

Orchids: The Elite Flower

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Acknowledgments

When I began this master's program back in 2009 I never thought I would end up writing about orchids, or botany, or jewelry for that matter. During a class on Art Nouveau my second semester in the program, taught by Dr. Elizabeth DeRosa, I stumbled upon Paulding Farnham while researching his *Iris Corsage Ornament* located at the Walter's Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland. From there things blossomed, so to speak. I learned all about what a "language of flowers" meant, and, most importantly, became captivated by Farnham's orchid jewels.

I realized I was destined to study jewelry and orchids for the remainder of the program. I dedicated my independent studies to furthering my knowledge on the subject, and through my research began to notice that no comprehensive study had been done solely on the study of botany impacting these orchid jewels. While references had been made on the subject I also came to realize that museums with orchid jewels in their collections had limited information. While building this thesis I discovered a magnificent and elegant story of orchids and jewelry, and their important significance.

I would like to thank several people for their support and guidance on this journey: First to my advisor, Jennifer Goldsborough, who was just as excited about this thesis, and watching the story unfold. Every week brought new discoveries and adventures! Her words of wisdom, and our long conversations, helped me mold this thesis into what I imagined; to Stephanie Walker, with whom I had fabulous discussions on jewelry, and who challenged me one summer to look at orchids outside of jewelry to really gain a deeper understanding of the orchid-mania movement; and thirdly to Janet Zapata, who shares with me a love for Paulding Farnham, Tiffany & Co., and jewelry

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I have enjoyed every moment of writing this thesis. I couldn't have picked a better topic, and yet I still realize there is much work to be done on the subject. I hope to continue this journey in the future. I hope that the reader enjoys the following story and gets swept up in the magic and mystery of orchids.

Introduction

The orchid: mysterious, beautiful, captivating, and elegant. For centuries the orchid has caught the attention not only of cultures but also entire countries. Its rich history tells the intricate story of a flower's transformation from a botanical study, to art, and to its enameled and gem-encrusted forms in jewelry. What is it about this particular flower that catches the eyes of people all around the Earth? Is it the beauty of the bright colors or the mysterious symbolism behind the orchid? Could it be the naturalistic orchid jewelry inspired by the "orchid mania" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? In any case this spectacular flower has somewhat diminished in popular significance within the decorative art field.

Top designers between 1889 and 1925 transformed the orchid flower into brilliant pieces of jewelry for elite customers and collectors. These magnificent orchid forms in jewelry were directly impacted by the increase of the study of botany between 1820 and 1850 due to heightened scientific research, international exploration, and trade. Several orchid jewels were created from the sketches of specific orchid flowers bringing to life the colors and realism. This movement reflected the social mores and culture of the upper-middle class in England and America. To parallel with this movement was the Arts and Crafts movement, which led to the acceptance of new and unusual materials being used to create realistic forms of orchid jewelry.

I suggest that three main events played major roles in elevating the significance of the orchid in jewelry: the importation and research of new exotic orchid species from South America, the change in social norms of Victorian society, and the elaborate orchid

jewelry designed by Paulding Farnham for Tiffany & Co. The orchid craze reached its peak between the dates of 1830 and 1900 due to a series of events such as exotic floral importation, scientific research focusing on the cultivation and hybridization of new orchid species, and the avid gardeners among the elite and educated members of society, such as Stephen Jay Gould, who took notice of the orchid both as a flower and in its jewel encrusted form. Only those of leisured wealth took notice of new species coming into England and America because they could afford these orchids, and the expensive upkeep.

The social norms of Victorian society also underwent several changes. The sexual and erotic observations of the orchid stirred controversy among Victorians because sex was a taboo subject. Because of this notion, orchids repulsed certain Victorians who saw them as vile compared to the everyday rose or lily, which often had religious or conservative meanings. The day to day fashions of the upper-middle class began to change becoming far more risqué in manner slowly allowing for more acceptance of sexuality, and in turn, the orchid. Due to this increased acceptance patrons became more inclined to purchase orchid jewelry.

The following thesis explores the complex and delicate meaning of orchids from their cultural meaning to their erotic symbolism leading to the gem encrusted orchid jewels created in the late Victorian and early Art Nouveau periods. The subjects of science and decorative arts become intertwined in a fascinating story about botany, sexuality, and jewelry. Top elite collectors and researchers of orchids will be discussed along with the most significant jewelry designers in history.

Chapter 1:

The Cultural Importance of Orchids: A Journey to Elite Status

Point is, what's so wonderful is that every one of these flowers has a specific relationship with the insect that pollinates it. There's a certain orchid look exactly like a certain insect so the insect is drawn to this flower, its double, its soul mate, and wants nothing more than to make love to it. And after the insect flies off, spots another soul-mate's flower and makes love to it, thus pollinating it. And neither the flower nor the insect will ever understand the significance of their lovemaking...- John Laroche in "Adaptation" 2002

The orchid was very important to Chinese culture. The orchid was first mentioned in Chinese writings around 800 B.C., and was later mentioned in the writings of Confucius who called orchids "King of the Fragrant Plant" since the Chinese were particularly interested in the fragrance of the plant.¹

Confucius mentioned the orchid, or *Ian*, in his writings including *The Book of Changes* where he states, "Words by friends with one and the same heart are just as sweet as the aroma of *Ian*."² The orchid was very symbolic to the Orient. The orchid already took on the role of symbolizing sexuality in artwork of the Orient much like it would later in the nineteenth century paintings by American artist Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904). A Chinese painting (fig. 1) from 1720-30 portrays a man and a woman whose sexual relations are represented by the orchids touching in the bottom right corner of the painting. This is very sensual because a man and a woman touching sexually would never be shown at the time.³ When the trading of orchids began it spread amongst several countries, which only furthered the interest and study of the orchid in other cultures.

As popularity of ornamental flowers grew, so did the commercial industry, especially in England during the Victorian Era.⁴ The importation of exotic tropical plants from South America became a booming industry in nineteenth century Europe and soon after, in America. People were fascinated by the unusual appearance of the orchid family. The Victorians took notice that these flowers looked different from the everyday rose, or lily, that they were used to. They especially took notice of the fact that there are several different species of orchid. While there are many kinds of wild orchids that are native to both England and North America their blossoms tend to be very small and therefore would not be widely used later for jewelry design inspiration. Particularly the English became curious about this flower being imported from lands overseas that were thousands of miles from their home country. As more orchids poured into England and the Americas due to trade, the importance of collecting, conservation, botanical science, and social events centered on orchids, and became a phenomena eventually leading to a true “orchid mania.” Orchid mania fell into the period between 1830 and 1900, the peak of the fascination with flora and nature. People wanted to collect, study, and own orchids, which came to have a special value to collectors, cultivators, and the wealthy.

By the Gilded Age (c. 1870-93) cultivating orchids had become a prestigious hobby, especially in England, for those who could afford the appropriate structures to properly grow orchids.⁵ The wealthy were really the only class that could afford the necessary greenhouses and proper utilities for orchids.⁶ People in New York and Boston were also showing a growing fascination with orchids and with the development of

growing them in heated greenhouses.⁷ John Lindley (1799-1865) and Sir Joseph Paxton¹ (1801-1865), both horticultural enthusiasts, would be among the first to improve the cultivation of orchids.

In 1823 Paxton had set off for employment in England, which he found through the Duke of Somerset at Wimbledon.⁸ The Royal Horticultural Society had also lent some land to be cultivated in the Chiswick area, which Paxton began to work as a gardener during November of 1823. These efforts helped in popularizing orchids among the wealthy class in London and the surrounding areas.⁹

William George Spencer Cavendish (1790-1858) was associated with the wealthy class and also took an interest in orchids.¹⁰ Cavendish's home bordered that of the Royal Horticultural Society; he had no interest in botany or horticulture until he befriended Paxton, who was in charge of new plants.¹¹ Under Paxton's supervision, Cavendish would create elaborate gardens and later was elected President of the Royal Horticultural Society.¹² Cavendish also had a greenhouse built to house orchids and other tropical plants in the family's grand country estate, Chatsworth, because he had become so "enamored" with orchids.¹³

Because of its popularity in England, "orchid mania" made its way to America, and, in no time at all, became just as popular and fashionable. Mr. Thomas Hogg's important collection of orchids, which were imported and resold, played a key role in spreading the orchid obsession along the Eastern coast of America.¹⁴ General John F.

¹ Sir Joseph Paxton was the builder of the famous Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, England

Rathbone of Albany made a statement about the orchid obsession, which clearly summarizes the typical feeling among orchids enthusiasts,

I was so delighted with the plant and flowers that I caught the Orchid Fever, which I am happy to say is now prevailing to considerable extent in this country, and which I trust will become epidemic. I purchased each year following a few plants. In 1867, that I might successfully grow this charming family of plants, I built a house exclusively for Orchids; and now I have a collection that will compare favorably with any in America.¹⁵

The “orchid mania” had also reached Paris. Monsieur Pescatore of St. Cloud was the first to grow imported orchids outside of England.¹⁶ According to a descriptive account found in the *Gardener’s Chronicle* in 1848, M. Pescatore’s collection was quite extensive with 640 orchid plants and 350 species.¹⁷ While botany had been a common pastime for men, it slowly became an acceptable scientific learning endeavor for women to study, which only enhanced orchids’ standing.¹⁸ This popularization of orchids, and of flowers in general, would lead to the development of what became known as a “Language of Flowers”.

Through collecting and improvements in gardening in general, the idea of an ornamental garden came about which was purposefully used to feature as many flowers and blossoms as possible.¹⁹ The basic understanding for the gardenesque style is that a garden is a work of art, not just a simulation of nature.²⁰ John Claudius Loudon, a well-known horticulturalist of the Victorian era, wrote about the gardenesque style, in his books, which in turn sparked several gardening magazines to write articles on the topic such as *Gardener’s Magazine* (1826-34), *Register of Rural*, and *Domestic Improvement*

(1835-43).²¹ People explored more flower species from North America and from places that were considered exotic: Turkey, China, India, Japan, and South America.²² Due to explorations, society had new species of plants to work with such as azaleas, bleeding hearts, chrysanthemums, dahlias, gardenias, hydrangeas, magnolias, petunias, rhododendrons, tiger lilies, wisteria, and more roses.²³

Chapter 2:

A Horticultural Fascination with the Orchid Family

Angraecum sesquipedale! A beauty! God! Darwin wrote about this one. Charles Darwin? Evolution guy? Hello? You see that nectary all the way down there? Darwin hypothesized a moth with a nose twelve inches long to pollinate it. Everyone thought he was a loon! Then, sure enough, they found this moth with a twelve-inch proboscis. Proboscis means "nose," by the way.- John Laroche in "Adaptation" 2002

There are over 25,000 species in the orchid family.²⁴ They are found on every continent and in every kind of environment.²⁵ The members of the orchid family are ecologically and environmentally advanced, and due to evolution are able to adapt to changing environments.²⁶ People have gone to great lengths to cultivate orchids. The root word for orchid comes from the Greek word *orchis*, which translates into testis referencing the tubers.²⁷ Orchids, like humans, are bilaterally symmetrical giving the beautiful flower personality.

Members of the orchid species have adapted interesting syndromes to achieve pollination. Orchids are made of three-sepals which have a petaloid shape; there are also three petals where the third petal has adapted for pollination purposes (fig.2).²⁸ The labellum (or lip) usually has special colors to attract the pollinator, which leads the pollinator to the flower.²⁹ The column of an orchid is made up of fused male and female parts. The anther-cap, located at the tip of the column, is knocked off when a pollinator touches it, which exposes the pollinia; the pollinia then attaches to the pollinator.³⁰

Some orchids are said to possess properties that help cure or treat certain medical issues. The yellow lady's slipper orchid is grown in large quantities in Eastern Europe for

the roots, which are used to create “medicine with ‘spasmolytic, thymoleptic, and diaphoretic’ properties.”³¹ These remedies are then used to treat symptoms such as “insomnia, anxiety, and pain.”³² These useful properties only added to the importance of the orchid in later medical studies conducted by botanists.

In China there were specific names given to certain medicinal orchids such as: *Shi-hu* was used to cure kidney disease, *Bai-ji* was used to stop bleeding, *Tain-ma* was used for treating dizziness, hypertension, and convulsions, *Shan-ci-gu* was used to treat cancer and tonsillitis, and the *Jin-xian-lian* was used to treat pneumonia.³³

As early as 1579, William Langham wrote an article in *The Garden of Health* on the ability of the *orchis* to be used medicinally.³⁴ Langham discussed a specific type of orchid, the *orchis odorata*, which could be used for a number of different medical purposes such as reducing fever, inflammation, mouth sores, and swelling.³⁵ These studies would be continued for many years researching how the orchid could further the study of medicine. The more botanists studied the orchid’s structure, the more they realized that the organs of an orchid could be used for medicinal purposes; therefore, herbalists began to gather orchids for their underground roots and organs, which contain alkaloids and other materials that can be used for curative purposes.³⁶

Parts of orchids, specifically the tubers, were also used as a way to boost a man’s libido. In China during the Han dynasty it was thought that ingesting certain parts of the *dendrobium nobile*² would provide aphrodisiac properties and boost lust and libido.³⁷ Salep is found in the tubers of particular species of orchid, for example, the *orchis*

² Later it was realized that ingesting large quantities of the *dendrobium* are poisonous. Alcock, John. *An Enthusiasm For Orchids: Sex and Deception in Plant Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc. 2006. 216

mascula.³⁸ The salep is usually kept in the form of a powder, or flour, resembling a yellowish color.³⁹ In ancient times salep was said to provide nutrients, and was also used in medicine.⁴⁰ Salep is commonly baked into Oriental and Middle Eastern desserts, and said to possess aphrodisiac properties.⁴¹ More commonly the orchid is found in many people's favorite dessert: vanilla ice-cream.⁴² The tiny black seeds seen in vanilla are the seeds of the vanilla orchid, and the flavor comes from the "fermented seed capsules."⁴³ Vanilla has been popularly used since its discovery by indigenous tribes in Mexico.⁴⁴ Montezuma, king of the Aztecs, was said to have used vanilla in a mixture involving chocolate that would give him the strength to sexually "satisfy his many wives."⁴⁵

The scientific study of orchids continued to become popular especially during the Victorian era when it reached its peak. Swedish botanist Carl Von Linne (1707-1778), also known as Linneaus, answered the calling of the rise of public interest in flora, and began to study the orchid as well as other flowers, which heightened the status of flora.⁴⁶ As botanical finds were communicated, other scientists of the Enlightenment combined the study of flowers (orchids) and sex by popularizing studies on the reproductive methods of flora.⁴⁷ Linneaus followed in the footsteps of those studying the reproductive methods of flowers and theorized that plants could, in fact, be classified binomially according to how they reproduce, which drew more attention to botanical studies.⁴⁸

Linked to the scientific study of orchids was the collecting-craze that overtook Victorian societies in England and America thus giving rise to "orchid mania." William Cattley's significant achievement in being the first to bloom a *cattleya labiata* in 1818 is closely linked to the spread of orchid popularity.⁴⁹ Other considerable scientific developments that helped in the increasing the status of the orchid were improvement in

building techniques for greenhouses, and subsequent increase in the cultivation of the orchid.⁵⁰

Charles Darwin was fascinated by the pollinating reproductive methods of orchids and wrote about this in the *Origin of Species* (1859). He described the details of complexity and challenges the orchid family provides for evolutionary theorists.⁵¹ Darwin tested his adaptation hypothesis on orchids, and their ability to effectively pollinate.⁵² When studying the yellow lady's slipper orchid he believed that pollination happened when an insect with a long nose landed on the lip of the orchid and used its "proboscis³" to reach the pollen.⁵³ Darwin would continue to study the reproductive methods of the yellow lady's slipper in order to better understand their adaptive nature and breeding techniques.⁵⁴

The orchid is a flower that is difficult to keep alive and cultivate in non-warm environments, hence the expensive greenhouses needed to aid in the cultivation process. Orchids had begun to be cultivated in greenhouses, where the building would be heated in order for the orchids to properly grow. Written by Lindley and Paxton, *Paxton's flower garden Volume 1 and II*, (1892), lays out in detail the proper cultivation of orchids; their finds are described with such great specificity they would require much more in-depth research.

John Lindley is known as "the father of modern orchidology," and greatly contributed to discovering the ideal nursery conditions for orchids.⁵⁵ When Lindley saw that orchids were becoming a popular collecting item he began a long study of the botany

³ Proboscis means nose

of the flower, and created a classification of the orchid family.⁵⁶ The first greenhouses for cultivating orchids were unsuccessful because of the lack of light, moisture, and temperature.⁵⁷ Lindley decided to improve the growing and cultivating techniques used to produce orchids, and began to conduct research studies based on information he gathered from collectors.⁵⁸ This information gave insight into proper growing conditions for orchids, and Paxton would use Lindley's information in order to take improving greenhouses to greater success.⁵⁹

Joseph Paxton abandoned the common practice of using a stove to maintain a warm temperature for orchid growing and instead opened his greenhouse up to circulate more air and sunlight; the orchids began to grow with more success.⁶⁰ Due to Paxton's experiments on orchid cultivation he was nicknamed "Prince of Gardeners."⁶¹

The constant communication that took place between America, which was then still referred to as the "New World", and England played a tremendous role in the rise in popularity of the study of botany as both profession and a hobby during the eighteenth century. Botanical study had become more of a trend than a leisure activity, and new botanical finds were rapidly published. American and English botanists were becoming enthralled with the search for new plants and vegetation, and many of these scientists exchanged their findings in letters via ships crossing the Atlantic. Without such correspondence, American and English horticulture may have matured differently.

During the eighteenth century new colonies were still in formation in the New World, and the terrain was lush with vegetation and new plants. It quickly became apparent that American gardeners possessed plants that were of interest to English

society.⁶² Peter Collinson, one of the most influential English gardeners and botanists would quickly gain recognition for his business letters with American gardener and botanist, John Bartram.⁶³ Collinson would write the most detailed records of plant life on both sides of the Atlantic that had ever been published to date.⁶⁴

Collinson was a Quaker who had been raised by his grandparents in Peckham, which was close-by to London.⁶⁵ Peckham included a garden of its own, but Collinson would often travel into London to observe the more elaborate gardens.⁶⁶ Collinson was apprenticed in his father's haberdashery firm from an early age, and used the nights to study.⁶⁷ When Collinson and his brother took over his father's firm he made it a personal interest to improve the trade between American colonies, and to incorporate gardening.⁶⁸ Collinson married Mary Russell, a fellow Quaker, in 1724 and moved their residence to Mill Hill in 1749.⁶⁹ In 1753 Collinson uprooted the garden at Peckham in order to create a new garden at Mill Hill.⁷⁰

Collinson realized that he needed a business partner in the American colonies from whom he could receive seeds and plants in order to further English horticulture – enter John Bartram.⁷¹ Bartram and Collinson became friends throughout years of letter exchanges, and “Bartram's Boxes”, protective cases housing collections of seeds and plant specimens from Bartram's travels that would be sent to Collinson.⁷² Once Collinson had received the boxes he often disbursed them among his English colleagues if they were in need of specimens or rare plants seeds.⁷³ Collinson would often send requests, which included the elusive lady's slipper orchid, in his letters.⁷⁴

It is important to note that several of the clients of “Bartram’s Boxes” were very wealthy, and were often from the most noble families in England. It only furthers the conclusion that the elite were the only class that could afford to own plants that included orchid species since orchids require such delicate, and specific, care. Collinson often kept record of who purchased the boxes. The names on the records are not only impressive, but shows the heightened interest that the wealthy took in botany:

In 1742 the two original (again with two boxes each) are joined by the Duke of Richmond and the Duke of Bedford with one box each...In 1744 the list has three dukes, Norfolk, Richmond and Bedford, and a man named Blackbourne. In 1745 it has only a gentleman named Fenwick. But in 1746 the list is headed by Lord Bute, the dukes of Norfolk and Richmond, Messrs. Fenwick, Blackbourne, Miller, and a new one, Mr. Williamson...But in 1749 and 1750 are banner years. The first begins with the Duke of Argyle, Lord Leicester, Lord Lincoln, Lord Deckford, Lord Hopton, Sir Hugh Smithson, and three gentleman, James West, and Williamson and Dobbs of Ireland, the last in for two boxes as opposed to all the other’s one each...The year 1751 sees the Prince of Wales subscribing for one box, and in 1752, for four. There is also one large order from Dr. Mitchell “for some nobility in Scotland”.⁷⁵

The list that was kept of plant specimen’s in the boxes was kept in a tidy record (fig. 3).

This example clearly shows the variety of plant species that clients requested.

Through Bartram’s and Collinson’s success with the “Bartram’s Boxes” would only encourage the study of botany in England and America, such a study was specific to the elite classes and upper-middle class. Throughout the study of botany plants began to take on meaning, and symbolism, which became important to everyday society. The orchid family took on a taboo meaning of lust, and seduction, which often lead Victorians to having superstition about some orchid species.

Chapter 3: Symbolism and Orchids: The “Language” of Seduction

*“The flower is the poetry of reproduction. It is an example of the eternal
seductiveness of life.”- Jean Giradudoux*

Orchids, and flora in general, have a long history of symbolic meanings. In Greek and Roman times floral garlands were made as a symbol of status.⁷⁶ Greek poetry writings reference garlands made of violets and narcissus being given as gifts to lovers.⁷⁷ In the early days of religion pagans used flowers in sensuous ways.⁷⁸ Other symbolic ways orchids are used are in poetry, medicine, and probably the most noted, sexuality. Orchids still stood as an important symbol of wealth and status in upper and middle classes in England and America. In an interesting way flora found itself as a major part of Victorian culture, through literature, which was accompanied by scientific studies.

William Shakespeare, known for floral references in his plays, was an avid observer of nature and of orchids.⁷⁹ In *Hamlet*, act 4 scene 7, the orchid is mentioned twice as Queen Gertrude describes the death of Ophelia,

“There is a willow grows aslant a brook, that shows his hoar leaves on the glassy stream; There, with fantastic garlands did she come, Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and *long purples*, That liberal shepherds give grosser name, But our cold maids do *dead men’s fingers* call them.”⁸⁰

The *long purples* in the first few lines are referencing the *Orchis Masculata*, which has twin underground tubers, while the *dead men’s fingers* are likely referring to *Orchis*

Latifolia and *Orchis Maculata*, which each have palmate, or digitate tubers, in other words, finger-like structures.⁸¹

Shakespeare was probably familiar with orchids because of earlier writings by John Parkinson.⁸² In a later writing, *Theatricum Botanicum* written in 1640, Parkinson listed several orchid species.⁸³ For example, on page 217, there is an illustration of an orchid plant, the *cypridpedium*, which was categorized as “our Ladyes Slipper.”⁸⁴ It is known that English explorers collected species of the *cypridpedium* and brought them back from North America to England.⁸⁵

The Language of Flowers

The nineteenth century concept of the language of flowers was a system of highly complex symbols, which were extremely popular in Victorian society. Known as “floriography⁴”, it was a way for people to decode the meaning of each type of flower.⁸⁶ In Kate Greenaway’s children’s book, *The Language of Flowers*, (1884) she described the meaning of popular flowers of the time. It is important to note that the “language of flowers” was not a standardized code, and there was often great variation in the “meaning” of a particular flower or its color. This “language of flowers” was a popular Victorian sentiment, but those captivated by orchids were far too sophisticated for such a general attitude. Christopher Smart referenced the language of flowers in this powerful statement from his *Jubilate Agno*, (written between 1759-1763),

For there is no Height in which there are not flowers. For Flowers have great virtues for all senses. For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary. For flowers have their angels even the words of

⁴ Known as “florigraphy”, from Tennenbaum, Suzanne, Janet Zapata. *Jeweled Garden*. New York: The Vendome Press, 2006. 116

God's creation. For the warp & woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits, For flowers are good both for the living and the dead. For there is a language of flowers. For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers. For elegant phrases are nothing but flowers.⁸⁷

Perhaps none make it so clear as to how important flowers were to the expression of Victorian society than Taxile Delord, a popular French writer between 1830-1871, "We are proud to be the first to pose the following aphorism: Flowers are the expression of society."⁸⁸

In both Eastern and Western cultures the meaning of a flower's significance is explained, although in some cases flowers were chosen for different reasons.⁸⁹ Western cultures were fascinated by the Eastern use of flowers and often heard through those traveling to Eastern cultures of "gardens of love."⁹⁰ Both in Eastern and Western societies, flowers and jewels, have romantic connotations, and a history of being associated with different aspects of love. Park Benjamin made this clear when he said, "Flowers are love's truest language; they betray, like the divining rods of Magi old, Where priceless wealth lies buried, not of gold, But love, strong, that never can decay."⁹¹

Orchids and Sexuality

The strongest association of orchids is with sensuality and sexuality. The unusual reproductive methods of the plant had been observed for many years, and were referred to in many writings. Such sexual and erotic observations stirred some controversy among Victorian society in England and America, because sex was a taboo subject.⁹² To the Victorians sex was morally questionable and therefore meant to be a secret. Because of

this notion, orchids repulsed certain Victorians who saw them as suspiciously voluptuous.⁹³

By observing the orchid's botanical structure scientist concluded that the flower reproductive system resembled human, or animal, sex organs. Therefore the flower became associated with stimulation and intercourse.⁹⁴ Dioscorides, in the first century A.D., stated that eating the roots of an orchid could influence the sex of a child, but would also create a surge of lust.⁹⁵ A British herbalist said in 1653 that the orchid must be studied with vigilance due to the fact that, "They are hot and moist in operation, under the dominion of Venus, and provoke lust exceedingly."⁹⁶ Athanasius Kircher, a seventeenth century Jesuit scholar, had said many years before the orchid-craze that orchids grew where animals had intercourse.⁹⁷ Even Linneaus wrote of the lustful properties of the orchid in his writing *Materia Medica* in 1749, which discusses the medicinal use of plants and minerals.⁹⁸ These examples show that the association between sexuality and orchids was far from a new, or unusual, concept.

Nineteenth century scholars began to make more references to sexuality and orchids; stronger erotic references using orchids were made in literature. An example of several erotic allusions are seen in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter* (1851), which boldly describes the orchid throughout the story, where it is said to have qualities such as "fierce, passionate, and even unnatural."⁹⁹ However, it was Darwin who would make the sexuality of plants and animals most explicit in his detailed work the *Origin of Species*.¹⁰⁰

The American painter Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904), openly, and boldly, expressed the sexuality of orchids through his works. The interaction between science and art is clearly seen in the works of Heade, who particularly specialized in orchids and hummingbirds in their natural habitat (fig. 4). He was responsible for inspiring jewelers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to create some of the most accurate pieces of floral jewelry ever made. By the end of the twentieth centuries the connection between orchids and human sexuality would begin to be more openly expressed.¹⁰¹

However one cannot say that all Victorians were uncomfortable with orchids because the flower became immensely popular. The acceptance of orchid “sexuality” was primarily among the wealthy and educated class of high society. Rich society often selected silver flatware patterns or tableware depicting nude or semi-nude female figures or furniture with suggestive designs. As previously discussed orchids possess features that look like human male and female genitalia. Were orchids used to mask or make acceptable sexual desires or curiosities that Victorians had? It is certainly possible. When viewing the lip of a *cattleya* it resembles a woman’s genitalia, which could have attracted men subconsciously to orchids and to the purchase of the later orchid jewelry produced by elite designers. The similar fashion for low plunging necklines and loose fabrics would intrigue both men and women of the elite and upper class Victorian society adding sexual titillation to accepted customs of clothing.

Chapter 4: Fashion and Victorian Society: Risqué Silhouettes

I'd rather have roses on my table than diamonds on my neck.- Emma Goldman

Victorian fashion during the 1800s underwent several changes that lead to more modern, and sometimes seductive, silhouettes. Previous women's dresses had been conservative, full of fabrics, long skirts, layers, and high necklines. There are clear changes in the dresses made for avant guard women that had more seductive features such as tighter bodices and lower necklines. Dressmakers began to use less fabric while still applying lavish designs using lace, beading, and exquisite patterns. Some patterns hinted at the exotic using designs that would be found in cultures far from England and America, which could possibly have lead Victorians to be more open to the exotic orchid species then being imported. The August 1886 edition of *Harper's* made a statement referring to the change in women's fashion, "...there will be less draperies, and above all less voluminous and fewer different fabrics employed for the same dress."¹⁰²

Every year presented a new trend in fashion especially in women's bodices. In 1887 more attention was being put on the bodice with characteristics once considered risqué; evening dresses had such attributes as lower bodices so that the skirt no longer dominating the outfit.¹⁰³ Ball gowns in 1887 had fewer folds in the skirt than in past years, and also had high shoulders to balance the lower bodice.¹⁰⁴

By 1888 dresses were incorporating a range of fits from tailor-made dresses close to a woman's body to looser-fitting garments.¹⁰⁵ Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress, wore a series of costumes in 1888 for a play titled *La Tosca*, which featured a series of undraped, loose-

fitted skirts.¹⁰⁶ The evening dresses in 1888 had low bodices and often were sleeveless, which some Victorians said created “nakedness”.¹⁰⁷ However this new trend of looser-fitted dresses and undraped skirts was not widely accepted by much of Victorian society.¹⁰⁸

By 1899 fashion trends turned to a woman’s waistline. The waistline was already quite small and the focus in 1899 was on accenting the hips by skirts so tight around the hips that often they made it difficult for a woman to walk.¹⁰⁹ The fact that it became difficult for women to walk forced them to “glide”, which added a seductive swishing of the hips.¹¹⁰

Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895) was among the most influential designers in the change of silhouettes; he took fashion to new levels. In 1858, Charles Worth opened his first dressmaking shop in Paris.¹¹¹ Worth wanted to make a significant contribution to the fashion industry by changing the way people viewed dressmaking.¹¹² In short he wanted to transform dressmaking from a craft to a work of art by developing higher “technical and aesthetic standards.”¹¹³ Worth focused on using luxurious textiles and fabrics to create elegant patterns and delicate embellishments.¹¹⁴ When Charles passed away his two sons, Jean-Philippe and Gaston, took over the business and continued their father’s legacy.¹¹⁵

In 1870 the House of Worth created a *Fancy Dress Costume* (fig. 5) inspired by the American and European fascination with Turkish fashions.¹¹⁶ The costume included the loose pants and tight fitting bodice that would have been appropriate for a fancy dress ball. Embellished with several floral designs, the costume also featured an almost sleeveless look and low neckline. Even while the costume had the looser pants the tight-fitting bodice⁵ draws

⁵ The bodice was refashioned from a loose bodice to a tighter fit to accommodate the trend at the time of having a tighter bodice. Reeder, Jan Glier. *High Style: masterworks from the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2010. 36

attention to the small waistline. The costume also demonstrates nineteenth-century curiosity and attraction to the exotic. The continued tolerance of exotic forms, especially in fashion, may have contributed to the acceptance and intrigue of the orchid floral family.

An example of an *Afternoon Dress* (fig. 6) from 1872 showed the lower neckline that was widely popular, and also the bustle, which had undergone some changes.¹¹⁷ In this vibrant purple dress the skirt folds are pulled towards the back of the dress to the bustle. The bodice neckline sits lower exposing hints of a woman's chest. The dress is decorated in dangling tassels with larger bows at the base of the sleeve. This particular dress would have been a walking dress; to assist with movement Charles added more support in the skirt and bustle, but did not lessen the fabric usage.¹¹⁸ This change in the bustle added a certain graceful flourish to the skirt often seen as provocative and seductive to the male Victorian eye.¹¹⁹

In 1888 the House of Worth created an *Evening Ensemble* (fig. 7) that incorporated important trends for the time.¹²⁰ The dress is decorated in an exquisite floral pattern along the pleated skirt, and gold fabric in between the pleats. There is a lower neckline outlined by several beading patterns and lace while the skirt is extensively draped in layers. The arts and crafts movement is present in this dress with the lily-pattern, which looks very much like an orchid.¹²¹ The dress form is reminiscent of a seventeenth-century design where the pleated drapery indicates the mantua, an overcoat that matched the under garments.¹²² Evening ensembles were the most revealing, and there were strict understandings for what was considered acceptable exposure.

While the French dominated the fashion industry and stylistic trends, the wealthiest Americans did not shy away from lavish decorations and often kept up with the changing styles.

Less fashionable ladies of America were not widely accepting of the new bodices and seductive silhouettes, and were slower in responding to these changes.¹²³ *An Evening Dress* by R.H White & Company in 1885 does show a tighter bodice, but it omits the lower neckline and shorter sleeves.¹²⁴ The dress does exemplify luxurious materials such as satin and velvet, and the intricate patterns. The relatively few American women who regularly travelled and purchased fine clothing abroad often waited a year to wear their new garments in order for New York fashions to catch up to French designers.

The fact that Victorian fashion became more risqué could also have contributed to the acceptance of orchids and their hints of sexuality. Some outfits also reference foreign cultures, which could have added curiosity in exploring the exotic. Men especially would have been drawn to the romantic, and sometimes seductive, features of women's dress. It is notable that men appeared to have been more captivated by orchids leading them to become avid horticulturalists and collectors. Considering the amount of fascination men had with orchids, one questions if orchids may have served as an acceptable mask for male sexual curiosities? With the creation of astonishing orchid jewelry it was men who were the more common purchasers of the jewelry. Whether the jeweled orchid was intended to be a gift or simply enjoyed for its form and beauty may never be known. The jeweled orchids of the late 1880s and early 1900s only added to the orchid obsession that swept through Victorian society.

Chapter 5: Jewelry and Orchids: A Revolution in Naturalism

“The artist is the confidant of nature, flowers carry on dialogues with him through the graceful bending of their stems and the harmoniously tinted nuances of their blossoms. Every flower has a cordial word which nature directs towards him.”- Auguste Rodin

Human fascination with flowers and the natural world have a long history in the evolution of jewelry design.¹²⁵ English medieval manuscripts contain some of the first examples of floral images, which were then used to create enameled jewelry.¹²⁶ The enameling techniques used to translate designs from the manuscripts would become the foundations for seventeenth century floral jewelry.¹²⁷ Some of the first examples of natural floral designs being incorporated into jewelry were by Jean Vovert in 1602; no examples are found today of Vovert's work.¹²⁸ In the seventeenth century, flowers were shown enameled on small ornaments surrounded by colors such as blue, yellow, or black.¹²⁹ Floral designs by 1640 were being engraved with more relief and realism.¹³⁰ Nineteenth-century floral jewelry would be highly influenced by the study of botany.¹³¹ Victorian gardeners were amused by developing different colors, and sizes of "cottage flowers" such as pansies which young girls might casually pin to their lapel or bonnet. Exotic imports such as camellias from China were admired as hair, corsage, or bouquet accessories, but Japanese chrysanthemums, despite their fashion as decorative motifs in the 1870s and '80s were not considered wearable because of their strong scent.

During the period in which orchid jewelry was being produced for the wealthy and collectors there was also mass-produced, inexpensive, jewelry being made for the middle class

by manufacturers such as the Newark jewelers. This inexpensive jewelry was trendy, but focused more on the common “cottage” flower such as the violet, roses, lilies, or daisies.

Referring back to Kate Greenaway’s book on *The Language of Flowers*, the concept of flowers possessing a meaning was popularized through Queen Victoria’s love for flowers, particularly orange blossoms. She often wore wreaths of ivy, specifically from Osborne⁶, which symbolized marriage and fidelity.¹³² Orange blossoms had significant meaning to Queen Victoria due to the fact that she owned a jewelry parure (fig. 8) which was designed by Prince Albert, her husband. Each orange blossom is made of porcelain, enameled gold, and sculpted petals, which made each piece of jewelry appear realistic. Albert added pieces to the parure when significant events occurred such as their engagement, Christmas, and their sixth wedding anniversary.¹³³ The orange blossom gained such significance that it became a part of the royal wedding and many weddings ever since.¹³⁴

For others the language of flowers was sentimental, a nostalgic, but essentially meaningless fad. The Rev. Hilderic Friend wrote *Flowers and Flower Lore* (1883), which completely dismissed a language of flowers and its symbolism although many gift books on the subject had been published in the middle of the century.¹³⁵ A painting by G.D. Leslie titled *The Language of Flowers* (1884) (fig. 9) shows two ladies, dressed in Regency revival style, looking through a book to decode the meaning of flowers.¹³⁶ By the late 1880s a language of flowers was looked upon as old-fashioned and having no place in modern society.¹³⁷

During the nineteenth century two important decorative arts design books were written, one by Owen Jones and the other by Christopher Dresser. Owen Jones wrote *The Grammar of*

⁶ Osborne House was the royal seaside house located on the Isle of Wight, England. See Gere, Charlotte and Judy Rudoe. *Jewellery in the age of Queen Victoria: a mirror to the world*. London : British Museum Press, 2010. 31

Ornament published in 1856 and Christopher Dresser wrote *Art of Decorative Design* published in 1862.¹³⁸ Each of these encyclopedias discussed the use of plant designs and floral motifs.¹³⁹ Several pattern and design books during the Victorian Era inspired floral designs used in jewelry from the 1860s on.¹⁴⁰

Another important piece of jewelry history written during the nineteenth century was a book by Henri Vever (1875-1932), a well-known jeweler, and historian. Vever wrote a detailed and comprehensive three-volume book titled *French Jewelry in the Nineteenth Century*, which was only recently translated from French to English in 2001 by Katherine Purcell. The book describes the history and importance of the legacy of French jewelry during the nineteenth century with emphasis on French jewelers who played a major role.

Paulding Farnham: Transforming the Expectation of Naturalism in Jewelry

Nobody was more important to the “orchid mania” movement, as it pertains to jewelry, than Paulding Farnham. Farnham created the most naturalistic pieces of orchid jewelry that the industry has seen to date; there has never been anything like Farnham’s orchids since their creation in the late 1880s. The orchids designed by Farnham constitute an entire category of their own. Their beauty and realism stun viewers in a way that floral jewelry has not done since. Due to Farnham’s significance his orchid designs are the first to be discussed followed chronologically by other major designers who created orchid jewelry. Farnham’s orchids displayed and sold under the Tiffany & Co. name contributed to elevating the reputation of this historic jewelry powerhouse, which had actually started as a stationery shop.

Charles Cook, who was vice president of Tiffany & Co. in 1900, encouraged George Paulding Farnham (1859-1927) to study under Edward C. Moore at the company.¹⁴¹ Moore at

the time was the lead creative director of the Tiffany silver shop.¹⁴² Moore began teaching instructive lessons in his Prince Street facility, which emphasized drawing and modeling from natural objects.¹⁴³ He soon established the Tiffany School with a focus on drawing and enameling.¹⁴⁴ Under Moore, Farnham perfected his design techniques from real objects, which would soon be reflected in his orchid jewelry. Farnham's first recorded work at Tiffany and Company dates from November 6th, 1885 when he signed a two- year contract as an assistant.¹⁴⁵ He became the artistic director for the jewelry department, and by 1893 became the chief designer and director of the jewelry division at Tiffany & Co., succeeding his mentor Moore.¹⁴⁶

The 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle marked Farnham's first major display of work, which fortuitously included the enameled and jeweled orchids. Each orchid was drawn from life after blossoms that had been sent to Tiffany's from places such as Guatemala, the Philippines, Columbia, India, Mexico, and Brazil. Each orchid was "coated in copper to preserve it for study."¹⁴⁷

Farnham used the design techniques that he had learned while in Moore's workshop. For example, the bright enamels were custom made to match the colors of each individual species of orchid. The colors of the enamels added detail to each orchid, with shades blending together to keep one's eyes constantly moving around the orchid, and picking up the simple details that Farnham added (fig. 10-15).

The drawings that Farnham did of the orchids capture scale, color, various angles, and up-close details of the blossoms (fig. 16-18). The drawings capture the remarkable realism of the orchids as well as the bright colors that give each type of orchid its own personality and character. Farnham and his team of designers carefully translated the drawings of each orchid

into magnificent sketches of the jewelry piece they were going to create. While the orchids are encrusted with various gems, they are meant to be both realistic and perfect reproductions of the actual flowers.¹⁴⁸ The orchids almost appear pliable, just as the natural blossoms would. The curves and bends in the jewelry are so convincing that they perfectly create the realism that Farnham and his team wanted to achieve. The attention Farnham's orchids would draw at the 1889 Exposition Universelle⁷ would forever change floral jewelry designs.

The Tiffany orchids caused quite a stir at the Exposition Universelle in 1889. The public was stunned and fascinated with the fact that the orchids were so life-like, and the actual species of orchid could be matched with the jeweled orchid. While many French jewelers such as Oscar Massin, Theodore Fester, and Boucheron had captured the floral form and stylized it, Farnham was able to recreate the flowers' very essence of realism and life. He took floral jewelry design to an entirely new level of naturalism. His pieces included gemstones and colored enamels that were carefully placed after studying the colors of the orchid. When the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris ended, Tiffany & Co. went back to America with several awards including a silver medal for Farnham's jewelry designs.¹⁴⁹ In total there were twenty-four orchids produced for the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle and seven currently remain in the Tiffany Archives.¹⁵⁰ The orchids proved to be so popular that following the exhibition Tiffany & Co. created more orchid and enameled flower designs to be sold in their New York and Paris salons.¹⁵¹ The variety of designs available for sale went from the twenty-four shown at the exhibition to at least forty-one.¹⁵² Orchid jewelry and other floral designs appear in the Tiffany Blue Books until 1896.¹⁵³

⁷ Before heading to the 1889 Exposition, there were fifteen orchids displayed in the Tiffany Union Square store between March 10- 16, 1889. Janet Zapata, "The Rediscovery of Paulding Farnham, Tiffany's designer extraordinaire Part 1: Jewelry," *The Magazine Antiques*. March 1991. 560

Through several articles about orchids and floral jewelry the Tiffany orchids became very well-known. A Paris newspaper, the *Herald*, published on September 30, 1889, captured the diversity and workmanship of these orchids,

...The corner consists of a series of twenty-four species of orchids, which are so faithfully reproduced that one would almost doubt that they are enamel, so well do they simulate the real flowers. Among these are the Vanda, Coerulea, Saccolabium Giganteum, Phalaenopsis Schillerianum, Coelogyn Cristata, Dendrobium Nobile from East India; Odontoglossum Maculatum, Odontoglossum Inseley Leopardinem, Oncidium Tigrinum, Odontoglossum Cervantesii, Oncidium Varicosum Rogersii, Oncidium Orinthorynchum from Mexico, Odontoglossum Harryanum...; Cattleya Bicolor, Odontoglossum Zygopetalum, Laelia Harpophylla from Brazil; Calanthea Veitchii Hybrid from Veitch's Nursery, London; Chysis Liminghi from Guatemala, Angraecum, Eburneum, Incidium Konesianum from Paraguay.¹⁵⁴

Many American designers, for example several manufacturers located in Newark, New Jersey⁸, started to replicate Farnham's orchids.¹⁵⁵ In the *New York Tribune*, March 15, 1889, a reporter wrote about the dazzling use of jewels and colorful enamels used in creating the extraordinary orchids,

The most unique and interesting feature of the exhibit is seen in the brooches. Here are gold enamelled orchids of fifteen varieties each as perfect in its way as the product of nature. The stems are made with green emeralds. The coloring of the leaves is marvelous beyond description, testifying to the extraordinary skill of the designer as well as to the artistic sense and exquisite taste of the enameller. Nothing more beautiful can be imagined than the general effect of each plant.¹⁵⁶

Another reviewer in the *Syracuse Herald*, April 7, 1889, was noted saying, "Only actual touch could convince the observer that they were the work of man's hands."¹⁵⁷

⁸ Newark, New Jersey became a center for mass-producing fashionable jewelry that the middle-class could afford

George Frederick Kunz (1856-1932), the chief gemologist for Tiffany & Co., also played a major role in the jewelry design of the 1889 Exposition Universelle Paris. Kunz was a leading advocate of using local gems in American jewelry. Several of the 1889 pieces included: amethysts from North Carolina, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, and aquamarines from North Carolina and Maine.¹⁵⁸ Kunz also chose aquamarines from foreign countries, such as Brazil, the Ural Mountains in Russia, and Siberia.¹⁵⁹ Kunz did use some Montana sapphires in the 1889 Exposition jewelry, but they became better known at the 1900 Exposition.¹⁶⁰ Kunz was willing to travel for the gems unlike his competitors, who stayed close to home. Kunz traveled to what were known as “exotic” locations, such as Mexico, to purchase gems to be used in designs.¹⁶¹ Kunz and Farnham often worked together on various design projects and Kunz inspired designers, like Farnham, to use more stones of American origin and “colored, non-precious stones.”¹⁶²

As with most Victorian traditions there was a certain code of etiquette involved particularly in the giving and receiving of jewelry. Firstly women of both the middle and upper classes did not buy jewelry for themselves as fashion accessories. Most jewelry, particularly fine jewelry, was purchased by men as gifts for a woman and often had great significance emotionally or socially. A proper young lady, no matter her class, was not permitted by etiquette to accept jewelry from a man until they were engaged. A woman who accepted jewelry from a married man, or who was not engaged to the giver, was assumed to be his mistress. The early Tiffany & Co. blue books were distributed to wealthy men in order primarily to purchase gifts for the mistress not his wife.

Many people also collected orchid jewels, both during the Victorian Era and more recently. Jay Gould saw Farnham’s orchids while they were on view in New York and

“purchased several for his collection.”¹⁶³ Gould did not purchase these orchids to give as gifts, but simply to be kept in his home for his own personal enjoyment.¹⁶⁴ Even today collectors still appreciate the beauty and realism of Farnham’s orchid designs and consider them jeweled masterpieces. On auction sites such as Christies (fig. 19), such pieces still fetch hefty prices, between \$40,000-\$228,000.

Marcus & Co: In the footsteps of Farnham

Herman Marcus (1828-99) was the founder of Marcus & Co in New York.¹⁶⁵ Marcus moved to New York on May 22, 1850 to begin what would turn out to be a ninety-one year legacy in the jewelry industry.¹⁶⁶ Marcus had gained valuable jewelry experience while apprenticed to Ellemeyer who was the court jeweler in Dresden, Germany.¹⁶⁷ In 1864 Marcus formed a partnership with fellow jeweler Theodore B. Starr (1837-1907), and built a solid reputation.¹⁶⁸ On June 1st, 1877, when the partnership between Starr and Marcus was dissolved, Marcus turned to Tiffany & Co. for employment as part of their jewelry division.¹⁶⁹ Marcus left Tiffany & Co. in 1884, and joined Jacques and Marcus, where his son, William Elder Marcus, was already a partner; through this partnership, Marcus & Co. was formed.¹⁷⁰

Shortly after the Tiffany & Co. orchids were displayed at the 1889 Exposition Universelle the American firm, Marcus & Co., created a complex orchid pendant (fig. 20) in 1900 made of plique-a-jour enamel, diamonds, conch pearls, and platinum. Although difficult to follow in the footsteps of Farnham, Marcus & Co. did a tremendous job of creating a delicate form with a subtle use of color. The orchid curves downward, with tiny pointed edges outlined with gold. The subtle color variations between enamels re-create the realistic color differences found in natural orchids. Tiny veins in the orchid run through the plique-à-jour enamel creating

details. The five leaves extending from the orchid are made up of several light colored enamels outlined with gold as they too curve to add life. The entire orchid and leaves are mounted on platinum diamonds, both above and below the flower, which create the stem of the orchid. At the bottom of the diamond stem three coral-colored pearls are mounted on three platinum branches with diamonds.

The orchid design of Marcus & Co. was much more brittle than the orchids of Tiffany & Co., and less life-like. The orchid has less realistic movement and is more stylized in form. The glass plique-à-jour technique makes it more fragile compared to that of the Tiffany orchids. Marcus & Co. became known for their use of plique-à-jour in jewelry, and their use of tracery around the form to give it realism.¹⁷¹ The company promoted the use of the plique-à-jour glass although it was not as widely popular in America as it was overseas.¹⁷² Marcus & Co. used a small number of stones in their orchid design creating a delicate balance between the stones and the enamel plique-à-jour compared to The House of Vever, who used bright enamels and several diamonds to create their version.

Henri Vever: Bright Colors-Magnificent Form

Henri Vever (1875-1932), mentioned above as an early jewelry historian, also directed his workshop, Maison Vever in Paris. Vever turned out some of the most stunning pieces of jewelry of the late Victorian era and into the early twentieth century. The jewelry that Vever's workshop created was of the highest quality, delicacy, and elegance.

Vever was born into a family with a long history of goldsmiths and jewelers.¹⁷³ He went through several years of training in the artistic and jewelry making industry until he achieved the status of craftsman, and then proceeded to be employed at 95 Rue des Petits-Champs, Paris.¹⁷⁴

While at 95 Rue des Petits-Champs he perfected his knowledge of jewelry design and setting stones.¹⁷⁵ Vever continued his education in the artistic industry by studying at the Ecole des Arts-Décoratifs, and in 1873 he passed the examination to be admitted to the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts to study painting.¹⁷⁶ Vever would have a quick rise to fame in the French jewelry industry and in 1889 at the Exposition Universelle he was awarded a Grande Prix for his designs.¹⁷⁷

Like Marcus, Vever, too, created an orchid jewel in 1900 (fig. 21). It is an impressive example of enamel and diamond usage. The orchid petals branch out from the center and are painted in bright colors that are not entirely naturalistic but extremely eye-catching. The orchid petals bring in the idea of movement as they bend at the tips. Vever not only achieves the life-like look of the orchid, but also exemplifies the use of fine materials. The diamonds along the stem and inside of the center of the orchid do not distract from the brilliant enamel colors, but rather add to the magnificence of the flower's over-all impact.

Vever enjoyed using flowers for inspiration when he designed jewelry. Due to Vever's use of good stones, and his knowledge of color, the House of Vever created new techniques for applying enamels to coordinate with stones used in designs.¹⁷⁸ All of his knowledge of color and stones helps to make this orchid a truly colorful masterpiece. The orchid is more of a cross between the Farnham orchids and the shapes of Marcus & Co. The diamonds in the orchid indicate that this piece of jewelry is meant for display, and really makes the shape of the orchid stand out to the viewer. The enameling along the petals of the orchid reminds the viewer of very similar enamel colors that Farnham chose for his orchids.

Georges Fouquet: From Lust to Design

Georges Fouquet (1852-1929) was a popular jeweler of the Art Nouveau style during the late 1800s and into the twentieth century. Fouquet was part of a successful company, which had been established by his father, Alphonse Fouquet. In line with the Art Nouveau period Fouquet had an interest in floral jewelry. His pieces were designed around the time of the great French jewelers. Due to the financial restrictions on the House of Fouquet at the time, it was difficult for them to compete with the great French jewelry masters.¹⁷⁹

Fouquet used precious stones and bright enamels to create colorful designs in his jewelry. He also applied geometric and sculptural elements to his designs making him a cross between Lalique's sculptural preferences, and Vever's use of stones. Fouquet first displayed his designs in 1898: lady-slipper orchid brooch and a tortoiseshell comb in the shape of a butterfly.¹⁸⁰ While picking team members to be involved in the creative process he chose Charles Desrosiers who exclusively designed jewelry for the House of Fouquet.¹⁸¹ Fouquet was adamant about having his team members involved in the creative process, and would hold twice-a-week meetings to discuss sketches and ideas.¹⁸²

Fouquet, like many other jewelers at the start of the Art Nouveau style, was fascinated by nature, and particularly flowers; which is evident in his designs from 1880 to 1895.¹⁸³ His orchid creations from the late 1880s and into the early 1900s (fig. 22-23) are much different from those of the other jewelers. His orchids were meant to exhibit the sexual attributes of the flower. His design brings the viewer into an intimate relationship with the jewelry as the petals open to display the central part of the orchid, usually marked by a gem of some sort. There is something

sensual, yet exotic, about the orchid form. The Fouquet orchids incorporating the use of pearls and subtle earthy tones in the enamel give each piece a natural feeling.

Although these orchids do not necessarily appear realistic they are in fact both modeled after particular species of orchids, the *paphiopedilum* (fig. 24), which also has more hybrids than any other orchid genus.¹⁸⁴ The fact that these orchids were modeled after a particular species of orchid shows that people still had an interest in the botanical character of the plant. Fouquet captured the movement of the flower as well as the shape. The colors do vary between the actual orchid blossom and the orchid jewelry, probably to appeal to a wider elite and wealthy market. Also when studying the design drawings for the orchids (fig. 25-27) it is clear that significant thought went into the intricate designs seen in the orchids. The placement of each gemstone was thought out in detail. Much like the drawings of Farnham's orchids a lot of time was spent studying the form of the orchid such as in the drawing focusing specifically the slipper orchid. It does seem, according to the sketches of the jewelry pieces, that Fouquet intentionally chose forms that would hint at the eroticism of the orchid species, and the libidinous mood that it can trigger. This is much different from the series of orchids designed by Rene Lalique, who chose to use creative materials to express naturalism.

René Lalique: Exploring Unusual Materials

René Lalique (1860-1945), the foremost jeweler of the Art Nouveau style, had a different take on the production of floral jewelry and a more sculptural approach to his designs. Lalique used a wide range of “modern” materials in jewelry such as bone or ivory. Although materials like ivory or bone had not been widely used in Western jewelry for a number of centuries, Lalique realized that these materials could be heated and molded into various objects.¹⁸⁵

Lalique was born in the small town Ay, which was part of the Marne region in France.¹⁸⁶ Lalique would spend time studying flowers, and other forms of nature, during family holidays spent in the countryside of France.¹⁸⁷ In 1876 Lalique was apprenticed to Louis Aucoc, another famous jeweler in Paris, where he spent two years studying jewelry.¹⁸⁸ After leaving Aucoc's studio he went to Sydenham College in London where he became familiar with the Arts and Crafts Movement, which was sweeping through Britain at the time.¹⁸⁹ Lalique returned to Paris in 1880 in time to see the birth of the Art Nouveau style, and using his knowledge of nature, would create designs that would leave viewers in a state of astonishment.¹⁹⁰

The *Ivory Hair Comb* (fig. 28) by Lalique was produced in 1903 and is made with ivory, plique-a-jour enamel, and a row of graduated diamonds.¹⁹¹ The comb incorporates one other important element; the orchid flower is made of a single piece of horn. It is a good example of the fully sculpted form found in Lalique jewelry. The orchid blossom is modeled in ivory with petals that appear to bend and move. Lalique proceeded to carve the veins of the orchid flower into the horn, making sure that no detail was left out. Branching out from the orchid are the olive colored plique-a-jour enameled leaves that look so thin and fragile that they could break off easily. Down the center of the plique-a-jour enamel leaves is a long row of graduated diamonds, which adds sparkle to the piece. It is also important to note that this comb was originally purchased as a *diadem* at the World's Fair in Saint Louis by the great Baltimore art collector Mr. Henry Walters (fig. 29), and in later descriptions provided by the Walters Art Museum was described as a hair comb.

Another hairpiece that Lalique created, the *Orchid Diadem* (fig. 30) located at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, represents an example of a second elaborate orchid diadem using horn. Lalique used horn and ivory to sculpt a total of three orchids into the diadem: two in

horn, and one in ivory. The single topaz used in the design is in the center of the ivory orchid. A gold hinge connects the comb portion of the diadem. The leaves of the horn orchids are sculpted with curves to appear more life-like. The technical workmanship used in sculpting the ivory orchid is notable in the amount of detail seen in the design. It is important to note that both orchid pieces by Lalique were purchased as works of art, and were not intended to be worn.

Lalique first tried using ivory in his jewelry designs in 1894 and in the following years continued his experimentation.¹⁹² Not only did ivory become a main material in Lalique's designs, but he also used it in relief panels to create the effect of translucency.¹⁹³ In 1896 Lalique began to incorporate horn in his jewelry, a practice that was highly unusual for a goldsmith to apply at the time.¹⁹⁴ Horn had been a useful material for centuries, but its appearance in fine jewelry was influenced by Arts and Crafts ideas. Lalique would continue his usage of horn and ivory until his career in jewelry ended in 1908.¹⁹⁵

An interesting aspect of Lalique's orchid is that it closely resembles the orchid hair comb of Marcus & Co. (fig.12), even though the Lalique's work was created three years later. Using similar designs for the orchid and the same plique-a-jour effects, both have naturalistic qualities. However, the comparison provides a great example of how American and French jewelers used different materials. The orchid by Marcus & Co. is sculpted out of gold and enamel, while the more avant garde Lalique orchid is made from ivory. The orchid in the Marcus & Co. piece is mounted on platinum, while the Lalique orchid is mounted on a comb made of horn. The only unworked natural materials in the Marcus & Co. pendant are the conch pearls dangling from the bottom of the stem of diamonds.

Lalique is a brilliant example of a designer using alternative materials in design as a result of popular during the Arts and Crafts movement. The Arts and Crafts movement of the later nineteenth-century inspired artists and designers⁹ to revert back to traditional methods of craft production by hand and stressing skilled and talented workmanship during a time of vastly increased mass production.¹⁹⁶ The movement was widespread throughout the United States and Britain, and gained significant support in the philosophical ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris.

John Ruskin (1819-1900), a prominent English writer and art critic, viewed the artisans of the decorative arts as having a relationship between the “artisan and materials.”¹⁹⁷ Ruskin believed in crafts being completed by skilled craftsman therefore giving individuality to the product versus mass production by machine where all goods look the same.¹⁹⁸ Ruskin also had a number of social reform ideas that he widely promoted in addition his views on the individuality of products produced by hand.¹⁹⁹ Throughout the Arts and Crafts movement Ruskin remained predominantly a critic on design and society compared to Morris who focused on “integrating theory with practice.”²⁰⁰

William Morris (1834-1896) became a leader of the Arts and Crafts movement with his ideas on new techniques, expression of beauty, and experimenting with new materials.²⁰¹ Morris was a major promoter of both designer and craftsman working together on projects, and he refused to use machines even in the production of intricately-patterned wallpapers or textiles.²⁰² Morris’s designs became hugely influential in architectural interiors and were often described as intense “dialogues”.²⁰³ Later Morris would assist in establishing Morris and Company, which

⁹ Guilds were independent organizations focusing on the craft tradition. Usually consisting of small workshops and apprentices who worked under a master trained in a specific skill. Raizman, David. *History of Modern Design*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 2004. 20

would be largely successful during the later 1800s in producing stained-glass windows and furnishings.²⁰⁴ In contrast, French designers of the same period stressed the decorative aspects of Art Nouveau.

Philippe Wolfers: Jeweled Slipper Orchids

The Belgian Philippe Wolfers (1858-1929), like his contemporaries Lalique and Vever, was also inspired by the natural world. His orchid design conveys a strong sensuality through the petals opening up to the center, which is encrusted with diamonds (fig. 31). Wolfers's orchid also represents a phenomenal example of plique-a-jour enameling, which reached new heights during the Art Nouveau style.

Wolfers's began his career as a designer and sculptor in Belgium.²⁰⁵ He was highly influenced by the Louis XV style, the neo-Renaissance, and eventually got swept up in the general fascination with plant and floral forms of the 1890s.²⁰⁶ Ivory became the material of choice for Belgian designers due to the large quantity provided by the Belgian Congo during the 1890s.²⁰⁷ Wolfers took full advantage of the availability of ivory and used it in several of his floral forms and other designs reflecting nature. Wolfers's became known for his asymmetrical designs and excellent skills.²⁰⁸ Near the end of the Art Nouveau period his designs would become more stylized and abstract, and would gradually change with the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁰⁹

Wolfers's orchid incorporates two examples of precious gems, the diamond and the ruby, with brilliant gold workmanship for the frame. The pale blue enamel, along with the diamonds and rubies, complement each other to create the physical appearance of the orchid. This particular jewel is modeled after a type of slipper orchid, *the paphiopedilum insigne* (fig. 32),

which is a member of the *cypripedioideae* family. The slipper orchid is characterized by the slipper-like pouch located at the base of the flower, which is used to attract insects for pollination. The pouch, in the case of the jewelry piece, is characterized by the ruby line through the middle of the pouch, surrounded by plique-a-jour and the gold frame of the orchid.

The orchids of Wolfers and Fouquet are quite similar in the fact that they move away from the traditional shape of the orchid, but still manage to capture the essence of its characteristic forms. These two designers were active in the later Art Nouveau style during which more emphasis was on being creative and artistically driven, rather than focusing on extreme realism like the American Paulding Farnham. These orchids do not copy the colors of actual blossoms; they are artistically stylized with enamels and gemstones to emphasize their qualities as jewelry.

While the orchid jewelry of the late 1880s through the early 1900s mimicked orchids mainly from South America, the fascination with orchids continued but with a different intent. The jewelers become more focused on diamonds or other precious gems rather than evoking naturalism. The naturalistic look that the major jewelers of the Victorian era accomplished diminished and the focus shifted to catering to a modern day status-conscious audience.

Van Cleef & Arpels: Stylized Patterns

Van Cleef & Arpels has been an important jewelry manufacturer since they opened their doors in 1906. Even though Van Cleef & Arpels was founded in Paris it has always had a major presence both in America, and internationally.²¹⁰ Van Cleef & Arpels really became a prominent business in the 1910s and early 1920s, during the Art Deco period, which emphasized a

geometric style of jewelry.²¹¹ The focus was on the quality of stones used and, as Sarah Coffin¹⁰ states, “its restraint and its tendency toward stylization and linear patterns as its underlying aesthetic.”²¹²

Charles Van Cleef during the latter half of the nineteenth century honed his talents while in Amsterdam re-cutting gemstones whose value had been reduced by flaws.²¹³ Charles set up a shop in Paris in 1867 to satisfy his ambitions, and on December 13th, 1873 his wife bore a son they named Alfred (1873-1938).²¹⁴ Alfred, while in school at Lycée Charlemagne, would sketch jewelry in his notebooks resulting in an apprenticeship in the workshops of Messrs. David et Grosgeat.²¹⁵ Alfred, after marrying his cousin Estelle in 1898, went into partnership with Charles and Julien Arpels¹¹.²¹⁶ Due to the limited space of the firm’s first location at 34 rue Drouot they moved to 22 Place Vendôme, which was a popular spot for the elite.²¹⁷

The firm gained great momentum at the Exposition Universelle 1900 in Paris, and within a few months of the exposition had an overwhelmingly successful reputation.²¹⁸ Van Cleef & Arpels became known for its elegant designs, and intricate use of gemstones. The wealthy were especially interested in the extraordinary designs of Van Cleef & Arpels. Throughout the history of Van Cleef & Arpels they have designed monumental pieces of jewelry for royalty and for cultural icons such as Elizabeth Taylor. Needless to say Van Cleef & Arpels strived to maintain perfection in all their designs.

Van Cleef & Arpels designers were no strangers to floral jewelry. Rubies were often used when creating peonies or poppies to give the correct color to the appropriate flower.²¹⁹ Their

¹⁰ Sarah D. Coffin is the curator of seventeenth and eighteenth century decorative arts and head of product design and decorative arts at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City.

¹¹ Charles and Julien Arpels were Alfred’s brothers-in-law.

main focus was not on creating realistic botanical flowers, but capturing the sparkle and brilliance of the gemstones.²²⁰ Van Cleef & Arpels designers wanted pieces of jewelry that are inspired by nature to have their own character, and to not merely be copies of nature but to be, "...a new entity--a piece of jewelry that has its own design."²²¹ The company strives to add personality to their pieces to separate them from all of the other competition in the jewelry industry.

In 1925 Van Cleef & Arpels created a diamond encrusted-brooch that is a very stylized orchid flower (fig. 33). As Coffin writes in the recent catalog *Set in Style*, Van Cleef & Arpels wanted to, "Evoke the spirit rather than slavishly copy the object."²²² The backing of the flower is platinum, which became readily available during the 1900s. Designers realized that platinum not only paired well with diamonds, but also was much more durable.²²³ It is clear that the designer(s) wanted the orchid to imply some movement, as the leaves are clearly bending just a little to add a naturalistic effect. The orchid shape is clear and, rather than use colored stones, the diamonds ensure that the blossom stands out and makes a statement.

The Van Cleef & Arpels orchid does not have the same naturalistic effect as earlier orchid jewelry. It is not a direct replica of a specific orchid blossom neither does it copy the same colors or shape of any specific orchid. The importance of this orchid jewel comes from its exquisite use of diamonds while maintaining a certain level of naturalism in the simple curves of the leaves and petals. Another note about this orchid is the reputation of the firm that is behind the design of this orchid piece. Van Cleef & Arpels was a designer for the elite and thus drew the attention of a very specific clientele. Van Cleef & Arpels is known for their geometric designs, also seen in orchid symmetry. There is immense renown associated with the firm, which gives immediate prestige to the orchid jewelry much like the importance of the House of Veveer gave

importance to the orchid jewels of Henri Vever. It is not always the level of naturalism, or the erotic overtone of the design that gives the orchid its importance, but also the name of the firm and the buyers it attracted.

Cartier: An Obsession Revisited

Cartier rose to success at the beginning of the twentieth century.²²⁴ Cartier was not necessarily considered part of the Art Nouveau movement, but associated more with the traditional Edwardian style of jewelry, which differed from that of Art Nouveau in the use of platinum.²²⁵ Led by Louis Cartier (1875-1942), the company began to produce jewelry that complemented the fashions of the day.²²⁶ During the beginning of the twentieth century, the sinuous “S” shape in various silhouettes was popularized; Cartier began designing jewelry that could be worn several different ways to complement the shape (i.e. necklace, tiara, corsage ornament).²²⁷

Another style that Cartier created in the early twentieth century was known as the garland style. The style included motifs such as bows, lace, wreaths, flowers, and other intertwining natural pieces. Cartier’s traditional style was largely based on a revival of Louis XV and Louis XVI motifs, and the lavish lifestyle of the French court.²²⁸

In the early twentieth century there was a debate between designers such as Cartier on one side and the designers Lalique and Fouquet on the other side.²²⁹ Lalique and Fouquet felt that the garland style lacked certain “symbolic and figural elements.”²³⁰ A main difference was the fact that Art Nouveau jewelry largely focused on naturalism and the use of new materials in jewelry, while Cartier used very little unusual material, but a great quantity of gemstones.²³¹ The Art Nouveau designers were determined to ensure that the garland style was hardly recognized.

The “Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs” organized several exhibitions, salons, and courses, which were dominated by Art Nouveau designers.²³² In the midst of the debate designers such as Vever and Boucheron tried to combine Art Nouveau and the garland style, but due to the fact that the garland style was often not symmetrical, the designers had a difficult time.²³³ Cartier was also designing jewelry for wealthy,¹² conservative clients whom he had designed for as early as 1900.²³⁴

More recently, in 2005, Jacqueline Karachi-Langane designed a series of orchid jewels for Cartier, which aimed to celebrate the form of the orchid and the very spirit of realism (fig. 34-37).²³⁵ Not only did Cartier want to attain what was called “unnatural naturalism,” but they also wanted to depict the mystery of the orchid.²³⁶ By using various stones to reproduce the brilliant colors of natural orchids Cartier designers captured the viewer’s attention, “The beholder becomes hypnotized, the eye caught in trap of lavish sensuality. Such a delicate work of art rarely betrays all the hard labor, technical mastery, and time required to create such a voluptuous, almost palpable, beauty.”²³⁷ Cartier creates not only naturalistic pieces, but also “Some Cartier orchids are stylized, streamlined...”, but still manage to reach a level of realism.²³⁸

As seen in various examples, when a new Cartier orchid design is not covered in pavé stones the orchids are carved from a single stone (fig. 38-41). The carving of the orchid from a single stone adds certain realism to the design as well as a different sense of movement and texture. The use of a stone for the main material of the orchid design reflects light differently than pavé stones and also adds a distinctive feeling to the design. A single carved stone for the

¹² Cartier did have some contacts with people such as the jeweler Philippe Wolfers (1858-1929) who was largely involved in Art Nouveau, and supplying pieces of jewelry for operas

design also allows the creator to provide the jewel with a different level of lavishness, and even eroticism as seen in fig. 41. In this example the large amethyst draws the viewer's attention into the middle of the orchid. The carved design of the amethyst could evoke sensual sensations in the viewer due to its shape.

The July/August 2010 (No.4) issue of *Rouge Cartier*, an electronic publication on the Rue Cartier website, featured several orchid jewels by Cartier under the title "Unreal Realism." The orchids look very much like those of Farnham from the 1889 Exposition Universelle; however, Cartier uses more gemstones than Farnham. The orchids incorporate movement by curving the petals gently, while the enamel and jewels add to the beauty of the flower.

The Cartier pieces do exactly what Farnham strived for while creating his orchid designs: realism. Nils Herrmann, the photographer, captures the very essence of the modern jeweled orchid. It does not only appeal to a high-end jewelry market, but it also captures the attention of those who may collect orchid flowers and/or jewelry created within the twenty or twenty-first century. These stunning gem-encrusted orchids are the best, and closest examples, of naturalistic orchids since Farnham.

Conclusion

Paulding Farnham revolutionized the world of floral jewelry design. His legacy lives on today in collections, jewelry history books, museums, and auctions. He inspired a movement in jewelry that has been recognized by designers for the wealthy such as Cartier. Even today the upper-class elite primarily collects the orchid jewels because only they can afford the extraordinary prices that these magnificent historical pieces fetch at auction. Through detailed sketches the skilled designers of the late Victorian and early Art Nouveau style studied the colors and form of the orchid species and, as if magically, translated them into enamel and colored stones to create vivid effects. The perfect craftsmanship and talent that are displayed in creating the orchids has left people in awe, and changed the expectation of floral designs in the jewelry industry. While there are indeed modern, and more stylized, floral forms today, the orchid jewelry created between 1889 and 1925 still reigns supreme; the only exception being the orchids Cartier presented in 2005 signaling a possible revival.

Reaching the level of naturalism in orchid jewelry would not have been possible if it were not for the collecting craze of “orchid-mania” and valuable scientific research by the likes of Collinson, Paxton, Lindley, and Linneaus. Each piece of scientific research helped to spark curiosity in orchid botany and the study of this exotic flower. The advancement of greenhouse technology, new cultivating techniques, and trade made the orchid one of the most prized flowers during the Victorian era. The elite saw this as a hobby, or maybe even a competition as to who could have the most impressive orchid collection. Either way when top designers presented dazzling orchid jewelry the elite saw these as possible additions to their already large collections of living orchids.

Those of elite status were particularly interested in this erotic flower because it must have struck them as curious and full of mystery. It challenged the elite Victorians to look past their conservative and puritanical views to see the orchid as sensual and even lustful. Presenting an orchid to a young lady during the days of Victorian courtship might represent the wrong intent. In later years during the twentieth century the prestige of orchid jewelry significantly contributed to the importance of presenting a lady with an orchid corsage.

Slowly the orchid family's extravagant history within cultures across the world is starting to be noticed again. Museums such as the Smithsonian Institution's Freer-Sackler Gallery and National Museum of Natural History, both located in Washington, DC, have recently had exhibitions pertaining specifically to the orchid. During the spring of 2012 the United States Botanic Gardens, located in Washington, DC, held an exhibition titled *Orchid Mystique: Nature's Triumph* to help inspire people to become active in preserving native orchids, and continue to educate people on the beauty of this diverse plant family.

While the general public may not necessarily realize the long cultural history of this flower, orchid enthusiasts and scholars continue to advocate for the orchid's revival. The orchid may never reach the level of prominence that it had during the height of "orchid-mania", but the push to recognize its importance may eventually lead to a revival. Through all the the various forms the orchid species take they continue to remain captivating and truly elegant flowers, whose mystery and beauty is never to diminish.

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