Mathilde Blind’s Contribution to Victorian Cosmopolitanism

Submitted by Ulrike Ina Hill to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
In February 2015

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.
Mathilde Blind’s Contribution to Victorian Cosmopolitanism

Abstract

Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitanism is in four distinct layers. The first layer is her unusual everyday family background in the transition from Jewish tradition to the life of European revolutionaries in the 1840s and exile in Britain. The second layer is Blind’s mental and moral development under Friederike’s care and educational guidance according to the German concept of Bildung. The third layer comes from Mazzini’s challenge for Blind to critically evaluate her German cultural heritage and the moral danger in the well-intended German concept of self-cultivation. Blind derives the fourth layer of her autonomous cosmopolitanism from Darwin’s theory of evolution and Buckle’s argument for a scientific approach to history. Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection postulates sexual autonomy of the individual organism as a pre-condition for evolution by natural selection. Buckle’s argument for a scientific approach to the study of history extends this concept by observing that the variety of geographical conditions around the globe gives rise to a diversity of cultures. The concept of social evolution is then anchored in the nature of interdependence between the individual and her society as it changes over time.

Overall, my argument is that Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism is to write about controversial subjects and to transcend ideological polarizations. She does this by transferring socio-political topics from the public domain into the intimacy of making “an immediate sensuous contact” with the individual reader. Her aim is to touch her reader’s heart and to trust in her reader’s ability and social will to care rather than to teach her about the individual poet’s particular ideas of what should be done to solve problems.
# Contents

1 Introduction: Blind’s Cosmopolitanism and Literary Criticism  
   1.1 Blind’s Concept of Autonomy  
   1.2 Blind’s Contemporaries as Critics  
   1.3 Blind and Periodization of Poetry  
   1.4 The Distorting Authority of the Modern Scholar  
   1.5 Mathilde Blind and William Morris  
   1.6 Conclusion  

2 Blind’s Immigrant Cosmopolitanism  
   2.1 German Exiles in Nineteenth-Century Britain  
   2.2 Blind’s Personal History and Development  
   2.3 Blind’s Retrospective View of her Education  
   2.4 The Challenging Culture of St John’s Wood  
   2.5 Conclusion  

3 Blind's Autonomous Radicalism  
   3.1 *George Eliot* (1883)  
   3.2 *Tarantella: A Romance* (1885)  
   3.3 *The Ascent of Man* (1889)  
   3.4 Conclusion  

4 The Woman Question  
   4.1 “Mary Wollstonecraft” (1878)  
   4.2 *Madame Roland* (1886)  
   4.3 *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff* (1890)  
   4.4 *Dramas in Miniature* (1891)  
   4.5 Conclusion
5 Blind’s Poems of her Travels 151
   5.1 The Prophecy of Saint Oran (1881) 155
   5.2 The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances (1886) 166
   5.3 Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident (1895) 179
   5.4 Conclusion 196

6 Conclusion 198

Works cited 202
1 Introduction: Cosmopolitanism and Literary Criticism

For the topic of Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism, I need to first recognize the plural form of “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms” as a designated field of study. It indicates a rich field of interactions in the production and consumption of literary texts. Causal chains of influence from different cultures and different periods need to be investigated; an author’s specific cosmopolitan interests and perspectives need to be explored; reviews and associated texts need to be considered for situating the text from a twenty-first-century cosmopolitan perspective as a contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism.

In their discussion of the wide range of possibilities for “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms,” Tanya Agathocleous and Jason R. Rudy refer as an example of Victorian cosmopolitanism to magazines carrying the word “cosmopolitan” in the title. From one of these, the *Cosmopolitan Review*, they quote a call for contributions from “those who, whatever may be their name, country, or colour, will be willing to seek with us the best means to bring concord and justice among men” (389).

Mathilde Blind would have shared these sentiments of good will to all human beings without sharing the implied idea of direct action. The cosmopolitanism of her writing is not political, nor does Blind subscribe to a future-oriented ideology or morality. Instead, her cosmopolitanism is science-based as she adopts Darwin’s emphasis on the importance of diversity of a species’ individual organisms for accumulating evolutionary material for natural selection. Natural selection is then the means for the species to respond to changing environmental conditions. Blind sees implied the concept of autonomy as an intrinsic attribute of the individual organism, both in terms of sexual energy and in terms of personality and point of view when it comes to the social evolution of humankind. Blind also accepts H. T. Buckle’s (1857) scientific approach to history as consistent with Darwin’s view of natural selection in response to environmental changes. Buckle argues that the geographical location of a society gives rise to its particular culture. He links biological evolution to social evolution by arguing that moral and intellectual progress is not a matter of “natural capacity,” but a matter of the subject’s share of
opportunity” in the “circumstances under which that capacity after birth comes into play” (128).

Accordingly, Blind’s cosmopolitanism is based on her Darwinian view of diversity in the commonality of the species and on Buckle’s view of geographical diversity of cultures. The progress of the individual depends then on the prevailing values and attitudes of society, and hence on the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society. Social evolution is to Blind then the responsibility of the autonomous individual human being by caring enough for, and having empathy with, her fellow human being. As a writer and poet, she sees the author’s function to present the reader with the opportunity to feel empathy with her fellow human being and thus to assert her social will for society to change. For Blind the need for change arises from a justifiable sense of the need of for greater fairness in respect of all marginalized people. She sees society to benefit from the inclusion of all sections of society by encouraging the individual to assert her social will in active contribution to the well-being of all. Blind’s main concern is to improve the position of women in society because women are represented in all other categories of marginalized people to the detriment of progress in the social evolution of humankind.

Blind’s concern as a biographer is to analyse her subject’s aspirations and struggles with the specific circumstances of her life in the wider relevant cultural contexts of her subject’s life-time. By this approach, Blind makes available to her reader the evidence that supports her argument. She encourages thereby her reader to evaluate the biographer’s interpretive argument as supported by the evidence. Blind aims to ensure that her analysis and interpretation is at sufficient depth, and related to sufficiently wide-cast cultural contexts, to enable her reader to reflect critically on her reading from her autonomous point of view. Blind considers the diversity of her readers’ views to depend on the individual reader’s specific circumstances in the relevant cultural context at the time of her reading.

As a novelist and poet she takes the opposite approach by presenting to the reader mini-histories without the detail of everyday reality. They are universal typologies of social situations that have the anonymity and mythological quality of stories of universal significance about inequalities in the interdependence between the individual and society. The aesthetics of her writing invite strong emotional responses that may lead to a social will for
change without presenting an intellectual argument for the reader to agree or to disagree. The narrator in these stories places the novelist or poet and her reader at an equal distance to their inner narrative. Blind leaves her reader to reflect on her reading-experience by referring to her personal life experiences and her particular point of view in asserting her social will for change.

Blind aims in all her writing to raise her reader’s awareness of the nature of the interdependence between the individual’s autonomy and society’s demands to subsume that autonomy under its organisational structures and regulatory rules. Her typologies reflect how autonomy is unequally supported or curtailed by society’s dominant ideology and behavioural codes. Whether this is how it should be or whether something should change, and if so, in what way, depends on the reader’s response to her reading-experience. Recognition of the individual’s intrinsic autonomy is to Blind a prerequisite for the individual’s ability to respond to her fellow human being with empathy according to her own sense of human fellowship and social interactions. This means that Blind considers as equally important the autonomy of her subject, the autonomy of her reader, and her own autonomy. As author she subsumes her personal autonomy under the diversity in this triangular relationship. This is the quality of the cosmopolitan autonomous voice of all her writing.

Blind’s science-based cosmopolitanism has therefore the abstract quality of a scientific theory. As the scientist separates her intuitions from the methodology of her investigations, Blind separates her personal political radicalism from her methodology of constructing a text. For her prose as a biographer, essayist and reviewer her method is that of today’s historian by analysis and interpretation with a focus on the questions being asked by her contemporary reader. Blind’s aim is to facilitate the reader’s critical evaluation of the text and so to deflect the authorial authority for a necessarily subjective literary project.

The approach was anticipated by Sebastian Franck, a Spiritualist of the Early German Reformation in the sixteenth century. He argued for the need to subvert authorial authority in order to share with his devout reader “valuable
He was accused, by Luther and others, of equivocation for asserting his authority in print while arguing against authorial authority (Brand 41-43). Franck’s intentions had been to share his insights about the authorial role in the Christian community rather than to assert unilaterally a supposedly superior way of communicating. In contrast, Blind’s abstract science-based concept of social evolution incorporates all authorial styles as relevant to the slow and gradual process of the social evolution of humankind. The idea of seeking approval in itself would be a denial of the scientific concept of the individual’s intrinsic autonomy.

However, as George Levine (1983) observed for the nineteenth century, the rise of science was accompanied by a mere shift of cultural emphasis. The new voices for science appropriated at first “from the displaced religion … the highest moral ideals, and a spirituality” that was different only by its source being “not God but Matter” (262). Scientific observations and arguments only gradually influenced a change of cultural perceptions. Nevertheless, as Regenia Gagnier (2010) points out, philosophical anthropologists had been working on the idea of the “co-evolution of Nature and humankind” since the eighteenth century (98). Under these conditions, Blind’s abstract, science-based concept of authorial authority had cultural support. She did not have to seek approval for her mission from some higher authority. She could avoid Franck’s experience of being trapped by her critics’ sophistry.

Blind’s intention for deflecting authorial authority as a novelist or poet is shared for Victorian fiction, in what Roger Fowler (1977) observed to be a two-pronged approach of a framing structure for the narrative and an artistic design for the text itself (79). Blind’s design for her novel and for her poems is shaped

---

1. *Les Enluminures* have published a manuscript of a scholar’s work on Sebastian Franck’s *Chronica* (1536). The presenter of the content of the manuscript comments: “One scholar summarizes, ‘Franck’s unbiased search for God in various cultures and historical traditions and his emphasis on nondogmatic, nonsectarian, noninstitutional forms of religion mark him as one of the most modern thinkers of the 16th century.’”

2. Gagnier argues that “philosophical anthropologists since Herder and Schopenhauer” have tried to understand a materialist “reality” in terms of “the co-evolution of Nature and humankind” (98).
by her intention of speaking from within the literary and artistic culture she shares with her reader. She does so by associating her text with the work of great artists that transcend time and place. For instance, her poem “The Russian Student’s Tale” (1891) is a response to Robert Browning’s “Jules and Phene” from his *Pippa Passes* (1841), whereas the narrator of her *Prophecy of Saint Oran* (1881) imitates the manipulative narrator of J. W. von Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (1809). However, since Blind does not assert herself to explain this, it is up to her critic, to trace the causal chains of influence on the aesthetic quality of her texts. This assumes, however, that the critic is not tied by her professionalism to rely on narrowly defined criteria of literary criticism.

In the absence of Blind’s clarification of her intentions and her methodology, her cosmopolitanism was not recognized by her reviewers, in praise or in criticism. Reviewers judged her poems by the values of the dominant culture. Agathocleous argues in *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (2011) that these values were based on the unquestioned assumption that evolution was “charting a uniform course for mankind” (10). It implies a common history within which “different groups had evolved at different rates … with Britain in the lead” (10). These assumptions shaped then the “cosmopolitan imagination” and “influenced not only imperial ideology but many other realms of social thought as well” (10). The egalitarian intentions of Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice would therefore have been “hard to fathom” (10). Hierarchical thinking included the cultural assumption that a woman poet, belongs to the subordinated female sphere of Victorian society, for which the dominant code of behaviour had its own rules. Blind’s *Dramas in Miniature* (1891) were viewed according to these rules. Blind’s focus for the series of typologies of the marginalization of women, particularly so where poverty is an additional marginalizing factor, was on the vulgarity of life on the edge of human existence. This was seen as offensive to middle-class tastes as it defied the required womanly decorum. A woman should not want to read about such low-life subject matter, and it certainly was not considered to be a subject for poetry. Blind’s use of everyday, even vulgar, language was considered evidence of her failure as a poet.

Blind’s *Ascent of Man* (1889) is the story of the human animal gradually, through manifold histories, becoming a human being in the struggle with the forces of nature. However, as this contradicted the prevailing view of history as
a uniform course for mankind, even the naturalists among the critics were unable to recognize Blind’s science-based account of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. Consequently, Blind, as a mere woman poet, was seen as ambitious beyond her capabilities of understanding Darwin’s and Wallace’s theory of evolution. The naturalists’ condemnation of Blind for the perceived inadequacy of her Ascent of Man consigned Blind to oblivion.

In what follows, I will examine the significance of naming a designated field of study in determining the researcher’s methodology and approach. I will argue that the previous focus on the period of “Victorian” or “fin-de-siècle” poetry meant that Victorian reviewers and critics remained the unintended arbiters of Blind’s poetry. In contrast, I will argue, the theme-based field of studies of “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms” permits an exploration of different strands of influence on Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice and on her intentions as a writer and poet.

In section 1.1, “Blind’s Concept of Autonomy,” I will examine Blind’s view of her function as a poet as it is based on her Darwinian concept of autonomy as an intrinsic attribute of the individual. I will explore how this affects Blind’s emphasis on the interdependence between the individual and society, and how she positions herself as author and poet vis-à-vis her reader at an equal distance to the internal narrative of her text. I will argue that Blind’s aim is to engage her reader with the rapturous forms of her poetics in the experience of love for, or in modern terms empathy with, the human being. I will argue that she considers this to be the basis of the individual’s social will for changing the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society.

In section 1.2, “Blind’s Contemporaries as Critics,” I will juxtapose the condescension of the Victorian reviewer, as represented by her friend Richard Garnett in his “Memoir” (1900), with Blind’s reviews of other poets’ work. I will emphasize her detached theme-based evaluation of a poem’s place and function in its relevant cultural contexts. A concluding reference to Arthur Symons’s brief “Introduction” to his 1897 edition of a selection of Blind’s poems serves as an example for a recurring issue, throughout Blind’s career, of close friends turning into dismissive reviewers according to cultural expectations of literary criticism at the time.

In section 1.3, “Blind and Periodization of Poetry,” I will turn to modern literary criticism and the impact of periodization on attempts to rescue Blind’s
poetry from oblivion. I will argue that Blind’s cosmopolitanism resists integrating her texts in comparative studies for the Victorian period. I will argue that using individual poems out of context, as part of a comparative study of Victorian poetry results at best in what James Diedrick described as “unintended misrepresentation.” At worst, it can lead to careless distortion of Blind’s intentions, as in John Holmes’s critique in *Darwin’s Bards* (2009). However, I will argue that even Diedrick’s aim to rescue “some of her best work” (*Dramatic Monologues* 362) signals an inadvertent acceptance of Victorian critics’ continuing power of arbitration on literary criticism for the period.

In section 1.4, “The Distorting Authority of the Modern Scholar,” I will address the distorting results of scholars asserting their specialist authority over Blind. My examples are Charles Laporte’s religious stance in his “Atheist Prophecy: Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and the Victorian Poetess” (2006), and Robert P. Fletcher’s critique of Blind’s supposed orientalism in his “‘Heir of All the Universe’: Evolutionary Epistemology in Mathilde Blind’s Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident.” I will juxtapose this with Jason Rudy’s theme-based approach in his history of *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (2009), which invites scholars to see Blind’s autonomous voice, like that of other poets, to be both creation and creator of her age.

In section 1.5, “Mathilde Blind and William Morris,” I will set out Agathocleous and Rudy’s call for a change in methodology for investigating cosmopolitanism. They argue that our strategies for literary criticism have to change just as much as authors’ literary strategies have changed for the contributions to “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms”. With reference to Gagnier’s example of William Morris as a macrobe, I will argue that Blind prefigures cosmopolitan strategies for literary criticism in her review of Morris’s *Love is Enough* (1872). I will argue that the comparison across a time lapse of a century and a half suggests that Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism is more recognizable now in a rapidly globalizing world than it was for her Victorian critics.
1.1 Blind’s Concept of Autonomy

Blind’s expression of her cosmopolitanism, in all her writing, is derived from her concept of autonomy as an intrinsic evolutionary attribute of the individual. According to Darwin’s theory of evolution, autonomy and the resulting diversity of individual organisms is the species’ resource for survival in changing environmental conditions by natural selection. Natural selection creates a species’ adaptability by always selecting the individual organism whose characteristics happen to be “fittest” at a given time and in a given place. The characteristics of fitness for the survival of the species are not fixed, but must change as circumstances change.

Blind extrapolates that the notion of what is “fittest” for the social evolution of humankind changes from an emphasis on physical fitness to an increasing importance of mental, emotional and moral fitness. Social evolution of humankind means that survival of the individual becomes increasingly interdependent with the survival of society. The social evolution of humankind is then a challenge to change the balance between competition and cooperation towards greater cooperation for the survival of both the individual and the species. However, adaptability to the challenges of external Nature, and to those of the internal nature of the human being, excludes by definition predictability. While the general principle of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind is established by the evidence of the past, insights about the past don’t yield more than probabilities for the future. The only constant in the human experiment for progress is the proven importance of the individual’s contribution to producing the species’ adaptability. Blind sees the artist’s function to engage the individual’s empathy with her fellow human beings by identifying with the whole of humankind, and so to generate a social will for change. She sees future-directed ideologies and political campaigning as legitimate expressions of the will for change, while seeing danger in the polarization of proselytizing ideologies. She sees therefore the poet’s function to bring public controversies into the intimate space of the individual reader’s reflections and thereby to work for a restoration of the equilibrium between society’s institutions and public opinion.

It is an abstract task for which Blind separates the biased self of her political radicalism from her construction of a depersonalized reflective voice as
a writer and poet. She is consistent with this separation to the point that our knowledge of her private life is mostly indirect. Outside her published work we have factual information of major events for the family, but very little of what these meant to her or the members of her family. Linda Hughes discusses the phenomenon of an “audible silence” in her biography of Graham R. Tomson (2005). She found in a letter by Tomson to Nora Chesson what she thought to be “the most authoritative account of her childhood,” in which Tomson still did not talk about her mother. After considering possible reasons for the silence, Hughes concludes that, if nothing else, the silence signals a preference for “obliquity over confession … that enabled her to anticipate modernist conceptions of impersonality” (12-13). We are told by Hughes that Blind befriended Tomson (69) and we know from Ana Parejo Vadillo’s “New Woman Poets and the Culture of the Salon at the Fin De Siècle” (1999) of Tomson’s salon with its focus on sexual politics where Blind was a regular visitor (29). They may have talked about the idea of separating one’s personal life from a depersonalized voice in one’s writing.

Blind’s audible silence is thunderous in her refusal to offer “private data for publication” to the editor of a dictionary of English literature (qtd. in Birch 34). It is also significant in Blind’s experiment with an autobiographical novel which focuses exclusively on her educational development through events and people from outside the Blind family. We know from a letter to Garnett that she left the family home in 1870, on her stepfather’s insistence. But we don’t know what happened, nor do we get the impression that anyone else had the information. This may be partly due to the fact that we know little about Blind’s friendships from Blind directly; there are occasional mentions in her correspondence with Richard Garnett or in her commonplace book. We know of the impact of her brother’s tragic death in 1866 only indirectly from her poem “Invocation. June, 1866.” However, there are links to people whom Blind met on a regular basis in modern accounts of the Victorian culture of salon in St. John’s Wood (A. P. Vadillo; Avery and G. R. Sims). In the same way, there is only indirect information about her professional views on writing from her published work as reviewer and biographer. Through her admiration for others we know what she values and what we might look for in a close-reading of the aesthetics of her own work.
The self-discipline for deflecting authorial authority to the point of keeping an audible silence was for Blind particularly hard to bear when her work was hailed as a success without recognition of her intentions. She said in her commonplace book on 01 January 1896: “Why should one so tenaciously cling to one’s work, even when the kind of success it achieves is only one humiliation the more. What matters this infinitesimal product to the world?” (F 37). And yet, despite reviewers’ lack of interest in her intentions, her emphasis on the individual’s responsibility in the social evolution of humankind was not isolated. For instance, Mill’s rational evaluation was that “the threat to society [is] not the excess, but the deficiency of personal impulses” (Gagnier 5).

Throughout her adult life Blind had paid the price for the effort of self-regulating her emotions of disappointment, frustration and, no doubt, anger. She suffered chronic ill health and long periods of depression. Particularly painful to contemplate is the discrepancy of her friends’ view of her as a person and poet as this contrasts with their projection of their authority as reviewers and literary critics of her poetry. I will show this in the next section with the example of Richard Garnett’s “Memoir,” a typical Victorian review of her life and work. It is patronizingly belittling her as a person and as a poet even though he had been a faithful friend and her literary mentor for twenty-five years. He would have known Blind’s different approach to reviewing, and yet there was no cross-fertilization to mellow his patronizing self-projection.

3. Blind’s focus on autonomy as an impersonal concept prefigures Stuart Hall’s (1932-2014) “incomplete identity model” for analysing the individual’s cultural identities as a never fixed process of becoming in interaction with others in constantly changing external circumstances.

4. Gagnier’s examples are Mill’s rational concern about the deficiency of personal impulses; Schopenhauer’s psychological approach to the individual’s self-interest as a threat to the whole; Spencer’s evolutionary optimism about progress through individuation; Smiles’s ethical perspective and his concern about a decline of “character” implying national decline and Walter Bagehot’s psychology-based political perspective of individuals imitating admired types and rejecting non-admired types (5-8).
1.2 Blind’s Contemporaries as Critics

In this section, I shall juxtapose the Victorian critic’s style of reviewing Blind’s poetry with Blind’s style of reviewing other poets’ work. I chose Richard Garnett’s “Memoir” in Arthur Symons’s edition of *Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind* (1900) as representative of Victorian reviewers’ use of sympathy as a basis for their evaluation. Despite his involvement in Blind’s career as an unfailing friend, Garnett prioritizes in his “Memoir” the projection of his self-image as keeper of Blind’s reputation vis-à-vis her public and her critics. Although he seems to aim for a balanced view of Blind’s strengths and weaknesses, he asserts the Victorian critic’s authority and entitlement to arbitrate. His “Memoir” is therefore a central document for Blind’s posthumous status among her contemporaries.

In contrast to Garnett’s stance as arbiter, Blind traces in her reviews of other poets the circumstances of the production of the poem in the context of the poet’s life and work. She follows this with her analysis of the aesthetic qualities of the poem and how this indicates the kind of reader who will be interested in the poet’s work. While this approach produces clear judgments of strengths and weaknesses, the authority for such judgments rests with Blind’s analysis and interpretation of the evidence. Both are accessible to her reader’s evaluation of reasoned criticism or agreement.

Richard Garnett’s benevolent authoritative stance towards Blind is underpinned by the general cultural importance of respectability, both by the male biographer’s dignity and knowledge, and by the female poet’s decorum in

---

5. In the letter dated 15 Oct. 1895, Blind writes to Garnett of her joy about Cotterell’s review of *Birds of Passage* saying that it was more appreciative than the reviews by her friends: “I felt as if I had taken a powerful stimulant. I immediately began a number of things & must have written about twenty pages in one day. I fear it must seem very egotistical to you who are so much more philosophical but I can’t help it. Voilà. My mind needs it as much as my body does food & drink & without it existence is often only a living death” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 145-47. MS 61929).

6. Symons’s edition of Blind’s poems was commissioned by Blind’s friend, Dr Ludwig Mond, the Jewish German-born chemist and industrialist, and his wife (Garnett 42).
her choice of subject matter and delicacy of form and execution. Richard Garnett’s respectability as writer, poet and keeper of printed books in the British Museum, is marked by his image appearing as one of the famous caricatures in *Vanity Fair*. It establishes the public gradient from his importance to Blind’s need of his sympathy as a woman poet.

This is how Garnett has to be understood when he surmises in his “Memoir” that, “[t]he independence which distinguished [Blind] for good and ill must have been exceedingly conspicuous” (2). He constructs a picture of Blind’s upbringing according to what “must have been” the case to have “endowed her with a premature knowledge of the world, and ideas and ideals unknown to most maidens of such tender years” (3). He judges disagreements between Blind and Mazzini about Byron to be a matter of age difference: “Mathilde in 1830 would have felt exactly as Mazzini still felt in 1860,” adding that Mazzini represented in some measure “a past generation” (15). He assures his reader that Blind’s advocacy of “female franchise” had been merely for the sake of removing “what she regarded as a stigma” (18). Blind’s work as a biographer, he reports as self-indulgent: “It was a passion with her to celebrate illustrious women, which the publication of the “Eminent Women Series,” edited by her friend, Mr. J. H. Ingram, enabled her to gratify” (32). And he dismisses Madox Brown’s unshakable belief in Blind’s genius as a flaw in his character for being lamentably “little skilled in the distribution of light and shade” in life (33).

In fact, he describes Blind’s intellectual stance in a sweeping judgement as unduly precocious:

Nothing was more characteristic of her than the instinct which led her to the highest things. She would always, if she could, address her conversation to the most distinguished person present in a company, read the greatest author, and consult the highest authority; in the main a most commendable course, but which may occasionally in society have overborne superior and mortified inferior people, and which in literature left her ignorant of many things which greater condescension to humble utility would have revealed. (26)

Garnett’s superior *balanced* view of Blind’s ability leads him to ignore the popular success of Blind’s *Ascent of Man* (1888). Instead, he echoes the
dismissive response of critics who judged the poem from the perspective of the Victorian conflation of biological and social evolution. Garnett’s tone is gently patronizing as he prepares his reader for a disappointment by making a general observation of Blind having “frequently approached the sublime and sometimes reached it” (35). As regards her *Ascent of Man*, he assures his reader that she was “passionately interested in her theme” and “as deeply versed in its scientific lore as was necessary for a poet,” and that she had been “struggling heroically against its gigantic difficulties” (35). All the same, the result was:

not indeed the desiderated epic, but a dithyramb, noble in many parts, here and there marred by grandiloquence and want of artistic form. If it must be said, magnis excidit ausis [failed in bold attempts (Ovid)], the descent was less abrupt than would have befallen a less animated poet, and was broken by excursions into the domains of history and allegory, more manageable than the domain of science. (36)

This Victorian tone of authority did not command total submission at the time; it was possible to argue back. Although Blind did never avail herself of that possibility, we know that she read her poems to friends and engaged with their criticism.

We have to assume that she shared with her friends values about the importance of communicating with the people as opposed to aiming for approval from the establishment of the arts. A general cultural acceptance of this approach would explain the publication of her signed essays and unsigned reviews of other people’s work. Her unsigned reviews in the *Athenæum* contrast with the Victorian reviewer’s *sympathy*, by the focused detachment of

---

7. This includes Wallace’s dismissive introduction to the second edition of Blind’s *Ascent of Man* (1899).

8. City University of London have identified Blind’s unsigned contributions to the *Athenæum* in their hard copies by writing her name across her contributions in ink.
the, as yet unnamed, concept of empathy. Blind sees the poet in the company of relevant poets for her subject matter and her poetics. She analyses the poem in the context of the poet's related interests, and according to the interests of potential readers. For instance, Woolner's *Silenus* (1884) draws from her a survey of the prevalence among poets with a classical education to choose classical topics. She notes three different ways of dealing with Greek myths, for two of which she refers to Swinburne and Shelley. The third, shared by "Mr. Lewis and Mr. Woolner," is to read "modern ethical lessons into the primitive creations of pagan naturalism" (165). Given this negative signal, Blind grants, however, that Woolner does it well. Nevertheless, she imagines that his reader might get confused if she tries to identify Woolner's "heroes" with the "well-remembered heroes of mythology" (165). She extends the opportunity to praise by contemplating the beneficial transference of influence from one art form to another with a reference to D. G. Rossetti's poems as a painter. Delighting in Woolner's sculpting to inspire a "magical faculty of describing [objects] in words," she finds him, however, "not equally successful" with "the more abstruse and symbolical parts of his subject." There he sounds "at times like a temperance preacher" (166). Summing up her review with a personal comment, she believes *Silenus* to be "likely to enhance Mr Woolner's reputation among his contemporaries, and to gain for itself a wide circle of appreciative readers" ("Silenus" 165-66). Her reader is thus informed of her true evaluation of the poem as not world-changing, but also of her empathy, given his circumstances, and of her respect for his achievement.

Using empathy in equal measure with a much more severe criticism for Canon Dixon's *Mano: a Poetical History* (1883), Blind acknowledges his choice of the medieval period as a worthwhile challenge, which he, however, "has not quite met" (233). She grants that the complications of the narrative of

9. Carolyn Burdett discusses how Vernon Lee developed the concept of "empathy" (translated from the German 'Einfühlung') in her "Beauty and Ugliness" (1897) as a "scientifically verifiable process which explains why beauty matters to us" (259). Aaron Simmons (2014) in "In Defense of the Moral Significance of Empathy" argues: "Although some forms of empathy may not be morally important, empathy ... is both necessary and sufficient to care for another's well-being, provided that one's empathy is both cognitive and affective [my emphasis] (97). This is what Blind means by "Love."
“Christendom [having been] in a state of unnatural tension, believing that the end of the world was at hand” would contribute to the fact that his characters are not fully developed (233). She is decisive, however, about his archaic diction being clumsy, with words that are “often devoid of taste and felicity.” Whilst she considers his chosen meter “terza rima” as “not well suited to the English language,” Blind dignifies the attempt by discussing its difficulties as evident in Shelley’s and Browning’s translations from the Divine Comedy (234). Shelley had completed only one poem in the form, his “Ode to the West Wind,” whereas Browning had “modified the meter to completely alter its character” (234). Based on her conscientious analysis and interpretation, Blind’s concluding comment considers the interested reader: “Mr Dixon can scarcely be said to have been successful; still a long narrative poem in so difficult a metrical form is an interesting experiment, and must possess considerable attraction for every student of poetry” (“Mano: A Poetical History” 233-34). Thus the Canon’s work has been honoured as a worthy attempt from which others might learn despite Blind’s strong reservations.

For a review of pleasant poetry, Blind dignifies The Poetical Works of Frances Anne Kemble (1884) with Goethe’s term “Gelegenheitsgedichte” (“occasional poems”). She promotes this perspective further by linking the volume to “the poet’s earlier publication” of the “fresh, vivid, and delightfully amusing ‘Records of a Girlhood’” (50). Condemning Kemble’s ballads with faint praise as “too good for blame, [and] not good enough for praise,” she allows that her judgment is hard in an age “of the most magnificent specimens of that form of poetry” (50). And on having listed the sins Kemble commits against the sonnet form, she finishes with the cheerful praise that these sonnets “sometimes in the beauty and intensity of their expression, though not in style, [...] remind us of the sonnets of Miss Rossetti” (“The Poetical Works of Frances Anne Kemble” 50-51). Blind ’s constructive review links poet and critic to the community of artists in the shared pleasure of discovering moments of exceptional beauty.

Where Blind shares an issue as a poet, she raises the underlying question as a general need for clarification. Her own novel Tarantella (1885) is imitating poetry and had to wait for five years to finally get published. She supports the Earl of Lytton’s “novel in verse,” “in an age when music has successfully amalgamated with the drama, and thus become a distinctly new
art, when pictures aspire to be symphonies and symphonies strive to paint landscapes” (264). She declares that, “what both artist and critic sorely need at the present hour is a new ‘Aesthetic,’ … [to] define the true limits of the different arts” (264).

As for her analysis of the Earl’s Glenaveril (1885), she acknowledges its treatment of the Darwinian and Spencerian theme of the law of heredity. The literary credentials accruing from this are in Blind’s reference to George Eliot who was “the first to embody their scientific teaching” in fiction, “in Felix Holt, The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda” (264). The extraordinary length of the poem is accepted for it “lightly touches on most of the topics of the age, from politics to Alpine adventure, and from Buddhism to land nationalization,” making it “in a certain sense … an epic of modern life” (266). Her mocking tone of declaring the author’s “political creed” to be a “Conservative communism” is supported by the evidence of Lytton’s invention of an economic system where “no wage-paid labour is allowed” (266). The logical consequence is a currency of meritocracy, which leaves those who cannot compete to be expelled from the community. Blind summarizes with critical generosity: “He glides from subject to subject, now donning the tragic and now the comic mask; but whether his mood be sentimental or satirical, he may drive his reader mad, but he never bores him” (266). Hence, although there is a lack of “a true poet’s perfection of form,” the poem “is so rich in varied experience of life” that it “would be ungracious to carp too much at its shortcomings” (“Glenaveril” 264-66). Although Blind cannot say these shortcomings serve a purpose in the poet’s intention of subverting perfection of form, she does allow that the poet’s aspirations count for more than the imperfections of form.

In these reviews of very different kinds of poems, Blind is consistent in giving convincing criticism by contextualising achievements and problems in equal measure. The implication is that both belong to a poet’s contribution to the British culture of her day. This theme-based approach is very different from the often dismissive but almost always patronizing judgemental tone in praise and criticism by her reviewers. During her lifetime, Blind was well respected and loved for the sympathy she showed for her typological characters in her
Her friends among the critics knew her as a poet with the same kind of comprehensive appreciation as Blind invests in her reviews. Singular evidence for this comes in the short introduction by Arthur Symons, her friend and literary executor, to his *Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind* (1897). He sketches Blind’s life and work without misrepresentation. He acknowledges “thought and feeling as one and the same substance” for Blind, and knows that in her poetry she could “express a vivid personality” while signalling detachment “in what may often seem to be an impersonal way.” He knows that she “believed” the “scientific teaching of Darwin, by an act of faith, as the devout Christian believes in the mysteries of his church.” And he knows of her “universal passion, which found its keenest satisfaction in the giving up of ‘puny personal joy and pain,’ its finest reward in a perhaps vague, yet closely realized, and certainly ‘deathless’ hope” (Symons v).

Despite this recognizable sketch of Blind, Symons bows to Victorian disapproval of Blind’s “Dramas in Miniature” (“Dramatic Monologues” 797) and “The Prophecy of St. Oran” by omitting these from his *Selection* of her poetry. Significantly, critics at the time praised his selection while being exceptionally critical of Blind as a poet; the particular focus for their dismissiveness was on her *Ascent of Man*. A reviewer for the *Academy* declared her *Ascent of Man* “in most respects, extraordinarily prosaic,” explaining that “[h]er intelligence was not strong enough … to fuse its scientific material into the glowing vapour of imaginative truth” (“Mathilde Blind” 567).

A correspondent rejected point for point the hostile review, agreeing with Symons that Blind “was a poet almost in spite of herself” as he quotes her “Nirvana” from her *Ascent of Man*, which he sees as Blind’s last word: “Divest thyself, O Soul, of vain desire” (J. 41). The reviewer in the *Saturday Review*, however, consigns her to oblivion, together with all the other “songstresses,” including Augusta Webster, Emily Pfeiffer and Amy Levy: “not one of them, praised as each was in her own time, has added so much as a single lyric to the store of permanent English poetry.” His only exceptions among woman poets are “Elizabeth Browning and Christina Rossetti” (“Miss Blind's Poems” 54).

10. A portrait photograph of Blind in formal attire with a direct look at the viewer appeared in 1897 in the *Literary Yearbook* (270).
Such is the voice of the Victorian arbiters of women’s poetry at the fin de siècle. I will examine their lasting dominance in the next section.

1.3 Blind and Periodization of Poetry

Scholars of Victorian poetry inherited thus the permanent English poetry, pruned of its women poets, and centred on the Victorian canon, until “Victorian Women’s Poetry” became an independent field of study in the 1990s. For Blind’s poetry, this new perspective meant that the occasional sonnet would appear in modern anthologies, most frequently her “Manchester by Night.” From time to time, scholars would include Blind in a comparative approach as a Victorian Woman Poet. In 1999, Blind received recognition as an established poet during her lifetime in Diedrick’s entry in the Dictionary of Literary Biography (“Mathilde Blind”), and in Vadillo’s theme-based focus in her “New Woman Poets and the Culture of the Salon at the Fin de Siècle.”

However, “Victorian Woman Poet,” as an addition to its parent field of “Victorian Poet,” could be seen as centring on a Literary Ladies’ canon, in relation to which Blind is still the outsider. Her approach of subsuming the individual’s point of view, including her own, under the diversity of all individual assertions appears to denote her as outsider to the literary identity of male and female poets alike.

11. Virginia Blain’s (2009) annotated anthology of Victorian Women Poets (2001) includes Blind as one of the thirteen poets with a section of twenty pages of poems (185-87).

12. Blind received also generous attention as a friend of Ford Madox Brown’s family in Thirlwell’s biographies William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis. (171-72 passim); and in Into the Frame: The Four loves of Ford Madox Brown (169-255).

13. E.g. in 2004 Angela Collins’s contribution to an online student project, “Darwin’s Sirens: Women Writing Evolution,” identifies Blind’s personal “political and social activism through a feminist perspective” as reason for Blind to have been “excluded from the literary canon.”

The examiner of my unpublished MA dissertation on Blind and the woman question (1989) declared her poetry to be “worthless.”
This causes problems to literary critics when the pressure is on researchers with an interest in her work to discover some comparability that justifies their interest in Blind’s poetry as significant to the period. For instance, Simon Avery assumes a political and social comparability with Eleanor Marx in his "Tantalising Glimpses" (2000). The glimpses are, however, scant and speculative. Mathilde’s social comparability with Eleanor as members of the second generation German exile community is lost with the break-up of the earlier friendship between Karl Marx and Karl Blind. It put an end to social relations between the two families when Eleanor could not have been more than five years old. The political radicalism of both women is expressed by Eleanor as a Marxist socialist in her political activism; Blind would have seen this as a legitimate stance without sharing the activist approach. Her mission was to transcend ideological polarizations, not to identify with one side or another in ideological polarizations. They would, however, be present at similar events. For instance both were scheduled as speakers on Shelley in the Shelley Society.

Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo introduced in 2006 “Fin-de-Siècle" as a new designated field of study to allow for literary criticism to explore how gender is “richly enmeshed in other concerns,” and to “lay the foundations for inquiries into … how their poetics can be traced to the twentieth century” (392). Out of fifteen articles three focused on Mathilde Blind. However, the focus on the fin de siècle as a period still inhibits tracing Blind’s poetics from the scientists’ influence to the twentieth century. The quest for some kind of comparability of Blind as a woman poet of the period does not allow the figure of Blind to acquire plasticity. She does not emerge as a fully modelled Victorian figure in a picture that has atmospheric and linear perspective. Attempts to bring the figure into focus depend on creating a variety of topical sub-frames within each of which a partial view of Blind is used for some comparison. Blind and her

---

14. Thain and Vadillo (2006) emphasize: “Moreover, the term ‘Victorian’ has begun to be scrutinized for its usefulness by critics such as Amanda Anderson, Joseph Bristow, Sharon Marcus, and Kate Flint because of its limitations when discussing issues … that …are at the very heart of fin de siècle poetics” (390).
work appears then as an impressionist figure like Cézanne’s Cupid in his *Still Life with Plaster Cast* (1894), viewed from shifting positions in shifting moods as a series of happenstances.

For example, Holmes’s *Darwin’s Bards* (2009) creates for Blind’s *Ascent of Man* the sub-frame “Darwinian evolution” (49). There is then an *a priori* assumption that Blind is comparable with others in John Holmes’s presentation of Darwin’s bards in British and American poetry. Thus Holmes lists Blind and Swinburne under his dismissive rubric of “pseudo-Darwinian evolutionary poetry” while castigating both for adapting “the idea of evolution … to their own purposes, … even though they knew that Darwinian evolution is undirected” (73). He links Blind with Wallace for their supposedly shared Darwinian feminism, even though Wallace had distanced himself from Blind’s *Ascent of Man* (J. Holmes 186).

For his next topic of comparison of Darwinism and feminism, Holmes refers to Evelleen Richards “and others” to assert comparability of feminists “such as Olive Schreiner, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Mathilde Blind” (523). He claims that they “tended to predicate their argument on a notion of sexual difference, emphasizing women’s maternal and co-operative virtues and arguing for the benefits to society of allowing these to exercise wider influence through politics and the professions” (523). It is a sweepingly blurred image of Blind as a Victorian woman poet. Holmes also pairs Blind with Meredith for a supposedly shared concept of love as a force of social evolution: “Like Blind’s *The Ascent of Man*, George Meredith’s *Modern Love* is a poetic exploration of the social implications of Darwinism” (John Holmes 523). Thus Blind remains firmly on Holmes’s studio table as a series of twisted flat images. Whatever the reasons for this, it does no harm where author and reader both know the full picture of a poet, and how much of it has been sacrificed to serve the author’s purpose for a particular study. But the shared understanding is missing here.

---

15. Jonathan Smith says that “the traffic between science and literature is still mostly assumed to travel in one direction, with the literary responding to the scientific, even when the two are regarded as parts of a common social context.” In contrast, he argues that “‘The Sundew’ and ‘Insectivorous Plants’ showed that “science and poetry resided on a two-way cultural street” for the Victorians” (147).
Even an exclusive focus on Blind suffers under the limitations of periodization. James Diedrick, in preparation for a literary biography of Blind, takes the approach of comparing and contrasting the critics’ idea of a permanent English literature and Blind’s neglect for this. He notes the continued neglect and misrepresentation in modern literary criticism and aims to “rescue some of Blind’s best poetry from the reductive judgments that have dogged her literary legacy” (“Dramatic Monologues” 362). Diedrick also alerts his reader to the unintended consequences of misrepresentation where scholars use extracts from Blind’s poems out of context. A specific example is Armstrong’s discussion of “Blind’s sonnet, ‘Motherhood’, in isolation from its context in her ‘The Ascent of Man’” (“Dramatic Monologues” 361). He draws attention to Blind’s slow emergence “from what E.P. Thompson has called ‘the enormous condescension of posterity’” (“The Dark Blue” 210). His example is that Bradley and Houghton have omitted to mention Mathilde Blind in their introduction to The Dark Blue in The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals (1987). He comments that the omission is “the more surprising because of the nature of the magazine; its aims are to promote progressive politics and avant-garde aesthetics,” which should make Blind “a primary representative of the magazine” (210).

His second layer of Blind’s comparability transcends the subject of the neglected Victorian woman poet and aims to integrate her engagement with the Victorian Zeitgeist as a basis for comparison. In the process, he notes her

---

16. Diedrick lists in 2002 Blind’s representation in Victorian anthologies: Sonnets of Three Centuries: A Selection (1882); Women’s Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems by English, Scotch and Irish Women (1889); The Poets and the Poetry of the Century (1892); and A Victorian Anthology 1847-1895 (1895) (FN1).

Ascent of Man as an example of the “positivist decadence” in her “late poetry” as a sign of her development since her poems in the Dark Blue (1871-72) when she had belonged to “the aesthetic school” (“The Hectic Beauty of Decay” 632). His argument for this development is circumstantial, however, as a development in her poetics during the “nine-year hiatus from poetry” while Blind was translating, editing and reviewing: “While Darwin tempered the melioristic humanism she imbibed from Comte and Strauss, her encounter with positivist science was liberating” (632). He sees Blind as displaying an independent assertiveness in her Ascent of Man and as challenging “this masquerade of culture,” by “enact[ing] the destruction of the humanist subject as Judeo-Christianity conceives it” (634). Under the dictate of comparability, this is another impressionistic, if wide-angled view of Blind, the Victorian poet.

I argued that periodization with a predetermined focus on poetry as a designated field of study commands the assumption of comparability. This does not serve well an informed recognition of Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism or British literature. Moreover, as a fragmentary impressionist image of Blind’s life and work is repeated, it starts to take on a solidity of its own. The misrepresentation of Blind’s intentions threatens to become a mockery of Blind’s life’s work. The next section will demonstrate how this happens in the hands of the dominant specialist.

1.4 The Distorting Authority of the Modern Scholar

Periodization presents genuine difficulties for retrieving Blind as a Victorian poet from the oblivion to which she had been assigned. Gagnier’s discussion of “Victorian cultural philanthropy: people making people, and some people making things” highlights the danger of perpetuating Victorian perspective on Blind as an issue of gender. Gagnier explains Mackail’s distinction of men being seen in the context of “the production of product” while women’s philanthropic work was to produce “women’s autonomy and beautiful Souls” (121). This product differentiation is constantly on display in Victorian reviews of the work of women poets. They deny women poets the right to choose their subject matter and reject a woman’s use of language as unsuitable for women. Labelling Blind as an independent feminist implies acceptance of
the Victorian dominant culture and the Victorian reviewer’s point of view by judging Blind to oppose the dominant culture with a particular ideology. If there is to be made a distinction of suitable material and language for poetry, it would have to be gender-blind for a focus of judging choice of subject and use of language to convey or not to convey meaning. Blind is the producer of a product, both on inescapable economic grounds and by her functional outward-orientation for the production of her contribution to Victorian literary culture.

The inadvertently retained dominance of the period’s critics as arbiters of Blind’s poetry is starting to become a serious issue when one long poem is taken out of context of Blind’s work to serve a scholar’s specialism. Examples of the implied lack of due consideration of Blind as producer of her own product are Laporte casting Blind as St Oran’s hagiographer, and Fletcher declaring Blind to have “woven into her *Birds of Passage* … a double discourse of colonialism” (435).

Laporte’s “Atheist Prophecy” is concerned with claiming an authoritative interpretation of Blind’s *The Prophecy of St. Oran* (1881) by arguing against Virginia Blain’s supposed view of Blind being one of the “representatives of ‘the new breed of post-Darwinian atheists.’” His counter-claim is that these poets work hard “to reclaim and redeem some of the prominent religious elements of the mid-century poetess tradition,” and that Eliot’s “unusual combination of sentimental piety and religious scepticism gives them a particularly useful model for doing so” (427). He adopts Eliot’s poem “A Minor Prophet” (1874) for comparability with Blind’s *St. Oran* (1881). This leads him to claim that Blind is Oran’s hagiographer because she follows “Eliot’s prophetess” by reshaping the “Christian past in ways that more clearly resonate within the secular present” (434). He concludes that Blind does not share the atheism of Oran’s prophecy “as scholars have insinuated from Garnett to the present day.” Instead, he claims that Blind reconstructs “from the fragments of Christian history … the stature of a saint as she conceived of one” (433).

Although Blind’s view of the interdependence between the human animal and Nature is not more misrepresented by Laporte than by her contemporaries, Laporte perpetuates the Victorian claim to masculine authority. He decides on Blind’s comparability to serve his purpose. The flaw is in his making Eliot his primary focus and in subordinating Blind to Eliot’s “unusual combination of sentimental piety and religious scepticism” (Abstract). He does so with his key
quotation from Blain, taken from her introduction not to Blind’s poems, but to Amy Levy’s poems. In fact, Blain is circumspect in declaring a degree of comparability in the title of her book as *Victorian Women Poets* while being careful to preserve the diversity as she draws attention in her introductions to similarities and differences. Her introduction to Blind’s *St. Oran* is to say that Blind “deals with religious questions from a firmly atheistic angle” (Blain 186). This is no more than to give the reader a useful pointer for choosing to read or not to read the poem. While Blind’s *St. Oran* has a wider relevance in Victorian culture, Blain does not misrepresent Blind’s engagement with the Victorian religious discourse. It is Laporte’s attempt to integrate Blind’s poem into his specialism that needs attention.

Fletcher also asserts an authoritative voice and takes umbrage at “recent commentators on Blind’s career” (450). He intends “to point out the pervasiveness and recalcitrance of Orientalist generalizations and oversights in both Victorian culture and our scholarship about it” (452). The title of his essay includes a quotation from her poem “Soul-Drift” in “Songs of the Occident.” The poem represents a moment’s sense of freedom in the garden of the Villa Borghese in Rome as it starts with the line “I let my soul drift with the thistledown.” The last of three stanzas is the speaker’s out-of-body experience with a sense of liberation of the physical reality of the speaker’s being:

Go, happy Soul! run fluid in the wave,
Vibrate in light, escape thy natal curse;
Go forth no longer as my body-slave,
But as the heir of all the Universe. (80)

Fletcher assigns these last words to a supposed “evolutionary epistemology” in his essay title, “‘Heir of All the Universe’: Evolutionary Epistemology in Mathilde Blind’s Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident” (2005). He claims the line to signal Blind’s “freedom from gendered

---

18. Fletcher points at Armstrong for lack of concern, although he likes her phrase that Blind “ransacked different cultures for material” (p. 375), and at Diedrick for his silence “on the relation between the book and colonial politics.” Leighton and Reynolds fail, according to Fletcher, by characterizing Blind’s *Birds of Passage* as “light-hearted” (451).
prohibitions that the traveling Englishwoman enjoys” (440). Accordingly, Fletcher declares a need to examine “our understanding of Blind and ... our construction of a tradition of Victorian women's poetry” (450). With an almost hostile disregard of any relationship between form and meaning in Blind's poem, he tells his reader of a discrepancy that must not be overlooked. Whereas the birds’ flight “seems to bind Europe and Egypt, Occident and Orient, through the common fate of human transience,” he points to the “spatio-temporal organization” represented in the histories of “Greece, Italy, and ‘old Egypt’s desert,’” which, in his view, means “an imperial genealogy from present to past” (435). Accordingly, he claims that he has detected a “combination of the bird’s eye view and the reverse chronology,” and tells his reader that this “signals the double discourse of colonialism woven into Birds of Passage” (435). Fletcher takes these “ideologies of imperialism” as the a priori standard against which he declares what “our understanding of Blind” should be (450).

Laporte and Fletcher misrepresent Blind’s life and work quite seriously due to their relatively detailed attention to the fragmentary impressionistic image of Blind. Their texts will, however, remain useful links of what Gagnier calls “the multidirectional causal chains” (19) for twenty-first century responses to Blind’s contribution to Victorian literature.¹⁹ However, to see the poems as a contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism with an appreciation of Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice we have to turn to Jason Rudy’s theme-based history, Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics (2009).

Rudy conducts an exploration of multidirectional causal chains in his history of Victorian physiological poetics. Starting with Hemans and Tennyson, he traces the influence of a “growing consensus within the Victorian scientific community” of seeing “electricity, magnetism, light and heat [as] interconnected” manifestations of the concept of “energy” (137). Linked to this is the biological energy, as Darwin “emphasizes the importance of rhythm in the process of sexual selection, and thus the evolutionary process as a whole” (138). Blind, as if echoing Rudy, says in her commonplace book, in Rome in 1893, of the poet’s

---

¹⁹. Sara Lyons builds on Laporte’s argument with a survey of the period for her suggestions of how Blind’s Prophecy of St. Oran might be read as a text of the Fin de Siècle.
connectedness with her reader through language: “The poet only truly lives when he feels the rapture of communion; when his soul, mirrored in a sister soul, is doubled like the moon glassed in the Lake of Nemi” (36). Rudy explains how it works: “Through the ‘shock’ of a felicitously placed word, a compelling linguistic friction, or a moving rhythmic pressure, poetry transmits, lightning-like, new truths to its reader” (Rudy 5).

Instead of comparing Blind and Swinburne, Rudy looks at each poet separately as they understand the passion of the late-Romantic poets, Byron and Shelley. Both gain in substance by the scientific advancements of the age, and by a will to find new poetic expressions for their respective political commitments. As a transition from the introduction to the two sections on Swinburne and Blind, Rudy makes a statement of comparability claiming that for both poets “rapture … comes to stand as a substitute for religious belief,” which is not the case for Blind, not even as “a poetic practice” (140). Nevertheless, Rudy argues with supporting evidence for both poets that they struggle “to imagine a form of poetry that might capture the resonances between human individuals and the natural world” (154). Thereby he allows for further exploration rather than insisting on interpretive authority.

Rudy’s evidence comes from our knowledge of the friendship between Blind and Swinburne from letters and from Blind’s review of Swinburne’s *Songs before Sunrise* in 1871. Blind sees Swinburne’s vitality through Rudy’s eyes, so to speak:

> whenever I happen to meet Swinburne I am struck afresh by the wonderful vitality and verve of the man’s mind. His conversation has the same bracing effect upon me in one way as sea-winds have in another, and I am conscious of a vibration after it for days and weeks together. (qtd. in Garnett 46)

20. Blind’s poetic voice and the design of her poems never substitute one faith for another, but address faith as a focus of human energy that depends on individual circumstances and cultural context. She writes in her commonplace book on 16 Dec 1895: “All religious beliefs have only been crutches or rather supports for the Infant mind till it should be strong enough to stand without them. But how very few are strong enough! And till they are, must we not be very careful how we deprive weak human nature of its story” (F 37).
Rudy traces Blind’s separateness in her personal biography and her commitment to the Darwinian “truth of rhythmic experience” by quoting from the opening lines of her *Ascent of Man*, where she refers to the “rhythmical chain … Far into vistas empyreal.” Accordingly, he reads the poem with Alice Meynell’s claim in mind, that “[i]f life is not always poetical, it is at least metrical.” By transcending comparability, he combines his reading of Blind’s poem with his attention to her struggle to “capture the resonances between human individuals and the natural world” (156).

Most importantly, Rudy explains Blind’s separateness by the way she differentiates her vision of the poet’s mission from Shelley’s, the poet she revered, by “building on Victorian physiological science and evolutionary theory”:

> Whereas Shelley describes the poet’s bringing new light to the world – “enlarge[ing] the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight” (Shelley 488) – Blind conceives of this poetic enlightenment as a physiological experience enabled by the revitalizing forces of rhythm and meter. (160)

Thus Rudy’s investigation of interaction and separateness in his thematic approach overcomes Diedrick’s problem with the constraints imposed on scholars by the implied requirement of producing some form of comparability within the community of *Fin-de-Siècle Poets*. Together with Tanya Agathocleous, Rudy has since introduced “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms” as a new designated field of study. This makes the need for comparability redundant by a change of methodology:

> we must not only expand our sense of the period beyond the confines of any individual nation but must also perform our own cosmopolitan juggling act, in which we must strive to close-read the aesthetic qualities of literary texts within an increasingly complex and far-reaching historical and geographical frame. (392-3)

This is exactly Blind’s approach to her reviews of the poems by other poets, particularly so in her review of William Morris’s *Love is Enough* (1872), as I will discuss in the next section.
1.5 Mathilde Blind and William Morris

I will argue here that we can see in Blind’s review of William Morris’s *Love is Enough* (1872), in the *Athenaeum*, an approach that is mirrored in Gagnier’s macrobe of William Morris as an autonomous world-citizen in the Victorian culture (150-58). Both Blind and Gagnier demonstrate Agathocleous and Rudy’s (2010) recommended methodology for analysing “the aesthetic qualities of literary texts” within their relevant historical and geographical frame.

Blind sees Morris as a time-traveller for using a metrical construction that had fallen into “such total disuse, that its reviver might be fairly entitled to the claim of invention.” She considers it to be “the only purely national one,” and analyses “this style of versification” in its European history as “habitual with Northern nations … rhymeless, like the poetry of the Greeks, … [it] possessed no system of foot measure, depending on accent instead.” She honours Morris’s world-citizenship for the “remarkable felicity” to the Icelandic songs in his “version of the Volsunga Saga.” And yet she values his creativeness in his English poem for its “greater affinity with English than Norse models.” She rehearses the “general law which regulated all alliterative meters,” and discusses its significance in the Icelandic and the Anglo-Saxon language to demonstrate Morris’s improvement in the approach for his poem. Her examples illustrate Morris’s variation of his use of alliteration and how this enhances “the melodious beauty of the verse” because of its apparent “harmony with the spirit of the narrative.” Overall, Blind tells her reader, Morris’s improvement means that “[w]e not merely realise a scene, or an image, by means of a mental effort, but are brought into an immediate sensuous contact with it. Triumphs of this kind are of the essence of poetry” (657).

Her only regret is about Morris’s choice of subject matter, which might have been of “loftier proportion” (658). She considers his “King Pharamond” to be “but a vague shadowy king” with the effect that “we see reality, not enhanced, but transformed” (658). However, for Blind, this is not to assert her authority, but to open discussion for poet and reader alike. She gives reasons for her regret and emphasizes: “The rare mastery with which Mr. Morris handles an unusual and truly magnificent form of versification, - a form the full scope of which reveals itself in passages where the grandeur of conception requires to be vigorously embodied.” Then she contemplates alternative causal chains as
worthy of Morris’s cosmopolitanism: “Homer would, for the first time become truly naturalized on English soil. … [or] some of the grand but fragmentary Norse tales might, for the first time, unfold their eagle plumage to the full, or the Arthurian legends at last attain to complete development.” She refers to Morris’s “singularly successful earliest work” and speculates that “the mysticism, the weird sweetness, of these Celtic legends, their strange, dreamy fascination, would marvellously harmonize with some of the most distinctive characteristics of Mr. Morris’s genius” (“Love Is Enough” 658).

Finally, she argues for the British culture to benefit as a world-culture from any such undertaking alongside Tennyson’s *Idylls*: “If we had as many King Arthurs as the Greeks possessed tragedies concerning the woes of the house of Agamemnon, or the Italians representations of the Madonna, we should probably find that in this way we could not fail to attain some culminating achievement” (658). In short, Blind’s method of reviewing Morris’s poem is to explore all the tentacles that show the poem to be part of a British cosmopolitan culture as opposed to judging the text from the position of the reviewer’s supposedly superior authority. As a reviewer of Morris’s poem, Blind sees her *function* to be a link in the multidirectional causal chains that transmit a local text into the status of a cultural good that helps to shape world-literature.  

Blind’s own autonomous world-citizenship is different from Morris’s inasmuch as Morris elected to live and work within the abstract realm of world-citizenship by transcending his local everyday culture. From his unambiguously English background as the son of a wealthy middle-class Essex family with an Oxford education, he later acquired the spirit of medievalism; he developed the outsider’s perspective on his own native culture. The resulting cosmopolitan

---

21. Twentieth-century critics place the subject matter of the poem with greater significance in the context of Morris’s life and work. Frederick Kirchhoff (1977) argues that “[i]t is precisely because *Love is Enough* makes explicit and therefore untenable the death wish of his earlier poetry that it points the way to the profounder writing of his final decades” (306). Florence S. Boos (1988) sees the poem as an expression of a “personally difficult time for Morris” as he “struggled to accept his wife’s emotional and sexual estrangement.” She argues that “[a] successful resolution of the introspective period of 1869-71 sustained Morris in the inner peace and other activity of his last twenty-five years” (53).
perspective means, however, an everyday reality in which he no longer takes for granted the social cultural values of his everyday existence. It is the growing loneliness of the world-citizen. In comparison, Blind arrived at her cosmopolitanism from the opposite direction. Uprooted from what might have been her home-culture, she was transferred into the cultural in-between zone of the community of exiled international revolutionaries in London. Both her everyday experience and the abstract world of reading and conversation supported an outsider status in relation to Victorian society. Her world was neither German nor English, neither Jewish nor atheist. The loneliness of the world-citizen was Blind’s starting point for a disorienting everyday reality. Identifying Morris and Blind as world-citizens is evoking a version of what Benedict Anderson called an *imagined community*. World-citizenship is not a diaspora or subculture. It has not the coherence of shared values or of its own invented traditions. It is a state of being and a trust that the world-citizen is only lonely, not actually alone; others are similarly lonely outsiders in their autonomous stance within their everyday culture and community. Morris and Blind would find these others in the culture of *salon* of St. John’s Wood and particularly among their friends in the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle.

The Italian world-citizen, Guiseppe Mazzini, knew about Blind’s loneliness and taught her to transcend it with the outward directedness of a personal mission: “we have each of us a *function*, an individualized mission” (Mathilde Blind 710). The “we” of the autonomous world-citizen and the *function* of the individualized mission are the attributes of the world-citizen’s imagined community of individuals with their increasingly dispersed histories across cultural boundaries. From within that community individual researchers might respond to Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism with their personal “cosmopolitan juggling” (Agathocleous and Rudy 392) from a growing diversity of standpoints.

1.6 Conclusion

I argued that Blind’s cosmopolitanism is science-based in adopting Darwin’s emphasis on the need of diversity for natural selection as the
mechanism of the biological evolution of the species. She sees the continued relevance of diversity for the social evolution of the species of the human animal in the ongoing co-evolution of Nature and humankind. She extrapolates from Darwin’s emphasis on the importance of the individual organism to the social importance of the individual’s autonomous point of view and a resulting diversity of ideas and points of view. Consequently, she transcends with her writing her personal political radicalism by a method of placing at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her writing: herself as author or poet, her subject and her reader. The designs of her work have the effect to subsume the authorial voice under the diversity of possible views of her contemporaries and of her twenty-first-century readers and critics.

I argued that this was contrary to the Victorian assumption of a universal history of humankind, in which Britain was seen as most advanced, and foreign cultures were considered to be at lower stages of the linear progress of a universal history. In terms of literary criticism this hierarchical view of the world positioned critics as the arbiters of literary taste and upholders of the values and attitudes of the dominant Victorian culture. Appreciative and supportive friends like Garnett and Symons were seamlessly also dismissive and condescending critics and editors.

I argued that the slowness of Blind’s emergence from neglect was strongly related to the choice of periodization for the designated field of study of Victorian and fin-de-siècle poets. Three consecutive designations for the Victorian period had the effect of inadvertently keeping in place the authority of Victorian critics. Researchers were obliged to challenge their authority by suitable comparison between the approved and the disapproved work of Victorian literature. I argued that Rudy’s theme-based approach for his Electric Meters (2009) transcends the need of comparability; it allows Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice to emerge as that of a Victorian writer and poet despite the loneliness of her stance as a world-citizen. Agathocleous and Rudy’s call for researchers employing a new methodology for contributions to “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms” permits me to follow Rudy’s theme-based approach with my own cosmopolitan juggling in the close-reading of the aesthetics of Blind’s texts.

I will follow the methodological examples of Rudy’s Electric Meters, Gagnier’s Individualism, and Blind’s review of Morris’s Love is Enough for my
approach in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2, “Blind’s Immigrant Cosmopolitanism,” I will consider the historical, political and cultural conditions of Germany in the 1840s as background for Blind’s family history. I will focus specifically on Blind’s mother, Friederike, for creating Blind’s nomadic lifestyle, and for transmitting to her the ethos and content of the German-style cultural education. For Blind’s development of her autonomous cosmopolitan voice, I will focus on the influential generosity and companionship Blind found in the culture of salon of St. John’s Wood. There, she learned to evaluate her German cultural background. She also shared there Shelleyan and Wagnerian ideas about art for the people, as opposed to art for art’s sake with an ambition to get establishment approval.

In Chapter 3, “Blind’s Autonomous Radicalism,” I will explore the difference between Blind’s personal political radicalism and her autonomous radicalism as a writer and poet. I will explore this in three works of different genres: her biography George Eliot (1883), her novel Tarantella (1885), and her poem The Ascent of Man (1888). I will argue that her method in all three genres is to commune with her reader on equal terms as individuals whose autonomy is an intrinsic attribute of their individuality. I will discuss the Victorian reviewer’s inability to recognize Blind’s cosmopolitan intentions with reference to relevant cultural contexts.

In Chapter 4, “The Woman Question,” I will explore Blind’s response to different demands on her biographical writing. Her subjects are women of controversial reputations as women, which overshadow potential recognition of their achievements. Her biographical essay “Mary Wollstonecraft” (1878) bypasses the public concern about Wollstonecraft’s reputation by focusing on her contribution to British culture as it is in 1878. An enforced major cut to Blind’s manuscript of her Madame Roland (1886) draws just criticism from two reviewers who identify the detrimental effect of the cut; they confirm thereby Blind’s sound judgement of her function as a biographer. The idea of Blind’s undue admiration for Madame Roland in particular is uncharacteristic for Blind’s intention of deflecting authorial authority. This is apparent in a comparison of her carefully constructed distance to the Russian painter, Marie Bashkirtseff despite her declared admiration for Bashkirtseff. Blind’s two-part biographical essay and introduction to her translation of the controversial French diary Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff (1887) aim for the reader’s detachment in
empathy with the young woman who caused so much outrage. Her intentions for all her work as a writer on the woman question are confirmed by the designs for her poems *Dramas in Miniature* (1891), where Blind creates the detachment of empathy by subverting the detail and linearity of a social realism with the typologies of imaginary mini-stories.

In Chapter 5, “Blind’s Poems of her Travels,” I will explore Blind’s response to the landscapes and people of her travels as a literary traveller to Scotland. Her focus on the landscape, its people’s culture and their history results in two specific poems. *The Prophecy of St. Oran* (1881) is a reworking of the sixth-century legend of St. Oran from the Scottish Isle of Iona. Blind’s nineteenth-century version investigates the psychological dynamics of scepticism. As such, its relevance radiates from religious scepticism into insights about a general duty of inquiry. Blind’s *The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances* (1886) presents Blind’s research into the Highland crofter’s history of exploitation and abuse and their ejectment from their homes and deportation to the colonies. It shows most clearly Blind’s division between the commitment of her personal political radicalism and her function as a poet to transcend polarizations in the public domain by retaining the detachment of empathy with her readers diverse points of view. Her political radicalism is unmasked in the frame of the poem in several ways: the dedication of the poem, a biblical reference, a preface and annotations consisting of extracts from other authors’ arguments against the national land reform. Nevertheless, Blind deflect authorial authority with her narrator’s voice telling the crofter’s history as a quasi-fable with the use of hyperbole as the means of deflection of authorial authority.

Unlike the Scottish poems, Blind’s *Birds of Passage; Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895) is a collection of poems of a tourist’s memories of her travels. I will suggest that Blind depersonalizes the autobiographical nature of these poems by juxtaposing memorable moments from the continent of Europe with those from her travels to Egypt. The resulting theme of uncertainties about the tourist’s cultural identity in her interdependence with the global community is expressed by Blind’s design of associating the poems with Poe’s “The Raven” (1845). I will argue that this is the only volume of poetry where Blind does not employ the detachment of empathy because she shares with her reader the
uncertainties of a changing world view with the increasing globalisation at the fin de siècle.

In a brief Chapter 6, “Conclusion,” I will summarize how Blind’s science-based view of autonomy as the individual’s intrinsic attribute informs both her autonomous cosmopolitan voice and her methodology of deflecting authorial authority. I will summarize the effects of multidirectional causal chains of influence on both poet and critics and the benefit of Agathocleous and Rudy’s call for a new methodology for investigating these influences. I will sum up the major benefit of this approach to be that it allows us to transcend what Jonathan Smith (2003) identified as a persistent assumption, “that traffic between science and literature travels in one direction, with literary responding to the scientific, even when the two are regarded as parts of a common social context” (147).
2. Blind’s Immigrant Cosmopolitanism

In the previous chapter I suggested that Mathilde Blind and William Morris have different personal histories for their cosmopolitanism, though both assert the autonomous voice of the lonely world-citizen. Blind’s review of Morris’s poem demonstrates Agathocleous and Rudy’s recommended methodology for the researcher to perform her own cosmopolitan juggling. In this chapter I will explore the influences from Blind’s German background and her personal history on the development of the cosmopolitan voice of her writing. I will present these influences as four distinct layers, the first two of which are part of the circumstances of her birth and the early years of her upbringing. The second two layers represent Blind’s autonomous engagement with the political concerns of the time in the rich environment of the culture of salon in St John’s Wood. In this environment, Guiseppe Mazzini, friend of the Blind family, was initially her most important mentor by challenging the young Mathilde Blind to evaluate her German cultural heritage for its cultural and political influence on her personal and professional development. Subsequently, among the salons with their different focal points and regular visitors, Ford Madox Brown’s fortnightly parties were particularly important. She found in the Pre-Raphaelitism of the world-citizens as artists, writers and poets in Ford Madox Brown’s circle an imagined community that sustained her own outsider identity and contributed to the development of her autonomous cosmopolitan voice.

In section 2.1, “German Exiles in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” I will explore the background of German history and politics in the 1840s for Blind’s mother, Friederike Cohen, to join Karl Blind’s revolutionary campaigns. I will contextualise their settling in London’s German exile community in 1852 within nineteenth-century British culture. My focus is on tracing influences on Blind’s development in the cultural in-between zone of the exile community. Of particular interest are tensions experienced in the German exile community, and their impact on Blind, from two periods of war, the Austro-Prussian war in 1866 and the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71.

In section 2.2, “Blind’s Personal History and Development,” I will explore the impact of the German concept of Bildung (“education”), which was intended to secure suitable human resources for the competitiveness of the
Immigrant Cosmopolitanism  U Hill   39

confederation of Germany in the world market. I will trace its consequences on
the individual's spiritual relationship with the state for positive cultural meaning
and the negative effect of marginalization of the educated German middle-class
from the political process. I will reflect on the isolating inwardness and the
individual's cultural loneliness as this is expressed as both a strength and a
weakness in Blind's pronounced symmetric relationship with her mother, both in
Blind's childhood and at times of crisis and distress in later years. I will refer to
Blind's novel _Tarantella_ (1885) where she explores the impact of the political
marginalization of the educated class in Germany in the 1840s as a prototype
for the detrimental effect of political ignorance and disengagement.

In section 2.3, “Blind’s Retrospective View of her Education,” I will
analyse Blind’s preparatory work for a planned autobiographical novel, which
covers the two periods of her formal education: her experience at St John’s
Wood School and her year in Zurich. Her focus is on her eponymous heroine’s
development as it highlights the two main themes of her writing: religious
scepticism and the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. I will argue that Blind
was inspired by Barrett Browning’s _Aurora Leigh_, but abandoned the
experiment of writing an autobiographical novel because she could not subvert
the confessional nature of the _Bildungsroman_ sufficiently to deflect authorial
authority.

In section 2.4, “The Challenging Culture of St John’s Wood,” I will explore
Blind’s development as a participant in what Vadillo called “the culture of the
salon” in St John’s Wood. I will argue that in the rich social and intellectual
environment two elements were of particular significance: Giuseppe Mazzini’s
challenging Blind to evaluate her German cultural heritage, and the shared Pre-
Raphaelitism of views on art and literature. I will argue that Pre-Raphaelitism
was expressed in different ways, but, significantly for Blind, there was a shared
devotion to Shelley’s lyrics and political views and a shared interest in Richard
Wagner’s latter-day view of the relationship between art and society.

My overall argument in this chapter is that Blind learned to manage the
cultural loneliness of her nomadic life by her science-based concept of the
individual's significance in her interdependence with the species as a whole. In
turn, this presented a scientific reason for subsuming her individuality under the
diversity of the species in the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. In practical
terms it explains her separation of her political radicalism from her _function_ as a
writer and poet for contributing to the social evolution of humankind from a cosmopolitan perspective.

2.1 German Exiles in Nineteenth-Century Britain

In this section I will explore the relevant historical perspectives on Germany that shaped Blind’s upbringing in her early years. Both Blind’s mother and Karl Blind were political activists in the European revolutionary movements of the 1840s, which led to their arriving as political exiles in London, in 1852. I will focus on the historical differences between British and German nationhood in the nineteenth century for assessing the cultural tensions within the German exile community. These are of particular importance in respect of the Austro-Prussian war in 1866 and the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71. My focus is on the effect events had on Mathilde Blind’s development of her autonomous cosmopolitan voice.

In 1815, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, the Congress of Vienna decreed the thirty-nine German-speaking states between Prussia and Austria to be a confederation. The intention was to coordinate the economies of the region while leaving political sovereignty of each absolute ruler intact. It involved comprehensive modernization to develop the region as a successful unit in a capitalistic market. Jürgen Kocka maintains that this was driven mainly by civil servants imposing "reforms top-down" (30). Part of this project was to develop efficient human resources by establishing a public educational system that would serve both the general population and the elites. Economic growth was increasingly taken for granted as industrialization took hold with the building of railways and factories. However, problems of widening social inequalities created tensions between work and capital (30-31). Although these dynamics of economic growth are not unusual, the German structure of an economic confederation without socio-political unity until 1871 left initiatives for facing up to the problems in disarray.

Without a coherent government and its organizational institutions, it was also impossible to form an organized opposition or give focus to a revolutionary movement. Sabine Freitag gives a vivid image of the incoherence with her sweeping statement about the range of political standpoints from one extreme
of “the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s claim to a God-given right to sovereignty,” to its opposite with Karl Blind’s republican passion of “thirsting for a tyrant’s blood” (8-9).

The incoherence was observed on a long-term basis by British Germanophile literary critics from Thomas Carlyle to George Eliot. Rosemary Ashton reports that the English Quaker William Howitt commented on a curiosity about German culture from his observations of everyday constraints on the political mind in a country where an enviable “universal education” is offset by it having “no parliamentary system and a muzzled press” (Little Germany 12).

In her novel Tarantella: A Romance (1880-85), Blind adopts the German example of the 1840s for her theme of individual responsibility to integrate personal ambitions in the everyday political concerns of her society. Although the central location of her novel is an unnamed town in the South of Germany, the area of her family background, she transcends the idea of harm coming from political disengagement as a specific German issue by the burlesque treatment of an imagined politically marginalized people. She presents the provincial small town’s bourgeoisie as preoccupied with petty social ambitions without an inkling of the “world of politics, with all its mind-stirring schemes.” In turn, she creates a prototype for society’s responsibility to promote political engagement in a conversation between two educated middle-class men at the height of the turbulence of the European revolutionary movements. There is a professor’s political naivety whose untrained, newly discovered revolutionary fervour makes him end up in jail without having achieved anything and his globe-trotting friend’s debonair air of useless high-mindedness. The latter’s superior judgment is meant to chime with Blind’s English reader’s retrospective knowledge of the failed revolutions. The suave globe-trotter declares that the “German Hydra of the thirty-six crowned heads” could never be demolished because, “should you cut off one of them you will see it immediately replaced by another!” (2:106-7, ch.37). The polarity between the two friends, without a connecting coherence of shared political knowledge and understanding, demonstrates the cultural loneliness of a people who are marginalized from the political process.

German philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner (1935) argues that the difference of the underlying conditions in Germany, compared to Britain
and France, is explained by seeing Germany as a delayed nation. His focus for comparison is on Britain’s history with its restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and the consequent beginnings of a democracy. He argues that the British monarch, as head of state and religious authority, created a spiritual unity between the individual and the state. In consequence, challenges from Nonconformist communities demanded a worldly functionality of the state in the form of the humanizing institutions of a democracy (62). He places particular importance on this gradual process of integrating marginalized groups into a core of national culture and spiritual unity which is expressed in shared memories and traditions.

Plessner considers it to be significant that it took Bismarck two more wars, the Austro-Prussian War (14 June to 23 August 1866) and the Franco-Prussian war (19 July 1870 to 10 May 1871), to integrate the confederation of German states with Prussia as the delayed nation of Germany. He argues, however, that Bismarck’s Germany of 1871 was a pragmatic compromise between two unsatisfactory possibilities. Berlin as capital for a Germany without Austria left out the predominantly Protestant regions behind the Limes, the border of the erstwhile Roman Empire, while it included the predominantly Catholic southern states whose people were, and are, culturally closer to Vienna than to the Prussian Berlin (49). On the other hand, if Vienna had become the capital of a greater Germany, the Prussian Lutheran Protestant culture and political opposition to Rome would have been damaged.

Plessner sees the enforced Protestant state-religion in Germany as particularly unsatisfactory because it fostered insecurity by not providing spiritual roots in shared traditions of either nationhood or personal religious commitment. Protestantism had lost its denominational stability of the individual’s commitment and favoured, instead, general secularization, leaving the individual in a state of cultural loneliness. The individual’s spiritual isolation or cultural loneliness turned the people to an isolating inwardness, a peculiar form of “worldly piety,” struggling for ideological expression. To this day, that worldly piety is recognized in the British stereotype of German earnestness. It penetrates work and play, research and art, all of social life, the economy and the state (Plessner 51-54). This is how the special pathos of the German word Kultur as a personal attribute of refinement by one’s cultural education makes sense. At the same time, it explains the outsider’s perception of seeing the
German *Bildungssystem* ("educational system") as a programme of "self-cultivation" ("Wilhelm von Humboldt" in Bruford 1-25). Either way, it can be seen as a nation-state-alternative, in the concept of nationhood, to the British spiritual unity between the individual and the state.

Britain’s democratic structures, on the other hand, had evolved by the mid-nineteenth century sufficiently to absorb the disruptive influence of exiled revolutionaries from foreign cultures. Britain was the only country to offer asylum to political exiles from all over Europe, including the friends Karl Marx and Karl Blind with their families. That this was indeed a willingness to deal with difficulties is clear from Ashton’s assessment of the Germans’ lack of gratitude and the belligerence of the refugees of 1848. Her profile of the community as political refugees, written in 1986, is empathetic: “their political views, their temperament, and the very condition of being stateless and uprooted, [made them] highly critical of the land of industrial progress, a liberal constitution, laissez-faire, individual liberty, and appalling urban distress” (*Little Germany*, 168). These same tensions also made the members of the exile community highly critical of each other.

The deterioration of the friendship between Karl Marx and Karl Blind and their families is a conspicuous example of escalating tensions. Their differences in lifestyle were too large for the geographical proximity of their lives. The older Marx was an established authority in European revolutionary circles. He worked in the Reading Room of the British Museum on his critical writing and never learned to speak English properly. His work was difficult to understand, which meant that he did not find publishers for his papers, and *Das Kapital* was not

---

1. Humboldt is considered to be an important architect of the German educational system. The system was well respected in England. Albisetti reports that “enough families sought out German women to teach their children that an Association of German Governesses in England could be founded in 1876; by 1890 it had over seven hundred members.” He also notes examples of educational migration, such as Howitt’s move to Heidelberg in 1840 “for the sake of his children’s education,” or Richard Cobden sending his son to Wiesbaden in the mid-1850s. The daughter of a close friend of his attended a school in Mannheim, a “popular destination for upper-class Victorian girls” (517).
translated into English until after his death. He never had any money and survived mainly by Engels’s generosity.  

In contrast, Karl Blind had wasted his scholarship for studying at Heidelberg University by getting expelled for his political activism. And now, in England, he buckled down to provide for his family. He became a successful journalist both by popularity and income. He wrote on many subjects: politics, history, literature, and especially German folklore and ethnology. Politically, he supported nationalism and democratic progress in Germany and elsewhere. Ashton considers important for his success that he “seems to have steered clear of British politics” (Little Germany 168).

As Ashton notes, within the narrow circuit of the exile community such differences made disagreements easily take on sharper contours and escalate to infighting (22-4). The estrangement between the Marx and Blind families started with no more than an unhappy turn of conversation between Marx and Friederike, Karl Blind’s wife, about Feuerbach (Muhs 92). Marx reports to Engels the incident in the self-justifying tone of a crestfallen schoolboy.  

The estrangement turned into animosity over the infamous “Vogt affair” (1859), which had its origins in information given to Marx by Karl Blind. Marx had accused the German politician, Carl Vogt, correctly as it eventually turned out, to have been in the pay of the French government for his pro-French position on the war of Italian unification. The ensuing row caused a scandal which was severely damaging to Marx, who felt betrayed by Karl Blind not owning up about having been the source for Marx’s accusation (Muhs 81). Thereafter, Marx kept

---

2. A description of Marx’s apartment in a report by a Prussian government spy in 1852 speaks of such poverty, disorder and dilapidation that, “A seller of second-hand goods would be ashamed to give away such a remarkable collection of odds and ends” (qtd in Little Germany 22).

3. “She was showing off with her atheism, Feuerbach etc. I attacked Feuerbach’s ideas – but of course, very well-mannered and in a most friendly fashion. Initially, the Jewess seemed to enjoy the discussion and that was the only reason why I engaged in the tedious topic ... Suddenly, I see tears welling up in the woman’s eyes. Blind looked at me with melancholically expressive eyes, she gets up – and was not seen again, neither was he” (my translation; qtd. in Muhs 92).
for Karl Blind an impeccable disdain and hatred, which had its impact on the exile community.

Nevertheless, the Blinds’ “Sunday evenings” continued to be popular as a cross-cultural meeting place. For instance, Karl Blind introduced Swinburne to his hero Giuseppe Mazzini. And Mathilde came to see both Mazzini and Swinburne as most particularly valued friends.

Acute anxieties for the German exile community arose from Mathilde’s brother, Ferdinand “Cohen-Blind,” as the German press called him, attempting to assassinate Bismarck in 1866. He had wanted to prevent the Austro-Prussian War (14 June to 23 August 1866) and “save many by the sacrifice of two lives,” Bismarck’s and his own (Schoeps 11-12; Ullrich 45). In the South of Germany, where he had been studying agricultural sciences for four years, people hated Bismarck for his bid for Prussian supremacy and were in uproar about an unjustified fratricidal war looming on the horizon (Sethe 11-15).

Ferdinand had completed his studies and was travelling to learn about agricultural systems throughout Europe. As he walked through the land, he imagined the fields being trampled on by soldiers and the soil stained by their blood. So he bought a revolver and went to Berlin (Letter to Karl Blind 6 May 1866 qtd. in Schoeps 38-41). He waited for Bismarck in Unter den Linden and shot him five times without killing him. Not knowing the ballistics of his revolver, he had been standing too close to Bismarck for the bullet to accelerate sufficiently to do more than bruise Bismarck’s chest. Ferdinand was apprehended and interrogated. Sitting next to his guard, in a break from the interrogation, he wiped the perspiration off his face and, in the same movement, cut his throat with the knife he had hidden in his handkerchief. His death was mourned in the South of Germany, where he was celebrated as a patriotic

---

4. Swinburne remembers this in his “Memorial Verses on the Death of Karl Blind” (in The Ballade of Truthful Charles, and Other Poems (printed for private circulation, 1910): “My thanks to him who gave Mazzini’s hand to mine.” The introduction in 1867 gave rise to Swinburne’s Songs before Sunrise (1871), a collection of poems about the unification of Italy. He honoured Mazzini with his poem “Dedication to Joseph Mazzini” (1871).

According to Diedrick, Mathilde Blind wrote a glowing review of Songs before Sunrise, which was never published, but was “instrumental in gaining her entry into The Dark Blue” (“The Dark Blue” 213).
hero. In the North, Bismarck’s survival was celebrated as a sign of God’s blessing (Schoeps 29).

In England, the response was one of consternation. On 10 May 1866, the reporter of the Times for “The Attack On Count Bismark [sic]” is at pains to distance the German exile community from the events by declaring Ferdinand not to have been Karl Blind’s son, but that of his wife’s “previous husband.” Besides, Ferdinand had been away in Germany for four years. He puts the blame on the known south German hatred for Bismarck for the fact that Ferdinand had committed “an act to be reprobated by all honourable men, and regretted by none more than the patriot whose name he had been permitted to bear” (8).

Karl Blind’s response to the Times on 15 May 1866 was published in many English and German papers. Its statement ends with:

let it not be expected that I, to whom he looked as to a father, should give the right to anyone of saying that I reprobate him whose inspirations have been the purest, and who has enthusiastically – although to the deepest sorrow of my disconsolate wife, of myself, and my family – given up his young and promising life in his country’s cause. (Schoeps 90)

Marx’s sarcastic comment was that Karl Blind “is exploiting the death of his stepson for his own purposes.” He finds it strange that Karl Blind had sacrificed “not his own son [Rudolf Blind], but the Isaac of the old [Jacob Abraham] Cohen on the altar of freedom.” He blames his former friend’s “blödsinniges Fürstenmordgeschwätz” (“foolish chatter about tyrannicide”) for Ferdinand’s death (qtd. in Schoeps 92; in Ullrich 47, Ashton 172).

In contrast to the reporter’s disapproval of Ferdinand, the Times’ correspondent’s piece “Prussia,” 12 May 1866, focuses on the circumstances leading up to the event in the overall momentum towards war. The correspondent comments on imperial ambitions and observes that the people suffer the brunt of the politicians’ machinations, whether or not it will come to a

5. Once the war was won, hundreds of Bismarck memorials were built all over Germany. Ferdinand Cohen-Blind had become persona non-grata (Ullrich 47-48).
war. He notes evidence for an imminent war in Austria's "armaments against Italy," and by the fact, that military provisions were being put into place on both sides. He describes the effects of war anxieties on financial institutions and the economies on both sides. Seamlessly, as another factual aspect, he reports the attack on Bismarck and Bismarck's proclaimed pride in his survival, as he closes his public address with a cry of: "Long Life to William I" (11).

Only then does he add a paragraph of Ferdinand's story, following it with the information that the "citizens from Breslau" and some "Conservative societies" have presented money "to the War-office, to be distributed among any soldiers who may distinguish themselves in the war" (11). The correspondent conveys a sense of helplessly registering the acceleration towards war.

The sense of helpless passivity is echoed in the German exile community. The philosopher Arnold Ruge, a member of Mazzini's Central European Committee, lets rip in a letter to his son, saying that killing Bismarck was too good for the man who got Germany into the mess it was in. War or no war, it no longer mattered. Whatever anybody did, the situation was too desperate for either option to bring a solution (Schoeps 94). The French politician Ledru-Rollin represents the general tone of the many letters to the Blinds. He colours personal condolence with a tinge of moral and political disapproval: "... his motives must have been the purest even in this unfortunate affair. I cannot imagine anything more dreadful for his mother..." Mazzini addresses in his letter on 10 May 1866 the Blind family in French with a simple "amies" ("friends"). He asks his friends to be strong "for the party and for the idea for which your son had died." He asks his friends to hold Mathilde's hand as he is speaking for her also (Blind Papers. Ff [LXV] 116-17. Add MS 40123).

Additional pressure on the community came from Germany in the form of hostile investigations. Bismarck dramatized himself as the intended victim of a conspiracy by casting Ferdinand as the frontman of a widespread network of conspirators with Karl Blind as leader (Schoeps, 60-84; Ullrich 47; Little Germany 173). As late as 1886, three years after Marx's death, Bismarck declared in the Reichstag that Marx had been implicated in the assassination
attempt. Eleanor Marx responded with a sharp letter of rejection to Bismarck, which was published throughout the German and French press.\textsuperscript{6}

The only indication we have of the impact on Mathilde Blind is a letter from her mother and her own poem “Invocation. June, 1866.” Mother and daughter know of each other’s lonely grief. Their relationship has perhaps never been the conventional “asymmetric mutuality” of mother and daughter. It certainly is now the “symmetric mutuality” of two lonely world-citizens (Gagnier 3) as each seeks to transpose and integrate the emotionally incomprehensible into a coherent faith in life and in humanity.

Friederike writes to her daughter on 29 October 1866 on black-rimmed mourning paper. She frames her letter with the hugging love of a mother: “My Darling, my sweet one!” and signing off with “Deine Dich treu liebende Mutter” (“your faithfully loving mother”). There is concern about her daughter’s silence, but no fuss. Had Mathilde not received her last letter or that from her stepbrother? Then Friederike tells Mathilde about herself with brief references to literature. She had been at the Drury Lane theatre “with Ledru-Rollin and his wife” to see \textit{Faust} and she is reading “Dante and Daniel Stern” (Correspondence. Vol. I. 1860-73. Ff 10-11. MS 61927). This is enough to share a mourning process.

Friederike’s train of thought through mentioning Goethe’s \textit{Faust}, Dante’s \textit{Divine Comedy} and Daniel Stern’s French dialogues \textit{Dante et Goethe} (1866) is enough to feel how both women are engulfed by grief for Ferdinand. The two women, like Marie Catherine Sophie, Comtesse d’Agoult, whose pen name is Daniel Stern, and her daughter Cosima Wagner, wife of the composer Richard Wagner, know of each other that “quand tout ici-bas nous devrait séparer, nous resterons unies d’un inaltérable amour” (“should everything on this earth separate us, we would still be united in our enduring love”) (Stern Dedication to

\textsuperscript{6} According to Yvonne Kapp, Eleanor declared that Marx had never seen “poor young Ferdinand Blind after he was 12 or 13 years old; that all the objects Blind could have had in courageously braving death by firing at Herr Bismarck were of complete indifference to our father… Bismarck was to Marx only a comic personage… The ridiculous idea that a man like Marx could spend his time ‘breeding assassins’ only proves how right Marx was to see in Bismarck nothing but a Prussian clodhopper” (90).
her daughter Cosima). Friederike’s daughter knows that Goethe’s and Dante’s paradox of virtue and vice being inextricably linked in the human being’s supreme efforts is a comfort to both mother and brother. It is a way of transcending the *self* and transposing personal pain into the pain of the public soul of humanity. Thinking of Dante as poet and character, *Faust* as Goethe’s creation and of Daniel Stern’s imagining a dialogue between Dante and Goethe is a process that takes Ferdinand out of his mother’s arms and places him into the arms of humanity. Blind will take up the theme of the paradox of the heroic surpassing good and evil, success and failure, in her Scottish poem *The Prophecy of Saint Oran* (1881).

Blind’s poem, “Invocation. June, 1866” in *Poems*, under the pseudonym of *Claude Lake* (1867), is her public commemoration of Ferdinand. He is subsumed under the “Spirit of the time / Pregnant with future.” His grief for the people has transcended her grief for her brother as she captures her brother’s spirit in the people’s hope for a release from their enslavement by imperialism:

> From Venetia’s dungeons,  
> From Roman shroud;

> From the graves of Poland,  
> From Germania’s plains,  
> From the death-pollution  
> Of imperial chains. (80)

The future for which she invokes the “Spirit of time” is one:

> Where a purer people,  
> Led by laws innate,  
> Shall, towards the heavens,  
> Tower in grander state. (82)

Thus, both women mother and daughter write as lonely world-citizens whose personal fate is subsumed under the fate of humankind.

However, imperialism was being overtaken by nationalism. Because of Bismarck’s decision for the smaller Germany under Prussian leadership he had provoked Napoleon’s “unexpected” declaration of war of 1870 with a quarrel about the succession to the Spanish throne (Andresen spiegel.de). So, the
Times’ correspondent on 19 July 1870 observing hatred of the “insulting foreigner” (“France and Germany” 5) signals a confusing change of the spirit of the time. While she had envisaged bringing an eventual escape from enslavement by European imperialism, it had turned out to be merely a new demise of enslavement by European nationalism. Self-regulating her strong emotions is a slow and painful process, as we surmise from Blind’s response to Garnett’s letter about the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war on 19 July 1870 (Correspondence. Vol. I. 1860-73. Ff 85-86. MS 61927).

He may have read the nationalistic report by the correspondent of the Times who remonstrates with the French about their “national character.” Their chauvinism, he declares, is in the country’s institutional structures and is displayed by the moral values of both the French elite and the French people. In contrast, he claims, the Germans have all the virtues of citizenship one might wish a people to have. And “[w]hatever remembrances of 1866 may have been lingering in men’s minds they are now submerged in a common hatred of the insulting foreigner” (“France and Germany” 5). Garnett echoes the outrage at “the most wicked and wanton war ever begun without provocation” (Correspondence. Vol. I. 1860-73. Ff 85-86. MS 61927).

Yet it takes another of Garnett’s letters before Blind responds, and then she buries the topic of war in other matters. After pages of delight about Beaumaris on Anglesey, where Garnett and his wife are holidaying, she copies out a poem she had written in Beaumaris. Then she rhapsodizes about her conversations with W.M. Rossetti and tells Garnett that “mama” had invited him for “Sunday,” admitting that she had needed “something of the kind” because “matters at home have been again in a most intolerable state.” “Mr. Blind,” she says, wants her gone before he leaves the house. Hence: “what with the troubles here and the horrible heat and the War I felt morally and physically upset.” And so she had “scarcely been able to do anything but read the newspapers” (Correspondence. Vol. I. 1860-73. Ff 87-91 MS 61927).

At this stage of still raw emotions on several fronts, nationalism breaks out of her as it seems to have done for everyone else: “However abhorrent the idea of the War,” she believes in “good consequences to Germany.” She sees both Germany and Italy gaining from the war for securing their respective positions in Europe. She declares: “Napoleon must fall.” As for Napoleon, she would want to see him treated as a “common criminal” because such a lesson
We don’t know why Karl Blind wants her gone so urgently. Her brief nationalistic outburst to the news of the war sounds as if, for the time being, she shares Karl Blind’s nationalism. The quality of undisclosed emotional turmoil in her letter hints more at a clash of personalities than at any specific conclusively momentous occasion to have caused the permanent parting of ways. Thus the timing, content and structure of her letter signal a painfully slow and self-conscious process for Blind to self-regulate her emotions.

Blind’s apparent effort of self-regulating her emotions may be seen in the context of her experience of having been transplanted from the supportive environment of her German-Jewish home-culture into the cosmopolitan community of international revolutionaries. The ability to assert self-discipline has to be seen as influenced by her mother’s educational guidance according to the German concept of Bildung and its English interpretation as self-cultivation. The sense of Blind isolating herself so determinedly should be seen in the context of Plessner’s analysis of a German cultural loneliness that gives rise to the individual’s worldly piety in compensation for the missing spiritual unity between the individual and the state. I will examine this in the next section with a focus on Blind’s personal history and development.

2.2 Blind’s Personal History and Development

Blind’s mother, Friederike Ettlinger, was married in 1839 to Jacob Abraham Cohen, a retired banker and widower who was by thirty years her senior and who had two grown-up sons. It was an arranged marriage according to European Jewish custom of parental control of the family’s social and financial status (Triendl-Zadoff). However, part of the social upheavals in the fragmented Germany since 1815, after the so-called “European Wars of

7. Blind’s half-brother, Rudolf Blind enlisted as a volunteer in the German Army at the outbreak of the war, and was in the ambulance service at the Siege of Strasbourg” (Find a Grave).
Liberation,” was that middle-class women in Germany began to form mutual support groups. Louise Otto-Peters, widely acknowledged as the mother of German feminism, was the first to give voice to their ideas in public in 1843. She answered a newspaper’s question about woman’s political position: “Die Teilnahme der Frauen an den Interessen des Staates ist nicht nur ein Recht, sondern eine Pflicht” (“women’s participation in matters of the state is not just a right, but also a duty”) (Bruhns Spiegel.de).

Friederike, well-educated in preparation for a suitable marriage, addressed her personal unhappiness by reading modern literature and philosophy in search of answers to her questions about the position of women in society. She asserted her autonomy by politicizing the insights from her reading; she met Karl Blind, a student seven years younger than her and expelled from the University of Heidelberg for his revolutionary activities, and joined him on his political campaigns. She took her children, Mathilde and Ferdinand, and their nursemaid on the campaign track across Europe into the nomadic life of international revolutionaries. In 1848, after the death of Mathilde’s father, Friederike married Karl Blind in Paris. Mathilde was then seven years old, Ferdinand was five, and Friederike would have two more children by Karl Blind, Otttilie and Rudolf. Karl Blind adopted Mathilde and Ferdinand. The Blinds arrived as a family in London’s German exile community in 1852. In a sense, Blind’s early childhood is a by-product of the European upheavals of the 1840s and the failed revolutions of 1848.

In the previous section I presented Kocka’s view of the German education system as founded for rallying the region’s human resources to make the German confederation a successful player in the capitalist market economy (30-31). Implied is the emphasis on a Bildungssystem (“educational system”) that places on the individual the responsibility to contribute to the nation-state’s position in a global world order according to her means and abilities. I will

8. In 1847, when Friederike was imprisoned, accused of distributing patriotic leaflets, she had asked for “Feuerbach’s work” for her reading. Karl Blind informs his reader of Friederike’s personal acquaintance with the author, and mentions George Eliot’s translation of his The Essence of Christianity (“In Years of Storm and Stress (No. I) 347-8).
explore now the influence from Blind’s German cultural background on her personal history and her British citizenship. I will argue that Blind’s poem for her mother’s birthday, when Mathilde was only eleven years old, shows already the effect of Friederike’s guidance according to the German concept of Bildung ("cultural education"). The poem signals a symmetric mutuality between mother and daughter that conveys a child’s loneliness in being grown up beyond her years. It is not a pitiful loneliness, but a poised loneliness in its balance of strength and weakness, as this is the potential of all human attributes.

Nevertheless, the German influence on Blind’s development by her mother’s management and educational guidance according to the German ideas is strongly felt in the isolating nature of such an education, intensified by the absence of the normal process of socialization that integrates a young person into a more or less stable community. Especially missing is the process of integrating into a peer group for learning a shared generational identity within the social structure of the community.

Blind’s unconscious acceptance of having to be strong in dealing with the instabilities of the family’s life comes across in the birthday poem for her mother. The family was in Belgium at the time, with a court case about the custody of Mathilde and Ferdinand hanging over them. Friederike’s family wanted the children back in Germany to bring them up in the “German-Jewish tradition” (Muhs 92). In the end, Friederike was able to keep the children, but had to give up three quarters of the legacy that was left to her by Mathilde’s father. Most of her adult life, Blind would only be able to just scrape by until, in 1892, her half-brother, Max Cohen, had left her his estate as his sole heir (Diedrick DLB 199).

Back in Belgium, in 1852, Mathilde went to school for the first time. However, judging by her birthday poem for her mother, her education had not been neglected. The poem’s title, “Meiner lieben Mutter zum Geburtstag” (“To my Dear Mother for her Birthday”), signals the poem as an object, a gift, perhaps like an album of family photos. The tone of the poem is poised, without a hint of a child wooing her mother for her love. It is presented on lined paper in sharply accurate and regular minute German Gothic script, dated Ghistelles (just south of Ostende) 15 August 1852 (Blind Papers. Fl 14-15. MS. 40124).

There are joyful images of nature from a family walk and images of the cultural splendour of Belgian cities: “Brüssel”, “Ostende”, “Ghent”, and “Brügge.”
There is also the image of a stormy sea, like “a raging animal rattling the bars of a cage,” to represent the family’s experience of danger and turmoil, and no-one knowing “where the ship will eventually come to lie.” In the family’s uncertainty about the future, Mathilde wishes her mother the warmth of “sunny Italy.”

Mathilde’s unselfconscious focus on her mother’s life and hopes conveys surprising understanding in an eleven year old girl of the adult concerns for the family and for the future. As an example of an expression of German self-cultivation, the poem could be said to show both the strength of its focus on the family and the weakness of the loneliness of a child’s self-sufficiency. However, Friederike’s faith in the cultural perspective of Bildung seems to be confirmed by her trying to retain for her daughter the philosophical principle of cultural education by her choice of school in London. She had looked at several schools before deciding on St John’s Wood School as congenial for Mathilde’s social and intellectual development (Garnett 4). The girls had much time for unsupervised activities to further their personal interests. As we know from Blind’s autobiographical fragments, one of her personal projects was to read and discuss with a friend books about religious and scientific worldviews. Blind reports a rising curiosity about “the strange discrepancies between the account of the Creation in genesis and the history of our globe as revealed to us by the rocks and stones” (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 16. N.d. TS. MS 61930). The girls’ level of engagement was such that they were walking each other home, going back and forth several times before separating at last.

The highpoint of their exploration was Lucifer’s “magnificent speech” in Byron’s Cain (1821). The girls “fell into each other’s arms with a sob of delight” (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 17. N.d. TS. B61930). Byron lifted off the girls’ minds the burden of supposed moral absolutes by letting Lucifer claim equality with Him, who supposedly represents the idea of good as a

9. The girls’ reading ranged from Joseph Butler’s Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed (1736), about Christian morality and human nature; William Paley’s View of the Evidences of Christianity (1794) with its complex arguments to arrive at the truth of Christianity and the authenticity of the Bible. They read Lyell’s Principles of Geology (1830-33) and essays on comparative mythology by Max Müller, a German scholar of modern languages in Oxford with a particular interest in Sanskrit philology and the religions of India (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 16. N.d. TS. 61930).
constant. His claim of a “mutual and irrevocable hate” (256) opens a new horizon for the concepts of good and evil. Lucifer’s protestation that “Evil and Good” are “things in their own essence,” not possessions of either God or Lucifer, may have influenced Blind’s concept of autonomy as an intrinsic attribute of the individual. It is a different concept of autonomy from the cultural assertion of autonomy as a middle ground between defiant independence and disempowered submissiveness. Byron’s Lucifer declares “Evil and Good” to be intertwined and “not made … by the giver” (256). So Lucifer demands that “if / Evil springs from [God], do not name it mine, / Till ye know better its true fount.” And good comes from Lucifer as a result of the human’s fall from grace because of that “fatal apple”:

   Your reason [sic]: - let it not be over-sway’d
   By tyrannous threats to force you into faith
   ’Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:
   Think and endure, - and form an inner world
   In your own bosom - where the outward fails;
   So shall you nearer be the spiritual
   Nature, and war triumphant with your own. (Scene II, 256)

   “Think and endure - and form an inner world / In your own bosom - where the outward fails” – it is Blind’s mission for her reader. Her determination is never to let her own beliefs intrude or become associated with “tyrannous threats to force [her reader] into faith” of any description. Instead of the immutabilities of laws of any ideology or dogmatism, she adopts the artist’s creativity to transcend time and space, as Byron does with his Cain or Shelley with The Revolt of Islam (1818) as cosmopolitans of the Romantic period.10

10. Blind focuses on Byron’s cosmopolitan “love of liberty.” She admires him for his “staunch advocacy of Irish claims” as an English nobleman in 1820, and his participation in the Carbonari risings in Italy and the revolutions in Greece in the face of severe physical stress and strain. She likes Byron’s style of letter writing. It is “always unmistakably letters … never prose poems or finished essays” and quotes with similar satisfaction Byron’s disgust with the “Barbarians,” of whom he knows that they intercept the mail: “Letters opened? - to be sure they are, and that’s the reason why I always put in my opinion of the German-Austrian scoundrels. There is not an Italian who loathes them more than I do, and whatever I could do to scour Italy and the earth of this infamous oppression would be done con amore” (“Introduction” Letters xiii).
The need to think and endure is linked for Blind to the hope for a social evolution towards Shelley’s inspirational creation of Cythna in his *Revolt of Islam* (1818):

In Cythna we hail a new female type … [Shelley] holds that woman, just as a man, is or should be a being whose sympathies are too vast – whose thoughts too multiform to converge to the one focus of personal love, and that in the self-same way it is at once her *right and duty* [my italics] to take an active share in the general concerns of humanity, and to influence them, not only indirectly through others, but directly by her own thoughts and actions. Thus Cythna, prophet, reformer, and martyr – invested with all the glow and glory which the poet’s imagination could bestow on her – is the creation unique in the whole range of fiction.

The poet, with deep insight, indicates in Canto ii. that the task of the regeneration of woman can only be brought about by woman herself; that it is she who must arouse man’s interest, and kindle his enthusiasm in her cause. ("Rossetti’s Shelley" 89)

Blind embraces Shelley’s vision of Cythna, the ideal of a “new female type,” as a Romantic vision for the future in the need of the human being’s “ultimate deliverance from subjection to Creeds and Crowns” (XXIV). Education is “the agency of the patient but deathless struggle of Prometheus, the impersonation of that ideal towards which the supremely human tends to approximate” ("Memoir of Shelley" XXIV).

However, as the girls found out, such reading was what Christine Ferguson called “forbidden knowledge” (465-78). The girls had their ecstasy

Shelley demonstrates his cosmopolitanism in a letter to his publisher as he describes *The Revolt of Islam*: “The scene is supposed to be laid in Constantinople and modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is, in fact, a tale illustrative of such a revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously, as I think) the modern philosophy, and contending with ancient notions and the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them. It is a Revolution of this kind that is the beau idéal, as it were, of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius and out of general knowledge” (Jones 563).

11. “The most forbidden knowledge of all was that which had no clear use or moral purpose, that which, far from fixing and stabilizing identity,
shattered when their reading was discovered and deemed to be heretical. Mathilde’s friend was whisked away to be re-integrated into the school’s ethos. Mathilde was left to choose between submitting to Christian views of the world or to leave the school. Friederike, from her personal history and experience of asserting a woman’s right to the forbidden knowledge, would have supported Mathilde’s courage to choose the forbidden knowledge at whatever cost.

Underlying this determination is the German idea of self-cultivation as the means to self-assertion for the good of society. It was not meant for the individual to think of her society as anything else but an abstract concept of community. The individualistic nature of the German idea of a lifelong process of self-education assumes the individual’s autonomous stance in any discourse. In principle at least, Bildung facilitates constant questioning of assumed absolute values at the risk of getting lost in inwardness, the risk of losing one’s grip on reality.¹²

Mathilde was therefore culturally compelled to choose the forbidden knowledge, but she was also outraged at the idea that one form of knowledge might be privileged over another form of knowledge. In her mother’s idea of cultural education there was no room for negotiating half-truths for the sake of one’s shared traditional values and spiritual unity between individual and state.

Indeed, Mathilde’s loss of this school-world among beloved peers and her shocked disbelief at what had been happening, has to be seen as a culture clash. She had been admitted to the school as the daughter of a German-Jewish family whose demeanour would have been non-religious. The school had not feared the challenge of a multi-cultural pupil population, nor had the girls been supervised to ensure that their free activities would meet with approval by some pre-determined standards (Diedrick 29). Her expulsion functioned to dissolve the way the subject had been envisioned, to seek the truth behind the self, regardless of the costs of this unveiling” (Ferguson 470).

¹² We know from Hitler’s dominance that the insularity of inwardness puts the individual at risk to submit to the authority of an assertive leader’s exploitative propaganda. Whatever the system, education can only provide; the individual’s development depends on other factors.
seems to have been the result of an unfortunate turn of events more than a matter of principle. However, this retrospective twenty-first-century view does not change the devastating impact these events had on the young Mathilde Blind.

After some months of Mathilde’s self-education under her mother’s guidance, arrangements were made for her to go to Zurich to stay with Friederike’s brother-in-law, a prosperous banker. Her uncle gave Mathilde a rich experience of cultural education in the form of intellectual training and opportunities to acquire the social graces and cultural tastes that are considered appropriate for the daughter of a good bourgeois family. Fostering his niece’s Bildung in this way was a privilege to her uncle, for he “seemed to enjoy parading [her] about the town” (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 30. N.d. TS. 61930). He bought for her clothes and accessories to go with her season tickets for “the theatre and the chief concerts” and for the invitations she received to go to balls and other societal occasions. Coincidentally, she also learned about society’s male and female spheres with their different privileges and limitations as she had to argue with her uncle about her wish to get private tuition. Her uncle had been apprehensive, worrying that it would turn his niece into an unmarriageable “bluestocking.” He agreed at last, and arranged tuition for Mathilde from an eminent professor and his scholarly wife (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. Ff 33-35. N.d. TS. 61930).¹³

Blind’s Zurich experience was thereby what would have been expected for, and of her, had she been a young man. Learning to socialize with grace, to appreciate the arts with an underpinning of the classics by reading Greek and Latin, and reading the mythologies of medieval German, that is the all-round

---

¹³. She studied the classical languages of Greek and Latin, and medieval German. For her reading she lists Cornelius Nepos, Julius Caesar’s Gaul, Ovid’s Metamorpheses… “ comparative etymology proved highly instructive.” Other reading of typical medieval poetry: “Der Arme Heinrich” by Hartmann von der Aue, portions of “Parzival”, the “Hildebrandslied”, the “Weckerlieder” by Walther von der Vogelweide and other Minnesaengers. “I followed these studies at home with the “Nibelungenlied”, “Gudrun,” Norse Mythology etc. … life full of rich and diversified impressions” (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-ca. 1900. F 35. N.d. TS. MS 61930).
education that is implied by the German concept of Bildung. It is designed to lay the foundations for an individual’s life-long active self-improvement by cultivating one’s knowledge, insights and capabilities. The idea is that the individual represents the German culture with personal dignity according to his or her status in society.

On her return to London in 1859 Blind continued the privileged life of private study and social interaction in the ideal setting of what Vadillo (1999) called “The Culture of the Salon at the Fin de Siècle” in St John’s Wood. Friederike and Mathilde went together to the British Museum to acquire their reader’s tickets for the Reading Room (Thirlwell 188). Through the Blinds’ “Sunday evenings” Mathilde made friends who introduced her to the salon of other hosts and hostesses, each with its own focus on particular topics in the company of interested individuals. In this environment Blind could develop her professionalism as a writer and poet, as well as have fun. She also travelled abroad frequently, most often for health reasons in search of warm, dry air. Nevertheless, taking distance from her interesting everyday life would have helped her to regenerate her ideas. From the time when Blind had to leave the family home she led a nomadic life of travelling and staying with friends for long periods; she had never again a permanent address (A.P. Vadillo 121, 24-5).

The general consensus among retrospective commentators is that Blind moved out of the family home in 1871 by amicable agreement with Karl Blind and his family (Diedrick; Garnett; Muhs). Several biographical indications speak against this. Swinburne, friend of both Karl and Mathilde Blind, writes in 1876 to Theodor Watts calling Mathilde “inconsistent” for keeping the name Blind even though she had “long” been on “bad terms” with her stepfather (Lang, Vol. 3, 224). Blind’s letter to a compiler of a dictionary of English literature in 1890 confirms Swinburne’s view of a hostile distance:

I have much pleasure in sending you the requisite information concerning my literary work but as I have hitherto made it a rule not to give any private data for publication you must excuse me for adhering to it also in the present instance, ... [I]f any allusion to my connection with Mr. Karl Blind can be avoided I should be obliged if you would do so. (Correspondence. Vol. IV.1862-ca 1900. Ff 95-96. N.d. MS 61930).
The public disassociation was mutual, as shown by the report of Blind’s funeral in the *Standard* on 2 Dec. 1896; it lists as chief mourners “Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hancock [stepsister Ottilie] and Mr. and Mrs. Rudolf Blind [stepbrother],” adding that there was a wreath “from Mrs. Karl Blind” without any mention of Karl Blind who was to survive Mathilde by ten years (“Funeral of Mathilde Blind”).

Friederike had been kept apart from Mathilde by this rift between her husband and her daughter. There is a letter from Friederike to her daughter, dated 16 December 1889, which shows the emotional closeness between mother and daughter despite the lack of contact. She tells her daughter about having met up with Ottilie, Mathilde’s half-sister, in front of Harold Rathbone’s portrait of Mathilde in the Grosvenor Gallery. Not knowing of the ordeal the sittings had been to both painter and subject, Friederike believes to see Rathbone’s evident love in painting the portrait. Touchingly, her criticism in finding her daughter’s nose “a bit too bent” reflects Blind’s quarrels with the painter.¹⁴ All the same, Friederike tries to justify her will to praise by declaring she likes her daughter’s outfit and hands (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 39-40. MS 61929).

Her interest in Mathilde’s career is keen, even though she is obliged to follow it from a distance. She is telling her daughter how much she loved her essays on Marie Bashkirtseff in *Woman’s World*, she could not get enough of reading these. She is excited about Gladstone’s, then prime minister, praise of her essays as “[v]ivid and striking.” She tells her daughter of the joy she gets from all the praise her daughter receives for her work, but acknowledges the typology of the artist’s hunger for an echo to her work, as she adds in English: “Poets live off love and fame” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 39-40. MS 61929).

She is worried to the point of feeling physically sick when she hears from Ottilie that Mathilde is about to go to Tunbridge Wells, which she knows means that Mathilde is not well. If only there was something she could do for her

---

¹⁴ Blind said “he made her face look like a piece of gingerbread, and that the poppies were like dabs of scarlet flannel and he said he had never been spoken to like that in his life before” (qtd. in Thirlwell 231).
daughter! As it is, Friederike can only hope that the visit to Tunbridge Wells will do her good (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 39-40. MS 61929). The implication of the social distance between mother and daughter is that the members of the Blind family no longer come across each other in the network of salons in St John’s Wood. And yet, the very public rift had never a public explanation. At the same time, although Blind’s relationships with her mother’s family inevitably suffered, they were never broken.

Particularly Blind’s half-brother, Max Cohen, is mentioned in her correspondence with Garnett now and again. Blind writes to Garnett on 20 May 1875, asking him for help with Max Cohen’s project of publishing an anthology on the theme of “the world in flowers” in “every European language” (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 54-55. MS 61928). Garnett responded with a list of over twenty poems. Max Cohen lived in Nice where Blind regularly spent several weeks for health reasons. On 9 September 1877, she tells Garnett of her travels with “my brother Max” in Switzerland (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 95-96. MS 61928). On 23 May 1892, she writes to Garnett on her way home from Egypt saying that she hopes to stay for a week in Nice, giving her address there as “C.O. Dr. Max Cohen, Rue Foucet” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 82-83. MS 61929). It was the year of Max Cohen’s death. He left her a legacy as his sole heir, which made life easier for her, and allowed her to pass on most of the money to Newnham College for an annual scholarship. The Mathilde Blind Scholarship is awarded to women who “study English, foreign or classical literature, in any combination” (Thirwell 227). Blind thereby passes on a cosmopolitan perspective as a responsibility for educated women to “arouse man’s interest, and kindle his enthusiasm in her cause” (“Rossetti’s Shelley” 89). The open-endedness of “any combination” endorses Blind’s idea that we cannot have specific expectations about future developments in the social evolution of humankind.

I argued in this section that the moral and mental development in Blind’s life has a clear continuum originating in the German concept of Bildung that

15. For instance George Sims mentions for the early years both Karl and Mathilde Blind as frequent visitors among his mother’s “working friends” on the woman question (53).
puts on the individual an obligation of cultivating her abilities as a contribution to society’s economic, social and cultural advance. Karl Blind’s position in British society allowed Mathilde to maintain this approach as an English citizen by gaining access to the culture of *salon* in St John’s Wood. He thereby afforded her the opportunity to integrate her developing autonomous cosmopolitanism in a culture of challenging, disparate views and perspectives. In the next section I will explore Blind’s own assessment towards the end of her life, in 1893, of the influence of her educational experiences in St John’s Wood School and in Zurich on her development as a writer and poet.

### 2.3 Blind’s Retrospective Views of her Education

Among Blind’s papers are two sections of a planned autobiographical novel, which Garnett says are factually accurate accounts of her experiences at St John’s Wood School and in her year in Zurich, distanced only by her use of fictitious names. The inspiration for the project came probably from Blind’s admiration for Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*. The eponymous Aurora of this novel in verse subverts the confessional structure of the *Bildungsroman* with frequent unmasked authorial interventions of discussing issues of her day such as the position of women in society. The subversion transposes Aurora into the public soul of the woman poet as a universal type in society. However, the overarching structure of *Aurora Leigh* is true to Barrett Browning’s conservatism as a continuum between Aurora’s story and the poet’s unmasked interventions.

This does not suit Blind’s aesthetics. In all her poetry and her novel *Tarantella*, Blind aims with her aesthetics to transcend a specific point of view to avoid a linearity that implies expectations on the reader to agree or disagree with a proposed view of the world. Instead, she values in art what she praised in Morris’s poem *Love is Enough*, an immediate sensuous contact that touches the reader’s impulse for empathy so that she would look for answers from her inner voice. Nevertheless, Blind had started on the experiment of finding a way
to write an autobiographical novel, having named her eponymous heroine “Alma.”

As in all her creative writing, Blind experiments by manipulating the narrator’s voice. She separates Alma’s tone of voice as a girl from that of her adult voice as commentator. Young Alma’s voice rises out of the naked moods of her past – from the giddiness of being in love and the excitement about discoveries in her reading, to the dismay and angry resentment of feeling betrayed. In the crisis of having to choose between submitting to the school’s dominant Christian culture or having to leave the school, she cries: “why should I be gagged and they have full liberty of speech? ... I can’t help it if we saw the impossibility of reconciling the account of Genesis with the facts of Nature” (Correspondence. Vol.IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 20. N.d. TS. MS 61930). The reflective adult voice asks still the same question from the distance of time:

… was this Christian theology then built on such rotten foundations that it could not stand the free enquiries of a single unprejudiced mind, and was it an honourable impulse which had prompted the school-mistress to tempt me to a dereliction from truth by the bribe of keeping my friends? (Correspondence. Vol.IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 22. N.d. TS. MS 61930).

Clearly, despite the attempt of breaking the developmental coherence of the *Bildungsroman*, the ideological continuum between narrator and subject remains strong and implies that Blind’s reader ought to be on Alma’s side. It is the inevitable characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* that the narrator, whatever her reflections on her life are, will follow the logic of writing her own history as a “vindication of the past” in such a way that it “contains a project for the future” (Chimisso 44). So, Blind abandoned the project.

The dominant themes that emerged for Blind from these two educational periods were the need to question the position of women in society and the

---

16. Blind and Mona Caird had rented a cottage in Wendover in 1893. Blind writes in her commonplace book in September that they talked about the project as they were sitting under a hedge. In one and the same moment both came up with the name “Alma Mornington” for “my heroine.” Blind wondered if there had been “a transmission of thought” (F. 23b).
related theme of scepticism as a form of questioning all assumptions of seemingly fixed truths. Although Blind’s *Ascent of Man* (1889) should be seen as a vindication of the past of humankind, that contains a project for the future, it is different from the *Bildungsroman* by the fact that the past of humankind is one of manifold, often contradictory histories. There is, for Blind, no need to justify an ideological or moral continuum from the past to a better future; nor is there a need to instruct the reader how to proceed into the future. The project for the future is a matter of the individual’s responsibility to care about the future with a social will for change.

In her poem *The Prophecy of Saint Oran* (1881), Blind celebrates the individual’s courage for scepticism as her poem transcends ideological polarities and religious dogma. After having explored the psychological dynamics of scepticism, her narrator leaves the reader abruptly to invent her own moral continuum to the story, if she is so inclined. Blind knew therefore that her experiment with an autobiographical novel was doomed to fail; the *Bildungsroman* cannot escape the narrator’s ideological stance, whether this is the author’s autobiographical stance or the stance of an invented alternative ideology.

Blind’s account of her experience in Zurich is interesting as an example of the day-to-day reality of a privileged young girl’s introduction to society. It is entertaining to see Alma’s spritely self-confidence in her beauty, her social graces, her ability to command her cousin Frida’s affection (F 31) and to attract suitors (34); most of all, to see her enthusiasm for her studies as a “life full of rich and diversified impressions.” With equal zest, fired by the determination to get over “love gone wrong,” she takes to the challenge of a solitary extended walking-tour in the Bernese Oberland (alpine foothills south of Berne) (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 35-36. N.d. TS. MS 61930). Throughout the account of her Zurich experiences are moments of Alma’s assertion against the decorum expected of a dutiful daughter or niece of a respected family. She takes up her studies despite her uncle’s worry of her becoming a “bluestocking” (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 33. N.d. TS.MS 61930); she learns how to deal with unwelcome suitors with more grace, while retaining the fortitude to physically fight off a presumptuous Frenchman in the mountains (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 49. N.d. TS. MS 61930). Two English lady travellers conveyed to her another
dimension of a young lady’s required decorum by their alarm of finding her walking in the Alps alone, without a chaperone (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 39. N.d. TS. MS 61930). On her return to Zurich she is intoxicated by her freedom as a member of a “group of revolutionists”17 and by the fact that she is accepted in that circle on equal terms (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-circa 1900. F 35. N.d. TS. MS 61930).

Blind’s Zurich story reads a little like modern chick lit novel of a privileged young woman of sixteen, going on seventeen. It is an enjoyable period for an autobiography. However, the authorial detachment for Blind’s young girls of the same age, Antonella and Mina, in her novel Tarantella (1885) are much more thought-provoking on the woman question, and so are the mostly unnamed characters of the typologies in her Dramas in Miniature (1891). Blind gives up the idea of an autobiographical novel because she cannot devise a narrator’s voice that makes her own experiences objectively valid as an outward-directed image of a generic type of a young woman in her mission to ask over and over again Shelley’s question: “Can man be free if woman be a slave?”18

The abandoned attempt, as late as 1893, shows how depersonalizing the self remains a challenge and an effort for each new project without ever yielding a re-usable formula. The conversations with stimulating people in St John’s Wood would have been much needed for a constant challenge of deflecting authorial authority by transcending her strong personal convictions. In dialogue with others she can regenerate her autonomous voice as it is linked to an everyday self that, with all her earnestness, she does not want to take too

17. At its centre “Mrs. Herder” is in real life the wife of Georg Herwegh, poet and journalist of the failed German revolution in 1848 (Garnett 10).

18. Can man be free if woman be a slave?
Chain one who lives, and breathes this boundless air
To the corruption of a closed grave!
Can they whose mates are beasts, condemned to bear
Scorn heavier far than toil or anguish, dare
To trample their oppressors? in their home
Among their babes, thou knowest a curse would wear
The shape of woman — hoary crime would come
Behind, and Fraud rebuild religion’s tottering dome
(The Revolt of Islam, Canto Second, verse XLIII).
seriously. In the next section I will focus on her experience and development as a poet as she participates in the culture of salon of St John’s Wood.

2.4 The Challenging Culture of St John’s Wood

The Bohemian neighbourhood of London’s St John’s Wood and its culture of salon was an ideal environment for woman poets to “promote and consolidate their individual careers, establish contacts with publishers, editors of magazines and newspapers, and express and discuss their ideas on poetry, poetics and politics” (Ana Parejo Vadillo 24). Above all, Blind needed the challenge from friends. As she reflects in later life that the world of poetry had been to her an “Earthly Paradise which the poets have planted with immortelles,” she grants that it was not “a good preparation for life” because one needs “experience to unravel” the subtlety of poetry (qtd. in Garnett 32-3).

Giuseppe Mazzini, friend of Karl Blind and frequent visitor at the Blinds’ Sunday evenings, became for Mathilde a truly seminal influence on her development as a writer and poet. She acknowledged this by dedicating her first book of poems to him (Poems. By Claude Lake 1867), to which she added late in life her essay “Personal Recollections of Mazzini” in the Fortnightly Review (1891). Mazzini helped her to understand the inwardness of her “Earthly Paradise” as more than a personal experience, namely a phenomenon of her German cultural background. More importantly, Mazzini discussed literature with her in such depth that she never let go of his teaching for how to transcend the inwardness of the self by producing a public soul as a writer and poet. For this, Mazzini’s ground rule was: “do not contemplate: work” and concerns for personal status, but “worship duty: it is the only reality,” arguing that self-regard and happiness will follow as a matter of course. He assures her, “if with steady aim you pursue an appointed task, just as unexpectedly as the sunshine falls on your path, happiness will surprise you unawares” (708).

19. “To Joseph Mazzini, the Prophet, Martyr, and Hero, these Poems are Dedicated, in Undying Gratitude and Reverence.”
In their discussion of her reading interests, he disapproves of her enthusiasm for Carlyle. Goethe, too, he declares to be flawed for being “incapable of considering events in their public connection.” And he wonders at Blind’s failure to recognize Carlyle’s self-regarding argument for force (704-6). Mazzini’s reasoning is demonstrated in his article “Byron and Goethe” (c 1857), in which he acknowledges Goethe’s genius, but is critical of what amounts to German self-cultivation. In comparison, he approves of Byron’s outward-directed commitment to the revolutionary cause in Greece (9). For the same reason he champions Schiller over Goethe (12). This is a challenge indeed; Carlyle’s friendship with Goethe and Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus, “the most German of English works,” were for Blind strong links, from her English perspective to the German culture (Ashton, R. 10, 76-104; Safranski, Rüdiger 303).20

However, Mazzini was insistent in urging her to see the German idea of self-cultivation as a means rather than as an end. He wants her to acknowledge that “we have each of us a function, an individualized mission” in the connectivity manifested through history. For, “man cannot save himself except by saving others - by modifying for the best the medium, the element in which he is living” (qtd. in Blind, “Recollections” 710). The lesson learned from Mazzini’s caring involvement echoes through Blind’s life.

Mazzini’s practical plan for putting his teaching into action envisaged clearly that Blind’s public soul would be cosmopolitan: six hours of study per day, first to familiarize herself with the laws of astronomy, and from there to “dive down, through geology, to the forces which have elaborated our globe.” Then it is “history from the most primitive times to our own,“ and only then, if necessary, philosophy – not for its own sake as it merely “teaches thought about thought.” Instead, Blind should study “different systems of philosophy each in connection with the period it sprang from – Plato, Descartes, Spinoza in their historical sequence” (706-7). This reads like a plan for her Ascent of Man

20. Karl Blind said that the friendship between Mazzini and the Blinds was not affected by religious differences: “… our dear friend Mazzini would now and then launch out, with almost priestly bitterness, against the views of Feuerbach, Strauss, Büchner, … as compared with those who were of his own way of believing” (“In Years of Storm and Stress (No. I)” 659).
(1889), where she traces the appearance of the human animal in the great scheme of the cosmic order, from whence the animal starts its gradual ascent to becoming a human being. The histories of this ascent allude to philosophies from different times and cultures as these give rise to new energies for good or evil. They are histories of advance and setbacks by natural disasters, war and destruction, by human ignorance, cruelty and indifference. The ongoing ascent of humankind’s social evolution depends in her poem on nothing more than the human being’s ability to care enough to accept responsibility for the well-being of others and for the individual’s social and cultural environment. The agent of responsibility can be none other than the individual, who has to follow with her social will the dictates of her personal empathy (Blind’s term is “Love”).

W. H. Bruford, British scholar of German literature, examines in his The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation (1975) the cultural context for Mazzini’s challenge to Blind by asking her to evaluate the German concept of self-cultivation. Bruford stresses in his sub-title the long-term relevance of the tradition: Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann (1795-1924). He echoes Mazzini’s remonstrations with Blind’s enthusiasm for Goethe and Carlyle by quoting from Thomas Mann’s lecture in 1923 to a group of republican students:

> The finest characteristic of the typical German, the best-known and also the most glittering to his self-esteem, is his inwardness. It is no accident that it was the Germans who gave to the world the intellectually stimulating and very humane literary form which we call the novel of personal cultivation and development [Bildungsroman]. Western Europe has its novel of social criticism, to which the Germans regard this other type as their own special counterpart; it is at the same time an autobiography, a confession. The inwardness, the culture of a German implies introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience [Bildung]; consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, deepening and perfecting of one’s own personality … To ask him to transfer his allegiance from inwardness to the objective, to politics, to what the peoples of Europe call freedom, would seem to him to amount to a demand that he should do violence to his own nature, and in fact give up his sense of national identity. (Bruford vii)

I have noted before this kind of assessment of inwardness as an unalterable character orientation of the German educated class in relation to the individual’s isolation from the political process. Blind’s British contemporaries observed it in the discrepancy between the universal education in Germany and
the absence of a *parliamentary system*. The historian Kocka explains it by its origins as an economic tool without an initial connection between education and nationhood (31). Plessner draws attention to a missing historical link between individual and state, which results in the individual’s cultural loneliness and an inevitable lack of engagement with the community (13, passim).

In contrast, Bruford, as a British scholar of German literature, and Mazzini, as an Italian politician and literary critic, both knowledgeable outsiders to the German inwardness, look for the dynamics of development with the implication that nothing is fixed for the future. Bruford argues that the political vacuum that existed, for whatever reason, between the educated German and the state in eighteenth-century Germany gave rise to the romantic idea of self-cultivation. He traces the historical roots of the “German tradition of self-cultivation” to the “Jenaer Romantiks” of the late eighteenth century (Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck and Clemens Brentano) (84-86). The main opposition in the ensuing controversy came from Schiller and Goethe, with Schiller particularly objecting to the “excesses” of freedom, “which is perfectible for good or evil” (Safranski, R. 86-7). The perfectibility for evil is Mazzini’s concern in his conversations with Blind as her mentor. Mazzini therefore advises Blind to use this freedom productively by avoiding political passivity, but also to guard against becoming a political romantic by insufficient engagement with day-to-day politics.

The difficulty of negotiating the opposites of abstract ideology and day-to-day reality for a useful and truthful political commitment is implied, however, by what Plessner identified as the German cultural loneliness. He uses the term for the individual of a nation without a shared history and without memories of a shared “golden age” (13). Without the historical accumulation of social and cultural textures, he says, there is a cultural loneliness that only arises when traditions are not strong enough to integrate the individual sufficiently into her society. By definition, it is not identifiable for those who experience it because the socializing potency of tradition is not a concept that exists for them. An

21. It has been recognized as contributing to the rise of the German fascist regime.
educated awareness from observation of others and by inference seeing what is missing in one's own hidden inner space remains a theoretical insight.

The German political theorist Carl Schmitt (1919) disparages the political romantic who applies her abstract ideas whenever she may need a self-serving argument. He explains the political romantic by the individual not knowing about her missing sense of national and spiritual unity, and therefore not being aware of her lack of a natural involvement with her country's day-to-day problems and politics. Schmitt contrasts the type of the political romantic with Wilhelm von Humboldt as a realistic practitioner as "Head of the Department for Culture and Public Education" in the Ministry of the Interior (134). Indeed, Humboldt, as founder of the German Bildungssystem, is widely acknowledged for his constructive intentions. However, Bruford uncovers the power of culturally transmitted inwardness with its danger of a pre-occupying inadvertent self-regard by quoting Humboldt: "The first rule of a true ethical code is 'Improve yourself,' and to '[i]nfluence others through what you are' comes only second" (14-5). Mazzini persuades Blind to acknowledge that this kind of priority emphasis on the self is inevitably misleading, however high-minded the intention and effort might be.

Minding his own advice, Mazzini does not further theorize, but turns, like Bruford, to the dynamics of individual literary voices in the German past. He championed Schiller over Goethe. Schiller agonized about the process of cultural demystification, from the richness of the Greek gods, to the coldness of Christian monotheism, and the dryness of rationalism and materialism. He considered the God of Monotheism to be a lonely god, autistically self-centred, who drives people into a pointless self-regard, making them introverted and therefore lonely (Safranski, R. 288-89). Thus, Schiller takes distance from his subjective self. He changes from writing plays to writing history for its outward-

22. The translator, Guy Oakes, discusses the difficulty as illustrated in Carl Schmitt's life. Schmitt had shown himself to be the political romantic he had disparaged. In 1933, he turned from warning about the National Socialists coming into power to "delivering Germany completely into the hands of this group" (ix-xi).

23. Geschichte des Abfalls der vereinigten Niederlande von der spanischen Regierung ("History of the Revolt of the Netherlands") (1788); and
directed cosmopolitan perspective. He tells his friend Körner in 1789: “It's a flimsy, petty ideal, to write for one nation; a philosophical spirit finds this limitation quite unbearable” (339). Schiller transposes his *self* to become a *public soul*. Cultivating the self is then a public duty and doing a friend a favour is shared work in promoting what is objectively valid (217).

This is a dynamic that does not deny explanations of the past of a German national character of inwardness and cultural loneliness. Instead, the individual employs the national characteristics constructively by using inwardness to produce a related kind of outward-directedness. Hence, Schiller prioritizes in his writing the aesthetic sense over reason; he wants beauty to encompass and to triumph over all, over goodness, truth and usefulness (290-1, passim). His intention is to prioritize the *function* of art, over art for art's sake, by meeting people's real needs as opposed to satisfying elitist views of high culture. He thereby bypasses the national stereotype, however valid it may be, with a cosmopolitan perspective on humankind.

Although this is recognizably Blind's construction of her cosmopolitanism, it is a task that involves constant effort exactly because of having to work with the passions of the *self* and having to self-regulate the emotions sufficiently to find a way of depersonalizing the specific *self*. The personal depersonalized is then used for the construction of the *public soul*, a representation of the universal human being. There are examples of the effort it takes Blind to self-regulate her emotions sufficiently to be able to depersonalize her own ideological impulses. There is her brief nationalistic outburst about Napoleon’s declaration of war, still uncontrollable despite the obvious attempt to control her

*Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (“History of the Thirty Years War”). (1790).

24. My translation of: “Es ist ein armseliges, kleinliches Ideal, für eine Nation zu schreiben; einem philosophischen Geist ist diese Grenze durchaus unerträglich.”

25. Hence, friendship is his *Elysium* – his “Ode an die Freude” (“Ode to Joy”) (1785/1808); as in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with the 1808 version of Schiller’s text (1824).
response to Garnett’s outrage. There is also a sense that her project for an autobiographical novel was a desire of the self, as creative writing can be therapeutic. But she had to deny herself the project as resisting the required distance to the self. As Symons notes in his brief introduction to his 1897 edition of her poems, Blind “was a poet almost in spite of herself” (vi) as the effort of caring, and yet distancing the subjective self from one’s subject of caring, seems to be expressed in her chronic ill health and long periods of depression throughout her nomadic life.

The experience she needed in this challenging task was interaction with interesting people who shared her cares about life in some form or another. She found this in the rich culture of salon of St John’s Wood with its easy emphasis on socializing and enjoyment of each other’s company while exchanging ideas, reading to each other recent work and making useful contacts. For the woman poet it was an exceptional environment for career-promoting networking, especially since women were excluded from Victorian professional associations such as the “Society of Authors.” Women’s assertion in creating their own club, the “Literary Ladies,” of which Blind was a founder member and president in 1889 (Hughes 251), was useful but it was inevitably also a recognition of the separated Victorian male and female spheres.

To show how enjoyable, useful and easy-going it all could be, Vadillo quotes from Arthur Symons’s letter a delightful example to illustrate the scene of enjoyment mixed with literary interests:

> Miss Blind was kind enough to introduce me to the Wm. Rossettis, where we went one afternoon. Quite a crowd of people there—the Miss Ferraris sang some Abruzzi popular songs—I was introduced to “Mrs [Augusta] Webster’s husband” (poor man, to have such a title—and such a nice old fellow too) and saw Amy Levy, who is getting noted for her stories of Jewish life. … I have made one or two other acquaintances.

> On Sunday Miss Blind, Sarrazin, Bunand and I lunched with the eminent Mrs Mona Caird, and then all went down, a jolly (and very peculiar-looking [sic]) party, to Kew! We didn’t discuss marriage all the time. No Mr Caird was visible. Sir James turned up, and was left behind with the little boy. About 10 or 11 we all turned up at Wm. Sharp’s and there, to my great delight, I met Mrs Meynell.” (qtd. in Vadillo 23)

The natural blend of socializing with professional interests allowed purposeful friendships to develop within a general sphere of shared cultural interests.
The keynote of each salon is given by the host’s interests and the circle of frequent visitors one might meet there. Blind’s starting point was, of course, Karl Blind’s Sunday evenings for which Simon Avery lists regular guests from among the “revolutionaries and champions of liberty,” including “Karl Marx, French politician and historian Louis Blanc, French politician Ledru-Rollin, the Polish patriot Langiewicz, Italian general, politician and patriot Garibaldi and Italian politician, journalist and activist Mazzini,” as well as “the Russian pro-Western socialist Alexander Herzen” (175). As Karl Blind’s close friend, Moncure Daniel Conway, American abolitionist and Unitarian clergyman, comments on the usual open door nature of these evenings: “if any interesting man came, especially from Germany, we were sure to meet him at one of those Sunday evenings in Winchester Road” (qtd. in Avery 175).

Blind’s two major themes of scepticism in the religious and scientific discourse and the marginalization of women were shared by Graham R. Tomson and her guests; Tomson’s salon was “shaped by her radical ideas in relation to sexual politics and to atheism.” Vadillo notes other regular callers to be “Amy Levy, Violet Hunt and Mona Caird” (29). From Blind’s friendship with Mona Caird in particular it is clear that regularly meeting each other and becoming quite close friends does not mean working out a common line of argument. Mona Caird’s highly controversial articles on marriage in the Westminster Review in 1888 are confrontational, whereas Blind’s interest in the woman question is to appeal to her reader to care for the position of women by investing their imagination with empathy for the woman’s predicament under the societal circumstances of her life as a woman.

Another example of the salon’s openness to a diversity of views is George Sims (1917) reminiscing about his mother’s “working friends” on the woman question. He lists both Karl and Mathilde Blind as frequent guests, together with “Augusta Webster, the poetess, … Dr Anna Kingsford, Mrs Fenwick-Miller, Ella Dietz, Dr. Zerffi, Professor Plumtree, Samuel Butler, author

26. Conway gave the address at Mathilde Blind’s funeral, despite the rift between Karl Blind and Mathilde, and despite Karl Blind’s name not being included on the ribbon of Friederike’s wreath for Mathilde’s grave ("Funeral of Mathilde Blind" 28 Dec. 1896.)
of ‘Erewhon,’ Frances Power Cobbe, and occasionally Lydia Becker.” And yet, he leaves out Mathilde Blind from his list of “remarkable” contributors to the magazine *The Dark Blue* for the year 1872 while mentioning the men of Mathilde Blind’s circle, including Karl Blind and Moncure D. Conway, D. R. Rossetti and Swinburne (Sims 54-5).

The pattern of Blind’s name appearing as a regular visitor with familiar and new names from one salon to another indicates openness of the culture of salon as opposed to cliquishness. By inference, we learn about Blind being seen as having wide-ranging interests. Vadillo characterizes F. Robinson’s salon by a need to feel artistically liberated by invigorating cross-fertilization in conversation. Blind is there a regular guest together with Amy Levy, Louise S. Bevington, Augusta Webster, Emily Pfeiffer, Elizabeth Chapman and Margaret Veley, “and, of course, Robinson's close friend Vernon Lee;” regulars among the men are J. A. Symonds, Arthur Symons, Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater and W. E. Henley, and there are her friends William and Lucy Rossetti, and the Pennells (Vadillo 27-8).

Blind’s review of W. M. Rossetti’s edition of poems by Shelley in the *Westminster Review* in 1870 was the start of her close friendships with W. M. Rossetti and his future father-in-law (1874), Ford Madox Brown. In his biography *Ford Madox Brown* (1896), Ford Madox Hueffer, grandson of Madox Brown, lists the “habitués” of Madox Brown’s fortnightly parties:

Theodore Watts-Dunton, Christina and William Rossetti, Mr. Stephens, Dr. Garnett, poets B.V. (James Thomson), Arthur O'Shaughnessy, Philip Marston and Mr. John Payne. And of the younger generation with promise: Miss Blind, Miss Spartali (now Mrs Stillman) and Lucy, Catherine and Oliver Madox Brown [Ford Madox Brown’s highly gifted son (1855–1874)]. Among the less frequent guests are Turgenev, Mazzini and James Whistler. (240-41)

The focus for these meetings was Pre-Raphaelitism in art and literature, as it had been flourishing since the dissolution of the original Brotherhood (1848-1854) (Wood 10, 22). The idea of the Brotherhood and its early doctrines had never been monastic, nor were the first seven members all painters; the initial ideas were to oppose the dominant artistic establishment as it was represented by the Royal Academy. The oppositional commitment was to
express genuine ideas with a concern for being truthful to nature. These principles were also seen in Shelley’s radical politics and lyrics at a time when Shelley’s works were banned from respectable Victorian homes, and Matthew Arnold famously described Shelley as a “beautiful but ineffectual angel” (Essays in Criticism 262). There was also the creature-bond between Shelley and Pre-Raphaelitism over having endured the critics’ disdain and hatred and, at times, having been ostracised accordingly (Wood 18-20). This oppositional stance was more widely shared as was evident in the membership of the Shelley Society, founded by F J Furnivall in 1886 with W M Rossetti its president. Members included also more assertive socialists like Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling (Avery 173). Naturally, Blind was a member; but for illness she would have presented a talk on Shelley. Her devotion to Shelley and her engagement with his work is demonstrated fully in her lecture “Shelley’s View of Nature Contrasted with Darwin’s” (1886). It is celebrated in Ford Madox Brown’s portrait of her as she is holding a roll of a manuscript of hers with the name “Shelley” distinctly visible.

For Blind, there is a change of emphasis from the Blinds’ Sunday evenings as a meeting point for international revolutionary interests to Madox Brown’s emphasis on the outsider’s perspective on art. There is an element of world-citizenship to the outsider’s stance of Pre-Raphaelitism that is partly related to the migratory lifestyle of its members, including the elective world-citizenship of Madox Brown’s friend William Morris. Ford Madox Brown, though of British descent, had lived in Belgium, Italy and France and came to England in 1845, at the age of twenty-five (Thirlwell 177). His daughter Catherine married the German music critic Franz Hueffer in 1872, shortly after his arrival in London in 1869, and her sister Lucy married the second generation Italian immigrant, William Michael Rossetti in 1874.

Pre-Raphaelite romantic realism included an interest in Richard Wagner’s “Music of the Future.” 27 Sheila Rowbotham in her biography Edward

---

27. Vadillo observes for her discussion of the decadent drama of A. C. Swinburne and Michael Field “behind the renaissance of verse drama at the fin de siècle was the aesthetes and decadents’ revival of the romantic spirit, most notably through the works of Goethe, Schiller, and Shelley. But the catalyst for
Carpenter (2009) identified a more wide-ranging interest for the political left: “Wagner's desire to reconnect art with the social lives of the people, along with his emphasis on the artist as an individual with exceptional insights, exerted considerable influence on socialist and anarchist artists” (254).

There were acrimonious attacks on Wagner’s music in Germany, France and England. Franz Huffer’s musical knowledge would have been particularly valuable to the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle. His essay on Richard Wagner in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1872 contextualizes his music in the light of Wagner’s reading of philosophy in his essay “Music of the Future” (French 1860, German 1861). Huffer condenses this into the axiom:

> music, vocal or instrumental, in its highest development, must aim at, and is capable of, rendering all the emotions of the human heart; not essentially differing in this from poetry, to which it is inferior in the distinctness of its means of expression, but which it surpasses in immediate impulse. (265)

Blind’s commitment to this view is evident in all her work as a poet and novelist, as Jason Rudy (2006) observes in his article, “Rapturous Forms: Mathilde Blind’s Darwinian Poetics.” He relates Blind’s poetics to the history of Victorian physiological poetics as a form of communion with her reader. He acknowledges Shelley’s influence on Blind’s “rhythmic ‘shaping’ [of] an entirely new experience of the world” and notes that “Blind, building on Victorian physiological science and evolutionary theory, takes Shelley one step further in her insistence on the physiological, bodily foundations of rhythmic ‘truth’ and experience” (160). This emphasis on understanding “rhythm as unifying not only individuals, but also the living world in its entirety” (15) is the essence of Blind’s cosmopolitanism.

Her essay “The Tale of Tristram and Iseult” in the *National Review* (1884) shows her engagement with the changes over time of the relationship between art and society as a development that transcends political radicalism.

---

the rethinking of the genre in the late-Victorian period was the opera criticism of Richard Wagner” (“Another Renaissance” 120).
She sees Wagner’s latest interpretation of the story as a culmination in a socio-artistic evolution. She explores the changes from Gottfried von Strassburg’s medieval epic poem, its Celtic origin, and elements of characters reaching as far back as the “Egyptian god Ptah and the goddess Isis” (826). Her argument is that Wagner “resolved the complete mediaeval romance into its simplest elements” in the form of “a transcendental passion, reaching beyond time and space” (837). Nevertheless, she distances herself from Wagner’s pessimism in his “aspiration towards death … as the sole redemption from the evils of life” – under the influence of “Schopenhauer’s philosophy” (837).

The publisher’s acceptance of the essay reflects its perceived relevance to Victorian culture. Rudy notes a connectedness through Blind’s and Swinburne’s emphasis on sound and rhythm in their poetry. Blind valued Swinburne’s poetry exactly for the qualities she was striving for, namely for “an intensity of feeling, [and a] depth of thought, music, and form” (qtd. in Rudy 155). She was particularly appreciative of this when Swinburne had been reading to friends “the first part of ‘Tristram and Iseult’” (Garnett 46).

It is this idea of the function of the arts to touch the human heart as opposed to cultivating the sophistication of separate genres that is particularly noticeable in the sounds and rhythms of Blind’s novel Tarantella (1885). She makes a scene ring with music at the expense of distinctness of expression. Even more pointedly she merges music and poetry in her “Russian Student’s Tale” (1891) with the poem’s sonata structure for the lyrical images of the romantic student life; the song of the nightingale threading through the structure as transitions and as cadence, evoking the nightingale’s song that survives the death of the individual nightingale as a statement of faith in the human being’s song of love to survive the demise of the lovers of her poem. The immediacy of communing with her reader by means of physiological impulses transcends the intellectual elitism of perfection in form and execution. The principle of

28. Her own view of death is Darwinian with a view of death as a function of regenerating the species. The inscription in gold on black silk for her wreath for Ford Madox Brown’s funeral: “DEATH IS THE MERCY OF ETERNITY” (Thirlwell 248) is repeated on the monument on her grave, which her friends, Ludwig Mond and his wife, had commissioned for her (Thirlwell 253).

29. Published as Tristram of Lyoness (1882).
immediacy gives Wagner’s music, like Blind’s and Swinburne’s poetry, political meaning.  

For Blind, as for Wagner, the artistic commitment to the people arises from their experience of the failure of the revolutions of the 1840s. Blind’s experience of her mother’s and Karl Blind’s imprisonment and exile, Wagner’s flight into exile from the barricades in Dresden in May 1849. Both transcend social realism “so that the stories, unburdened of distracting realistic details, could keep the focus on (a) simple and elemental structures and (b) those primal feelings and emotions threatened and blunted by the busyness of contemporary quotidian life” (McGann “Wagner, Baudelaire, Swinburne: Poetry in the Condition of Music” 624).

Richard Garnett crystallizes this panorama of Blind’s engagement with people in St John’s Wood in his “Memoir”:

She shone principally in conversation, her brilliant things were sparks struck out from the collision of mind with mind. Always fluent and animated, never disposed to engross conversation unduly, she was admirable whether in a tête-à-tête or as the centre of a group of congenial spirits. (23)

These encounters with like-minded artists and intellectuals in St John’s Wood broke her sense of isolation in her “Earthly Paradise” and gave her a sense of Victorian world-citizenship.

2.5 Conclusion

I argued in this chapter that Blind’s immigrant cosmopolitanism has developed through four layers of her life experiences. The first layer was shaped by her having been transferred as a small child from her family’s home-

30. Like Rudy, Blind differentiates underlying political meaning from aspirational “poetics of rapture.” She notes Byron’s choice of words to be always for “the most adequate expression of the image in his mind” against the “aesthetic method, where the luxuriant beauty of expression becomes of such supreme importance that it weakens, undermines, and finally destroys the sap and marrow of thought, as the enlacing ivy the tree that is its stay” (Letters vii).
culture to the nomadic lifestyle of the European culture of international revolutionaries. The second layer has been transmitted by her mother Friederike’s educational guidance according to the German concept of Bildung. She emerged in the third layer as a person who knows her own mind by asserting her intellectual curiosity against the dominant Christian culture of her school and against her uncle’s warning of becoming an unmarriageable bluestocking. I argued, however, that it is only in the contemplative third and fourth layers as a participant in the salon in St John’s Wood that she learned to assert her autonomous cosmopolitan voice as a writer and poet. Although Mazzini’s challenge for Blind to evaluate her German cultural heritage was of fundamental importance, sharing more widely a sense of world-citizenship, and a view of truth in art, was essential for Blind’s health and well-being.

In the next chapter I will explore Blind’s autonomous radicalism as writer and poet as distinct from her personal political radicalism. I will argue that her aim is to transcend polarization in the public domain, for which she adopts a depersonalized cosmopolitan voice that deflects authorial authority as she depersonalizes the subject of her writing. I will examine her method of doing this in three different genres: her biography George Eliot (1883) where she transcends the social and moral criticism of Eliot’s “informal union” with George Lewes, a married man; the novel Tarantella (1885) where she transcends the ideological polarization across European societies in response to Ibsen’s A Doll’s House; with her poem The Ascent of Man (1889) she transcends the Victorian conflation between biological and social evolution in times of severe anxiety of not knowing what to do about the social problems of urbanisation and the degeneration of the city on account of the urban poor.
3. Blind’s Autonomous Radicalism

I argued in the previous chapter that Blind’s immigrant cosmopolitanism is layered by different experiences. Living in the community of European international revolutionaries gives her a political radicalism with an international perspective. Her mother’s supervision of her education according to the German education system gives her a strong German cultural background. Mazzini’s challenge to evaluate her German cultural heritage introduces her to developing an autonomous cosmopolitan voice as a writer and poet, which she worked on as a participant of the culture of salon in St. John’s Wood. As a writer and poet she aims to transcend polarizations in public debates about specific issues of the time by presenting such issues to her reader as a matter of autonomous contemplation. Throughout her work, in her non-fictional and creative writing, Blind meets the challenge of this function according to Buckle’s scientific approach to history and his argument that moral and intellectual progress is not a matter of “natural capacity,” but a matter of the subject’s share of “opportunity” in the “circumstances under which that capacity after birth comes into play” (Buckle 128).

Blind signals this understanding as relevant for any individual, whether the individual is the subject of her writing, herself as author or her reader. She aims therefore to place author and reader at an equal distance to the story and argument of her text.

I will argue in this chapter that Blind’s consistent aim is realized by different methods across the genres of biography, her novel and her poetry. In Blind’s Darwinian view of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind, it is the responsibility of the individual to empathize with her fellow human being and to

---

1. Blind is indebted to H.T. Buckle’s History of Civilization in England (1857) for his argument for a scientific approach to history by analysis and interpretation on the grounds that geographical conditions give rise to a diversity of cultures (Garnett 29).

Blind’s method prefigures the “incomplete identity model,” which the cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall offered in 1990 in his Cultural Identity.

Blind’s presenting the interdependence between the individual and society also prefigures Manuel Castells’s (1997) conceptual model of the dynamics of change over time for a society by the interaction between a society’s legitimizing institutional authorities and its marginalized groups.
invest her social will in caring about the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society as the driving force of the social evolution of humankind. As a biographer, she examines her subject's aspirations and struggles in the specific circumstances of her life in the relevant cultural contexts of her time. Whilst analysis and interpretation focuses on the uniqueness of a specific individual, the process also exposes the general dynamics of opportunities and constraints as they affect individuals in their striving. Blind’s biographies offer the reader the opportunity to compare her subject’s interdependence with society with her own experiences from her point of view. Her biographies also present change over time, both within her subject’s personal life and in the time between her subject’s life and the time of the communion between author and reader. Observable change in the past suggests, by extrapolation, observable change to come. The reader’s tension of what is and what could be energizes her social will for change. Blind aims to allow for the inevitable diversity of responses as the individual reader engages with different aspects of a biography.

For George Eliot, the public controversy is about Eliot’s “informal union” of living with Lewes, a married man; for her novel Tarantella the controversy is about Ibsens’s A Doll’s House as it was seen as an attack on the institution of marriage; for her poem The Ascent of Man the polarization is about the Victorian Zeitgeist of a rising dominance of science over religion, which is marked by a transitional conflation of biological and social evolution. Blind addresses each of these topics by transferring the issues of public debate and controversy into the individual reader’s personal space of autonomous reflection.

As biographer she separates analysis and interpretation of her subject’s life and work from authorial discussion of related issues. As novelist and poet she addresses her reader in the depersonalized manner of Shelley’s poet who inhabits a “cloud of mind [which is] discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring or is about to be restored” (Prometheus, “Preface” xiii). Thus she distances herself as novelist and poet by associating her creative work with the work of great poets and artists as “masterpiece[s] of Nature” that transcend the specificity of their creators’ own time. Her deflection of authorial authority is therefore not a moral stance, but science-based, with the help of Shelley’s insight that “[p]oets, not
otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age” (xiii).

In section 3.1, “George Eliot (1883),” I will argue that Blind deflects authorial authority by analysing Eliot’s aspirations and struggles in the specific circumstances of her life in the wider relevant cultural contexts. She emphasises the author’s personal distance with authorial interventions, in which she presents to her reader the rationale of the unforeseeable consequences of an individual’s socially and morally independent life-choices. This approach engages the reader in an empathetic reading-experience and the opportunity, and duty, to evaluate the relevance of Blind’s approach from the reader’s autonomous point of view. I will refer to Tracey Rosenberg’s (2007) comparison of George Eliot’s Victorian biographers in support of my argument for Blind’s approach.

In section 3.2, “Tarantella: A Romance (1885),” I will explore Blind’s novel as a response to Ibsen’s play A Doll’s House (1879). I will argue that she places author and reader at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her text by applying the opposite method from her biographical writing. Instead of giving in-depth detail, Blind subverts the social realism of the linear narrative of Ibsen’s play by creating an unreliable narrator who presents a kaleidoscope of typological mini-stories. She replaces Ibsen’s metaphor of the tarantella for Torvald’s control over his wife Nora with the tarantella of the title of her novel, where it is no longer a metaphor, but the representation of the scientific recognized importance of rhythm in the process of sexual selection. Blind’s typological mini-stories compare the man and woman of equal sexual energy with their unequal opportunities for autonomously asserting their energy in a meaningful contribution to the social evolution of humankind. Thus Blind transcends the ideological polarization about the institution of marriage by leaving her reader with the question about the nature of the individual’s unequal interdependence with society. She leaves it to the reader to reflect on the relevance of the individual’s interdependence with society for a man and a woman transmuting a romance into a mutually rewarding marriage. I will argue with Joan Templeton in her Ibsen’s Women (2001) that Blind’s response to Ibsen’s novel is a recognition of his intentions being not to write about women’s rights, but about “the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person” (110).
In section 3.3, “The Ascent of Man (1889),” I will explore Blind’s approach of combining universal typologies with the specificity of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. The typologies are of the human being’s struggle with the external and internal forces of Nature, whereas the specificity of the ascent of man spans the typologies of the manifold histories of humankind. I will argue that she subverts thereby the nineteenth-century unquestioned assumption of a uniform course for mankind and the consequent conflation of biological and social evolution. Blind’s design for the poem in imitation of a Dionysian festival evokes the concept of manifold histories as a cultural recognition of the ancient Greeks’ re-figuration of their mythological histories. At the same time, the device evokes the Greek citizen’s attendance at the festival as part of his duty to reflect on the interdependence of private and public morality in the business of the democratic governance of the polis. The device deflects authorial authority of the individual as a matter of course. Blind’s authorial assertion about the co-evolution of Nature and humankind is in the narrator’s awakening to a statement of faith in the destiny of humankind with her trust in the individual human being’s capacity for Love. I will explore the critical reception of Blind’s Ascent as an expression of the Zeitgeist in respect of the Victorian religious and scientific discourse.

Overall I will argue that Blind differentiates between her own political radicalism as an individual and the autonomous radicalism of her cosmopolitan voice by deflecting the authorial authority in the construction of a narrator who places author and reader at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her text. Her approach is consistent as biographer, novelist and poet, although her method changes with the subject of her text. The purpose of her autonomous voice in all her writing is to transcend ideological polarization with the aim to restore “the equilibrium between institutions and opinions” (Shelley Prometheus xiii).

3.1 George Eliot (1883)

Blind admired George Eliot and would have been delighted to be commissioned by John H. Ingram to write the first biography of her for the Eminent Women Series. She gives that impression by declaring her admiration
for Eliot in her “Introductory” chapter with a contextual analysis of Eliot’s “charming essay” on European women writers (1854) (1). It is a comparison by Eliot of French women writers with English and German women writers. According to Eliot, the former’s “vital influence on the development of literature,” is impossible for the latter to wield because of their “larger brain and slower temperament” (3). Hence Eliot argues that “the physique of a woman may suffice as the substratum for a superior Gallic mind, but is too thin a soil for a superior Teutonic one” (3). Blind defers to future scientists to “satisfactorily elucidate this question” (5).

Blind resists Eliot’s argument, however, by quoting Mme de Staël for saying, “Le génie n’a pas de sexe” (2) and by matching Eliot’s “formidable list” (4) of great French women writers with her own list of great English women writers. Eliot tops Blind’s list alongside “the Brontës” and “Mrs. Browning” (5). She singles out Eliot as “the sole novelist who has incorporated in an artistic form some of the leading ideas of Comte, of Mazzini, and of Darwin” (8). For moral influence she places Eliot above Carlyle because of her more explicit ethical code, praising her for:

lessons of pitying love towards fellow-men; of sympathy with all human suffering; of unwavering faithfulness towards the social bond, consisting in the claims of race, of country, of family; of unflagging aspiration after that life which is most beneficent to the community, that life, in short, towards which she herself aspired. (8)

Blind praises Eliot’s conservative moral code in combination with her sympathy for the individual’s specific circumstances as a caring view of humanity.

Eric Robertson, the reviewer for the Academy disapproves of Blind’s detached analysis of the cultural function of Eliot’s work. He complains that she “dwell[s] too much on George Eliot as the individual creator or artist,” and passes over the “episode” of Eliot’s “informal union” with Lewes. Blind, he claims, is “cheating the scandal-lover” (286). Indeed, Tracey Rosenberg (2007) notes Blind’s different approach to that of other nineteenth-century biographers of George Eliot. They isolate the issue of the informal union and take a subjective stance in their presentation of it. This varies from refusing “to condone Eliot’s relationship” to pleading for mitigating circumstances and to
justifying Eliot’s actions. All signal their acknowledgment of the importance of the issue to their Victorian readership according to the sacrosanct standards against which Eliot’s life and work has to be judged (Rosenberg 9-10).

In contrast, Blind intervenes in her narrative with an argument in response to the concerns of her Victorian reader by asking the reader to consider the interdependence between the individual and society. She argues that it is impossible to know what kind of contribution an individual’s independence will be seen to have made in the long term. Independence, she argues, is judged differently against the behavioural codes of the present from how future generations will evaluate it, because an independent action is:

precisely the point where the highest natures and the lowest sometimes apparently meet; since to act in opposition to custom may be due to the loftiest motives—may be the spiritual exaltation of the reformer, braving social ostracism for the sake of an idea, or may spring, on the other hand, from purely rebellious promptings of an anti-social egoism, which recognizes no law higher than that of personal gratification. At the same time, it seems that no progress could well be made in the evolution of society without these departures on the part of individuals from the well-beaten tracks, for even the failures help eventually towards a fuller recognition of what is beneficial and possible of attainment. (63)

She follows this up with examples for her reader to check out her argument against the reader’s own ideas:

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, George Sand, the New England Transcendentalists, with their communistic experiment at Brooke Farm, all more or less strove to be path-finders to a better and happier state of society. (63)

Only then does Blind admit to “George Eliot, however, hardly belong[ing] to this order of mind,” and ends up by analysing Eliot’s informal union within the context of Eliot’s life as consistent while regretting the disjointedness between Eliot’s life and work:

Circumstances prompted her to disregard one of the most binding laws of society, yet, while she considered herself justified in doing so, her sympathies were, on the whole, more enlisted in the state of things as they are than as they might be. It is certainly curious that the woman,
who in her own life had followed such an independent course, severing herself in many ways from her past with all its traditional sanctities, should yet so often inculcate the very opposite teaching in her works—should inculcate an almost slavish adherence to whatever surroundings, beliefs, and family ties a human being may be born to. (63-4)

Blind’s analysis of Eliot’s circumstances is methodical in moving from the immediacy of the event to an exploration of what had been leading up to the event. She dismisses any judgemental stance: “How far the blame of this might attach to one side or to the other does not concern us here.” Instead, she focuses on Eliot’s decision on receiving Mr. Lewes’s letter to consent to his proposal, “after having satisfied her conscience that in reality she was not injuring the claims of others; … she bore Mr. Lewes’s name, and became his wife in every sense but the legal one” (63).

Seeking to engage her reader’s imagination and understanding, in fact, her empathy in modern terms, she records Eliot’s “independent views about marriage” as a girl, when she is “strongly advocating the German divorce law” (85). By the time she is twenty-four, Eliot’s views on marriage in Jane Eyre are in disagreement with the general approval of Jane’s conduct as she argues Rochester had been “justified in contracting a fresh marriage” (85). And for the year 1854, when Eliot and Lewes decided to live together, Blind quotes at some length from Eliot’s article on Madame de Sablé in criticism of the “laxity of opinion and practice with regard to the marriage-tie in France” (85). Blind quotes Eliot’s praise of the “quiescence and security of the conjugal relation” for persons “who have already attained a high standard of culture.” Eliot compares this with the dark side of marriage when marriage is without “passion sufficient to rouse all the faculties to aid in winning or retaining its beloved object—to convert indolence into activity, indifference into ardent partisanship, dullness into perspicuity” (86).

Having made the intellectual case for Eliot’s moral consistency in respect of her own view of marriage in principle, Blind then focuses on the circumstances of Eliot’s life for an appreciation of Eliot’s development. She analyses how the characters of Eliot’s novels evoke the “traditional sanctities” of Eliot’s early life, inviting the reader thereby to empathize with inconsistencies in Eliot’s life and work (88). She traces Eliot’s father, whose nickname in the Evans family was “Adam Bede,” and how his “career and character are partially
depicted in Adam Bede, Caleb Garth and Mr. Hackit – portraitures in which the different stages of his life are recorded with a mingling of fact and fiction” (9). The nature of the “traditional sanctities” is thereby described by Blind in Mr. Evans’s conduct as a land agent as “gentle, but of indomitable firmness” (10). Blind dwells on the image of Mr. Evans’s firmness by speculating that Eliot’s mother must have been “a pattern of womanhood” because “very little is known” of her, referring to Schiller’s pronouncement of “the best women, like the best ruled states, have no history” (10; also qtd. in Safranski 11-12).

Anecdotally, Blind argues that the strong hold of these early traditional sanctities on Eliot, for good or ill, can be seen in the story of the reception of her anonymously published “Scenes of Clerical Life” (1857) in Blackwood’s Magazine. Eliot was thirty-nine years old by then and yet her stories gave such a vivid account of these early years that her readers in Nuneaton were “considerably perplexed and excited to find well-known places and persons touched off to the life” (120). Their curiosity about the author’s identity proceeded with their provincial reasoning to identify a Mr. Liggins as author. He was a man who had “studied at Cambridge, gallantly run through a fortune, and [was] in very needy circumstances.” He had to be the author of “Scenes of Clerical Life,” since these were “exactly the qualifications to be expected in a man of genius” (121). Blind argues that the vividness of the scenes shows Eliot’s strong roots in the early years of her life, while the Nuneaton readers’ narrow-minded deductive argument about the author’s identity showed Eliot’s need to sever herself “in many ways from her past and its traditional sanctities” (88).

Blind suggests that the need to break away must have been triggered by loneliness, as being considered different from those around you is a cause for loneliness. She tells her reader that already at the age of thirteen Eliot was different by her looks with her “fully formed” features and “a seriousness of expression almost startling for her years” (14).

Blind contextualizes isolation as different for men and women in view of Eliot’s “excessive study” when she and her father had moved to Coventry and her father was much away from home:

At this time she must have often had a painful consciousness of being cut off from that living fellowship with the like-minded so stimulating to
the intellectual life. Men are not so subject to this form of soul hunger as women; for at their public schools and colleges they are brought into contact with their contemporaries, and cannot fail to find comrades amongst them of like thoughts and aspirations with themselves. (25)

With these reflections, Blind has argued for Eliot’s receptiveness to change when she joins the “Rosehill Circle” in Coventry. She sees Eliot’s values of her “traditional sanctities” challenged by “philosophical speculations” with the effect of making Eliot feel “cramped by dogmas that had now lost their vitality” (33). Blind appreciates the different challenge for Eliot to “break with an inherited form of belief to which a thousand tender associations bound her” (33) compared with her own brief journey into Christianity on her way into a scientific explanation of the natural world. Thus Blind takes it as an indication of stress rather than hypocrisy, that Eliot continued “outward observances” (37), such as going to church with her father, just to appease his agitation.

Blind’s empathetic consideration of Eliot’s circumstances does not prevent her from being critical of Eliot’s political stance in Daniel Deronda. She grants Eliot admiration for her engagement with the issues of the Jewish community, but reproaches her for the creation of her character Mordecai and his “ardent desire to found a new national state in Palestine” (192). Eliot, Blind declares, carries “the principle of nationality to an extreme, if not pernicious length” (195). Blind sees in Eliot’s vision of Jewish nationhood and in her proposal of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine a rigidity that is as “unnatural as it is dangerous.” She argues that it would be “too tenacious a clinging to inherited memories” (195).

Blind’s own Jewish nationality makes it important for her to separate the self from her function as biographer in her evaluation of Eliot’s nationalism. She extrapolates from Daniel Deronda: Eliot would have to disapprove of countries such as America and the “slow amalgamation of many allied and even heterogeneous races into a new nation.” And, drawing back from such a suggestion, Blind grants that, “George Eliot does not absolutely hold these views,” if only because, “[i]t is impossible to arrest this tendency” of “fusion of races,” and because of the fact that “all we can do is to moderate its course” (195). Blind’s grievance is with Eliot’s synecdochical view of the Jewish people.
as inconsistent with Eliot's known admiration for "many of the most eminent Jews" whose attitudes are not nationalistic:

The sympathies of Spinoza, the Mendelssohns, Rahel, Meyerbeer, Heine, and many others, are not distinctively Jewish but humanitarian. And the grandest, as well as truest thing that has been uttered about them is that saying of Heine's: "The country of the Jews is the ideal, is God." (196)

Throughout her biography of George Eliot, Blind separates her political radicalism, by which she is estranged from Eliot's conservative authorial voice in her novels, from the radicalism of her autonomous cosmopolitan voice of deflecting authorial authority. She manages this separation by focusing on analysing Eliot's life and work in the circumstances of her personal life in the relevant wider cultural context of her time. She addresses controversial issues, such as her informal union with Lewes and her criticism of Eliot's political stance in Daniel Deronda, with authorial intervention of a separate discussion, in which she offers her reasoning, rather than her judgment, to her reader's reflections and evaluation from the reader's personal point of view. Blind's autonomous radicalism is cosmopolitan in that she transcends the dominant values and attitudes of Victorian society with her focus on the relationship between individual and humankind. Blind thereby conveys to her reader a world-citizen's perspective on the interdependence of the individual and society, leaving her reader to reflect about the nature of a wider interdependence between the individual and humankind as a species. While this is also Blind's aim with her novel Tarantella, her method of producing the effect of deflected authorial authority in her creative writing depends on Blind's invention of a suitable artistic design.

3.2 Tarantella: A Romance (1885)

Blind is in dialogue with Ibsen for her novel Tarantella (written in 1880 and published in 1885) in response to his play A Doll's House (1879). Ibsen's play is about a Norwegian couple, Torvald and Nora. Torvald's aspirations for middle-class respectability and social status are stifling his own autonomy and
that of his “little squirrel,” his wife Nora (Acts I and II). Events lead up to Nora realizing that Torvald is not even willing to confront the fact that he sacrifices truth and family values to protect this outward display of respectability. The play ends with the audience hearing the door being slammed as Nora leaves the marital home.

The public response to the play was one of ideological warfare. The European institution of marriage was seen to be under attack with the male prerogative as head of the marital household being put into question. So performances in Germany and France were censored; the first performance in London was not until 1884, and then only as an anodyne adaptation. Sheila Rowbotham views the importance of the play to the political left as of equal rank with the central texts by the political economist Henry George or Karl Marx (80). And yet, Templeton (2001) says with reference to Michael Meyer’s biography of Ibsen (1971) that Ibsen’s Doll’s House is not about women’s rights; instead its “theme is the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person” (110). Nevertheless, if half the literary public is on Torvald’s side in defence of the status quo, and the other half on Nora’s side in attacking the institution of marriage as it is, then the play is perceived by both sides as a representation of the social institution of marriage under the impact of society’s division between male and female spheres.

Blind agrees with Ibsen’s intended focus on the individual, and seeks to transcend the polarization of ideological interpretations of the play by subverting the linear narrative of the play’s social realism. If Torvald is meant to be the male protagonist who fails to know himself and to be true to that self, then Nora’s slamming of the door on her marriage at the end of the play signals necessarily his failure. He either fails by trying to prevent her from being herself in their marriage, or he fails by being unable to keep up with her development as a human being. Either interpretation drives European audiences into an ideological warfare of attack on, and defence of, the European institution of marriage. At the centre is the dominant European division of male and female spheres, according to which it is the male prerogative to be the head of the household and the female duty to honour the institution of marriage with her virtuous striving to be the Angel in the House.
Blind sees this unequal interdependence between the individual and society for men and women to be detrimental to both man and woman in a relationship, therefore to society as a whole. She transcends the ideological polarization about the *status quo* with her science-based vision of the slow and gradual process of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. In this, the agent of change is the social will of the people according to the diversity of the individual’s experiences and point of view. She engages the passion of the reader from either side of the public polarizations by creating an unreliable narrator who presents a turbulence of mini female histories as she traces the public triumph of her male protagonist and his private tragedy of his failed attempts to transmute romance into marriage. The narrator’s contradictory manipulation of a kaleidoscope of images defies the reader’s attempt to attach reasoned blame to one character or another. The imagined dilemmas confound rational argument against the underlying social realism of European societies’ division into male and female spheres.

Blind establishes the natural equality of two young people in a mutually fulfilling sexual encounter that functions like a rite of passage into their adult lives as man and woman. From there on, their paths divert. The man is in charge of his progress to gain fame and fortune, the woman sinks into obscurity through a variety of typologies of the *fallen woman*. The protagonist’s second romance is with the other Victorian type of woman, Patmore’s *Angel in the House*. The narrator has only one sketch of such a woman, who dies because she mistakes self-sacrifice for love. The singular sketch of of the *Angel in the House* underlines the myth of the type without any kind of real woman supporting the myth. The title *Tarantella: A Romance* promises a wild romance with romantic intrigues as opposed to an argument about the institution of marriage. Blind’s narrator’s Bohemian decadence is for author and reader equally remote to everyday reality. Blind thereby deflects authorial authority and shares with her reader a multitude of possibilities of what might have to change in the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society to be able to imagine a happy ending to the male protagonist’s intentions to get married.

Blind’s narrator takes her male protagonist from adolescence to retirement. The protagonist’s name denotes an adolescent and artistic
character, “Emanuel Sturm” (from “Sturm und Drang” (“storm and drive”)).

The reader meets him some way into the novel when he returns to his small hometown in the South of Germany as an internationally celebrated violinist and composer. The unnamed small town is at the centre of the novel as the epitome of provincial backwardness and political marginalization in the fragmented Germany of the 1840s. The town is the central location for making sense of scenes from all over Europe. Not naming the town is significant for claiming the novel’s universal representation of the question about the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society. It is significant because the narrator names all other locations: Capri, Naples, Rome, Paris, Moscow, Frankfurt and the “Volscian hills, not far from the ruined town of Norba” (3: 241; ch. XLVI)

On his return, Emanuel Sturm tells the story of his adolescent experience on Capri to his boyhood friend, now the professor Leopold Sontheim. Subject to the adolescent mood-swings, he was downcast. The narrator lets the images of the mood-swings surge into the reader’s mind: waves breaking against the cliff of an Italian island, birds swirling around the hero’s head, a “sultry blue” sky overhead rimmed by dark thunderstorm clouds over the distant coast-line. The hero’s extravagant “mood of savage despair” feels absurdly delicious as the reader knows that the young violinist, Emanuel, won’t do it. He won’t throw his violin over the precipice to drown its sound in the “dirge-like boom of the breakers in the hollow caves.” The lure of rhythm works on the reader not despite the verbosity of the phrase, but because of it. It reverberates in the sympathetic reader’s mind with the luxury of self-dramatization; the tautology of “hollow caves” feels right both for sensing the extravagance of Emanuel’s “Sturm und Drang”-mood and for the pleasure of the dramatic rhythm and sound of the phrase (1: 128-29; ch. XV).

The reader senses the young man’s drive for sexual and professional fulfilment as, altogether, a desire for self-approval in his role as a human being. The “piercing scream” calls for both, his male presence and his virtuosity as

---

2. The name “Emanuel” has biblical resonance from Matt. 1:23: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (King James Bible).
a violinist, and it comes just in time. He has to save the life of a beautiful young peasant girl, Antonella, her name rhyming with tarantella signifies responsiveness rather than a storming self-assertion. Emanuel finds her lying lifeless on the ground. She is a victim of tarantism, the result of a tarantula-bite, for which, according to the Italian myth, dancing the tarantella is the only antidote. As Emanuel plays, Antonella’s face “indicate[s] violent transitions of passion … her limbs [are] contorted with emotion …,” and in turn “a demon seemed to enter [his] brain and fingers.” In bewildering frenzy it was that “from her to [him] and [him] to her an electric impulse of rhythmical movement perpetually vibrated to and fro” (2: 132-3; ch. XV). It lasts until the last string on the violin is broken and both fall into a deathlike sleep of recovery.

The narrator marks this encounter as a moment of natural selection by the sexual equality between Emanuel Sturm’s awakening masculinity and Antonella’s recovery from the Victorian malady of female hysteria. For Emanuel it is the start of a brilliant career, inspired by this first composition of his tarantella. In contrast, Antonella is lost out of sight. Throughout the novel she appears and disappears in different guises of female typologies of a woman of equal sexual energy without equal opportunities to invest this energy in an independent contribution to society and thus become his societal equal. Antonella’s type ranges from not respectable enough as a peasant girl to being an object of social disapproval as a femme fatale. She is packed off into a convent (2: 233-34; ch. XXII); she enters a fake marriage conducted by a “rakish priest” in Rome (2: 126; ch. XV); she is hidden away as a kept woman, becomes a painter’s model (3: 22-25; ch. XXV); she progresses to be a painter and a run-away wife, eloping with the Russian Count Ogotshki (3: 17; ch. X; passim), and turns up in Paris as “Madame la Comtess” (3: 42-51; ch. XXIX); she appears in Emanuel’s hometown as the visiting Polish Countess Straja (1: 105; ch. X; passim) who had come from Ukranian Odessa (3: 176; ch. XL). The variety of Antonella’s type is played as a kaleidoscope of different mini-histories of the lack of opportunities for the female adolescent to assert her discovered womanhood and creative drive.

Emanuel’s second romance, at the height of his fame and wealth, is with the young girl who has all the promise of being the other type of Victorian womanhood, the Angel in the House. Mina (diminutive of the name Wilhelmine), the young, sexually not yet aware girl, still has the promise of the Victorian
illusion of what a woman is, or ought to be, namely innately moral. She is unassumingly beautiful and devoted to the care of her younger brothers and her grandmother, in short, a promising Angel in the House. Yet, she is remarkable by virtue of her sensitivity to music and her thoughtfulness. The possibility of her blossoming into a woman who knows her own mind is her charm. However, Mina is growing up in the fragmented Germany of the 1840s where even the educated men are marginalized from the political process. The young person’s growth is stunted in the provincial petty bourgeois life without meaningful engagement with the world.

The narrator dramatizes the importance of individual engagement with the everyday political problems in one’s society. It is relevant to the unintentional neglect of Mina’s development. Blind’s English reader would recognize the criticism of the devastating gap between Germany’s educational excellence and the lack of political engagement.\(^3\) The narrator demonstrates this gap in a conversation between Emanuel Sturm, Mina’s suitor, and his friend, Professor Leopold Sontheim, Mina’s godfather. They are talking about a revolutionary “storm brewing” (2: 106; ch. XXXVII). Sontheim is an “ardent patriot” who, nevertheless, had been “hitherto too much of a book-worm to concern himself practically with politics, especially at a time when the thing itself scarcely existed in the German fatherland” (2: 133; ch. XXXVII). The suave Emanuel, on the other hand, indulges in his cosmopolitan privileges as “the friend — or at least on terms of apparent friendship with the very princes whom evening after evening [Sontheim] denounced as leeches, cut-purses, and assassins of the people” (2: 134; ch. XXXVII). Neither man knows enough to engage in a meaningful conversation about politics or to talk meaningfully about Mina’s interests in the affair of Emanuel’s courtship.

As for the women, they are addressed by their husband’s (dead or alive) professional status without any obligations of a professionalism of their own.

\(^3\) George Eliot presents in 1856 in the Westminster Review the German provincialism of the fragmented German Confederation in her review of two books by W. H. Riehl, German journalist and folklorist. She compares the rural remoteness of German regions with the English idea of the countryside to explain an isolating impact of geographical remoteness from the centre of a region’s political and administrative processes in the German Confederation (“The Natural History of German Life”).
The conferred dignity is asserted in ludicrously petty-minded schemes of social ambition. Blind’s burlesque treatment of their petit bourgeois pretensions leaves the reader in a surge of self-indulgent despair. The “Frau Professorin,” and her friend, the “Frau Obertribunalprocurator Hopfengärtner,” stifle the life in each other with their total lack of interest in worldly affairs (3: 99-166; chs. XXXIV and XXXV). Their apparent inability to see Mina’s potential or their duty of care for the development of her potential appears to be almost malicious. Their petty social ambition forbids them to see that Mina is to the eligible Emanuel no more than a possession, his future Angel in the House. She is to him the diminutive creature who is to be showered with gifts and protected from the complications of his own life. She can be ignored as and when necessary. Mina is too inexperienced, to know herself and then to be true to that self. She has not outgrown the naïve innocence of childhood in her obedience to the petit bourgeois morality of her surroundings. Nor does she know rivalry between women, to which she falls victim in her innately moral idea of love demanding self-sacriﬁce.

Blind creates the eligible man’s drama of not finding a woman with whom he can have a mutually rewarding relationship. She does so with what Andrew Cooper calls the gothic remoteness for “combining the ‘imagination and improbability’ of the ancient romance with the ‘strict adherence to modern life’” (37). He argues that “this blend of kinds makes unrealistic evils appear to be a part of the ‘universal drama,’” leaving the reader free to pass judgement on the characters of a novel according to their own ideas about possible relevance to her own experience of modern life (37).

Blind’s narrator constructs two key scenes of the encounter between the two types of Victorian womanhood. Both are melodramatic scenes of imagination and improbability. Both are indirectly instigated by Antonella in the guise of the rich Russian/Polish Countess. Twice, the Countess intrudes uninvited in Mina’s pristine chamber, the “bower” under the roof, next to a pear tree (1: 25; ch. I). The first occasion establishes the gulf between the mature woman who is aware of her sexuality and the young, sexually not awakened girl. The chamber is dark, Mina is listening to Emanuel’s tarantella in the “pale moonshine,” enjoying the music without realizing that she is being serenaded. The Countess enters and stands in the dark shadow at the back of the room.
She hears the tarantella and her whole frame reverberates to the magic of sound and rhythm:

her limbs, her features, nay, her very eyebrows, seemed convulsed with emotion, then with abrupt, violent gesticulations, with quivering lips, with heaving bosom, with head thrown back in passionate self-abandonment, chanting fragments of a wildly thrilling melody, she threaded the bewildering figures of an intricate and mysterious dance.

Suddenly, the women become aware of each other’s presence:

All at once the dancer burst [sic] into mocking, seemingly irrepressible laughter. She had caught sight of Mina’s gaze, half amazement, half terror, fixed full upon her: in the midst of her unaccountable excitement this seemed to have produced a violent revulsion to mirth in her. (1: 32-33; ch. III)

The narrator comments on her own verbosity: “This whole scene, long as it has taken to describe, lasted scarcely a few minutes” (1: 34; ch. III). Yet, it is the verbosity that creates the reader’s alienation from the experience. The reader withdraws from the story sufficiently to let personal memories intervene: who has not experienced the overpowering selfishness of another’s passion, or indeed, the irritation with the naïve innocence of someone who fails to understand one’s passion? The women’s hostile incomprehension of each other is equally painful for the reader, whether in irritation with Mina or in apprehension of Mina’s danger from Antonella.

The Countess enters Mina’s chamber again on Christmas Eve, the evening before her wedding to Emanuel. The narrator appears to take with the chapter heading of “The True Tarantula” (3; ch. XL) the moral stance of the Victorian establishment, which divides not so much men and women as belonging to different spheres, but respectable women from loose women as they supposedly benefit or harm society. Here Antonella, in the guise of the Countess, goads Mina’s piety into sacrificing her love for Emanuel: “Would you deprive him of all [I have to offer], because in a moment of pique he chose to get engaged to you?” (3: 181; ch. XL). She gets Mina to promise to leave the town immediately without humiliating or morally bullying Emanuel into marrying her. Mina promises, but cannot deny herself seeing Emanuel one last time,
even without being able to talk to him. So she sets off; it is Christmas Eve, the 
night before her wedding, and it is snowing. She sees Emanuel composing, and 
swoons with exhaustion. Emanuel finds her as his “Snow Bride” (heading of a 
different chapter: 3; ch. XXXIX) on “his very threshold” as something “so caked 
with snow that it was indistinguishable on this dim winter’s morning” (“The 
Marriage Morn,” 3: 214; ch. XLIV).

Blind’s unreliable narrator subverts any realistic story line. If Antonella is 
the true tarantula, she must be guilty of Mina’s death. However, Antonella 
cannot be blamed for Mina’s naïve idea of love. If the reader wants to blame the 
women in defence of Emanuel, then she has to accept that Emanuel is a mere 
object of female rivalry. If the reader wants to blame Emanuel for the women’s 
demise, then his conventional decency does not make sense. If the reader 
wants to distribute blame between Emanuel and the two women fairly, then the 
lack of opportunities for women of a life without Emanuel does not make sense. 
The Victorian, or rather European, dominant ideology does not give Antonella in 
any of her different guises as the fallen woman an opportunity to contribute to 
society according to her capabilities and energy. The condescending myth of 
the Angel in the House leaves the type of Mina out from contributing except in 
the self-sacrificial meekness of a kept woman within the family. If the reader 
insists on resolving the painful tensions of her reading experience, there is no 
option but to ask how society would have to change for Emanuel to find a 
mutually rewarding relationship that dignifies the social institution of marriage.

From whatever point of view a reader might reflect on the question, the 
tensions are bound to energize her social will for change. The change that is 
relevant, according to Blind’s cosmopolitan perspective of the co-evolution of 
Nature and humankind, is a greater equality between man and woman in the 
individual’s interdependence with society. However, the reader who has no 
social will for change is free to blame the narrator for irritating the reader’s 
sense of social realism.

In the aftermath of Mina’s death, Antonella haunts Emanuel by her 
presence in every “concert-room” all over Europe until he cannot bear it any 
longer (3: 238-39; ch. XLVI). He retires “from the world” into the material and 
aesthetic luxury of his “noble Italian palazzo, situated amidst the Volscian hills, 
not far from the ruined town of Norba” (3: 241; ch. XLVI). Antonella, on the other 
hand, is now deprived of her relentless pursuit. She is impoverished by the
family of her Russian Count disinheriting her on his death. Her descent into the disreputable typologies of the *fallen woman* goes through all the stages. She “disappeared in the most disreputable circles in Paris, the associate of gamblers and sharpers” and dies an ignominious death in dire poverty (3: 239, ch. XLVI).

The narrator’s detached retrospective on Emanuel’s romance focuses on his safe return to a life of, what Rudy called, a “sympathetic metrical regularity” (“Blind’s Darwinian Poetics” 450). Enjoying convivial company on his “terrace overlooking the magnificent view,” the conversation “happen[s] to turn on the primitive manners of the Italian peasant” (3: 244, ch. XLVI). Antonella is mentioned as possibly the last known case of “tarantism.” No longer an object of passion, she is now an object of male professionalism. The doctor holds forth:

> The only way in which I can at all reconcile the extraordinary phenomenon, of which you are probably the last authentic witness, … is, that what you saw was nothing but one of the protean manifestations of hysteria working on a survival of the superstition common in Italy during the seventeenth century. … I have been studying “Ferdinando,” … and I myself think of including the results of these investigations in a book on nervous affections which I have long been meditating. (3: 245, ch. XLVI)

Thus everything in the world of spasmodic spasms returns to the “metrical regularity” of the masculine world, where woman serves a purpose. Emanuel’s international fame has risen by his retirement “in the very zenith of his reputation,” and his failure in love added to the violinist’s romantic aura, as in distant countries “he was even said to have played two wives to death by his violin” (3: 243; ch. XLVI).

Blind’s cosmopolitan engagement with Ibsen’s play of localized social realism could be summed up in Isobel Armstrong’s words as a cultural expression of her “historicised consciousness [which] is also a deeply politicised consciousness, political in the sense that the displacement of the aesthetic realm into secondariness forces the poet to conceptualise him- or herself as external and over and against what comes to be seen as life” (6). Blind does so by her narrator communing with her reader in Blind’s rapturous forms; the physiological impulses aim to create an atmosphere of empathy and a social will for change. Her narrator invites the reader’s response to the physiological
impulse of her reading-experience in the context of her own life-experiences and point of view. Blind aims for the individual’s social engagement and an assertion of the reader’s social will for change on behalf of the men and women who are caught up in the contradictions of the natural mutuality and European disparate male and female spheres with consequences on the social, economic and cultural significance of the institution of marriage.

Blind’s novel produces reflections on the background of Ibsen’s social realism with a kaleidoscope of typological scenes until they fall into a pattern in which the reader recognizes something meaningful that engages her social will for change. Blind’s belief in the social evolution of humankind is supported by Byron’s Lucifer’s advice, to

Think and endure, — and form an inner world
In your own bosom — where the outward fails;
So shall you nearer be the spiritual
Nature, and war triumphant with your own. (Scene II, 247)

For five years Blind did not find a publisher for the novel. And when in 1885 it was published, the circumspect reviewer for the Athenaeum foresees problems for the critic’s evaluation of the novel. He discusses “imitations” of poetry in such novels as Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre. He argues for acknowledgement of “a kind of unmetrical narrative so poetic in motif, so concrete in diction, and so emotional in treatment, as to escape the critical canons usually applied to prose.” The critic should “not apply to one kind of prose fiction the canons of criticism which are only properly applicable to another;” Tarantella, he argues, has the “very opposite kind of charm” to the


5. We know from Blind’s correspondence with Garnett of several attempts to get the novel published. In November 1880, the names “Bentley” and “Srahan” are mentioned. And a Mr. Wilkinson offered to find a publisher in America. In 1882, Garnett suggests trying Chapman & Hall. In 1883 Garnett is annoyed at Messrs. Allen rejecting the book and suggests trying Remington & Co. In February 1884, a Mr. Ireland asks for the book without mentioning anything about “printing it in the Examiner.” In September 1884, Garnett says that he has read the proofs and sent them to Unwin (Vol. II. 1874-84.Ff 128, 155, 165-66, 172, 187-88).
“delicate sketching as is now in vogue.” He affirms the poetical conception and treatment of the novel, despite it not being written in meter and it being “burdened with a luxury of dictation” (“Novels of the Week” 84).

Jason Rudy (2006) sets Blind’s novel into its historical context for the modern literary critic to recognize her experimenting with “rapturous forms” as part of a widely shared interest among Victorian poets. They are aiming to match, he argues, “a moment of physiological, emotional, and intellectual union … by way of poetic form and content” (140). Particularly poignant is Rudy’s general observation, as it applies to Blind’s novel, that the late Victorian “poet of rapture … neither reflects the world (like a mirror) nor casts illuminating light on the world around him (like a lamp), but instead jumps headlong into a world of chaotic flux, a space of colliding energies and rhythmic forces” (140). This is exactly what Blind does by leaving her reader to turn the kaleidoscope of meanings at her pleasure.

Underpinning her headlong jump into the colliding energies of human romance and the institution of marriage is Blind’s faith in the Darwinian concept of sexual autonomy. By extension she applies this to a concept of the individual’s intrinsic autonomy of her creative energy in the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. I will explore in the next section Blind’s method of conveying this in her poem *The Ascent of Man* by her narrator’s imagined flight through the manifold histories of humankind.

### 3.3 The Ascent of Man (1889)

The undercurrent to both works, her biography of George Eliot and her novel *Tarantella*, is Blind’s view of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. As biographer, her focus is on investigating questions related to her subject’s reputation and to provide her reader with the means of evaluating her subject’s aspirations in the struggle with the particular circumstances of her life and work in the relevant wider cultural context(s). Similarly, Blind’s focus for her novel is on investigating the complexity of ideologically divisive standpoints about the institution of marriage. There she deflects authorial authority by creating imaginative and improbable typologies that transcend rational argument.
Blind encompasses both approaches for her poem *The Ascent of Man*. She responds to the Zeitgeist of tensions about the rising dominance of science over religion and contradictory trends of pride in progress and dismay about an increasingly divided society. In 1851, the Great Exhibition was a statement of national pride as the world’s industrial leader, while there was dismay about the related social problems of a massive population growth and the urbanisation of an industrialising nation. Anxiety about the state of affairs is expressed in the literature of social realist novels such as Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), but also Henry Mayhew’s accounts of *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) and the commissioned research into questions of social cohesion with the *Census of Religious Worship in England and Wales* and the *Census of Education in England and Wales* (1851). The results of the latter caused dismay about the lack of shared spiritual and moral values, and the fear that the underclass was about to outbreed the respectable section of society. The tensions gave rise to a conflation of biological and social evolution with ideas of well-intended eugenics for improving the stock of humankind.

Blind’s method of transcending pride and anxiety in the Zeitgeist is signalled by the optimistic title of her poem, *The Ascent of Man* (1889). It mirrors Darwin’s theory of the appearance of the human animal in the slow and gradual process of biological evolution in his *Descent of Man* (1871). As the human animal descends in the biological evolution of the species, she traces its slow and gradual ascent of becoming a human being in the struggle with the forces of Nature. Blind transcends the anxieties of her age with a call for patience and faith in the righteousness of the cosmic order for the slow and gradual process of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind.

Blind’s science-based argument is assertive. She deflects authorial authority by adopting for her structure an imitation of the Dionysian open-air festival of ancient Greece, communing with her Victorian reader in their shared awareness of ancient Greece as the origin of European culture. At the same time, Blind’s choice of meter for the beginning of time links her poem to the beginning of European culture and the Greek festival. According to Kathleen Kuiper (2011), “dactylic hexameter is the oldest known form of Greek poetry and is the preeminent meter of narrative and didactic poetry in Greek and Latin, that, however, “its rhythms are not readily adapted to the [English] language, and it has never been a popular form” (95-96).
time, she invokes the reader's cultural awareness of the function of the Greek festival as the playwright refigures the mythological past with a focus on contemporary socio-political concerns. As the Greek tragedy appeals to the audience's emotions of fear and pity in experiencing the protagonist's inevitable demise as a trait of her heroic strength rather than by a destructive external force, so Blind engages her reader's passions. Blind, like the Greek playwright, aims for catharsis to free her reader's anxieties for constructive reflections on her own point of view in relation to contemporary issues.

Blind's narrator, a mythical earthling, takes her reader on a mythological flight through the manifold histories of humankind. As this flight reaches the reader's own time and place, the earthling calls out in despair about what is supposed to be progress: “Peace ye call this? Call this justice, meted / Equally to rich and poor alike?” (52). However, when the earthling awakes from the mythological dream, she has rediscovered her faith in the enduring human capacity for “Love” (56), the modern concept of empathy. It is the individual's capability to accept responsibility for the social evolution of humankind. The discussion of how that is to come about is the same issue as it was for the Greek audience of working out the nature of the interdependence between private and public morality as a constant repetition of refiguring the past in the interest of regenerating the relationship between the individual and society.

Blind conveys her historical analogy by the structure of her *Ascent of Man* of three main sections that represent the full-length plays of the Greek festival. Short poems and sonnets between these parts represent interludes when the chorus would sing and dance to give the audience time for reflection and entertainment. The variety of poems in content, meter and rhythms is held together by the narrator's mythical flight through human histories from the beginning of time:

As compressed within the bounded shell  
Boundless Ocean seems to surge and swell,  
Haunting echoes of an infinite whole  
Moan and murmur through Man's finite soul. (Part I, 6)

Blind's reader responded well. The poem was so popular that the reviewer from the *Athenaeum* reported of a reader having been literally carried away with it and missed “the Underground station of his destination” (qtd. in
Thirlwell 232). Nevertheless, reviewers of Symons’s *Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind* (1900) for the *Academy* projected onto the poem the Victorian conflation of biological and social evolution and declared it a failure. The general tone is set by a reviewer’s decisive pronouncement: “Her intelligence was not strong enough … Scientific formulae or ‘laws’ gain nothing by being rhythmically enunciated. To live as poetry they must be born again” (“Mathilde Blind” 567).

The arrogance of the judgemental tone is an expression of the defensive self-assertion of scientists at the time, as George Levine argues in his “Scientific discourse as an alternative to faith” (2008). As the discipline of science is only just emerging against the dominance of religion, the naturalists’ assertiveness competes with reciprocal dogmatism as they rage against religious dogmatism. Levine explains this with T. H. Huxley’s cultural stance as a “self-conscious proselytizer for a science … that could only be practiced adequately if it were protected against established intellectual authority” (101). Nevertheless, Huxley is willing to reject other scientists’ proposals of a mild form of eugenics in his “Prolegomena” (1894), saying that “there is no hope that mere human beings will ever possess enough intelligence to select the fittest” (qtd. in C. Levine 103-04).

At the time, Blind’s trust for mere human beings’ capacity to care enough for the destiny of humankind, and Huxley’s pessimism about mere human beings not being able to advance biological evolution, have the same quality of reasoned intuition. Both separate biological evolution, which is measured in a geological time scale, from genetic mutations, which are measured across the minute timespan of the succession of generations. It was then all that was possible to put forward against the Victorian conflation of biological and social evolution. Huxley, like Blind, turns to literature, as he quotes aphorisms from Goethe, whom he calls the “Romantic poet-scientist” (Levine 131). Levine reports these aphorisms to be “full of paradoxes” with a “sense of nature’s mysterious refusal to resolve itself into rational human structures” (131).

The implied willingness to live with the uncertainties by relentlessly asking unanswerable questions had established itself in Blind’s mental landscape when first she sacrificed her school life for the right to seek the unobtainable truth. By this willingness she embraces the cautioning of her friend, mathematician and philosopher W. K. Clifford: “A maxim valid for us can only be valid for such portions of the human race as are practically identical with
ourselves” (qtd. in Levine 134-35). She understands this caution to apply to the postulate of living with uncertainties without losing faith in oneself and in the destiny of humankind. She knew about the insidious danger of rational argument, as a means to proselytize, from the ensuing controversies of George Eliot’s translation of David Friedrich Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* (1846) as much as from Strauss’s bullying conservatism on behalf of his proposed new faith in his *The Old Faith and the New* (1872, Blind’s translation 1873).

Marcus Borg (1991) presents Strauss’s method in *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835, translation by Eliot 1846) as a critical evaluation of opposing arguments by “rationalists” and “supernaturalists.” The “rationalists” sought to demystify the miracles in the New Testament by empirical explanations, whereas the “supernaturalists” defended the belief in the reality of the miracles (par. 4-6). In *The Old Faith and the New* (1872, Blind’s translation 1873), Strauss questions the logic for the “general conception of a world-creating Deity” by discrepancies such as an omnipotent God supposedly needing six days, “according to the Jewish division of a week,” to create the world; or God supposedly having created the sun on the fourth day, when the sun is required for counting days. Crucially, however, he argues for a historical validity of the miracles, as one should not reproach “the old Hebrew prophet that he was ignorant of the system of Copernicus, of the modern discoveries in geology.” Nevertheless, he claims that it is “unjust to such a biblical narrative … to thus petrify it into a dogma” (16-17).

Blind agrees with his historical perspective of appreciating the different cultural context for the scriptures and with Strauss’s analysis of religion in the co-evolution of Nature and humankind, as seen by him in 1872:

[m]an did not come forth from the hand of God, but arose from the depths of Nature, his first estate was not paradisiacal [sic], but almost brutal. … He did not begin his career on a great elevation, to sink very low immediately afterwards; on the contrary, he began very low, to rise, although very slowly, yet gradually to ever greater heights. By this means alone he is included in the universal law of development, from which the Christian conception withdraws him at the very first. (39)

However, she does not agree with Strauss’s method of imposing rational arguments on matters of faith. Instead, she seeks to commune with her reader about the human being’s need for faith as the only means of being able to live
with the uncertainties in the struggle with the irresponsible forces of nature. Her method as a poet is therefore to tell the story of the human being’s struggle as the human being stumbles through natural disasters, wars, destruction, and commits individual cruelty and selfishness, whilst humanity as a whole has made long-term progress in becoming more dignified. She observes a slow and gradual shift from an emphasis on competition to an increasing willingness to cooperate as a means for survival of the species. While the future is not predictable from the experiences of the past, the past does justify a faith in the destiny of humankind within the universal laws of nature. Universally, for Blind, the uncertainties about social evolution continuing in the future are to be faced by the individual accepting responsibility towards her fellow human being. It is a poet’s sensitivity to the scientist’s inductive argument of predicting probabilities as opposed to asking for certainties.

Blind states in her commonplace book on 16 December 1895 her own need for spirituality as a personal faith in accordance with the scientific view of the natural world: “In order to live truly & to any purpose one must have faith in three things: faith in oneself; faith in the destiny of Man; faith in the righteousness of the cosmic Order.” And her terms for encompassing all factions, of the religious and scientific spectrum, are embracing human nature: “All religious beliefs have only been crutches or rather supports for the Infant mind till it should be strong enough to stand without them. But how very few are strong enough! And till they are must we not be very careful how we deprive weak human nature of its story?” (F37).

Although both poet and scientist are subsumed under the universal law of development, Blind, in her lecture “Shelley’s View of Nature contrasted with Darwin’s” (1886) sees each to play a different role:

Speaking broadly, I think it will be admitted that the poet’s attitude toward, and interpretation of, Nature may be said to undergo continual modification in harmony with the development of religious and scientific thought. For although the poet in his happiest intuitions often leaps at truths far in advance of the conclusions reached by the slower processes of methodical research, yet on the whole, the representative poems of the world seem to body forth the view of Nature, which is essentially the product of their age and nation. (9)
Her historical perspective compares antiquity, when nature was neither better nor worse than “the Gods or Man,” with the Christian era when Nature is seen as bad and “opposed to the divine” (11).

She regrets that Shelley held Rousseau’s romantic view of the material universe and its corruption by man’s civilization while idealizing Nature. His call to return to Nature as a panacea for us to “immediately enter on the Golden Age” seems as much a belief that needs to be challenged as any religious belief (13). Yet as Strauss does for the Bible, she allows for the cultural context of Shelley’s time: “Had Shelley only lived longer, he might have succeeded in harmonizing his views of Nature with those so luminously developed by Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and other scientific thinkers” (13). She argues that he would have had to come to terms with “that dread [my italics] law formulated by Darwin: ‘Let the strongest live and the weakest die’” (17). Thus she would have preferred more historic realism by Shelley to show “Man as emerging from a semi-brutal, barbarous condition, and continually progressing to higher stages of moral and mental development” (20).

Nevertheless, Darwin’s dread law is the scientist’s domain, whereas the human being’s moral and mental development is going to be investigated from within the disciplines of the social sciences. It is the domain of the arts to encompass and transcend both. Blind does so with her *Ascent of Man* as a poetic exploration of the human being’s struggle with the external and internal forces of nature. Blind’s exploration is cosmopolitan by the fact that her subject is the survival of the species and thus transcends national and racial arguments of superiority. Her autonomous radicalism is in her tolerance of the mere human being struggling by whatever means, including struggles of rational and ideological competition for intellectual dominance such as the assertion of science “as though it had become a faith” (Levine 108). Blind would have taken Levine’s view of the need to recognize that the naturalists of her day “were importantly focused on fundamental issues both of knowledge and social organization, and they were almost always intensely humane” (108).

This is true for Alfred Russel Wallace, whose socialism had its roots in his experience of a humble start in life and in his early work as a surveyor with the Welsh hill farmers (110-11). His “intensely humane” view of life alerted Wallace to the savages’ level of intelligence matching his own, causing him to see, different from Darwin, no racial difference in intelligence and hence in the
level of evolution between Europeans and the people of primitive tribes. However, the soundness of his intuition lost impact when he suggested as an explanation of the gap between the highest primate and the species of the human animal intervention by some supernatural force. The problem was that this would challenge the whole theory of evolution by natural selection as Darwin and Wallace had presented it to the Linnean Society in 1858 (Gross 500-03). Additionally, it was not possible to test Wallace’s hypothesis by scientific method. Yet, socialist commitment, triggered by the Great Depression between 1873 and the 1890s, led Wallace to propose well-intended schemes that were marred by the Victorian conflation of biological and social evolution. He advanced the idea that social institutions should inculcate the young with the “best impulses,” and women should be taught to select husbands wisely, “which will steadily tend to eliminate the lower and more degraded types of man, and thus continuously raise the average standard of the race” ("Human Selection " 331).

Blind values Wallace’s humane intensity, evidence for which is, as Judith Willson notes, her inclusion of a “lengthy section from his Land Nationalization: Its Necessity and Its Aims (1882)” in support of her Heather on Fire (1886) about the Highland clearances (102). It is all the more sad to read Wallace’s “Introductory Note” to the second edition of Blind’s Ascent of Man (1899) where he failed to recognize her indebtedness to his achievements as a scientist. Ironically, his criticism of her poem is harsh on the very historic realism that she believed Shelley might have learned from Wallace to give his poetic work more “backbone and solidity” (13):

For the true conflict consists in man’s struggle with the irresponsible forces of Nature, and the victory in his conquest over them, both as regards the subjection of his own lower animal instincts and in his continually growing power through knowledge of turning these elemental forces, that filled his savage progenitors with fear and terror, into the

---

7. See Special Issue No. 9 of The Linnean Newsletter and Proceedings of The Linnean Society of London, 2008.

8. Wallace considered “Human Selection” (1890) to be “the most important contribution I have made to the science of sociology and the cause of human progress" (My Life 209).
nimblest of servants. This, I take it, would have been a conclusion more in harmony with the Darwinian conception of the universe, and also more consoling on the whole. (19)

It is precisely the “consoling on the whole” in Blind’s Ascent of Man that Wallace’s faith in science misses when he refers to “The Leading of Sorrow,” the third part of Blind’s narrative sections:

[We] have first a vivid picture of the destruction and war ever going on in the animal world, from the lowest to the highest forms. The pessimistic view of the pain and misery thus arising is that taken by the author -- one entirely opposed to that of Darwin and the present writer. ("Introductory Note" ix)

He asks Blind’s reader to consider his disappointment with Blind’s Ascent of Man “on scientific ground.” He considers her “treatment of the subject” “not altogether satisfactory” for dealing “more with the social and spiritual aspects of the subject” (v-vi). He judges “her main inspiration” to be Darwin’s Descent of Man, while anticipating theological account of evolution by “Professor Drummond both as to his title and in some of his main conceptions” (vi-vii).

9 This projection by Wallace, of all people, is surprising. The more attentive reader might have been tempted to compare Blind’s faith in the righteousness of the Cosmic order with Tennyson’s religious anxiety and doubt, which Eugene August sees as “stemming from the space-time malady: overwhelmed by the enormity of the universe” (219):

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life; (Tennyson LV, 5-6, qtd. in August 219)

9. The publisher’s description of Drummond’s The Ascent of Man (1894) for the 2007 edition says that he “combines his own theories with a heavy dose of Christian doctrine to arrive at what may best be called ‘theological biology,’ which assumes man to be the greatest, highest purpose of the universe” (dust-cover).
In comparison, Blind’s voice is one of acceptance of man’s struggle with the irresponsible forces of Nature, where God is no longer blamed or expected to intervene:

War rages on the teeming earth;
The hot and sanguinary fight
Begins with each new creature’s birth:
A dreadful war where might is right;
Where still the strongest slay and win,
Where weakness is the only sin. (7)

If non-judgemental interest in mere human beings is meant to be a Christian virtue, then yes, Blind’s voice has a Christian ring. However, Blind’s scientific concept of autonomy as an intrinsic attribute of the individual implies an objectively unbridgeable distance between autonomous individuals. Blind’s concept of Love has the detachment of empathy; it is neither selfish nor altruistic. Carolyn Burdett (2011) considers empathy to be a state of engagement with one’s fellow human beings through the corporeal impact of the external world on the self as a “process of self-realisation, not self-abnegation, but one which is orientated outwards” (274). Blind’s rapturous forms are “radiating outward toward her readers” for experiencing a sharing of the “rapture of communion” in a “flash of sympathetic confederacy … colliding energies and rhythmic forces” (Rudy 154). It is a sharing of the process of self-realisation between autonomous individuals without an implied expectation of self-abnegation for the sake of any other individual’s well-being. Aiming for this form of immediacy, as Rudy argues, emanates from a “wide-ranging mid-Victorian discourse on physiology” and from the poet’s understanding of “the human body’s physical experience of rhythm” (84, 140).

Blind states her intention in her Prelude “Wings.” She creates “my Soul” as a mystical spirit which poet and reader share in the mysterious flight through history from the beginning of time: “Ascend! take wing on the thoughts of the Dead, my Soul” (3). She follows this with her first part, “Chants of Life,” which is in six sections. Each has its own form and meaning. It starts with the ponderous rhythm of dactylic hexameter that measures the beginning of time in aeons, “Struck out of dim fluctuant forces and shock of electrical vapour, / Repelled and attracted the atoms flashed mingling in union primeval” (4-5).
Animate nature measured in shorter periods of time follows in iambic six-line stanzas with varied rhythms for “myriad forms” emerging as “A pulse stirred in the plastic slime / Responsive to the rhythm of Time” (5). Within this time-frame “Man” appears as just another form of life in the spasmodic rhythm of his pathetic helplessness:

A new strange creature hath its birth:
Wild --- stammering --- nameless --- shameless --- nude;
Spurred on by want, held in by fear,
He hides his head in caverns drear. (8)

The history of the survival of the human being is the third section, in orderly, rhymed traditional iambic pentameter. Man and woman are differentiated by their roles; man’s strength is felt in the rhythm of the one-syllable words with ringing vowels: “He’ll fire the bush whose flames shall help him fel [sic] / The trunks to prop his roof, where he may dwell / Beside the bubbling of a crystal well.” This is followed by the contrasting slower mincing rhythm in words of more than one syllable and more covered vowels for the woman’s more laborious role: “Delving there, / His cumbered wife, whose multifarious toil / Seems never done, breaks the rich virgin soil” (9). With rising self-consciousness from the awareness of death and gnawing bereavement the need arises to transcend reality with a belief in some higher authority:

Man, feeble Man, whom unknown Fates appal,
With prayer and praise seeks to propitiate all
The spirits, who, for good or evil plight,
Bless him in victory or in sickness smite. (12)

In the third section, “The Leading Sorrow,” Blind’s autonomous radicalism does not celebrate European civilization as evidence of European “Man” having reached the top of the evolutionary tree. The very idea of the reader’s pride provokes the earthling to burst out in bitter anger:

Peace ye call this? Call this justice, meted
Equally to rich and poor alike?
Better than this peace the battle’s heated
   Cannon-balls that ask not whom they strike!
Better than this masquerade of culture
Hiding strange hyæna [sic] appetites,  
The frank ravening of the raw-necked vulture  
As its beak the senseless carrion smites. (52)

The earthling’s bitterness is met by “a Voice [that] came from the peaks of time” – justifying the evolution of the universe and passing on to the earthling the responsibility for humankind’s social evolution:

   I have cast my burden on thy shoulder;  
 ........................................
Bear, oh, bear the terrible compulsion,  
   Flinch not from the path thy fathers trod,  
From Man’s martyrdom in slow convulsion  
   Will be born the infinite goodness—God. (56)

Only acceptance of this responsibility leads Blind’s narrator to the vision of “the Future’s promised land” by re-discovering “Love” that had seemed dead before:

   And beside me in the golden morning  
     I beheld my shrouded phantom-guide;  
But no longer sorrow-veiled and mourning—  
     It became transfigured by my side.  
And I knew—as one escaped from prison  
     Sees old things again with fresh surprise—  
It was Love himself, Love re-arisen  
     With the Eternal shining th[r]ough his eyes. (56-57)

This is Blind’s answer to the anxious controversies between science, the emerging social sciences and religion. What matters is not to take sides, but to celebrate the individual’s engagement and social will to contribute to the process of shaping and re-shaping the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society in self-realising empathy with the marginalized.

    I argued in this section that Blind’s Ascent of Man is an expression of her autonomous radicalism as she transcends ideological perspectives in the Victorian scientific and religious discourse. I showed that Blind shares an understanding of the diversity of cultures as they change over time and a consequent plea for future-directed scepticism with David Friedrich Strauss’s historical perspective, and most particularly, with her friend William Kingdon Clifford’s support of scepticism. I argued with Levine for our need to recognize
both Blind’s intentions in her *Ascent of Man*, and to appreciate Wallace’s intentions despite the damning introductory note to the second edition of Blind’s poem. Wallace’s introduction contributed, however, to Blind’s contemporaries consigning her to oblivion. The fact that critics from a variety of backgrounds, but particularly among scientists, did not recognize Blind’s intentions is an expression of their own anxieties and need to inhibit uncertainties.

### 3.4 Conclusion

I argued in this chapter that Blind transcends her personal political radicalism with the construction of a *public soul*, for which she subsumes her personal autonomy under the diversity of individual autonomy. She deflects authorial authority aiming to place the subject of her text, herself as author and her reader at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her text. As biographer, she responds to the known controversies about her subject’s reputation by appealing to her reader’s empathy with detailed and wide-ranging analysis of her subject’s aspirations and struggles in the specific circumstances of her time. As novelist and poet she takes the opposite approach of subverting specificity by engaging her reader’s passion about issues of social concerns and public debates with universal typologies.

As Eliot’s biographer, Blind separates the deflected authorial authority of her narrative from authorial intervention, where she explains the rationale of her analysis and interpretation in conjunction with publicly agreed examples. She thereby provides her reader with the means for a critical evaluation of every aspect of the biography. Blind’s aim in this approach is to engage her reader’s empathy from the point of view of the reader’s own relevant life-experiences and critical perspective on Eliot’s controversial reputation.

I argued that Blind’s novel *Tarantella* transcends the social realism of Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* in recognition of his intended purpose to focus on the individual’s duty to know herself and then to be true to that self. Her method is to transcend the ideological polarization in the public response to the social realism of his play. She does so by creating an unreliable narrator who employs a variety of techniques from romanticism to melodrama and from political realism to social burlesque of petty bourgeois life. The only realistic constant in
the novel is the European organisation of societies in separate male and female spheres with the social institution of marriage placing the man as head of his household and the woman as his subordinate who is required to be his *Angel in the House*. Blind leaves it to the reader’s social will to reflect on the kind of change in the organisation of European societies that might present the man with a better chance to transmute a romance into a mutually rewarding marriage. Blind’s intention is to turn the public polarization about the institution of marriage into her reader’s personal concern of how to change society to strengthen the institution of marriage as a pillar of society.

I argued that Blind combines in her *Ascent of Man* the biographer’s retrospective analysis and interpretation with the poet’s inspiration for humankind’s continuing social evolution. She evokes European cultural history with the design of her poem as an imitation of the Dionysian festival of ancient Greece. It is a cultural reminder of the origins of European civilization in the Greek tradition of refiguring mythological history as a way of engaging the audience in questioning the nature of the interdependence between public and private morality. The shared purpose is to regenerate the individual’s sense of responsibility for the community. By adopting the varied structure of the festival Blind subverts the Victorian idea of a uniform course of history. She deflects authorial authority by making the story a mythological flight, from which the narrator awakes as from a dream. Her poetic inspiration for the destiny of humankind is in the narrator’s final statement of faith in the human being’s capacity for Love, which implies the individual’s ability to accept responsibility for the community with a social will for change.

In the next chapter I will investigate Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism in respect of the Victorian Woman Question as a biographer, translator and poet. Her non-fiction writing is on women whose controversial reputation Blind seeks to transcend. Two of the women are linked to the French Revolution. They are the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and the French Girondist Madame Roland (1754-1793). The third woman is the young contemporary Russian painter Marie Bashkirtseff (1860-1884), whose controversial diary, *Le Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff* (1887), Blind translates with the detachment of empathy based on her research for her biographical essay on Bashkirtseff. I will explore Blind’s cosmopolitan voice by comparing
her approach as a writer of non-fiction with that as a poet of her *Dramas in Miniature* (1891).
4 The Woman Question

In the previous chapter I argued that Blind’s deflection of authorial authority is consistent across three genres with the aim of placing herself and her reader at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her text. While her method differs for her non-fictional writing and her creative writing, her aim is the same of transcending socio-political polarization in public controversies. She seeks to appeal to her reader’s feelings and emotions in the intimacy of the individual reading experience, with the aim of promoting the reader’s autonomous reflections on divisive issues in the public domain. Her approach is science-based according to Darwin’s emphasis on the importance of the individual in the accumulation of diverse evolutionary material for natural selection. Blind considers the importance of diversity for biological evolution to continue as the importance of diversity of individual points of view for the co-evolution of Nature and humankind.

In this chapter I will explore Blind’s focus on the Victorian woman question with a comparison of her biographies of women whose reputations were controversial in the light of the dominant ideology of divided, and therefore divisive, male and female spheres. They are women who could be described as Shelley’s “new female type” in his *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) (“Rossetti’s Shelley” 89; Vadillo). They took on “the task of the regeneration of woman” as they sought to arouse “man’s interest, and kindle his enthusiasm in her cause” (“Rossetti’s Shelley” 89). They are the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), famous for her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), also known for what was considered a scandalous private life. Feminists, in particular were concerned about Wollstonecraft giving feminism a dubious reputation. From the same period is Madame Roland (1754-93), the influential Girondist supporter in the French Revolution, whose reputation was controversial for her claim of having been born a politician and for her love for a fellow Girondist and family friend that was considered to have been adulterous.

The Russian painter Marie Bashkirtseff (1860-84) had a controversial reputation for her choice of subject matter from ugly and sordid street scenes in Paris and for the uncensored self-centredness of the person who emerged from
her published diary, *Le Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff* (1887). Although Blind was similarly admonished for her choice of subject matter and her unpoetic use of language in her *Dramas in Miniature* (1891), Blind emphasises Bashkirtseff’s autonomy as a fellow world-citizen rather than employing Bashkirtseff to proselytise feminism.

In section 4.1, “‘Mary Wollstonecraft’ (1878),” I will argue that Blind’s essay bypasses Wollstonecraft’s reputation for a *scandalous private life* in consequence of her husband William Godwin’s *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1798). She does so by presenting Wollstonecraft’s achievements as an indisputable contribution to British culture as it is almost a century after the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). I will relate Blind’s emphasis on acknowledging Wollstonecraft’s historical importance to Millicent Fawcett’s introduction to the 1891 edition of *Vindication* and compare both with Barbara Caine’s focus on Victorian feminism in 1997.

In section 4.2, “Madame Roland (1886),” I will argue that circumstantial evidence of the publication of the biography for Ingram’s *Eminent Women Series* contributes to our understanding of Blind’s cosmopolitan voice. An enforced cut of her manuscript highlights Blind’s method of deflecting authorial authority by detailed contextual analysis and interpretation. The importance she places on deflecting authorial authority is underlined by Blind’s wish to withdraw the manuscript rather than having it published in its reduced form. I will argue that the soundness of Blind’s judgement is foregrounded by two critics having identified the detrimental effect of a lack of contextual analysis and of Blind’s insufficiently justified admiration for Madame Roland. Further evidence for Blind’s care about the reader’s autonomous evaluation of her work is her attempt to counteract the disadvantages of the enforced cut of her work by adding a lengthy “List of Authorities.” I will argue that Ingram having published a denial in 1902 of having enforced the cut suggests that Blind’s readership was sufficiently sensitized to Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice to keep alive the criticism about the cut of her manuscript.

In section 4.3, “The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff (1890),” I will investigate Blind’s method of investing biographical insights from her two-part essay "Marie Bashkirtseff, the Russian Painter" (1888) in her translation of Bashkirtseff’s *Journal*. I will argue that Blind’s investigation into Bashkirtseff’s nomadic life across European cultures presents Bashkirtseff as a fellow lonely
world-citizen rather than as a feminist. It is the stance that informs Blind’s cultural translation of Bashkirtseff’s *Journal* as she aims to reproduce Bashkirtseff’s French author-reader relationship in the English cultural and language context. I will argue that Blind protects Bashkirtseff from a translator’s ideological interpretation of her text as far as the subjective nature of translating allows.

In section 4.4, “Dramas in Miniature (1891),” I will survey the variety of designs for the typologies of universal social scenes Blind uses to deflect authorial authority. I will relate the *Dramas* to Bashkirtseff’s paintings of the common life of the streets as both painter and poet accentuate the anonymity of the characters of their narratives. I will argue, with reference to W. David Shaw, that Blind aims to make “mythic representations … of the possible and the generic, … of events that may not actually have happened” (159). I will focus on Blind’s “The Russian Student’s Tale” as a particular example and argue that the poem represents a response to Browning’s “Jules and Phene” in his *Pippa Passes* (1841). Blind’s design and structure for the poem as a musical analogy in sonata form distances the poem from the linearity of Browning’s Romantic realism and transfers the issue of responsibility from Browning’s Jules to Blind’s reader in response to the physiological impulses of her rapturous forms.

Overall I will explore Blind’s care to distance the self and her personal political radicalism from her function as biographer, translator and poet. Her writing transcends ideological polarization in the public domain, including her own political stance. Nevertheless, her personal ideological perspective in everyday life remains that of a political radical. Leaving Max Cohen’s legacy to Newnham College for an annual scholarship to promote women’s education is salient evidence for this.

### 4.1 “Mary Wollstonecraft” (1878)

The last edition of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was published in 1796. According to Barbara Caine (1997), Wollstonecraft was “well-known throughout the century but more for her scandalous private life as recounted by William Godwin than for her ideas.”
(261). As scandalous was considered her relationship with Mr. Imlay, an American in Paris of various professions with a womanizer’s charm. Wollstonecraft had lived with him, had pursued him when she was left behind while expecting his baby, had taken child and nurse to Norway on his business, and had eventually tried to commit suicide on finding Imlay ensconced with an actress.

Disapprobation from the Victorian establishment was matched by the feminists’ fear of the possibility that linking Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with her scandalous life might suggest that “personal rebellion and feminist commitment were connected” (Caine, B. 263). This influenced George Eliot’s essay “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,” published in the *Leader and Saturday analyst* in 1855, the year after Eliot had decided to live with George Lewes. She aimed to deflect attention from a writer’s private life, and explained the neglect of Wollstonecraft’s book by her critical evaluation of the text as “eminently serious, severely moral, and withal rather heavy” (988).

Kegan Paul published in 1876 the *Life of Godwin* with an account of Mary Wollstonecraft. He was seen to be in a position of authority, at least by himself, as his essay in *Fraser’s Magazine*, “Mary Wollstonecraft; a Vindication,” (June 1878) was to “set her right in the eyes of those who will choose to see her as she was” (748). He claimed to vindicate Mary Wollstonecraft’s life and work “eighty years after her death” (748). However, his claim to authority for presenting her “as she was” is overshadowed by the dominance of Coventry Patmore’s “Angel in the House.” Paul’s act of vindication does not move far away from the myth of what women are, or ought to be, namely innately moral. He retrieves Wollstonecraft into the fold of respectable women and explains the neglect of her *Vindication* by her mismanagement of the author-reader relationship, rather than an argument of why her book is relevant to the Victorian reader.

His style is that of a novelist writing about the interesting life of a remarkable woman. He shifts his criticism and blame onto Wollstonecraft’s potential public by stating that her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* “has ever been more known by name than by perusal” and “even now excites acrimony rather than calm discussion” (752). He is critical of those who had read her book for holding the book up to “claim emancipation alike from law, from custom, and from morality” (752). Nevertheless, he allows that Mary Wollstonecraft had
contributed to these misconceptions by having misjudged the likely reception of her book, as signalled by her dedication of the book to M. Talleyrand-Périgord. This, he considered, had been a mistake because Talleyrand-Périgord was then Bishop of Autun and was known for his “unstable … liberalism” (752). Most of all, Paul blamed the lack of interest on Wollstonecraft’s “extraordinary plainness of speech” (753). In faint praise, he feels entitled to call her book on the French Revolution the “most balanced and philosophical book I know on the Revolution, as far as it had then gone” (757).

On 21 December 1877 Blind tells Garnett that Dr Hueffer\(^1\), Ford Madox Brown’s son-in-law, had asked Blind to write an article on Mary Wollstonecraft for the first number of his editorship of the *New Quarterly Magazine*. He “begged” her not to make it a dissertation on Women’s Rights but merely write “a historical essay on Mary Wollstonecraft’s opinion on the subject.” Blind was happy to “give a simple analysis” of Wollstonecraft’s “chief works” as those of the “first person who broached these views publicly in England” (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Fl 99-101. MS 61928). Blind’s essay “Mary Wollstonecraft” appeared a month after Paul’s essay in July 1878. Its simple analysis was exactly what had been missing in Paul’s article.

Blind’s focus on Wollstonecraft’s historical importance to British culture overcomes all concerns about feminism:

> Whether our sympathies are favourable, opposed, or simply indifferent to the present movement for securing to women certain professional privileges and political rights, from the historic point of view it should at least not be forgotten that it was Mary Wollstonecraft who, in this country, boldly ventured to raise a voice on behalf of her sex. (“Mary Wollstonecraft” 390)

In other words, Blind is arguing that British society has changed in a way that affects everyone, including her reader, whether or not he or she is aware of that fact. Irrespective of any discomfort her reader might experience about Wollstonecraft’s private life, her contribution has helped to shape British

\(^1\) His German name “Hüffer” is spelt in English as Hueffer or Huffer.
national identity to be what it is in 1878. Her contribution is then of equal national interest to a similar achievement by any man. By implication, the Victorian myth about the female sphere being divided into two categories, the fallen woman and the Angel in the House, is irrelevant, even if it were to be a true account of women at the time.

Nevertheless, Blind allows the ghost of The Angel in the House to play her part in the fluctuations of a long-term historical perspective. Both the attempt of reinstating Wollstonecraft in the public domain and the barrier to this by the surrounding controversies about her life emerge from Blind’s perspective on Wollstonecraft as an individual and as the producer of her work. In Blind’s account there is no one right point of view. As she had argued in her biography of George Eliot: there is no need to reject an individual for following the dictates of his private judgment when the long-term impact on society from deviant behaviour is unknowable. Even less is there a point for judging the conduct of an individual in the relatively distant past when the outcome is known to have been beneficial to society. Thus Blind’s simple analysis presents Wollstonecraft’s Vindication as the product of Wollstonecraft’s personal life in the context of the “mighty impulse” of the French Revolution (390).

Wollstonecraft had witnessed the subjugation of her mother by her disreputable father. She herself had been worn down by the drudgery of caring for others’ and for her own survival. Blind shows how Wollstonecraft’s personal experiences created conditions that made her vulnerable to the exploitations of a womanizing man. At the same time, Wollstonecraft had been able to transcend her personal life by seeing how she shares miseries and injustices in one form or another with all women. To assert herself on her own behalf meant then to speak up for all women’s rights. Blind acknowledges Wollstonecraft’s lack of education but rejects criticism of her writing style. She argues that her writing demonstrates deplorable aspects of eighteenth century style rather than personal shortcomings. So, Blind demonstrates for anyone who is willing to see that there is a necessary connection between a woman’s rebellious private decisions and her demand for Women’s Rights; as Blind’s simple analysis shows, the link originates in society’s oppression of women, and in the fact that this oppression affects each individual woman differently according to the specifics of her circumstances, her aspirations and her capabilities.

Thus Blind tells of Wollstonecraft’s disastrous relationship with Mr Imlay...
as a common fate. He was “evidently a gentlemanlike person of captivating manners.” Though Blind thinks it “a curious freak of nature that the writer who so frequently censures her sex for being habitually attracted by men of superficial refinement instead of sterling worth, should herself have succumbed to the charms she deprecated” (404). Consequently, the high passions in Wollstonecraft’s letters to Imlay give a completely different picture of her personal life from the stern morality in her publications. Realistically, Blind sees Wollstonecraft’s letters as positive in comparison with “her writings in general” where she identifies “the defects common to the eighteenth century – hasty generalizations, trite moral reflections and copious use of what strikes us now as rather stilted sentiment” (404). Blind concludes with an appreciation of Wollstonecraft’s achievements under difficult circumstances as a motivating force for the reader’s own efforts:

Although her writings are at this day but little-known and still less read, the spirit that animates them has, to a great extent, become part of the thought of our age, and at present many eminent men and women are putting into practice many of the theories she broached nearly a century ago. (412)

Blind’s intentions were to transcend Victorian feminist anxieties about Wollstonecraft’s “scandalous private life” potentially serving as “a constant and sometimes unwelcome reminder of the ways in which personal rebellion and feminist commitment were connected” (Caine, B. 261). Millicent Garrett Fawcett shared these intentions. She had moved to London, 2 Gower Street, in 1877 (Vadillo, “New Woman Poets” 49), the year before Blind published her essay. They might have met at the Browns’ fortnightly parties because Ford Madox Brown had painted a portrait of Millicent Garrett Fawcett and her husband, in 1872 (Howarth, Oxford DNB). Fawcett’s approach for writing her “Introduction to the New Edition” (1891) of Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* reads like an elucidation of Blind’s presentation almost twenty years after Blind’s brief historical account.
Fawcett analyses Wollstonecraft’s arguments in the context of the dominant influence of male arguments in the eighteenth century. She discusses the “petty maxims” about women’s education, or preferred lack of education, of the Scottish physician Dr. James Gregory’s in his *Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1761) and of the moralistic influence of the Scottish clergyman, Rev. Dr. James Fordyce with his *Sermons to Young Women* (1776) (10-11). Most importantly, Fawcett accounts for Wollstonecraft being “intensely antagonistic” to Rousseau “in all that touched upon the position of women and upon domestic life” (13). Fawcett links Wollstonecraft to Victorian times, saying that she “anticipated Ibsen for asking women to aim for ‘knowledge, and self-respect, a worship of truth and not of mere outward observances’” (29).

Both Blind and Fawcett conclude by emphasising Wollstonecraft’s call for education for women. Blind places this call in the context of eighteenth-century awakening “to a penetrating sense of freedom and power,” in which

Mary Wollstonecraft took her share in the work of that time, by eloquently pointing out that if there is to be real progress women must be educated in a rational manner, and fitted by their social position to co-operate in promoting the welfare of humanity. (412)

Fawcett traces Wollstonecraft’s importance to the cause of women’s position in society by comparative analysis and interpretation. Only by her concluding reflection on feminist anxieties among her contemporaries did she incur Barbara Caine’s disapprobation from her modern perspective on “Victorian feminism and the ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft” (1997).

Caine does not mention Blind’s essay and focuses instead on Kegan’s defence of “Wollstonecraft’s deviation from accepted moral norms” for bringing about a change in the discussion of Wollstonecraft in the 1880s and 1890s (269). This line of argument causes her to overlook Fawcett’s intention to follow Blind’s historical account of changing attitudes over time. She interprets Fawcett’s tone of mediation, which is reserved for her concluding sentence in the introduction, as evidence for a legitimate reading of the whole introduction. Thus she declares Fawcett to have attempted “quite clearly to tame Wollstonecraft” (270):
Women need education, need economic independence, need political enfranchisement, need social equality and friendship mainly because without them they are less able to do their duty to themselves and their neighbours [Caine’s italics].” (qtd. in Caine 270)

Clearly, the feminist fear of Coventry Patmore’s *Angel in the House* has its grip even on modern feminists as an apprehension about submitting inadvertently to male perceptions of women. As late as 1931, Virginia Woolf talks about being intimidated by *The Angel in the House*, saying that as a professional reviewer of books, “the Angel … bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her” (Woolf 301). Seemingly, it requires Blind’s determined deflection of authorial authority to ensure that the author does not inadvertently encroach on the reader’s autonomous reflections on her cultural identity as a feminist.

In reality, women’s position in British society was, at the time, particularly favourable in comparison with other countries. According to Henrietta Muller’s survey of *The Woman Question in Europe* (1884), Wollstonecraft and Blind are part of a changing society to the credit of Britain’s achievements for women. She finds Britain to be the most advanced country in respect of women’s suffrage, university education and women in professional positions (186). Eleanor Marx and Aveling add in their essay in the Westminster Review on the “The Woman Question. Form a Socialist Point of View” (1886), that women’s social and legal position is the best in Britain while warning that this should ease the way for the necessary “larger social change” without which “women will never be free” (211). Blind’s perspective on the woman question was clearly shared even if Caine were to be right about Paul’s condescension of retrieving Wollstonecraft into the fold of Victorian respectability having led the way to the new edition of her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1891.

Blind’s task with her essay on Wollstonecraft had been to transcend controversies about Wollstonecraft’s so-called scandalous private life and fears of how these might set back the cause of feminism as a clamour for women’s rights to licentiousness. Blind met the task arguing that a century after Wollstonecraft’s life and work her long-term contribution to Britain’s advance in improving the position of women is to be celebrated for its ennobling effect on the whole of society. She did so in an essay of about four thousand words. If
she had been given a word limit before writing a full-length biography of Madame Roland for the *Eminent Women Series* she would have managed her material equally successfully, even though the cultural distance between her English reader and the subject of Madame Roland as a significant Girondist in the French Revolution demanded from the outset a more detailed approach to analysis and interpretation. Having to reduce the finished manuscript of the biography is a different kind of imposition. The rancour about the publication of *Madame Roland* gives insights into Blind’s approach as a biographer and her reader’s receptiveness to her approach. I will explore the dynamics of the production and reception of *Madame Roland* in the next section.

### 4.2 Madame Roland (1886)

Wollstonecraft was in Paris, in 1793, and was a Girondist supporter when Madame Roland died on the guillotine at the age of thirty-nine. She died as the wife of Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, the leader of the moderate Girondists. Although there are tangential forces in the lives of the two women, the Victorian reader’s interest in Madame Roland would have been to compare the woman question in France and Britain with particular reference to Madame Roland’s role in the French Revolution. Blind can assume therefore her English reader’s interest in sufficient detail of the specific circumstances of Madame Roland’s life and work in the foreign culture as events were leading up to the French Revolution. This coincides with Blind’s belief in deflecting authorial authority for the sake of promoting her reader’s autonomous inquiry.

Accordingly, Blind’s *Madame Roland* turned out to be larger in volume than the average book of the *Eminent Women Series*. A maximum word limit had not been given. Instead, J. H. Ingram, the editor of the series, made a retrospective decision about the outward appearance of the series and demanded of Blind a cut of the finished work from 400 to 318 pages. Under these conditions, Blind would have preferred to withdraw her manuscript, but was advised against it for legal reasons. The episode shows the strength of Blind’s commitment to her reader with the construction of a *public soul* as subsumed under the diversity of autonomous points of view. Events surrounding the publication of her biography of Madame Roland also show that
it is a different matter if her intentions are not allowed to reach her reading public from reviewers and critics not recognizing her intentions.\textsuperscript{2}

As it was, reviewers of Blind’s \textit{Madame Roland} were critical of the consequences of the cuts. The historian Bertha M. Gardiner, praised Blind’s “skilful use of her materials” in bringing “clearly before her readers the social circumstances and the personal feelings by which Mdme. Roland was actuated” (\textit{Academy} 115). Against that, she finds Blind’s “historical setting to her story … less successful.” She judges Blind to have “hardly … taken trouble enough about it,” arguing her case with the example of Blind’s summoning up images of French society before the Revolution, where “the status of the peasantry … is described in words of which there may be as many interpretations as readers.” With faint praise she comments that Blind knew better than to leave out an account of the separation of the bourgeoisie from the people – “the political fact which most requires emphasis in a life of Mdme. Roland” (\textit{Academy} 115).\textsuperscript{3}

The justice of Gardiner’s criticism is felt in what seems in Blind’s biography a bundling together of a variety of issues of the separation of the bourgeoisie from the people. Blind presents Madame Roland’s political commitment as emerging from a time of extremes of inequality without “gentle transition from ease to comfort, from comfort to wealth” (Young, qtd. in Blind 124). She reminds her reader of the mental turbulence that gave rise to impassioned arguments. Instead of analysis she summons up a parade of key

\textsuperscript{2} Garnett called on Madox Brown and W.M. Rossetti in letters to Blind on 28 August and 3 September 1884 for trying to persuade Ingram not to insist on the cuts. When Ingram did not give way, Garnett advised Blind not to withdraw since no-one else would publish the biography in defiance of Ingram (Correspondence. Vol. II.1874-84. Ff 182-83. Ff 184-86. MS 61928). The rancour outlived Blind in Garnett’s “Memoir” (1900) where he comments in a suitably dramatic voice: “Madame Roland was decapitated for the second time” (60). The affair had dragged on in the public domain sufficiently for Ingram to have presented a two-paragraph announcement in \textit{The Athenaeum}, in September 1902, refuting Garnett’s accusation, and claiming that the cuts had been made by Blind by mutual agreement (351).

\textsuperscript{3} The 5\textsuperscript{th} edition of Gardiner’s \textit{The French Revolution, 1789-1795} was published in 1890. By signing her review the reader of the \textit{Academy} would have felt the weight of her verdict not only by the excellent focus on Blind’s work, but also by Gardiner’s reputation.
figures. This parade includes the Swiss Jean-Jacques Rousseau; she assumes further that “the very sound of the names” of middle-class Frenchmen such as Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, D'Holbach, Condillac, Helvétius — still ring upon our ears like so many battle-cries” (125). It is a shortcut version of Blind’s text in her original manuscript, even though it looks confident in Blind’s personalized tone of voice as she assures her reader that these men were “no word-mongers calmly writing by their snug firesides.” In comparison, her English reader at the geographical and cultural distance from the French Revolution might be considered to be reflecting on the events at her snug fireside. By comparison, Blind sees these Frenchmen as “soldiers in the heat of their fight” (125).

Blind evokes the inevitable paradox for these men and Madame Roland having to fight a system of which they themselves are the product. This is reason for Blind to commend these men and the unrecognized women to the empathetic consideration of later generations and onlookers from different countries. Blind is aware of the complexity as she raises rational political criticism of Madame Roland for having been “greatly at fault … in her persistent repulse of Danton” (208). Her commendation is in proposing to her reader an acknowledgement of how the virtue of moral courage might turn into the vice of an inflexible righteousness: “But Madame Roland knew not how to make a compromise with evil” (208). There is clearly so much in this exploration for the reader to want to know in more detail of what had been in Blind’s full-length manuscript.

The reviewer of the London Quarterly Review discusses in 1891 the neglect of Madame Roland by historians and the unfair criticism of Madame Roland’s Memoirs by the antifeminists. He praises Blind, but finds her also off the mark for knowing “no bounds in her admiration” (“Some Men and Women of the Revolution” 12). This should also be seen to be an effect of Blind having to make personal assertions where contextual analysis would have secured her the preferred authorial distance. She tried to counteract the disempowering effect on the reader with her detailed “List of Authorities” – the bibliography to her work.4 Ingram’s defensive denial of having enforced the cuts appears in the

4. In the series are twenty-four volumes. Most authors, including Blind for her George Eliot, offer a preface with acknowledgements to help received in different ways. Blind's Madame Roland is one of eight biographies with a “List of
Athenaeum in September 1902 (351), two years after the publication of Garnett’s accusation in his “Memoir.” It suggests that the controversy about the cuts and their impact on the quality of the biography of Madame Roland was still raging, six years after the publication of Blind’s Madame Roland.

Blind used the variety of sources to contextualize what information she could get for tracing Madame Roland’s development, and the influences on her from childhood, to address a contentious issue of Madame Roland’s Mémoires. Hostilities were directed against Madame Roland on the discovery of letters from her younger days which were said to belie the claim in her Mémoires of having been born a politician. Kathryn Kadane (1964), however, takes Blind’s approach of analysing the early letters of Manon Phlipon, as she was called

Authorities.” The ten sources in Blind’s list indicate the depth of her research for a volume of short of 65,000 words:

- Mémoires de Madame Roland, review et completes sur les MS. Autographes et accompagnées de notes et pieces inédites, par M.P. Faugère. 1864.
- Lettres en Partie Inédites de Madame Roland (Mademoiselle Phlipon) aux Demoiselles Cannet, etc., par C.A. Dauban. 1867.
- Mémoires de Buzot, publiées par M. Gaudet. 1883.
- Mémoires de Jean Pierre Brissot de Warville.
- Les Femmes Célèbres de 1789-95, et leur Influence dans la Révolution, par E. Lairtullier.
- Portraits de Femmes, par Sainte-Beuve. 1876.
- Histoire de Girondins, par Alphonse de Lamartine. 1847.
- Histoire de la Révolution Française, par Jules Michelet. 9 tom. 1877-83.

Arthur Young : Travels during the Years 1787-89. 1793.
Du Contrat Social, par Jean Jacques Rousseau.
Les Confessions, par Jean Jacques Rousseau.
Deux Femmes Célèbres, par Victor Lamy. 1884.
then, as belonging to different circumstances in different cultural contexts (542-43). Her conclusion is that Manon Phlipon was “unable to exercise her political talents in a way acceptable to her modest bourgeois society.” Given the different sets of circumstances in her life, Kadane assesses, “the political orientation of that life is as clear from its writings at twenty as from its actions and words at thirty-nine” (549).

An additional practical difficulty with Madame Roland’s Mémoires to overcome was raised in a review of Dauban’s book Étude sur Madame Roland et Son Temps in 1865 in the Edinburgh Review.⁵ The Mémoires were written in prison and smuggled out by her friend Bosc for later publication. Bosc had bowdlerized the work with cuts and alterations to protect “living political personages” and Madame Roland’s daughter and friends. Some passages were cut for “their coarseness and offensive indecency” (“Madame Roland” 386). The editor of the next edition of the Mémoires, M. Champagneux, was the husband of Madame Roland’s daughter; he had “erased all traces of the unlawful and ill-starred love which it had evidently been the intention of Madame Roland to relate fully to the world, had her life been spared” (“Madame Roland” 386-87). These tensions surrounding the main documents of Madame Roland’s life and work made it all the more important that Blind would be allowed to give the necessary contextual analysis for as faithful an account as possible.

Marie Phlipon or Manon, as she was known as a child, had been the only surviving child of seven children to a gentle mother and a father of a “hasty and violent temper” (4). Blind analyses and interprets what this meant in the context of the hierarchical family structure in French society at the time. She observes the emergence of the exceptional human being, the autonomous Madame Roland, from the influential French social-cultural contexts. When still a child, she responds to ill-treatment with her own resolve and learns to keep her own counsel. Her early passion for reading (e.g. Plutarch, Voltaire and later Rousseau) contributes to her development as an almost over-conscientious

⁵ Blind tells Garnett in a letter on 8 February 1884 that Dauban’s two volumes “have been of greatest use to me, in fact I could not possibly have written Mme. R’s life without it, unless I had been satisfied to make it a mere échauffé of her Memoires” (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 171-72. MS 61928).
child. In tears at having to hurt her parents she asks one day to be sent to a nunnery so that she could prepare appropriately for her first communion.

In the chapter “Manon’s Suitors,” Blind’s narrative conveys Madame Roland’s regard for the twenty years older Jean-Marie Roland and her decision to prefer him to all her other suitors. Blind’s analysis and interpretation prepares the reader to empathize with Madame Roland when later she is overtaken by the experience of a love that is more than regard and friendship, for a man other than her husband.

In other ways, too, Blind allows Madame Roland to emerge as an exceptional woman in the context of memories of key events and cultural realities of France’s past from long before the French Revolution. France as a fragmented country with a disastrous polity gave rise to key events that would shape an urgent sense of enquiry for men and women, including the maturing Marie Phlipon. Blind traces apparent contradictions in Madame Roland’s life in their historical contexts, helping her reader to empathize with Madame Roland. Thus her claim to a right to imprisonment and refusal to accept help to escape from prison make sense as a ruse “to protect her husband, for whose sake she was imprisoned while he was in hiding, and to protect her jailers from revenge” if she were to escape (275).

Blind’s contextual analysis shows Madame Roland’s willingness to sacrifice herself for others and for the Girondists’ cause as consistent with her being true to herself and her love for François Buzot, a family friend and fellow Girondist. Without remonstrating with a reader who judges this love to be immoral and adulterous, Blind sees Madame Roland to be “cherishing the fetters which left her free to love her friend unrestrictedly, and thanking Heaven for having substituted her present chains for those which she had previously borne.” Blind acknowledges that many might disapprove of Madame Roland’s love, “which she owed to her husband,” while reflecting that the Revolution “prepared the soil for those insurrections of the heart and heroisms of love so pathetically interwoven with its political history” (258).

Altogether, the enforced reduction of her biography appears to have condensed Blind’s focus on the woman question. Madame Roland’s fortitude in self-regulating her emotions under circumstances of extreme stress remained Blind’s priority when she had to cut her work by almost a quarter. If she had no
choice but to cut her manuscript then the intellectual analysis of the historical precursors to the French Revolution had to be sacrificed, not the reader’s chance to regard Madame Roland’s courage and determination. Thus Blind’s biography is a response to the neglect of Madame Roland and the antifeminist hostilities against her without sufficient contextual analysis to allow her English language reader to evaluate Blind’s argument and admiration for Madame Roland’s life and work. I will explore in the next section the care Blind invests in mediating between French and English cultural perceptions of Bashkirtseff and her Journal with both her biographical writing and her translation of the Journal.

4.3 The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff (1890)

Blind was in Nice in 1887, where she met Oscar Wilde, who invited her to write an article for The Woman’s World. The idea of a subject came to life there and then, as she tells Garnett in her letter of 26 November 1887. By good fortune, a Russian acquaintance introduced Blind to “Mme Bashkirtseff,” the mother of “so distinguished an artist that two of her pictures are now at the Luxembourg” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-95. Ff 23-26. MS 61929). Marie Bashkirtseff (1858-84) was of Ukrainian old Provincial nobility. Her family lived in Nice and she trained as a painter in Paris. A troublesome weakness of the chest had given her a foreboding of an early death when she was still a child. At the age of twelve she decided to write her diary for posthumous publication, as a document of detached observation of her behaviour, feelings and thoughts. She considered this to be a document of an example of a human being, more particularly of feminine nature. Bashkirtseff died of tuberculosis when twenty-five years old. Her Journal is written without evaluating commentary, without a voice in the margins, so to speak. As Blind tells Garnett in her letter on 26 November 1887, it was published to reviews “in most of the French papers”

---

6. The paintings are no longer in the Luxembourg. Un meeting is in the Musée d’Orsay, where it was in the exhibition Naturalism in 2011. Bashkirtseff’s feminine portraits are mentioned in an article on the exhibition Mystery and Glitter. Pastels in the Musée d’Orsay. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.
Shortly before her death, she had added a preface, in which she declares herself to be a public project: “I, personally, may, perhaps, possess but a feeble interest for you; but do not think that it is I: think, here is a human being who tells you all its impressions from childhood” (Journal xxxv).

Blind understood the separation of the *self* for the sake of the *function* of one’s writing. Blind also understood from her regular stays in Nice and from her French friends the different significance of the woman question in French and English society. Her own world-citizenship leads her therefore to see the task of translating the *Journal* as a cultural translation. Her emphasis is on preserving the author-reader relationship between Bashkirtseff’s French voice and her French reader for Bashkirtseff’s English voice and her English language reader. Blind saw Bashkirtseff’s standpoint as that of the lonely world-citizen who, by her exceptional life circumstances, is an outsider to every culture she is associated with. Her imagined community is humankind from a woman’s perspective. Blind seeks to convey this in her biographical writing: the two-part essay “Marie Bashkirtseff, The Russian Painter” (1888) in Oscar Wilde’s *The Woman’s World*. This focus is maintained in her introduction to the English translation of Bashkirtseff’s *Journal* (1890).

The French publication of the *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff* in 1887 was hailed as a literary event that carried Bashkirtseff’s fame “over the face of the civilized globe” (Dixon qtd. in Parker vi). A hundred years later, Parker and Pollock reflect in their “New Introduction” to Blind’s translation in the Virago edition of 1985:

Never before had a woman so urgently proclaimed her ambition to excel, her hunger for public fame. Never before had a woman so coolly analysed her emotions and questioned woman’s guiding purpose – love. Never before had a woman so openly revolted against all that woman was meant to be – where she should have been self-sacrificing, she was egotistical; where she should have longed for home and hearth, she

---

7. The paintings are no longer in the Luxembourg. *Un meeting* is in the Musée d’Orsay, where it was in the exhibition *Naturalism* in 2011. Bashkirtseff’s feminine portraits are mentioned in an article on the exhibition *Mystery and Glitter. Pastels in the Musée d’Orsay*.
desired knowledge and education; where she should have patiently waited for marriage, she equivocated about that option; where she should have been content to live as some man’s wife, she longed to be famous for herself. … The Journal broke the mould and depending on its readers’ gender and ideology, shocked, horrified fascinated or thrilled readers. (vii-viii)\(^8\)

An early indication of this impact on the English language reader\(^9\) of the Journal is that Blind’s two-part essay in 1888 was followed by two more essays on the Journal in 1889. Helen Zimmern, a German writer and translator, reports the Journal as a literary event in her essay “Marie Bashkirtseff: a human document” without judgement or personal comment on the complex personality that emerges from the Journal. The second essay was by Gladstone, the British Liberal statesman and four-times prime minister, in the Nineteenth Century with the French title: “Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff.” Gladstone signals that he expects the magazine’s reader to be interested in the French original before there might be an English translation. He refers his reader to Blind’s essay as “a vivid and striking paper, which furnishes much needful information for such as may desire to obtain it” (603).\(^10\) The tone of his own essay is that of a

\(^8\) The shock and horror is recorded by Peter Collister in “Marie Bashkirtseff in Fiction: Edmond De Goncourt and Mrs. Humphry Ward” (1984) with his approval: “Bashkirtseff’s most characteristic pose is struck when she revels in her own egotism, judging an effect she may have made, or assessing her talent and beauty in relation to the world, or, more specifically, the beau monde. In the view of Lionel Johnson, she was ‘a monomaniac, unable to think of anything but herself,’ epitomizing the worst of what he characterizes as the modern spirit. ‘Silly petulance, ill-bred ostentation, unfathomable conceit, offensive vulgarity, and no trace of affection or of thought: these are the gifts and qualities which we are called upon to study and to admire’”(53).

\(^9\) Blind’s translation sold well in America. Blind also contributed to Theuriet’s book Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art (1892) with her chapter “A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff,” about her close friendship with Bastien-Lepage in the last months of both their fading young lives.

\(^10\) Blind writes to Gladstone on 15 October 1889, thanking him for his mention of her article on Marie Bashkirtseff. She asks if he would allow the publishers, Cassell & Co, to reprint his article as an introduction to her translation of Le Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff (Gladstone Papers. Ff 66-67. MS 44508). This did not happen.
conventional book review from the perspective of the British consumer of literature. He notes as an overall quality Bashkirtseff’s “naïveté which never abandons her” (602). The static concept of “naïveté” is applied to fixed persona of “the authoress.”

In comparison, Blind presents the *Journal* in her “Introduction” as a work of *becoming* rather than a document of a static form of *being*; the writing remains for Blind “in the nude, breathing and palpitating with life.” What for Gladstone is “naïveté” is for Blind an expression of common humanity. She invites the reader to recognize this in “the momentary feelings and impulses, the uninvited back-stair thoughts passing like a breath across our consciousness, which we ignore for the most part when presenting our mental harvest to the public” (viii).

Blind responds to criticism of Bashkirtseff’s supposedly “morbid preference” for “what is ‘ugly and sordid’ in Paris” by setting her paintings into their cultural context of the city of Paris (“A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff” 178). Bashkirtseff’s painting of street boys putting their heads together, *Un meeting* (1884), is an example of her choice of *ugly and sordid* subjects; it is today in the Musée d’Orsay. Blind calls her reader’s attention to the cultural influence on Bashkirtseff’s choice from the stark French social realism in the “extremely powerful but one-sided novels of De Goncourt, Zola, and Guy de Maupassant” (“A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff” 159). Confronting her reader with the need to reflect on the relevance of Bashkirtseff’s bi-cultural identity and its impact on her work, she emphasises Bashkirtseff’s nature as an artist who sees beauty in the true expressiveness and immediacy of the moment, and whose object it was, “to seize life – to seize the flying impression as she happened to see it; to render it with unflinching faithfulness to nature without any attempt at arrangement, composition, or beauty of treatment” (150). Consequently, Blind argues, if Bashkirtseff had remained in the Ukraine, she would have found movement and true expression “without admixture of ugliness” (“A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff” 183-84).

Blind’s recommendation for her reader to reflect on Bashkirtseff with the detachment of empathy is informing her own careful distance from Bashkirtseff’s autonomous voice in the translation of her *Journal*. If anything, she protects the *Journal* from interpretation in the mistaken belief that the
translator is the spokesperson for the original author. Nevertheless, drawing on different definitions of the process of translation, Kabi Hartman (1999) sees Blind as a feminist translator. Her argument is that Blind is inevitably “involved in a politics of transmission, in perpetuating or contesting the values which sustain ... literary culture” because translating is “a process of mediation which does not stand above ideology but works through it” (Simon, qtd. in Hartman 62). Hartman compares Blind’s translation with one by Mary Serrano for publication in America, in 1889.

She rightly sees Blind’s work as an example of the view that “translator and foreign author should be simpatico” so that “the translated text is read as the transparent expression of authorial psychology or meaning” (Venuti, qtd. in Hartman 62). I argue, however, that Blind’s simpatico is with Bashkirtseff as a world-citizen, not as a feminist. Nevertheless, Hartman gives useful insights in comparing the translations by Blind and Serrano and their different approaches. Serrano’s view is that the translator has to be “content to live a reflected life” with the detachment of a mirror that reflects irrespective of personal values (qtd. in Hartman 67). Hartman argues that this view is untenable because it assumes there is a notion of correctness that denies the unavoidably subjective reading of a text by any reader. Her comparison identifies Serrano’s “not unselfish conservatism by selective – and ideologically inflected – omissions” (68) against Blind’s feminism (65).

As an example, Hartman compares translations of a passage in which Bashkirtseff gives vent to her frustration. Not being able to go out alone to the parks, galleries, museums and even the shops for painterly inspiration makes her swear: “... Ah! crê nom d’un chien, c’est alors que je rage d’être femme! ...”

11. Hartman questions even where the translation process starts by proposing that Mme. Bashkirtseff’s interference is part of the process. Marie’s mother had “bowdlerized the journal without scruple, changing off-colour words and phrases, subtracting two years from her daughter’s age (... Bashkirtseff had been conceived out of wedlock), and finally handing over the re-copied and re-sculpted document to the popular romantic novelist André Theuriet for further editing and publication. In this way the so-called ‘original’ French-language edition ... was – ironically and poignantly – (re)conceived .... Thus did Bashkirtseff, who in her life had felt hemmed in and inhibited by her family with respect to her artistic aspirations, achieve the international fame she sought only through her mother’s ‘translation’” (66).
Serrano’s translation has the ellipses of frustration and the expletive of anger removed, which makes the passage sound like the piqued complaint of a flâneuse. Blind, on the other hand, presents Bashkirtseff’s frustration of being in a woman’s position by translating: “… Curse it all, it is this that makes me gnash my teeth to think I am a woman! …,” (73), thus staying true to Bashkirtseff’s sentiments but softening the blow to the face of her English language reader by replacing the expletive with the restraint of “makes me gnash my teeth.”

Another of Hartman’s comparisons is of a paragraph that had been chosen by reviewers of the French original as representative for Bashkirtseff’s Journal.12 The agreement about the choice of paragraph makes a comparison for the subjective nature of translation meaningful. The passage is particularly useful for identifying Blind’s supposed feminist perspective:

> Je n’ai de la femme que l’enveloppe, et cette enveloppe est diablement féminine; quant au reste, il est diablement autre chose. Ce n’est pas moi qui le dis, puisque je m’imagine que toutes les femmes sont comme moi. (70)

Serrano cuts the passage, which is consistent with her conservative stance, whether or not she is aware of it. Gladstone (605) and C. W. Spence (544) portrayed in their reviews Bashkirtseff as lacking femininity by withholding the assertive “toutes les femmes sont comme moi.” Zimmern’s non-interpretive report renders “Je n’ai de la femme que l’enveloppe” in a literal translation that leaves the English reader to puzzle over the phrase, “[o]f the woman I have only the envelope” (Zimmern 318). Blind’s simpatico mode is expressed by transposing the sentence into: “I have nothing of the woman about me” (Blind 290), emphasizing Bashkirtseff’s feminist tone of protest, even though she softens Bashkirtseff’s expletives for the English reader by using the euphemism

of “deucedly” for the French “diablement” and not repeating the invocation of the devil (Hartman 70-72).

Blind must have known that her inner freedom to allow for these autonomous decisions would bring her ridicule from linguists, irrespective of any approval from her general reader. Arthur Symons, for example, praises Blind’s translation as “a genuine triumph over difficulties.” And yet, he misses Blind’s careful intentions for which her handling of the passage is representative. With faint praise for the overall effect of her translation he sees in Blind and her subject “a like disregard of the minor correctnesses [sic]” and contextualizes Blind as translator in the observed affinity between Blind and Bashkirtseff: “Miss Blind’s original work has just these characteristics” (qtd. in Hartman 66). True, it does, but she would like her critic to absorb the impact of these characteristics on her reader’s sensitivities, rather than see both women considered to fall short in the execution of their work.

Hartman is more circumspect by identifying Blind’s purposefully simpatico strategy in the creation of “intra-textual coherence” (74). In another example, Blind uses the word “envelope” for the French word “peau” against others’ literal translation of the word as “skin.” Bashkirtseff declares in the relevant passage that she sees herself as two people – one observing and analysing the other with cold indifference; she observes: “my pride, my self-love, my interests, my envelope [others: “skin”], my eyes, which suffer, or weep, or rejoice” (260). Linguistically Blind’s use of “my envelope” here is a justifiable interpretive leap. The image of skin as an envelope, a disposable object of outward appearance that is superimposed on the individual by society, has the ring of a woman’s resistance against being judged a woman instead of being seen as the individual she is. The idea of a disposable “envelope” is also closer to the English word “shoes,” as in the saying of “putting oneself into another person’s shoes” for imagining oneself in the other person’s predicament so as to withhold judgement, if only for a moment. The expression with the same meaning in French is, “se mettre dans la peau de quelqu’un.” In other words, Blind transposes Bashkirtseff’s rage over the lack of freedom to be herself as it is addressed to the French reader into the English language and the cultural context of the English reader as faithfully as possible.

Transposing “peau” ’skin’ to become “envelope,” in French, ‘enveloppe,’ is, on the surface, taking a liberty. However, the liberty aims to serve the original
author's intentions. In contrast, leaving out the phrase “toutes les femmes sont comme moi,” as other translators have done, is to disallow the original author’s intentions on ideological grounds. Against that, Blind’s softening the tone of rage in Bashkirtseff’s voice is in Bashkirtseff’s interest by not offending her English reader more than Bashkirtseff had offended her French reader. Bashkirtseff would have approved of this sensitivity, as her practical reflections show:

Ah! how women are to be pitied; men are at least free. … But you will say, “Why don't you, superior woman as you are, seize this liberty?” It is impossible, for the woman who emancipates herself thus, if young and pretty, is almost tabooed; she becomes singular, conspicuous, and cranky; she is censured, and is, consequently, less free than when respecting those absurd customs. (536)

Contrary to Symons’s assessment of Blind’s *simpatico* mode being expressed by her “characteristic” “disregard of the minor correctnesses,” Blind subverts with pronounced intention the correctness of the dominant culture. The individual’s autonomy takes priority, both her own and that of Bashkirtseff; each individual is separate from the other, though both are “comme toutes les femmes.” Once this is accepted, it is easy to see how Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice is consistent in all her work. While the choice of Blind’s subject is always evidence of her *simpatico*, her approach is one of deflecting authorial authority on the basis that the autonomy of subject, reader and author or translator is of equal importance in the diversity of points a view needed for the social evolution of humankind.

Hence Gladstone rightly called Blind’s two-part essay in *The Woman’s World* informative. This includes Blind’s personal recommendation of reflecting on the “curious, composite, prematurely developed nature” of Bashkirtseff as a product of her circumstances in the cultural context of her time (“Introduction” x). Through her own cosmopolitan outlook, Blind prepares the English reader to regard the young girl’s “most sublime egotism” as an expression of a member “of that floating Russian population which drinks the waters at Baden-Baden, stakes its thousands at Monte Carlo, and looks upon Paris as its earthly Paradise” (“Introduction xi). She reflects that Bashkirtseff’s “violent temperament” may be understood as the expression of a life “full of stress and
tumult [that] may be partly due to the opposing tendencies of heredity and actual circumstances" ("Introduction" ix). After all, her “mind and manners” are “moulded” by the different cultural influences of the “social atmosphere of Nice, of Rome, and of Paris” (“The Russian Painter” 354).

Blind understands the impact of different, and often contradictory, influences on the development of a person who has been uprooted from the culture of her family’s traditions. She is also familiar with some aspects of Russian and Eastern European cultures from Karl Blind’s international guests at the Blinds’ Sunday evening gatherings. She engages her English reader in the contemplation of the world-citizen’s outsider status everywhere, wherever she is, at home or abroad. Thus she comments on Bashkirtseff’s “hastily formed impressions” on an extended stay in Russia when Bashkirtseff interprets “the gaping rustics” being astonished at a lady of her rank wearing the “picturesque, tastefully embroidered” peasant dress. According to Blind, the Russian people would have been used to ladies of high rank wearing the peasant costume; people would have stared “probably because they regarded her as a stranger” (“The Russian Painter” 357).

And, in her “Introduction” to the translation, Blind prepares her reader to expect moments of consternation. She allows, for instance, for the possible barriers to a sympathetic reading where Bashkirtseff’s attitude to religion is concerned. She imagines her reader to be taken aback by Bashkirtseff’s volatile temperament, and, in turn, to be sympathetic to, or to take distance from, Bashkirtseff’s attitude to religion in the form of her “curious compound of primitive idolatry and philosophical reasoning” (ix). Thus Blind evokes the figure of a “savage’s worship of his idol” whose devotion is commensurate with the degree of her requests being granted, and only then tells her reader of Bashkirtseff’s detachment to her own person as a “born critic of life” (x). As a critic of life, all of her experiences - “love and sorrow, passion and pain” - serve her “but as the raw material for the development of thought and analysis” (x). Blind thereby warns her reader of the unusual experience of reading Bashkirtseff’s Journal rather than telling her how to read it. Nevertheless, she makes a personal judgement on the book as being of “more absorbing interest than any novel can ever be – a book with all the attraction of romance, and yet a mirror reflecting life in its passage from day to day” (x).
Blind concludes her two-part essay in the *Woman’s World* by quoting from Bashkirtseff’s diary an entry shortly before her death: “I dreamed that a coffin had been placed on my bed, and they told me it contained the body of a young girl. And the coffin shone like phosphorus in the night” (457). Blind interprets this with a personal statement:

> Even thus through the night of death shines the sleepless soul of this marvellous girl, filling us at once with sorrow and hope — sorrow for her who was fated to perish as one among the inheritors of unfulfilled renown; hope of what others of our sex may accomplish in the near future, who start more completely equipped for the struggle of existence entailed by all high achievement. (457)

Wilde’s *The Woman’s World* addressed an “élite but expanding readership of middle and upper class educated women” (Green 102). Blind’s readers might have been familiar with the English version of Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (translation in 1854). They might have appreciated Blind’s reflection on the image of Bashkirtseff’s dream “filling us at once with sorrow and hope” evoking Goethe’s theme of “dying and becoming” (Reusch 155); particularly so as the dream evokes a mystical scene from Goethe’s *Affinities*: Nanny, a young girl, had colluded with her mistress Ottilie’s suicide by starvation. She watches the funeral procession from an upstairs window; in a haze of guilt, she falls to her death as Ottilie’s coffin is carried past the house. Both are now dead. Yet, mysteriously, both raise their hands and touch. Nanny is reborn, free of her guilt and strong in supporting others in their grief (Goethe 256-67). Thus, resonances from literature are more likely to inspire Blind’s translation of the diary of a *marvellous girl* than any form of ideological feminism.

Based on the response to the French publication of Bashkirtseff’s *Journal* and on the reception of Blind’s essay “Marie Bashkirtseff, the Russian Painter,” Bashkirtseff’s *Journal* could be seen as “an enthusiasm to the few, a curiosity to the many,” and, either way, as “taking rank among the auto-biographies the world will not willingly let die” (“Introduction xxviii). And, returning Gladstone’s recognition of her essay in the *Woman’s World*, she reminds her English reader of Gladstone’s review “Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff” which “the spell of
[Bashkirtseff's] personality" had drawn from “the grand old humanitarian leader of England” (xxviii). Here as ever, Blind’s approach is to refer to the other if at all possible so as to place herself with her reader at an equal distance to the narrative of her text. I will explore in the next section Blind’s method of placing poet and reader at an equal distance to her contribution to the woman question with her poems *Dramas in Miniature*.

### 4.4 *Dramas in Miniature* (1891)

Blind’s focus on the woman question in her biographical writing is determined by her choice of subject as a specific woman whose contribution to the cultures of European societies is seen as controversial. I explored her method of sharing with her reader her analysis and interpretation of her subject’s life and work. For her poetry, Blind adopts the opposite approach of addressing the reader’s imagination by presenting typologies that are denuded of realistic detail. Her *Dramas in Miniature* are, like Bashkirtseff’s paintings, images of “the common life of the streets.” For the designs of her poems, Blind associates the inner narrative of a poem with different forms of art: visual images, music and literature. It is an invitation for the reader to feel the cultural reverberation from other works of literature and the arts.

The device means that Blind deflects authorial authority in her poetry as if placing her typology on a Brechtian stage. Her anonymous typologies are presented with appropriately realistic theatrical props, but removed from any specific context. However, where Brecht’s political purpose is to achieve a *Verfremdungseffekt* (“distancing effect”) for keeping the audience critically alert, Blind’s distancing effect has the opposite purpose. She intends to let the emotional power of the aesthetics of her rapturous forms envelop the reader in the cultural reverberations of the reading-experience. Blind trusts her reader’s response to the physiological impulse created by her rapturous forms to generate an emotional turbulence, which the reader may dismiss or use to explore her own mind about the socio-political and cultural implications of the
inner narrative of a poem. Bashkirtseff’s paintings, Wagner’s musical dramas\textsuperscript{13} and Blind’s poems are designed to touch the individual’s heart on an issue that matters to the artist. It is their contribution to the slow and gradual process of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind.\textsuperscript{14}

Blind constructs her \textit{Dramas in Miniature} by experimenting with a hybrid form of fusing the dramatic with the lyrical. Her aesthetics and authorial stance evoke Lewes’s evaluation of Goethe’s relationship to his characters:

\begin{quote}
... his portraiture carry their moral \textit{with} them, \textit{in} them, but have no “moral” superimposed – no accompanying verdict as from some outstanding judge. Further – this is a point to be insisted on – his style, both in poetry and prose, is subject to the same law. It is vivid with images, but has scarcely any “imagery.” Most poets describe objects by metaphors or comparisons, Goethe seldom tells you what an object \textit{is like}, he tells you what it \textit{is}. (qtd. in Ashton 138)
\end{quote}

Goethe’s influence on Blind is felt in her \textit{Dramas in Miniature} through what Roger Fowler called in his \textit{Linguistics and the Novel} (1977) a two-pronged approach to reading a literary text by its structure and by its design (79). Blind structures a poem as the narration of a social scene where the essence of human feeling is cast as the main character, as it were. The generic nature of her characters inhibits the reader’s impulse for an immediate moral judgement. For the design of her poems, Blind adopts various devices with the same

\textsuperscript{13} Blind is intoxicated with a sense of a fusion of the arts on having seen Lohengrin. She writes on 23 Jul. 1875 to Garnett: “We have here, indeed, a great new art transcending all that has yet been achieved in < illegal> departments, for it blends in one, not only music and poetry, but in the effects of colour and form, produced even the effects of the plastic arts.” (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 61-62. MS 61928).

\textsuperscript{14} Ford Madox Brown had drawn the frontispiece for the first publication of the volume in 1891. Its caption is a quote from her poem “The message,” the tale of Nelly Dean (also narrator of Emily Brontë’s \textit{Wuthering Heights}), here a young prostitute on her deathbed having her recalcitrance usurped as “The perfume of the breath of May / Had passed into her soul.” The model for the painting was his second wife, Emma (Thirlwell \textit{Into the Frame} 238).
intention of situating poet and reader at a distant location relative to the narrator’s internal narrative. The designs for her *Dramas in Miniature* vary: a musical analogy to the sonata form in “The Russian Student’s Tale,” interposing an imagined audience in “The Message,” implying one mood whilst the poem expresses another in “The Teamster.” There are perplexing reversals of conventional values in her use of a wedding day in “Renunciation” and “A Bridal in the Bois de Boulogne,” death from neglect in “Noonday Rest” and the image of Christmas Day for a child’s death in “A Mother’s Dream.” In her most lyrical dramas the distance is created by mythological images, the spirit of Christ in “The Mystic’s Vision,” a Hungarian tale of superstition in “The Song of the Willi,” the idea of a dream in “The Abandoned” and an image from Greek mythology in “Scherzo.” Throughout her *Dramas* her disengagement is thereby from the polemics of her time, not from its issues of the woman question.

However, reviewers did not notice her intentions. As with Bashkirtseff’s paintings, Blind’s poems were criticized for their low-life subject matter. Eric Robertson, the reviewer in the *Academy* focuses on Blind’s use of language. He mocks the linguistic paradox in the title “Dramas in Miniature” as meaningless. His praise for Blind’s use of language in “Love’s Somnambulist,” for “that calm, irresistible growth of one simply appropriate word upon another,” is dimmed with his reprimand for her use of “commonplace colloquialisms at important points of her stories.” He does not acknowledge the appropriateness of the commonplace in the character’s expression of anger and frustration as a nurse repeats the vulgarity of a dying young prostitute in Blind’s poem “The Message.” He merely quotes disapprovingly her un-poetic language: “Was she a wicked girl? What then? / She didn’t care a pin!” (“Dramas in Miniature” 531)

The thoughtful reviewer in the *Athenaeum* condemns the *Dramas* as “painful” tragedies. He is only “thankful” for the lack of realism because, as a woman, Blind should not know about the “sordid, unholy life.” Although he likes how the poems “thrill with compassionate emotion,” he suggests that Blind might learn from Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s moralizing “Jenny” to satisfy “our
sense of reality” (n.p. "Dramas in Miniature" 659). Taking her “Russian Student’s Tale” to be “much the finest of these studies,” he acknowledges the story’s history in literature, and tells his reader that Blind’s story is “practically that of Jules and Phéné in [Browning’s] ‘Pippa Passes,’ [1841] but with another ending” (659). He quotes from Blind’s exceptional use of language as “sustained at an equal elevation,” without noting that this is an allusion to Browning’s “Jules and Phene” in Pippa Passes. So he misses Blind’s dialogue with Browning about their shared interest in the woman question and their different views of where to place the responsibility for change. While Browning holds the individual man responsible for the relationship between a specific man and woman, Blind asks her reader for empathy with the unnamed student’s unhappy love affair as he harms himself with accepting the dictates of society. The question is, should the woman’s confession of having been driven to prostitution as a means for survival force the lovers apart or not.

For Blind it is an issue of the reader’s responsibility to care about people whose nature is suppressed by their society’s man-made rules and behavioural codes. The detail of specific case histories gives always grounds to argue about blame and to preach a person’s need for moral improvement. The generic image of a social situation, on the other hand, allows the reader to remember a variety of experiences and observations in her own life and to ask for a common element, which in itself means to question the nature of in the individual’s interdependence with society. These reflections are part of the individual’s social will for change, whether or not it is translated by the individual into specific actions.

15. Rossetti’s “Jenny” (1870) is a prostitute, asleep on the speaker’s lap as he contemplates the evils of prostitution by comparing her to another woman, an Angel in the House type of woman. It is a poem addressing the social ills of prostitution and keeping the poet’s voice in the superior stance of the educated male.

16. According to Frederic E. Faverty (1941), the plot of the “Jules-Phene episode in Browning’s Pippa Passes” (1841) had “held the public interest through the entire nineteenth century, appearing first in story form in 1801, later in Bulwer’s dazzling theatrical success, The Lady of Lyons (1838), and in “Victor Hugo’s famous Ruy Blas (1838), and in various burlesques and the opera based upon Bulwer's drama” (97).
As it is, the reviewer in the *Athenaeum* might have felt this in the privacy of his reading. He comments with praise that a “remarkable effect is produced by a sort of refrain – some fervid lines describing the song of the nightingale heard without – which comes, as it were casually, at the pauses of the narrative” ("Dramas in Miniature" 659). He does not, however, discuss a possible relevance of Blind’s design for invoking the song of the nightingale for a doomed love story. He does not refer to the known significance of the nightingale’s lament for poets throughout history.17

In Browning’s poem *Pippa Passes*, the story of “Jules and Phene” is a mere interlude. It is about a marriage that is an affront to Victorian behavioural codes and subject to social sanctions. Jules, a young sculptor, had been tricked by fake letters into believing Phene loved him. It was meant as a prank to amuse the pranksters with Jules’s embarrassment about having to break off the fictitious relationship. Instead, Jules and Phene come to love each other. The French sculptor Jules and the Italian fallen woman Phene are getting married on New Year’s Day in Asolo, Italy. They defy the social code that should prevent the marriage by going into exile. To the honourable Jules, the appropriate course of action is easy – “I do but break these paltry models up / To begin Art afresh” (49).

Reviewers of *Pippa Passes* did not comment on this interlude. The reception of the poem was controversial for other reasons. The foreignness of the location and the characters seem to have kept the story in the sphere of Romance rather than social commentary. The balance between public and private morality is questioned by the story of Jules and Phene at a safe

17. Frederick Goldin quotes in his review of Wendy Pfeffer’s *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature* (1988) how she sees the symbol of the nightingale as a literary symbol since the myth of Philomela and Procrine in Homer’s *Odyssey* as complex: “The love with which it is traditionally identified may be unhappy or happy. Associated with the ancient story of rape and revenge, the bird sings a lament; associated with the spring and the May morning, the nightingale sings simply of happy love; associated with the poet, it can express either personal ecstasy or pain; in a further meaning … directly opposed to the secular interpretation … the nightingale sings of Christ’s death and resurrection and is itself the symbol of the greatest love” (455).
distance. It is also less troublesome by the implication that Jules, the individual man, is left by Browning in control of his own destiny.

Blind mirrors Browning’s story with her unnamed Russian student’s melancholic memories of a lost love in the glorious white nights of Moscow. The poem rings with the romantic atmosphere of these nights and the nightingale’s song. Like Browning’s Jules, Blind’s student is set to get married. Then the girl tells him of her unhappy past. Unlike Browning’s Jules and Phene, Blind’s lovers say their “irretrievable farewell” (Dramas in Miniature 11) in deference to the dominant social code of behaviour. Setting Browning’s scene of sunny Italy in the cool splendour of the Russian midnight sun signals that it is not enough to evade the social stigma by escaping one’s local community. Lovers are only safe to work out their own destiny if the nature of the individual’s interdependence with society changes at a cosmopolitan scale.

The design of the poem is by means of a musical analogy, in sonata structure, with its emphasis on light and sound for the changing mood over four long stanzas with an extended refrain as transition. Each section has its own mood for a stage in the relationship of the student and his girl. The introduction sets the scene with the romantic mood of “The midnight sun with phantom glare” (3). The exposition is of the student scene with “we two” becoming friends as nature’s sights and sounds harmonize with the elation of students’ socializing. The development takes the student into a reflective mood about the early days of rapturous love: “I see her still beside me;” he remembers his declaration of “How I was hers, and seemed to be / Her own to all eternity” (7). The recapitulation starts with the second “I see her still beside me;” but this time he remembers “Her ineradicable shame” - as she confesses to her past as a “weary seamstress.” With the impact of this confession: “between us twain / A murdered virgin seemed to lie” (9). The refrain of the song of the nightingale between these sections, in musical language a transition, is a framing image of sexual love which is equally in the nature of the human being and the nightingale. “The splendour of the white / Electrically glowing night” casts its spell over all of Nature’s creatures with the sound of “lyric spasms of wildest wail, / The love-song of a nightingale” (5, 9, 11). The repetition after the final verse is like a prolonged coda. It follows the student’s sorrow and feelings of
guilt as he starts with “Poor craven creature! What was I, to sit in judgment on her life” and changes into a minor key, as it were:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{… the smouldering glow of night} \\
\text{…………………………………………} \\
\text{With lyric spasms, as from a throat} \\
\text{Which dying breathes a faltering note} \\
\text{There faded o’er the silent vale} \\
\text{The last sob of a nightingale. (12)}
\end{align*}
\]

The distancing effect of the musical analogy is also developed by changes in the student’s voice as narrator. He tells his tale in the past tense until the memories become so vivid that he slides into using the present tense: “And then we landed — I and she. / There’s an old Café in the wood.” The effect is that the reader is not addressed, nor is she privileged to listen in over the speaker’s shoulder to be privy to a soliloquy. Instead, the reader is exposed to the music of what Rudy called “unregulated rhythmic impulses” in the rapturous forms of images. There are images of different qualities of light. The glorious student life in the Russian “midnight sun with phantom glare” changes to the intimacy of “a room / Green-curtained by the tremulous gloom / Of those fraternal poplar trees” (7). The sounds change from the public reverberations of the students’ joyousness:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And we, we two, turned night to day,} \\
\text{As whistling many a student’s lay,} \\
\text{We sped along each ghostly street,} \\
\text{With girls whose lightly tripping feet} \\
\text{Well matched our longer, stronger stride,} \\
\text{In hurrying to the water-side. (3-4)}
\end{align*}
\]

They drift off into intimating growing seclusion and closeness as “on, on we row, / Now laughing loud, now whispering low.”

The drama of love is told in colours: the stirring passion of seeing “that pathetic flower-like blue / Of eyes which, as they look at you / Seemed yet to stab your bosom through.” This is followed by the colour of humiliation, “I hear her tell with cheek aflame / Her ineradicable shame -,” (7) of naked worldliness; she had been “beguiled” “for the sake of gold.” The colour of passion turns into
the colour of despair and harrowing desire as “looking in her eyes’ clear blue / My passion nearly drove me mad!”

These images of light and sound, of the changing colours in a girl’s face and the rhythms that convey and connect these images, have an impact on the reader that is recognisably the impact of music. Blind reverses the concept of programme music, the music that renders musically an extra-musical narrative, is now rendering a textual narrative in the structured rhythms, sounds and texture of a musical analogy. Programme music belongs to the Romantic period and was particularly popular in the nineteenth century, which means that her reader might have been sensitive to respond to the music of her unregulated rhythmic impulses, even if she had not been aware of what it was she was responding to.

And yet, the image of the nightingale in literature transcends the sorrow as hope transcends the sorrow in Blind’s Ascent of Man. Blind’s literary echo in her nightingale’s song invokes Blind’s faith in the destiny of man as she evokes Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
......................................................

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now ’tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep? (Keats 1819)

Blind shares Keats’s faith in the nightingale’s song surviving the death of the single nightingale as love survives the broken hearts of individual lovers. It therefore does not matter how her reader responds to the student’s regret:

Poor craven creature! What was I,  
To sit in judgment on her life,  
Who dared not make this child my wife,  
And lift her up to love’s own sky? (10)
There are many possibilities: she might sit in judgment about the student’s unmanly weakness or praise his humility; she might even be indignant at his assumption that he should have the power “to lift her up to love’s own sky.” What matters is that her reader engages with the story as a story that has many echoes throughout European societies. It is the diversity of the readers’ responses that raises awareness of the issues and introduces the possibility of movement by debate, which means in Darwinian terms the accumulation of material for natural selection from the diversity of points of view.

### 4.5 Conclusion

I explored in this chapter Blind’s perspective on the Victorian woman question. I argued that Blind transcends both her own political radicalism and the ideological controversies between different Victorian perspectives on the position of women in society. As a biographer, she responds to the controversial reputation of her subject by analysing the individual woman’s aspirations and struggles in her personal circumstances; she interprets these in the wider relevant cultural contexts. She leaves it to her reader to critically evaluate her narrative. She adopts the opposite approach as a poet by presenting generic social typologies of universal drama of the impact of society’s division into male and female spheres on the relationships between men and women throughout Europe.

I argued that Blind’s historical account of Mary Wollstonecraft’s life and work as a contribution to British culture as it is in 1878 is informative as opposed to reflective about her controversial reputation. There is therefore no authorial intervention in her narrative for discussing relevant forms of argument.

In contrast, I argued that Ingram’s retrospectively enforced cut of Blind’s manuscript of Madame Roland gives insights into Blind’s method of constructing her autonomous cosmopolitan voice. The acknowledged historian and expert on the French Revolution made clear that Blind’s in-depth analysis and interpretation of the relevance of French history and political culture would have been necessary for the English reader to appreciate Madame Roland’s life and work in the Girondist faction of the French Revolution. The reviewer of books on
the French Revolution, in turn, identified an unjustified degree of admiration in Blind’s biography of Madame Roland, which is also a result of insufficient contextual analysis. These critics confirm Blind’s approach to be well-judged, even if it is only recognized when it is damaged by a publisher’s intervention.

For Blind’s translation of Marie Bashkirtseff’s *Journal*, I argued that her biographical writing on Bashkirtseff offers insights into the way Blind relates to the imagined community of lonely world-citizens. She conveys to her reader her empathy with the complexity of Bashkirtseff’s cultural identity as influenced by the variety of cultures with which she was associated. Blind also accounts for the consequent difficulties for the readers of Bashkirtseff’s *Journal* and how this changes from the French to the English cultural and language context. I argued that Blind’s biographical introduction to, and her cultural translation of, the *Journal* combine to create Blind’s consistent deflection of authorial authority, as she avoids taking possession of Bashkirtseff’s *Journal* as a feminist text. Instead, she aims to give her reader insights into the creative loneliness of Bashkirtseff’s world-citizenship as Bashkirtseff presents herself as “a human being who tells you all its impressions from childhood” (xxxv).

As a poet, Blind continues to present a cosmopolitan perspective on the woman question in her poems *Dramas in Miniature* by subverting the specificity of social realism with universal typologies of representative imagined, possibly even improbable scenes; this is a similar approach to that in her novel *Tarantella*. I argued that her method of deflecting authorial authority for these poems is by a variety of designs for framing her poems. My specific example was her poem “The Russian Student’s Tale,” which she associates with Keats’s image of the immortality of the nightingale’s song to convey the immortality of love despite the individual couple’s demise. Blind conveys this by structuring her poem in the sonata form as an inversion of the nineteenth-century taste for programmatic music. Her rapturous poetics invoke with colours, sounds and change of the narrator’s use of tense in the fluid immediacy of an experience like listening to music.

In the next chapter I will focus on Blind’s poems from her research travels to Scotland, which gave rise to her poems *The Prophecy of Saint Oran* (1881), a reworking of the legend of St Oran from the Isle of Iona, and to her poem *The Heather on Fire* (1886) in support of the Highland crofters’ cause in
the debates about the national land reform. Her nomadic life as a health tourist is expressed in her *Birds of Passage* (1896) where the undercurrent of the meaning of her travel images is about the uncertainties of the tourist’s cultural identity in a world with increasingly lowered cultural boundaries between countries and continents.
5. Blind’s Poems of her Travels

I analysed in the previous chapter Blind’s method of addressing the Victorian woman question in her *Dramas in Miniature* with typological representations of the relationship between man and woman. I argued that her poems are objects of a romantic realism that invite the reader to *feel* the relevance of the common life of the street and to reflect on the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society.¹ Blind’s poems of her travels are different only in their focus on the individual in the context of major wide-ranging debates that contribute to shape the Zeitgeist of the late nineteenth century. These poems link Blind’s nomadic personal life with her commitment to the everyday concerns in the public domain of British society.

Blind first travelled to Scotland in 1873 to visit the western isles of Skye, Staffa and Iona. She had in her luggage European medieval literature² and had recently been reviewing Morris’s neo-medieval poem *Love is Enough* (1872). Thus her focus on medieval literature show her in her letters to Garnett on 6 September and 25 September 1873 to be sensitized to the delight of visualizing the Viking “pirates” at Dunvegan Castle on its “high promontory and surrounded by a wild and blasted country;” similarly, she sees the balsamic structures of Fingal’s Cave on Staffa as a “natural Cathedral paved by the wandering wave” (Correspondence. Vol. I.1860-73. Ff 207-09; Ff 218-19. MS 61927). At the time, she was also revising her translation of Strauss’s *The Old Faith and the New* (1873) for its second edition³ and was receptive to the charm of imagining the

---

¹. The physiological impulse of Blind’s rapturous forms would have been *felt* by her contemporaries particularly in the shared leisure of reading aloud to each other in an evening’s entertainment with family and friends, as was the custom.

². The German *Nibelungenlied*, the Icelandic *Edda* and the French *Morte d'Arthur*, books which echo her studies in Zurich in the late 1850s.

³. Strauss died on 8 February 1874. Blind’s essay on Strauss’s place in the history of the European sceptical movement was in the hands of her publisher, Asher; it appeared in the *Saturday Review* on 14 February 1874. It is unsigned, but has all the hallmarks of Blind’s knowledge and balanced evaluation. She asked Garnett on 23 February 1874 to tell her about it if he
history of Iona at the sight of its sixth-century Abbey and the graves of twelfth-century kings as a reminder of the history of European scepticism. She would rework Iona’s sixth-century legend of the blaspheming St. Oran as a nineteenth-century story of the psychological dynamics of scepticism for her poem The Prophecy of St. Oran (1881).

However, on traversing the monotonous interior of Skye, she also saw the miserable living conditions of the Highland crofters. She would return to Scotland at the height of what was known as the Crofter’s War to research the background for her poem The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances (1886). The poem is most closely an expression of her personal political stance in support of the crofters’ cause as a contribution to the controversies about the national land reform, which permitted Scottish landlords to eject the crofters from their tenancies. Both these poems are the product of Blind’s literary travelling.

Most of Blind’s travelling was part of her nomadic lifestyle of staying with friends or travelling as a health tourist in search of dry and warm air to enable her to work. The collection of poems of Blind’s volume Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident (1895) is from these travels. The autobiographical nature of these poems works like images in a tourist’s photo-album, as opposed to the result of purposeful research in different locations. The poems represent moments of reflection from different locations in England and on the continent, juxtaposed with poems from Egypt by the arrangement as “Songs of the Orient” and “Songs of the Occident.” The tourist’s temporal disjunction is Blind’s theme for Birds of Passage; it is the tourist’s experience of the external moment in an unfamiliar place intersecting with the internal mental landscape that has been shaped by different cultural contexts. The juxtaposition of orient and occident signals a rising complexity of the tourist’s view of the world from a position of uncertainty and anxiety about individual identity in a world of increasing globalisation and lowering boundaries between countries, continents and cultures.4

should see “my detailed account of S.” because she “could not ask Asher to procure it” for her (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 7-8. MS 61928).

4. According to W. H. Koeber (1912), the literary traveller of the mid-Victorian period was different. She took the Grand Tour which gave the traveller a lifetime accolade as a fashionable globe-trotter. By the turn of the century, the
Blind’s nomadic lifestyle of frequently repeated temporal disjunctions of outward discontinuity to be integrated into an internal continuity created a kind of pattern of literature and art bridging different external realities to create a sense of continuity of personal identity. An example of how Blind handles this comes from a letter to Garnett on 27 August 1874 from the village of Shottersmill in Yorkshire. She switches from description to reflection for a reader who shares her general knowledge of English landscapes and culture. She describes the “old-fashioned mellow brown roofs” blending “exquisitely with the trees …” and associates the description with Morris’s “Earthly Paradise.” She turns to the local culture, linking the pleasure of seeing the fish “leaping … out of the water” to the water’s usefulness for driving “the wheel of the Mill.” The “quite picturesque” line of sheepskins “stretching from willow to willow” elicits a plan to visit the leather manufacturer. Finally, she reminds Garnett of her letters from Scotland as she compares the “deliciously rural aspects” with “the open moorland scenery of Scotland” (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 30-33. MS 61928). This interaction between seeing, remembering and reflecting identifies the tourist as outsider and onlooker, as subjective interpreter as opposed to a literary traveller with a sense of purpose to visit a specific location.

In section 5.1, “The Prophecy of St. Oran (1881),” I will argue that the poem is a nineteenth-century version of the sixth-century legend that transcends religious scepticism as it traces the psychological dynamics of scepticism and celebrates scepticism as a duty of inquiry. Blind signals this by framing the poem with the Gaelic proverb that has entered the Scottish culture from the sixth-century legend of St. Oran. She emphasises this non-specialist perspective by associating her poem with Goethe’s Elective Affinities as the novel questions the interdependence between public and private morality in relation to the institution of marriage.

“Sphinx and Pyramids produced about the same amount of astonishment as a pond on Hampstead Heath” (285; see also Sims 97). R. Ashton’s The German Idea (1994) presents examples of English border-crossing views of literature from George Eliot and Henry Lewes from their travelling in Germany as a research project for Lewes’s Life of Goethe in 1855 (31-46, 66-73). Alex Murray discusses the literary traveller to France at the fin-de-siècle importing the decadent movement to English literature (857).
In section 5.2, “The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances (1886),” I will explore Ford Madox Brown’s influence on Blind’s research travels and their shared concerns about social injustice. I will relate this to the Madox Browns joining Blind on her research trip to the Isle of Arran in 1884 and to Madox Brown’s project in the Town Hall of Manchester at the time. I will argue that Blind deflects authorial authority, despite her passionate personal commitment to the crofters’ cause, by the design of her poem as a quasi-fable. Her narrator performs in the tone of a children’s story teller, despite the poem’s structure imitating an Ossianic ballad as a mark of the crofter’s heroic history as a sub-nation, in contrast to the marginalized people Blind is fighting for. At the same time, the device emphasises Blind’s deflection of authorial authority by suggesting the crofters’ equal status of human dignity with that of the poet and the reader. Blind asserts her personal political commitment to the crofters’ cause through framing annotations in her notes, which consist of extracts from expert authors on the issues of the Highland clearances.

In section 5.3, “Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident (1895),” I will explore the autobiographical nature of Blind’s collection of her travel poems. I will argue that Blind addresses with her juxtaposing “Songs of the Orient” and “Songs of the Occident” the uncertainties of the tourist’s cultural identity. Blind is the tourist, her poems are the public soul of the tourist. There is no distance between Blind the individual and the depersonalized poetic voice of her poems. Blind struggles with the uncertainties of the tourist at both levels. She shares the questions about the new world-view as a tourist with her reader at an equal level. She emphasises the undercurrent of sharing these uncertainties with her reader by associating her poems with Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven.” I will argue that her “The Tombs of Kings” presents specifically the tourist’s temporal disjunction in the experience of different cultures against her personal state of mind. Blind’s state if mind is one of mourning the death of Ford Madox Brown in 1893. “The Beautiful Beeshareen Boy,” on the other hand is the key poem for the question of the English tourist’s unwitting implication in British colonialism and imperialism.
5.1 The Prophecy of St. Oran (1881)

In this section I will trace the influence from Blind’s interests and work in 1873 and her travels to the western Isles of Scotland on her poem The Prophecy of St. Oran. She started work on the poem while she was still in Scotland and completed it in Manchester, in 1881. She was inspired by the sixth-century legend of St. Oran to rewrite its story from a nineteenth-century perspective as a history of the European sceptical movement. I will argue that Blind employed nineteenth-century psychological insights into the dynamics of scepticism as an integral part of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind.\(^5\)

This is supported by J. Jamieson (1811) arguing that Columba’s desperate command to bury Oran again was to stop his blasphemous account of the other world on his return from death: “Earth, earth on the mouth of Oran, [sic] that he may blab no more” has become a Gaelic proverb (20). It expresses popular mockery of one’s betters who attempt to stifle opposition. Blind frames her poem by using the proverb as a subtitle for her poem and ending the poem by the chorus of monks shouting the line. I will argue that Blind reflects by this device that the history of religious scepticism has natural roots in the individual’s sexual energy and drive of survival. As such scepticism, according to friend William Kingdon Clifford in his “Ethics of Belief” (1876) is a general “Duty of Inquiry” (289-95).

Blind underlines further the wider importance of scepticism by associating the poem with Goethe’s novel Elective Affinities (1809, English 1854), which explores the tensions between natural mutuality and the nuptial vows for the social institution of marriage. Goethe’s narrator stages the action as if for an experiment in a chemistry laboratory. Blind adopts the narrator who acts in her poem like a stage-manager by deciding on which elements of a story are worth telling and which elements need condensing. Both narrators introduce

---

5. David Leary (1980) traces the development of psychology in the nineteenth century to the German idealism of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. He argues that, “[p]ne of the most crucial changes in the definition of science resulted from the idealists’ abolition of things-in-themselves. … Knowledge, the idealists now maintained, does not result from the a posteriori experience of things-in-themselves; rather “things” are themselves manifestations of will (Fichte), imagination (Schelling), or reason (Hegel)” (299).
a hypothetical character; in literary terms, an insufficiently developed character, without a role as protagonist, whose inner and outer beauty is proposed, rather than psychologically and socially explored. The author behind the narrator is posing the theoretical question of what if this were to happen? The hypothetical character is simply there to test the nature of the protagonist’s commitment to the community by his religious or nuptial vows. Both Goethe’s Eduard and Blind’s Oran succumb to their natures’ yearning for a union with the hypothetical ideal of womanhood. In both Goethe’s novel and Blind’s poem, the heavenly creature shares no responsibility for her effect on the protagonist. Her role is merely to show up a hidden fault line in the seeming harmony of the elected community. Goethe and Blind deflect authorial authority by concluding the experiment before the denouement. They do this by disposing of the narrator and her hypothetical character once the experiment is concluded. Both stories morph then into a nonsensical mythological form that disperses the story’s strands and subverts the idea of a denouement. This leaves both Goethe’s and Blind’s reader to her own reflections for interpreting the experiment from her own point of view.

The sixth-century legend of St. Oran is told slightly differently, depending on where one finds an account of it. The core is, however, the same. It is about Irish monks who, with St. Columba as their abbot, braved the stormy sea crossing from Ireland to the Isle of Iona. They established themselves on Iona for their mission to convert the Picts, the native people of Iona, from their polytheistic religion to Christianity. Their attempts of building a convent were frustrated by some disturbed spirit night after night razing to the ground their efforts. The evil spirit demanded a human being to be buried alive. The lot fell on Oran in some accounts, in others he volunteered. He was duly interred. Three days later, Columba wanted to know what had happened to Oran and had him dug up. Oran opened his eyes and proclaimed: “There is no wonder in death, and hell is not as it is reported. In fact, the way you think it is is not the way at all.” Shocked at Oran’s blasphemy, Columba cried his command: “Earth, earth on the mouth of Oran, [sic] that he may blab no more” (Jamieson 20). All the same, Columba is said to have named the chapel on Iona after Oran in his memory (Jamieson 21). Thus the legend demonstrates the contradictory nature of scepticism as the Christian Columba obeys the Celtic sea-monster and the blaspheming Oran evokes Christ’s resurrection on the third day.
Blind writes to Garnett on 6 Sept. 1873 about the emotionally charged daytrip to the isles of Staffa and Iona. She struggled with the forbidding balsamic structures of Staffa and the awe-inspiring “natural Cathedral” of Fingal’s Cave; after that, the “low grass-green shores and its little coves of silver sand” is bliss. She delights in: “the Cathedral that rears its grey towers on this sea-girt island touches the heart with a deeper pathos than the grandest structures in Europe” (Correspondence. Vol. I. 1860-73. Ff 207-09. MS 61927).

In her letter 25 Sept. 1873 she tells Garnett of her walk between the Chapel of St. Oran and the graves of Christian monks, and Celtic kings, she marvels:

every stone, every mouldering cross speaks of St. Columba and his devoted little band, and whatever of truth and beauty was contained in Christianity forces itself on the imagination in this <illeg.> spot with whose soil is mingled the dust of these ardent and heroic men. – I should be inclined to call Iona the island of the Dead, for every <illeg> of ground you tread upon almost is marked by a grave. Tombs of kings and chieftains, some defaced by time, some ornamented by sculptured figures lie here in rows with the green grass growing between them. Forty Scottish kings are said to have been buried here, besides princes of many other nations, on account of a Gaelic prophecy according to which a deluge was to drown all natives.⁶ (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 218-19. MS 61928)

Although the legend was still known in the region, Oran was losing his mythic power: “some think him a saint, others an evil-doer: a martyr or a deservedly punished man.” “Some swear by his grave, as though it were almost as sacred as the Black Stone of Iona: to others, perhaps most, his is now but an idle name” (Sharp 149). The scope of religious scepticism was changing. The Pictish polytheism of sea-monsters and propitiatory sacrifice vying with Christian dogmatism has made way for Christian dogmatism to vie with

⁶. Ian Bradley (2013) discusses Saint Columba in his article “Scotland’s First Minister as “the patron saint of Scotland prior to Saint Andrew.” He considers how representations of Columba maintained his popularity among Scots throughout the centuries, even being adopted by Protestants after the Reformation as an early example of anti-Roman sentiment (11).
Enlightenment rationalism and the naturalists’ Positivism. The change is part of the nineteenth-century Zeitgeist of individualism, that is religious individualism in the idea of a personal salvation, and the naturalist’s individualism in the idea of the survival of the fittest. Both are maintained in their economic equivalent of a laissez-faire policy in celebration of the market. In all these spheres, difficulties arise in deciding on the most efficacious nature of the interdependence between the individual and society.

Blind sees the changing nature of the interdependence as key to the social evolution of humankind. The competitive concept of the survival of the fittest gradually shifts towards the idea of the fittest having responsibilities for the weak; the idea of fitness for survival of the individual and of society spreads into areas of emotional, social, moral and intellectual fitness. Interdependence means then mutual responsibilities in the dynamics of interaction: the individual’s constant state of alertness in the interest of the community is to be mirrored by the community’s willingness to respond to challenges from the individual. As Blind’s friend the philosopher W. K. Clifford argues in his essays “On the Scientific Basis of Morals” (1875) and “The Ethics of Belief” (1876): there is for the individual and for society a mutual “Duty of Inquiry” (“Ethics” 289-95).

His starting point is the relevant group or society, which he calls the tribe. For the tribe to exist, it has to have the support of the individual. The tribe therefore requires the individual to internalize the tribe’s interests and to develop a sense of “piety” in the form of an unconscious sublimation of the individual’s desires and interests to those of the tribe (“Morals” 654-55). He therefore sees the individual’s scepticism as her duty to challenge the demands of the tribe in the name of the tribe’s reasons for existence. For mere obedience is a danger to the individual and to the tribe: “He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or

7. The contradictory complexity of the sixth century is repeated in the religious and scientific discourse of the nineteenth century. For example, Wallace, the naturalist, believing nevertheless in spiritualism; Comte, the positivist, believing in a humanistic church; J.S. Mill turning against Comte for the implications of a necessarily hierarchical structure of an organized religion (Mill 144).
Church better than Christianity, and end loving himself better than all” (Coleridge qtd. in “Ethics” 295).

In this sense, Blind’s poem *The Prophecy of St. Oran* is concerned with two major tribes of late nineteenth-century religious thought: the theistic tribe and the secularist’s or naturalist’s tribe. Since scepticism is the individual’s striving for the unattainable truth, the individual challenges the demands of whichever of these two tribes has the greater hold over her. This makes the contradictory elements of the legend of St. Oran so timelessly relevant that Columba’s fear in his stifling command “Earth, earth on the mouth of Oran, that he may blab no more” has survived as a Gaelic proverb for mocking the manipulative power of the leaders of the tribe, in whatever context.

Blind’s structural change to the legend for her poem is to replace the sixth-century Celtic sea-monster with the Christian God. Instead of the monster accepting any volunteer as propitiatory sacrifice, the personalized Christian God demands the identification of a sinning monk and the extirpation of his sin, for the Christian God “smites us in the hurricane,” because of “some secret deadly sin” in the heart of one individual among the monks (III, ii). Columba, representing the voice of God in the hierarchical monotheistic religion, declares: “The Lord rebukes us in His wrath!” Hence it is Columba’s duty to ferret out the sinner for the requisite punishment to appease the Lord (III, xi).

As a poet, Blind faces the challenge of how to transcend the confrontation between two kinds of world-views so that the contradictory nature of scepticism remains at the centre of the story. She does so by adopting Goethe’s narrator both for structuring the nineteenth-century psychological drama and for adding her reader’s awareness of her echo to Goethe’s novel*8* *Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), or *Elective Affinities* (1854),*9* as additional

---

8. Lewes says of Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften* that the novel “shows how Goethe adopts neither a moral nor an ‘immoral’ attitude on the subject of his protagonists’ desired and imagined adultery,” as Goethe is in this work “an Artist, not an Advocate” (qtd. in Ashton, R. 136).

9. The English furore over continental scepticism infiltrating English culture is demonstrated by James Anthony Froude, the translator of *Elective Affinities*, having withheld his name as translator. His novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), with close parallels to Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*, had met with hostility to the point of a public burning of his book, and of Froude having
cultural meaning for exploring the function, and the functioning, of the concept of scepticism throughout society.

Blind’s narrator dramatizes Columba’s arrival with his “zealous little band” on Iona with great staging effect. “The storm had ceased to rave” and Columba is standing in their “rude coracle” and “lifting high / His pale worn hands” in prayer that “wafted from his soul to God.” They had survived being plunged from “the crests of mountainous wave” “down glassy walls of shifting spray / From which death roared as from an open grave” (I, i-iii). Soon the narrator’s stage management becomes palpable as she condenses events; the Pictish “islesmen” are opportunely present at Columba’s first service when he delivers his exposition of the Christian doctrine. The events of the arrival, baptism, death and burial of the Pictish chieftain are all told in just four stanzas (I, xvi-xx). The narrator has now established the monks’ religious missionary enthusiasm and explained the appearance of the narrator’s hypothetical character, Mona.

As the chieftain’s daughter, Mona’s grieving presence is to be expected. In turn, her grief necessitates Columba and Oran to approach her with their Christian solace. The device highlights the difference between the two monks in age and experience and in their hierarchical position within Irish Catholicism. It also starts to imply the asymmetric relationship of abbot and youngest monk as it is going to be tested by an underlying natural mutuality of Columba “loving [Oran] with more than woman’s love” (III, xxxvii).

The reader becomes aware of the underlying tensions in Columba’s and Oran’s different approach to Mona. For both, their Christian duty is to comfort

lost his Oxford fellowship at Exeter College. Pernicious influence on the novel was seen to come from Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Baur through “left-wing Hegelian philosophy,” the “systematising infidelity of the day.” A chain of influence was seen from Lessing to Coleridge and to the English historian Gibbon and the Danish-German statesman and historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr, who had “undermined the authority of Livy’s account of Roman history and influenced Strauss’s scrutiny of biblical texts.” Another cross-cultural perspective was the view that in Germany and France the novel “would have excited but little notice and no surprise. Here, on the contrary, … such a turbid infusion generally creates astonishment and indignation” (Stark 114).

Mona with spiritual support. Columba approaches Mona first, calling her grief, in
dogmatic tone, “blasphemous” in the face of the “heavenly Father’s care”:

Must not His love contain all lesser love
Of father, mother, brother, husband, wife—
The Alpha He and Omega of life? (I, xxv)

When she remains inconsolable and won’t stop wailing, he turns to go as he mutters: “Nay, sooner parley with the roaring main / Than with a woman maddening in her pain” (I, xxvii). Then Oran, the “Young, but most fervid of their brotherhood,” is caught unawares by Mona’s presence as it shakes his missionary zeal and celibate devotion:

Why throbbed his heart so loudly in his breast,
As if impatient of the heavy yoke
Of faith, that curbed desire as soon as born,
That nipped the rose, but left its piercing thorn? (I, xxxiv)

Since Columba does not share the reader’s insights, he sends Oran with his blessings to the Picts to help in an acute calamity: “Go then, my son, and God go with thee still, / While I abide to speed His temple here” (II, xxv).

Oran’s obedience puts him into the testing situation of having to look after Mona as a sick woman. He tries to speak of God to her. However, their natural mutuality allows her to take in nothing but “The pathos of his pleading voice would steal / Sweeter than sweetest music through her frame” (II, xxxiii). The inevitable happens and Oran is overwhelmed with a sense of betrayal of God the Father and his representative, the abbot Columba. He tries to impress on Mona the importance of secrecy about their intimacy, which the reader recognizes as a betrayal of both relationships, the asymmetrical mutuality of Church and monk as much as the natural symmetrical mutuality between Oran and the heavenly creature Mona.

The hypothetical Mona is morally pure and innocent and does not understand intrigues. She assumes that the disaster that had befallen her people, the Picts, takes priority. Standing among the monks, she assures Oran that he will understand, “When I have told thee what has brought me here, / How sore distraught I was with grief and fear” (III, xxii). This is the turning point
when Oran’s dilemma between obedience and natural mutuality has to surface. The narrator evokes Peter’s betrayal of Christ (*King James Bible*, Matt. 26: 69-75). Three times Oran denies Mona, raising his pitch to a final, “Master, I know her not—the woman lies!” (III, xxviii). He suffers her to be abused as “Satan’s deadliest snare” (III, xxx). He only owns up when “two venerable brothers … / First crossed themselves, then seized the struggling maid” to “fling her” from the rock’s “giddiest cone — / Into the ocean … like a stone” (III, xxxii). Only then does Oran shout:

    Hold! hold! stain not your hands with innocent blood;
    I broke my vow, I am the sinner, I
    Seduced the maid,—spare her, and let me die. (III, xxxiv)

Inescapably, the culturally produced sense of guilt and the corresponding attempt to expiate the guilt of betrayal by self-sacrifice are morally identical. Both actions distort the truth. Excluding Mona from the truth of their natural mutuality by taking the blame is as much a betrayal of Mona as allowing Columba to accuse Mona as Satan’s deadliest snare. The narrator had vouched for their natural mutuality: “Simultaneously / Their yearning lips had sobbed each other’s name!” (II, xl).

However, Oran’s agony in his dilemma makes Columba become aware of his own betrayal of the Church’s dogma as he realizes his natural desire for Oran as “the gnawing worm within” making him seek revenge to see Oran “stand pilloried” before his “zealous little band.” Appalled at the insight, he accepts his own guilt and what he considers to be the “judgment on me from above / For loving him with more than woman’s love” (III, xxxvii). Yet he cannot expiate his sin as head of what Clifford calls “an ultramontane religion” (“Religion” 52), he is faced with the duty to act in fulfilment of his custodianship. So he acts out his authority and pronounces judgement. He orders Oran to be buried “beneath the sod, / And so propitiate the Lord our God” (III, xxxix).

At this point the narrator has completed her experiment. The triangular relationship between Columba and Oran and their heavenly Father has been tested and shown to be corruptible by natural mutuality, that between two monks or, hypothetically, that between a monk and an irreproachable young woman. Both Blind’s narrator and the hypothetical Mona fade away as the story
slides into an uncontrollable alternative world of legendary goblins and ghosts. Mona turns into a “pallid shape” “[a]thwart the little roofless house of prayer.” She is referred to as “it,” flinging “itself, low wailing, on the floor” (IV, iv). The “pious brethren” are heard to approach by the “tinkling sound of magic bells,” worn, “To keep the fiends and goblins off that prowl / For ever near to catch a tripping soul” (IV, vi). And Oran’s prophecy floats from a ghostly “shrunken body” in “dull sepulchral sounds”: “Deluded priests, ye think the world a snare.” His naturalist declaration is that, “There is no room amid the stars which gem / The firmament for your Jerusalem” (IV, xiv).

Oran’s prophecy anticipates the “Voice” that “came from the peaks of time” in Blind’s Ascent of Man (1889) where the “Voice” passes the responsibility for social evolution on to the earthling as narrator: “From Man’s martyrdom in slow convulsion / Will be born the infinite goodness—God” (III 56). Oran’s prophecy in 1881 is more immediate as it addresses a handful of individuals: “if ye were wise, / The earth itself would change to Paradise.” The natural mutuality with “The earth itself” “Would render back your love a thousandfold [sic]” (IV, xviii); “For if within, around, beneath, above / There is a living God, that God is Love” (IV, xix).

In the ensuing eerie turbulence Mona is mistaken for a “fiend in female guise” and is driven “forth with threats.” “Across the stones and mounded graves she flies / Towards that lapping, moon-illumined mere” and “casts her life thereon, and is at rest.” The simplicity of the words does not allow an interpretation of how she died – by accident, suicide or homicide. “And while the waves close gurgling o’er her head, / A grave is dug” for Oran’s ghost. The poem closes with the words of the Gaelic proverb as the “tribe” in its majority suppresses the scepticism of the individual:

All shouting as they stifle him with clay:
“Earth on his mouth — the earth he would adore,
That his blaspheming tongue may blab no more.” (IV, xxi-xxiii)

Thus Blind’s cosmopolitan voice transcends the specific issue of scepticism in time and place with the poem’s celebration of the striving individual who accepts the duty of inquiry; it transcends the specific focus on religious scepticism as the human being’s universal capacity to seek the
unattainable truth. It is the natural expression of the individual's autonomy as the intrinsic attribute of a person's individuality. Her poem honours Columba in equal measure as an individual who faces the truth within himself despite the outer constraint of his position as abbot as it honours Oran's eventual rejection of the hierarchical Church's dogma.

The challenge of Blind's emphasis in framing her poem with the Gaelic proverb is that she communes with her reader about the individual's role of watching over the nature of the interdependence between the individual and the tribe, whatever the reader's significant tribe might be. For the reader to accept having to come to terms with Columba's and Oran's kind of dilemmas means that she is willing to accept responsibility for contributing to change for the sake of the original reason of the tribe's existence. This has implications for the interdependence of the individual and the community, in all its contexts from family to society and to the global community. The psychological dynamics of scepticism remain the same over time and in different tribal cultures.

The theme of the individual's responsibility in the social evolution of humankind reverberates through all of Blind's work. In between starting to write St. Oran in 1873 and finishing it in 1881 she had written her novel Tarantella, which is equally open-ended in her trust in the individual's social will for change from a diversity of points of view. In her poem, Columba comes to grief by losing his friend and by being shamed into recognizing his guilt according to the dogma of the Church. Whether the reader considers him to be displaying admirable masculine leadership strength, or pities him in his predicament of having to sacrifice his personal truthfulness and redemption in the interests of the Church, depends on the reader's ideological stance and point of view.

Although selling well, Blind's St. Oran was withdrawn from distribution by her publisher, Newman, who was thought to have "got frightened because of the atheism within the poem" (W. Rossetti, qtd. in Diedrick "My love is a force" 35). The poem was not published again, not even in Symons's Selection (1897) until Symons included it in his edition of The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind (1900), four years after Blind's death. Appropriate acknowledgement of Blind's intentions came from the reviewer of the Pall Mall Gazette, in 1881. He comments that Blind "preaches no philosophic doctrine; she merely tells her story as a poet, leaving it to the reader to draw from it his own conclusions" ("The Prophecy of St. Oran" 12). And contrary to Newman's fears, Garnett
reports that a Bishop had written to Blind in praise of her “deep insight” and “truly catholic spirit” (Memoir 70).

Otherwise, reviewers weighed up general praise for the poetic qualities, the narrative’s pacing and the characterization against their recoil from the content of the story. T. Hall Caine, Manx novelist and playwright, writing for the Academy, is unfamiliar with the sixth-century legend and found the return of Oran’s ghost a “cumbrous expedient” to justify “Oran’s earthly love which [Blind’s] purpose is to promulgate” (44). The reviewer of the Athenaeum objected to “looseness of thought” that is “characteristic of the Positivists” (“The Prophecy of St. Oran, and other Poems” 137). Reviewers of Arthur Symons’s Poetical Works (1900) did not comment on the poem. The strong echo of Goethe’s Elective Affinities was not noted. However, that is a sign of the difficulty at the time regarding the subject of scepticism. Even in Germany, where scepticism was not frowned upon to quite the extent as this was the case in England, Goethe had, according to Benedikt Jeßing’s “Nachwort” in the Reclam edition of the Wahlverwandtschaften (1956), not expected to be writing for the general public, but relied for the first edition on self-publishing for a select readership. The novel was not widely “discovered” in Germany until 1920 (266-67).11 In Britain, according to G. M. Young (1936), perceptions of Victorian scepticism were topsy-turvy in the 1870s and 1880s:

11. The Department of German Literature of the Meiji University in Tokyo has a research website for German language secondary sources on Goethe’s Wahlverwandtschaften. While Michael Mandelartz invites any additional discoveries, there are eight links to secondary sources published before 1920 and almost three hundred after 1920. Mandelarzt’s list of links reflects Johan Galtung’s findings about the Japanese approach to research with an emphasis on collecting relevant sources to a topic.

Nikolas Immer (2010) acknowledges that a full history of the “creative reception” of Goethe’s Wahlverwandtschaften has not yet been established. He mentions for the twentieth century Henry James’ The Golden Bowl (1904) and Ford Madox Ford’s The Good Soldier (1915); Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis (1915) and The Trial (1925) (460).

Andrew McKinnon sees Goethe’s novel as influential on sociological theory through Weber’s Die protestantische Ethik und der ‘Geist’ des Kapitalismus: “By understanding elective affinity as a Goethean chemical metaphor we can better understand the causal claims that Weber makes in his famous essay: Weber’s argument is best understood as an analysis of emergence in the chemistry of social relations” (Abstract).
Looked at from the Early Victorian years it is a time of licence, of an unrestrained and dangerous scepticism, a perilous trifling with the essential decencies of society and sex. Looking back, we may see it as a time of excessive caution and reserve. Both pictures would be true. (154)

I argued in this section that Blind focused on her travels to Scotland in 1873 on medieval literature, which had been an important field of study ever since the private tuition she received in Zurich, in the late 1850s. She had reviewed Morris’s neo-medieval poem *Love is Enough* and had written an essay, in which she placed Strauss in the European history of scepticism. She was receptive to the atmosphere of Iona, where she spent a few hours and was inspired to rework its sixth-century legend of St. Oran. Blind’s focus on the contradictory nature of scepticism, as a process of inquiry into alternative views of the world, presents the human being’s autonomous quest for truth as constant across the centuries. Only the nature of competing alternative views changes over time and across cultural boundaries. By the nineteenth-century, the tensions between nature and abstract spirituality remain the same as those between the Pictish polytheism and monotheistic Christianity. Both are about an emphasis on abstract Spirituality versus an emphasis on Nature. Blind’s imitation of Goethe’s narrator for his *Elective Affinities* widens the function of scepticism in the social evolution of humankind to all spheres of the interdependence between the individual and society.

This is an issue of the Zeitgeist, whereas Blind’s purposeful return to Scotland in the 1880s is motivated by her personal political radicalism and her outrage about the injustice inflicted on the community of crofters by the Highland clearances. I will explore in the next section how Blind separates her personal political radicalism from her function as a poet by constructing a *public soul* for her autonomous cosmopolitan voice.

5.2 *The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances* (1886)

In this section I will focus on Blind’s return to Scotland in 1883 to research the background for her poem *The Heather on Fire* in response to the
escalation of the controversies in the 1880s about the Highland clearances. I will explore how Blind shared her political radicalism with Ford Madox Brown and his family in the wider cultural context of Madox Brown's personal memories of emigration, from the 1850s, and the varied issues of emigration and deportation for Britain as a colonial power, in the years of the Great Depression of 1873-1896.

I will then analyse Blind’s two-pronged approach of conveying her absolute commitment to the crofters’ cause with her equally uncompromising commitment to her function as a poet who deflects authorial authority in adherence to the science-based concept of the individual’s autonomy being subsumed under the diversity of individual points of view. I will argue that Blind asserts her radical politics and commitment to the crofters’ cause is expressed by her dedication of the poem to “Captain Cameron, / Whose glory it is to have thrown up his place rather than proceed in command of the steamer ‘Lochiel,’ which was to convey the police expedition against the Skye crofters in the winter of 1884” (1). She reinforces her statement of personal commitment by heading her “Preface” with a quotation from the Bible: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head” (Matt. 8: 20); implied is the reminder that what we do to “one of the least of these my brethren,” we do unto him (Matt. 25:40). Blind also frames the poem with “Notes,” consisting of extracts from the works of other authors of historical and economic expertise, as well as eye-witness reports of the crofters’ ordeals in their abusive ejectment from their tenancies.

Within the non-fictional outer frame Blind’s design for the poem is to structure the poem in imitation of an Ossianic ballad that suggests the crofter’s history of having endured abuse and exploitation to be heroic. She constructs the narrator’s voice in the guise of a children’s story teller of a cautionary tale who sets out to entertain and astonish the reader, to stir her passions and not to leave her time for intellectual reflection. The poem is a quasi-fable, designed to raise the reader’s autonomous voice with a social will for change as she follows the public debate on the national land reform.

In 1873, Blind describes in her letters to Garnett, on 23 August and 6 September 1873, the housing of the crofters in the interior of Skye as “hovels,” which were improvised by “merely a few stones put roughly upon each other and thatched with heather and straw.” They often had “neither windows nor
chimneys and the thick peat smoke issued by the door.” She is even more shocked at seeing the people: “some old hags which outside of a fairy tale one would scarcely have thought possible,” whereas “the children are not as bad-looking but indescribably dirty” (Correspondence. Vol. I. Ff 199-200; Ff 207-09. MS 61927). The Highlands had been under shared ownership between the Lairds and their tenants until 1745, when the concept of individual ownership was established in England. This was the start of landowners driving their tenants off the land for a better economic return by a different land use, often involving enforced transportation of the crofters to the colonies. According to Ian Bradley, it had come to the “battle of the Braes in April 1882” on the Isle of Skye (“Having and Holding” 26). Some fifty Glasgow police officers were attacked when they tried to enforce a summons of ejectment on the crofters. In January 1883, policemen were beaten up by a group of crofters in Glendale, in the very west of Skye. Their imprisonment caused further escalation to the point where it was possible to talk of a “Crofters’ War” (26-28). In September 1883, Blind sets out to Perthshire to undertake research for her poem in support of the crofters.

By then Ford Madox Brown had been for some years her main mentor and close friend. There is no correspondence with Ford Madox Brown and only one letter to Garnett, on 14 September 1883, from this period of Blind’s travels. She writes to let Garnett know her address in Crieff. She apologizes for the delay on account of Madox Brown having been very ill, which had “preoccupied [her] very painfully.” There are also irksome irritations to report. George Eliot is “out at last,” but the “binding is execrable;” there is a misprint in a poem which is to be set to music (Blind and Harold Rhodes), and she still has not found a publisher for her novel Tarantella. Nor is she happy in Scotland; with “a veil of grey mist hanging over the landscape & obliterating it, … there seem no mountains visible anywhere – Grantown was really very fine but too cold for me, at least with the wet weather we had most of the time” (Correspondence. Vol. II. 1874-84. Ff 169-70. MS 61928).

Ford Madox Brown had moved to Manchester with his family in 1880 to paint the Murals of the Great Hall of the Town Hall, and Blind had stayed with the Madox Browns or in lodgings nearby for long periods. She visited Madox

---

12. Scottish title for the owner of a landed estate
Brown every lunch time with her morning’s work while the organist practised his music (Garnett 60). As the three people supported each other with spiritual sustenance, so was the atmosphere generally supportive between the Madox Browns and Blind. Their shared concern about social injustice meant that both Blind and Madox Brown were working in 1883 on subjects of legitimated unfairness. He was painting the panel of *The Proclamation regarding Weights and Measures A.D. 1556* and Blind was working on her *Heather on Fire*.

In 1884, Blind travelled to the Isle of Arran, “for some further research [on] the Highland Clearances;” she booked a hotel room for the Madox Browns to join her (Thirlwell 192-4, 220-23). Blind refers to this visit in her “Preface” with the story told by “a solitary old Scotchwoman” (*The Heather on Fire* 3). The woman’s story, “told as it was on the melancholy slopes of the North Glen Sannox,” establishes for the poem Blind’s commitment to the crofters as a person to person response, as opposed to a political polemic. It is about the fate of the “Glen Sannox people, the largest population then collected in any one spot of the island, and evicted by the Duke of Hamilton in 1832” (3). The woman’s sigh evokes a history of suffering: “Ah, it was a sore day that, when the old people cast themselves down on the seashore and wept” (4). And yet, from the old woman’s lips it is a gentle story, whereas the actual scenes of the Highland clearances, so Blind assures her reader, would have been “too revolting for the purposes of art” (1). The reality, she says, “can only be matched by the brutal excesses of victorious troops on foreign soil” (1). The comparison would have been vivid in Blind’s mind for she was also working on the horrors of the Reign of Terror for her *Madame Roland*, to be published in the same year as her *Heather on Fire*.

The cruellest form of injustice inflicted on the crofters was to transport them against their will, like cattle, to the colonies. However, emigration was a complex topic in the Victorian period and touched the lives of many, as seen in Madox Brown’s painting *The Last of England* (1852-55), for which his wife Emma had modelled. Times were difficult in those days; some of the Pre-Raphaelites emigrated for the “Australian gold rush” and Ford Madox Brown was contemplating emigration to India in pursuit of a better life (Thirlwell 57). There was, however, still the difference between the sad resolve to leave England and being deported. Nevertheless, the cruelty of transportation of
convicts and Highland crofters was part of a confusing picture about emigration, as various sections of society had their own perspectives on the subject.

The Church was concerned about balancing her rising importance abroad with a loss of commitment at home; unions were asking for government funding to sponsor members who were emigrating in search of work, and, according to J. Morrow (2007), Carlyle pronounced emigration to be one of the “key areas where an active state might have an immediate and positive effect on the condition of the working classes” (99-100). Susan Brown (2003) sets out the arguments of social Darwinists “such as Argyll,” who argued that “private property had a natural basis” and Herbert Spencer, who “opposed government interference to protect weaker, that is, less well adapted, members or groups of society against the operations of a natural social order which could progress slowly through the survival of the ‘fittest’ individuals or races” (138). In disagreement, Wallace “considered evolution insufficient to explain people’s moral capacities;” he flatly denied that we should allow evolution to operate in respect of social issues now that man was able to “modify his environment, both organic and inorganic, and thus control the forces of nature” (138). Blind agrees with Wallace and includes a long section from his Nationalisation of Land (1882) in the “Notes” to her poem. His argument, together with an array of extracts from non-fictional sources by other authors support unambiguously Blind’s political standpoint. They condemn the injustice of the clearances and the cruel mismanagement of the evictions, but they also argue against these injustices as a mismanagement of British human resources. Blind’s voice is absent both in her notes and in her poem, for which she has created a narrator who tells a quasi-fable about the exploitation and abuse of the crofters.

The narrator’s story is of one representative family and their community. The narrator tells the tale of Mary and Michael from their courtship to family life, through the hardships at the hands of their oppressive lord of all that land to the ordeal of ejectment from the glen and enforced transportation to the colonies. Life is hard even before the final calamity. To survive, the menfolk have to absent themselves for long periods to get some income from high sea fishing. The women are left to work the land, look after the many children and take care of worn-out parents. Once the factor’s men have burned the settlements and driven the people to the shore for deportation, the tragedy of the crofters’
community ends by drowning, as Michael’s father, a crippled veteran, watches on as the sole survivor.

Blind was praised by the reviewer of the Athenaeum for the “boldness in choosing a subject of our own time, fertile in what is pathetic and awe-inspiring.” It was considered “something of a new departure” ("Heather on Fire"). And yet, she had actually followed Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Aurora Leigh (1856) for what Blind considered “the first revelation of the world through poetry” (Garnett 19). Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s engagement with the real world is, like Blind’s Heather on Fire, two-pronged. Where Barrett Browning uses Aurora’s interventions in the masked autobiographical account of her life, Blind uses her notes with extracts from other authors as intervention in the narrator’s tale. Aurora Leigh is a real woman, a woman like Marie Bashkirtseff, a woman like Mathilde Blind. They all believe that “toutes les femmes” are as varied and many-sided, as ambitious and as responsible as “tous les hommes” and ought to have the right to assert their autonomous contributions to society.

Armstrong (1993) singles out Barrett Browning and Blind for this kind of writing as poets who write “without a mask.” She identifies in Aurora’s narration, Barrett Browning’s masked autobiographical voice, Aurora’s unmasked interventions with “propositions about women and aesthetics and women and society” (367). It is a woman poet’s bold and courageous stance to voice her criticism of the dominant culture. As women they are not in a position to have the right to be heard, as poets their poetics in conveying their criticism are necessarily outside the male-dominated canon, and at risk of not being approved of by critics and reviewers. Even thirty years after Aurora Leigh was published, Blind must still have felt the echoing vibrations of Aurora’s unmasked defiance:

I have written truth,
And I a woman — feebly, partially
Inaptly in presentation, Romney’ll add,
Because a woman. (vii. 749-52).

And she must have delighted in Aurora’s self-conscious defiance of male expectations in allowing “some chromatic sequence of fine thought” to lead to an “unconjectured harmony” (iv. 1100-2).
Literary critics in our time have noted *Aurora Leigh* as an influence on Blind’s *The Heather on Fire*. Susan Brown (2003) compares “the egalitarian union of lovers at the conclusion of *Aurora Leigh*” with “Blind’s portrait of Mary’s expectations as a bride” (130). Nevertheless, Brown’s example also highlights their different points of view. Barrett Browning’s Romney expresses confidence in the conservative institution of marriage: “Our work shall still be better for our love, / And still our love be sweeter for our work,” and sees it as a paradigm for “all true workers and true lovers, born” (ix, 924-28). In contrast, Blind’s narrator describes Mary’s vision of “that narrow, grey-thatched home” as a vision of *becoming* with all the uncertainties that this implies. The narrator’s repeated use of the modal verb “would” signals Mary’s vision as an unattainably hoped for state: “where work and love, / Like the twin orbs that share the heavens above, / Would round their lives” (II.vi, 32).

Blind’s political radicalism, is indirectly unmasked by her construction of an elaborate frame for the poem. There are the extracts of criticism of the national land reform from different authors as annotations to her poem, without any commentary from Blind. By associating the structure of her poem with that of Macpherson’s Ossianic ballad, Blind raises the status of the community of crofters from a disposable marginalized category of people to the dignity of a sub-nation, and hence to be the social equal of poet and reader. She does this by labelling the larger sections of her poem with the Scottish term “Duan,”³ by numbering her stanzas and by closing each stanza of iambic pentameter with a last line of alexandrine meter. The result echoes the Ossianic paragraphs of poetic rhythm, meter and syntax. The allusion to the form of the Ossianic ballad signals the crofters’ own cultural identity as one of nationhood, grounded in a heroic past and a history of their own.

The romantic appeal of Macpherson’s bard for its power to convey the idea of a heroic past was stronger in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century than even in Scotland.¹⁴ So much so, that today’s English students of

---

13. The word was used by James Macpherson for major divisions of his Ossianic verse and hence was taken to be the Scottish Gaelic equivalent of canto (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

14. The Gutenberg Project of *Spiegel Online Kultur* offers 284 links to German language texts for the search term “Ossian.” Seven of these are to
Blind’s Travels U Hill

the German language learn about Ossian from Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* ("The Sorrows of Young Werther"), for the young Werther rhapsodizes the Romantic Ossian declaring that “Ossian has superseded Homer in my heart” (89-90). His last act of devotion to his beloved Lotte, before he shoots himself, is to respond to her request to “recite” to her his own translation of “the songs of Ossian,” which she hands to him from a drawer, where she had kept it in anticipation of such an occasion (116). He starts reading “The Songs of Selma.” “Star of descending night! …” (Macpherson 285 ff; *Werther* 117-124).^{15}

The extravagant search for a heroic past suits Blind’s design of a quasi-fable. Her title, “The Heather on Fire,” is hyperbole, implying that the whole of the heather is on fire; its descriptive subtitle, “A Tale of Highland Clearances,” links the hyperbole to the genre of cautionary tales. The idea echoes in the German childhood book, Heinrich Hoffmann’s tales of *Struwwelpeter*. Its German narrator has the deadpan voice of Lewis Carroll’s Queen of Hearts when she shouts “Off with their heads!” Potentially frightening, it is in its absurd exaggeration hilarious while stirring a child’s imagination about the world.

Making sure of this effect, Hoffmann frames his cautionary tales with graphics that take the exaggeration to a ludicrous level. For his tale about a girl

---

^{15}. Ascarate (2005) discusses a German “Ossianomanie” in their "longing for a heroic past," which resonated in the romantic “natural imagery described in the ballads.” Variations were: “Ossian as the original genius” (the “Homer of the North”), “archetype” of the sentimentalist poet,” “Mother of Romanticism” (Uhland and Jean-Paul with a view to a “Universalpoesie”), and as the “Prototype of the last of the race” (251).

Blind’s own involvement is in her reading-list of medieval German literature and Norse mythology as a young woman, and in the books she had with her on the Isle of Skye in 1873. There is a reference to Ossian in her poem “A Sigh” (1867): her “Low-wailing Ossian’s ghost did float / Across the water drear” (Claude Lake *Poems* 28). It is Blind’s vision of the dank reality of the poor in response to Wordsworth’s romantic phantasy of the personification of the “black peak” over the “craggy ridge” in the *Prelude*, Book First (lines 369-380).
who plays with fire and goes up in flames, he shows a heap of smouldering ashes with bright yellow smoke, the colour of the flames when the child was still burning. All that is left of the girl are her pretty red shoes, unharmed and neatly placed well in front of the heap of the smouldering ashes. A cat on either side of the smouldering ashes produces a solid pale blue wedge of tears from each cat’s nose and accurately delineated rivers of tears in a neat circle around the red shoes. Each cat is holding to her off-side eye a large handkerchief in richly falling drapes. Without being lectured, the child learns to think about the danger of playing with fire.\(^\text{16}\)

The deadpan directness is stronger in the German language culture.\(^\text{17}\) Blind uses hyperbole for a quasi-fable to universalize the character of Mary as the generic maid of the glen. She is introduced by the narrator like a statue, standing on a “granite boulder, huge in girth,” a rock from a different geological age. And instead of watching Mary, the reader’s imagination turns with her gaze out to sea as “the sun’s auroral motion / Twinkled in milky ways on the grey heaving ocean” (I, i).

Mary is waiting for her beloved Michael as the men return from their high sea fishing. The hardly differentiated names of Mary and Michael signal their generic function to represent the community. As folks disperse, “[w]ith many a ‘God-speed’ from the fishermen” (I, xv), the narrator takes the reader to accompany Mary and Michael over the forty-nine stanzas of the “Duan First.” The reader experiences the beauty, but also the couple’s isolation and the

16. *Struwwelpeter* (1844, English 1848). Ben Parrot argues for a moral and emotional distance in the text-image relationship where the graphics subvert the text by “supporting it too faithfully,” as they are “depicting the exaggerated elements of the text in a literal manner” (51).

17. Language comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German version (1844)</th>
<th>English (1848)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Die gar traurige Geschichte mit dem Feuerzeug</td>
<td>The dreadful story of Harriet and the Matches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doch weh! die Flamme faßt das Kleid,</td>
<td>And see! Oh! What a dreadful thing!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Schürze brennt, es leuchtet weit.</td>
<td>The fire has caught her apron-string;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es brent die Hand, es brennt das Haar,</td>
<td>Her apron burns, her arms, her hair –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es brennt das ganze Kind sogar.</td>
<td>She burns all over everywhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My non-poetic translation</td>
<td>Oh no! The flame catches the dress,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The oh so sorry tale of the lighter</td>
<td>The apron burns, the light spreads far.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The hand burns, the hair burns,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In fact, the whole child burns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
arduousness of the journey to the upper glen. There is the couple’s bliss in their belongingness to the landscape as their love lends radiance to the beauty of “the long withdrawing upper glen” (I, xix). It is felt the more for the lack of dialogue.

What spoken words there are, emphasize the couple’s generic significance. When Michael sees “the roof where first he saw the light of day,” the narrator lets him speak on behalf of the community: “My glen, my bonnie glen! the Crofter [my italics] said, / And reverently bared his tawny head” (I, xxiv). Accordingly, the universal crofter greets the universal mother with a cry of “Oh mother, mother! cried the bearded man [my italics]” (I, xxviii). The tenderness is stated with melodramatic exaggeration so as to contrast with the evil to be announced later, when in the moonlight, they come up against “the grim castle … / The lordly mansion of the lord of all that land” (I, xlv). A stanza of six out of eight lines starting with “To him …” itemizes every sphere in a crofter’s life as “belonging” to “the lord of all that land.” It is followed by a stanza of relentless repetition of “For him …,” recounting the ways of the crofters’ subjugation by “the lord of all that land” as he commands “the hind’s interminable toil / … / For was he not his lord, and lord of all that land?” (I, xlv-xlvii).

Having established the generic relationship between the Lairds and their tenant farmers, the narrator paints a picture of the crofters’ dignity and virtues as tenant farmers, their merits as high sea fishermen and their bravery as soldiers. In her seemingly unpolished performance she tells of Michael’s father, Rory, as a veteran of the Peninsular War who is “crippled in life and limb” (I, xxx). “With the right arm gone, on crutches, he returned” (I, xxxi), and yet, when he sees his wife burn to death, he finds that his “strength of by-gone days once more / Surged through [his] shrunken veins” (III, xlv). He drags her out of the fire, but too late. It is because, not despite, of the very physical impossibility of the crippled man’s actions that the reader feels the old man’s desperation. The immediacy of lack of polish in the execution and the exaggeration to the ludicrous, in the breath-taking speed of the narrator’s performance, create the
physiological impulse of Blind’s rapturous forms, leaving no room for demeaning the old man as a victim.\textsuperscript{18}

Equally, the narrator conveys respect for the crofters’ contribution to British supremacy without gravity. She raises a smile at the old man’s boastful war-stories with echoes of the ten thousand men of “The Grand Old Duke of York.” He brags of “Our General,” who, irritated to be woken with news of the French approaching, growls: “The Frenchmen coming up the hill? What then? / Drive me these Frenchmen down again, my men!” (II, xi). In support of the old man’s pride, Blind quotes in her “Notes” an extract in French from Comte Louis Lafond’s \textit{Une crise sociale en Écosse: les Highlands et la question des crofters} (1885). Lafond expresses his concern about the social crises that he foresees from the neglect of the crofters’ well-being. He lauds the crofters’ character traits as a human resource for British industry and on British warships, adding: “It’s the same for recruiting for the army. Enlisting from the Highlands is gradually going down with emigration having taken its toll of the most robust and most determined of the rural population” (100-01).\textsuperscript{19} This evaluation is supported by Wallace’s historical perspective in his \textit{Nationalisation of Land} (1882) where he exposes false justifications for the clearances, reinforced by statistical evidence. He sums up the prioritization of landownership over land-use as “a scandal to British legislation” as he places the crofters’ distress alongside the “barren solitary pomp” of the landowners (107-10).

Another fifteen extracts in the “Notes” form factual documentation for elucidation of the narrator’s cautionary tale. They are from history books,

\textsuperscript{18} Garnett says in his “Memoir”: “The ‘Heather on Fire’ … gives voice to the general indignation against the reckless clearance of Highland estates, and a highly finished execution would have been out of place” (67).

Adorno was particularly concerned about the relationship between art and suffering. He considered the writing of lyric poetry after Auschwitz to be barbaric and only gradually came to feel that “abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting,” and that “it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it” (qtd. in Walder 73).

\textsuperscript{19} My translation of: “Il en est de même du recrutement de l’armée de terre. Les enrolements deviennent de plus en plus rares dans les Highlands, l’émigration moissonant la partie la plus robuste et la plus determinée de la population rurale.”
publications of personal memories, from published letters and articles about the land reform, and include eyewitness-reports published by the Royal Commission. Underlining the arguments from these texts is Blind’s quotation from the Bible in the *Preface*: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head” (Matt. 8: 20), which associates Mary, the orphan-girl in Blind’s poem, with the Virgin Mary.

Mary and Michael’s wedding is the story over the twenty-four stanzas of the “Duan Second.” It is a celebration of the dignity and warmth of the crofters’ community life. Everyone helps with the preparations of “meaty barley brose,” “various kinds of meat” and “good whisky” (II, ii-iii) and people travel “From township, bothie, shieling, miles away” (II, iv). The festive spirit lasts for days. On the day itself, Michael’s father, Rory, the old war veteran, raises his glass to the memory of Mary’s father, Donald, whose death he had avenged by making sure that the French sniper “ne’er went back to France, but like enough to hell” (II, xvi). It is a common enough crofters’ tale, for:

Those were braw fechting days! Ye’ll all have heard
Tell on the Forty-Second? Show us the glen
In Highland or in Island sent not its bonny men!” (II, xvii)

It is nine years later that the factor’s men move in to destroy the community. The narrator reports the drama in sixty-three stanzas of the “Duan Third.” Mary’s everyday life is in crisis. She has four children and one on its way. One child is sick and Michael’s parents are now frail and in need of looking after. She has no money and is waiting desperately for Michael’s return. At this point of Mary’s vulnerability the factor’s men are advancing on the village: “some carrying picks, / Axes, crow bars, others armed with sticks” (III, xxiv). By the time the “bewildered mariners” are returning they are “[p]iloted by the flames that flashed from vale and height” (III, lxii). The tale switches now to the heroic men in their disempowerment. In their outrage of finding “their levelled walls and huts laid low” (III, lxii) they are “Dowered with the lion’s strength” (III, lxiii) against the brutality of the ejectment, in which even the “preacher” bears down on them with his moralising “God will have it so.” The suffering, he says, is inflicted on the community to save them from “the burning pit of Hell” (III, lxiii).
The narrator’s final section of forty-seven stanzas of the “Duan Fourth” is pure tragedy. Michael’s defeat in his heroic attempt to save his family is typical, as shown in the report by the Royal Commission, from Scottish histories and journalistic articles. Like others, Michael is trying to hide with his family to escape transportation. In a raging tempest he finds little shelter for his family behind the remaining walls of the ruin of a cottage. He manages to make a fire. But Mary gives birth, only to “launch” herself and her “babe” “into eternity” (IV, xi). Rory goes mad. The “great Lord’s hireling men” (IV, xxi) find the family out and drive them like cattle to the shore where Michael buries Mary and her child in the presence of the “desolate folk” who were “Wetting with tears that earth where they may never lie” (IV, xxvii). Only Rory, the crippled old man, is spared by the narrator to see the ship being “hurled and battered” in the tempest: “Sheer on the rock she springs, and falls back wrecked and shattered” (IV, xliv). He is to carry the weight of the sorrow of it all as he sees “his own son, as with his children pressed / Close to his heart” drowned with all the others (.IV, xlv).

Blind’s reviewers did not mention her documentary evidence of the Highland clearances since 1745. So they did not concern themselves with the tension between Blind’s political commitment and the narrator’s breath-taking performance as a storyteller. By missing the echoes of the Ossianic ballad and the genre of the cautionary tale one reviewer turned to lecture about Blind’s ignorance. The captain of the ship, he said, would in reality never have set out to sea in a tempest that had been raging for two days; Blind, he argues, has failed to offer “real similitude or artistic propriety” (“Heather on Fire” 75). A more circumspect reviewer is puzzled about a lack of “uniformity” in the quality of the execution of the poem. He wonders if it was for Blind missing “equal skill” or “equal care,” for “the most difficult scenes are those in which Miss Blind succeeds best” (Monkhouse). Yet Blind trusted Gladstone to recognize her intentions and appreciate the design. She knew him to share her concerns

---

because his Government had set up in February 1883 the “Commission under Lord Napier to enquire into the condition of the crofters and cotters in the Highlands and Islands” (Bradley 27). She probably sent Gladstone a copy of the book after having asked W.M. Rossetti in a letter on 30 May 1886, “where had I better address it to think you?” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 15* & 15**. MS 61929).  

This section explored Blind’s two-pronged approach for her poem *The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances* as a quasi-fable which is framed by non-fictional texts in her “Notes.” I argued that Blind’s poem is true to both her personal political radicalism and her determination to deflect her authorial authority. She deflects authorial authority with the design of her poem by constructing a narrator who combines a story-teller’s tale with the structure of an Ossianic ballad. I argued that the purpose and effect in this is to transcend the polarizations in public controversies about the national land reform by committing the typological scenes of the crofter’s life to the intimate space of a poetry-reading individual. Her intention is that the physiological pulse of her rapturous forms would enrapture her reader with empathy so as to energize her reader’s social will for change. In the next section I will explore Blind’s socio-political uncertainties about the tourist’s cultural identity in the interdependence between the individual and the global community.

### 5.3 Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident (1895)

I presented in the previous sections Blind’s Scottish poems as the work of a literary traveller who asserts her standpoint with her research into a specific topic. This means that Blind has a clear personal view on the topic of her poems, which she does not want to impose on her reader. So she needs to find ways of deflecting authorial authority. This is different for her collection of poems in *Birds of Passage*. These poems have the autobiographical quality of a

---

21. Blind writes to Gladstone on 6 November 1891, thanking him for his “very kind & valued letter upon my two books.” She is also sending him an advance copy of her *Dramas in Miniature* (Gladstone Papers. F 243. MS 44513).
tourist’s occasional reflective moments. The poetic voice says as much about
the speaker as it does about the subject of the poem, while the subject of the
poem belongs to the moment without implying a contextualized argument.
Blind’s construction of a public soul is therefore of the moment, without the
distance of a retrospective view of the tourist and her experiences.

However, by arranging the poems as “Songs of the Orient” and “Songs of
the Occident” she implies there is meaning to be gleaned from the juxtaposition.
Although, what that meaning is, remains uncertain by the autobiographical
nature of the disjointed moments of a tourist’s reflections. The equivocation of
suggesting meaning without offering meaning is at the fin de siècle the shared
issue of uncertainty about the tourist’s identity as participant in the as yet
unexplored imperial tourism. While Punch had been mocking as early as 1848,
“English tourism in Africa as an established power over the land,” a full
investigation of the cultural implications of Imperial Tourism was yet to come
(Buzard 315-24). It would come nearly a century later with Said’s analytical tool
Orientalism (1978).

Nevertheless, Joseph McLaughlin (2000) notices a shift in perceptions of
the British Empire from an “absolute geographical difference (a world of us
versus them)” to “a world that is increasingly without boundaries (a world of us
as them)” with personal identity becoming “a matter of epistemological
uncertainty and anxiety,” but also a matter of pleasure (3).22 Blind’s personal
appreciation of this shift is anchored in her agreement with Buckle’s argument
about geographical conditions giving rise to a diversity of cultures; the people’s
views and actions are then “regulated by the moral and intellectual notions
prevalent in their own time” (Buckle 128-30).23

22. McLaughlin refers for this shift to Robert Louis Stevenson’s New
Arabian Nights (1882), Doyle’s The Sign of Four (1890) and Oscar Wilde’s The
Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) (30).

23. This influenced Blind’s questioning focus on the individual in society
similar to Stuart Hall’s “incomplete identity model” with his method of analysing
the individual’s point of view in her specific circumstances in the wider cultural
contexts of her experiences and interests as it changes over time (qtd. in
Chimisso 40-41).
Given the diversity of histories, Blind is aware of the tourist’s occasional reflections being no more than the tourist’s temporal disjunctions at a moment when external experience intersects with an internal mental landscape that has been shaped by the cultural history and the specific circumstances of her background in a different location at a different time.

Blind’s friend, Mona Caird, was a kindred spirit in this view of the complexity of the world by the manifold histories of humankind. The two women rented together in September 1893 a cottage in Wendover. According to Lisa Surridge (2005), Caird would have been working on her novel *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) (139). The novel investigates the tourist’s uncertainties and cultural loneliness through Hadria’s story. Hadria’s resentment when Miss Temperley assumes to know Hadria intimately, purely on the strength of conversations with Hadria’s brother (118), makes her, in turn, self-conscious about the risk of inadvertently committing a similar faux pas of behaving as if knowing about the other is the same as knowing the other. She is plagued with self-doubt as she finds herself in Paris “in the midst of a little society whose real codes and ideas she had gropingly to learn” (305). On reflection, she observes that she had “never been narrowly British,” and yet she finds herself to be suddenly “almost grotesquely English” and clumsy “amidst an uprightly, dexterous people” (306). Blind and Caird might have discussed the inescapability of these seemingly self-obsessed spirals into a grotesque sense of self-importance when the aim is merely to find a practical answer to the question of what kind of interdependence between the individual tourist and the global community is appropriate.

Sadly, though, Blind was called away from Wendover to Ford Madox Brown’s bedside. He had collapsed while working on a replica of *The Trial of Wycliffe*, one of the panels of his Manchester Murals. Although he rallied enough to send Blind ahead to Tunbridge Wells and to ask her to book rooms for himself, his daughter and his granddaughter, they did not see each other again. He succumbed to “an attack of apoplexy” and died on the 6th of October 1893. It was said that his “last quite coherent words” might have been spoken to Blind “whilst advising some alterations” to a poem she had been reading to him (Thirlwell 245-47). Now, all that was left was the funeral “in the unconsecrated section of St. Pancras Cemetery,” where Moncure Conway gave a secular address. Blind was reported in several papers as “Mathilde Brown.” Also
reported in detail was her “beautiful foliage wreath” with a line from Blake’s *Milton* “woven in gold on a ribbon of black silk: ‘Death is the mercy of eternity.’”24 Blind had replaced Blake’s use of the word “time” with her choice of “death” (Thirlwell 248-49), signalling hers and Ford Madox Brown’s acceptance of death as part of the social evolution in their shared faith in the destiny of humankind and the righteousness of the cosmic order.25 Mourning the death of her closest friend while struggling with its acceptance became a strong element of Blind’s mental landscape on her second journey to Egypt. It made her all the more aware of the uncertainty of the impact of the tourist’s temporal disjunctions as the external moment intersects with the tourist’s mental landscape.

Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven” (1845) and its reception conveyed a cultural sense of the individual’s identity being suspended in uncertainty between external and internal reality. Poe’s raven is mysteriously “perched above [the speaker’s] chamber door - / Perched upon a bust of Pallas” and happens to become part of the speaker’s dark thoughts, late in the night as he dwells, “weak and weary,” on the death of his love, Lenore. The raven can speak but one word: “Nevermore.” The word penetrates the speaker’s mind as an answer to anything he says or thinks. The speaker spirals with his unanswerable questions into a state of self-doubt to the point of exhaustion. His last line is that his soul “Shall be lifted - nevermore!”

Eliza Richards (2005) finds evidence of the cultural impact of the poem by the many publications across America and Europe, and quotes from J. H. Ingram’s biography *Edgar Allan Poe* (1885): “‘The Raven’ had produced a multi-layered sensation, which was dominated by the raven’s enigmatic ‘Nevermore’” (210). The literary impact of the poem was such that “no collection of modern

24. As a more lasting homage to Ford Madox Brown Blind purchased his “Don Juan by Haidee (Byron, Don Juan, chant II, 129-131), oil on canvas” (1878) and donated it to the Louvre’s British Collection in the Musée d’Orsay as a “bequest by Mathilde Blind, 1896.” It is the last of three versions; the first is in water colour on paper (1869) in Melbourne and the second is in oil on canvas (1873) in Birmingham. (see also Garnett 34).

25. Blind’s friends, Ludwig Mond and his wife, would commission a monument for her grave with the same consolatory line cut into the marble beneath her name (Thirlwell, *Into the Frame* 253).
Blind’s Travels  U Hill

poetry would be deemed complete without it” (205). She even reports controversies about the poem’s provenance. They included a version of “The Raven” having been said to be an almost literal translation of a Persian poem (210). Richards sums up her evidence by saying that altogether, “The Raven’ disseminates outwards and dissolves into the work of many writers of the period” (219). By 1890 the ominous uncertainty and self-doubt of Poe’s poem was sufficiently an element of the Zeitgeist that J. F. Keppler’s London edition of the humorous magazine Puck used an image of the poem’s night-scene for his editorial cartoon, labelled “The Raven.” He used it to lampoon the American President Benjamin Harrison for his deteriorating relationship with his Secretary of State James G. Blaine (Lib. of Congress).

Blind associates her *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* with Poe’s “The Raven” as a question of the intersection between the reality of the natural world of the migratory birds’ flyway and the imaginary world of a western cultural perspective that divides south and north as *orient* and *occident*. The birds’ migration from their northern breeding ground to their southern wintering ground for the survival of the species happens at the expense of a vast loss of individual birds. Their flight marks the sites of ancient histories of a western idea of progress as evidence of the might of the fittest at the cost of the weakest. The image of the hazards of the birds’ perennial migration equivocates with the idea of the hazards in the manifold human histories. The intersection between the birds’ flyway and the sites of ancient histories evokes in Blind’s “Prelude” the notion of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind.

Blind’s choice of the catalectic trochaic octameter for two of her key poems, “Prelude” and “The Tombs of Kings” is a significant link to Poe. In his essay, “The Philosophy of Composition,” in *Graham’s Magazine* (1846), Poe stresses in his account of the process of writing the poem the originality of “The Raven” to be in his inventive use of meter. For Blind to associate her poems with the sense of ambiguity that has been generated by Poe’s poem is not so

26. Poe started by deciding on the length of the poem, then the refrain and the function of stanzas. He then worked out the shape of the stanzas, e.g. his combination of lines and meters (trochaic feet: trochaic acatalectic octameter alternating with catalectic heptameter, and terminating with catalectic trochaic tetrameter) (166). He argued that that poetry overall should keep the suggested meaning in “the undercurrent of the theme” (167).
much a deflection of authorial authority as an acknowledgement of the shared uncertainties of the moment.

Blind formalizes the idea of a shifting world view in her “Prelude” as she announces in sixteen couplets of catalectic trochaic octameter the birds’ flyway for the equinoctial adventure which starts as the “Multitudinous Birds of Passage round the cliffs of England throng” (4). While they cross at their peril “Waves, like hollow graves beneath them, hoarsely howling, yawn for prey,” their shadows mark the distant past of Greek mythology: “across the Bay of Biscay …, / Where mild seas move musically murmuring of the Odyssey” (4). The European idea of “old Egypt” is equally remote from the Egyptian reality of the day: “Where old Egypt’s desert … / Gleams with threads of channelled waters, green with palms on either hand” (6). The Prelude sums up the co-evolution of Nature and humankind with an echo to Tennyson’s In Memoriam and the anxiety about Nature: “So careful of the type she seems, / So careless of the single life” (LV) in Blind’s last couplet: “Even as shadows Birds of Passage cast upon their onward flight / Have men’s generations vanished, waned and vanished into night” (4-8).

Blind’s second poem in couplets of catalectic trochaic octameter is her “The Tombs of Kings.” The tourist’s temporal disjunctions intersect the moment of a guided tour with the tourist’s memories of history lessons and the experience takes on meaning by the tourist’s emotional state of mourning. The reflective poetic voice is depersonalized as the speaker’s voice changes from contemplating the idea of the tombs of human beings “Grisly in their gilded coffins …/ …balking Nature of her own” (14) to the kings’ imagined brutal pomposity that had led to the tourist’s moment of visiting their tombs: “We have smitten rebel nations, as a child is whipped with rods” (16) and their grandiose self-righteousness: “No! Death shall not dare come near us, nor Corruption shall not lay / Hands upon our sacred bodies, incorruptible as day” (16). Yet, there is also a recognition of the human being’s biological drive for survival and self-preservation that is part of most religions: “On the changing earth unchanging let us bide till Time shall end, / Till, reborn in blest Osiris, mortal with Immortal blend” (17).

With a “Yea, so spake [sic] the Kings of Egypt,” the speaker switches to contemplating the past as a reality in the present. She sees the “haughty rulers” eternity in the “Vale of Desolation, where no beast or bird draws breath” under
the “unveiled Blue of heaven in its bare intensity” in the darkness of their “Metropolis of Death” (18, 19). She questions the history of their might by asking for familiar names from history books: “those pillared towns of yore / Whose auroral temples glittered by the Nile’s thick-peopled shore?” (20). She juxtaposes the procession of mummies “in their Mausoleums” in their preserved splendour as “pilgrims of Eternity” with the outer eternity of Nature still filling “the empty wilderness with a silver fall of dew” (23). She turns to pity for “those Kings within their tombs, / locked in stony isolation in those petrifying glooms!” (24), a solitary state of being, “where all is motion in a rolling Universe” (25).

The speaker, from her standpoint as a British tourist, has switched between the outer world of the tourist’s tour of the pyramid and the inner world of European history lessons to a mental landscape of the Victorian religious and scientific discourse. All of this leads up to the speaker’s personal reflection on her state of mourning with a personal statement of faith in the final couplet: “Nothing dies but what is tethered, kept when Time would set it free, / To fulfil Thought’s yearning tension upward through Eternity” (25). On one hand, the poem is to the western European reader an uplifting experience of witnessing the personal perceptions and reflections of an educated tourist’s visit to the pyramid. On the other hand, the unashamed western perspective is disquietingly assertive, even today. For Blind’s contemporaries it may have raised the question about the Christian idea of eternal life in quite a different way. The universal British tourist represents a diversity of individuals. The poem contributes therefore to an exploration of that diversity and the nature of the interdependence between the individual and the global community.

However, Blind’s western tourist’s reflections are not comparable with, as reviewers claimed, Shelley’s sonnet “Ozymandias” (1818). They called it a “kindred example” (“Miss Blind's New Poems”; Watts-Dunton). There is a remote ring of Shelley’s sestet where the speaker mocks the hubris of a mighty man: “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (Examiner 24). Yet Shelley’s sonnet has a completely different dimension as he responds to a second-hand experience of having read
“Volney’s meditation on the eclipse of glory” (Waith 22). In contrast, Blind’s poem is about the temporal disjunctions of a tourist in the presence of another country’s distant past: a past that is remembered from books of the tourist’s home-culture and comes alive amid the reality of the visited country’s modernity. The generic tourist views the tombs with reference to individually different external and internal circumstances and in relation to a particular state of mind. It is the state of mind that determines the tourist’s standpoint for reflecting and interpreting the experience. Blind’s choice of linking the poem specifically to Poe’s ambiguous “Nevermore” signals her intellectual awareness of the inescapably subjective nature of the tourist’s point of view and the uncertainty about the individual tourist’s cultural identity in interdependence with the global community.

The impact of the experience for Blind at the time of her grievous loss of Ford Madox Brown is significant for her faith in the thought of “Death is the mercy of eternity.” Hence the speaker is asking if these Kings have indeed conquered death, if only by an everlasting fame, and concludes against the idea, because “Motionless where all is motion in a rolling Universe, / Heaven, by answering their prayer, turned it to a deadly curse” (25). On reflection she returns to her personal faith in the righteousness of the cosmic order: “Nothing dies but what is tethered, kept when Time would set it free, / To fulfil Thought’s yearning tension upward through Eternity” (25).

“Thought’s yearning tension upward through Eternity” represents in Blind’s work the drive for survival and self-preservation as a characteristic of the species as it resides in the individual’s intrinsic autonomy. It transcends the individual life as the nightingale’s song transcends the life of the individual nightingale. Consequently, Blind’s tourist observes with her mini-histories and her birds-eye-views of different locations their different landscapes; she

27. Shelley and his friend, Horace Smith, had a competition of writing a sonnet about Ozymandias. The Examiner published Shelley’s sonnet under the name Glirastes, and Horace Smith’s poem under the initials H. S. in 1811. Shelley won. However, Smith’s sestet is closer to Blind’s reflective approach by imagining a “wilderness / Where London stood” and a future “Hunter” coming across “some fragment huge” and guessing “What powerful but unrecorded race / Once dwelt in that annihilated place” (27).
wonders about the peoples’ cultures for the different ways societies promote or inhibit the individual's striving. There are poems of joy and exuberance in different landscapes and their mythological histories. An example for her “Orient” is “A Fantasy” of an Arab and his horse in the “Beautiful desert, / Boundless and bare!” and his fantasy of “Ibrahim’s daughter” yearning for her to “stifle” him with caresses (58, 60). The traveller found a corresponding joy in “Songs of the Occident” in the name of “The Mirror of Diana.” It is the romantic popular name for a crater lake in the Italian Alban Hills where “Queen Moon” is gazing at herself in “Lake Nemi’s magic glass of love” (85).

In contrast, there are reflections on women’s striving being thwarted by society in different ways according to the cultures of different geographical locations. The sonnet “Mourning Women” from the orient is of women who are “[a]ll veiled in black, with faces hid from sight, / Crouching together in a jolting cart” in the midst of the “motley crowd, fantastically bright” (68). The woman tourist laments:

Most wretched women! Whom your prophet dooms
To take love’s penalties without its prize!
… you shall …
…………………………………………………………
… beat your breasts among the tombs;
But souls ye have none fit for Paradise.” (68)

Her corresponding poem “Noonday Rest” in her “Songs of the Occident” is an observation of a woman in distress on Hampstead Heath. The woman is isolated by misery in the midst of the beauty of the heath: “Still as a stone, a ragged woman lies, / her baby at her breast.” Here too, the speaker sees the

28. Fletcher takes the poem as evidence of Blind’s “double discourse of colonialism,” condemning her for focusing not on the “oppression of Egyptian women by an Egyptian male elite of her time … but, rather, the religion of Islam.” He criticises Blain for a footnote explaining the “supposedly Islamic denial of spiritual equality to women” (451). Blain has withdrawn the footnote in the 2009 edition of her book. However, the question of spiritual equality between men and women according to the Qur'an is still a matter of debate on the Internet, as googling for “Muslim woman’s soul” shows. Blind associates her poems with Poe’s “The Raven” exactly for the tourist’s uncertainties about the tourist’s inescapably subjective point of view.
woman deprived of the very energy of striving. Again, it is the moral code of the dominant culture – whether secular or Christian: “Man had no pity on her—no, nor God— / A nameless castaway!” (102-03).

In comparison to the tourist, the literary traveller is in some ways like the migratory bird because her travelling is part of how she survives by her work. She earns her living as traveller either by the kind of work she does or by her need to travel in search of warm, dry air, which she needs to be able to work. Her striving is both promoted and defeated by the diversity of cultural histories shaping her inner landscape. Thus Blind’s “Dying Dragoman”29 is lying in the desert while seeing scenes of the Black Forest – switching between inner and outer histories of his life, not too dissimilar to the tourist of “The Tombs of the Kings,” if with a different kind of intensity. He lay “Alone amid the waste” as the “hot sand burnt him to the bone” (49); when “Home-sickness seized him for the cuckoo birds” of the Black Forest (53). Eventually, when, “The sun has burnt itself away,” the stars “one by one / Look down upon the lifeless man / As if they were his children’s eyes” (56-57).

In return, “Internal Firesides” of “Songs of the Occident,” Blind’s English traveller longs for the foreign landscape when she is at home. The octave of the sonnet paints a picture of exceptional beauty of the “icy glare” of an English winter’s day with “whirling flakes” as “Tree skeletons … to ruthless tempest bowed.” In the sestet, the speaker feels the cold and turns to the “hearth of glowing memories” from the “palm-fringed Nile” where “Lank camels lounge against transparent skies” (71). In both poems, the images of real time and remembered time are equally compelling and leave the traveller on the periphery of both the internal and external landscapes. Blind’s poems are an exploration of the individual’s temporal disjunctions that announce the exponential shift from an emphasis on the nature of the interdependence between the individual and society to the nature of the interdependence between the individual and the global community.

29. A dragoman is an “official interpreter in countries where Arabic, Turkish, and Persian are spoken” (Britannica).
Blind’s poem “The Beautiful Beeshareen Boy” addresses this complexity of experience and interpretation at the fin de siècle. The speaker’s use of the plural form “we” for the Thomas Cook travellers, on the Nile, emphasizes the generic type of the tourist. Her use of “thou” gives the speaker’s voice a ring of a Shakespearean mixture of superiority and intimacy of a tourist’s presumptions of her supposed intimacy with the boy:

Thy lovely limbs are bare;  
Only a rag, in haste,  
Draped with a princely air,  
Girdles they [sic] slender waist.  
And gaudy beads and charms,  
Dangling from neck and arms,  
Ward off dread spells and harms  
Of Efreet of the waste. (41)

It evokes Caird’s Hadria resentment about Miss Temperley presuming intimacy because she had been talked about by Hadria’s brother. Thus, in the tourist’s innocent possessiveness about the boy, the “Spoilt darling of our bark” (43), seems supported by the “strolling Almeh’s” tale that “Thou shouldst have been a prince, / Boy of ebon fell!” (41). The poem displays what Said (1978) called an “almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity,” which he named “latent Orientalism” (206-07).

When the tourists return in the following year, they cannot find the boy. As far as the tourist is concerned, this reflects on Egypt rather badly: “Forlorn sits Assouan; / Where is her boy, her pride?” They had “sought him far and wide” (46) without success because he had been “Shipped to the World’s great Fair” of 1893 “just like other ware” to be “Shown at Porkopolis,” Chicago’s

30. The Beeshareen (or Bisharin) are a nomadic Egyptian tribe who live mainly in Sudan (Britannica).

31. An efreet “is an enormous winged creature of smoke” an efreet is “most often depicted as a wicked and ruthless being” (Britannica).

32. “Almeh” is in Egypt a trained female entertainer of a type that was formerly engaged to dance, sing, or recite poetry (OED).
derogative byname for its economic success. The speaker's lament is for the loss of the boy “to thy orphaned Nile.” This equivocates between a loss to Egyptian culture and a loss of the boy as an exotic tourist attraction (47).

In her notes to the poem, Blind tells the tourists’ story as it happened. They were searching for the boy and were told eventually that he was known to have got “as far as Marseilles, where he utterly vanished” (147). The wider background to the story shows evidence for “admitting “stated knowledges [sic] and views about the Orient,” which is in Said’s terms “manifest Orientalism” (206; 210; 219).

According to D. M. Reid (2002), Egypt would have been officially represented in Chicago but for the British controller-general in Egypt, the Earl of Cromer, and his “piastre-pinching regime” (228) having refused to fund an exhibit. Consequently, Georges Pangalo, a private entrepreneur, made a commercial venture of it and developed the “Streets of Cairo” for the Midway Plaisance zone in Chicago (228). The representation of Egypt was, however, left outside the circuits of official control and the national displays in the White City. Instead, Egypt was reduced to a truly orientalist form of exotic entertainment. Pangalo himself put it into its exploitative context:

For the past thirty years merchants in antiquities have been despoiling old Cairo of its treasures for the benefit of tourists, artists and museums.

It was now my turn to join the ranks of the despoilers ... and although I blush in saying it, I went to work with a vim that would have done credit to a vandal. (qtd. in Reid 228)

If then it is the consumer, the tourist, who is ultimately to be blamed, the question is which consumer because both the British and the Egyptian traveller were benefiting from imperial tourism. R.W. Fraser’s history of T. Cook and son, *The Business of Travel* (1891) gives insights into the complex questions of

---

33. According to a letter to Garnett on 12 January 1893, Blind had been asked to write an essay for the “Women’s section of the Chicago Exhibition” on “Women’s literary work during this century.” She asks for help with books “for dates etc. etc.” She feels under pressure, having intended to return to Egypt the week before; the paper “must be sent in on the 1st of April” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 87-90. MS 61929).
Thomas Cook and the Egyptian government negotiating mutually favourable terms to benefit British tourists and native travellers (Fraser 144, 66, 76, 280-82). In any case, even if western fascination with Egypt can only end up by corrupting Egyptian culture and its people, imperialism has happened and globalisation is increasing. Pursuing a backward causal chain of blame only leaves the soul, in the words of Poe’s poem, “floating on the floor.” For Blind, the poet’s function is to touch her reader’s capacity for empathy with the traveller’s predicament and reflect on what it says about the nature of the interdependence between the individual and the global community.

In our time, Dipesh Chakrabaty (2009) argues for the academic discipline of history to come to terms with a post-colonial perspective on Blind’s unanswerable question. From his Indian perspective he identifies a need for Subaltern Studies for post-colonial societies to free themselves of western interpretations of their past. He concedes that this is a paradoxical exercise because of its inevitable failure. The reality of writing a history of what happened among the indigenous masses by “provincializing Europe” is flawed from the outset because of the inescapable fact that European elitist histories are inerasably part of the histories of post-colonial societies (Chakrabarty 34-42). Nevertheless, Chakrabarty’s approach to history, like Blind’s approach as a poet, originates in a cosmopolitanism of accepting the world as it is while promoting the reader’s emotional engagement with different histories. Both seek to engage the reader’s interest in, and empathy with, people of different persuasions. Both seek to engage the reader’s social will for change by encouraging a diversity of autonomous assertions about the nature of the interdependence between the individual and her society, and between the individual and the global community.

It is therefore a step backwards for Robert Fletcher (2005) to challenge Victorianists with Said’s synchronic concept of Orientalism, in 1978, when the western stance of superiority over the orient started to be understood. He sees the poems of Blind’s Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident (1895) as a “combination of [Blind’s] bird’s eye view and the reverse chronology” as a regression “from present to past, West to East” and a consequent “double discourse of colonialism” (435). Considering the changes over time since Blind’s disquiet about the tourist’s cultural identity and interdependence with the global community, Homi Bhabha’s (1994) demand for a “diachronic” dimension of
Orientalism serves to appreciate the timeless validity of Blind’s intentions. Blind shares with her reader through the aesthetics of her rapturous forms her own uncertainties as a tourist who inhabits the world as it is at the fin de siècle. Her mission is to engage her reader’s reflections on the traveller’s temporal disjunctions according to her own experiences as part of a process that makes the individual increasingly responsible to reflect on the lives of her fellow human beings in different circumstances and in different cultures.

In accounting for Bhabha’s diachronic dimension, Muireann O’Cinneide (2009) proposes an alternative approach for investigating Victorian Orientalism. Her recommendation is to find out “what it is that interests individual authors” and “to what use they put that interest” in the cultural context of their time, both in terms of production and the reception of their work. It is an approach that generates a plurality of “Victorian Orients” and allows therefore a growing understanding of what seem like geological shifts in Orientalism and the changing perceptions of it (21).

34. O’Cinneide’s argument subverts the missionary zeal of ferreting out Orientalism. She mirrors Bhabha’s criticism of the Western missionary zeal in the demand for narrative. Bhabha quotes as an example from the journals of the missionary C.T.E. Rhenius, 1818:

Rhenius  What do you want?
Indian Pilgrim  Whatever you give I take.
R   What then do you want?
IP  I have already enough of everything.
R   Do you know God?
IP  I know he is in me. When you put rice into a mortar and stamp it with a pestle, the rice gets clean. So, God is known to me [the comparisons of the Heathen are often incomprehensible to a European] (sic) …
IP  But tell me in what shape do you like to see him?
R   In the shape of the Almighty, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Eternal, the Unchangeable, the Holy One, the Righteous, the Truth, The Wisdom and the Love.
IP  I shall show him to you: but first you must learn all that I have learned – then you will see God. (Qtd.in Bhabha 140).

35. Loftus and Wood explore the diachronic changes in respect of the Art of Benin. Change is observed from equal trading relationships in the sixteenth century between the Portuguese and the Benin people compared with the nineteenth-century British protectorate over a “savage people.” Orientalist attitudes accompany the power relationships as Benin artefacts were regarded as objects of ethnographic interest. They were discovered as art by Western avant-garde artists celebrating the authenticity of African objects as “primitive
Blind’s cosmopolitan stance is expressed in her *Birds of Passage* by the design of her poems carrying the undercurrent meaning of ambiguities. As an individual English citizen, she is politically engaged with British perceptions of and attitudes to Egypt in the 1890s. In this capacity she tried to contribute to the controversies about the proposed project of building a dam across the Nile at Aswan. She tells Garnett “in great haste” in a letter dated 14 March 1894 that she is just sending off an article on Philae for the *Fortnightly Review*. She asks him if he could correct “the press” if the Editor should send him a proof. Explaining the piece, she says, “the idea of the submersion of this lovely island has preoccupied me a good deal & I have done [what] I could for it in my paper.” It had been hard work simply because “[t]he flies tease one to such an extent that it is difficult to write the simplest note even” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 111-12. MS 61929).

The article was never published. Thus her attempt failed to penetrate the unified debate about British “political-ideological intentions” (Bhabha 102) of Britain as an imperial power in respect of the Aswan dam. The project involved flooding the Isle of Philae and its temples. The controversy was therefore

---

36. Blind’s manuscript materials include an essay “The Excavation of the Temple of Queen Hatasu at Deir-El-Bahari” from *Egypt Exploration Fund*, in praise of the project for the exceptional architectural features of interest to art lovers and scientists from The Academy, 09 February 1895 (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-curca 1900. Ff. 117. MS 61930).

37. Blind’s manuscript materials include an essay “The Excavation of the Temple of Queen Hatasu at Deir-El-Bahari” from *Egypt Exploration Fund*, in praise of the project for the exceptional architectural features of interest to art lovers and scientists (Correspondence. Vol. IV. 1862-ca. 1900. F 64. MS 61930). Blind’s writes to Garnett on 14 March 1894. She asks him if he “would not mind correcting the press for me in case the Editor sends you a proof” (Correspondence. Vol. III. 1885-96. Ff 87-90. MS 61929).
between economic arguments in favour and archaeological arguments of preservation against the project. The unified debate, according to Casper Andersen (2011), centred on the common view that it “was up to the British and not to the Egyptians to decide whether dam or temple should take precedence” as a “point of convergence” (215). The assumption was that “Egyptians in their modern-day ‘depraved state’ were incapable of appreciating the country’s past” and that they were “incompetent in analysing the requirements of the present situation” (215). Under the circumstances, we must assume that the *Fortnightly Review* could not accommodate an article that failed to comply with the point of convergence.\(^3^8\) In fact, the building of the dam started in 1898 to serve British interests. The shifting attitudes in the post-colonial era explain that “the temples of Philae [were] finally removed to the Island of Agilika in a campaign and programme led by UNESCO” in the 1950s (216).\(^3^9\) Thus Blind’s expression of hope for her reader’s continued willingness to ask unanswerable questions in her *Birds of Passage* has been fulfilled in this particular instance.

It is also interesting to observe that the process of changing attitudes showed already in Blind’s reviewers’ willingness to have the horizon for their perceptions of Egyptian culture expanded. Although to a modern view of Orientalism, their hailing Blind for being the first to celebrate in English verse the “mystery, the charm, the colour of the East” has an orientalist ring, seeing her praised for her “historic imagination” and her “attitude of mind” by having “penetrated some of its remoter secrets” is consoling. They declared her poems to be different from “Fromentin’s saleable Arab cavalier” and the novelist “Loti’s evocation of the Holy Land” (n.p. “Miss Blind’s New Poems”; n.p. “Book

---

\(^{38}\) Fletcher (2005) calls Blind’s attempt of contributing to the public debate a “measure of both Blind’s appreciation for ancient Egyptian culture and the double bind of her placement in the colonial world” (444).

\(^{39}\) Lord Cromer decided in 1898 to have the dam built. Claire Cookson-Hills’s (2013) investigations show the Aswan Dam to have been a technological and financial success in making “Egypt more economically profitable for the British Empire, specifically through cash-crop cotton” (64). However, by destroying an irrigation system that was three thousand years old without appropriate considerations for population displacements, changes to plant and animal life, caused spreading disease. Remaining socio-political issues have left Egypt with the Dam’s “continuing environmental repercussions” (77).
The comparison relates to the Victorian taste for the “Oriental” in “Eastern architectural motifs, furniture, decorative arts, and textiles.” In paintings, Orientalism was exploited for “depicting living scenes in a world sufficiently remote and timeless” that the artist could paint “according to the principles of Realism and simultaneously intend the result to stand as an example of eternal beauty” (Stevens 18, 21). In Said's terms these are signs of “unconscious positivity” or latent Orientalism. The reviewers' unconscious positivity was nevertheless open to Blind’s challenge of asking questions as they welcomed her greater penetration of the secrets of the Orient. Their reception of her poems is thus part of the slow and gradual process of the social evolution of humankind.

I argued in this section that Blind’s *Birds of Passage* is a collection of poems of personal relevance from her nomadic life, but arranged for constructing a *public soul* of a depersonalized tourist. Her theme, as announced in the title for the collection, is to raise questions about geographical North and South signifying from the western perspective a cultural division between the *Orient* and the *Occident*. I argued that personal experience and the experience of the generic type of *the British tourist* merge in these poems as Blind, both as tourist and as poet, shares the uncertainties about the tourist's identity as a matter of the changing nature of the interdependence of the individual and the global community. I also argued that Blind emphasises the uncertainties of a shifting world-view at the fin de siècle by echoing Poe’s poem, “The Raven.” She does so by juxtaposing the earth’s south and north with the western division of orient and occident as an unanswerable question about the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. She associates her poems directly by echoing Poe’s unusual choice of trochaic octameter for two key poems. Her “Prelude” represents her intentions for the juxtaposition of her “Songs of the Orient” and “Songs of the Occident.” Her poem “The Tombs of the Kings” raises the complexity of the tourist’s temporal disjunctions as external and internal reality intersect in such a way that the tourist’s mental state dominates the tourist’s perceptions of the great monument of Egyptian history and culture. The implied shared message is that asking unanswerable questions is the only contribution to the co-evolution of Nature and humankind the tourist has to offer.
5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored Blind’s construction of a public soul from her personal experiences of a nomadic life. All three of the poems focus on her intellectual engagement with the Victorian Zeitgeist at the fin de siècle. Her poem, *The Prophecy of St. Oran* (1881), addresses the history of European religious scepticism by interpreting the sixth-century legend of St. Oran with the nineteenth-century psychological dynamics of scepticism. Her *Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances* (1886) addresses a debate about the current affairs of the national land reform. This is an issue of the Zeitgeist of a British economic cosmopolitanism that incorporates emigration to the colonies as a legitimate measure for managing the local economy. Her last collection of poems in *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895) addresses what McLaughlin (2002) had identified as the “epistemological uncertainty and anxiety” about individual identity in an increasingly globalising world and its corresponding lowering of boundaries between continents and their societies.

I argued that Blind’s deflection of authorial authority for her *Prophecy of St. Oran* (1881) is extending the horizon on the concept of scepticism from its context in the religious and scientific discourse of the age. By imitating Goethe’s manipulative narrator in his *Elective Affinities* and framing the poem with the Gaelic proverb from the sixth-century legend, Blind extends her exploration of the psychological dynamics of scepticism as a relevant duty of inquiry in all spheres of life that affect the individual’s interdependence with society.

I argued that Blind deflects authorial authority for her poem *The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances* (1886) despite her clear commitment to the crofters’ cause by an elaborate two-pronged approach. She declares personal commitment by the dedication of the poem, by a reference to the Bible and by her unmasked Preface to the poem. She annotates the text of the poem with elucidating extracts from texts by other authors to construct an argument against the national land reform. Nevertheless she places poet and reader, and the crofters as subject, at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her poem by her choice of narrator as a teller of a cautionary tale and by structuring the quasi-fable in imitation of Macpherson’s Ossianic ballad.
Blind, associates the most autobiographical project of her collection of reflective moments from her travels in *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895) with Edgar Allan Poe’s poem, “The Raven.” I argued that by adopting an imitation of his unusual choice of meter she signalled not so much a deflection of authorial authority than acknowledging her own sense of uncertainty about the individual tourist’s cultural identity as a shared issue of her age. She asserts this by adopting for two of her key poems, the “Prelude” and the “Tombs of Kings,” couplets in the catalectic trochaic octameter, in which she explores the uncertainty about the individual’s interdependence with the global community in the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. I argued that Blind thereby prefigures Bhabha’s analysis of diachronic layers of constantly changing levels of, and perspectives on, Said’s synchronic concept of latent and manifest orientalism.

In the short last chapter, “Conclusion,” I will sum up the argument of this thesis. I will show that Agathocleous and Rudy’s call for a new methodology has meant to trace the multidirectional causal chains of influence on the production and reception of Blind’s poetry. This, in turn, has uncovered Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice to be science-based in transcending persistent assumptions that literature follows science. Contrary to these assumptions, then and now, Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice conveys her view of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind as she embraces both science and the arts as parts of a common social context.
6 Conclusion

I explored in this thesis Blind’s contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism as a biographer and translator, as an essayist and reviewer, and as a novelist and poet. I did so by tracing multidirectional causal chains of influence on the aesthetic quality of her texts and on the reception of her work by her contemporaries and by modern literary critics. I argued that Blind’s contribution is consistently cosmopolitan because of her science-based view of the interdependence between the individual and society in the continuum of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind. All her texts are informed by Blind’s recognition of the Darwinian concept of autonomy as an intrinsic attribute of the individual and the consequent diversity in the species as the source of both biological and social evolution. As a writer and poet, Blind’s contribution to the social evolution of humankind is to transcend ideological polarizations in the public domain with the aim of restoring the equilibrium between institutions and opinions.

Her method as biographer or reviewer is to analyse the aspirations and achievements of her subject in the struggle with the specific circumstances of her life in the wider relevant cultural contexts of the subject’s time. It is the modern historian’s approach in that the aim is to address the reader’s interests in a specific subject with an interpretation that is supported by the available primary sources. It is a methodology that accepts authorial responsibility, while deflecting authorial authority. I argued that Blind’s Madame Roland demonstrates her reader’s appreciation of the approach by the fact that a historian identified the shortcomings that were introduced by the publisher’s enforced major cut of the manuscript.

As a novelist and poet, Blind takes the opposite approach to her non-fictional work. She presents typologies of social situations that are denuded of the detail of a case history’s social realism. Her aim is to engage her reader’s passions in the universal stories of the human being. She trusts her reader’s autonomous interpretation of the reading-experience and consequent social will for change in consideration of related public controversies. The diversity of reader responses is ensured by her readers’ different life experiences and ideological commitments.
Like the scientist, Blind separates her *professional function* as a writer and poet from the *self* and from her personal political radicalism. As for a scientist, her choice of interest and research is influenced by her early life experiences and her aspirations and struggles in the specific circumstances of her early years. Also like the scientist, she separates her personal interest in a field of investigation from her *professional function* by her choice of an appropriate methodology for her research. Both Blind and the scientist employ the chosen methodology to see themselves as researching subject and as object within the data of their investigations.

In literary terms, Shelley had expressed this process as the poet being both creation and creator of her age. As creation of her age, Blind recognizes the cultural influences she shares with her reader like a *cloud of mind* that is shaped by the works of great artists, in literature, the visual arts and music. She signals her status as creation of her age by associating her novel and her long poems with the works of great artists, *masterpieces of Nature* that transcend the specificity of their creators' own time with their influence on the cultural receptiveness of her age. As creator, Blind links scientist and poet to their age by their different methodologies. The scientist with the *slower processes of methodical research* creates new knowledge about the natural world; the *representative poems of the world seem to body forth the view of Nature, which is essentially the product of their age and nation*.

However, the difference between knowledge and understanding the relevance of one's knowledge is for both scientist and poet a cultural issue. The culturally unquestioned assumption that evolution was *charting a uniform course for mankind*, together with the intellectual dominance of the scientists, created a *Zeitgeist* that favoured a conflation of biological and social evolution. The relevance of the theory of biological evolution by natural selection was seen to be in the discovery of a tool for managing the social evolution of humankind by manipulating natural selection with eugenic policies and endeavours. Consequently, scientists were unable to see Blind's vision of the co-evolution of Nature and humankind as consistent with Darwinian law of natural selection in response to environmental changes across geographical regions and over time. The intellectual dominance of the scientist made it possible for Wallace to dismiss Blind's *Ascent of Man* even in the introduction to the second edition of her book, in 1899. While Blind's reader responded well to the refiguration of the
Greek Dionysian festival for her typology of the manifold histories of humankind, the naturalists were not receptive to the idea. The hierarchical world-view of the time induced reviewers to explain the disagreement by pronouncing Blind’s intelligence to be not strong enough for such an ambitious project.

Blind was spared the humiliation of this dismissal, as it came three years after her death. However, she would not have been able to respond in her defence because her commitment to deflecting authorial authority included an audible silence about all her private data. Deflection of authorial authority is undermined when critics use private data to infer authority from extra-textual evidence. Similarly, periodization for a designated field of study for modern literary criticism undermines Blind’s deflection of authorial authority. Investigations of comparability of Blind’s text as significant for Victorian poetry make Blind’s poetry susceptible to inter-textual interpretations that assume authorial authority. Blind’s supposed authorial intentions are extracted from inter-textual readings with the result that she has been declared to be St. Oran’s hagiographer, a feminist in her “Dramas in Miniature,” a polemicist in her “The Heather on Fire” and an imperialist in her “Birds of Passage.” These are inferences based on the assumption that Blind’s audible silence does not have a professional purpose, but is relevant only for a biographical interest in her life and work. While these inferences are evidence for the twenty-first-century reception of her poetry, they leave room for further investigation.

Agathocleous and Rudy’s call for a new methodology of striving to close-read the aesthetic qualities of literary texts within an increasingly complex and far-reaching historical and geographical frame opens up the opportunity to explore Blind’s poetry in the context of all her writing. By tracing the influences from the multidirectional causal chains on Blind’s personal radicalism and the development of her autonomous cosmopolitan voice, it becomes clear that Blind deflects authorial authority as a means for her professional function as a writer and poet which is comparable to the professional function of a committed scientist. At the same time, it becomes apparent that critics, like poets, are creations and creator of their age.

Blind remained invisible for literary critics of our time as a result of the limitations of periodization and the focus on the “Victorian Poet” and “Victorian Woman Poet.” She received first serious attention in the more inclusive field of study of “Fin-de-Siècle.” However, only by breaking out of the limitations of
periodization for the theme-based field of study “Victorian Cosmopolitanisms” and the concomitant change of methodology is it possible to investigate Blind’s audible silence as significant for the aesthetic qualities of her literary texts. It is significant for her methodology of deflecting authorial authority in her poetry by placing poet, subject and reader at an equal distance to the inner narrative of her poem.

By tracing the multidirectional causal chains on the reception of Blind’s poetry we overcome a barrier to recognizing what Jonathan Smith (2003) has identified as our persistent assumption that “the traffic between science and literature travels in one direction, with literary responding to the scientific, even when the two are regarded as parts of a common social context” (147). Blind’s poetry presents the human being as subject to the universal laws of Nature. The laws of Nature subordinate the individual to the diversity within the species, and hence to the diversity of points of view within society. The individual’s social will carries responsibility rather than authority. Blind’s autonomous cosmopolitan voice is her contribution to Victorian cosmopolitanism across a variety of themes, all of which are open to theme-based approaches for investigating her contribution to Victorian literature, from her cosmopolitan stance, at the fin de siècle.
Works Cited

Unpublished Manuscript Materials.


Printed Published Materials.


March 2015.


---. Rev. (unsigned) of "Glenaveril; or, the Metamorphoses. By the Earl of 

---. Rev. (unsigned) of "Love Is Enough; or, the Freeing of Pharamond: a 
Morality. By William Morris. (Ellis & White.)" *The Athenaeum*.2352 

21 March 2015.

---. Rev. (unsigned) of "The Poetical Works of Frances Anne Kemble." *The 
2015.

---. Rev. (unsigned) of *Silenus*. By Thomas Woolner. (Macmillan & Co.)" *The 
2015.

---. "A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff." *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art. A 
Memoir*. Ed. Theuriet, André: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892. *Digital General 

Bonfiglio, Richard. "Cosmopolitan Realism: Portable Domesticity in Brontë's 

"Book Review." Rev. of "*Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident. 
By Mathilde Blind. (Chatto & Windus).*" *The Athenaeum*.3535 (1895): 

Boos, Florence S. "Love Is Enough as a Secular Theodicy." *Papers on 
Web. 10 March 2015.


Rev. of "Dramas in Miniature. By Mathilde Blind. (Chatto & Windus)."


Goldin, Frederick. Rev. of The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature, by Wendy Pfeffer. (American University Studies, ser. 3:


Hoffmann, Heinrich. Der Struwwelpeter Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag, 1844. Gutenberg Project (German and English). Web. 03 April 2015.


