

WHEN A ROSE IS NOT A ROSE: ESPRONCEDA'S FLOWER POETICS

Because they offer such a wide range of connotations, flowers are a significant source of imagery in European poetry. In Spanish literature, flower figures first appear in the Middle Ages. During the Renaissance and Golden Age, Garcilaso, Quevedo, and Rioja—to name a few—use flowers, especially roses, to express the theme of life's brevity. Both rococo gallantry and neoclassic pastoralism lead to an abundance of floral imagery in the eighteenth century. Although strongly influenced by poets of the previous century, the nineteenth-century poet José de Espronceda has a particularly characteristic use of flowers, one that will influence later writers. Flowers abound in Espronceda's poetry; they appear, in one form or another, in over half of the lyric poetry and all the long narrative poems, from his earliest neoclassic pastoral verses to the titanic Romanticism of *El diablo mundo*. These figures fulfill several functions. Most readers notice the association between women and flowers in *El estudiante de Salamanca* and the "Canto a Teresa". Other uses, however, have received less attention. While critics such as Marrast and Brereton have commented on the earlier pastoral poetry, they have ignored Espronceda's continued reliance on these motifs in his mature poems. Another surprising aspect of this poet's work is the comparison, not of women, but of men with flowers. As Espronceda's style evolves, he uses this imagery to examine the major issues of his own life: women, love, and ambition. Flower figures comprise one of the most important elements in Espronceda, reflecting the development of his thought on both a personal and a poetic level.

These tendencies already emerge at the beginning of Espronceda's career. His first long narrative poem, *El Pelayo*, includes sections of a composition on the same theme written by his teacher, the neoclassic poet Alberto Lista. Yet, when Espronceda chooses to rewrite some of Lista's verses, the younger man radically transforms them, hinting at his future accomplishments. Lista's original text professes neoclassic commonplaces:

De la mansión del Aries, deliciosa,
la bella Primavera descendía,
y en el regazo de la tierra ansiosa,
vivificantes fuegos encendía.
Templaba el mar; la furia procelosa
al encendido viento suspendía;
y el alba derramaba en sus albores
luz regalada, y plácidos amores (qtd. in Marrast 101)

Espronceda's verses, however, show a greater vitality. As Marrast has noted, "véase con qué habilidad y seguro instinto retoca una estrofa de Lista, escrita de primera mano, dándole color y armonía" (100):

Todo es placer: de su mansión de rosa
la primavera cándida desciende,
y en el regazo de la tierra ansiosa
el fuego animador de vida enciende;
templa del mar la furia procelosa,
el viento en calma plácida suspende,
y derrama la aurora en sus albores
luz regalada, y regaladas flores. (qtd. in Marrast 101)

But what Marrast fails to observe is that Espronceda's verses take their strength from the use of flowers. Substituting Lista's final *amores* for the more allusive *flores*, Espronceda expands the flower imagery, giving greater emphasis to the notion of pleasure. Other verses also insinuate the conventional affiliation between flowers and sexuality (Goody 3-4); instead of simply beautiful, Espronceda makes Spring *cándida*—innocent, pure, and even naive. Subtle changes in word order and choice replace the rather indifferent "vivificantes fuegos" with the more potent "el fuego animador de vida enciende". By adding flowers to his description, Espronceda emphasizes life and passion. In this context, the one verse completely unaltered between the two versions ("en el regazo de la tierra ansiosa") takes on a new, sexualized, meaning. Both strophes present the same scene, but Espronceda's differs greatly from Lista's. At this early stage Espronceda already reveals the erotic use of flowers that will dominate his later work.

In spite of the importance flower images have in Espronceda's poetry, his verses offer surprisingly little variety. The generic *flor/flores* easily outnumber any individual species. As might be expected, the rose, ever popular in European poetry (Goody 56), appears most frequently. Other flowers surface only sporadically in specific works: the lily in "Serenata" and *El diablo mundo*, carnations in "El Pescador", white violets in "A Matilde", orange blossoms and flowering acacias in *El estudiante de Salamanca*. Espronceda's choices could be dictated by rhyme. *Flor/flores* rhymes with other words ending in *-or/-ores*, several of which have special significance for Espronceda: *colores*, *amores*, *dolores*. *Rosa* rhymes with *-osa*, a common adjectival ending. The adjective *florida* combines with *vida* and *afligida*. These patterns suggest a formulaic aspect to Espronceda's poetry as the poet relies in part on a group of rhyme schemes readily available in the process of composition.

But references to flowers often arise in positions other than verse end and as such have no effect on the rhyme. Espronceda must then have other reasons for using flower figures. This article will trace the development of this imagery in Espronceda's poetry. Following Marrast's divisions, the first period, Espronceda's

apprenticeship, comprises the years 1808-27¹. As almost every critic has noted, these poems lack originality. They belong to the pastoral genre typical of Neoclassicism and differ sharply from the rest of Espronceda's production in their overall feeling of contentment. But this early poetry displays some individual characteristics. Espronceda emphasizes the flowers' fragrance, a trait which will predominate in subsequent floral descriptions and that calls attention to these images since, as Ynduráin notes, references to olfactory sensations are rare in Espronceda (33). The wind, an essential element in poems like *El estudiante de Salamanca*, also emerges. In "A Anfriso en sus días", it merely provides a gentle breeze that, along with the sun, revives the languishing flowers. Later on it will have a destructive role.

Yet even the pastoral horizon is marked by clouds. In most of these poems, Espronceda presents flowers in the full bloom of fulfilled love. But in "La tormenta de la noche", the reader finds a wilted flower, an image that will come to obsess this poet. Nor does the course of passion flow smoothly. The disdainful shepherdess needs persuading. On the other hand, the presence of a bee who flits from flower to flower hints at the male lover's eventual betrayal. "A Anfriso en sus días" provides another early example of life-long fixations when the poet alludes to the sexual surrender of the pretty *jardinera*. In both poems the tone remains serene, but these elements allude to Espronceda's future torments.

The poet's life takes its first decisive turn with his exile from Spain for political reasons. The works of this period² develop a somber tone as Espronceda uses flower figures in a more negative fashion than before. The poem that perhaps most clearly expresses Espronceda's sense of misfortune is "La entrada del invierno en Londres", where the ex-patriot describes his loneliness in a landscape very different from his native soil.

The title and some descriptions of the London winter notwithstanding, this poem concerns Spain more than England, a supposition supported by Brereton's belief that Espronceda unconsciously imitated Lista's "La entrada del invierno" (19). In a song to pastoralism lost, Espronceda depicts his previous life in Horatian terms: fields of flowers, a simple cabin, and a lyre-playing poet crowned with garlands of ivy and bulrush. As Marrast has noted, these images belong to Espronceda's earlier poetry (193-4). They will, however, remain constant in his later work. Espronceda takes a neoclassic motif—the comparison of the happy days of youth with a field of flowers—and makes it his own.

The stay in England does cause some changes in Espronceda's style. His contact with the cult of Ossian (Marrast 188-93) results in more forests than fields and flowers in the poetry of this period. But many of the specific trees mentioned in

1. The poems in this period which use floral imagery are: "Vida del campo", "Romance a la mañana", "La tormenta de noche", "A Anfriso en sus días" and "A la noche".

2. "La entrada del invierno en Londres", "A las quejas de su amor", "Serenata", "El pescador", "A don Diego de Alvear Ward", "A Anfriso", "A don José García de Villalta, I", "A don José García de Villalta, II", "A Matilde", "A un ruiseñor", "A una mariposa".

these works—cypresses, palms, cedars of Lebanon—seem Mediterranean rather than Northern. The palm trees in particular evoke a desert environment of sand and dryness. Again, the plant imagery Espronceda chooses corresponds to his mental state and not his physical location. This blasted, flowerless, landscape symbolizes Espronceda's disillusionment.

Yet even in his use of trees, Espronceda relies not only on English Romantic influences, but on Spanish eighteenth-century models. In works like "Al Sol",³ Espronceda emulates the wind-scattered tree leaves of poems by Meléndez and others (Arce 417-9, Casaldueiro 19-22, 143). In his mature poetry, Espronceda will add his own innovations, combining the aspects of wind, leaves, and trees with flowers.

Espronceda does not forget Spanish themes and influences while in exile. Nor does he abandon Spanish politics; Espronceda's concern for his homeland appears in his first long narrative poem, *El Pelayo*. Begun while he was Lista's student back in Spain, Espronceda continued working on this poem while abroad (Marrast 185). Although critics have not determined when the different sections were written, *El Pelayo* probably continued to interest the exiled poet because of its political content. Octaves V through X recount the story of the Visigothic king Rodrigo and the woman known in Spanish legend as either La Cava or, less frequently, Florinda. Espronceda opts for the second name because of its obvious floral references. In strophe #5, Florinda resembles a flower with her rosy lips and scented breath. Above all, she remains untouched. Her purity is described by terms—"cándida" and "celestial"—that will come to dominate Espronceda's portrayal of women.

The sexualized landscape commented on at the beginning of this article appears in the next strophe. The poem then continues with two octaves taken from Lista which describe a flower opening its breast to the sun's rays. Espronceda no doubt included these delicate verses as a prefiguration of the destruction to come. Flowers also prevail when Rodrigo rapes Florinda: the lascivious king "mancha la hermosa flor de su decoro" (83; v. 80). Relying on a long cultural history of floral metaphors for female sexual organs (Goody 3-6), Espronceda delivers a political message. Rodrigo represents the tyrant—the contemporary Fernando VII—while Florinda, the flower-woman, is the violated Spain. Political passions, however, often ruin art, and most readers find this octave crude and unsuccessful.

A more subtle presentation of the same theme appears in "A la patria", a composition Espronceda clearly wrote while in exile:

So la rabia cayó la virgen pura
del déspota sombrío,
como eclipsa la rosa su hermosura
en el sol del estío (143; vv. 17-20).

3. See also "Canto al cruzado" and "Cuento".

Here Espronceda cleverly combines several strains to create a more intricate and satisfying statement. He reiterates his typical identification of woman with a rose destroyed by the summer heat. But Espronceda also develops a new association where the sun represents both male desire and the despot's might. The poem gains further complexity through an intentional confusion of boundaries. The description of the tyrant combines both light (the sun) and shadows ("el déspota sombrío"). On the other hand, the rose's beauty is "eclipsed", a word normally applied to the sun. As Espronceda's style evolves, he increasingly exchanges male and female elements.

The love poetry of this period shows a similar evolution in the use of floral imagery. Flowers come to represent not only feminine beauty, but morality. This development receives its clearest expression in "A Matilde" where, more than a scenic backdrop or even a metaphor, the violet becomes an example for the woman:

que es la viola pudorosa
flor hermosa del candor.

Tal, Matilde, brilla pura
tu hermosura celestial (192; vv. 19-22).

This poem displays Espronceda's continued concern with chastity. Drawing on a long practice coupling flowers with virginity (Goody 122), every aspect of this flower evokes purity: its white color, innocence, and "fragancia virginal" (192; v. 8). Espronceda has given the violet human qualities: the flower has become a woman, but an ideal one. Urged to imitate the personified flower, woman becomes in turn an object, a literary image akin to the flower. In this poem, Espronceda uses more delicate floral comparisons than in *El Pelayo*. His view of women, however, remains unchanged: she serves as a representation of either male political or sentimental ideals.

The perfect Romantic heroine is proffered in the poetry of the next period, that of Espronceda's mature work. With the victimized Elvira of *El estudiante de Salamanca*, the identification between woman and flower becomes complete. A rose that blossoms in the warmth of Félix's seduction, Elvira dies with his disappearance. The old theme of the brief life of the rose, combined with the destructive power of the sun seen in "A la patria", forms one facet of the floral imagery in these verses. But Espronceda draws on other currents as well; he uses more varieties of flowers to describe Elvira than any other female persona in his work. The poet produces an abundance of plants, emphasizing, as in some earlier poems, their aroma. This richness, motivated in part by an imitation of Shakespeare's Ophelia, allows Espronceda to create a particularly Romantic atmosphere. As only proper for a flower-woman, Elvira's life transpires in one place: a perfumed, Edenic, garden.

The loss of innocence evokes metaphors of desert dryness:

¡El corazón sin amor!
¡triste páramo cubierto
con la lava del dolor,
oscuro, inmenso desierto
donde no nace una flor! (98; vv. 273-7).

Returning to a negative use of floral imagery, Espronceda employs the absence of plant-life to illustrate Elvira's misfortune. Some references to her defilement recall earlier verses; like the deflowered maidens of *El Pelayo* and "A la patria", Elvira is compared to withered flowers. Others, however, create new analogies. The seduced Elvira plucks petals which the wind then blows away: "Mas ¡ay! que se disipó / tu pureza virginal, / tu encanto el aire llevó" (97; vv. 263-5).

The wind dominates various sections of *El estudiante de Salamanca*. In the second part, the one dedicated to Elvira, Espronceda combines the notion of tree leaves in the wind, a favorite theme of such neoclassic predecessors as Meléndez and Lista, with his own favorite image, flowers. Both tree leaves, seen earlier in "Al Sol", and flower petals are swept away by the wind's force in this poem (Casalduero 189-191). Another example of the persistence of these motifs appears with the garlands Elvira makes and destroys. Although possibly a reference to another source, Goethe's Margarite from Faust, they also allude to Espronceda's pastoral verses, where the contented poet wears crowns of leaves and flowers. In spite of the protestations in *El pastor clasiquino*, Espronceda does not abandon his eighteenth-century inheritance. Even in his mature work, he transforms it on his own terms.

The use of flower figures reveals once more Espronceda's constant preoccupation with virginity. Yet Elvira receives kinder treatment than either earlier or later women. Espronceda softens the blow—flowers represent Elvira's soul: "Deshojadas y marchitas/ ¡Pobres flores de tu alma!" (97; vv. 256-7). Her defilement remains spiritual rather than carnal. This special treatment results from the poet's identification with his creation. Like the poet, she lives in a world of illusions. Unlike the poet, she goes insane and can conserve her love until the end: "Amada del Señor, flor venturosa" (102; v. 355). For almost the only time in his work, Espronceda creates in Elvira a woman incapable of deception.

Other affinities between the poet and Elvira are also expressed through flowers. In the poetry written during his exile, Espronceda had also used desert metaphors to express his sense of betrayal. In vv. 833-84 of *El estudiante de Salamanca*, the poet offers his own bitter reflections on the world. He complains about sleepless nights spent on a "lecho de espinas" (128; v. 871), the only floral image in this poem applied directly to the poet. The thorns insinuate an almost religious significance, as in a crown of thorns, and also obviously relate to roses, a flower with its own sacred connotations (Goody 129, 155-6). These verses imply that the poet shares Elvira's suffering. In the earlier part of the poem, Elvira acts as a surrogate for the poet. The connection between the two now becomes complete.

Although excluded from the communion between the poet and Elvira, even Félix submits to this flower rhetoric. In his role as villain, he sarcastically suggests that Elvira dies from "alguna calentura" (117; v. 608), an allusion to fever that equates Félix with the destructive heat of the earlier sun-rapists of *El Pelayo* and "A la patria". Félix's own destruction also occurs within the context of plant imagery. As Félix plays cards with Elvira's brother, a hurricane blows outdoors. Later, as he follows Elvira's ghost, repeated references to the wind and its strength appear in the text. Finally, in the haunted mansion, a whirlwind of spirits lifts Félix up:

los espectros, su ronda empezaron,
cual en círculos raudos el viento
remolinos de polvo violento
y hojas secas agita sin fin (151; 1574-7)

Espronceda's metrical virtuosity—the scale of decreasing and increasing verses—further heightens the sense of a ferocious storm. When Félix dies, he literally folds in upon himself, curling up and letting the uncontrollable *danse macabre* sweep him away. Has Félix become a leaf, similar to those described in the famous verses: "Hojas del árbol caídas / juguete del viento son" (97; vv. 268-9)? Once Félix receives his just reward, the winds calm down and Espronceda ends *El estudiante de Salamanca* with the gentle breezes of his earlier pastoral poetry. Innocence returns to the Earth.

The identification of male figures with flowers hinted at in *El estudiante de Salamanca* becomes one of Espronceda's principal themes in these years (1835-1840). "El reo de muerte" provides an example of the first step in this process. The extreme bleakness of the prison cell lifts somewhat at the end as the condemned man dreams of his wife. Espronceda uses here pastoral images reminiscent of his earliest poetry: woman as gentle flower, fields, April personified as a gallant beau. But when the prisoner reaches out to touch her, the vision disappears, leaving only the grim scaffold. Espronceda uses the neoclassic models of his own youth to express the Romantic concept of lost hope.

In two other poems, woman as intermediary agent almost completely disappears, placing the focus more firmly on the disillusioned poet. "A una estrella" contrasts the star's lost brightness with the poet's lack of faith. Any connection with women or love appears almost in passing (250-1; vv. 49-58). Instead of Elvira—or some other female surrogate—enclosed in an idyllic garden, Espronceda now places man in a flowery Eden. Loss of innocence is not incarnated in the destroyed body of a flower-woman, but by floral metaphors relating directly to the poet's evolution. In the early, easy, days, he walked "por fácil senda florida" (251; v. 62). His deception comes as a wilting: "se agosta ya mi juventud florida" (253; v. 111), while white flowers symbolize aspirations for the future. As Kirkpatrick has noted, "so thoroughly solipsistic is the male lyrical subject in this poem that the woman has no existence except as the unstable pretext of desire" (128). But this poem also

evidences Espronceda's increasing desire not to depend on female intercessors, but instead to turn the power of his imagery directly onto male figures, including that of the poet.

Similar developments occur in "A XXX dedicándole estas poesías". The woman does not appear until the sonnet's last strophe, while the rest of the poem explores the poet's struggle between fantasy and reality in terms suggestive of Bécquer. While this organization follows the requirement that a sonnet provide a revelation in the last quartet, the first two verses, "Marchitas ya las juveniles flores / nublado el sol de la esperanza mía" (264), provide a stronger emphasis on the male's mental state. Espronceda repeats the old images of the flower and the sun. But, instead of a male-female opposition, both apply to the man.

An earlier sonnet, "Fresca, lozana, pura y olorosa", actually provides the best expression of this tendency. Espronceda uses the Golden Age tradition of sonnets dedicated to the brief life of the rose to express in one place themes scattered throughout other poems: the concern for purity, the emphasis on olfactory senses, the sun that destroys the bud and the wind that carries its petals away. Yet he goes one step further. The defoliated flower represents only the poet's illusions, "la dulce flor de la esperanza mía". There are no hints, even in passing, of the beloved woman, leaving the emphasis squarely on the man. Marrast believes Espronceda wrote this composition before his exile, but it seems much more complex than the other youthful works. Casaldueiro groups it with "A una estrella" and "A Jarifa" (206-11). Espronceda published the poem in 1834, and perhaps he rewrote it at that time. Even so, it is the first, and most successful, of all the poems linking the theme of the flower with male characteristics. This composition offers a fusion of all the elements of Espronceda's flower poetics seen up to this point. It acts as a point of transition between early and mature works, providing a foundation for later compositions like *El estudiante de Salamanca*, "El reo de muerte", "A una estrella", and "A XXX".

Yet Espronceda extends his use of flower images even further, creating an amplified context into which he fits related elements. These developments appear in three works, each displaying very different attitudes towards women. The only major female persona in Espronceda who is not defined by means of flowers emerges in "A Jarifa en una orgía". In contrast with the virginal maidens of earlier poetry, the prostitute Jarifa cannot give even the initial illusion of purity. While Espronceda continues to evoke happier days in pastoral terms, the meadows and flowers of youth once more give way to the deserts seen in "A la patria" and *El estudiante de Salamanca* and to a new ingredient: thistles. The poet and the prostitute cohabit a devastated landscape, unsuitable for flowers or love. Another example of how Espronceda incorporates new elements is provided by mud. Though this substance has no exclusive association with flowers, it gains significance within the framework of *El diablo mundo*. In canto II, the "Canto a Teresa", the poet follows a comparison of Teresa to a flower with a description of a crystalline river whose

corrupted waters become trapped among the "fétido fango" (231; v. 1699). Shortly thereafter he states: "es la mujer ángel caído / o mujer nada más y lodo inmundo" (231; vv. 1708-9). Teresa has progressed from flower to fallen woman to mud. Espronceda's use of this image reveals both a Romantic fascination with corruption and a desire to debase the female. An even closer connection occurs later on in *El diablo mundo*. In canto VI, Espronceda compares the innocent Lucía to a rose trodden in the mud: "Y allí cual rosa que pisó el villano / y de barro manchó su planta impura" (367; vv. 5438-39). In this context, the parallels to "A Jarifa" seem more plausible:

Mujeres vi de virginal limpieza
entre albas nubes de celeste lumbre;
yo las toqué, y en su pureza
trocarse vi, y en lodo y podredumbre (261; vv. 69-72).

Once more Espronceda repeats his customary affiliation of women with purity and illusions. The situation here also bears some similarity to "El reo de muerte", where female visions disappear when man reaches out for them. Can the reader fail to think of flowers at this point? But Espronceda does more than just repeat old themes. He develops the flower and related images into an increasingly complex network of associations.

More evidence of this evolution appears in the "Canto a Teresa". Included as the second canto of Espronceda's last long narrative poem, the poet intended this, the most personal of all his works, as an elegy for his real life lover. But Espronceda's sentiments towards Teresa remain confused. In contrast with the fictional personae—the poet defends Elvira and shows some compassion even for Jarifa—Teresa is exposed and vilified. This causes a radical change in the flowers and related images that describe her. This poem shocks because of the extreme negativity and even cruelty of the poet's reflections. Yet it also provokes admiration, as Espronceda attains even greater variety in his flower poetics.

The "Canto a Teresa" continues to cultivate previous motifs; Espronceda compares Teresa to a butterfly amongst the flowers, a possible reminiscence of his earlier "A una mariposa", which depicts a similar scene. The poet describes Teresa's loss of innocence in terms recalling Florinda's violation in *El Pelayo*. In this supposedly private, emotion-filled context, Espronceda repeats both a similar vocabulary and word order: "agostó la flor de tu pureza" (*El diablo mundo* 231; v. 1693) and "mancha la hermosa flor de su decoro" (*El Pelayo* 83, v. 80). The metaphorical connection between female purity and flowers has become so automatic that it appears almost spontaneously.

Yet newer developments continue to evolve. As in "A Jarifa", the disillusioned poet now sees the flowers turning to thistles. In vv. 1716-23, Espronceda combines flowers with water, one of the other main images in the canto. A celestial fountain flows down to earth, "y en la tierra su límpida corriente / sus márgenes con flores

engalana" (232; vv. 1718-19). But the flowers deceive, disguising a poisoned liquid from Hell. Espronceda creates here a poetic landscape encompassing flowers, water, and mud. This network of images includes attributes less directly related to flowers, such as water and light. In this regard, the "Canto a Teresa" rivals the sections of *El estudiante de Salamanca* dedicated to Elvira.

In spite of the numerous floral references, Espronceda avoids a clear identification between woman and flowers. The poet describes certain characteristics in floral terms—"la flor de tu pureza" (231; v. 1693), "la flor de tu hermosura" (234; v. 1758), "las rosas del amor" (233; v. 1736)—, but does not overtly transform Teresa into a flower, as he did with Elvira. While not the pointed absence seen with Jarifa, the poet hints at Teresa's unworthiness through this disuse.

One exception to this rule occurs in the section where the poet tries to address his own culpability. After comparing Teresa to a bright star, he switches to flowers: "Que yo como una flor que en la mañana / abre su cáliz al naciente día / ¡ay! al amor abrí tu alma temprana" (236; vv. 1788-90). Espronceda repeats here the theme of the violating sun, briefly identifying himself with its destructive power. But, in contrast with the sun-rapists of *El Pelayo* or "A la patria", the poet insists on his guiltlessness: "yo inocente también" (236; v. 1792). These ambiguous connotations reflect Espronceda's own confused emotions. The poem's earlier sun images are positive. Espronceda uses phrases like "al sol de mi esperanza" (223; v. 1514) and others to portray the hopeful days of his youth. He likens Teresa to light throughout the canto. But in several places the sun has a clearly negative role: Espronceda makes several references to the heat and dryness to which Teresa falls victim. Her heart becomes *árido* (234; v. 1757) and *seco* (237; v. 1826) from the searing effects of passion. Teresa becomes, perhaps subconsciously, a flower destroyed by the poet's ardor.

Other, more remote, images also point to Teresa's hidden similarities with flowers. Espronceda describes Teresa as "roída de recuerdos de amargura" (234; v. 1756). The verb *roer* implies a connection with worms, an interpretation supported by works of the period. In *El diablo mundo*, Espronceda adds worms to his poetic system: "ese gusano que roe / tu corazón" (185; vv. 495-6). "gusanos que roéis nuestra semilla" (264; v. 2646). The final quatrain of "A Carolina Coronado"⁴ makes the connection between insects and flowers even more apparent:

Mas ¡ay! perdona, virginal capullo,
 cierra tu cáliz a mi loco amor.
 Que nacimos de un aura al mismo arrullo,
 para ser, yo el insecto, tú la flor (272; vv. 13-16).

The worm appears consistently as a destructive element in Espronceda's final poems. The opposition insect-flower in "A Carolina Coronado" casts the poet him-

4. Susan Kirkpatrick has made some excellent comments on this poem (209-210).

self—albeit in jest—in the negative role of potential victimizer. In the “Canto a Teresa”, the worm represents the idea of bitterness, and not the poet. Just who or what destroys Teresa remains unclear to Espronceda.

But the poet has no doubts as to Teresa's suffering, which he also expresses through flowers. The poet imagines Teresa attempting to uproot her own heart piece by piece (232; vv. 1726-7). When Teresa dies, she is literally ripped from the ground: “la muerte te arrancó del suelo” (233; v. 1754). The poem presents various levels of emotion, oscillating between male guilt and a fierce recrimination of the female loved one. Espronceda does not—perhaps cannot—openly use floral figures to portray Teresa. At a more subliminal level, however, she becomes a blasted, deracinated and devoured flower. This poem's force—the impact it has on readers—results from the violence of these images, creating a work that, as Kirkpatrick has observed, “borders on the sadistic and suggests a wish to punish” (131).

Yet, two instances of flower imagery arise that might suggest the poet's sense of fellowship between Teresa and himself. At the end of the canto he speaks of his own mutilated heart being torn from his chest (238; vv. 1842-3). The use of the verb *arrancar* both here and with Teresa suggests the notion of the heart as a flower that is ripped apart, a scene similar to Elvira's madness in *El estudiante de Salamanca*. Likewise, the poet envisions an agonizing Teresa on a “lecho de espinas” (237; v. 1830). In *El estudiante de Salamanca*, the poet had endured a bed of thorns. Although thorns conform with a fairly standard concept of pain, this repetition contributes to the affinity between Teresa and the poet in the last part of the poem. “For the most part, Teresa's subjectivity, like Jarifa's, reflects the poet's own consciousness” (Kirkpatrick 131). Society has rejected them both. She suffers and dies. He suffers and lives.

The “Canto a Teresa” ultimately offers a complex use of flower poetics. By contrast, the rest of the *El diablo mundo*, perhaps because Espronceda never finished it, remains rather simplistic in its use of floral images. Once more, Espronceda draws on his favorite themes: woman as (destroyed) flower, flowers representing love, illusions and ambitions, and disillusionment symbolized by thorns. The wind, which appears frequently canto I, combines with flowers and petals in canto V, as Adán's passion for adventure destroys Salada and her gentle, flower-like, love. Although uncomplicated in their scope, flowers are fairly abundant in *El diablo mundo*. Every stage of Adán's story has some connection with floral imagery, and, in certain parts of the text, the reader finds whole sections scattered with flowers.

El diablo mundo does, however, present some evolution in the use of flowers. Espronceda regularly compares beloved women with flowers. He exchanges these roles with Adán; Salada likens her lover to a flower (332; v. 4503). This imagery reflects a reversal of roles. Adán is tender and innocent. Salada lives in a world of crime and knifes a man. But, Adán “grows up” and starts to long for more. As he becomes increasingly cruel towards Salada, the characters assume conventional positions. In canto V, she finally becomes a flower while Adán is the more tradition-

ally male wind. Flowers also define the women Adán subsequently encounters; the *condesa de Alcira*—with her decaying garden, withered garlands, and jewels shaped like flowers—and Lucía, the downtrodden rose. As so often before in Espronceda's poetry, flowers figures, through female intermediaries, represent masculine illusions and ambitions. Yet, though partial, the identification of Adán with flowers displays another current, seen earlier with "A XXX" and "Fresca, lozana, pura y olorosa", offering a direct identification between flowers and what they represent, and man.

This new development in Espronceda's flower poetics remains, however, unfulfilled. But Espronceda does draw on an old myth, one closely related to plant-life, to recount man's existential journey. Mentioned only once in *El estudiante de Salamanca* (95; v. 211), the Garden of Eden appears repeatedly in *El diablo mundo*. In canto II, the "Canto a Teresa", the poet laments the loss of the innocent love known in the Garden. Adán's story in cantos III and IV imitates the Creation myth. Adán walks through the streets of Madrid as naked as the original Adam. His imprisonment functions as another expulsion: "que este segundo Adán no verá el día / nacer en los pensiles del Edén, / sino en la cárcel lóbrega y sombría (277; vv. 3071-3). True to Romantic tenets, love promises a return to paradise; Salada's poor room is "convertido en Edén de ricas flores / al soplo germinal de los amores" (303; vv. 3915-6).

But Eden does not stand alone. These references appear in the same context as, or close to, other images coming from neoclassical poetry. The tendency to convey lost youth in pastoral terms, seen throughout Espronceda's work, becomes even more marked in this poem. In canto III, Espronceda describes Adán's first day through images of springtime, fields, flowers, and butterflies. Madrid, with all its people and confusion, appears to Adán as a field of flowers swaying in the breeze (271; vv. 2861-9). Canto IV begins with a stylized description of the dawn, and an April sunrise and dew on the flowers illustrates Adán and Salada's love. The canto ends with the poet's injunction that the two should: "gozad, que os brinda la primera aurora / con el jardín de sus primeras flores / coged de amor las rosas y azucenas" (308; vv. 4065-7). Espronceda can combine biblical and pastoral traditions in *El diablo mundo* because they both share the flower imagery so essential to his work.

But the pastoralism of *El diablo mundo* has a sarcastic edge. At the end of *El estudiante de Salamanca*, Espronceda depicts a pastoral landscape to show that Félix's penance has restored harmony to the earth. In *El diablo mundo*, no such order exists. Canto II, "A Teresa" begins with pastoral scenery as the poet describes his happier days. It ends, however, in desolation:

Brilla radiante el sol, la primavera
 los campos pinta en la estación florida:
 truéquese en risa mi dolor profundo...
 Que haya un cadáver más, ¡qué importa al mundo! (239; vv. 1848-51).

The ironic contrast between the verdant spring fields and Teresa's dead body accentuates the poet's loss of hope. A similar pattern of pastoral scenes and ironic contrast governs Adán's story in cantos III and IV. Adán goes out to discover a beautiful world, but the flower-people he imagined throw him in jail. As the poet explains, the world seems a fine place, as long as one does not look too closely, "sin entrarse jamás en pormenores / ni detenerse a examinar despacio / que espinas llevan las lozanas flores" (249; vv. 2161-3). During these two cantos, the poet constantly interrupts the narration with his sardonic commentary. By the end of canto IV, the reader realizes that these pastoral depictions of love are lies; the poet knows, and the reader knows, that this romance will end badly. Espronceda's flowers of hope have become flowers of evil.

In works prior to *El diablo mundo*, flowers represent passion and other illusions, and loss is declared through an absence of flowers. But now flowers themselves become false:

Sueños son los deleites, los amores
 la juventud, la gloria y la hermosura;
 sueños las dichas son, sueños las flores,
 la esperanza, el dolor, la desventura; (212; vv. 1308-11)

This series of inanimate concepts contains only one living element: flowers. But these flowers are anything but "real", acting instead as representations. In most of Espronceda's poetry they signify positive values: love, beauty, and youthful illusions. In *El diablo mundo*, however, they take on negative meanings such as pain and misfortune. This development paradoxically enhances their poetic value, permitting a sarcastic use in keeping with the poet's increasingly corrosive view of the world.

Espronceda also turns his ironic gaze in upon himself and his work. *El diablo mundo* encompasses a double vision: the poet's mockery undercuts the earnestness of the "Canto a Teresa" and Adán's wanderings. Floral descriptions, always extensive in Espronceda's poetry, now reach an exaggerated level. Entire sections are literally strewn with references to flowers and related imagery. For example, flowers appear five times in seven strophes in canto I (212-3; vv. 1290-336) and six times in seven strophes in canto III (247-50; vv. 2106-88). In this last case, Espronceda further emphasizes his point by including related ideas such as April, gardens, thorns, etc. He purposefully calls attention to flower figures, spoofing his own favorite imagery and themes. The pastoral landscapes in *El diablo mundo* comprise intensified versions of Espronceda's earliest work; he has progressed from a naive use of the pastoral to the lament for pastoralism lost of later poetry and finally to a travesty of the pastoral in his last long poem.

In other instances, Espronceda devalues the flower's lofty symbolism, intentionally destroying Romantic ideals. When Salada brings the naked Adán some clothing, she includes "un pañuelo de estampadas flores" (285; v. 3329), a usage

that brings flowers down to earth; instead of metaphors for an everlasting love, they serve as the design on a neckerchief. When the poet dreams of immortality, he longs to see his bust in a café or barbershop. Or perhaps a perfume bottle will provide a suitable monument to his fame, his stomach filled for all eternity with rosewater (vv. 1484-8). These reflections appear at the end of canto I. Next follows the emotional examination of the "Canto a Teresa". In Canto III the poet recuperates his ironic voice:

ellas la senda de ásperos abrojos
de la vida suavizan y coloran,
¡y a las mujeres los llorosos ojos
y los cabellos canos no enamoran! (240-1; vv. 1896-99)

The first two verses reiterate the old identification of women with flowers, asserting once more that only they can make life bearable. The last verses, however, mock this Romantic idea of love. The poet focuses instead on the vanity of both male and female partners, equating passion with superficial gallantry. Not only do these verses contradict each other, but they alter the larger framework of *El diablo mundo* itself, enclosing its most personal, heartfelt section, the "Canto a Teresa", between a sarcastic assessment of Espronceda's merit as a poet and a sardonic denial of both love and his worth as a lover⁵. The poet separates himself from his previous sentiments, effecting the "distance...signaled by irony" (Hutcheon 32) that characterizes parody. *El diablo mundo* is a self-parody. Conscious of the role of flower figures in his poetics, Espronceda proves their importance by choosing to distort his work through a manipulation of precisely these images.

The parodic aspect of Espronceda's work has inspired similar efforts in other writers. In his *Sonata de otoño*, Valle-Inclán uses the same wilted flowers as Espronceda to create an atmosphere of love and death reminiscent of *El estudiante de Salamanca*. Another parody appears in *Tirano Banderas*, where, as Zamora Vicente has noted, the drunken exchange between Nacho Veguillas and a prostitute in Book 2, chapter 5 contains clear references to the "Canto a Teresa" and "A Jarifa en una orgía" (98; note 6). Nacho proclaims the prostitute "esta azucena, caída en el barro vil de tu comercio" (98), and calls her "Jarifa" (99). By making specific references to Espronceda's flower poetics, Valle comments ironically on the view of women and love that Romantic writers bequeathed to Hispanic poetry (98; note 6).

A female response to Espronceda appears with Rosalía de Castro, a poet whose work encompasses the transition from Romanticism to Modernism. *En las orillas del Sar* #72 offers a new perspective on motifs inherited from Espronceda, responding to the "Canto a Teresa" through the combination of two of Espronceda's frequent

5. For more on this aspect of *El diablo mundo*, see Polt.

images: the thistle and the bed of thorns. By amplifying this opposition, the text expands on Espronceda's themes, providing a starker statement of contrasts: I against you, misery versus fortune, and even perhaps male against female, though nothing indicates that this is a female voice. In fact, a male voice speaks in several poems, at least one of which, #40, provides another reminiscence of Espronceda: "antes que te abras de otro sol al rayo, / véate secar, fresco capullo" (115; vv. 47-8). This ambiguity reveals Rosalía de Castro's divided loyalties: while she identifies with seduced and abandoned women, as a fellow poet she comprehends Espronceda's tormented creativity. This same confusion had arisen earlier in Espronceda's verses—Teresa suffers on a bed of thorns, but so does the poet. In the case of Rosalía de Castro, however, the poet allies herself with the downtrodden one, a characteristic feature of *En las orillas del Sar*. Rosalía de Castro appreciates both the richness of Espronceda's flower poetics and the flexibility that allows these images to accommodate her own voice.

The flower forms an essential element of Espronceda's work. Flowers in particular express innermost feelings; as Ynduráin has noted, plural nouns appear infrequently in Espronceda, with the result that "cuando aparecen es en momentos que intentan ser de gran intensidad dramática o de elevado lirismo" (40). Departing from the somewhat artificial imagery of a received tradition, Espronceda molds these flower figures into a pliant vehicle that allows him to explore lost youth, ambition, and love. Yet, in spite of the importance placed on this imagery, his work lacks a sense of the natural world. Like most Spanish Romantics⁶, Espronceda tends to remain citybound...not even in imagination does the poet wander through the countryside. There is no intrinsic reason why Espronceda should not have chosen some other source of imagery. Flowers prevail because of his early exposure to pastoral poetry and because they incarnate the period's favorite themes: they are beautiful and die young, their fragile allure transformed to scenes of horror and despair. Espronceda journeys far from his neoclassic background, but never entirely abandons it; the playful, but inherently problematic, sexuality of eighteenth-century poetry breeds the tormented disillusionment of Romanticism. From student days to his mature works to the final stage of self-parody, Espronceda enters into a dialogue with both neoclassic predecessors and, ultimately, his own work. In the process, he develops a rhetoric of flowers that, while remaining very personal, speaks to others.

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6. For the view from France, see Philip Knight's *Flower Poetics in Nineteenth-Century France*. I have followed Knight's lead in my choice of terminology. Readers may also be interested in the many points of similarity between Espronceda's flower poetics and those of contemporaneous French poets. I would suggest, however, that these correspondences arise more from affinities than from actual influences.

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