Flowers for the Book-binder's Wife: An Investigation of Florilegia and Early Modern Women's Writing

Abstract
Working under the presumed tutelage of ancient Roman scholars, early modern writers embraced the notion of florilegia, passages or quotations, which once deemed pleasing or insightful were extracted for use in the writer's own work. The category of florilegia, or flowers, particularly included the subcategory of sententiae, or commonplaces, which were considered sources of wisdom and advice. By their chronic recycling of such maxims, Renaissance writers reinforced the prominence of literary imitation rather than encouraging originality. Thus, when early modern authors employed the childbirth metaphor to describe authorship, painting themselves as mothers and their compositions as the child-like fruits of their labor, they attempted to identify a compositional process based on replication with reproduction. Interestingly, in the early modern era, the term, "flowers," also euphemistically denoted a woman's menses, the monthly evidence of her body's ability to bear children. Using this semantic junction as an entry point, this thesis investigates Giambattista Della Porta's demonization of women's menstrual flowers in his books of secrets, Shakespeare's depiction of the danger of patriarchal sententiae for women, and finally Isabella's Whitney's entry into authorship, a venture which captured the early modern opposition between the writer's ability to replicate and the female body's capacity to reproduce. By demonstrating the shortcomings of florilegia, especially sententiae, this thesis makes a feminist intervention for the redemptive potency of female menstruation in early modern literature.

Subject
florilegia
sententiae
commonplaces
Giambattista Della Porta
Isabella Whitney
apian metaphor
A Sweet Nosgay
Lavinia
Lucrece
Ophelia
menstruation
flowers

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"Flowers for Algernon," written in 1966 by Daniel Keyes, has rightly become one of the most well-known fantasy novels in world literature. Originally written as a short story, the story of Charlie Gordon—the main character of the book—had later been rewritten in the form of a novel, which helped the author to fully disclose personalities of the main characters and make the plot complete. The novel is written in the form of laboratory reports, written by Charlie on his own behalf. Charlie Gordon is a mentally-disabled 32 year-old cleaner in a bakery. His IQ rate is 68, and because of this, he has to rely on a machine to help him communicate with others.