

**Marginalisation Vs. Emancipation: The  
(New) Woman Question in Dollie  
Radford's Diary and Poetry**

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## Abstract

This thesis sheds light on Dollie Radford as one of the talented women writers whose work is still insufficiently acknowledged by contemporary studies because of the lack of extant information about her life. LeeAnne Richardson, Ruth Livesey, and Emily Harrington are three of only a handful of scholars who have discussed in any detail Radford's role as a poet, socialist, and activist who was surrounded by key figures in the history of English literature and culture, such as William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Eleanor Marx, and Olive Schreiner. Despite being identified by Victorian reviewers as a "domestic" woman poet, all contemporary scholars who have hitherto considered Radford pinpoint her "radical" thoughts and engagement with the New Woman. Building on arguments by Radford's contemporary scholars, my argument highlights Radford's role as a Victorian feminist who sought, through her poetry, to challenge patriarchal attitudes and defy social conventions which imprisoned women of her generation.

While the first two chapters of this thesis provide a contextual background of women's rights and women's poetry in the Victorian era, the four remaining chapters explore how Radford's personal conflict as an ignored married woman and unsupported writer might have influenced her empathetic portrayal of marginalised figures, such as prostitutes, the working classes, women writers, and homosexuals. Simultaneously, the chapters highlight the subversive meanings obscured by Radford's use of evocative and aesthetic language. The majority of the poems, letters, and diary entries included here are unpublished and have not yet been considered by contemporary critics. Thus, this research adds to the existing body of knowledge, offering a new approach to Radford's life and poetry in relation to aspects concerning women in Victorian and Edwardian England. By continuously interrogating Radford's choice of metaphors and images in contrast with those depicted by other Victorian poets, I aim to establish Radford as a significant *fin-se-*

*siècle* woman poet whose poetry embraces a literary tradition which questions negative gendered attitudes biased against passionate women writers.

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# Introduction

## Research Questions and Aims

This thesis explores Dollie Radford's life and poetry in relation to issues concerning women in the Victorian era. It demonstrates how Radford was mindful of her own marginalisation and the limited opportunities afforded to individuals of her gender, a fact which encouraged her to defy conventional norms in both her life and poetry. Aimed at raising awareness of Radford's name, which is still unfamiliar to many readers, this thesis reports on her active involvement in the literary and social changes which took place during her lifetime. It also highlights her acquaintance with radical figures, offering a new insight into her unconventional responses to their personal experiences, and/or published works. By relating Radford's poetry to the wider debate on the Victorian woman question, this thesis brings Radford into sharper focus, as one of the women writers whom Elaine Showalter describes as "the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next, we have not had a very clear understanding of the continuities in women's writing, nor any reliable information about the relationships between the writers' lives and the changes in the legal, economic, and social status of women" (Showalter, 2009: 6). As the discussion in forthcoming chapters will reveal, Radford and her poetry are indeed inseparable from the legal and social reforms which took place in late Victorian England.

In their definition of the *fin de siècle*, Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst observe:

The Victorian *fin de siècle* was an epoch of endings and beginnings. The collision between the old and the new that characterized the turn of the century marks it as an excitingly volatile and transitional period; a time when British cultural politics were caught between two ages, the Victorian and the modern; a time fraught with anxiety and with an exhilarating sense of possibility. (Ledger and Luckhurst, 2000: x)

This thesis positions Radford's life and poetry within *fin-de-siècle* culture and highlights the predominant sense of "anxiety" present in many of her poems, bridging older

conventions and ambition for the “new”. By considering diary entries, letters, and poems, which have not yet been considered by contemporary scholars, the argument presented here adds to the existing body of knowledge on Radford, filling the gaps left by the fragmentary history of her life. In addition, the majority of the thematic focus offered in this thesis is absent from contemporary literature. Thus, the significance of this research lies in the way it moves the debate on Radford forward to address aspects to be considered for the first time.

### **Methodologies and Sources**

Throughout, the thesis traces a number of methods shared by contemporary scholars in their approach to Victorian women poets. In his study of Victorian women poets, particularly Michael Field,<sup>1</sup> Erik Gray proposes three methods that scholars should consider in their study of any Victorian woman poet: “First she must be seen clearly, as in herself she really is, then understood in relation to her contemporaries. Then she can be understood in relation to the many broader traditions in which she participates” (Gray, 2003: 466). Building on Gray’s argument, this thesis sheds light on Radford as “she really is”, in order to show how her life as a married woman and a writer might have influenced her portrayal of the different themes introduced. “[H]er relation to her contemporaries”,

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<sup>1</sup> The joint pseudonym for the lesbian aunt Katherine Bradley (1846-1914) and the niece Edith Cooper (1862-1913). In *‘Michael Field’: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle*, Marion Thain points out: “‘Michael Field’ was the name under which they were to establish their literary reputation [...] The pseudonym came directly from the women’s private articulation of their identity. Fond of nicknames, Katherine was known amongst her friends as ‘Michael’, and Edith was ‘Field’ or ‘Henry’” (Thain, 2007: 4). Michael Field were Radford’s contemporaries and fellow poets, whose acquaintance with Radford is recorded during the 1890s: “Michael Field came to see us. [...] The niece, Miss Cooper, I like ever so much. We are to see them in their home [...]. She is one of the rare people I think” (Radford Diary, 14 April 1891). See Chapters Four and Five for further discussion of their possible influence on Radford.

such as Amy Levy,<sup>2</sup> Eleanor Marx<sup>3</sup> and many others, in addition to “the many broader traditions”, including the strategies used by other Victorian poets, will be explored through an analysis of her poems in each chapter.

In my approach to Radford’s life and poetry, I consult the two unbound parts of her diary held in the William Andrew Clark Memorial Library at the University of California, Los Angeles and the British Library in London. By considering Radford’s diary as one of the primary sources, the thesis builds on arguments by critics, like Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, who signal the importance of diary authorship for women: “The Latin root of *diary* means ‘daily allowance’; and the very repetitiveness and frequent interruptions of a day’s work for most women make diaries a logical mode for women writers to choose to pen their life stories” (Bunkers and Huff, 1996: 5). Therefore, it is possible to read Radford’s diary entries, especially those which reflect on her conflict as a married woman and a writer, as her “daily allowance” through which she escapes the burden of domestic duties to express her own feelings. In addition, Mary Jane Moffat locates the importance of diaries for women observing: “Dissatisfaction with the ways love and work have been defined for the female is the unconscious impulse that prompts many to pour out their feelings on paper and to acquire the habit of personal accounting on some more or less regular basis” (Moffat, 1975: 5). This “dissatisfaction” with the existing gendered system, which will be discussed further in Chapter One, is evident in Radford’s diary in many places.

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<sup>2</sup> Levy (1861-1889) was a Jewish poet and novelist whose works are best known for their resistance to conventional and heterosexual norms. See Richard Whittington-Egan’s “Amy Levy: A Tragic Victorian Novelist”, which offers a short biography of Levy and a list of her published works (Whittington-Egan, 2002: 40-47). In addition, more scholarship on Levy will be addressed in the discussion of her close friendship with and possible influence on Radford in forthcoming chapters.

<sup>3</sup> Marx (1855-1898) was the daughter of the well-known philosopher Karl Marx. She was a socialist and active in issues concerning women’s rights. See Rachel Holmes’s invaluable biography *Eleanor Marx: A Life* (Holmes, 2014: 249-250). Also see Chapter Six, for a detailed discussion of Marx’s life and her close friendship with Radford.

The evidence from Radford's diary entries is complemented by sources obtained at the archive in the British Library, which includes photos and private correspondences between Radford, and her family members, and friends. These sources provide the biographical background to enhance understanding of Radford's poems. Thus, when reading Radford's poems, arguments by scholars, such as Joanne Shattock, who pinpoint techniques for the prevailing "construction" of women writers, are also considered; in particular: "The charge that [women writers] could only write what they knew, and that what they knew best was themselves, was made regularly by reviewers. The easy association of the life and work, or, more accurately, a refusal to separate them, was crucial to the reading of these writers by their contemporaries" (Shattock, 2001: 8). Aiming at avoiding a wholly gendered perception of Victorian women's poetry, the thesis offers a number of possibilities to interpret the images and meanings addressed in the poems. In doing so, I demonstrate how Radford's poetry engages with the wider debate on women's rights, legal reforms, and social changes which took place during her lifetime.

Besides the diary and archival manuscripts, the major sources for the main body of this thesis are Radford's volumes of poetry, *A Light Load* (1891), *Songs and Other Verses* (1895), *A Ballad of Victory and Other Verses* (1907), *Poems* (1910), and her play *The Ransom* (1915). Although some of the poems included herein were published in Victorian periodicals and magazines, they are contextualised here in volumes, and relative to the poems of the other Victorian poets with whom Radford shared her resistance to conventional norms.

## **Thesis Structure**

The thesis is divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter One, "Between the Private and the Public Spheres: Laws, Social Attitudes, Literary Genres and Victorian Women", provides a contextual background for the thesis,

introducing and evaluating the social and legal issues concerning women in the Victorian era. The chapter begins by discussing the injustices suffered by married women, demonstrating how they were victims of social idealism of the state of marriage as sufficient reward and fulfilment of their dreams. In particular, it discusses the fact that, because marriage denied women their legal existence and deprived them of their sexual rights, many Victorians perceived it as a form of prostitution, an issue addressed by a number of writers, including Radford herself. Although the 1882 Married Women's Property Act ended coverture, husbands and wives could not yet meet as economic equals. The chapter explains that the very confining nature of marriage allowed women to create networks with other women and develop friendships that were recognised as encouraging women's commitment to their domestic roles. Contemporary scholars argue that such networks were not as naïve as the Victorians outwardly characterised them, but rather enabled women to fulfil their intellectual and sexual needs; a theory endorsed by the readings of some of Radford's poems put forward in later chapters.

The chapter then touches on women's lives in the public sphere, offering an insight into social attitudes towards their education. It also considers male dominance over the literary sphere, and lists the hardships women had to overcome in order to pursue their careers as writers. Both women's education and the concept of female authorship in the Victorian era are aspects linked to Radford's life and her awareness of the limitations surrounding her as a woman writer. Finally, the chapter contemplates aestheticism and the New Woman as two literary genres and modes used by late Victorian writers to challenge prevailing gendered politics against women in both the private and the public spheres.

Chapter Two, "The Woman Question in Victorian Women's Poetry: Literary Traditions, Forms, and Common Themes", explores the influence of context on women poets who embraced particular traditions, such as the ungendered speaker, to challenge a fixed reading of their poems. The chapter also highlights women poets' use of forms,

including the dramatic monologue, sonnet, and decadent form, for the purpose of social critique and to give voice to society's marginalised figures. Similarly, the chapter considers women's portrayal of particular themes, such as marriage, nature, and female authorship, revealing the oppression suffered by women and their desire to escape the social and legal boundaries that confined them. As in Chapter One, the discussion in this chapter is continuously, yet briefly linked to Radford's similar use of images and themes, which are later expanded on in forthcoming chapters.

Chapter Three, "Women's Passion and Domestic/Social Walls: Depictions of Marriage and Love in Radford's Diary and Poetry" is the first chapter which offers a detailed account of Radford's life and poetry in relation to the context depicted in Chapters One and Two. The first part of the chapter addresses the three different phases of love and marriage in Radford's life, before her marriage (when she was engaged to Ernest), after getting married and becoming preoccupied with domestic and maternal duties, and her later emotional conflict. The second part of the chapter proposes the influence of Radford's own experience on her representation of love and marriage in some of her poems. However, the reading of Radford's poems presented is not merely biographical, but relates to literary traditions and strategies adopted by her contemporary women poets. It also pinpoints Radford's engagement with the wider debate on the marriage question and the comparison made between married women and prostitutes. Although LeeAnne Marie Richardson previously discussed the theme of marriage and prostitution in "Your Gift" and *The Ransom*, my reading offers a new insight into Radford's use of images and metaphors which address anger, isolation and frustration in relation to poems by other Victorian poets. The chapter also explores the negative portrayal of the love theme in some of Radford's poems which have not yet been critiqued by contemporary scholars. By highlighting the speakers' disappointment with love and marriage in Radford's poems,

this chapter aims to position Radford among New Women writers who criticise marriage rather than idealise it.

As in Chapter Three, which considers Radford's experience as a lonely married woman, the discussion in Chapter Four: "Female Authorship and Visual Art in Radford's Diary and Poetry" is informed by Radford's awareness of her own marginalisation as a woman poet. The chapter offers a discourse analysis of Radford's diary entries, in which she explicitly addresses the hardships she encountered as a woman writer, and the gendered reviews from her contemporary critics of her volumes of poetry. Simultaneously, it reveals Radford's appreciation of visual art and her visits to galleries and museums. The second half of the chapter considers Radford's poems which address the conflicts suffered by minor poets who sought fame and a livelihood. In addition, it includes Radford's poems which criticise the conventional patriarchal representation of the female muse. The thematic analysis of Radford's poems in this chapter is cross referenced with poems by Radford's contemporary poets to highlight their shared defiance of existing social conventions imposed on women. In its emphasis on Radford's defiance of the cultural prejudice against women writers, the chapter contributes to the thesis by pinpointing Radford's musings on women's engagement in writing and visual art. It also considers Radford's portrayal of the hardships of old age, a theme yet to be addressed by contemporary scholars.

Radford's experience as a married woman and a writer, which is discussed in Chapters Three and Four, played a role in shaping her feminist thought. Chapter Five, "Female Emancipation and the 'New Woman' Question in the Life and Poetry of Dollie Radford", begins by presenting arguments made by contemporary scholars who emphasise Radford's support of the New Woman and female emancipation. This chapter adds to existing scholarship on Radford a number of diary entries and letters which demonstrate Radford's evident engagement with early feminism. In doing so, the first half

of this chapter contextualises my reading of Radford's poems whose content is in line with other literary works published by writers who supported the New Woman. By highlighting Radford's reflection on social change and her depiction of activities, such as dancing and smoking, which were associated with the revolutionary New Woman, this chapter aims to emphasise the fact that despite being a married woman, Radford opposes conventional norms and her poetry continuously questions male authority which imprisoned women.

Chapter Six, "Surpassing Conventional Heterosexuality: Free Love and Lesbian Possibilities in Radford's Poetry", is a continuation of the argument put forward in Chapter Five; it identifies ways in which Radford did not conform to heterosexual norms. The first part of the chapter shows that Radford was a friend to homosexual figures, as well as women who chose to live with male partners in free love unions. In addition, this part considers some entries from Radford's diary and correspondence with her female friends as evidence of her possible bisexuality. The second part of this chapter includes a number of Radford's poems which address same-sex desire. As we shall see, Radford's portrayal of the possibly homosexual speakers in some of her poems is empathetic and mirrors the alienation suffered by homosexuals at that time. By linking the images and metaphors of Radford's poems to those which are addressed by her homosexual contemporaries, the chapter endorses the argument that Radford exhibits a revolutionary character which enabled her to engage with Victorian taboos.

### **First Encounter with Dollie Radford's Name**

While reviewing the existing literature on Victorian women's poetry, I was intrigued to see the name Dollie Radford mentioned in association with radical literary and social figures. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin De Siècle*, William Greenslade identifies Radford as among Levy's "radical women" friends (Greenslade, 2007: 80), but offers no more details on her life. Similarly, a search of the library shelves

in Edinburgh showed no record of any biographical or critical works on Radford. This lack of extant information about Radford's life and poetry presented a challenge, and opened up potential for misdirection. However, a number of journal articles and book chapters, which are dedicated entirely to Radford's role as a poet, socialist, and feminist, confirmed the suspicion that contemporary scholars have unjustly neglected Radford and that she deserves more attention.

In "Naturally Radical: The Subversive Poetics of Dollie Radford", Richardson offers readings of a number of Radford's poems in relation to "issues circulating around the New Woman fiction: woman's independent emotional life and her position in a changing society" (Richardson, 2000: 112). In a more recent article, Richardson reaffirms Radford's role as a New Woman who "moved toward a greater social commitment in which her identity as a woman is a key element of her poetic" (Richardson, 2012: 29). Radford's engagement with the New Woman is at the heart of this thesis, and as the discussion in the following chapters will show, some poems explicitly address revolutionary aspects concerning women and challenge the prevailing expectations of women's conventional femininity.

Like Richardson, Ruth Livesey's "Dollie Radford and the Ethical Aesthetics of *Fin-De-Siècle* Poetry" emphasises Radford's radicalism, albeit from a different perspective. Livesey illuminates Radford's role as an active socialist and a woman writer whose poems underscore the gendered conventions against women writers in the Victorian period:

Radford's works continually negotiated the circumscribed identity of the "poetess" and explored an alternative possibility for a woman poet at the turn of the century. [...] Her work thus sheds light on the tension between socialism and aestheticism in the late nineteenth century whilst underscoring the possibility of unlooked-for pluralism: politics and aesthetics might work in this case as a both/and rather than an either/or. (Livesey, 2006: 495-496)

Although Radford's political views do not provide the main focus of this thesis, Livesey's argument inspires the readings of some of Radford's poems given herein. In particular, those which address her empathy with marginal figures, including the working classes and women poets. In addition, Livesey's proposal of the integration between aestheticism and politics in Radford's poetry is a concept which will be referred to as a strategy embraced by many Victorian women poets, including Radford herself.

Unquestionably, Richardson's and Livesey's studies have made Radford's name more familiar to readers of Victorian poetry, proving that her poetry, like her life, is worth investigation. Emily Harrington's chapter, "'So I Can Wait and Sing': Dollie Radford's Poetics of Waiting", provides evidence of the increasing interest in Radford. Harrington focuses on Radford's use of short songs and her representation of waiting, which, as she points out, serve to meet radical rather than conventional ends: "Radford presents waiting as an act of patient defiance, an attitude of attention and openness that she asserts is necessary for aesthetic and social progress" (Harrington, 2014: 142). In her reading of Radford's poems, Harrington associates Radford's portrayal of waiting with her friendships with and influence by socialists and feminists, including William Morris<sup>4</sup> and Olive Schreiner,<sup>5</sup> suggesting thereby Radford's refusal to conform to male-established literary traditions.

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<sup>4</sup> Morris (1843-1896) was a writer, socialist, and "one of the foremost creative artists of the nineteenth century. Designer of furniture and wallpaper, printer, architect, novelist and poet, Morris was respected by the 'respectable' people of Victorian capitalist society" (Morris and Socialist Party, 1990: 5). Radford was a close friend of Morris and his daughter May whose name is mentioned frequently in Radford's diary. Soon after Morris's death, Radford expressed her grief in a letter to her son, Maitland: "We went on Saturday to the Arts and Crafts private view, but we were all very sad, because Mr. Morris died in the morning, soon after the gallery was opened" (Add MS 89029/.35, Dollie Radford to Maitland Radford, 06 June 1896). See Chapter Three for further discussion of Radford's friendship with Morris and her admiration of his socialist views.

<sup>5</sup> Schreiner (1855-1920), wrote under the pseudonym Ralph Iron, and was a South African writer whose work, including *The Story of an African Farm*, is best recognised today for its support of female emancipation. In *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird*, Ann Heilmann points out: "Schreiner's pioneering feminism was the outcome of her passionate quest for identity and moral-political integrity against the backdrop of intellectual, emotional and physical isolation" (Heilmann, 2004:

While existing scholars evaluating Radford differ in their focus and the themes and angles from which they approach Radford's life and work, they reach the same conclusion, describing Radford as a "radical" woman poet. This radicalism was what increased the sense of curiosity and the desire to celebrate Radford's life through this work. Building on existing scholarship on Radford, this thesis underscores Radford's radical thoughts in relation to aspects concerning women's passion, their sexual freedom, and their engagement in the public sphere.

### **Dollie Radford (1858-1920): A Short Biography**

Due to the lack of biographical information on Radford, this section gives an overview of her life by drawing on her correspondences with family members and friends. Caroline Maitland (Dollie Radford's maiden name) grew up in London and experienced the death of her mother at a young age. She wrote in her diary: "My mother has been dead seventeen years – last month" (Radford Diary, 8 August 1885). Together with her sister Clara, Dollie was left in the care of her father, Robert Maitland, who was unhappily married to his second wife, Charlotte. Dollie was aware of her father's marital conflict, and she once wrote to him: "I am very sorry you are having so much troubles about Charlotte. She is very strange. She has had a chance of being a better woman. I hope you will get the divorce soon. Will it take long!" (Add MS 89029/.71, Caroline Maitland to Robert Maitland, 23 August 1882). Despite the lack of background on their marriage, the fact that Dollie refers to her stepmother as "strange" reveals her early conventional thoughts which might be read in relation to the wider social conventions which disadvantage women. In addition, the letter throws light on the confining nature of Victorian marriage, implying that getting a divorce is a challenging task. However, as will

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122). Also, see Chapter Five for more discussion of Schreiner's works and her friendship with Radford whose diary records her admiration of and influence by Schreiner's thoughts.

become evident throughout the thesis, as she got older, Dollie became more politicised, especially about issues concerning women.



Figure 1: A photograph of Dollie, apparently, before her marriage, copied from Christine Pullen's *The Woman Who Dared: A Biography of Amy Levy* (Pullen, 2010: 103).

In 1875, Dollie joined the prestigious school for girls Queen's College in Harley Street, where her name as a poet was first made after she won a local competition for the best poem by a lady writer. Christine Pullen points out: "This achievement may have first brought her to the attention of the scholar F J Furnivall" who later introduced her to Marx (Pullen, 2012: 35). Dollie became a close friend of Marx with whom she recited Shakespeare's plays in "The Dogberry Club" in Marx's home.<sup>6</sup> Despite the absence of a mother's encouraging role in Dollie's life, she grew to be a passionate young woman seeking to maintain a career as a poet. In one of her letters to her father, Dollie wrote: "I should very much like to see my poems in print, (if that is what you meant by publishing)" (Add MS 89029/.67, Caroline Maitland to Robert Maitland, 26 October 1872). As it is

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<sup>6</sup> Holmes notes that the "Dogberries" were "led by Tussy, Dollie and Edward", who "went to the theatre as often as possible, including to see Irving in *Hamlet*" (Holmes, 2014: 156-157).

evident from the letter, she started writing poetry in the 1870s, but, as the historical records show, she was first acknowledged as a writer in 1883, when she published in *Progress: A Monthly Magazine of Advanced Thoughts* under the initials “C. M.”.



Figure 2: Grace Black’s pencil portraits of Dollie Radford (Add MS 89029/4/2, Drawings of Dollie Radford by Grace Black, 1881).

In the same year, Dollie was married to Ernest Radford, a poet, socialist, and member of The Rhymers’ Club.<sup>7</sup> In her diary, Dollie mentions: “Ernest & I have decided that the 20<sup>th</sup> of next month is a nice date!” (Radford Diary, 10 September 1883). The “nice date” was the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1883, when she announces: “Married a gentleman by the name of Radford” (Radford Diary, 20 October 1883). Radford’s earliest letters to her husband convey her adoption of the role of a committed wife, willing to cherish her

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<sup>7</sup> Founded by W. B. Yeats and Ernest Rhys, The Rhymers’ Club was held regularly between the years 1890 and 1895 in London. In *The Rhymers’ Club: Poets of the Tragic Generation*, Norman Alford demonstrates how the Club “was not conceived as a place for recreation in the broad sense of the world. Nor was it needed to supply a deficiency in social contacts [...]. It was intended to achieve a greater degree of concentration on the craft of poetry, to be specially a place for mutual audience and criticism” (Alford, 1994: 10).

husband and gain his heart. During her engagement to Ernest, Dollie wrote on a daily basis, expressing her love and affection: “I do want you Ernest, so much, & so often: I like to think I greet you in the morning; this must find you well” (Add MS 89029/.27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 2 July 1883). As we shall see shortly, the love and passion expressed in the letter, did not last long and were later transformed into frustration. Between the years 1884 and 1889, Dollie and Ernest had three children, Maitland, Hester, and Margaret,<sup>8</sup> and were actively engaged in art and socialist campaigns, including the Arts and Crafts<sup>9</sup> and Morris’s Socialist League.<sup>10</sup>

Despite her maternal and domestic commitments, Radford continued to write poetry, and her first volume, *A Light Load*, was published in 1891. She also published some of her poems in radical journals including *The Yellow Book*.<sup>11</sup> However, in 1892 her husband suffered a mental illness from which he did not recover. During that time, Radford was left alone striving to make a living for herself and three children, possibly explaining what led Marx to write to Radford: “The year is coming to an end - & I know what a very, very terrible year it has been for you. I need not tell you that with all my heart

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix for dates of birth.

<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1888, the Arts and Crafts movement supported the working class, and opposed the social distinction caused in the market by the industrial revolution. The Exhibition was inspired by John Ruskin’s philosophy, which sought unity between different fields of art. In “Ernest Radford and the First Arts and Crafts Exhibition, 1888”, Radford’s granddaughter, Ann MacEwen points out: “The Industrial Revolution, with its division of labour, had debased design and turned the craftsman into a mere cog in the wheel of machinery. The reformers believed craftsmanship - the fusion of beauty and use - was being destroyed. In accordance with Ruskinian principles they wanted harmony between architect, designer and craftsman, respect for the intrinsic nature of materials, fitness for purpose in the design of objects and well-made goods of every kind made available to all levels of society” (MacEwen, 2006: 29). Also, see Chapter Four for more discussion concerning Radford’s engagement with the Arts and Crafts.

<sup>10</sup> In the 1880s, Morris adopted his role as a leading socialist in Victorian England: “In December 1884 Morris, together with a number of other socialist revolutionaries [...] resigned from the SDF and formed a new body, the Socialist League, which was free from the advocacy of reforms – or palliatives, as they were then referred to” (Morris and Socialist Party, 1990: 7). See Chapter Three for further information on Radford’s participation in the League. Also see MacEwen’s “The Radford’s, William Morris and the Socialist League” (MacEwen, 2007: 30-33).

<sup>11</sup> *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897) was one of the most defining periodicals published during the 1890s. See Chapter One for more information on the magazine’s agenda. Also, see Chapters Three and Five for further discussion of Radford’s contribution to *The Yellow Book*, and her correspondence with its publisher, John Lane.

I am hoping that this new year may bring you happiness, & that before very long Ernest will be as strong & well as ever” (Add MS 89029/.25, Eleanor Marx to Dollie Radford, 28 December 1892). As Radford’s closest friend, Marx obviously knew how “terrible” it had been for the young inexperienced Radford to survive without her husband. However, Marx’s prayers were not answered, for the New Year did not bring happiness nor see Ernest recover from his illness. In 1893, Edward Carpenter,<sup>12</sup> a frequent visitor, wrote to Radford: “You have suffered a deal & Im [*sic*] sure for a long time - & I really believe the book has been a help to you” (Add MS 89029/.24, Edward Carpenter to Dollie Radford, 30 April 1893). Carpenter’s letter refers to *A Light Load* as the “book”, whose income might have been “a help” to Radford. In addition, the term “help” could imply the way the volume provided relief in terms of her feelings and her struggle as a wife and writer. A month after Carpenter’s letter, Radford wrote: “Perhaps I think going back to our old friends will be going back to our old happiness, before my dear was ill” (Radford Diary, 23 May 1893). In this diary entry, Radford reveals her nostalgia for the past clarifying that “happiness” had become an “old” concept, something to remember.

Radford’s struggle to make a living worsened with each passing year, and her letters to her husband throughout this period were mainly focused on their financial problems. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1895, Radford writes to Ernest: “I have no money to go on with, or to send you”. Three months later, she reminds Ernest: “I don’t quite see how to manage till Christmas when you can lend me some”. In October 1898, Radford seems to take a decision about it: “we must either make some money or reduce our expenses” (Add MS 89029/.29, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 28 October

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<sup>12</sup> Carpenter (1844-1929) was an English socialist and poet whose book, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908), was considered a major and influential text for the Lesbian and Gay movement in the twentieth century. For further information, see Sheila Rowbotham’s *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* which discusses Carpenter’s role as a sex reformer and supporter of women’s rights (Rowbotham, 2008: 1-8). Also, see Chapters Four and Six, for more discussion on Radford’s acquaintance with and her admiration of Carpenter.

1898). Besides the burden of an ill husband, financial insecurity was clearly a factor which impacted negatively on Radford's life. In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, Ernest's institutionalisation led to a coldness of emotions that Radford frequently commented on in her diary and letters. Radford remained lonely and in a passionless marriage until Ernest's death in 1919.

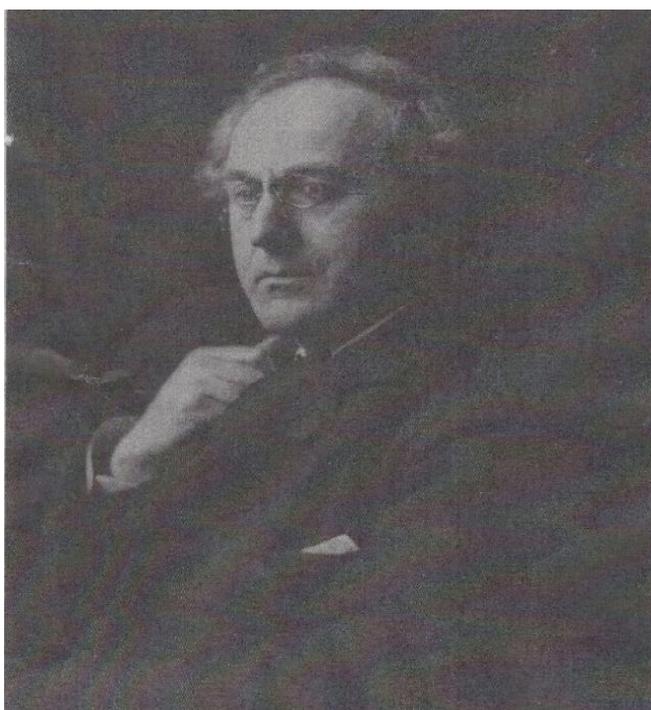


Figure 3: A Photograph of Ernest Radford taken nine years prior to his death (Add MS 89029/6/8, Framed Photograph of Ernest Radford, 1910).

In 1899, the death of Radford's father no doubt added to her feeling of grief and isolation. Radford's diary records: "Dear Pater you are in my thoughts all the time, much nearer than for a long time. I cannot realise you are gone" (Radford's Diary, 25 January 1900). Although this is the last diary entry Radford made, her correspondence with her friends, as we shall see, offers further evidence of her anguish.

Radford was well-known among literary circles and in socialist communities. In addition to her friendships with Morris, Levy, Schreiner and Marx, her milieu included Oscar Wilde,<sup>13</sup> Michael Field, D. H. Lawrence<sup>14</sup> and many other key figures in the history of English literature and culture. Radford's archive in the British Library includes a newspaper clipping published after Radford's death. In this article, Radford is acknowledged as one of the writers "who were in their prime a generation ago" (Add MS 89029/2/1, "The Late Mrs. Ernest Radford"). 100 years on, the writer's comment, surprisingly, contrasts with the perception of Radford's name today, and she remains insufficiently acknowledged in the mainstream of contemporary scholarship.

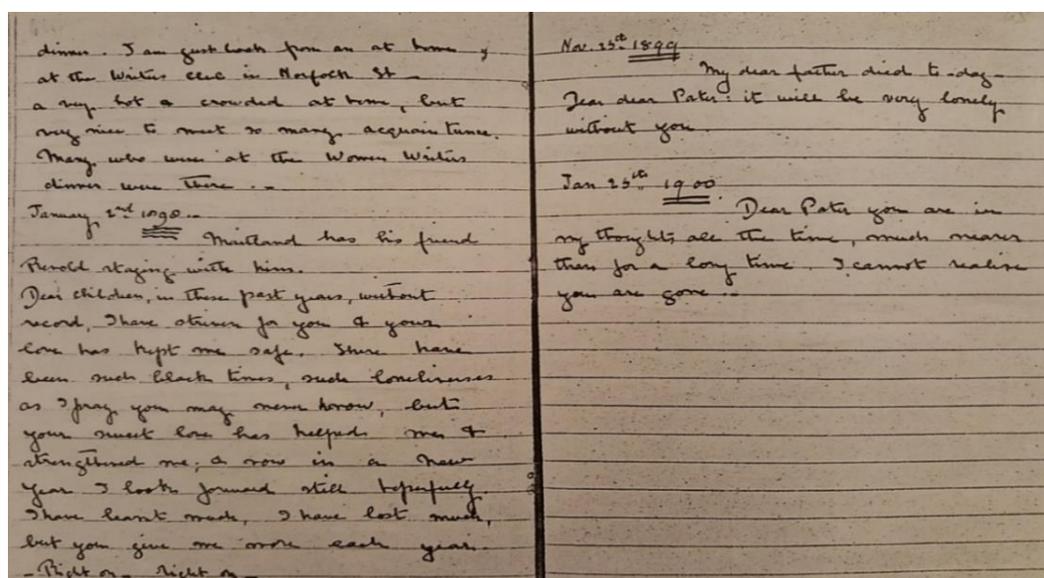


Figure 4: A copy of the last page in Radford's diary in which she expresses to her children the grief and loneliness she suffered, mostly because of Ernest's illness. On the right hand side, Radford also refers to her father's death (Add MS 89029/7/3, Photocopy of Dollie Radford's Diary, 1891-1900).

<sup>13</sup> Wilde (1854-1900) was an Irish author who is best recognised today for his homosexual identity. Wilde was well-known among literary circles for his radical thematic focus which criticised bourgeois' conventional ideals especially regarding marriage and sexuality. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is an example of his attack on prevailing morals. In "Aestheticism versus Realism? Narcissistic Mania of the Unheeded Soul in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*", Ali Taghizadeh and Mojtaba Jaihouni argue: "Wilde's inexpressible ability in questioning the conventions of the English society has brought an unforgettable name out of him in the English Literature" (Taghizadeh and Jaihouni, 2014: 1445). See Chapters Three and Six for more discussion on Wilde's acquaintance with Radford and the possibility of her empathy with his case in some of her poems.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence (1885-1930) was an English novelist and critic whose close friendship with Radford became more evident in her later years. Lawrence's letters to Radford express the horror of World War I and the sorrow and grief felt by both of them. In one of his correspondences with Radford, Lawrence wrote: "My dear Dollie, we must now begin, with our deepest souls, to bring peace and life into the world. [...] It shall begin to end now, this horror and evil. We will come in, now, Dollie, we will be strong for life and perfection. Let us rouse ourselves now" (D. H. Lawrence to Dollie Radford, 9 March 1917 in *The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, 1962: 506). See Chapter Three, for Lawrence's feedback on Radford's work.

# Chapter One: Between the Private and the Public

## Spheres: Laws, Social Attitudes, Literary Genres, and

### Victorian Women

#### Overview

This chapter offers insight into legal regulations and social perceptions concerning women and their rights in Victorian England. Each section discusses an issue which will be considered in relation to Radford's life and poetry in forthcoming chapters. Thus, the chapter works as a contextual background for the thesis.

The chapter is divided into three parts. Part One discusses the domestic role and expected duties of women in the private sphere. The first section of Part One, "The Marriage Contract", sheds light on Victorian marriage as an institution which limited women's legal rights and restricted their dreams. It also demonstrates how women were defined through their commitment to domestic duties and fulfilling their husbands' needs, a concept which is celebrated in Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* (1854).<sup>15</sup> Toward the end of the section, Radford's resistance to women's passivity and her complaint about the burden of domesticity will be briefly considered.

The second section of Part One, entitled "Confined Sexuality Vs. Prostitution", addresses prevailing attitudes towards women's sexuality and the fact that they were not

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<sup>15</sup> Patmore (1823-1896) was an English poet and critic who is best known for his poem *Angel in the House*. See Chapters Three and Five for further discussion of Radford's resistance to his ideology as well as her acquaintance with him. Also see Elaine Hartnell's "'Nothing but sweet and womanly': Hagiography of Patmore's Angel" which sheds light on Patmore's conception of womanhood as part of a wider social convention: "The version of femininity to be found in *The Angel in the House* is by no means exclusive to Patmore, although he and some of his contemporaries added certain features to a pre-existent paradigm. Patmore's Woman is dependent upon a view of society in which discourses of the dominant posit the existence of two separate spheres – the public or worldly sphere which is the province of men and the domestic or private sphere of the home which is presided over, and legalised for, by women" (Hartnell, 1996: 458).

expected to engage in sexual activity except for procreation and to please their husbands. This very fact led to the association between Victorian marriage and prostitution. This section also sheds light on the different phases of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which were gender-based. The final section in Part One, “Passionate Female Friendships”, explores female networks as an alternative relationship which Victorian women sought in order to fulfil their intellectual and sexual desires. Although female friendship was a socially conceivable phenomenon among Victorians, lesbian studies have referred to it as a form of lesbianism, this will be further elucidated in Chapter Six.

The second part of this chapter considers women’s position in the public sphere. The first section of Part Two, “Women and Education”, demonstrates how women were prevented from receiving a proper education and lacked the access to a wide array of reading materials enjoyed by their brothers. At that time, social attitudes endorsed the belief that women were mentally inferior to men, and encouraged them to focus on enhancing their physical appearance rather than acquiring knowledge. This demotivated them in their quest to become more active members of society. In addition, this section considers Mary Wollstonecraft’s<sup>16</sup> views on women’s education as inspirational to many Victorian feminists who highlight the value of education even to women’s future as wives and mothers. Like women’s education, which was governed by negative ideologies, the second section of Part Two, “Female Authorship”, sheds light on the social and economic struggles women writers had to overcome in order to pursue their career. I link the discussion to Radford and her awareness of the gendered system in the writing domain, a theme which will be explored in Chapter Four.

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<sup>16</sup> Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was a famous English figure best known for her role in changing the social attitudes and laws which restricted women’s freedom in Victorian England. Although Wollstonecraft was one of many eighteenth-century women to write about women’s rights, she is one of the few remembered as particularly influential. In *Mary Wollstonecraft: An Annotated Bibliography*, Janet M. Todd relates this fact to Wollstonecraft’s “welding of personal experience with theory” as well as “the time when she wrote, during the early part of the French Revolution” (Todd, 1976: ix).

“Literary Genres and the Role of Woman in Late Victorian England” is the third and final part of this chapter. It aims to show that despite the social prejudice against them, women writers continued to participate in the literary field and challenged earlier genres. The first section, entitled “Women Writers and Aestheticism”, provides a list of some of the characteristics which distinguished British aestheticism. This section also includes a discussion of how female aesthetes, including Radford, contributed to the genre and how their writing undermined men’s conventional representation of women’s external beauty, which is in line with the prevailing perception of women as merely sexual objects. By criticising male authority and questioning its reliability, female aesthetes were inspiring to many women writers of the time, a notion which opens the discussion in the second section of Part Three, “The New Woman”. This section asserts that the previously discussed unjust laws and gendered norms, which impeded women’s freedom, were the main reasons for the rise of the revolutionary New Woman who rejected conventional and domestic roles. A number of literary examples are offered, such as Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879),<sup>17</sup> Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895),<sup>18</sup> and Victoria Cross’s *The*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibsen (1828-1906) was a Norwegian poet and playwright. It is worth noting that Radford was aware of Ibsen’s play, for her diary records, “Tussy & Aveling called in the evening, to ask us to read in Ibsen’s ‘Nora’” (Radford Diary, 12 December 1884). It will be noted in Chapter Three that Radford could have been influenced by Ibsen’s work in her poems which address women’s frustration with marriage. This influence comes from the fact that Marx, whose friendship with Radford will be discussed in Chapter Six, supported and translated Ibsen’s play. In “Victorian Women, the Home Theatre, and the Cultural Potency of *A Doll’s House*”, Ann M. Mazur argues that Marx “maximized the effect of *A Doll’s House* in Britain” and in addition to her translation of the play, “provides more support for the easy translation of home theatre into the real woman’s life through the parallels between her life and Nora’s” (Mazur, 2013: 25).

<sup>18</sup> Allen’s full name was Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen (1848 -1899). He was a Canadian writer who draws upon theories of evolution in his works, including *The Woman Who Did*. See Peter Morton’s “Grant Allen: A Centenary Reassessment” for further information on Allen and the reception of *The Woman Who Did*, which “was a scandalous success of the first magnitude. Though often reviled by critics from every part of the ideological spectrum, including some of those otherwise sympathetic to New Woman fiction, this ‘sex problem’ novel sold enormously” (Morton, 2001: 405). It is possible to argue that Radford had read Allen’s novel, for her diary records her awareness of Allen: “Have had little time of reading [...] Grant Allen’s little life of Darwin” (Radford Diary, 12 December 1885). Also, Radford’s acquaintance with Allen is evident in another diary entry in which Radford describes her son’s poetical talent: “He has the real poetic spark, & Grant Allen has brought him very much up to date in the great marriage question” (Radford Diary, 13 March 1894).

*Woman Who Didn't* (1895),<sup>19</sup> all of which address different aspects of the debate on the New Woman.

The choice of the topics of aestheticism and the New Woman in Part Three is not intended to suggest that these were the only genres and movements which women writers of the period engaged with; however, they are the primary themes echoed in the poems discussed in the following chapters. In addition, by continuously relating the discussion of this chapter to Radford's life and poetry, the aim is to show that Radford's conflict in her married life, as well as her awareness of her marginalisation as a woman writer, were products of a society which considers women of no importance.

## **Part One: Women in the Private Sphere**

### **The Marriage Contract**

I am only you!  
I am yours – part of you – your wife!  
And I have no other life.  
I cannot think, cannot do,  
I cannot breathe, cannot see;  
There is “us”, but there is not “me” –  
And worst, at your kiss, I grow  
Contented so.

(Nesbit, “The Woman’s  
World” 25-32)

Edith Nesbit's<sup>20</sup> poem provides a clear image of the prevailing understanding of the marriage union in the Victorian era. The speaker identifies her existence through her

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<sup>19</sup> Annie Sophie Cory (1868 -1952) wrote novels under the pseudonyms Victoria Cross(e), Vivian Cory, and V.C. Griffin. She started her career with John Lane publishing in *The Yellow Book*, a fact which will be mentioned later in my reading of *The Woman Who Didn't* (Mitchell, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Web. 9 Jun. 2015). Also see Shoshana M. Knapp's “Victoria Cross” for further information on Cross and the gendered reviews of *The Woman Who Didn't* (Knapp, 1999: 82).

<sup>20</sup> Nesbit (1858-1924) was Radford's contemporary and a political activist whose works engage with modern aspects and *fin de siècle* social changes. Although many contemporary scholars claim Nesbit's

husband: “There is ‘us’, but there is not ‘me’”, an expression which relates to the starting point of this chapter’s argument. Victorian marriage was a system of coverture and considered married women as legal non-entities; their behaviour was the responsibility of their husbands. For example, a married woman could not sue nor be sued, because in the eyes of the law she was represented by her husband.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Victorian marital laws were inspired by William Blackstone<sup>22</sup> who states: “By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage” (Blackstone, 1765: 442). Despite the different legal reforms which took place over the later decades of the nineteenth century, married women were still economically and politically marginalised.<sup>23</sup>

It was only after the 1882 Married Women’s Property Act that married women were allowed to have control of their property and take responsibility for their own actions. The government bill of 1882 states:

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opposition to women’s emancipation and her distance from strategies adopted by other New Woman writers, Victoria Margree observes that Nesbit’s writings, even those which were published as children stories, “foreground women’s marginal status and its deleterious consequences, and hold up the patriarchal conventions of her society for scrutiny” (Margree, 2014: 427). Margree’s argument is in line with the reading presented here of the poem above, which reflects the patriarchal oppression suffered by married women in the Victorian period. Simultaneously, however, the poem portrays an inner conflict because the speaker clearly does derive pleasure from being with her partner.

<sup>21</sup> See Barbara Bodichon’s *A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women; Together with a Few Observations Thereon* (Bodichon, 1854: 8).

<sup>22</sup> Blackstone (1723-1780) was an eighteenth century English lawyer and politician who became most known for his four-volume treatise *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), which influenced Victorian law concerning marriage. See “‘That Sole and Despotic Dominion’: Slaves, Wives, and Game in Blackstone’s *Commentaries*” in which Teresa Michals pinpoints the influence of Blackstone’s theories on defending husbands’ authority over their wives’ property (Michals, 1993: 202).

<sup>23</sup> According to the marriage contract, whatever a woman owned or earned, whether money, jewels, clothes or an inheritance, belonged to her husband after marriage. “In return”, Elizabeth Foyster points out, “a husband had a common law duty to provide his wife with the ‘necessaries’ of life; food, clothing, shelter, and when needed, medical care” (Foyster, 2005: 46). Foyster also explores the economic injustice suffered by women and how even after divorce: “Their husbands retained all income from their real estate, could seize their personal property and return to claim their future earnings” (Foyster, 2005: 18). Even the Married Women’s Property Act of 1870 was still disappointing to many reformers because it did not grant married women rights to their own property. In *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England*, Mary Shanley observes: “only some of a wife’s property was removed from her husband’s control, and that by creating a fictional trust rather than by giving a married woman the same ability to control her property as her single sister enjoyed” (Shanley, 1989: 68).

A married woman shall be capable of entering into and rendering herself liable to any contract, and of suing and being sued, either in contract or in tort, or otherwise, in all respects as if she were *feme sole*, and her husband need not to be joined with her as plaintiff or defendant or be made a party to any action or other legal proceeding. (Government bill of 1882 in Shanley, 1989: 126)

Although the bill, apparently, ended coverture and was considered a huge achievement for Victorian feminists, wives continued to be situated in the private sphere and were not allowed to participate in public and political circles as men did.<sup>24</sup> Mary Shanley argues: “Married women were given protection, not independence, equity, not equality. Despite the great change in the law worked by the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, Parliament managed to retain the language of coverture and of a married woman’s unique legal status” (Shanley, 1989: 130). This very fact continued to occupy women writers for whom women’s independence was a chief concern.

In Nesbit’s poem, for instance, the speaker dismisses herself as “part of” her husband. Here, Nesbit may have intended to recall and criticise earlier conventions and laws, such as those inspired by Blackstone. Thus, in Nesbit’s poem the speaker loses the ability to even use her senses (“I cannot think, cannot do/ I cannot breathe, cannot see”), suggesting complete dependence on her husband. This restrictive nature of marriage is portrayed by Radford in many of her poems, including “A Bride” (1891) where the title character’s expectation of marriage does not come to fruition, and she remains lonely with her desires unfulfilled.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the diary entries by Radford, which will be discussed in Chapter Three, share with Nesbit’s poem the sense of dependency on and need for a husband.

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<sup>24</sup> This does not mean, however, that women were entirely shunned from the public sphere, for as the forthcoming discussion will show, the end of the century witnessed an increasing rise of educational and professional opportunities for women.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Three.

In Victorian England, marriage was rarely the product of a woman's choice, but was rather a social norm and a way of determining her identity. In addition to the need for economic security, the social idealisation of marriage led young women to consider it as their primary goal in life. Shanley argues, "The ideology of the home encouraged women of all classes to tend to domestic duties and to make the household a haven from the turmoil and competition of the marketplace" (Shanley, 1989: 7). This ideology was endorsed by many Victorian writers, including Patmore, whose *Angel in the House* embodies the Victorian ideal of passive selfless womanhood:

Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
Of his condoled necessities  
She casts her best, she flings herself.

(*Angel in the House*, CANTO IX. – SAHARA 1-4)

Patmore's poem reflects the perception that a woman's value could only be achieved through sacrificing and devoting herself to her husband, children, and domestic duties, a point which is emphasised later in the poem: "[She] [d]enies herself to his desire" (*Angel in the House*, CANTOXII. II – DENIED 4). Jenni Calder observes, "In herself [a married woman] was nothing. Only by relating to husband and children could she develop and fulfil her moral personality" (Calder, 1976: 57). However, due to the legal changes which took place in the last decades of the nineteenth century, such as those implemented in the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, the Patmorian model of femininity was no longer idealised and was confronted in both real life and literary works. Forthcoming chapters will show how Radford herself did continue to socialise and participate in art and socialist campaigns even after her marriage.<sup>26</sup> Simultaneously, her poetry eschews Patmore's

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Chapter Three which discusses Radford's participation in Morris's Socialist League. Also, Chapter Four offers an account of Radford's membership in the Woman Writers Club and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition.

description of the passive angel and offers a more radical image of a revolutionary angel pursuing her own desire. Chapter Two will demonstrate similar representation of marriage by Radford's contemporary and fellow poet Graham Tomson<sup>27</sup> whose poetry leaves behind conformity and commitment to domestic norms.

### **Confined Sexuality Vs. Prostitution**

The emerging sexual ideals, which were imposed on women, were another aspect which restricted women's freedom that encouraged many female writers to criticise the institution of marriage.<sup>28</sup> For example, it was believed that wives should not attain orgasm as this might affect the holiness of marriage. As Calder points out,

There was a reluctance to believe that women, apart from prostitutes, could, or should, experience sexual pleasure. Sex was a marital duty, and the strictest view was that it was a duty only to be performed for the purpose of procreation. Thus it was tacitly assumed that a husband could, and even should, go elsewhere rather than impose his desires on his wife too frequently. (Calder, 1976: 88)

Despite the fact that female sexuality was rarely considered or discussed outside the institution of marriage, women were warned about purported consequences of over-indulgence in sexual activities and were expected to remain cold in sexual intercourse.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Wrote under the pseudonym Graham R. Tomson (1860-1911), Rosamund Marriott Watson was Radford's contemporary and fellow poet. In April 1891, Radford's diary records that "Graham Tomson & her husband", along with many other writers, have visited Radford (Radford Diary, 8 April 1891). As will be demonstrated in Chapter Two, Tomson's own suffering and failing marriages might have influenced her poetry which was known for its attack on prevailing conventions.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Three, in which the speaker of Radford's poem "Outside the hedge of roses" expresses her desire to escape the confining nature of heterosexual marriage which is embodied in the image of the "fragrant wall".

<sup>29</sup> See F. Barry Smith's "Sexuality in Britain, 1800-1900: Some Suggested Revisions" in which he observes, "Females had to be especially careful during sexual play because their blood, according to available medical opinion, was more 'capillary and lymphatic' than that of males. This condition made them more excitable and insatiable than males and therefore more vulnerable to 'exhaustion' and degeneration of their sexual organs" (Smith, 1977: 195). However, it is worth noting that the history of Victorian sexuality and the idea of women's passionless nature drawn from William Acton via Smith has been refuted in more recent work by Peter Gay who refers to other Victorian books of advice, which challenge Acton's claim. Gay considers Fredrick Hollick's *The Marriage Guide, or Natural History of Generation* (1850) as an example which

This idea is reflected in a number of Radford's diary entries and poems in which she explicitly describes her feelings as "cold" in the marriage context.<sup>30</sup> Even according to medical opinions, it was preferable for a man to have sex with a prostitute if he wanted to experience more pleasure. In *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Judith R. Walkowitz argues: "It was a great source of public shame that prostitution was 'supported and upheld by men whose positions in society should afford a guarantee against a morality so lax'" (Walkowitz, 1980: 34). Victorian sexual ideology inadvertently bolstered prostitution because men were thought to have sexual needs that wives may not be able to fulfil. In addition, Victorian marriage was often associated with prostitution because many women had few opportunities other than selling themselves on the marriage market. Deborah Epstein Nord claims that "the nature of the relationship between the woman of the streets and the woman of the hearth became a social and symbolic question worth pondering. The woman of the hearth might be innocent victim, heroic redeemer, or insidious reflection of her fallen counterpart" (Nord, 1995: 110). As we shall see in Chapter Three, Radford herself creates a parallel between marriage and prostitution in her poem "Your Gift" (1910) and, more evidently, in her play *The Ransom* (1915).<sup>31</sup>

Prostitution was perceived as "the Great Social Evil"; ignorant of their husbands' activities with prostitutes, many wives became infected with venereal diseases.<sup>32</sup> Although the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869<sup>33</sup> were implemented

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"freely dispenses anatomical information complete with explicit diagrams, and advocates birth control", Gay continues, Hollick identifies sexual enjoyment as "a natural instinct, beautified by sensible self-control and by love. And it is an instinct equal in men and women" (Gay, 1980: 376).

<sup>30</sup> See Chapters Three and Six.

<sup>31</sup> See also Lyn Pykett's "Women Writing Woman: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Gender and Sexuality" which similarly identifies the prostitute as "the counterpart of passionless maternal Woman; she was produced by middle-class marriage customs, middle-class definitions of maternal femininity and by the economic vulnerability of all women" (Pykett, 2001: 82).

<sup>32</sup> See Shanley (Shanley, 1989: 85).

<sup>33</sup> 1864: "First *Contagious Diseases Act* establishes a registry of 'common prostitutes', and compels women so defined to undergo internal examination and, if required, detention in a lock hospital for three months. The Act applies to eleven garrison and port towns in England".

primarily to limit the spread of venereal diseases, women were obliged to be examined, while men were exempted. In *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, Ann Heilmann comments: “While the acts policed female presence in public life, implicitly incriminating all working-class women, men who frequented prostitutes were not liable to any examination” (Heilmann, 1998: xx). It will be demonstrated later in this chapter that these unjust policies were indeed frustrating to many women writers who supported the New Woman, a fact which led many of them to seek a change in the legislation: “The widespread feminist anger about the Contagious Diseases Acts provided an important context against which the New Woman debate developed” (Heilmann, 1998: xix). Thus, many writers revealed empathy with prostitutes and offered an image of them as victims rather than a threat.<sup>34</sup> In Chapter Three, a number of examples will be explored, including Augusta Webster’s “A Castaway” (1870),<sup>35</sup> and

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1866: “Second *Contagious Diseases Act* extends the act to more areas and lengthens the lock hospital stay to nine months.

1869: “Third *Contagious Diseases Act* extended” (Hamilton, 1995: Chronology xxii-xxiii). See also Walkowitz’s “The Making of an Outcast Group: Prostitutes and Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Plymouth and Southampton” which explores how these “Acts represented an attempt to clarify the relationship between the unrespectable and respectable poor. They were designed to force prostitutes to accept their status as public women by destroying their private identities and associations with the poor working-class community” (Walkowitz, 1977: 72-73).

<sup>34</sup> Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837) offers a more complex portrayal of Nancy, the prostitute, than as either angel or whore. While Nancy meets the conventional death of a fallen woman, her characterisation as a whole is more ambivalent. In addition, Dickens arguably demonstrated empathy with prostitutes like Nancy, stating in his preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, “I find a sufficient assurance that [Nancy’s story] needed to be told” (Dickens, 1841). See also Aşkın Haluk Yildirim’s “Angels of the house: Dickens Victorian Women” which shows how “Dickens’ concern for the ‘fallen women’ of Victorian England later became evident in his involvement and organization of the Urania Cottage founded for the redemption and welfare of these women. Dickens’ depiction of Nancy in *Oliver Twist* clearly demonstrates that he was not the sort of Victorian male who strictly favoured the virtuous and condemned the rest” (Yildirim, 2012: 121-122).

<sup>35</sup> Webster (1837-1894) was an English poet and dramatist - best known for mastering poetic forms to convey her radical views on women’s position in the Victorian era. See Melissa Valiska Gregory’s “Augusta Webster Writing Motherhood in the Dramatic Monologue and the Sonnet Sequence” which describes how Webster’s poems focus “on her ideological engagement with urgent mid-to-late-Victorian social questions related to female sexuality” (Gregory, 2011: 27). See also Susan Brown’s “Economical Representations: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Jenny,’ Augusta Webster’s ‘A Castaway,’ and the Campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts” which explores how Webster’s “A Castaway” was published against the backdrop of the various instalments of the Contagious Diseases Acts passed during the Victorian time (Brown, 1991: 90).

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Jenny" (1870),<sup>36</sup> which share a similar empathetic representation of the prostitute.

### **Passionate Female Friendships**

Within the oppressive system of marriage women were allowed to socialise with other women, largely because such relationships were expected to increase their commitment to domesticity. In *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, Sharon Marcus offers an insight into female friendship as an accepted norm among the Victorians: "Victorians accepted friendship between women because they believed it cultivated the feminine virtues of sympathy and altruism that made women into good helpmates" (Marcus, 2007: 26). Whether female friendships in the nineteenth century included sexual intercourse or not continues to be a controversial issue. In her study of female friendship, Lilian Faderman argues:

Because throughout much of the nineteenth century in Britain and America, sex was considered an activity in which virtuous women were not interested and did not indulge unless to gratify their husbands and to procreate, it was generally inconceivable to society that an otherwise respectable woman could choose to participate in a sexual activity that had as its goal neither procreation nor pleasing a husband. (Faderman, 1981: 152)

While Faderman describes women's friendship in the nineteenth century as "romantic", she excludes the possibility of any sexual attraction between them. Even in her comment on Michael Field, Faderman asserts: "from a twentieth-century perspective it is hard to believe that their love was not—as a Victorian would phrase it—innocent" (Faderman, 1981: 210). Forthcoming chapters will show how Faderman's argument has hitherto been

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<sup>36</sup> Brother to and painter of Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel (1828-1882) was an established poet and artist. He was one of the main developers of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was later described by its opponents as "the fleshly school". As Daniel Harris has shown, Rossetti's "Jenny" was the first poem by a male author to show any sympathy toward the figure of the prostitute (Harris, 1984: 197). See Chapters Three and Four for further discussion of his poems in relation to Radford's.

challenged by contemporary scholars, especially regarding Michael Field whose poetry continuously explores erotic desire between women.<sup>37</sup>

Studies which perceive female friendship as a form of lesbianism consider sexual practices among women as a rejection of marriage. Marcus points out: “Lesbian studies place women’s friendships on a continuum with lesbian relationships and equate both with resistance to the family and marriage” (Marcus, 2007: 29). Radford’s refusal to conform to domestic ideals as well as her friendship with lesbian women might have influenced her empathetic portrayal of same-sex love in many of her poems. For example, “Outside the hedge of roses” (1907) arguably offers an image of the speaker’s desire to escape the confines of marriage in order to follow her female lover. In *Marriage, Property, and Women’s Narrative*, Sally A. Livingston argues, “[Women’s] desire to escape marriage did not mean a rejection of sexuality, but rather a rejection of the compulsory sexuality that was necessitated by the conjugal debt” (Livingston, 2012: 63). Accordingly, the poem could be read as a rejection of heterosexual norms through which the speaker shows her attempt to replace heterosexuality by her friendship with another woman. Therefore, Chapter Six proposes Radford’s possible bisexuality and explores, in more depth, Radford’s engagement with the unrequited love theme.

In addition, my reading of Radford’s diary entries, letters, and poems presented in this thesis will reveal how, as Marcus observes:

Female friendship allowed middle-class women to enjoy another privilege that scholars have assumed only men could indulge—the opportunity to display affection and experience pleasurable physical contact outside marriage without any loss of respectability. [...] Women regularly kissed each other on the lips, a gesture that could be a routine social greeting or provide intense enjoyment. (Marcus, 2007: 57)

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapters Two, Four, and Five for further discussion on Michael Field’s lesbianism and its possible influence on some of Radford’s poems.

Marcus's implication here may be that Faderman justifies her description of female friendship as "innocent" in relation to the Victorian expectations of women's sexuality as exclusively heterosexual. Marcus, on the other hand, explores how the prevailing ideals benefitted women and allowed them to conceal their erotic desire. In Chapter Six, Turkish Baths are considered as one of the places in which women possibly enjoyed "pleasurable physical contact", in Marcus's terms, without the fear of social stigma. However, in its approach to female friendships in Radford's life, this thesis will also consider scholars such as Martha Vicinus, who in her study of female friendships, points out:

A few woman fully acknowledged and acted upon the sexual basis of their deep love for another woman. [...] A sexual love might not achieve physical consummation for a variety of reasons, including social circumstances, religious scruples, a belief in the superiority of nonfulfillment, or preference for the erotic pleasure of unfulfilled, idealized love. (Vicinus, 2004: xix)

Thus, the proposed possibility of Radford's bisexuality and her portrayal of the unrequited love theme emphasises the ambiguity and anxiety of such emotions which women could not freely express because of social and religious conventions.

## **Part Two: Women in the Public Sphere**

### **Women and Education**

Even outside the relationship of marriage, women were controlled by oppressive laws which had a negative impact on their choices of who to marry, and later on, in their married life. Men's fear of women's competition along with claims of women's inferior mental capacity led to negative attitudes concerning women's access to education. In "Women and Degrees at Cambridge University, 1862-1897", Rita McWilliams-Tullberg argues: "A refusal to share [education] with women was one of the major reasons for

denying them their degrees” (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 118). Theories of women’s inferiority were adopted by many women writers, including Sarah Stickney Ellis<sup>38</sup> who argues that “women, in their position to life, must be content to be inferior to men” and are “exempt from the most laborious occupations both of mind and body” (Ellis, 2006: 98). Ellis’s view was the product of a society in which it was commonly believed that education would have negative impacts on a woman’s biology and reproductive system.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it was assumed that women should not be educated nor engage in any kind of activities which could enhance their knowledge, for their main role was to satisfy their husbands. Simultaneously, universities, as McWilliams-Tullberg points out, “had granted women very little—no membership, no degrees, not even the right to attend lectures” (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 133). Men, on the other hand, enjoyed a better education and were widely welcomed by universities. Forthcoming chapters will demonstrate how Radford was aware of the limited educational opportunities available to women at that time, and often complained about her need for “a different mind” which would have allowed her to be more intellectually and socially active.

Submissiveness, passivity, and domesticity were common traits taught to schoolgirls, and, as we shall see shortly, were major themes in many literary works of the period. Girls did not have the freedom to choose the books which matched their areas of interest, but were only allowed limited access to materials that had been carefully examined and determined by their parents. In order for a girl to have access to a certain

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<sup>38</sup> Ellis (1799-1872) is best known for her writings on women’s domestic education and their role in society; her works include *The Wives of England*, *The Women of England*, *The Mothers of England*, and *The Daughters of England*. In *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839), Ellis dedicates an entire chapter to “Modern Education” in which she claims that the ideal education for a young woman would not necessarily be something of her interest, but would prepare her to be “most valued, admired, and beloved”, in other words “her disinterested kindness” (Ellis, 2010: 61).

<sup>39</sup> See Pykett, who discusses social attitudes towards women and their engagement in the public sphere: “Woman’s nature and her social role were said to be controlled by her womb and her ovaries, and were the inevitable and invisible consequences of her reproductive function. [...] This view, together with arguments about Woman’s inferior evolutionary development, became part of the rhetoric of the separate spheres, and was used as an argument against women being admitted to the public world of work and politics, and to the same education as men” (Pykett, 2001: 79).

book, it had to include enough domestic and moral messages to prepare her for married life. In *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction*, Judith Rowbotham explores how such books were meant to restrict girls' attention to domestic duties as their primary role: "The stories written for girls throughout the period expose the pivotal importance of that 'traditional' feminine role in contemporary society, by revealing many of the factors and reasoning behind this limited domestic tradition" (Rowbotham, 1989: 12). In his description of this kind of education, Simon Morgan observes:

[T]he middle-classes were educating their daughters as decorative toys; in other words as 'ladies', possessed of fine accomplishments, such as drawing, dancing and singing, but very little else. [...] It was argued that such an education made women worse than useless; superficially charming in the flower of youth, perhaps, but incapable of fulfilling any serious role in society. (Morgan, 2007: 36)

Morgan's comment may be linked to Patmore's representation of ignorance as part of ideal womanhood:

And her light-hearted ignorance  
Of interest in our discourse  
Fill'd me with love, and seem'd to enhance  
Her beauty with pathetic force

*(Angel in the House, CANTO VI. – THE DEAN 4.9-12)*

The speaker's admiration of the wife's "light-hearted ignorance" and his emphasis on her beauty over her knowledge echoes Morgan's description of the "useless" education Victorian women received. Subsequent chapters will show how Radford refused to submit to such "feminine" and "charming" characteristics and continuously sought an alternative kind of knowledge which would enable her to fulfil roles beyond merely the domestic sphere. In Chapter Three, for example, a letter from Radford to her husband describes domestic duties as a burden which prevents her from being useful to others. Radford thus

embraces a liberated approach to a woman's life which resists the Victorian perception of women's passivity.

In fact, Radford's challenge to the gendered ideals concerning women's education and her thirst for knowledge, which will be traced thoroughly in the following chapters, may be read as a result of the increasing educational opportunities for women in the second half of the nineteenth century. As briefly mentioned in the Introduction, in 1875, Radford was admitted to Queen's College Harley Street, the first institution opened for women's further education with an important history. The college was founded in 1848 by Frederick Denison Maurice, who was known for his empathy to young women's financial worries and, as Shirley C. Gordon points out, he "had long wanted an improvement in female education" (Gordon, 1955: 145). Along with a group of women activists, Maurice succeeded to demonstrate and meet women's basic educational and training needs, for the College, as Gordon remarks, "developed a full-scale experiment in the academic education of young women"; therefore, it was regarded as one of "the highest institutions for female education in England" (Gordon, 1955: 144).

In her account of the College's teaching and training programme, McWilliams-Tullberg notes:

One special feature of Queen's College was the attention paid to testing students. The authorities felt examinations would help train women in disciplined study, and as college women took up work in a few girls' school, many of them felt the need for a standard comprehensible to the public that would measure their students' progress. (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 122)

The College's mission was pioneering in the way it aimed at improving the quality of women's education; thus, allowing them to be better governesses. Although Radford should have been aware of the value of her involvement in a leading institution which resembles a new movement in women's education, she, like many women of her

generation, was simultaneously confined by the gendered perceptions of the kind of knowledge and professions women could attain. McWilliams-Tullberg records that even in the last decades of the nineteenth century, “university-educated women were [...] largely to be found at low-status levels in a limited number of professions” (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 118). As we shall see in Chapter Five, this very fact is evident in a number of diary entries in which Radford criticises man-made ideals and encourages her son to acknowledge his sisters’ rights of equal educational opportunities.

Like Radford, Levy’s education as “the first Jewish woman to be admitted to study at Newnham College Cambridge” reflects on women’s increasing access to education which went against conventional customs and traditions (Pullen, 2010: 13). In 1879, Levy was admitted to Cambridge, the first university to encourage women’s studies. However, like many Victorian institutions, Cambridge, as McWilliams-Tullberg has shown, was governed by the established gendered system:

[A]fter taking the same examination as men, [women] were not awarded the degrees they had earned. [...] Since women clearly made progress toward the goal of economic and social independence during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is sometimes assumed that men’s attitudes developed simultaneously in a positive direction. (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 117)

As the case with Radford, Levy was surely aware of such confines whose ultimate aim was to keep women away from the market’s competition.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Pullen acknowledges the significance of Levy’s education in Cambridge which, as she states, “can only have served to strengthen her belief in the importance of female emancipation” (Pullen, 2010: 38). Levy’s experience should have endorsed her feeling of independence

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Four for Levy’s letter which records her awareness of the limited opportunities to her gender, encouraging her to think of giving up writing in favour of sheep-farming.

and freedom which were sought by many women activists and social reformers of her generation.<sup>41</sup>

McWilliams-Tullberg points out: “The women’s education movement shared with the suffrage movement and with other groups working for the social, economic, and legal rights of women a desire to free women from preconceived roles as subservient and incapable relatives of men” (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 118). In addition to economic independence, Victorian feminists embraced the thoughts expressed in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she highlights education as an important element in preparing women for their future as wives and mothers: “Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice” (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 71). Radford also embraced this notion, expressing an explicit desire to be a helpful wife, while remaining aware of the limited opportunities available to her.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Radford’s admiration of Wollstonecraft is evident in her diary, in which she writes, “Read Lives of George Eliot (Cross), of Mary Wollstonecraft. Maria Edgeworth. Each of them interesting in their way, & that of Mary Wollstonecraft very particularly” (Radford Diary, 1 June 1886). Radford’s interest in Wollstonecraft is obvious in her poem “A Novice”, which offers an image of a smoking wife who complains of the fact that she has “[n]o modern skills” (“A Novice” 6) which would enable her to respond to “the great family affairs” (“A Novice” 13). With

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that contemporary scholars often acknowledge the role of women’s education at the end of the century in the context of same-sex desire. For example, in her article on Vernon Lee’s lesbianism, Sally Newman argues: “One of the core issues at stake in the romantic friendship/lesbianism debates has been the experience and expression of sexual passion between predominantly white, educated women of privileged classes” (Newman, 2005: 58). This very fact will be revisited in Chapter Six which considers further arguments on Levy’s education as encouraging to new emotional and sexual identities.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

this portrayal, Radford adopts Wollstonecraft's view that women's education would enable a better marital companionship.<sup>43</sup>

Even prior to Radford's generation, the conflicting debate about women's education was a major theme in Victorian literature. In *Middlemarch* (1874), for example, George Eliot<sup>44</sup> characterises her female heroines against the Victorian backdrop of women's education. In the first book of the novel, Dorothea's imperfect education and her lack of knowledge about different social issues, including marriage, is described: "[She] retained very childlike ideas about marriage" and always imagined her husband to be a "sort of father" and teacher who knows more than she does (*Middlemarch* 32). Dorothea's thirst for education and knowledge, which have had a negative impact on her choice of husband, allows Eliot to criticise and simultaneously question social attitudes which regard women's education as dangerous to their biological nature. Such attitudes are mirrored in Mr. Brook's conversation with Dorothea when he claims: "We must not have you getting too learned for a woman, you know" (*Middlemarch* 423). On another occasion Mr. Brook asserts: "Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know", and he proceeds, "I cannot let young ladies meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty" (*Middlemarch* 39-42). The same gendered view of women's mental capacity is also expressed later in the novel when Celia says to Dorothea: "of course men know best about everything, except what women know better... I mean about babies and those things" (*Middlemarch* 792). Eliot's fictional account of women's insufficient education (and

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter Five for further discussion of Radford's "A Novice".

<sup>44</sup> Like many women writers of the time, Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880), one of the greatest novelists of the century, preferred not to reveal her real name in order to avoid the male stereotyping of her works as feminine. She used the male pseudonym of George Eliot as a form of protest against male critiques of the woman writer. See Showalter (Showalter, 2009: 62). Despite her engagement with issues concerning women, including marriage and education, Eliot was committed to the realist genre and once expressed that she feels "as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what the reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath" (Eliot in Brown, 2011: 97). For more information on Eliot's life and her representation of the marriage theme, see George Willis Cooke's *George Eliot: A Critical Study of her Life, Writings and Philosophy* (Cooke, 2010: 40-62).

Dorothea's tragic story in particular) shares with earlier feminists, including Wollstonecraft, the belief that an appropriate education would improve women's chances of happiness in marriage. Dorothea's frustration to be intellectually engaged with her husband anticipates Levy's pessimistic representation of Xantippe later in the century. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, Xantippe's initial eagerness to share Socrates's knowledge is finally confronted by his selfishness and underestimation of her mental capacity. Despite the mentioned changes in women's increasing access to schools and universities, women did not enjoy the same education and training opportunities men had. This very fact continued to occupy late-Victorian women writers who, like their predecessors, sought better educational and professional opportunities.

### **Female Authorship**

“Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be”

(Southey in Showalter, 2009:  
45-46)

The excerpt above is from a letter from Robert Southey<sup>45</sup> to Charlotte Brontë, who had asked for his advice on pursuing a career as a poet. The quote is representative of the Victorian opposition to women's participation in the literary field. Unlike women writers, male writers, as Dale Spender puts it, used to “get a fairer hearing and a better reception”

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Southey (1774-1843) was an English poet and reviewer who occupied various positions during his lifetime. Geoffrey Carnall notes that Southey was known for being “conscientious in responding to requests for advice from aspiring writers, most famously in his letters to Charlotte Brontë in 1837” (Carnall, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Web. 23 Sep. 2012). It is worth noting that Southey was a real support to his widow and fellow poet Caroline Bowles and this often used letter to Brontë does not give the whole picture of Southey's attitude to women writers. His reply to Brontë can thus be seen as part of his awareness of the limited educational opportunities for women which did not qualify them to become talented writers. In her study of Southey's friendship with Bowles, Blain comments: “Although he was immediately convinced of her genius, he felt, he said, that she needed more of the precision of thought and language for which women's education fits them badly” (Blain, 1998: 23). However, Blain acknowledges that “Southey had a reputation for his catholic taste, and for his readiness to help both women and working-class poets to find their way into print” (Blain, 1998: 21).

(Spender, 1986: 164). In reality, such gendered attitudes were due to the fact that women lacked educational opportunities which would qualify them to compete with their male counterparts. In *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Virginia Woolf<sup>46</sup> refers to such attitudes and describes the position of the Victorian woman writer from a twentieth-century point of view:

[T]here was an enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually. Even if her father did not read out aloud these opinions, any girl could read them for herself; and the reading, even in the nineteenth century, must have lowered her vitality, and told profoundly upon her work. There would always have been that assertion—you cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that—to protest against, to overcome. (Woolf, 1928: 63)

The cultural prejudice against women's intellectual ability had a negative impact on the motivation of many women writers who exposed such discouragement in their works. Like Woolf, contemporary scholars, including Joanne Wilkes, highlight the negative perception of women writers. Wilkes argues, "given that creativity was strongly linked to mental capacities, notions about women's intellectual inferiority to men meant that women writers were seen as inferior in the creative sense, as less capable of original thinking" (Wilkes, 2001: 38). Chapter Four will include a discussion of how Radford herself was often discouraged by male editors and reviewers.

In addition to their lack of education, Woolf identifies the need for money as another major obstacle encountered by Victorian women writers (Woolf, 1928: 53). Also, Margaret Beetham observes that the position of the woman writer "was still based on their legal and economic dependence on men and this constrained their access to print"

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<sup>46</sup> Woolf (1882-1941) was a modernist English writer, critic, and an influential figure in London literary society. In addition to *A Room of One's Own*, her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is considered one of her best works and was influenced by her own marriage, illness, and anxiety after World War I. In her study of Woolf's life and works, Katherine Dalsimer argues that she "lived a life of vibrance and intensity and accomplishment in spite of the hover of illness and in spite of life's cruelty to her" (Dalsimer, 2001: xiv).

(Beetham, 2001: 60). As discussed earlier, before the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, husbands maintained authority over their wives' property; consequently, a wife could not enjoy access to her own money because, in the eyes of the law, it belonged to her husband. Livingston explores the influence of this financial position on women writers and argues: "As objects rather than their own subjects, women have been put in the position of the economically marginalized, unable to take full possession of either their property or themselves. This marginalization parallels the way women write" (Livingston, 2012: 4). Livingston's comment will be revisited in Chapter Four, which includes a discussion of how Radford's poems, such as "How the Unknown Poets Die" (1895) and "In Our Square" (1891), address issues concerning marginalised writers and artists.

Besides money, class also came into play; women were discouraged, according to middle-class standards, from writing for money. In *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change*, Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortin observe: "The paucity of women admitting that they were authors affirms that even as late as the 1860s middle-class norms prevented respectable women from acknowledging that they wrote for money" (Tuchman and Fortin, 1989: 51). This bias against women writers among the middle class led to the phenomenon of using pseudonyms as a means of escaping both the social stigma and a gendered perception of their work.<sup>47</sup>

The lack of privacy was another problem encountered by women writers. It was unlikely for a woman to have her own room where she was able to practise writing without the observation of others. Woolf points out: "In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble" (Woolf, 1928: 61). In the early nineteenth century,

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<sup>47</sup> For more information on the use of pseudonyms, see Tuchman and Fortin (Tuchman and Fortin, 1989: 53), and Showalter (Showalter, 2009: 62).

if women were to write, they had to do so in the dining or drawing room in the company of their families and sometimes guests. This was likely, of course, to have a negative impact on their concentration and might also restrict their freedom of thought. In addition, the burden of domestic duties and family commitment were other distracting aspects of the lives of women writers. Radford's diary records her struggle with writing, especially after giving birth to her son, whose demands continued to occupy her and distract her from writing.<sup>48</sup>

## **Part Three: Literary Genres and the Role of Woman in Late Victorian England**

### **Women Writers and Aestheticism**

Despite these conventions and male dominance over the field, women writers, including Radford, continued to participate in various literary modes, including aestheticism. Talia Schaffer relates the rise of aesthetic literature to sensation fiction,<sup>49</sup> which “prepared readers to appreciate fiction that challenged dominant beliefs about literature’s moral effect, sentimental appeal, and realistic style. By opening up this alternative way of writing, sensation fiction made aestheticism possible” (Schaffer, 2011: 614). Aestheticism was a literary movement that emerged in the 1870s in which women

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>49</sup> The rise of sensation fiction in the 1860s was seen as a break with the realist genre. Pamela Gilbert argues that sensation fiction was mainly distinguished for “its ‘low’ appeal to physical appetites for ‘sensations’ whether erotic or pleurably horrifying, [and] its questionable morality” (Gilbert, 2011: 2). Daniel Brown relates the critical attack on sensation fiction to the fact “that its more shocking revelations were no different from those found in daily newspapers and police reports. Sensation fiction suggested that the sordid and the criminal might just be as real as the domestic and the provincial” (Brown, 2011: 103). Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) is an example of sensation fiction which questions the Victorian morals concerning women and marriage and consequently challenges the double standards represented in realist fiction. Saverio Tomaiuolo points out: “Apart from Braddon’s attempts to question the moral standards of Victorian novels through her scandalous heroine, she also decided to reconfigure the teachings of the Victorian realistic school with a subversive intent” (Tomaiuolo, 2010: 142).

writers occupied a significant place.<sup>50</sup> In her description of the movement's agenda, Livesey points out: "By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the critical movement of aestheticism had come to be associated with an insistence on the freedom of art from the ethical claims of the world: the individual artist could revel in the pleasure of art for the sake of that art alone" (Livesey, 2007: 1). The movement was also distinguished and supported by certain journals, such as *The Yellow Book*, which played a key role in promoting aesthete writers. In *The Forgotten Female Aesthete*, Schaffer points out: "The magazine's expensive, glossy format reveals the movement's desire to gain serious consideration. High quality art reproductions insist on the professionalism of the movement's artistic participants" (Schaffer, 2000: 1). *The Yellow Book* was a significant journal in the late nineteenth century, which engaged with radical social aspects and literary genres, including aestheticism and later, the New Woman.<sup>51</sup>

Although both writers of sensation fiction and aestheticism challenged what has been defined as a high form of art, they differ in the way they were received by society: "Whereas female sensation writers were seen as dashing recklessly into tales of crime that ought not to concern them, female aesthetes could retain approval for their continued femininity (so long as they did not verge on decadence)" (Schaffer, 2011: 622). Unlike sensation novelists, the work of aesthetes was more conforming to feminine norms, at

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<sup>50</sup> See Linda Hughes's "A Female Aesthete at the Helm: 'Sylvia's Journal' and 'Graham R. Tomson', 1893-1894" which refers to the ambiguity of female aestheticism: "The term 'female aesthete' was riddled with tensions and contradictions given middle-class ideologies of gender. If 'aesthete' implies a commitment to the unity of arts, cultural authority (in the form of taste), and, as with Wilde, 'advanced' political and artistic views superior to that of the bourgeois herd, 'female' invokes domestic duties and cultural marginality, as well as the internal contradictions that constituted Victorian feminine subjectivity" (Hughes, 1996: 173).

<sup>51</sup> For more information about the relationship between aestheticism, the New Woman and *The Yellow Book*, see Ledger's "Wilde Women and the Yellow Book: Sexual Politics of Aestheticism and Decadence" (Ledger, 2007: 5).

least on the surface.<sup>52</sup> However, this does not mean that female aesthetes never approached social and marital problems; as Schaffer observes:

Women writers enjoyed aestheticism because its elaborate language allowed them to write the pretty visual descriptions that critics liked, yet it was also avant-garde enough to permit a new range of daring topics. Aestheticism let women articulate their complex feelings about women's changing roles, and thus it tended to attract precisely those writers whose gender ideas were in flux. (Schaffer, 2000: 5)

Radford's poetry, despite its engagement with visual art and use of aesthetic language, continues to question women's inferior position in literature and art while simultaneously criticising male-established conventions. In addition, British aestheticism was distinguished for its effeminacy and association with women's beauty. As Kathy Alexis Psomiades argues, "aestheticism's association with passionate emotion and sensation, often seen as feminizing male poets and artists, also seems compatible with the participation of a woman poet" (Psomiades, 1999: 104). Radford's engagement with this characteristic is evident in her poem "In Our Square" (1895) which offers a feminised image of the male artist who identifies with her as a woman poet.

However, Radford's portrayal is not merely an engagement with male tradition; it also works to undermine it. She shares with Christina Rossetti<sup>53</sup> a questioning of the reliability of male art. As Psomiades points out, "some of the best feminist criticism of Rossetti's work sees it as criticising Pre-Raphaelitism's use of feminine images" (Psomiades, 1999: 108). Chapter Four will explore Radford's criticism of the male gaze and the "use of feminine images" in her poems "Cold Stone" (1891) and "A Model"

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<sup>52</sup> See Jonathan Loesberg's *Aestheticism and Deconstruction*, which explores how "aestheticism has always operated as a central mode both of engaging in and of interpreting philosophy, history, and politics" (Loesberg, 2014: 14).

<sup>53</sup> Rossetti (1830-1894) was an English poet and the sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti; both were part of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. See Chapter Four for more discussion of their poetry in relation to a number of Radford's poems which deal with visual art.

(1895). This analysis will also be linked to Rossetti's "In an Artist's Studio" (1857) as one of the poems which challenges men's representation of women as passive angels.

The strategies adopted by female aesthetes led them to consider themselves a source of inspiration for the New Woman, who shared similar yet more revolutionary concerns. Schaffer points out:

Female aesthetes were New Women inasmuch as they participated in a rebellious cultural clique, wrote unconventional literature, and supported themselves. But they departed from the New Women movement in their affinity for artistic products that often carried nostalgic, apparently apolitical or even conservative ideologies. (Schaffer, 2000: 20)

This intersection between aestheticism and the New Woman, which is addressed in Radford's poem "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town" (1895), will be considered in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.<sup>54</sup> It will also be demonstrated that although some of Radford's poems are "apparently apolitical", to use Schaffer's terms, they share with New Women writers their depiction of radical social and political issues.

### **The New Woman**

Although the figure of the New Woman appeared in many literary works of the 1880s, including Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883),<sup>55</sup> the phrase was first used by Ouida in 1894.<sup>56</sup> In her description of the Victorian perception of the New Woman, Heilmann observes,

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<sup>54</sup> See Ledger's discussion of the relationship between aestheticism and the New Woman: "That there was a discursive and aesthetic resonance between aestheticism, the Decadence and the New Woman writing is indisputable. For the cultural movement that embraced aestheticism and Decadence was broader and more eclectic than is sometimes allowed" (Ledger, 2007: 7). See also Margaret D. Stetz's "Debating Aestheticism from a Feminist Perspective", which explores "how broad and numerous were the intersections between the literature of the New Woman and the literature of the aesthetic movement" (Stetz, 1999: 30).

<sup>55</sup> See Chapter Five for further discussion of the novel in relation to Radford's engagement with the New Woman theme in her poetry.

<sup>56</sup> Ouida was the pseudonym of the English novelist Maria Louise Ramé (1839-1908) whose novel *Under Two Flags* has been described by contemporary scholars as one of the novels which anticipated the New Woman (see Chapter Five for further discussion of the novel in relation to Radford's poem "a Novice").

Depending on who wrote about her, she was constructed as a mannish, chain-smoking aggressive virago; a physically and morally strong, [...] above all sophisticated woman, whose steadfast refusal to shut her eyes to injustice and oppression had made her into an impassioned advocate of her sex; or a bicycle-riding [...] and yet fashionable young lady. (Heilmann, 1998: x)

Chapter Five will explore how some of Radford's speakers share the characteristics mentioned by Heilmann to prove her engagement with both aestheticism and the New Woman. The fact that Radford herself practised some of the activities which were first embraced by the New Woman will also be discussed. In doing so, both her life as a married woman and mother, and her poetry, which apparently conforms to domestic norms, challenge the Victorian definition of passive femininity as opposed to the intellectually and sexually active New Woman. Radford's own character as well as that of her heroines coincide with Ledger's definition of the New Woman:

She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women's movement. (Ledger, 1997: 1)

While this section offers a number of fictional discourses on the New Woman, Chapter Two explores different depictions of the theme by Victorian women poets.

Writers who supported the New Woman were concerned about a number of aspects which are summed up in Heilmann's statement: "Marital inequality and related issues—the moral and legal double standard, violence to women, male sexual practice and prostitution—were high on the New Woman's agenda" (Heilmann, 1998: xvi). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the oppressive laws concerning marriage and

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Although Ouida was a conservative and an antifeminist, her literary heroines, including Cigarette, challenged traditional gender roles. Schaffer refers to the novel as "the most popular novel of this period" (Schaffer, 2000: 125). In 1894, Ouida was credited with coining the phrase "New Woman" from Sarah Grand's essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" (Ledger, 1997: 9).

prostitution led many women writers, including Radford, to criticise male authority in their writing and resist the conventional roles of wives and mothers.<sup>57</sup>

The Scottish novelist, social reformer, and New Woman Mona Caird<sup>58</sup> is best known for her work towards granting women equality by changing marriage laws and other social attitudes. In her essay, “Marriage” (1888), Caird writes: “So the dog is punished by chaining for the misfortune of having been chained, till death releases him. In the same way we have subjected women for centuries to a restricted life” (Caird, 2004: 240). Like many other reformers, Caird believed that these laws destroyed the concept of marriage as a spiritual union and restricted women’s freedom. Her comparison of “dog” and woman reflects women’s inferior position and male authority over them, for they were similarly “chained” and controlled.<sup>59</sup> As do most of Caird’s works, the following poem offers an image of women’s suffering:

Why should I live? Do I not know  
The life of woman is full of woe!  
Toiling on, and on, and on,  
With breaking heart, and tearful eyes,  
And silent lips, and in the soul  
The secret longings that arise  
Which this world never satisfies!

(Caird, 2004: 246-247)

The use of sorrowful language reminds the reader of the dysfunctional meanings implied in Nesbit’s poem, which began this chapter. In Nesbit’s poem, the woman “cannot think,

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<sup>57</sup> See also Beth Palmer’s *Women’s Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture*, which explores how New Women writers “strove to be innovative by discussing sex, venereal disease, and gender inequalities with greater forthrightness than ever before” (Palmer, 2011: 158-159).

<sup>58</sup> See Ledger’s *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, where Caird is described as one of the most influential New Woman novelists who “was more radical in her sexual politics [...] than her contemporary [writers]” (Ledger, 1997: 27).

<sup>59</sup> Like Caird, Wollstonecraft used the image of “dog” to describe the subjugation of women and their lack of sufficient education which left them with no choice but to be subordinate: “Considering the length of time that women have been dependent, is it surprising that some of them hug their chains, and fawn like the spaniel? ‘These dogs,’ observes a naturalist, ‘at first kept their ears erect; but custom has superseded nature, and a token of fear is become a beauty’” (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 163).

cannot do”; similarly, Caird’s speaker has “silent lips”. Thus, both poems reflect on women’s suffering and inferior position in the Victorian era.

The New Woman’s rejection of Victorian morals and traditions was attacked by many conservatives and, as Ledger notes, “was regarded by some not merely as a rebellious whim but as a threat to the English ‘race’” (Ledger, 1997: 18). Moreover, the demand for equal educational and employment opportunities was another factor which contributed to the animosity towards the New Woman. Like writers of sensation fiction, New Women writers challenged the reliability of the realist genre and competed with their male counterparts in the field. As Beth Palmer argues: “Feminization and democratization, in the 1890s as in the 1860s, were the twin enemies of [...] critics and writers who saw themselves as defending moral and cultural standards and safeguarding the privileged male’s domination of literature” (Palmer, 2011: 163). Men’s fear of losing their authority in the private sphere and their reputation as established writers was one of the issues which led women writers to question the moral and social double standards of the time and seek alternatives. In addition to the “new” thematic focus, the works of New Women writers “push the boundaries of linear narrative” and “embody a departure from the past” (Palmer, 2011: 158). Despite the fact that some of Radford’s poems seem traditional in form, many others criticise male-dominated ideals, challenge women’s inferior position in the private and public spheres, and leave behind traditional forms.

Like women writers, many male writers of the time engaged with the debate on the New Woman even before the 1890s. Ibsen characterised Nora, the heroine of his play *A Doll’s House* (1879), against the backdrop of nineteenth-century marriage:

Nora. [...] When I was at home with Papa he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you \_\_\_\_\_

Hel. What sort of an expression is that to use about our marriage?

Nora. [*undisturbed*]. I mean that I was simply transferred from Papa's hands to yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you – or else I pretended to. [...] You and Papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life. (*A Doll's House* 66)

The transformation of Nora's character from the naïve, passive, middle-class wife into a revolutionary woman who chooses to leave her husband and children for her own sake would indeed have been shocking to nineteenth-century readers. Ibsen's use of the word "doll" echoes the previously quoted assertion by Morgan who writes that middle-class daughters were regarded as "decorative toys" who could only learn about "drawing, dancing and singing, but very little else" (Morgan, 2007: 36). Nora is a typical example of the middle-class daughter Morgan refers to.

In addition, the play challenges the realist genre in its representation of marriage as fulfilling to women's dreams. In her comment on the marriage plot between the years 1870 and 1910, Schaffer notes:

These writers decisively ended the century long convention of representing marriage as a delightful haven, a solution to all plot problems, and a reward for the virtuous heroine. Instead, they set their novels mostly after the wedding ceremony and depicted marriage as a site of conflict and distress. (Schaffer, 2000: 39)

Although Schaffer's comment concerns Victorian novelists at that time, Ibsen's play and its representation of marriage as frustrating to Nora identifies him with those novelists who expose marriage "as a site of conflict and distress" rather than "a delightful haven".

The marriage question and its legal reforms continued to preoccupy both men and women novelists. Allen's *The Woman Who Did* was published in 1895 when the debate about the New Woman had reached a climax. The preface of the novel mirrors the reality of the nineteenth century when it was impossible for women to eschew the marriage bond:

“‘But surely no woman would ever dare to do so,’ said my friend. ‘I knew a woman who did,’ said I; ‘and this is her story’” (*The Woman Who Did* 4). The novel is centred on Herminia who grows up rejecting the ideals of marriage and finds them enslaving to women:

But, Alan, I can't. My conscience won't let me. I know what marriage is, from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what unseen horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttressed; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained, and made possible. I know it has a history, I know its past, I know its present, and I can't embrace it; I can't be untrue to my most sacred beliefs. I can't pander to the malignant thing, just because a man who loves me would be pleased by my giving way and would kiss me, and fondle me for it. (*The Woman Who Did* 17)

Herminia's rejection of the marriage bond is one of the characteristics which distinguished the New Woman who supported free love unions,<sup>60</sup> a theme which is also represented by Radford in “A Modern Polypheme” (1891). Herminia's choice of free love may be further read as part of Allen's engagement with evolutionary theories, for she admits her desire to eschew the “past” and the “present” of the history of marriage; in other words, she seeks to participate in the creation of a better future. In “Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did: Spencerian Individualism and Teaching New Women to Be Mothers*”, Brooke Cameron observes: “For Herminia, this sexual revolution will contribute to a larger history of social progress, to ‘the future of her kind,’ in which she herself ‘seek[s] no temporal end’” (Cameron, 2008: 281). Chapters Three and Five will discuss the way Radford embraces Charles Darwin's<sup>61</sup> evolutionary theories in “My bird who may not lift his wings” (1910)

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<sup>60</sup> Despite the fact that many New Women supported the free love union, other New Women writers, referred to as “social purity feminists”, were opposed to free love and identified it as morally degenerating. In her description of their ideology, Heilmann points out, “Social purity feminists thought that while men's ‘lust’ and general self-centredness was destructive of society, women's maternal, self-sacrificing nature secured the interests of the weaker elements in society and thus safeguarded the moral and social health of the nation” (Heilmann, 1998: xxii).

<sup>61</sup> Darwin (1809-1882) was an English scientist best known for his theories of evolution, which had a huge influence on his contemporaries. See Peter J. Bowler's *Charles Darwin: The Man and His Influence* (Bowler, 1990: 181-201).

and “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town” in order to strengthen her female speakers and emphasise their influence on future generations. Thus, Radford shares with Allen his endorsement of women’s role in social progression.

The very ending of Allen’s novel holds a number of moral messages; before she poisons herself, Herminia writes to her daughter:

My child, my child, you must see, [...] that all I ever did was done, up to my lights, to serve and bless you. I thought, by giving you the father and the birth I did, I was giving you the best any mother on earth had ever yet given her dearest daughter. I believe it still; but I see I should never succeed in making YOU feel it. [...] My darling, it is indeed a very bitter cup to me that you should wish me dead; but ‘tis a small thing to die, above all for the sake of those we love. I die for you gladly. (*The Woman Who Did* 89)

Despite her revolutionary character, Herminia could not survive her daughter’s abandonment and the story ends tragically. Relating the events of the novel back to the nineteenth century reveals how New Woman novels mirror the reality suffered by many ambitious women, including Marx, who ended her life in the same manner as Herminia. By choosing such a conclusion, Allen may have intended to show how women’s passions could be confronted by death in Victorian England. Although the language of Herminia’s letter provides a tragic conclusion, it holds many moral lessons. The closing lines of the letter do not express the mystery or frustrations which usually precede death, but rather express her pride in dying for her daughter’s sake. Thus, Herminia serves as a reminder of Heilmann’s description of the New Woman as “strong”. Part of this strength lies in her reference to death as “a small thing”, a phrase which may be intended to juxtapose the amount of suffering and abandonment she experienced. Therefore, death, in Herminia’s case, provides a sense of relief, which is also the case with Marx, whose best friend Schreiner expressed to Radford how glad she was for Marx’s death.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Six for further details on Marx’s life and her tragic death.

In response to Allen's novel, Cross wrote *The Woman Who Didn't* with an opposite construction of the heroine who refuses to have a love affair with the Indian officer she meets on a boat trip. From the beginning of the novel, Eurydice Williamson is portrayed as a stereotype of the Victorian woman who is fearful, and refuses to rebel against marriage and social traditions. For example, she is described as the only woman who does not smoke in the cabin (*The Woman Who Didn't* 32). As Heilmann's argument shows, smoking was often associated with the New Woman, a fact which will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five. Thus, Eurydice's refusal to smoke identifies her as conforming to feminine ideals. However, Eurydice's character cannot be perceived as merely conventional, for she talks to Evelyn about her unhappy marriage: "My marriage is not such a pleasant thing that I am always thinking and talking of it' [...] 'He does not care for me,' she continued bitterly. 'I am nothing to him'" (*The Woman Who Didn't* 67-69). Given the fact that the novel was published in *The Yellow Book*, it is possible to argue that Eurydice shares with other heroines of New Woman novels the way they question the existing idealisation of marriage. Her situation offers an image of men's selfishness and how marriage effectively imprisoned women, leaving them with no choice but to remain committed to the matrimonial bond. Eurydice's tone is similar to that expressed in Radford's "A Bride" and Levy's "Xantippe" (1881), which both offer an image of the wife as lonely and uncared for by her husband.<sup>63</sup>

Despite Eurydice's unfulfilled relationship with her husband, divorce is not a valid option for her because her husband "is not cruel" (*The Woman Who Didn't* 70). Her justification reflects the earlier implementation of the Matrimonial Causes Act which did not allow a woman to divorce her husband except in cases of violence or adultery.<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>64</sup> Bodichon's *Brief Summary* shows that divorce could only be achieved in the cases of "1st. Adultery, 2nd. Intolerable cruelty, and 3rd. Unnatural practices" (Bodichon, 1854: 10). However, such cases were not equally applied to men and women seeking divorce: "Had the amendment passed, a husband would have

period's social attitudes towards divorce are explored by Elizabeth Foyster who observes: "It was in society's best interests that couples remained married, even if this meant that some individuals suffered and were miserable" (Foyster, 2005: 242). Unlike Herminia in *The Woman Who Did*, Eurydice conforms to a belief that marriage is "the holiest of all sacraments" while divorce "is a sacrilege" (*The Woman Who Didn't* 71). Furthermore, her views are stereotypical of a society which perceived divorce as a sin: "He has broken [the marriage vows] in secret, but divorce breaks them in public. [...] The fact that he has sinned does not give me a licence to sin also" (*The Woman Who Didn't* 72-73). Eurydice ultimately refuses to form a relationship with the man who truly loved her, but chooses to remain a faithful wife. Published at a time when the debate on marriage and the New Woman preoccupied the Victorian reader, Cross may have intended to represent a conventional character who still holds on to older social ideals despite the emerging movements.

## Conclusion

This chapter has offered a contextual background on the position of women in the Victorian period and addressed how they were constrained by gendered laws and social attitudes established to endorse male authority and subjugate women. While many Victorian women found themselves confined by the unjust laws and had no choice but to conform to the widespread understanding of the feminine ideal, other women refused such

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been able to commit adultery repeatedly with total legal impunity, while a single transgression by a wife would have subjected her to divorce without the possibility of remarriage" (Shanley, 1989: 42). Under the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act, a "husband's repeated abuse of his wife, no matter how severe, was not considered as serious an offense against marriage as a single's instance of a wife's infidelity" (Shanley, 1989: 170). One of the most influential literary works which sheds light on divorce law as frustrating to both men and women was Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Despite all the troubles and misery Arabella causes Jude, he does not consider divorcing her until she asks him to do so "in kindness to her" (*Jude the Obscure* 238). As Hardy sets his novel against the backdrop of the legislation surrounding marriage and divorce at that time, he demonstrates how difficult it was for married people to get a divorce outside adultery cases. It is also notable that in the novel, Jude's divorce ends up causing him suffering related to debts and other financial problems (*Jude the Obscure* 299).

submission and continuously sought to obtain more rights. By cross-referencing forthcoming chapters, it has been demonstrated that Radford was one of those revolutionary women who, as a writer, had the double advantage of challenging patriarchal conventions in both her life and her work. The next chapter explores the impact of a male-dominated culture on Victorian women's poetry and how women poets, especially those from Radford's generation, encountered and questioned such dominance in their poetry. Thus, the next chapter, along with the given context in this chapter, identifies Radford's poetry as part of a literary tradition which undermines former beliefs on marriage, female friendship, women's education, female authorship, and the New Woman.

# **Chapter Two: The Woman Question in Victorian Women's Poetry: Literary Traditions, Forms, and Common Themes**

## **Overview**

Chapter One provided an overview of the patriarchal conventions which governed women's freedom in Victorian England. This chapter offers a more detailed contextualisation of Victorian women's poetry as present within a dominant culture which condemned women's talent. The argument in this chapter is a continuum of the previous one, for it illustrates how women poets were influenced by and sought to defy prevailing social conditions. The first section, "Victorian Women Poets and their Strategies to Escape Literary and Social Expectations of the 'Poetess' Figure", considers how Victorians and contemporary scholars perceived women's poetry in relation to a larger male dominated tradition. In addition, this part addresses some of the strategies, including that of the ungendered speaker, which were adopted by women poets to question the reception of their poetry as conventionally feminine. In doing so, it endorses the fact that women's poetry was unexpectedly subversive, representing a challenge to social and political circumstances.

Entitled: "Forms and their Significance in Understanding Victorian Women's Poetry", the second part in this chapter discusses the "Dramatic Monologue", "Sonnet", and "Decadent Poetry" as three forms commonly used by women poets. It will show how women poets experimented with each form in a way which resists their traditional use by male poets who usually represent the female figure as passive and/or silent. For example, the dramatic monologue allowed women poets to distance themselves from the poetic voice and simultaneously criticise social issues. Similarly, the sonnet enabled women

poets to portray their experience as marginalised figures in society. Later in the century, decadent poetry marked a transformation from traditional forms in terms of length and thematic concerns. In fact, the forms included in this section are not the only forms adopted by women poets, but are introduced here as they are the ones that will be addressed the most in forthcoming chapters. Although the majority of Radford's poetry is represented as short songs, she often used the dramatic monologue for the purpose of social critique.

The third and final part of this chapter is "Common Themes and Contrary Representations in Victorian Women's Poetry", and includes a number of the themes that will pervade subsequent chapters. The title of this subheading hints at the fact that women's poetry, despite its representation of common concerns, differs in its depiction of these concerns. The first section, "Marriage and Gender", identifies marriage as a major theme debated by women poets. As discussed in Chapter One, the conventional idealisation of the marriage theme changed toward the end of the century when calls for women's rights appeared with the rise of the New Woman, as is evidenced in Victorian women's poetry. By including examples, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's<sup>65</sup> *Aurora Leigh* (1856), and Levy's "A Ballad of Religion and Marriage" (1888), this section, on the one hand, sheds light on the transformation of ideals mirrored in women's poetry. On the other hand, it illustrates how the poets' depictions of a particular theme was sometimes influenced by their own personal experience.

The second section in this part is entitled: "Nature", a theme which allowed women poets to eschew the conventions imposed on them by city life. The section explores women poets' unconventional use of particular symbols and metaphors, such as

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<sup>65</sup> Barrett Browning (1806-1861) was one of the most prominent poets in the Victorian time. Radford's diary frequently records her reading of Barrett Browning's poems and her visits to the Browning Society. She once notes: "I have twice addressed the 'Browning Society'" (Radford Diary, 12 December: 1885).

flowers and roses, to express their sexual desire. Although the Victorians perceived women poets' representation of rural and wild places as conforming to their domestic role, contemporary scholars have explored the subversive and sexual meanings beyond what appear to be merely images of nature. Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) and Barrett Browning's "The Deserted Garden" (1838) are included as examples in which women poets used woodland and other rural settings to escape patriarchal and heterosexual conventions. This section contextualises the forthcoming analysis of Radford's poems which address similar meanings and convey similar messages.

The final theme discussed in this chapter is "Female Authorship and Poetic Identity", which considers the concept of marginalisation as suffered by women writers and as a key issue in Victorian women's poetry. The section highlights women poets' awareness of the gendered approach to their poetry, offering examples like Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Alice Meynell's<sup>66</sup> "A Poet's Fancies" (1875), which resist the victimised image of the woman poet and empower her instead. Alongside Chapter One, the aim of this chapter is to provide a contextual background for the analysis of Radford's poems presented in later chapters. While Chapter One offered an insight into the inferior position of women in Victorian culture, Chapter Two sheds light on strategies, forms, and themes of Victorian women's poetry to show how the genre engaged with the debate on the woman question. Throughout the chapter, I briefly cross-reference Radford's poems in order to demonstrate that Radford's poetry is part of a literary tradition which questions and simultaneously challenges male authority in life and literature.

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<sup>66</sup> Meynell (1847-1922) was Radford's fellow poet, whose poetry offers unconventional representations of different aspects of women's lives, including motherhood and female authorship. See Chapters Four and Five for more discussion of Meynell's acquaintance with and possible influence on Radford.

## **Part One: Victorian Women Poets and their Strategies to Escape**

### **Literary and Social Expectations of the “Poetess” Figure**

This section highlights a number of the codes and strategies adopted by Victorian women poets to challenge and escape prevailing expectations of the “poetess” figure. In one of the earliest and most influential studies of Victorian women poets, Isobel Armstrong argues that “doubleness” is a key issue which must be considered when approaching women’s poetry. In her explanation of the term “doubleness” Armstrong notes:

The doubleness of women’s poetry comes from its ostensible adoption of an affective mode, often simple, often pious, often conventional. But those conventions are subjected to investigation, questioned, or used for unexpected purposes. The simpler the surface of the poem, the more likely it is that a second and a more difficult poem will exist beneath it. (Armstrong, 1996: 264)

In fact, Armstrong’s claim questions the validity of conventional readings of women’s poetry, and permits the possibility of different interpretations beyond femininity and domesticity. As we shall see in the forthcoming chapters, Radford often uses simple and evocative language to hide more revolutionary meanings, which were often dismissed and ignored by her contemporary reviewers.

Armstrong finds “that men both enabled and controlled women’s poetic production in a way that was often complex” (Armstrong, 1996: 262). The complexity Armstrong refers to here is the way Victorians respected the woman poet or the “poetess”, as she was called at that time, and simultaneously underestimated her work. Victorian critics often attributed limited qualities, such as “conventional piety” and “didactic feeling”, to women’s poetry (Armstrong, 1996: 261). Chapter Four, will discuss how these limited qualities go hand in hand with the “feminine” and “charming” terms selected by Radford’s reviewers to describe her work. Therefore, by adopting the “doubleness”

approach, Victorian women poets like Radford attempted to escape and at the same time challenge dominant expectations of women's poetry, which were, like other aspects of women's lives, dominated by men. Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo claim: "Indeed it is only when one questions the comprehensiveness of the term 'Victorian' that one is able to account for the uneasiness with which *fin-de-siècle* poets such as [Mathilde] Blind or Dollie Radford engaged intellectually with, yet simultaneously observed their distance from, the figure of the 'Victorian' poetess" (Thain and Vadillo, 2006: 390). The "uneasiness" of Radford's poetry may be part of its "doubleness", which leads Thain and Vadillo to identify her as a "socialist" Victorian poet rather than a Victorian "poetess".

The "poetess", as Alison Chapman observes, "is firmly identified with English national character as homely and domestic" (Chapman, 2003: 65). Thus, it is again the "homely and domestic" themes which make the "poetess" figure a respectable one and not her poetical talent. "Victorian poems", Dorothy Mermin argues, "like Victorian women were expected to be morally and spiritually uplifting, to stay mostly in the private sphere" (Mermin, 1995: 69). The Victorians' association between poetry and femininity correlated with the rise of gift books and annuals; these were decorated books printed at the beginning of the century and included short stories, essays and poems, accompanied by illustrations, predominantly exchanged by younger women during the holiday season.<sup>67</sup> At that time, women were not expected to hold a pen except for domestic purposes or to extoll domesticity; that is, to write about social idealisation of marriage as an institution, depicting conventional and sacrificial models of femininity. Patricia Pulham notes that "[w]omen poets and women's poetry were both marketed together in the feminised culture

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<sup>67</sup> See Manuela Mourão's "Remembrance of Things Past: Literary Annuals' Self Historicization" which discusses the history of Victorian annuals and gift books: "Literary annuals and gift books, the lavishly illustrated, richly bound anthologies of poetry and prose fashionable in England during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, attracted readers by their combination of text and pictures inside a pretty package. They typically appeared at the end of the year and were meant to be Christmas presents or tokens of remembrance between friends and family members" (Mourão, 2012: 107).

of the annual” (Pulham, 2003: 13). As discussed in Chapter One, women’s lack of a sufficient education played a role in the prevailing association between womanhood and domesticity. Jason David Hall observes that due to the unequal educational opportunities afforded to men and women in the nineteenth century, “many male educators, publishers, and critics argued that the finer points of grammar and prosody were beyond the mental reach of women” (Hall, 2011: 12). In order to avoid this cultural prejudice against their poetical ability and to defy the conventional idealisation of womanhood, women poets experimented with multiple forms and used different strategies, including the “doubleness” referenced by Armstrong.

In addition to the double meaning of women’s poetry, Pulham finds that to escape the underestimation of the quality of their work, women poets had “to fragment [their] identity and adopt the masculine position. [...] they adopt the recognisable position of the male lover writing to the female beloved in the amatory tradition” (Pulham, 2003: 28). Women poets problematize the gendered criticism of their poetry by distancing themselves from the female voice, making it more difficult to distinguish the gender of the poem’s speaker. As will be demonstrated in the following example, the issue becomes even more tangled when the addressee in the poem is obviously a female, leaving the reader with ambiguous interpretations of the sexual implications raised in the poem. The obscure identity of the poem’s speaker continues to be an intriguing topic for literary critics who fail to give a definite conclusion. For example, Virginia Blain begins her essay “Sexual Politics of the (Victorian) Closet; *or*, No Sex Please – We’re Poets” asking: “[C]an a love poem which deals only in the pronouns ‘you’, ‘I’ and ‘we’ (not the gender-specific ‘he’ and ‘she’) make good its escape from the established gender-markers into a more ambiguous discursive space?” (Blain, 1999: 135). Blain declares that the use of pronouns by Victorian women poets is intended as a challenge to the reader’s assumptions of the speaker behind the poem; thus, as readers we have to be careful in our analysis of

gender roles in women's poetry. Due to the fact that "[t]he Victorians were obsessed with the poet (or 'poetess') *behind* the poem" (Blain, 1999: 140), in addition to their desire to avoid the feminine connotations of the so called "poetess", some Victorian women poets intended to hide the identity of the speaker in order to avoid the social stigma of homosexuality.

My argument takes as its starting point Pulham's conclusion that "in directing their own words to a female 'beloved', the annuals' women poets employ a 'sapphic' gaze which eroticises the exchange between themselves and the women in the illustrations that elicit their poetry" (Pulham, 2003: 30). Although Pulham's suggestion of erotic desire between women is particularly applied to women's poetry which was published in annuals, endless examples of Victorian women's poetry provide evidence of the poet's use of the pronoun "I" to confuse the hetero/homo sexual relationship between the speaker and the recipient in the poem. Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's<sup>68</sup> "The Witch" (1893), which will be discussed in relation to Radford's poem "A Wanderer" in Chapter Three, is worth quoting at length here, to illustrate the dual implication of the "I" persona:

I have walked a great while over the snow,  
And I am not tall nor strong.  
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,  
And the way was hard and long.  
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,  
But I never came here before.  
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.  
I dare not stand in the blast.  
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,  
And the worst of death is past.  
I am but a little maiden still,

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Elizabeth Coleridge (1861-1907) is Radford's contemporary poet and novelist. Donald E. Stanford and R. W. Crump argue that she, like Radford, had "a thirst for knowledge including science and philosophy, and a deep interest in literature – especially poetry" (Stanford and Crump, 2007: 70). During her lifetime, Coleridge published her poems under the pseudonym "Anodos", which is usually translated as "Wanderer" (Stanford and Crump, 2007: 90-91).

My little white feet are sore.  
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,  
Who plead for their heart's desire.  
She came—she came—and the quivering flame  
Sunk and died in the fire.  
It never was lit again on my hearth  
Since I hurried across the floor,  
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

(“The Witch”)

The poem has two speakers and is about a wandering woman, who begs her lover to let her into the warm home; finally, she is allowed entry. The first line in the final stanza reveals the identity of the object of the stanza as obviously a woman, but again, the “I” remains ambivalent, allowing hetero/homo sexual interpretations of the eroticism hinted at in the stanza. In her reading of the poem, Katherine McGowan finds that the use of the pronoun “I” “masks and swaps the identities of the two figures in the poem”; McGowan continues, “whether this union is between two women, or a man and a woman is never revealed” (McGowan, 1996: 187-188). Such ambiguity allowed women poets greater freedom to express their sexual desires, while continuing to question readers’ fixed expectations of the narrator’s gender. Many of Radford’s poems offer examples of this tangled use of pronouns, which while complicating the certainty of one reading, allow the validity of another. The phrase “heart’s desire” in particular, which is used by Coleridge with an uncertain reference to the gender of the speaker, is similarly used by Radford in “To A Stranger” (1895), where the identity of the lover is also hidden.<sup>69</sup> In short, intertextual readings of Victorian women’s poetry create a clearer vision and enhance our

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<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Six.

understanding of the literary tradition they engaged with in order to transcend moral expectations.

## **Part Two: Forms and their Significance in Understanding**

### **Victorian Women's Poetry**

#### **Dramatic Monologue**

This section sheds light on the different poetical forms used by Victorian women poets, and explores how each form helped women poets to maintain and deliver particular meanings. For example, women poets commonly deployed the use of the pronoun “I” in the form of the dramatic monologue.<sup>70</sup> E. Warwick Slinn identifies the dramatic monologue as “the flagship genre of Victorian poetry. Widely regarded as the most significant poetic innovation of the age, it gained widespread use after the 1830s by an overwhelming range of poets, both male [...] and female” (Slinn, 2002: 80). Although it was widely used by both male and female poets, the form proved to be of particular value to women poets. In her argument about the value of the dramatic monologue to Victorian women poets, Glennis Byron observes: “Speaking in the voice of dramatised ‘I’ allows women to assume the position of the authoritative speaking subject while insisting that the voice is not to be identified as her own” (Byron, 2003: 81). Given the existing social prejudices against women’s writing and its quality, women writers had to find a way to lend authority to their voices, without necessarily identifying the voice as their own. The use of the dramatic monologue was, in Armstrong’s words, a “mask” women poets had to

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<sup>70</sup> The dramatic monologue is “a poem in the form of a speech or narrative by an imagined person, in which the speaker inadvertently reveals aspects of their character while describing a particular situation or series of events” (*Oxford Dictionaries*. Web. 4 Jan. 2014). Also, see Cynthia Scheinberg’s “Recasting ‘sympathy and judgment’: Amy Levy and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue” in which she highlights the history of male dominance over the form and the exclusion of women’s poetry: “[W]omen writers have been locked out of the theoretical discourse on Victorian dramatic monologues” (Scheinberg, 1997: 173).

adopt in order “to involve a displacement of feminine subjectivity” (Armstrong, 1996: 266). This displacement not only offers an opportunity for women to escape the conventional reception of their poetry and freely express erotic desires, but also gives them a space to criticise social and political issues.

Byron argues that women poets “did play a primary role in establishing and refining [...] the monologue for the purpose of social critique” (Byron, 2003: 84). Whether the form was founded by women poets or not remains a controversial point; however, their contribution in developing it seems to be a definite claim by many scholars, including Byron herself. Women poets used dramatized voices to condemn patriarchal institutions and celebrate their femininity by giving “voice to marginalised and silenced figures in society” (Byron, 2003: 96). The authority women poets give to the poetical figure, one who is typically oppressed in real life, could be read as a revolutionary method. That is, as a way in which to reclaim the rights eroded by the social and legal injustices applied to their gender.<sup>71</sup> For example, “The Carmelite Nun” (1894) by Constance Naden,<sup>72</sup> tells a story of suffering and silence in the form of the dramatic monologue:

Silence is mine, and everlasting peace;  
My heart is empty, waiting for its Lord;  
All hope, all passion, all desire shall cease,  
And loss of self shall be my last reward.

(“The Carmelite Nun” 1-4)

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<sup>71</sup> See Mermin’s “‘The Fruitful Feud of Hers and His’: Sameness, Difference, and Gender in Victorian Poetry” in which she observes: “Women poets most often use dramatic monologues to allow female speakers to express passion, rage, and rebellion against social constraints” (Mermin, 1995: 151).

<sup>72</sup> Naden (1858-1889) is Radford’s contemporary whose poetry is best known for its engagement with science and evolutionary theories which occurred at the end of the century. In “Fated Marginalization: Women and Science in the Poetry of Constance Naden”, Patricia Murphy argues: “Naden deems efforts to enter this masculine world as insurmountably thwarted by nineteenth-century perceptions of female subjectivity that valorize acquiescence, silence, morality, sensibility, and passivity for the gender presumed inevitably flawed in its mental capacity. The discourse of science, then, serves as a vehicle of power whereby Victorian women can be delimited and defined as the Other” (Murphy, 2002: 107). This discussion is relevant to my proposal of Radford’s possible intention to engage with Darwin’s evolutionary theory in “My bird who may not lift his wing” and “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town” which both represent the female speaker stronger than the man (see Chapters Three and Five).

Although the title suggests that the speaker is a nun, Byron proposes the integration of Naden's atheist belief in the poem. This renders the title ironic, allowing the poet to doubt and resist Christianity. Unlike devotional Christian nuns, Naden's speaker questions her religious beliefs. This resistance to Christianity is evident throughout the poem including the first stanza, where the poet is waiting for the Lord to return her lost voice, while she knows that her waiting is useless and "loss of self" will be her only reward.

Toward the end of the poem, the speaker's lack of faith is even more obvious and questions religious beliefs regarding justice for human beings and women in particular:

Oh, Mary, Mother, help me to endure!  
I am a woman, with a heart like thine:  
But no—thy nature is too high and pure,  
Thou canst not feel these low-born pangs of mine.

(“The Carmelite Nun” 33-36)

Like the speaker's pointless waiting for the Lord's mercy, her description of Mother Mary's nature as “high and pure” could also be ironic. This purity, from the speaker's perspective, prevents Mary from feeling the needs of an ordinary woman, leading the reader to doubt the reliability of either Lord or Mother, who fail to help or provide justice. Naden's use of the dramatic monologue in this poem allows her to distance herself from the merely feminine association with women's poetry, and enables her to shed light on a major Victorian taboo, namely religious doubts. In Chapter Six, I will discuss how Radford's use of the dramatic monologue allows her to engage with radical aspects, including same-sex desires, which were not spoken of at that time.

## Sonnet

In addition to the dramatic monologue, the sonnet<sup>73</sup> was another form utilised by Victorian women poets, especially during the *fin de siècle*. The form was originated in Italy in the thirteenth century as the Petrarchan sonnet, but was not introduced to England until the sixteenth century when another version of the form occurred which was known as the Shakespearean sonnet. The form, as Chapman points out, was used initially to express the male speaker's love of "an ideal female beloved who is absent, unattainable or dead. In this way, the male speaker predicates his identity on the absence of the female addressee" (Chapman, 2002: 102). However, both male and female poets later used the form for different purposes, and, as will be shown in the following example, the silent female beloved was no longer the only theme of the sonnet, especially at the *fin de siècle* when the form gained more popularity. Natalie M. Houston attributes the popularity of the form in the *fin de siècle* to the public awareness of "the value of its economical size for busy modern readers" (Houston, 2003: 150). The end of the century witnessed radical changes in terms of forms, such as the three-decker novel, which had been dominant in the first part and middle of the century.<sup>74</sup> Similar to the three-decker novel, the long narratives of the verse novel and verse dramas were no longer in demand at the *fin de siècle*.

The popularity of new forms can be seen as an advantage for women poets whose main aim was to draw attention to their poetical talent in a male dominated sphere. Despite its brevity, the sonnet continued to discuss topics which had frequently been represented in longer poetical forms. As Houston observes: "The importance of each word in a sonnet

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<sup>73</sup> A sonnet is "a poem of fourteen lines using any of a number of formal rhyme schemes, in English typically having ten syllables per line" (*Oxford Dictionaries*. Web. 4 Jan. 2014).

<sup>74</sup> In *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914*, Peter Keating has shown that by the end of the century, some publishers and circulating libraries announced that volume prices will be decreased in order "to render the publication of three-volume novels uneconomic, and to encourage publishers to issue new fiction in single-volume form" (Keating, 1989: 25-26).

gave weight to each detail, and the poem's small size focused the reader's attention on things that might be overlooked in a longer descriptive poem" (Houston, 2003: 153). The ability of the sonnet to successfully lend "weight to each detail" can be looked at as women's attempts to challenge the older and longer forms which had principally been used by male poets. In addition, Houston points out: "The sonnet offered late-Victorian poets a strategy for representing and analysing [...] fragments of experience" (Houston, 2003: 157). The very nature of the sonnet as a device to capture and visualise a moment allowed Victorian poets, women poets in particular, to use the form to portray images of nature as well as implying fragments of their experience, especially concerning the double disadvantage of being both women and writers in a patriarchal society.

This dual use of the form is evident in many sonnets by women writers, including "An Autumn Morning" (1889) by Tomson:

A sunny autumn morning, calm and stilled,  
Smiles on the bare, burnt meadows; down the lane  
The hedge-fruits ripen, fresh with last night's rain,  
Among broad leaves the sun begins to gild;  
The crisp low-breathing air no frost has chilled,  
Sweet with pine-fragrance, stings the sense again,  
With joy so keen it meets the lips of pain  
With dim desires and fancies unfulfilled.

Ah, swift and sudden as a swallow's flight  
These flitting golden glimpses come and go;  
The Unseen clasps us through the veil, and, lo!  
Our blood stirs strangely with a deep delight —  
Old dreams, vague visions, glimmer on our sight.  
All we have known, and all we may not know.

("An Autumn Morning")

Tomson's use of the sonnet form allows her to picture the scene through a series of impressions, and then relates it to unsatisfied human desires. The sonnet does not, as its title suggests, provide a mere description of an autumn morning; however, its representation of images of nature is mixed with references to the speaker's unfulfilled dreams. Armstrong argues that language of air and breathing in women's poetry is

“figured as a responsive, finely organized feminine creativity, receptive to external influence, returning back to the world as music that has flowed in, an exhalation or breath of sound” (Armstrong, 1996: 267). Building on Armstrong’s argument, the “crisp low-breathing air” in Tomson’s poem, for instance, may be read as the speaker’s “exhalation”, her own experience of the external world where she is finally left frustrated with “dim desires”.

As we shall see in later chapters, these “dim desires”, which also appear in Radford’s poems as vague and unfulfilled, often have meanings beyond women’s ambitions and dreams; that is, they may have sexual implications. By referring to their unfulfilled fancies and desires, women poets successfully use the sonnet form to capture a moment and represent, as previously noted, fragments of their experience. More importantly, the choice of language and meanings, such as air, breezes and breathing, which are also very common in Radford’s poems, have proved to be women’s own way of reflecting on their emotional and social state, and have consequently become indicative of how women’s poetry is distinguished. Although none of Radford’s poems in this thesis adopt the sonnet form,<sup>75</sup> some of the poems referred to in relation to them, including Rossetti’s, make unconventional use of the sonnet to challenge pre-established beliefs regarding women’s passivity.

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<sup>75</sup> Radford did use the sonnet form, and her sonnet sequence “At Night” (1910) is an obvious example of her mature experimentation of the form. However, as the content of Radford’s sonnets does not, directly, fall into the argument of this thesis, future research may consider in more depth Radford’s use of the sonnet in relation to the wider debate on its significance for Victorian women poets.

## Decadent Poetry

Decadent poetry was an integral component of decadence as a larger movement in art and literature.<sup>76</sup> The movement was criticised by many Victorians, including the German philosopher Max Nordau, whose work *Degeneration* (1895) was hugely influential in shaping the Victorians' ideologies regarding the movement as a decline from morals and what was believed to be high form of art.<sup>77</sup> Nordau describes the *fin de siècle* as “the Dusk of the Nations” referring to the literary and aesthetic trends, which occurred during the decade, as “moral sea-sickness” (Nordau, 1895: 6-7). In addition, Nordau attacks “the originators of all the *fin-de-siècle* movements in art and literature” as “degenerates” whose works are diseased (Nordau, 1895: 17). However, Nordau's views were undermined by other supporters of the movement, such as Egmont Hake, whose work *Regeneration: A Reply to Max Nordau* (1895) identifies the movement as a sign of modernity rather than degeneration:

We cannot believe, with Max Nordau, that such signs as we see of degeneration spring from moral and intellectual weakness. In the external circumstances, we find sufficient cause for far more demoralization than actually exists; and the Germans, taken as individuals, show themselves to possess plenty of those mental and moral qualities which are the only possible foundations of a healthy State (Hake, 1896: 303).

Unlike Nordau, who defines the *fin de siècle* as the end of civilization, Hake classifies it as a transitional stage, marking an era of progress toward a better “healthy” state. Therefore, “decadence” and “degeneration” are understood to encode unfixed meanings and contrary associations; these are often explored in decadent literature. As we shall see

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<sup>76</sup> In “Productive Decadence: ‘The Queer Comradship of Outlawed Thought’: Vernon Lee, Max Nordau, and Oscar Wilde” Richard Dellamora offers an insight into the movement, arguing: “The decadent movement in nineteenth-century Western Europe might be characterized as a critically antimodern tendency within modernity, which depends on vanguard aesthetic techniques and subject matter. The term decadence also partakes of the interest within liberal thought in the possibility of social transformation” (Dellamora, 2004: 529).

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter One for discussions on aestheticism and the New Woman.

in the analysis of “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town”, Radford engages with the decadent movement and Nordau’s work is an implied intertext in her poem which announces the end of one stage and the beginning of another.<sup>78</sup>

In *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, Hall and Alex Murray identify decadent poetry as an inseparable form of the movement which “has always been marked by perpetual ambiguity and its own terminological restlessness” (Hall and Murray, 2013: 14). Like the decadent movement, which was perceived differently, “decadent” becomes an ambiguous term when applied to poetry. The very ambiguity of decadent poetry lies in its social critique as well as its boldness in addressing what had been considered taboo by earlier poets. Decadent poetry does not simply reject existing morals, but continues to search for alternatives. One of the valid alternatives that distinguished *fin-de-siècle* poetry was death, a theme adopted by a number of late Victorian poets to imply more subversive meanings beyond simply the end of a person’s life.

Joseph Bristow recognises Michael Field as among those poets who “sought to position themselves as part of an ongoing debate about the ways in which lyric voice, even when it most authoritatively expresses intense erotic desire, has from the outset been confronted by death” (Bristow, 2013: 31). As will be explored later in the analysis of Michael Field’s “Your Rose is Dead” (1898), restlessness seemed to be an important factor in decadent poetry, which even when it revolts against social and sexual conventions, cannot escape a negative reputation, nor can its writer live in an everlasting peace. As a result, death, on the one hand, can be read as the predetermined fate of any poet who decides to confront social or moral conditions. On the other hand, and as the subsequent analysis of some of Radford’s poems will prove, death is used by women poets

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter Five.

as a metaphor for power by which they can still resist Victorian norms.<sup>79</sup> By choosing to end their lives, women poets refuse to conform to predominant expectations of their role, and consequently represent death as a weapon rather than a fate.

In fact, the representation of death in the poetry of the 1890s is only one aspect of the historical association between death and decadence as a form. For many Victorians, decadence was synonymous with death for more than one reason. Chris Snodgrass relates W. B. Yeats' idea of the tragic generation, a phrase which describes poets of the 1890s,<sup>80</sup> to the fact that "many of the most famous nineties poets happened to die young, usually from diseases [...] traditionally linked to a decadent lifestyle" (Snodgrass, 2002: 321). The collapse of Victorian morals was believed to be a primary cause of the early deaths of these writers, who themselves sought to separate their art from morality, announcing thereby the death of the high form of art which was dominant during the Victorian age. Instead, writers of decadent poetry adopted what Carol T. Christ identifies as "the use of details of modern urban life, like make-up, street girls, trains and cigarettes". Christ adds that "[t]he liberation of subject matter in Decadent poetry" helped in the creation of "a new realism to the lyric" (Christ, 2002: 18). Decadent poetry no longer idealised the institution of marriage, for instance, but alternatively provides an assault on it. By espousing the death of older forms and morals, decadent poetry introduces a new form of art which embodies possibilities of alternative life.

Radford's poetry is indeed an obvious example of the decadent form, in which she uses the kinds of symbols of modern life Christ refers to, such as "cigarettes" and

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter Three in which my analysis of Radford's poem "My Angel" is linked to Bristow's argument on Michael Field's portrayal of death as the fate of women's passion and erotic desire.

<sup>80</sup> In "Tragic Generations", Robert B. Shaw demonstrates how most of Yeats's friends died young, "Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson ruined themselves with alcohol, whatever physical ailments technically killed them. John Davidson, also an alcoholic, drowned himself in the English Channel. Arthur Symons, although he outlived Yeats, might as well have died decades earlier, having been largely incompetent by a shattering nervous collapse" (Shaw, 2000: 210).

“street girls”, in order to criticise the social idealisation of marriage.<sup>81</sup> Radford is, after all, one of the women poets Snodgrass describes: “In a Victorian age that had held up woman as the emblem of domesticity, chastity, stability and religious faith, women poets of the nineties wrote frequently about homelessness, sexual desire, a woman’s secret life, and belligerent unbelief” (Snodgrass, 2002: 328). As discussed earlier in this section, women poets unquestionably competed with their male counterparts for the creation and development of many poetical forms, and decadent poetry is one of them. By diverging from early and mid-Victorian representations of women’s passivity into more radical models of womanhood, women poets of the 1890s contributed completely distinct experiences to the form from those represented by male poets. Similar to the death of Victorian morals and values, which were proclaimed by the male writers and critics of the decade, women poets slew the conventional sacrificial models of femininity and announced the birth of new revolutionary models whose dreams and desires should not be perceived as inferior any more. Meanings of death and regeneration will be explored in more detail in the following chapters which provide close readings of Radford’s poems.

## **Part Three: Common Themes and Contrary Representations in Victorian Women’s Poetry**

### **Marriage and Gender**

Aside from its engagement with multiple experimental forms, this section explores how Victorian women’s poetry discusses a variety of themes starting with domestic life, including maternal and wifely roles, and ending with the New Woman’s ambitions and desires. However, women poets did not exclusively focus on women’s issues; their poetry

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapters Three and Five for my discussion of these symbols.

also concerns other social and political aspects, such as socialism and landscape. Although earlier and later Victorian women's poetry shares common themes, the representation and contextualisation of these themes is distinct and depends to some extent on each poet's personal ideals and beliefs. Linda Hughes suggests, "that biographical details, when admitted as part of a reading strategy, can at times construct the perception- hence the operation- of a greater aesthetic richness and complexity in a poem" (Hughes, 1996: 181). The following examples of poems by Tomson, Barrett Browning and Levy indeed validate Hughes's claim of how considering aspects of women poets' real lives can enhance the reader's understanding of their representation of gender and marital themes. This is evident in Chapter Three where my analysis of Radford's representation of marriage in relation to the conflicts in her marital life reveals a contribution from biographical details to the richness of poetical meanings.

Hughes believes that "marriage as problem figured rarely in poetry of the time. Nineteenth-century British women poets tended to avoid the subject altogether" (Hughes, 1996: 164). Hughes's assertion regarding the scarcity of the theme of marriage in women's poetry is confronted by Angela Leighton, whose study of Victorian women poets concludes that "the extent to which the Victorians hung their sexual morality on cooking, shirt-buttons and silence gave women, particularly in the last decades of the century, a strong cause for revolt against the whole system of men and matrimony" (Leighton, 1992: 170). Even if women poets did not explicitly highlight marriage as a problem in their poetry, they alternatively use metaphors of prisons and cages to implicitly reflect on the legal conditions and social attitudes regarding women's inferior marital position which continued to be explored by many married and single women poets.

Some Victorian women poets, including Tomson, chose to embody their marital suffering in the image of wild animals, which as Mermin observes, "don't come just from emotional hunger, or sexual repression, or cultural pressure toward certain acceptable

female subjects: they are generated by the need in certain kinds of poems for someone or something to take the woman's role in relation to the speaker" (Mermin, 1995: 70). While wild animals could immediately bring to the readers' attention sexual connotations of lust and dangerous desires, they were also used by Victorian women poets to blur their identity. By referring to animals in their poetry, women poets obscure the relationship between the marital and social needs expressed in the poem and the speaker of it. They make their desires implicit in the animals' needs for recognition and freedom. Hughes's reading of Tomson's representation of animals in "Ballad of the Bird-Bride" (1889) in relation to her own life is an example of this strategy. However, as mentioned earlier, biographical information can help infer poetical meanings from the context of their writers' life, even when these writers attempt to distance themselves from the narrators and narratives of their poetry. In Tomson's case, Hughes notes: "Tomson's readers, at least among her literary circles, would have read [her] poems in light of her own marital history" (Hughes, 1996: 165). Tomson's repeatedly failing marriages are mirrored in her depiction of marital life in many of her poems, including "Bird-Bride".

In the poem, Tomson depicts an ironic association between her bird-bride and the Victorian angel. Although the bird-bride is white and has wings, she is described as a "wild white wife" ("Bird-Bride" 43). Her wildness is represented in the strength of her beating wings, which imply her desire to fly and escape the confines of domesticity. This point is revisited in the analysis of Radford's "My Angel" in Chapter Three, in which the revolutionary characteristics of the speaker, like Tomson's, challenge Patmore's passive angel. In her reading of Tomson's poem, Hughes observes:

[I]nstead of reciprocating the man's love and focusing only on her bond with him, this bird-maiden retains her native wildness within the confines of domestic walls. [...] Graham Tomson likewise links the bird-bride and the female werewolf to the angel – the angel of the house. (Hughes, 1996: 167-169)

Despite the wife's wildness and her rejection of the man's love, the poem is concluded by the voice of the man emphasising that his wife remains his property:

Ay, ye were mine, and till I forget,  
Ye are mine forever and aye,  
Mine, wherever your wild wings go

(“Bird-Bride” 81-83)

The poem describes the wife's efforts to free herself and her children from her husband's subordination, but finally the husband claims authority over his wife, possibly reflecting on the insufficient amendments of the Matrimonial Causes Act. Tomson herself, as Bristow notes, “had experienced two painful divorces, both of which not only involved the loss of custody of three children but also encouraged her to create yet another authorial identity” (Bristow, 2006: 519). Thus, her depiction shows that it was difficult for women to escape marriage conditions both in real life and in poetry. As will be explored in Chapter Three, the bird, which seeks freedom, is a repeated image in Radford's poems. Contextualising these poems in relation to Radford's own later marital conflict leads to an interpretation similar to that of Tomson's use of animals to express her own needs. Therefore, the flying birds in Radford's poems may be seen as a reflection of her own desire to escape the chains of marriage to move toward a freer life.

Unlike Tomson and Radford, Barrett Browning was not a *fin de siècle* poet, but her mid-nineteenth-century poetry provided a similar representation of marriage's restricting conditions. Written earlier in the century, her most popular nine book verse novel *Aurora Leigh*, explores the construction of Aurora's identity as a woman writer in

Victorian society. Also, the verse novel<sup>82</sup> offers a critique of the Victorians' celebration of matrimony and the institution of marriage, which continued to be a concern for many *fin de siècle* women poets, including Levy. Both *Aurora Leigh* and Levy's "A Ballad of Religion and Marriage" (1888) depict the theme of marriage in a manner contrary to the typical models of Victorian middle-class marriages. Julia F. Saville comments that *Aurora Leigh* "produces a version of companionate marriage that is specifically middle-class, and considerably distanced from the ideal invoked by Patmore in *The Angel*" (Saville, 2002: 530). Despite Aurora's initial refusal to marry her cousin Romney, who underestimates her poetical talent, she partly conforms to social values by marrying him, although she still does not relinquish her profession. In doing so, Barrett Browning disrupts the sacrificial and angelic model of femininity without exceeding heterosexual confines.

On the other hand, Levy's poem, which obviously engages with calls by the New Woman, provides an assault on the marital institution and domestic tasks and strives for a world where all social conventions are discarded:

Grant, in a million years at most,  
Folk shall be neither pairs nor odd—  
Alas! we sha'n't be there to boast  
"Marriage has gone the way of God!"

("A Ballad of Religion and Marriage" 25-28)

Unlike the final book of *Aurora Leigh*, which ends with heterosexual marriage, the final stanza of Levy's poem refuses to conform to such kinds of relationships. In her study of the theme of marriage and gender in Victorian poetry, including Levy's, Saville observes: "Ironically, as monogamous marriage became an increasingly popular trope for representing breaches of faith and the potential breakdown of domestic and imperial negotiation, it was at the same time used to represent same-sex unions in some of the most

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of Barrett Browning's use of fusion of genres in relation to Radford's poetic play: *The Ransom*.

vital poetry of the age” (Saville, 2002: 536). Considering the different sexual identities of both writers – Barrett Browning is speaking from a heterosexual marriage experience and Levy from a homosocial point of view – it seems that each poet plays with her representation of the theme to serve her own ideologies and identification. Levy, for instance, is a poet who addresses monogamous marriage for homosexual purposes, and ends her poem by anticipating a time when Victorian hierarchy and subordination no longer exist. Alex Goody finds that “A Ballade of Religion and Marriage” “critiques hegemonic conceptions of femininity and the social, legal, and cultural position of women” (Goody, 2006: 466). In another essay, Goody explicitly notes, the poem “imagines a nonheterosexual future” (Goody, 2010: 168). Thus, the choice of a “million years” as a time gap may be read as an escape, demonstrating how the celebration of same-sex unions was an impossible dream in Victorian England. Levy is calling for a spectrum of more fluid relationships and identities in which people are not categorised as either pairs or single.

The choice of antonyms “pairs” and “odd” may also echo the problem of odd women at the *fin de siècle*, which is explored in George Gissing’s<sup>83</sup> novel *The Odd Women* (1893). In his novel, Gissing engages with the marriage question and women’s employment opportunities, offering a critique of the Victorian idealisation of women’s conventional roles. From the very outset of the novel, we are introduced to Dr. Madden’s view as stereotypical of the Victorian perception of women’s role: “Mrs. Madden, having given birth to six daughters, had fulfilled her function in this wonderful world. [...] A sweet, calm, unpretending woman; admirable in the domesticities” (*The Odd Women* 3). These lines recall the discussion in Chapter One which highlights passivity and commitment to domesticity as the characteristics a woman must have in order to be

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<sup>83</sup> Gissing (1857-1903) was an English novelist identified by Jacob Korg as “[a]n enemy of the Victorian myth of the inferiority of women, he believed firmly that women were the intellectual and spiritual equals of men” (Korg, 1980: 185). Korg’s comment is evidenced by Gissing’s portrayal of marriage as a disappointing and failing institution in *The Odd Women*.

socially acceptable. Therefore, Alice and Virginia Madden are represented as odd and unmarriageable, due to their “shapeless” and “unhealthy look” (*The Odd Women* 9).

On the other hand, Monica’s beauty is a reason enough for her to attract a husband: “Monica was sure to marry. Thanks Heaven, she was sure to marry!” (*The Odd Women* 11). Although Gissing’s representation of the Madden’s sisters mirrors the prevailing idleness of a society that did not value a woman for her qualifications and passion but for her beauty, Susan Colon argues that Gissing’s novel “interrogates in new ways the interrelationship of the professional and the domestic in women’s lives” (Colon, 2001: 441). The “new[ness]”, in Colon’s terms, may be read in relation to the tragic endings of the marriage plots in the novel. In Monica’s case, beauty was not enough to grant her a happy marriage. Nor did she manage to accept her husband’s jealousy and authority over her, as is evident on many occasions:

‘A married woman must accept her husband’s opinion, at all events about men.’ [...] Monica could not reply. That word ‘love’ had grown a weariness to her upon his lips. She did not love him. Every day the distance between them widened, and when he took her in his arms she had to struggle with a sense of shrinking, of disgust. The union was unnatural; she felt herself constrained by a hateful force when he called upon her for the show of wifely tenderness. (*The Odd Women* 158-159)

In his reading of the novel, Jacob Korg points out: “While Monica’s story exemplifies the danger of marriage on the old plan, Rhoda’s shows how impossible the new plan is in a society governed by the old suppositions” (Korg, 1980: 189). Unlike Monica, Rhoda Nunn resists conventional marriage and seeks a free-love union instead. When arguing with Mr. Barfoot, Rhoda mentions that she wants to teach girls

[t]o scorn the old idea that a woman’s life is wasted if she does not marry. My work is to help those women who, by sheer necessity, must live alone – women whom vulgar opinion ridicules. How can I help them so effectually as by living among them, one of them, and showing that my life is anything but

weariness and lamentation? I am fitted for this. It gives me a sense of power and usefulness which I enjoy. (*The Odd Women* 145)

Rhoda's view echoes Herminia's in *The Woman Who Did*, as both share with the New Woman her search for more alternative and revolutionary roles. While Herminia's main conflict is not to conform to matrimony, Rhoda fears that marriage would interfere with her job and chooses to fulfil her passion by maintaining her career rather than to get married.

Similarly, Levy's poem engages with the position of single women portrayed in Gissing's *The Odd Women*, and with advanced views on unconventional sexuality which were marginalised in her lifetime. Emma Francis points out: "[Levy] was writing several decades prior to the widespread dissemination of sexology, during the inter-war period, which several historians of sexuality have argued provided the first discursive space in which a coherent lesbian identity could be grounded" (Francis, 1999: 186). Francis's claim shows that Levy's call for a time when "[f]olk shall be neither pairs nor odd" is not simply a revolt against cultural prejudice and discrimination against single women, but introduces homosexual thoughts unspoken of at her time. The majority of the following chapters will demonstrate how Radford's poetry shares many of the metaphors and meanings addressed by Levy to possibly serve her lesbian thoughts, which leads me to propose that Radford's representations of homosexual speakers are empathetic.

## **Nature**

Like the escape from time, nature, which is usually associated with rural places, is a common theme in Victorian women's poetry. As the readings of Radford's poems that follow will show, woodlands and rural places are usually represented as places which the speaker escapes to from the burden of city life. However, it is not always rest and comfort

which women poets seek in these woods. Literary critics, including Pauline Fletcher, argue that for some Victorian poets, “wild places are often the realm of unacknowledged and dangerous desires” (Fletcher, 2002: 495). According to Fletcher, wildness, commonly associated with woodlands, may be read as a metaphor for women’s sexual desire which does not find satisfaction in the city life of Victorian England. In addition, Mermin identifies “women’s use of flowers, which traditionally represent female objects of male desire” as an example of the wide range of metaphors that women employ to hint at eroticism (Mermin, 1995: 69). As a result, flowers and roses, which are often associated with women’s representations of landscape, should be understood not simply as symbols of nature’s beauty, but rather as having more subversive sensual implications in women’s poetry, a point which I will explore in my analysis of floral imagery in Radford’s poems as possibly addressing homosexual desire.

Accordingly, Chris White suggests that flowers and roses in Michael Field’s poetry could be read in relation to their lesbianism while simultaneously asserting that the unrevealed identity of the speaker complicates this reading. White finds that Michael Field’s “Your Rose is Dead”

produces an image of sensual pleasure that is dependent upon an appreciation of refined morbidity in the decay of the rose. Again the scenario is one of walking through a cultivated garden, examining the flowers, but the apparently literal roses are female, sensual and the object of love. (White, 1996: 57)

Associating the roses in Michael Field’s poem as “female, sensual and the object of love” with Bristow’s previously quoted observation on Michael Field’s adoption of death as a myth in their decadent poetry renders the image of the dying flower as possibly portraying women’s dying (homosexual) desires in a society where sexuality was perceived as exclusively heterosexual:

While I, drawn on to vague, prodigious pleasure,  
Fondle my treasure.  
O sweet, let death prevail  
Upon you, as your nervous outlines thicken  
And totter, as your crimsons stale,  
I feel fresh rhythms quicken,  
Fresh music follows you.

(“Your Rose is Dead” 23-29)

A biographical reading of these lines suggests the strong bond between the speaker and her beloved, despite the age gap. As White points out: “the text pursues the celebration of a woman who has been loved for a long time, and whose aged appearance has made no difference to the love” (White, 1996: 57). The lover does not mind her beloved’s death, as long as her “nervous outlines”, which could be associated with the wildness of nature, “thicken” and become stronger. Cheryl Wilson points out: “Despite changing conceptions of gender roles and sexuality at the fin-de-siècle, in certain arenas, pushing women onto the path from virginal courtship, to heterosexual marriage, to domestic bliss remained the status quo” (Wilson, 2008: 192). Therefore, it is possible to argue that death becomes a welcome end to women who insist on revolting against heterosexual conventions. However, Kirstie Blair describes the sexual meanings in Michael Field’s poem as “disturbing”, “vague”, and “ill-defined” (Blair, 2008: 12-13). Blair’s description is unsurprising, for Michael Field’s use of nature images and the playful tone, which could be an attempt to blur subversive sexual meanings, led many contemporary scholars to avoid a straightforward or fixed reading of the poem. Thus, it is also possible to suggest that Michael Field’s poem involves a pun of the hitherto association between sexual orgasm and death. In *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*, Regina Barreca observes: “the loss of self during orgasm apparently mirrored the loss of self in death. Sex and death both indicated the limits of human control and were therefore to be feared” (Barreca, 1990: 1). Whether the speaker in the poem is male or female, the thirst for orgasm, which is

possibly implied in “let death prevail”, validates a reading which suggests women poets’ use of rural and wild images for subversive ends.

In fact, a reading of Radford’s representation of wildlife and similar use of metaphors by other Victorian women poets would support claims about the possibility of implied sexual meanings in rural images. Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” is an obvious example of women poets’ use of rural images to express unconventional sentiments. Although the poem was received as a children’s story, it is underlain by subversive meanings. Rossetti sets her poem in the wood and hints at women’s forbidden sexual desire through her multiple references to attractive fruits, which they should not taste: “We must not look at goblin men/ We must not buy their fruits” (“Goblin Market” 42-43). The concept of sisterhood, which is explored throughout the poem, allows us to read the rejection of the merchants’ fruits as advice on how to avoid male seduction. It may also be a rejection of males’ sexual ideals, suggesting the sisters’ refusal of heterosexual norms. Linda H. Peterson points out: “Rossetti occasionally invoked a domestic scene, as in ‘Goblin Market’, to validate the bonds of sisterly love and warn against the rapacity of the outside world” (Peterson, 2002: 47). As in Michael Field’s poem, in which nature is associated with same-sex desire, the “sisterly love” Peterson refers to may be read as a lesbian discourse, informing Laura’s and Lizzi’s relationship. As discussed in Chapter One, contemporary scholars explore the sexual bonds in female friendships which were believed to encourage women’s domestic commitment. In addition, Laura’s and Lizzi’s strong relationship, and ultimately their survival without men’s help, indicates that the placement of events beyond the restraints of city life celebrates femininity away from patriarchal and heterosexual conventions. Terrence Holt notes that “*Goblin Market* attempts to imagine a position for women outside systems of power” (Holt, 1996: 195). Thus, the theme of nature in women’s poetry provides the sisters with a chance to escape

from the injustice of real life, while questioning and challenging men's authority over women.

In a setting where censorship of literary works was relatively commonplace, Mermin explores how women poets were able to avoid this: "since the surface of their poetry – diction, subject matter, and (at least apparently) tone – did not contradict what Victorian women were expected to say, their shifts in point of view and revisions of old stories generally went unobserved and unencouraged" (Mermin, 1995: 79). In Rossetti's case, for instance, the tone of the poem might sound like that of a fairy tale, while it conceals more subversive meanings about heroic sisterhood. Rossetti, as Mermin argues, "uses a literary form [...] that purports to be nothing more serious than a tale told by a woman to amuse and instruct children; the form, like the content, seems to betray an assumption that women can only be grown-up, independent, productive, and active in a life without men" (Mermin, 1996: 155). If children were Rossetti's intended audience for "Goblin Market", then she no doubt aimed to encourage them to dream of a better world where women can live happily and safely without men's assistance. However, the poem's imagining of a female-based utopia is not conclusive, for towards the end of the poem, the sisters conform to heterosexual norms: "Days, weeks, months, years/ Afterwards, when both were wives/ With children of their own" ("Goblin Market" 543-545). Holt suggests that the poem "brings us to recognize the utopian fantasies of a separate women's culture are just that: fantasies of an impossible utopia" (Holt, 1996: 205). While the heterosexual ending of the poem, apparently, reflects on the fact that a Victorian woman's fate is tied to marriage, it still undermines men's power by dismissing any reference to the husbands.

Similarly, the speaker in Barrett Browning's "The Deserted Garden" (1838), while addressing issues concerning children's rights, expresses her delight with the wildness of the deserted garden away from men's sight:

I call'd the place my wilderness,  
For no one enter'd there but I.  
The sheep look'd in, the grass to espy,  
And pass'd it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,  
And spread their boughs enough about  
To keep both sheep and shepherd out,  
But not a happy child.

(“The Deserted Garden” 9-16)

The speaker empowers herself by calling the deserted garden her “wilderness”, implying that she is ruler there rather than ruled by others. Building on Fletcher’s argument, mentioned earlier in this section, the “interwoven” boughs of the wild trees may be read as dangerous sexual desires, which scare men and “keep both sheep and shepherd out”. In his reading of the poem, Simon Avery proposes: “As a place of immense beauty, seemingly cut off from the external world with its patriarchal familial, religious, and political institutions [...], the garden represents a completely private space” (Avery, 2006: 415-416). I add to Avery’s suggestion about Barrett Browning’s intention to distance her heroine from man-made laws and attitudes that by referring to men as “shepherd”, that is, occupier of an inferior profession, the poet undermines the authority of patriarchal institutions. The speaker rejects the sense of shepherds as guarding and looking after others, possibly women. Meanwhile, this image offers a critique of paternalist discourse, imagining women and children as “sheep” requiring looking after in a traditional sense. By locking the shepherd out, the speaker’s practice of power extends to include the outer world which she initially escapes.

## Female Authorship and Poetic Identity

The marginalisation and isolation Victorian women poets suffered in a male dominated literary sphere are inescapable dilemmas in women's poetry. In her analysis of the poet figure in Meynell's poetry, Kathleen Anderson highlights: "During the Victorian period, women poets especially could not avoid the tangled web of contradictory gender ideologies that seemed to necessitate, with every act of poetic creation, their simultaneous reinforcement and undercutting of patriarchal constructs of femininity" (Anderson, 2003: 259). As will be discussed in Chapter Four, women poets, including Radford, did not simply submit to and reflect on the negativity of the prejudiced reception of their work, but challenged patriarchal constructions of their poetic identity, revealing this identity to be a source of power and inspiration.

Meynell's poems countered the placement of women's poetry in an inferior position. Her celebration of her poetic identity and her resistance to gendered ideologies are evident in many of her works, such as "A Poet's Fancies" (1875), which includes a series of poems mainly centred on the figure of the poet. Meynell chooses to end the collection with a poem entitled "Unlinked", which addresses the poet's authority over her art:

No, I shall live a poet waking, sleeping,  
And I shall die a poet unaware.

From me, my art, thou canst not pass away;  
And I, a singer though I cease to sing,  
Shall own thee without joy in thee or woe.

Through my indifferent words of every day,  
Scattered and all unlinked the rhymes shall ring,  
And make my poem; and I shall not know.

("Unlinked" 7-14)

The speaker shows that poetry is something inseparable from her, something that accompanies her even after her death. She ironically indicates that her art is a thing which cannot escape her, and which she cannot escape either. This representation leads Anderson to acknowledge Meynell's success "in constructing a female poetic voice that generates and affirms itself, rather than being defined by the Not-Male. She depicts the world as a reflection of her poetic greatness rather than as a hindrance to it" (Anderson, 2003: 259). Instead of highlighting the disadvantages of being a woman poet, Meynell emphasises the authority of the poet, in possession of her own art, in a literary sphere where female poets were usually silenced. Whereas traditional poetry/the epics she alludes to with reference to the "singer" who "sing[s]", would have been about heroic subjects and male warriors, the "indifferent words of everyday" may refer to women's everyday lives, also suggesting the value of female experience. By doing so, Meynell provides an unconventional depiction of the female poet, a figure who usually strives for social recognition.

However, Meynell's celebration of her poetic identity is not a stereotype of the poet figure in Victorian women's poetry. The search for social recognition, which is absent from Meynell's "Unlinked", is a key factor in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* earlier in the century. Aurora's struggle for a place in the literary sphere is contextualised against the backdrop of Victorian patriarchy. As Charles LaPorte argues: "Already a prominent figure by the early 1850s, Barrett Browning meant *Aurora Leigh* to contest the literary marginalization of women and to cement her own reputation at the same time" (LaPorte, 2013: 830). As briefly noted when discussing the theme of marriage in *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora's challenge to the patriarchal system and the literary market lies in her insistence on connecting with a wider audience and in not leaving her profession even after her marriage. In addition, the integration of biographical elements in *Aurora Leigh* is essential to our understanding of how Victorian women poets use their literary heroines to resist and criticise the subordination of women in real life. As LaPorte observes: "Both

Barrett Browning and Aurora write from the gendered margins of art to claim an esteem that had been denied to earlier woman poets” (LaPorte, 2013: 846). Thus, Barrett Browning’s portrayal of Aurora’s poetic journey is not a mere poetic innovation, but is rather aimed at raising awareness of the unjust dismissal of the woman poet in Victorian England.

A close reading of the following extract from *Aurora Leigh* parallels the previous claim about Aurora’s struggle for recognition, especially from her cousin and future husband, Romney:

I smiled that all this youth should love me, - sighed  
That such a love could scarcely raise them up  
To love what was more worthy than myself;  
Then sighed again, again, less generously,  
To think the very love they lavished so,  
Proved me inferior. The strong loved me not,  
And he ... my cousin Romney ... did not write.

(*Aurora Leigh* III.227-233)

The dismissal of Aurora’s work as “inferior”, mirrors the stereotypical gendered assessment of Victorian women’s poetry, as in Victorian England, femininity was reason enough to underestimate women’s literary talent. Crucially in her construction of the poetic identity, Barrett Browning details Aurora’s reaction to Romney’s rejection of it. His denial of her poetical ability negatively influences her, causing sadness and frustration to permeate her tone. The discouragement Aurora experiences, while reflecting the suffering many women poets had to confront, offers a more conventional image of the woman poet. Unlike the poet in Meynell’s “Unlinked”, who is confident of her authority and creativity, Aurora seeks to satisfy and achieve recognition from the male figure in her life. These contradictory representations, while complicating the validity of fixed

assumptions regarding women's engagement with the theme, enhance our understanding of the complex notion of women's poetic identity in the Victorian era.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has explained how Victorian women's poetry engaged with the debate on women's changing roles in the private and public spheres. Women poets' awareness of the gendered politics, which denied them their rights, led them to articulate their anger with and rebellion against prevailing norms. By using evocative language, which at the surface level conforms to domestic ideals, women poets were able to hide subversive and revolutionary meanings which confront the prejudiced perception of their work. In addition, the use of particular forms and certain strategies, such as the ungendered speaker, allowed them to distance themselves from the poetic voice, challenging, therefore, biographical readings of their poems. However, this does not mean that women's personal experiences have not influenced their portrayal of aspects concerning women's oppression. Indeed, the personal was informed by the political and vice versa, a fact which will be revealed in the following chapter which sheds light on Radford's personal conflict as a factor which contributes to her empathetic representation of the female speaker who expresses frustration and marginalisation.

# **Chapter Three: Women's Passion and Domestic/Social Walls: Depictions of Marriage and Love in Radford's Diary and Poetry**

## **Overview**

This chapter offers an insight into the way Radford's poetry engages with and, simultaneously, challenges prevailing debates concerning marriage and women's domestic role. Radford's poetry identifies woman's passion as a source of fear and threatening to her assumed angelic/domestic role. The analysis of the poems will examine the use of the ungendered speaker which permits more than one interpretation. Therefore, the passion addressed by Radford's speakers not only reflects on a married woman's desire to escape the confines of domestic walls, but also identifies with a number of marginal figures in society, such as prostitutes. By relating different personal and social aspects to Radford's poems, which address the themes of love and marriage, this chapter aims to highlight Radford's advanced and liberal thoughts concerning marriage. It also identifies Radford as a radical poet who shares with her contemporary women poets a literary tradition, which challenges male representations of the female figure as submissive and conventionally feminine.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part One, "Passion, Love and Marriage in Radford's Diary and Letters", explores the three different phases of love and marriage in Radford's personal life. It also forms the biographical background to the analysis of the poems influenced by Radford's personal suffering. The first section of Part One, "Radford's Romantic Expectations of Marriage and her Early Marital Years", focuses on diary entries and letters which reveal how Radford, like many Victorian women, was

initially driven by the social idealisation of marriage as fulfilling to women's emotions and dreams. However, the second section, "Facing the Reality of Marriage and the Burden of Domestic Duties", conveys the challenge Radford's romantic ideals faced immediately after marriage, due to the frustrations and limitations of her maternal and domestic duties. The final section, "The Emotional Struggle of a Lonely Wife with an Ill Husband", pinpoints the transformation in Radford's personal life after her husband's mental illness, which left her desperate for love and suffering emotional insecurity in isolation. This section focuses on the significance of unpublished diary entries and letters which have not yet been discussed by contemporary scholars.

The second part of the chapter includes a selection of poems from Radford's early and later published volumes of poetry which highlight her critique of the ideals imposed on married women, along with other marginal figures in society. The first subheading, "A Bride's 'High Thoughts' and Marriage's 'Fragrant wall': Expectations Vs. Reality", forms a discussion of "A Bride" and "Outside the hedge of roses", which address the existing idealisation of marriage, but finally represent the speaker either as lonely and frustrated, or escaping the domestic confines. The second section, "The Marginal Wife/Lover and (her) Neglected Passion" focuses on the poems "Your Gift" and "My Angel", which share the theme of the passionate speaker who seeks love and support, but remains ignored. A cross reading of both poems in relation to Radford's play *The Ransom* and Webster's poem "A Castaway" reveals the poems' concerns with issues of prostitution and the legal position of marriage. The final subheading, "Domestic/Social Confines and the Birds Imagery", includes "A Wanderer" (1910) and "My bird who may not lift his wing", both published in *Poems* and address contrasting portrayals of the bird image; wandering and striving in the first poem, but restricted and incapable in the other.

Apart from Hughes's brief association of "Outside the hedge of roses" with Wilde's trial and Richardson's proposal of the personal and political meanings in "Your Gift" and *The Ransom*, the poems in this chapter are all analysed for the first time. Thus, both parts of this chapter add to the existing body of knowledge, offering a new approach to Radford's life and poetry in relation to the conflict experienced by married women and other marginal figures in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

## **Part One: Passion, Love and Marriage in Radford's Diary and Letters**

### **Radford's Romantic Expectations of Marriage and her Early Marital Years**

A chronological approach to Radford's diary entries and letters reveals a number of different phases to her marriage, including the frustration experienced by a passionate woman confined by the domestic sphere of the nineteenth century. A few months prior to their marriage, Dollie tells Ernest: "I seem to lose my hold on the daily life around me & my own – when I am away from you: Things lose their acuteness and intensity - I want to be stronger, but it is difficult to gather up ones [sic] power of self containment after letting it slip away" (Add MS 89029/.27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 27 June 1883). This letter suggests Radford's emotional dependence on Ernest, a fact which will be recalled in the discussion of Levy's "Xantippe". It is also a reminder of Nesbit's poem in Chapter One, in which the speaker identifies herself as "part of [her husband]", having "no other life". In a letter sent the following day to Ernest, Dollie writes:

I have to rest you a little, & take care of your head on my shoulders:  
I want to be so helpful, so useful to you Ernest. Sometimes when  
I think up all I want to be, it seems as though life for ever & ever,

could not be long enough to grow, & learn, & do. – I am afraid sometimes of dreaming too much, & becoming inactive in my life. (Add MS 89029/.27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 28 June 1883)

Although the letter reveals Radford's ambition, it shares with the previous one the way Radford links the value of her life to Ernest. While in the first one she conveys a sense of dependency on him, the second reveals the depth of her commitment to fulfilling her husband's needs by being "so helpful, so useful to" him. Despite this commitment, Radford seems to be aware of the limitations of her love. Her "care of" Ernest may be the reason for her belief that life "could not be long enough to grow, & learn, & do", as if to say that her domestic duties will occupy the larger part of her life, and she will no longer have time to further her learning and develop intellectual skills. By being "afraid" of "becoming inactive" in her life, Radford signals a desire for liberation from women's traditional role. As will be discussed below, this conflict between domestic duties and the active life which Radford dreamed of becomes more evident after her marriage.

Like many Victorian women, Radford was misled in expecting that marriage would be fulfilling to her emotional and intellectual needs. Before her marriage, her diary records: "I want quiet days just now for a little! Quiet days with Ernest" (Radford Diary, 28 August 1883). However, as will be revealed in later sections, her married life was not as "quiet" as she wished. As a young woman on her honeymoon, Radford was preoccupied by the presents Ernest brought to her: "Ernest went out, secretly, and brought me back an old flemish [sic] amethyst brooch! – A beautiful little jewel. – It will look lovely in my green liberty silk" (Radford Diary, 26 October 1883). However, after 1883, the diary lacks further entries on Ernest's presents, and Radford's admiration of jewellery starts to diminish. As will be revealed in the analysis of "Your Gift" in Part Two, these gifts become a source of fear rather than a means of cherishing the lover. While this may be due to Ernest's neglect of his wife, it could also be due to Radford's realisation that her

marital desires were more than simply materialistic ones; she also needed to feel her husband's love and care.

## **Facing the Reality of Marriage and the Burden of Domestic**

### **Duties**

The following year, Radford complains: "Feel my mind to be getting weaker and fuller every day!" (Radford Diary, 8 June 1884). Although Radford's feeling of weakness may be due to her pregnancy with Maitland, her first son, this diary entry echoes the frustrated tone surfacing in her letters to Ernest. During that time, Ernest was occupied with his work, which led Radford to feel "[v]ery lonesome without Ernest" (Radford Diary, 20 November 1884). Radford's disappointment in her limited role is evident in her diary and letters, particularly after the birth of Maitland, when, as a result of her maternal duties, she experiences loneliness and an inability to intellectually engage with her husband. In a letter to Ernest dated 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1886, Radford notes:

I think sometimes that I could help you more, if I had a different mind & stronger head; & there I feel unhappy because I get tired over domestic things, & rendered unfit to give away keep at all. – I feel that our life must find experience in something for other people – the world – to be quite happy. (Add MS 89029/.27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 2 September 1886)

The letter articulates Radford's frustration and realisation of her limited role. The experience of being fully occupied with domestic duties frustrates her expectation of a more productive life of her own, and also to be the centre of Ernest's life. During their engagement, she had wanted to be "so helpful" and "so useful", but only two years into the marriage, Radford becomes aware of her need for "a different mind" in order to "help" Ernest and become a more productive person. She is clearly "unhappy" with domestic life, which she believes prevents her from being useful to others. As I shall refer to later in Part

Two, the frustration in this letter echoes the elegiac tone of poems, such as “A Bride”, which address the theme of love and marriage.

Radford’s inability to cope with her domestic duties is addressed by Ann MacEwen as a major reason behind the conflict in her later life:

[She] was high on romantic expectations [but] low on the skills of household management. ... She had not had a mother from whom to learn, and had lived with her father and young sister in a succession of lodgings in which the landlady, with the help of a servant or two, would have seen to the domestic round of catering, cooking and cleaning. Nor had Dollie any experience of managing money. ... The combination of over-idealism about marriage and under-familiarity with home economics was to compound the difficulties that her life with Ernest was to run into later on. (MacEwen in Pullen, 2012: 35)

MacEwen’s comment touches directly on the title and content of this chapter. It reveals the way in which Radford herself was a victim of the “over-idealism about marriage” of Victorian culture. In addition to her incompetence in household management, Radford, MacEwen states, “was high on romantic expectations”. This led her to continue to search for love and warmth, both in her poetry and real life. These “high” “expectations” are explicitly, and at times implicitly, addressed in Radford’s poems as the reason for women ending up lonely or looking for an alternative way of life.



Figure 5: A photograph of Dollie Radford two years after her marriage (Add MS 89029/6/9 – 1, Framed Photographs of Dollie Radford, 1885).



Figure 6: Dollie and Ernest Radford, their son Maitland and their eldest daughter Hester, 1888. The photograph is copied from Pullen’s “Dollie Radford and Anna Wickham: two of Hampstead’s radical women poets” (Pullen, 2012: 36).

### **The Emotional Struggle of a Lonely Wife with an Ill Husband**

The second part of Radford’s diary conveys the emotional transformation in her life. As mentioned in the introduction, Ernest developed a mental illness from which he

does not seem to have recovered, and Radford was left alone seeking love from her ill husband: “Dearest – dearest – The days are so long, and the waiting. I have learnt so much in these weeks – I know the deepest pain of the world” (Radford Diary, 27 April 1892). For such a loving and a caring woman like Radford, “the deepest pain of the world” would not be due only to her experience of loneliness, but also a result of the imperative need to financially support herself and her three children.

Radford’s loneliness also influenced her own emotions, as mirrored in the tone of her diary entries: “My love come back to me – do not leave me so. Let me tell you all my love for you – all my life is part of you [...] I have been cold sometimes & seemed far away – but you knew all the time how I belonged to you” (Radford Diary, 20 May 1892). From this entry onwards, Radford begins to reflect on a coldness she has experienced for some time towards Ernest: “I remember your face is sad when I have been cold & looking only on my own heart. Only God can know, and you dear, the depth of my sorrow, all the words and times I remember when I have failed you” (Radford Diary, 27 May 1892). In Part Two, the word “cold”, which is repeated in both entries, continues to appear throughout the majority of Radford’s poems with both female and ungendered speakers attempting to escape the “cold nest” to seek love. Although Radford records regretting the coldness of her emotions in her diary, the fact that she was, for some time, “looking only on [her] own heart” may be read in relation to the way she attempted to fulfil her own desires, potentially through love with another woman or man. Chapter Six will address the lesbian overtones in Radford’s poetry; however, it is also worth noting in relation to “Outside the hedge of roses”, in which the speaker attempts to escape the lover’s “wall” to fulfil her own passion. The following section will demonstrate the way in which the elegiac tone in Radford’s poetry reflects her own grief and emotional insecurity.

## **Part Two: Passion, Love and Marriage in Radford's Poetry**

### **A Bride's "High Thoughts" and Marriage's "Fragrant Wall": Expectations Vs. Reality**

The subheading of this section includes the phrases used by Radford in "A Bride" and "Outside the hedge of roses" to indicate the ways in which women's romantic expectations of marriage are finally confronted by the reality of its demands. In her interdisciplinary approach to women's marriage and property narratives, Livingston observes: "Moving from her father's home to her husband's, the young woman often experiences a shift from idealistic hope to realistic disillusion" (Livingston, 2012: 2). Radford engages with the marriage debate and women's disappointment with the reality of marriage which would have been promoted as a woman's best (and indeed only) career. As Chapter One has demonstrated, attacking the Victorian idealisation of marriage was a theme adopted by many writers, including Caird, who supported the New Woman's dreams. The "restricted life" Caird refers to in "Marriage" (1888) is portrayed in the works of many Victorian novelists and poets, including Radford herself. In "A Bride" (1891) Radford provides a critique of women's expectation of marriage as "Love's country", in which they remain the "loneliest of all":

I SAW your portrait yesterday,  
Set in a golden frame;  
Around it twines a blossom-spray,  
Beneath it is your name.

And tender smiles are round your mouth,  
High thoughts are on your brow,  
The world is beautiful as Youth,  
You are so happy now.

The shining gates are opened wide,  
Love stretches forth his hand  
And bids the bridegroom bring his bride  
Into the promised land.

And you and he dwell there alone,  
Beneath Love's radiant sky,  
While all the world's great grief and moan  
As a sad dream pass by.

Yet on Love's flowers strange and rare,  
Your saddest tears may fall,  
And in Love's country you may fare  
The loneliest of all.

(“A Bride”)

Unlike the ambiguous relationships between the ungendered protagonists of Radford's other poems, “A Bride” focuses explicitly on the marital relationship, and in particular the bride's expectations. The speaker's reference to the bride as a portrait rather than an active human being expresses the restrictions as opposed to her ideals. Also, the description of the bride as being “so happy now” hints that such happiness is fleeting. Despite the image of the couple entering the “heaven” of marriage, it is ultimately defined as a lonely place. Radford's representation echoes Eurydice's unhappy marriage in *The Woman Who Didn't*.<sup>84</sup> Although Eurydice complained about her passionless marriage, she, like Radford's bride, remains trapped and lonely.

Although the content of the poem may be read as a critique of marriage in the Victorian period, it also reflects Radford's own experience in the early eighteen nineties when Ernest began to suffer a mental breakdown, leaving her suffering without love and with the sole financial responsibility for their three children. In 1892, only a year after her volume *A Light Load* was published, Radford's diary records: “Dearest, I pray each night & each morning – to have you back again. [...] The days are so lonely – my heart so empty – the world so far off – only God & my sorrow seem real to me” (Radford Diary, 24 May 1892). Radford's prayers to have her husband “back again” and her description of the days

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter One for a more in-depth discussion of *The Woman Who Didn't*.

as “lonely” echo the loneliness of the bride in the poem. The fact that “only God” and her “sorrow seem real to” her can be read as part of her realisation that everything else in her life, including her expectation of marriage, is unreal. The language of both the poem and the letter recalls MacEwen’s view of Radford as driven by the idealisation of marriage. In the poem, the bride’s “high thoughts” reflect how Radford “was high on romantic expectations” before her marriage to Ernest. Therefore, in the final two stanzas, the poet depicts the grief and loneliness the bride will encounter after she enters the “shining gates”, which are parallels with heaven, suggesting that the lustre of these gates is superficial and does not necessarily mirror the reality of marriage. While the bride’s tears may be due to the burden of domestic duties, her loneliness results from the fact that women are those who suffer most from the idealisation of marriage, remaining ultimately lonely with their dreams unrealised.

In his study of *Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry*, Wendell Stacy Johnson argues: “the major Victorian poets regarded contemporary marriage as a largely false institution that encouraged lies” (Johnson, 1975: 252). Radford shares her contemporaries’ representation of marriage as a failing institution and a disappointment to women’s dreams. Many of the metaphors and meanings used in “A Bride” are also explored in Levy’s “Xantippe” (1881),<sup>85</sup> which concerns the wife of Sokrates, who, like the bride in Radford’s poem, is disillusioned in her hopes and dreams about marriage and regrets her choice and ideals. Levy was one of Radford’s closest friends, and the two women

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<sup>85</sup> “Xantippe” is one of Levy’s major poems, acknowledged by contemporary critics as an attack on Victorian ideology regarding women and marriage. Karen Weisman suggests: “The auditory ease of the merry mockeries of maidens is abruptly undermined by the trochaic retarding of the ‘sharp voices’ insisting on ‘maiden labour’” (Weisman, 2001: 61). Also see “Daughters of Danaus and Daphne: Woman Poets and the Marriage Question” in which Hughes refers to Levy’s “Xantippe” as one of the poems which contributes to a new movement against the Victorian idealisation of marriage: “‘Xantippe’ is all the more notable because its artful, nuanced depiction of women’s enforced ignorance, its awareness that the stereotypic shrew, like woman, is not born but made, preceded the publication date of Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* by two years” (Hughes, 2006: 482).

frequently exchanged opinions about their work.<sup>86</sup> Radford's diary records: "Amy Levy came in after dinner & talked to us of her work, & of many other things. It appears that my verses 'In our square' were published in London Society in the summer: Amy saw them" (Radford Diary, 29 December 1884). Levy's unconventional thoughts (which challenged the institution of marriage) would indeed have influenced Radford, particularly in her choice of the theme of "A Bride" which was published a decade later than Levy's "Xantippe".

Before her marriage, Xantippe is seen as having had "high thoughts", "golden dreams", placing all her hopes on marrying an educated husband who will share his knowledge with her:

And when, at length, my father told me all,  
That I should wed me with great Sokrates,  
I, foolish, wept to see at once cast down  
The maiden image of a future love,  
Where perfect body matched the perfect soul.

("Xantippe" 74-78)

Although the two poems share the same theme, they differ in their representation of women's "high thoughts". While Radford emphasises the bride's anticipation of marriage as "the promised land" of love, Levy focuses on knowledge and education as the chief aspects of Xantippe's dream of her future husband:

Again of thee, sweet Hope, my spirit dreamed!  
I, guided by his wisdom and his love,  
Led by his words, and counselled by his care,  
Should lift the shrouding veil from things which be,  
And at the flowing fountain of his soul  
Refresh my thirsting spirit. . .

("Xantippe" 88-93)

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter Four for further details on the friendship between Radford and Levy, including their private correspondence.

Levy's representation of Xantippe's desire to be "guided by [Sokrates's] wisdom" reminds us of Radford's letter to Ernest in which she declares: "Things lose their acuteness and intensity" when Ernest is away, suggesting her need for his guidance. Both Radford and Xantippe find it essential to have a male partner as a source of strength and support, a fact which reflects on the limitations placed on women during the Victorian period. As shown in Chapter One, McWilliams-Tullberg highlights the widespread belief in women's inferior mental capacity, and the fact that universities were rarely open to women (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1977: 133). This absence of sufficient education and experience to enable them to live independently created conflict for many ambitious women, particularly those, like Radford, who were aware of their need for "a different mind & stronger head". Radford's reflection on her mental capacity is similarly echoed in "Xantippe" when the speaker refers to Sokrates's dismissal of her "half-grown mind" ("Xantippe" 88). Thus, both Radford's diary and Levy's poem criticise women's lack of access to education, along with vital knowledge and skills.

Xantippe's ambitions to share Sokrates's knowledge were confronted immediately after her marriage when she discovered that Sokrates believes "not to stoop to touch so slight a thing/ As the fine fabric of a woman's brain--/ So subtle as a passionate woman's soul" ("Xantippe" 121-123). Like typical patriarchs, Sokrates underestimates his wife's mental ability and strong emotions and refuses to teach her his philosophies. Cynthia Scheinberg argues that Levy's main message in "Xantippe" is to show how "Socrates treated [his wife] as a "mere household vessel," refusing to acknowledge her deeply intellectual and philosophical nature and so explicitly denying her, quite cruelly, any membership in his homo-social intellectual coterie" (Scheinberg, 1997: 181). Levy's representation of Xantippe's marriage is an explicit attack on the prevailing idealisation of matrimony, providing a critique of men's selfishness in enslaving their wives and preventing them from sharing their knowledge.

Contrary to her expectations, Xantippe's marriage brings nothing to her soul and adds nothing to her life, but disappointment and the burden of domesticity:

I think I could have borne the weary life,  
The narrow life within the narrow walls,  
If he had loved me; but he kept his love  
For this Athenian city and her sons

(“Xantippe” 227-230)

The “narrow walls” may be read as a metaphor for the restriction of life after marriage, leading Rosie Miles to conclude: “Xantippe realizes there is no place for the woman she aspires to be within the philosophic framework embodied by her husband. Translating this back to the early 1880s the poem strikes a note of anxiety and uncertainty” (Miles, 2013: 123). Furthermore, Xantippe is not only prevented from achieving her dream of better knowledge, but she is also forbidden a place in her husband's heart. Levy shows that even love, which is the least reward a woman might expect to receive from her husband, remains a futile ambition after marriage. The image of loneliness and grief, which forms the conclusion to Radford's “A Bride”, echoes the elegiac tone of “Xantippe”. T. D. Olverson points out: “If there is a moral to Xantippe's cautionary tale, it is for young women to avoid marriage and to become educated critics. [...] ‘Xantippe’ also appeals for female solidarity and the need to create new communities, based on education and knowledge” (Olverson, 2010: 121). Given the closeness of their friendship and the fact that “A Bride” was published later than “Xantippe”, it is likely that Radford shared Levy's thoughts on warning young women about their prospects of marriage as promising and satisfying to their intellectual and emotional needs.

In “Xantippe”, Levy's reflection on men's selfishness is addressed with the theme of unrequited love; instead of loving his wife, Sokrates “kept his love/ For this Athenian city and her sons”, which implies his homosexuality. Levy's representation of Sokrates's homosocial community raises questions about her possible lesbianism, which is claimed

by scholars like Goody.<sup>87</sup> However, this argument has been contested by other contemporary scholars who call for a more nuanced approach to the notion of Victorian women's homosexuality. For example, Pullen raises the possibility of Levy's unrequited love for Karl Pearson, and in her reading of "Xantippe", she points out:

As a well-brought-up young Victorian, it is highly unlikely that she knew anything about physical relationships between men – or women for that matter – but during her periods of residence at the Wick she would have had a unique opportunity to observe at first hand the intense male bonding that was an accepted aspect of life at a boys school in the nineteenth century. (Pullen, 2010: 39)

Thus, my approach to Levy's sexual identity in forthcoming chapters, like in my proposal of Radford's possible bisexuality, considers that Levy's awareness of homosocial/homoerotic encounters between men may have encouraged her defiance of heterosexual unions in her life and poetry.

Although the theme of homosexuality is absent from Radford's "A Bride", it is explicit in "Outside the hedge of roses" (1907) in which Radford sheds light on the prevailing idealisation of marriage and finally addresses potential homosexual desire as an escape from the domestic confines:

Outside the hedge of roses  
Which walls my garden round,  
And many a flower encloses,  
Lies fresh unfurrowed ground.

I have not delved nor planted  
In that strange land, nor come  
To sow, in soil enchanted,  
Fresh promises of bloom.

My labours all have ended  
Within my fragrant wall,  
The blossoms I have tended  
Have grown so sweet and tall.

But now in silver showers

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<sup>87</sup> See Chapters Two and Four for further discussion of Goody's argument. Also see Bristow's "'All out of tune in this world's instrument': The 'Minor' Poetry of Amy Levy" in which Levy is identified as a "lesbian" (Bristow, 1999: 91; 102).

Your laughter falls on me,  
And fairer than all flowers  
Your flower face I see.

And, bound no more by roses,  
I break my barrier through,  
And leave all it encloses,  
Dear one, to follow you.

(“Outside the hedge of roses”)

As in other poems discussed in this chapter, Radford shares with her contemporary women poets the tradition of the ungendered speaker, which, as Blain has shown, was commonly used to “escape from the established gender-markers” (Blain, 1999: 135). Thus, it is possible to read this poem as a female rejection of heterosexual domestic life. If the speaker is a female, the “fragrant wall” may be read as a metaphor for the confines of domesticity and the man’s attempt to make them palatable and fragrant. This argument is substantiated by Nafiseh Salman Saleh’s argument that “women were excluded from the production market and were welcomed by a sweet vocation instead; the manager of the domestic hearth” (Saleh, 2014: 90). Thus, the image of the “fragrant wall” in Radford’s poem mirrors the Victorian and Edwardian idealisation of women’s domestic role as “sweet” and enjoyable. However, as with the “narrow walls” in “Xantippe”, the “wall” in Radford’s poem could also be understood as a metaphor for the barriers and challenges women needed to overcome in order to reach the “strange land”, possibly the land of female emancipation. The speaker’s unfamiliarity with the land reflects on women’s rare engagement in the public sphere, for the speaker has never “delved nor planted/ In that strange land”. This strangeness could also be associated with different sexual identities/affairs which were not spoken of at that time. Saleh points out: “Women were also considered to have no sexual rights; they were doubly victims of idealization and particularly abuse – the double standard in sexual morality—which branded liberated women as ‘fallen’” (Saleh, 2014: 90). The language of Radford’s poem indicates how

many women lacked experience and were not allowed to engage in any social or intellectual activity outside familial ones.

Hughes identifies this poem, along with other New Woman poems published in *The Yellow Book*, as a response to Wilde's trial,<sup>88</sup> which, she argues, "was a reminder of the high stakes of masculinity in securing bourgeois regimes of gender and morality; women, already marginal, could more safely articulate thoughts that had become dangerous for men" (Hughes, 2004: 859). Wilde's scandal opened a space for women, including Radford, to criticise and question male-dominated conventions which were presumed to protect middle and upper class society from moral and familial corruption. For example, the man-made laws and social attitudes towards married women were intended to empower men and subjugate women and exclude them from the public sphere. As a representative of upper class men, Wilde's homosexuality (a clear articulation of his dissatisfaction with heterosexual marriage), challenged the ideals set by his male counterparts.<sup>89</sup> In her reading of Radford's poem, Hughes suggests that it "glance[s] toward Wilde in [its] celebration of escape from prison into sensual freedom, [it] also seem[s] to invoke heterosexual contexts" (Hughes, 2004: 859). As will be discussed in Chapter Six, Radford provides a more direct reference to Wilde in "At Last", thus supporting Hughes's assumption.

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<sup>88</sup> Wilde's trial and the scandal surrounding his homosexual affairs was one of the most significant events of 1895. Dustin Friedman identifies Wilde as a "cultural product who decisively influenced the discursive invention of the homosexual subject during the late nineteenth century" (Friedman, 2013: 597). By that time, Wilde was a famous character, best known for his opposition to conventional values and literary representations. However, his radical views and sexual identity made him a criminal in the eyes of Victorian society and law. Ruth Robbins points out: "[I]n April and May 1895, Wilde was the prosecutor in one libel case that he more or less lost, and the defendant in two criminal trials, the second of which ended with Wilde's imprisonment for two years with hard labour on a charge of gross indecency; while in prison he was legally separated from his wife, lost custody of his children (whom he never saw again) and was declared bankrupt" (Robbins, 2011: 4).

<sup>89</sup> Wilde's homosexuality is not the only evidence of his dissatisfaction with Victorian marriage, as the majority of his published works criticise both marriage and its prevailing idealisation. Richard D. McGhee argues: "Marriage would be his great subject; his genius was for comic satire, and the great tradition of comedy was especially a tradition of bringing human affairs into the order of courtship and marriage" (McGhee, 1980: 269).

The fact that Radford knew Wilde both as a public figure and personally makes her sympathy with his case and her reference to his sexual identity a highly possible reading. In 1888, Radford writes: “Met Oscar Wilde today (Oct: 18<sup>th</sup> 1888) in the New Gallery & found him both pleasant & businesslike (didn’t expect either)” (Radford Diary, 18 October 1888). Ruth Robbins notes that Wilde “cultivated a reputation for being an entertaining dinner guest, dazzling London Society with his conversation” (Robbins, 2011: 12). Indeed, his “entertaining” character would be what led Radford to describe him as a “pleasant” fellow. A year after her entry on Wilde, Radford wrote to her husband: “I have a new year greeting card from Mr and Mrs Oscar Wilde” (Add MS 89029/.28, Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 29 December 1889). Radford’s archive in the British library includes a letter from Wilde’s wife, Constance, whose correspondence with Radford forms further evidence of the relationship between Radford and Wilde.

Whether or not Radford used Wilde as a specific subtext, the poem arguably represents the limitation of the Victorian belief that sexuality was exclusively heterosexual, an assumption many men and women wished to escape. As Livingston’s argument in Chapter One demonstrates, women’s rejection of marriage was also a rejection of the conventional sexual ideologies imposed upon rather than a rejection of sexuality itself (Livingston, 2012: 63). Therefore, at the end of the poem, the speaker chooses to “leave” behind all that is being said and imposed on her in order to “follow” her lover, who is possibly given a feminine characteristic through the word “flower face”. Reading these lines as those from a female speaker to her female lover echoes Hughes’s claim that Radford’s intention was to engage with Wilde’s homosexuality as an “escape” from the “confines” of heterosexual marriage.

## **The Marginal Wife/Lover and (her) Neglected Passion**

Wilde's imprisonment is not the only controversial issue with which Radford engages. Her marital conflict and suffering gave her the empathy to explore broader social and political concerns, particularly in relation to marginalised women whose intellectual and sexual passion found no quarter in a male-dominated society. Published in *Poems*, "Your Gift" (1910) is an example of Radford's engagement with multiple emotional and sexual issues concerning women. This reading takes as its cue Richardson's comment on the cultural and political prejudice against women as "a major subtext" in "Your Gift":

The restrictive gender system of late Victorian England is clearly a major subtext in "Your Gift". [...] The sentiments of a woman in a cold and loveless marriage register inequitable legal and social codes: divorce laws, the sexual double standard, restrictions on women's employment, social sanction of spousal abuse, social ignorance of women's desire. (Richardson, 2000: 118)

Although Richardson reads the poem in relation to Radford's personal conflict and the "restrictive gender system", she does not offer a detailed explanation of the "gift" as a metaphor for the different legal and sexual restrictions she cites. My own reading, on the other hand, proposes Radford's intention to engage with prostitute's suffering and marginalisation.

The poem opens with the speaker addressing a sleeping lover who neglects her existence:

YOU turn your face away,  
Whose light would shine  
On the flower of my spirit that pales,  
That is sick for the comfort that fails,  
Whose petals pine  
And wither day by day.

Your heart so cold in sleep,  
I may not wake,  
And I wander and slip from your sight  
To the measureless caves of the night,  
And for your sake  
My flower of passion keep.

You give me to the night  
That chains the stars,  
To the dreams that are locked in the earth,  
That must anguish and die at their birth,  
Whose shadowy bars  
Shall ever stay their flight.

You give me to the wind  
That rocks the day,  
And I drift in the wrack of his wings,  
In the salt of the seas that he flings.  
A castaway  
Unloved and left behind

You give me to my grief  
That has no place  
In the cities of earth or of Heaven,  
That must drift as a ghost that is driven,  
Shut out from grace,  
In its great unbelief.

Oh you whose heart is cold,  
If I should show  
All the waste of my life at your side,  
All the flower of my soul that has died,  
You would not know  
The gift of gifts you hold.

Oh you whose sleep is dear,  
And long to take,  
Should you dream how they sicken and die,  
Who are cast from the earth and the sky,  
You would awake  
And keep your gift for fear.

(“Your Gift”)

In “Your Gift” (as in the other poems from the same volume under discussion) demonstrates that the simple language and evocative images used in previous volumes are no longer suffice. In *Poems*, the lyrics are longer, the images are more violent, and the implied meanings are even more subversive. These changes are influenced by Radford’s age and the hardship of life she passed through; she turns from the ambitious young woman into a mature hopeless one. For example, in “Your Gift”, Radford portrays a

negative image of the gift, with the speaker imagining herself a gift, which her lover does not care for, but throws away leaving her to face her own destiny and the hardship of life.

The lover is represented as “cold” and “[a]sleep”, indicating his abandonment of the speaker who seeks warmth and nurturing. The speaker asserts that her lover gives her “to the night/ That chains the stars”, a possible metaphor for the social injustice that constrains women. Published at a time when Radford was lonely, and dealing with the emptiness of her own marriage, the speaker in “Your Gift” is frustrated, seeking a fulfilling relationship both sexually and intellectually. Her “flower of passion”, which may be a metaphor for her sexuality, is kept “for [her lover’s] sake”. The fact that the lover is unconscious of his beloved’s passion indicates Radford’s aim to highlight the lack of any outlet for a woman’s sexuality outside the confines of marriage. This point is emphasised in Chapter One in Calder’s reference to sex as “a marital duty” (Calder, 1976: 88). This belief is implied in the poem; despite the fact that the lover’s “heart [is] so cold in sleep” and that the speaker “wander[s]” seeking to fulfil her desire, her sexuality must be kept imprisoned for her lover’s/husband’s “sake”.

Loneliness and isolation are evident throughout the poem with the speaker identifying herself as a “castaway/ Unloved and left behind”. This may be read at two levels, personally and politically. Personally, it is a reminder of Radford’s letters and diary entries conveying her fear and loneliness during the time of Ernest’s illness. Politically, it gives a general sense of the social and legal tyranny suffered by women at that time. These meanings are further emphasised at the end of the poem where the speaker regrets “[a]ll the waste of my life at your side”, suggesting that despite sacrificing her sexual and intellectual passions for her lover’s/husband’s sake, she ends up “cast from the earth and the sky”. As we shall see in “A Wanderer”, this image of the speaker’s dreams, which “sicken and die” because they find no place, is in line with the image of the bird with “tired wings” which ends up “beat[ing] upon the air” going nowhere.

Radford's use of the ungendered speaker in "Your Gift" lends ambiguity to the poem. The phrase "I wander and slip from your sight/ To the measureless caves of the night" may therefore be also read as an allegory for prostitution, for it hints at streetwalking at night, a time respectable middle-class women were expected to remain indoors. As Hughes observes: "Any woman could walk the streets of London if accompanied by a man; walking alone after dark, she risked being mistaken for a prostitute or lower-class worker" (Hughes, 2007: 235-236). In addition, Radford's description of the speaker as a "castaway/ Unloved and left behind" may be read as an allusion to Eulalie, the prostitute heroine in Webster's poem "A Castaway" (1870). Eulalie is the narrator of her own story which questions Victorian morality and respectability:

I'm not drunk in the streets, ply not for hire  
[...]  
My present lover or my next to come,  
Value me at my worth, fill your purse full,  
For I am modest; yes, honour me  
As though your schoolgirl sister or your wife

("A Castaway" 48-56).

By not identifying herself as a woman of the street, Eulalie challenges the widespread view of streetwalkers as prostitutes. As Walkowitz notes: "Some nineteenth-century observers argued that casual prostitutes greatly exceeded the more visible, full-time street walkers" (Walkowitz, 1980: 14). Eulalie blurs the distinction between respectable and fallen women, identifying herself with middle-class women demanding her customer to "value" her as he does his sister and his wife. Christine Sutphin notes that in "A *Castaway* the appearance of modesty is what makes the prostitute valuable, but it is also what makes her threatening to a society that needed to categorize women by class and morality, and that constructed an ideal of womanhood that was simple, honest, and unpaid" (Sutphin, 2000: 520). Despite this threat, Eulalie is still aware of her own marginalisation. She refers to herself as "I the thing/ of shame and rottenness, the animal/ that feed men's lust and

prey on them” (“A Castaway” 393-395). She no longer identifies herself as a human being nor as a mere object, yet as an “animal”.

Webster’s choice of words in her representation of Eulalie’s emotional and physical decline is apparent on more than one occasion: “I paint my cheeks’ – I always wear them pale” (“A Castaway” 169). Therefore, images of decay in words like “pales”, “fails”, and “wither” in Radford’s “Your Gift” may be read as further evidence of the theme of prostitution. However, Unlike Webster whose heroine is clearly a fallen woman, Radford uses an ungendered speaker, thus allowing her to escape criticism from contemporary reviewers for whom prostitution was not a subject to be discussed by respectable women. Sutphin points out that “although it was a subject intimately concerned with women, prostitution was not generally accepted as a woman’s subject” (Sutphin, 2000: 512). However, it can be argued that Radford tended to challenge this by setting her poem against the backdrop of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had been implemented a few decades before the publication of the poem. Prostitutes as Sutphin argues, “are often marginal characters constructed in the third person by male authors and do not themselves speak extensively about prostitution” (Sutphin, 2000: 512). The possibility of the marginal prostitute being the speaker of the poem illustrates Radford’s challenge to conventional representations, echoing Webster in giving “voice to a prostitute persona” (Sutphin, 2000: 514). By using the “gift” metaphor, Radford challenges prevailing morality regarding women in the street, and simultaneously addresses the economic hardship suffered by prostitutes, for gifts are not paid objects.

The earlier analysis of the poem as a reflection on Radford’s personal life does not contradict my reading of the “gift” and the “castaway” as economic and social metaphors for prostitution, as both are valid. Linking the two readings further proposes Radford’s engagement with other Victorian writers in their representation of middle-class marriage as a form of prostitution. Given Nord’s comparison of married women and prostitutes, it

is possible to argue that Radford's depiction of the speaker as "a castaway" mirrors the case of many married women, who were suffering a similar seclusion to that faced by prostitutes.

This parallel between passionless marriage and prostitution is explicitly addressed in Radford's play *The Ransom* (1915), which demonstrates Radford's interest in the theme of prostitution. At the very beginning of the play we are introduced by the Four Girls to Lady Margery's loneliness and imprisoned life, a result of her passionless marriage:

2<sup>nd</sup> Girl: Her man is old, and his grey life is lived  
Deep in his scholar books; he seldom speaks.  
Once long ago, the Lady Margery said  
A wife was held more captive by her loneliness  
Than any prisoned creature in the world.

(*The Ransom*, Act I: 119)

The representation of the husband is a reminder of Levy's "Xantippe" in which Sokrates is preoccupied with his work and neglects Xantippe's passion. Similarly, Margery's husband gives her all she needs materially, but not emotionally. When she falls in love with Martin, a younger man, she says: "You gave me back my beauty with your kiss,/ And all my confident youth, for I was beautiful/ Once, long ago" (*The Ransom*, Act I: 131). This nostalgic tone and emphasis on the lacking beauty and hardships of old age will be recalled in Chapter Four and Five, in which Radford's poems "A Model" and "Soliloquy of a Maiden Aunt" (1891) address the same theme, although in different contexts.



Figure 7: A Photograph of Dollie Radford aging fifty four, the year *The Ransom* was published (Add MS 89029/6/9 – 2, Framed Photographs of Dollie Radford, 1915).

Margery is represented as a pilgrim seeking love, an image which will be revisited in my reading of “My Angel” and “A Wanderer”. Pilgrimage, as Simon Coleman observes, “acts as a catalyst for conflict” (Coleman, 2013: 265). In Margery’s case, this sense of conflict is caused by her passion and dreams which she strives to fulfil, but finally fails to do so:

Anna: [*tenderly*] Dear child, there is no man  
Wise enough now to tread a woman’s dream  
[...]  
There are no pilgrim heroes now, who seek  
Pale women prisoned close by custom’s bar

(*The Ransom*, Act I: 127)

Spoken by Anna, an old nurse, these lines reflect the isolation suffered by women whose ambition remains unrecognised by the male figures in their lives. However, the use of time-frame in the word “now”, while criticising prevailing gendered attitudes, also hints at a possibility for change, suggesting that there may be “pilgrim heroes” who support

women's dreams in the future. This reading takes its cue from Radford's representation of hope and anticipation of better life in poems which explicitly address the theme of female emancipation.<sup>90</sup>

Towards the end of the play, when Margery poisons herself in the wood, she hears the voices of unloved women and prostitutes:

1<sup>st</sup> Voice: [*from the prostitutes*]  
You have peace and the pride of your living.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Voice: [*from the unloved lonely women*]  
We are robbed of life's tenderest due,  
1<sup>st</sup> Voice: You are free for your having or giving,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Voice: We are prisoned more surely than you.  
1<sup>st</sup> Voice: We are dead ere the dawn of our dying,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Voice: We are ghosts growing sick for our life,  
Both: Oh, Love, hear the sound of the crying  
That breaks the waste of our strife.

(*The Ransom*, Act III: 149)

These lines echo Nord's argument concerning the prevailing association between married women and prostitutes. Yet, the unloved women claim their lives are even worse than those of the prostitutes, explicitly criticising existing conventions regarding marriage. In his comment on this last act, Lawrence writes: "I like the last act the best. There is to me something rather terrible in the idea of the chorus of unloved women chanting against the chorus of prostitutes - something really Great in the conception. That is the most splendid part of the play" (D. H. Lawrence to Dollie Radford, 9 April 1915 in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, 1962: 316). As a close friend, who is aware of the grief Radford has encountered during her lifetime, Lawrence praises the comparison made in Radford's play as "Great". Arguably, Lawrence is Radford's only male contemporary to acknowledge the revolutionary meaning of her work, for, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Radford's reviewers often dismiss her published volumes of poetry as "domestic" and "feminine".

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<sup>90</sup> See Chapter Five for my reading of Radford's poems "A Dream of 'Dreams' to Olive Schreiner", "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town", and "A Novice" which all demonstrate hope for brighter future.

In her reading of Radford's play, Richardson points out:

The most radical device [...] is putting lonely, unloved women (among whose number Lady Margery counts herself) on the same plane with prostitutes. Like the feminists of the 1890s, Radford faults men for the existence of prostitutes, and recovers the victims of male lust (as opposed to female passion) into a sisterhood of ill-used women, women who do not find fulfilment in life. (Richardson, 2000: 120)

The fact that prostitution was a major issue for New Women identifies Radford as one who attacks rather than idealises male hierarchy. However, the length of time between the phases of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the rise of the New Woman, and the date of the play, suggests that following the rise of the suffragette movement<sup>91</sup> and at the age of fifty-four Radford had become even more politicised. Susan Kingsley Kent argues that women's suffrage campaign sought to "redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture of Britain" (Kent, 1987: 3). So, it is not merely votes for political representations that women suffragettes were aiming at.

Anne Schwan's *Convict Voices: Women, Class, and Writing about Prison in Nineteenth-Century England* remarks the way Katie Gliddon<sup>92</sup> shows solidarity with prostitutes as one of her motivations behind getting involved in the suffragette movement. In her prison diary, Gliddon writes: "In the cell underneath me now is a young girl, a prostitute off the London streets. She is frightened of the night, poor little thing. She is

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<sup>91</sup> In "Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: some reflections" June Purvis argues: "The term 'suffragette' is usually applied to the members of the Women's Social and Political Union or WSPU, founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and a small group of socialist women to actively campaign for the parliamentary vote for women" (Purvis, 2013: 576-577). In another article, Purvis demonstrates the WSPU's agenda which "campaigns for an end to a wide range of social ills that particularly affected working-class women, such as sweated labour, low pay, women's and children's sexual slavery, and was thus feminist socialist in orientation" (Purvis, 1995: 107). Also see Lise Shapiro Sanders's "Equal Laws Based upon an Equal Standard": the Garrett Sisters, the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the sexual politics of Victorian and Edwardian feminism revisited" which refers to the Contagious Diseases Acts as a primary concern for many Edwardian suffragists (Sanders, 2015: 391).

<sup>92</sup> Gliddon was a middle-class artist who was briefly imprisoned for window breaking in 1912, and whose prison diary crosses gender and class boundaries. For more biographical information on Gliddon, see Schwan's "'Bless the Gods for my pencils and paper': Katie Gliddon's prison diary, Percy Bysshe Shelley and the suffragettes at Holloway" (Schwan, 2013: 150-152).

knocking on her wall to her companion. [...] Hundreds of women would come to prison if they could hear that frightened knocking like a bird caught in a net. But you have to come to prison to hear it” (Gliddon in Schwan, 2014: 175). Although Gliddon’s point of view is expressed in a different genre and from a prison context, she, like Radford, offers an empathetic portrayal of the prostitute. Also, her description of the prostitute as “poor little thing” echoes Eulalie’s reference to herself as a “thing” in Webster’s poem, highlighting their awareness of the prevailing marginalisation of prostitutes.

The significance of the bird imagery used in Gliddon’s comment is a point which I will refer to in my reading of Radford’s “A Wanderer”. In her reading of Gliddon’s diary entry, Schwan argues: “The painter’s sympathy with one especially frightened prisoner, who becomes symbol and motivation for the suffrage campaign, suggests that prison here functions as a space that enables this insight across social boundaries” (Schwan, 2014: 175). In drawing a parallel between a married woman and a prostitute, Radford’s account of prostitution shares the feminist motives of other suffragettes in undermining man-made laws.<sup>93</sup> Pullen reports the possibility of Radford’s engagement in the women’s suffrage campaign:

Dollie and Anna would also have been drawn together by their support for the women’s suffrage campaign. [...] Anna held her own garden party at 49 Downshire Hill to which she invited the writer and suffragist Israel Zangwill and at which she dressed her boys and one of their friends in blouses with lettering that when their arms were linked, spelt out the slogan VOTES FOR WOMEN. It is likely that Constance Garnett was a guest at the party, and very possible that Dollie Radford was there too. (Pullen, 2012: 38)

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<sup>93</sup> It is worth noting that Schwan also highlights the ambivalence of Gliddon’s approach to prostitution, and her awareness of the marginalisation of prostitutes, for her reference to the prostitute as “poor little thing” suggests a sense of “victimization” (Schwan, 2014: 176).

Although Pullen’s claim is based on assumptions, Radford’s support for women’s rights and her friendship with other feminists are evident on more than one occasion.<sup>94</sup>

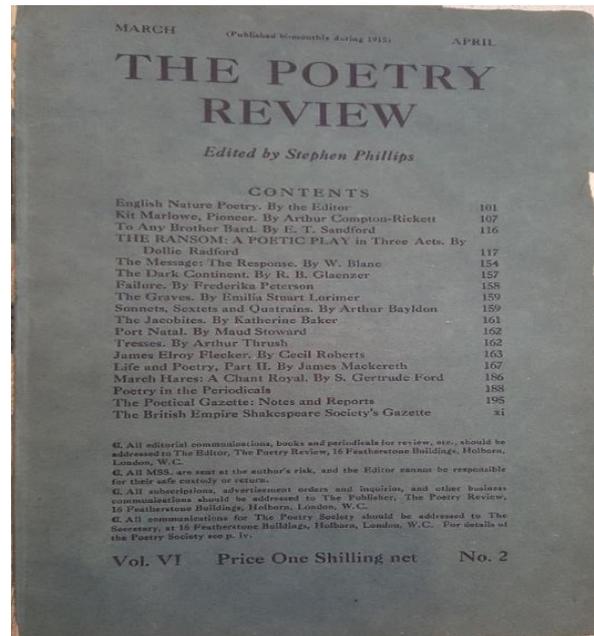


Figure 8: The front cover of *The Poetry Review* in which Radford’s *The Ransom* was published. It is listed fourth in the contents.

As shown in Figure 8, the *Poetry Review* refers to *The Ransom* as “a poetic play”, hinting at a fusion of genres which may indicate a newness in approach, both formally and thematically. In her reading of Barrett Browning’s merging of genres in her verse novel *Aurora Leigh*, Marjorie Stone points out: “Browning deliberately unsettle[s] genre distinctions in order to facilitate and reinforce [her] questioning of gender distinctions” (Stone, 1987: 103). Thus, it can be argued that Radford’s refusal to conform to one genre in *The Ransom* is a refusal to fixity in both form and content. By mastering two genres in one text, Radford, on the one hand, eschews the cultural prejudice against women’s writing, a key factor of my discussion in Chapter Four. On the other hand, Radford questions male hierarchy through primarily employing female figures and points of view.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapters Four and Five. In addition, Radford was a great admirer of the romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) and her diary records: “Shelley is my poet, I feel nearer to him than to any: I understand him I think so clearly” (Radford Diary, 7 July 1883). Kate Flint’s *The Woman Reader* acknowledges Shelley’s name as one of those who were popularly read among suffrage activists (Flint, 1993:120).

While in most of the play the stage is given to the Four Girls, Lady Margery, Anna, and Carol (the prostitute), Margery's husband is absent from the scenes and when her lover, Martin, is given a voice, it is to express empathy with Margery's situation.

Given Radford's subversion of genre and her empathetic portrayal of the prostitute, it is possible to argue that Radford's "Your Gift" and *The Ransom* subversively challenge Gabriel Rossetti's representation of the muted prostitute who lies asleep in "Jenny":

Why, Jenny, you're asleep at last!—  
Asleep, poor Jenny, hard and fast,—  
So young and soft and tired; so fair,  
With chin thus nestled in your hair,  
Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue  
As if some sky of dreams shone through!

("Jenny" 171-176)

Rossetti's speaker does not treat Jenny as a threatening figure, but, like Radford and Webster, shows his sympathy toward her and her "poor" and "tired" life. Meanwhile, the monologue empowers the male speaker and does not give voice to Jenny.<sup>95</sup> Daniel Harris points out: "Jenny's unconsciousness renders her an object having a merely animal or natural existence; deprived of speech both by sleep and by generic function, she has, like the female culture she represents, 'no voice'" (Harris, 1984: 203). On the other hand, Radford's poem gives voice to the prostitute and represents the potentially male addressee as asleep: "Oh you whose sleep is dear,/ And long to take". In doing so, Radford challenges male representations of marginal figures in society, and highlights the fact that even when such figures are given a voice, they are still perceived as "cast from the earth and the sky".

Published in the same volume, "My Angel" (1910) highlights the same sense of marginalisation and isolation. However, unlike the ungendered speaker in "Your Gift",

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<sup>95</sup> See also Sutphin, who identifies Rossetti's "Jenny" as one of the "rare" Victorian poems which represent prostitution. She argues: "Not only is Jenny never given voice in the poem, she falls asleep in the middle of it, suggesting her 'unconsciousness' of the weighty moral dilemma her customer is capable of discussing" (Sutphin, 2000: 513).

passion is clearly feminised. As discussed in Chapter One, passion itself was enough to create a conflict for many women who were dissatisfied with the limited roles they could occupy. This conflict is clear in the poem as the speaker imagines her passion as an isolated angel, which like the “gift” in the previous poem, can find no resting place:

MY passion was an angel veiled in grey,  
She stood and dreamed apart on shadowy ground,  
So still she was she stirred not night or day  
In those dim hills her timorous feet had found;  
My passion was an angel veiled in grey  
Until she fled you down the immortal way.

My passion was an angel clad in white,  
Her glistering wings were spread to sweep the skies,  
The eternal gates were opened at her flight,  
Wet with the unshaken dew of paradise;  
Till God, Who had no pity for her peace,  
Closed all the heavenly land roads of her release.

My passion was an angel wrapt in fire,  
Outcast from heaven and pilgrim from her birth,  
About her flamed the torches of desire  
That left no streams of healing on the earth;  
Till God said she should die for pity's sake--  
My angel neither heaven nor earth would take.

My angel who is dead you shall not see,  
Nor how your name is scarred upon her breast,  
Scorched on her whiteness for eternity,  
Your tenderest name that burnt her into rest;  
My angel that you killed you shall not see,  
Shrouded and still she lies 'twixt you and me.

(“My Angel”)

Regardless of whether “passion” in this poem is emotional, intellectual or even sexual, it remains unfulfilled, in a similar manner to the neglected “flower of passion” in “Your Gift”. However, this poem differs in its sense of the fluctuating progression, possibly reflecting the way passion was a source of conflict in a Victorian/Edwardian woman's life. By representing passion in the form of a “pilgrim” with “timorous feet”, Radford, as with Lady Margery in *The Ransom*, associates women's dreams and desires with a journey of suffering.

From the beginning of the poem, the speaker's passion "stood and dreamed apart", suggesting its distance and isolation from the husband or lover. The "veil" may be a metaphor for concealment or the speaker's immaturity and shyness, which prevents her from releasing her passion. The choice of time being "not night or day" indicates that she is in limbo, not yet fully alive. This sense of uncertainty no longer exists after the angel "fled you down the immortal way", suggesting that death is the only release for her passion and dreams. In her representation of death as a fate for women's passion, Radford reminds us of Bristow's argument, referenced in Chapter Two, concerning the ways in which *fin-de-siècle* women poets, such as Michael Field, "sought to position themselves as part of an ongoing debate about the ways in which lyric voice, even when it most authoritatively expresses intense erotic desire, has from the outset been confronted by death" (Bristow, 2013: 31). Homo/erotic desires is one of the possibilities to which I will refer in my analysis of the second and third stanzas; therefore, the speaker's passion is "confronted by death" from the beginning of the poem. The death of this desire becomes even more evident in the final stanza, in which the angel is "killed" and "shrouded".

The second stanza offers a contrast in imagery to the first with the angel no longer "veiled in grey" and isolated, but flying with wings which "spread to sweep the skies", hinting at her joy and freedom. In her representation of the rebellious passion and desires in the form of an angel, it is possible to argue that Radford would have meant to challenge Patmore's conventional ideals of the *Angel in the House*.<sup>96</sup> Although "clad in white" with "glistening wings", Radford's angel entirely lacks the submissive and sacrificing nature of Patmore's angel: "Man must be pleased; but him to please/ Is Women's pleasure; down the gulf" (*Angel in the House*, Canto IX. – SAHARA 1-2). Unlike the mere womanly characteristics of Patmore's angel, Radford's angel seeks to please herself, but finally fails to do so.

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<sup>96</sup> See Chapter One.

Susan P. Casteras explores the changing representations of the *Angel in the House*, in particular by women writers and artists: “The Victorian woman of religious faith and commitment was challenged by both real and fictional ‘adversaries’ in life, literature and art, among them the formidable foes of the aesthetic female and the decadent modern or New Woman during the last quarter of the century” (Casteras, 1998: 186). In its contrast to Patmore’s angel, Radford’s poem shares aspects of Webster’s representation of Eulalie as “a sort of fractious angel misconceived” (“A Castaway” 77). Earlier in “A Castaway”, Eulalie also describes herself as “not womanly in every woman’s grace” (“A Castaway” 33). By portraying a prostitute through the image of an angel, Webster questions and threatens the Victorian domestic ideal.

Radford’s poem is in iambic pentameter and the stressed words, such as “wra<sup>pt</sup> in fire” and “torches of desire” could signal passion as much as anger. Thus, it is possible to argue that the speaker’s passion becomes an “outcast” because of her strong sexual desire and need for sexual freedom. This reading makes homosexual desire another possible implied meaning behind the angel’s forbidden passion. Thus, it is likely that Radford attempts to show empathy with some of her contemporary friends, including Levy and Michael Field who witnessed social alienation because of their defiance of heterosexual norms; Michael Field in particular, as Bonnie J. Robinson points out, “became progressively isolated and estranged from their society and peers” (Robinson, 2000: 7). As noted previously, Radford’s engagement with the theme of the female pilgrim seeking rest and a fulfilling relationship stems directly from her own experience, along with the marginalisation suffered by the women around her, who longed for financial security and passionate love outside a conventional marriage.

## Domestic/Social Confines and the Birds Imagery

Although this subheading primarily deals with poems employing the image of birds, it shares the melancholic tone and themes of the previous poems, including the burden of domesticity, neglected lovers and marginal figures. For example, the hopeless-pilgrim speaker in “My Angel” is similarly represented in “A Wanderer” (1910), where the ungendered speaker identifies himself/herself as a tired bird with beating wings:

I AM a bird that beats upon the air,  
With tired wings that may not fold in death,  
With eyes that may no longer pierce despair,  
With broken flight that strives and faints for breath,  
    I fall within your gate-  
Ah take me in and hold me for a day  
Beside your hearth that I may feel its flame,  
And when the fire has dropped and burned away,  
I will fly forth again from whence I came;  
You shall no [sic] know my fate.

I am a wanderer through the starless night,  
With secrets of the morning in my breast,  
I bear a deathless vision of the light  
That flows at dawn about my waiting nest;  
Enclose me with your hands –

The shining dews are hidden in mine eyes,  
The sweetness of the woods is in my mouth,  
And from your door I may no more arise,  
So swiftly have I flown to find the South,  
From out the icy lands.

Oh hasten to your door, the night is long,  
The coldness clings about me like a shroud,  
Are all the prison bars of sleep so strong,  
You come not forth to one who calls aloud;  
    Has Heaven no further care  
For all the pain and passion of my doom,  
The gathered anguish of a storm that flings  
Its cry against the silence of your room;  
I am a wanderer with tired wings,  
That beat upon the air.

(“A Wanderer”)

The poem shares themes addressed in Tomson's "Bird-Bride",<sup>97</sup> and can be interpreted as Radford's attempt to engage with the condition of married women. In Tomson's poem, the bird-bride "beat her long white arms on high" ("Bird-Bride" 54), in her desire to escape her husband's domestic walls, but finally the husband claims authority over his wife: "Ye are mine forever and aye,/ Mine wherever your wild wings go" ("Bird-Bride" 82-83). Likewise, the bird-speaker in Radford's poem ends up "a wanderer with tired wings/ That beat upon the air".

Radford's ambition for a life beyond domesticity corresponds with the language she employs in the poem to express her continuous search for a better life. The representation of the bird as a "wanderer" and pilgrim looking for warmth and nurturing echoes the entries in the second part of Radford's diary, which convey her loneliness and need for love. Like Ernest, whose illness distanced him from Radford's emotional and sexual needs, the bird assures the reader that the lover/husband "shall no[t] know my fate", indicating her separate existence. In addition, the choice of pessimistic words, such as, "despair", "pain", and "anguish", recall the previously quoted letters and diary entries in which Radford complains about her suffering: "I know the deepest pain of the world". Accordingly, the "waiting nest" may be interpreted as reflection on Radford's waiting for Ernest to recover and return back to her. Like Radford in her longing for Ernest's love and support, the bird asks the lover/husband to "[e]nclose me with your hands", suggesting the need for protection. The "coldness" which "clings" about the bird further hints at Radford's own description of her feelings as "cold". This coldness restricts the bird's freedom, forming a "shroud", a metaphor which is associated with death, not necessarily in the physical sense, but, as in the closing lines of "My Angel", with the death of emotions and dreams.

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<sup>97</sup> See Chapter Two for more discussion on Tomson's poem.

A further interpretation arises when the language and images in Radford's poem are compared to those in Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's "The Witch" (1893). Like the bird-wanderer in Radford's poem, Coleridge's witch cries: "I have walked a great while over the snow" ("The Witch" 1), before continuing: "I have wandered over the fruitful earth" ("The Witch" 5). Despite the fact that Coleridge's poem was published a few decades before Radford's, the setting and sense of journey bear similarities to "A Wanderer", in which the speaker has "flown to find the South,/ From out the icy lands". However, Coleridge's poem more clearly identifies the first speaker as female, with the second speaker asserting: "Her voice was the voice that women have,/ Who plead for their heart's desire" ("The Witch" 15-16). The sex of the speaker in Radford's poem is unknown, but he/she shares with Coleridge's witch a repeated request to enter the lover's home and be loved and cherished: "Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!" ("The Witch" 7). Similarly, the speaker in Radford's poem asks: "Ah take me in and hold me for a day/ Beside your hearth that I may feel its flame". Kasey Bass Baker argues: "In 'The Witch,' a woman knocks at the door and demands entrance and transport over the threshold"; Baker continues, the woman is "alone fleeing from an unknown past and begging for entrance into a warm home with a crackling fire—the domestic ideal from which she has become somehow barred" (Baker, 2010: 199). Therefore, it can be argued that in Radford's poem, the wanderer's request is an attempt to conform to "the domestic ideal" which Baker refers to.

However, the domestic ideal is not conclusively reaffirmed in either poem. At the end of Coleridge's poem, the speaker asserts that fire "never was lit again on my hearth/ Since I hurried across the floor" to let the speaker in ("The Witch" 19-20). Baker observes that "the dying fire could also suggest a radical shift in the idea of home. The domestic norm has been transformed so that the sort of ideal domestic safety the first speaker craved has been replaced by something else – a union of bodies and lives that re-creates domestic

life, even domestic bliss” (Baker, 2010: 204). Baker reads the poem in relation to Coleridge’s relationship with her women friends, proposing an intimate friendship as a theme in this poem. Linking Baker’s argument of “the dying fire” to Radford’s poem, further suggests a transformation in domestic ideals, although not necessarily an intimate friendship. In Coleridge’s poem, the witch is allowed to enter the warm home after the change in the domestic ideal embodied in “the dying fire”. Radford’s wanderer, however, remarks: “And when the fire has dropped and burned away,/ I will fly forth again from whence I came”, suggesting his/her distance from this home before and even after the fire is “dropped and burned away”. This is signalled from the start, with the speaker’s plea for respect and to be held “for a day” rather than forever.

Radford’s challenge of the “hearth” and “fire” as metaphors for domesticity is evident in more than one way. If the speaker is assumed to be female, Radford challenges what Saleh describes as the notion of the Victorian home and how “a woman’s identity was shaped within the safe domestic hearth to carry out her duties as the manager of the domesticity as well as man’s welcomer to the domestic haven” (Saleh, 2014: 90). In Radford’s poem, the speaker is placed outside “the safe domestic hearth” and a possibly male lover is her “welcomer to the domestic haven”. My reading of the speaker as a female considers Radford’s choice of the metaphor of the bird, a creature perceived as beautiful and fragile and in need for care. However, Radford’s explicit gendering of the bird as male in “My bird who may not lift his wing”, which I will discuss shortly, can also lead to an argument that the speaker of “A Wanderer” is a male bird. Radford’s representation refuses to conform to Victorian domestic ideology, even if the speaker is viewed as male, for the wife/beloved uses her role as “the manager of the domesticity” to deny him access. This ironic and ambivalent depiction may be intended to show that Victorian ideals regarding women’s role in the private sphere may not necessarily safeguard male authority,

but might threaten it. As discussed below, such a play with socially-accepted roles of feminine and masculine is also clear in “My bird who may not lift his wing”.

The conflict embodied in the need for a safe home, while simultaneously rejecting its ideals, may also be linked to the wider social context of the poem. The speaker’s desire to break “the silence of your room” may be read as a socially conscious exploration of other marginal figures. As shown in “Your Gift”, there was a common association between street-walkers and prostitutes, and thus a further interpretation of the poem could be to consider the “wanderer through the starless night” as a metaphor for a prostitute. If the speaker in “A Wanderer” is a prostitute, as in “Your Gift”, Radford once again challenges Rossetti’s “Jenny” by giving a prostitute persona a voice, while the addressee (in this case possibly a male customer) is silent. The prostitute’s need for the addressee’s nurturing and protection is in itself ironic, as it is requested of someone who owns a home and consequently belongs to a better class: “Ah take me and hold me for a day/ Beside your hearth that I may feel its flame”. As addressed in Chapter One, Walkowitz demonstrates that prostitution was supported by middle-class men (Walkowitz, 1980: 34), and it is thus possible that Radford’s intention is to criticise these double standards. In doing so, Radford, as in “Outside the hedge of roses”, questions the reliability of male authority, whose laws and morals were expected to protect society from degeneration rather than supporting fallen women who were perceived as “the Great Social Evil”.

Radford’s possible portrayal of a prostitute in the image of “bird”, which seeks nurturing, recalls Gliddon’s prison diary entry in which she refers to the prostitute’s “frightened knocking” and describes her as a trapped “bird” which needs to be freed. As Schwan argues: “The image of the girl as a ‘bird caught in a net’ operates on a double level, suggesting that prison only acts as an extension of society for young women who are already trapped in prostitution; the metaphor also implies that this ‘bird’ must be liberated by others, namely, female activists and reformers” (Schwan, 2014: 175).

Although in Radford's poem the prostitute/bird is not literally imprisoned as the case with Gliddon's prostitute, she is aware of how "strong" are "the prison bars of sleep", possibly suggesting that silence and social injustice against prostitutes form a metaphorical prison. Building on Schwan's reading of the bird imagery, it is possible to argue that the prostitute's desire to be held and cared for in Radford's poem implies a cry to be freed. Thus, the individual inside the "hearth" may be a middle-class feminist or social reformer, from whom the prostitute seeks sympathy.

In addition to the neglected wife, lover and prostitute, the ungendered "wanderer" may be further read as a metaphor for a homeless child, man or even woman. This reading takes as its starting point Radford's diary which records her socialist views: "I want to teach [my children] to be socialists – but that must come with serious thought – to belong to the struggling ones, & those who are at a disadvantage" (Radford Diary, 31 April 1893). Radford's desire to engage her children with socialism and to teach them how "to belong to the struggling ones" draws on her interest in the socialist movement.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Radford was deeply influenced by Morris's ideas: "we went to hear Morris lecture on Socialism. 'How we live, & how we might live'.<sup>99</sup> It was a beautiful address. He is truly a poet. [...] Home very late & very wet, & more than ever convinced of the seriousness & beauty of the Socialistic movement" (Radford Diary, 30 November 1884). Radford's admiration of Morris's talk indicates that she was persuaded by the role of socialists in

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<sup>98</sup> Between the years 1883 and 1886, Radford's diary records her frequent visits to "The Club", a meeting-event organised by Radford and her feminist and socialist friend, Clementina Black, to invite both men and women to discuss their socialist thoughts. In 1884, Radford's diary records: "'The Club'. [...] I am re-elected president" (Radford Diary, 22 January 1884). In 1885, this club was led by Karl Pearson who changed it to "The Men and Women's Club" to talk about sex. For more details on The Club's agenda, see Walkowitz's "Science, Feminism, and Romance: The Men and Women's Club 1885-1889" (Walkowitz, 1986: 37). Also, due to her close friendship with Marx, which I will discuss in Chapter Six, Radford knew her father Karl Marx and thus may have been influenced by his revolutionary socialist theories.

<sup>99</sup> In his talk, Morris focuses mainly on how the passions of the human race are ruled by either hope or fear; fear of the rich to be challenged in their role as superiors, and hope of the oppressed to have a better life. He suggests solutions that can reduce the suffering of the working class and gradually engage them with civilization: "First, a healthy body; second, an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future; thirdly, occupation fit for a healthy body and an active mind; and fourthly, a beautiful world to live in" (Morris and Socialist Party, 1990: 34).

reforming society, a fact which later encouraged her to join Morris's League: "We are members of the League too" (Radford Diary, 6 February 1886). In her study of Radford's socialist role, Livesey points out: "Radford and her husband Ernest moved to Hammersmith from their former home in Bloomsbury largely in order to participate in Morris's Socialist organisation; this was a political commitment they maintained alongside active membership of the ideologically distinct Fabian Society" (Livesey, 2006: 496). It can therefore be argued that the language in the poem reflects on Radford's socialist views and her awareness of the sufferings of the working class which might have influenced her portrayal of a homeless "wanderer".

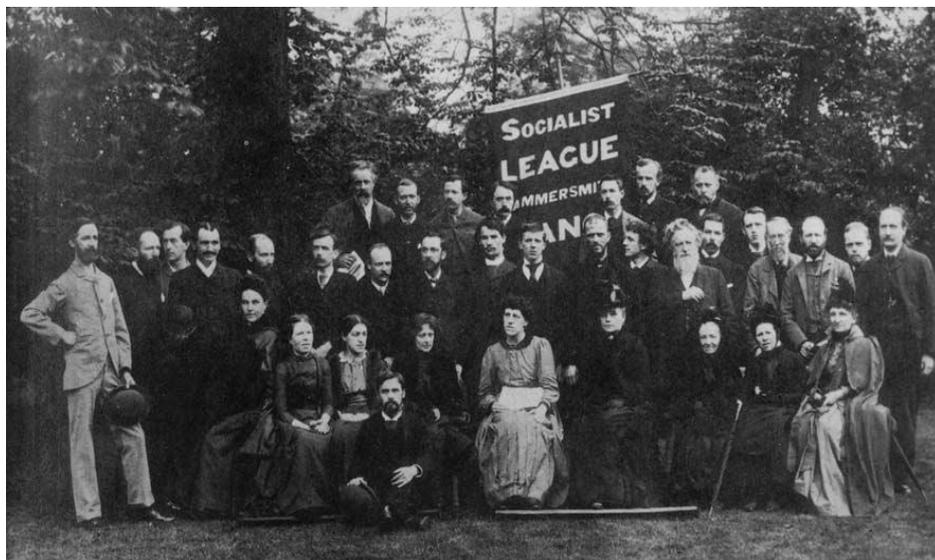


Figure 9: The Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League, 1887. Radford sits third from left, facing forwards. Anonymous photograph courtesy of the People's History Museum, copied from Livesey's "Dollie Radford and the Ethical Aesthetics of Fin-De-Siècle Poetry" (Livesey, 2006: 497).

Considering homelessness as a theme, the "coldness", which "clings about" the wanderer, may be the coldness of poverty or even the inability to feel the warmth of a shelter which is addressed from the beginning of the poem. The speaker's striving to be held and protected "for a day" suggests a hopeless yearning for long-lasting rest. This meaning is emphasised when the "wanderer" cries: "I will fly forth again from whence I came;/ You shall no[t] know my fate", indicating his/her awareness that suffering is an

inescapable destiny. Therefore, “the prison bars of sleep so strong,/ You come not forth to one who calls aloud” are likely to express the chained life and misery suffered by the speaker, due to the social neglect of his/her “pain and passion”. The loud “cry”, which is later embodied in an image of a “storm”, parallels working class demands during the Victorian period for reform and equality.<sup>100</sup>

As demonstrated in “A Wanderer”, Radford employs the metaphor of a bird for an ungendered speaker who searches for love and freedom in order to challenge both domestic and social limitations. However, in “My bird who may not lift his wing” (1910) she portrays loneliness and isolation more explicitly in the image of a masculine bird. Saleh observes: “In the Victorian patriarchal ideology, men’s roles were defined in the social sphere to manage the family unit, while, women were restricted within the chains of domestic sphere” (Saleh, 2014: 89). Radford’s gendering is ironic in its reversal of traditional roles; associating passion and desires presumed to be male with an ungendered speaker, while using images of a confined life as a critique of masculinity. She places a stationary male bird in the nest, which may be a metaphor for marriage and domesticity:

My bird who may not lift his wing,  
Nor stir in his cold nest,  
Who never more may dare to sing,  
Who sits with frozen breast,  
My bird who in the wood alone  
Is turned to stone.

How shall he find the seas of light  
That flood the leafy ways,  
Or watch the shadow’s trembling flight  
That neither goes nor stays,  
How seek his dreaming mate who keeps  
The pearly deeps.

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<sup>100</sup> Radford’s diary records her awareness of the demands made by the working class during the 1880s: “Great demonstration today in Hyde Park: a hundred thousand working men. The largest & most orderly that has yet been London” (Radford Diary, 21 July 1884). A year before this entry was made, Andrew Mearns published his pamphlet *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883) which focuses on the moral and physical conditions of late-Victorian East End where “the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt” (Mearns, 1883: 4). Thus, the “pain” and “cry” of Radford’s speaker recall Mearns’s representation of urban distress and resistance to class hierarchy.

How shall he learn the liquid notes  
That break the passionate air,  
Or hear the melody that floats  
From love sung unaware,  
My bird who may not rise his head-  
Who now is dead.

(“My bird who may not lift his wing”)

The poem may be read as undermining of male authority in the private sphere for the bird “may not lift his wing”, which possibly means that he is unable to fly out to the public sphere and subsequently cannot be the breadwinner of the family. Thus, it is possible to argue that Radford is referring to her husband, whose later illness prevented him from writing poetry and left her struggling to make a living.<sup>101</sup> As we shall see in Chapter Five, this meaning is similarly implied in “A Novice” where the wife nurses her ill husband: “When the great family affairs/ Demand the most gigantic cares,/ And one is very ill upstairs, With Poultices?” (“A Novice” 13-16).

When the bird is gendered as masculine, he lacks a voice, with another speaking on his behalf. The use of the word “my” indicates a sense of possession which is affectionate and sad, and unlike the bird-wanderer who “calls aloud”, the bird in this poem can no longer sing due to the isolation he lives in. He lacks a number of the qualities given to the ungendered speaker in “A Wanderer”. In the latter, the bird is represented with “tired wings that may not fold in death”, which means that he/she does not cease trying to fly and fulfil his/her desires. However, in this poem, the male bird “may not lift his wing”, suggesting weakness and submissiveness. Given the social context of the poem, this representation undermines what is described in Saleh’s argument as male authority “to manage the family unit”. From a biographical point of view, it reflects on Ernest who

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<sup>101</sup> See the Introduction for Radford’s letters which demonstrate the financial burden she had to deal with after Ernest’s illness. In order to earn a living for herself and her three children, Radford, in addition to loans from family members and friends, depended mainly on writing. This is evident in one of her letters to Ernest: “I hope to get £30 for the story I am writing now – for bill at Xmas. Don’t sell the dining-room picture!” (Add MS 89029/.29, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 24 October 1898).

remained ill and inactive until his death, while Radford went out to make a living for her children. Like Ernest, the bird's illness and coldness distance him from his "mate" who is, like Radford, "dreaming" and passionate. Thus, the "pearly deeps" may be a metaphor for the speaker's emotional, intellectual or sexual needs in a passionless relationship.

In her representation of a passive and finally deceased male bird, it is possible to argue that Radford's poem engages with evolutionary feminism.<sup>102</sup> In her thesis *Evolutionary Feminism in Late-Victorian Women's Poetry: Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and May Kendall*, Catherine Elizabeth Birch observes that "male animals are portrayed in Darwin's work as passive bodies to be shaped by the females", a fact which led a number of *fin-de-siècle* women poets and intellectuals to emphasise "the importance of female choice and the crucial role of female animals in evolution" (Birch, 2011: 201). Radford refers in her diary to her interest in science: "Read Darwin all the morning. The Descent of Man" (Radford Diary, 5 September 1883). In a further entry, she notes: "Shall read nothing now but science: it is shocking to be ignorant of everything which is most vital" (Radford Diary, 28 January 1884). Given Radford's awareness of Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871), her representation of the male bird as incapable may be read in view of Birch's argument. Although it is not specified whether the bird's "mate" is female or not, the death of the male bird at the end of the poem may be interpreted in relation to Darwin's theory of sexual selection. According to Darwin, "it appears that in a state of nature female birds, by having long selected the more attractive males, have added to their beauty" (Darwin, 1871: 259). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the unattractive

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<sup>102</sup> Critics, such as John Holmes, have explored the interrelationship between feminism and Darwinism: "from the late 1880s leading feminists argued that the education and emancipation of women was either an evolutionary inevitability or a necessary intervention to avoid the degeneration of the race" (Holmes, 2010: 523). Feminists, such as Olive Schreiner, tackled Darwin's description of women as a "lower race". In *Woman and Labour* (1911), Schreiner claims that women's intellectual and bodily evolution is necessary not only for themselves, but for the entirety of the race: "Give us labour and the training which fits for labour! We demand this, not for ourselves alone, but for the race" (*Woman and Labour*, Ch.1: Parasitism, *Project Gutenberg ebooks*. Web. 07 Aug. 2014). Also, see Chapter Five in which my reading of "Our Emancipated Aunt" is linked to Darwin's evolutionary theory.

characteristics by which the speaker describes the male bird (e.g. alone, frozen, stone, unaware) increase his illness and contribute to his death. In doing so, Radford as Birch points out, highlights “the importance of female choice” which could empower and at the same time weaken male self-esteem.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how Radford’s marital conflict might have influenced her portrayal of speakers seeking love and fulfilling relationships outside the domestic sphere. Yearning, melancholy, frustration, anger, alienation and isolation are aspects emphasised by the poetic voice, especially in poems which potentially address Radford’s own conflict with her husband. Despite the despair suffered by Radford’s speakers, they share a common sense of rebellion and revolution against social norms, and thus challenge the prevailing expectation of women as feminine/submissive angels who were assumed to find no joy outside the domestic and social ideals imposed on them. As this chapter has also revealed, Radford’s personal experience might have encouraged her to identify with the suffering of marginal figures, including the working class, prostitutes, and others possessing emotional, intellectual, sexual and financial needs which failed to find a place in Victorian and Edwardian England. This forms an introduction to the following chapter which explores Radford’s depiction of “poets” and “artists” as other marginal figures in a society which does not value their ambition.

## **Chapter Four: Female Authorship and Visual Art in**

### **Radford's Diary and Poetry**

#### **Overview**

As shown in Chapter Three, Radford's personal conflict as a married woman, whose dreams extended beyond domesticity, led her to identify with figures marginalised by society, such as neglected lovers and prostitutes. This chapter considers Radford's depiction of poets and artists as other marginal figures whose suffering echoes her experience as a "minor" woman poet. In addition, the chapter offers an insight into Radford's critique of the female muse in male art, which usually represents women either as angels conforming to domesticity or monsters seeking to fulfil their desires. By illuminating these themes, this chapter aims to show how Radford sets her poetry against a backdrop in which art is classified by the class and gender of its producer.

The first part of this chapter offers biographical details to explain the role of art in Radford's life. The first subheading "Editorship and Critical Prejudice against Radford's Talent" reveals the hardships Radford encountered as a woman poet whose talent was underestimated by her contemporary male editors and reviewers. Exploring the gendered system that disadvantaged female authors, the second subheading "Limitations Surrounding Radford as a Woman Writer" discusses lack of education, as well as maternal and domestic duties as other obstacles which Radford complained about in her diary. Despite these limitations, the third subheading, "The Value of Art in Radford's Life", shows that Radford never lost faith in the capacity of art to enrich one's life. In addition, this section highlights Radford's increasing interest in art as evidenced through her frequent visits to museums and galleries, a fact which might have influenced her portrayal of the female muse in the poems included in Part Two. As we shall see later in the chapter,

only two of the diary entries included in Part One have been considered by Livesey in relation to Radford as a socialist and aesthete poet. Therefore, the discussion of Radford's diary entries and letters adds a different angle to Livesey's argument and contextualises Radford's experience and the obstacles she faced as a woman writer. In doing so, the aim is to show how the marginalisation Radford suffered was part of a larger cultural prejudice that targeted women writers during the nineteenth century.

Divided into two sections, the second part of this chapter addresses a number of Radford's poems which deal with the struggling artist/poet. Entitled "The Suffering of Marginalised Poets and Artists", the first subheading includes "How the Unknown Poets Die" and "In Our Square" which both engage with the theme of the marginalised artist, although differently. While the first poem represents suffering and isolation as part of the "unknown poets" journey, the second one ironically depicts an image of a "pale" male artist, possibly representative of the experience of Radford and other women artists. The second subheading "Radford's Depiction of Art and the Female Muse" includes "Cold Stone", "To the Caryatid, in the Elgin Room – British Museum", and "A Model" in which the female figure is represented as "still" and "worn", but simultaneously "tired" and striving to escape the restrictions imposed on her.

None of the poems in this chapter have previously been considered by contemporary scholars, and are therefore being considered for the first time here. Therefore, the analysis in this chapter adds to the existing body of knowledge on Victorian women poets and to Radford's contribution to prevailing attitudes against female authorship. Also, as my analysis will show, Radford does not simply engage with the issue of marginal artists, but shares with other contemporary women poets and art critics a challenge to male representations of the female figure as passive and incapable. In doing so, I aim to consider Radford as one of the "nineteenth-century women observers" who, as Hilary Fraser observes in her recent study on visual artists, "have become invisible to

the modern gaze. They have barely crossed the sightline even of second-wave feminist art historians” (Fraser, 2014: 3). Both parts in this chapter posit a role for Radford’s in the artistic field, corresponding with Showalter’s argument in the Introduction that there is a need to reveal women writers who were and still are considered minor.

## **Part One: Authorship and Art in Radford’s Diary**

### **Editorship and Critical Prejudice against Radford’s Talent**

Radford’s diary records the gender-biased attitudes toward women writers:

I have some verses in my head  
As many have, but then  
What is the use; I wish instead  
The same were in my pen.  
Oh I would write such stirring lines  
About the great to-morrow,  
And send them to the owners of  
“To-day” – to ease their sorrow  
What idle dreams! My simpler writing lacks  
All qualities that Messrs Joynes & Bax  
Would most approve: in intimate relation  
I’ve been with Nihilists of every station  
And German socialists of every plan,  
But never have I known a working man.

(Radford Diary, 23 January 1884)

On the one hand, this poem laments Radford’s limited role in socialist campaigns and her limited insight into the suffering of the poor. However, this very fact might have arguably influenced her desire to teach her children to be socialists, and informed her empathetic portrayal of marginal figures in society.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, the poem highlights the prevailing prejudice against female authorship: “My simpler writing lacks/ All qualities that Messers Joynes & Bax/ Would most approve”. In her reading of the poem, Livesey

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<sup>103</sup> See Chapter Three.

points out: “Dollie Radford felt herself absurdly lacking in what the editors required. That affective discourse of the feminised poetic heart could not be further from the embodied labour of the ‘working man’ that so eluded Radford’s limited field of acquaintance in the radical drawing rooms of Bloomsbury” (Livesey, 2006: 503). As shown in Chapter One, Woolf criticises these dominant attitudes and the supposition that “nothing could be expected of women intellectually” (Woolf, 1928: 63). Joynes’s and Bax’s<sup>104</sup> underestimation of Radford’s poetical ability is indicative of her contemporaries’ cultural scepticism about women’s writing.

Bax and Joynes were not the only editors with whom Radford experienced conflict. In 1889, Radford mentioned: “Horribly maltreated by [?] the Editor. Hope to forgive him!”:

An author, for fame a competitor,  
Mistook a large cow for an Editor!  
With horns & with hoofs  
She ‘corrected’ his proofs  
In a manner you hardly would credit her.

(Radford Diary, 12 November 1889)

In this entry Radford reflects on her mistreatment by the editor and mocks him in a limerick form. She identifies herself as an “author” who seeks “fame”, a point which will be revisited in the subsequent analysis of “How the Unknown Poets Die” which describes how the poets finally die ignored and unsupported. Ironically, Radford refers to herself as a professional who “‘corrected’ his proofs”, while using comic language to humiliate the editor by describing him as “a large cow”. An additional irony lies in the use of slippage, namely that Radford implies that the “author” and the “Editor” are “a large cow” with

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<sup>104</sup> Ernest Belfort Bax and James Leigh Joynes were members of the Marxist Socialist Democratic Federation and the co-editors of *Today* in which “Socialism”, as they claimed, was “the key-note of our magazine” (Bax and Joynes, 1884: 1). Livesey argues: “Bax, in particular, was a notorious misogynist who claimed that women were simply incapable of turning their attention from their own love affairs to great social question” (Livesey, 2006: 502). Bax’s prejudice against women writers might be the very reason which led Radford to write the verses above.

“horns” and “hoofs” in need of being corrected. These lines show that when encountering the presumption that as a female writer she is poetically incapable, Radford refuses to respond with passivity.

Like Radford’s editors, the critics and reviewers of her poetry often underestimate the revolutionary meaning she implies. In reviewing her first volume *A Light Load*, A reviewer in *The Bookman* (1891-1934) identified the volume as “domestic in the word’s best sense” (*The Bookman*, 1896: 79). The reviewer’s comment is reminiscent of Mermin’s study which finds that as long as the surface of Victorian women’s poetry conforms to social norms, the meanings underneath the actual poems were often neglected (Mermin, 1995: 79). Similarly, Showalter argues: “To their contemporaries, nineteenth-century women writers were women first, artists second. A woman novelist, unless disguised herself with a male pseudonym, had to expect critics to focus on her femininity” (Showalter, 2009: 61). This prejudice against women writers provides evidence of how Radford’s contemporary critics reviewed her volumes of poetry.

As with *A Light Load*, reviewers of *Songs and Other Verses* ignored its revolutionary themes as “feminine”. For example, *The Athenaeum*<sup>105</sup> records: “MRS. Radford’s verse is very feminine, in the best and most characteristic sense of the term. [...] How great a relief is so cool and fragrant a volume among the many heated and hysterical productions of the modern woman!” (*The Athenaeum*, 1895: 378). While the reviewer’s comment labels Radford’s collection as conventionally feminine, it uses the word “relief” to highlight rising anxiety about women’s passion and its appearance in their poetry. This passion was feared for its potentially negative influence on Victorian women’s values.

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<sup>105</sup> *The Athenaeum* (1828-1921) was a popular periodical in which literary texts and articles by women occupied a significant part. See Marysa Demoor’s *Their Fair Share: Women, Power and Criticism in the Athenaeum, from Millicent Garrett to Katherine Mansfield, 1870-1920* which shows how the “*Athenaeum* has its very own place in nineteenth-century culture. Indeed, it is generally considered to be ‘the single most important literary periodical of Victorian times’” (Demoor, 2000: 25).

Although, as the next chapter will show, *Songs and Other Verses* includes Radford's most explicitly feminist poems, the reviewers disregarded them in favour of the sentimental meanings in "Ah, bring it not so grudgingly", a love song which portrays the speaker's joy and excitement upon receipt of the gifts her lover brings her. Similarly, *The Bookman* mentions: "In this pacific house of dolls we may look for no rude violence. For anything save sweetness you may search Mrs. Radford's verses in vain" (*The Bookman*, 1895: 146). This time, the reviewer makes a direct association between Radford's volume and the role of women as passive "dolls", a metaphor which recalls Morgan's argument in Chapter One in which he refers to the perception that middle-class women were merely "decorative toys" (Morgan, 2007: 36). Radford is patronised as a woman writer, and the language used by her reviewers reminds us of the qualities Victorian critics commonly attributed to women's writing.<sup>106</sup> It is also possible that the critic of *The Bookman* is referencing Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in which Nora finally revolts against nineteenth-century norms, although Radford, at least on the surface of her poems, does not.

While these reviews locate Radford among the many women writers confronted by prejudice, Richardson considers the possibility of Radford's intention to hide subversive meanings under gentle inoffensive language: "by making these early poems ambiguous, she escapes official censure and courts wider appeal. But at a cost: she gains the reputation of being an unthreatening domestic ladies' writer" (Richardson, 2000: 111). I bolster Richardson's argument concerning Radford's engagement with aestheticism and the aesthetic strategies adopted by many women writers.<sup>107</sup> As Schaffer argues: "Women writers enjoyed aestheticism because its elaborate language allowed them to write the pretty visual descriptions that critics liked, yet it was also avant-garde enough to permit a new range of daring topics" (Schaffer, 2000: 5). Therefore, it is plausible to argue that

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<sup>106</sup> See Armstrong's argument in Chapter Two.

<sup>107</sup> See Chapter One.

aesthetic language offers Radford a space to engage with and critique social issues. However, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, this is not always the case in Radford's poems especially those published in her later volume *Poems*, which marks a transformation from the aesthetic language and images used in *A Light Load*.

### **Limitations Surrounding Radford as a Woman Writer**

Besides the hardships of editorship and cultural prejudice, the first poem quoted in the previous section sheds light on the limitations faced by Radford as a woman poet, who has "some verses in [her] head", but is unable to articulate them: "I wish instead/ The same were in my pen". However, Radford's use of the possessive in "my pen" may be ironic as it identifies poetry writing, embodied in the metaphor of the "pen", as her own. In their discussion of the prevailing prejudice against female authorship, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to the "pen" as "penis", codifying thereby literary activity as patriarchal: "Male sexuality [...] is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet's pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 4). Thus, set against the Victorian backdrop, in which the "pen" signified male authority, Radford's statement of possession of her pen gains weight.

As discussed in Chapter One, female writers did not receive the same kind of education as men in terms of poetry and verse-writing, and "creativity", as Wilkes argues, "was strongly linked to mental capacities". Therefore, "notions about women's intellectual inferiority to men meant that women writers were seen as inferior in the creative sense" (Wilkes, 2001: 38). This notion might have impacted Radford's sense that her poetry failed to match the standards required by her contemporary editors; she states: "My simpler writing lacks/ All qualities that Messrs Joynes & Bax/ Would most approve". Radford's awareness of her lack of appropriate education is evident even before her marriage when she complains: "My eyes ache so; must read many 'science' books. The

days begin to feel rather empty just now: I get no time for reading or anything somehow!” (Radford Diary, 8 September 1883). This entry echoes Woolf’s assertion that Victorian women had no time to call their own (Woolf, 1928: 77). It also recalls Radford’s thirst for knowledge, of science in particular, as previously discussed in Chapter Three.

The influence of this lack of time and privacy heightened after Radford’s marriage. A month after Maitland was born, Radford writes: “Wrote some more tale: am maddened by my effort to alter some verses: goaded on by Ernest!” (Radford Diary, 7 July 1884). Three days later, the diary records: “Sent ‘In yonder bay’ to ‘To-Day’. What a fag I have had with those verses!” (Radford Diary, 10 July 1884). Both entries demonstrate the difficulty Radford encountered when writing poetry. As a consequence of her domestic and maternal commitments, Radford relied on Ernest’s encouragement and expended more “effort” in order to produce poetry. This stage in Radford’s life justifies her fear “of dreaming too much, & becoming inactive in my life”, as expressed in her earlier letters to Ernest.<sup>108</sup> Later in the same year, Radford writes to her father: “I am very disappointed at not being able to earn” (Add MS 89029/.73, Dollie Radford to Robert Maitland, 2 November 1884). Two years later, she similarly complains about her inability to work: “I’m not doing much these days. I think it is too cold for my brain to act – anyhow I’ve been home since Dec 22<sup>nd</sup> & have done no work. Alas!” (Radford Diary, 9 February 1886). Whether it is the coldness of the winter weather or the coldness and inactivity of domestic life, both are possible reasons to add on the existing difficulty of writing. In correspondence with Ernest, Radford complains: “I have played into my story, but it does seem very hard to write prose. I cannot get along very quickly yet, & cannot think of the right name for the heroine” (Add Ms 89029/.29 Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 27 September 1895). Thus, Radford’s reported experiences bear out Showalter’s observation that “many women writers of this period found it difficult to finish their books or to write

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<sup>108</sup> See Chapter Three.

more than one” (Showalter, 2009: 159). Radford laments the difficulties that proceed from the expectations placed on women that inhabit her creativity as a passionate woman writer in a male-dominated society.

### **The Value of Visual Art and Literature in Radford’s Life**

Despite the limitations she experienced, Radford’s diary records her continuous attempts to establish her name. She participated in clubs where the main concern it is to support and encourage women writers: “On the 31<sup>st</sup> I went to The Women Writers”. There she met famous women writers, such as Mathilde Blind who was “the chair” (Radford Diary, 4 June 1893). In her article, “A Club of their Own, ‘The Literary Ladies,’ New Women Writers, and *Fin-de-Siècle* Authorship”, Hughes explores the connection between “The Women Writers” dinner, which was previously known as Literary Ladies, and the emergence of the New Woman:

Several founding members of the Literary Ladies were later identified as New Women, including Mona Caird, who presided at the inaugural dinner. Ironically, as the New Woman novel became notorious, the dining club, renamed the Women Writers in 1894, became more respectable for reasons related to the structuring of authorship and the literary marketplace. (Hughes, 2007: 233)

The fact that the club attracted women writers, whose support for the New Woman was predominant in their work, is an issue that the next Chapter will expand on when discussing Radford’s feminist thoughts and her engagement with the New Woman. However, what I would like to shed light on here is how the club, as Hughes puts it, “represented significant innovation in *fin-de-siècle* authorship” (Hughes, 2007: 233). This significance might have led Radford to describe her visit to the “Women Writers” as “pleasant”, while in the same diary entry, she adds: “I think there is too much dinner & not enough social opportunity. About fifty present I think” (Radford Diary, 4 June 1893). Radford’s comment reveals her enthusiasm to socialise with other women writers. In

addition, her archive in the British Library includes a cheque for five shillings to the “Woman Writers Suffrage League”,<sup>109</sup> signed with her name (Add Ms 89029/2/1). Whether the cheque is a subscription fee or offered in support of the movement is unknown, but both are possibilities.

In addition, Radford seems to have retained her interest in art. Paintings and statues continued to attract her, both inside and outside London. Her diary records multiple visits to the New Gallery during the 1880s and 1890s when she met radical figures, including Wilde. In 1884, Radford remembers her honeymoon with Ernest: “Looked at the Raphael & Michelangelo reproductions, & at our old Assyrian reliefs: it is nice to walk a little once more through the galleries, & recall the days when Ernest & I strolled there & Louie & Gracie worked among the statues” (Radford Diary, 28 February 1884). MacEwen notes that the Radfords’ honeymoon, which was spent visiting galleries, museums and churches was “something that Ernest had long been wanting to undertake”, but she adds: “It may not have been Dollie’s idea of the most perfect way in which to spend their first weeks alone together” (MacEwen in Pullen, 2012: 35). MacEwen alleges that Dollie would most likely not have been interested in spending her honeymoon in this way; however, all the entries in Radford’s diary contradict this claim and prove the opposite.

In addition to her comment that she finds it “nice to walk a little once more through the galleries, & recall” her honeymoon, Radford continues to show interest and give her opinions on art in the places she visits. After viewing the Rotterdam Pictures in

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<sup>109</sup> Founded in 1908, the “Women Writers Suffrage League” was the first professional organisation of women writers in Britain. In “The First Professional: The Women Writers Suffrage League”, Sowon S. Park argues that the organisation was the first to allow membership for both men and women regardless of their social class (Park, 1997: 185). In addition, Park identifies Schreiner, Meynell, and Mrs. Havelock Ellis as three of the league’s leading figures (Park, 1997: 191), pointing out that gender politics and the woman question were vital concerns for the league’s members: “[A]s a writers’ group the WWSL had a far wider scope than any society centered on particular literary values. A writer’s prestige or distinction had to have a use for gender politics if she or he were to contribute to the league” (Park, 1997: 193). Similarly, in “Socialist-Feminist Criticism: A Case Study, Women’s Suffrage and Literature, 1906-14”, Wendy Mulford emphasises the league’s feminist politics which is embodied “in the evolution of women’s emancipation and, more broadly, in the developing politicisation of women through their awareness of their oppression as women” (Mulford, 2003: 186).

1883, she comments: “Excellent new catalogue: well lighted galleries pictures [...] no. 191 a fine portrait of a lady. An ‘unknown portrait’” (Radford Diary, 1 November 1883). In 1884, she writes: “To the Grosvenor. [...] The sleeping nude figure is beautiful. The most beautiful of the collection I think” (Radford Diary, 11 February 1884). These entries may be read as indicative of Radford’s appreciation of art and her engagement with women’s rights and aestheticism which were supported by the Grosvenor Gallery.<sup>110</sup> As Paula Gillett argues,

Women [...] were even more central to the Grosvenor’s character and success. Founded during a decade in which women’s abilities, opportunities, and rights were matters of pressing concern, the Grosvenor Gallery played a role by the recognition it gave to the talents of female artists. Several women artists who contributed prominently to the Grosvenor shows were participants in the early suffrage movement. [...] The participation of these feminists in Grosvenor exhibitions is likely to have attracted fellow suffragists who knew of some of these artists. (Gillett, 1996: 55)

Gillett’s emphasis on the role of feminist artists in the Grosvenor confirms that Radford’s interest in art is in line with her feminist motivations,<sup>111</sup> a theme which I will return to in Chapter Five. In this Chapter I would like to argue that Radford offers a challenge to conventional male representation of the female muse. This will be explored throughout the analysis in Part Two, which echoes her admiration of and comment on the “nude figure” which may be one of the many nude men and women shown in the gallery’s collection. As Fraser points out: “art criticism was a masculine intellectual field in which a handful

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<sup>110</sup> In *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, Colleen Denney points out that the Gallery “was located on New Bond Street, London, from 1877 to 1890, at one of the most elite addresses for a gallery during the Victorian period. It was an exhibition site that embraced challenge and change at the end of the century, both in the artists it represented and in the ways their works were displayed within the spacious interior. [...] its owners, the aristocrats Sir Coutts Lindsay (1824-1913) and Blanche, Lady Lindsay (1844-1912), wanted to promote artists who were not receiving attention or proper recognition elsewhere” (Denney, 1996: 1).

<sup>111</sup> See “Women Artists and the Politics of Feminism 1850-1900” in which Deborah Cherry argues: “For many women working as professional artists the decision to pursue a career as an artist was motivated and/or paralleled by campaigning for a wide range of women’s issues and rights. Art and politics were, on a daily basis, interlinked: working in the studio and supporting a campaign were activities shaped in and by feminism” (Cherry, 1995: 49).

of women played a merely secondary role” (Fraser, 2014: 2). Radford’s diary entries and the poems discussed later in this chapter establish a form of resistance to male dominance over the field of art. This supports Fraser’s suggestion that the marginalisation of women writers and critics made it an easier task for them “to refuse conventional categories” (Fraser, 2014: 29). According to Fraser, by writing from outside masculine conventions, women had the space and freedom to gaze and observe without the fear of criticism.

In 1888, Radford’s admiration of art became more palpable through her participation in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, which considered the working class in a manner in line with her socialist views.<sup>112</sup> In her diary, she made frequent references to the Arts and Crafts: “To the Arts & Crafts with Ada to hear Cobden-Sanderson lecture on Book-binding. A very interesting lecture – & audience” (Radford Diary, 22 November 1888). The following day, Radford mentions: “Ada & I took the Boy to the Arts & Crafts. He much excited & interested; especially at having his dinner there” (Radford Diary, 23 November 1888). The fact that Radford took her son to the Exhibition shows how she combined her family duties with her interest in art, defying thereby prevailing beliefs regarding women’s passive role. Her comment also reflects an interest in the Exhibition’s lectures and the social atmosphere which attracted well-known literary and social characters: “Exciting committee meeting at the Arts & Crafts” (Radford Diary, 27 November 1888). More importantly, it seems that Radford was not a mere public attendant of the Exhibition, for she once noted: “Our Exhibition (the A. & C.E.S.) has been opened a fortnight. It appears to be a thoroughly successful venture. Artists & public are pleased alike” (Radford Diary, 13 October 1888). Radford’s choice of the pronoun “our” suggests she was not a member of the public visiting the Society, but a member attending its committee meetings and possibly also played a role in its social and artistic events.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See the Introduction for MacEwen’s consideration of the Arts and Crafts’ agenda.

<sup>113</sup> It is worth noting that Radford’s sense of ownership may also hint at the fact that Ernest was Secretary to the A&C Exhibition Society. As MacEwen points out: “Ernest was interviewed by the Finance Committee

This involvement by Radford in the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions is part of a completely new movement in women's labour. Schaffer argues, "the Arts and Crafts movement introduced a new code of professionalism. [...] the professional craft after 1860 is quite opposed to the amateur female craft" (Schaffer, 2013: 39). As evidenced in the diary entries above, Radford's reference to the craft is frequently associated with what Schaffer describes as "the professional craft" rather than the domestic handicraft/needlework which occupied many middle-class women during the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, arguably Radford exemplifies those women who were no longer conforming to "the traditional housewifely model" referred to by Schaffer. According to Schaffer, "for women affiliating themselves with more contemporary gender models, like the emergent aesthetic or New Woman roles, the domestic handicraft symbolised a retrograde past" (Schaffer, 2013: 39). Radford's appreciation of art, in addition to her support of the New Woman identify her as someone who was challenging the idea that the domestic sphere is women's only domain.

The value of art in Radford's life is summed up in a diary entry written in 1893:

How full the world is – it is new life to feel again the intensity and joy of art work. How much I wish every one could make one thing of his very own that might live for always. I think we all can, & do, in differing ways. The happiest of all must be to be a great painter – the saddest of all – to be blind & dull and unawakened to the beauty of life. I do know many people – sad and hopeless – creeping through their lives in a shell – shut up & withered – If they could have painted one picture – made one song – or done one little thing of their very own – I think they would have awakened. It is all in "Towards Democracy". Edward Carpenter understands well. (Radford Diary, 23 March 1893)

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of the [A&C] Society on 10 April [1888] and offered the job the next day at a salary of £150" (MacEwen, 2006: 29).

<sup>114</sup> Schaffer argues that "in the early nineteenth century, handicraft was increasingly identified with a middle-class sensibility, as a thrifty, skilful mode of domestic management" (Schaffer, 2013: 27).

For Radford, the ability to change, be beneficial to others, and produce a work “that might live for always” are the chief sources of happiness. This idea is addressed in Chapter Three when Radford complained to Ernest about the burden of domestic duties and finds “that our life must find experience in something for other people – the world – to be quite happy” (Add MS 89029/.27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 2 September 1886). A cross reading of the entries reveals that Radford’s admiration of art grew stronger as she never lost faith in its value in the way she did with social ideals concerning marriage for instance. For Radford, “paint[ing] one picture” or making “one song”, in other words art, are enough to relieve the dullness of one’s life. In her understanding of the value of art as enabling a fulfilled life, Radford shares with Carpenter his ideals in *Towards Democracy* (1883)<sup>115</sup> which she explicitly refers to. In her interpretation of women’s reference to their preferred reading materials in their diaries, Kate Flint observes: “Some autobiographers chose to present themselves as having, indeed, been influenced by what they read” (Flint, 1993: 219). Radford’s acknowledgment of Carpenter’s book may be read in the context of Flint’s argument as a means by which Victorian women tended to pinpoint the influence of radical writers and characters on their lives. According to Carpenter, “Artists” are “heroes” whose “struggle” is part of the journey towards freedom and democracy:

Here the essence of all expression, and the final surrender of  
Art – for this the divine Artists have struggled and still struggle;  
For this the heroes and lovers of all ages have laid down their  
lives; and nations like tigers have fought, knowing well that this  
life was a mere empty blob without Freedom.

Where this makes itself known in a people or even in the soul  
of a single man or woman, there Democracy begins to exist.

(*Towards Democracy* 12)

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<sup>115</sup> Contemporary scholars consider Carpenter’s book as an essential text for socialism. Stephen Yeo argues: “This book may indeed be read as a document of what it felt like to experience unity between things normally held apart in the culture” (Yeo, 1977: 14). Therefore, equality between the sexes is another concern in *Towards Democracy*. Also see “Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain” by Lesley Hall who identifies Carpenter as a “feminist” (Hall, 2004: 38).

Carpenter presents the view that artists should strive for an ideal world where “Equality” and “Freedom” are spread among both men and women. Therefore, Radford’s admiration of Carpenter’s thoughts shows that her identity as an artist is inseparable from her feminist role, the very notion which commences the discussion in the next chapter. Given the friendship between Radford and Carpenter,<sup>116</sup> it is possible to argue that Radford consciously chose to adopt Carpenter’s ideals in her poetry; certainly, her artistic language calls for the same equality, freedom, and democracy that Carpenter seeks. In addition, Radford’s admiration of Carpenter will be recalled in Chapter Six which addresses Carpenter’s homosexuality and his vital role in establishing homosexual theories which might have inspired Radford to engage with the theme of lesbianism and homoerotic desire in some of her poems.

## **Part Two: Authorship and Visual Art in Radford’s Poetry**

### **The Suffering of Marginalised Poets and Artists**

As apparent from Part One of this chapter, Radford was aware of the obstacles a woman might encounter when she chose to be an artist. While taking a walk in a square, Radford makes an enigmatic note in her diary: ““One old tower left standing in the middle of the grass where the children play: perhaps as poets unknown”” (Radford Diary, 4 July 1884). Whether Radford implies the future of children as poets, or simply describing a scene she has witnessed is not evident. However, it is obvious that she has identified an abandoned building with unknown poets. Similarly, she gave one of her longest poems the title “How the Unknown Poets Die” (1895); it describes the journey of passionate, yet unacknowledged poets who spend their lives striving to find support and recognition:

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<sup>116</sup> See the Introduction.

IN the light of a summer sky,  
In the warmth of a noon-day sun,  
With the roses in fullest bloom,  
With the gold of the hours to run;  
With the earth breathing deep for joy  
Of the riches that deck her breast,  
With her promises new and sweet,  
They pass to their early rest.

In the busy and eager town,  
In the desolate crowded street,  
In a passionate great despair  
For the face which they do not meet;  
With the world passing heedless by  
In its pleasure and pride and strife,  
While its magical pulses beat  
They silently slip from life.

For the want of a tender hand  
To lead lovingly through the flowers,  
To the place where their home was laid  
With its treasure of tuneful hours,

Long ago when the earth was young,  
By the spirits of land and sea,  
In the quest of their hidden home  
They close their eyes mournfully.

For the need of a kindly voice  
To bid theirs arise clear and strong,  
To remind them the world has need,  
Ever need of a helping song;  
For the want of a healing word  
For their hurts on the stony way,  
For the want of their daily bread  
They pass, as the chosen may.

With the tears in their tired hearts,  
Burning tears which they dared not weep,  
In the sorrows that gave them birth,  
In the watches they had to keep;  
In the love which they gave and sought,  
In the longings they strove to quell,  
In the life which they tried to live,  
And passing, for them, is well.

In the flood of a triumph song,  
From the burden of words set free,  
In the beautiful last release  
Of a striving life melody;

In the brightest of all their hopes,



Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.”

(“The City of Dreadful Night” I.29-35)

The tiring journey implied by the “wild path” that the “wanderer” has to take in Thomson’s poem echoes the poets’ “hurts on the stony way” in Radford’s poem. William Sharpe argues: “This never-quite-frustrated sense of community and collective consciousness growing out of the personal isolation enforced by the city is Thomson’s most important theme” (Sharpe, 1984: 67). Unlike Thomson’s poem, in which the poet’s death might be read as a form of submission to the confining nature of urban life, the poets’ death in Radford’s poem indicates a resistance to urban strictures.

As a woman poet, Radford challenges the restricting nature of city life through the poets’ passing (“[t]hey pass”, “passing”, “slip”). Goody identifies the act of “passing” (whether to death or between places) in Levy’s poetry as a “resistance to fixity [which] is also a resistance to intelligible sexual, racial, or gender identity” (Goody, 2010: 171). By choosing death, one of the double meanings of passing Goody refers to, Radford’s poets resist and escape their inferior position in city life. In doing so, Radford’s poem recalls some of the meanings in Levy’s “London Poets: In Memoriam” (1889).<sup>119</sup> Similar to the poets in Radford’s poem, who live “[i]n the busy and eager town”, the poets in Levy’s poem “trod the streets and squares where now I tread” (“London Poets: In Memoriam” 1). Although both poems posit death as the poets’ despairing fate, Levy’s poem makes a more obvious association between the city poets and the speaker of the poem: “they are dead./ The sorrow of their souls to them did seem/ As real as mine to me, as permanent”

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<sup>119</sup> “London Poets: In Memoriam” was published in *A London Plane-Tree, and Other Verse*, Levy’s final volume. Throughout the volume, Levy represents city as an ambiguous subject; enabling and simultaneously confining. In “Murder in Mile End: Amy Levy, Jewishness, and the City”, Goody interprets such ambivalence as a method by which modernist women writers expressed and challenged their marginalisation. In Levy’s case, “her poems and the voices they echo and speak have no place to rest, no point of view; they are almost inevitably threatened by a collapse into non-being and silence” (Goody, 2006: 475).

(“London Poets: In Memoriam” 8-10). This link between the speaker and the experience of marginal poets is absent from Radford’s poem; however, the biographical background given in Part One suggests Radford’s inclusion as one of those “unknown poets”, a point expanded upon later.

The aforementioned reference to “passing” in Radford’s poem may be also read as an “articulation of transgressive racial and sexual identities” (Goody, 2010: 175). As we shall see in Chapter Six, many of Radford’s poems, which engage with the theme of homosexuality, address the “hand” as a symbol of intimate/sexual friendships. Similarly, in this poem the speaker articulates the poets’ desire to pass in a manner that is linked to a search for love: “For the want of a tender hand/ To lead lovingly through the flowers”. Given the challenge the poem extends to city life, as discussed earlier, it is possible to read the poets’ passing as a means of resistance to the fixed heterosexual identities in this city. Therefore, “the want of a tender hand” may be, on the one hand, a metaphor for same-sex desire to fulfil the needs which heterosexuality failed to meet. On the other hand, passing may be further read as a weapon which empowers the possibly working-class poets to challenge prevailing beliefs regarding their inferiority. In doing so, passing in Radford’s poem confronts social and cultural attitudes toward writing as a middle-class sphere. This reading takes as its cue Radford’s empathy with the working classes and her socialist role which is discussed in Chapter Three. Also, in a letter to her husband, Radford writes: “I have a post card from Le Gallienne saying he has sent my ‘unknown poets’ to the Yellow Book editor – Harland - & it will come out in the Christmas number IV” (Add MS 89029/1/29, Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 16 September 1894). Given the radical content of the literary works included in *The Yellow Book*, Radford’s letter is a further endorsement of my unconventional reading of the poem.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> In her reading of the “burning tears” in Radford’s poem “Two Songs” (1891), Livesey points out: “Given the public concern with prostitution and the sexual exploitation of children in London during the mid-1880s, it is possible to read these ‘burning tears’ as an allusion to the physical hazards of women taking to the streets at night in the form of venereal disease. This heavy fruit of sexual knowledge is shared by women of

In fact, both Levy's and Radford's poems mirror the situation experienced by many gifted women writers, including Levy and Radford themselves, who could not achieve the same level of fame some men had at that time. In Radford's case, Richardson observes: "Although she did not achieve her husband's level of fame, Radford is, objectively, the better poet. She has a sureness of touch in her poetic phrasing and a mastery of meter and rhyme that is nowhere represented in Ernest Radford's work, outside of 'Oh what know they of harbors'" (Richardson, 2001: 192). Richardson's comment on Radford reflects the Victorian gendered system, in particular how women, as Jan Marsh puts it, "were counselled to be modest, self-effacing, altruistic; and it is not difficult to see that these qualities will seldom bring the success and fame that depend on professional and public esteem. [...] The story then becomes one of the struggle to realise that potential, that ambition to 'make a name'" (Marsh, 1995: 34). Therefore, it is possible to read the elegiac tone of the poem in relation to Radford's awareness of her poetic talent which failed to find appropriate recognition due to the cultural prejudice against women writers who were not expected to fight for fame.

Assuming that women poets are one group of the unknown poets in need of support, then the poem may be read as a response to patriarchal attitudes toward women's poetry writing. As Mermin argues, it was believed "that women could not summon up the sense of self and the self-assertiveness that poetry requires, and that they were too repressed to write strong lyrics" (Mermin, 1995: 65). Such negative attitudes are depicted in the unknown poets' "want of a healing word" and "their hurts on the stony way" which might symbolise the social neglect, publishing conditions, and other diverse forces that prevented them from attaining fame and realising their goals. In addition, the financial insecurity Radford faced because of her husband's illness reminds us of Livingston's

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all classes" (Livesey, 2006: 505). Livesey's reading of the "burning tears" in relation to prostitution is a further evidence of the argument forward that Radford attempts to show her empathy with society's marginalised figures, for the "burning tears" are similarly addressed in "How the Unknown Poets Die".

comment regarding women's economic marginalisation, which "parallels the way [they] write" (Livingston, 2012: 4). In Radford's case, lacking an appropriate income might have influenced her portrayal of the unknown poets' "want of their daily bread".

Radford's friendship with other marginal poets might have encouraged her to empathise with their experiences. For example, Levy, whose letters to Radford demonstrate the anxiety she experienced as a woman poet who remained unacknowledged in the mainstream of a male-dominated society.<sup>121</sup> In one of her letters to Radford, Levy states: "I'm losing all faith in myself as a literary person, & think of sheep-farming in the Far West. 'Oh that I were a man –'" (Add MS 89029 /. / 25, Amy Levy to Dollie Radford, 10 August 1884). Levy's tone sounds pessimistic and hopeless as she muses on abandoning her literary career to become a sheep-farmer, while highlighting the limitations she feels due to her gender. The correspondence also affirms Linda Beckman's argument about Levy's writings, in particular concerning how they "show that she was highly aware of her marginalization" (Beckman, 2000: 7). Levy's tone is ironic mocking the prevailing gender discrimination against women; even being a sheep-farmer would be considered more acceptable than being a woman poet. This could be read as implying that whatever knowledge women accrue, they will always be considered secondary to male-occupied professions which do not require good education or qualifications.

The suffering of Levy, who finally decided to end her life by committing suicide, is likely to have influenced Radford's thoughts and the sorrow expressed in "How the Unknown Poets Die". Grace Black<sup>122</sup> described the grief Radford might have felt when

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<sup>121</sup> In "Disorientalism: Minority and Visuality in Imperial London", Nicholas Mirzoeff refers to Levy as a minor poet, and defines minority as "a legal status in which a minor could not be a legal subject. [...] For those confined to legal minority, such as the enslaved, women, children, Jews, the insane, and others, emancipation (the legal state resulting from leaving nonage) became a double hurdle" (Mirzoeff, 2006: 54). Levy's identity as a possibly lesbian woman and a Jew renders her a double minority, as conveyed in the conflict expressed in her letter to Radford.

<sup>122</sup> Black (1863-1934), later known as Grace Human, was an active socialist and member of the Fabian Society. Black was Radford's friend whose name is mentioned frequently in Radford's diary: "Gracie Black

receiving the news of Levy's death in a letter to Ernest Radford. In her letter, Black explains how Levy "shut herself into a little room & so painfully killed herself during the night", and then adds: "I cannot bear that this should grieve Dollie: as I know it must" (Add MS 89029/. / 31, Grace Black to Ernest Radford 16 September 1889). Levy's suicide would indeed deeply affect Radford, for not only did they share the same profession, but they were also close friends who shared a number of activities together.



Figure 10: A portrait of Amy Levy copied from Pullen's *The Woman Who Dared: A Biography of Amy Levy* (Pullen, 2010: 106).

Given the influence of Levy's life on Radford, it is possible to read Radford's poem as a response to Levy's "A Minor Poet" (1884), in which the speaker attempts to commit suicide three times, and finally dies. Thus, death becomes the poets' fate in both poems. Translating the death of the poets back to the 1880s reveals ambition for a better social statue was the main conflict encountered, especially for intelligent women poets. Beckman notes that "[t]he primary speaker of 'A Minor Poet' is recognizably the Hungry Poet, that voice in Levy's psyche that desperately longed for joy, love, and whatever else

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was with us about 3 weeks at the beginning of this term. Very delightful it was to see so much of a sweet face & be in contact with a mind at once active & earnest" (Radford Diary, 12 December 1885).

we mean today by the term *personal fulfilment*” (Beckman, 2000: 105). Although Levy’s “minor poet” is male, Beckman identifies the poem as an interpretation of Levy’s own search for social recognition. Similarly, while in Radford’s poem the gender of the poets is not revealed – they are a group of poets who may be a mixture of both males and females – it may be argued that the poem echoes the “voice” in Radford’s “psyche”, interpreting her own conflict as an unknown poet. Richardson’s comment on Radford’s failure to achieve her husband’s level of fame despite being the better poet, in addition to previously quoted letters about Radford’s fear of not accomplishing her dreams offer a body of evidence supporting this reading.

In Levy’s poem, however, the speaker is obviously a male who chooses to end his life; stating “I want all, all, all;/ I’ve appetite for all. I want the best” (“A Minor Poet” 140-141), but finally realises that “[t]here are not seats for all!” (“A Minor Poet” 151). In fact, Levy’s choice of a male speaker is ironic and may be read at two levels. On the one hand, Levy could intentionally use the male speaker to distance herself from the narrative to avoid critical attack. The speaker is aware of the social hierarchy and the absence of equality, but rejects conformity or accepting less than he deserves. As Miles points out: “Levy’s minor poet, and indeed Levy herself, seem to herald this distinctive response” (Miles, 2013: 125). By “distinctive response” Miles means that both Levy and her speaker committed suicide as a symptom of modernity and rejection of social injustice. On the other hand, Miles suggests that “the ventriloquizing of a voice in the dramatic monologue allows her to articulate same-sex longing, in an era that had no linguistic or cultural framework to recognize such love between women” (Miles, 2013: 124). Therefore, the use of the male speaker offers Levy a space to express her conflict freely, both as a marginalised poet and as a woman who explores desires outside the realm of heteronormativity.

Similarly, in “In Our Square” (1891) Radford uses the image of a pale male artist to mock the gendered system which places women in the private and men in the public sphere. In addition, she represents tennis as an activity associated with women’s emancipation, while simultaneously shedding light on it as one among the few limited physical exercises available for women at that time:

LAST night again we saw  
him there,  
Beneath the plane-tree  
in the Square,  
Our student neighbour.

He watches every evening now  
Our garden tennis, and somehow  
It seemed a labour

The running round, and futile stretching  
At random balls, while he was sketching  
That foolish Polly,

Who quietly stood, with arm up-raised,  
The while her junior partner praised  
Her style of volley.

I passed so near him as we played,  
He looked so peaceful in the shade,  
Amid our bustle.

He draws and sketches all the day,  
And studies through the night, they say  
Some bone or muscle.

And is this why his cheek is pale,  
And why he looks so thin and frail,  
And is such labour

The reason that his coat is bare,  
And worn, and marks him everywhere--  
Our student neighbour?

I know that I shall almost cry  
To-morrow when we pass him by,  
All bound together

For Cornish seas, while he—but there  
Miss Polly’s always in the Square  
This summer weather.

(“In Our Square”)

Before turning to the body of the poem, it is worth contextualising it in relation to Radford’s diary and literary scholarship which acknowledges a correlation between tennis and the New Woman. Jihang Park argues: “The New Woman was the one who ‘rode a bicycle, played tennis or golf’ [...]. Indeed, the historical evaluation of the relationship between these phenomena has generally agreed with the opinion that sport and feminism developed together” (Park, 1989: 10). In her diary, Radford mentions tennis as one of the very frequent activities she used to practise with her women friends: “Clara and I to tennis at the Levy’s [sic]” (Radford Diary, 16 May 1883). Reading Park’s argument in relation to Radford’s playing of tennis reveals Radford’s engagement with women’s emancipation in her life and poetry.

However, scholars, such as Jennifer Hargreaves, observe that although women’s engagement in different kinds of sports, including tennis, was associated with the social changes in late-Victorian England, women continued to be governed by conventional ideals and were not expected to be as physically active as men: “The bourgeois lady remained, even in the tennis court, the wifely ornament of beauty, a physically incapacitated player, inhibited and subdued by convention” (Hargreaves, 2002: 55). Therefore, while tennis in Radford’s poem may signify women’s emancipation, it may also be read in relation to conventional ideals which restricted women’s freedom. In her diary, Radford refers to Ernest’s knickerbockers as enabling of more flexible movements: “his garb was the gay knickerbocker,/ With freedom to leap and to dance” (Radford Diary, 6 September 1885). Written in verse form, this entry shows Radford’s admiration of attire that was considered unsuitable for her gender.<sup>123</sup> Earlier in the same year, Radford writes about a party she went to: “All the women wore very low dresses: this gave the party a

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<sup>123</sup> See Chapter Five for further details on knickerbockers and the rise of Bloomer. Also, see Chapter Six for C. Willett Cunnington’s argument about women’s clothes during the nineteenth century.

distinguished air” (Radford Diary, 11 February 1885). Both entries convey Radford’s interest in the opportunity to wear more liberating clothes than those conventionally permitted for women, as shown in the illustration below.



Figure 11: This illustration is attached to Radford’s poem “In Our Square” and is copied from *A Light Load* with designs by B. E. Parsons (*A Light Load* 67).

In her admiration of unconventional dress, Radford shares with her contemporary poet Michael Field what Vadillo describes as their use of “dress [as] an expression of their dreams and desires” (Vadillo, 2013: 246). Vadillo adds: “Dress became a symbol of their art and resistance” (Vadillo, 2013: 260). Vadillo’s article demonstrates how the aunt and niece wore art objects of a distinguished aesthetic taste which did not conform to what was expected of middle-class women. The couple’s rejection of conventional clothes is evident even at the end of their lives. As Vadillo points out:

After a life devoted to poetry, beauty and sumptuous fabrics, [Cooper] could not accept the “stiffness” of veil or what it symbolised: a chaste, ascetic life dedicated to Christ. The vampiric body of this “wild poet” refused the veil because it was ugly and coarse and, more significantly, because it did not evoke her aesthetic being. (Vadillo, 2013: 268)

For Cooper, the “stiffness” of the “veil” may not only be restricting to a woman’s physical freedom, but also implies her frustration with and rejection of the norms imposed on women. As we shall see, this rejection echoes the speaker’s desire in Radford’s poem “Cold Stone” to “dr[a]w the veil away”, suggesting a need for freedom.

Women’s conventional dresses are not the only issues criticised in “In Our Square”; indeed, the title itself suggests women’s control over the place. The use of the pronoun “our” indicates that tennis is exclusively for women and subsequently identifies the man as a voyeur. In so doing, the title offers a challenge to prevailing attitudes toward women’s engagement in the public sphere. As Hughes argues, in *fin-de-siècle* England, “the bourgeois ‘feminine sphere’ was still defined in terms of private spaces” (Hughes, 2007: 236). By locating women in the Square, Radford’s poem challenges the Victorian definition of the “feminine sphere” as exclusively private. She offers an ironic representation of the male character seated in the middle of a feminine scene where women are playing tennis, while he remains silently watchful. The muted student neighbour who “looked so peaceful” in the middle of the women’s “bustle” is the central point of the irony expressed, because it is usually women who remain silent in a patriarchal society. Despite the fact that women are represented as physically active in the illustration, their long dresses inform Hargreaves’s description of women as “physically incapacitated player[s]”, as their clothes restricted movements.

As shown in Chapter Three, Radford uses role reversal between men and women as a strategy by which she challenges imposed roles on women. For example, in “My bird who may not lift his wing”, she uses a masculine image of the bird, intertwining domesticity and the male figure. Therefore, another reading applies when we identify the characteristics of the male in “In Our Square” with Radford as a woman artist. While the poem represents women as physically active – a characteristic often associated with masculinity, the man is represented as “pale” and “frail”. The male is feminised through

his weak physique and also by engaging in sketching, a traditionally feminine occupation.<sup>124</sup> Thus, the frailty of the male artist suggests Radford's empathy toward him, for his frailty may be read as a metaphor for the prevailing position of the woman artist, whose talent was undermined and identified with her gender as weak and incapable. This reading takes its starting point from Radford's diary entries while she was writing the poem in 1884: "Connie came, sat in the square and talked of many things – mostly of poets" (Radford Diary, 17 May 1884). Two months later, she writes: "Sent the 'Square' to London Society" (Radford Diary, 12 July 1884). The square in the poem could be Brunswick Square which Radford mentions frequently in her diary as a place she used to sit in with her women friends. The fact that they "talked of many things – mostly of poets", when read in reference to the completion of the poem and submission of it to London Society, makes her engagement with the position of the woman poet/artist a plausible theme. Also, by representing a feminised image of the artist as an observer, Radford, on the one hand, resists male dominance in art and addresses the possibility of a gaze that differs from the conventionally masculine one. On the other hand, reading the choice of language in the poem in relation to the illustration attached with it suggests Radford's criticism of the traditional male gaze, for the artist chooses to draw Polly, the woman with conventional dress rather than those wearing knickerbockers. Polly's dress may be read in line with the speaker's description of her as "foolish", a woman who "quietly stood", in other words, one conforming to Victorian norms in both her customs and behaviour. Therefore, she is rendered a suitable recipient of the artist's gaze.

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<sup>124</sup> Hargreaves points out that sketching and drawing were similarly identified with singing and needlework as "much admired genteel activities" for middle-class women (Hargreaves, 2002: 56).

## Radford's Depiction of Art and the Female Muse

In "Cold Stone" (1891), Radford critiques the depiction of female figures in male art. The speaker in the poem is ungendered; therefore, we can assume that the woman, who is represented as a statue is being described by either a male artist or from a female perspective:

COLD, quite cold, I could only see  
Beauty of curve and line,  
I could not find that deeper thing  
That secret which dwells in everything,  
I could not make it mine.  
The marble stood so cold and still,  
And yet, within her breast,  
I knew lay hid a wondrous spell  
To open dreams too fair to tell,  
Where I might stay and rest.  
I find it ever in the flowers,  
    In tints and perfumes sweet,  
And in the silent stars at night,  
And in the rays of sun-set light,  
Their meaning is complete.  
I cried for light to find it here,  
And waited, till, one day,  
The hand that hid the wondrous gift,  
Came from the past the clouds to lift,  
And drew the veil away.

("Cold Stone")

As Radford was a reader and reciter of Shakespeare's plays at "The Dogberry Club", it is possible to read the statue in the poem as an allusion to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1623). In the play, Hermione appears to die of grief after the loss of her only son, Mamillius, when she was turned into a statue. However, at the end of the play, King Leontes and his daughter Perdita witness the transformation of Hermione's statue into flesh and blood:

[To HERMIONE] 'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach.  
Strike all that look upon with marvel.  
[...]  
LEONTES                   O, she's warm!  
If this be magic, let it be an art.

Similarly, in Radford's poem the "marble" is finally freed by the "hand" of nature which removes the "veil". Gilbert and Gubar argue: "Dramatizations of imprisonment and escape are so all-pervasive in nineteenth-century literature by women that we believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this period"; they add, "veils and costumes, mirrors, paintings, statues [...] and other domestic furnishing" are symbols of imprisonment that women sought to escape (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 85). Thus, Gilbert's and Gubar's argument can form a starting point to my analysis of Radford's poem in which the images and metaphors are in line with what they describe as "a uniquely female tradition".

As mentioned briefly earlier, it is possible that Radford intended to describe the passivity of the female as an iconic figure in male art. In her description of the female face in nineteenth-century poetry, Dolores Rosenblum notes: "One way of seeing the female face in nineteenth-century poetry is as picture or statue, something that does not change, that has material permanence, and that may be owned by the poet-speaker" (Rosenblum, 1996: 84). Like the female face in the poems Rosenblum examines, the female figure in Radford's poem does not change, but "stood so cold and still". The "cold[ness]" and "still[ness]" may be read as metaphors for the limitations placed on female demeanour in the Victorian period, suggesting that the woman has been frozen into a statue of conventional roles. In addition, the "material permanence" is portrayed in the representation of the female figure as "marble". Radford's reflection on the use of the female muse is similarly represented in the "[b]eauty of curve and line", that is, the external beauty of the female figure whose dreams lie in the natural elements around her, although the restrictions imposed on her prevent her from achieving her dreams.

By offering such representation, it is likely that Radford also considered Rossetti's sonnet "In an Artist's Studio" (1856) as an implied text. Similar to Radford's statue, which "waited, till, one day" when she will be free, Rossetti's female figure is "[n]ot wan with waiting", which means that she has not yet relinquished her hope of escaping the male artist's studio ("In an Artist's Studio" 12). By representing a defiant female figure, Rossetti's sonnet challenges the traditional male use of the form which addresses "an ideal female beloved who is absent, unattainable or dead" (Chapman, 2002: 102). Rossetti, as U. C. Knoepfelmacher argues, "brilliantly renders a male artist's appropriation of an idealized female other" (Knoepfelmacher, 1986: 299). Rossetti's poem is very much a critique of the painter's depiction of the female face as an "angel", because he "feeds upon her face by day and night" ("In an Artist's Studio" 9), which means that he is forcing his own idealisation of the female figure and not portraying the reality. He does not view her "as she is, but as she fills his dream" ("In an Artist's Studio" 14). This meaning is similarly implied in Radford's poem "A Model" to which I will refer later. The line, "feeds upon her face" implies metaphorical cannibalism and suggests the woman's rejection of male's sexuality.

The second half of "Cold Stone" expresses sensuousness as opposed to the cold marble described in the first half. As will be discussed in more detail later, the nature imagery included in the second half of the poem may be read as a source of life and desire, suggesting female solidarity between the statue and the possibly female addressee. Some of the places in which the figure's dreams can be found are the "flowers", "tints" and "perfumes sweet". Radford's use of scents and fragrances which appear with different synonyms in her poems may be read in relation to recent criticism about the relationship between scents and decadent literature. Catherine Maxwell claims: "Literary and cultural decadence importantly coincides with the discovery and use of synthetic fragrance materials and the concomitant birth of the modern perfume industry, which saw its formal

beginning in the 1880s and was becoming more established by the turn of the century” (Maxwell, 2013: 213). Radford’s choice of perfumes rather than other natural fragrances is in line with the establishment of the modern perfume industry and shows her engagement with innovations and industrial changes that occurred at the end of the century. In fact, the use of scents not only tells us about the writer’s modern thoughts, but also contributes to our understanding of the literary text. Maxwell acknowledges the multiple meanings associated with the use of perfumes and observes:

[F]ragrant writing uses perfume in a variety of ways to indicate diverse though often inter-related things as style, atmosphere, influence, sexuality, sensibility, spirituality, refinement, individuality and the aura of personality, dandyism, modernity, and memory. Allusions to scent thus offer a particularly rich experience of the concentrated essence of aestheticism and decadence, with perfume producing a powerful set of connections between the material and the immaterial, the body and the spirit. (Maxwell, 2013: 222)

Although it is possible for the perfume to be a symbol of dandyism, for, as shown in Chapter Three, Radford’s diary records her early interest in fancy clothes and brooches, this reading does not reveal the overall meaning of the poem. However, the figure’s spell which can be attributed to the “sweet[ness]” of the perfume may be seen as a symbol of modernity. Interestingly, the perfume serves to connect “the body and the spirit”, in Maxwell’s terms, as the “wondrous spell”, which the speaker can find in “perfumes sweet”, is hidden in the figure’s breast. By linking the statue to the external world, the speaker challenges traditional representations of the fixed female figure and hints at her active role, although she is otherwise depicted as passive.

It is worth noting that “Cold Stone” had first appeared in *Progress*’s first issue of the second volume (1883) under the title “To a Greek Statue”. Given this fact, the poem

makes an interesting pairing with Radford's later poem "To the Caryatid, In the Elgin Room – British Museum" (1895):<sup>125</sup>

SO long ago, and day by day,  
I came to learn from you, to pray,  
You did not hear, you did not know  
The thing I craved, so long ago.

The days were always days of spring,  
Hope laid her hand on every thing,  
And in your golden room, on me,  
She rested it most lovingly.

Of all the season's sun and showers,  
I gathered up the fairest flowers,  
And brought my garlands, fresh and sweet,  
To place in gladness at your feet.

And prayed to stand in strength, as you,  
Through the long years untried and new,  
With dauntless mien and steadfast gaze,  
To bear the burden of the days.

Now many tired years are told,  
My prayer long since is dead and cold,  
You were too wise to grant it me,  
Although I prayed so patiently.

But at your feet my flowers lie,  
The happy flowers which cannot die,  
I see them through my tears, and know  
They are as sweet as long ago.

("To the Caryatid, In the Elgin Room – British Museum")

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<sup>125</sup> The Elgin room in the British Museum speaks of a history of over 200 years: "In the early 19th century, British diplomat Thomas Bruce, the Earl of Elgin, took some of the best sculptures and brought them back to the U.K. He sold them to the British Parliament in 1816, after which they were presented to the British Museum and called the Elgin marbles" (Gross and Bouras, 2014).



Figure 12: “Caryatids, marble, in the Porch of the Maidens, Erechtheion, Athens, c. 421–405 BC”  
copied from (*Grove Art Online*. Web. 27 Oct. 2015).

It is highly likely that the caryatid is an allusion to the female Greek statue in “Cold Stone”, for the sculpted female caryatid first appeared in ancient Greek architecture.<sup>126</sup> The “secret which dwells in everything” in “Cold Stone” is probably what the speaker “came to learn from [the caryatid]” years ago, suggesting her continuous search for hope and freedom. In the latter, the speaker identifies herself with the statue, yet failing “to stand in strength, as you,/ [...] [t]o bear the burden of the days”. In the Introduction of this thesis, a diary entry dated in 1893 records Radford’s desire to return back to her “old happiness, before my dear was ill”. Likewise, the speaker in “To the Caryatid” remembers with nostalgia: “The days were always days of spring,/ Hope laid her hand on every thing”. Thus, it is possible to argue that the poem reflects on Radford’s personal experience during the 1890s when her diary records her emotional and financial struggle after Ernest’s illness. As shown in Chapter Three, Radford’s prayers to have her husband back and healthy were not answered; similarly, the speaker in the poem cries: “Now many tired years are told,/ My prayer long since is dead and cold”.

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<sup>126</sup> See G. Lloyd-Morgan’s “Caryatid” (*Grove Art Online*. Web. 27 Oct. 2015).

On the other hand, the poem, as with “Cold Stone”, may be read as engaging with the theme of the female muse. The images in “To the Caryatid” bear similarities to the descriptions of the female stone in the previous poem in which the marble’s breast, despite its coldness, holds “a wondrous spell/ To open dreams too fair to tell”. A similar meaning of resistance to hopelessness is implied in the caryatid’s patience to stand “[w]ith dauntless mien and steadfast gaze” through the long years. If the speaker is, assumingly, a female, she eschews men’s conventional perception of the female as passive art object, sharing, thereby, Michael Field’s use of ekphrastic poetry (i.e. poetry which describes another work of art usually visual) for feminist purposes. Jill Ehnenn argues: “Michael Field’s ekphrastic project often acknowledges the art object (and painter) only to cite and thereby refute the painting’s representations of sexuality and gender”, Ehnenn continues: *Sight and Song* [...] challenges the heteropatriarchal assumptions that often drive dominant Victorian notions of universal vision and intrinsic beauty” (Ehnenn, 2005: 216-217). Therefore, considering the speaker in Radford’s poem as a female offers up a potential queer reading, for “flowers”, as discussed in Chapter Two, are considered as symbols of female sexuality, a theme which will be addressed shortly in Michael Field’s “Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus*”. Although the speaker’s “prayer” is described as “dead” toward the end of the poem, the “fairest flowers” which she “gathered up” to “place in gladness at [the caryatid’s] feet” remain “happy” and “sweet”. This suggests the strength of the possibly homoerotic bond which “cannot die” despite all the described burdens.

In her representation of the female muse, Radford, as briefly mentioned earlier, shares one of the themes addressed by Michael Field in their volume *Sight and Song* (1892). Vadillo describes the volume as “a poetic and aesthetic experiment which aimed at showing the gendered experience of art, both in its production and its perception” (Vadillo, 2000: 16). One side of the gendered experience Vadillo refers to is the male gaze directed toward the female as an object. Similarly, Ehnenn observes that the picture-

poems in the volume “criticize the silencing of the female model [and] move female figures from margin to the centre” (Ehenn, 2005: 110).<sup>127</sup> This challenge is represented in Michael Field’s “Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus*”, a poem based on Giorgione’s painting with the same title,<sup>128</sup> where the female figure is represented in an act of masturbation:

Her left arm remains beside  
The plastic body’s lower heaves,  
Controlled by them, as when a river-side  
With its sandy margin weaves  
Deflections in a lenient tide;  
Her hand the thigh’s tense surface leaves,  
Falling inward. Not even sleep  
Dare invalidate the deep,  
Universal pleasure sex  
Must unto itself annex---  
Even the stillest sleep; at peace,  
More profound with rest’s increase,  
She enjoys the good  
Of delicious womanhood.

(“Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus*” 57-70)



Figure 13: Giorgione’s “The Sleeping Venus” (1508-10) copied from Andrea Nicole Maier’s “Jean Dubuffet and the Bodies of Ladies” (Maier, 2011: 1017).

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<sup>127</sup> Also see Fraser who emphasises the role of Michael Field as poets and art critics who “narrativises the woman’s agency, by representing her not merely as the passive model for the painter’s art, but as the active subject, the artist indeed, of her own self-creation” (Fraser, 2014: 89).

<sup>128</sup> “The Sleeping Venus” was originally painted by the Italian artist Giorgione and completed by Titian after Giorgione’s death in 1510. Giorgione’s paintings are known for their “atmospheric landscape”, a fact related to the discussion of “The Sleeping Venus” below (*Macmillan Encyclopedia*. Web. 26 Jun. 2015).

The quoted lines offer an explicit description of the woman's sexual pleasure, which she achieves without the need for a male partner. Vadillo argues: "Venus is in control of the game of the gaze, becoming a powerful subject in control of her gaze and the gaze of others. Indeed, in the traditional economy of vision, Venus manages to overcome the masculine division between observer and observed" (Vadillo, 2000: 31). Venus's ability "to overcome the masculine division" proceeds from her control of her own sexuality through masturbation: "[s]he enjoys the good/ Of delicious womanhood" and becomes the observer of her own body. Ehnenn points out that the poem "represents autoerotic and homoerotic possibility for all women" (Ehnenn, 2005: 123). In doing so, Michael Field not only challenges male art and its representation of the female muse, but undermines Victorian heterosexual norms. From the beginning of the poem, Venus forges a bond with nature, not a male lover. We are told that Venus's body "has the curves/ The same extensive smoothness seen/ In yonder breadths of pasture, in the swerves/ Of the grassy mountain green" ("Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*" 15-18). Similarly, the female figure in Radford's "Cold Stone" is depicted through "the beauty of curve and line", and in both "Cold stone" and "To the Caryatid" there is a link between the female statue and natural elements, which are similarly found in Michael Field's poem. Although in Michael Field's poem sexuality is more explicit than that in Radford's, the link between the female body and nature in Radford's poems might be intended to imagine a world for women in which they can enjoy an active sexuality. While in "Cold Stone", the speaker finds her rest "in the flowers,/ In tints and perfumes sweet", "To the Caryatid" closes with an image of the undying "flowers", emphasising their significance to the female bond.

Furthermore, the speaker's positioning of dreams in "Cold Stone" is critical and holds subversive meanings. She finds her dreams in the stars, which despite their "silen[ce]", still shine in the dark night. Similarly, the "meaning" of these dreams "is complete", although they are still "veil[ed]" possibly because of the gloominess of male

authority. In addition, the chosen symbols reveal that these dreams are far from the figure's reach, for she "cried for light to find it here". However, Victorian women poets often used isolated places and rural images in relation to women's power rather than a mere escape from patriarchy.<sup>129</sup> This meaning is emphasised at the end of the poem where the "veil" has been taken away, indicating the female figure's freedom. As shown in "My Angel" in Chapter Three, the "veil" is represented by Radford as a symbol of restriction blinding to the speaker whose "passion was an angel veiled in grey/ Until she fled you down the immortal way". In "Cold Stone", "dr[a]w[ing] the veil away" and the nature images may be linked to Giorgione's painting of the nude figure on a background which represents nature and landscape. Mieke Bal locates the revolutionary notion of Giorgione's "Venus" and suggests that she is "fully alert and active while still lying naked on her bed, as if to foreground her allegiance with, and revenge for, her more passive and submissive predecessors" (Bal, 1996: 268). This sense of solidarity may be linked to Giorgione's distancing of the nude figure from marriage/the patriarchal authority represented in the small house at the top of the picture. In doing so, he empowers the female figure and allows more space for freedom in her sexual desire, a notion endorsed in Michael Field's poem. Similarly, the statue in Radford's poem can only "stay and rest" in nature, possibly offering an image of love and sexual freedom that cannot find a place in male art which veils her beauty and desire.

As in "Cold Stone" and "To the Caryatid", the speaker in "A Model" (1895) alludes to the model as a metaphor for a woman whose choices and future are shaped and determined by the male artists/characters in her life:

YEAR after year I sit for them,  
The boys and girls who come and go,  
Although my beauty's diadem  
Has lain for many seasons low.

When first I came my hair was bright

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<sup>129</sup> See Chapter Two.

How hard, they said, to paint its gold,  
How difficult to catch the light  
Which fell upon it, fold on fold.

How hard to give my happy youth  
In all its pride of white and red,  
None would believe, in very truth,  
A maiden was so fair, they said.

How could they know they gave to me  
The daily hope which made me fair,  
Sweet promises of things to be,  
The happy things I was to share.

The flowers painted round my face,  
The magic seas and skies above,  
And many a far enchanted place  
Full of the summer time and love.

They set me in a fairy-land,  
So much more real than they knew,  
And I was slow to understand  
The pictures could not all come true.

But one by one, they died somehow,  
The waking dreams which kept me glad,  
And as I sat, they told me now,  
None would believe a maid so sad.

They paint me still, but now I sit  
Just for my neck and shoulder lines,  
And for the little lingering bit  
Of colour in my hair that shines.

And as a figure worn and strange  
Into their groups I sometimes stray,  
To break the light, to mark their range  
Of sun and shade, of grave and gay.

And evermore they come and go,  
With life and hope so sweet and high,  
In all the world how should they know  
There is no one so tired as I!

(“A Model”)

It is possible to read this poem as a critique of male artists and their use of the female muse. However, the use of the pronoun “they” complicates this reading and suggests that the painters could be both men and women. The speaker describes how the painters

idealise her hopes and draw an image of her that she wants to escape. Radford's representation is in line with Gilbert's and Gubar's argument which demonstrates that "a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 17). In "A Model", it is the passive angelic depiction embodied in the "[s]weet promises" and "happy things" that Radford might have wished to challenge. As shown in Chapter Two, flowers are typically used by Victorian poets to represent female sexuality as an object of male desire; thus, "[t]he flowers painted round [the speaker's] face" may be further read as part of the angelic characteristics imposed by the painters on the model, suggesting that ideals of innocence and happiness are depicted in art but not possible in life.

Like the "flowers", the depiction of the model's hair may be read as symbol of sexuality, for her "hair was bright/ How hard, they said, to paint its gold", an image which contrasts with the one towards the end of the poem when "little lingering bit/ Of colour in my hair that shines". As Elisabeth G. Gitter argues:

In painting and literature, as well as in their popular culture, [the Victorians] discovered in the image of women's hair a variety of rich and complex meanings, ascribing to it powers both magical and symbolic. Golden hair, through which wealth and female sexuality are inevitably linked, was the obvious and ideal vehicle for expressing their notorious-and ambivalent-fascination both with money and with female sexual power" (Gitter, 1984: 936).

Although the transformation in the woman's hair is a result of the model's ageing, which is conveyed in the phrase "a figure worn and strange", the fact that the hair still "shines" suggests remaining signs of the model's "sexual power", in Gitter's term. Given Radford's awareness of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Rossetti,<sup>130</sup> it is possible to argue that Radford's representation of a strong model and her choice of symbols and metaphors,

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<sup>130</sup> Radford's diary records: "we have a Pre-Raphaelite for a landlord – F.G. Stephens to whit. Our relations so far have been firmly of a business character. [...] He is a perfect gentleman" (Radford Diary, 20 May 1885).

such as “flowers” and “hair”, are influenced by but simultaneously offer a criticism of Gabriel Rossetti’s depiction of “Lady Lilith” (1868).<sup>131</sup> In Rossetti’s sonnet, Lilith’s beauty, her “golden hair” in particular, is what: “Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave” (“Lady Lilith” 7). Similarly, after the stanza which describes the model’s hair in Radford’s poem, her beauty is emphasised: “None would believe, in very truth,/ A maiden was so fair, they said”. In her reading of the woman’s hair in “Lady Lilith”, Gitter points out that “the grand woman achieved her transcendent vitality partly through her magic hair, which was invested with independent energy: enchanting-and enchanted-her gleaming tresses both expressed her mythic power and were its source” (Gitter, 1984: 936). However, this is not the case in Radford’s poem, for, as will be shown later, the model remains strong even after her hair loses its youth and shine. In addition, contrary to Rossetti, who limits the value of Lilith to her external beauty and “youth’s eyes” (“Lady Lilith” 12), Radford’s model has “daily hope” and “waking dreams”, suggesting that her value extends beyond the merely sexual.



Figure 14: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Lady Lilith;” 1868 copied from (*Rossetti Archive*. Web. 05 Apr 2015).

<sup>131</sup> “Lady Lilith” is the title of the sonnet and painting Rossetti published in 1868. In “‘One Strangling Golden Hair’: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith*” (1984) Virginia M. Allen shares other scholars’ views by identifying Lilith in both the poem and the painting as an erotic icon: “According to the ancient dualism of body and soul, Lilith stands for the body and, no doubt, sin” (Allen, 1984: 285). Although Allen points out that Lilith “represents the New Woman, free of male control, scourge of the patriarchal Victorian family”, she is, at the same time “deadly as well as seductive” (Allen, 1984: 286). The latter descriptions would indeed be what Radford criticised in “A Model”.

Therefore, as in “Cold Stone”, Radford’s “A Model” recalls the meanings and images used in Rossetti’s “An Artist Studio”, for the artists of Radford’s female model “paint” her “still”, the way she fits the Victorian expectation of woman, passive and inactive except in terms of her external beauty. Terry L. Spaise identifies Rossetti’s poem as “a clear example of her awareness of and dissatisfaction with how her gender was viewed by Victorian men in general, and how women were expected to repress their emotions and more lively personalities if they wished to gain male approval” (Spaise, 1997: 59). Therefore, it is plausible to argue that the continuous appearance of the pronoun “they” in Radford’s poem, such as “they said” and “they gave”, implies the model, like Rossetti’s figure, is under the control of the artists. Although in Radford’s poem the pronoun “they”, as mentioned earlier, may refer to male and female artists, both poems challenge and question voyeurism and the male gaze.

In addition, as Rosenblum’s argument shows, male art usually represents the female face as “capable perhaps of fantastic transformations, but unchanging and inexpressive in any humane sense” (Rosenblum, 1996: 86). Therefore, Radford’s use of the fairy land as a setting for the model, on the one hand, implies women’s alienation and isolation from real life, including the field of art. On the other hand, the location of her within a fairy land could bestow upon the model the power of “fantastic transformations” Rosenblum refers to. Also, reading the fairy land as a form of landscape recalls previous discussions about the use of nature and isolated places by women poets to empower their female speakers and enable them to fulfil their desires. However, the speaker simultaneously challenges this concept by indicating that her hopes and dreams are more real than male artists could imagine: “much more real than they knew”, suggesting that to them she is an art object.

In her representation of the ageing model, Radford shares with the Victorians a capacity to portray aging figures in reference to the outcomes of emerging events. In her

study *The Victorians and Old Age*, Karen Chase “places the Victorian construction of agedness into signal clusters of related phenomena from the social and literary cultures in which it was developed” (Chase, 2009: 5). Given the context of the poem, it is possible to argue that the model’s ageing results from the limited positions for women in art which may be read as part of “the social and literary cultures” Chase refers to. Therefore, the sharp contrast of the model’s youth and beauty with the image of her “neck and shoulder lines” towards the end of the poem is included only after the stanzas which address how the painters idealise the models’ dreams and “set her in a fairy-land”. As Chase points out: “Frequently, ageing eschews process and comes about as the consequence of a sudden occurrence in response to some deeply moving event” (Chase, 2009: 65). The model’s ageing in Radford’s poem is in line with Chase’s argument, for as readers we are not given any “process” of that ageing, but are provided with juxtaposed images of youth and agedness “in response to” the painters’ idealised image which kills the speaker’s dreams: “But one by one, they died somehow,/ The waking dreams which kept me glad”.

However, as mentioned earlier, the language of Radford’s poem includes determination and power as much as it portrays the hardships of old age. Thus, the model’s resistance to the pose the painters sit her in may be behind her reception as a “strange” woman who does not conform to the Victorian definition of angelic womanhood anymore. Similarly, the choice of words in: “To break the light, to mark their range/ Of sun and shade, of grave and gay” implies the speaker’s continuous desire to challenge her painters. As we shall see in Chapter Five, this image of the strong old model will be recalled in my analysis of Radford’s poem “Soliloquy of a Maiden Aunt” in which the female speaker similarly challenges the Victorian norms despite being old and ignored. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “From a male point of view, women who reject the submissive silences of domesticity have been seen as terrible objects”, in other words as monsters (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 79). Radford’s speaker challenges this notion by refuting “the extreme

images of “angel” and “monster”; the model’s resistance to the painters’ angelic image of her does not necessarily mean she is a monster. Thus, the search for an ideal in Radford’s poems which address the art theme is in line with how “the female aesthetes”, as Schaffer puts it, “positioned themselves as alternatives to both New Women and traditional Angels in the House, not only by rebelling against these roles but, more profoundly, by incorporating selected aspects of these identities into their own self-images” (Schaffer, 2000: 17). I argue that Radford adopts an aestheticist strategy, but not in all her poems. As the next chapter will show aesthete women writers, including Radford herself, intersected with New Women and consequently shared similar concerns.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter has discussed Radford’s personal experience as a writer in a male dominated sphere. Although her experience might have influenced Radford’s poetic portrayal of the isolated unsupported poet/artist, the analysis herein demonstrated that Radford’s representations engage with wider debates around the role of women and identify with the experience of marginal writers who were excluded by conventional norms. Radford’s poems question and simultaneously challenge her contemporaries’ gendered attitudes which portrayed women as objects of the male gaze. Within the context of that gaze, women were only appreciated for their beauty and as sexual objects, a concept criticised in Radford’s poems. By shedding light on Radford’s unconventional portrayal of women in art, I aim to have shown that Radford’s poetry is part of a literary tradition which is embraced by other Victorian women poets including Levy and Michael Field. By recollecting the threads introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the evidence included here can be seen as reflecting Radford’s appreciation of art, as inspired by her feminist motives and support of women’s emancipation which form the main scope of the next chapter.

# **Chapter Five: Female Emancipation and the “New Woman” Question in the Life and Poetry of Dollie Radford**

## **Overview**

Chapter Four explained that Radford’s role as a woman writer is inseparable from her role as a feminist preoccupied with issues concerning women’s emancipation. This chapter takes this point further to explore Radford’s liberal views and her engagement with the New Woman in both her life and poetry. As we shall see, a number of scholars have already acknowledged Radford’s feminism and support for women’s rights; however, my analysis offers more depth in terms of contextualising the poems and cross-referencing other poems by Radford’s contemporary women writers. Thus, this chapter adds new insight to the existing body of criticism on Radford based on her diary entries, letters, and poems which address her feminist views.

Part One, “Early Feminism in Radford’s Life”, provides a contextual background for the analysis presented in Part Two. The first section, “Contemporary Scholarship on Radford’s Feminism”, acknowledges prior scholars’ studies on Radford’s portrayal of female emancipation and the New Woman Question. In doing so, this section forms a solid basis for the argument made in the rest of the chapter. The second section, “Feminism in Radford’s Diary and Letters”, deals with a selection of Radford’s letters and diary entries which have not yet been considered by contemporary critics. These entries and letters demonstrate Radford’s defiance in the face of conventional norms which placed women in the private sphere. In addition, they highlight Radford’s desire to raise her children as feminists as well as introducing them to the radical minds of the day, such as Schreiner.

Part Two, “Female Emancipation and the New Woman Question in Radford’s Poetry”, discusses a number of Radford’s feminist poems under four subheadings. The first one, “Adopting Schreiner’s *Dreams*”, explores Schreiner’s influence on Radford’s poem “A Dream of ‘Dreams’ to Olive Schreiner” in which she obviously engages with the feminist themes in Schreiner’s collection of short stories, *Dreams*. The second subheading, “Beyond Schreiner’s *Dreams*: The Interrelationship between Aestheticism and the New Woman” focuses on “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town”, apparently, Radford’s most feminist poem. In my analysis of the poem I shed light on Radford’s reflection on the revolutionary changes which took place in *fin-de-siècle* England; simultaneously, specific attention is paid to her use of foreign terms and powerful language to endorse the argument on her role as a feminist and a social reformer.

Radford’s representation of “ballet” towards the end of “From Our Emancipated Aunt” leads to the discussion in the following section “Dance and the New Woman”, which deals with Radford’s “Soliloquy of a Maiden Aunt”, a poem which has not yet been considered by Radford scholars. Building on Wilson’s argument on the use of dance by late Victorian women poets to challenge prevailing ballrooms practices, my analysis of the poem examines Radford’s depiction of dance as a criticism of male authority and men’s perception that a woman’s role is limited to her youth and beauty. Towards the end of the analysis I recall the similar meanings addressed in Radford’s poem “A Model” which is discussed in Chapter Four. The final section in Part Two, “The Metaphor of ‘Cigarette’ and the Smoking New Woman”, discusses Radford’s poem “A Novice” which portrays another issue concerning the New Woman, that is, women smoking. My analysis of the poem focuses on Radford’s choice of the “cigarette” to challenge women’s traditional role and to reject domesticity. It also links the image of the smoking wife to the existing association between the cigar and the “mannish” New Woman. This idea inspires the final argument in my analysis which proposes Radford’s possible representation of the

smoking woman as a lesbian, the very idea which commences my argument in the next chapter.

## **Part One: Early Feminism in Radford's Life**

### **Contemporary Scholarship on Radford's Feminism**

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, only a handful of scholars have discussed in any detail Radford's life and poetry; however, almost all of them pinpoint her role as a feminist. As we shall see in Part Two, Harrington acknowledges Radford's engagement with the New Woman in "A Dream of 'Dreams' to *Olive Schreiner*" (1891) and "A Novice". In addition, Richardson commences her article by arguing: "For most of her career Radford wrote short Romantic lyrics that bring together Romantic nature imagery with the feminist ideas circulated by 'New Woman' writers of the 1880s and 1890s" (Richardson, 2000: 109). Although Richardson is the first to dedicate an entire article to Radford, she is not the first to acknowledge her engagement with feminism. Scholars, such as Leighton, refer to "A Novice" and "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town", which are both published in *Songs and Other Verses* and will be discussed in Part Two of this chapter, as "comical feminist poems" (Leighton, 1996: 240). Similarly, Robinson mentions "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town" in her study of women poets who "fostered [...] further growth through their writing by contesting ideological polarities, confusing the so-called separation of the spheres, of private/public, etc., and by transforming stereotypes" (Robinson, 2000: 3). The analysis of these poems presented in Part Two builds on the scholars' acknowledgment of Radford's engagement with the feminist debate which contradicts the conventional reviews imposed on her by her contemporary critics and reviewers.<sup>132</sup> My analysis also adds to the existing knowledge in

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<sup>132</sup> See Chapter Four.

the way it explores Radford's choice of images and metaphors, which have not yet been discussed by contemporary scholars, in relation to other literary texts which deal with the New Woman.

### **Feminism in Radford's Diary and Letters**

In 1895, a letter from Dollie to her husband mentions a visit "from Mr. Hill, on his bicycle, who discussed the New Woman" (Add Ms 89029/.29, Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 2 December 1895). Although Radford does not expound on her discussion with Mr. Hill, the letter reveals her engagement with the debate on the New Woman, a theme which is also evident in her poetry. In addition, Radford's diary records her worries about her children's morals and her desire to expose them to liberal thoughts. Under the subheading of "To my dear children", Radford writes to her son, Maitland: "if you must have your fulfilled life, then your sisters must also. There is no difference between you, only the ideal which the world has made for women, God has not made it" (Radford Diary 4 June 1892). Radford's belief in equality between men and women is obvious in these lines which shed light on her role as a loving mother who wishes to educate her son as a modern man and a feminist. Radford's awareness of her own marginalisation as a woman in a male-dominated society may be the reason which encouraged her to warn her son of conforming to the existing conventions.

An entry with similar implications is directed to her daughters Hester and Margaret:

Hester & Margaret, when you are grown women. Remember men are lonely – very lonely – in a knowledge of life which the women to whom they belong do not share. Don't let it come between you. Do not shut yourself up with your ideal – go out & understand all things [...] Do not be hurt by a knowledge you have not had. (Radford Diary 4 June 1892)

A desire for women's emancipation is obvious in this entry which reflects Radford's awareness of the limitations placed on women of her generation. By encouraging her

daughters to “go out”, Radford challenges the Victorian idealisation of women’s role and their expected place in the private sphere. Also, in the entries dedicated to her children, Radford shares with her contemporary poet and critic Meynell<sup>133</sup> her resistance to the prevailing laws which deprived women of the opportunity to engage in the public sphere. In her diary Meynell writes: “Of all the crying evils in this depraved earth, ay, of all the sins of which the cry must surely come to Heaven, the greatest, judged by all the laws of God and of Humanity is the miserable selfishness of men that keeps women from work” (Meynell in Schaffer, 2000: 164). Both Radford and Meynell believed that the injustice suffered by women were fostered by men. For Radford, these limitations are ones “the world has made for women”; similarly, Meynell relates them to the “miserable selfishness of men”.

One year later, Radford expounds on her desire to free her children from “conventional nature” as well as introducing them to “forward minds of the time”:

I want to keep them, while they are growing & learning, in touch with the forward minds of the time – with all who are doing something in the world to make it better – to spare them, for ever & ever, the dull monotony of empty days, & the depression of conventional nature. I hope they will not waste any years in any kind of blindness & dullness. Life is so full – of knowledge – of beautiful things. (Radford Diary, 31 April 1893)

In this entry, Radford emphasises the importance of having liberal acquaintances. As shown in Chapters Three and Four, she herself was surrounded by radical figures, including Morris, Michael Field and Levy, whose works did not conform to Victorian

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<sup>133</sup> See Chapter Two for more discussion on Meynell and her poetry. Also, the reference to Meynell is significant here due to the similar characteristics she shares with Radford. Schaffer argues: “To the turn-of-the-century observers, Meynell was the living proof of the female aesthetes’ theory that New Womanism and traditional femininity could merge seamlessly, that a woman could be ‘a saint and a sibyl smoking a cigarette’” (Schaffer, 2000: 161). Like Meynell, Radford might be seen as another “living proof” who dedicated her life to her husband and children, but simultaneously supports women’s rights and addresses issues concerning the New Woman in her poetry. Also, Radford’s diary records her correspondence with Meynell: “A nice letter from Alice Thompson thanking me for my book” (Radford Diary, 4 May 1891).

morals and have influenced her thoughts and poetry. Also, as we shall see in Part Two, the language of the entry echoes the speaker's concern in "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town" about the future of the next generation. Two months later, Radford mentions that "one feels Olive Schreiner's genius from her conversation [...] I am to take the children to see her one day" (Radford Diary, 4 June 1893). Schreiner was evidently one of those "minds" whom Radford would have liked her children to be influenced by.

## **Part Two: Female Emancipation and The New Woman Question in Radford's Poetry**

### **Adopting Schreiner's *Dreams***

Radford's feminist views, as recorded in her diary, are evident from the beginning of her career, when she first published *A Light Load*, a volume which she chooses to end with "A Dream of 'Dreams' To Olive Schreiner" (1891). As in many other poems, Radford engages with issues concerning the New Woman who is considered to be the inspirational figure for later feminist movements.<sup>134</sup> The poem conveys Schreiner's influence as a contemporary New Woman writer. As discussed in Part One, Radford's diary records her friendship with Schreiner and her appreciation of her work. In another diary entry Radford states: "Am reading Miss Schreiner's book 'South African Farm'. It is a wonderful book" (Radford Diary, 27 August 1883). Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* is marked by contemporary scholars, including Carolyn Burdett, as "the first 'New Woman' novel, a decade before the phrase was coined" (Burdett, 2013: 14). Radford's description of the novel as a wonderful book would be due to her admiration of

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<sup>134</sup> Ledger describes New Woman writers and supporters, such as Sarah Grand, "as the most significant foremother of modern feminism at the *fin de siècle*" (Ledger, 1997: 22). Also, Ledger cites David Rubinstein, who claims: "never before had literature and fiction contributed so much to the feminist movement as it did at the *fin de siècle*" (Rubinstein in Ledger, 1997: 27).

its unconventional characters. For example, Lyndall, one of the three main characters who were raised in Tant' Sannie's farm, seeks free love and admits to her companion Em: "I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot; and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies" (*S.A.F* 131). Later in the novel, Lyndall refuses to marry the father of her child: "I cannot marry you", she said slowly, "because I cannot be tied" (*S.A.F* 178). As will be discussed in Chapter Six, Radford's acquaintance with Schreiner and her exposure to the radical characters in her work might have influenced her portrayal of the free love theme in "A Modern Polypheme". Waldo, in Schreiner's novel, is another radical character who has religious doubts and from the very beginning of the novel confesses: "I love Jesus Christ, but I hate God" (*S.A.F* 7). Both Lyndall's and Waldo's views are set against the conventional matrimonial and Christian ideologies which were dominant during the Victorian time. The revolutionary underpinnings evident in Radford's poems are likely to have been inspired by these characters:

ALL day I read your book, at Eve  
Your dreams into my dark sleep  
stole,  
Through the unbroken hours to weave  
A picture for my soul.

Now from the deep inspired night  
I rise, and, near and stretching far,  
I see the earth lie clear and bright  
Beneath one morning star.

The great World-Spirit watching still  
Broods over all with folded wings,  
And ever down-cast eyes until  
The first bird wakes and sings,

And through the eastern clouds the sun  
Breaks with a new unnumbered day  
And now His watching is all done --  
The night has passed away

He turns toward the dawn, and I  
Wait as he breathes the sweet fresh air,  
Then with a new-born joy I cry  
To see His face so fair.

(“A Dream of ‘Dreams’ To Olive Schreiner”)

Radford’s admiration of Schreiner’s genius is rendered explicit from the very beginning of her poem where she speaks of her reading and awareness of Schreiner’s *Dreams*,<sup>135</sup> which is a collection of allegorical short stories published in 1890. As Richardson points out: “Like Schreiner’s collection, the poem expresses hope and joy and a sense of something grand waiting just ahead” (Richardson, 2000: 112). As the analysis of the poem presented below will show, Schreiner’s feminist messages in *Dreams* identify with the speaker’s dreams in Radford’s poem. The speaker expresses how women’s freedom and equality with men, which are the main focus in *Dreams*, inspire her thoughts and give her a clearer vision of the world.



Figure 15: A photograph of Olive Schreiner copied from Holmes’s *Eleanor Marx: A Life*.

The speaker in Radford’s poem marks the night when she read Schreiner’s work as a “deep inspired night” by the hopes and dreams of her thoughts which anticipate the New Woman. Schreiner’s work also helps the speaker in anticipating a fairer brighter

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<sup>135</sup> See Liz Stanley’s *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman: Olive Schreiner’s Social Theory* in which Schreiner’s *Dreams* is described as a “highly successful collection of allegorical stories with a feminist and socialist message” (Stanley, 2002: 1).

future for the New Woman, whose dreams are possibly implied in the metaphor a “morning star”. The poet’s choice of the metaphor may hint at society’s lack of awareness of the New Woman, a phrase which had not yet been coined; therefore, her dreams might look as strange as a “morning star”. This meaning is evident from the very beginning of Schreiner’s *Dreams*, whose preface states: “To a small girl-child, who may live to grasp somewhat of that which for us is yet sight, not touch” (*Dreams* Preface). Schreiner makes it clear that women at that time had not yet achieved their rights. In “A Far-Off World” her dreams of equality between the sexes are associated with landscape: “There is a world in one of the far-off stars, and things do not happen here as they happen there. In that world were a man and woman; they had one work, and they walked together side by side on many days, and were friends” (*Dreams* IV. In a Far-Off World). It is possible to argue that the “morning star” in Radford’s poem is one of “the far-off stars” where men and women are equals and “walked together side by side”. Thus, for Radford, “the earth lie[s] clear and bright” only “beneath” this “morning star”, indicating that women’s “bright” future will not be achieved unless there is equality between men and women on earth as symbolised by this star, which may be understood as a metaphor for aspiration.

Although as many of the poems in *A Light Load*, the language used is simple and inoffensive, the images and metaphors are subversive. For example, the metaphor of “the first bird” which “wakes and sings” carries an implied reference to revolution and liberty, for birds, as shown in Chapter Three, are represented by Radford as seeking freedom and dreaming of unchained life. The radical messages are further implied in the portrayal of the sunrise. Radford’s choice of vocabulary, such as “breaks” rather than rises suggests the strength of the political and social changes which will record “a new unnumbered day” that was not expected in the history of women’s rights. After justice takes place, the speaker considers that God’s watching should be done, which may be read as a metaphor for the end of patriarchal surveillance. The conclusion of the poem reflects the image of

the male God in the illustration accompanying the poem entitled as “The End” which, on the one hand, may simply be marking the end of the volume; on the other hand, it may be read in relation to the radical meanings of the poem which engages with women’s rights and announces the end of their subordination.

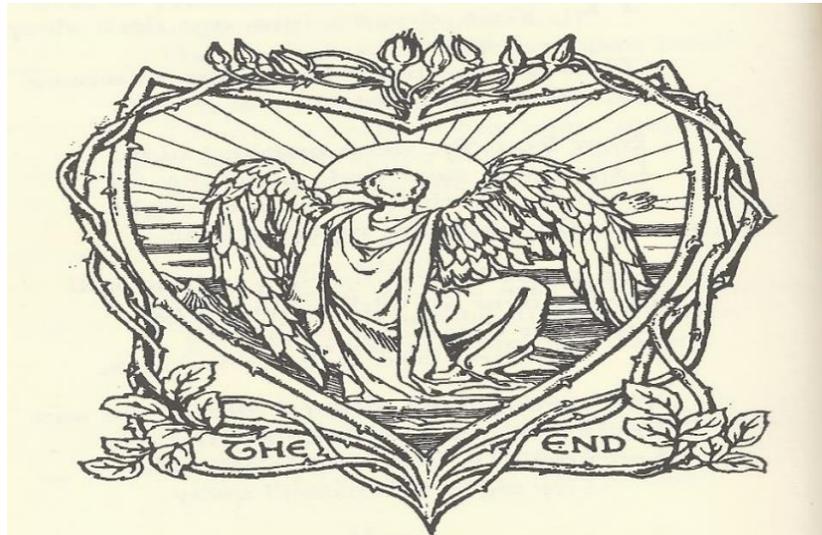


Figure 16: This illustration accompanies Radford’s poem “A Dream of ‘Dreams’ To Olive Schreiner” and is copied from *A Light Load* with designs by B. E. Parsons (*A Light Load* 76).

This meaning may be further read as an allusion to Schreiner’s “Three Dreams in a Desert” which appears in the same collection of *Dreams*. In the woman’s first dream, the reader is told that “there stood one beside me watching” (*Dreams* V. Three Dreams in a Desert). The watcher plays the role of the instructing and guiding male observer in the woman’s dreams in which she seeks freedom. Heilmann argues: “With its emphasis on vigilance, scrutiny and (in a more positive sense) protectiveness, this sentence conjures up the law of the father in its religious, social and familial dimensions” (Heilmann, 2004: 127). However, the role of the watcher comes to an end and in the third dream, the woman reflects on her own experience without the need of the watcher’s guidance. After his watching is done, the woman dreams of a land where “brave women and brave men” walked together “hand in hand” (*Dreams* V. Three Dreams in a Desert). Likewise, in Radford’s poem, the “new unnumbered day” for women comes when “His watching is all

done”, suggesting that women’s freedom could only be achieved once there is an end to the patriarchy embodied in her reference to the male god.

The similarity between Schreiner’s *Dreams* and Radford’s poem is highlighted by Harrington in her recent study.<sup>136</sup> According to Harrington: “For Radford, and for Schreiner, waiting is precisely what allows them to endure change that comes only slowly. The dedication to Schreiner’s feminist, activist writing also signifies that waiting is not only an abstract virtue of patience, but part and parcel of the evolution of social progress” (Harrington, 2014: 150). Harrington’s reading of the poem supports mine in the way it resists the critics’ conventional reviews of Radford’s volume.<sup>137</sup> In addition, it confirms the radical meanings discussed earlier and shows that waiting in Radford’s poem defies passivity and powerlessness, for the speaker’s waiting carries hope and finally leads to the delight of “a new-born joy”. Harrington locates this “new-born joy” as part of her argument on Radford’s use of songs to challenge traditional forms:

Radford signals her allegiance with Schreiner’s feminist, socialist stance, with her experimental style, and joins her in asserting that patience is part of the effort required to welcome the new [...] As the final poem of *A Light Load*, “A Dream of Dreams” speaks for the collection, asserting that for all its failings, fin de siècle song cultivates the attention and openness of waiting, preparing poets and readers for the dawning of some transcendental truth. (Harrington, 2014: 151)

Harrington’s interpretation of the “new” is based on Radford’s challenge to traditional depictions of waiting by male poets, including Arthur Symons whose songs depict waiting in a pessimistic context.<sup>138</sup> I add to Harrington’s argument that the “new-born joy” is not

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<sup>136</sup> Harrington makes a similar comparison between Radford’s poem and Schreiner’s *Dreams*. Her publication is recent and came towards the end of my project when I had already made similar arguments and presented a paper of the analysis in the British Women Writers Conference (Binghamton; New York: June 2014).

<sup>137</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>138</sup> Symons was one of Radford’s close friends and reviewed some of her published volumes, including *A Light Load*. In his “The Broken Tryst” Symons represents waiting with disappointment and hopelessness: I felt so patient; I could wait, [...]

necessarily a metaphor for songs as a new form, but could also be the joy of women's emancipation which is the main idea celebrated in Schreiner's *Dreams*.

### **Beyond Schreiner's *Dreams*: The Interrelationship between Aestheticism and the New Woman**

Radford's feminist views are also evident in her second volume *Songs and Other Verses* (1895) which was published by John Lane,<sup>139</sup> the publisher of *The Yellow Book* whose poetry as Hughes puts it, "is relevant to a study of the gendered dynamic of *fin-de-siècle* poetry and of New Woman writers" (Hughes, 2004: 850). The fact that Radford herself was one of the 1890s women poets who published in *The Yellow Book*, which was known for its involvement with radical topics, and her correspondence with its publisher, are all evidence which supports my reading of Radford's poems as engaging with women's emancipation rather than conforming to conventional norms.

In "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town" (1895), Radford describes a stage of transformation in the ideals and beliefs of a society, where men are no longer dominating and women should face all the challenges and fight for their rights:

All has befallen as I say,  
The old régime has passed away,  
And quite a new one

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I had no hope, I had no power  
To think – for thought was but despair.

A thing had happened. What? My brain  
Dared not so much as guess the thing. ("The Broken Tryst" 10-38)  
Harrington points out: "the form of waiting that Symons represents contrasts sharply with Radford's; Symons hollows out the hopefulness of waiting by suggesting that patience is only justified by certainty" (Harrington, 2014: 147).

<sup>139</sup> Radford's archive in the British Library includes a number of letters in which Lane expresses his admiration of Radford's first volume *A Light Load*. In a letter headed as "Conviviality and Mutual Admiration", Lane writes: "Each little story has been in time the favourite till the [last?] was read" (Add, MS 89029 // 25, John Lane to Dollie Radford, 19 April 1991). Lane's admiration of Radford's volume might be a factor which encouraged him to publish Radford's second volume which includes two of her more overtly feminist poems.

Is being fashioned in a fire,  
The fervours of whose burning tire  
And quite undo one.

The fairy prince has passed from sight,  
Away into the *ewigkeit*,  
With best intention

I served him, as you know my dears,  
Unflinching through more years  
Than ladies mention.

And though the fairy prince has gone,  
With all the props I leaned upon,  
And I am stranded,

With old ideals blown away,  
And all opinions, in the fray,  
Long since disbanded.

And though he's only left to me,  
Of course quite inadvertently,  
The faintest glimmer

Of humour, to illumine my way,  
I'm thankful he has had his day,  
His shine and shimmer.

*Le roi est mort* – but what's to come? -  
Surcharged the air is with the hum  
Of startling changes,

And our great "question" is per force  
The vital one, o'er what a course  
It boldly ranges!

Strange gentlemen to me express  
At quiet "at homes" their willingness,  
To ease our fetters

And ladies, in a fleeting car,  
Will tell me that the moderns are  
My moral betters.

My knees I know are much too weak  
To mount the high and shaky peak  
Of latest ethics,

I'm tabulated, and I stand  
By evolution, in a band  
Of poor pathetics

Who cannot go alone, who cling  
To many a worn out tottering thing  
Of a convention;

To many a prejudice and hope,  
And to the old proverbial rope  
Of long dimension.

It is to you to whom I look  
To beautify our history book,  
For coming readers,

To my nieces, who must face  
Our right and wrong, and take your place  
As future leaders.

And I, meanwhile, shall still pursue  
All that is weird and wild and new,  
In song and ballet,

In lecture, drama, verse and prose,  
With every cult that comes and goes  
Your aunt will dally.

A microscopic analyst  
Of female hearts, she will subsist  
On queerest notions,

And subtle views of maid and wife  
Ever engaged in deadly strife  
With the emotions.

But while you walk, and smile at her,  
In quiet lanes, which you prefer  
To public meetings,

Remember she prepares your way,  
With many another Aunt to-day,  
And send her greetings.

(“From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town”)

Radford starts her poem by emphasising that the “old régime has passed away”, which could be a reference to the patriarchal conditions that governed women in the Victorian time, and were then reformed under the different phases of legal acts.<sup>140</sup> More significantly the “old régime” is the French term which was associated with the period prior to the French Revolution. The old regime in France was, as Dena Goodman defines it, “the moment in which all attempts at oppositional definitions of public and private were contested and undermined” (Goodman, 1992: 2). Such “oppositional definitions” also

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<sup>140</sup> See Chapter One.

took place in Victorian England and other European countries, including Germany, where conservatives, such as Nordau, feared infection from the French revolution of the late eighteenth century, and its outcome on their societies. The fact that the poem was published the same year as Nordau's *Degeneration*, raises the possibility of Radford's intention to challenge his perspective of the *fin de siècle* as the age of darkness which was brought by the French culture. According to Nordau, "*Fin de Siècle* is French, for it was in France that the mental state so entitled was first consciously realized" (Nordau, 1895: 1). While Nordau's language associates the French revolution with insanity, Radford's choice of language, such as "fire" and "burning tire", reflects on these social changes as costly and serious. The use of such symbols challenges Nordau's conservative pessimism and confirms Radford's role as a social reformer who revolted against the prevailing expectation of women in a politicised way.

The speaker notes that the "fairy prince" "has had his day" and "has passed from sight", announcing the end of patriarchal authority and women's engagement with domesticity. The image of the prince also projects the notion of women giving up on idealistic notions about masculinity and gender relations. As argued in Chapter Three, Radford's own suffering and her unhappy marriage might have influenced her language and choice of themes. Therefore, it is possible that Ernest is the implied man here, for his mental illness drove him away from his family life and Radford, as in the poem, had "served him" for a long time. However, another reading might apply if we relate the meanings of the poem to the use of foreign terms. In the poem, Radford's diary records her awareness of the French culture, and her knowledge of the language: "We get on very nicely with the french [*sic*] tongue" (Radford Diary, 22 October 1883). The diary also reveals her interest in French literature: "Morning at the Museum, reading French plays" (Radford Diary, 23 January 1884). Other entries confirm Radford's study of German: "Am reading German with Tussy twice a week" (Radford Diary, 13 January 1884). She

believes in the importance of learning languages: “We must read French – German – Latin – Greek – & some other tongues!” (Radford Diary, 10 July 1884). Lesa Scholl examines the importance of learning a second language to Victorian women and how it “opened their minds to the philosophies and ideologies explicated in foreign texts, enabling them to explore previously unknown cultural ideas, as well as providing them with alternative means of self-expression” (Scholl, 2011: 11). In Radford’s case, her knowledge of other languages not only enabled her to access foreign ideologies, but allowed her to cross cultural boundaries in her poetry. For example, the German word “*ewigkeit*”, which means “eternity” in English,<sup>141</sup> may have been symbolically chosen to dismiss names like Nordau and to show that his ideals are gone forever. Similarly, the French phrase “*Le roi est mort*”, which means “the king is dead”,<sup>142</sup> pinpoints the end of patriarchy and the birth of a new age where women have a more active role and are no longer inferior to men. Despite the fact that the poem is noticeably longer and the language is much more mature than the short songs and inoffensive images in *A Light Load*, its meanings recall the end of “A Dream of ‘Dreams’” in which women’s emancipation is only achieved when “His watching is all done”. In this poem, Radford may have intended to show that as she got older, her ideals did not change and her feminist views grew even stronger. Thus, metaphorically, Radford may be the “emancipated aunt” who has something to offer to the younger generation and is asking not to be forgotten by those who will benefit from her struggles: “Remember she prepares your way,/ With many another Aunt to-day,/ And send her greetings”. In these final lines, Radford identifies herself with other “emancipated aunt[s]”, in other words feminists of her generation, who were preoccupied with social and legal reforms and sought a better future.

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<sup>141</sup> “Ewigkeit”. *Oxford Dictionaries*. Web. 18 Jan. 2014.

<sup>142</sup> “Roi”. *Oxford Dictionaries*. Web. 18 Jan. 2014.  
“Mort”. *Oxford Dictionaries*. Web. 18 Jan. 2014.

The concept of anticipating a better future may be further read in relation to the speaker's decision to "stand by/ Evolution". Although the speaker expresses the hardship of adopting the "latest ethics", the poem's overall tone is radical rather than conventional. The aunt's assertion: "It is to you to whom I look/ To beautify our history book" suggests her concern with future generations and her desire to liberate them from the older "convention[s]" she struggles with. From a biographical point of view, it is possible that a letter from Marx to Radford, dated in April 1891 (four years before this volume was out), lies behind the poem. The letter conveys Marx's response to a letter sent by Radford informing her about her stepmother's death:

My dearest Dollie,

Your letter about poor Charlotte has been a great shock to me. I don't mean "poor" Charlotte because of her death; for from what I knew, & from what you told me when we last spoke of her, that Cd hardly be repeated. But I am thinking of her life, and what a terribly sad one it was after all. So wasted & so useless, & so miserable. (Add MS 89029/.25, Eleanor Marx to Dollie Radford, 14 April 1891)

Radford's awareness of the suffering endured by the limited opportunities open to women, like Charlotte, whose life was, as Marx describes it, "[s]o useless, & so miserable", may have motivated her to encourage the niece in the poem to "beautify our history book" and to face "[o]ur right and wrong,/ and take your place/ As future leaders". Radford's concern about the younger generation is more obvious in the second half of Marx's letter:

You say, dear, that you often think that by the tie your life is finished you will have learned just enough to begin it well. No, Dollie, we must just live our lives, & what we have missed who knows, & we may help others to realise. [...]. [A]t least what life has taught you will make more easy & more beautiful their lives, & though each one must work out his own solution we can make the work perhaps a little less hard for those that shall come after. (Add MS 89029/.25, Eleanor Marx to Dollie Radford, 14 April 1891)

As one of Radford's close friends, Marx seems to be aware of Radford's concerns. The language used in her letter indicates that she identifies with the ideas expressed in Radford's poem in which the aunt is concerned about the niece's future. Both Radford's poem and Marx's letter are reminiscent of the diary entry presented in Part One in which Radford expresses her desire "to spare [her children], for ever & ever, the dull monotony of empty days, & the depression of conventional nature". Her desire to distance her children from the "conventional nature" of her own time indicates that Radford, like the aunt in the poem, views women as key players in the evolution of the human race, whose role is to challenge existing theories on women's inferiority. As John Holmes points out: "many leading evolutionists including Darwin himself took what they perceived to be the lesser cultural and intellectual achievement of women in Victorian society and across history as a biological datum, thereby naturalizing female inferiority" (Holmes, 2010: 523). Given Radford's knowledge of science and Darwin's works in particular, it is possible to argue that she shares with many feminists in late Victorian England their calls for women's emancipation as means of social progression.<sup>143</sup>

Radford's feminist views are further emphasised in her choice of terms and images. As the changes indicated in the poem are arguably influenced by other cultures, the speaker refers to them as "startling" rather than welcomed. Ironically and even sarcastically, "gentlemen" are described as "[s]trange" and quiet "at homes",<sup>144</sup> suggesting men's inability to socialise. On the other hand, "ladies" are driving fast "in a fleeting car". In her diary Radford similarly reflects on other modern means of transport: "we went home by train; drove from the station" (Radford Diary, 28 August 1883). In

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<sup>143</sup> See Chapter Three for Radford's diary entries which records her reading of Darwin's works, and for Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* as an example of feminists' engagement with the emerging evolutionary theories.

<sup>144</sup> "At home" was a term used for casual evening parties in the 1880s and 1890s, and were mentioned frequently in Radford's diary: "Clara's 'At Home' today. Very bad weather for it" (Radford Diary, 6 June 1884).

another entry, she mentions: “Clemie called later, & she & Ernest & I went, by tram” (Radford Diary, 20 July 1884). Considering the “car” in the poem and the “train” and “tram” in the diary as urban mass transports, it is possible to argue that Radford embraces the strategy of other Victorian women poets, including Levy. As Vadillo argues, “for Levy, the figure of the passenger had important social and political implications because it was as passengers, she argued, that women poets could become spectators of modern life, challenging masculinist representations of women in the modern metropolis, and transgressing the incarcerating ideology of the private/public spheres” (Vadillo, 2005: 40). The car in Radford’s poem symbolises the fact that the “ladies” are “transgressing” norms and behaviours for women in the public sphere thus liberating themselves from older ideologies. In addition, the choice of the word “fleeting” suggests the desire to be moved into a different time and place, a reading which supports the suggestion made earlier regarding Radford’s possible intention to confront Nordau’s conventional ideals and her obvious support of social change. Also, this reversal of traditional roles is common in Radford’s poetry, such as “My bird who may not lift his wings” and “In Our Square”,<sup>145</sup> a fact which would be behind Leighton’s previously quoted patronising description of “From Our Emancipated Aunt” as a “comical feminist” poem, for it exchanges, complicates, and resists the Victorian placing of men and women; in other words, mobilises humour to serve a feminist agenda.

In addition, in her association between the “ladies, in a fleeting car” and her knowledge of “the moderns”, who are possibly representative of the new social/political life, Radford’s representation equates transportation with modernity and women’s freedom. This association echoes Levy’s portrayal of the speaker’s feeling of freedom on

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<sup>145</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

the omnibus journey in “Ballade of an Omnibus” (1889). Throughout Levy’s poem, the speaker continues to confirm her satisfaction with the omnibus:

Some men to carriages aspire;  
On some the costly hansoms wait;  
Some seek a fly, on job or hire;  
Some mount the totting steed, elate.  
I envy not the rich and great,  
A wandering minstrel, poor and free,  
I am contented with my fate-  
An omnibus suffices me.

(“Ballad of an Omnibus” 1-8)

The speaker expresses her modesty through eschewing “the rich and great”, identifying herself as a “poor”, and being “contented with” the omnibus. While on the surface the poem may seem to be in conformity with the minor position a woman poet had to endure, Vadillo observes that the omnibus in Levy’s poem “implied a political change because it transported (Jewish) women to the centre of the urban experience. [...] it also implied an important aesthetic transformation of *fin-de-siècle* culture and poetics” (Vadillo, 2005: 73). In Levy’s poem, the omnibus offers the speaker the freedom to observe city life, a similar freedom which the car in Radford’s poem provides, for, as suggested earlier, it moves “the ladies” into the public sphere and implies social change. Thus, Radford could be added to the list of women poets whom Vadillo identifies in her study as “Passengers of Modernity”. This recalls the very idea expressed at the outset of this chapter, which was that Radford’s role as a woman writer is inseparable and in line with her advanced feminist views.

Despite the difference in political ideologies called by aesthetes and writers who supported the New Woman,<sup>146</sup> Radford’s poem eschews these differences and offers an image of a female aesthete and a New Woman in the blood-bond of an aunt and niece. In

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<sup>146</sup> See Chapter One.

doing so, Radford shows how “in the lived reality of the 1890s”, as Schaffer argues, “aesthetes and New Women were intimately connected and strongly allied” (Schaffer, 2000: 18). Radford herself adopted aesthetic language and themes in her poetry, and was greatly influenced by writers, such as Schreiner and Levy, who have influenced her ideals in the context of women’s rights and female emancipation. As shown in Chapter Four, Michael Field, like Radford, adopt aestheticism in their daily life and poetry which espoused issues concerning the New Woman. Therefore, Radford’s choice of the “aunt” and “niece” rather than “mother” and “daughter” may be interpreted as a defiance of the heterosexual bond and may be further read in the context of Michael Field. In the preface to their volume *Underneath the Bough: A Book of Verses* (1898), they write: “For some years my work has been done for ‘the younger generation’ – not yet knocking at the door, hut awaited with welcome” (*Underneath the Bough* 5). In Radford’s poem, the aunt’s efforts in “prepar[ing]” the “way” for the younger generation anticipates Michael Field’s assertion that her work was meant “for [the] younger generation”. Also, the fact that the aunt will hold on “weird and wild and new” is reminiscent of Michael Field’s poems which address “wild and new” subjects, anticipating a liberated future for women. Studies, like the one carried out by Kate Thomas, find that “Michael Field awaits a new century, a new era in which to be discovered” (Thomas, 2007: 329). Both their work and their lesbian relationship were related to their anticipation of a new era when women would enjoy greater freedom. This concept of anticipation may be linked back to the first stanza of the poem where the speaker announces the dawn of a new era which replaces older norms.

Significantly, the aunt is pursuing the “new” in “songs and ballet”, that is art, while she is calling to the younger generation to become “future leaders”, suggesting that political positions could not be achieved by women of the older generation. This verse may also be read in view of Schaffer’s argument: “The female aesthetes’ avoidance of politics in itself implies an interesting political formation, a resistance to the reductive

categories of feminist/antifeminist, a silence that ought to be heard” (Schaffer, 2000: 15). Therefore, the aunt’s distance from politics in Radford’s poem does not necessarily imply weakness, but rather a form of power which she adopts to obfuscate a fixed understanding of her interests and political views. For example, she chooses “ballet”, a form of dancing which is identified by Wilson as a political element used by *fin de siècle* women poets in order to express their engagement with the New Woman: “writing about dance allowed them to engage with aesthetic ideals while using their poetry to promote the political ideals associated with the New Woman” (Wilson, 2008: 191-192). Wilson’s study hints at the complex interrelationship between aestheticism and the New Woman, which is embodied in the aunt-niece bond in Radford’s poem. Levy, as Wilson observes, also uses aesthetic language in order to portray her political messages. For example, “A Wall Flower” (1889) was written by Levy as an invective against the unpleasant practices of the Victorian ballroom:<sup>147</sup>

My spirit rises to the music’s beat;  
There is a leaden fiend lurks in my feet!  
To move unto your motion, Love, were sweet.  
Somewhere, I think, some other where, not here,  
In other ages, on another sphere,  
I danced with you, and you with me, my dear.

(“A Wall Flower” 1-6)

The speaker’s choice to dance with her beloved in another place and in a different time criticises the Victorian ballroom practices, and shows her objection to the prevailing traditions that denied unmarried women their rights, such as being able to refuse to dance with a partner without an acceptable justification. As Wilson points out: “Women are, essentially, at the mercy of any potential suitor, and they are continually thrust into a series

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<sup>147</sup> See Molly Engelhardt’s *Dancing Out of Line, Ballrooms, Ballets, and Mobility in Victorian Fiction and Culture* for more details on how “the nineteenth-century ballroom became more threatening, capable of framing acts of wickedness, transgression, and death just as easily as celebrating life and communal oneness” (Engelhardt, 2009: 20). Although Engelhardt’s book focuses mainly on fictional representations of dance and dancers, it shares with Wilson her claim that dancing practices in the Victorian ballrooms were a form of mobility and allowed women to challenge the restricting nature of the domestic sphere.

of partnerships—the body is forced to act, despite the wishes of the mind and heart” (Wilson, 2008: 192). Therefore, the choice of Levy’s speaker to dance in “other ages” and in “another sphere” echoes her call for a more liberated spectrum in “A Ballad of Religion and Marriage”.<sup>148</sup> The escape to a different time and a different place reflects on Levy’s despair and her unfulfilled desires which were dislocated by the demands of Victorian society. The timeline between Levy’s and Radford’s poems suggests that Radford may have been influenced by Levy whose aesthetic description of dancing is meant to criticise the institution of the Victorian ballroom. Similarly, ballet in Radford’s poem is adopted by the aesthete aunt and is linked to what is “weird and wild and new”, a fact which suggests that dance here is a metaphor for freedom and leaves behind the older conventions mentioned at the beginning of the poem.

### **Dance and the New Woman**

Although in “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town” Radford briefly refers to dance in the context of the New Woman, in “Soliloquy of a Maiden Aunt” (1891) she dedicates the entire poem to a woman recalling her dance in a ballroom:

THE ladies bow and partners set,  
And turn around and pirouette  
And trip the lancers.

But no one seeks my ample chair,  
Or asks me with persuasive air  
To join the dancers.

They greet me, as I sit alone  
Upon my solitary throne,  
And pass politely.

Yet mine could keep the measured beat,  
As surely as the youngest feet,  
And tread as lightly.

No other maiden had my skill  
In our old homestead on the hill –

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<sup>148</sup> See Chapter Two.

That merry May-time

When Allan closed the flagging ball,  
And danced with me before them all,  
Until the day-time.

Again I laugh, and step alone,  
And curtsey low as on my own  
His strong hand closes.

But Allan now seeks staid delight,  
His son there brought my niece to-night  
These early roses.

Time orders well, we have our Spring,  
Our songs, and May-flower gathering,  
Our love and laughter.

And children chatter all the while,  
And leap the brook and climb the stile  
And follow after

And yet - the step of Allan's son,  
Is not as light as was the one  
That went before it.

And that old lace, I think, falls down  
Less softly on Priscilla's gown  
Than when I wore it.

(“Soliloquy of a Maiden Aunt”)

As in “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town”, Radford uses the aunt and niece bond to express issues concerning the New Woman. The dance theme, as mentioned earlier, was depicted by many New Woman poets. Radford’s speaker embraces the role of the dancer in Levy’s “A Wall Flower”. Wilson argues: “Playing the wallflower—standing unpartnered in the ballroom—is the role of the odd woman, who will remain unpartnered in marriage” (Wilson, 2008: 196). Wilson’s use of the word “odd” to describe single women is reminiscent of Gissing’s *The Odd Women* which, as discussed in Chapter Two, offers a criticism of Victorian marriage and portrays the conflict suffered by many single and ambitious women. In his representation of the Madden sisters, Gissing shows how Victorians chose their future wives on the basis of beauty. Therefore, looking back with

nostalgia at her youth, the aunt in Radford's poem expresses her loneliness in the form of a dramatic monologue, which, as Byron's argument has shown, was used by women poets to condemn patriarchal institutions and celebrate their femininity by giving "voice to marginalised and silenced figures in society" (Byron, 2003: 96). The ballroom, where Radford's poem is set, stands for one of the patriarchal institutions that women poets sought to criticise. Similarly, the aunt, who recalls her dance with Allan and seeks courtship but finally remains unpartnered when "no one seeks [her] ample chair", is one of the "marginalised and silenced figures" who is given a voice through Radford's interpretation of her soliloquy.

Radford's representation of a lonely aunt observing the dancers anticipates a similar image of the one depicted by her contemporary woman poet Katharine Tynan<sup>149</sup> in "The Spinster Lament" (1908). Tynan's poem opens with the speaker asking "Where are now the gay lads gone/ Who my partners were of yore?" ("The Spinster Lament" ll. 1-2). This sense of nostalgia for the past is similarly represented by the aunt who, while remembering her youth, has not been asked "[t]o join the dancers". Despite the nostalgic tone of both poems, the throwback offers a sense of power rather than a regret for the speakers. For example, Tynan's speaker confirms that "Twenty lovers once had I" ("The Spinster Lament" ll. 15); likewise, the aunt in Radford's poem asserts with pride: "No other maiden had my skill". In her reading of Tynan's poem, Wilson observes:

Tynan places her speaker in the ballroom and links the dancers of the present with the dancers of the past to heighten the nostalgia of the poem. However, this setting also allows her to emphasize the ways in which a woman's fate is tied to the ballroom—a situation that enforces her repeated participation in the rituals of

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<sup>149</sup> In her study of Katharine Tynan (1861-1931) Ann Connerton Fallon points out that she "is remembered today as a leading member of the Irish literary movement which developed in the last decade of the nineteenth century [...]. Throughout her long career Katharine Tynan published over two hundred titles, including volumes of poetry, novels, plays, autobiographical works, and commemorations. [...] her writing career gave her entry not only into the male-dominated profession of writing, but into that very life-style once considered the private and enviable domain of the writer. She had access to the social life of the writer—the literary circles, the publishers' parties, the traveling abroad, the social acceptance into all ranks of society, the fame and the notoriety of the established and successful writer. For the daughter of the gentleman farmer from the Irish countryside, a girl with little formal education, nearly blind, and of plain appearance, this success was achieved by a very remarkable personality" (Fallon, 1979: Preface).

heterosexual courtship. Although she is clearly past her youth, the speaker returns to the ballroom [...] mirrors the mechanized social system that propels women into marriage. (Wilson, 2008: 194)

Wilson's interpretation recalls the very idea posited at the outset of the analysis of Radford's poem and her choice of an aunt and niece rather than a mother and daughter. Unlike Allan, who is possibly married because the young male dancer is "[h]is son", the aunt, as the title suggest, remains "maiden". However, the aunt's return to the ballroom and her comparison between the past and the present may be read in relation to Wilson's comment in which she identifies "a woman's fate" as "tied to the ballroom" and marriage. This reading is further emphasised towards the end of the poem when the aunt refers to children: "And children chatter all the while [...] And follow after", suggesting the repetitive nature of the Victorian gendered system. This meaning may be read in the context of an entry in Radford's diary which records: "Coventry Patmore was much pleased with the book, & with the 'maiden aunt' particularly" (Radford Diary, 25 April 1891). Given Patmore's conventional views and his idealisation of the sacrificing/submissive model of womanhood in *The Angel in the House*,<sup>150</sup> it is possible to argue that he, like Radford's reviewers, was misled by the surface meaning of the poem which seems to conform to Victorian conventions.

However, in her representation of dance, Radford shares with Levy and Tynan the way they criticise Victorian ballrooms practices, women's limited opportunities and the fact that, as Wilson puts it, they were "at the mercy of any potential suitor". This very fact is mirrored in the aunt's assertion: "But Allan now seeks staid delight", which indicates that she is no longer of interest to him. In doing so, Radford's representation echoes Tynan's poem which "suggests that the union of the dance is only a brief union because men—as was the case with her former partners—always move on" (Wilson, 2008: 194).

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<sup>150</sup> See Chapters One and Three.

The male dancers' movement from one female to another may be what led the aunt to describe "the step of Allan's son" as being "not as light as" his father's possibly to challenge the perception of freedom associated with how men, as Wilson suggests, "always move on". At the same time, if the niece, as in "From Our Emancipated Aunt", represents the New Woman, she can no longer conform to the ideals and etiquettes of the ballroom, for "that old lace", which may be a metaphor for older conventions of the ballroom, "falls down/ Less softly on Priscilla's gown", indicating its restricting nature or even her resistance to it. Also, from the very beginning of the poem, the reader is introduced to the aunt as an observer rather than an object of the gaze: "The ladies bow and partners set,/ And turn around and pirouette". Despite her feeling of loneliness, the aunt's role as an observer may be read as a challenge to the traditional concept of the gaze.

In a more recent article, Wilson argues:

[W]hile the traditional reading of the gaze would suggest that the male viewer has power over the female dancer, Victorian writers draw on the dancer's ability to manipulate that gaze and exercise power over the audience – primarily accomplished through her performance and display of "exotic" sexuality – to suggest that she is not merely a passive victim of masculine control. (Wilson, 2012: 352)

Wilson's argument examines the role of the solo female dancer rather than those who dance with a male partner. However, given Radford's unconventional representation of the gaze, it is possible to read the aunt's comments on Allan and his son as a way by which Radford may have intended to show that the female dancer, even when being ignored by her male partner, "is not merely a passive victim of masculine control", but could be a spectator who evaluates his performance.

As an aging yet strong character, the aunt is reminiscent of the female speaker in Radford's "A Model". As discussed in Chapter Four, despite the model's continuous resistance to the passive image the painters set her in, the poem portrays the hardship of old age, a theme barely remarked on by contemporary scholars of Radford. Like the aunt,

who looks back at her youth and claims that “[n]o other maiden had my skill”, the model recalls her “beauty” and asserts: “None would believe, in very truth,/ A maiden was so fair, they said”. Unlike Radford’s usual use of short songs, both poems are in the form of a dramatic monologue, which was used by women poets for “social critique”.<sup>151</sup> In “A Maiden Aunt” and “A Model”, the use of the dramatic monologue gives voice to the female heroines and allows them to challenge prevailing attitudes against women from within the convention. While in the former poem the aunt indicates that her age is the reason behind the male dancers’ aversion to dance with her, the latter poem shows how the painters idealise the model’s image to fit in with the Victorian definition of passive womanhood. Both poems criticise how the Victorians limited women’s role, whether as partners or in art, to their youth and beauty, that is sexuality. However, as we saw in Chapter Four, ageing in Radford’s poems is in line with Chase’s argument “that the terrors, anxieties, and yearnings of old age as well as its pleasures and humors not only exceed, but often challenge, the emerging conventions” (Chase, 2009: 5). Radford’s speakers in both poems question and simultaneously resist passive and merely sexual roles; the aunt possibly defies ballroom practices through her New Woman niece who finds the “old lace” not as “soft” as her former aunt did. Similarly, the model refuses to submit to both the painters and the hardship of her old age and despite being “a figure worn and strange”, she finally announces: “They paint me still, but now I sit”.

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<sup>151</sup> See Chapter Two.



Figure 17: A photograph of Dollie Radford copied from Pullen's "Dollie Radford and Anna Wickham: two of Hampstead's radical women poets" (Pullen, 2012: 37).

### **The Metaphor of "Cigarette" and the Smoking New Woman**

Like dance, cigarettes and smoking were associated with the revolutionary New Woman who wants to break the patriarchal traditions and to have equal positions with men in the public sphere. As Jennifer Baltzer-Lovato points out: "It would seem that women's tobacco use was so taboo that it could not be spoken of, which makes the *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon of the 'new woman' and her audacity in daring to smoke even more significant" (Baltzer-Lovato, 2013). Also, as discussed in Chapter Two, Christ refers to the cigarette as one of the symbols of modern life which distinguished decadent poetry in the *fin de siècle*. Thus, in "A Novice" (1895), the "cigarette" may be read in relation to Radford's engagement with the radical notion of the New Woman who resists the traditional feminine role:<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> See Elizabeth Langland's "Nobody's Angel: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel", where smoking and smoking rooms are identified as parts of the Victorian "male domain" (Langland, 1992: 295). Also, in her article on smoking and tobacco in the nineteenth century, Baltzer-Lovato argues: "It was in the early years of the Victorian era that smoking becomes an unquestionably male oriented pursuit, performed in isolation from feminine company" (Baltzer-Lovato, 2013). Later in the century, smoking became a practice which was associated with the "mannish" New Woman. As Heilmann points out in her description of the New Woman, "she was constructed as a mannish, chain-smoking aggressive virago" (Heilmann, 1998: x).

WHAT is it, in these latter days,  
Transfigures my domestic ways,  
And round me, as a halo, plays?  
My cigarette.

For me so daintily prepared,  
No modern skill, or perfume, spared,  
What would have happened had I dared  
To pass it yet?

What else could lighten times of woe,  
When some one says "I told you so,"  
When all the servants, in a row,  
Give notices?

When the great family affairs  
Demand the most gigantic cares,  
And one is very ill upstairs,  
With poultices?

What else could ease my aching head,  
When, though I long to be in bed,  
I settle steadily instead  
To my "accounts?"

And while the house is slumbering,  
Go over them like anything,  
And find them ever varying,  
In their amounts!

Ah yes, the cook may spoil the broth,  
The cream of life resolve to froth,  
I cannot now, though very wroth,  
Distracted be;

For as the smoke curls blue and thin  
From my own lips, I first begin  
To bathe my tired spirit in  
Philosophy.

And sweetest healing on her pours,  
Once more into the world she soars,  
And sees it full of open doors,  
And helping hands.

In spite of those who, knocking, stay,  
At sullen portals day by day,  
And weary at the long delay  
To their demands.

The promised epoch, like a star,  
Shines very bright and very far,  
But nothing shall its lustre mar,  
Though distant yet.

If I, in vain, must sit and wait,

To realize our future state,  
I shall not be disconsolate,  
My cigarette!

(“A Novice”)

The title of the poem suggests that the speaker is inexperienced and has not had any previous encounters with the changes happening around her. In “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town”, Radford sheds light on a historical stage when women’s lives were responding to the transformation in traditions and cultures brought about by the social revolution in late Victorian England. Despite the fact that Radford’s poems, as Richardson puts it, “do display an undeniable charm, this quality often serves subversive rather than sentimental ends” (Richardson, 2000: 109). Richardson’s reading of Radford’s poems also corresponds with Armstrong’s observation, which makes it clear that women’s use of aesthetic language in their poetry does not necessarily indicate conventionality.<sup>153</sup> In the poem, the speaker refers to a period of time which women are waiting for to gain their freedom. She compares aims of the women’s movement with the “star”, which despite its distance, still shines and glows. Harrington similarly argues: “although the ‘promised epoch’ of full equality for women is distant, its light still shines brightly; waiting rather wearisome knocking will ‘realize’ the future” (Harrington, 2014: 143). As in “A Dream of ‘Dreams’”, waiting is represented by Radford to accompany hope for change rather than desperateness, for the speaker finally asserts: “I shall not be disconsolate”.

The future which was dreamed of by many New Women was a topic of satire for many writers and illustrators. For example, the picture below was a satirical label drawn on the lid of a cigar box which existed in the 1890s. It offers an exaggerated depiction of women’s clubs in the nineteenth century when, as noted earlier, it was uncommon for women to smoke:

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<sup>153</sup> See Chapter Two.



Figure 18: “Bloomer Club” Cigar Box Label. Collection of the author copied from Lori Merish’s *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, And Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Merish, 2000: 302).

Almost every object in the picture symbolises a forbidden practice or emancipated behaviour for Victorian women and presents the extreme opposite of the feminine/domestic sphere. Lori Merish argues:

[L]abels such as one for the ‘Bloomer Club’ cigar [...] reverse conventionally gendered relations of proprietorship, and foreground a more complex set of issues involving sexual, gender, and racial identification. This label can be considered one of the long tradition of female (often lesbian) appropriations of the cigar, appropriations that trope on the cigar as a cultural sign of masculinity. [...] In an important sense, this label (like the works of Ellis and others) displaces the male homoerotics of cigar consumption onto a specifically lesbian context. (Merish, 2000: 302)

Merish’s comment on the cigar and its association with lesbianism is a point which will be expanded upon later, but what I would like to shed light on here is how such labels “reverse conventionally gendered relations”, to use Merish’s term. The swords in the background, for instance, were usually associated with men’s clubs and are here symbols of defiance. However, as we shall see, some women writers, such as Ouida, challenged the Victorian gendered-base classification of activities through their representation of the

strong female heroine who carries a weapon. Also, the two most visible women in the picture are dressed like men wearing Bloomers,<sup>154</sup> a uniform which was not acceptable in genteel middle-class women's clubs. The Bloomers in this illustration are similar to the clothing of one of the women in the image attached with Radford's poem "In Our Square".<sup>155</sup> The wine bottles underneath the women's chairs represent other forms of forbidden pleasures for Victorian women who were highly unlikely to be drinking in a pub.<sup>156</sup> However, drinking at homes or at parties was normalised, a fact which is occasionally reflected upon in Radford's diary: "Am drinking, perforce, all kind of strange – to me – drinks" (Radford Diary, 31 October 1883). Also, in a letter to Ernest, Radford writes: "I am still drinking Champaine [sic], & filling up all gaps with egg-flips!" (Add MS 89029/1/28, Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 19 September 1888). In addition, Radford's diary and her photos in the British Library show that she used to keep her hair cut short<sup>157</sup> and practised many of the sports drawn in the background of the picture, such as cycling which was later associated with the New Woman.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Women's custom and dress reform were one of the feminists' concerns during the nineteenth century; the Bloomer was named after the American feminist Amelia Bloomer. In "Dress Reform and the Bloomer", Jennifer Ladd Nelson refers to how both practitioners of alternative medicine and feminists contributed to the dress reform. Nelson points out: "While each of these interested parties contributed to dress reform at various stages, it was the mainstream feminists, under the leadership of Amelia Bloomer and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who brought dress reform to the attention of society with the introduction of the Bloomer custom" (Nelson, 2000: 21).

<sup>155</sup> See Chapter Four for the image and more discussion on Radford's admiration of knickerbockers.

<sup>156</sup> In "Gender, Class, and Public Drinking in Britain during the First World War", David W. Gutzke argues, "By the early Victorian period [...] [g]ender modified class drinking habits, inhabiting women far more than men. Women probably accounted overall for 25 to 30 per cent of all pub patrons, about the same proportion as in arrests for drunkenness, but scarcely represented a cross-section of the working class. Age, marital status, and income imposed insuperable barriers to acceptability. Young, unmarried women seldom ventured into the pub alone, lest they be mistaken for prostitutes" (Gutzke, 1994: 368).

<sup>157</sup> In addition to many diary entries in which Radford reflects on her short hair, during her honeymoon the diary records: "Have had my hair cut in French" (Radford Diary, 22 October 1883). See Figure 5, for instance. Also, in a letter to her father, Dollie wrote: "I am sorry to say Clara has already had her hair cut quite short. She did it by herself. [...] However, she looks very well with it short – so perhaps you will not dislike it as much as you think you will" (Add MS 89029/.71, Dollie Radford to Robert Maitland, 30 August 1882). Although the letter concerns Radford's sister, it sheds light on the prevailing dislike for short-haired women and how, as discussed in Chapter One, it was associated with the masculine New Woman.

<sup>158</sup> Radford herself, as her diary records, used to practise different kinds of sports and activities, such as chess, tennis, and cycling with her friends: "We played chess!" (Radford Diary, 14 May 1883). Such activities appear very frequently in the diary, which indicates Radford's rejection of women's passivity, and

Considering that the illustration was formulated against a backdrop of the Victorian expectation of middle-class women, and given Radford's awareness of and engagement with activities associated with the New Woman, it is possible to argue that by representing a smoking wife rather than a maiden, Radford challenges prevailing expectations of a wife's naïve and sacrificing nature. She offers an image of a woman's passive role in the domestic domain accompanied with smoking and waiting "[t]o realize our future state", suggesting that the "promised epoch" is not anticipated by active New Women only, but even by those who suffer the burden of domesticity. In her reading of the poem Harrington acknowledges Radford's engagement with "the figure of the smoking 'New Woman'" and argues: "Although this 'Novice' is merely waiting, she has encroached into previously male-dominated territory by philosophizing, smoking and rejecting domestic duties" (Harrington, 2014: 142-143). Harrington's interpretation of "smoking" as a way of "rejecting domestic duties" echoes Baltzer-Lovato's argument which identifies "daring to smoke" as one of the characteristics associated with the revolutionary New Woman. In addition, her reading is reminiscent of Richardson's which states:

Radford transforms the subversive connotation of the cigarette (smoking as one of the hallmarks of the rebellious woman) into a heavenly one: the smoke becomes her halo. This angel in the house is a transgressive one: the sign of her virtue is her unashamed subversion of traditional notions of middleclass domesticity. (Richardson, 2000: 114)

The "halo" in Radford's poem is caused by smoking: "And round me, as a halo, plays?/ My cigarette", an image which may be interpreted as a criticism of middle-class understanding of the angel in the house whose halo is an outcome of her passivity and domesticity. Moreover, the speaker enjoys the "halo" resulting from the forbidden practice

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her engagement with the notion of the New Woman in the illustration above. Also, see Chapter Four for more discussion on sports, including tennis, which was associated with the rise of the New Woman; see Park's argument.

of smoking and finds it the only thing which “could lighten times of woe”, suggesting that engaging with New Women’s activities is the only relief from the burden of domesticity. Thus, the metaphor of the “halo” implies the necessity of transformation in middle-class norms of the angel, for passivity and the lack of “skills” prove to be of no use to the speaker who fails to respond to “the great family affairs”. The wife’s failure to match the Victorian understanding of ideal womanhood is reminiscent of MacEwen’s description of Radford as incompetent in household duties. Also, the speaker’s description of “family affairs” as requiring “gigantic cares” echoes Radford’s own frustration over domestic duties.<sup>159</sup>

Radford’s choice of “cigarette” reminds us of Cigarette, the female heroine in Ouida’s *Under Two Flags* (1867).<sup>160</sup> The novel is centred on Cigarette, a mannish woman who smokes, drinks, rides horses, and fights. Cigarette falls in love with the British aristocratic dandy Bertie Cecil who joins the French army in Algeria. Out of jealousy and love of Cigarette, Major Doyle sends Cecil on dangerous assignments in order to get rid of him. Cecil falls in love with Lady Venetia, but, ironically, at the end of the novel, Cigarette is the one who sacrifices her life for her lover’s sake. Cigarette obviously shares with the revolutionary New Woman many of her characteristics and her portrayal resembles the women in the picture above; she has a “defiant face”, “short jetty hair”, and “had had a thousand lovers” (*U.T.F* 205). For Cigarette, these features serve as a way of defying social conventions: “Cigarette was making scorn of her doom of Sex, dancing it down, drinking it down, laughing it down, burning it out in tobacco fumes, drowning it in

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<sup>159</sup> See Chapter Three for MacEwen’s comment and Radford’s letter to Ernest to whom she complains about the burden of domestic duties.

<sup>160</sup> See Chapter One for more details on Ouida’s novel in relation to the New Woman. Also, in her reading of Cigarette’s character as a solo dancer, Wilson argues that she “anticipate[s] the activities of the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman. Cigarette’s participation in the life and daily activities of the army – the only woman in a masculine sphere – occasions numerous instances of gender crossing; she sports a boy-short haircut, carries a weapon, and glorifies in the plunder of Arab treasures” (Wilson, 2012: 353).

trembling cascades of wine” (*U.T.F* 297). However, Cigarette’s celebration of her courage and masculine practices are not represented as being dangerous or threatening to her relationships with men. In her reading of Cigarette’s character, Dolores Mitchell argues: “Rather than destroying the man she loves, she becomes his ‘comrade-in-arms’; she rides into an ambush meant for him and dies fighting” (Mitchell, 1991: 4). By offering such a portrayal, Ouida may have intended to challenge the existing idealisation of women’s passive femininity and their limited role in society.

This integration of Cigarette’s revolutionary practices and her role as a healer is a point which has been remarked on by J. Stephen Addcox who observes: “Cigarette uses her medical knowledge to save and protect men, rather than women. In this way Cigarette’s paradoxical contradictions seem to stem from the confluence of her status as sexually open [...] with her role as a healer and surgeon” (Addcox: 2009: 24). Through her characterisation of Cigarette, Ouida questions gendered biased attitudes by showing how women’s physical freedom and medical training can be complementary to their healing and sacrificing nature. Ouida’s representation of Cigarette parallels Radford’s poem in which the speaker, like Cigarette, resists conventional norms through smoking. However, unlike Cigarette, Radford’s speaker has “no modern skills” which prepare her for the new transformation in women’s lives. Radford highlights the necessity of having such skills, not only for women’s engagement in the public sphere, but also finds them essential for their domestic practices. In doing so, Radford’s poem engages with Wollstonecraft’s early feminist views on women’s education and how it helps women to be better companions. Radford’s admiration for Wollstonecraft and her awareness of her own limited educational opportunities provide a specific context for the poem. The speaker’s inability to cope with her marital duties due to her lack of skills to nurse the person who “is very ill upstairs” may be read in relation to Radford’s biography, leading us to conclude that this person could be Radford’s husband, who suffered from a long

lasting mental illness which had a negative impact on Radford's marital and financial life. Like Radford, whose diary and letters record that she was financially broken during the 1890s, the speaker "settle[s] steadily instead/ To my "accounts".

However, a more radical reading applies if we link Radford's representation of "cigarette" to Merish's reading of the cigar in a "lesbian context". In her discussion of women smokers in nineteenth-century literature, Mitchell points out: "Rarely depicted women smokers were usually 'outsiders'-actresses, prostitutes, lesbians, degenerate society women, or 'new women' for whom cigarettes symbolized deviance" (Mitchell, 1991: 3). By locating the "cigarette" in a context which does not conform to heteronormativity, it is possible to argue that Radford shares with Levy the representation of same-sex desire in "Love, Dreams, and Death", a sequence in *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verses* (1889). In one of the sequences entitled "A Reminiscence", the "cigarette" reminds the speaker of her absent lover:

IT is so long gone by, and yet  
How clearly now I see it all!  
The glimmer of your cigarette,  
The little chamber, narrow and tall.

("A Reminiscence" 1-5)

In Levy's poem, the "cigarette" leaves behind the negative attitudes associated with women smokers; instead, its "glimmer" is the only thing left in the speaker's memory. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Goody offers a queer reading of Levy's sequence, though she does not particularly identify the "cigarette" as a signifier of homoeroticism. However, my proposal of the speaker's lesbianism is encouraged by Pullen's reading of the poem which, as she argues,

was evidently inspired by an evening visit that [Levy] made whilst staying in Florence. In a prospect to a letter that she wrote to [Vernon] Lee shortly after the abandonment of her planned return to Italy she recalled wistfully: 'I remember seeing you there, so

well, one evening last year; with Mr. Cross, Mr. Benson and some American cigarettes'. (Pullen, 2010: 125)

Although, as mentioned in Chapter Three, Pullen avoids any direct reference to Levy's homosexuality, her reading of Levy's letter to Lee<sup>161</sup> as behind the context of the poem makes homoeroticism possible. This reading takes as its cue the close relationship of Levy and Lee whose lesbianism is debated by contemporary scholars.

As with the speaker in Levy's poem, Radford's Novice finds that smoking is the only way "to lighten times of woe" and "ease my aching head". Moreover, the speaker "cannot now, though very wroth,/ Distracted be", suggesting that despite her discontent with domestic duties and family commitment, she is fully engaged with and enjoying the moment of smoking. Radford's portrayal of images of self-possession, pleasure, and autonomy, which all resemble the characteristics of the New Woman, may be read as part of what Harrington, in her description of the speaker's smoking, calls the "rejecting [of] domestic duties". Such a reading opens up potentially queer readings. In fact, this point works as an introduction to the next chapter which discusses Radford's possible bisexuality and her evident empathy with homosexual figures.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown Radford's rejection of women's passive role and her support of their emancipation in both her diary and poetry. In light of Radford's diary entries, which reflect her unconventional character and resistance to patriarchal norms, my analysis of her poems as feminist and engaging with the New Woman is justified, for

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<sup>161</sup> Vernon Lee, was the pseudonym of the woman writer Violet Paget (1856-1935), whose name, as Newman observes, is being re-evaluated by contemporary scholars "as a female essayist and novelist, and romantic friend to the women with whom she shared her life" (Newman, 2005: 55). Newman's article offers a detailed account of Lee's lesbianism which is straightforwardly acknowledged by many lesbian historians (Newman, 2005: 61). Also, it is worth noting, surely, that Radford's diary records her awareness of some of Lee's published work (Radford Diary, 4 March 1885).

such radical themes would not have been written by a passive/submissive woman. Also, Radford's choice of language and metaphors which are also used by other contemporary New Women and lesbian writers offers further evidence for the revolutionary content of her poems. Although each poem addresses a different aspect concerning the New Woman, including dance and smoking, they share the way they condemn patriarchal ideals, encourage women's emancipation, and search for alternatives to the domestic sphere. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, Radford's emotional and financial conflict with her husband, in addition to her awareness of the limited opportunities for her as a woman writer may all be read as factors which contribute to her representation of a strong female heroine who suffers the burden of domesticity, but simultaneously defies the conventions imposed on her. In doing so, the poems in this chapter, as the ones in previous chapters, leave behind the "feminine" and "domestic" descriptions imposed on her poetry by her contemporary reviewers. As the next chapter will show, these reviews are further undermined through Radford's possible bisexuality, her friendship with homosexual figures, and her empathetic portrayal of homosexuality which is an evident theme in some of her poems.

## **Chapter Six: Surpassing Conventional Heterosexuality: Free Love and Lesbian Possibilities in Radford's Poetry**

### **Overview**

This chapter builds on the discussion in Chapter Five, which sheds light on Radford's engagement with the New Woman themes. It considers sexual freedom as one of the issues which concerned New Woman writers, including Radford herself. Although it is not the aim of this chapter to claim that Radford was necessarily bisexual herself, it sheds light on Radford's friendship with radical sexologists and homosexual figures whose influence is evident in many of her poems. By offering an insight into Radford's ambiguous choice of language in her diary entries, letters, and poems, I propose the possibility of Radford's sexual attraction to some of her close women friends and highlight her portrayal of same-sex desires in many of her poems.

Part One, "Radford's Acquaintance and Correspondence with Radical and Homosexual Figures", provides a contextual background for the chapter. The first subheading, "Eleanor Marx and her Free Love with Edward Aveling", discusses Radford's friendship with Marx and demonstrates how supportive and encouraging Radford was, even when she was informed of Marx's decision to live with Aveling without a legal marriage contract. The second section, "Homosexuals and Sexologists in Radford's Life", provides a brief overview of Radford's acquaintance with Levy, Michael Field, and other homosexual figures whose influence on Radford is already discussed in previous chapters. It also considers Radford's admiration of radical sexologists, such as Henry Havelock Ellis<sup>162</sup> and Carpenter, as evidenced by her awareness of and sympathy

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<sup>162</sup> Ellis (1859-1939) was an English physician who is best known for his sexual theories which engage with the rise of homosexuality in late Victorian England. Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull identify Ellis as "the first British doctor to discuss female homosexuality at any length" (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 99). His co-edited book *Sexual Inversion* (1897) was considered as the first medical text to address sympathy towards

with their homosexual theories. In fact, the first two sections form an introduction to the third subheading, “The Possibility of Radford’s Involvement in Romantic/Intimate Friendships”, in which I interpret the language used in some of Radford’s diary entries and letters in relation to Victorian and contemporary lesbian studies. The last subheading in this part, “Women’s Sexuality and Further Evidence for Possible Bisexuality: The Turkish Baths (in Radford’s Life)”, explores the possibility of homosexual practices between women bathers in Victorian England, and considers Radford’s frequent visits to Turkish baths with her close women friends as part of this debate.

Divided into two subheadings, the second part of this chapter, “Unconventional Sexuality in Radford’s Poetry”, demonstrates the way in which the background outlined in Part One may have influenced Radford’s portrayal of sexual freedom and homoerotic themes in her poetry. For example, in “(Anticipating) Free Love as Opposed to Conventional Marriage”, I argue that Radford’s friendship with Marx is a contributing factor to her representation of the free love theme in the poem “A Modern Polypheme”. The following section, “The Masked Lover and Potential Homosexuality in Radford’s Poems”, includes the four poems “My Sweetheart” (1891), “My Friend” (1891), “To A Stranger”, and “At Last” whose images and metaphors correspond to those used by contemporary homosexual men and women poets, such as Levy and Wilde. By proposing Radford’s possible bisexuality and shedding light on her engagement with and depictions of homosexual themes, this chapter adds to the existing body of knowledge a new approach to Radford’s life and poetry. As shown in Chapter Three, Hughes is the only scholar who briefly refers to Radford’s “Outside the hedge of roses” as a response to Wilde’s trial. I take Hughes’s argument further and explore more poems which are inspired by the experience of Wilde and lesbian women.

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same-sex sexuality. See Ivan Dally Crozier’s “Taking Prisoners: Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, and the Construction of Homosexuality, 1897-1951” which discusses Havelock Ellis’s efforts to form theories of homosexuality (Crozier, 2000: 449).

## Part One: Radford's Acquaintance and Correspondence with Radical and Homosexual Figures

### Eleanor Marx and her Free Love with Edward Aveling

Chapter One formed a discussion of free love as one of the issues adopted by the New Woman. It also included fictional examples, such as *The Woman Who Did* and *The Woman Who Didn't*, which offer different portrayals of the heroine who resists the marriage union. In fact, Marx was one of those women whose relationship with Aveling is crucial to our understanding of her life as a New Woman.<sup>163</sup> Rachel Holmes points out: “Many of the freedoms and benefits of modern democracy Britain inherited for the twentieth century and beyond into our own millennium were a direct result of the work done by Eleanor Marx and women and men like her” (Holmes, 2014: 448). If Marx's influence, as Holmes suggests, spreads to reach “modern democracy Britain”, then she would have been inspiring to her contemporaries. Marx was an influential character in Radford's life and played a major role in introducing her to literary communities and socialist leagues. This section takes Marx's influence beyond literary life and explores the ways in which her liberated thoughts along with her decision to eschew the institution of marriage might have impacted on Radford's ideals. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1884, Marx sent a letter to Radford telling her that she was hesitating to inform her about her decision to live with Aveling without marrying him:

[S]omehow it is easier to write – & it is perhaps fairer to you, because you can then think over what I am going to tell you. - Well then this is it – I am going to live with Edward Aveling as his wife.

[...]

- I shall quite understand if you think the position one you cannot care for, & I shall think of you both with affection if we do not any longer count you among our immediate friends. -

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<sup>163</sup> See Ledger's *The New Woman* which identifies Marx as one “of the most prominent New Woman figures of the *fin de siècle*” (Ledger, 1997: 122).

Always my dear old friend  
your loving  
Tussy

In the same letter, Marx informs Radford that she understands “that people [are] brought up differently” and that “old ideas & prejudices will think me very wrong” (Add. MS 89029 // 25, Eleanor Marx to Dollie Radford, 30 June 1884). Despite Marx’s justifications, Radford did not need time to “think over what” Marx told her. Two days later, a further letter was sent by Marx expressing her gratitude to Radford for her decision to support her and maintain their friendship: “Your letter has made me feel so glad. [...] I do care & very much for my friends, & the thought that I might possibly be losing you two has been a very sad one” (Add. MS 89029 // 25, Eleanor Marx to Dollie Radford, 2 July 1884). Although Radford’s archive in the British Library lacks a record of Radford’s reply to Marx, a glance at Marx’s letter reveals that Radford was encouraging her not to care how others would judge her decision. Indeed, such a reply would not have been written from a woman who conforms to conventional morals.



Figure 19: A photograph of Tussy in 1886 copied from Holmes’s *Eleanor Marx: A Life*.

Despite the fact that Marx's relationship with Aveling flouted Victorian conventions regarding the institution of marriage, it failed to free her from the oppression suffered by contemporary married women. In her diary Radford writes: "Came home late for dinner, & found Tussy here. She is in trouble – poor Tussy: will she never have happiness!" (Radford Diary, 16 May 1885). As one of her closest friends, Radford was kept updated with Marx's private life, which was distressing due to Aveling's various sexual affairs. As Holmes observes: "Dollie and Ernest Radford tried to tell her that it was her relationship with Edward that was the mistake but Eleanor had to learn her own lessons and couldn't hear them" (Holmes, 2014: 303). Throughout her short life,<sup>164</sup> Marx was torn between her lover and the close friends she did not wish to lose. Many of her letters to Radford express her love while simultaneously revealing her anxiety "to give up" their friendship: "Certainly no letter has been more welcome to me this Christmas time than was yours. It is pleasant to hear you have thought of me – it is so hard to give up old friends. And you are a very old friend, Dollie, one of the few who knew my father & mother well & therefore doubly dear to me" (Add. MS 89029 ././ 25, Eleanor Marx to Dollie Radford, 28 December 1887). Marx's description of Radford as "doubly dear" reveals the closeness of their relationship which, as will become clear in my analysis of "A Modern Polypheme", could have played a role in Radford's portrayal of free love as an alternative to conventional marriage.

In order for this friendship to last, Radford had to endure Aveling. MacEwan claims: "Like so many others, Dollie and Ernest felt affection and admiration for Eleanor but distrusted Edward, and tolerated him for her sake" (MacEwan, 2007: 37).<sup>165</sup> In fact,

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<sup>164</sup> In 1898, aged 43, Marx was found dead after poisoning herself with a strong medicine. Contemporary scholars, including Holmes, refer to the depression caused to Marx by Aveling as the major reason for her suicide (Holmes, 2014: 425-433).

<sup>165</sup> The hatred of Aveling from Marx's friends, was not a mere result of his untrustworthiness and sexual affairs, but his vulgarity with others was a chief and evident reason. In her diary Radford makes her dislike of Aveling obvious: "To see Tussy. Aveling is fit only for contempt: I was beginning to like him better, now I know exactly how to regard him" (Radford Diary, 19 May 1885).

Radford was not the only one whose dislike of Aveling was puzzling to Marx.<sup>166</sup> Schreiner could be one of the figures MacEwan implies, for as Ledger points out: “Olive disliked Edward Aveling and wrote to Havelock Ellis that: ‘I love her [Eleanor], but *he* makes me unhappy. You can’t think what a horror I am getting to have of Dr Aveling’” (Ledger, 1997: 122). Schreiner’s fear may be read as an outcome of Marx’s letters in which she complains about the emotional and financial trouble she is experiencing because of Aveling.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, she refuses to reconsider her feeling towards Aveling even after Marx’s death. In a letter to Radford, Schreiner encloses a note entitled “Private” in which she writes:

I don’t know if you know the life she lead with him: she has come to me nearly mad having found him in her own bedroom with two prostitutes. Just before I left England, a few days before in 1890 a friend of mine a married woman with many children came & told me how he had made love to her, & she [had crossed-out] & her husband forbad him [from] their house. [...] I am so glad Eleanor is dead. It is such a mercy she has escaped from him. (Add. MS 89029/. / 26, Olive Schreiner to Dollie Radford, June 1898)

It is due to the utter misery Aveling inflicted on Marx that despite her grief, Schreiner describes Marx’s death as “a mercy”. Although Marx’s relationship with Aveling is the main focus of this section, it is worth considering contemporary studies, including Ledger’s, which propose the possibility of Marx’s bisexuality. Ledger argues: “It remains unclear whether Olive’s and Eleanor’s emotional empathy included sexual attraction” (Ledger, 1997: 122). If Marx had any homoerotic desire towards Schreiner,

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<sup>166</sup> The conflict suffered by Marx because of Aveling is evident in one of Dollie’s letters to Ernest: “[Eleanor] must understand perfectly, & feels really easier and freer now she has not to stand up between you & him, as it were, constantly” (Add MS 89029/. /27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 10 June 1887).

<sup>167</sup> In one of her letters to Schreiner, Marx complains: “apart even from all the other troubles, we have mere money troubles enough to worry an ordinary man or woman into the grave. [...] And while I feel utterly desperate he is perfectly unconcerned. It is a continual source of wonder to me. I do not grow used to it, but always feel equally astounded at his absolute incapacity to feel anything – unless he is personally incommoded by it” (Marx to Schreiner in Ledger, 1997: 123).

she becomes one of the many homosexual and bisexual women and men whom Radford knew.

### **Homosexuals and Sexologists in Radford's Life**

The previous chapters have already recorded Radford's acquaintance with homosexual figures whose poetic images and metaphors proved to be similar to those of Radford. For example, the majority of chapters consider Radford's friendship with Levy whose influence is evident in many of Radford's poems, including "A Bride", "How the Unknown Poets Die", and "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town". Michael Field is another lesbian couple whom Radford admired; she shared some of their strategies in criticising the Victorian gendered system.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, Chapter Three addresses Radford's acquaintance with Wilde, proposing Radford's sympathy with his trial and imprisonment in "Outside the hedge of roses" where the speaker possibly escapes the walls of conventional heterosexuality. As will be shown in Part Two, Wilde's influence is even more evident in "At Last" in which Radford embraces the same language used by Wilde's lover to describe their homoerotic desires.

In addition to her close relationship with Levy, Michael Field and Wilde, Radford was a friend and admirer of Havelock Ellis, who is described by Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull as "the most important British sexologist" in the Victorian period (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 94). Ellis's name is mentioned frequently in Radford's diary: "Clara & I spread the flowers & tea, & many nice people came. Michael Field – George Moore – Miss Blind – Havelock & Miss Ellis" (Radford Diary, 8 April 1891). In another entry, Radford mentions: "Mr & Mrs Havelock came to see us. How kind & good they are" (Radford Diary, 31 April 1893). Despite her friendship with Ellis, Radford's diary

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<sup>168</sup> See Chapters Four and Five.

lacks entries on his work, a fact which may be linked to the existing censorship on reading materials. Oram and Turnbull point out that Ellis's work "was not easily available to lay members of the public before World War I, being restricted to medical practitioners, lawyers and bona fide sex researchers" (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 94).<sup>169</sup> However, the lack of access to Ellis's work does not imply that Radford was entirely unaware of his study, for, as will be discussed in Part Two, Radford's portrayal of the potentially homosexual speaker echoes Ellis's description of the "inverted woman": "While the inverted woman is cold, or at most comradely, in her bearing towards men, she may become shy and confused in the presence of attractive persons of her own sex" (Ellis, 1901: 145). In my analysis of "At Last", which was published a decade after Ellis's book, I propose Radford's potential engagement with his theory, especially in her representation of the speaker's heart which remains "cold" until she/he meets the love that "dare not speak" its name. The intent behind relating Radford's diary entries and poems to Ellis's study is to highlight the inherent prejudice within his theories, which are stereotypical of the Victorian conventional perceptions of women who sought fulfilling relationships outside marriage, as "inverted" and abnormal. Vicinus argues: "Numerous contradictory behaviours and definitions coexisted, though the most common identifying mark of the woman who loved women was still gender inversion" (Vicinus, 2004: 82). Building on Vicinus's argument, my reading of Radford's diary and poetry locates the anxiety addressed with same-sex desire as one aspect of the existing gendered conventions.

Like Ellis, Carpenter was another contemporary leading sexologist and a homosexual himself.<sup>170</sup> Although Radford's acquaintance with Carpenter is already discussed in earlier chapters, this section places greater emphasis on how his theories of

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<sup>169</sup> Also see Rebecca Jennings who argues: "in a period in which conventional notions of femininity emphasised women's sexual innocence and asexuality, any public discussion of sexuality by women remained highly contentious" (Jennings, 2007: 71).

<sup>170</sup> See Oram and Turnbull (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 129).

sexuality might have influenced Radford and her poetry. Radford's diary records: "Edward Carpenter to see us. A good thing to see Edward Carpenter – a real idealist" (Radford Diary, 12 April 1891). Radford's admiration for Carpenter is evident in this entry. Unlike the diary entry quoted in Chapter Three, in which Radford explicitly reflects on Carpenter's socialist views and his book *Towards Democracy*, this one offers no context in terms of Radford's description. Therefore, it may be argued that it is Carpenter's theories on homosexuality which render him a "real idealist" for Radford.<sup>171</sup> According to Oram and Turnbull, the work of Carpenter "was welcomed and taken up by some women, since it enabled them to describe their emerging and varied lesbian identities" (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 95). This reception is an outcome of Carpenter's sympathy with homosexuals whom he referred to as "The Intermediate Sex" (1908). According to Carpenter: "Formerly it was assumed as a matter of course, that the type was merely a result of disease and degeneration; but [...] it appears that, on the contrary, many are fine, healthy specimens of their sex, [...] with nothing abnormal or morbid of any kind observable in their physical structure or constitution" (Carpenter, 1912: 22-23). Carpenter is implicitly commenting on and rejecting Ellis's earlier work which locates the rise of homosexuality among women as an "indirect" result of women's movements and the demands for equality.<sup>172</sup> In his sympathetic study Carpenter provides a contrast to

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<sup>171</sup> Although Carpenter's book was not published until 1908, he started writing pamphlets early in the 1890s, when Radford's diary records her acquaintance with him. "In 1893 and 1894, Carpenter wrote four pamphlets on sexuality: *Woman and her Place in a Free Society*; *Marriage in a Free Society*; *Sex-Love and its Place in a Free Society*; and *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society*" (Brooke, 2011: 20). Although there is no recorded evidence of Radford's reading of any of these pamphlets, it is highly likely that she was aware of them, or, at least, of Carpenter's thoughts which are expressed in them.

<sup>172</sup> In his book chapter "Sexual Inversion in Women", Ellis observes: "Marriage is decaying, and, while men are allowed freedom, the sexual field of women is becoming restricted to trivial flirtation with the opposite sex. And to intimacy with their own sex; having been taught independence of men and disdain for the old theory which placed women in the moated grange of the home to sigh for a man who never comes, a tendency develops for women to carry this independence still further and to find love where they find work. I do not say these unquestionable influences of modern movements can directly cause sexual inversion, though they may indirectly, in so far as they promote heredity neurosis; but they develop the germs of it, and they probably cause a spurious imitation" (Ellis, 1901: 148).

established conventional prejudice against homosexuals, a further potential reason for Radford's admiration.

### **The Possibility of Radford's involvement in Romantic/Intimate Friendships**

As is the case with Marx, there is no direct evidence of Radford's sexual attraction to any of her women friends and it remains unclear whether Radford enjoyed sexual affairs with any of her close friends. However, as discussed in Chapter One, intimate friendship was a common phenomenon among Victorian women; therefore, Radford's involvement in romantic friendships is possible. As Faderman observes: "women with ambition to make a name for themselves looked for kindred spirits to appreciate their achievements and sympathize with them for the coldness with which the world greeted their efforts" (Faderman, 1981: 163-164). Radford is indeed one of those passionate women who sought to escape the "coldness" of her increasingly emotionless marriage which alongside the "coldness" of the cultural prejudice against her writing might have led her to become involved in romantic friendships in order to fulfil her emotional, intellectual, or even sexual needs.

Some of the correspondences found in Radford's archive in the British Library may be read in relation to contemporary scholarship on homosexuality amongst Victorian women. Oram and Turnbull argue: "The different genres reveal various facets of passionate friendship. Private letters could be used to convey the strength of loving feelings, to discuss plans and fantasies" (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 50). A number of the letters received by Radford from Katherine (Katie) Pattinson and her sister Winifred, who were two of Radford's old friends, raise intriguing questions about the kind of friendship they had, particularly when related to Victorian and contemporary sex theories.

In a letter to Radford, Pattinson writes:

My Dearest Dolly,

Thanks for your letter which I hasten to reply to as I thought you might like to hear what Jeanie thinks of you. She, I think, agrees with the nephew [...] in thinking you are tolerable then of course being my friend she may give you a little more than your due! On account of my feelings but she thinks you are very nice & altogether I think I have hit it off with you both. [...] I believe she is very fond of me, at least she pretends to be but you know I am never very sure about the feminine affections!!! (Add. MS 89029 // 25, Katharine Pattinson & Winifred Pattinson to Dollie Radford, 1876?)

As readers we cannot be certain about the context of the letter and if Radford is eager to know Jeanie's opinion of her as a lover or simply as a friend. However, the language of the letter may be interpreted in relation to Ellis's description of the love experienced between English schoolgirls as encouraging to homosexual affairs: "In such cases a school-girl or young woman forms an ardent attachment for another girl, probably somewhat older than herself, often a schoolfellow, sometimes her schoolmistress, upon whom she will lavish an astonishing amount of affection and devotion" (Ellis, 1901: 130). Pattinson's choice of "the feminine affections" is in line with Ellis's description of exchanging "affection" as a possible form of homosexual practices between schoolgirls.

Like Ellis, contemporary scholars, including Oram and Turnbull, confirm that "schools still remain potent places for concern about female homosexuality"; they add: "In contrast to the comparative lack of ordinary language to describe adult lesbian love, there has been a wide variety of common or slang terms for these adolescent feelings" (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 129). Pattinson's description of the fact that her friend is "fond of" her as "feminine affections" may be read as one of the terms by which young women expressed their passionate love towards their fellows. In addition, the language of the letter echoes Lord Alfred Douglas's<sup>173</sup> confession to his mother about his love for Wilde: "I am

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<sup>173</sup> Douglas (1870-1945) was a poet from an aristocratic family. In his study of Douglas's life, Caspar Wintermans points out that Douglas became Wilde's lover in 1892 (Wintermans, 2007: 34). Part Two of this chapter discusses his relationship with Wilde, his poem "Two Loves", and Radford's possible

passionately fond of him, and he of me” (Douglas in Wintermans, 2007: 38). While Douglas’s letter does not explicitly express the fact that he was sexually attracted to Wilde, their homosexuality became evident after Wilde’s trial in 1895.

In fact, the use of such ambivalent language should not be surprising, for, as noted previously, sexuality was a taboo topic for discussion. Also, as Rebecca Jennings observes: “Individual attitudes to sexual identity varied among specific women, with some developing a clearly sexual identity based around their same-sex desires, while other women created a more discreet and ambiguous identity which emphasised affection and love rather than desire” (Jennings, 2007: 54). Thus, the fact that the letter does not explicitly express any sexual attraction towards Radford does not necessarily mean the absence of sexual craving. In her discussion of Levy’s letters to her friends and teachers, Beckman observes: “Such sentiments obviously raise the question of sexual orientation” (Beckman, 2000: 31). Similarly yet in a more conservative manner, Francis proposes that young women’s “rejection of the traditional roles of the dependent daughter or wife enclosed within the family, and consequently of the emotional satisfactions these roles advertised, meant that new emotional investments came to be sought” (Francis, 1999: 195). Given the fact that Pattinson’s letter to Radford was written during their time at school, the language of affection expressed in the letter may be explored as one of the “new emotional investments” Francis refers to as a result of women’s education.<sup>174</sup>

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engagement with his experience and language in her poem “At Last”. In one of her letters to her husband, Radford writes: “I had to stay to dinner, to which Mr. Maitland – Douglas - & more other artists came” (Add MS 89029/1/29, Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 23 November 1895). Whether Alfred Douglas is the figure referred to by Radford remains unclear in the context of the letter. However, I have included the letter as a source of potential evidence for Radford’s acquaintance with Douglas.

<sup>174</sup> See also Terry Castle’s *Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* which distinguishes lesbianism in late Victorian England as a “challenge to the political, economic, and sexual authority of men over women. It implies a whole new social order, characterized - at the very least – by a profound feminine indifference to masculine charisma” (Castle, 1993: 62).

Although the letter above was written when Radford was young and not yet married, her interest in romantic friendship continued even after her marriage. As Vicinus points out: “One woman, one kind of love, did not automatically exclude other lovers or kind of love. [Many women] had serious filtrations with both women and men, and some were married” (Vicinus, 2004: xix). Similarly, Jennings concludes that “marriage was not always sufficient to protect women’s friendships from suspicion, particularly if women’s commitment to marriage was open to question” (Jennings, 2007: 49). As discussed in Chapter Three, Radford frequently complained of her “cold” marriage, particularly after Ernest’s illness, and once regretted: “I have been cold & looking only on my own heart”. In another entry written after her engagement to Ernest, Radford’s diary records her reading of Mathilde Blind’s “George Eliot” followed by a short poem:

The spirit ever hath desire  
 To read, this form of friendship, higher;  
 And somewhere gains its destined part  
 In the communion – heart with heart  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 Ah, friend of youth! Thy fresh-cut grave  
 Is warmer than the hand you gave!  
 Else were not (strangers many years) (comrades)  
 Lost friend, lost friend! These tears, these tears.

(Radford Diary, 16 July 1883)

Radford’s desire “[t]o read, this form of friendship” demonstrates that her allegiance does not diminish even after engaging in a heterosexual relationship. Although by that time, Radford was still misled by the idealisation of marriage as fulfilling to her emotional and intellectual needs,<sup>175</sup> her cry in “Ah, friend of youth! Thy fresh-cut grave” offers a nostalgia for the past, indicating that the dead person’s memories continue to live with her. It is possible that the addressed “lost friend” is Pattinson. In 1877, Pattinson’s sister wrote to Radford: “I know if [any one?] must miss my darling you must: for you did love her as

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<sup>175</sup> See Chapter Three.

she should be loved – I don't know what shall I do without my beautiful Katie, the horror is so desolate" (Add. MS 89029 // 25, Katharine Pattinson & Winifred Pattinson to Dollie Radford, 1877). Although Radford's archive in the British Library does not include record of Radford's letter to Pattinson, the reply reveals that Radford has missed her dead friend, a fact which is in line with the meanings of the poem. Oram and Turnbull suggest: "While not all girls who experience schoolgirl crushes grow out of them, many look back wistfully from later heterosexual marriage to the power of these feelings" (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 129). Reading the poem in relation to Oram's and Turnbull's argument leads to interpretation of the warmth of the memories and "the hand" as implications of the intimate friendship. As will be demonstrated in my analysis of "My Sweetheart", "My Friend", and "To A Stranger", Radford offers similar images of the hand to possibly hint at homoerotic desires between the ungendered speaker and the female addressee.

### **Women's Sexuality and Further Evidence for Possible Bisexuality: Turkish Baths (in Radford's Life)**

This section contextualises Radford's visits to Turkish baths with her women friends and proposes the possibility of homosexual practices. Although by the end of the nineteenth century the Turkish baths were used for leisure and hygiene purposes,<sup>176</sup> they do raise questions about stimulating women's homoerotic desires towards other half-dressed women in the same bath. Before turning to theories on homosexuality in Turkish

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<sup>176</sup> Efterpi Mitsi argues that the Turkish bath was used in the nineteenth century as a symbol of leisure: "One of the central paradigms of spatial configurations in [...] women's travelogues is the Turkish bath, the *hammam*, which [...] functions as an emblem, a trope of the Orient itself, becoming at the same time a commodity, a tourist attraction of the oriental journey" (Mitsi, 2008: 49). She adds the rising awareness on personal hygiene as another reason: "In the West, it was only in the nineteenth century that medical science declared that the frequent washing of the body was necessary for the health of the human being" (Mitsi, 2008: 60). It is worth noting that Mitsi's study on how Western and English women travellers responded to Turkish baths in the orient forms a slightly different context than Turkish baths in London. However, given the fact that it is one of the very few pieces of scholarship on nineteenth-century Turkish baths, Mitsi's work is employed as a background to the argument put forward.

baths, I will give an overview of Radford's diary entries which refer to her experience in Turkish baths. The language Radford uses in her diary reveals the different uses of these baths among middle-class Victorian women. For example, she accentuates their role for cleanliness and restoration purposes: "I was forced to the Turkish Bath for restoration; went in company with Tussy. Enjoyed it greatly. I have not had one for months" (Radford Diary, 15 November 1884). This visit to the Turkish bath followed the birth of Maitland, and the fact that she felt compelled to go indicates its effectiveness for women, especially in releasing stress and pain.<sup>177</sup> In one of her letters prior her father's death, Radford writes to him: "I am so sorry you are so poorly, & hope you will get a Turkish bath"; in the same letter, Radford also refers to the positive influence of a Turkish bath on "indigestion as well as lumbago" (Add MS 89029/.73, Dollie Radford to Robert Maitland, 13 October 1899). These diary entries and letters convey Radford's awareness of the medicinal benefits of Turkish baths.

Also, Radford identifies the efficiency of the Turkish bath as a leisure activity and an agent of relaxation: "I went up to Highgate to Nina's – Nina from home! Went then to the Turkish bath, met Jenny there. The Turkish bath is the most perfect rest and refreshment in the world. No person can be thoroughly good and happy who does not take them!" (Radford Diary, 25 May 1883). In another entry, she comments: "Turkish bath at the Euston baths. – They are extremely nice. The Turkish bath is a perfect health restorer! They 'set me up' like a sea breeze" (Radford Diary, 24 September 1883). The association of baths with a luxurious life is also evident in Radford's declaration: "I went, this morning, to the Northumberland Avenue Turkish Baths with Tussy. They are regal! I enjoyed myself there ever so much, & longed to stay for ever" (Radford Diary, 14 May 1885). The

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<sup>177</sup> Malcolm Shifrin's website recounts the history of Victorian Turkish baths and refers to earlier beliefs on their necessity for women. In "Attitudes to privacy, nudity, and exercise", he cites Joseph Constantine who reports: "Ladies need these baths even more than gentlemen, and are more benefited by them, owing to their being more confined to the house and not getting so much exercise in the open air as men do" (*Victorian Turkish Bath*. Web. 18 Jun. 2013).

Northumberland Turkish bath was opened six months before Radford's visit in May 1885, so it must indeed have seemed regal in comparison with the one at Euston, which had already been open for nearly ten years.

As the following images show, the materials and finishing used in the decoration of the Northumberland Turkish bath would have been considered very regal and modern in Victorian times. The pictures on the right and left provide views of the women's entrance and windows, while the middle photograph is of the cooling room which appears to contain considerably luxury facilities and equipment for relaxation, including sofas and tea tables. Although the view of the cooling-room is taken from the men's section, it would not have differed greatly from the women's cooling-room, apart from being smaller in size.

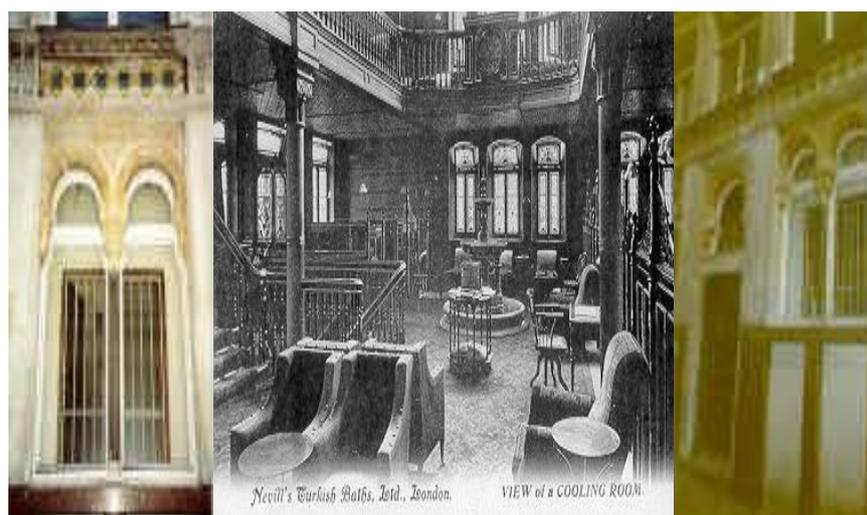


Figure 20: Views of women's entrance and men's cooling room at Nevill's Turkish baths in Northumberland Avenue (*Victorian Turkish Bath*. Web. 18 June 2013).

The fact that Radford's diary entries do not hint at any physical attraction towards her women friends could be due to the prevailing norms which regarded sexuality as a taboo topic for women.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, the lack of scholarship on Victorian Turkish baths

<sup>178</sup> Hiding homoerotic desires was very common among Victorian women even those whose lesbianism is out of the question for many contemporary scholars. In Levy's case, for instance, Goody argues: "Levy in no sense explicitly articulated or celebrated lesbian desire" (Goody, 2006: 464).

and homosexuality between women bathers may be due to the fact that erotic desires between women were not only unacceptable to Victorians, but not even acknowledged. For example, Marcus's argument, which is addressed in Chapter One, shows that women kissing each other was perceived as "a gesture that could be a routine social greeting or provide intense enjoyment" (Marcus, 2007: 57). In proposing potential homosexuality among women in Turkish baths, my suggestion takes as its cue studies by both Victorian theorists and contemporary critics who address homosexuality as a potentially common practice in Turkish baths. For example, Ellis remarks:

[H]omosexuality is specially fostered by those employments which keep women in constant association [...] without the company of men. [...] Laycock, many years ago, noted the prevalence of manifestations of this kind, which he regarded as hysterical, among seamstresses, lace-makers, etc., confined for long hours in close contact with one another in heated rooms. (Ellis, 1901: 127)

While Ellis does not explicitly acknowledge the role of Turkish baths in his case studies, the features of the places he offers are similar to the atmosphere of the Turkish bath where women, as will be shown in the images below, remain in proximity in heated rooms. It is therefore plausible to consider Turkish baths as a place where homosexuality may have taken place. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, Ellis's theories are representative of the cultural prejudice against same-sex desires and references to his study are used only to give an overview of the Victorian conventional perception of homosexual practices.

Contemporary scholars propose Turkish baths as places where women can escape their conventional role, and therefore also with the potential to cross the boundaries of conventional sexuality. Efterpi Mitsi, for example, examines the ways in which nineteenth-century women considered Turkish baths as "one of the public spheres" where they could "escape from domesticity and transgress gender restrictions" (Mitsi, 2008: 48). Mitsi adds: "By transferring a private act, like washing, to the public sphere, cleanliness

transforms to sexual self-expression, and therefore leads, according to many travellers, to physical and mental degeneration” (Mitsi, 2008: 58-59). Mitsi refers to nineteenth-century travellers’ views that such “sexual self-expression” led to “physical and mental degeneration”, which, at the time, could have involved homosexuality. In addition, Mitsi notes that the bodies of Victorian women “whether dressed or undressed, also provoked curiosity and scrutiny, as the bathers, the objects of the travellers’ study, desire, or even disgust, returned the gaze” (Mitsi, 2008: 53). Although Mitsi is commenting on the experience of Western and English women travellers and their perception of Turkish Baths and women bathers in the Orient, her observation is applicable in Radford’s case because Radford’s diary records her admiration of women’s beauty even when they were fully dressed in public places. Thus, gazing at partially-naked women would be even more inspiring for Radford. In her diary Radford mentions: “Mrs. Cuffe is very beautiful. Her husband is not” (Radford Diary, 23 January 1885). Contrary to her straightforward perception of men, Radford is explicit about her appreciation of women’s beauty. In another entry, the diary records: “I met a certain Lady Pilkington there, she & her name are very suitable for a ‘sketch’” (Radford Diary, 25 March 1885). This diary entry is reminiscent of the concept of the gaze and how it was expected to be exclusive to male art.<sup>179</sup> By adopting the role of the male artist, who usually draws/sketches his female lover, Radford may hint at her own homoerotic desire.

The theory of gazing may be further emphasised by the fact that baths were the only places where women could meet each other without the long cumbersome dresses commonly worn during the century. C. Willett Cunnington observes: “the high neck for dinner wear, the minimum display of physical charms until the close of the decade, and the preference for heavy materials, all were in keeping with the spirit of the period. The

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<sup>179</sup> See Chapter Four.

principle was strict, the beauty should make no passionate appeal” (Cunnington, 1937: 309). The restricting nature of the heavy clothing imposed on women may well have impacted on women’s choice to visit the baths in the company of their women friends in order to enjoy discovering the usually covered parts of their bodies. Besides, as my analysis of the following novels will demonstrate, bathing with other women allowed them the freedom to discuss traditionally unacceptable topics. The freedom of the gaze and conversations may be linked to Radford’s comments on Turkish baths which she rarely visits without at least one or two of her close women friends.

Studies of women’s customs in Turkish baths are contradictory and do not always refer to the same costumes worn by men and women. Malcolm Shifrin observes that women were naked apart from loosely wrapped towels, and “many women probably did swim naked in the plunge pools, just as the men did”.<sup>180</sup> However, other studies question Shifrin’s claim, rendering it less likely to be the complete truth. Cunnington’s study of women’s dress during the 1880s, when Radford visited Turkish baths with her friends, shows that women’s bathing costumes were a “belted tunic and drawers loose below the knee; no sleeve but an epaulette” (Cunnington, 1937: 326). The following two illustrations provide sketches of women’s dress in Victorian baths. While the first one provides an illustration of a Turkish bath for women in Melbourne, Australia, it offers a similar image to the manner in which women dressed in London’s Turkish baths. Both images show women half naked with towels partially wrapped around them either relaxing or having a chat with other bathers.

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<sup>180</sup> See Shifrin’s “Attitudes to Privacy, Nudity, and Exercise.” (*Victorian Turkish Bath*. Web. 18 Jun. 2013).

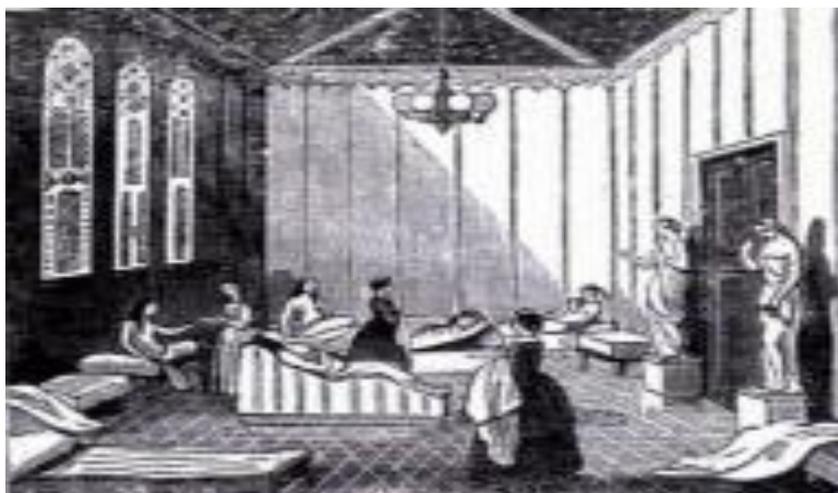


Figure 21: The image is an illustration of the Turkish bath Tepidarium in Melbourne, Australia 1862. It “is intended to show potential bathers that the ambience within is relaxed, the women apparently without clothes and loosely wrapped in towels” (*Victorian Turkish Bath*. Web. 14 Jun. 2013).



Figure 22: “Women’s day in the hot room”, York Hall, London 1991. The photograph was taken in a Victorian Turkish Bath at the end of the Twentieth century. “The same women have been meeting in the same Turkish baths for years; and though they claim that they wouldn’t recognize each other with their clothes on, they know all the ins and outs of each others lives... ‘You bare your body and you bare your soul down here’” (*Victorian Turkish Bath*. Web. 14 Jun. 2013).

In *The Mystery of a Turkish Bath* (1888), Rita<sup>181</sup> gives a detailed description of Mrs. Jefferson’s dressing in a hotel’s Turkish bath: “The shape was always the same-viz.,

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<sup>181</sup> Eliza Margaret Jane Humphreys; initially wrote under the pseudonym Rita (1850-1938) was a Scottish novelist. Brian Pearce points out: “As a writer, Rita greatly admired Ouida” and had “much in common with” her. Like Ouida, Rita was an antifeminist and criticised New Women novelists. (Pearce, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Web. 17 January 2015). Rita’s novel, *The Mystery of a Turkish Bath*, is centered on Mrs. Ray Jefferson, an American married woman, and the “mystery” beautiful woman, whom she meets in a hotel’s Turkish bath. Later in the novel, the hotel’s visitors are surprised to know that this woman is Princess Zairoff, a woman with abnormal powers which finally lead to her death.

short in the skirt, low in the neck, and bare as to sleeves. The material was generally pink cotton, or white with a red border” (*M.T.B* 4). Although Rita’s description is a fictional one, it reflects on the images above; either a loose gown with a towel turban or a large towel wrapped loosely around the body. As previously noted, Victorian novels represent Turkish baths as places where women could escape patriarchal conditions, freely discuss taboo topics, and exchange their opinions on social and religious activities. In Rita’s novel, the Turkish bath provides an example of a place where women, who come from different cultures, discuss their different thoughts. For example, Princess Zairoff shocks the women in the bath’s rooms by her atheist views: ““The history of religion is a very curious history,’ said the stranger in her low clear tones. ‘Looked at dispassionately, it has done very little for mankind in general” (*M.T.B* 11). Despite her attack on religion, the princess was fully aware of the prevailing conditions: “In the world, and in society, religion is a tabooed subject – it is only kept for Sundays and for the churches” (*M.T.B* 14). Rita’s portrayal of the princess’s liberal political and atheist views, which confront conventional religion confirms the fact that the Turkish bath forms an escape for many women from the confines of religious conventions which did not allow them the same freedom men had.<sup>182</sup> To the women in the bath, the princess’s views were as strange as her skin colour, a fact which led her old lover, Colonel Estcourt, to confess: “it seemed strange to see you here, treading the narrow path of English conventionalism” (*M.T.B* 41).

A further intriguing aspect in the novel is Mrs. Jefferson’s admiration of the princess’s views: “I’ve quite enjoyed this morning, I assure you. You’ve diverted my thoughts from my own ailments, and stimulated my digestion” (*M.T.B* 31). In fact, Mrs

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<sup>182</sup> Relating the novel to Radford’s experience of Turkish bath, reminds us of one of the letters she sent to Ernest expressing her excitement on the conversation she had with a group of women in the Turkish bath: “I am in the Cooling Room of the bath [...] I feel so fresh & nice after the heat & water & other pleasant-senses. [...] There are two beautiful people here, & they chatter incessantly, & tell me many interesting things about themselves” (Add MS 89029/.27, Dollie Maitland Radford to Ernest Radford, 1883).

Jefferson's admiration of the princess was not merely because of her advanced views; but arguably a physical attraction as well. From the time they met, Mrs. Jefferson continues to describe the princess's beauty, and later in the novel she tells Colonel: "I'm only a woman, and yet if it's possible to fall in love with one of my own sex, I've done it. She's perfectly charmed me. I can't get her out of my head for a single moment. It's not only her wonderful beauty, but her mind" (*M.T.B* 90). Despite being a married woman, Mrs. Jefferson's words obviously hint at her attraction to the princess, a fact which I will recall in my reading of the following short story. Unlike Mrs. Masterman, who conveys her dislike of the princess, Mrs. Jefferson's friendship and admiration of the princess finally lead her to experience a frightful night. In doing so, it is possible to argue that Rita, once more, endorses her antifeminist views and warns women against their sexual and intellectual passion.

Women's sexuality in the context of Victorian Turkish baths is also evident in Katherine Mansfield's<sup>183</sup> short story *Bains Turcs* (1913) which juxtaposes conventional marriage and "street women",<sup>184</sup> in other words, prostitutes: "Two tall blonde women in red and white check gowns came in and took the chairs opposite mine. One of them carried a box of mandarins wrapped in silver paper and the other a manicure set" (*B.T* 2). In her portrayal of the narrator, who is a married woman, and two prostitutes together in the same room Mansfield reminds us of Radford's "Your Gift" and *The Ransom*. Also, the

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<sup>183</sup> Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp (1888-1923), who wrote as Katherine Mansfield, was born and raised in New Zealand, but later moved to London with her family and Joined Queen's College. Gillian Boddy argues that Mansfield gained an "international reputation as one of the world's best-known short story writers" (Boddy, 1988: 153). Also, Boddy argues that many of Mansfield's stories focus on "[h]er ambivalence about her own sexuality and women's traditional child-bearing role was also explored on them" (Boddy, 1988: 156). This "ambivalence" is also evident in *Bains Turcs* as the narrator shows her dislike of conventional married women, while simultaneously describing the possibly lesbian women as "street women".

<sup>184</sup> The two women are identified by one of the married women in the bath as "not respectable women—you can tell at a glance. At least I can, any married woman can. They're nothing but a couple of street women" (*B.T* 3).

“mandarins”, which may be a metaphor for lust,<sup>185</sup> are only eaten by these two women, suggesting that married women cannot enjoy sexual pleasure. Despite being married, the narrator is later influenced by the prostitutes’ conversation in which they describe married women bathers as “hideous”. Similarly, at the end of the story the married woman points out: “I looked round at the other women. Yes, they were hideous, lying back, red and moist, with dull eyes and lank hair, the only little energy they had vented in shocked prudery at the behaviour of the two blondes” (B.T 3). Gillian Boddy notes that many of Mansfield’s stories “show the unmistakable influence of Oscar Wilde in their subject matter, exotic mood of ornate style” (Boddy, 1988: 154). Wilde’s influence on Mansfield and her opposition to conventional marriage may be read as a context for the story in which Mansfield not only criticises conservative views disapproval of women’s sexual freedom, but also praises it as opposed to conventional marriage.

Like women bathers in Victorian novels, contemporary writers like Nene Adams, a lesbian American writer, offer even a more radical representation of women bathers. Despite the time gap between the writers addressed in this section, the Victorian Turkish bath appears to be an interesting setting for Adams to express her lesbian thoughts from a twenty-first century point of view. In *The Madonna of the Sorrows* (2005), Adams introduces women in the Victorian Turkish bath as “Wrapped in a towel that covered her from armpits to ankles” (M.O.S 6). In doing so, both Victorian and contemporary fictional examples provide similar presentations of women’s clothing in Turkish baths. However, unlike Rita’s novel, lesbianism in Adams’s novel is explicit in the context of the bath where Rhiannon thinks: “*It’s not really a surprise that I haven’t noticed her. When Lina and I are here together, we rarely have our attention focused on anyone other than ourselves*” (M.O.S 8). Rhiannon’s complete attention to her female lover, which takes

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<sup>185</sup> See Chapter Two for further discussion on the association between fruits and sexual pleasure; e.g. Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”.

place in the heart of a Victorian Turkish bath, may be read in relation to how some modern scholars, including Oram and Turnbull, approach intimate female friendship as an archetype of lesbianism. This approach is further emphasised through the description of the cooling room: “Sunlight slanted down through the dome in a blazing riot of colours, predominantly scarlet and yellow and an emerald green that reminded Rhiannon of Lina’s eyes. A faience-tiled fountain splashed in the centre of the room. [...] The air smelled strongly of lemons and mint and sugar” (*M.O.S* 6-7). In her association of the green colour with her lover’s eyes Rhiannon implies that the atmosphere of the Turkish bath continues to be a reminder of her lesbian identity.

## **Part Two: Unconventional Sexuality in Radford’s Poetry**

### **(Anticipating) Free Love as Opposed to Conventional**

#### **Marriage**

This section reveals the ways in which Radford’s possible bisexuality and her friendship with homosexual men and women might have influenced her portrayal of the heroine in “A Modern Polypheme” (1891), a poem which obviously challenges prevailing norms of conventional heterosexuality:

A FLASH of colour through the trees,  
A step upon the trembling plank,  
A white sail flapping in the breeze,  
And then a maiden leaves the bank.

Each day I watch her, as she guides  
Her little boat with dexterous hand,  
And like a river goddess rides  
In gracious triumph through the land.

I watch her as she lightly tacks,  
And marvel at the art which steers  
Her boat into the quiet “backs,”  
And sorrow when it disappears.

Who, in the summer evening, knows

What gentle feelings fill her breast,  
Or by what bower the water flows  
Which bears her dingy to its rest?

Perchance a lover, dark and tall,  
Awaits her in some flowery nook,  
And gazing at her gathers all  
Her thoughts, as from an open book.

Perchance - I have not learnt her name,  
I know not where her home may be,  
For one brief space alone I claim  
Her beauty, as she passes me.

For then the Heaven-winged dreams,  
which smile  
And fade in youth's first golden hour,  
Come back and soothe my soul awhile  
As the sweet perfume of a flower.

And so I watch for her nor care  
Where Acis tarries down the stream-  
Enough to see her, I forswear  
Thy black emotions, Polypheme!

(“A Modern Polypheme”)

Like many of Radford's poems, which are discussed in the previous chapters, the gender of the speaker in “A Modern Polypheme” is unspecified. However, Richardson assumes that the speaker is a female and claims that she “compares herself to the cyclops Polypheme” (Richardson, 2000: 112). Based on Greek superstition and methodology, Cyclops Polypheme was a violent jealous “gigantic giant who fed on human flesh” (Bonnerjea, 1927: 179). Due to his jealousy and his love for Galatea, Polypheme killed Acis, “a Sicilian shepherd loved by the Galatea” and later his blood “was changed into a river which bears the same name” (Bonnerjea, 1927: 7). I suggest that the ungendered speaker is used by Radford to challenge our fixed assumptions of the hetero/homo sexual relationships implied in the poem which may be read at two levels. Based on the Greek myth, the “I” addresses a male lover who at the end of the poem affirms his love and rejects Polypheme's “black emotions” and jealousy. However, if the speaker is a female,

then homoerotic desires between the two women becomes a plausible theme, particularly in the final stanza in which it is sufficient for the speaker “to watch for her nor care/ Where Acis carries down the stream”. Thus, the speaker could be suggesting that intimate love between women leaves behind the sexual conflict and violence associated with conventional heterosexual love.

By adopting a superstitious myth in “A Modern Polypheme” to criticise prevailing sexual roles, Radford reminds us of Mary Elizabeth Coleridge’s poem “The Witch” in which heterosexual marriage and domestic norms are challenged through Coleridge’s alienation of her characters.<sup>186</sup> It is also possible that Radford’s use of superstition is a way by which she would have intended to escape criticism by her contemporary reviewers. The images she creates challenge the bloody events of the original story and consequently eschew men’s violence. In doing so, Radford manipulates legendary material to serve freethinking and feminist ends. She turns the “river” of Acis’s blood into a peaceful place where the maiden “like a river goddess rides/ In gracious triumph through the land”. It is also possible that the maiden, who is riding her boat, is inspired by Alfred Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” (1832), where a lady of the island of Shalott is imprisoned in a tower and is unable to access the outside world except through her mirror. Finally, the lady lies down in a boat where she writes her name and the downstream takes her dead body to Camelot. However, unlike Tennyson’s heroine who “loosed the chain, and down she lay;/ The broad stream bore her far away/ The Lady of Shalott” (“The Lady of Shalott” IV. 16-18), Radford’s maiden “guides/ Her little boat with dexterous hand”. The boat in “The Lady of Shalott” leads to the lady’s death, whereas in Radford’s poem the boat gives a sense of freedom and the “dexterous hand” makes the woman more capable. Radford refutes Tennyson’s assumptions about women dying for love, for her heroine as the title of the poem suggests, is “modern”, strong, able to use her own power, and conflicts with

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<sup>186</sup> See Chapter Three.

his representations of female passivity and dependence on men. As discussed in previous chapters, this reversal of gender roles is common in Radford's poems and is usually used to challenge existing expectations of women's capabilities.

Despite the difference in determination, Radford's maiden shares with the lady of Shalott a number of characteristics. The identity of both maidens remains unknown; in Tennyson's poem, no one seems to know the lady: "Or is she known in all the land/ The lady of Shalott?" ("The Lady of Shalott" I. 26-27). As Edgar F. Shannon observes, the lady "has no societal being, and her identity remains problematic, not only to others but to herself" (Shannon, 1981: 210). This absence of "societal being" is also evident in Radford's poem where the speaker asserts: "I have not learnt her name,/ I know not where her home may be". The unknown identity of the lady in Tennyson's poem is part of her conflict as an artist, whose relationship with real life as literary commentators have hitherto explored, is a main concern in the poem. Carl Plasa argues that "The Lady of Shalott" is "a poem centrally concerned with the question of the relation between 'art' and 'life'" (Plasa, 1992: 247). In "The Lady of Shalott", art is the reason behind the heroine's isolation in the tower; similarly, despite being an expert in steering a boat, "art" in Radford's poem "steers [the maiden's] boat into the quiet 'backs'", which may be a metaphor for the private sphere where women had no active roles and were expected to stay at the "backs". In offering such representation, Radford may have aimed to show how challenging it was for strong ambitious women to achieve their dreams and gain their rights.

However, Radford's choice to set the maiden in an open place rather than an isolated one contrasts with Tennyson's portrayal of isolation as part of the lady's being. From the very beginning, the lady of Shalott is aware that she is not permitted to look from the window: "A curse is on her if she stay/ To look down to Camelot" ("The Lady of Shalott" II. 4-5). This curse will take force should the lady leave the tower, the private

domestic place where society expected her to be. In his reading of the lady's isolation, Joseph Chadwick argues:

The cultivated barley fields and the busy road and river surrounding the island, as well as the reapers who hear the Lady's song and the various social types that go by in her mirror, define Shalott and the femininity it "imbowers" as unmoving, unchanging, cut off from all social activity. (Chadwick, 1986: 17)

The "unmoving, unchanging" nature of the tower where the lady of Shalott lies implies that if women were artists, they would only manage the art of the private sphere; that is the art of domesticity. This view is confronted by Radford's portrayal of the maiden who is introduced with nature images of "the trees" and "the bank". Radford suggests that female art should not be limited to household duties, but could also find a place outside the private sphere.

In addition to her social isolation, the lady of Shalott "hath no loyal knight" ("The Lady of Shalott" II. 26) and even "when the moon was overhead,/ Came two young lovers lately wed", she said: "I am half sick of shadows" ("The Lady of Shalott" II. 33-35). In contrast to Tennyson's heroine, who has no lover, the lover of Radford's maiden "[a]waits her in some flowery nook,/ And gazing at her". This verse suggests that unlike the lady of Shalott, who uses her mirror to gaze at herself, Radford's maiden is sexually active and the subject of her lover's gaze. At the same time, the fact that the maiden is free to meet her lover outside the confines of the domestic realm may be read as a call for free love away from the conventions of matrimony. This conclusion works as a plausible answer to Richardson who ends her reading of this poem by asking "Might this 'tender and submissive' poetess – as *The Bookman* reviewer calls her – be advocating free love?" (Richardson, 2000: 112). Building on Richardson's argument, my analysis suggests Radford's engagement with the free love theme, for, as discussed in Chapter One, Radford's acquaintance with Allen makes her awareness of *The Woman Who Did* and Herminia's free love union possible. Also, Chapter Five refers to an entry in Radford's

diary which records her admiration of Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm*, in which Lyndall finally refuses to marry the father of her child. In addition to these two elements, Radford was a close friend of Marx and aware of her free love with Aveling. Despite the fact that Marx's relationship with Aveling ended tragically, Radford portrays a positive image of the free love theme in her poem. Thus, Radford chooses to challenge Victorian norms of heterosexual love rather than conforming to them, both in suggesting the theme of free love and the possibility of homoerotic desire through the use of the ungendered speaker.

### **The Masked Lover and Potential Homosexuality in Radford's**

#### **Poems**

As discussed in Part One, Marx was not the only friend whom Radford was influenced by, but she was also a friend of many homosexual men and women. Despite the fact that these friendships were celebrated in public, it would have been impossible for Victorian women to explicitly express their homoerotic desire. Therefore, women poets tended to mask the gender of their speakers in order to complicate a fixed heterosexual reading of their poems. Given Radford's biographical background in Part One and the unspecified gender strategy used by her contemporary women poets, I propose the possibility of Radford's depiction of homosexual themes in many of her poems, including "My Sweetheart" (1891):

MY sweetheart lays her hand in mine  
When she would have me glad,  
She sings and sings, she never knows  
What music makes me sad.

My sweetheart holds my heart to hers  
When she would have me rest,  
She never hears the heavy sigh  
Which breaks within my breast.

Her sweet lips press my tired lids

When she would have me sleep;  
Alas, they have no power to stay  
The burning tears I weep.

(“My Sweetheart”)

One way of reading the poem is as conforming to heterosexual norms, that is, as Harrington suggests, a male speaker addressing his female lover: “‘My Sweetheart’ depicts a lover who cannot hear his beloved’s songs in the way that she wants him to, displaying an anxiety about poetic reception and the failure of communication” (Harrington, 2014: 164). While Harrington considers studies which locate songs and music as signifiers of physical intimacy and erotic feelings,<sup>187</sup> she disregards any sexual implications in the poem and does not acknowledge the possibility of a female speaker expressing her feelings towards a female friend/lover. Homosexual identity was a core issue of the New Woman’s movement, and homosexual relationships were portrayed in literary texts by female and male writers. Ledger argues: “A good number of New Woman novels feature same-sex relationships between women” (Ledger, 1997: 124). Given Radford’s evident support of the New Woman which is discussed in previous chapters and even acknowledged by Richardson and Harrington, Radford’s portrayal of such desire is imaginable.

Although the poem is distinguished by its simple language and short lyrics, this strategy, as Armstrong’s argument has shown, generally serves radical rather than conventional ends.<sup>188</sup> Harrington herself considers Radford’s choice of the short song genre as a way by which she looks for “something that will be truly new, if always still

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<sup>187</sup> Harrington refers to Kramer’s argument that: “The most immediate impact of song is to convert this dissociated speech-image into an occasion of expressive intimacy. [...] song reconnects the impulse to speak with its basis in physical sensation and the felt continuity of the ego” (Kramer in Harrington, 2014: 165). However, Harrington claims: “Dollie Radford questions the idea that poems constructed as songs can establish intimacy” (Harrington, 2014: 140).

<sup>188</sup> See Chapter Two.

incomplete. To find that new, she avers, one must have the capacity to reject old fantasies and to remain open and attentive” (Harrington, 2014: 141). I add to Harrington’s statement that by refusing to follow traditional forms, Radford simultaneously rejects the conventional themes represented in these forms. Thus, her choice of language and expressions, such as “lays her hand in mine” rather than simply “holds my hand”, may be read as a metaphor for the speaker’s homoerotic desire. Also, as I briefly noted in Part One, the word “hand” is usually addressed by Radford in the context of possible homosexuality. This very fact is endorsed by Michael Field’s use of the woman’s hand in “The Sleeping Venus” to fulfil her sexual desire: “Her hand the thigh’s tense surface leaves,/ Falling inward”.<sup>189</sup> Although in Michael Field’s poem the hand is used for masturbation and sexuality is more explicit than in Radford’s poem, Ehnenn points out that Michael Field’s poem “represents autoerotic and homoerotic possibility for all women” (Ehnenn, 2005: 123). Given Michael Field’s lesbian identity and Radford’s friendship with them and her awareness of their work, it is possible to argue that Radford’s choice of the hand similarly hints at the homoerotic bond between the two female lovers, a fact which is even more evident in the upcoming poems.

The speaker’s lesbian desire may be further implied in the line which demonstrates that the lover “never hears the heavy sigh/ Which breaks within my breast”, suggesting her lack of knowledge and inability to articulate her erotic desire to her female partner. Oram and Turnbull argue: “Names were not named and the evidence that exists for the nineteenth century suggests the consideration of lesbian activities was largely absent from the criminal law” (Oram and Turnbull, 2001: 156). Although, as will be discussed later, this concept of naming is more evident in Radford’s poem “At Last”, it is worth noting that this prevailing lack of awareness of lesbianism as a sexual identity may be a reason for Radford’s association between homoerotic desire and the pain embodied in “the heavy

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<sup>189</sup> See Chapter Four.

sigh” and the “burning tears”. Jennings’s argument shows how women used the language of pain “to articulate erotic bonds which women were otherwise unable to express” (Jennings, 2007: 55). This association continues to appear in Radford’s poems which address the theme of homosexuality.

“My Friend” (1891) is another poem in which Radford possibly engages with the theme of passionate female friendship:

THE tender touch of a gentle hand  
To-night on my aching brow,  
The sound of a loving low-tuned voice,  
How pleasant they would send the shadows  
away  
Which hang so closely around me to-day.

And, sitting idly, I close my eyes  
And dream how perhaps one day,  
In my lonely hours, my long-sought friend  
Will come to my home and say:  
“Bring all your tired thoughts to me,  
dear, and rest,  
No shadow will touch you here on my  
breast.”

I shall not tell her, but she will know;  
My rest will be very sweet,  
And all the shadow and gloom will go,  
Caught up in the toiling street;  
And I shall thank her and clasp her hand,  
And she will smile and understand.

And if on the morrow we chance to meet  
With others, her face will be  
Happy and bright for them all, and just  
A little kinder for me,  
And once I shall look in her eyes, and so,  
Learn something there no other may  
know.

(“My Friend”)

As in “My Sweetheart”, the speaker is ungendered, allowing thereby more than one interpretation. If the speaker is male addressing his female friend, their relationship refuses to conform to conventional marriage, for the female remains a friend rather than a

wife. Also, she has the power of enabling her male partner to rest, and playing the role of the protector as opposed to the existing norms of men as guardians to women: “No shadow will touch you here in my breast”. Thus, the poem embraces a similar message to the one implied in “A Dream of ‘Dreams’ to *Olive Schreiner*” in which women’s emancipation, as in Schreiner’s *Dreams*, is gained only when the role of the male watcher/protector “is all done”.<sup>190</sup> On the other hand, the male speaker is “lonely” in his “home”, a characteristic which is usually associated with the passive role of the wife.<sup>191</sup> This meaning is further implied in the fact that the female friend is the one who takes “the shadow and gloom” out “in the toiling street”, suggesting her engagement in the public sphere. In its representation of an active and strong female character, the poem traces other poems in *A Light Load* in their support of the New Woman.

A further reading applies if the speaker is assumed to be female expressing her gratitude and affection towards her female friend. This claim takes as its clue the fact that, as Jennings points out, “women frequently turned to each other for emotional support and understanding” (Jennings, 2007: 60). This need “for emotional support” is obvious from the very beginning of the poem, and may even indicate a homosexual relationship between the two friends. Radford’s choice of the “gentle hand” in this context is reminiscent of the “hand” in “My Sweetheart” along with the poem in Radford’s diary on female friendship. The “tender touch” of this “hand” eases the pain of the speaker’s “aching brow”, which may be read as a metaphor for “[t]he language of pain or illness” which, as Jennings argues, “was sometimes employed to articulate erotic bonds which women were otherwise unable to express” (Jennings, 2007: 55). This homoerotic bond is also implied in the friend’s assertion: “No shadow will touch you here on my breast”, suggesting that the two friends

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<sup>190</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>191</sup> See Chapter Three in which Radford’s poem “A Bride” offers a contrary representation and portrays the wife as “lonely” in “Love’s country”.

are physically close. In addition, this line signifies female solidarity, a theme which is adopted in many of Radford's poems, including "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town".

As in "My Sweetheart", the speaker "shall not tell her" friend about her desire and the delight of being "on [her] breast", reminding us of how lesbianism was an unspeakable topic in Victorian England. However, unlike the lover who "never hears the heavy sigh" in "My Sweetheart", the friend in this poem "will know;/ My rest will be very sweet". In doing so, Radford may have intended to shed light on the strong bond between female friends and their responsiveness to each other's desire, for only when the lover is identified in the title of the poem as "My Friend", she becomes aware of her friend's homoerotic desire. Reading the poem in view of Radford's life makes it possible to argue that Marx is the implied friend. As discussed in Part One, Marx was one of Radford's close friends who accompanied her to Turkish baths, a place where women had the potential to reveal their sexual attraction to each other. The fact that Marx played a major role in introducing Radford to literary circles as well as teaching her the German language may also be read in relation to the speaker's assertion in Radford's poem that her friend is a person from whom she may "[l]earn something there no other may know". In doing so, Radford emphasises the friend's intellectual and sexual role in the speaker's life.

The themes of passionate friendship and homosexual desire continue to appear in Radford's later volumes. However, unlike "My Sweetheart" and "My Friend", the following poems reflect on Radford's poetical maturation, for the poems turn from the short songs in *A Light Load* into longer more ambiguous poems. Furthermore, as noted in previous chapters, the image of death becomes predominant in her later volumes. For example, "To A Stranger" (1895) is a poem in which the speaker expresses her/his consolation for the loss of a dear person whose "strangeness", as the title suggests, may be a result of her/his homosexual identity.

LAST night I lay and dreamed of you,  
Through all the wind and rain,  
So close a part I seemed of you,  
I could not wake again;  
Sunk in your spirit, deep, so deep,  
In the blue caverns of my sleep.

Your face seemed full of love for me,  
You knew my heart's desire,  
Vague and unquiet as the sea,  
For which I toil and tire

With prayer and pilgrimage and tears,  
Through all the rolling of the years.

You welcomed me with gentle hands,  
As one expected long,  
The earth was made of heavenly lands,  
And life an angel-song,  
Fervent and full from rise to fall,  
With God's great music through it all.

How came it to be you I sought,  
In the wide realm of sleep?  
Remote from all my waking thought,  
As the two ways we keep  
Are distant, with dark growths between,  
Making each day a surer screen.

And now you draw me with a spell  
I have no power to break,  
My lonely heart alone knows well  
How it much ache and ache:  
I pray you do not pass to-day,  
Till I have dreamed my dream away!

(“To a Stranger”)

It is possible that the “stranger” is an unknown individual the speaker might have seen in the street or not even met yet. However, the poem reads like those of a lover. Though not explicit, the addressed “stranger” may also be a metaphor for the alienation suffered by figures, such as Marx or Levy, for both were considered radical and nonconforming to Victorian norms (Marx for her choice to live in a free love relationship, and Levy for her Jewish and ambiguous sexual identity). Although the ungendered speaker challenges our assumption of a certain interpretation, Radford's use of images and metaphors, which are similarly used by other lesbian Victorian poets, makes it more plausible to argue that the

speaker is a female. She makes it clear that the lover is aware of her “heart’s desire” which may be interpreted as the homosexual desire she feels. As shown in Chapter Three, Baker reads Mary Elizabeth Coleridge’s “The Witch”, in which women similarly “plead for their heart’s desire”, as a poem which explores intimate female friendship as an alternative to “domestic life”. Thus, the “vagueness” and ambiguity of the speaker’s desire may arise from the fact that it was taboo for Victorian women to feel or practise such relationships. Despite the social conventions, in “To A Stranger”, the speaker’s love is still “unquiet as the sea”, which suggests that her desire, whether intellectual or sexual, is revolutionary and refuses to submit to social norms. Radford’s portrayal of the sea image might have been influenced by her own feelings which are expressed in one of her letters to her husband: “I love the sea, as you know, but it always seems a very unsafe thing to trust to for so long” (Add MS 89029/1/29, Dollie Radford to Ernest Radford, 18 September 1894). Both, the poem and the letter represent sea as an “unsafe” place. At the same time, Radford’s use of language is similar to that in Levy’s “Xantippe” who, before her marriage, had “vague desires” which distinguish her from other maidens. Literary commentators, including Olverson, argue that as a lesbian, Levy’s primary message in “Xantippe” is to warn young women of marriage and encourage them to build female communities (Olverson, 2010: 121). Thus, Xantippe’s “vague desires” may also be read as a metaphor for same-sex desire.

The speaker’s “heart’s desire” is associated with “pilgrimage” and suffering, the same case when the theme of homosexuality is clearly addressed in “At Last” which I will discuss later. This sense of journey and restless search is also reminiscent of Radford’s “A Wanderer” and Coleridge’s “The Witch” whose speakers are drained pilgrims looking for warmth and nurturing. As shown in Chapter Three, the speakers of both poems revolt against the domestic ideals which are embodied in the metaphor of the “home”/ “hearth”. Accordingly, the fact that the speaker in “To A Stranger” “toil[s] and tire[s]/ With prayer

and pilgrimage and tears” for the sake of her “heart’s desire” may be read within a homosexual context; in other words, the speaker’s search for fulfilment and recognition of her lesbian identity which fails to find a place and is only welcomed by her lover: “You welcomed me with gentle hands/ As one expected long”. As we shall see, the phrase “gentle hands”, which is also used in “My Sweetheart” and “My Friend”, is similarly represented by Levy in the context of dreams to possibly express same-sex desire. In Radford’s poem, the lover’s early death thwarts the speaker’s expectation of a long-term relationship. This unexpected death may form a reference to the suicide of Levy or Marx. As Black’s letter shows in Chapter Four, Levy’s death “should grieve Dollie”, as should Marx’s death.

The grief Radford would have felt may have influenced the sorrowful language used in the poem. As in the poem in Radford’s diary in which the dead friend is remembered with tears: “Lost friend, lost friend! These tears, these tears”, the speaker’s “lonely heart” in “To A Stranger” “knows well/ How it much ache and ache”. In both poems, the death of the friend/lover is a source of pain. In addition, in the first poem the speaker is left with the lost friend’s memory which is “warmer than the hand you gave”, indicating the strength of bond between female friends whose relationship continues even after death. Likewise, throughout “To A Stranger” the lover is addressed through the speaker’s dream. On the one hand, the use of the dream demonstrates that the friend/lover continues to occupy the speaker’s thoughts, despite the fact that “the two ways we keep/ Are distant, with dark growth between”. From a biographical point of view, this difference may be due to the fact that Radford was apparently committed to domestic ideals by being a wife and a mother, while both Levy and Marx died unmarried.

On the other hand, Radford’s choice of the dream may be a way of distancing the theme of homoerotic desire from the real world or even to avoid any biographical reading of the poem. In one of her diary entries, which are written in a verse form, Radford writes:

“Only my soul enjoys the hour/ The dreams – my pen can never speak” (Radford Diary, 16 July 1883). On the one hand, the verse suggests Radford’s awareness of the prevailing limitations surrounding women writers who were not expected to hold a pen except to write about domesticity and conventional models of femininity. On the other hand, Radford’s inability to articulate her “dreams” may imply that these “dreams” are one of the Victorian taboos, which would involve homosexuality. Therefore, apart from the first few lines in “To a Stranger”, which explain the pre-dream phase, the reader is taken into the speaker’s dream in a form which resembles the interior monologue. In doing so, Radford shares with Levy her possible representation of same-sex desire in “Love, Dreams, and Death”, a sequence in *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verses*. Throughout the sequence, the speaker addresses a lost person, occasionally referred to as a friend, in her dreams. Goody observes:

Poems like “The Dream,” “Borderland,” and “In the Night” evoke liminal states inhabited by a ghostly beloved, a “she” who persists as a fragrant memory of a consummation that is also a moment of death and loss. Such poems exemplify how the presence of death necessarily accompanies the undermining of oppositions and blurring of boundaries that Levy’s poems of same-sex desire explore, emphasizing how such desire exceeds the limits of articulation. (Goody, 2006: 465).

Goody’s argument supports my previous claim of Radford’s possible intention to distance homoerotic desire from reality; however, Goody shows that representing such desires in association with dreams and death is not merely for the purpose of escape. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that Radford follows Levy’s example in linking the theme of homoerotic desire with dreams in order to reveal that “such desire exceeds the limits of articulation”, for “To A Stranger” offers a very similar context to Levy’s “The Dream”.

Like Radford’s poem, Levy’s opens with a dream about a dead lover:

A FAIR dream to my chamber flew:  
Such a crowd of folk that stirred,

Jested, fluttered; only you,  
You alone of all that band,  
Calm and silent, spake no word.  
Only once you neared my place,  
And your hand one moment's space  
Sought the fingers of my hand;  
Your eyes flashed to mine; I knew  
All was well between us two.

(“The Dream” 1-10).

In both poems the dream provides an image of the close relationship between the speaker and the addressee. In Levy’s poem the speaker asserts: “Only once you neared my place”; likewise, in Radford’s poem the speaker dreams of how “[s]o close a part I seemed of you,/ [...] Sunk in your spirit, deep, so deep”, emphasising the depth of the relationship and offering a sense of union between the lovers. Furthermore, the lover in Levy’s poem “[s]ought the fingers of [the speaker’s] hand”, reminding us of the lover in Radford’s poem who “welcomed me with gentle hands”. Given Goody’s argument in which she locates “The Dream” as one of Levy’s poems in which she explores homoerotic desires, Radford’s use of the hand becomes an evident signifier of a same-sex bond.<sup>192</sup>

The elegiac tone which is dominant in “To A Stranger” is also evident in “At Last” (1910), in which the ungendered speaker portrays a journey of suffering:

MY feet had faltered in the way,  
Before I was aware,  
In the bleak road it was most mete  
I should before the night complete,  
The stony road that tore my feet-  
Which were so bare.

My eyes were watchful as I went,  
And steadfast night and day,  
Through all the valley mists that rise  
From spring to spring – I was so wise-

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<sup>192</sup> See also “The Sequel to ‘A Reminiscence’” a poem in the same sequence of “Love, Dream and Death” in which Levy similarly regrets the death of a lover and asks: “Whose hand was warm in my hand last week?” (“The Sequel to ‘A Reminiscence’” 48), reminding us of Radford’s poem on female friendship: “Ah, friend of youth! Thy fresh-cut grave/ Is warmer than the hand you gave!”.

There were not any tearless eyes  
More clear than they.

So sure upon the road I was,  
My heart was cold as stone,  
I would not let its passion wake,  
I strove and killed it for the sake  
Of that high way I thought to take,  
Till Heaven were won.

So cold my heart and icy deep,  
The dreams upon it cast,  
My pain was like a frozen shroud  
Round a dead Queen whose face is proud,  
The while I said that God allowed  
Such pain to last.

But came a day of all the days  
That were so surely bleak,  
My shroud was changed to leaping flame,  
From sun and moon and stars there came  
A fire to fill my heart – whose name  
I dare not speak.

I did not stop for joy or fear,  
I did not stay my feet,  
I said “My heart is strong as fire,  
My heart shall burn with its desire,  
Its rapture shall not break nor tire  
This is most mete.”

Before I was aware, oh God,  
Before my strength could choose,  
I left the road so long decreed,  
I faltered-and my steps were freed,  
To find these flowers-for all my need-  
These morning dews.

This summer bed of fragrant thyme,  
For me so newly made,  
These shining meadows through whose sun  
Like little streams the shadows run,  
Where now-before the day is done-  
I am afraid.

My tears are wet upon my cheek  
I have not any care,  
Deep in the dews I bow my face-  
To ask Thy pity in this place,  
Where I have faltered by Thy grace,  
So unaware.

(“At Last”)

Like the speaker's "pilgrimage" in "To A Stranger", the sense of journey in this poem represents the conflict the speaker encounters between the passionate possibly homosexual love she/he hides and the heterosexual relationship she/he has to conform to "[t]ill Heaven were won". Despite being determined on the heterosexual identity she chooses, the speaker's heart is "cold", reminding us of Radford's claim: "I have been cold & looking only on my own heart". This diary entry demonstrates the time Radford was cold in her feelings towards Ernest and possibly looking for a homosexual relationship to fulfil her desires. Like Radford, whose diary and letters lack direct signs of homoerotic desire, the speaker is represented as "watchful" and would like to end her journey "before the night complete", possibly because of the fear of social stigma. This conflict is portrayed in the image of pain and death, which while confirming that such desire had no place in Victorian and Edwardian England, simultaneously reminds us of Jennings's argument about women's use of pain and illness to express their homoerotic desire.

However, the poem includes a sense of progression and the pain no longer remains due to the emergence of the speaker's lover. Radford's "Outside the hedge of roses" shows her empathy with Wilde's case; this empathy is even more evident in "At Last" in which Radford provides an explicit reference to his trial, making it possible to argue that the subject of the poem concerns male homosexuality rather than female friendship. Radford's acquaintance with Wilde, her awareness of his homosexual identity, and the scandals surrounding him<sup>193</sup> are not the only reasons which might have influenced Radford's portrayal of same-sex desire. As Marcus points out, Wilde was also an active

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<sup>193</sup> The scandal surrounding Wilde was an outcome of the strict legal sentences. Wintermans points out: "In 1886 an Act had come into force outlawing *all* sexual contacts between males, irrespectable of whether they took place in public or in private" (Wintermans, 2007: 34). Also, social attitudes against homosexual men played a major role, for "gentlemen who preferred their own sex were despised or, at best, laughed out of court by most people" (Wintermans, 2007: 32).

figure in terms of women's rights and his works dealt with female friendships and the sexual desire between them:

Wilde's role as editor of *Woman's World*, his own social relations, and his plays all evince his interest in female fantasy, the plot of female amity, and erotic desire between women. Far from being the absence that historians of the gay Wilde have made it out to be, the social force of female bonds and their relation to male ones were questions he returned to repeatedly, and are the center of the epochal changes in the history of sexuality that he represents. (Marcus, 2007: 261)

Wilde's interest in women's freedom and their erotic/romantic friendships should be considered of significance to Radford as a *fin de siècle* poet who was surrounded by many intellectual and lesbian women friends.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, in "At Last" Radford describes the feeling of a woman who suddenly becomes alive because she found her love and possibly discovers her lesbian sexual identity. By this point, the choice of words has changed from its connotation with pain and death, embodied in the phrase "a frozen shroud", into the powerful lively image of the "leaping flame" which reflects on the dynamic transformation of the speaker's desire and sexuality.

The speaker's reference to this love as a "fire to fill my heart--whose name/ I dare not speak" echoes the language in "Two Loves" (1894) by Wilde's lover Douglas. Douglas represents the male lover as "true Love, I fill/ The hearts of boys and girls with mutual flame" ("Two Loves" 71-72), most likely the same "leaping flame" which the speaker's shroud in Radford's poem has changed to. Also, Radford's poem instantly recalls the famous statement in Wilde's trial in which he defines "the love that dare not

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<sup>194</sup> See Sos Eltis's *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde* which emphasises Wilde's role as "a consistent champion of women's rights both in his life and his work, supporting all the primary demands of late nineteenth-century feminism" (Eltis, 1996: 8). Also see "The Bi-Social Oscar Wilde and 'Modern' Women" by Stetz who explores Wilde's support of and influence on women writers: "since the early 1880s Wilde had made himself an integral and indispensable part of the careers and personal histories of his female contemporaries. He often served as a source of literary commissions [...] Indeed, few prominent men of the day did more than Wilde to encourage the ambitions of female artists and to promote their access to the public sphere or to influence the social climate in ways beneficial to middle- and upper-middle-class women seeking advancement or financial independence" (Stetz, 2001: 518-519).

“speak its name” in the nineteenth century as “a great affection of an elder for a younger man” (Wilde in Moran, 2008: 244). The phrase was first used in Douglas’s poem, and was later read out in the trial as evidence of homosexuality. Despite the scandal, Douglas was the only person who visited Wilde in his prison on a daily basis, but as Caspar Wintermans observes: “The couple were allowed only fifteen minutes each twenty four hours to speak to each other” (Wintermans, 2007: 60). This incomprehension of the bond between Wilde and Douglas is portrayed in “Two Loves” in which the lover finally declares “I am the love that dare not speak its name” (“Two Loves” 74), even before the trial took place.

Radford’s use of the same phrase almost a decade after the publication of Douglas’s poem indicates her awareness of the social rejection of homosexuality. Faderman locates Douglas’s use of the phrase in relation to female friendships and argues:

It was not, as Alfred Douglas said of male homosexuality later in the century, the love that dared not speak its name. It was the love that had no name, unless it were a sentimental one like “romantic friendship”, even if the intensity of the relationship made the term “friendship” inaccurate and misleading. (Faderman, 1981: 154)

Faderman’s argument echoes that of Oram’s and Turnbull’s that “[n]ames were not named” and that there was no legal consideration of homoerotic desires between women. As discussed in Chapter One, this very fact is due to the prevailing beliefs in the purity of female friendships and how it was thought to have a positive impact on women’s domestic role. After she finds her lover, the speaker’s “steps were freed,/ To find these flowers-for all my need”. As shown in Chapter Two, flowers in Victorian poetry are used to symbolise female’s sexuality as object of male desire, a concept which is challenged by many women poets including Radford herself. Neil Bartlett also discusses the use of flowers as codes by homosexuals, like Wilde, in the late nineteenth century. In his association of floral imagery and homosexuals, Bartlett suggests: “Homosexuals, like flowers, have no reason to exist; they delight only themselves” (Bartlett, 1988: 46). This meaning may be read in

relation to Radford's poem in which the speaker looks for the "flowers-for all [her] need", implying a desire to fulfil her own needs. Despite the fact that Radford's speaker is finally free with her desires fulfilled, she ends up "afraid" and needing to "ask Thy pity". In doing so, the poem discontinues the sense of progression referred to earlier, but rather embraces the pessimistic and elegiac tone it starts with, suggesting that despair and pain are the inescapable fate of homosexual desire.

### **Conclusion**

The chapter has shown the ways in which Radford's friendships with radical and homosexual characters might have influenced her portrayal of same-sex desires in her poetry. The poems share in common the melancholy tone which echoes the conflict suffered by homosexuals in late Victorian and Edwardian England, including Levy's and Wilde's experience. Also, when the poems possibly address the theme of homosexuality, the ambivalent use of the pronoun "I" becomes common, hiding thereby the gender of the speaker. While Radford's sympathetic representation of homosexual characters suggests her engagement with women's sexual freedom as one of the issues addressed by New Women writers, it simultaneously raises questions about her own bisexuality and whether her friendships with lesbian women involved any homosexual practices. Besides her "cold" marriage, Radford's appreciation of female friendship, which formed a vital part of her intellectual and emotional life, are all factors which make her bisexuality possible. Even if Radford was not a bisexual and simply sought to show her awareness of and openness to different sexual identities, my conclusion of this final chapter is in line with the discussion in previous chapters which highlight Radford's radical and feminist thoughts, questioning therefore the "feminine" and "domestic" descriptions imposed on her poetry by her contemporary reviewers.

## Afterword

The themes and findings presented herein, as revealed through Radford's diary, letters, and poems, combine to offer evidence of the fact that her name is worthy of more attention than it has received formerly. The thesis has shown Radford's engagement with the wider debate raised by her contemporaries concerning women and their role in the private and the public spheres. Despite being a married woman and a mother, Radford, as her diary entries and poems convey, defied confining social norms which imprisoned women and deprived them of their rights. While some of her poems, arguably, are quite traditional in form, the underlying meanings are revolutionary and question male authority which oppressed women. In doing so, Radford's poems identify with the concept of "doubleness" Armstrong refers to as a distinguished strategy used in Victorian women's poetry. However, the radical meanings are not always merely implied in Radford's poems, but they are often addressed explicitly. As has been demonstrated in Chapter Three, Radford's frustration with her marriage and social attitudes towards it is evident on many occasions, a fact which led her to compare the position of the married woman to that of the prostitute. She also depicts the woman as a rebellious angel to confront Patmore's notion of her as passive angel. A conventional woman who is entirely devoted to domestic duties would not have introduced such themes. Therefore, this research has offered original contributions to previous readings of Radford in terms of her use of the ungendered speakers and her fusion of genres for the purpose of progressive and feminist agenda.

Radford's appreciation of literature and visual art, which were perceived as exclusively masculine domains, and her desire to introduce her children to foremost minds of her time are further evidence of Radford's defiance of prevailing conventions. As discussed in Chapter Four, Radford was mindful of the cultural prejudice against women writers and artists. Her failure to achieve the fame she ought to have, in addition to her awareness of the marginalisation suffered by her women friends are all aspects which

might have influenced the melancholic tone of her poems which address the theme of authorship. While Radford's poetry represents passionate women as lonely and isolated, these women are also seen as resistant to what had previously been believed to be their only fate. In the case of the female muse, for instance, Radford's speakers seek to escape the conventionally feminine images portrayed by male artists, and so her poems challenge rather than acquiesce to the male gaze. The chapter's thematic focus on visual art and ageing women contributes to the existing body of knowledge, for these themes have not yet been considered by contemporary scholars of Radford.

Although some of Radford's poems are ambiguous and may be read at different levels, some of her others more overtly engage with early feminism. The speakers of the poems included in Chapter Five clearly identify with the characteristics of the New Woman who seeks social and legal reform. Also, the fact that Radford's milieu included many figures who were identified by their contemporaries as New Women must have played a role in liberating Radford's thoughts. In her diary, she criticised the gendered-ideals which were imposed on women and warned her children of them. More subversively, Radford's poems offer an empathetic portrayal rather than a dislike of speakers who revolt against traditional heterosexual roles. She clearly identifies with the suffering of homosexuals and highlights the alienation of those who surrender to same-sex desires. Radford's visits to the Turkish baths with her women friends and her portrayal of homosexuality are all aspects pondered here for the first time. By illuminating Radford's advanced thoughts and the radical meanings of her poems, whose images and metaphors are in line with those used by her contemporary women poets, I aim to have offered an original insight into Radford's life and her relationship to social and legal reform. Thus, this work endorses Showalter's argument, which is quoted in the Introduction, on unknown women writers and how they "were the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next" (Showalter, 2009: 6).

There is still scope for more work on Radford. She also published volumes of fairy tales and children's songs, which are worthy of exploration in relation to the myths and strategies used by her contemporaries to convey unconventional messages. The theme of motherhood, which appears in most of Radford's volumes of poetry, is one that I have not continued in my thesis and so could be the subject of future research. As a researcher from a middle-eastern background, I am keen to take this study of Radford further by comparing her life and poems with the lives of Arabic women poets, such as May Ziadeh<sup>195</sup> who was greatly influenced by English literature and shared with Radford many of her unconventional ideologies concerning women. By working on a comparative approach, I aim to traverse cultural and geographical boundaries to prove that those women, who lived in the Victorian time, have paid the price for women's emancipation and remain a source of inspiration to contemporary feminists.

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<sup>195</sup> Ziadeh (1886-1941) was a Christian Palestinian-Lebanese poet who was actively involved in Oriental feminism. Ziadeh grew up learning French and English literature and was greatly influenced by writers, such as Byron and Shelley. Like Radford, Ziadeh had interest in foreign languages and learned German, Greek and Spanish, along with her knowledge of English and French. See Muna Alshrafi's thesis, "The Literature of Mai Ziyadeh; A Literary and a Sociological Approach".

## Appendix

Year	Event
1858	- Caroline Maitland was born.
1871	- Charles Darwin's <i>The Descent of Man</i> was published.
1874	- The publication of James Thomson's <i>The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems</i> .
1883	- Dollie's marriage to Ernest Radford. - Olive Schreiner's <i>The Story of an African Farm</i> was first published.
1884	- Radford's first son, Maitland, was born. - Amy Levy's <i>A Minor Poet and Other Verse</i> was published.
1886	- Dollie and Ernest joined William Morris's Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League.
1887	- Radford's daughter, Hester, was born. - "Bloody Sunday" (the repression of many socialists in Trafalgar Square).
1889	- Radford's second daughter, Margaret, was born. - Amy Levy's death.
1891	- Radford's first volume, <i>A Light Load</i> , was out.
1892	- Ernest Radford suffered from a mental illness from which he did not recover.
1893	- Radford's volume <i>Songs for Somebody</i> was published.
1894	- The term "New Woman" was first coined by Ouida.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The first published volume of <i>The Yellow Book</i>.</li> <li>- Lord Alfred Douglas's poem "Two Loves" was out.</li> <li>- Christina Rossetti's death.</li> </ul>
1895	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radford's <i>Songs and Other Verses</i> and <i>Good Night</i> were published.</li> <li>- Oscar Wilde's trial.</li> <li>- Max Nordau's <i>Degeneration</i> was translated into English.</li> <li>- Grant Allen's novel <i>The Woman Who Did</i>.</li> <li>- Victoria Cross's <i>The Woman Who Didn't</i>.</li> <li>- Henrik Ibsen's play <i>A Doll's House</i>.</li> </ul>
1897	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The publication of Havelock Ellis's <i>Sexual Inversion</i> as the first medical textbook on homosexuality.</li> </ul>
1898	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eleanor Marx's death.</li> <li>- The publication of Radford's novel <i>One Way of Love: An Idyll</i>.</li> </ul>
1899	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The death of Radford's father, Robert Maitland.</li> </ul>
1900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radford's <i>The Poet's Larder &amp; Other Stories</i> was published.</li> </ul>
1901	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The death of Queen Victoria and her son Albert Edward VII became the king of the United Kingdom.</li> </ul>
1903	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- WSPU: "Women's Social and Political Union" was founded.</li> </ul>
1904	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The publication of Radford's fairy tale <i>Sea Thrift</i> and <i>The Young Gardeners' Kalendar</i>.</li> </ul>
1905	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radford's <i>In Summer Time</i> was published.</li> </ul>
1906	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The publication of Radford's <i>Shadow-Rabbit</i>.</li> </ul>

1907	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The publication of Radford's volume <i>A Ballad of Victory and Other Poems</i>.</li> </ul>
1908	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Edward Carpenter's <i>Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women</i> was published.</li> <li>- WWSL: "Women Writers Suffrage League" was founded.</li> </ul>
1910	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Death of King Edward VII.</li> <li>- The publication of Radford's volume <i>Poems</i>.</li> </ul>
1914	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- World War I began.</li> </ul>
1915	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radford's play <i>The Ransom</i> was published.</li> </ul>
1918	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- End of World War I.</li> </ul>
1919	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ernest Radford's death.</li> </ul>
1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dollie Radford's death.</li> </ul>

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