

**EVOLUTIONARY FEMINISM IN LATE-
VICTORIAN WOMEN'S POETRY:
MATHILDE BLIND, CONSTANCE NADEN
AND MAY KENDALL**

by

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Abstract

In recent years, feminist critics have moved from focusing on the misogynistic aspects of late-Victorian evolutionary science to recognising that many women found liberating possibilities within this science. However, most studies of evolution and gender in New Woman writing have concentrated on serious novels. This thesis is the first full-length study of representations of evolution in women's poetry. Focusing predominantly on the work of Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and May Kendall, I examine how the depiction of evolution in women's poetry of the 1880s and 1890s, particularly comic poetry, responds to the conclusions of professional scientists about the application of evolutionary theory to human society. By reading the poetry in the context of contemporary scientific works, in books and periodicals, I demonstrate that, unlike many social Darwinists, who used evolutionary theory to reinforce the status quo, these poets found aspects within Darwin's work that could be used to disrupt assumptions about natural femininity and to argue for the necessity of social change. The themes examined in this thesis include change, the blurring of boundaries and undermining of hierarchies, the association of white women with people of other races in scientific discourse, and Darwin's representation of women's sexual and reproductive role.

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By his enthusiastic belief in her he gave her the only thing she wanted – a thorough belief in herself. (Mathilde Blind, *George Eliot* 89)

Contents

Introduction	1
Evolution and Feminism	1
Gender and Science in Periodicals and Novels	4
Poetry and Humour	15
Literature Review	21
Structure of the Thesis	28
1. Biographies	31
The Poets and Science	31
Mathilde Blind	33
Constance Naden	45
May Kendall	56
Other Poets	65
“Pin Your Faith to Darwin”	68
2. Change	78
Social Darwinism	78
Darwin and Change	81
Celebrating Change	86
Progressive Evolution	96
Undirected Change	105
Lamarckian Evolution	113
Conclusion	122
3. Crossing the Line	125
Hierarchies and Boundaries	125
“ <i>The Lower Life</i> ”	129
Language and Classification	139
<i>Punch</i> and Species Boundaries	149
Conclusion	158
4. The Other	160
Race and Gender	160
Identification and Appropriation in Blind’s Poetry	167
Race and “Fitness” in <i>The Heather on Fire</i>	178
Kendall and Craniology	187
Conclusion	196
5. Sexual Selection	199
Darwin and Femininity	199

Mating Rituals in “The Song of the Willi”	204
Blind and Sexual Selection in the 1880s	211
Naden and Human Sexual Selection	219
Blind and Motherhood	230
Childlessness in Naden’s Poetry	240
Conclusion	247
Conclusion	250
Summary	250
The Decline of Evolutionary Feminism	254
The Language of Science	261
Appendix 1: Poems	271
Appendix 2: Illustrations to May Kendall’s Poems in <i>Punch</i>	295
Bibliography	298

Introduction

Evolution and Feminism

When Mill wrote on the “Subjection of Women,” Darwin had already written on the “Origin of Species,” but there is no sign that the speculations of the naturalist had told upon the conclusions of the logician, nor did the average reader see why they should do so. Since that time there is no department of thought which they have not influenced. (Julia Wedgwood, “Male and Female Created He Them” 122)

The quotation above from an 1889 *Contemporary Review* article by Charles Darwin’s niece, Julia Wedgwood, demonstrates how pervasive the influence of evolutionary theory had become in the three decades since the publication of *The Origin of Species*. As the reference to John Stuart Mill suggests, the Woman Question was one department of thought with which late-Victorian evolutionary science was particularly concerned. With the rise of the figure of the New Woman, women’s increasing entry into higher education, demands for greater access to the professions for unmarried women, campaigns for more equal marriage and divorce laws, including custody of children for divorced mothers, and the beginnings of agitation for women’s suffrage, the last two decades of the nineteenth century were a time of increasing anxiety for those who wanted to keep Victorian gender hierarchies intact. Authors on both sides of this debate made use of evolutionary science to give authority to their arguments.

Focusing particularly on the work of Mathilde Blind (1841-1896), Constance Naden (1858-1889) and May Kendall (1861-1943), this study analyses the ways in which the presentation of evolutionary science in New Woman poetry of the 1880s and 1890s works both to reinforce and disrupt the conclusions of professional scientists about the

application of evolutionary theory to human society and gender relations.¹ I have chosen to focus particularly on these poets because all three of them demonstrate a sustained engagement with the language, imagery and ideas of Victorian science, as well as an explicit or implicit commitment to the principles of women's rights. The work of four other women poets – L.S. Bevington, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emily Pfeiffer, and A. Mary F. Robinson – will also be discussed in this thesis.² These poets will not receive the same degree of attention as Blind, Naden and Kendall because Gilman was more of a prose writer than a poet and the other three were less consistently concerned with either evolution or feminism so their work does not participate to the same extent in the evolutionary feminist poetic strategy that I have identified in the work of the other three poets.

My focus in this study will be on the ways in which evolutionary theory could be used to support a variety of different, and even opposing, arguments, especially in relation to questions of gender. I will argue that the poets featured in this study took scientific theories that were frequently used to oppose increased rights for women and found potentially feminist elements within them. I will contrast the use of evolution in New Woman poetry with its use in other genres of New Woman literature such as periodical articles and realist novels in order to highlight the similar themes and approaches found in different genres of feminist literature but also the significant differences between the poetic and prose texts.

In the title of this thesis I have defined the poets' responses to evolutionary theory as "evolutionary feminism", despite the fact that the term "feminism" was not in use in

¹ Although the term "New Woman" was not coined until 1894 (Ledger 2), and the poets' most overtly scientific poetry was published before this date, the New Woman figure was in existence before she was named. I am following Linda Hughes's example in designating feminist poets from the mid 1880s onwards as New Women (*New Woman Poets 2*).

² Unlike Blind, Naden and Kendall, these poets all married and changed their names. I will refer to all of them by the name they are most frequently known by in their published works and in modern literary criticism.

Britain in the 1880s, when most of the poetry that will be examined in this thesis was written. The term “féminisme” was coined in France in the 1880s and spread to Britain in the 1890s, only gradually entering into common usage (Offen 126). In this thesis I will follow the example of critics like Barbara Caine and Philippa Levine by applying the terms “feminist” and “feminism” to women who were active shortly before these terms began to be used in Britain, on the grounds that there is continuity between the women’s rights campaigns of the 1880s and the twentieth-century feminist movement (Caine 4-7; Levine 14). Designating Blind and Naden as feminists is relatively straightforward since both poets interrogate gender stereotypes in their work and both were involved with campaigns for women’s suffrage. Blind’s membership of the Literary Ladies dining club and Naden’s campaigning for a variety of women’s causes, both of which will be discussed in the following chapter, suggest a sense of solidarity with other women and an awareness of sexual inequality. Some of the other poets who will be mentioned in this thesis – particularly Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Emily Pfeiffer – were also involved with feminist political causes, especially the campaign for women’s suffrage. These writers would be described as feminists by modern commentators even though Gilman herself rejected the label of “feminist” when the use of this term became widespread in the twentieth century (Golden 263 n.2).

The question of whether Kendall can be described as a feminist is a more complicated one. Although she is known to have been politically active as a member of the socialist Fabian Society, there is no surviving evidence of her having been involved in any campaigns for women’s rights. She rarely addresses gender relations in her work and when she does deal with these questions she can sometimes be seen as mocking feminism rather than advocating it. However, the seeming mockery of feminism in some of Kendall’s work, such as the comment in her novel *Such is Life* that one character “seemed a kind

soul, in spite of a certain air of Woman's Suffrage" (88), seems more like light-hearted self-mockery than genuine ridicule. As I will argue in later chapters, although Kendall rarely speaks openly about questions of gender, several of her poems can be read as attacking sexual inequality indirectly. While it is true that I do not have enough evidence to be sure of Kendall's opinion on many questions relating to women's rights and women's suffrage or to know whether she was actively involved in any feminist campaigns, she can certainly be designated a New Woman. As an unmarried, educated, financially independent woman who invaded masculine territory in her writing for *Punch* she was among those who were actively involved in widening women's sphere, whatever her opinion on specific questions relating to women's political position. Moreover, her poetry, although it does not specifically focus on gender, criticises the current system, undermines hierarchies and promotes a vision of change and possibility, which aligns it with more overtly feminist writing.

In the remainder of this introduction I will outline the debates about evolution and women's rights that were being conducted in popular periodicals in the late nineteenth century and will relate the techniques used by feminist journalists in periodicals to the similar responses to evolution found in New Woman novels and women's poetry. I will discuss the humorous nature of many of the poems that will be examined in this thesis and examine the poets' use of humour as a political tool. I will give a brief survey of the critical work produced to date on the theme of science in the work of the three main poets discussed in this thesis. In my concluding section I will outline the structure of the thesis and briefly restate my aims.

Gender and Science in Periodicals and Novels

The reading of general periodicals will inform my discussion of late-Victorian science as much as the study of major scientific works such as Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*. Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of periodicals in disseminating scientific information and ideas in the nineteenth century:

From the perspective of readers, science was omnipresent, and general periodicals played a far greater role than books in shaping the public understanding of new scientific discoveries, theories, and practices. (Cantor et al. 1-2)

Although Naden studied science at university and is known to have read and written for specialist journals, including the *Journal of Science and Knowledge*, there is some evidence in her poetry of an awareness of more popular scientific writings and contemporary debates in periodicals. Blind had access to important scientific works through the reading room of the British Museum but her correspondence reveals that she also read periodicals in which science was presented for a non-specialist audience, such as the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Westminster Review* (Blind, Correspondence and Papers 1: 21, 1: 47). There is no surviving evidence of Kendall's scientific reading but her work, more than that of the other two poets, shows an engagement with topical issues in science and recent periodical articles. The following chapter will address the poets' scientific reading in more detail but for now it is sufficient to note that all three of them would have encountered popular science writing as well as books that were written for a more specialist audience.

An examination of periodical articles from the 1880s and 1890s reveals the ways in which debates about gender and science were intertwined in *fin-de-siècle* British culture.

Discussions of the Woman Question in general periodicals often echoed Darwin's conclusions about female inferiority in *The Descent of Man*, such as the assertion that:

The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn [sic] by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman – whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands. (629)

Anti-feminists' discussions of the Woman Question in late-Victorian periodicals frequently used the study of women's brains and bodies, and comparisons with other species, to prove that women were less intelligent, less logical, less original and less "fit" than men and that their predestined role in life was maternity. George Romanes's notorious 1887 article, "Mental Differences Between Men and Women", exemplifies such reasoning:

Seeing that the average brain-weight of women is about five ounces less than that of men, on merely anatomical grounds we should be prepared to expect a marked inferiority of intellectual power in the former. Moreover, as the general physique of women is less robust than that of men – and therefore less able to sustain the fatigue of serious or prolonged brain action – we should also on physiological grounds be prepared to entertain a similar anticipation. (654-5)

It was also alleged that higher education harmed women's reproductive systems, and that no amount of intellectual work by women could compensate for the great men that they might otherwise have given birth to:

Bacon, for want of a mother, will not be born. She who should have been his mother will perhaps be a very distinguished collegian. That one truism says it all – women are made and meant to be, not men, but mothers of men. (Dr. Withers-Moore, qtd. in Linton, “The Higher Education” 503-4)

As well as using science to argue against a greater public role for women, these authors also kept the argument about women’s rights rooted in the scientific evidence, an area of debate in which most women were at a disadvantage due to their inferior education. Through sneering references to the illogicality of feminism, such as Romanes’s comment that “the human female would but illustrate her own deficiency of rational development by supposing that any exception to the general laws of evolution can have been made in her favour” (665), they ensured that feminists could not be taken seriously if they tried to argue on moral or social grounds without referring to science. An example of this can be found in an 1886 article by the anti-feminist author Eliza Lynn Linton:

Scarcely a week passes without some letter in the papers, wherein an imperfectly-educated woman attacks a master in his profession, on the ground of her sentiment as superior to his facts – her spiritual enlightenment the Aaron’s rod which swallows up his inferior little serpents of scientific truths. (Linton “The Higher Education” 502)

These authors dictated the terms of the debate and dismissed any arguments that were based on abstract concepts like justice and equality instead of biological facts.

As a result of the frequent allegations of feminism's unscientific and illogical nature, many feminist journalists used evolutionary ideas in their periodical articles to refute the charge that they were engaged in an impossible battle against the laws of nature. As Cynthia Eagle Russett observes:

Only at the very end of the century did cultural interpretations begin to achieve respectability; prior to that time they were simply dismissed as unscientific. So it is understandable why, given the enormous prestige of science and the universal acceptance of its authoritative status in matters of sex difference, some women tried to confront scientific antifeminism on its own terms. (13)

In their responses to these anti-feminist periodical articles, some feminists argued that moral and social lessons could not be drawn directly from nature, because there is more to human life than the attempt to "be a good animal" (McKerlie 112). Others pointed out that nature is diverse and multifarious and that examples can be found of a variety of different relations between the sexes in other species. In her 1887 response to Romanes's "Mental Differences", Edith Simcox contests Romanes's assertion that psychological differences between the sexes can be found throughout nature and observes that:

Even among the vertebrates, it was not a foregone conclusion from the first that the mother bird or fish should hatch and protect the young: this function is shared or monopolised by the male so often that we can not be certain, if the rulers of the world had been developed from the races that swim or creep or fly, that intellectual birds or moralised reptiles would have noticed the same psychological sex distinctions as ourselves. (391-2)

Most Victorian feminists accepted the idea of some degree of difference in the minds and characters of men and women. Some argued that such differences had been developed through environment and social circumstances and would not exist under more favourable conditions, as Helen McKerlie did in her 1887 response to Linton's "Higher Education of Women":

[A] man has been trained and educated by the struggle of life. Each generation of men starts at a higher stage of development than the last; while women, so far as their minds and characters go, have been left uncultured, and in the general affairs of life they have made no progress worth speaking of. (McKerlie 115)

In her response to Romanes's article, Simcox accepts that a sexual division of labour may have been useful during earlier phases of human evolution but reminds the reader that "there is a difference between things practically useful under given material conditions and things belonging to the eternal and immutable 'nature of things'" (392). Other feminists, including Julia Wedgwood, accepted and exaggerated the idea of innate biological differences between the sexes in order to argue for the moral superiority of women:

Woman inherits a longer tradition of moral relation than man does: she, in the very dawn of her existence, finds herself dowered with a heritage of instincts unknown to him; he passes through a long stage of his education before he knows himself to be a father, but she is, from the first, consciously a mother. He is not more surely the stronger in the realm of physical might than she is the elder in that of moral law. (Wedgwood 125)

In this case the argument that women are defined by their biological function is used to raise the status of women rather than to restrict their activities or opportunities.

Other authors subverted evolutionary arguments more directly by taking common themes of anti-feminist articles, particularly the ideas of fitness and degeneration, and using them to support opposite conclusions to the ones reached by anti-feminist writers. For example, M. Eastwood argues in an 1894 article that instead of being an evolutionary anomaly, destined to die out because of her damaged reproductive organs, the New Woman is in fact a higher type:

Far from being unfitted for the world in which she lives, she is adapting herself with marvellous rapidity to its altered conditions. And why should she not? Why should the strong current of evolution which bears all else before it, leave woman alone behind? (91)

Olive Schreiner uses a similar technique in her book *Woman and Labour*.³ In opposition to the suggestion that female advancement would lead to the degeneration of the race as a whole because women would be unfitted for motherhood, Schreiner argues that divorcing women from labour turns them into sexual parasites who are entirely dependent on men for their survival. The extreme passivity of this role will lead to female degeneration and consequently to the degeneration of their male descendents:

The conception which again and again appears to have haunted successive societies, that it was a possibility for the human male to advance in physical power

³ Although *Woman and Labour* was not published until 1911, Schreiner began working on it in the 1880s (Felski 156-7) and the book reflects the rhetorical strategies used by *fin-de-siècle* feminists.

and intellectual vigour, while his companion female became stationary and inactive, taking no share in the labours of society beyond the passive fulfilment of sexual functions, has always been negated. It has ended as would end the experiment of a man seeking to raise a breed of winning race-horses out of unexercised, short-winded, knock-kneed mares. (106-7)

With its social-Darwinistic tone and the use of another species as an analogy, the structure of Schreiner's argument is very similar to that of the anti-feminist books and articles that she is arguing against but she appropriates their rhetorical strategies while arguing for the opposite conclusion.

This technique was also used in New Woman novels. Writers like Schreiner and Mona Caird subverted evolutionary discourse to promote a more feminist interpretation of the science. For example, in *From Man to Man*, Schreiner reverses the idea, found in the work of many late-nineteenth century evolutionists including the sexologist Havelock Ellis, with whom Schreiner had a relationship, that the male drives evolution while the female preserves the past characteristics of the race (Weeks para.4; Ellis 420-1). Schreiner takes the commonly held idea that humans' walking on their hind legs was associated with the use of tools and subverts it by presenting a vision of human evolutionary development being driven by women's caring responsibilities instead:

It [the early human] tried hard to set the sole of its hind limb flat on the ground and to straighten out its hip, so that the fore limb might be free to carry the helpless young, and to pick the fruits and dig out roots. (404)

Throughout the novel, Schreiner argues that nurturing and cooperation have been more important to evolutionary development than struggle and competition, and that the role of women and female animals has been central to this development:

Neither man nor bird nor beast, nor even insect, is what it is and has survived here to-day, simply because the stronger has preyed on the weaker. ... [T]hrough all nature, life and growth and evolution are possible only because of mother-love. (185)

In this way Schreiner replaces the masculine priorities that normally dominated evolutionary discourse with feminine ones, while also making a claim for the crucial role of the female in evolutionary development.

Caird's *Daughters of Danaus* subverts evolutionary discourse more directly by reinterpreting concepts of struggle and fitness from a feminist perspective. Hadria, the main character of the novel, implicitly contests the association of "fitness" with superiority when she sarcastically suggests that it makes evolutionary good sense to emulate the women who succeed in life by manipulating men:

It is cunning, shallow, heartless women who really fare best in our society; its conditions suit them. *They* have no pity, no sympathy to make a chain of; *they* don't mind stooping to conquer; *they* don't mind playing upon the weaker, baser sides of men's natures; ... *That* is the sort of "woman's nature" that our conditions are busy selecting. Let us cultivate it. We live in a scientific age; the fittest survive. Let us be "fit". (347)

Hadria's own story demonstrates that success or failure is no indication of superiority or inferiority, only of the ability to succeed under particular conditions. The novel implies that the best women are being crushed by Victorian society while the shallow and manipulative succeed. As a young woman Hadria had a strong constitution and a talent for musical composition but she has been exhausted and prevented from working on her music by the harassing demands of her parents, husband and children: "Without entirely abandoning her music, it had, perforce, to fall into abeyance" (371). Shortly after this she meets a young man at a dinner party whose arguments about women's innate lack of originality echo those of evolutionists like Romanes, who noted in "Mental Differences Between Men and Women" that "it is a matter of ordinary comment that in no one department of creative thought can women be said to have at all approached men, save in fiction. Yet in poetry, music and painting ... the field has always been open to both" (655). Like Romanes, Hadria's dining companion dismisses the argument that cultural factors could have contributed to women's lack of success in the arts:

Women's strength lay in a different domain—in the home. It was of no use to try to fight against Nature. Look at music for instance; one required no particular liberty to pursue *that* art, yet where were the women-composers? If there was so much buried talent among women, why didn't they arise and bring out operas and oratorios? (372)

Hadria does not respond but for the reader her own story acts as an implicit challenge to this view. By parodying the language and arguments of evolutionary sexism, Caird reveals the flaws and inconsistencies in the evolutionists' conclusions about women's abilities and she subjects these conclusions to ridicule.

Modern historians' and literary critics' assessments of this scientific feminism generally deem it to have been a failure. Evelleen Richards asserts that the strand of

Victorian feminism that was based on naturalistic, scientific explanations for human behaviour and society, in opposition to patriarchal religion, was “effectively undermin[ed]” by late-nineteenth-century Darwinism’s collusion with the “bourgeois social order” (“Darwin” 61). She suggests that those feminists who were also committed Darwinians were increasingly forced to accept ideas of biological determinism and an innate difference between the sexes as a result of evolutionary science’s growing disregard for environmental and social factors as scientific explanations (96). Sally Ledger, in her discussion of evolution in Mona Caird’s novels, comes to a similar conclusion about the incompatibility of Darwinism and feminism. Although she acknowledges that feminists’ appropriation of the vocabulary of the “dominant discourse” of evolutionary science “had both benefits and limitations” (24), her arguments for the limitations of this strategy are more persuasive:

But there are also, clearly, disadvantages to using the language of the dominant discourse when attempting to challenge it, since the parameters of debate have thereby been laid down by that dominant discourse, leaving the challenger hidebound by the vocabulary available in which to frame a challenge. By contesting the logic of evolutionism in its own terms, Mona Caird’s challenge in *The Daughters of Danaus* is from its inception radically limited. (28)

She concludes that ultimately “Caird’s negotiation of evolutionist discourses finally seems to defeat the powerful feminist vision of her fiction” (30). Although I am more inclined to agree with Angelique Richardson that “the most politically effective aspect of Caird’s art lies in the fact that she chooses to subvert scientific discourse from within, radically reworking the coordinates of the evolutionary terms within which she is working”

(“People Talk a Lot of Nonsense” 199), Ledger is right to observe that scientific terminology carries ideological baggage that can dictate the terms of the debate. Like Caird, the poets in this study appropriate the language of evolutionary science in order to subvert the sexist assumptions often made by its proponents. In the following section I will move on to examine the unique aspects of the poetic responses to evolution, particularly the role of humour and poetic form.

Poetry and Humour

Despite the recent critical interest in the use of evolutionary themes in Victorian women’s writing, very little attention has yet been paid to the use of these themes in the work of women poets. R.K.R. Thornton and Marion Thain have suggested that, in contrast to the themes of decline and degeneration in the work of male *fin-de-siècle* poets, female poets “used Darwinian theory to imagine a future in which they would come into their own in literary, social and political spheres” (262) but, as yet, no critic has examined the theme of evolution in *fin-de-siècle* women’s poetry in detail. Building on Rita Felski’s argument that many New Woman novelists were unable to substantially re-imagine women’s role in society because “the constraints of a predominantly realist format” kept their characters trapped within “the social and sexual realities of [their] time” (146), I will examine whether poetry, and particularly humorous poetry, allows its authors more freedom to explore alternative versions of reality. Linda Hughes suggests that poetry has not always been included in the category of New Woman literature because poetry is less likely than novels to include overt political statement (*New Woman Poets* 1). She argues that this is due to the influence of aestheticism on women poets of this period:

By choosing to focus on beauty or art as an end in itself, for example, women could deflect attack and, even more important, explore their own ambivalence about contemporary society and feminism without having to reject any single position or possibility (ibid.)

My own study will take this lack of overt political statement into account, focusing both on the explicit representations of gender in the poetry and also the ways in which the imagery of evolution contributes to a vision of equality and progress. In the case of Kendall and Naden, the lack of political statement is not purely due to aestheticism but also to their frequent use of humour.⁴ Like aestheticism, humour allows female poets to deflect attack and to raise questions rather than being tied to a single political position. It enables them to bypass existing social realities and to raise ideas without being challenged on the facts, as feminist writers in non-fiction forms invariably were.

It is appropriate that Naden and Kendall's responses to evolutionary theory often took a humorous form because, as Dwight Culler has indicated, with its reversals of established values and its emphasis on chance, Darwin's writing shares several important techniques with comedy (237-8). Both defamiliarise common objects or behaviour and upset the reader's preconceptions. This function of humour has long been recognised as potentially political:

[H]umorous and comic representations function politically by revealing contradictions in ideological discourses, by exposing repressed illogicalities and

⁴ Robert Bernard Martin has noted that in the nineteenth century a distinction was made between wit and humour (37-8). Wit was seen as a cruel form of comedy while humour was warmer, showing sympathy with other human beings but not necessarily provoking laughter. In this discussion I am using "humour" in the modern sense, to denote anything that causes amusement.

prejudices, by way of irony or ridicule, attendant to nineteenth-century ideologies of gender, class, race, nationalism. (Wagner-Lawlor xvi)

Naden and Kendall use the combination of science and humour to question the idea of objective reality and to suggest that there is nothing inevitable about the current state of society. Their humorous poetry makes subtle political points by subverting or questioning elements of their culture, undermining smug male characters and foregrounding minority perspectives. It could be argued that detailed academic study is an inappropriate response to poetry that was written primarily for amusement but these poets often use their humour to intervene in serious debates about the meaning of evolutionary theory for human society and for an understanding of the role of women within that society.

The technical qualities of the poems play a role in the political aspects of the poetry and are worthy of close examination. In her work on the function of rhyme, Gillian Beer has indicated some ways in which comic rhyme can be subversive or troubling:

Rhyme's unargued juxtaposition of unlike words can topple all the grave hierarchies of what it is polite (or politic) to couple with what. So 'light verse' may throw light on the dark corners of a culture. ("Rhyming as Resurrection" 200)

She also argues that rhyme contaminates: "Its mimicry of the first word rhymed-on may call the bluff of that term and challenge its autonomy" (ibid.). Marion Thain has observed that Naden takes advantage of this effect of rhyme to undermine the masculine, authoritative language of science:

[In “Scientific Wooing”] it is not accidental that “enigma” rhymes with “stigma” and “random” with “*Quod erat demonstrandum!*” The “certainties” of empirical science are implicitly reduced to mystery and chance. (“Scientific Wooing” 159)

As these writers have shown, close reading of humorous verse can help to reveal the strategies which this poetry uses to question or undermine the dominant discourses of its society. Beer, Thain and Patricia Murphy have demonstrated how this kind of analysis can contribute to our understanding of Naden and Kendall’s poetry, and my own work will build on their example.

On the other hand, as I suggested earlier, the use of humour can also represent an avoidance of a political statement. Margaret D. Stetz argues that the humour used in New Woman poetry was “a version of ridicule moderate enough to allow for continued relations between the jokester and the object of mockery” (226) because women recognised that as long as power was concentrated in the hands of men it would be counterproductive to offend them. Humorous verse can be less threatening and less likely to provoke a negative response than an overtly political statement would be. Naden and Kendall’s satires on Victorian gender politics are fairly gentle and would be unlikely to offend the men or the institutions they targeted. Stetz concludes that ultimately humorous verse alone was not enough to effect any real change: “Even as they laughed, they recognised that satire is no substitute for political solidarity and that poking fun at patriarchy cannot do the work of organized action” (240). Both Naden and Kendall eventually moved away from poetry and turned to more overtly political activities like campaigning for women’s suffrage or documenting the conditions of poor women’s lives.

As with their use of evolutionary discourse, Kendall and Naden’s decision to write humorous verse can be seen as an appropriation of a masculine form. Stetz has noted that

wit was generally depicted as a masculine quality in the nineteenth century (221). This view is supported by Alfred H. Miles's comments on May Kendall's poetry in the volume of his *Poets and Poetry of the Century* dedicated to humorous verse. After noting that Kendall is the only woman featured in this volume he goes on to observe that:

A glance at other collections of the humorous poets of the century shows that ... no woman poet of the century receives more than passing mention for humorous work. This would seem to go far to prove the contention often made that women are distinctly lacking in a sense of humour. ("May Kendall" 613)

Other comments on Kendall's work, such as the anonymous review of *Dreams to Sell* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, reinforce this association between humour and masculinity:

We prefer Miss May Kendall's humorous verse to her serious. The latter is sweet and tender; but it is such as many women have written and could write; the former has a quite masculine force. ("Five Volumes of Verse" 3)

Conversely, Marion Thain suggests that humour played a role in a specifically feminine poetic strategy at the *fin de siècle*. She sees women poets' use of humorous verse as an element of the contrast that she and R.K.R. Thornton have noted between the themes of decay and decline in male-authored poetry and the greater optimism in poetry by women (Thornton and Thain 261-2). She suggests that women poets were reacting against the pessimism of Decadent poetry, and using humour in a "playful, revisionary approach to poetic tradition which helps them to find their own identity as women poets" ("Michael Field" 76). Both of these elements are in play in Kendall and Naden's humorous poetry;

their use of humour represents a refusal to write in an acceptably feminine form but their approach to humour is inflected by their female experience of marginalisation and is often used to mock existing power structures or suggest optimism about the future.

Blind has been described, somewhat unfairly, as having had “no discernible sense of humour” (Srebrnik para. 2). It is true that her work is less overtly humorous than that of the other two poets in this study, but at times she does make use of a jaunty metre or unconventional imagery in an amusing way. For example, in “The Song of the Willi”, from *Dramas in Miniature*, in which a dead woman rises from the grave to dance her fiancé to death, Blind playfully sets a song-like metre and the repeated refrain “Heigho!” against images of decomposition:

I rise from my bed, and my bed has no feather,
Heigho, heigho!
My bed is deep down in the brown sullen mould,
My head is laid low on the clod;
So wormy the sheets, and the pillow so cold,
Of clammy and moist clinging sod. (I lines 3-8)

The poem develops into a love duet in which conventional romantic descriptions of the woman’s body are replaced by “dank tresses” and cold lips (XVII 3, 7). Some of Blind’s poems, although not humorous in themselves, hold two contradictory possibilities in balance without coming to a clear resolution, as in “Snow or Snowdrops?”. This is a characteristic shared by some humorous or nonsense poetry (Gray 222). Blind does not generally use humour to make political points, as the other poets do. On the few occasions when she does use satire the tone is more bitter than in Naden and Kendall’s writing:

Yea, who prowl there, hunger-nipped and pallid,
Breathing nightmares limned upon the gloom?
'Tis but human rubbish, gaunt and squalid,
Whom their country spurns for lack of room. ("The Leading of Sorrow" 197-200)

Because of the fact that Blind's use of humour is rarely political, the humorous aspects of her poetry will be less important to this study than such aspects of Naden's and Kendall's poetry.

Literature Review

Although, as I indicated above, there has not yet been a full-length study examining the theme of evolutionary science in New Woman poetry, the theme of science has received some attention in critical works on the individual poets. Evolution in these poets' work has been discussed in relation to a range of themes, including gender, socialism, motherhood, metrics, and orientalism. Blind has received significantly more critical attention than the other two poets, with many journal articles focusing solely on her work and frequent references to her in books and articles on Victorian literature more generally. Apart from one article by Marion Thain on the role of the muse in Naden's poetry ("Love's Mirror"), critical work on Naden has been clearly focused on the theme of science, much more so than in work on the other two poets. Kendall is sometimes mentioned in articles on women's poetry but only three critics, Thain, Diana Maltz and John Holmes, have examined her work in any detail. Holmes has produced recent critical work on the use of

evolution in the work of all three of my main poets but his analysis of their poetry does not place as much emphasis on the theme of gender as my study will.

Critical engagements with the representation of science in Naden's work have focused predominantly on issues of gender and the interconnectedness of branches of knowledge. In her book *In Science's Shadow*, Patricia Murphy uses a close examination of the formal qualities of Naden's poems to argue that Naden's assessment of women's role in science is ultimately pessimistic. She asserts that the poems that are narrated by women fall less easily into a clearly-defined poetic form, demonstrating that women are reduced to inaccurate mimicry of the masculine in order to have a voice in society, however weak. Thain's "Scientific Wooing" discusses the blending of science and literature in Naden's work in the context of her philosophy of Hylo-Idealism, which collapses boundaries between the physical and spiritual worlds and stresses unity. Thain asserts that the fact that Naden was publishing articles in scientific journals as well as writing poetry sets her apart from the other female poets who were writing on scientific themes. The main focus is on Naden's prose writing and biographical information; the poetry is not analysed in detail. Andrea Kaston Tange continues the discussion of the interconnectedness of branches of knowledge but with a more explicitly feminist focus than in Thain's essay. She places "Evolutional Erotics" in the context of the wider body of Naden's poetry instead of her scientific and philosophical work. Tange contests Murphy's claim that Naden's poetry reinforces women's exclusion from science. She argues that an examination of a larger selection of Naden's poetry than just the "Evolutional Erotics" sequence demonstrates Naden's ironic distance from the poems that appear to perpetuate negative stereotypes (203-4). Tange suggests that the "unproductive and unproductive unions" (235) in Naden's love poems demonstrate that gender relations in Victorian society work against evolutionary improvement by encouraging women to accept intellectually inferior partners

and that society must evolve for the sake of future generations. John Holmes also focuses on the “Evolutional Erotics” sequence in his analysis of Naden’s work in his book *Darwin’s Bards*. He argues that the poems in this sequence, particularly “Natural Selection” are a response to Darwin’s anthropomorphism and reliance on gender stereotypes in the *Descent*.

I agree with Tange that Murphy’s interpretations of the poetry are sometimes limited by a failure to take irony into account. I also think that, although form and metre are obviously important to Naden and should be engaged with, Murphy’s arguments from metrics are sometimes unconvincing and insufficiently evidenced. Thain’s piece is interesting and is a reminder of the importance to Naden of her prose writing and philosophical work. Tange’s discussion of evolutionary science is based on extracts from the *Descent of Man* in an anthology rather than the work as a whole (235). She consequently overstates some of Darwin’s conclusions, such as claiming that physical attractiveness is an indication of fitness whereas Darwin only tentatively suggests that this may be the case: “Nor is it at all obvious how the offspring from the more beautiful pairs of hermaphrodites would have any advantage over the offspring of the less beautiful, so as to increase in number, unless indeed vigour and beauty generally coincided” (*Descent* 305). Holmes’s discussion of Naden’s work has a clearer focus on the influence of Darwin than any of the other critical works discussed in this paragraph. He also pays greater attention than most critics do to the effect of humour in these poems. My own approach will combine Tange’s focus on the theme of gender with Holmes’s close engagement with primary scientific texts.

The critics discussed above have concentrated solely on Naden’s work but Charles LaPorte compares the religious elements of Naden and Blind’s poetry and places their work in the context of George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the poetess tradition.

LaPorte argues that Eliot's poetry reclaims elements of the poetess's piety, removing the tradition from its Christian context and re-casting the prophet figure as a female religious sceptic whose prophecy originates from her sympathy and emotional strength. He traces a continuation of this tradition in Naden and Blind's work but with the addition of Victorian scientific ideas further complicating this reimagining of religion. As he says of Blind's "The Prophecy of Saint Oran": "The New Jerusalem works wonderfully as a Biblical metaphor, but there was no room for it in a cosmos that the Victorians associated with telescopes, solar systems, and Sir John Herschel" (433). This approach of comparing the poets' treatment of a theme and seeing links to predecessors and contemporaries is the approach that I will take in my own study.

Although there has been much more critical work on Blind than on the other two poets, there has been surprisingly little on the theme of science in her poetry. The work that has been done on Blind's relationship to science covers a wide range of themes, such as religion, orientalism, motherhood, and metre, but often the science aspect receives less attention than in similar articles on Naden. For example, Robert P. Fletcher's "'Heir of all the Universe': Evolutionary Epistemology in Mathilde Blind's *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident*" is predominantly about orientalism, not evolution as its title implies. Fletcher does suggest that "The Desert" is about Darwinian degeneration, arguing that the monument in the poem was built by a more advanced civilisation that has since declined, but there is little in the article to suggest that his reading of Blind's portrayal of other races is influenced by evolutionary theory. My own discussion of racial difference in Chapter Four will engage more directly with evolutionary discourse. Holmes does engage with the scientific aspects of Blind's poetry in detail but he designates her poetry as "non-Darwinian" and only highlights those aspects of her poetry that imply a teleological view of evolution rather than random, undirected Darwinian evolution. I agree that there are

non-Darwinian aspects to some of Blind's poems but she also frequently engages directly with Darwin's work, particularly his work on sexual selection, and Holmes's reading of Blind's poetry neglects this aspect of her writing. By contrast, Kevin Mills suggests that the teleological elements in Blind's poetry stem from her being too influenced by Darwin and consequently being infected by "Darwin's own inability to escape apocalyptic rhetoric and its related discourses of Christian value and perception" (39).

The theme of motherhood in Blind's poetry provides a link between her interests in gender and evolution. Isobel Armstrong believes that Blind's sonnet "Motherhood" may have been the first poem by a nineteenth-century woman to describe childbirth. She sees this sonnet as being tied in with *The Ascent of Man*'s exploration of violence, where "for a moment violence is productive" (Armstrong 376). James Diedrick ("My Love is a Force", 361) suggests that the critical focus on "Motherhood" has served to associate Blind's poetry with the domestic, obscuring her political commitments, but Susan Brown's essay, "A Still and Mute-Born Vision", highlights the ways in which Blind's depiction of motherhood *is* political. Brown argues that evolutionary theory placed "women's child-bearing bodies at the centre of history" (143) and that this creative power could be used by women to claim authority for themselves. Brown focuses particularly on *The Heather on Fire* in which, she suggests, the actions of the landowners in forcibly evicting the crofters are depicted as a "travesty ... of evolutionary process" (133). I will address the links between motherhood and evolution in Blind's work in Chapter Five.

Jason R. Rudy's "Rapturous Forms" highlights the importance of rhythm and metre in Blind's work. He sees rhythm as a form of pre-linguistic communication, fostering sympathy between people. He also argues that evolution in *The Ascent of Man* is a process of moving towards ordered metre. I find Rudy's discussion of metre more convincing than Murphy's, particularly when he contextualises his argument by linking it to Darwin's

discussions of rhythm. The study of metrics will play a part in my research but my study will link metre to other aspects of the writing and the wider context, as Rudy does, instead of studying metrics almost in isolation as Murphy does. I will address the scientific aspects of Blind's work much more explicitly than other critics have done. I will argue that even in those poems that are not explicitly scientific, Blind's work is imbued with the themes and imagery of evolutionary theory and that this imagery is a crucial component of the feminist vision presented in her writing.

When Kendall is mentioned briefly in a general article on women's writing it is normally in the context of poetry on the theme of science, but only one critic has looked at Kendall's engagement with science in detail. In "The Lay of the Trilobite": Rereading May Kendall", John Holmes examines Kendall's most famous poem from several contextual perspectives, including its original publication in *Punch* in 1885, its republication in Kendall's first collection, *Dreams to Sell*, and its relationship to Kendall's Christian periodical articles from the 1880s and 1890s. Holmes argues that "Lay of the Trilobite" contests the providential evolutionism of scientists like Richard Owen in its representation of a scientific trilobite undermining the evolutionary faith of the human narrator, but that the errors in the trilobite's depiction of evolution also call into question the authority of the materialism he espouses. My own study will also be concerned with the original publication context of the poems and how this affects their meaning.

The other two critics who have engaged with Kendall's work in depth have only alluded to science in the context of another theme, such as class or gender. Diana Maltz contrasts the portrayal of impoverished characters in Kendall's poetry with the treatment of her subjects in her sociological study *How the Labourer Lives*, written with B. Seebohm Rowntree. Maltz argues that the satirical tone and frequently stereotypical characterisation in the poetry prevents it from eliciting sympathy, while the sociological investigation

presents its subjects as more complex human beings. Maltz briefly links this work with the idea of Darwinian degeneration, arguing that the nutritional deficiencies highlighted in Kendall and Rowntree's study will harm the next generation. Ultimately, however, Maltz suggests that Kendall rejects the possibility of degeneration by focusing on the resourcefulness and creativity of the women in these families as a source of hope for the future. In her doctoral dissertation, "Michael Field, May Kendall, May Probyn and A. Mary F. Robinson: Late Victorian Responses to a Problem of Poetic Identity", Thain discusses the theme of science as one aspect of Kendall's search for identity as a female poet. Thain separates Kendall's portrayal of science into negative and positive aspects, with more focus on the negative. I agree that both negative and positive aspects are in evidence in Kendall's writing but I do not agree that these aspects can be so easily separated. For example, Thain suggests that science in Kendall's work is portrayed as a masculine discourse which destroys the capacity for wonder and is opposed to the feminine realm of folk tales and fairies (85-88). She argues that the poem "A Pure Hypothesis" with its "recognition that things, and discourse could have been otherwise" (88) opens up a space for a feminine discourse, but, as I will argue in Chapter Two, this recognition of alternative possibilities is linked to evolution and the ways in which developments in nineteenth-century science overturned common-sense assumptions. I would argue that negative and positive views of science are often at work in the same poem and I will aim to highlight this complexity in my own work.

The study of Victorian periodicals will be important to this thesis, not only from the point of view of investigating popular science, but also because several of the poems that I will be discussing were originally published in periodicals. Linda K. Hughes suggests that scholars have generally viewed poetry in periodicals as "filler" ("Women Poets" 849), and consequently as unworthy of serious research, but recently critics have

begun to realise the importance of studying such work in its original context. As Hughes points out, one crucial difference between periodical publication and publishing in books is that periodicals allow poets to engage with contemporary debates in a way that the less immediate and more lasting format of the book does not (ibid. 866). For example, James Diedrick sees Blind's "Nocturne", published in *The Dark Blue*, as being in dialogue with the work of male aesthetic poets, particularly Rossetti's "Down Stream" and Swinburne's "The End of a Month" which were published in earlier issues of the same journal ("My Love is a Force" 371-3; "A Pioneering Female Aesthete" 220-223). Such contextual detail can be recovered by studying poetry in periodicals in a different way from poetry in books, with a greater focus on contemporary debates and recent publications. The nature of the periodicals in which this poetry was published is also important. My discussion of the feminist aspects of Kendall's scientific poetry must necessarily be complicated by the fact that her most overtly scientific poems were originally published in *Punch*, described by Sally Ledger as "this most misogynist of Victorian journals" (94). Although this description may be a little simplistic, it is certainly true that cartoons and articles in *Punch* were often unsympathetic to the New Woman's agenda. This may help to explain why so few of Kendall's poems address the theme of gender directly. By examining the publication context of the poems under consideration in this study and reading them in conjunction with contemporary journal articles I hope to contribute to the understanding of these texts and the poets' interactions with their culture.

Structure of the Thesis

The chapters of this study are arranged thematically, with at least two poets being discussed in each chapter. This structure allows me to contrast different feminist strategies

and responses to evolutionary themes instead of seeing the poets in isolation. The themes of these chapters move from more general evolutionary themes to more specifically gender-related ones as the thesis progresses. The first chapter will introduce the poets and discuss their scientific education and their ideas about evolution. I will give evidence of their scientific reading and use their non-fiction prose works to suggest their opinions on the meaning and consequences of evolutionary theory. The second chapter will address the theme of change in the poetry in order to argue that this theme was used by women poets to suggest the desirability of social reform as well as biological change. The kind of change depicted – whether progressive or random, Darwinian or Lamarckian – is also significant for the political message advanced in the poems. The third chapter will suggest ways in which evolutionary ideas imperilled hierarchies of species, gender, race and class, and also blurred boundaries between seemingly distinct categories. I will concentrate particularly on the association of humans with other species, effected through the use of articulate language by non-human creatures. The fourth chapter will focus on the analogy, used in *The Descent of Man* and other anthropological works, associating white women with people of other races. When this analogy was used by male scientists it normally served to reinforce the supposed inferiority of both groups but in the hands of female writers it is often used to protest unequal power relations in society or to erase human difference. However, I will also note ways in which this analogy could move from identification to appropriation, with non-white characters being used to represent the situation of a white woman rather than being seen as human beings in their own right. The final chapter will examine Blind and Naden's application of Darwin's theory of sexual selection to human relationships and their responses to evolutionary and eugenic discourses surrounding motherhood. I will argue that Blind was already indirectly responding to the themes of the *Descent* in her writing within months of the book's

publication in 1871, particularly in her poem “The Song of the Willi”. The themes that she focused on in this early response – particularly the importance of female choice and the variety of possible gender roles found in nature – recur in her later poetry on sexual selection, published in her 1889 collection *The Ascent of Man*. Naden also focuses on the importance of female choice but in her work this theme is often manifested in depictions of women choosing to remain single rather than selecting to mate with the more attractive male. I will also argue that, in contrast to the focus on the importance of motherhood in much evolutionary feminist writing, including Blind’s work, Naden’s poetry often celebrates childlessness as a positive choice for both male and female characters. In the concluding chapter I will examine the fate of this evolutionary feminism in the early twentieth century and will argue that the move away from evolutionary imagery in twentieth-century women’s writing suggests some ways in which this imagery was unhelpful for feminists. Through this approach I hope to contribute to an understanding of the strategies used by evolutionist feminists at the *fin de siècle* and to assess whether the genre of poetry enabled the selected writers to make evolutionary theory compatible with feminism or whether, in Sally Ledger’s words, these writers were ultimately “intellectually defeated” by the “dominant evolutionist discourses of the *fin de siècle*” (Ledger 29).

Chapter One

Biographies

The Poets and Science

In this chapter I will give detailed biographies of the three principal poets examined in this study and will briefly introduce the four other women poets whose work will be explored to a lesser extent. The biographies will incorporate discussions of the poets' scientific education and attitudes towards science. In the final section I will outline the poets' applications of evolutionary ideas to social questions in their non-fiction prose articles in periodicals in order to provide a basis for examining the interpretations of science found in their poetry. There are potential drawbacks to using an author's biography in the interpretation of their work. As Pamela Gilbert argues, feminist criticism's focus on authorial biography "unintentionally replicates the traditional sexist tendency to read canonical male-authored texts as self-contained 'art' and female-authored texts as simple extensions or reflections of personal experience" (7). On the other hand, the decision to write exclusively about women's poetry suggests that the lives of the poets do have a role to play in my interpretation of their work. Certain information, such as the poets' religious and political beliefs is likely to have a bearing on the poetry, and the comparative critical neglect of Kendall may be partly due to the lack of knowledge of the circumstances of her life and the difficulty of locating her in relation to other writers and literary movements.

Of particular significance in a study of poetry on the theme of science is the poets' scientific education and access to important scientific texts. As Gillian Beer observes in *Darwin's Plots*: "Ideas pass more rapidly into the state of assumptions when they are *unread*" because "[r]eading is an essentially question-raising procedure" (4). Consequently, it is necessary to ascertain how far the poets' scientific ideas were obtained

through the reading of primary science works and how far they were simply responding to the current of evolutionary thought in the culture. As I will note in the individual biographies, there is evidence to suggest that the three main poets in this study read the *Origin of Species* and that Blind and Naden also read the *Descent of Man*. The different versions of evolution presented in the poetry and the emphasis placed on different aspects of the theory reflect the poets' varied experiences of evolutionary science. The differences in the poets' methods of studying science would have affected their writing. Naden's formal scientific training would have been very different from Blind's purely textual experience of scientific ideas, and Blind's reading of the most important scientific texts would have differed from Kendall's reading, which appears to have been focused predominantly on popular science in periodicals.

The different ages of the three poets may also have affected their responses to Darwinian evolution. Blind was eighteen in 1859 when *The Origin of Species* was published, while Naden was a year old and Kendall was unborn. Only Blind would be old enough to remember pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories or to have observed the controversy surrounding the publication of the *Origin*. On the other hand, despite their different ages, the three poets produced the majority of their poetry at roughly the same period. Naden and Kendall's most obviously science-inspired collections, *A Modern Apostle* and *Dreams to Sell* respectively, were both published in 1887; Blind's *Ascent of Man* was published in 1889. As a consequence of this, there are times when two poets appear to be responding to the same text or theory, particularly in those poems which seem to have been directly inspired by periodical articles. For example, Kendall's "Nirvana" refers to the exchange of articles between Huxley and Gladstone in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1885 and 1886 about whether or not the depiction of the creation in *Genesis* could be seen as having anticipated the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century:

One fancies Huxley might display
A faint concern, as wondering whether
He'd time to have a parting fray
With Gladstone ere they rushed together – (13-16)

Naden's "The Nebular Theory" may have been inspired by the same source. In opening her poem about the nebular hypothesis with the line "This is the genesis of heaven and earth" she may be seen as ridiculing or exploring Gladstone's claim that recent scientific theories of the creation of the earth were compatible with the Mosaic account of the creation (Gladstone, "Dawn of Creation" 697-8). In the remainder of this chapter I will highlight other similarities and differences between the poets, and other significant circumstances of their lives, that will inform my reading of their poetry.

Mathilde Blind

Mathilde Blind (21 March 1841 – 26 November 1896) wrote seven volumes of poetry: *Poems* (using the pseudonym Claude Lake) (1867), *The Prophecy of St Oran and Other Poems* (1881), *The Heather on Fire* (1886), *The Ascent of Man* (1889), *Dramas in Miniature* (1891), *Songs and Sonnets* (1893), and *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895). Although she is chiefly remembered as a poet, Blind was also a prolific prose writer. As well as one novel, *Tarantella* (1885), she produced biographies of George Eliot and Madame Roland, contributed numerous articles, reviews and short stories to periodicals, translated D.F. Strauss's *The Old Faith and the New* and the journal of Russian artist Marie Bashkirtseff, and published selections of Byron and Shelley's poetry.

She was a great Shelley enthusiast and an active member of the Shelley Society (Avery 180).

Although there is significantly more surviving biographical material on Blind than on Naden and Kendall, there are gaps and discrepancies in the different accounts of her life. She appears to have been quite protective of her privacy, as a letter to a compiler of a dictionary of English literature, dated 2 January 1890, suggests:

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 [her stepfather] can be avoided I should be obliged if you would do so. (Correspondence and Papers 4: 95)

Towards the end of her life Blind began to write her memoirs but in her account of her childhood all names have been changed and her family is barely mentioned. This reticence appears to stem from a combination of a desire for privacy and a wish to avoid discussing the animosity between herself and her stepfather. The most useful source of biographical material is the memoir of Blind by her friend Richard Garnett. Blind and Garnett's correspondence is held by the British Library but there are some years for which almost no letters from Blind survive and at times it seems as though letters may have been deliberately destroyed to protect her privacy. Her commonplace book for the years 1892-96 is in the Bodleian Library.

Although some details have been lost, most of the basic facts about Blind's life are known. She was born in 1841 in Mannheim, Germany, the elder of two children of a

Jewish banker named Cohen and his second wife, Friederike Ettlinger.⁵ Mr Cohen died while Mathilde and her brother Ferdinand were still very young, and Friederike subsequently married the writer and revolutionary Karl Blind. Mathilde had an unsettled childhood as a consequence of her mother and stepfather's revolutionary activities. In 1847 Karl and Friederike were both imprisoned for distributing treasonable pamphlets while on holiday with the children in Bavaria (K. Blind 5: 342). Karl was imprisoned again in 1848 for his part in the Baden uprising. Upon the establishment of a German republic he was released and sent to Paris as a representative of Baden and Rhenish Bavaria. However, the revolution in Germany failed, and in Paris, after armed uprisings against the president Louis Bonaparte, a state of siege was declared which led to Karl Blind and his family being exiled to Belgium (K. Blind 8: 813). While living in Belgium, Karl and Friederike had two children, Rudolph and Ottilie (*Ancestry Library*). In 1852 the family was forced to leave Belgium because of pressure put on the Belgian government by France so they claimed asylum in Britain (Avery 174). They settled in St John's Wood in London, where their household became a meeting place for exiled European revolutionaries, including Karl Marx, Louis Blanc, and Giuseppe Mazzini (Diedrick, "Mathilde Blind" 30). A friend of the family, Moncure Conway, later referred to the Blind household as "a sort of *salon*. If any interesting man came, especially from Germany, we were sure to meet him at one of those Sunday evenings in Winchester Road" (Conway 2: 62). Blind shared the socialist and republican sentiments of these revolutionaries and remained committed to these ideals throughout her life.

Blind's mother and stepfather supported her intellectual pursuits but her education was disrupted by the upheaval of moving from place to place when she was a child,

⁵ Different biographers disagree on certain details about Blind's family, in particular the comparative ages of Mathilde and Ferdinand. Although Richard Garnett gave the correct information in his "Memoir", James Diedrick has claimed that Ferdinand was older than Mathilde ("Mathilde Blind" 29), and Armstrong Bristow and Sharrock report that Ferdinand was 17 when he died, at a time when Mathilde was 25 (652). Census returns reveal that Ferdinand was three years younger than Mathilde (*Ancestry Library*).

resulting in her attending “a good many more or less bad schools” (Correspondence and Papers 4: 96). When her family lived in Belgium she was sent to a boarding school in Brussels and during her later teenage years she attended “an educational establishment for young ladies” in London (ibid.). There were several periods when she was between schools and was left to educate herself. During her time at the school in London, Blind became deeply interested in Christianity, having been brought up in an atheistic household. As she put it: “the Christ ideal seized hold of my imagination” (Blind, Autobiography 10). However she soon began to question her newly discovered faith and to explore the challenges presented to the biblical account of the creation by recent geological discoveries. She discussed her reading on this subject with her classmates and was consequently expelled for atheism (Autobiography 14-22). The injustice of this punishment and the loss of her school friends appear to have affected her deeply. A few months after this incident she was sent to live with an uncle in Zurich, where she was able to study Latin and Old German (Autobiography 33). On her return to England the following year she took charge of her own education, spending much of her time studying in the British Museum reading room. As Richard Garnett put it in his memoir: “Among the numerous companions of her girlhood, she was the only one who could be considered well educated, and she had educated herself” (18).

Blind’s family had a significant effect on her intellectual and ideological development in her youth but events that occurred when she was an adult meant that her family played less of a role later in her life and she began to rely more heavily on her friends for emotional and financial support. In 1866 Blind’s younger brother Ferdinand, who was studying in Germany, attempted to assassinate the Prussian Minister-President, Otto von Bismarck, to prevent him from leading Germany into war. Bismarck, although alone and unarmed, managed to overpower Ferdinand and had him arrested. Ferdinand

killed himself in his cell the following day (Avery 176). Richard Garnett first met Blind while she was in mourning for her brother and he describes this event in his memoir as a “grievous catastrophe” that “sobered” “[t]he frequent exuberance of her spirits” and eroded the “school-girlishness” that had previously characterised her temperament (22). Angela Thirlwell suggests that Ferdinand’s actions may have been at least partly prompted by a desire to please his politically radical stepfather and that Mathilde blamed Karl for her brother’s death, contributing to the tensions that already existed between the two of them (*Into the Frame* 184). Whatever the reason, by 1871 Blind’s relationship with her stepfather had broken down to such an extent that she could no longer bear to live at home. Despite her limited finances she moved out of the family home and spent the rest of her life living alone or with friends. Her animosity towards her stepfather lasted a lifetime. In a letter dated December 4 1876 Swinburne advised Theodore Watts (later Watts-Dunton) to avoid even mentioning Karl Blind in Mathilde’s presence:

[O]ur friend Miss Mathilde ... has long (I believe) been on bad terms with him, though still retaining (rather inconsistently as I must say it seems to me) [his] surname” (Cecil Y. Lang 3: 224)

In her will Mathilde set up an annuity for her mother that could only be paid once Karl Blind had died (Blind, *Last Will and Testament* 3). There is evidence from Blind’s correspondence that she kept in contact with her mother and her half-brother and sister. She also had some contact with her half-brother Max from her father’s first marriage who still lived in Germany, particularly later in life when she travelled extensively in Europe (*Correspondence and Papers* vol. 2).

Blind read widely, and her reading included many scientific works. When she had finished with formal education her friend, the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini, to whom she dedicated her first collection of poems, advised her on a course of independent study which included astronomy, geology, history and philosophy. Blind confided to her friend Lily Wolfsohn that having begun this reading she was “fairly dazzled with the infinite distances that opened out before me as if by magic” (Garnett 16). Among the papers held by the British Library is a list of the books that most influenced Blind’s writing and ideas. She lists Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and Buckle’s *History of Civilisation* as the works that most affected the subject of her books (Blind, Correspondence and Papers 4: 102). Her correspondence reveals that she also read *The Creed of Science: Religious, Moral and Social* by William Graham (ibid. 2: 139). The two works most obviously influenced by her scientific reading are *The Ascent of Man* and her 1886 lecture, “Shelley’s View of Nature Contrasted With Darwin’s”. In the posthumous 1899 edition of *The Ascent of Man*, Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer of natural selection, added an “Introductory Note” to the book in which he expressed admiration for its “picturesque and forcible language” (xii) but described it as “not altogether satisfactory” (v) because of its focus on the social and spiritual, rather than the scientific, aspects of evolution (v-vi), and the pessimism of Blind’s view of struggle and competition in nature (ix). Despite his criticisms, the fact of a prominent scientist writing an assessment of this volume presents the book as a serious intervention in debates about the meaning of evolution, and as worthy of consideration by the scientific community. As Wallace noted, *The Ascent of Man* clearly shows the influence of Darwin on Blind’s scientific ideas (vi). Although she named the *Origin* as one of the books that had most influenced her, the impact of the *Descent* on her work is much more obvious. As I will argue in the final chapter, Blind echoes the language of the *Descent* in several poems from the *Ascent of*

Man and also in her novel, *Tarantella*. Her explorations of the courtship plot in these books are clearly indebted to Darwin's ideas of sexual selection and a gendered division of labour throughout nature. Blind's interest in the *Descent* fits in with her focus on women's rights because, as I will argue in the final chapter, although the theories in this book were used to reinforce the idea of female inferiority, there were elements in the *Descent* that could be used to undermine the idea of fixed gender roles, and some that could even imply the superiority of women.

Blind's commitment to women's rights is evident from her writing, particularly her desire to memorialise great women in her biographies and translation, and her challenging of sexual double standards in her poetry, for example in "The Message" from *Dramas in Miniature* in which a prostitute protests that "She was not worse than all those men/ Who looked so shocked in public, when/ They made and shared her sin" (68-70). As Richard Garnett remembers:

She was in favour of women following all callings, except the military and naval, and when invited by the present writer to consider the consequence of throwing a mass of cheap labour into occupations much overstocked, she rejoined, with decision, that the men might emigrate, as they probably may whenever the women shall have preceded them. (18)

Blind was a signatory of the petition in support of women's suffrage published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1889, along with other writers including Emily Pfeiffer, Olive Schreiner, Edith Simcox and Julia Wedgwood ("Women's Suffrage: A Reply" 138). She is known to have attended at least one women's rights demonstration, with William and Lucy Rossetti on 6 May 1880, and to have considered the idea of giving a public lecture on

women's suffrage, although William Rossetti advised her not to because of the "anti-religious" nature of the hall at which she was planning to speak (Thirlwell, *William and Lucy* 239; Bornand 183).

Blind frequently criticised religion in her writing but also included elements of mysticism and biblical allusions, such as the image in *The Heather on Fire* of the Highlands as a Garden of Eden with the entrance barred "[a]s with a flaming sword" (Duan Fourth XXXV 6). She claimed that she had been saved from "a blank atheism" by her reading of Henry Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilization*, a scientific approach to the study of history that sees the progress of humankind as having been driven by natural laws (Garnett 21). Blind often treats science as a replacement for religion in her writing, particularly in *The Ascent of Man*, and friends' descriptions of her approach to science often use religious language:

The Ascent of Man, her largest work, is a hymn to religious ecstasy; for the scientific teaching of Darwin, to most people a very negative sort of gospel, inflamed her with the ardour of a worshipper: she believed it, by an act of faith, as the devout Christian believes in the mysteries of his church. (Symons v)

Unsurprisingly, this scientific religion proved controversial. In 1881, not long after its publication, Blind's *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems* was withdrawn by the publisher over concerns about its "atheistic character" (Peattie 400). Later in the same decade, Naden was to have similar problems with publishers; a London publisher refused her second volume of poetry, *A Modern Apostle*, "fearing it would discredit their establishment" (W.R. Hughes 31).

Blind was friends with several writers and artists. Her literary friendships included many important women writers, such as Graham R. Tomson, Violet Hunt, Vernon Lee, Amy Levy and Mona Caird, and several poets who were interested in science, such as A. Mary F. Robinson, L.S. Bevington and James Thompson (Avery 181; Diedrick, “Hectic Beauty” 638; Vadillo 27-29). She was a member of the “Literary Ladies”: a dining club for women writers and editors that was founded in 1889 as a female equivalent to men-only literary clubs like the Savile (Linda Hughes, “A Club of Their Own” 233-4). Membership of this group enabled women to form relationships that could open up professional opportunities, and, as Linda Hughes observes, also involved a high-profile invasion by women of the public sphere (ibid. 234-6). Hughes suggests that many of the stereotypes of the “New Woman” in the 1890s – women who undermined gender roles by smoking and acting like men – could be found in embryo in the press coverage of the first Literary Ladies dinner (233). Blind was part of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, establishing friendships based on a shared love of Shelley with Richard Garnett, William Michael Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne. She was also friends with the mathematician and evolutionary philosopher William Kingdon Clifford, whom she met at a regular gathering of radicals and republicans at Moncure Conway’s South Place Chapel in Finsbury (Dawson 167). In a letter to the mathematician, eugenicist and socialist Karl Pearson, written eight years after Clifford’s death, Blind described their friendship as “an intimacy which I see more & more is very rare between men & women” (Blind, Letter to Karl Pearson, 6th January 1887).

James Diedrick has suggested that Blind placed the love lyric “Scherzo” in the same section as the dramatic monologues in *Dramas in Miniature* instead of grouping it with the other lyrics because “[a]s an attractive, accomplished, unmarried woman holding radical views of sexual politics” she feared that her contemporaries “would equate her with

the speaker of poems like this one” (Diedrick, “Hectic Beauty” 638). In a letter of 21 December 1891 Arthur Symonds proves her caution to have been justified by doing just that:

I sent you for Christmas Miss Blind’s last book of poems – a book which may interest you for other than its poetic quality when I tell you that the later poems, from “Scherzo” onwards some twenty pages, are written about my humble self. (Beckson and Munro 91)

Many similar assertions are made about Blind having been infatuated or involved with the famous men of her acquaintance, and with almost no surviving evidence from Blind herself it is difficult to disentangle the reality from the baseless gossip. Several of Swinburne’s acquaintances appear to have hoped that his friendship with Blind would lead to a marriage that would save him from his sexual non-conformity (Thomas 150), and Edmund Gosse suggests that Blind entertained the same hope. He claims that from about 1867 she “openly ‘threw herself at [Swinburne’s] head,’ and gave him every opportunity to propose marriage to her” but that Swinburne only “cultivated her company for the sake of her regicide principles and her love of verse”. He raises the possibility of a relationship between them but concludes by saying that when Swinburne’s letters to Blind were later sold “it was found that they contained no word of love” (Gosse 243).

Of all the men whose names have been linked with Blind’s, the most convincing argument is for Ford Madox Brown. During the 1870s and 1880s Blind took holidays with Madox Brown and his wife Emma, she spent periods of time living in their house and she nursed Madox Brown when he was ill. In 1883 Blind quarrelled with his daughters, who were close to her own age, over plans for Blind and Madox Brown to take a holiday by the

sea for his health. As William Michael Rossetti, the husband of Madox Brown's daughter Lucy, recorded in his diary on 6 April 1883, "The distressing part of the affair is that Brown is more on Mathilde's side than that of Lucy or Cathy" (Peattie 446). Lucy and William's daughter later recorded the rumours of a relationship in her memoir of her family:

Miss Blind was his junior by some ten or twelve years [it was actually twenty years], and his feelings for her towards the close of his life were perhaps more romantic than those of mere friendship. Not long before his death (his wife Emma pre-deceased him by some four years) there was a rumour in the family that he meant to marry her, even that he actually had married her. This, however, was mere rumour. (Helen Angeli Rossetti 49-50)

Madox Brown may well have had feelings that were "more romantic than those of mere friendship" but there is little evidence of Blind's feelings or of the nature of their relationship. This lack of evidence in itself could be taken as an indication that there was a relationship. Very few letters survive from the periods when Blind lived with the Madox Browns, and the letter giving Blind's reaction to Madox Brown's death is also lost. Only Garnett's reply to this letter survives. It is possible that these letters were deliberately withheld or destroyed. If there was a relationship it seems unlikely to have begun "towards the close of [Madox Brown's] life", but to have been at its peak in the 1880s, when Emma Madox Brown was still alive. By the early 1890s, when Madox Brown was a widower, his health had declined further and Blind was increasingly travelling abroad to alleviate her own health problems. Angela Thirlwell suggests that Blind and Madox Brown did have a relationship but it is unlikely to have been physical. She describes Blind as Madox

Brown's "mistress in the head if not in the bed" (*Into the Frame* 217). Whatever the reality of the nature of their relationship, Blind's connection with Madox Brown was one of the most significant relationships of her life.

Blind's health was poor for much of her life. There are frequent references in her correspondence to bronchial attacks and periods of weakness and depression. She found that travel to warmer climates was beneficial, and this became much easier to afford in 1892 when her half-brother Max died and made her the chief beneficiary of his will. As Richard Garnett puts it, "the harassing struggle with narrow means, which had counted for much in her adversities, was terminated" (Garnett 37). During the few years between her brother's death and her own, Blind travelled extensively in Europe and was able to make two trips to Egypt, which were the inspiration behind her last volume of poetry, *Birds of Passage*. This final decade of Blind's life was a particularly prolific one, perhaps because she wanted to achieve fame for her writing before she died. However, writing cost her an increasingly great effort and contributed to her poor health, as she observed in a letter to Richard Garnett, written in January 1891:

I was writing at one [poem], "A Mother's Dream" till five o'clock in the morning last week. I didn't mean to but could not help myself; the emotional intensity was such that it went over me like waves & each time I lay down I had to start up & go on again. I paid for it with two days of sickness & suffering, (Correspondence and Papers 3: 56)

Theodore Watts-Dunton linked writing and poor health in his obituary of Blind, when he described her desire for fame as "feverish" (797).

Garnett's memoir is coy about the cause of Blind's death, telling us only that her health was declining and she was "[c]onscious of the inevitable termination of her illness" (41). Garnett implies that her death may have been a result of her bronchitis, without giving any explicit information, and most of Blind's later biographers have taken a similar approach.⁶ In fact, according to Blind's death certificate, she was killed by "uterine cancer" which had been diagnosed ten months previously (Death Certificate, Mathilde Blind). She became increasingly ill during 1896 and after completing her will on October 23rd she moved into an invalids' home where she died a few weeks later (Blind, Last Will and Testament 4; Garnett 41). Among other bequests, Blind's will set up an annuity for Ford Madox Brown's daughter Catherine, and gave money to Newnham College Cambridge to fund scholarships for female students of limited means who wished to study "English or Foreign or Ancient Literature" (Blind, Last Will and Testament 3). Blind was cremated and her ashes were interred at St Pancras cemetery, near Ford Madox Brown's grave. A statue was erected to her memory two years after her death (Thirlwell, *Into the Frame* 253).

Constance Naden

As John Holmes observes, although the Victorians viewed Tennyson as the poet of science, "of all the Victorian poets it was Naden who had the most comprehensive and up-to-date scientific education" (*Darwin's Bards* 190). During her lifetime Constance Naden (24 January 1858 – 23 December 1889) produced two volumes of poetry: *Songs and Sonnets of Springtime* (1881) and *A Modern Apostle; The Elixir of Life; The Story of Clarice; and Other Poems* (1887), and contributed articles to journals including

⁶ Angela Thirlwell's recent book, *Into the Frame* (2010), is the first published biography to give Blind's actual cause of death.

Knowledge, *The Journal of Science* and *The Agnostic Annual* as well as writing several pamphlets on scientific and philosophical subjects. After her death, her friend Robert Lewins arranged for the publication of her *Complete Poetical Works* (1894), her prize-winning essay *Induction and Deduction* (1890), and some of her other prose writings in *Further Reliques of Constance Naden* (1891) and *Selections from the Philosophical and Poetic Works of Constance C.W. Naden* (1893). In an article for *The Speaker*, written shortly after Naden's death, William Gladstone listed her as one of the best poets of the nineteenth century along with such other "remarkable additions ... to the train of Sappho" as Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Brontë (Gladstone, "British Poetry" 34-5). However, according to her friends' reminiscences, Naden did not "[regard] poetry as the serious business of her life. ... [H]er great aim was to become, not a poet, but a student in philosophy, a teacher of ethics" (Lapworth, "Introduction" xvii-xviii). She wrote her poetry while carrying out other tasks or during times of illness "when real work, as she termed it, was impossible" (William Hughes 16; Lapworth, "Introduction" xviii). In 1887, when she finished her studies at Mason College, she ceased writing poetry altogether (Daniell xi).

A lot of information about Naden's life can be obtained from several memoirs that appeared in books and periodicals in the years following her death. She was born Constance Caroline Woodhill Naden at 15 Francis Road, Edgbaston on 24 January 1858 to Thomas Naden, an architect, and his wife Caroline, "a bright, thoughtful woman, much given to books" (William Hughes 6; R.W. Dale 509). Caroline Naden died twelve days after the birth and Constance was sent to live with her mother's parents, Josiah and Caroline Woodhill. Thomas Naden also lived with them for the first few years of his daughter's life before re-marrying and having four more children (William Hughes 6; *Ancestry Library*). Josiah Woodhill's ways "were of the old Non-conformist type.

‘Worldly’ amusements were regarded with disfavour” (R.W. Dale 516) but his house was full of books and the young Constance was said to be familiar with the contents of all of them (William Hughes 13-14). As a consequence of her upbringing she was, in the words of her cousin Miss Woodhill, “a quaint, retiring, meditative, and silent child” (ibid. 7) but she inherited her mother’s wit, open-mindedness and facility with rhyme (ibid. 13). From the age of eight Naden was sent to a small private day school, run by two Unitarian sisters (ibid. 9). The school did not hold examinations and discouraged competition so her intelligence went largely unnoticed and she distinguished herself only by her abilities in story-telling and flower-painting (ibid. 9-10). R.W. Dale’s comments on this system hint at Victorian fears about the cost of intellectual strain on the female reproductive system: “one thinks with envy of the girls whose intellectual life had so wholesome a development, and who were spared the fierce and wasting excitements of our modern methods” (512). After leaving school at the age of seventeen Naden spent a few years at home, reading and working on her flower-painting. One of her paintings was accepted by the Birmingham Society of Artists, and these pictures were later to appear on the covers of her books (William Hughes 10-11). It was during this period that she began composing the poems that would be published as *Songs and Sonnets of Springtime* (ibid. 16).

In 1876, while on holiday in Southport, Naden met the army surgeon and philosopher Robert Lewins, who was to affect the course of her intellectual and philosophical development (Pitha 212). Over the next few years Lewins gradually converted Naden to his theory of Hylozoism which holds that energy is inherent in matter instead of being breathed into it by an external force or spirit (Lewins, *Humanism* 12). It appears that Naden was initially resistant to giving up the religion of her childhood; Lewins’s letters to her, published in *Humanism Versus Theism*, suggest that she required some persuasion. He speaks in biblical metaphors and assures her that he also experiences

“that sense of indwelling divinity, without which you say you could not live” (31) but that his spiritual moments occur “in places like Kew Gardens and Natural History museums” (13). R.W. Dale reads many of the poems in *Songs and Sonnets of Springtime* as suggestive of Naden’s feelings about her movement away from the Christian faith:

But in several of her strains there was a recurrence, though with striking variations, of the same *motif*, and this disclosed the innermost secrets of her own heart. She had become conscious of detachment from the life which surrounded her and from the life of her own earlier years. The discovery made her sad, but there was no remedy (513)

Once she had become fully convinced by Lewins’s theory Naden added her own ideas to it. Lewins credits Naden with having “resolve[d] Hylozoism into Hylo-idealism, of which the somatic self is centre, radius, and periphery” (Lewins, “Additions” 79). Hylo-Idealism extends ideas that were implied in Lewins’s writings on Hylozoism in order to argue that the world can only be experienced subjectively, when sights or sounds are converted into impulses in the brain, and so effectively there is no objective reality and each individual is the creator of their own universe (Brewer 11; Lewins, “Hylozoism” 623). Naden wrote many articles on Hylo-Idealism for the *Journal of Science and Knowledge*. James Moore has argued that the use of the pseudonyms C.N. or Constance Arden for these writings was a device to separate herself, as a respectable middle-class student, from her philosophical writings (“Re-membering” 36). However this theory is undermined by Naden’s willingness to present a paper on Hylo-Idealism in her own name to a meeting of the Mason College Physical Society (“Mason College Physical Society” 115).

Naden's understanding of science was central to her philosophical and religious ideas. In her writings on Hylo-Idealism she emphasises the scientific basis of the theory. For example, the idea that energy is inherent in matter is supported by Newton's work on gravitation (Naden, "Hylozoic Materialism" 314), while the materialism of the theory "cannot ... be either new or startling to any cultured Englishman, since it is implicitly asserted in the Darwinian theory of evolution, which acknowledges no impassable gulf between man and 'the brute creation'" (Naden, "What is Religion?" 117). Naden's conception of materialism gives matter a spiritual aspect, as in her poem "Starlight II", in which the human heart contains atoms that used to be part of a star (10). She also retains some of the moral aspects of Christianity in her personal philosophy but sees moral behaviour as evolutionary good sense rather than a means of attaining personal immortality:

Without moral principles, society could not cohere; and as the more coherent societies tend to survive those which are less coherent, so the individuals better fitted for social cohesion tend to survive the worst fitted individuals. ("Pig Philosophy" 11)

In her understanding of morality in evolutionary terms, Naden was particularly influenced by the work of the evolutionary philosopher Herbert Spencer, especially his *Data of Ethics*, on which her "Evolutionary Ethics" was based.

In 1879 Naden returned to formal education. Over the next two years she took classes in Botany, Science, Art, German and French at the Birmingham and Midland Institute (William Hughes 17). She got a First Class in both the elementary and advanced stage examinations in the Science and Art departments ("The Late Miss Naden"). She also

studied Latin at Queen's College, Birmingham. A fellow student of Latin remembers being unable to live up to the standard set by Naden: "Miss Naden had pitched the keynote, and the two other surviving members of the class simply had to study from morning till night to get through the work required of them" ("In Memoriam" 51). She was equally proficient in German and was the only student in her German class who was equipped to translate a passage of ancient Greek into modern German (William Hughes 18).

In Autumn 1881 Naden became a student of the newly opened Mason Science College (William Hughes 18). Although women were able to take degrees at the new civic universities, in contrast to older institutions like Oxford and Cambridge (Julie Gilbert 405-6), Naden chose to pursue her own programme of study instead of working towards a qualification (William Hughes 22). This intellectual independence enabled her to tailor her scientific education to her philosophical interests:

Miss Naden's study of geology, as that of other sciences, was only as a means to an end. She was above all things a student of man and of mind. ... The old question – Man, whence and whither? – had for her the old irresistible fascination (Lapworth, "Introduction" xv)

Instead of specialising in a single branch of science Naden was "struck by the relation of one science to all, and she grew eager to master them all one by one" (William Hughes 18). She studied Chemistry, Zoology, Physiology, Geology and Physics in turn (ibid. 22), acquiring an admirable depth as well as breadth of knowledge, as "the marginal notes in her text books [testify]" ("In Memoriam" 51). She was "distinctly an evolutionist", and her interest in other sciences often appears to stem from their links to evolutionary theory (Lapworth, "Edgbastonians" 18). Professor Lapworth suggests that her interest in geology

centred around a fascination with “the awful immensity of past time – the slow but irresistible effects of natural causes – the gradual evolution of the geography of the globe – the upward sweep and elaboration of organic forms” (“Introduction” xiii) and that she studied palaeontology for the “evidences it affords that the life of the present is the descendent and heir of the life of the past” (“Edgbastonians” 18). She was also an avid student of Herbert Spencer’s Synthetic Philosophy: the application of evolutionary theory to the study of society (William Hughes 24). Naden was highly successful academically, habitually ending up in the top class and winning prizes for her essays without ever giving her friends the impression that any effort was required for her to attain this success (ibid. 22-3; Lapworth “Introduction” xv).

Given her detailed knowledge of evolution it is almost certain that Naden read the *Origin* but, as with Blind, the influence of the *Descent* on her poetry and prose works is much more evident. Naden’s poetry, particularly her “Evolutional Erotics” sequence shows a clear understanding of the principles of sexual selection and applies these principles to human courtship. Her article, “Evolution of the Sense of Beauty”, proves that she read the *Descent* rather than acquiring her knowledge of sexual selection from another source because she quotes directly from Darwin’s discussion of birds’ mating habits in the *Descent*:

How did the birds obtain their fine feathers? They obtained them by *courtship*. How the *Rupicola Crocea* capers about, spreads his beautiful orange wings and his tail like an orange fan, that so he may win him a bride; how the gold pheasants “expand and raise their splendid frills,” and even “twist them obliquely towards the

female on whichever side she may be standing,” at the same time turning “their beautiful tails and tail-coverts a little toward the same side”; (79-80)⁷

Although Naden was clearly familiar with Darwin’s work, she seems to have been more interested in those evolutionists and philosophers who used Darwin’s ideas to comment on religion and human society more forcefully than Darwin himself did. As has already been noted, Naden was a great admirer of Herbert Spencer (William Hughes 24). When Spencer is mentioned in her poetry he is often presented as an extreme evolutionist, either as a hero or villain, depending on the character’s viewpoint:

Carlyle he conned, and – guilt of dye intenser!

Dallied with Darwin and with Herbert Spencer. (“A Modern Apostle” I 79-80)

Something worse they whisper too,

But I’m sure it **can’t** be true –

For they tell me, Fred, that you

Scoff at Herbert Spencer! (“The New Orthodoxy” 53-6)

She was also sufficiently familiar with Huxley’s work to write a review of his *Science and Culture and Other Essays* for *The Journal of Science*. In this article Naden demonstrates her knowledge of Huxley’s work by referring to several of his other writings in order to reinforce her argument that some of his statements in *Science and Culture* are insufficiently materialist (Naden, “Animal Automatism” 191). As will be evident from my discussion of her work in later chapters, Naden’s poetry clearly shows the influence of her

⁷ These quotations are from page 446 of the *Descent*.

thorough scientific education, engaging with the work of a range of scientific thinkers in addition to those discussed in this section.

The social side of college life offered a much-needed contrast to the restrictive atmosphere of home. In imagery reminiscent of Naden's "The Story of Clarice", her friend Mrs Houghton comments that at Mason College "Miss Naden developed like a plant brought out of semi-darkness into sunshine" (William Hughes 19). She became an active member of the Union and its societies. She was the editor of the *Mason College Magazine* from 1883 until 1884 and was a member of the Physical Society, the Chemical Society, the Sociological Section of the Natural History and Microscopical Society, the Poesy Society, the Debating Society and the Société de Débats Français. She served on the committees of most of these societies at some point in her college career (*Mason College Magazine* 1883-7). Naden was also a member of the Edgbaston Ladies' Debating Society, and its president for the session 1883-1884, and she taught at a Home for Friendless Girls every Thursday evening (Daniell xii-xiii).

Naden's grandfather had died in 1881, and when her grandmother died in the summer of 1887 Naden inherited a fortune (Pitha 213-214). She left Mason College and embarked on a nine-month trip with her friend Madeline Daniell which covered parts of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and India (Daniell xiv-xvi). Naden became particularly interested in Indian society, entering into conversations with "educated natives" about their opinions of colonial rule (ibid. xvi). On her return to England she joined the National Indian Association and raised money for the training of medical women in India (Daniell xvi; William Hughes 50). While she was in India Naden contracted a fever which left her incapacitated from March 1888 until May, when they returned to England (Daniell xvi). As the author of the obituary in *Mason College Magazine* notes, the effects of this fever affected Naden for the rest of her life: "From the

effects of this illness Miss Naden never completely recovered, though for some time she regained a certain amount of strength. She faced the problem of an enfeebled life with that calm resolution which was one of her chief characteristics” (“In Memoriam” 55).

On their return to England Naden bought a house in London, 114 Park Street, Grosvenor Square, and she and Daniell moved into it in February 1889 (Daniell xvi-xvii). Naden became very involved in public life, lecturing for the Central National Committee for Women’s Suffrage and the Women’s Liberal Association, canvassing for the Liberal candidate for Marylebone, G. Leveson-Gower, and holding a benefit for the new Hospital for Women, attended by Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (Daniell xvii). She dispensed numerous private charitable gifts, “poor ladies being a special subject of interest to her” (Daniell xiii). She also joined the Norwood Ladies’ Debating Society, the Royal Institution and the Aristotelian Society (Daniell xvii, xiii). At a meeting of the latter, Naden forced a “distinguished evolutionist” to admit that he had not read Spencer’s *Data of Ethics* (Hughes 44). Moore suggests, from having examined the list of members, that the evolutionist in question was George Romanes, whose patronising comments in *The Nineteenth Century* on women’s intellectual abilities would have made him a legitimate target (Moore, *Re-membering*, App. 19 n.87; Romanes “Mental Differences”). Daniell describes some of Naden’s London friends as “well known in the literary world” but does not elaborate (xvii). Naden is known to have been acquainted with Edith Cooper, one of the Michael Field poets, and a letter from Naden to Cooper survives in the Bodleian Library. However, this acquaintance appears to stem from family connections in Birmingham rather than from shared membership of a literary circle. Naden sends her regards to Cooper’s mother, who “will care to hear of me for my mother’s sake” (Naden, Letter to Edith Cooper 57). As she was no longer writing poetry at the time of her

residence in London it is unlikely that Naden would deliberately have sought out a literary circle.

Symptoms of a severe illness began to appear in the summer of 1889. Naden was examined by Dr Thomas Spencer Wells and then on December 5 an operation to remove ovarian cysts was carried out in her home by Dr Robert Lawson Tait (William Hughes 56-7).⁸ For a while it appeared that she would recover but on December 22 she had a fainting fit and became extremely weak and on the following day she died (ibid. 57). She was buried with her mother and grandparents in the Old Cemetery in Birmingham on December 28 1889 (ibid. 63). Naden's death certificate gives the cause of death as "exhaustion" from the operation and notes that she was gangrenous at the time the operation was carried out (Death Certificate, Constance Naden). Her friend William Hughes blamed "conditions which had arisen long antecedent to the operation", suggesting that weakness from her Indian fever prevented her recovery (William Hughes 57). Other observers suggested that Naden's intellectual activities were responsible. In a letter to Robert Lewins in 1890, acknowledging receipt of a copy of *Induction and Deduction*, Herbert Spencer commented that:

I cannot let pass the occasion for remarking that in her case, as in other cases, the mental powers so highly developed in a woman are in some measure abnormal, and involve a physiological cost which the feminine organization will not bear without injury more or less profound. (ibid. 89-90)

⁸ Moore has noted that an operation performed by Lawson Tait in London in December 1889, which is reported in the *British Medical Journal*, bears strong similarities to Naden's case (*Re-membering*, App. 21-2 n.106). If this report does refer to Naden, her tumours contained skin, hair and teeth and were at an advanced stage of growth: "the operation had been delayed almost beyond hope of recovery" ("Birmingham and Midland Counties Branch").

William Hughes reprinted this letter and added his own comment that “in cases where the feminine intellect, under high pressure, is made to vie with the masculine in power, the physical tax tells primarily on the reproductive system” (91). However, the rest of Naden’s friends refuted the claim, arguing, as Miss Maude Mitchell did, that “[s]tudy was never an effort for her, but was as easy and natural as novel reading is to most girls” (ibid. 61).

In the years following her death, Lewins worked hard to preserve Naden’s memory. He arranged for the posthumous publication of many of her scientific and philosophical essays, a *Complete Poetical Works* and a memoir, as well as paying for a bust to be made and displayed at Mason Science College and an academic medal to be established in her name (Moore, “Erotics of Evolution” 255). Although his efforts did not prevent her poetry and philosophy from declining in popularity, the existence of these works means that the circumstances of her life have not been lost over nearly a century of critical neglect before her rediscovery in the 1990s.

May Kendall

May Kendall (4 December 1861 – 11 October 1943) was a poet, novelist and sociologist with a keen interest in science. Her first full-length publication was *That Very Mab* (1885), a social satire from the perspective of a fairy, co-written with the writer and folklore collector Andrew Lang. She wrote two volumes of poetry: *Dreams to Sell* (1887) and *Songs from Dreamland* (1894), three novels: *From a Garret* (1887), *Such is Life* (1889) and *White Poppies* (1893), and one volume of short stories: *Turkish Bonds* (1898). She published numerous poems and short stories in publications such as *Punch*, *Longman’s Magazine*, *St James’s Gazette* and *Sylvia’s Journal*, and essays in *The London Quarterly Review* and *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*. In the twentieth century she focused more

on non-fiction, carrying out sociological investigations with B. Seebohm Rowntree and contributing to his books and articles, particularly *How the Labourer Lives* (1913). She published some poetry in the *Cornhill Magazine* between 1927 and 1931 but did not produce any more collections once she had become involved in social investigation.

Of the three poets discussed in this study, Kendall is the one for whom the least biographical material survives. However, official documents and archives yield some information. She was born Emma Goldworth Kendall in Bridlington, Yorkshire in 1861. Census returns reveal that she was the youngest of four children of Rev. James Kendall, a Wesleyan minister, and his wife Eliza Goldworth Kendall (*Ancestry Library*). As a Wesleyan minister James Kendall was required to move frequently, never staying in one place for more than three years. During Kendall's lifetime her family lived in Bridlington, Durham, Blyth in Northumberland, Otley in Yorkshire, Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire, Alford and Boston in Lincolnshire, Selby and Guisborough in Yorkshire before settling in York when her father retired in 1890 (Waller 120).⁹ Kendall appears to have lived with her parents until their deaths in 1903 and 1909, and to have remained in York for the rest of her life. Her older sister Ann also lived at home until she married in 1893, aged around forty-five, and returned to her parents' house when she was widowed a few years later. Kendall's brothers, William and Charles, became a Wesleyan minister and a glass stainer respectively. Towards the end of their lives Kendall's parents appear to have been quite wealthy. They kept a servant and lived in Heworth Green in York, where most of their neighbours were people of independent means (*Ancestry Library*).

Nothing is known about Kendall's school career but she was clearly well educated, particularly in the field of science. It is interesting that the young female characters in her short stories written in the 1880s and early 1890s – “Baroko”, “Barbara” and “The Story of

⁹ Thanks are due to Philip Thornborow, Methodist Connexional Archives Liaison Officer, for helping me to locate this information and for supplying a photocopy of the relevant pages of Waller's book.

Meg” – share a similar educational background: educated at boarding school until the age of eighteen before returning to the parental home to seek a husband. The girls of “the Academy”, the setting for “Baroko” and “Barbara”, study literature, mathematics, logic, Latin, and a wide range of sciences, including anatomy, palaeontology, geology and botany. They examine fossils and take excursions to sites of geological or botanical interest. There is no way of knowing whether the stories reflect Kendall’s real educational experiences or the education she would have liked to have had but the scientific education described in these tales is consistent with the level and breadth of knowledge displayed in the scientific poetry in *Dreams to Sell*. It is possible that Kendall returned to formal education in her late twenties. The occupation listed for her in the 1891 census is “Scholar” but it is not clear what or where she studied (*Ancestry Library*). Although several of the poems in *Songs from Dreamland* were originally published in Liverpool University’s student magazine, *The Sphinx*, she does not appear to have been a student there, as there is no record of her in the university’s archives and the few references to her in the magazine do not suggest that she was studying at the university at the time (*Songs from Dreamland* viii; *The Sphinx*).¹⁰ The description of Kendall as a scholar does not necessarily mean that she was in formal education, but may refer instead to independent study and literary activity.

Although in her scientific poetry Kendall sometimes feigns a lack of knowledge or draws attention to her own errors or inaccuracies, as she does in the footnotes to “Lay of the Trilobite” and “Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus”, some of the scientific details in her writing suggest a familiarity with Darwin’s work. In *That Very Mab* an ant and a bee compete over which species has received the most attention from scientists, and the bee offers to give Mab “an account of the formation of hexagonal cells by Natural Selection,

¹⁰ Thanks are due to Roy Lumb, archivist at Liverpool University for checking the university archives including: Registers of Certificates 1888-1893, Terminal Examinations 1889-1893, University College Calendars and Day Students’ Address Books.

culled from the pages of the ‘Origin of Species’” (Kendall and Lang chpt. II). The development of bees’ instincts for building hexagonal cells was a well-known section of the *Origin* that Kendall could have read about in periodicals, but elsewhere in her work she refers to more obscure aspects of Darwin’s theory, as in her reference in “The Lower Life” to “Evolution’s plan,/ To give as little as she can” (13-14), which appears to be an allusion to Darwin’s theory of economy of growth, “that natural selection is continually trying to economise in every part of the organisation” by reducing the size of non-essential organs and avoiding expenditure of energy on the development of unnecessary structures (Darwin, *Origin* 186). Her knowledge of less well-known aspects of the *Origin* makes it more likely that she read the book itself rather than reading extracts from or discussions of the book in periodicals. More than the other writers in this thesis, Kendall also refers to popular science and recent controversies. This may be a consequence of the fact that several of Kendall’s scientific poems were published in *Punch*, which, as Richard Noakes observes, referred much more frequently to scientific articles in newspapers or periodicals than to books (109).

James R. Moore has identified two common responses to Darwinism by Christians who believed in the theory of evolution: one response was to accept Darwinian evolution as long as it confined itself to questions of biology and did not interfere with religion (*Post-Darwinian* 243), while others took almost the opposite approach: accepting the concept of evolution but denying the truth of natural selection. These Christians chose a version of evolution that was closer to Herbert Spencer’s system of Synthetic Philosophy, and involved “adulterat[ing] Darwinism with the concept of inevitable material, social, and spiritual progress” (ibid. 239). Elements of both of these approaches can be found in Kendall’s writing. Her earlier poetry is often very Darwinian, particularly “Lay of the Trilobite”, in *Dreams to Sell*, in which she specifically states that humans have evolved

“From Jelly-fish and Trilobites/ By Natural Selection” (31-2). In her later, more overtly religious writings, her references to evolution become more metaphorical and less Darwinian, as in her description in “Pessimism and Thomas Hardy’s Poems” of “spiritual evolution” as “the constant struggle with the baser self by which the higher self is purified” (234) or the claim in “A Plea for Asceticism” that “the lesson of evolution itself” is the “constant surrender of the lower to the higher type” (125). As well as expanding the idea of evolution beyond its biological context, Kendall’s later writings speak of moral and spiritual laws in the same terms as natural laws:

[Christ] didn’t *make* [the moral and spiritual conditions of our lives] – he discovered and taught them. You can no more dispense with the truths of Christianity by calling Christ a myth than you can dispense with gravitation by saying that Sir Isaac Newton never existed (Four Meditations, “Inner Light” 4)

It is not clear what would have caused Kendall to move from holding two belief systems independently of each other to requiring that her scientific beliefs should exist in a form that would give support to her religious beliefs but such a shift does seem to have occurred in between the publication of her first and second poetry collections. In her writings from the 1890s onwards, her scientific references become less frequent and are normally used as support for or illustration of a moral or religious point.

Kendall became friends with Andrew Lang in the 1880s. Lang helped Kendall’s career in several ways: he offered suggestions on her poetry, collaborated with her on *That Very Mab* and printed her work in his “At the Sign of the Ship” column in *Longman’s Magazine* (Green 65).¹¹ He may also have provided her with a link to other female writers.

¹¹ For Kendall’s poems in Lang’s “At the Sign of the Ship” columns, see *Longman’s Magazine* 1887-1894.

It is unlikely that Kendall was ever really part of a literary circle, given her geographical isolation from the *salons* of London, but she is linked in several ways to Graham R. Tomson, Violet Hunt and Edith Nesbit. Both Tomson and Hunt were among Lang's *protégées*, and Nesbit corresponded with him (Linda Hughes, *Graham R.* 180, 64; Green 124). Kendall and Hunt both contributed stories to Lang's *Blue Fairy Book*; Kendall, Nesbit and Tomson had work published in the Christmas gift book *Treasures of Art and Song* (Hughes, *Graham R.* 67). Most importantly, as editor of *Sylvia's Journal*, Tomson serialised Kendall's *White Poppies*, providing invaluable publicity for Kendall as a novelist, an area of literature in which she had not previously been successful (ibid. 180-1). Asa Briggs notes that Kendall was a founding member of the York branch of the Fabian Society, which provides another link to Nesbit, who was also an active Fabian (Briggs 23; Hughes, *Graham R.* 70).

As I suggested in the introduction, of the three main poets in this thesis, Kendall is the one whose position as a feminist poet is least secure. Many of the aspects of her poetry that I will designate as feminist could equally be read as reflecting her socialist beliefs. Despite Karl Pearson's claim that the concerns of women and the working classes are closely linked because "the status of woman and the status of labour are intimately associated with the manner in which property is held and wealth inherited" ("Woman and Labour" 230), the feminist and socialist movements were frequently antagonistic to one another. The bourgeois feminist movement alienated socialists by focusing its attention on equal legal and political rights for middle- and upper-class women and largely ignoring the needs of working-class women, while many male socialists opposed feminism because they feared women's further encroachment into the workplace (Ledger 38-9). For socialist feminists like Eleanor Marx, the mainstream feminist movement was inadequate to address the needs of all women. Marx asserted that she could see "no more in common between

[prominent feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett] and a laundress than ... between Rothschild and one of his employees” (qtd. in Ledger 38) and so fighting for the rights of one group of women would do nothing for the majority. As Sally Alexander notes, feminists within the Fabian Society made “class difference among women ... central to their analysis of women’s economic condition” (6-7). Consequently, Kendall is difficult to locate in relation to the middle-class feminist movement because her awareness of class inequalities complicates her feminist ideas. However, this does not mean that she should not be described as a feminist, only that her feminism is less straightforward than that of some other writers of the time and that the socialist aspects of her work should not be ignored.

Blind’s poetry frequently portrays Christianity as the enemy of socialism, using the promise of an afterlife to prevent people from agitating for better living and working conditions on earth. In Blind’s poetry the church gives people “creeds for bread/ And warm roof o’erhead,” (“Chaunts of Life” V 29-30) or prevents the victims of injustice from fighting back because “God will have it so” (*The Heather on Fire* Duan Third LXIII 4). For Kendall, however, her Christianity and her socialism appear to have been inextricably linked. She supported strike action because it meant skilled workers fighting for unskilled workers, and argued that “[w]hen that spirit, uniting men within a class, expands and unites all classes ... one may almost say that the millennium will be within measurable distance” (Four Meditations, third essay, 7). In her writings she treats the struggle for a fairer society as an essential aspect of Christianity and argues that those who refuse to join this struggle have no right to profess “to follow one ‘who gave *his* life a ransom for many”” (Four Meditations, “Foundation v. Coping” 2). Kendall’s actions reflect this belief. Friends’ and colleagues’ memories invest her with an almost supernatural degree of goodness. She was a “great saint” (Patricia Hall) and an “other-

worldly person” (Briggs 83), and was responsible for “many acts of devotion which became known only by chance to her closest friends” (“Death of Miss May Kendall”).

Kendall’s literary abilities, her scientific viewpoint and her desire to do good found an outlet in her work for the Rowntree family during the second half of her life. She initially worked with John Wilhelm Rowntree, who died in 1905, on “some powerful essays in a series of Present Day Papers” (“Death of Miss May Kendall”) and later assisted B. Seebohm Rowntree in writing books on social problems, using “her gift for homely anecdote [to make] many of Rowntree’s articles and books more readable than they otherwise would have been” (Briggs 83).¹² She was acknowledged as a co-author of *How the Labourer Lives*, for which she visited families in Yorkshire, Essex, Oxfordshire, Leicestershire and Berkshire to interview labourers’ wives about their finances and nutritional intake (Rowntree and Kendall 38). These interviews highlighted the near impossibility of maintaining a family in an adequate state of health on a labourer’s wage. Although she was not credited as a co-author of Rowntree’s other books, she is known to have “‘polished’ Rowntree’s style” in many publications, including *The Human Needs of Labour* (1918) (Briggs 83, 151). There is evidence in the archives of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to suggest that she was also involved with Rowntree’s 1941 study *Poverty and Progress*, although she was nearly eighty at the time and could reasonably be expected to have retired. An entry in a cash ledger from 1939 is labelled “Miss Kendall. Part of 1939 grant. Poverty enquiry” (Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, “Cash Ledger” 90). By 1939 the door-to-door enquiries had been completed so Kendall would have been involved in collecting additional information from employers or assisting Rowntree in writing the book (Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress* v-vii). Other records of payments to Kendall in

¹² It is not clear exactly when Kendall first became acquainted with the Rowntree family. *How the Labourer Lives* was published in 1913 but in order to have worked with John Wilhelm Rowntree she must have known the family by the beginning of the twentieth century. Patricia Hall places the meeting even earlier when she remembers Kendall saying to B. Seebohm Rowntree “If ONLY you had remained the man you were at 25!”, suggesting that she already knew him quite well by 1896.

1940-43 are labelled “J.R.V.T.”, which stands for “Joseph Rowntree Village Trust”, but I have been unable to find details of what her work for this organisation entailed (Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, “Cash Book” 16, 18, 115).

Aside from a few documents held by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation there is very little evidence of Kendall’s movements in the twentieth century. At the time of the 1911 census Kendall was living alone in a two-room attic flat above the home of a butcher and his family at 10 Monkgate in York. She defined her work as “literary and secretarial” (*Ancestry Library*). The fact that Kendall completed her census return suggests that she did not take part in the campaign run by *Votes for Women* for female heads of households to ruin their census returns as a protest against the refusal of full citizenship to women: “women who in the eyes of the law are not ‘persons’ but only ‘property,’ will refuse as far as it is possible to be counted in the Census” (“Women and the Census”). This implies that Kendall did not participate in militant campaigns for women’s suffrage at this time, and is consistent with the tentative or veiled feminist statements in her writing. Armstrong, Bristow and Sharrock note that in her old age Kendall was “renowned for her eccentricity, living for many years at 10 Monkgate in a house overrun with cats” (760). It appears that this eccentricity turned to dementia and that she was unable to care for herself during the last months of her life. In July 1943 she left her council flat in Burdyke Avenue and was admitted to a public assistance institution: a former workhouse which continued to care for the elderly and infirm. An “L. Grossling” arranged for her to be admitted and it appears that this person was responsible for providing Kendall’s personal details to the institution because some of the information, such as her date of birth, is incorrect (*Religious Creed Register*). Kendall remained in the institution until her death in October. Her cause of death is given as “Senile” (Death Certificate, May Kendall). The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust paid for Kendall’s doctors’ fees and funeral and arranged for an obituary

to be placed in the *Yorkshire Gazette* (Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, “Cash Book” 46; “Cash Ledger” 153). She was buried in York Cemetery with her brother William, who had died in 1930. Their grave is unmarked but is close to that of their parents (Burial Records).

Kendall’s legacy has suffered as a result of the timing of her death. If she had died in the late nineteenth century like Blind and Naden, while still at the peak of her poetic career, there would have been more obituaries and possibly even a collected edition of her poetic works with a memoir. Dying in the mid-twentieth century when her poetry had been forgotten and her friends had pre-deceased her, her death went almost unremarked and it is unlikely that anyone remained to hoard her correspondence and papers. Furthermore, during wartime there were paper shortages and information was restricted so some publications, such as trade directories, were not produced at all, while others came out in a much shorter form. This makes it more difficult to locate information about Kendall’s last years. The *Rowntree’s Cocoa Works Magazine*, which would ordinarily have contained an obituary and possibly a photograph, only had space to note her passing (*Rowntree’s* 14). There may be more information for future researchers to find but we will probably never know as much about Kendall as we do about her contemporaries whose legacies were better preserved.

Other Poets

Louisa Sarah Bevington (later Guggenberger) (14 May 1845 – 28 November 1895) produced three books of poetry: *Key-Notes* (1876), *Poems, Lyrics, and Sonnets* (1882) and *Liberty Lyrics* (1895) as well as several periodical articles about evolution and morality. Evolution is a recurring theme throughout her published works. In his biography of her for the eighth volume of *The Poets and Poetry of the Century* Alfred H. Miles observes that

“[i]t is not surprising that Mrs. Guggenberger should have broken the spell which for fifteen years had confined Darwin to the world of prose, for her part is emphatically that of the poetess of evolutionary science” (“Louisa S. Guggenberger” 263). Miles also notes that Herbert Spencer was responsible for arranging for Bevington’s sequence “The Teachings of a Day” to be published in *Popular Science Monthly*, and that Darwin read *Key-Notes*, despite his famous loss of interest in poetry later in his life (262).¹³

In the 1880s Bevington abandoned her earlier Quakerism in favour of anarchist socialism (Senaha 14). She was deeply committed to this cause and strongly advocated the use of violence to bring about an anarchist state. She may have done more than speak about violence: Eijun Senaha notes that evidence from her correspondence suggests that Bevington was involved in a failed plot to blow up the Greenwich Observatory (17). Although her work is more explicitly concerned with socialism, she does sometimes address feminist concerns, as she does in “Bees in Clover”, which looks forward to a time of perfected social evolution in which the abused wife “shall be free” (43), or “Looking Downwards”, a response to Edward Bellamy’s utopian novel *Looking Backward*, in which the inhabitants of a perfected society judge the past state of society by its effect on women: “All the smug misguides of youth,/ That have mocked and martyred maidens,/ That have given stones for bread;/ That have bound the wife in wedlock,/ Made for her the harlot’s bed” (60-4). Although her work is less concerned with feminism than that of some of the other poets in this thesis, Bevington is a significant figure because she was taken seriously both in literary and scientific circles (Senaha 14). Her focus on the desirability of social change means that her responses to evolution are often comparable to those of more overtly feminist poets.

¹³ For a discussion of Darwin’s loss of interest in literature see Beer, *Darwin’s Plots* 26-7.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (née Perkins, also Perkins Stetson) (3 July 1860 – 17 August 1935) is the only poet discussed in this thesis who was not British by birth or adoption. She was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and later lived in California where she became an active proponent of feminist and socialist causes (Doscow 9, 11). Like most women at this time, Gilman did not receive any formal scientific education but, by reading the periodical *Popular Science Monthly* and a variety of books in the fields of biology, anthropology, ethnology and sociology, she was able to educate herself to a high enough standard that she felt equipped to challenge scientific anti-feminism openly in her work (Love 117). Gilman was predominantly a prose writer but she also published two volumes of poetry: *In This Our World* (1893) and *Suffrage Songs and Verses* (1911). In her prose and poetry Gilman frequently addresses the interconnected discourses of evolution and feminism. For example, her treatise *Women and Economics* (1898) explores the effects of human gender inequality on Darwinian sexual selection, and her most famous novel, *Herland*, describes a utopian women-only society from an evolutionary perspective. In her poetry Gilman often uses humour to subvert scientists' claims about female inferiority or the evolutionary importance of maintaining the status quo.

Emily Pfeiffer (née Davis) (26 November 1827 – 23 January 1890), frequently addressed issues of women's rights and women's suffrage in her poetry and prose and also wrote several sonnets on nature and evolution. A correspondent writing in the *Academy* in 1900 described the second sonnet in Pfeiffer's "To Nature" sequence as the only poetic response to evolution that "seems to rise to the level of true poetry" (Forster). Pfeiffer's poetry on evolution frequently addresses, in Kathleen Hickok's words, "the confusion and dismay science has wrought upon religious faith" ("Why" 377). However, evolution is also depicted in positive terms elsewhere in Pfeiffer's work, as in her article "The Suffrage for Women" (1885), in which, in language reminiscent of some of Kendall's articles, she

defines social evolution as “the slow triumph of the spiritual nature over the brute” (419). Although Pfeiffer is less focused on science than most of the other poets whose work is discussed in this thesis, she is known to have read the *Descent* because she wrote to Darwin shortly after its publication to give her thoughts on the book, for which she professed admiration (Pfeiffer, “Letter 7411”). She was largely self-educated because her father did not have the money to educate her properly when she was young. Her marriage in 1850 to Jurgen Pfeiffer, a wealthy German merchant, gave her the means and the leisure time to educate herself (Hickok, “Emily Pfeiffer” 233). Like Blind, who was also disadvantaged by a lack of formal education, Pfeiffer left money in her will to further the cause of higher education for women. This money was used to erect Aberdare Hall, the first hall of residence for women students at University College, Cardiff (ibid. 242).

The final poet, Agnes Mary Frances Robinson (later Darmesteter and then Duclaux) (27 February 1857 – 9 February 1944) did not demonstrate the same sustained interest in evolution shown by the other poets in this study. As in other studies of evolution and poetry, such as John Holmes’s *Darwin’s Bards*, Robinson will only be discussed in this thesis for her 1888 poem “Darwinism”. As I will argue in the following chapter, this poem does not accurately depict Darwinian evolution and suggests a lesser degree of scientific knowledge than that displayed by the other poets in this study.

“Pin Your Faith to Darwin”

Naden, Bevington, Blind, Kendall and Gilman all applied evolutionary ideas to human society in their work but their understanding of the lessons that humanity could draw from evolution did not necessarily match that of social Darwinists like Spencer. Before embarking on the main argument of this thesis, I will discuss the poets’ comments on

evolution and society in essays, speeches and journal articles in order to provide a framework for examining the uses of evolution in their poetry. I will begin with Naden, whose admiration of Spencer makes it unsurprising that she applies evolutionary ideas to human society. The influence of Spencer can be seen in Naden's focus, both in poetry and philosophy, on human beings as products of evolution, and in her use of his ideas in her essays on morality. Spencer's system of evolutionary ethics called for minimal state intervention in order to allow society to evolve through competition towards a more perfect condition in which individuals would be better adapted to their social environment. He held that the aim of human behaviour should be to promote happiness and that actions must be judged according to their success in achieving that aim (Spencer, *Principles of Ethics* 1: 30). According to Spencer, an individual's chief moral duties are self-preservation, care for offspring and promoting the welfare of others (ibid. 1: 25-6). Naden adopts aspects of Spencer's system in her own writing about ethics. Like Spencer, Naden elevates self-preservation to the status of a moral quality. In "Evolutionary Ethics" she claims that "It is our duty to be both healthy and happy; for our fitness or unfitness will be transmitted to future generations" (109). She focuses particularly on the more positive, joyful aspects of Spencer's theory, such as the idea that "[e]volution has been possible because sentient beings have, on the whole, liked life, and taken delight in the exercise of their faculties" (Naden, "Pessimism and Physiology" 7). However, she does not seem to have agreed with Spencer's more extreme "Social Darwinist" ideas such as the argument that it is wrong to preserve the lives of those who are unable to support themselves because it is a law of nature that "a creature not energetic enough to maintain itself must die" (Spencer, "The Coming Slavery" 462). Although Naden was the least socialistic of the five poets discussed in this section she does appear to have recognised that the very poor were trapped in poverty by society and not by their own failings. In "Evolutionary Ethics" she

explicitly opposes Spencer's ideas about the positive effects of competition in the capitalist system: "What is our 'peaceful' system of competition but a bloodless war, in which the vanquished are not slain on the battle-field, but suffer a more cruel because a more lingering death from hunger and heart-break, or live a joyless and degraded life, far more terrible than death itself?" (126). Although she accepted most of Spencer's ideas about a scientific framework for morality, on social questions Naden did not base her opinions on a Spencerian interpretation of evolution.

L.S. Bevington's periodical articles on evolution and morality also show the influence of Spencer. In "The Moral Colour of Rationalism" she quotes approvingly from Spencer's *Data of Ethics* (181). Like Naden and Spencer she agrees that evolutionary ideas can be used to determine morality: "[t]he bearings of evolution ... touch not merely matters of fact, but matters of principle" ("Modern Atheism" 999). In her poetry and prose writings Bevington treats evolution as equivalent to a religion, and its lessons as religious commandments: in her poem "Upward", from *Key-Notes* she asserts that "[t]o live by the last-learned law [that of the necessity of living in harmony with evolutionary principles] is more than to praise or to pray" (10). The lessons that she takes from evolution seem mainly to concern the importance of altruism and social instincts for human survival, because we have evolved to be mutually dependent:

[W]hile sociology offers explanation of the anti-social tendencies still left in individuals, by regarding them as surviving remnants of inherited brutality, it implicitly condemns them *by that very explanation* as unsuited to the vastly changed external conditions of human existence. Sociologically viewed, such tendencies are, among ourselves, unfit. ("The Moral Colour" 183)

For Bevington, a belief in evolution is more conducive to sympathy and altruism than Christian faith is, because Christian brotherhood relies upon a shared belief system whereas evolutionary origins make all people family regardless of their beliefs or actions (“Moral Colour” 185). She argues that as a corollary of this evolutionary familial relationship, far from providing justification for imperialism and oppression of other races, social Darwinism is more firmly opposed to this behaviour than is orthodox Christianity, which “is inclined to keep its theory of world-wide humanity for its wife and children to listen to, duly couched in Jewish phraseology, on Sunday” (ibid. 191), rather than applying ethical principles to real life. As evidence of the humane tendency of evolutionary thought she highlights the large number of prominent evolutionists, including Darwin and Spencer, who joined the campaign for the governor of Jamaica, Governor Eyre, to face criminal proceedings for his brutal response to an uprising of colonial subjects in 1865 (ibid. 188). Bevington also stresses the importance of “the subtlety, multiplicity, and constant flux of relations, and the continuity of causation” (ibid. 182) in evolutionary thought and argues that commentators who use evolutionary concepts to postulate “a fixed rigidity of relation” (ibid.) have misunderstood the theory. This focus on the importance of change in evolutionary theory is common to several women poets, as I will argue in the following chapter.

While Naden and Bevington follow Spencer in seeking to derive moral lessons from evolution and the natural world, Blind’s work anticipates Huxley’s conclusion to his 1893 lecture “Evolution and Ethics” that “the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it” (T.H. Huxley and Julian Huxley 82). Blind’s 1886 lecture “Shelley’s View of Nature Contrasted With Darwin’s” also uses images of combat to describe the human struggle with the immorality of the natural world:

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 nimblest of servants. (19)

Blind's poem "The Leading of Sorrow", in *The Ascent of Man* offers a similar moral. In the poem the narrator witnesses the suffering and death that are inherent in the struggle for existence. She sees that the modern capitalist system mirrors competition among the lower animals but is more insidious because the ruthlessness and cruelty are disguised:

Better than this masquerade of culture
Hiding strange hyæna appetites,
The frank ravening of the raw-necked vulture
As its beak the senseless carrion smites. (325-328)

The poem suggests that the struggle for existence is not purposeful or moral but is based on animal instincts which humans should be able to overcome. In particular, Blind highlights the suffering of women under a system which leads to the physically weaker being trampled. Halfway through the poem Blind tells the story of a young woman who is seduced and impregnated by a lord. In a series of escalating catastrophes she is turned out by her family, forced into prostitution, loses her child, and dies of a sexually transmitted disease, all by the age of twenty. Meanwhile, the man who was responsible for her fall remains in the same privileged position that he has always occupied:

And in after-dinner talk he preaches
Resignation – o'er his burgundy –
Till a grateful public dubs his speeches
Oracles of true philanthropy. (317-20)

By placing this vignette about the sexual double standard in the context of a poem about evolutionary struggle, Blind relates gender inequality to her critique of unrestrained competition and residual animal instincts, implying that men have taken advantage of this system in order to use their physical strength to dominate women. Although, as I noted earlier in this chapter, Blind described her faith in evolution in religious terms, she was less willing than Naden or Bevington to draw moral lessons from nature and went further than they did in acknowledging the pain and injustice inherent in an evolutionary system of competition. As the quotation from “Shelley’s View of Nature” suggests, although she did not believe that science could teach morality she did believe that, through improvements in technology and increased knowledge, it could be a force for good in human society.

Kendall does not address evolutionary ethics or social Darwinism in her non-fiction prose to the extent that the other poets do but she sometimes alludes to these themes in her articles on religion. Unsurprisingly, in these articles Kendall refutes Herbert Spencer’s claims that selfishness is a moral good:

Somewhere Mr. Spencer seems to think that one day the biddings of egoism and altruism will coincide. But that day, at all events, is too far remote to need consideration. We shall know what to do when it comes; but in the meantime no

amount of appeal to egoistic motives will ever produce a democracy, a utopia, or whatever we like to call it, that would hold together an hour. Nor, if it held together, would it be worth having. (“The Social Ideal” 427)

Kendall concludes the article with the statement that “‘the grace of God’ ... must be present ... in any republic worth the name” (427). She also opposes the idea that competition is healthy; in one of the essays on Christianity that is held in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation archives she argues that if “competition does not serve to make God and the human brotherhood more real, then competition is condemned in the measure of its failure to do this” (Four Meditations “Foundation v. Coping” 1). Kendall’s socialism, as well as her Christianity, led her to oppose Spencer’s individualism. Her fellow Fabians were also opposed to many of Spencer’s ideas, as is demonstrated by Sidney Webb’s sarcastic comment in the 1889 *Fabian Essays in Socialism* that Spencer’s opposition to state regulation suggests a desire to “bring back the legal position which made possible the ‘white slavery’ of which the ‘sins of legislators’ have deprived us” (Webb 41). Kendall dramatises her opposition to Spencerian ethics in her poetry. For example, J.J. Jackson, in “The Legend of J.J. Jackson, the Self-Made Man”, is an evolutionary success in Spencerian terms, since he has raised himself to a higher social position through his own abilities, but in Kendall’s hands he is punished for his vanity and selfishness by being surrounded and attacked by all of the portraits and statues he has had made of himself. Although altruistic characters in Kendall’s poems often encounter difficulties, like the narrator of “A Lesson of Life” who is unable to go home because he has made a commitment to help lame dogs over a stile but finds that there is an endless succession of dogs in need of help, self-sacrifice does appear to be applauded in the poems, even if it is not rewarded on earth. In “Evolutionary Ethics” Naden suggests that such extreme self-

sacrifice may be harmful in the long term: “excessive unselfishness not only fosters selfishness directly, by accustoming others to receive and expect undue sacrifices, but it also fosters selfishness indirectly, by tending towards the non-survival of the unselfish” (109). Kendall appears not to have been persuaded by such evolutionary logic. However, although Kendall did not base her ideas about morality on evolution, she did, as I will suggest in the following chapters, make use of evolution as a metaphor to promote her ideas about social and political questions.

The final poet to be examined in this section is Gilman, whose non-fiction prose work on social Darwinism is more overtly concerned with gender than the prose works of the other poets are. In *Women and Economics* (1898) Gilman argues that in human society the female’s economic dependence on the male has led to sex distinctions becoming much more exaggerated than in other species because, instead of evolving to be suited to their environment, women have evolved to appeal to men:

When man began to feed and defend woman, she ceased proportionately to feed and defend herself. ... When he became her immediate and all-important environment, she began proportionately to respond to this new influence, and to be modified accordingly. (61-2)

Consequently, instead of natural selection acting as a check on sexual selection, as it does in species in which the males and females face the same environment, it has exaggerated sexual differences because it is through their sexuality that women are able to find the means of economic support (37-8). In a phrase that would later be used by Olive Schreiner in *Woman and Labour*, Gilman describes women’s economic dependence on men as “parasitic” (62). In her poetry she foreshadows Schreiner’s comparison of society’s

expectation that women will simply breed and not develop their own qualities with “the experiment of a man seeking to raise a breed of winning race-horses out of unexercised, short-winded, knock-kneed mares” (*Woman and Labour* 107). In Gilman’s poem, “A Brood Mare”, a man attempts to sell the narrator a brood mare that is weak and flabby and barely able to walk, on the grounds that her father was thoroughbred and “Mares do not need to have themselves/ The points which they transmit!” (51-2). The narrator demands to see the mare’s colts to prove her breeding ability: “He looked a little dashed at this/ And the poor mare hung her head;/ ‘Fact is’ said he ‘she’s had but one,/ And that one – well, it’s dead!’” (69-72). In this poem Gilman challenges the argument that women who have an education or a career will be less successful as mothers – “A mare that’s good for breeding/ Can be good for nothing more” (63-4) – by suggesting that in fact the opposite may be true. In its use of humour and its displacement of gendered controversies onto another species this poem uses similar techniques to the work of the main poets in this thesis.

In this chapter I have begun to bring out some of the similarities and differences between the poets and to situate them in relation to debates about the meaning of evolution for human society. I have suggested that Naden’s university education sets her apart from the other poets, who were mainly self-educated, and that Kendall and Bevington’s socialism means that their feminism is manifested differently from that of poets like Naden who were less concerned about class inequality. On the other hand, there is much that links these poets, such as admiration of Darwin and the use of humour. Although it is not as clear from their poetry, Blind and Gilman share the socialist beliefs expressed by Kendall and Bevington. In my analysis of the poetry in the remaining chapters of this thesis I will continue to use this biographical material and the writers’ prose works to contextualise their poetry and to draw comparisons between the different poets. I will also bring in a

broader range of contextual material, such as the publication context of the poems under consideration. In the following chapter I will examine how these poets' feminist perspectives are manifested in their representation of the theme of evolutionary change, both in terms of the depiction of evolutionary change as either progressive or random, and in terms of the use of either Darwinian or Lamarckian evolutionary theories to explain the mechanism behind this change.

Chapter Two

Change

Social Darwinism

After the publication of *The Origin of Species*, evolutionary theory was used to support a wide range of social theories. A similar set of ideas could act as the basis both for Herbert Spencer's laissez faire individualism and Peter Kropotkin's belief in anarchy and mutual cooperation. As George Levine has observed, none of these readings were misreadings or distortions, but were rather a testament to the flexibility and possibilities inherent in Darwin's theory:

But the history of interpretations of Darwin is not the history of a series of intellectuals who simply misinterpret him for their own purposes. Rather, virtually all of them legitimately located in his writings arguments that might sanction their own positions (almost, one might add, the way the Bible continues to be mined for ideological possibilities, except that Darwinians seem to be much more careful to think through the whole context of Darwinian thought as they take his theories where they want to go). (*Darwin Loves You* xi)

Gillian Beer ascribes this variety of responses to “the element of obscurity, of metaphors whose peripheries remain undescribed”, arguing that “[t]he presence of *latent meaning* made the *Origin* suggestive, even unstoppable in its action upon minds” (*Darwin's Plots* 92-3). The fact that the *Origin* did not discuss evolution in relation to humankind also allowed Darwin's readers to formulate their own ideas about this subject before Darwin explicitly addressed human evolution in the *Descent of Man*.

When evolutionary theory was applied to human society it was most often used to lend support to the existing social order. As Greta Jones has observed, this often meant simply updating the idea of human society as ordered by God:

[Social Darwinism] removed God but it reinstated the idea of order, equilibrium and hierarchy, this time in a social context. It therefore “naturalised” the social order. Even the social Darwinist’s interest in evolution was often basically a journey into the past in order to discover the roots of their own society. Social Darwinism substituted natural, scientific processes for God as the guarantor of social equilibrium. (xiii)

As Jones notes, it is “paradoxical” that Darwinism, “the theory of change and disequilibrium in nature”, came to be used as an image of social stability and conservatism (xiv). Evelleen Richards argues that the use of evolutionary theory to support an image of a stable, hierarchical society was a deliberate strategy by Darwin’s followers to make the theory fit with their social ideas, and that T.H. Huxley, in particular, “[brought] Darwinian anthropology and biology to the aid of a rapidly advancing liberal bourgeoisie who, with the decline of religion, lacked a compelling ideological defence against equality and democracy” (“Huxley” 276-7). Richards claims that through the efforts of Huxley and his contemporaries “ideologically neutral Darwinism erected the necessary barriers, by proving that the inferior could not compete in an open society” (ibid. 277). An example of this is Huxley’s claim in “Emancipation – Black and White” (1865) that although white women and black people should not be prevented from competing equally with white men, their natural inferiority would prevent these groups from being any threat to white male dominance (73-4). This focus on the natural inferiority of all groups apart from white

middle- and upper-class men was used to reassure those men who felt threatened by evolution's decentring of humanity and to close down potentially socially radical interpretations of the theory.

The use of evolutionary theory to reinforce existing power structures is the social application of evolution that has attracted the most attention from feminist critics. Rose Lovell-Smith has noted that “[w]here Darwinism and women have been written about, evolutionary theory is more often seen in its aspect of misogyny: its liberating possibilities have been harder to recover” (310). However, there *were* liberating possibilities, and feminist writers highlighted these aspects in their work, but it is only recently that their contributions to the evolutionary debate have been recognised. Rosaleen Love observes that “[w]hen we read the histories of social Darwinism, it is the ideas of men which are reported to us” and asks rhetorically whether there were no women “in the great age of the struggle for women’s rights ... who saw that evolutionary theory might be adapted to their political advantage” (113). Her conclusion is that “of course, there were indeed women who exploited the evolutionary metaphor as skilfully as anyone else. It is their misfortune that for some reason they just happen to be left out of the standard histories” (ibid.). One of the critics who have recently highlighted the links between evolution and feminism in the late nineteenth century is Lucy Bland, who has noted Darwinism’s applicability to a wide range of belief systems:

Darwin’s theory was so multivalent that it allowed feminists to make readings in stark contrast to the dominant readings of the day. Those happy with the status quo chose to assume that Darwin’s theory implied that the present age, of white, male, capitalist supremacy, was evolution’s pinnacle. Feminists questioned this

assumption; they saw the future as a potentially far superior alternative, in which patriarchy had been abolished, and, for some feminists, capitalism as well. (85)

Although when Darwin explicitly spoke about human society in the *Descent* he used his science to reinforce existing hierarchies, as in his comment that through struggle and competition with other males “man has ultimately become superior to woman” (631), the poets in this study found elements within his work that supported a more democratic and progressive viewpoint. These elements include the concept of constant change, the idea that no species can be described as higher or lower than any other, and the blurring of boundaries between species, and implicitly between other categories. These potentially feminist aspects are easier to locate in the *Origin*, a book that Levine describes as “various, democratic, multitudinous, constantly transforming, intricately entangled” (*Darwin and the Novelists* 86), than in the *Descent*, with its explicit support for Victorian ideas about gender relations. In the next two chapters of this study I will focus on the poets’ responses to these more general evolutionary themes from the *Origin*, before moving on to examine their responses to evolutionists’ explicit discussions of gender difference, such as those in the *Descent*. This chapter will discuss the theme of change in the poetry, and the different interpretations of evolutionary change depicted by these poets. I will explore the advantages and disadvantages for women writers of depicting evolution in terms of either inevitable progress or random chance. I will also examine the extent to which the evolutionary change depicted in the poetry is the result of social and environmental factors or innate biological factors.

Darwin and Change

Before examining the depiction of evolutionary change in the poetry it is necessary to look at the representation of change in Darwin's work. In the *Origin*, Darwin depicted evolution as a process of almost inevitable constant change, with "fitness" depending more on adaptability than physical strength. There are some inconsistencies in his representation of change, in that he removes the idea of a conscious creator from his theory and makes chance variation the driving force behind evolution but retains elements of teleology in his confidence that "all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (*Origin* 459). Natural selection leads creatures to become better adapted to their environment but "perfection" is a misleading term, suggesting an ultimate goal that all life is striving towards. Levine observes that this inconsistency within Darwin's own work helps to explain the varied interpretations of the significance of Darwin's theories for human society:

Thus, while the uniformitarian, law-bound Darwin transfers metaphorically into a conservative political force, the chance-invoking, change-affirming Darwin poses a major threat to things as they are. (*Darwin and the Novelists* 94)

Social applications of Darwinism most often emphasised the "uniformitarian, law-bound" aspects to emphasise stability rather than reform. The extremely gradual nature of evolutionary change was contrasted with revolutionary change and used to argue for a more "natural" state of society in which change was so slow as to be almost imperceptible. Darwinian scientists often tried to place limits on evolutionary change when talking about human society to avoid an association with radical social reform, as in Huxley's comments in "Emancipation – Black and White" that:

The most Darwinian of theorists will not venture to propound the doctrine, that the physical difficulties under which women have hitherto laboured in the struggle for existence with men are likely to be removed by even the most skilfully conducted process of educational selection. (74)

However, Darwin himself said that, with enough time, any amount of change is possible:

It cannot be objected that there has not been time sufficient for any amount of organic change; for the lapse of time has been so great as to be utterly inappreciable by the human intellect. (*Origin* 439)

Sue V. Rosser and A. Charlotte Hogsett have argued that, as in this quotation, Darwin's writing only emphasises change and possibility when talking about the past, and that his projections into the future suggest that he does not wish human society to move beyond the Victorian model:

We do not suppose that, had he been asked, Darwin would have asserted the immutability of the Victorian natural and human world; yet certainly his language betrays a tendency to arrest the process of development at that point. ... Continuing natural and social change in the future would seem to be the inevitable consequence of the story Darwin tells. Yet he shrinks from that consequence. ... The story of evolution is apparently not, according to his wishes, to be an ongoing one, certainly not in the human realm. (46)

Although I do not believe that Darwin would have approved of his theory being used to support a radical change in the power relations of his society, I disagree with the assertion that his language forecloses the possibility of all change in the human realm. When he gestures to the future, Darwin often implies an expectation of future progress or an acknowledgement that there is room for improvement in human biology and society: “man has risen, though by slow and interrupted steps, from a lowly condition to the highest standard *as yet attained by him* in knowledge, morals and religion” (*Descent* 171-2) [My italics]. In the concluding chapter of the *Descent* he explicitly states that he expects the human race to evolve further in the future:

Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future. (*Descent* 689)

It is likely that his understanding of the form this progress would take differs from the interpretations of the poets in this study but the idea that the current state of society is a temporary condition on the way to something better helped to make evolutionary theory attractive to women writers. Darwin’s depictions of evolutionary change created a sense of possibility that was seized upon by Darwinian feminists. As Edith Simcox observed in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1887, “Science teaches that nature is eminently mutable” (392) so any amount of biological or social change is theoretically possible:

If we are disposed to take a cheerful view of the future of the race – and all evolutionists are optimists at heart – we must look forward, not to a continued

difference between the functions and ideals of the sexes, but to the evolution of an ideal of human character and duty combining the best elements in the two detached and incomplete ideals. (402)

Like Simcox, women poets often use these ideas of mutability and possibility to justify, explicitly or implicitly, an optimistic view of future gender relations.

To understand how Darwin's depiction of change opens up the possibility of an alteration in the power relations between men and women in the future, we need only compare Darwin's writings to the work of Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson. Geddes and Thomson's *The Evolution of Sex* made use of evolutionary arguments but diverged from Darwin's theory in their claim that the differences between men and women stemmed from fundamental differences in their metabolisms and cell functions instead of having been evolved through sexual selection. According to this theory, male cells are katabolic, expending energy in short bursts of activity, while female cells are anabolic, passively conserving energy for future use (26). These fundamental sexual differences mean that men and male animals are suited to short energetic tasks like hunting while females are suited to child-bearing and domestic tasks (18). In this theory evolution is seen as having progressed too far for gender roles to be altered now:

We have seen that a deep difference in constitution expresses itself in the distinctions between male and female, whether these be physical or mental. The differences may be exaggerated or lessened, but to obliterate them it would be necessary to have all the evolution over again on a new basis. What was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament. (267)

Any move towards greater sexual equality would be futile, or even harmful, because the female constitution makes women fundamentally unsuited to an energetic or public role. Darwin, on the other hand, despite his low opinion of women's intelligence and abilities, treats gendered characteristics as responses to a particular environment that are not fixed for all time. As Cynthia Eagle Russett observes:

One striking aspect of [Darwin's] analysis – one that set him apart from the majority of commentators on male and female nature – was the tentativeness of his conclusions and the cautiousness of his recommendations. Darwin was not a dogmatist. If change was the essence of evolution, he did not propose to elaborate theories that foreclosed change. (101)

It is this sense of possibility and the idea of change as almost inevitable that attracted many female poets to the subject of evolution.

Celebrating Change

The idea of evolution as almost inevitable change was taken up enthusiastically by women poets. They frequently linked evolutionary change with social progress, as in Emily Pfeiffer's sonnet "A Chrysalis", which was originally published in *Poems* (1876):¹⁴

When gathering shells cast upwards by the waves
Of Progress, they who note its ebb and flow,

¹⁴ A fire in a warehouse owned by Pfeiffer's publisher Kegan Paul in 1882 destroyed the plates of all of Pfeiffer's works published before this date (Hickok, "Emily Pfeiffer" 241). Consequently, *Poems* is rare and difficult to get hold of. I took this poem from Pfeiffer's 1886 collection, *Sonnets*.

Its flux and re-flux, surely come to know
That the sea-level rises; that dark caves
Of ignorance are flooded, and foul graves
Of sin are cleansed; albeit the work is slow;
Till, seeing great from less for ever grow,
Law comes to mean for them the Love that saves (1-8)

Although this poem is not overtly about the position of women, its focus on the inevitability of reform echoes the sentiment expressed by Pfeiffer in an article on women's suffrage for the *Contemporary Review*: "it is only needful to cast an eye over the course [woman] has trodden, to feel that this long and even progress, accelerated as it has been in the last few years, implies a goal which she must inevitably reach" ("The Suffrage for Women" 420). Kathleen Hickok also sees parallels between the representation of evolutionary change in this poem and Pfeiffer's commitment to social reform. She argues that the theme of this poem is that "social progress and evolutionary change are divinely inspired, and that amelioration of the human condition, though slow, is therefore certain" ("Intimate Egoism" 18). More specifically, feminist poets like Pfeiffer could take comfort from the idea that if progress seemed slow then society was moving by "numerous, successive, slight modifications" (*Origin* 219) in the direction of an improvement in the position of women. The form of this poem continues the idea of a gradual movement towards a goal. The Petrarchan rhyme scheme of the octave mirrors the sense of ebb and flow that is described in the poem by repeatedly moving backwards and forwards between the same two rhyme sounds, while the rhyming couplet at the end of the poem – "A soul of worship, tho' of vision dim,/ Which links me with wing-folded cherubim" (13-14) – gives a sense of completion, reinforcing the implication of an ultimate purpose to evolutionary

change. This poem contains elements that are often found in poetry by evolutionist feminists: without overtly commenting on gender relations these poems celebrate the near-inevitability of evolutionary change and implicitly link this change to women's rights.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Similar Cases" from *In This Our World* (1893) is another poem that associates the inevitability of evolutionary change with feminists' demands for a change in the position of women. The poem highlights the amount of change that has been brought about by evolution to date in order to suggest that the future change that feminists envisaged would be equally achievable. In this poem, a series of prehistoric creatures – an Eohippus, an anthropoidal ape and a Neolithic man – describe the forms that they will one day evolve into but are jeered at by their companions. At the beginning of the poem, the Eohippus, an ancestor of the horse, boasts that "I'm going to have a flowing tail!/ I'm going to have a mane!/ I'm going to stand fourteen hands high/ On the psychozoic plain!" (17-20).¹⁵ The other prehistoric creatures can only see the small size achieved by his species to date so they dismiss his boasting:

"What! Be a great tall, handsome beast

With hoofs to gallop on!

Why, you'd have to change your nature!"

Said the Loxolophodon. (33-6)

The Loxolophodon's argument is a parody of the argument, frequently used against feminists, that women have evolved to be ideally suited to child-rearing but are not fit for work outside the home. For example, Herbert Spencer claimed in his 1878 essay "Biology and 'Woman's Rights'" that women's confinement to the domestic sphere did not result

¹⁵ "Psychozoic" refers to the period of geological time characterised by human intelligence (OED Online).

from oppression by men but simply from the fact that “[e]ach sex fulfils the tasks for which it is especially adapted by Nature” (208). Spencer used this claim to suggest that gender roles had been permanently fixed by evolution and could not be altered by human actions. Gilman treats this argument with derision. When the anthropoidal ape is informed by his fellows that building houses and making fires are not in his nature and will never be achieved by himself or his descendents the narrator scornfully remarks that “these things passed as arguments,/ With the Anthropoidal Apes” (79-80). In this way, Gilman turns the mockery that was frequently directed at feminists back onto the anti-feminists by putting their arguments into the mouths of primitive mammals.

In its use of humorous techniques, particularly the representation of prehistoric creatures as possessing the power of speech and the rhyming of multisyllabic scientific words like “Loxolophodon”, this poem is reminiscent of several of Kendall’s poems, particularly “Lay of the Trilobite” and “Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus”, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The poem is also similar to much of Kendall’s work in that it does not contain an overt feminist argument. Only the title, “Similar Cases”, implies that this poem is about more than these individual incidents. The title can be read as meaning that these cases are similar to each other but it also suggests that they are similar to another case, namely the position of women in the nineteenth century. That this was Gilman’s intention can be inferred through a comparison with the more overtly feminist poetry in the same volume, such as “She Who is to Come”, the poem that precedes “Similar Cases”, in which Gilman looks forward to the type of woman that will emerge under a more equal society: “A self-poised royal soul, brave, wise, and tender,/ No longer blind and dumb” (9-10). “She Who is to Come” is not overtly about evolution, only change and improvement, while “Similar Cases” is not overtly about feminism, but by placing these two poems next to each other Gilman allows them to comment on each other.

The presence of “Similar Cases” on the facing page implies to the reader of “She Who is to Come” that the imagined improvement in the women of the future will be brought about by evolution, while the message of “She Who is to Come” undermines the Loxolophodon’s argument from “nature” by implying that nature is not fixed but can change with changing conditions. By surveying the evolutionary change that has transformed “a little animal,/ No bigger than a fox” (1-2) into a horse, or an ape into a human, Gilman implies that the change in human society that would be required to bring about greater equality of the sexes is comparatively trivial and eminently achievable.

The desirability and inevitability of change could also be suggested through a depiction of its opposite, as the images of stasis and crystallisation found in the writing of many reformers suggest. For example, Blind’s friend W.K. Clifford, in his essay “On Some of the Conditions of Mental Development” (1868), argued that crystallisation in the ideas or behaviour of a race would lead to decline because the survival of a race, as with a species, depends on adaptability:

[I]f we consider that a race, in proportion as it is plastic and capable of change, may be regarded as young and vigorous, while a race which is fixed, persistent in form, unable to change, is as surely effete, worn out, in peril of extinction; we shall see, I think, the immense importance to a nation of checking the growth of conventionalities (71)

The idea that only a finite amount of change is possible for a species or race does not come from Darwin but the focus on the importance of adaptability and the weakening effect of too much stability is a Darwinian concept. George Levine draws attention to this theme in his description of the *Origin*’s “treatment of stability, perfection and finality as its true

enemies” (*Darwin and the Novelists* 103). Although Clifford links his discussion of crystallisation to the risks of conventional morality and fixed ideas, he could equally have applied his claims to the organisation of society and the gendered power relations within that society, as the philosopher David G. Ritchie did in his 1891 *Darwinism and Politics*:

Because a certain method has led us up to a certain point, it does not follow that the same method continued will carry us on further. Races that have reached a certain stage may be hindered by extreme conservatism from making any further progress – like the Chinese. ... The persons who use this kind of argument [that extreme differentiation between the sexes is characteristic of more civilised societies and that greater equality would lead to degeneration] fancy that they are influenced by scientific considerations, but they are really influenced by what they happen to have grown accustomed to. (63)

Like the poets discussed in this thesis, Ritchie deploys the language of degeneration that was often used by those who opposed equal rights for women, and uses it to argue that science is on the side of reform.

Blind’s depiction of crystallisation in “The Tombs of the Kings” should also be read as a comment on gender relations, and possibly also class relations, suggesting that the fixed hierarchies and power relations in British society will lead to decline. Like Ritchie, Blind uses another race as an example of extreme conservatism to force her Victorian readers into examining their own ideas and behaviour as though from outside; in Blind’s case this other race is the Ancient Egyptians. The poem depicts mummification as destructive because it prevents the natural changes in the body after death. The Egyptian

rulers who have chosen to be mummified have brought about their own destruction because the only real death, according to this poem, lies in stasis:

Heaven, by answering their prayer, turned it to a deadly curse.

Left them fixed where all is fluid in a world of star-winged skies;

Where, in myriad transformations, all things pass and nothing dies;

Nothing dies but what is tethered, kept when Time would set it free,

To fulfil Thought's yearning tension upward through Eternity. (94-8)

In contrast to discussions of mummies in newspapers and periodicals at this time, which often celebrate the preservation of these bodies, using phrases like “wonderful preservation” and “admirable preservation”, *Blind* represents the choice of mummification as a destructive attempt to oppose nature and natural laws (“The Royal Mummies” 61; “Egyptian Royal Mummies” 629). The kings’ decision to resist change puts them at odds with the natural rhythms of the earth, which are dependent on change: “On the changing earth unchanging let us bide till Time shall end” (27). By trying to hold on to their power at all costs and resisting natural changes the kings have destroyed themselves. George Meredith expresses a similar idea in “The Woods of Westermain”, in which he also contrasts evolutionary transformation with crystallisation and “decay”:

Him shall Change, transforming late,

Wonderously renovate.

Hug himself the creature may:

What he hugs is loathed decay. (IV 61-4)

Like *Blind*, Meredith also supported women's emancipation and women's suffrage (Holmes, "Darwinism" 524), and his focus on the necessity of change in his evolutionary poetry can similarly be connected to his desire for social change. As John Holmes observes, one of the important evolutionary themes in Meredith's sonnet sequence *Modern Love* is the idea that "Nature accepts that things pass, that without change and death life would stagnate, and we should do the same" (ibid., 530). A similar idea can be found in *Blind*'s poem.

As well as being a comment on social relations, "The Tombs of the Kings" could also be referring to the idea of male variability and female conservatism. Many evolutionists believed that evolutionary changes originated with the male of the species, while the female retained the past characteristics of the race. This idea can be found in Havelock Ellis's *Man and Woman* (1894): "From an organic standpoint, therefore, women represent the more stable and conservative element in evolution" (421). *Blind* reverses this argument by making the kings the ones whose bodies reflect the past: "But these Kings hold fast their bodies of four thousand years ago" (60). In this way the poem links male social conservatism with biological primitiveness and inferiority, depicting men who resist social change as enemies of human social and biological progress.

The fact that these rulers are out of synch with natural rhythms is demonstrated in the unnatural rhythms of the poem. The poem is written predominantly in trochaic octameter, which is both an unnaturally long line and an unnatural metre in English speech. The metre is particularly strong at the beginning of the poem when the narrator describes the mummies:

Where the mummied Kings of Egypt, wrapped in linen fold on fold,
Couched for ages in their coffins, crowned with crowns of dusky gold,

Lie in subterranean chambers, biding to the day of doom,
Counterfeit life's hollow semblance in each mazy mountain tomb,

Grisly in their gilded coffins, mocking masks of skin and bone,
Yet remain in change unchanging, balking Nature of her own; (1-6)

John Lennard suggests that when poets writing in English choose to use a falling rhythm it is often done to give a sense of oddness or foreignness to the poem, as in Browning's "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" or Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* (Lennard 6-7). In Blind's poem this metre creates a feeling of artificiality to reinforce the implication that the kings are acting against the dictates of nature. In opposition to the argument that women who seek to change their position in society are disobeying natural law, Blind suggests that the law of nature *is* change and that those who seek to resist such change are the unnatural ones.

As Lorna Duffin observes "[e]volution presupposed change, yet it was used primarily to argue against change in the status and position of women within society" (57). An example of this paradox can be found in Herbert Spencer's "Biology and 'Woman's Rights'", discussed earlier in this section. After claiming that gender inequalities have been brought about by natural processes of evolution, Spencer argues that this means that any attempt to alter the division of labour in Victorian society would not only be futile but could also be dangerous: if this experiment were tried, "the position of the species in the

great and constant struggle for existence would be very decidedly altered for the worse” (208) because tasks would no longer be carried out by the most suitable people:

We must conclude, therefore, that the attempt to alter the present relations of the sexes is not a rebellion against some arbitrary law instituted by a despot or a majority – not an attempt to break the yoke of a mere convention; it is a struggle against Nature; a war undertaken to reverse the very conditions under which not man alone, but all mammalian species have reached their current development. (ibid.)

In this way, evolution was used to preclude any attempt at reform by declaring all potential changes to the present power relations in society to be dangerous, despite the centrality of the idea of change to evolutionary theory. The persistent focus on change in women’s poetry at this time can be seen as an attempt to highlight this contradiction and to return the theme of change to its central position in evolutionary theory. This focus on change links the poets to female authors of prose treatises on evolution, such as Antoinette Brown Blackwell, who, as Sally Gregory Kohlstedt and Mark R. Jorgensen observe, “jettisoned ideas about biological determinism in favour of those that emphasized the significance of change within evolutionary theory” (284).

However, unlike these treatises on gender and evolution, poems on the theme of evolutionary change were rarely seen as political by the poets’ contemporaries. The reviewer of Gilman’s *In This Our World* for the *Saturday Review* recognised that the volume as a whole was intended to promote a belief in “the great things that are to come to humanity through the women of the future”, but dismissed “Similar Cases” as merely “amusing” (“In This Our World” 438). Reviewers of Blind’s *Birds of Passage* frequently

single out “The Tombs of the Kings” for praise but I have not encountered any reviewer who connects this poem with Blind’s interests in evolution and women’s rights. Most, like the reviewer of her *Selected Poems* for the *Saturday Review*, classify this piece as a “poem of the half-topographical, half-antiquarian class” and ignore the poem’s focus on the desirability of change (“A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind” 54). In part, this is because poetry is frequently more ambiguous than prose and so it can be more difficult to uncover a single authorised meaning. As the reviewer of *In This Our World* observes: “Heaven forbid we should have to read a blank-verse syllabus of reform or a plan of campaign in a sonnet sequence” (“In This Our World” 438). It is to be expected that the feminist elements of these poems will be less straightforward than the feminism in a non-fiction discussion of the impact of evolutionary thought on the social position of women. If, as I have argued, these poems were written with the intention of highlighting the centrality of change to evolution and connecting evolutionary change with social change then the responses of reviewers suggest that they were not successful. Nevertheless, even if these poems were not recognised as contributions to feminist debates by those outside the women’s rights movement, they were in dialogue with more overtly feminist works through their use of similar images and their shared focus on the centrality of change to evolution. As such, these poems should be read as part of the wider project of reinterpreting Darwin’s work from a feminist perspective that was shared by authors and intellectuals working in a variety of genres and literary forms.

Progressive Evolution

Not only the fact of change but the type of change depicted in the poetry is significant for this chapter. Evolutionary change in the work of fin-de-siècle feminist writers most often

appears in the guise of inevitable progress, and this progress is often implicitly linked to social change. This view of evolution as progressive is not taken from Darwin's work, in which natural selection leads to species becoming better adapted to their environments but does not necessarily lead to anything that humans would recognise as improvement. Consequently, progressive evolution is more likely to appear in the work of writers who engage less frequently with Darwin's work than Naden, Kendall and Blind do. For example, A. Mary F. Robinson's "Darwinism" (1888) and Emily Pfeiffer's sonnet "Evolution" (1876) both depict evolution as a process of continual, inevitable improvement, resulting from a hunger for progress in all living things. Robinson's poem describes a progressive urge that drove prehistoric ferns to evolve into trees, and apes into humans, and that still "[g]oads" humanity towards an "invisible goal" (22). Pfeiffer's poem is addressed to evolution, depicting it as a "[h]unger" (1) that "drivest rooted things/ To break their moorings" (2-3) and spurs creatures on to higher stages. Despite the title of Robinson's poem, neither of these poems depicts Darwinian evolution. Both contain elements of Lamarckian evolution, which works through a combination of the organism's responses to the environment and an inner urge to progress.¹⁶ These poems also hint at a divine plan underlying evolution, as in the reference to an "invisible goal" in Robinson's poem, and the concluding couplet to Pfeiffer's poem:

Thou art the unknown God on whom we wait;
Thy path the course of our unfolding fate. (13-14)

Lamarckian evolution gives power to individual organisms to bring about their own evolutionary development through their actions and the force of their will, but the poems'

¹⁶ I will discuss Lamarckian evolution in more detail later in this chapter.

depiction of a divine plan guiding this evolutionary development in a particular direction provides a guarantee of a positive outcome. As John Holmes suggests, Robinson's use of non-Darwinian evolution in a poem entitled "Darwinism" is likely to be the result of a misunderstanding, demonstrating "the extent to which Darwin's name had become identified with the accepted fact of evolution rather than the contested theory of natural selection" (*Darwin's Bards* 39). However, Pfeiffer's poem also depicts non-Darwinian evolution, even though, as I stated in the previous chapter, she is known to have read Darwin's work and appears to have had a clear understanding of it. Consequently, her use of teleological Lamarckian evolution in this poem is likely to have been a conscious choice rather than a misunderstanding. As Peter Bowler has demonstrated, there were several competing evolutionary theories circulating in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and Darwinian natural selection had by no means been established as the dominant theory (Bowler 7-8). Even for writers who were familiar with, and convinced by, Darwinian evolution, there were ways in which the progressive elements of some non-Darwinian evolutionary theories could be useful for promoting a vision of positive social change. The combination of individual agency and divine intervention in these poems is somewhat paradoxical but it helps to support the poems' celebration of change by implying both that social change will inevitably lead to improvement and that human actions to promote change are necessary to bring about God's plan.

Neither poem is explicitly about gender but both contain elements that invite comparisons with feminist literature. Both of these poems end by gesturing towards the future evolutionary improvement of the human race: the last line of Pfeiffer's poem refers to "our unfolding fate" (14) and Robinson's final stanza describes humanity as feeling the same desire to strive for a higher evolutionary goal that, according to this poem, drove apes to evolve into humans. Like the poems described in the previous section, both of

these pieces depict change as ongoing, in contrast to those commentators who saw Victorian society as the peak of evolutionary development. Furthermore, the depiction in both poems of frustration with limitations and restrictions leading to progress could be linked to the situation of middle-class women seeking wider opportunities than are offered by domestic responsibilities. Robinson's ape is depicted as inhabiting a primate version of the domestic sphere: "happy in his airy house" (11). He has material comforts but is dissatisfied and seeks to raise himself to a higher level. The ape is feminised by the depiction of his urge for evolutionary progress as equivalent to pregnancy: he is conscious of the "stirr[ing]" within him of an "unborn and aching thought" (13, 19), associating the ape's urge for progress with female biology, and implicitly with the dissatisfaction of Victorian women. Pfeiffer's poem depicts evolutionary progress as a movement towards greater freedom, particularly in the early lines, which depict restless organisms eschewing rootedness and acquiring wings (1-4). As Kathleen Hickok notes, the image of metamorphosis "is a recurrent metaphor in the tradition of women's poetry" ("Intimate Egoism" 27 n.17). This poem may not have been intended as a comment on gender but the imagery of metamorphosis and the association of evolutionary change with progress in both of these poems links them with other, more overtly feminist, responses to evolution. For example, Sarah Grand's novel *The Heavenly Twins* explicitly links the idea of teleological evolution with the idea of women's rights when the narrator comments that Evadne's father "was ready to resent even the upward tendency of evolution when it presented itself to him in the form of any change, ... more especially so if such change threatened to bring about an improvement in the position of women" (15). It is clear why the idea of teleological evolution would be attractive to feminist writers: this image could be used to suggest that not only is a change in the structure of society inevitable but that this change must be in the direction of "perfection", which for these writers means greater

gender equality. These poems take the celebration of change, discussed in the previous section, a step further by implying that this change will necessarily have a positive outcome.

Although the three main poets in this thesis generally show a more sophisticated understanding of evolutionary theory than many other poets who use evolution as a metaphor, Blind and Kendall sometimes depict evolutionary change as inevitably progressive in contrast to the undirected evolution described by Darwin. Blind's depiction of progressive evolution has led Holmes to describe her *Ascent of Man* as an act of "bad faith" (*Darwin's Bards* 49) because she understands evolution well enough to know that her depiction of it is inaccurate. The title of *The Ascent of Man* gives an obvious indication of Blind's focus on improvement and progress, and this focus is clear from poems such as "Chaunts of Life", in which "life is whetted upon life/ And step by panting step mounts higher" (II 87-8). The human evolution depicted in this poem, like the evolution in Pfeiffer's and Robinson's poems, implies that humanity is a goal that our ancestors were striving for, instead of the outcome of a series of chance variations, acted upon by natural selection:

From age to dumb unnumbered age,
By dim gradations long and slow,
He reaches on from stage to stage (II 115-17)

This description of early humans rising "from stage to stage" implies a pre-determined course of evolution rather than undirected change arising from random variations, as in Darwin's work. As I suggested in the previous chapter, some of Blind's poetry, particularly her poetry on sexual selection, is very Darwinian so, as Holmes observes, it is

not that she does not know better but that she has deliberately chosen to depict a non-Darwinian form of evolution in some of her work (*Darwin's Bards* 54). Holmes attributes this non-Darwinian poetry to a wish to avoid the bleaker aspects of Darwin's theory and to give a guarantee of a positive outcome to evolution (ibid. 52) but the depiction of progressive evolution in Blind's work may also be due to her belief in the positive nature of social change, particularly in regard to the position of women. The gendered dimension to Blind's representation of progressive evolution in *The Ascent of Man* is clear from the last few stanzas of "The Leading of Sorrow". In this poem, the voice of Mother Nature implores humankind to move beyond their animal heritage to a more loving and more divine future: "Oh, redeem me from my tiger rages,/ Reptile greed, and foul hyæna lust" (425-6). It is clear that male and female elements will share a more equal role in this future: the human ideal will combine "the hero's deeds" and "the thoughts of sages" with "healing love of woman" (427, 429). In this way, Blind's vision of progressive evolution is linked to her wish for greater equality for men and women and her belief in female agency as a powerful force for change. Although Mike Hawkins does not share my understanding of Blind's personified nature as a female figure he does argue that, through *The Ascent of Man's* focus on love and nurturing as the driving force behind this progressive evolution, "those features of nature through which salvation is possible are invested with features designated as feminine" (271).¹⁷ Through her depiction of evolution as an upward course and her focus on the positive impact of women and female nature on the direction of evolution Blind implies that society is moving towards a more hopeful, and more female, future.

The idea of evolution as inevitable progress is frequently ridiculed in Kendall's work, as in "Lay of the Trilobite" in which the narrator's faith in "The providential plan"

¹⁷ I will discuss Blind's representation of Mother Nature in more detail in the final chapter.

(14) is undermined by the trilobite's focus on randomness and imperfection, but she appears to endorse this interpretation of evolution in "Woman's Future". Of all the poems discussed in this chapter, "Woman's Future" makes the links between evolutionary change and an improvement in the position of women most explicit. The poem begins by outlining the supposed intellectual inferiority of women in the first few lines and then turns with hope to the future:

We heed not the falsehood, the base innuendo,
The laws of the universe, these are our friends.
Our talents shall rise in a mighty crescendo,
We trust Evolution to make us amends! (5-8)

There appears to be an element of mockery in these early lines, in the naïve insistence that "The laws of the universe, these are our friends" (6) and the depiction of Evolution as a sentient being or deity with the capacity to "make ... amends" for women's former disabilities. This seemingly mocking tone is underlined by the song-like metre and the comical two-syllable rhyme of "innuendo" and "crescendo". For a reader who is encountering this poem in its original context in *Dreams to Sell*, following on from poems like "Lay of the Trilobite" and "The Lower Life", it appears at this point in the poem that Kendall is parodying the idea of evolution as inevitable improvement and that the narrator's faith in progressive evolution will suffer the same fate as that of the narrator of "Lay of the Trilobite". However, this expectation is not fulfilled. The tone of the poem becomes more serious in later stanzas, when the narrator urges women to change their behaviour in order to bring about the evolutionary expansion of their brains:

Mere charms superficial, mere feminine graces,
That fade or that flourish, no more may you prize;
But the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,
The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes. (29-32)

At this point in the poem it becomes clear that Kendall is not, in Dorothy Mermin's phrase, "signalling to us from behind the speaker's back" (208), but is in fact promoting the progressive view of evolution that her other poems refute. In these later stanzas the alternating masculine and feminine rhymes that suggested a mocking tone in the first stanza give a sense of pace and urgency that lends conviction and emphasis to these lines.

As Holmes observes, the evolution depicted in this poem differs from the evolution depicted in poems like Pfeiffer's and Robinson's because, instead of originating from God or an inner urge to progress, the desired improvements will stem from a deliberate change in women's actions. Holmes argues that this difference explains the seeming contradiction of Kendall's other poetry mocking the idea of progressive evolution while "Woman's Future" appears to endorse it: "Where the providentialist trusts to evolution to do its own work, Kendall herself has no such illusions. Political and spiritual progress must be achieved through the 'lifework' of individuals" ("The Lay of the Trilobite" 12). However, the differences between the attitude to evolution expressed in this poem and that expressed in other poems from the "Science" section of *Dreams to Sell* can equally be explained by the difference in Kendall's purpose in writing this poem. Although several of Kendall's poems about science can be read as implying a feminist message, this is her only evolutionary poem that overtly addresses the subject of gender. Like the poems discussed earlier in this chapter, "Woman's Future" serves to remind scientists that human attributes and relationships are not fixed and can change with changing conditions, but the poem is

also addressed to women and it seeks a hopeful image to set against scientists' claims of female inferiority. Random, undirected Darwinian evolution is not sufficient; Kendall needs a guarantee of improvement in order to motivate other women to change their behaviour. The seemingly mocking tone in the early stanzas may be an indication of tension between Kendall's understanding of Darwinian evolution and the image of progress as women's evolutionary destiny that she promotes in this poem, but the science depicted in the poetry does not have to reflect Kendall's intellectual beliefs. Kendall's poetry does not aim to set out a coherent interpretation of the science but to explore the implications of evolution for the relationships between humans and other species, and between men and women. At times this necessitates endorsing a view of evolution that she does not hold. Like several other poems discussed in this chapter, "Woman's Future" celebrates the central role of change in evolutionary theory but also includes a non-Darwinian understanding of change as progress in order to avoid the potentially negative consequences of random, undirected change. Of all of the poems discussed in this chapter, this is the one that makes the most explicit association between evolutionary change and a change in the position of women. Reading the other poems in this chapter in conjunction with "Woman's Future" makes the potentially feminist aspects of the theme of change clearer.

Change is a central theme of evolution, and the depiction of evolution as progressive change is not exclusive to female poets but it is less common for evolutionary poetry by male poets to focus on the fact of change or progress itself rather than on the mechanism driving the change. For example, Lewis Morris's "Ode of Creation" depicts a progressive form of evolution – he describes evolution as an "upward course" (62) – but in his poem the focus is on the possible causes of evolutionary change. He asks whether evolution is driven by "some Inner Law" (59), an innate urge to progress as in Robinson

and Pfeiffer's poems, or by "some creative breath Divine" (61). He also refers to Darwinian natural selection: "Struggle on struggle, sentience, consciousness, ravin and pain" (43). Whereas Robinson's and Pfeiffer's poems focus on the theme of transformation but are vague about the mechanism that drives this change, the fact of change is less important in Morris's poem than in similar poems by women poets. However, there were male poets who wrote about evolutionary change in a way that is comparable to the work of the female poets discussed in this thesis. As I noted in the previous section, George Meredith's evolutionary poetry often focuses on the importance of change in a similar way to Blind's poetry. Some of A.C. Swinburne's poetry also uses evolution in a way that is comparable to Blind's. Like Blind's "Leading of Sorrow", Swinburne's "Hertha" features the voice of Mother Earth or Mother Nature, and she is similarly committed to human progress: "I have need of you free/ As your mouths of mine air;/ That my heart may be greater within me, beholding the fruits of me fair" (158-60). Meredith's feminism and Swinburne's republicanism and desire for a more liberal society lead them to represent evolutionary change in a similar way to the female poets discussed in this study.¹⁸ Because of cases like these, it is not possible to make a simple distinction between the depictions of evolutionary change by men and women. Rather, the division is between those who sought social change and those who wished to maintain the current state of society. However, most of those who used progressive evolution as an image of social change were women because women had more obvious gains to make from a change in the structure of society, and, as in the examples given in this section, the change depicted in women's poetry is often implicitly associated with gender.

Undirected Change

¹⁸ For more on Swinburne's desire for social change see Rooksby, para. 26.

Although the idea of progressive or teleological evolution could be used as an image of the desired improvement in the position of women there were also ways in which this view of evolution could be unhelpful for feminists. Many of the depictions of evolution discussed above imply a single line of development with all living creatures ranged along it at different points, in contrast to the branching evolution described by Darwin. This form of evolution is associated with recapitulation theory, which suggested that each individual repeats the evolution of its species in miniature. For example, the human embryo passes through a stage in which it resembles a single-celled organism, then later it passes through a fish-like stage and an amphibian stage, then later still it is hairy like an ape, before becoming a human infant. Each generation passes through these earlier stages but then progresses a fraction further than the previous generation. Cynthia Eagle Russett notes that this view of evolution is associated with the idea of a hierarchy of species, and that it stemmed from “the pre-Darwinian conception of nature as a Great Chain of Being, a single, ladder-like scale of relative levels of perfection. On this ladder one, and only one, being occupied the highest rung, all others failing to achieve perfection in greater or lesser degree” (52). Evolutionists who wished to reinforce the gendered status quo often used the idea of a single line of evolution, combined with recapitulation theory, to imply that women were following the same evolutionary course as men but were trailing considerably behind them. This idea is summed up by Geddes and Thomson: “In short, Darwin’s man is as it were an evolved woman, and Spencer’s woman an arrested man” (37). Havelock Ellis’s frequent descriptions of women as more childlike than men also stem from this analogy between the development of a species and the development of an individual: woman, as the less evolved sex, represents an earlier stage in the development both of the species and of the individual (Ellis 442). As Evelleen Richards notes: “[m]ost nineteenth-

century arguments for the lower evolutionary status of women sooner or later resorted to recapitulation theory” (“Darwin” 111 n.163). The association of teleological evolution and recapitulation theory with traditional hierarchies explains why some women poets rejected this image of evolution and instead emphasised the chance-driven aspects of Darwinism.

Naden’s “Solomon Redivivus, 1886” parodies the idea of evolution as progressive and hierarchical. In this poem a male narrator who depicts himself as a modern King Solomon describes to his Queen of Sheba how the two of them have passed through a series of other forms, beginning with the amoeba. This depiction of evolution may have been influenced by Ernst Haeckel’s *The History of Creation*, in which Haeckel, a proponent of recapitulation theory, identified twenty-two distinct stages in human evolution, corresponding to still-existing species, by examining human embryos (278-94).¹⁹ Both Haeckel and the narrator of “Solomon Redivivus” describe the evolving human race as having originated from amoebae then passed through simple invertebrate forms before becoming fish. Haeckel’s next stage is amphibians, while King Solomon’s is reptiles, but both then agree that our ancestors passed through several different forms of mammals before becoming apes and then humans. The details vary slightly in these two accounts of evolution but both depict still-existing species as corresponding to earlier stages in human evolution, and suggest that the process of becoming human represents a movement towards perfection. Although he delights in the puncturing of human pride resulting from the realisation that humans are just another part of nature, Haeckel does retain the old hierarchies in his depiction of humans as representing the highest stage of evolution. He refers to “the endless career in which man has since progressively developed, and in which he has far outstripped his animal ancestors” (299). Naden’s narrator also retains these hierarchies in his depiction of the process of becoming human as

¹⁹ Naden would have had access to this book, since a copy of it was owned by Mason Science College. The book is still held by the University of Birmingham library, with the original Mason Science College stamps.

“upward toil” (56) from lower to higher “grade[s]” (55) of life. His description of himself as a second King Solomon suggests his self-satisfaction and his image of himself as the peak of evolution.

The narrator’s sense of his own superiority extends to his relationship with his Queen of Sheba. Patricia Murphy notes that there are clear gender inequalities in the relationship between the two characters in this poem, with the narrator describing himself as “in brief, the Age” (4) while placing the woman in the subordinate position of passive listener and student (*In Science’s Shadow* 55). The poem does not allow the narrator to get away with this arrogant attitude, but instead it punctures his pomposity by giving him ridiculous rhymes, such as “odium” and “pseudopodium” or “reptile” and “crept, I’ll”. These rhymes render the poem, and its narrator, comical. Murphy attributes the narrator’s sense of superiority to “the masculine scientific view of women as a secondary entity” (56). I agree with this assessment but feel that Naden’s target is not science in general but particular aspects of evolution that were associated with gender hierarchies, especially providential evolution and recapitulation theory. As well as parodying Haeckel’s work in its description of the course of evolution, the poem also alludes to recapitulation theory through its form. The final stanza repeats, almost exactly, the words of the sixth stanza in which the narrator began describing the course of human evolution. The sixth stanza is as follows:

We were a soft Amoeba
In ages past and gone,
Ere you were Queen of Sheba,
And I King Solomon. (21-4)

In the final stanza the first and third lines change to “So, from that soft Amoeba, ... You’ve grown the Queen of Sheba” (61, 63), while the second and fourth lines remain the same. This repetition with variation mirrors the process of recapitulation that the poem alludes to. The description of the narrator as King Solomon reborn (“Redivivus”), also suggests a repetition of ancestral stages. As she does in “The New Orthodoxy”, Naden treats evolution as a modern form of mythology or religion in this poem. Through the use of biblical characters and the device of storytelling she mocks the myth of innate male superiority that is so frequently associated with evolution in the work of scientists and journalists. This poem, written while Naden was studying science at Mason College, reminds her scientific readers of the elements of myth-making inherent in their own belief systems and ridicules them for using evolutionary mythology to support their ideas about society and gender relations. With her detailed knowledge of evolutionary science Naden was more aware than most of the poets in this thesis of the ways in which the seemingly positive image of progressive evolution could be used to reinforce hierarchies and denigrate women’s intellect. Consequently she rejects this view of evolution in her work.

Like many of the poets discussed in this chapter, L.S. Bevington sometimes explores the idea of progressive, teleological evolution in her work, as in “Upward” (1879), in which she depicts all life as progressing towards “The Perfect” (17), but she seems ultimately to reject this idea in favour of chance-driven evolution. In “Egoisme à Deux” (1882) she ridicules the idea of divine intervention in human evolution by juxtaposing large universal images with the concerns of a human couple. The narrator describes the beginning of the earth and the origins of life and asks whether, while the planet was coming into existence, there was a divine urge to create herself and her lover:

When the warm swirl of chaos-elements
Fashioned the chance that woke to sentient strife,
Did there a Longing seek, and hasten on
Our mutual life?

That flux of many accidents but now
That brought you near and linked your hand in mine, –
That fused our souls in love's most final faith, –
Was it divine? (9-16)

Bevington employs some of the same ideas and imagery as those used in the poems by Robinson and Pfeiffer, discussed earlier, but she subverts this imagery in order to undermine the concept of teleological evolution. The “Longing” in Bevington’s poem is reminiscent of Robinson’s “unrest” and Pfeiffer’s “hunger”, and all three poems invoke a divine consciousness underlying evolution. Bevington undermines this teleological imagery by using large, universal images to dwarf the human element in the poem, ridiculing the idea that such powerful forces could exist just to bring about two individual lives. In opposition to the imagery of consciousness and intention she invokes “chaos” (9), “chance” (10), “flux” (13) and “accidents” (13). To reinforce her message the title dismisses the idea of divine intervention in human evolution as egotism.

Bevington’s targets in “Egoisme à Deux” are religion and humankind’s inflated sense of its own importance rather than gender inequality but in her use of humour to deflate human pride and her emphasis on the role of chance her work invites comparisons with some of Kendall’s poems, such as “Lay of the Trilobite”. Kendall uses a similar technique in “A Pure Hypothesis”. In this poem a being who lives in four-dimensioned

space has a dream about life in three dimensions as a result of a lecture by a professor who suggests that “The bounds of Time and Space,/ The categories we revere,/ May be in quite another case/ In quite another sphere” (5-8). Both the narrator and the professor depict three-dimensioned space as a mistake or as in some way inferior to their own environment. The professor describes the inhabitants of this hypothetical world as “beings incomplete” (14) with “feeble comprehension” (10), while the narrator experiences the three-dimensioned world of his or her dream as “unutterably wrong” (28) and “frightfully askew” (44) and imagines that the inhabitants of this world must be a “hapless race” (54):

I would not, if I could, recall
The horror of those novel heavens,
Where Present, Past, and Future all
Appeared at sixes and at sevens,
Where Capital and Labour fought,
And, in the nightmare of the mind,
No contradictories were thought
As truthfully combined! (33-40)

Life has evolved in a different direction on the narrator’s planet from the course that human life has taken and so aspects of society that Kendall’s readers would have taken for granted appear illogical and alien to this character. In opposition to those who depicted Victorian society and gender roles as the inevitable culmination of human evolution, Kendall suggests that life on earth could have evolved in any number of different ways and that the current state of the world, and of Victorian society, is no more logical or inevitable than any other potential outcome of evolution.

Although this poem is not explicitly about evolution it is indebted to Darwin's explorations of the alternative directions that natural selection might have taken under different circumstances. Some of these potential realities struck Darwin's original readers as entirely implausible, such as the image from the first edition of the *Origin* of a variety of bears evolving into whales:

In North America the black bear was seen by Hearne swimming for hours with widely open mouth, thus catching, like a whale, insects in the water. Even in so extreme a case as this, if the supply of insects were constant, and if better adapted competitors did not already exist in the country, I can see no difficulty in a race of bears being rendered, by natural selection, more and more aquatic in their structure and habits, with larger and larger mouths, till a creature was produced as monstrous as a whale. (215)

This passage provoked so much mockery that it was removed from later editions of the *Origin* (Ellegård 239). However, the sense of almost infinite possibility engendered by passages like this one influenced Darwin's contemporaries. As Tina Young Choi observes, "In the *Origin*, where impartial laws have taken the place of providence, any one vision of the world is as likely and as valid as any other" (290). Choi goes on to link this sense of possibility to the element of the fantastic found in much late-Victorian literature:

While [Darwin's] proposals – a natural world in which cuckoo mothers tend their own eggs, or in which all the flowers are blue – might seem modest ... they nevertheless represent a mode of thinking about past and future that encouraged readers to imagine yet more radical contingencies and elaborately conceived

alternative worlds, ones where decks of cards might come alive or Martians might appear on Earth. (294)

In Kendall's work these radical contingencies are not an end in themselves but instead serve to call the organisation of Victorian society into question. Like the poets discussed earlier, Kendall uses the idea of evolutionary change to suggest hope for the future. However, instead of linking this sense of optimism to inevitable progress, she finds a positive image in random, chance-driven evolution because of the implication that nothing is inevitable, and, equally, nothing is impossible.

Lamarckian Evolution

Of the evolutionary theories that existed before the publication of *The Origin of Species*, that of Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet de Lamarck was one of the most prominent. Lamarck believed that evolutionary changes in plants and less complex animals were brought about by the direct effect of the environment and that in the more complex animals they were caused by a combination of an inner urge to progress and the individual's actions in response to the environment. As the environment changed, so did the animals' habits, and such changes in behaviour led to certain organs becoming more developed as they were used more (Gribbin 335-6; Bowler 58). For example, as certain birds began spending more time in the water they spread their toes to aid their swimming and as the skin between the toes was stretched they gradually developed webbed feet (Lyell 189). Other organs, which were no longer in use, would atrophy. These adaptations, acquired within the lifetime of the individual, would then be passed on to the organism's offspring. Alvar Ellegård's 1958 study of evolution in mid-Victorian periodicals reveals that

although, in the decades after 1859, Darwin's work convinced the majority of educated people of the truth of evolution, comparatively few were persuaded by his proposed mechanism of natural selection and some returned to the earlier, Lamarckian, evolutionary ideas (17). By the 1880s, when the poets' most overtly scientific poetry was written, the role of natural selection was still very much in debate. Evolutionists ranged from neo-Lamarckians like Spencer who thought that evolution could be explained by the effects of environment and habit and by the inheritance of acquired characteristics, with natural selection playing a very small role or none at all, to neo-Darwinians like Wallace, who thought that all evolutionary changes could be attributed to natural selection. Between these two extremes were evolutionists like Huxley, Romanes, and Darwin's cousin Francis Galton who believed, like Darwin, that natural selection was the main cause of evolutionary change but that environment and habit may have played a role and that acquired adaptations may sometimes be inherited (Moore, *Post-Darwinian* 175-6).

Shafquat Towheed has noted that, even at the end of the nineteenth century, after the concept of the inheritance of acquired characteristics had been discredited, many writers still made use of Lamarckian ideas as "an explicatory and creative metaphor rather than a verifiable scientific fact" (41). There were good reasons for feminist or socialist writers to employ Lamarckian imagery, even if they were not intellectually convinced by the theory. Towards the end of Darwin's life and after his death the most prominent Darwinians were becoming increasingly hostile to environmental and social explanations of change or diversity:

[Darwin's] refusal to concede any but naturalistic explanations of human intelligence and morality, hardened into a biological determinism that rejected all social and cultural causation other than that which could be subsumed under the

natural laws of inheritance and thus become innate or fixed. ... The contradiction was that such rigid exclusion of environmental explanation led full circle back to the Wise Designer and Law Giver who ultimately sanctioned the social order which men and women could not change by their own efforts. (Evelleen Richards, "Darwin" 91-2)

Towards the end of his life Darwin wrote in his autobiography: "I am inclined to agree with Francis Galton in believing that education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of anyone, and that most of our qualities are innate" (Darwin, *Autobiography* 43). This insistence on biological rather than social explanations for human development meant, as I suggested in the introduction, that feminists who argued that many of the differences between men and women had been caused by social circumstances and women's restricted opportunities were dismissed as unscientific. It also made the idea that a change in the structure of society would erase many of women's supposed inferiorities seem less plausible. The related idea that the poor would be more moral and less drawn to crime if their living conditions were improved was also jeopardised by the hardening of the Darwinian theory:

By the 1880s the idea of demoralization was replaced by the idea of degeneration, and the political and social were displaced onto the biological. In a process of staged, explanatory moves from the social and moral to the biological, which were intimately linked with developments in scientific thinking, the poor were being cast as victims of their own biology. It followed that if poverty was a biological condition, it was immune to the environmental changes that could be brought about through social reform. (Richardson, *Love* 23-4)

As Richardson goes on to argue, when the Lamarckian idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics was discredited then many people abandoned the idea that improving the conditions of the poor of the present generation would help to improve future generations: “From the hereditarian standpoint, no amount of moralizing the poor, or uplifting their souls, would help; neither God, nor education, nor philanthropy were any use against defective germ-plasm” (24).

The role of cultural factors in inhibiting development was particularly clear to women, who had often experienced firsthand the effects of limited education and social constraints on an individual’s growth. Women writers frequently use aspects of Lamarckism to contest easy judgements of biological superiority or inferiority which do not take into account the effect of the environment. Richardson observes that Lamarckism “lies at the core of [Mona Caird’s] *The Daughters of Danaus*” (Love 198). Richardson notes that Caird uses the language of Lamarckian biological transmission in the novel to highlight the importance of cultural transmission (“People Talk” 199). For example, Professor Fortescue observes to the main character, Hadria, that her mother’s neglect of her mental powers “is taking its inevitable revenge ... upon you all. One can’t doom one’s best powers to decay, however excellent the motive, without bringing punishment upon oneself and one’s children in some form or other” (107). Professor Fortescue’s language implies that by allowing her intellectual abilities to atrophy through disuse Hadria’s mother has transmitted less acute mental powers to her children than she otherwise could have done but in reality he means that having sacrificed her intellectual potential in order to devote herself to her family, Mrs Fullerton now concentrates her energies on sabotaging her children’s potential: “Having allowed her own abilities to decay, Mrs Fullerton had developed an extraordinary power of interfering with the employment of the abilities of

others” (44). In this novel Caird implies both that social conditions stifle women’s talents and that forcing women to sacrifice their intellectual or artistic potential for their children will harm those children by depriving them of the example and encouragement of intellectual parents.

Like Caird, Naden uses the language of biological transmission to describe cultural transmission. In Naden’s case this may be partly due to the fact that, to a much greater extent than the other poets in this thesis, she was intellectually convinced by Spencer’s neo-Lamarckism. In a debate at Mason Science College, Naden stated that although she believed in natural selection she felt that it was “not sufficient to explain the phenomena of evolution” and that the “‘internal factor’ of Spencer must be taken into account” (“The Union”), and in her essay “Evolutionary Ethics” she echoes Spencer’s ideas in her claim that “[i]n the course of evolution, experience is stored up in heritable nervous structures, so that each individual, almost from birth, responds to signs which have become racially associated with certain feelings” (124). However, although Naden’s use of neo-Lamarckian ideas reflects her intellectual beliefs, she also appears to have found the model of the inheritance of acquired characteristics useful for communicating her feminist ideas. In *The Story of Clarice*, Clarice’s education is described as having been genetically inherited from her academic father rather than having been passed on verbally: “As though what others con with aching head/ This maiden knew by right inherited” (17-18). Naden’s conflation of biological and cultural inheritance in this image allows her to present education for women as natural and healthy rather than a potentially harmful strain that could damage the reproductive system, as some commentators suggested. This image also implicitly contests the assertion made by some writers that mental qualities were only transmitted from parents to children of the same sex, causing mental differences between men and women to become more exaggerated:

[S]ome qualities, transmitted only in a latent form from father to daughter or from mother to son, are fully inherited only by children of the same sex as the parent who bequeaths them. So that, while the progress of our latest civilization tends towards obliteration of the dividing line of male and female, a much older and wider set of influences are at work, tending to make every generation of women in some sense more feminine, every generation of men in some sense more masculine. (Wedgwood 123)

Thus, Naden's use of the image of mental qualities being transmitted from father to daughter denies both that education for women is unnatural and that qualities of mind or intellect are restricted to one sex. I will return to the subject of Naden's use of the imagery of biological inheritance to describe cultural inheritance in the final chapter.

Unlike Naden, Kendall does not appear to have been intellectually convinced by neo-Lamarckians like Spencer but she also uses some potentially Lamarckian imagery in her poetry, as in the suggestion in "Woman's Future" that women's brains will expand through increased use. In this case the concept of change being effected through the use or disuse of organs places power in the hands of women and reinstates the concept of intention that is absent from Darwinian evolution. It also shifts the focus of the debate away from innate biological factors, which are difficult to alter, and onto social factors and human actions. Kendall's use of potentially Lamarckian imagery is also linked to her socialism because, as George Levine notes, "Lamarckian intention became a very popular variation on Darwinism in the late nineteenth century, particularly among the Fabians" (*Darwin Loves You* 175). In her poetry about working class characters Kendall repeatedly stresses the impact of the environment on characters' development. For example, in "The

Ballad of the Cadger”, the curate observes that the cadger, a “hawker” (1) who makes a living by selling cheap religious medals and jewellery, “had so little chance,/ Because of want and training/ And adverse circumstance” (42-4). The maid in “The Legend of the Maid of All Work” explicitly links environment and moral development when she says of Kensington: “I think folk never grow so base/ In such a pleasant dwelling-place” (43-4). However, if Linda K. Hughes is correct in suggesting that the “fine Kensington lady who hands the maid flowers one night is most likely a working woman herself, a prostitute” (*New Woman Poets* 7) then Kendall may be satirising this easy association of environment and morality. Nevertheless, the implication that human character is shaped more by circumstances than by biological inheritance seems, on the whole, to be meant genuinely.

However, although this recognition of the influence of circumstances on people’s development avoids the spectre of inevitable degeneration or biological inferiority, there is a danger in stressing the impact of the environment that it may turn characters into passive victims of their surroundings. As Greta Jones observes, “use-inheritance could produce a biological determinism as strong as other theories of inheritance”:

Certainly institutions moulded character but the effects of this moulding might be to trap an individual’s heredity in a set of permanent roles or faculties from which they could escape only – if ever – after a long historical process. ... By suggesting that institutions produced hereditary changes in character and that character was not a product of external interventions by social institutions in the lifetime of an individual, use-inheritance might give less freedom to the individual to change his or her pattern of behaviour. (82-3)

There is a difference in Kendall's use of Lamarckism in her poems about working-class characters from her use of this theory in relation to gender in "Woman's Future". In "Woman's Future" she urges women to change their actions in order to effect a change in biology but in her worker poems the environment is depicted as having a more direct impact, regardless of the characters' actions. Diana Maltz observes that it is impossible to feel hope for the characters in Kendall's poetry because "Kendall proposes no other future for them" (324). Although "Ballad of the Cadger" contains an acknowledgement that the cadger has been shaped by "what he'd gone through" (46), rather than having been born with a tendency to be mercenary and "cunning" (54), there is no indication that he could change his nature if he chose to. Even on his deathbed he is trapped in habits and attitudes that have been formed by his life of poverty. When the curate, administering the last rites, asks him for a signal that he believes in God, the cadger responds by trying to sell him a medal:

Then over the hawker's features

A smile of cunning broke,

And his hands seemed groping after

The medals as he spoke:

'The Bulwarks of Religion,

Penny complete, all there!

Together on a farthing,

The Creed and the Lord's Prayer!' (53-60)

Although Kendall makes it clear that the cadger's unappealing qualities have been formed by circumstances rather than biology, the effect is the same and these qualities are just as fixed as if the man had been born with them.

Kendall's poems about working class characters manage to avoid the idea of biological degeneracy but her consequent reliance on environmental explanations may be behind Maltz's charge that "her worker-poems send mixed messages about laborers' evolving autonomy and insight" (317). Maltz contrasts these poems with Kendall's evolutionary treatment of gender, seeing her writing on gender as clearly positive while her worker poems are self-contradictory and sometimes reinforce stereotypes about the poor (ibid.). Maltz attributes this to the comic elements of Kendall's worker poems undermining the social commentary (ibid.). It is true that there is sometimes an element of conflict between the depictions of poverty and disadvantage within the poems and the characteristics of light verse, such as regular metre and rhyme and the element of mockery in descriptions of characters like the cadger. However, the sense of the characters' lack of agency or ability to break old patterns can more readily be attributed to Lamarckian evolution's focus on the inheritance of acquired characteristics and the importance of habit. As Maltz observes, Kendall balances an acknowledgement of difficult environmental conditions with a sense of working people's independence and abilities more effectively when she writes about real people in *How the Labourer Lives* than she does in her poetry:

It was not until Kendall moved from poetry to sociological analysis in the 1910s that she represented working people as complex, self-conscious creatures capable of adaptation and merely hindered by the constraints of their environment. There,

in the face of eugenic theory, she strenuously denied that physical and moral decay were mutually contingent. (315)

When Kendall uses fictional working people to function as evolutionary types she exaggerates the impact of the environment on their development but in her sociological work, when she makes less use of the imagery of evolutionary theory, she is able to give a more balanced and complex picture. Although I have suggested that these poets' use of evolutionary imagery is generally positive and helpful, there are times, like this one, when the science dictates the direction of the poem to the detriment of the intended message.

Conclusion

As George Levine has observed, as a result of the *Origin*:

Value would now be seen to inhere not in permanence, but in change, not in mechanical design but in flexibility and randomness. (*Darwin and the Novelists* 94)

The concept of the inevitability and importance of change was helpful to feminist poets in allowing them to make claims for the inevitability of social reform but the theme of evolutionary change is used very differently in the work of different poets, and even in different poems by the same poet. The image of progressive, teleological evolution could be used as a metaphor for inevitable social reform but its associations with a single, linear course of evolution, and thus with a natural hierarchy of species could undermine arguments for gender equality. Using the image of random, chance-driven evolution meant sacrificing any suggestion that future social change would necessarily mean an

improvement on the present state of society, but this view of evolution has the advantage of being associated with a branching pattern in which different species are evolving in different directions but are not higher or lower than any other species. Chance-driven evolution also allows for an almost infinite number of possibilities instead of limiting future change to a narrowly defined concept of “progress”. These aspects of the poetry contribute to a vision of possibility and chance which suggests that current gender roles are not divinely ordered or inevitable and that the future state of society could be very different. Although Darwin’s work is associated with this random and non-hierarchical version of evolution while Lamarckism can be hierarchical and is associated with many of the ideas that are described as “social Darwinism”, some aspects of Lamarckian evolution were useful to feminist and socialist writers. In particular, the focus on the environment gave scientific authority to the argument that many of the differences between men and women were caused by society and education instead of being biologically determined. Lamarckism also suggested that improving the living conditions and education of the poor was worthwhile because it would improve the character of future generations. However, arguments about the biological effects of an individual’s surroundings could lead writers to replace biological determinism with an equally deterministic view of the impact of the environment, as I have argued that Kendall does in her poems about poverty.

Although these poems tended not to be read as a commentary on gender relations, their focus on the centrality of change to evolutionary theory links them to more overtly feminist texts, like Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, and implicitly reinforces these texts’ calls for social change. By placing the poetry in the context of more overtly political prose texts this chapter has highlighted some ways in which the poetry alludes to a feminist interpretation of evolution, even though the gendered aspects of these poems are rarely made explicit. Recovering the texture of debate in this way means that poetry that is

normally seen as aloof from political issues becomes part of a wider conversation about the implications of evolutionary theory for human gender relations. This focus on implicit feminist allusions gives a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which women writers were intervening in debates about evolution and gender in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It also broadens the definition of feminist literature in a way that is more relevant to poetry by looking beyond overt political statements. This chapter has begun to suggest some of the implications of the poets' interpretations of evolutionary change for social and gendered hierarchies. The following chapter will give a more detailed examination of the concept of hierarchies in relation to evolution. I will also explore the blurring of boundaries between different species and categories in evolutionary discourse, and the impact of this technique on the poetry.

Chapter Three

Crossing the Line

Hierarchies and Boundaries

In the previous chapter I examined some ways in which the theme of change in evolutionary theory could be used to argue for the inevitability of social change. In this chapter I will explore the poets' responses to the related idea that, as species have evolved gradually from a common ancestor instead of having been created in their present form, attempts to classify and divide them, or to establish a hierarchy of species, are arbitrary and not a case of revealing an objective truth. Although Darwin's work was popularly associated with progress from lower to higher forms, Darwin himself was aware of, and frequently commented on, the difficulty of using terms such as "higher" and "lower" to refer to different species:

The embryo in the course of development generally rises in organisation: I use this expression, though I am aware that it is hardly possible to define clearly what is meant by the organisation being higher or lower. (*Origin* 420-1)

Although Darwin's next comment, that "no one probably will dispute that the butterfly is higher than the caterpillar" (421), reinstates the idea of hierarchy, he generally only uses terms such as "higher" and "lower" to refer to adaptation to the environment or fitness for survival rather than using anthropocentric criteria of highness or lowness:

The inhabitants of each successive period in the world's history have beaten their predecessors in the race for life, and are, in so far, higher in the scale of nature; and

this may account for that vague yet ill-defined sentiment, felt by many palaeontologists, that organisation on the whole has progressed. (*Origin* 343)

Gillian Beer observes that Darwin's early notebooks reveal his "exultant pleasure ... in restoring man to an equality with other forms of life and in undermining that hubristic separation which man had accorded himself in all previous natural history" (*Darwin's Plots* 55). In the notebooks Darwin reverses the values of his culture as well as unsettling species hierarchies:

It is absurd to talk of one animal being higher than another. – We consider those, where the cerebral structure/ intellectual faculties most developed, as highest. – A bee doubtless would when the instincts were. (Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks* 74)

In comments like this, Darwin suggests that the human perspective is just one viewpoint among many and is no more valid than the viewpoint of any other species. As Beer notes, this democratic approach to species difference is also evident in his published works, as in his description in the *Descent* of the brain of the ant as "one of the most marvellous atoms of matter in the world, perhaps more so than the brain of a man" (Beer, *Darwin's Plots* 55; *Descent* 74). Beer argues that Darwin's theory is radical because it "suggested that man was not fully equipped to understand the history of life on earth and that he might not be central to that history" (ibid. 15). As L.S. Bevington puts it in her poem "Unto This Present" from *Key-Notes*, evolution demonstrates that "[t]he life of man is not the end of things" (IV 22). Like Darwin, Bevington delights in undermining human arrogance but in her case this may be due to her socialist and feminist views and her desire to demolish

human hierarchies, rather than a respect for other species like the one that motivates Darwin. As I will go on to argue, it is likely that Kendall's focus on those aspects of Darwin's theories that undermine hierarchies and blur boundaries between species is due to her own socialist and feminist perspective. Darwin's work replaced the old idea of the chain of being, a static hierarchy of species, created by God, with the non-hierarchical image of the tree of life and the "disordered, democratic" (Hyman 33) entangled bank "clothed with plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, ... so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner" (Darwin, *Origin* 459). In this world, brought about through natural processes of variation and selection rather than having been created by a conscious designer, there is no God to place any one species above any other, and so species can no longer be described as higher or lower than each other. This aspect of Darwin's work helps to explain its appeal to poets who sought a more equal society.

Darwin's work also undermined hierarchies by blurring boundaries between species. In the *Origin* Darwin proved that all organisms ultimately blend into each other and so concepts like "species" and "variety" are merely a convenient way of grouping similar organisms and have no real meaning:

From these remarks it will be seen that I look at the term species, as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, and for mere convenience sake. (108)

This revelation threatened humanity's special position by blurring the boundary between human and animal as well as making other boundaries and divisions seem less secure. This unsettling of fixed categories and blurring of boundaries is one way in which discourses of science and gender were associated in the nineteenth century. As barriers between species were being eroded and divisions in society seemed threatened by the demands for greater political participation by women and the working classes, the language of biology was used to reinforce divisions between men and women. This tendency is evident in George Romanes's comments that "in the animal kingdom as a whole the males admit of being classified, as it were, in one psychological species and the females in another" (654). Susan David Bernstein has noted this overlap between discussions of species boundaries and of divisions between human genders, classes and races:

The widening currency of a scientific theory that seemed to run contrary to the verifiable facts of, for instance, evident differences between bears and whales, or between apes and humans, resonates with a more diffused cultural anxiety about social and biological taxonomies as shifting and unreliable. (Bernstein, "Ape Anxiety" 254)

The questions and anxieties provoked by this evolutionary blurring of boundaries are reflected in the images of hybridity and crossing of species barriers in the literature of this era, particularly the humorous literature.

This chapter will focus particularly on Kendall, who makes use of this unsettling of seemingly fixed categories by undermining divisions between species in order to call social and gendered divisions into question. As the perceived distance between humans and apes was reduced by evolutionary science, the differences between men and women

could be made to seem trivial. This chapter will begin by exploring how Kendall's poem "The Lower Life" undermines hierarchies and divisions between species. I will then move on to discuss some ways in which Kendall and Naden's poetry blurs boundaries between species in order to challenge the idea of male superiority over women. I will compare the blurring of species boundaries in their poetry with *Punch* cartoons that played on taxonomic confusion. Through a focus on these themes this chapter will demonstrate how poems that are not overtly linked to gender can still be seen as engaging with debates about the meaning of evolution for the relationships between men and women. Kendall uses elements from the *Origin* that undermine species boundaries in order to contest the focus in other scientific texts, such as Geddes and Thomson's *The Evolution of Sex*, on innate and insurmountable differences between men and women. Although this approach is less overtly feminist than that of Blind and Naden, Kendall's focus on evolutionary theory's unsettling of hierarchies and divisions provides a Darwinian alternative to the logic of scientific sexism and is a key aspect of the feminist re-evaluation of evolution that is examined in this thesis.

"The Lower Life"

Gillian Beer notes that both Kendall and Naden "take the position of the others of evolution" in their scientific poetry ("Rhyming as Resurrection" 201). Although this is the case with Naden, and also Blind, who uses her evolutionary poetry to demonstrate the harmful effects of struggle and competition on women, children and the poor, it is particularly true of Kendall. Later in this chapter I will discuss poems such as "Lay of the Trilobite", "The Philanthropist and the Jelly-Fish" and "The Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus" in which Kendall uses anthropomorphism to blur species boundaries and writes from the

perspective of creatures who are extinct or who are considered as “low” forms, but I will begin by exploring a related strategy found in her poem “The Lower Life” – that of calling hierarchical ideas into question by viewing species characteristics from an objective evolutionary perspective rather than an anthropocentric perspective. In “The Lower Life” Kendall demonstrates that no species has been rendered perfect by evolution, and highlights ways in which other species may be seen as superior to humans:

The birds soar higher far than we,
The fish outswim us in the sea,
The simple fishes. (4-6)

The idea of human inferiority to other species, at least in some aspects, is often touched upon by late-Victorian commentators on evolution, both evolutionists and anti-evolutionists, but is normally treated briefly and then dismissed. An early example of this can be found in the philologist Max Müller’s 1861 lecture, “The Theoretical Stage, and the Origin of Language”:

Are there not many creatures in many points more perfect even than man? Do we not envy the lion’s strength, the eagle’s eye, the wings of every bird? If there existed animals altogether as perfect as man in their physical structure, nay, even more perfect, no thoughtful man would ever be uneasy. His true superiority rests on different grounds. (*Lectures on the Science of Language* 354)

The grounds of human superiority that Müller refers to are the possession of language and the ability to reason, which, as I will argue later in this chapter, were frequently used to

erect barriers between humans and other species by those who were hostile to the theory of evolution. On the evolutionists' side, Huxley makes a similar point at the end of *Man's Place in Nature* (1863): "Our reverence for the nobility of manhood will not be lessened by the knowledge, that Man is, in substance and in structure, one with the brutes; for, he alone possesses the marvellous endowment of intelligible and rational speech" (104). In the first two stanzas of "The Lower Life" Kendall parodies this tendency to flirt with human equality or inferiority to other species but then to bury the question in an appeal to reason or language. The lines from the first stanza, quoted above, raise the question of human inferiority and then the first lines of the second stanza imitate the attempt to resolve the question in humanity's favour:

But, evolutionists reflect,
We have the pull in intellect,
And that's undoubted: (7-9)

However, instead of ending by assuring her readers of their superiority, Kendall's poem places humans and other animals on a level of equality by suggesting that the ability to swim or fly could be seen as equivalent to human intelligence and that she would need to experience the life of other species before she could judge which state was better:

Ah, could I be a fish indeed,
Of lucky horoscope, and creed
Utilitarian,
'Mong blissful waves to glide or rest,
I'd choose the lot I found the best,

Or fish or Aryan! (49-54)

The ending of the poem places the power of flight and the ability to reason on a level of equality and suggests that any attempt to privilege one over the other would simply be a matter of preference: "I'd tell you which I voted for,/ The flight of airy pinions, or/ The March of Reason" (58-60). This conclusion suggests that the human perspective is only one of many perspectives and that the subjectivity of a fish or bird is as valid as that of a human. In the same way that Darwin suggests, in the quotation from his notebook given in the previous section, that bees may have different values from those of humans and that their perspective is no less valid than ours, Kendall observes that humans can only judge from the perspective of our own species and questions our ability to construct hierarchies based on this limited and subjective knowledge.

Just as Darwin's work questions anthropocentric values by imaginatively inhabiting the perspectives of other creatures, Kendall asks whether human intelligence and reason are really superior to the qualities possessed by other species:

Is wisdom, then, the only test,

Of lot superlatively blest?

There have been others.

Our aeon too will pass, and then

Are monads so much less than men?

Alas, my brothers! (37-42)

Particularly significant for an examination of Kendall's place in poetic debates about the meaning of science are the lines "Our aeon too will pass, and then/ Are monads so much

less than men?” (40-41) because Kendall uses them to enact a subtle parody of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*. The lines that Kendall parodies are from section CXX, in which the persona refuses to let his view of humanity’s role and purpose be determined by scientific discoveries, and, although allowing that the future man may choose to embrace his animal ancestry and “shape/ His action like the greater ape” (CXX 10-11), insists that he himself “was *born* to other things” (12). The lines from this section that Kendall parodies are from the stanza in which the persona rejects the suggestion that human beings are merely bodies without souls, or “cunning casts in clay” (CXX 5):

Let Science prove we are, and then
What matters Science unto men, (CXX 6-7)

Kendall’s couplet echoes Tennyson’s line endings, “and then” and “men”, and also parodies the metre of his lines exactly, to the extent that line forty of Kendall’s poem uses words with the same number of syllables as their equivalents in line six of Tennyson’s. She uses these echoes to indicate that her poem should be read as a response to Tennyson’s. Whereas he views science as a threat to humanity’s special position and to the idea of spiritual life, she embraces a democratic evolutionary vision of diversity and equality.

Olive Schreiner unsettles hierarchies in a similar way in her unfinished novel, *From Man to Man*. At one point in the novel the main character, Rebekah, reflects on the notion of higher and lower races and questions how any human being could be impartial enough to identify those qualities that make one race higher than another (170-1). She demonstrates that qualities such as intelligence and logic, that are valued by her society,

may be of less importance to the species than qualities like self sacrifice, that are often valued less highly:

[W]hat if to me the little Bushman woman, who cannot count up to five and who, sitting alone and hidden on a koppie, sees danger approaching and stands up, raising a wild cry to warn her fellows in the plain below that the enemy are coming, though she knows she will fall dead struck by poisonous arrows, shows a quality higher and of more importance to the race than those of any Bismarck? ... Who shall contend I am not right? (172)

Carolyn Burdett argues that Schreiner uses Rebekah's "relativism of values" to oppose "the 'scientific' certainty with which racial differences are *valued* in evolutionary discourse" (102). Burdett's discussion of Schreiner's response to social Darwinism is interesting and insightful but fails to note the ways in which this "relativism of values" is indebted to evolutionary discourse instead of simply being opposed to it. Like Kendall's poem, Schreiner's text seeks a reassessment of human values from an evolutionary perspective to highlight the extent to which masculine and European priorities have predominated in assigning worth to people and groups. She demonstrates that from an evolutionary point of view all such qualities should be judged by their survival value to the species rather than from subjective ideas of superiority and inferiority.

As well as the unsettling of hierarchies in Kendall's and Schreiner's writing being indebted to Darwin's work, the prevalence of questions in both of these texts recalls Darwin's frequent use of questions in the *Origin* to highlight weaknesses in his opponents' arguments or to suggest alternatives to his readers' common-sense assumptions:

It is scarcely possible to avoid comparing the eye to a telescope. We know that this instrument has been perfected by the long-continued efforts of the highest human intellects; and we naturally infer that the eye has been formed by a somewhat analogous process. But may not this inference be presumptuous? Have we any right to assume that the Creator works by intellectual powers like those of man? ... In living bodies, variation will cause the slight alterations, generation will multiply them almost infinitely, and natural selection will pick out with unerring skill each improvement. Let this process go on for millions on millions of years; and during each year on millions of individuals of many kinds; and may we not believe that a living optical instrument might thus be formed as superior to one of glass, as the works of the Creator are to those of man? (219)

Gillian Beer describes Darwin's frequent use of the present tense in the *Origin* as "reinforc[ing] the effect of *discovery*, of being on the brink of finding out, rather than sharing an already formulated and arrested discovery" (*Darwin's Plots* 43), and his use of questions, too, makes the reader a participant in the process of discovery, as though they are working through the problem with him. His use of questions also undermines common-sense assumptions by pulling apart and examining what is usually taken for granted, and submitting automatic prejudices to a process of logical examination. Kendall and Schreiner, too, use questions both to draw the reader in to the process of discovery and to force them to question their own assumptions. Both texts ask the reader to justify their sense that a European politician is superior to an African tribeswoman, or a human being to a single-celled organism. In the absence of a designing intelligence, superiority and inferiority can only be judged in relation to particular roles or environmental conditions, and the criteria for judging these qualities will vary in different circumstances.

Consequently, it is not possible, from an evolutionary perspective, to declare that any one species or individual is superior to any other. This is the message of both Kendall's and Schreiner's texts.

These two texts differ in that while Schreiner's is overtly seeking to persuade the reader of her argument, Kendall's is more ambiguous and playful. In some ways this makes Kendall's text more readable and more persuasive than Schreiner's. The quotation from *From Man to Man* is taken from a point in the book where the novel format is effectively suspended and replaced with an extended essay on social Darwinism, which can try the reader's patience at times. Kendall avoids polemic in favour of entertainment which makes it easier to slip an argument past the reader. As Linda M. Shires suggests, less moralising forms of humour, such as fantasy, nonsense and parody may sometimes be more politically effective than satire:

[W]hereas satire carries the air of self-righteousness about it, these forms of comedy are finally more disturbing because less secured in a standard of right and wrong. There is something relative, even arbitrary, that these forms convey through their reliance on inversion and juxtaposition. They can, perhaps paradoxically, be less easily dismissed than satire. (271)

Kendall's poem does not attempt to engage the reader in a serious intellectual debate, but her seemingly trivial and light-hearted questions about the place of the human race in relation to other species unsettle conceptions of human dominance and superiority by calling common-sense assumptions into question. The poem's refusal even to attempt to answer the question "Are monads so much less than men" is also challenging because the poem upsets the reader's conception of the relationships between different species but does

not offer any resolution. Ultimately, the humour in this poem is disturbing because it challenges the idea that it is possible to make objective judgements of the superiority of a man over a fish, or a man over a woman.

On the other hand, Kendall's avoidance of an overt argument can sometimes make it difficult to be certain what her point is. The passage from Schreiner's text is clearly about racial hierarchies, the morality of social Darwinism and questioning the idea that greater physical force is a sign of innate superiority. There is also clearly a gendered element to this passage when Rebekah moves from thinking about racial oppression to a consideration of the ways in which "the stronger sex has so perpetually attempted to crush the physically smaller" (195). Although Kendall also addresses the concept of hierarchies in relation to evolutionary theory it is not clear whether her poem should be read as a challenge to racial, gendered or class hierarchies or simply as a consideration of the relationship between different species. There are some elements to this poem that encourage a feminist interpretation. For example, Kendall's argument that qualities like flight or swimming ability are equivalent to human intellect is reminiscent of the feminist argument, put most notably by Antoinette Brown Blackwell, that females are not inferior to males but instead possess distinctive feminine qualities that are equivalent to masculine qualities:

[T]he extra size, the greater beauty of color; and wealth of appendages, and the greater physical strength and activity in males, have been in each species mathematically offset in the females by corresponding advantages such as more highly differentiated structural development, greater rapidity of organic processes, larger relative endurance It is claimed that the stronger passionate force in the

male finds its equivalent in the deeper parental and conjugal affection of the female, (Blackwell 6)

In “The Lower Life”, Kendall insists that difference does not need to indicate inequality, in an argument that parallels more overtly feminist responses to evolution, such as Blackwell’s. Some of the language used in “The Lower Life” can be read as an allusion to the women’s rights movement, such as the description of animal life as “a lower sphere” (47), suggesting the idea of “separate spheres”, or the phrase “I’d tell you which I voted for” (58), which may be a reference to the emerging women’s suffrage debate. However, these elements are so subtle that they may not be intentional.

Attempts to untangle the political connotations of Kendall’s use of the theme of hierarchies are further complicated by the presence of a second theme running through the poem: that of individual moral and spiritual development. Following on from the discussion of the evolutionary compromise between intelligence and other qualities, like the ability to swim or fly, Kendall then applies this principle to individual life, arguing that “[t]he gaining of a higher goal/ Increaseth sorrow” (26-7):

If we have freedom, we lose peace.

If self-renunciation, cease

To care for pleasure.

If we have Truth – important prize!

We wholly must away with lies,

Or in a measure. (31-6)

The title, “The Lower Life”, is a comic reversal of the phrase “The Higher Life”, which normally has a spiritual meaning, as in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, in which Angelica’s aunt Lady Fulda tells Angelica that she is being called to “the Higher Life” (445). Kendall herself uses the phrase “the lower life” as a contrast to spiritual life in her article “The Social Ideal” (1894), when she complains that society privileges material considerations over spiritual ones, and teaches people that if they “[a]ccumulate more and more physical well being, more of the lower life” then “the higher, the spiritual life, ... will somehow come out of it” (427). The presence of multiple themes in this poem means that it cannot be read as clear social commentary on a single issue but, whatever Kendall’s intentions in writing this poem, it clearly undermines hierarchies and jeopardises any attempt to place humanity on a different evolutionary plane to other species. Even if Kendall did not intend this poem to be read specifically as a comment on class or gender relations, its undermining of species hierarchies implicitly threatens human social hierarchies by questioning the concepts of superiority and inferiority and by problematising the societal values that determine such hierarchies.

Language and Classification

Kendall uses the evolutionary perspective to blur boundaries and undermine hierarchies in a number of poems, but of particular interest is “Lay of the Trilobite”, which uses several different aspects of evolutionary theory in its questioning of species hierarchies. In this section I will discuss Kendall’s exploration in “Lay of the Trilobite”, and to a lesser extent *That Very Mab*, of the ways in which evolutionary theory and new scientific discoveries unsettled the concept of divisions between species. I will focus particularly on the debates

about the role of language in separating humans from other species and the importance of the discovery of egg-laying mammals for the stability of species categories.

In “Lay of the Trilobite”, a smug Victorian gentleman encounters a fossilised trilobite who describes the course of human evolution and criticises the current state of society, convincing the man that he would have been better off as a trilobite. From the man’s first encounter with the trilobite it becomes clear that we are in the territory of nonsense poetry:

And then, quite natural and free
 Out of his rocky bed,
That Trilobite he spoke to me,
 And this is what he said; (17-20)

The lack of a caesura or alteration of the metre in the line “That Trilobite he spoke to me” (19) suggests a fairly ready acceptance by the man of the idea of trilobite speech. The tone is reminiscent of the nonsense poetry of authors like Lewis Carroll, in which unusual situations are treated as ordinary, or with only mild surprise:

The sun was shining on the sea,
 Shining with all his might;
He did his very best to make
 The billows smooth and bright –
And this was odd, because it was
 The middle of the night. (Carroll, “The Walrus and the Carpenter” 1-6)

“Lay of the Trilobite” is not a nonsense poem but it does resemble this form in its tone and logic. The nonsense elements, combined with Kendall’s references to evolutionary theory, are used to destabilise seemingly fixed categories and hierarchies.

The most obvious way in which “Lay of the Trilobite” resembles a nonsense poem is in its use of a speaking fossil, which links this piece to nonsense poems such as Carroll’s, with its speaking oysters. However, this is not done simply for comic effect but is also a reference to evolutionary debates about species boundaries because the possession of articulate language is often treated as the definitive boundary between humans and other species in the work of Victorian biologists, anthropologists and philologists. In an 1861 lecture, “The Theoretical Stage, and the Origin of Language”, Max Müller described language as the “Rubicon” that beasts would not “dare to cross” (*Lectures* 360), and in an essay written four years later August Schleicher suggested that a speaking ape should be considered human, while a speechless human should not (Schleicher 78). Although this debate was most prevalent in the 1860s and 1870s, it had not been resolved by the 1880s, as is evidenced by St. George Jackson Mivart’s article “A Limit to Evolution”, printed in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1884. In this article Mivart argues that, through the possession of language and the capacity for abstract thought, “a most marked difference, a difference not of degree but of kind, divides men from all, even the highest brutes” (279). These debates about language suggest that if animals were to acquire the power of speech, human separateness and dominance would be threatened. Darwin and his followers used these debates to further undermine boundaries between species by playing down the uniqueness of human language and focusing on non-verbal forms of communication, as in Darwin’s comments in *The Descent of Man*:

The habitual use of articulate language is, however, peculiar to man; but he uses, in common with the lower animals, inarticulate cries to express his meaning, aided by gestures and the movements of the muscles of the face. This especially holds good with the more simple and vivid feelings, which are but little connected with our higher intelligence. Our cries of pain, fear, surprise, anger, together with their appropriate actions, and the murmur of a mother to her beloved child, are more expressive than any words. (107)

Both sides in this debate saw language as a barrier between humans and other species, whether they sought to reinforce or undermine this barrier. In this context, questions of language, and of which characters in the poetry have access to it, become questions of species and boundaries.

In “Lay of the Trilobite”, instead of following Darwin in suggesting that animals might have the capacity to acquire articulate language in the future, Kendall takes this idea a step further by depicting a member of another species as having already acquired the power of speech. The trilobite’s ability to speak in perfect English places him on a level of equality with the man and makes any other differences between them seem trivial. As Christine Ferguson has observed of the language used by the non-European characters in Grant Allen’s novels, such “startling English fluency ... threatens to dissolve their classification as Other” (9). As August Schleicher put it: “If a pig were ever to say to me, ‘I am a pig,’ it would *ipso facto* cease to be a pig” (qtd. in Müller, “Lectures on Mr. Darwin’s Philosophy” 182). In other words, in the act of describing his difference from the man – “I didn’t grumble, didn’t steal,/ I *never* took to rhyme:/ Salt water was my frugal meal,/ And carbonate of lime” (53-6) – the trilobite erodes that difference through his use of language. Like authors of nonsense poetry, Kendall “put[s] the real in jeopardy” and

“unsettle[s] fixed positions for the reader and for characters or speakers” (Shires 267, 272). The unsettling of fixed positions is clear in this poem from the blurring of boundaries that is effected through the metre. By the end of the poem the narrator’s speech has degenerated from the almost entirely regular iambic metre of the first two stanzas to encompass the feminine endings of “thicker” (66) and “quicker” (68) and the two dactyls in the final line: “In the Silurian seas” (72). This reflects contamination by the more variable metre of the trilobite’s speech. In losing his monopoly on language the man has lost the source of his human uniqueness and his assumed superiority over others.

As Marion Thain remarks, the loss of distinction between species in this poem also imperils gender divisions: “If man has lost his grip on what separates him from the trilobite, then he has also lost his grip on what separates him from woman” (“Michael Field”, 103). Although both characters in “Lay of the Trilobite” are male, this poem contains potentially gendered aspects. The narrator’s pride in his “mighty mind” (4) may be a reflection of the debates surrounding brain size and gender, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The trilobite does not attempt to rival the man’s intellect, freely admitting to being “gentle, stupid, free from woe” (49), but does demonstrate that the man’s intelligence has evolved organically from something equivalent to the trilobite’s, and that any difference between them is only a difference of degree rather than kind: “you evolved your shining lights/ Of wisdom and perfection/ From Jelly-fish and Trilobites/ By Natural Selection” (29-32). The trilobite also undermines traditional hierarchies by privileging stereotypically feminine qualities such as gentleness, cheerfulness and a supposed lack of intelligence over masculine intellect and colonial aggression. He considers his simple way of life to be superior to the man’s and feels pity for the human condition: ““oh, a pretty fix you’re in!”/ Remarkd the Trilobite” (47-8). As well as unsettling species hierarchies, and implicitly gender hierarchies, Thain observes that the

association of the man and the trilobite links the man to the natural world and undermines the Victorian association of women with nature and men with the “more exalted spiritual realm” (“May Kendall” 119). I will argue in the final chapter that Blind and Naden respond to the association of women and nature in scientific discourse by replicating this association in order to interrogate it. Kendall takes a different approach, avoiding any discussion of women’s supposed affinity with nature and instead making the male narrator of “Lay of the Trilobite” the one who is associated with the natural world. Instead of allowing the man to observe nature from a distance, as he does at the beginning of the poem when he climbs a mountain in search of a sublime experience, the trilobite, through his focus on the narrator’s descent from “Jelly-fish and Trilobites” (31), demonstrates to the man that he *is* nature, every bit as much as women are. By placing the man on a level of equality with the trilobite, the poem not only undermines his sense of his own superiority but also his sense of separation from the debased and feminised material world.

In addition to these potentially gendered aspects, the poem could also be read as a commentary on class hierarchies, with the narrator’s arrogant conviction that his elevated evolutionary position has been brought about by “[t]he providential plan” (14) reflecting the complacent attitude of the higher classes to their privileged position. Kendall’s opposition to this class arrogance is clear from her criticism in one of her essays of those who “regard slums as the creation and natural environment of a certain *inferior* type of character, and content themselves with saying ‘If you put them into a palace, they would turn it into a slum’” (Four Meditations, third essay 7). It is not necessary to choose between a feminist and a socialist reading of this poem since the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Kendall was clearly concerned with challenging both gender and class hierarchies, and this poem’s unsettling of hierarchies and divisions is significant for debates about both gender and class. As in “A Pure Hypothesis”, which was discussed in

the previous chapter, Kendall looks at her society through an outsider's eyes and shows that the current state of affairs is not inevitable. Shires suggests that nonsense poetry ultimately "re-establish[es] a sense of the real even more firmly" (272) but Kendall uses aspects of this form to raise questions and doubts that are not resolved. As the variation in the metre of the man's speech makes clear, notions of "the real" have been permanently altered by his encounter with the trilobite and his ideas of human male superiority over others have been shaken.

Like the trilobite's use of language, Kendall's references to the difficulties of classification in this poem also destabilise seemingly fixed categories. In the footnote to line fifty-two she playfully reminds the reader of the almost arbitrary nature of divisions between species and families:

He was not a Crustacean. He has since discovered that he was an Arachnid, or something similar. But he says it does not matter. He says they told him wrong once, and they may again.

The barriers between supposedly distinct species or families are seen as artificial and permeable as a result of evolutionary theory. Classification "does not matter" because all species ultimately graduate into each other and the current categories may be subject to change:

Certainly no clear line of demarcation has as yet been drawn between species and sub-species – that is, the forms which in the opinion of some naturalists come very near to, but do not quite arrive at the rank of species; or, again, between sub-species and well-marked varieties, or between lesser varieties and individual

differences. These differences blend into each other in an insensible series;
(Darwin, *Origin* 107)

Kendall's work captures this sense of all categories being arbitrary and provisional. The reference to monotremes in the poem, "in the silent sea/ Your ancestors were Monotremes –/ Whatever these may be" (26-8), also highlights difficulties of classification. Monotremes are egg-laying mammals like the duck-billed platypus and the echidna. This order of mammals was the focus of much scientific and popular interest in 1885, when "Lay of the Trilobite" was first published, because it was only the previous year that the zoologist William Caldwell had provided conclusive proof that monotremes lay eggs ("Science in 1884"). This discovery helped to support the theory of evolution by providing a link between mammals and reptiles. It also unsettled taxonomic systems by "call[ing] into question both the zoological assumptions current before [monotremes' and marsupials'] advent and the systems in which those assumptions were embedded" (Ritvo, *Platypus* 10).

As well as indicating the trilobite's awareness that monotremes do not fit into any pre-existing category, the phrase "Whatever these may be" also suggests that the meaning of this word is not really important. The pleasure that the poem takes in rhyming technical scientific words, such as "monotremes" or "crustacean", regardless of whether these words are appropriate to the sentence is another way in which "Lay of the Trilobite" resembles a nonsense poem.²⁰ The trilobite's claim that monotremes, which are land-dwelling mammals, could be found "in the silent sea" (26) is clearly fallacious, reinforcing the idea that "monotremes" functions in this poem as a nonsense word rather than a specific taxonomic category. "Monotremes" rhymes with "dreams", two lines previously, it fits the

²⁰ See McGillis 156-159 for a discussion of the use of a similar technique in nonsense poetry.

metre and it sounds appropriately scientific, and in the context of this poem these factors are more important than the meaning of the word. With its privileging of the sounds of scientific words over their meaning, “Lay of the Trilobite” is similar to James C. Bayles’s nonsense poem, “In the Gloaming”, which mixes obvious nonsense words like “shagreen” and “soboliferous” with scientific words like “protoplasm” and “mastodon”, and treats both classes of words in the same way:

And it's O for the jungles of Boorabul.
For the jingling jungles to jangle in,
With a moony maze of mellado mull,
And a protoplasm for next of kin.
O, sweet is the note of the shagreen shard
And mellow the mew of the mastodon,
When the soboliferous Somminard
Is scenting the shadows at set of sun. (13-20)

Both of these poems undermine the associations of scientific language with power and authority and destabilise seemingly fixed categories and hierarchies of language, in the same way that Kendall’s poem undermines divisions and hierarchies between species. These elements of nonsense poetry make the poem appear less overtly political than it otherwise would be but also allow Kendall to take her questioning of apparently objective reality further than she could in a more serious poem.

Kendall unsettles fixed categories in a similar way in *That Very Mab*, when the professor uses the evidence of taxonomy to prove that fairies cannot exist because there is no room for them in any existing genus:

And the professor ran through all the animal kingdoms and sub-kingdoms very fast, and proved quite conclusively, in a perfect cataract of polysyllables, that fairies didn't belong to any of them. (Kendall and Lang chpt. III)

But fairies clearly do exist, because he has just captured one, so the fault must lie with the taxonomic system and not with the fairies themselves. Kendall uses fairies to ridicule the scientific mindset that seeks to classify and define everything even though Darwin's work rendered such a clear drawing of boundaries impossible. Fairies, with their mixture of human and insect characteristics, blur boundaries in the same way that monotremes do by presenting characteristics that are intermediate between two taxonomic categories. As Nicola Bown has observed, the resemblance of fairies' to butterflies' wings means that fairies have long been associated with insects, and images of fairies have been used to make insects appear less alien and threatening to human observers (125). However, as a result of Darwin's work, fairies themselves became threatening because "fairies are as much like humans as they are like insects" (135) and so they reduce the distance between humans and insects by providing a "missing link" between the two groups. Gillian Beer observes that the concept of the "missing link" was a source both of fascination and dread in the nineteenth century: "Once [the link was] found, mankind would indissolubly be part of the material order. So long as the gap remained, mystery prevailed and the supremacy of the human could remain intact" (*Open Fields* 129). So, like the trilobite's ability to speak, the fairies' human characteristics threaten to collapse divisions between species and place humans on a level with other animals. The taxonomic confusion connected to the idea of the fairy helps to explain why Kendall associates fairies with science, in both this book and

her poem, “Fairies and the Philologist”. Bown’s reading of *That Very Mab* sees the influence of science in purely negative terms and concludes that:

Believers in fairies and men of science have mutually incompatible ways of understanding the world, and the beliefs of the former must yield to the knowledge of the latter, even if this involves the loss of everything that fairies represent. (103)

It is certainly true that Kendall uses her representation of fairies to ridicule the scientific mindset that undervalues the imagination and that seeks to crystallise social and biological relations, but it is also important to note the ways in which her representation of fairies is indebted to her study of a science that frequently undermines the tendency to classify and define. By highlighting the difficulty of drawing clear boundaries in nature, both in *That Very Mab* and “Lay of the Trilobite”, Kendall implicitly calls into question the legitimacy of the divisions in society.

***Punch* and Species Boundaries**

All three of Kendall’s poems in which animals or fossils speak – “Lay of the Trilobite”, “Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus” and “The Philanthropist and the Jelly-Fish”²¹ – were originally published in *Punch* between 1885 and 1886. In all three cases, the illustrators of these poems have emphasised the anthropomorphic qualities of the creatures (see Appendix 2). The ichthyosaurus is in a schoolroom, wearing a mortarboard and a pair of over-sized shoes, while the jellyfish and trilobite are nearly as large as the humans in the pictures and have human faces and, in particular, human mouths. These pictures reinforce

²¹ The version of this poem in *Punch* was named “The Jelly-fish and the Philanthropist”.

the similarities between the humans and other creatures in these poems while the anthropomorphised mouths emphasise the importance of speech in making these creatures more human. The technique of making humans and animals the same size also links Kendall's work to nonsense poetry by reminding the reader of Edward Lear's pictures in his *Book of Nonsense*. However, the similarities between the men in Kendall's pictures and the trilobite and jellyfish are not as marked as those between humans and birds in Lear's "There was an Old Man who said, 'Hush!/ I perceive a young bird in this bush'" and "There was an Old Man with an owl" (Lear 41, 53). The receding hairline of the man in the "Lay of the Trilobite" picture may also remind the reader of some of the balding long-haired men in Lear's drawings. As John Holmes observes, the trilobite in the illustration to "Lay of the Trilobite" is not a trilobite at all, but a eurypterid, or sea scorpion:

The fact that *Punch* illustrates a poem about a trilobite with a picture of a eurypterid strongly suggests that the trilobite was for this particular illustrator and the magazine's editor, and perhaps for Kendall too, a vague concept – some form of ancient fossil from the "Silurian seas" (l. 7), as the poem puts it – rather than a clear palaeontological type. (Holmes, "The Lay of the Trilobite" 4)

The inaccuracies in this illustration fit in with the poem's playful negligence about the exact meaning of certain technical words, and continue the sense of the triviality of species boundaries.

The fact that these three poems were printed in *Punch* both reinforces and complicates my reading of them. As Richard Noakes has observed, scientific poetry in *Punch* should be read as commenting on current affairs and non-scientific issues as well as engaging with contemporary scientific debates (105), and this is exactly what I have

suggested that Kendall's poetry does. However, *Punch* was "a periodical written largely by men for a predominantly male audience" (ibid. 101) and its attitude towards women's rights was often ambivalent. Suzanne Le-May Sheffield observes that although *Punch* sometimes presented higher education for women in a positive light it also repeatedly depicted women as less intelligent than men and expressed the fear that if the education of women resembled that of men, then women would become less feminine (17-19). This can be seen, for example, in the conclusion to the 1884 poem "The Woman of the Future":

O pedants of these later days, who go on undiscerning,
To overload a woman's brain and cram our girls with learning,
You'll make a woman half a man, the souls of parents vexing,
To find that all the gentle sex this process is unsexing.
Leave one or two nice girls before the sex your system smothers,
Or what on earth will poor men do for sweethearts, wives, and mothers? (25-30)

With its concern about women being "unsex[ed]" by education, this quotation illustrates the anxiety about the blurring of gender boundaries that I alluded to earlier in this chapter. The fact that *Punch* so frequently expressed such anxieties about women moving outside their proper sphere could undermine my reading of "Lay of the Trilobite". It could be argued that the publication of this poem in *Punch* makes a feminist reading of the poem less plausible because the editors of this periodical were not interested in challenging the organisation of their society. John Glendening uses a similar argument to claim that "Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus" should be read as a conservative, anti-evolutionary poem:

Appropriately for the conservative *Punch*, the silliness of a talking museum exhibit undercuts ideas of human evolution and the survival of the fittest, and it softens that of extinction by pointing to a cause of non-survival that need not worry our brainy species: “the brain of the Ichthyosaurus/ Was never a match for its eye” (36)

However, with her active commitment to socialism, Kendall’s politics are not as conservative as those of *Punch*. As I have argued in this chapter, her poetry tends rather to challenge than to reinforce hierarchies, and the poetry that she published in *Punch* is no exception. The evidence of her other poetry and her prose works such as *That Very Mab* suggests that Kendall was broadly supportive of evolutionary theory so I disagree with Glendening that her target in these poems is evolutionary theory itself. All of Kendall’s poems in which animals or fossils speak can be seen, not as questioning evolution, but as using scientific discourse to challenge hierarchies and divisions. These poems’ publication in *Punch* may explain why the potentially subversive elements of the poems are not overt and are buried beneath the more obvious characteristics of nonsense poetry in order to fit with the editorial principles of this publication, but it does not negate a feminist reading. Kendall’s indirect allusions to gender allow her to explore the implications of evolution for relations between men and women without the exposure of speaking directly on this subject. “Lay of the Trilobite”, in particular, uses the evolutionary theme to undermine the concept of male superiority but does so subtly enough that it does not seem out of place in the pages of *Punch*.

Although Kendall’s gender politics differentiate her from many of her fellow contributors to *Punch*, her focus on the blurring of species boundaries aligns her with them, and particularly with the cartoonists. As James Paradis has noted, between the publication of *The Origin of Species* and the end of the century, “[c]aricaturists like

[George] du Maurier and Linley Sambourne, absorbed by the sheer strangeness of Darwinian metamorphosis, furnished a steady stream of morphological eccentricities that revealed a profound comic impulse in the materials of evolution” (150). Paradis focuses on the recurrent gorilla imagery of the early 1860s, which cartoonists used to explore the implications of evolutionary theory for human ancestry and taxonomy. The most famous of these is Sir Phillip Edgerton’s anonymously-published cartoon and poem entitled “Monkeyana” (1861).²² Like “Lay of the Trilobite”, this piece uses a speaking animal, in this case a gorilla, to probe the boundaries between species and question the nature of humanity. The gorilla, with a sign around his neck that reads “Am I a Man and a Brother?” asks his audience to solve the category disputes that have been raised about his place in nature by evolutionary theory:

Am I satyr or man?

Pray tell me who can,

And settle my place in the scale.

A man in ape’s shape,

An anthropoid ape,

Or monkey deprived of his tail? (1-6)

The gorilla is as knowledgeable about science as Kendall’s trilobite, and, as this quotation demonstrates, is equally aware of the implications of Darwin’s work for the relationships between different species. He outlines ways in which scientific advances have undermined the Biblical account of creation and the concept of humanity’s special place in the scale of nature, before describing the main arguments in the dispute between Professors Huxley

²² Edgerton is named in Paradis p.157.

and Owen about differences between ape and human brains. Like the trilobite, he names particular scientists and important figures of the day and refers to recent developments in science. As Noakes has pointed out, the line “To twice slay the slain” in the final stanza of “Monkeyana” is a direct quotation from an article by Huxley in the *Athenaeum* five days earlier (109). Kendall’s poem is in the same tradition; the trilobite names contemporary figures such as Huxley, Carpenter and Mr Punch as part of his commentary on human society,²³ but whereas “Monkeyana” restricts its satire to scientific questions, Kendall’s social satire is more wide-ranging. The ape describes recent scientific discoveries and disputes and uses them to claim admittance to the human family, whereas the trilobite also claims a relationship with humans but uses this position to allow him to criticise Victorian society and to suggest that trilobites are not only equal to humans but may be superior. In 1861 the mere association of human and ape reflected deep anxieties but in Kendall’s poem the trilobite not only claims kinship with humans but also suggests that he is unimpressed by his newly discovered relatives.

Although Kendall’s poetry uses similar techniques to “Monkeyana”, she does not use apes to blur boundaries between humans and other species. Naden, on the other hand, does use apes in this way in “Solomon Redivivus, 1886”:

Till anthropoid and wary
 Appeared the parent ape,
And soon we grew less hairy,
 And soon began to drape. (57-60)

²³ This refers to the version of the poem printed in *Punch*. In the *Dreams to Sell* version he names Huxley, Kant, Hegel, Browning and Mr Punch.

The repetition of “soon” suggests the comparatively small evolutionary step from our primate ancestors to modern humans and the phrase “parent ape” highlights the closeness of the evolutionary relationship. The implication that hairlessness and clothing are the only substantial differences between apes and humans echoes the observation in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Princess Ida* that “Darwinian man, though well-behav’d,/ At best is only a monkey shav’d!” (W.S. Gilbert, lines 35-6). In *Princess Ida* this line is used to draw a clear distinction between Darwinian man and the superior woman, whereas in “Solomon Redivivus” both sexes are associated with the ape but the man’s status is more deeply affected because his inflated sense of his own worth contrasts so sharply with the image of him as an ape in human clothing. The close association between the narrator and the ape is used to ridicule his boasting that he is “the modern Sage/ Seer, savant, merchant, poet –/ ... in brief, the Age” (2-4). Naden suggests that, even if he is the greatest of men, men are only bald apes and so his vanity is misplaced. Paradis notes that gorilla imagery in *Punch* is often used to comment indirectly on human hierarchies:

Gorilla imagery dramatically shifted the social center, for, next to the hierarchy of biological ancestry, other hierarchies now became trivial by comparison. (Paradis, 157-8)

Paradis applies this observation to the representation of class hierarchies but treating men as identical to apes also trivialises any perceived difference in status between men and women. The language used throughout “Solomon Redivivus” also undermines hierarchies by suggesting that the narrator and his auditor have personally passed through all of the evolutionary stages described: the narrator says that “We” were “a soft Amoeba” (21), “jolly fishes” (43) and reptiles (49) before becoming human. Kendall uses a similar

technique in “Lay of the Trilobite” when the trilobite claims that the man himself, rather than his ancestors, “evolved [his] shining lights/ Of wisdom and perfection/ From Jellyfish and Trilobites” (29-31). These poems do not allow people to distance themselves from their ancestors but make the implications of evolution personal and immediate.

There are several possible reasons why Kendall may have chosen not to use ape imagery in her poetry. The association between apes and evolutionary theory was less straightforward in the 1880s than it was in the 1860s. As Susan David Bernstein notes, the use of ape imagery in the late nineteenth century often carried racial connotations, generally in connection with Irish or African men, rather than simply being associated with evolution (“Designs after Nature” 77). If Kendall had used imagery that had such racist associations she would simply have replaced one social hierarchy with another instead of challenging all human hierarchies. Furthermore, the association of humans and apes had become commonplace by the 1880s and no longer possessed the power to shock. Naden’s poem describes a succession of evolutionary stages, of which apes are the most recent, but when Kendall is focusing on a single non-human species she chooses to avoid the clichéd ape. The species that Kendall uses – the trilobite, ichthyosaurus and jellyfish – are generally recognised as “low” species, and the trilobite and ichthyosaurus have proved their inferiority by becoming extinct. The linking of such “inferior” species with human beings stretches the idea of evolutionary kinship even further than gorilla imagery does, and further undermines the idea of humanity’s special position in nature.

As well as being seen as low in the scale of nature, the species that Kendall chooses to write about are all species that blur boundaries or cause taxonomic confusion. The question of whether the trilobite was a crustacean or an arachnid has already been discussed but similar questions are raised by jellyfish and ichthyosauri. Jellyfish lie on the margins of solid and liquid, and animal and plant forms. A periodical article on jellyfish,

published in 1880, notes that “[s]o unresisting is the bodily fabric of these beings, that they seem to drain away into a shapeless pulp if we attempt, even carefully and gently, to lift them from their native waters” (Wilson, “Jelly-fishes” 208). The same article highlights the close relationship of jellyfish to “zoophytes”, which “are so plant-like that, when picked up on the beach by ingenuous collectors of seaweeds, their plant-nature seems unquestionable” (214). Kendall highlights the liminal status of these creatures by drawing attention to their lack of a central nervous system: “*I haven’t a Sensorium, / And that is how it is*” (51-2). Ichthyosauri also cause taxonomic confusion. As Glendening has observed, part of the fascination and monstrosity of ichthyosauri for their nineteenth-century observers lay in their being “hodge-podges of features belonging to various animals” (33). Ichthyosauri shared characteristics with modern dolphins, whales, crocodiles, fish and lizards, making them, like monotremes, impossible to classify in any existing genus. In Kendall’s poem this hybridity is reflected in the ichthyosaurus’s fanciful claims about his abilities in the second stanza:

Our paddles were fins, and they bore us

Through water: in air we could fly; (13-14)

In the footnote Kendall admits that this final claim is fallacious and blames the creature’s faulty memory but the idea that the ichthyosaurus could fly does not seem entirely out of place for a creature that combines elements of so many others, and it is this sense of strangeness and possibility that the poem plays on. In this way, Kendall blurs boundaries through her choice of species as well as through the uses to which she puts these creatures in her poetry. In her work Kendall frequently makes use of the blurring of boundaries and unsettling of hierarchies inherent in evolutionary theory in order to call into question

hierarchies and divisions in society, and her use of humorous techniques contributes to the unsettling of common-sense assumptions enabled by this evolutionary viewpoint.

Conclusion

For feminist and socialist poets like Kendall, the blurring of boundaries between seemingly fixed categories effected by evolutionary theory served as a useful metaphor for the erasure of social divisions and fixed gender roles. The poetry discussed in this chapter blurs boundaries by highlighting difficulties of classification, giving human qualities to other species and associating humans with other animals. Like the depictions of evolutionary change discussed in the previous chapter, this theme allows Kendall to suggest that current gender roles are not inevitable or fixed. If species categories are arbitrary and fluid then gender divisions can be depicted in similar terms. Furthermore, as all species were brought closer together by the revelation of their evolutionary kinship, any differences between men and women could be made to seem equally trivial. Cartoons in *Punch* blur boundaries in a similar way but for different reasons. In these cartoons the association of humans and other species was often used as a way of exploring the implications of Darwin's theories and probing the limits of the human. These cartoons were frequently used to defuse anxieties about the position of humanity in nature, whereas Kendall and Naden make use of these anxieties to puncture human pride and undermine ideas of male superiority.

Although Kendall's poetry is rarely overtly feminist, her focus on aspects of evolution that unsettle the status quo can be seen as part of a subtle feminist poetics that engages with ideas surrounding evolutionary debates on gender without addressing the question of gender directly. Kendall's focus on the permeability of species boundaries

subverts the language of difference and hierarchy that was used to characterise human gender relations. In response to claims like Darwin's, that there is an innate difference in disposition and mental powers between men and women, just as "the bull differs in disposition from the cow, the wild-boar from the sow, the stallion from the mare" (*Descent* 629), Kendall uses the theme of the blurring of boundaries between species that is found elsewhere in Darwin's work to reduce the mental difference between a man and a trilobite in order to trivialise any differences between the minds of men and women. This subtle and humorous approach to feminism has received less critical attention than more overtly political writing has but it is significant that feminist commentary on the implications of evolutionary theory could be found even in a conservative publication like *Punch*, albeit in a disguised form. In the last two chapters I have attempted to widen the definition of evolutionary feminism to incorporate poetry that implicitly attacks conservatism, hierarchical thinking and the concept of "separate spheres" without overtly referring to gender. This focus on implicit feminist themes is particularly important to the study of poetry, in which the meaning is often less explicit than in prose. If poetry on the theme of evolution is to benefit from the sort of feminist analysis that has been applied to New Woman novels then it is necessary to be alert to ways in which these texts allude to debates about gender rather than addressing them openly. In the following chapter I will expand on the themes of this chapter by looking at a specific instance of the blurring of boundaries, in the association of white women with people of other races in Darwin's *Descent of Man* and other scientific texts, before moving on in the final chapter to address Blind and Naden's responses to scientists' explicit discussions of gender in evolutionary discourse.

Chapter Four

The Other

Race and Gender

Although, as I have suggested in the earlier chapters of this thesis, Darwin's writings on evolution contained a number of ideas that could be used to support a feminist viewpoint, his explicit discussion in the *Descent of Man* of the implications of his theories for human society reinforced existing gendered, racial and class hierarchies. As Evelleen Richards has observed, many feminists had embraced evolutionary theory after the publication of the *Origin* but upon the publication of the *Descent* they found that Darwin's use of evolution to support ideas of female inferiority and a gendered division of labour meant that their scientific and feminist beliefs were in conflict with each other:

The earlier alliance the feminists had forged with science in the opposition of naturalistic interpretations of human nature and society to conventional wisdom and authority, ultimately betrayed them when science, particularly Darwinism, gave a naturalistic, scientific basis to the class and sexual divisions of Victorian society. ("Darwin" 96)

Darwin's disparaging comments on female intelligence have frequently been quoted. He concludes, on the basis of men's greater intellectual and cultural achievements to date that "the average of mental power in man must be above that of woman" (629) and argues that if children only inherited characteristics from the parent of their own sex "it is probable that man would have become as superior in mental endowment to woman, as the peacock is in ornamental plumage to the peahen" (631). However, as I will argue in the remaining

chapters of this thesis, even the *Descent* contained elements that could be used to lend scientific support to a feminist viewpoint. In this chapter I will explore the poets' use of the analogy, found in the *Descent* and other late-Victorian scientific texts, that associated white women with people of other races, before moving on in the final chapter to examine their responses to Darwin's representation of women's sexual and reproductive role.

Adrian Desmond and James Moore have argued that Darwin's main reason for writing the *Descent*, and for developing his theory of sexual selection, was to provide a mechanism through which all human races could have diverged from a common human ancestor instead of having been separately created or having evolved from different species of apes, as some polygenist scientists claimed (360). Like the rest of his family, Darwin was a committed abolitionist, and, as I noted in Chapter One, he also joined the campaign to demand that Edward Eyre, the governor of Jamaica, face justice for his violent response to an uprising by the black citizens of Jamaica. However, some of Darwin's pronouncements on race in the *Descent* would be considered unacceptable by modern readers, particularly his unquestioning belief in the superiority of the white race:

Nor is the difference slight in moral disposition between a barbarian, such as the man described by the old navigator Byron, who dashed his child on the rocks for dropping a basket of sea-urchins, and a Howard or Clarkson; and in intellect, between a savage who uses hardly any abstract terms, and a Newton or Shakspeare [sic.]. (86)

As Desmond and Moore observe, by the time he wrote the *Descent*, Darwin had moved from holding the radical idea, expressed in his early notebooks, that "there was no 'up' or 'down' at all" (122) in the differences between species or races to "calibrating human

‘rank’ no differently from the rest of his society” (318). Darwin’s belief in white European superiority often converges with his belief in male superiority, and racial and gender difference are linked in his theory of sexual selection. This theory suggested that differences between the males and females of a species had been developed through the choice by the females of the most attractive males over many generations, and that the distinctive body shapes and markings of different species had emerged through this mechanism. Darwin suggested that, like sexual differences, racial differences between humans originally developed through sexual selection because in certain groups those with darker skin would be considered more attractive and so they would find a mate more easily and produce more offspring whereas other groups favoured lighter-skinned individuals (*Descent* 673). The theory that racial and sexual characteristics had evolved through the same mechanism meant that the themes of race and gender were closely linked in Darwin’s writing, and racial and sexual characteristics could be described in terms of each other:

It is generally admitted that with women the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation. (*Descent* 629)

Even before the *Descent*, Victorian anthropologists often described all other groups apart from white adult males in terms of each other. For example, black people and white women are described as having similar skulls and brains, both groups are childlike in their temperament, and black people, white women and children, along with the lower classes,

criminals and prostitutes are all closer to the ape than are white middle- and upper-class men. This tendency is evident in the German scientist Carl Vogt's *Lectures on Man*:

The grown up Negro partakes, as regards his intellectual faculties, of the nature of the child, the female, and the senile White. He manifests a propensity to pleasure, music, dancing, physical enjoyments, and imitation, while his inconstancy of impressions and all the feelings are those of the child. ... The Negro resembles the female in his love to children, his family, and his cabin; he resembles the old man in his indolence, apathy, and his obstinacy. (192)

Vogt was important for his influence on Darwin, who approvingly quoted Vogt's assertion that "the difference between the sexes, as regards the cranial cavity, increases with the development of the race, so that the male European excels much more the female, than the negro the negress" in his discussion of the mental powers of men and women in the *Descent* (631). Darwin's use of Vogt's work in the *Descent* gave a wider audience to Vogt's ideas than they would otherwise have reached and gave scientific authority to his racist and sexist uses of biology.

As Stephen Jay Gould has noted, the linking of race and gender guided the direction of scientific work and led many scientists to overstate the similarities between white women, black people and apes while disregarding the obvious differences between these groups and the similarities between apes and white men (86). In general, the analogy linking race and gender was used by scientists in such a way that both women and black people were devalued by association with each other, as in the quotation above in which Darwin dismisses women's intuition and quick judgement as "characteristic of the lower races". T.H. Huxley linked white women and black people in his "Emancipation – Black

and White” (1865). In this lecture, Huxley, one of the more generous interpreters of the scientific evidence, argued that all political and social obstacles to the advancement of black people and women should be removed on the grounds of fairness but that no scientific observer would be foolish enough to believe that these groups could ever really compete with white men as equals:

[I]t is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed, and our prognathous [large-jawed] relative has a fair field and no favour, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried on by thoughts and not by bites. (67)

His view of women’s abilities, although expressed in less insulting terms, was no more positive:

The big chests, the massive brains, the vigorous muscles and stout frames of the best men will carry the day, whenever it is worth their while to contest the prizes of life with the best women. (ibid. 73-4)

The idea that white women and black people were inferior to white men, and inferior in a similar way, was used to explain and justify their subordinate position in society.

Susan Meyer argues that many Victorian female novelists link sex and race in their work and that this linking should be read as a response to the association of women and people of other races in Victorian science:

Given the high prestige of scientific thought in the nineteenth century, and the numerous and highly influential links it drew between white women and nonwhite races, it begins to seem overdetermined that women novelists concerned with calling into question the inferiority of women should have felt drawn to engage with such comparisons, and should have responded by using race as a metaphor for their own purposes. (20)

Meyer asserts that when it is used by female writers this analogy transforms an image of “shared inferiority” into one of “a shared experience of frustration, limitation, and subordination” (7). She suggests that the imagery of slavery or racial difference in *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss*, and the association of a white woman with a man who is seen as racially different in *Wuthering Heights* and *Daniel Deronda*, are used to explore women’s experiences of repression and inequality. The poets in this study also make use of this analogy rather than contesting the notion that white women are like black people, simply by virtue of being different from white men. This is particularly true of Blind, who identifies more strongly with characters of other races in her writing than Naden and Kendall do. This may be partly because she had experienced a sense of being racially different as a German of Jewish extraction living in London. Descriptions of her by friends and acquaintances often refer to her ethnic identity, as in W.M. Rossetti’s description of her as being “of Jewish race” with a “noticeably Teutonic” accent (W.M. Rossetti 388). Although Blind does not appear to have defined herself as Jewish, she is likely to have been aware of this perception of her and it may have affected her view of those who were racially different from herself. As James Diedrick observes: “Difference defined Blind’s ‘subject position’ from the start” (“My Love is a Force” 363). In contrast, Naden, whose work will not be discussed in this chapter, is the poet who makes the least use of the

imagery of other races, and is also the least obviously opposed to imperialism. In the memoir in *Induction and Deduction* she is described as defending the British Raj in conversations with Indians, suggesting that she shared the view of many British people that British rule was beneficial to India (Daniell xvi). Kendall's personal views on race and empire, other than those expressed in her poetry, are not known but her perspective on these issues may have been affected by the fact that her elder brother spent some time preaching in Calcutta and married an Anglo-Indian woman (Waller 120; 1891 Census, *Ancestry Library*).

Blind and Kendall use the linking of race and gender in quite different ways but there are some similarities. Both poets criticise racial oppression in their poetry instead of using racial imagery solely as an analogy for gendered oppression. For example, Blind's "Chaunts of Life" shows a clear awareness of the ways in which the progress of civilisation has depended on exploitation and the "toil of captive hands" (IV 74), while Kendall's "Lay of the Trilobite" highlights the violence inherent in the supposedly civilising mission of imperialism:

The native of an alien land
You call a man and brother,
And greet with hymn-book in one hand
And pistol in the other! (37-40)

Blind and Kendall use their work in a variety of ways to explore real or imagined links between the groups that are characterised as "other". They make use of the ways in which the analogy linking race and gender erases human difference and allows for a greater fluidity of racial and gendered identity within the poetry. However, this analogy can also

ignore the differences in people's circumstances and treat racial and sexual inequalities as though they were interchangeable. I will begin with an examination of Blind's use of this analogy as a means of identification with people of different races and nationalities or as a commentary on racist and sexist oppression before moving on to explore the allusions to racial and sexual science in Kendall's poetry.

Identification and Appropriation in Blind's Poetry

Although most of the scientific examples that I gave in the previous section date from the 1860s and 1870s, when racial science was at its height, the analogy linking race and gender was still widespread later in the century. It was particularly prevalent in the work of the sexologists of the 1890s, to the extent that in her discussion of Otis Tufton Mason's anthropological study *Woman's Share in Primitive Culture* (1895) Lynette Turner considers it worthy of comment that Mason does not participate in the sexologists' preoccupation with the discovery of "tangible connections between European women and 'primitive' peoples" (190-1). For example, in *Man and Woman* (1894), Havelock Ellis notes that "In various parts of the world anthropologists have found reason to suppose that the primitive racial elements in a population are more distinctly preserved by the women than by the men" (421). Throughout the book Ellis frequently draws comparisons between women and "savages" or children but unlike earlier scientists he does not associate these groups with apes, suggesting instead that male humans resemble other primate species more closely than females and children do: "Women, it is true, remain nearer than men to the infantile state; but, on the other hand, men approach more nearly than women to the ape-like and senile state" (449). As Russett notes, *Man and Woman* "represent[ed] the consensus of medical and scientific opinion of the day" and was widely read in the decades

following its initial publication (28), making this association of white women, other races and children an influential one.

The analogy linking white women and people of other races moved from scientific discourse into the wider culture, as is evidenced by a review in the *Quarterly Review* in 1894 of several books that address the theme of gender. Ellis's *Man and Woman* is one of the books discussed in this review but the reviewer applies the linking of white women and other races to Sarah Grand's *Heavenly Twins*, published the previous year, instead of restricting this imagery to discussions of the anthropological study. The reviewer responds to public praise of Grand's book as "so original" by suggesting that "aboriginal" would be a more appropriate word ("The Strike of a Sex" 295). He argues that women's "psychic atavism", their mental reversion to a lower state of civilisation, leaves them ill-equipped for abstract thought or scientific study (303) and that "[t]he aboriginal in [woman] ... will never be scientific" and so when a woman writer uses science in her work as Grand does "it will be passion seizing the weapons of the male, and brandishing them for stage effect" (296). In this author's use of racial imagery the intention is clearly misogynistic but in the work of scientific authors like Ellis the association of white women with people of other races is not intended to be derogatory to either group but is seen as legitimate science.

The fact that the linking of race and gender was particularly prominent in the scientific works of the 1860s and 1870s, when Blind was educating herself in the sciences, and the 1890s, when she was writing *Birds of Passage*, may help to explain why this analogy is so much more significant in Blind's work than in Kendall and Naden's. The other two poets were children in the 1860s and 1870s, and by the 1890s, when the association of race and gender was re-emerging in scientific discourse, Naden had died and Kendall was turning away from poetry so their work is less clearly influenced by this idea. Blind's *Birds of Passage*, published the year after Ellis's *Man and Woman*, is her most

obvious engagement with the theme of racial difference and is also clearly influenced by the scientific discourse surrounding race and gender. In this section I will examine the use of racial imagery in *Birds of Passage* and in Blind's earlier collection *Dramas in Miniature* (1891). Stephen D. Arata observes that "the travel narrative concerns itself with boundaries – both with maintaining and with transgressing them" (626), and this is true of Blind's travel narrative of her trips to Egypt that forms the first half of *Birds of Passage*. In this book Blind uses the imagery linking race and gender to erase human difference and allow her characters to cross racial and gender boundaries but she also sometimes maintains the boundaries between herself and characters of other races by depicting these characters as alien and even inhuman.

A particularly intriguing poem from *Birds of Passage* is "A Fantasy" in which an unnamed narrator declares: "I was an Arab,/ I loved my horse;/ Swift as an arrow/ He swept the course" (1-4) before going on to describe the experiences of this Arab. No information is given about the narrator but James Diedrick and Robert P. Fletcher have both suggested that Blind may have imagined this poem's narrator as a British woman and I concur with their interpretation (Diedrick, "My Love is a Force" 378-9; Fletcher 440-1). The contrast between the freedom of the Arab – "Free as the wild wind,/ Light as a foal;/ Ah, there is room there/ To stretch one's soul" (17-20) – and the confinement and "home-sickness" (51) experienced by the narrator suggests the restricted lifestyle of a middle-class Victorian woman. It is not clear in what sense the narrator "was" an Arab; Diedrick suggests that this poem may represent the memory of a past life ("My Love is a Force" 378), but such a close association with a man of another race could equally be explained by the scientific discourse that treats white women and black men in similar terms, despite the differences in their circumstances. Blind takes this analogy further to enable them to stand in for one another and share each other's experiences, allowing the

female narrator to imaginatively experience masculinity, with the independence and sexual freedom that this entails. This sexual freedom is demonstrated in the poem through the man's encounter with a woman:

I am athirst, girl;

 Parched with desire,

Love in my bosom

 Burns as a fire.

Green thy oasis,

 Waving with Palms;

Oh, be no niggard,

 Maid, with thy alms.

Kiss me with kisses,

 Buds of thy mouth,

Sweeter than Cassia

 Fresh from the South.

Bind me with tresses,

 Clasp with a curl;

And in caresses

 Stifle me, girl. (33-48)

In this poem *Blind* makes use of the association of non-white races with sexuality that was found in the work of both polygenist and monogenist scientists. As Douglas A. Lorimer observes, this linking of other races with sexuality in Victorian science “was more a consequence of ... xenophobia, and the association of the black man with the supposed sensual, animal nature of tropical, savage life than a result of empirical observations” (133). Because of this racist stereotype, and the Arab’s gender, *Blind* is free to express sexual desire in this poem in a way that would be inappropriate for a white middle-class woman. However, the poem suggests that the “I” behind the Arab’s monologue may *be* a white middle-class woman. As Diedrick observes, if the narrator is a woman, this section is not only unexpectedly erotic but also contains “a coded expression of lesbian passion” (“My Love is a Force” 379).

Virginia Blain argues that much of the female-authored love poetry of the late Victorian period “runs aslant to the usually assumed heterosexual position” (“Sexual Politics” 138). In *Blind*’s case, the potentially lesbian elements to some of her poems are consistent with the blurring of boundaries and erasure of difference in her work. Karen Sánchez-Eppler suggests that bisexuality is comparable to the mixing of races because both cases “[offer] the body not as an irreducible and irreconcilable sign of absolute difference – male versus female, white versus black – but instead as the site where difference meets” (66). It is appropriate that “A Fantasy” matches the blurring of racial and gender boundaries with a refusal of a clearly-defined heterosexual position. By accepting and exaggerating the implications of the metaphor that associates white women and black men *Blind* is able to take “the mobility of the poet’s self to playful extremes” (Fletcher 440). Imaginatively inhabiting subjectivities that are different from her own allows *Blind* to escape conventional gender roles and the restrictions of heterosexual relationships. In this poem the identification between the white woman and the non-white man is so

complete that Blind depicts them as being the same person, whereas elsewhere in her work the identification is only partial. The close connection between these characters allows the white woman to take on qualities, such as sexual assertiveness, that are normally depicted as belonging only to non-white men. In this way Blind stretches the analogy linking race and gender in order to claim masculine characteristics for her female narrator.

However, as Sánchez-Eppler observes in her study of abolitionist feminism, although the identification with other oppressed groups can be an effective tool of feminist rhetoric, there is a danger that this identification can lead to appropriation:

Though the metaphoric linking of women and slaves uses their shared position as bodies to be bought, owned and designated as a grounds of resistance, it nevertheless obliterates the particularity of black and female experience, making their distinct exploitations appear identical. The difficulty of preventing moments of identification from becoming acts of appropriation constitutes the essential dilemma of feminist-abolitionist rhetoric. (20)

Blind shows a clear awareness of the dangers of appropriation in her poem “The Beautiful Beeshareen Boy”, which describes an adolescent boy from a nomadic tribe in Egypt who is taken abroad to be displayed at the Chicago World’s Fair. In the notes to this poem Blind reveals that it is based on the story of “a lovely boy of sixteen” whom she met on her first trip to Egypt and who was “carried off to the World’s Fair with other curiosities of Egypt” (*Birds of Passage* 145-6). The sarcastic reference to the boy as a “curiosit[y] of Egypt” suggests Blind’s disapproval and also highlights the erasure of the boy’s individual identity through being treated as an exotic object. However, at times in this volume she can be seen as appropriating non-white characters for her own purposes and ignoring their

individuality in much the same way that the organisers of the World's Fair did with the Beeshareen boy. "A Fantasy" gives little sense of the man's subjectivity or individuality; his main function is to allow the white woman to experience masculinity and sexual freedom vicariously through him and to suggest, by contrast, the stifling nature of the lifestyle of middle-class Victorian women. By using a man of another race as a representative of unrestrained passion Blind also perpetuates racist stereotypes by accepting the association of blackness and sexuality. Although Blind criticises racial oppression as well as sexual oppression in this volume, there are times when she appears simply to be using race as a means of talking about gender, and ignoring the differences in the different forms of oppression.

As well as depicting non-white male characters in some of her poetry in a way that can obscure their individuality, in "Mourning Women", another poem from *Birds of Passage*, Blind depicts non-white women as alien, and even inhuman. In this poem Blind protests the oppression of Muslim women in Egypt and claims that this oppression stems from an Islamic belief that women do not have souls.²⁴ Although Blind sympathises with these women, she does not identify with them in the same way that she does with male characters in other poems. The clothing worn by these women covers their bodies and most of their faces (1); this makes it difficult for the observer to see the woman beneath and leads Blind to describe them as "forms" (3) rather than people. Throughout the poem, these women are defined by their difference. As well as being depicted as faceless shapes, the women are separated from the people around them by their attitude of "abject apathy to life's delight" (4) and their dark clothing, which contrasts with the bright colours of the "motley crowd" (5). Unlike other Egyptian characters who are described in this volume, such as "The Dying Dragoman" and the man from "A Fantasy", we are given little insight

²⁴ Robert Fletcher notes that the claim that Muslims believe that women do not have souls is false (451).

into these women's inner lives: apart from the allusion to their "suffering heart[s]" (7) they exist purely as exotic surfaces for the viewer to project emotions onto. As Joanna de Groot observes, in Orientalist travel literature "it is the sight of veiled women which tells the voyager that he is in the Orient ... [t]hey are the image of what the Other actually *is*" (105), and Blind similarly uses these women as an image of "the Other" instead of seeking to understand or identify with them.

Blind's selective identification with characters of other races – identifying closely with certain male characters but distancing herself to some extent when describing Islamic female characters – suggests that her use of this identification is more about claiming certain qualities of these characters for herself than about erasing racial difference. There are advantages for a white woman in identifying with a non-white man because it gives her access to stereotypes of independence, a nomadic lifestyle and sexual freedom, but non-white women, such as the Egyptian women described in "Mourning Women" are often viewed as being in a more oppressed state than European women so there are less clear advantages to identifying with them. Poems like "The Beautiful Beeshareen Boy" demonstrate Blind's genuine concern about racial oppression and exploitation but at times she inadvertently perpetuates the racist discourses that she critiques elsewhere, either by depicting characters of other races as inescapably "Other" or by implicitly accepting racist stereotypes.

The crossing of racial barriers in *Birds of Passage* is indebted to the discourse that connects white women and people of other races but *Dramas in Miniature*, written before this analogy became widespread in the 1890s, contains elements that can be read as engaging indirectly with the scientific discourse that linked gender and race. Although the linking of gender and race was frequently applied to all women, there is a tendency in the scientific literature to see sexualised white women as more closely linked to other races

and also to apes than other white women are. Sander Gilman observes that by the eighteenth century the figure of the black person stood as “an icon for deviant sexuality” (Gilman 81). This analogy was accepted by scientists to such an extent that some conducted studies into physical characteristics, such as steatopygia (prominent buttocks), believed to be shared by prostitutes and “Hottentot” (Khoikhoi) women in order to prove that prostitutes were more “primitive” than other European women (ibid. 99). It is unsurprising, then, that imagery associating race and gender should be found in *Dramas in Miniature*, which explores female sexuality and particularly “deviant” sexuality such as adultery and prostitution. In the remainder of this section I will focus on one example of this association: Blind’s interrogation of the use of racial imagery to depict women as Other in her poem “A Carnival Episode”.

“A Carnival Episode” describes an encounter between a soldier and his general’s wife, in which they contemplate adultery but are disturbed by an earthquake. The poem uses racial imagery to critique sexual inequalities in a similar way to the work of the novelists in Susan Meyer’s study: as James Diedrick has observed, the poem’s use of colonial imagery, and the fact that the woman’s husband is away fighting for the empire, links the gendered power relations between the two central characters to European colonial intervention in Africa (“My Love is a Force” 376). However, this imagery is also used to indicate the woman’s threatening Otherness in the eyes of the male narrator. The narrator’s earliest descriptions of the woman contain subtly racialised imagery:

How fatally fair with that mutinous mien,
And those velvety hands all alive with the sheen
Of her rings, and her eyes that were narrowed between
Heavy lids darkly laced with long lashes! (VI 3-6)

The imagery used to describe the woman is dark and heavy, such as the image of her “velvety hands” and dark eyes, which makes her appear exotic and potentially threatening. Her “mutinous mien” implies the threat of a colonial uprising rather than a military or naval mutiny. The description in the previous stanza of the woman’s hair as “brown snakes” (V 6) adds to the racial imagery by associating her with exotic wildlife but also blurs species boundaries, as part of the woman’s body metaphorically blurs into another species. She is associated with another species again towards the end of the poem when she springs “like a greyhound” in her hurry to escape the effects of the earthquake (XVIII 1). This suggests the blending of different kinds of “Otherness” – of gender, race and species – in nineteenth-century scientific discourse, as in Carl Vogt’s assertion that Afro-Caribbean people resemble apes more closely than European people do, and that the women of all races are more ape-like than the men: “We may be sure that, whenever we perceive an approach to the animal type, the female is nearer to it than the male” (180). Blind describes the encounter between the two characters using metaphors of conflict. The narrator claims that he would “have willingly bared broad chest to the dart” (VIII 5) for the opportunity to have a relationship with the woman but it is not clear whether the “dart” represents the punishment of society for adultery or the threat of harm from the woman herself. If the dart is the woman’s weapon then this adds to the imagery of her as a non-European and fits with the descriptions of her possessing a power that seems like witchcraft or voodoo: “the spell of her eyes on my eyes” (IX 2), “She would drain him of love and then break him in two” (XI 5). Meanwhile the man has greater physical force and the power to “strangle us both in the ropes of your hair” (XII 5). The hair that was earlier described as “snakes” becomes rope in the man’s hands – a more conventional European weapon.

Throughout the poem the narrator blames the woman for their encounter, depicting her as powerful and manipulative:

Yet I knew, though I loved her so madly, I knew
She was only just playing her game.
She would toy with my heart all the Carnival through;
She would turn to a traitor a man who was true;
She would drain him of love and then break him in two,
And wash her white hands of his shame. (XI 1-6)

However, the woman's evident relief at the end of the poem at being "saved" by the earthquake from committing adultery undermines the narrator's assertion that she was in control of the situation and suggests that he is simply trying to absolve himself of blame (XX 5). The narrator's use of racial imagery to describe the woman is a crucial part of his strategy of displacing blame onto her, as it links her to the discourse of sexualised women as "primitive" and exaggerates the differences between the two characters. As Angelique Richardson observes, nineteenth-century racial and sexual science "had little to do with objective studies and much to do with the process of collective self-definition through the construction, exclusion and demonising of Otherness" ("Some Science" 317). Blind picks up on this aspect of the science in the narrator's use of the linking of race and gender to depict the woman as different and threatening. However, to return to Diedrick's point, the use of this imagery also undermines the narrator's claim that the woman holds the power in their relationship by associating her with colonised subjects and him with European colonisers. As well as simultaneously drawing attention to and undermining the narrator's blaming strategy, Blind's use of racial imagery in this poem shows her clear awareness of

the ways in which the linking of race and gender could be used to exaggerate difference, as it does in scientific discourse.

Race and “Fitness” in *The Heather on Fire*

Although race and gender are not as clearly associated in *The Heather on Fire* (1886) as in Blind’s later works, there are points where they converge in interesting ways. The poem addresses the subject of the forcible evictions and transportation of Highland crofters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to make way for sheep farming and game shooting. The poem highlights the human cost of the Highland Clearances by focusing on the effects of forced eviction on a single family: Michael, a fisherman and crofter, his pregnant wife Mary, their children and his elderly parents. The poem describes how, while the men are away at sea, the women, children and elderly people are forced from their homes with no warning and the houses are then torched with most of their belongings inside. One by one, all of the characters except Michael’s father, Rory, are killed by the effects of the eviction: Michael’s bedridden mother is unable to leave the house before it is torched and is killed by the fire, Mary and Michael’s younger son, already ill before the eviction, dies from exposure, Mary goes into premature labour in the ruined castle where the family are sheltering and both she and the baby die, and their elder daughter collapses and dies from stress and fatigue. After this series of tragedies, Michael and his two remaining children board the boat that is due to take the evicted crofters to a new life overseas but they too are killed when the boat sinks shortly after setting sail. Rory, who lost his mind when his wife died, escapes the men who are forcing the crofters onto the boats and is left alone on the shore, where he witnesses the shipwreck. In this section I will argue that this poem is not

only an indictment of the cruelty of the Highland Clearances but also an engagement with wider themes of racial and sexual oppression and the concept of racial “fitness”.

It may seem odd to treat Scottish Highlanders as racially different from other white British people but, as Nancy Stepan observes, the concept of “race” was broader in the nineteenth century than it is now, and many groups that were considered as separate races would not be seen in this way today:

At one time or another, the “Jews”, the “Celts”, the “Irish”, the “Negro”, the “Hottentots”, the “Border-Scots”, the “Chinese”, the “Anglo-Saxons”, the “Europeans”, the “Mediterraneans”, the “Teutons”, the “Aryans”, and the “Spanish Americans” were all “races” according to scientists. (*The Idea of Race* xvii)

It may also seem odd to depict Scottish people as victims of imperial oppression, since, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “Scots played a leading part in making British imperialism what it was” (Linda Colley 133-4), but this is exactly what Blind does in this poem. Blind links the Clearances to racial and imperial oppression in her preface to the book by comparing the treatment of the Highlanders to “the brutal excesses of victorious troops on a foreign soil” (p.6) and by selecting quotations for the notes at the end of the book that frequently make reference to race or slavery.

The Highland Clearances were already depicted in racial terms before Blind wrote *The Heather on Fire*. Much was made by commentators of the Highlanders’ different language and customs. Alexander Mackenzie’s *The Highland Clearances*, a source that Blind relied heavily upon in her own account,²⁵ frequently uses racial imagery in its descriptions of the Highlanders. Mackenzie shifts the racial positions of the Highlanders

²⁵ The notes to *The Heather on Fire* contain four passages quoted from Mackenzie’s book, and several of the incidents in the poem were taken from his account.

and landlords at different points in the text. At some points he highlights the Highlanders' vulnerability by depicting them as "primitive" (9) and noting the inability of most of them to speak English (32) but elsewhere he focuses on their Britishness and Christianity while characterising their treatment as being like racial oppression or slavery:

They were to be treated as if they were nothing better than Africans, and the laws of their country on a level with those which regulated South American slavery. (3)²⁶

In his depiction of the evicted Highlanders sheltering in ruined buildings or improvised huts Mackenzie uses racial imagery for both the Highlanders and their landlords:

A savage from Terra-del-Fuego, or a Red Indian from beyond the Rocky Mountains, would not exchange huts with these victims, nor humanity with their persecutors. (6)

Similarly, Mackenzie quotes an eyewitness as saying that to call the Highlanders' persecutors "savages" "would be paying them too high a compliment, for among savages conduct such as theirs is unknown" (24). Thus, the association of British characters with other races can be used to suggest either vulnerability or cruelty.

Blind also alternates between focusing on the Highlanders' Britishness and their foreignness to her English readers. She alludes to the role of Scots as imperial agents in Rory's boasting about his military service for Britain in the "Black Watch" Highland Regiment: "Ye'll all have heard/ Tell on the Forty-Second? Show us the glen/ In Highland

²⁶ Blind quoted this extract in her notes to the poem, showing the importance of race in her understanding of the Clearances.

or in Island sent not its bonny men” (Duan Second XVII 6-8). This reference to Highlanders’ loyal service of Britain emphasises the injustice of their treatment. The characters’ Christianity is frequently alluded to, as in their recitation of the Lord’s prayer and Mary’s prayer for “those in peril of the seas” (Duan Third XX 2; Duan First XI 8). On the other hand, Blind emphasises their difference from her English readers in her descriptions of their homes and customs: “right in the middle of the floor/ A fire of turf blazed on a flat round stone” (Duan First XXVIII 6-7). At times the sense of the Highlanders’ foreignness extends further than their Scottishness, such as when the narrator describes rocks as “[s]harp-fanged like crocodiles agape for prey” (Duan First VI 6), which makes the Highlanders appear exotic and links them to other races. As with the factual accounts of the Clearances, discussed in the previous paragraph, the use of imagery of racial difference and colonialism highlights the Highlanders’ vulnerability and the cruelty of their treatment. However, Blind does not use this imagery solely to comment on the Clearances but also to engage with the discourse of racial “fitness” that was applied equally to discussions of the Clearances and imperialism.

The idea that the destruction of the “weaker” races by the “stronger” was natural and inevitable recurred frequently in late-Victorian writings and was used to give scientific justification to imperialism (Brantlinger 186-7). For example, in the *Descent* Darwin discusses the extinction of the Tasmanians as a result of European colonisation and presents this as a regrettable but inevitable consequence of competition between “high” and “low” races: “When civilised nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race” (212). The debate over the Highland Clearances and land reform in Scotland was one that engaged scientists, and was debated in similar terms to discussions of racial extermination in other countries. The Duke of Argyll claimed that the Clearances represented necessary progress because

the laws of nature meant that the inefficient customs of land tenure must die out in favour of more modern agriculture in the same way that other scientists claimed that “primitive” races must inevitably die out to make way for more “civilised” ones.²⁷ He explicitly linked his arguments to evolutionary theory by describing the old system as a “survival of the unfittest” (Argyll 31). Blind’s view was closer to that of Alfred Russel Wallace, whose ideas about the Clearances were guided by his belief that human beings can and should cooperate to overcome the laws of nature that affect other species by protecting the weaker members of society (Brown 138). Wallace protested the Clearances in his article “The ‘Why’ and the ‘How’ of Land Nationalisation” and his book, *Land Nationalisation*, from which Blind quoted at length in her notes to *The Heather on Fire* (pp.75-6). When analysed in relation to the association of the Clearances with debates about race and fitness, the deaths of all but one of the main characters of *The Heather on Fire*, from premature labour, exposure, stress, fire, or shipwreck, no longer appear as gratuitous melodrama but as an image of racial extermination. Blind uses the poem to protest imperialism and particularly the scientific acceptance of genocide.

Susan Brown describes the events of *The Heather on Fire* as “a travesty rather than a fulfilment of evolutionary process” because Mary and Michael are adapted to their environment and have acted in accordance with sexual selection in their choice of partners but they and their children are still wiped out as a result of human interference in their environment (133). However, since evolutionary “fitness” is judged purely by the ability to survive and to produce offspring able to reach adulthood, the fact that the characters do not survive means that, by this definition, they are not “fit” and their destruction is in accordance with the principles of evolution. The Duke of Argyll suggested that the Highlanders were poorly adapted to their surroundings and unable to support themselves:

²⁷ George Campbell, eighth duke of Argyll (1823-1900), was a Liberal politician and anti-Darwinian scientist. As a Scottish landowner he was involved in evicting tenants and pressuring them to emigrate, although his methods appear to have been less drastic than those described in Blind’s poem (Matthew).

“It does almost look as if the Celtic and other tribes who moved westwards had never been sufficiently settled to master the new conditions under which they came to live” (Argyll 27), but Blind depicts them as so well adapted to that particular place that when their situation changes they are unable to survive. This, too, is a form of unfitness; Darwin notes that “primitive” people often die out as the result of a sudden change in their environment, whereas “civilised” people are more adaptable and more able to withstand change (*Descent* 220).

As Alvar Ellegård notes, many early reviewers of the *Origin*, and most social Darwinists, wrongly understood natural selection to mean “the selection of the strongest, or biggest, or most highly organized animals or plants”:

In short, one replaced “survival of the fittest”, which meant only the survival of those races which, for whatever reason, were able to produce most offspring able to survive to a mature age in a certain environment by “survival of the best”, which meant the survival of those forms which, from some arbitrarily chosen, often anthropomorphic point of view, were considered worthy of such an epithet. (254)

Blind exhibits no such confusion. Like other New Woman writers, particularly Olive Schreiner, she makes a clear distinction between evolutionary success and superiority. As Rebekah reflects in Schreiner’s *From Man to Man*:

In the ages which have passed since [the alligator] came into existence, many fair and rare forms have existed and passed out of existence. The little winged creatures with large eyes and brains, reptile in order but fitted for flitting in the air and sunshine, whose images we find impressed on rocks, have gone; ... but the alligator

survives. Not because it was more fair, more beautiful, more complex, more brave, than the creatures upon whom it lived or whose stay on earth it outstayed, but because its long jaw set with serrated teeth ... fitted it to destroy the complex pulsating animals and to outlive the beautiful aërial forms which had not its almighty jaw and its mighty stomach. (191)

Similarly, *Blind* depicts the Highlanders as gentler, more moral and more in harmony with their environment than the people who cause their deaths, but, from an evolutionary perspective, less fit. *Blind* gives the language of evolutionary fitness to the factor who evicts the crofters from their homes. Like the Duke of Argyll he denigrates their farming practices: “Cumbering the ill-used soil they hack and scratch,/ And call it tillage!” (Duan Third XXV 5-6). The factor uses comparisons with other species to highlight the evolutionary justification for his argument that the evictions are in the interests of progress; he likens the crofters’ attachment to unproductive soil to the actions of “Silly hens that’d hatch/ Their addled eggs” (Duan Third XXV 6-7). The conflict that this poem sets up between morality and evolutionary process reflects *Blind*’s argument in “Shelley’s View of Nature Contrasted With Darwin’s” that humans should struggle against “the irresponsible forces of nature” instead of being ruled by them (19).

Making a distinction in this way between evolutionary success and inherent value was particularly important to those who sought to undermine social hierarchies because scientists who wanted to retain these hierarchies often conflated the two. For example, in order to prove that men are more intelligent than women, Darwin argues in the *Descent* that “[i]f two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in poetry, painting, sculpture, music ..., history, science and philosophy, with half-a-dozen names under each subject, the two lists would not bear comparison” (*Descent* 629). However, this only

proves that men have succeeded better under a particular set of social conditions, not that they are necessarily superior to women. The discussion of evolutionary fitness in *From Man to Man* is clearly linked both to race and gender. Shortly after the passage quoted above, Rebekah asks whether “when nation sweeps out nation ... [it is] always the loftier, more desirable form that survives” (192), implicitly contesting Darwin’s categorisation of races as higher and lower according to their ability to survive under changing conditions. Rebekah observes that it is not only through the destruction of the gentlest societies that humanity has suffered, but also through the “suppression and subjection of the weaker sex by the muscularly stronger sex” (195). She mourns the “possible [female] Shakespeares we might have had, [who were] stifled out without one line written, simply because, being of the weaker sex, life gave no room for action and grasp on life” (195). Blind is equally aware of the effects of struggle and competition on the “weaker” sex and races, as she demonstrates in her exploration of the effects of gender inequality in “The Leading of Sorrow”, discussed in the first chapter. In *The Heather on Fire* she does not overtly link the themes of struggle and fitness to racial and gendered oppression but these themes are implicitly connected.

Although *The Heather on Fire* does not treat white women and people of other races in the same terms, as some of Blind’s later books do, there are points in the book where racial and sexual oppression are linked. The most obvious link is the fact that the man whose marriage proposal Mary rejected years before is now the factor in charge of overseeing the evictions. He uses his power as a man and a coloniser to exact revenge on Mary by ensuring that her family suffers:

“Ye mind,” he hissed, lowering his voice, “I’se bet,

What a big fool ye made of me; and yet,

Mary, you were a bigger! ...

I swore

You'd rue it, as you have, and shall do more and more. (Duan Third XXXVII 1-3, 7-8)

Although, as I will observe in the final chapter of this thesis, females hold the power in sexual selection, the real power in Victorian society was held by men, and the factor uses his power to exact revenge for his earlier rejection. The beginning of Duan Fourth also links racial and gendered oppression by recounting a story about a Viking murdering a Gaelic chieftain and forcibly marrying his daughter, only to be murdered himself by his new bride. This tale seems like a tangent but it makes explicit the link between racial and sexual oppression that it is implicitly present elsewhere in the book, as well as enacting the resistance and revenge that do not occur in the main narrative.

Susan Brown observes that the Highland men in this poem are feminised by their association with imagery of maternity (139); for example, near the beginning of the poem the glen is described as being as dear to the fishermen as is “her first-born’s earliest lisp/ To a young mother” (Duan First V 1-2), and their love for the land that requires so much work to farm is compared to the feelings of mothers who “oft are fain/ To love those best who cost them sorest pain” (Duan Third III 5-6). For Brown, this imagery reflects the sharing of labour and nurturing between men and women that makes their society so ideal (140-1). However, this imagery also suggests unequal power relations between the Highlanders and their landlords, like the racial imagery applied to women in poems like “A Carnival Episode”. In *The Heather on Fire* the linking of race and gender is a comment on the Highlanders’ position and the oppression that they face, rather than suggesting that they share similar qualities with white British women. This imagery highlights the

Highlanders' vulnerability as colonial subjects and the weakness of their position as tenants of the lord, like women who are economically dependent on men. Although this poem does not explicitly link race and gender in the way that Blind's later books do, it does engage with debates that resonate with questions of race and gender. This book contains a different approach to forging identification between white women and people of other races, focusing on a shared experience of oppression rather than describing these groups as possessing shared qualities. Blind also subverts arguments about evolutionary "fitness" that were applied both to women and non-white races, by insisting that evolutionary success is not an indication of innate superiority, only of the ability to prosper under particular conditions.

Kendall and Craniology

Although Kendall rarely uses racial imagery to describe characters in her poetry, her work does show the influence of the scientific discourse on race and gender. This is evident in the elements of craniology in "Woman's Future" and "The Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus". Craniology is a sub-section of anthropology that focuses on the measurement of skulls and brains, and it was at its peak in the last few decades of the nineteenth century (Fee, "Nineteenth-Century Craniology" 419, 426). Nancy Stepan notes that "measurements of the skull, brain weights, and brain convolutions" played a crucial role in giving "apparent precision to the analogies between anthropoid apes, lower races, women, criminal types, lower classes, and the child" ("Race and Gender" 266). One of craniology's main contributions to anthropology was to give scientific support to the theory that black people and white women are less intelligent than white men by perpetuating the belief that brain size is a faithful indicator of intellect (Fee "Nineteenth-Century Craniology 420). This idea

became less congenial to some scientists when it was found that certain racial groups, such as Eskimos and Mongolians, had inconveniently large brains, but on the whole craniology was able to support existing racial and gendered hierarchies (Gould 87). It was particularly successful at reinforcing the long-standing prejudice of women's intellectual inferiority because women do, on average, have slightly smaller brains than men, in proportion to their smaller body size (ibid. 104). The idea that brain size may be proportional to body size, rather than being directly correlated with intelligence, was raised during the nineteenth century, particularly in relation to what Fee calls the "elephant problem":

If either the absolute size of the brain or cranial volume was to be taken as a measure of intelligence, then the elephant and the whale must be the lords of creation. ("Nineteenth-Century Craniology" 421)

However, when some scientists attempted to measure brain weight as a proportion of body weight they found that many women had proportionally heavier brains than men and so they did not pursue that line of investigation (Gould 106). The findings of craniologists form part of Darwin's discussion of sexual and racial difference in the *Descent*. Darwin argues that "[t]he belief that there exists in man some close relation between the size of the brain and the development of the intellectual faculties is supported by the comparison of the skulls of savage and civilised races" (74). In other words, Darwin found craniology convincing because it reinforced the racial prejudices that he already held. The discovery that women have smaller brains than men also reinforced existing prejudices. Consequently, women's smaller brain size was still being used as evidence of female inferiority at the end of the nineteenth century, even after many scientists had admitted that craniology had not provided conclusive proof of women's lower intellect (Malane 11). As

Cynthia Eagle Russett observes, although “skeptics had voiced doubts about the simple correlation of brain size with intelligence” towards the end of the nineteenth century “the most sophisticated attacks came after the turn of the century” (164).

Kendall’s most explicit response to the claims about women’s brain size can be found in “Woman’s Future”. This poem should be read in the context of George Romanes’s “Mental Differences Between Men and Women”, although it may not have been directly inspired by it. Romanes’s article was published in 1887, the same year as *Dreams to Sell*, and is indicative of the discourse about women’s abilities that Kendall is responding to in the poem. Romanes begins his discussion with the claim that “[s]eeing that the average brain-weight of women is about five ounces less than that of men, on merely anatomical grounds we should be prepared to expect a marked inferiority of intellectual power in the former” (654-5). Although his evidence is largely anecdotal, he claims the authority of science while dismissing as unscientific the suggestion that the paucity of great intellectual women in history has been due to women’s social position and not a lack of intelligence. Kendall summarises the arguments of Romanes and others like him in the opening lines of “Woman’s Future”:

Complacent they tell us, hard hearts and derisive,
In vain is our ardour: in vain are our sighs:
Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
To the level of Homer’s may never arise. (1-4)

As well as describing the scientists’ argument that there are biological limits to women’s intellectual achievements, these lines also imitate scientific discourse in the reference to Homer in the fourth line. This is a parody of the technique used by anthropologists, when

talking about gender or racial difference, of comparing one exceptional white man with the average woman or African (Stepan, *The Idea of Race* xviii). An example of this is Darwin's comparison of "a savage who uses hardly any abstract terms" with "a Newton or Shakspeare [sic]" (*Descent* 86). Kendall also uses Newton as an example of male intellect in the poem, followed by Spencer: "the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,/ The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes" (31-2). The use of this technique roots the poem in the scientific discourse about human difference and may also be intended to imply the inequality of such a comparison.

"Woman's Future" was not published in *Punch* as several other poems from the "Science" section of *Dreams to Sell* were. An examination of the poetic response to Romanes's claims about female intelligence that *Punch* did print helps to demonstrate why "Woman's Future" would not have fitted in with *Punch*'s stance on women's intelligence and education.²⁸ The anonymous author of the poem, "Romanes Awry", takes a tone of pretended indignation in response to Romanes's claims about female mental inferiority but in reality the poem only raises an objection to one of Romanes's arguments, that one of women's mental defects is that of "not knowing their own minds" (Romanes 660): "Not know her own mind? What a scandalous flout!/ Why a woman's chief charm is, she's *never* in doubt" (1-2). While pretending to defend women against Romanes's insulting claims, the poem actually perpetuates negative stereotypes about female irrationality:

It was not a woman invented such trash
As Logic or Parliaments; she at a dash
Flies straight to conclusions, despising the plan
Of step by step premises – leaves *them* to man,

²⁸ This poem was not a response to the article itself but rather to Romanes's 1887 lecture to the Royal Institution, which was later reprinted as the article in the *Nineteenth Century*.

The stupid slow goose who can't rule without laws,
Believe without reason, or hate without cause. (5-10)

As a *Punch* poem, “Romanes Awry” is more explicitly linked to current events than “Woman’s Future” is: the poem names Romanes in the title and the poem itself, as well as including an explanatory note that refers the reader to Romanes’s recent lecture. Although “Woman’s Future” does not contain these specific topical references, it does show the influence of *Punch* in its form: both “Woman’s Future” and “Romanes Awry” are written in an irregular anapaestic tetrameter metre and both exploit the comic potential of rhyme. However, the attitude to women expressed in the two poems is very different. “Romanes Awry” is more openly misogynistic than the article it claims to object to, ridiculing and deriding women rather than patronising them as Romanes does. While “Romanes Awry” treats all women as identical and unchanging, “Woman’s Future” focuses on the potential for change if women alter their attitudes and behaviour.

Kendall’s poem genuinely opposes the “deris[ion]” (1) directed at women by scientists, instead of replacing the patronising assumptions of the scientists with another set of negative stereotypes as the *Punch* poem does but at times “Woman’s Future” can be seen to reinforce some of the assumptions of scientists like Romanes. Edith Simcox’s response to Romanes’s article, also published in the *Nineteenth Century*, focuses on causes of sexual inequality that are entirely out of women’s control, such as women’s lack of access to an intellectual community or opportunities for high-level debate (395). Simcox argues that it has not been proven that there are inequalities between men’s and women’s brains since they have not been put under the same conditions or had the same demands placed upon them. She observes that, for this reason, it is not “altogether unscientific to hold our judgement in suspense as to what feminine brains may do, should circumstances

ever become propitious to their productiveness” (ibid.). Kendall’s poem, on the other hand, accepts the premise that women’s slightly smaller brains indicate that they have less intelligence than men and restricts any hope of improvement to a desire for evolutionary change at some unspecified future period. Even Romanes suggests that evolution might supply “the missing five ounces of the female brain”, although requiring “many centuries” for this to occur (666). Kendall’s opinion of the majority of women, as expressed in the poem, is fairly pessimistic:

Alas, is it woolwork you take for your mission,
Or Art that your fingers so gaily attack?
Can patchwork atone for the mind’s inanition?
Can the soul, oh my sisters, be fed on a *plaque*? (17-20)

However, even while criticising women for their superficiality and lack of ambition, Kendall’s poem treats these negative characteristics as a response to a particular social environment rather than being essential feminine qualities. The description of women’s trivial interests stemming from their feelings having been “compressed in Society’s mangle” (13) hints at the argument that many mental differences between the sexes are socially constructed, in contrast to Romanes’s confidence that women have innate natural abilities in “the arrangement of flowers, the furnishing of rooms, the choice of combinations in apparel, and so forth” (658). Although Kendall does not refute the claims of scientists like Romanes as forcefully as Simcox does, she does, as I observed in Chapter Two, remind scientists that change is central to evolution and so any inequalities that might exist are not permanent. She also highlights the role of craniology in exaggerating

inequalities and treating differences as fixed and immutable by linking the poem explicitly to debates about brain size.

As well as having a different perspective on gender from that of “Romanes Awry”, “Woman’s Future” is also less humorous. Kendall presents this piece as a comic poem, using the same stanza structure and rhyme scheme as in “Lay of the Trilobite” and including amusing multisyllabic rhymes such as “innuendo” and “crescendo” (5, 7). Some of the imagery in this poem is mildly comical, such as the exhortation to women to “[i]nvent a new planet, a flying-machine” (28). However, this poem is significantly less humorous than many of her other poems on the theme of science, and the scathing wit that was evident in “Lay of the Trilobite” is absent from Kendall’s treatment of sexist scientists in this poem. Unlike Naden, who is at her most humorous when addressing scientists’ views of women, Kendall avoids humour almost entirely when overtly discussing scientists’ pronouncements on gender. This may reflect a lack of confidence in her own scientific education and a reluctance to enter the debate about science and gender too openly but it may also suggest a lack of faith in humour itself. Margaret Stetz argues that New Woman writers were often sceptical of the power of humour to effect change because, as frequent targets of misogynistic comedy themselves, they had a clearer understanding than most people did of the effects of humour and the limits to its political efficacy:

The jeers and sneers directed at the New Women themselves had done nothing to reconcile them to the point of view of their attackers, so there was little reason for them to believe unconditionally in such weapons as effective political strategies for bringing about institutional change. (228)

Whereas Naden, who was not prevented from entering the field of science by her gender, feels comfortable enough to mock and parody the arguments of sexist scientists in her work, Kendall's avoidance of overt mockery in her only explicit response to scientific sexism may reflect a greater awareness of the harm that these ideas could do and a lack of faith in humour as a solution.

Kendall is able to be more scathing of craniology when she displaces the gender aspect of the argument onto a question of species difference. In "Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus", which was published in *Punch*, an ichthyosaurus in a museum laments his small brain and scientists' comments on his limited intelligence. In this poem Kendall takes the idea of mental differences between different sexes and races being equivalent to species difference, as in Romanes's description of males and females representing two separate "psychological species" (654), to its logical conclusion by using a creature of a different species to stand in for all people who are depicted as inferior in the work of craniologists. Instead of men and women being portrayed as mentally different, they are both grouped together in the ichthyosaurus's statement that the intelligent humans that he envies are "women and men" (52). Meanwhile, the ichthyosaurus is in women's position of being excluded from intellectual activity and can only "sigh" "[f]or higher endowments" (30). This line echoes the "sighs" of intellectual women in "Woman's Future" (2), implicitly linking the ichthyosaurus to women. It is also significant that the ichthyosaurus mentions the "Little-Go" examinations at Cambridge (59), which women were allowed to sit from the 1870s onwards even though they were not able to take degrees (Russett 102). This reference can be read as an allusion to debates about higher education for women, even though Kendall does not make this association explicit. Kendall elides the gender aspect of the subject again in the observation that "[s]ometimes [the brain] explodes at high pressure/ Of some overwhelming demand" (41-2). This

reflects a common concern about female education: that women's weaker brains and bodies would be harmed by intensive intellectual activity, and that their reproductive systems would suffer as the energy needed for physiological processes was diverted to the brain (Malane 44). The poem makes this idea appear comical without explicitly acknowledging that it refers specifically to women's brains.

As well as standing in for women, the ichthyosaurus also represents people of other races who are treated as inferior in the work of craniologists. This is demonstrated by the comparison of the ichthyosaurus's brain with the "Aryan" brain, instead of the human brain. In the nineteenth century the word "Aryan" referred to Indo-Europeans, who were seen as a superior race originating from the same stock, although it was sometimes used casually to mean a higher European type (Stepan, *The Idea of Race* 98-100). The phrase "Ere Man was developed, our brother" (9) also suggests the idea of racial difference by subtly echoing the phrase "Am I not a man and a brother?". This phrase was used on anti-slavery medallions cast by Darwin's grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood (Desmond and Moore 6). This was later parodied in the 1861 *Punch* cartoon "Monkeyana", discussed in the previous chapter, in which a gorilla wears a sandwich board bearing the question "Am I a man and a brother?" (Edgerton). Through the use of a phrase that was associated with ideas of racial difference and species difference Kendall shows how closely connected these discourses were. In this way, those who are disadvantaged as a result of their gender, race or species are linked together and can be substituted for one another.

This poem does not contest the assumptions of craniologists but it does ridicule the science in a more overt way than "Woman's Future" does. Kendall mocks craniology by parodying its language in phrases like "mark but the fair convolution/ And size of the Aryan brain" (35-6) and reducing the study of different parts of the brain to an observation that it is "bulging in many directions" (39). The ichthyosaurus's assessment of the

importance of the intelligence that he is denied is also gently mocking: the highest compliment he pays to the “Aryan brain” is that it is “furnished for School Board inspections,/ And garnished for taking degrees” (37-8), there is no suggestion that such intelligence enables people to effect change in any material way. Kendall appears to feel less self-conscious about mocking or opposing the claims of craniologists when she is not addressing the gender or racial implications of this science directly. She may lack the confidence to enter into a confrontation about scientific questions with professional scientists or fear being dismissed as emotional and unscientific if she questions the pronouncements of scientists more directly, but, as I argued earlier in this section, the lack of overt mockery in “Woman’s Future” could equally be explained by a sense that humour is inappropriate to a discussion of scientific sexism. Displacing these issues onto another species gives Kendall more freedom to make use of the humour that she has reservations about using in relation to more overt discussions of gender. Kendall’s use of the analogy linking race and gender is different from the use made of it by Blind and other female authors: instead of openly linking race and gender to create solidarity between different oppressed groups she displaces both race and gender onto an image of species difference so that she can allude to the use of science to reinforce inequality without discussing it openly.

Conclusion

The poets in this study use the anthropological analogy linking white women and black people in a variety of ways to comment on inequalities of race or gender, or to question or overturn hierarchies. This analogy allows the poets to blur racial and gender boundaries in their work and to move some way towards erasing differences between people. In Blind’s

work, in particular, an aspect of scientific discourse that is normally used to reinforce the inferiority of white women and black people serves to create a sense of solidarity between different oppressed groups and to undermine hierarchies and artificial distinctions between people. However, this technique can also erase distinctions between the experiences of the groups that are linked in this analogy. Blind's work sometimes ignores the fact that a white middle-class woman's experiences of social and political inequalities would be very different from the racial oppression experienced by a colonial subject, and to conflate these experiences and claim that the members of one oppressed group are qualified to speak for all of the others may be seen as patronising or insincere. Blind's technique of undermining differences between black men and white women could be seen to undermine differences of race and gender more generally, but she does not really develop the implications of the permeability of racial and gender boundaries in the poetry. Although, in poems like "A Carnival Episode", she shows an awareness of scientists' use of the linking of race and gender to depict women and black people as "Other", there are times when her own use of this analogy can produce a similar effect by reinforcing the idea of white women and black people being united by their difference from white men. In *The Heather on Fire* her focus is more clearly on the shared experience of oppression of women and colonial subjects, and on the discourse of evolutionary "fitness" that was used to denigrate both groups. Kendall takes a different approach to this theme, using the close links in scientific writing between race, gender and species to allow her to displace discussions of racial or sexual inequalities onto other creatures. In "The Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus", in which she uses this technique, she appears more confident and more willing to use humour than in "Woman's Future" in which she addresses scientific sexism more directly.

It is significant that the treatment of evolution in Blind's work goes beyond the content of scientific theories to engage with scientists' use of metaphor. This demonstrates

her detailed knowledge of primary scientific texts and her awareness of the importance of the way that scientific ideas are presented. Because the poems by Blind that are discussed in this chapter are less concerned with scientific ideas than with the imagery used in the presentation of these ideas, they are less explicitly linked to evolution than the poetry that is addressed in the other chapters of this thesis. Nevertheless, they are equally important for an exploration of her evolutionist feminist strategy because the language and imagery of scientific texts is as significant as the theories themselves in determining their public reception. Like the poetry by Kendall that was discussed in the previous chapter, the poems that deal with race take advantage of evolutionary science's tendency to collapse discrete categories in order to undermine divisions and hierarchies between different human groups. Although I have designated their poetry as "feminist", the poems examined in this chapter demonstrate that Blind and Kendall sometimes use a similar evolutionary strategy to undermine racial divisions as well as gendered divisions. In the following chapter I will conclude my analysis of the poets' responses to the *Descent* by examining how Blind and Naden interrogate Darwin's representation of women's sexual and reproductive roles.

Chapter Five

Sexual Selection

Darwin and Femininity

In the previous chapter I discussed Darwin's comments on female inferiority in the *Descent*, but in addition to its overt commentary on intellectual inequality, the *Descent* also naturalised social inequality by reinforcing stereotypes about gendered minds and behaviour. As Evelleen Richards notes, when Darwin describes the sexual behaviour of other species he depicts them as adhering to middle-class Victorian gender roles, with energetic males competing for the attention of coy females (Richards, "Darwin" 77):

The female, ... with the rarest exceptions, is less eager than the male. As the illustrious Hunter long ago observed, she generally "requires to be courted"; she is coy, and may often be seen endeavouring for a long time to escape from the male. (*Descent* 257)

Richards observes that, "[w]hen such anthropomorphic description was analogically reapplied to human behaviour and social institutions, it inevitably provided naturalistic corroboration of Victorian values" ("Darwin" 77). In other words, having found evidence in nature of female passivity and dependence, evolutionists could then claim that passivity and dependence are women's natural state, making them unfit for competition with men. An example of this approach can be found in Herbert Spencer's 1878 article "Biology and 'Woman's Rights'":

We find therefore, that throughout the class Mammalia the respective tasks of the two sexes are precisely such as we find in our own species: the male is the defender and provider, ... the female is the nurse. ... Each sex fulfils the task for which it is especially adapted by Nature, and anything like “subjugation” is utterly out of the question. (208)

As in this example, the claim that women are inherently passive was often used as evidence that social equality would be harmful to the species by conflicting with women’s natural inclinations and abilities.

However, there are elements within the *Descent* that undermine Darwin’s overt commentary on gender differences. One of the most striking aspects of the examples that Darwin gives of sexual selection in other species is the variety of gender roles found in nature. Darwin describes one species of emu in which the male incubates the eggs and then has to defend the young against their mother’s attempts to kill them: “So that with this emu we have a complete reversal not only of the parental and incubating instincts, but of the usual moral qualities of the two sexes; the females being savage, quarrelsome, and noisy, the males gentle and good” (*Descent* 536). Some feminists used such examples to undermine gender stereotypes, as in Edith Simcox’s comment that, since in many other species the parental role is shared between both parents or taken on exclusively by the male, “we can not be certain, if the rulers of the world had been developed from the races that swim or creep or fly, that intellectual birds or moralised reptiles would have noticed the same psychological sex distinctions as ourselves” (391-2). By using this technique of focusing on the variety of gender roles in nature, feminist writers undermined attempts to promote a single, authorised model of male and female behavioural patterns and parental roles.

The *Descent* also appealed to feminists for the crucial role that Darwin gave to female choice. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Darwin's theory of sexual selection held that secondary sexual characteristics like the brighter plumage of many male birds or the antlers of stags had been developed through the choice by the females over many generations of the more attractive males. In the *Descent* Darwin compares sexual selection to artificial selection, thus associating female animals with human breeders who have the power to modify the physical characteristics of a species:

Just as man can give beauty, according to his standard of taste, to his male poultry, ... so it appears that female birds in a state of nature, have by a long selection of the more attractive males, added to their beauty or other attractive qualities. (246)

Female intellectuals who responded to Darwin's work often emphasised the importance of female choice and the crucial role of female animals in evolution (Kohlstedt and Jorgensen 268). As Levine observes, "if followed out to its fullest possibilities in directions Darwin established but did not follow, [the theory of sexual selection] might very well imply the intellectual superiority of women" (Levine, *Darwin Loves You* 201) because female aesthetic tastes have taken an active role in the development of species while male animals are portrayed in Darwin's work as passive bodies to be shaped by the females. The theory of sexual selection was not very influential among scientists, partly because "the scientific community found it impossible to credit the idea that the female could have had much to do with evolutionary development" (ibid. 189). However, this was not the case in literature. Bert Bender observes that, in the *Descent*, writers found "a surprisingly rich source of ideas, incidents, and plots, as earlier writers had found such materials in the biblical source" (xi). Alluding to Darwin in their courtship plots meant invoking "the latest

and very highest authority” (ibid.), because “he or she who ‘owned’ or most effectively interpreted the evolutionary past could claim the greatest right to the literary present” (xii). Equally, he or she who most effectively interpreted the evolutionary past could use the authority of science to promote their own view of gender relations, and this helps to explain why the *Descent* appealed to writers who were seeking scientific support for their feminist ideas.

Another theme that will be important in this chapter is women’s reproductive role. Many evolutionist feminists at this time incorporated the idea of the evolutionary importance of reproduction and parenting into their arguments for greater rights for women. Olive Schreiner, in her argument that female parasitism leads to degeneration, makes women’s role as mothers central to her demand for greater access to work outside the home. She asserts that: “Only an able and labouring womanhood can permanently produce an able and labouring manhood; only an effete and inactive male can ultimately be produced by an effete and inactive womanhood” (*Woman and Labour* 107). Other feminists, particularly Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Frances Swiney, argued that women’s ability to bear and nurse children should be seen as of at least equal evolutionary value to the intelligence and originality that were depicted as masculine qualities. However, women’s reproductive potential could equally be used to restrict their opportunities, as in Grant Allen’s argument that instead of women being allowed to enter higher education on equal terms with men, a move that Allen claimed damaged their reproductive systems and weakened their maternal instincts (457), they should be educated purely to “suckle strong and intelligent children, and to order well a wholesome, beautiful, reasonable household” (453). Both the feminist and anti-feminist arguments about the evolutionary importance of motherhood were also applied to childless women, based on their potential maternity, so that even women with no intention of becoming mothers were

affected by attempts to promote the importance of women's potential maternity on one side and to use this potential maternity to restrict women's opportunities on the other.

This chapter will examine Blind and Naden's responses to the representation of women's sexual and reproductive role in the *Descent*. Kendall's work will not be discussed in this chapter because she does not explicitly refer to sexual selection in her poetry. Her avoidance of this subject fits in with the avoidance of overt discussions of gender politics in most of her work. In Blind and Naden's work, on the other hand, sexual selection is one of the most prominent evolutionary themes. Blind began responding to the *Descent* soon after it was published, as my discussion of "The Song of the Willi" will make clear, and the theme of sexual selection pervades her writing from the 1880s. Blind's work contests the view of women being limited by their reproductive functions by highlighting the evolutionary importance of mothering and undermining the association of motherhood with nurturing and passivity. The theme of sexual selection is equally prominent in Naden's work, especially her "Evolutional Erotics" sequence. Most of the critical work that has been carried out on Naden's poetry to date has focused on this theme to some extent. My reading will build on these critical responses by taking into account the original publication of these poems in *Mason College Magazine*. I will also examine Naden's representation of childlessness, a theme that has been neglected in existing critical work on her poetry. I will argue that instead of celebrating motherhood in her work, as Blind does, Naden uses imagery of maternity to raise the status of childlessness. The authority that the use of evolutionary theory could give to discussions of gender helps to explain why Naden and Blind were attracted to this theme. Neither poet either rejects the theory of sexual selection outright or accepts it in its entirety but both think through the theory and tease out its implications and inconsistencies.

Mating Rituals in “The Song of the Willi”

Blind was the only one of the three main poets discussed in this thesis who was an adult when the *Descent* was published, and she began exploring the implications of sexual selection in her work within months of the book’s publication. In this section I will discuss Blind’s response to the *Descent* in one of her earliest pieces to be published under her own name, “The Song of the Willi” (1871). This poem was originally printed in *The Dark Blue*, a magazine that attracted Pre-Raphaelite authors including William Morris, D.G. Rossetti and A.C. Swinburne, but also contained articles on a range of topical issues (Houghton 181). The style of “The Song of the Willi” aligns it with the Aesthetic poetry published in *The Dark Blue*, while the allusions to sexual selection connect the poem with the topical articles which, although they rarely focus explicitly on scientific topics, often refer in passing to Darwin and evolution.²⁹ Blind’s knowledge of Darwin’s work is more sophisticated than that of most of the authors in the *Dark Blue*, and “The Song of the Willi” is inflected by the themes of the *Descent*. It is not clear exactly when Blind read the *Descent* but she was certainly aware of the book and the debates surrounding it from the time of its publication. In a letter dated 8th March 1871 Richard Garnett draws her attention to the latest edition of *The Saturday Review*, which will interest her for “a review of Darwin’s new book” (Correspondence and Papers 1 113). In the same letter he mentions a newly established magazine, *The Dark Blue*, to which she may wish to submit an article, thus establishing a link between this publication and the *Descent* from the beginning (ibid.). No other critic to date has seen “The Song of the Willi” as a response to the *Descent* but I would argue that, although this poem is not explicitly linked to Darwin’s

²⁹ See, for example, H.E.P. Platt’s 1871 article “Modern Socialism” which refers to the “struggle for existence” in human society (452).

work, it does allude to themes from the *Descent*, and it contains elements that recur in Blind's later, more overtly evolutionary, poetry.

"The Song of the Willi" was published in August 1871, six months after the *Descent*, and was later re-written for *Dramas in Miniature* (1891).³⁰ In this poem, Blind uses Darwinian imagery to explore the application of the theory of sexual selection to human relationships. Jason Rudy, in his article "Rapturous Forms", has noted the importance of rhythm in sexual selection and in Blind's writing. He sees Blind's focus on metre and rhythm as a response to Darwin because rhythm "marks Darwin's ideas of evolution, and especially his theories of sexual selection" (444). In particular, "rhythm facilitates the communication required among animals for procreation" (445). Surprisingly, Rudy's discussion does not include "The Song of the Willi", despite the poem's clear focus on themes of sexuality and rhythm. In this section I will attempt to rectify this omission by considering "The Song of the Willi" in relation to Darwin's depictions of animal mating rituals in the *Descent*.

In the note appended to the 1891 version of this poem, Blind traces the origin of the story to "a widespread Hungarian superstition" in which "the spirits of young affianced girls who, dying before marriage, could not rest in their graves" would "nightly haunt lonely heaths in the neighbourhood of their native villages till the disconsolate lovers came as if drawn by a magnetic charm". When the men appeared, the spirits, or Willis, would dance with them until they died of exhaustion. James Diedrick notes that the origin of this legend was actually Slovakian and argues that Blind's misattribution of it to Hungary suggests that she encountered the story in a German translation of a book of popular Hungarian stories, *Magyarische Sagen und Märchen* by János József Mailáth

³⁰ Most of the quotations that I give from the poem will be from the original 1871 version but at times I will refer to the 1891 version, in which Blind strengthened the rhythmic elements of the poem and added an explanatory note. When I quote from the 1891 version I will make it clear that that is the version I am referring to.

("Pioneering" 234 n.18). Blind may well have read this book but a more obvious influence on this poem lies in the recurring references to the Willi legend in the work of the German poet, Heinrich Heine. Blind is known to have read Heine; in Richard Garnett's memoir a friend remembers that she was "well grounded in German literature" as a young woman, and that she "commented on the wit and beauty of Heine" (11). Heine's version of the Willi legend in his book *De L'Allemagne*, like Blind's version, concerns "affianced maidens who have died before their wedding-day, but are unable to rest peacefully in their graves" (Beaumont 19). The foregoing quotation is from a critic's summary of Heine's story but the similarities between his and Blind's descriptions suggest that both encountered the legend from the same source, namely Heine's works. Both Blind and Heine omit a crucial element of the original story: that the Willis have died of a broken heart after being abandoned by faithless lovers and they now dance men to death as revenge (ibid. 19). This omission suggests that Blind read Heine's version of the tale. However, in some ways Blind's version of the Willi legend is very different from Heine's. In his interpretation of the legend, and in other versions of the story that were written by men, the Willis are vengeful female vampires, representing "in a codified, displaced and condensed form the fears and desires of a patriarchal culture" (Ruprecht 111). Blind replaces this story with a romantic tale about love transcending death. The man in Blind's poem enters willingly into the dance of death in preference to continuing to live alone.

Blind's allusions to sexual selection mark another significant difference between this poem and earlier versions of the Willi story. To begin with, among the animals that she mentions most frequently in the poem are stags and cocks. The poem describes one character, Bilba, whose eyes "are as big/ As a stag's" (viii 5-6), and towards the end of the poem the narrator's heart leaps "like a stag" (xvi 5). The poem twice marks the sunrise by describing cocks crowing: on the first occasion the narrator is still alive and the morning

marks the end of a night of dancing (xi 5), while on the second occasion the crowing of cocks accompanies the lover's death from exhaustion (xix 1). The most obvious function of the imagery of cocks crowing is to draw parallels between the two dances described in the poem but, more importantly, the imagery of stags and cocks makes an implicit link between the human relationship described in this poem and Darwinian sexual selection. Stags and cocks are well-known illustrations of creatures with characteristics developed by sexual selection that are useful for attracting a mate but may harm an individual's chances of survival. This is the case with stags because their branching antlers, though decorative, are heavy and not as well suited for fighting as a single point would be (*Descent* 573), and cocks because their ornamental combs and wattles are disadvantageous in a fight because they give opponents something to hold on to (454). Darwin highlights cases like these in order to prove that these characteristics could not have been developed through natural selection because they make the creature's survival less, rather than more, likely.

More importantly, in Blind's version of the legend, the dance of the Willis is more like the mating rituals of birds than the vampirical revenge described in other versions of the story. In the early stanzas of the poem the lovers are both compared to birds: the narrator describes how she danced with her lover while she was alive and he complimented the lightness of her step: "a bird is not lighter" (vi 1). Later, the two lovers are compared to swans: "slow as two down-bosomed swans, we were sliding" (x 1). Swans are not particularly significant in the *Descent* but may be used here to represent fidelity and mating for life. The poem's use of avian imagery prepares the reader for the mating ritual in the later stanzas of the poem. Like male birds at what Darwin describes as "dancing-part[ies]" (*Descent* 446), the Willis gather at a particular location and perform their seductive dance together:

The snow flocketh grisly and ghostly, and gleams
In the glare of the moon as it swirls;
What pale flurried phantoms move drear in her beams,
And circle in shadowy whirls (xiii 5-8)

Like the Willis, several species of birds gather in groups and perform a dance together in a circle to attract their mates:

In Northern America, large numbers of a grouse, the *Tetrao phasianellus*, meet every morning during the breeding-season on a selected level spot, and here they run round and round in a circle of about fifteen or twenty feet in diameter, so that the ground is worn quite bare, like a fairy-ring. In these Partridge-dances, as they are called by the hunters, the birds assume the strangest attitudes, and run round, some to the left and some to the right. (*Descent* 430)

The purpose of the dance in both cases is to attract members of the opposite sex. In the *Descent*, Darwin quotes from a description by Thomas Jerdon of the peculiar leaping dance that the male Indian bustard does to call the females to him:

[He] “rises perpendicularly into the air with a hurried flapping of his wings, raising his crest and puffing out the feathers of his neck and breast, and then drops to the ground”; ... Such females as happen to be near “obey this saltatory summons”, and when they approach he trails his wings and spreads his tail like a turkey-cock. (430)

Similarly, in the poem, the Willi's dance acts as a summons that draws her fiancé to her by instinct: in the note to the 1891 version of the poem he is described as being attracted "as if ... by a magnetic charm", and in the poem he walks "like one in a trance" (xv 6).

Another area in which Blind appears to have been influenced by Darwin is in her focus on the importance of rhythm to this courtship. Darwin repeatedly describes the role of rhythm and music in allowing birds to attract a mate:

It is a curious fact that in the same class of animals, sounds so different as the drumming of the snipe's tail, the tapping of the woodpecker's beak, the harsh trumpet-like cry of certain water-fowl, the cooing of the turtle-dove, and the song of the nightingale, should all be pleasing to the females of the several species.
(*Descent* 429)

The importance of rhythm in sexual selection is reflected in the imagery used in this poem. The Willi makes frequent references to rhythm in her narration: "Quick, quick beat our hearts to the tune" (vi 6), "For shrill crew the cock as the sun 'gan to rise,/ And it rang from afar like a knell" (xi 5-6), and in the 1891 version, "At the sound of thy footfall my numb heart is shaken" (xvi 1). But more than the references to rhythm in the language, the metre of the poem itself suggests the importance of rhythm to this courtship. The metre is predominantly amphibrachic, with an iambic refrain in the second and fourth lines of each stanza. The iambic lines break the rhythm and slow the poem down to prevent the metre from becoming overwhelming or repetitive, and the use of a refrain reinforces the song-like qualities of the poem. These qualities remind the reader that this poem originated from a folk tale, they jar with the disturbing subject matter and they also continue the association of sexual selection and music. Amphibrachic metre is uncommon in English

poetry but it is an appropriate choice for this poem because of its leaping, dancing rhythm and the sense of speed and breathlessness it gives to the poem. As in the poems examined by Rudy, rhythm here strengthens the relations between people and shows that they are in tune with one another. When the fiancé speaks he uses the predominantly amphibrachic metre that the Willi has used throughout the poem: “I hold thee, I hold thee, I drink thy caresses,/ O love, my love!” (xvii 1-2). The Willi responds in the same metre: “Round thy face, round thy throat, I roll my dank tresses,/ Oh love, my love!” (xvii 3-4). The original version of the poem contains a short monologue in which the Willi’s fiancé describes his misery at having lost her but in the 1891 version this speech is split between the two lovers; they speak alternate lines and finish each other’s sentences:

“I hold thee, I hold thee! Eight nights, wan and weeping,”

I wandered loud sobbing thy name!

“Thy lips are as cold as the snowdrift a-sweeping;”

But thy breath soon shall fan them to flame! (xvii 5-8)

This shared speech is like a love duet and helps to demonstrate the lovers’ closeness and compatibility. In this poem, rhythm both attracts the Willi’s fiancé and allows the lovers to express their feelings for one another.

As Diedrick has noted, there is an element of gender inversion in this poem, in the description of the Willi’s heart “leap[ing] like a stag” (xvi 5; Diedrick, “Pioneering” 218). However, as should be evident from my discussion so far, the gender inversion in this poem goes much further than Diedrick’s reading suggests. Throughout the poem the Willi takes on the masculine role in sexual selection, calling and attracting her lover, and leading him in the mating dance that will cause his death. It may also be significant that the Willi’s

heart is described as “like a lark” (xvi 7) as well as a stag. As Darwin notes, larks are among the very few species of birds in which the females sing. This represents a “partial transference of secondary masculine characters to the female” (419). Consequently, this image reinforces the androgynous character of the Willi. The elements that Blind takes from the *Descent* in her interpretation of the Willi legend – female desire and choice, non-verbal communication through dance and rhythm, and the possession of masculine characteristics by female animals – allow her to imagine a version of sexual selection in which the male and female are equal and mentally compatible. I stated in Chapter One that Bevington was praised by Alfred H. Miles for having “broken the spell which for fifteen years had confined Darwin to the world of prose” (“Louisa S. Guggenberger” 263) but, if I am correct in reading “The Song of the Willi” as an exploration of sexual selection, Blind was responding to Darwin’s work even earlier than Bevington was. As I will demonstrate in the following section, the elements that struck Blind as significant in this initial response to the *Descent* remained central in the more overtly Darwinian writing that she produced in the 1880s.

Blind and Sexual Selection in the 1880s

In Blind’s semi-fictionalised autobiography, her alter-ego, Alma, is travelling alone in the Alps when she meets a young woman called Constance. Constance is impressed by Alma’s independence but finds it difficult to believe that a woman can truly be free and asks “Do not nature and society play into each other’s hands [in keeping women in a dependent state]?” (Autobiography 39). Alma replies: “I don’t know about nature ... There seems very little difference in the habits of male and female eagles, seagulls and swallows, elephants or ants” (ibid.). This technique of focusing on the diversity of gender roles in

other species in order to question the naturalness of human gender divisions recurs throughout Blind's responses to Darwinian sexual selection, from "The Song of the Willi" to the representation of the love triangle in her novel, *Tarantella* (1885), and the depictions of human and animal sexual selection in *The Ascent of Man* (1889). In most of these pieces Blind applies natural imagery to human relationships to highlight the frequent instances of male and female equality, or female dominance, in other species. However, in "The Teamster" from *The Ascent of Man*, which I will discuss later in this section, Blind uses imagery of other species to represent a state of extreme female passivity, like that described by Darwin, in order to render Darwin's perpetuation of gender stereotypes ridiculous.

The plot of *Tarantella* concerns a love triangle between Mina, a young woman from a rural German village, Emmanuel, a famous composer, and Emmanuel's estranged wife, Antonella. Blind's echoes of Darwin's language in this novel indicate to the scientific reader that this book should be read as a commentary on the *Descent*. In one short paragraph describing the movements of the swallows outside Mina's window, Blind uses the phrases "graceful evolutions" and "more expressive than any words" (I 29). Both phrases are direct quotations from the *Descent*. The first is taken from Chapter Fourteen:

Small parties of an African weaver (*Ploceus*) congregate, during the breeding-season, and perform for hours their graceful evolutions. (456)

Like Darwin, Blind uses the word "evolution" to describe a turning motion rather than the evolution of a species: "A pair [of swallows] ... has remained, executing a thousand graceful evolutions before Mina's eyes" (I 28-9). The second phrase echoes the passage from the *Descent* that I quoted in Chapter Three: "Our cries of pain, fear, surprise, anger,

together with their appropriate actions, and the murmur of a mother to her beloved child, are more expressive than any words” (107). In Darwin’s work, this phrase is not connected with sexual selection but Blind’s application of this language to the communication between mating birds associates it with this theme:

Here they are again, hovering round the old nest, inspecting it now from this side, now from that, twittering in shrill tones, more expressive than any words, of their heartfelt joy at being home once more in the old familiar place. (I 29)

In the work of another writer these echoes of the *Descent* might be seen as a coincidence. However, in the context of Blind’s thorough knowledge of Darwin’s work and the repeated references to the *Descent* in her poetry this explanation appears unlikely. Blind often uses such linguistic echoes of Darwin’s work. For example, in the poem “Chaunts of Life”, she refers to birdsong as “love-notes” (VI 147), a phrase used by Darwin in Chapter Thirteen of the *Descent* (416), and uses the word “antics” (II 40) to describe birds’ mating dances, as Darwin does in Chapter Eight (245). The use of these Darwinian phrases signals to the reader that this novel will be concerned with sexual selection, a promise that is borne out by the depiction of the courtship plot later in the book.

Having established a link between her novel and the *Descent*, Blind uses natural imagery throughout the book to emphasise the differences between the two main female characters. Mina, the heroine of the novel is repeatedly associated with nature. Her bedroom is described as a “bower” (25), and descriptions of Mina herself by other characters frequently associate her with nature: she is a “goose” (46), a “tender plant” (142), a “little half-fledged chick” (211). Mina’s love for nature and the description of her as a part of nature are used to illustrate her caring and carefree personality. Antonella is

also closely associated with nature, in the spider imagery that recurs throughout the novel, but in her case this association is less positive. The name Antonella has echoes of “tarantella”, the dance believed to counteract the effects of poisonous spider bites, and her full name, Antonella Mansi connects her with Anansi, the spider from African folklore. The spider imagery is most obvious towards the end of the novel, when Antonella manipulates Mina under the guise of friendship in order to persuade her to leave the village so that Antonella and Emmanuel can be reconciled. Antonella’s actions indirectly cause Mina’s death by driving her to run through the snow towards Emmanuel’s home, where she freezes to death at his door. Chapter Forty, in which Antonella lies to Mina about Emmanuel’s feelings for the two women, is entitled “The True Tarantula”. In this chapter, when Antonella tells Mina about her marriage to Emmanuel, Mina clutches her heart “as though she had been stung there” (II 178), recalling her dream about being stung by a spider in the first chapter (I 11). From this point in the novel, the association with the spider becomes much more overt:

Like a spider balancing itself in the centre of its web, now and again shooting out a cunning thread where the meshes seemed weakest, she was weaving, weaving the most subtle of stories, wherewith to entrap Emmanuel on the morrow when she should come upon him unawares. (II 211)

In Emmanuel’s feverish nightmares following Mina’s death he sees Antonella as a spider and himself as a fly (II 228-9).

However, for readers who are familiar with the *Descent*, the spider imagery associated with Antonella begins with her first meeting with Emmanuel. At this first meeting, Antonella has been bitten by a tarantula and Emmanuel saves her life by playing

a tarantella on his violin which drives her to dance and sweat out the poison. However, the imagery implies not only that she has been bitten by a spider but that Antonella *is* a spider. In his discussion of spiders in the *Descent*, Darwin notes that male spiders have “the power of making a stridulating sound ... to call or to excite the female” (315). This music is made by “a serrated ridge at the base of the abdomen, against which the hard hinder part of the thorax is rubbed” (315), like a violin. In a later section of the book, Darwin describes the similar parts possessed by male crickets as a “bow” and “fiddle” (327). Antonella’s hypnotic movements suggest an instinctive response to the music:

So still she stood, that with her shut eyes and face of unearthly pallor she might have been taken for a statue, till, as I slightly quickened the *tempo*, a convulsive tremor passed through her rigid, exquisitely moulded limbs, and then with measured gestures of inexpressible grace she began slowly swaying herself to and fro. Softly her eyes unclosed now, and mistily as yet their gaze dwelt upon me. There was intoxication in their fixed stare, and almost involuntarily I struck into an impassioned *allegro*. (I 167)

Darwin does not describe spiders’ mating rituals in detail but Antonella’s absorption in the dance mirrors that of other species in their mating dances, particularly some species of birds, such as the males of the Black-cock in Germany who “are so absorbed that they become almost blind and deaf ... hence bird after bird may be shot on the same spot, or even caught by the hand” (Darwin, *Descent* 412). As in a mating ritual, the rhythm of Emmanuel’s music is depicted as a form of sexual communication between the two characters: “from her to me and me to her an electric impulse of rhythmical movement perpetually vibrated to and fro” (I 168). In the same way that the music of spiders works

“to call or to excite the female”, Emmanuel’s music draws Antonella to him. Shortly after he plays the tarantella to save Antonella’s life, he is practising the same tune in his room at the inn when he becomes aware of the shadow of a dancing woman outside his window (203). This is Antonella, who has been attracted by the music.

For the scientific reader, the allusions to spider mating rituals suggest danger for Emmanuel because the female spider sometimes devours the male after mating, or, as Darwin describes it, “carries her coyness to a dangerous pitch” (*Descent* 314-15). Despite Darwin’s attempt to understand the female spider’s cannibalism as an appropriately feminine display of “coyness”, it was clear to most commentators that this creature did not adhere to stereotypical human gender roles. The use of spider imagery in *Tarantella* serves a similar purpose to the use of this imagery in a 1912 article in the suffragette newspaper *Votes for Women*. In response to the eugenicist Dr Saleeby’s argument that women should model their behaviour on queen bees, by focusing their energy on breeding rather than careers, the author suggests that “if we are to learn from the animal kingdom, we will produce the lady spider – she eats her husband. Would this not be a simple solution of the whole question?” (S.B. 54). In response to Darwin’s attempt to “expunge even the possibility of these dangerously desirous and carnal women from the pages of his respectable and overtly patriarchal monograph” (Dawson 50), feminists like Blind and the *Votes for Women* reviewer focused on the female spider to undermine Darwin’s projection of Victorian gender stereotypes onto nature. Emmanuel’s repeated descriptions of Antonella as “coquettish” or “coquetting” (II 15, 17, 23, 64) parody Darwin’s attempt to defuse the female spider’s threat to established gender roles. Because his view of Antonella is shaped by stereotypes of feminine behaviour, Emmanuel does not realise the full extent of her destructive power until it is too late. Like other nineteenth-century feminists, such as Edith Simcox, Blind draws attention to the variety of relationships in

nature, using the spider imagery in *Tarantella* as an image of female dominance to demonstrate that there is not a single “natural law” governing female animals’ sexual behaviour.

While *Tarantella* undermines Darwin’s depiction of female animals as passive and nurturing by focusing on a creature that does not fit this stereotype, Blind’s poem “The Teamster” from *The Ascent of Man* exaggerates the idea of female passivity in order to ridicule it. “The Teamster” is not in the first section of the book, “The Ascent of Man”, which is the only section that is explicitly linked to evolution. The two later sections, “Poems of the Open Air” and “Love in Exile”, initially appear unconnected to the evolutionary themes of the first section. The use of a quotation from Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” as the epigraph to “Poems of the Open Air” suggests a shift from an evolutionary conception of nature to a Romantic perspective. However, the evolutionary theme continues in this section, albeit in a disguised form, in the imagery of sexual selection used to describe the relationship in “The Teamster”. In contrast to the desiring female sexual selectors found elsewhere in Blind’s work, such as the leopardess in “Chaunts of Life” whose pulses are “[s]tir[red] with intoxicating stress” (II 47) at the sight of a leopard lying “[v]oluptuously” (II 44) before her, the presentation of sexual selection in “The Teamster” is striking for the complete absence of female choice. In this poem, Sam, who rears horses, is in love with a servant girl called May, but after he burns her master’s hayricks in a fit of anger he is transported to the colonies for seven years. When he returns he finds that May is engaged to another man. Sam punches May’s fiancé and she allows herself to be claimed as a prize:

But Sam, whose arm with iron force could smite,

Knocked his cowed rival down, and won his bride.

May wept and smiled, swayed like a wild red rose

As the wind blows. (171-4)

As Darwin notes, when male animals fight over a female, the female still chooses which one to mate with and does not automatically attach herself to the winner:

It does not, however, appear that the females invariably prefer the victorious males.

I have indeed been assured by Dr. W. Kovalevsky that the female capercaillie sometimes steals away with a young male who has not dared to enter the arena with the older cocks, (*Descent* 415-16)

As he later observes, after all of the evidence that he has collected to prove that female birds select their partners, “it would be a strange anomaly if female quadrupeds, which stand higher in the scale and have higher mental powers, did not generally, or at least often, exert some choice” (585). This raises the question of why a poet as familiar with the theory of sexual selection as Blind was would portray a female mammal as being so entirely devoid of volition. The answer may lie in the shift in Darwin’s portrayal of sexual selection when he is discussing human relationships. According to Darwin, because human males are “more powerful in body and mind” than the females, men have “gained the power of selection” (665). Women have not, however, taken on the male role of pursuer. As Cynthia Eagle Russett observes: “Why this situation did not represent a ‘strange anomaly’ as it would have among the quadrupeds, Darwin did not explain” (80).

Because Darwin’s depiction of human relationships leaves no role for women, Blind’s poetic exploration of human sexual selection struggles to find a realistic role for May. The two male characters in the poem are associated with other mammals: Sam is

“[l]ike some tired cart-horse in a field alone” (17) and is linked to bulls through his association with the pub called “The Bull” (149) while his rival, Ned, is “sheep-faced” (161) and “cowed” (172). However, there is no mammal that is passive enough to be associated with May so she is described using floral imagery, which is appropriate to the purely decorative role given to women by Darwin’s theory. May’s name associates her with plants, as does the physical description of her in the fifth stanza of the poem: her eyes are “hazel” (26), her cheeks are “pouting roses” (28), and she is a “fresh-blown girl” (30). Her actions are also plant-like. In the stanza quoted at the beginning of this paragraph, May reacts to the fight by “sway[ing] like a wild red rose” (173). Even her death is not human: she “dropped off, flower-like, into the long sleep” (178). This floral imagery is incompatible with the animal imagery used for the male characters in the poem and strikes the reader as incongruous. While much of Blind’s writing on sexual selection focuses on the importance of female choice and the range of different versions of femininity found in nature, “The Teamster” highlights the inconsistencies in Darwin’s depiction of human sexual selection by demonstrating what genuine female passivity would entail.

Naden and Human Sexual Selection

Like Blind, Naden also uses imagery of sexual selection to explore Darwin’s representation of femininity but rather than aligning women with more positive role models from nature like Blind does, Naden often entirely rejects the use of other species as models for human sexual behaviour or gender roles. She is also more interested than Blind in the importance of female choice, and especially the ability of females to select against an undesirable male. This is particularly true of her “Evolutional Erotics” sequence, which has attracted the majority of the critical attention that has been given to her poetry so far.

Andrea Kaston Tange argues that the failed relationships in this sequence demonstrate that Victorian models of courtship and marriage will have to evolve to meet the needs of modern educated women or marriage will become obsolete (235). I would like to take this further and argue that the influence of Darwin on this sequence can not only be felt in the use of evolutionary arguments to demonstrate the importance of a change in human relationships but also in its subtle echoes of Darwin's statements about women and female animals. These echoes are used to suggest that men who take their view of women from Darwin and ignore the influence of cultural factors on sexual choices will be disadvantaged in sexual selection. In this section I will examine how three poems from this sequence – "Natural Selection", "Scientific Wooing" and "The New Orthodoxy" – and also the long poem "A Modern Apostle", explore the significance of sexual selection for human relationships, and suggest the limitations of applying a Darwinian model to human sexual behaviour.

In "Natural Selection" Naden implies that scientists' ideas about "natural" female behaviour may reflect their prejudices about women rather than impartial observation. The speaker of this poem prides himself on being "scientific" (19), and when his lover, Chloe, leaves him for another man he takes comfort from his knowledge of sexual selection: "for since Chloe is false,/ I'm certain that Darwin is true" (32). His descriptions of Chloe and her new lover deny the couple's humanity by seeing them as birds who "strut" (18) and "sing" (23) and "coo" (30). He portrays Chloe as an irrational slave to her biology, but it is clear to the reader that Chloe has perfectly rational reasons for ending this relationship. John Holmes reads "Natural Selection" as arguing that, although Chloe has prioritised style over substance in her choice of partner, the narrator is wrong to assume that all women would make a similar choice (192). However, like Tange, I would argue that it is only the rejected suitor who believes that Chloe has made the wrong decision, while the

reader is encouraged to approve of her choice (224). There are hints in the early stanzas of the poem that Chloe doubts the morality of the narrator's "dig[ging] up an ancestor's grave" (6) and is not satisfied with his "hole" of a study (14) or "gift" (1) of bones, but the narrator ignores these. Instead of examining his own scientific reaction to an emotional situation, he smugly reminds himself of Darwin's theory that among birds "[t]he females are most excited by, or prefer pairing with, the more ornamented males, or those which are the best songsters, or play the best antics" (*Descent* 249):

And we know the more dandified males
By dance and by song win their wives –
'Tis a law that with *Aves* prevails,
And even in *Homo* survives. (25-8)

In the extract above, the narrator blurs species boundaries, both by comparing people to birds and by describing birds as "dandified" creatures who have "wives" rather than mates. This reflects Darwin's own mixture of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. Darwin frequently associates humans with birds in the *Descent*, such as when he compares mating birds to "young rustics at a fair courting a pretty girl" in order to demonstrate that in both cases "the eagerness of the wooers to please her" proves that the female has the power of choice (473). He also uses observations of birds to understand human female behaviour, as in his observation that women's "conscious[ness] of the value of their own beauty" is demonstrated by them "borrow[ing] the plumage of male birds, with which nature has decked this sex in order to charm the female" (665). Naden's blurring of species boundaries in "Natural Selection" shows an awareness of the role of anthropomorphism in Darwin's perpetuation of gender stereotypes. By failing to distinguish between the natural

behaviour of birds and the rational, culturally constructed behaviour of women, the scientist in this poem is able to reinforce his own prejudices about Chloe's irrationality and lower intellect. However, a comparison with other poems from the same volume suggests that this man's perpetuation of gender stereotypes, through the association of Chloe with birds, is not only a misunderstanding of his situation but may also be part of the reason for their relationship having ended in the first place.

The narrator of another poem in the "Evolutional Erotics" sequence, "Scientific Wooing", has been diverted from his passion for scientific study by his attraction to Mary Maud Trevelyhan, and plans to use his scientific knowledge in his courtship of her. Like the narrator of "Natural Selection", this man's ideas about women have been affected by his reading of Darwin's works, since he expects that Mary's response to his courtship can be predicted by studying other species. Patricia Murphy sees the narrator's scientific knowledge as a powerful weapon to be used against a less educated woman, and assumes that his ability to "imitate the successful strategies that lower organisms have adopted in the process of sexual selection" (*In Science's Shadow* 50) will ensure his success. However, this reading ignores the poem's hints that the narrator's adherence to a Darwinian model of gender roles will prevent him from succeeding with Mary. The narrator describes how he intends to instruct Mary in the correct response to his courtship by teaching her about sexual selection in nature:

I'll sing a deep Darwinian lay
Of little birds with plumage gay,
 Who solved by courtship Life's enigma;
I'll teach her how the wild-flowers love,
And why the trembling stamens move,

And how the anthers kiss the stigma. (73-8)

He expects that after this lesson she will model her behaviour on that of other females, regardless of species. In this assumption he is perhaps influenced by Darwin's idea of a standard female personality, characterised by "greater tenderness and less selfishness" (*Descent* 629), that transcends species boundaries. However, the telling rhyme of "Mary" (48) and "vary" (45), coming just before he lays out his plan to "lure the maid to sweet communion" (63), suggests a level of individuality that he has not taken into account. It is particularly significant that the narrator acknowledges that Mary is never "coy" (40), the adjective that Darwin so frequently applies to female animals. If Mary does not adhere to Darwinian gender stereotypes, it may not be possible for the narrator to court her by using his knowledge of evolutionary science. As Tange suggests, the presence of "Natural Selection" in the same sequence as "Scientific Wooing" acts as an ironic commentary on the "Scientific Wooing" narrator's confidence in his romantic strategy by reminding the reader of the possibility that he will be unsuccessful (225). Since Darwinian "fitness" is partly determined by success in leaving progeny, the men in Naden's poems are rendered less fit by holding attitudes towards women that decrease their chances of marrying and reproducing.

Tange observes that a comparison of "Natural Selection" and "Scientific Wooing" with another poem from this sequence, "The New Orthodoxy", demonstrates that although the women in the former two poems are silenced by their lovers "it does not logically follow that such women would have nothing to say were they given a chance to speak" (225). "The New Orthodoxy" is narrated by Amy, a model of the educated New Woman, who threatens to reject her lover if he cannot share her faith in evolutionary doctrine. Throughout the poem she clearly demonstrates her intelligence and her understanding of

scientific concepts: “Laplace/ Said this Earth was nought but gas/ Till the vast rotating mass/ Denser grew and denser” (49-52). Amy’s intelligence acts as an implicit refutation of the comments of Darwin and his followers on female intelligence and acquisition of knowledge, such as Romanes’s claim that “there is a greater power of amassing knowledge on the part of the male” and “a woman’s information is less wide and deep and thorough than that of a man” (655). Several critics have commented on Amy’s intelligence in this regard but the difference in social status between the two characters in “The New Orthodoxy” is also a comment on Darwinian gender stereotypes. The fact that “[l]ittle Amy Merton” (20) is prepared to reject “Sir Frederick’s heir” (19) contradicts Darwin’s assertion that, in human selection, women’s “choice is largely influenced by the social position and wealth of the men” (*Descent* 653). As with Mary’s individuality and lack of coyness in “Scientific Wooing”, Naden’s depiction of Amy contradicts Darwin’s view of women. As Tange implies, the presence of a poem in this sequence that is narrated by an educated, independent woman leads the reader to question the male portrayals of the women in “Natural Selection” and “Scientific Wooing”.

There are also hints in “Scientific Wooing” that Naden intended this poem to be read against “A Modern Apostle”, one of the longer poems from the same volume. The narrator’s strategy in “Scientific Wooing” can be compared to the advice given to Alan in “A Modern Apostle” about how to approach his courtship of the intellectual Ella:

Go, woo her with Dynamics and with Statics,
And term your love a force molecular;
She then, perchance, may fathom your intention –
Plain language is beneath her comprehension. (III 53-6)

The similar approach adopted by the narrator of “Scientific Wooing” may be intended to imply that Mary is just as intellectual as Ella, and the description of Mary appearing “chill” (49) also links her to Ella, with her reputation for “gentle chillness” (III 166). The narrator’s admission in “Scientific Wooing” that Mary is “never kind, she’s never coy,/ She treats me simply as a boy,/ And asks me how I like my classes” (40-2) suggests equality and a shared interest in education, possibly stemming from both characters being students at the same university, rather than meeting on a purely social footing. If the narrator’s scientific approach to courtship is an indication of Mary’s intellectuality, his construction of her as purely decorative and as equivalent to a bird or plant is even more inappropriate than it appears to be on the first reading. As well as implying that Mary may be more intellectual than the narrator of “Scientific Wooing” suggests, the implicit link between “Scientific Wooing” and “A Modern Apostle” hints at potential rejection for the narrator of “Scientific Wooing” because “A Modern Apostle” is another poem, like “Natural Selection” and “The New Orthodoxy”, that concerns the ending of a relationship.

“A Modern Apostle” concerns the relationship between Alan, a mystic and visionary, and his rational, scientific fiancée Ella, who ends their relationship because she realises that she cannot share Alan’s spiritual vision. A comparison of the poetic version of “A Modern Apostle” to Naden’s earlier short story of the same name, published in *Mason College Magazine*, raises interesting questions about Naden’s intentions in writing this poem. Arthur Burnet, the principal male character in the story, is a more obviously unsympathetic character than Alan, but Alan has many similar characteristics to a less pronounced degree. Like the men in “Natural Selection” and “Scientific Wooing”, Arthur associates Claudia, the story’s equivalent to Ella, with nature in order to allow him to feel that he understands and can study her:

“No one has understood me till now,” said Burnet, in response to some remark of Claudia’s, “but you understand. Since I saw you first, I have felt that you knew my message instinctively. I watched you, and I saw how you welcomed ideas. Look at these roses. You drink in sunlight just as they do.”

“After all, that is a very passive virtue,” she replied.

“But how can you see the beauty of light until the flowers change it to colour? Then it is a new revelation. You do not know how you have taught me and helped me and inspired me. You do not know how often I have felt that I could not speak a word to the people, and then I have looked at you and you gave me strength.”

“But I have scarcely said anything to you about it.”

“No; you did not tell me in words, but still I knew.” (“A Modern Apostle” 48-9)

Unlike the women in Naden’s poetry, Claudia contests this construction of her, in her comment that “that is a very passive virtue” (49). It is interesting that Alan uses exactly the same image in the poem:

I saw your eyes that drank
The message, and returned it richly bright,
As this deep rose gives beauty to the light. (IV 54-6)

In this case Ella does not protest but allows Alan to treat her as a passive recipient of his ideas instead of a rational being with ideas of her own. Claudia’s objection to the woman-as-flower image in the story suggests that the use of the same image in the poem is meant to be troubling, but Naden’s greater ambiguity in her poetry than her prose means that this is not made explicit. As Tange observes, the women in Naden’s poetry “are silent because

their pompous suitors will not allow them to get a word in edgewise” (Tange 225), and the reader is left to infer what they would have said if they were given the opportunity.

Although Alan’s construction of Ella as akin to passive, floral nature could lead her to have concerns about this relationship, Ella’s mother’s experience of marriage may have led her to have doubts about any relationship. When Ella announces her engagement, her mother, “ill at ease” (IV 93), advises her that the marriage is a bad idea and will lead to the stifling of her intellectual potential: “what’s the use of all your Conic Sections/ If like a fool you yield to your affections?” (IV 95-6). Ella’s mother’s evident discomfort about the engagement leads the reader to question what her own experience of marriage has been, and the poem hints that her marriage may not be a happy one. When Alan’s friend George first describes Ella’s family he tells Alan that the only person who does not “reverence” (III 37) Ella’s father is “his helpmate; commonplace and keen,/ Through her sage lord her wifely eyes have seen” (III 39-40). The reader is given very little insight into Ella’s parents’ marriage but George’s use of the phrase “wifely eyes” seems sarcastic, suggesting that Ella’s mother’s treatment of her husband is very far from the stereotype of wifely devotion. This, and her stated opposition to Ella’s marriage, suggests dissatisfaction with her own life and hints that marriage may not always be a positive choice for a woman. In this way, this poem moves beyond the strategy of the “Evolutional Erotics” poems, of contesting the use of other species to explain women’s sexual behaviour, and instead hints at the social factors that shape women’s choices.

Claudia, in the prose version of this story, also ends her relationship because she does not share Arthur’s beliefs, but in her case this is presented as absolutely the right choice. Arthur recovers quickly from Claudia’s rejection of him, proving that his feelings for her were not genuine. Although Claudia suffers for her choice, her refusal to compromise her intellectual beliefs allows her to “[keep] in her heart an unstained ideal”

(53). The consequences of Ella's rejection of Alan are more serious. He is deeply unhappy about the relationship ending and he consequently neglects his health and devotes all of his energies to his work. He becomes so weak that he is unable to recover from the injury he receives when he tries to stop a riot, and he dies with Ella by his bedside. A comparison of this poem with the original story suggests that the reader is meant to support Ella's choice but it is difficult to see this as an entirely positive decision when it leads to such great suffering for both characters. The poem presents female choice in much more challenging terms than the story does, suggesting that although female independence and choice are positive, there will sometimes be painful consequences to those choices.

With its focus on the social factors behind human sexual selection, "A Modern Apostle" makes an interesting companion piece to the "Evolutional Erotics" sequence. The poem also presents the decision to opt out of sexual selection and procreation altogether as a perfectly valid choice. Instead of supporting Alan in his work, as she would have done as his wife, Ella takes over Alan's mission at the end of the poem and is able to make a difference in her own right. Marion Thain observes that "A Modern Apostle" begins as Alan's tale but by the end of the poem it is Ella who is the apostle of the title ("Constance Naden" 65). Whereas the "Evolutional Erotics" poems deal with failed courtships and doomed relationships, "A Modern Apostle" continues beyond the end of a relationship to hint that a woman may have a more fulfilling life outside marriage than within it. As Tange argues, the reader's understanding of each of these poems is enlarged by considering them in relation to each other (215). Read together, "Natural Selection", "Scientific Wooing", "The New Orthodoxy" and "A Modern Apostle" contest the use of Darwinian models to explain women's sexual choices, highlight the intelligence and independence of many modern women and suggest that social, rather than biological,

motivations may shape women's sexual choices, including the choice of opting out of marriage and procreation altogether.

Tange has observed that, in the "Evolutional Erotics" sequence, "Naden assumes that her readers are already conversant in contemporary scientific theories, and, based on that assumption, she offers a complex critique of how those theories get deployed to ideological ends" (213). This assumption of her readers' scientific knowledge may be explained by the fact that "Scientific Wooing", "Natural Selection" and "The New Orthodoxy" were all originally published in *Mason College Magazine*, where most of her readers were science students who frequently engaged in debates about scientific issues.³¹ This publishing context may also partially explain Naden's greater willingness to address issues of gender openly, in comparison to Kendall in her poetry for *Punch* and other periodicals. Unlike Kendall, Naden published very little poetry in periodicals and did not rely on writing for her financial support. Apart from a few scattered publications in *St. James's Magazine*, *The Agnostic Annual* and Oscar Wilde's *The Woman's World*, most of her periodical publications were in *Mason College Magazine*, where she did not have to disguise her feminist sentiments to fit in with the editorial principles of the magazine because, between 1883 and 1884, she *was* the editor, and she later remained involved with the magazine. Julie S. Gilbert has concluded, from a study of *Mason College Magazine* and other magazines published by redbrick universities in the late nineteenth century that the women at these universities took an active role in university life, and that the close contact between men and women in lectures and at union activities overcame any vestige of separate spheres ideology in the minds of male students (417-19). She notes the frequent appearance of "anti-female gibes" (419) in these magazines, depicting female students as either earnest and humourless with no interest in men or frivolous and distracting (418).

³¹ The scientific tone of the magazine was such that one of the correspondents to the letters page complained that for students of non-scientific subjects it was not possible to read the magazine without the aid of a scientific dictionary (Lillie Dale 127).

However, she argues that these satires do not indicate hostility towards the presence of women at university but are a “backhanded symbol of the acceptance of female students” (419), indicating familiarity and friendly relations between the men and women. In her “Evolutional Erotics” sequence, Naden responds in kind, depicting male scientists as socially inept and limited by their stereotypical view of women. In other words, the light-hearted tone of Naden’s social critique in these poems is not, as Margaret D. Stetz suggests of women’s humorous poetry of the 1890s, used as a defensive mechanism because the poetry “had to remain palatable to a male audience in order to achieve publication at all” (228). Rather, Naden has the power to publish more overtly feminist poetry but she keeps her satire gentle and understated because the male scientists that she is criticising are her friends and fellow students.

Blind and Motherhood

The elements of Blind’s work that have been examined so far in this chapter complicate John Holmes’s assertion that Blind was among those feminists who “tended to predicate their arguments 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” (Holmes “Darwinism” 523), since Blind’s writing on sexual selection more often minimises sexual differences and undermines stereotypes about natural feminine qualities. Her poetry on motherhood, on the other hand, frequently does emphasise sexual difference and uses women’s reproductive capacity as an image of female power. However, even in this poetry I disagree with Holmes’s claim that the focus is on nurturing and co-operation. As I will go on to argue, the mothers and maternal forces in Blind’s work are often as powerful and destructive as they are creative.

The theme of motherhood was a significant one for evolutionary feminists, partly because the idea that limitations are placed on women's intelligence and abilities by their reproductive systems is a recurring theme in the discussions of sexual difference in the *Descent* and other late-Victorian science texts. Even childless women were depicted as being physiologically and psychologically disadvantaged by their potential maternity, as in Herbert Spencer's argument that there is "a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men; necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction" (*The Study of Sociology* 373). Women's potential maternity was believed to make them more selfless than men but also less suited to struggle and competition:

Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness; ... Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she would often extend them towards her fellow-creatures. (Darwin, *Descent* 629)

On the other hand, the focus on the importance of reproduction in Darwin's work gave greater status to women by placing "women's child-bearing bodies at the centre of history" (Brown 143). Some feminist writers subverted the idea of women being defined by their maternal qualities and used the concept of natural maternal instincts to argue that women should have more power and a greater public role because they were the mothers of the race. An example of this can be found in Gilman's poem "To Mothers":

Shall a mother be kept from her children?

These people are ours!

They are ours! [Man] is ours for we made him!

In our arms he has nestled and smiled!

Shall we, the world-mothers be hindered

By the freaks of a child? (55-60)

By expanding the concept of the maternal role to include responsibility for the whole human race, writers like Gilman sought to widen women's sphere and to redefine politics and leadership as appropriate arenas for women. In her evolutionary treatise *The Awakening of Women*, Frances Swiney explicitly applied imagery of maternity to childless women as well as mothers in order to highlight the moral superiority and public duty of all women. She argued that "even without having after the flesh borne sons and daughters, [a woman] can with world-wide mother-love take suffering, toiling, sorrowing humanity to her bosom, and expend far and wide the treasures of her affection and devotion" (121). Blind's work responds to the evolutionary representation of motherhood in three ways: by depicting motherhood and childbirth as heroic, by associating motherhood with evolutionary creation, and by contesting the association of motherhood with nurturing through a focus on the destructive side of Mother Nature.

Blind's sonnet "Motherhood" is her most explicit response to this theme. This poem focuses on the pain and danger of childbirth in order to present women's reproductive labour as at least as valuable and difficult as men's contributions to the evolutionary future:

A life hath been upheaved with struggle and pain; ...

To moans of anguish terrible and wild –
As shrieks the night-wind through an ill-shut pane –
Pure heaven succeeds; (2, 5-7)

Blind's depiction of motherhood and childbirth in this poem is clearly indebted to her interest in evolution. The use of the word "struggle" to describe labour depicts the danger of childbirth, for both infant and mother, as an evolutionary struggle for survival. Similarly, in *The Heather on Fire*, Mary's unborn child is described as "the burden of the life beneath/ Her heart – that battle-field of wrestling life and death" (Duan Third LIV 7-8), mirroring Darwin's use of martial metaphors, as in the phrase "the great battle of life" (*Origin* 127). In "Motherhood" the mother and baby both survive, whereas Mary and her baby in *The Heather on Fire* do not, but in both poems Blind invokes the very real danger of childbirth for a Victorian woman in order to present this female act of creation as heroic.

Kathleen Hickok suggests that the evolutionary meaning in "Motherhood" goes beyond the imagery of struggle. She argues that rather than being seen simply as a depiction of a single human birth, the poem should be read as a representation of creation:

The woman is Mother Earth herself, who, with upheaval and struggle and pain, may at last give birth to perfected humanity, with the capacity to "bring a brightness to the darkened earth." (*Representations* 79)

I agree with Hickok that the reader is encouraged to draw parallels between the mother in this poem and Mother Earth or Mother Nature but I do not agree that the woman should be read as a representation of Mother Earth, rather, her act of creation mirrors other forms of

creation but on a smaller scale. “Motherhood” is clearly linked to the more overtly evolutionary poetry in this volume through the striking similarity between the language used to describe childbirth in this poem and the language used to describe the creation of the earth in other poems from *The Ascent of Man*. In the early sections of “Chaunts of Life”, the development of life is described using “heavy-handed birthing images” (Groth 334) and images of motherhood, such as the description of mountains as “broad-bosomed mothers” (I 10). The poem describes mountains being “upheaved” from the “womb of the waters” (I 6), echoing the phrase “A life has been upheaved” (2) from “Motherhood”, which underlines the association of this image with childbirth and draws links between the two poems in the reader’s mind.

As well as combining evolutionary and reproductive discourses, Blind uses biblical language in her description of the creation of the earth in “Chaunts of Life”. The use of this language allies Blind with other *fin-de-siècle* women writers, such as Olive Schreiner, who, as Rose Lovell-Smith has noted, show a “specifically feminist tendency to reconcile the world-views of Darwinism and religious belief” (303). As Lovell-Smith observes:

Nature, on the one hand, and God, on the other, had long been used to sanction the prevailing unevenness of the relations of the sexes. Small wonder, then, that women writers with subversive intentions often make swift acknowledgement of these twin (or rival) authorities: (304)

The writers discussed in Lovell-Smith’s article either combine evolution and religion in such a way that both discourses appear to support the writer’s argument or juxtapose them so that each undermines the other (304). In *The Ascent of Man* Blind favours the first technique, using biblical language and evolutionary imagery to give a central role to

processes of birth and mothering in her depiction of religious and evolutionary history. Her use of biblical language to describe evolutionary origins has been remarked upon by Kevin Mills, who notes that, “the primordial chaos [described in Blind’s “Chaunts of Life”] is strangely familiar to readers of the Bible” (40). However, Mills does not discuss the ways in which imagery of maternity interacts with these religious and scientific discourses. In her description of the evolution of the earth at the beginning of this poem Blind echoes the phrase “the face of the waters” from Genesis (Genesis 2:2; “Chaunts of Life” I 3) but then a few lines later she repeats the phrase, replacing “face” with “womb”: “And lo, from the womb of the waters, upheaved in volcanic convulsion,/ Ribbed and ravaged and rent there rose bald peaks and the rocky/ Heights of confederate mountains” (I 6-8). By replacing the Word of God with the womb of the earth as the starting point of creation, Blind reinstates women’s reproductive power, which was usurped by the creation of new life from a man’s rib instead of a woman’s womb in Genesis (2:21-2).³²

As well as echoing the language of “Motherhood”, the description of mountains being “upheaved” also echoes Milton’s depiction of the emergence of mountains in *Paradise Lost*:

Immediately the mountains huge appear
Emergent, and the broad bare backs upheave
Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky: (VII 285-7)

This extract is taken from a passage in which Milton, like Blind, depicts the creation of the earth using imagery of childbirth:

³² See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* p.29 for a more detailed examination of the significance of the story of Adam’s rib.

The earth was formed, but in the womb as yet
Of waters, embryo immature involved,
Appeared not: over all the face of the earth
Main ocean flowed, not idle, but with warm
Prolific humour softening all her globe,
Fermented the great mother to conceive,
Satiated with general moisture, (VII 276-282)

As Margaret Homans observes, Milton's Mother Earth "is passive and requires the active agency of 'Main Ocean' to complete the process" (*Women Writers* 16). This image stems from the Aristotelian view of conception, in which the mother provided the matter for the bodies of her offspring while the father's semen provided the soul that caused the baby's body to take shape (Merchant 13-16). Carolyn Merchant notes that in the sixteenth century, the century before *Paradise Lost* was written, it became common to describe creation in nature using an Aristotelian image of the impregnation of a feminine earth by the masculine heavens (16). As Merchant observes, in this view "the female and the earth are both passive receptors" (ibid.). In "Chaunts of Life" Blind replaces Milton's representation of a passive female role in creation with a much more active role, with the alliteration of "Ribbed and ravaged and rent" (I 7) suggesting the violence of childbirth. She uses this imagery to raise the status of all women by celebrating their potential maternity and associating the creation of an individual life with the creation of the earth.

The association of evolution with childbirth is continued in "The Leading of Sorrow". After the narrator of this poem, having witnessed the cruel reality of evolutionary struggle, wishes for the earth to be destroyed, she is confronted by the voice of Mother

Nature,³³ who describes the work of creation using imagery of childbirth. The imagery of “fiery earthquake shocks” (404), “fierce throbs of flame” and “slow upheaval” (405), echoes the phrase “fiery strain” (7) from “Motherhood”, as well as the imagery of upheaval that has already been noted in both “Motherhood” and “Chaunts of Life”. The imagery becomes more explicitly linked to childbirth when the voice describes how she “yearned and panted” (409) until, after having created the rest of the earth, she “bore” the human race, “my youngest child” (416). Since the birth of humankind, Mother Nature has guided the development of the species:

I – I draw thee on through fume and fret,
Croon to thee in pain and call through sorrow,
Flowers and stars take for thy alphabet. (418-20)

This poem moves beyond the association of creation with pregnancy and birth that was found in “Chaunts of Life” by attributing this creation to a conscious female designer rather than the mindless forces of evolution.

Blind’s depiction of a maternal female nature goddess is not simply due to her feminist beliefs but is also indebted to Darwin’s representation of a personified female nature:

Man can act only on external and visible characters: nature cares nothing for appearances, except in so far as they may be useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole

³³ In attributing this voice to Mother Nature my reading differs from those of Helen Groth, Susan Brown and John Holmes. Groth attributes part of this speech to the “voice of ‘man’” (334) and part to the narrator of the rest of the poem (339); this appears to be a misreading since it is clear from the poem that the entire speech belongs to a single speaker. Brown describes the voice as “humanist Love” (140), while Holmes sees it as “a personification of life itself” (52).

machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends. (*Origin* 132)

Several feminist critics have observed that the association of women with nature in Darwin's work and other nineteenth-century scientific texts hampered women's participation in intellectual debate by aligning the feminine with nature in opposition to culture and education. As Marina Benjamin observes: "Such metaphor serves symbolically to equate woman with nature as that which is known, as opposed to that which is capable of knowing" (3). However, Darwin's feminine nature can also be viewed as a powerful female figure. Stanley Edgar Hyman argues that in Darwin's alternative to the teleology of the Natural Theologists "all-seeing Mother Nature [is] substituted for God the Father" (40). Blind similarly turns Mother Nature into a deity. A reviewer of the 1900 posthumous reissue of *The Ascent of Man* read this figure as the male Christian God: "this is the message of Him who raised us up 'from the ocean slime'" ("Darwin and the Muse" 25), but this reading ignores the prominent imagery of birth and maternal nurturing that pervades the poem. In placing a feminine figure in the position of the creator, Blind has erased the patriarchal God of the Bible and *Paradise Lost* and replaced him with Mother Earth.

However, Blind's Mother Nature figure is not entirely benign, as the first two lines of her speech suggest: "Wilt thou judge me, wilt thou curse me, Creature/ Whom I raised up from the Ocean slime?" (399-400). Her tone is threatening, and addressing her human child as "Creature" (399) does not suggest the devotion that the Victorians associated with the figure of the mother. The mixture of nurturing and threatening elements to this character reflects the destructive side of nature, which was increasingly difficult to ignore in the light of Darwinian evolution. As James Eli Adams notes, the suggestion of

nurturance in Darwin's description of nature "tend[ing]" living beings is deceptive and could only be achieved by using the word "being" to stand for an entire species in order to disguise the fact that many individuals have to die for the species as a whole to prosper (12). Adams argues that as a result of Darwin's work, Mother Nature could no longer be presented as a nurturing figure but was rather "an angel of death, a monstrous agent that rigidly and impersonally lays waste to its own dependents" (13). Emily Pfeiffer's "To Nature" sequence reflects this altered view of Mother Nature. Pfeiffer observes that in the past "we loved to see [in Nature]/ A nursing mother, clothing with her life/ The seeds of love divine" ("To Nature" II 1-3) but in the light of Darwin's work it is no longer possible to interpret Nature's actions as motivated by love. In her ruthless destruction of life, Pfeiffer's Nature is not motivated by any emotion but instead works her "bootless ill/ In mere vacuity of mind and will" (III 2-3), because the mindless mechanism of natural selection has removed any sense of intention from nature. Rather than celebrating the replacement of the patriarchal God with a mother Goddess, Pfeiffer depicts the new view of nature as monstrous and addresses her as "Dread mother of unfathered worlds" (I 10).

Conversely, Blind appears untroubled by the destructive qualities of Darwin's Mother Nature, and may even have been attracted by them. As Adams notes, Darwin's image of a destructive feminine nature "rendered newly problematic a deeply traditional and comforting archetype of womanhood" (7) as well as unsettling conceptions of a benevolent nature. Blind's work demonstrates her awareness of the association between the representation of nature and the representation of women, as in *Tarantella*, in which Mina's first experience of female cruelty – Antonella's betrayal – is accompanied by an awareness of "the terrible and sinister side of nature, and where she had hitherto only loved a universal mother, there met her now, in her direst need, but a pitiless indifference that added to her desolation" (202). Whereas Tennyson depicts his personified feminine

nature in “In Memoriam” as “red in tooth and claw/ With ravine” (LVI 15-16) and Swinburne’s Hertha is selflessly devoted to her human children, Blind treads a middle ground, presenting a largely positive vision of a powerful matriarch who combines the nurturing and threatening elements found in these male-authored depictions of nature. Darwin’s destructive Mother Nature figure is another female, like the female spider or emu, that can be used to undermine stereotypes of female passivity. This may explain why Blind is not repelled by the negative aspects of this character. As in her writing on sexual selection, Blind’s poetry about motherhood takes elements from within Darwin’s work – in this case Darwin’s personified female nature and the evolutionary importance of reproduction and parenting – and uses them to contest gender stereotypes and to celebrate the female contribution to evolutionary development.

Childlessness in Naden’s Poetry

Like Blind, Naden was also concerned with the scientific representation of women’s potential maternity but she approached this theme from a different perspective, perhaps because her role as an intellectual and philosopher as well as a poet made her more aware than Blind was of the frequent opposition between intellectual women and mothers in cultural discourse. The focus on the importance of reproduction in evolutionary development that was used by some feminists to depict women as superior to men could also be used to argue that women only have value through their reproductive capacity. An extreme example of this view can be found in an article by Grant Allen, published in *The Forum* in 1889:

I believe it to be true that [woman] is very much less the race than man; that she is, indeed, not even half the race at present, but rather a part of it told specially off for the continuance of the species, just as truly as drones or male spiders are parts of their species told off for the performance of male-functions, ... She is the sex sacrificed to reproductive necessities.³⁴

This view of reproduction as women's primary function meant that childless women were often depicted as unnatural. This is particularly true of educated women, who were frequently portrayed as non-maternal or incapable of child-bearing, as in Herbert Spencer's comment that "absolute or relative infertility is often produced in women by mental labour carried to excess" (*Principles of Biology* 2: 485). Naden herself had experienced the hostility directed towards childless intellectual women: S. Billing, writing in the *Journal of Science* in response to a Hylo-Idealistic pamphlet by Naden (under the name C.N.) and a series of letters in the *Journal of Science* (as C.N. and Constance Arden) suggested that Arden would be "better employed in woman's vocation – as Iago suggests, 'suckle fools, &c.' – than so to write" (Billing 315). As Marion Thain observes, Billing evidently assumes C.N. to be male and is consequently significantly more critical of the female Arden ("Constance Naden" 24). Billing does not only criticise Arden's philosophy but questions her right to be involved in the debate at all, since by doing so she is neglecting her proper feminine role. Having personally experienced the division between intellectual women and mothers, Naden cannot align herself unproblematically with imagery of maternity as Blind does, but instead she complicates this imagery by using it to celebrate the labour of childless people.

³⁴ Quoted in Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* 172.

Although R.W. Dale suggested in 1891 that in Naden's *Songs and Sonnets of Springtime* there is "a recurrence ... of the same *motif*" (513), that of the loss of religious faith, and that this is the main theme of the volume, at least as important a theme is the difficulty of choosing between a career and a family. In response to arguments like Grant Allen's that in order for the human race to survive, "in every community, and to all time, the vast majority of women must become wives and mothers" (449), Naden depicts the labour of childless people as at least as necessary and self-sacrificing as parenthood. Although evolutionary fitness is partly measured by success in leaving progeny, in the *Descent* Darwin argued that while great men may sometimes have fewer children than ordinary people they benefit their societies in other ways:

Great lawgivers, the founders of beneficent religions, great philosophers and discoverers in science, aid the progress of mankind in a far higher degree by their works than by leaving a numerous progeny. (162)

Naden appears to have this idea in mind in the alchemist's speech in "The Elixir of Life":

For all mankind shall be my deathless heirs:
I, friendless, childless, poor, will yet bequeathe
One boon – Eternity for all who breathe! (102-4)

In this image the alchemist justifies his search for the secret of eternal life by treating it as equivalent, in its effect on his society, to leaving a large number of healthy offspring. In this way, Naden conflates cultural with biological inheritance and treats both as equally valid contributions to future generations. Like the imagery of Lamarckian inheritance

found elsewhere in Naden's poetry, this may be a response to many Darwinians' treatment of human characteristics as almost entirely biologically determined. An example can be found in Karl Pearson's 1894 essay, "Woman and Labour", in which he suggests that childless New Women may compete on equal terms with men but their failure to breed and pass on their feminist tendencies means that feminism will quickly die out:

But this type of woman cannot become the prevalent type, nor indeed would it tend to social efficiency, if it could. Such women cannot transmit the asexualism which fits them for competition with men to a numerous offspring; they leave the women whose maternal and sexual instincts are strong to be the mothers of the coming generation, and to transmit those instincts to the women of the future. (238)

In this argument Pearson treats feminism as an evolutionary aberration that can only be transmitted biologically. Mary Knight, writing in the *Westminster Review* in 1909 in support of educated women's refusal to be "machines" for the production of babies (39), notes that the proponents of views like Pearson's have neglected the role of verbal communication in spreading ideas and beliefs: "Before the advanced women go down into the silences, they will impress their opinions upon the motherly women" (40). Similarly, Naden's poetry portrays childless people, not as an evolutionary dead-end, but as men and women who are capable of changing society through cultural, rather than biological, transmission.

Naden applies the imagery of non-biological inheritance equally to men and women, implying that, like the great men described by Darwin, intelligent women may also benefit their society more by remaining single than by marrying and sacrificing their gifts for their children. Ella, in "A Modern Apostle", is repeatedly described using imagery

of parenthood: she has a “sweet Madonna-face” (III 120) and is “Like some new-born diviner consciousness/ Evolving from completed human grace/ The future parent of a nobler race” (III 134-6). This imagery sets up expectations that Ella will marry and have children but the ending of the poem vindicates her decision to remain single when she takes over Alan’s mission as a prophet and social reformer. Rather than being a literal parent, Ella is a higher evolutionary type, heralding the future of humanity, and this form of transmission is of more value to her society than procreation would have been. The nurse in “The Sister of Mercy” does not explicitly use imagery of parenthood to describe her career but she does reframe the moral argument in order to overcome the stigma of selfishness attached to women’s choice of a career over a family. She claims that she lives “for others” (27), like an idealised Victorian wife and mother, and when offered the opportunity to choose marriage and a family over her nursing career she argues that to do so would be selfish: “Ah, for what other, by what passion fired,/ Could I desert my life-work, loved so long?” (32-3). The use of the word “desert” associates the idea of giving up her career with maternal abandonment. In this way, Naden subverts the image of womanly self-sacrifice that is normally associated with motherhood by applying it to the narrator’s career. Like *Blind*, Naden uses imagery of motherhood to raise the status of women’s contributions to society but unlike *Blind* she applies this imagery only to childless women and not to literal mothers.

The poem “Song”, from *A Modern Apostle*, can be read in two possible ways, either as arguing that New Women can still fulfil their natural maternal and domestic duties while entering higher education and professions or as equating childless women’s contributions to society with motherhood. On the first reading this poem appears to be addressed to the narrator’s husband and to be responding to his fears that if the narrator is

allowed to enjoy a level of independence from the domestic sphere she will neglect her family. The narrator responds by giving examples of female independence in nature:

The bird must leave her nest
 And fledglings five,
The honey-bee must rest
 Far from her hive. (5-8)

The conclusion to the poem appears to argue that if the narrator is allowed a temporary respite from the domestic sphere she will be a better wife and mother on her return: “My heart, with richer store,/ Goes home at night” (11-12). However, it is interesting that of the two images that Naden presents of other species combining liberty with domestic duties, the bird is a mother but the bee is not. Unlike the queen bee, which was often used in the nineteenth century, by both feminists and anti-feminists, to represent an extreme sexual division of labour,³⁵ the bee alluded to in this poem is the infertile worker bee that Geddes and Thomson used as an analogy for the working woman in *Problems of Sex* (1912), on the grounds that both working women and worker bees have independence and large brains but pay for them with a short lifespan (Russett 149). Although Naden’s poem was published twenty-five years before Geddes and Thomson’s book, she may have had a similar idea in mind, using the worker bee to represent female childlessness and freedom from the domestic sphere. In the light of this image it could be argued that the narrator of this poem is not a wife or mother at all but an independent single woman and that the addressee of the poem is not a man but society as a whole. Instead of being a response to a

³⁵ See, for example, Gilman’s comment in *Women and Economics* that if girls did not inherit characteristics from their fathers as well as their mothers “we should have been queen bees, indeed, long before this” (72), suited only to reproduction and not self-preservation.

lover's accusation of faithlessness, the opening of the poem can be read as an exhortation to society not to judge the New Woman for neglecting her feminine duties:

Think not I roam afield
 With heart untrue;
The gifts my rambles yield
 Are all for you. (1-4)

In this reading, the "you" addressed in the fourth line is the society that will benefit from the products of female labour. Instead of being selfish and unnatural, the New Woman is able to benefit her society, like the worker bee, because of her freedom from domestic constraints. In this instance, Naden does not refute the association of women with nature but uses natural imagery in the way that Blind does, to provide a precedent for female independence and childlessness. Her reliance on this occasion on the natural imagery that she rejects elsewhere may be motivated by a wish to contest the image of childless women as unnatural or monstrous.

Unlike her poetry on the theme of sexual selection, Naden's poems about childlessness do not use humour to make their point. This may indicate that she took this theme more seriously than the theme of gender stereotypes that she addresses in her "Evolutional Erotics" poems. As Angela Leighton observes, "the difficult choice of love or work, marriage or vocation, is ... presented as primarily a female one" in Naden's poetry (Leighton and Reynolds 559), suggesting that this was an area in which Naden was aware of, and troubled by, sexual inequality. As an independently wealthy woman with access to higher education, Naden was not constrained by her gender to the extent that most nineteenth-century women were but, despite this, she was still aware of the extreme

difficulty for women of combining a family with study or a career, and she had first-hand experience of society's harsh judgements of women who chose to remain unmarried and childless. Although her poetry does not openly discuss the theme of childlessness, her allusions to this theme treat it seriously and use imagery of nature and parenthood to celebrate the labour of childless people.

Conclusion

In his discussions of gender in the *Descent*, Darwin often uses his observations of other species to reinforce stereotypes of feminine coyness and passivity, but at times the examples he uses undermine his overt commentary on gender relations. Blind and Naden highlight elements in the *Descent* that suggest the diversity of possible gender roles in nature and they use imagery of spiders, bees and birds to suggest that human relationships need not be confined to one single model of masculinity and femininity either. An early example of this technique can be found in Blind's "Song of the Willi", which has not previously been read as a Darwinian poem. In this poem Blind sets the pattern that continues in her later work of focusing on female power and gender inversion in sexual selection in order to undermine Darwin's projection of Victorian gender stereotypes onto other species. She takes a similar approach to the representation of motherhood in her poetry, highlighting elements of motherhood and the Mother Nature figure that suggest power, and even destructiveness, in order to overcome the association of motherhood with nurturing and gentleness. Another important theme in the *Descent* is female choice, which gives female animals a crucial role in the development of their species, but which also includes the option of choosing not to reproduce at all, an option that Naden explores in several poems. Like Blind, Naden also uses imagery of birth and parenthood to highlight

the value of women's contributions to society, but in her case this imagery is applied specifically to childless people and is used to insist that the decision to remain childless is a natural and positive choice for people who can better serve their society in other ways. To some extent, Blind's use of maternal imagery to raise the status of women implies an acceptance of the idea that women have value only through reproduction, but Naden's application of this imagery to the labour of childless people complicates and challenges this idea.

Although the theme of sexual selection is also present in the work of male poets, I have not found any poems by male poets that are directly comparable to Blind and Naden's poetry in terms of their interrogation of gender stereotypes. If anything, the tendency in male-authored poems, particularly light verse in periodicals, is to reinforce gender stereotypes, as in "Natural Selection" by Adrian Ross, published in a short-lived periodical called *The Butterfly* in 1899, in which he states that, just as the "duty of the spider is to catch and drain [the fly] dry" (3), "[t]he duty of the maid/ Is to look demure and staid,/ And to tell an ardent lover that she's dreadfully afraid;/ The duty of the man/ Is to catch her if he can" (25-9). This quotation reproduces Darwin's opposition of coy females and passionate males without complicating or questioning it as Blind and Naden do. Ross's reference to spiders in the third line is purely a reference to natural selection and entirely ignores the threat posed by the female spider to Darwin's image of female passivity. Although John Holmes has made a case for understanding George Meredith's *Modern Love* as a feminist exploration of the implications of Darwinism for sexual relationships, the Darwinian themes that Holmes locates in Meredith's work are the importance of change and the close evolutionary relationship between humans and other species, rather than the gender implications of sexual selection ("Darwinism" 532). While Meredith's focus is on overcoming the sexual double standard by moving beyond a

Christian understanding of morality (ibid.), Blind and Naden are more concerned with the ways in which scientists' perpetuation of gender stereotypes was used to argue that women were less fitted than men for competition and involvement in the public sphere. The poems by Blind and Naden that are overtly focused on gender are often more clearly linked to specific aspects of Darwin's work than those poems that implicitly use the themes of the *Origin* to comment on gender relations. They take particular examples from the *Descent* or echo Darwin's words in order to claim authority for their feminist uses of Darwin's work. Although I have argued throughout this thesis that the use of examples and imagery from the work of Darwin and other evolutionists was helpful to feminist poets in allowing them to claim scientific authority for their political beliefs, the rapid decline of this evolutionary feminist strategy in the early twentieth century suggests that there were also limitations to this approach, as I will argue in the concluding chapter.

Conclusion

Summary

In this thesis I have argued that the themes commonly found in evolutionary poetry by Victorian women poets – including the importance of change, the blurring of boundaries and unsettling of hierarchies and the central role of the female in sexual selection and reproduction – represent a concerted feminist effort to subvert the meanings that were normally attached to Darwin’s theory by scientists who were resistant to any change in the relations between the sexes. As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, although some important work has already been carried out on evolution in New Woman novels by critics such as Sally Ledger and Angelique Richardson, I am the first scholar to have devoted a full-length study to the theme of evolution in women’s poetry. My focus on women poets’ engagement with the evolutionary theme is a significant development because of the crucial differences between poetry and prose. Lilian Mohin argues that poetry, “with its tradition of concentrated insights, its brevity of form” is an “ideal vehicle” for a feminist questioning of patriarchal norms and values (Mohin 1). It is also an ideal vehicle for raising questions about the inferences that were habitually drawn from Darwin’s work without simply replacing these with another fixed meaning. Poetry, which is less constrained by the logic and realism of the novel, and which often works by regarding everyday objects and experiences from a new perspective, allows the poets to defamiliarise their own society and call common-sense ideas into question, as in Kendall’s “A Pure Hypothesis” and “Lay of the Trilobite” which use outsiders to question Victorian values.

The representation of evolution also differs in poetry and prose. Characters in the novels that I have discussed are frequently moved to make statements on the applications

of evolution to human society, and these statements often reflect the views of the author. Conversely, in the poetry, any commentary on the lessons to be drawn from evolutionary theory tends to be implicit and metaphorical rather than being openly stated. For example, Hadria in *The Daughters of Danaus* frequently discourses on the position of women and the roles of nature and environment in forming women's character:

Girls ... are stuffed with certain stereotyped sentiments from their infancy, and when that painful process is completed, intelligent philosophers come and smile upon the victims, and point to them as proofs of the intentions of Nature regarding our sex, admirable examples of the unvarying instincts of the feminine creature.
(23)

The poets allude to similar issues but their responses to these questions tend to be more ambiguous. As I argued in Chapter Five, Naden's "Evolutional Erotics" sequence challenges the representation of women in evolutionary discourse by implying in "Natural Selection" that the narrator's view of women, based on an unquestioned association of women with nature, may not be accurate. In "Scientific Wooing", as I argued in the same chapter, the rhyme of "Mary" with "vary" suggests that women are not as homogenous or as unchanging as some scientists suggested. However, my readings of these poems may not be the readings that Naden intended because she does not make her meaning explicit. The ambiguity of the poets' representation of evolution means that they avoid replacing one dogmatic interpretation of the science with another but it also makes the feminist aspects of the poetry more obscure and more difficult to interpret, which may explain why there has been so little work on gender and evolution in women's poetry until now.

As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, it may be easier for poets, particularly humorous poets, to avoid the negative implications of evolution for women because they can escape the demands of realism and can deal with the evolutionary theme less directly and more selectively. For example, as I observed in Chapter Four, Kendall's "Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus" alludes to contemporary debates about gender and brain size but displaces these arguments onto another species. Similarly, in "The Song of the Willi" Blind is able to ignore the arguments in the *Descent* about female inferiority and focus entirely on female choice and the diversity of possible gender roles in other species. As I argued in my discussion of Kendall's "The Lower Life" in the third chapter, the use of humorous poetry can be liberating for a writer, in that it allows them to intervene in debates indirectly and without exposing themselves to criticism. It also allows them to be more entertaining than realist writers tend to be when addressing the evolutionary theme. On the other hand, poetry's greater ambiguity means that the political aspects can be less obvious and consequently less effective.

In addition to focusing on gender and evolution in poetry rather than prose, I have made an original contribution by considering these poets as a group and tracing a common feminist strategy in the work of several evolutionist women poets, rather than studying the individual writers in isolation. This has enabled me to highlight common themes in the work of several poets but also to reveal the significant differences between them. Rather than uncovering a single univocal category of evolutionist feminist poetry I have noted some similarities of theme and perspective in the work of otherwise very different poets. While other studies that address evolution and feminism have focused on a single literary genre – normally the New Woman novel – or the work of a single author in several genres, I have contextualised my study of the poetry by reading it against other varieties of feminist literature, such as novels and periodical articles. This broader focus has revealed

some very similar techniques that cross the boundaries of genre and literary form, such as drawing attention to species whose habits undermine the idea of fixed gender roles throughout nature or associating evolutionary change with an improvement in the position of women. Emily Pfeiffer's comment that "it is only needful to cast an eye over the course [woman] has trodden, to feel that this long and even progress, accelerated as it has been in the last few years, implies a goal which she must inevitably reach" ("The Suffrage" 420), Sarah Grand's attribution of the improvement in women's position during the course of the nineteenth century to "the upward tendency of evolution" (15) and Kendall's assertion that "The laws of the universe, these are our friends" ("Woman's Future" 6) express broadly the same idea. The focus on the themes of evolution and gender in the work of so many different authors suggests that many women saw the evolutionary arguments against women's rights as a genuine threat to the feminist movement and that they found similar techniques for countering this threat.

My thesis has also focused on the original periodical publication context of many of these poems. Taking a similar approach to critics like James Diedrick and John Holmes, I have read the poems in relation to contemporary events and the other content of the same title in order to understand the assumptions and associations that would have shaped the responses of the poets' original readers. For example, by noting the proximity of the original publication date of Blind's "The Song of the Willi" to the publication date of the *Descent* I have uncovered the latent Darwinian content of this poem. The publication of three of the poems from Naden's "Evolutional Erotics" sequence in *Mason College Magazine* during her editorship of this title explains both the boldness of the feminism in these poems, which may not have achieved publication in a periodical with a more conservative editor, and the poems' assumption of a scientifically literate reader, because her first readers were mostly students of science subjects. Conversely, the less overt

feminist arguments in Kendall's poetry may be partially explained by her writing for *Punch*, a periodical that normally opposed any move towards greater equality for men and women. I have examined the presentation of Kendall's poems in *Punch*, looking particularly at the cartoons accompanying these poems, in order to suggest ways in which this presentation affected Kendall's first readers' understanding of these poems. By paying attention to these contextual details I have reached a broader understanding of the role of these poems in literary culture and scientific debates. Another important theme in this thesis has been the role of humour in these poems. I have built upon the work of writers like Margaret D. Stetz and Gillian Beer to demonstrate that seemingly "light" verse can repay close reading that gives serious consideration to the formal and metrical qualities of the poem. Rather than these poems being significant in spite of their humorous qualities, I have argued that they function as important and insightful responses to Darwin's work *because* of their use of parody or satire to subvert scientists' conclusions about the implications of evolutionary theory for human society and gender roles. However, as I will argue in the remainder of this conclusion, there were also drawbacks to this evolutionist feminist poetic strategy, as the rapid decline of evolutionary feminism in the twentieth century suggests.

The Decline of Evolutionary Feminism

This thesis has focused predominantly on those aspects of evolution that could be used positively as feminist metaphors but there were also drawbacks to this evolutionary imagery, as is exemplified by the transition from imagery of evolution to that of revolution in the work of many feminists in the early years of the twentieth century. Although some writers continued to use evolutionary imagery in the same way as *fin-de-siècle* feminists did – as in M.A. Stobart's 1910 article "The Eternal Womanly" in the *Fortnightly Review*,

which uses evolution as an image of social change and finds examples in nature of diversity in gender roles – many early twentieth-century feminists turned away from evolutionary imagery. As Rita Felski observes, the shift from imagery of evolution to imagery of revolution reflects the suffragettes’ demands for immediate, substantial reform, rather than the gradual move towards greater equality desired by the previous generation of feminists:

This adoption of revolution as a guiding image of feminist activity brought with it not just connotations of violence, agitation, and extremity but a marked difference in temporal register. The idea of history as an organic continuation of an already existing process was replaced by the vocabulary of rupture, transformation, and discontinuity. Rather than gesturing hopefully toward a distant utopia, militant feminist discourse demanded the future *within* the present from a vanguardist standpoint that denounced the prison-house of the past and the tyranny of the present. (Felski 165)

As Felski suggests, the twentieth-century feminists’ demands for a “revolution” in gender relations are in stark contrast to nineteenth-century feminists’ “gesturing hopefully toward a distant utopia”, as in Hadria’s “grotesque vision, or waking-dream” (451) at the end of *Daughters of Danaus*. Having been forced to abandon her desire for an independent life and a career as a composer by her mother’s illness, Hadria has a vision of “a vast abyss” that has to be filled by the bodies of women, who must be sacrificed so that the women of the future might escape:

But Hadria knew, in her dream, that some day it would have claimed its last victim, and the surface would be level and solid, so that people would come and go, scarcely remembering that beneath their feet was once a chasm into which throbbing lives had to descend, to darkness and a living death. (451)

Instead of demanding a change in society within her own lifetime, Hadria comforts herself with the thought that her sacrifice is a small contribution towards a more hopeful future. A similar idea is found in Kendall's "Woman's Future", which insists that women must "rouse to a lifework – do something worth doing" (27), not for themselves but because their actions will contribute to a distant future in which women will have made up for their alleged intellectual inferiority and will even be recognised as the more intelligent sex:

Oh, wait for the time when our brains shall expand!

When once we're enthroned, you shall never dethrone us –

The poets, the sages, the seers of the land! (34-6)

This attitude gives comfort to those who are suffering from the restrictions placed on women's lives but by deferring the hope of reform to a future, more perfect, society it allows the subordination of women to continue in the present.

An example of the shift from the imagery of evolution to that of revolution can be found in Emmeline Pethick Lawrence's definition of revolution in a 1910 article in the suffragette newspaper *Votes for Women* as "the catastrophe that follows upon an obstinate attempt on the part of the powers of Government to stop the working of life's great law of evolution" (24), meaning that the natural processes that many nineteenth-century feminists associated with inevitable improvement have failed because of obstruction by the

government and so more drastic measures must be used. Articles like this one presented women's emancipation by the natural process of evolution as desirable but frustratingly slow, and stressed the necessity of more direct means to bring about women's suffrage. Emmeline Pankhurst highlighted another drawback of evolutionary imagery in a speech in 1913 in which she argued that because evolutionary imagery implies the inevitability of change it makes political agitation for change seem unnecessary:

[Y]ou are saying "Woman Suffrage is sure to come; the emancipation of humanity is an evolutionary process, and how is it ... that these militant women are using violence and upsetting the business arrangements of the country in their undue impatience to attain their end?" (153)

In this way, the idea of the inevitability of reform that was used as a strength by feminists in the 1880s became a drawback for suffragettes in the early twentieth century when it undermined their argument for the necessity of direct action.

The three main poets discussed in this study did not move from imagery of evolution to revolution in their work, perhaps because they had all stopped writing poetry by the mid 1890s when the suffrage agitation was starting to become more militant, but L.S. Bevington did make this transition in her poem "Revolution" from her 1895 collection *Liberty Lyrics*:

Who recks of your doubting and fearing

Phrase-bound "Evolution?"

Do you not hear the sea sounding it?

Do you not feel the fates founding it?

Do you not know it for nearing?

Its name – Revolution. (3-8)

Although Bevington's main focus was on socialism rather than feminism, this extract does suggest the sense of impatience with evolutionary imagery that was emerging by the end of the nineteenth century. The move away from the imagery of evolution in women's writing suggests some ways in which it was an unhelpful image for feminists, largely because its association with extremely gradual change conflicted with demands for significant reform.

Another reason for the decline in evolutionary imagery in feminist writing in the early twentieth century is that many of the main scientific ideas that had been used as evidence of female inferiority in the nineteenth century were discredited in the first decades of the twentieth century and so it was no longer necessary to use the language of evolution to contest the scientific establishment's view of women. As Cynthia Eagle Russett notes:

There were things one simply could no longer say in 1915 that had been perfectly acceptable in 1880. No reputable scientist could any longer say, for example, that metabolism determined sex, and that anabolism characterized the female as katabolism epitomized the male. No scientist could suppose that the mental and physical chasm between men and women was widening. No one was any longer likely to look for intellectual capacity in the size and contours of the brain. (Russett 178)

As the arguments against equal rights for women were no longer framed in evolutionary terms, the feminist response was no longer so reliant on evolutionary imagery. This change in approach is reflected in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Suffrage Songs and Verses* (1911). In "Women Do Not Want It" she describes the arguments used by "Religionists and scientists" (13) when the campaign for women's suffrage was first emerging in the nineteenth century: "We were told of disabilities – a long array of these,/ Till one could think that womanhood was merely a disease" (9-10). However, Gilman notes that these arguments have been superseded in the twentieth century:

They would not hear the reason, they would not fairly yield,
They would not own their arguments were beaten in the field;
But time passed on, and somehow, we need not ask them how,
Whatever ails those arguments – we do not hear them now! (17-20)

By the early twentieth century the argument had moved on from the claim that women were "not fit" (16) for the vote to the claim that the majority of women did not want the right to vote and it would be wrong to force it on them. Gilman, too, moved from focusing on evolution, as she did in her earlier poetry in *In This Our World* (1893) to focusing on rights and justice. She sarcastically asks: "Have we women always wanted what you gave to us before?" (28):

Did we ask to be forbidden from all the trades that pay?
Did we claim the lower wages for a man's full work today?
Have we petitioned for the laws wherein our shame is shown:
That not a woman's child – nor her body – is her own?

What women want has never been a strongly acting cause,
When woman has been wronged by man in churches, customs, laws;
Why should he find this preference so largely in his way,
When he himself admits the right of what we ask today? (33-40)

As in her earlier poetry, Gilman uses humour to highlight the illogicality of anti-feminist arguments. However, rather than demonstrating that these arguments are not borne out by the observation of other species or the facts of evolution as she does in *In This Our World*, in *Suffrage Songs and Verses* she focuses much more on the contradictions between different anti-feminist arguments and the injustice of refusing women the right to vote. Gilman does not entirely abandon evolutionary themes in this volume. In “Now” she describes women as being “[p]atient with Nature’s long delay,/ Proud of our conscious upward swing” (5-6), which can be read as suggesting that the move towards equal rights is a matter of inevitable evolutionary improvement. However, the description of the “upward swing” as “conscious” suggests that women are not waiting for evolution to bring about equal rights but are at least partially driving this change through their own actions. In this volume the evolutionary themes are no longer considered to be a sufficient argument in themselves but instead are mixed with the language of rights and justice.

The shift away from the imagery of evolution in feminist writing is significant because it suggests dissatisfaction with this imagery and raises questions about the efficacy of evolutionary arguments as part of a feminist strategy. If, as I have suggested, early twentieth-century feminist writers moved away from evolutionary imagery because it was not appropriate to express their feminist ideas, is this simply because circumstances had changed or does it suggest that there were always flaws in the use of evolutionary imagery

in feminist literature? In the following section I will discuss the poets' use of scientific language in their work in order to highlight some possible drawbacks to the evolutionary feminist poetic strategy that this thesis has explored.

The Language of Science

In the introduction to this thesis I discussed Sally Ledger's assertion that the use of scientific language could be problematic for women writers and that Mona Caird and her character Hadria in *The Daughters of Danaus* were "intellectually defeated" by this language (29). Although I am more inclined to agree with Angelique Richardson that "the most politically effective aspect of Caird's art lies in the fact that she chooses to subvert scientific discourse from within" ("People Talk" 199), the use of scientific language was potentially problematic for feminists because although there were ways in which the content of Darwin's theory could be used to undermine hierarchies, the language used to discuss evolution was frequently hierarchical. This is particularly true of Herbert Spencer's phrase "the survival of the fittest" – in Gillian Beer's words, "the punitive tautology which exalts the survivors as necessarily those proper to survive" (*Darwin's Plots* 200). Beer describes this phrase as tautological because the fitness or unfitness of an organism or species is proved by its ability to survive. Hence, "the survival of the fittest" effectively means "the survival of the survivors". However, as Beer observes, there is a value judgement implied by this phrase, which "pre-emptively extolled the conquerors" (240). As I observed in Chapter Four, women writers were particularly alert to the potential implications of the concept of evolutionary "fitness" because the tendency to conflate evolutionary success with innate superiority is especially prevalent in discussions of gender difference. Consequently, the writers discussed in this thesis frequently use

scientific language in such a way that its hierarchical implications are subverted or undermined.

As in Hadria's comment in *Daughters of Danaus* that "cunning, shallow, heartless women" are the fittest (347), Kendall's work uses irony to subvert the meaning of "fitness". In *That Very Mab*, the owl describes a wealthy chocolate manufacturer as "a typical and beautiful example of the Survival of the Fittest":

He worked his way, by means of native moral superiority and pure chocolate composed of mortar and molasses tinted with sepia, right from the gallery into one of the very best reserved seats, and now has little books written on himself, as exemplifying the reward of virtue, and exhorts everybody to go in and do likewise.
(Kendall and Lang, chpt. VII)

The owl exemplifies what Alvar Ellegård describes as the confusion of "survival of the fittest" with "survival of the best" (254) in his assumption that the manufacturer, "inflated with the success gained by cheating" (Henkin 111), must possess some innate superiority that would explain his achievements. By contesting the superiority of the manufacturer, Kendall also implicitly contests the inferiority of those who have not "do[ne] likewise", and furthered their own interests at the expense of others. Kendall's "Cold Comfort: The Hope of the Evolutionist", published in *Longman's Magazine* in 1885, the same year as *That Very Mab*, also satirises the concept of "fitness". This poem envisages the future development of the human race if the sun runs out of energy, as Lord Kelvin had predicted in 1852 that it would (Gribbin 388). Kendall depicts this change of climate as leading to degeneration. She describes the cooling of the globe and the human response to it – "all our intelligent Aryans/ (The globe growing wofully cold)/ Will slowly revert to barbarians/

And shelter in caves, as of old” (5-8) – but she confidently asserts that in this eventuality “[t]he Darwinian will smother his anguish –/ *He* knows that the fittest survive!” (15-16). At this stage in the poem it appears that the narrator is referring to the “survival of the best”, and suggesting that the most moral or most intelligent will survive, but the final stanza of the poem makes it clear that the fittest to survive in this environment will be the most brutal and violent:

Then, Prospero, triumph no longer,
Then, Caliban, live and prevail,
Then speed to the arm that is stronger,
Then woe to the arm that is frail!
But, though duty and justice be sleeping,
Though plunder and anarchy thrive,
Till death takes the stars in his keeping,
As now, shall the fittest survive! (33-40)

The phrase “As now” in the final line sarcastically suggests that society in its current state fosters selfishness and brutality just as effectively as the future society that Kendall imagines. In this poem and *That Very Mab* Kendall uses the word “fit” in such a way that it is emptied of any sense of moral or physical superiority and means simply the ability to survive at the expense of others.

This ironic use of scientific language is common to poetry and prose but the poets also make use of tools, such as metre and rhyme, that the novelists do not have access to, in order to mock or undermine the authority of scientific language. As Carolyn Burdett has observed, many middle-class Victorian women were disadvantaged in their intellectual

discussions with men by a lack of scientific education and a consequent exclusion from the language of science. She notes that in the Men and Women's Club, a mixed-gendered socialist discussion group, many of the women's contributions to debates were dismissed for being based on subjective experience rather than scientific principles (50). Both Naden and Kendall frequently mock or undermine this seemingly authoritative discourse. I observed in the third chapter that in "Lay of the Trilobite" Kendall uses scientific words such as "monotremes" and "crustacean" as though they were nonsense words, chosen to fit the rhyme and metre but ultimately meaningless. In that chapter I suggested that Kendall's mockery of this language was a part of the undermining of hierarchies and divisions that occurs in much of her work. Naden's use of this language, however, appears to be much more closely linked to these questions of gender and scientific language. As I noted in the second chapter, the narrator of Naden's "Solomon Redivivus" is rendered comical by rhymes such as "odium" (29) and "pseudopodium" (31) or "reptile" (49) and "crept, I'll" (51), and the same technique is used in "Scientific Wooing": "For when my daily task was o'er/ I dreamed of H₂SO₄" (7-8). By giving the technical, chemical name of Sulphuric Acid the narrator demonstrates his knowledge but the preposterous rhyme subtly deflates the serious intellectual image that he wishes to cultivate. Gillian Beer describes the rhyming of rare words as "the very type of comic rhyme" and Naden uses this technique to particularly good effect when writing in an arrogant masculine voice ("Rhyming as Comedy", 183). It is clear that Naden's masculine narrators wish to be taken seriously but the poet's exploitation of the comic potential of scientific words undermines the authority associated with their use of technical language.

Unlike many women, Naden had access to scientific language, and also to Latin, which was often used in science books to prevent women from reading about subjects that were considered unsuitable for them (Evelleen Richards, "Huxley" 258). It is interesting,

then, that she does not claim the authority of science for herself, but instead uses her poetry to undermine the authority of her male narrators. In part, this mockery of science is likely to be the affectionate mockery of an insider, a shared joke with her fellow science students at Mason College. However, it is probable that it also reflects an awareness of the exclusion of women from this authoritative discourse, an awareness that is evident in “Love *Versus* Learning”, in which the narrator’s lover stifles her attempts to “talk science” (31). As Patricia Murphy notes, Naden’s female narrators use scientific language much less frequently than her male narrators (*In Science’s Shadow* 44). Murphy argues that this indicates Naden’s pessimism about women’s opportunities for participating in science (ibid.) but I would argue instead that the simple language used by Amy in “The New Orthodoxy” is more authoritative than the technical language used by the male narrators in the “Evolutional Erotics” sequence:

Things with fin, and claw, and hoof
Join to give us perfect proof
That our being’s warp and woof
We from near and far win; (41-4)

Gillian Beer has observed that rhyme may trivialise, as in the examples from “Scientific Wooing” and “Solomon Redivivus”, but it may also serve to make statements seem more believable:

The repetition that inheres in rhyme affirms the existence of something known already, already experienced. What is said in rhyme seems more *true* (as writers of

advertising jingles and retailers of proverbs know: “Not just nearly clean, but really clean”; “Birds of a feather flock together”). (“Rhyiming as Resurrection” 192)

The insistent repetition of the monosyllabic rhymes of “hoof”, “proof” and “woof” serves this function in “The New Orthodoxy”. The lack of technical scientific language paradoxically gives Amy authority through the use of short words that make her speech more deliberate. Both by giving Amy an authoritative voice that exists outside the masculine realm of scientific language and by eroding the authority associated with the use of scientific language in her poems with male narrators, Naden counters the idea that powerful speech is necessarily masculine speech.

Another significant use of scientific language in these poets’ work is found in Naden and Blind’s use of direct quotations from the *Descent* in some of their poetry and prose works. These quotations serve several purposes, sometimes being used to mock or undermine the language of science and sometimes to claim the authority of science for the poets. As John Holmes observes, the juxtaposition of Darwin’s words with the language of Victorian courtship in Naden’s essay “Evolution of the Sense of Beauty” highlights the anthropomorphism that is latent in Darwin’s prose:

How did the birds obtain their fine feathers? They obtained them by *courtship*. How the *Rupicola Crocea* capers about, spreads his beautiful orange wings and his tail like an orange fan, that so he may win him a bride; how the gold pheasants “expand and raise their splendid frills,” and even “twist them obliquely towards the female on whichever side she may be standing,” at the same time turning “their beautiful tails and tail-coverts a little toward the same side”; (79-80)

Naden's description of bird mating rituals in terms of brides and courtship renders this passage comical. Her language becomes more anthropomorphic in the following paragraph when the "bird-bridegroom" is compared to "a newly-presented courtier" and the "bird-bride" to "a votary of 'art for art's sake'" (80). As Holmes observes, this is not done merely for comic effect. He argues that Naden's point is that "all language carries with it connotations to which we need to be alert" (193). Naden's use of this inappropriate register to describe animal courtship draws attention to the points in Darwin's work when his anthropomorphic language becomes similarly inappropriate to his subject. By linking Darwin's language with the language of courtship Naden highlights the ways in which Darwin's anthropomorphism naturalises Victorian values by projecting them onto the natural world. Conversely, when Blind echoes the language of the *Descent* in "Chaunts of Life" and *Tarantella* she is not obviously being critical of Darwin. There may be an element of implied criticism in her references to the *Descent* in *Tarantella*, since the novel implicitly undermines Darwin's characterisation of female animals as coy and passive through the example of the female spider. However, the main point of the echoes of the *Descent* in *Tarantella* appears to be to indicate to educated readers that the novel is a commentary on the application of the principles of sexual selection to humans. In both *Tarantella* and "Chaunts of Life" these links signal Blind's familiarity with the *Descent* to those who have also read Darwin's work but the echoes are subtle enough to be missed by less scientific readers. In this way, Blind aligns herself with these educated readers and implicitly presents herself as an authority and her work as a serious commentary on the science.

Despite the exclusion of many women from scientific language and the hierarchical implications of much of this language, I would argue that, far from being "intellectually defeated" by the language of science, the poets discussed in this thesis were aware of the

potential pitfalls in the use of this language and were generally able to avoid them. The tools of metre and rhyme enabled the poets to parody and ridicule this language without allowing its hierarchical implications to infect their words. However, even if these poets were not defeated by the language of the dominant discourse, it is questionable whether it helped them to achieve their aims. Before her death, Naden had given up poetry in favour of science and philosophy; Kendall published very little poetry in the twentieth century, and the poetry she did publish was not concerned with evolutionary themes; Blind was still committed to poetry at the end of her life but, although I have identified some themes in *Birds of Passage* that can be read as engaging with scientific discourse, her later work was much less overtly concerned with evolution than earlier books such as *Tarantella* and *The Ascent of Man* were. If the poets had felt that their evolutionary poetry was an effective way of communicating their feminist or socialist ideas it is unlikely that they would have abandoned it so decisively. Any study of the political uses of evolution in the work of these poets must acknowledge this movement away from evolutionary poetry later in their lives.

Flavia Alaya has identified a “discontinuity” (261) in the tradition of feminist thought that occurred in the nineteenth century and that she argues was brought about by evolutionary science giving “vigorous and persuasive reinforcement to the traditional dogmatic view of sexual character” (262). She asserts that nineteenth-century feminists abandoned the traditional feminist opposition to the claim of limits imposed on women by nature and instead exaggerated sexual differences in order to argue for the importance of feminine characteristics playing a role in public life (262-3). For example, although Blind’s glorification of motherhood in “Chaunts of Life” highlights the crucial female contribution to the development of the species, she also naturalises a gendered division of

labour by suggesting that there is a universal female character and that prehistoric women, and even female apes, inhabited a world equivalent to the Victorian domestic sphere:

They raise a light aërial house
On shafts of widely branching trees,
Where, harboured warily, each spouse
May feed her little ape in peace,
Green cradled in his heaven-roofed bed,
Leaves rustling lullabies o’erhead. (II 91-6)

In this case the anthropomorphic language – “house”, “spouse”, “cradled”, “lullabies” – is not used to highlight Darwin’s anthropomorphism but is used in the way that he would use it himself, to reduce the distance between different species. Although in *Tarantella* and in poems like “The Song of the Willi” Blind alludes to the diversity of gender roles in nature, her application of Victorian values to apes in this poem suggests that these values are natural and universal instead of being culturally constructed and belonging to a particular time and place. Although these writers use scientific language knowingly, sometimes the evolutionary theme leads them to overstate the differences between men and women or to focus on narrow scientific arguments for reform that ignore the moral dimension. As this thesis has demonstrated, there were clearly positive aspects to the use of evolutionary imagery by feminist poets. In particular, it allowed them to refute sexist scientific pronouncements in the scientists’ own language and to claim scientific authority for their vision of social change and equality. However, there are occasions when the logic of evolution forces the poets to accept some of the premises of sexist science, such as the idea of psychological differences between men and women. The focus on scientific evidence

excludes other aspects of the question and makes the claim for women's rights depend on the weight of the brain or on evidence of alternative gender roles in other species rather than on concepts such as justice or equality. These drawbacks may help to explain why there was such a decisive move away from evolutionary feminist arguments in the twentieth century.

Because of the frequent use of science to provide solutions to social questions in the nineteenth century, an understanding of the interaction of the themes of evolution and gender in this era sheds light on an important aspect of the Victorian women's rights movement. Although when the scientists themselves applied evolutionary arguments to questions of gender they normally used them to uphold the status quo, there were equally compelling arguments within Darwin's work for greater equality of the sexes, and the poets examined in this study made use of these arguments in their writing. As women and as poets these writers approached Darwin's work from a different perspective from that of most of their contemporaries. As women they were acutely aware of the use of scientific arguments to oppose any move towards greater social equality, and as poets they were alert to Darwin's use of language and metaphor as well as the richness and ambiguity of his writing. This perspective enabled them to produce poetry that subverted the sexist conclusions of Victorian scientists but which still raises a smile among twenty-first-century readers.

Appendix 1:

Poems

THE SONG OF THE WILLI.

A BALLAD.

I.

THE wild wind is whistling o'er moorland and heather,
Heigho, heigho!
I rise from my bed, and my bed has no feather,
Heigho, heigho!
My bed is deep down in the brown sullen mould,
My head is laid low on the clod;
So wormy the sheets, and the pillow so cold
Of clammy and moist clinging sod.

[II.]

The lone livid moon rideth high up in heaven,
Heigho, heigho!
The stars' cutting glitter their dull shrouds hath riven,
Heigho, heigho!
I rise and I glide out far into the night,
A shadow so swift and so still;
Bleak, bleak is the moonshine all ghastly and white,
The dank morass drinketh its fill.

III.

And down in yon valley, in wan vapour shrinking,
Heigho, heigho!
The bare moated town covers fitfully blinking,
Heigho, heigho!
There warm under shelter, the fire burning bright,
My lover sleeps sound in his bed;
But I flit alone in the pitiless night,
Unpitied, unloved, and unwed

IV.

And couldst thou forget then the deep troth we plighted?
 No, no, no, no!
 Too warm was thy love by cold death to be blighted,
 Oh, oh; oh, oh!
 My sweetheart! and mind'st thou that this is the night,
 The night that we should have been wed;
 And while I flit restless, a low-wailing sprite,
 Ah, say canst thou sleep in thy bed?

V.

A week, but a week, and a wreath of gay flowers,
 Heigho, heigho!
 I wore as I vied with the fleet-footed hours,
 Heigho, heigho!
 As I vied with the hours in dancing them down,
 Till the stars reeled low in the sky,
 And sweet came thy whispers, as rose-leaves when blown
 About on the breeze of July:

VI.

'Thou'rt light, oh my chosen; a bird is not lighter,
 My dove, my doe!
 I'd dance into death with thee; death would be brighter,
 My own swift roe!'
 And they struck up a wild and a wonderful measure;
 Quick, quick beat our hearts to the tune;
 Quick, quick the feet tingled and passioned with pleasure
 To the sound of the fife and bassoon.

VII.

On, on whirled the pairs on the swift music driven,
 Hurrah, hurrah!
 Like gleaming loose vapours blown wildly o'er heaven,
 Hurrah, hurrah!
 Like loose gleaming vapours in silence they fled,
 But a flicker I saw through the haze;
 For fleetier than all the fleet dancers we sped
 In the rush of the rapturous race.

VIII.

How often turned Wanda, the slim, lily-throated,
 Hah hah, hah hah!
 And gazed at us wistful as onward we floated
 Hah hah, hah hah!

And Bilba, the swarthy, whose eyes are as big
 As a stag's, with a glitter of steel,
 She lifts up her lashes, so long and so thick,
 To stare at my true love and leal.

IX.

But he, he saw none o' them, brown-faced or rosy,
 Hah hah, huzzah !
 Tho' maidens bloomed bright like a fresh-gathered posy,
 Hah hah, huzzah !
 For his eyes, that shone black as the sloes of the hedges,
 They shone like two stars over me;
 And his breath, thrilling o'er me as breeze over sedges,
 Brushed my hair till it crinkled with glee.

X.

Now slow as two down-bosomed swans, we were sliding,
 Sah, sah ; sah, sah !
 O'er the low heaving swell of the silver sounds gliding,
 Sah, sah ; sah, sah !
 Now hollowly booming drums rumbled apace,
 Flashed sharp clatt'ring cymbals around,
 And swung like loose leaves in a stormy embrace,
 We whirled in a tumult of sound.

XI.

But pallid the cheeks grew erst flushing with pleasure,
 Alas, oh woe !
 As slowly away swooned the languishing measure ;
 Oh woe, oh woe !
 For shrill crew the cock as the sun 'gan to rise,
 And it rang from afar like a knell ;
 Our kisses grew bitter and sweet grew our sighs,
 As sadly we murmured 'Farewell.'

XII.

High up in the chambers the maidens together,
 Ah me, ah me !
 Were piling bleached linen as pure as swan's feather,
 Ah me, ah me !
 Were weaving and spinning and singing aloud,
 Were broidering my bride-veil of lace,
 But the lowering three sisters they wove me my shroud
 As death kissed me cold on the face.

XIII.

The wild wind is whistling o'er moorland and heather,
 Heigho, heigho !
 I rise from my bed, and my bed has no feather—
 Heigho, heigho !
 The snow flocketh grisly and ghostly, and gleams
 In the glare of the moon as it swirls ;
 What pale flurried phantoms move drear in her beams,
 And circle in shadowy whirls ?

XIV.

Mayhap ye were maidens death plucked in your flower—
 Woe, woe ; woe, woe !
 As clust'ring you glowed in love's murmuring bower—
 Woe, woe ; woe, woe !
 Who delirious for life from the gloom of your graves
 Are driven to wander with me,
 And ye rise from your tombs like the white-crested waves
 From the depths of the dolorous sea.

XV.

Hah, maidens, pale maidens, o'er moorland and heather,
 Hail, hail, hurrah !
 The bridegroom see ! comes through the wintry bleak weather !
 Hurrah, hurrah !
 Full shines the fair moon on his beautiful face ;
 He walketh like one in a trance ;
 His arms are wide open, far yearning his gaze,
 With his bride, with his dead bride to dance.

XVI.

At the sound of thy foot-fall my frozen heart bursting,
 Hah, hah ; huzzah !
 Through the bonds of its cerements now leaps like a thirsting,
 Hah, hah ; huzzah !
 Leaps like a stag that is borne as on wings,
 To the brooks thawing thick through the noon,
 Like a lark from the glebe, like a lily that springs
 From its bier to the bosom of June.

XVII.

' I hold thee, I hold thee, I drink thy caresses,
 Oh love, my love !'
 Round thy face, round thy throat, I roll my dank tresses,
 Oh love, my love !

'I hold thee, I hold thee; eight nights wan and weeping
 Have I wandered loud sobbing thy name,
 Thy lips are as cold as the snow-drift a-sweeping!
 My breath soon shall fan them to flame!'

XVIII.

Blow up for the dance, now chill whirlwind of winter!
 Hurrah, hurrah!
 Till the welkin's floor shaken be shattered and splinter—
 Hurrah, hurrah!
 Till the wheeling clouds whirl in their dizzying races,
 Hunted on by the moon's lashing light,
 In the silvery rear of whose fugitive traces
 Reel the stars through the revelling night!

XIX.

'Cocks crow, and the breath on thy sweet lips is failing,
 Oh love, my love!'
 Stars swoon, and the flame in thy dark eye is quailing,
 Oh love, my love!
 'Oh, brighter the night than the fires of the day,'
 When thine eyes shine as stars over me;
 'Oh, sweeter thy grave than the soft breath of May—'
 Down to death then, my love, but with thee.

MATHILDE BLIND.

Song

Think not I roam afield
With heart untrue;
The gifts my rambles yield
Are all for you.

The bird must leave her nest
And fledglings five,
The honey-bee must rest
Far from her hive.

New regions I explore
While day is bright;
My heart, with richer store,
Goes home at night.

Constance Naden

Scientific Wooing

I was a youth of studious mind,
Fair Science was my mistress kind,
And held me with attraction chemic;
No germs of Love attacked my heart,
Secured as by Pasteurian art
Against that fatal epidemic.

For when my daily task was o'er
I dreamed of H₂SO₄,
While stealing through my slumbers placid
Came Iodine, with violet fumes,
And Sulphur, with its yellow blooms,
And whiffs of Hydrochloric Acid.

My daily visions, thoughts, and schemes
With wildest hope illumed my dreams,
The daring dreams of trustful twenty:
I might accomplish my desire,
And set the river Thames on fire
If but Potassium were in plenty!

Alas! that yearnings so sublime
Should all be blasted in their prime
 By hazel eyes and lips vermilion!
Ye gods! restore the halcyon days
While yet I walked in Wisdom's ways,
 And knew not Mary Maud Trevelyhan!

Yet nay! the sacrilegious prayer
Was not mine own, oh fairest fair!
 Thee, dear one, will I ever cherish;
Thy worshipped image shall remain
In the grey thought-cells of my brain
 Until their form and function perish.

Away with books, away with cram
For Intermediate Exam.!
 Away with every college duty!
Though once Agnostic to the core,
A virgin Saint I now adore,
 And swear belief in Love and Beauty.

Yet when I meet her tranquil gaze,
I dare not plead, I dare not praise,
 Like other men with other lasses;
She's never kind, she's never coy,
She treats me simply as a boy,
 And asks me how I like my classes!

I covet not her golden dower—
Yet surely Love's attractive power
 Directly as the mass must vary—
But ah! inversely as the square
Of distance! shall I ever dare
 To cross the gulf, and gain my Mary?

So chill she seems—and yet she might
Welcome with radiant heat and light
 My courtship, if I once began it;
For is not e'en the palest star
That gleams so coldly from afar
 A sun to some revolving planet?

My Mary! be a solar sphere!

Envy no comet's mad career,
No arid, airless lunar crescent!
Oh for a spectroscope to show
That in thy gentle eyes doth glow
Love's vapour, pure and incandescent!

Bright fancy! can I fail to please
If with similitudes like these
I lure the maid to sweet communion?
My suit, with Optics well begun,
By Magnetism shall be won,
And closed at last in Chemic union!

At this I'll aim, for this I'll toil,
And this I'll reach—I will, by Boyle,
By Avogadro, and by Davy!
When every science lends a trope
To feed my love, to fire my hope,
Her maiden pride must cry is "*Peccavi!*"
I'll sing a deep Darwinian lay
Of little birds with plumage gay,
Who solved by courtship Life's enigma;
I'll teach her how the wild-flowers love,
And why the trembling stamens move,
And how the anthers kiss the stigma.

Or Mathematically true
With rigorous Logic will I woo,
And not a word I'll say at random;
Till urged by Syllogistic stress,
She falter forth a tearful "Yes,"
A sweet "*Quod erat demonstrandum!*"

Constance Naden

Natural Selection

I had found out a gift for my fair,
I had found where the cave-men were laid;
Skull, femur, and pelvis were there,
And spears, that of silex they made.

But he ne'er could be true, she averred,

Who would dig up an ancestor's grave—
And I loved her the more when I heard
Such filial regard for the Cave.

My shelves, they are furnished with stones
All sorted and labelled with care,
And a splendid collection of bones,
Each one of them ancient and rare;

One would think she might like to retire
To my study—she calls it a “hole!”
Not a fossil I heard her admire,
But I begged it, or borrowed, or stole.

But there comes an idealess lad,
With a strut, and a stare, and a smirk;
And I watch, scientific though sad,
The Law of Selection at work.

Of Science he hasn't a trace,
He seeks not the How and the Why,
But he sings with an amateur's grace,
And he dances much better than I.

And we know the more dandified males
By dance and by song win their wives—
'Tis a law that with Aves prevails,
And even in Homo survives.

Shall I rage as they whirl in the valse?
Shall I sneer as they carol and coo?
Ah no! for since Chloe is false,
I'm certain that Darwin is true!

Constance Naden

Solomon Redivivus, 1886

What am I? Ah, you know it,

I am the modern Sage,
Seer, savant, merchant, poet—
I am, in brief, the Age.

Look not upon my glory
Of gold and sandal-wood,
But sit and hear a story
From Darwin and from Buddh.

Count not my Indian treasures,
All wrought in curious shapes,
My labours and my pleasures,
My peacocks and my apes;

For when you ask me riddles,
And when I answer each,
Until my fifes and fiddles
Burst in and drown our speech,

Oh then your soul astonished
Must surely faint and fail,
Unless, by me admonished,
You hear our wondrous tale.

We were a soft Amœba
In ages past and gone,
Ere you were Queen Of Sheba,
And I King Solomon.

Unorganed, undivided,
We lived in happy sloth,
And all that you did I did,
One dinner nourished both:

Till you incurred the odium
Of fission and divorce—
A severed pseudopodium
You strayed your lonely course.

When next we met together
Our cycles to fulfil,
Each was a bag of leather,
With stomach and with gill.

But our Ascidian morals
 Recalled that old mischance,
And we avoided quarrels
 By separate maintenance.

Long ages passed—our wishes
 Were fetterless and free,
For we were jolly fishes,
 A-swimming in the sea.

We roamed by groves of coral,
 We watched the youngsters play—
The memory and the moral
 Had vanished quite away.

Next, each became a reptile,
 With fangs to sting and slay;
No wiser ever crept, I'll
 Assert, deny who may.

But now, disdainful trammels
 Of scale and limbless coil,
Through every grade of mammals
 We passed with upward toil.

Till, anthropoid and wary
 Appeared the parent ape,
And soon we grew less hairy,
 And soon began to drape.

So, from that soft Amœba,
 In ages past and gone,
You've grown the Queen of Sheba,
 And I King Solomon.

Constance Naden

Lay of the Trilobite

A mountain's giddy height I sought,
 Because I could not find
Sufficient vague and mighty thought

To fill my mighty mind;
And as I wandered ill at ease,
 There chanced upon my sight
A native of Silurian seas,
 An ancient Trilobite.

So calm, so peacefully he lay,
 I watched him even with tears:
I thought of Monads far away
 In the forgotten years.
How wonderful it seemed and right,
 The providential plan,
That he should be a Trilobite,
 And I should be a Man!

And then, quite natural and free
 Out of his rocky bed,
That Trilobite he spoke to me
 And this is what he said:
'I don't know how the thing was done,
 Although I cannot doubt it;
But Huxley - he if anyone
 Can tell you all about it;

'How all your faiths are ghosts and dreams,
 How in the silent sea
Your ancestors were Monotremes -
 Whatever these may be;
How you evolved your shining lights
 Of wisdom and perfection
From Jelly-Fish and Trilobites
 By Natural Selection.

'You've Kant to make your brains go round,
 Hegel you have to clear them,
You've Mr Browning to confound,
 And Mr Punch to cheer them!
The native of an alien land
 You call a man and brother,
And greet with hymn-book in one hand
 And pistol in the other!

'You've Politics to make you fight
 As if you were possessed:

You've cannon and you've dynamite
 To give the nations rest:
The side that makes the loudest din
 Is surest to be right,
And oh, a pretty fix you're in!'
 Remarked the Trilobite.

'But gentle, stupid, free from woe
 I lived among my nation,
I didn't care - I didn't know
 That I was a Crustacean.¹
I didn't grumble, didn't steal,
 I never took to rhyme:
Salt water was my frugal meal,
 And carbonate of lime.'

Reluctantly I turned away,
 No other word he said;
An ancient Trilobite, he lay
 Within his rocky bed.
I did not answer him, for that
 Would have annoyed my pride:
I merely bowed, and raised my hat,
 But in my heart I cried:—

'I wish our brains were not so good,
 I wish our skulls were thicker,
I wish that Evolution could
 Have stopped a little quicker;
For oh, it was a happy plight,
 Of liberty and ease,
To be a simple Trilobite
 In the Silurian seas!'

¹ He was not a Crustacean. He has since discovered that he was an Arachnid, or something similar. But he says it does not matter. He says they told him wrong once, and they may again.

May Kendall

Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus

(The Ichthyosaurus laments his imperfect advantages. He aspires after the Higher Life)

I abide in a goodly Museum,
Frequented by sages profound:
'Tis a kind of strange mausoleum,
Where the beasts that have vanished abound.
There's a bird of the ages Triassic,
With his antediluvian beak,
And many a reptile Jurassic,
And many a monster antique.

Ere man was developed, our brother,
We swam and we ducked and we dived,
And we dined, as a rule, on each other –
What matter, the toughest survived.
Our paddles were fins, and they bore us
Through water: in air we could fly;¹
But the brain of the Ichthyosaurus
Was never a match for his eye.

Geologists, active and eager,
Its excellence hasten to own,
And praise, with no eulogy meagre,
The eye that is plated with bone.
'See how, with unerring precision,
His prey through the wave he could spy.
Oh, wonderful organ of vision,
Gigantic and beautiful Eye!'

The I listen in gloomy dejection,
I gaze, and I wish I could weep;
For what is mere visual perfection
To Intellect subtle and deep?
A loftier goal is before us,
For higher endowments we sigh.
But the brain of the Ichthyosaurus
Was never a patch on his eye!

It owned no supreme constitution,
Was shallow, and simple, and plain,
While mark but the fair convolution
And size of the Aryan brain.
'Tis furnished for School Board inspections,
And garnished for taking degrees,
And bulging in many directions,
As every phrenologist sees.

Sometimes it explodes at high pressure
Of some overwhelming demand,
But plied in unmerciful measure
‘Tis wonderful what it will stand!
In college, in cottage, in mansion,
Bear witness, the girls and the boys,
How great are its powers of expansion,
How very peculiar its joys!

Oh Brain that is bulgy with learning,
Oh wisdom of women and men,
Oh Maids for a First that are yearning,
Oh youths that are lectured by Wren!
You’re acquainted with Pisces and Taurus,
And all sorts of beasts in the sky,
But the brain of the Ichthyosaurus
Was never so good as his eye!

Reconstructed by Darwin or Owen,
We dwell in sweet Bloomsbury’s halls,
But we couldn’t have passed Little go in
The Schools, we’d have floundered in Smalls!
Though so cleverly people restore us,
We are bound to confess with a sigh
That the brain of the Ichthyosaurus
Was *never* so good as his eye!

¹ He could not really fly. After so many millions of years, perhaps he may be excused for slipping in a matter of detail.

May Kendall

The Lower Life

It might seem matter for regret
That Evolution has not yet
Fulfilled our wishes.
The birds soar higher far than we,
The fish outswim us in the sea,
The simple fishes.

But, evolutionists reflect,

We have the pull in intellect,
And that's undoubted:
Yet still we cry: 'Can this atone
For fins or pinions of our own,
Not to be scouted?'

We hold that Evolution's plan,
To give as little as she can,
Is something trying.
Fair share of brains, indeed, we win;
But why not throw the swimming in,
Why not the flying?

But ah, she gives not more or less,
We pay for all that we possess,
We weep and waver,
While Evolution, still the same,
With knights or pawns pursues the game,
And shows no favour.

As onward yet life's currents roll,
The gaining of a higher goal
Increaseth sorrow;
And what we win at its own cost
We win; and what we lose is lost,
Nor can we borrow.

If we have freedom, we lose peace.
If self-renunciation, cease
To care for pleasure.
If we have Truth – important prize!
We wholly must away with lies,
Or in a measure.

Is wisdom, then, the only test,
Of lot superlatively blest?
There have been others.
Our aeon too will pass, and then
Are monads so much less than men?
Alas, my brothers!

This higher life is curious stuff,
Too high, yet not quite high enough,
A mingled vial!

This higher life is sold too dear –
Would I could give a lower sphere
 An equal trial!

Ah, could I be a fish indeed,
Of lucky horoscope, and creed
 Utilitarian,
'Mong blissful waves to glide or rest,
I'd choose the lot I found the best,
 Or fish or Aryan!

Or could I be a bird and fly
Through forests all unhaunted by
 The shooting season,
I'd tell you which I'd voted for,
The flight of airy pinions, or
 The March of Reason!

May Kendall

Woman's Future

Complacent they tell us, hard hearts and derisive,
 In vain is our ardour: in vain are our sighs:
Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
 To the level of Homer's may never arise.
We heed not the falsehood, the base innuendo,
 The laws of the universe, these are our friends.
Our talents shall rise in a mighty crescendo,
 We trust Evolution to make us amends!

But ah, when I ask you for food that is mental,
 My sisters, you offer me ices and tea!
You cherish the fleeting, the mere accidental,
 At cost of the True, the Intrinsic, the Free.
Your feelings, compressed in Society's mangle,
 Are vapid and frivolous, pallid and mean.
To slander you love; but you don't care to wrangle:
 You bow to Decorum, and cherish Routine.

Alas, is it woolwork you take for your mission,
 Or Art that your fingers so gaily attack?
Can patchwork atone for the mind's inanition?

Can the soul, oh my sisters, be fed on a *plaque*?
Is this your vocation? My goal is another,
And empty and vain is the end you pursue.
In antimacassars the world you may smother;
But intellect marches o'er them and o'er you.

On fashion's vagaries your energies strewing,
Devoting your days to a rug or a screen,
Oh, rouse to a lifework – do something worth doing!
Invent a new planet, a flying-machine.
Mere charms superficial, mere feminine graces,
That fade or that flourish, no more you may prize;
But the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,
The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes.

ENVOY

Though jealous exclusion may tremble to own us,
Oh, wait for the time when our brains shall expand!
When once we're enthroned, you shall never dethrone us –
The poets, the sages, the seers of the land!

May Kendall

Similar Cases

There was once a little animal,
No bigger than a fox,
And on five toes he scampered
Over Tertiary rocks.
They called him Eohippus,
And they called him very small,
And they thought him of no value –
When they thought of him at all.
For the lumpish Dinoceras
And Coryphodont so slow
Were the heavy aristocracy
In days of long ago.

Said the little Eohippus:
“I am going to be a horse!
And on my middle finger nails
To run my earthly course!
I’m going to have a long flowing tail!
I’m going to have a mane!
I’m going to stand fourteen hands high
On the psychozoic plain!”
The Coryphodont was horrified,
The Dinoceras shocked;
And they chased young Eohippus,
But he skipped away and mocked.

Then they laughed enormous laughter,
And they groaned enormous groans,
And they bode young Eohippus
Go and view his father’s bones.
Said they: “You always were as small
And mean as now we see,
And therefore it is evident
That you’re always going to be!

‘What! Be a great tall, handsome beast
With hoofs to gallop on!
Why, you’d have to change your nature!’
Said the Loxolophodon.
They considered him disposed of,
And retired with gait serene –

That was the way they argued
In “the early eocene.”

There was once an Anthropoidal Ape,
Far smarter than the rest,
And everything that they could do
He always did the best;
So they naturally disliked him
And they gave him shoulders cool,
And when they had to mention him,
They said he was a fool.
Cried this pretentious ape one day:
“I’m going to be a man!
And stand upright and hunt and fight,
And conquer all I can!

I’m going to cut down forest trees
To make my houses higher!
I’m going to kill the Mastodon!
I’m going to make a fire!”
Loud screamed the Anthropoidal Apes
With laughter wild and gay;
Then tried to catch the boastful one,
But he always got away.
So they yelled at him in chorus,
Which he minded not a whit;
And they pelted him with coconuts,
Which didn’t seem to hit.

And then they gave him reasons,
Which they thought of much avail,
To prove how his preposterous
Attempt was sure to fail.
Said the sages: “In the first place,
The thing cannot be done!
And second, if it *could* be,
It would not be any fun!

And third, and most conclusive,
And admitting no reply,
You would have to change your nature!
We should like to see you try!”
They chuckled then triumphantly,
These lean and hairy shapes,

For these things passed as arguments,
With the Anthropoidal Apes.

There was once a Neolithic Man,
An enterprising wight,
Who made his chopping implements
Unusually bright,
Unusually clever he,
Unusually brave,
And he drew delightful mammoths
On the borders of his cave.
To his Neolithic neighbors,
Who were startled and surprised.
Said he: "My friends, in course of time,
We shall be civilized!

We are going to live in cities!
We are going to fight in wars!
We are going to eat three times a day,
Without the natural cause!
We are going to turn life upside-down
About a thing called gold!
We are going to want the earth, and take
As much as we can hold!
We are going to wear great piles pf stuff
Outside our proper skins;
We are going to have Diseases!
And Accomplishments!! and Sins!!!"

Then they all rose up in fury
Against their boastful friend;
For prehistoric patience
Cometh quickly to an end.
Said one: "This is chimerical!
Utopian! Absurd!"
Said another: "What a stupid life!
Too dull, upon my word!"
Cried all: "Before such things can come,
You idiotic child,
You must alter Human Nature!"
And they all sat back and smiled.

Thought they: "An answer to that last
It will be hard to find!"

It was a clinching argument
To the Neolithic Mind!

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

A Chrysalis

When gathering shells cast upwards by the waves
Of progress, they who note its ebb and flow,
Its flux and re-flux, surely come to know
That the sea-level rises; that dark caves
Of ignorance are flooded, and foul graves
Of sin are cleansed; albeit the work is slow;
Till, seeing great from less for ever grow,
Law comes to mean for them the Love that saves

And leaning down the ages, my dull ear,
Catching their slow-ascending harmonies,
I am uplift of them, and borne more near,
I feel within my flesh – laid pupa-wise –
A soul of worship, tho' of vision dim,
Which links me with wing-folded cherubim.

Emily Pfeiffer

Evolution

Hunger that strives in the restless arms
Of the sea-flower, that drivest rooted things
To break their moorings, that unfoldest wings
In creatures to be rapt above they harms;
Hunger, of whom the hungry-seeming waves
Were the first ministers, till, free to range,
Thou mad'st the Universe thry park and grange,
What is it thine insatiate heart still craves?

Sacred disquietude, divine unrest!
Maker of all that breathes the breath of life,
No unthrift greed spurs thine unflagging zest,
No lust self-slaying hounds thee to the strife;
Thou art the Unknown God on whom we wait:
Thy path the course of our unfolding fate.

Darwinism

When first the unflowering Fern-forest
 Shadowed the dim lagoons of old,
A vague, unconscious, long unrest
 Swayed the great fronds of green and gold.

Until the flexible stem grew rude,
 The fronds began to branch and bower,
And lo! upon the unblossoming wood
 There breaks a dawn of appleflower.

Then on the fruitful forest-boughs
 For ages long the unquiet ape
Swung happy in his airy house
 And plucked the apple, and sucked the grape.

Until at length in him there stirred
 The old, unchanged, remote distress,
That pierced his world of wind and bird
 With some divine unhappiness.

Not love, nor the wild fruits he sought,
 Nor the fierce battles of his clan
Could still the unborn and aching thought,
 Until the brute became the man.

Long since; and now the same unrest
 Goads to the same invisible goal,
Till some new gift, undream'd, unguess'd,
 End the new travail of the soul.

A. Mary F. Robinson

Appendix 2:

**Illustrations to May
Kendall's Poems in
*Punch***

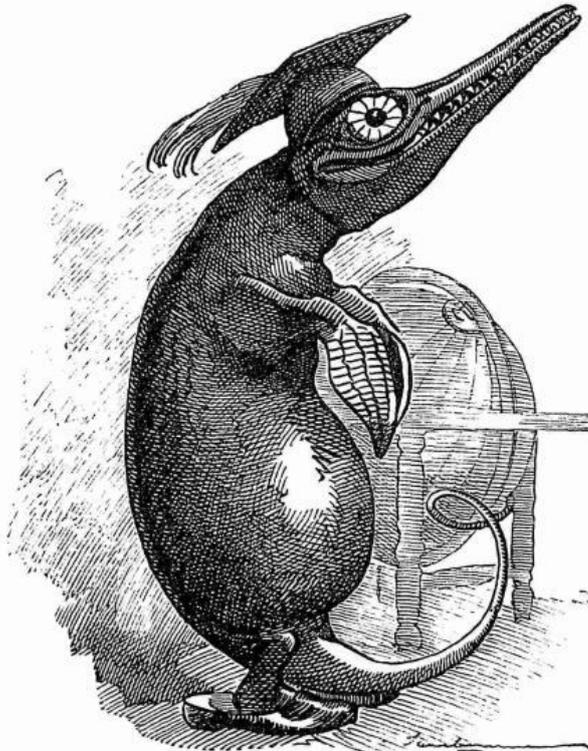
THE LAY OF THE TRILOBITE.



[May Kendall] "The Lay of the Trilobite." *Punch* 88 (24 January 1885): 41.

BALLAD OF THE ICHTHYOSAURUS.

[The Ichthyosaurus laments his incomplete development and imperfect education. He aspires to better things.]



[May Kendall] "Ballad of the Ichthyosaurus." *Punch* 88 (February 14 1885): 82.

THE JELLY-FISH AND THE PHILANTHROPIST.



[May Kendall] "The Jelly-Fish and the Philanthropist." *Punch* 91 (November 27 1886): 255.

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