as a "crammed mass." Like the paradoxical characterization of Marian and Aurora as aggregates composed of more than two halves, Barrett Browning offers another paradoxical model of social counting here in which class divisions are understood simultaneously as disrupted bodies and compressed populations. The recurrent tension between the plurality of parts and the mass of a whole supports my argument that Barrett Browning is working with the collective nature of aggregates. It seems that whenever a combination is in question, be it related to individual identity, motherhood, marriage, or social class, the form of the poem both challenges and reassures us by metrically aggregating options into particulate collections. One does not have to decide, the meter implies; this is not a situation of either/or but of both/and.

I have argued that *Aurora Leigh* engages readers in the complex practice of social math as it pertains to the politics of women's bodies and social classes. My investigation of the diverse formal and thematic divisions in *Aurora Leigh* demonstrates the possibility of a different kind of relationship between the fragmentary work of poetic form in Barrett Browning's text and the divisive work of the political in the nineteenth century. Barrett Browning's verse novel implicitly links halfness to political divisions of citizens and individuals to suggest that those who lack a voice in a democratic society require a generative supplement to be brought into the political fold. For women, writing and reproduction are supplements that redeem a woman's halfness and make her whole politically and socially. Writing as a supplement for the absence of speech also performs political work as it comes to represent an absent speaker or one whose voice might not otherwise be heard. Barrett Browning develops both senses of a supplement in order to make a case for poetry's political potential, while also encouraging her readers to think about how society divides itself and what a reconciliation of such divisions might accomplish. Reading *Aurora Leigh*'s productive aggregates in conversation with social counting in the nineteenth century clarifies long-running critical discussions of the poem's hybridity, formal combinations, and apparent discrepancies, while also

reorienting our attention to forms of nineteenth-century poetic quantification as a critical source of social justice and statistical commentary.

Notes

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1 All quotations from *Aurora Leigh* are in the *Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Margaret Reynolds (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

2 By "social sciences," I intend the developing science of sociology and its use of statistics as a method in the nineteenth century. Sociology and its methods (statistics among them) were focused on affecting immediate changes in Victorian society. Anthropology, while also a developing social science, was invested in the biological side of humans as a species, their history, and societies. The publication of *Aurora Leigh* (1854) predates the historical moment when anthropology's diverse methods (anatomy, linguistics, ethnology) began to coalesce into an actual discipline with the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). It is more likely that Barrett Browning's references to statistics and to social counting had in mind the new statistical measures in Victorian society, rather than anthropological measures. The formation of the Registrar-General for England and Wales and the Board of Trade centralized statistical authority in England in 1837, the same year that Queen Victoria assumed the throne (Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005], p. 28). The institutionalization of statistical methods thus coincides with Victoria's reign, providing a clear historical justification for such a focus in Victorian poetry.

3 Michael Potter, *Set Theory and Its Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 32–33.

4 There are a few references to "statistics" in Barrett Browning's correspondence, which refer to contexts such as book printing (to Anna Brownwell Jameson, 2 May 1856) and household economy (to Mary Russell Mitford, 5–8 November 1846). Comments directly related to the sociological use of statistics refer to "marriage statistics" (to Anna Brownwell Jameson, 24 February 1855) and public health concerns, such as the unhealthy air in the Malvern hills (to Mary Russell Mitford, 6 January 1846). She writes, "The Malvern medical men used to count on their fingers, to my knowledge, when they were talking statistics, the frequency of consumptive cases in that neighbourhood in comparison to other neighbourhood[s]." *The Browning Letters*, Baylor Browning Archive (accessed online 4 February 2017).

5 Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Arabella Barrett, 10–18 December 1856, in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 339. In this same letter, Barrett Browning claims she was "helped" to address the "spiritual truth" by the works of "that madman, Swedenborg." Emanuel

Swedenborg's work bridged the physical sciences and Christian faith; Barrett Browning's efforts to align social sciences methods with the spiritual attempt a similar affiliation. She wrote, "[Swedenborg holds] sublime truths in his right hand, & most humbly I have used them as I could."

6 Fusion also involves absorbing individual gender differences into a male-female binary. As Marisa Palacios Knox observes in her reading of fluid gender roles in *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning's verse novel resolutely rejects such dissolution of the self as "fusion" ("Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in *Aurora Leigh*," *VP* 52, no. 2 [2014]: 278–279). Contrary to Knox's reading, Christine Sutphin claims that a "fusion of individuality and care for others" is achieved by Aurora in conclusion ("Revising Old Scripts: The Fusion of Independence and Intimacy in *Aurora Leigh*," *Browning Institute Studies* 15 [Spring 1987]: 44).

7 Audrey Jaffe, *The Affective Life of the Average Man: The Victorian Novel and the Stock-Market Graph* (Columbus: Ohio Univ. Press, 2010), p. 2. For a more recent discussion of a social aggregate as "a total entity theoretically reducible to equal, interchangeable parts," see Nathan Hensley, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), p. 94. Emily Steinlight's extensive study of populations similarly understands social aggregates as "masses," "the many," and "surplus population," smooth wholes made up of fungible parts (*Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2018], see esp. pp. 21–22, 118–119). Beyond their related definitions of aggregation, what each of these studies has in common is that they focus on the novel, the governing logic of which is on "neither the control of individual bodies nor the self-mastery of subjects but the management of population in the aggregate" (Steinlight, p. 118). My project shows that poetry's governing logic approached both aggregates and the individual differently than the novel.

8 In *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015), Caroline Levine offers a "methodological alternative to breaking forms apart" and says that "the field has been so concerned with breaking forms apart that we have neglected to analyze the major work that forms do in our world" (pp. 29, 9). Yet, in their brokenness, there is also a powerful force for reconciliation, redemption, and re-creation.

9 Natasha Moore, "Epic and Novel: The Encyclopedic Impulse in Victorian Poetry," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 68, no. 3 (2013): 401. Donald Hair's *Fresh Strange Music* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2015) locates the "turbulence" of the poem in its "mixed style" (p. 207), and Monique Morgan discusses *Aurora Leigh* as a poem that "keeps various generic fragments distinct" (*Narrative Means, Lyric Ends: Temporality in the Nineteenth-Century British Long Poem* [Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2009], pp. 120–121). Marjorie Stone and Rebecca Stott, like Moore, identify *Aurora Leigh* as a work of sage discourse in their respective works on the poem (Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995], pp. 12–13, 138; Stott, "'Where Angels Fear to Tread': *Aurora Leigh*," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott [London: Pearson Education, 2003], p. 206). It is worth noting that sage discourse is itself a produc-

tive, generic aggregate. John Holloway claims in *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1953) that reading sage discourse involves the examination of "a series of particular cases, the parts of [of which] contribute to the impression mediated by the whole" (p. 11). Sage writing "comes to possess a non-logical unity"; it is an act of "imaginative integration" and "synthesis" that, not unlike the poetic aggregates I describe in this article, pull together disparate pieces and sources to construct "some larger sense of a single total impression" (pp. 18, 14).

10 Margaret Reynolds's concept of "experimental bricolage" is pertinent here. She defines it as a "magpie form, which steals fragments from a tradition or language from which women have been alienated, to rewrite or invert them" and says that it "can be defined in itself . . . as culturally feminine" ("Allusion in the Verse-Novel: Experimental Bricolage," in Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, p. 554). In Reynolds's "Critical Introduction" to *Aurora Leigh* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1992), she also identifies the poem's strategies of "diffusion and fragmentation," which evokes Barrett Browning's own characterization of her work as "blots and fragments" (p. 12); see also Barrett Browning to Robert Browning, 26 February 1846, quoted in Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (Norton ed.), p. 330. On hybrid gender roles in the poem, see Knox, "Masculine Identification," pp. 277–300.

11 As Hacking explains in *Taming of Chance*, the first half of the nineteenth century had "generated a world of becoming numerical and measured in every corner of its being" (p. 61). The emergence of new technologies of classifying and enumerating created a faddish "enthusiasm for numerical data" in the nineteenth century (p. 2).

12 Many critics have written about the gender and class politics of *Aurora Leigh*. See, for example, Lana Dalley, "'The least "Angelical" poem in the language': Political Economy, Gender, and the Heritage of *Aurora Leigh*," *VP* 44, no. 4 (2006): 525–542; Barbara Barrow, "Gender, Language, and the Politics of Disembodiment in *Aurora Leigh*," *VP* 53, no. 3 (2015): 243–262; Lynda Chouiten, "Irony and Gender Politics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 11, no. 3 (2012): 1–17. For a reading of *Aurora Leigh* as an "instrument of reform," see Laura Rotunno, "Writings of Reform and Reforming Writings in *Aurora Leigh* and *A Writer of Books*," in *Gender and Victorian Reform*, ed. Anita Rose (Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), p. 59. Deirdre David, by contrast, assigns the poem's political "service" a role in "a patriarchal vision of the apocalypse," one that enslaves Barrett Browning's project to "a male ideal" ("'Art's a Service': Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and *Aurora Leigh*," in *Victorian Women Poets: Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti*, ed. Joseph Bristow (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), p. 108.

13 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 20.

14 Jacques Rancière, *The Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), p. 61.

15 For a discussion of the application of emergent statistical and social science methods to women's issues, see Hacking, *Taming of Chance*, pp. 18–19. Ben Griffin also identifies the ligature between women's property-law reform activity and the emerging

social sciences in *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 79–80. A detailed account of the relationship between the National Social Science Association and feminists seeking suffrage, marriage reform, and property rights can be found in Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850–1895* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), esp. pp. 11, 54–56.

16 As Teresa de Laurentis notes in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), there is a "double status of woman as bearer of economic, positive value, and woman as bearer of semiotic, negative value, of difference" (p. 19). However, double status, as I will demonstrate, is too narrow conceptually to accommodate the plurality of ways that women are divided by discourse.

17 As an alternative to marriage and childbearing, independent nineteenth-century women emphasized their value as a massive workforce capable of providing much-needed service to the country. Through philanthropic societies and political organizations, women whom society largely viewed as redundant could instead form a new unity, one founded on purpose. For an extended study of unmarried women's "unity of purpose" see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 7.

18 Elsie Michie, *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), p. 2. For related studies on women writers, see Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and the Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987); Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing against the Heart* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1992).

19 Quoted in Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder, 1857), p. 102.

20 Michie, *Outside the Pale*, p. 4; William Edmondstoune Aytoun, "Mrs. Barrett Browning—*Aurora Leigh*," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 81 (January 1857): 32.

21 Joyce Zonana has raised the possibility of yet another division for women writers: that of the poet and muse. She argues that patriarchal poetry's vision of the muse is as separate from the body of the poet. Instead, she reads Aurora Leigh as both poet and muse, refusing the "premise that the muse must be external and Other to the poet, the 'object' of a quest" ("The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8, no. 2 [1989]: 242).

22 Hair explains that Barrett Browning, in her early poetry, used "the pulse as her prime example of the music—the beat," later transitioning in *Aurora Leigh* to what he calls "rhythmic turbulence," a more energetic, chaotic style (*Fresh Strange Music*, p. 205).

23 Alison Chapman, "The Expatriate Poetess: Nationhood, Poetics, and Politics," in *Victorian Women Poets*, ed. Alison Chapman (Cambridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 2003), p. 59.

24 Barrett Browning's affiliation with Italy has been much discussed by critics. See, for example, Sandra Gilbert, "From *Patria* to *Matria*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Risorgimento*," *PMLA* 99 (1984): 194–122; Alison Chapman, "Risorgimento: Spiritualism, Politics and Elizabeth Barrett Browning," in *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Writers and Artists in Italy*, ed. Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 70–89; Marjorie Stone, "Constructing the Archive and the Nation in 'Italy! world's Italy!,' 'My Last Duchess,' *Aurora Leigh*, and an Unpublished Manuscript by Elizabeth Barrett Browning," *Victorian Review* 33, no. 2 (2007): 35–57.

25 Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, pp. 66–68; Bruce Thornton, *Democracy's Dangers and Discontents: The Tyranny of the Majority from the Greeks to Obama* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2014), pp. 2–7.

26 For more on virginity in the Victorian era, see the essays in Lloyd Davis, ed., *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993). It is also worth noting that increasingly work, such as Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall's edited collection *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989), has offered a valuable corrective to the notion that all Victorian sexuality was repressed and prudish. Yet, at the same time, "[v]irginity in women had been valued and continued to be valued for the security it gave to the dynastic transmission of property. Innocence offered a greater security, an internalized security, in a world more vulnerable to political and economic disorder. For upper- and middle-class French and English women, innocence meant knowing nothing about sex: the very etymology of the word—*non-nocere* (not to do harm)—suggests that knowledge of sexuality was harmful" (Mendus and Rendall, introduction to *Sexuality and Subordination*, p. 7).

27 Leighton views the figure of the fallen woman as Barrett Browning's "most pointed accusation" of her poem's social criticism ("'Because men made the laws': The Fallen Woman and the Woman Poet," in *Victorian Women Poets: Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti*, ed. Joseph Bristow [New York: St. Martin's, 1995], p. 224).

28 Famously, W. R. Greg suggested shipping an estimated 440,000 women to Canada, Australia, and the United States to find husbands. The remaining 310,000 women would be left in England in the hopes of making a match wherein their lives would be defined by "completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others" ("Why Are Women Redundant," *National Review* 14 [April 1862]: 436).

29 Barrow also reads Aurora and Marian as "linked by gender" but "divided by class." She asserts that their class division is, in fact, "equally central" to *Aurora Leigh*'s political strategies ("Gender, Language, and the Politics of Disembodiment," p. 254).

30 Knox notes, "The critical impulse tends toward imposing some kind of 'solution' upon the problems of *Aurora Leigh*, but *Aurora Leigh* is emphatically not a solution in any sense of the word, and does not believe in a solution-based approach to artistic or social problems" ("Masculine Identification," p. 293).

31 Although the text references the "hand of a seducer," which can be read as Aurora assuming that Marian has only been wooed by sexual advances, Aurora also says

immediately prior that Marian has to answer for "a wrong" she has done "[b]ecause of certain profits" (6.747, 6.743–744). I read this as a reference to prostitution. To take those "profits" is the "wrong / Beyond the first wrong" of sexual intercourse (6.744–775).

32 In the nineteenth century, the National Social Science Association (NSSA) also wrestled with such categorical distinctions. Shanley details a meeting of the NSSA (to decide whether physical examinations for contagious diseases should be extended to women's bodies) in which the members "implicitly drew a distinction between 'ladies,' whose ears could not bear hearing of venereal disease, and prostitutes, whose bodies could be apprehended and examined" (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law*, pp. 82–83).

33 Several recent studies have established that poetry rhythm's conscripted and moved nineteenth-century bodies, forming them into collectives. See Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of English Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860–1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012); Jason Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2009); and Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012).

34 For the purposes of this article, I follow Derek Attridge's syllable-stress scansion methods in *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995).

35 I round up these percentages when they are above one-half, as they are in this instance (26/64 =.40625).

36 Hair establishes that "EBB wanted to use modern dialogue in poetry," despite criticisms that dialogue was not appropriate for poetry (*Fresh Strange Music*, pp. 209–210).

37 Mary-Catherine Harrison observes that "[c]ollective terms such as 'the people,' 'the masses,' and 'the mob' constructed poor individuals as part of a massive whole" ("'The Great Sum of Universal Anguish': Statistical Empathy in Victorian Social-Problem Literature," in *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, ed. Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim [New York: Routledge, 2014], p. 139).