

## Edith Hall

## Classically Educated Women in the early Independent Labour Party



The heroine of Mona Caird's 1894 novel *The Daughters of Danaus* is the sardonic Scottish heroine Hadria Fullerton. She is a 'New Woman' of outspoken views and advanced education, whose name may allude to the Philhellene Roman emperor Hadrian, or to the wall named after him in the British borders. She points out that the Greeks regarded 'their respectable women as simple reproductive agents of inferior human quality'. But she is keenly aware that contemporary young women are still,

bafflingly, content to embrace ‘the ideas of the old Greeks. They don't mind playing the part of cows so long as one doesn't mention it.’<sup>1</sup> Hadria herself wants to be a composer, but expends all her energies on the demands made by her parents, her husband, and her children, like the angry Danaids constantly trying to fill a leaking vessel with water. This is an apt image for the endless drains on the creative energies of women in a society where men are exempted from responsibilities for domestic and familial care.

The ancient Greeks were everywhere in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, the era of the ‘New Woman’.<sup>2</sup> The sensual recreations of ancient Mediterranean life in the paintings of Frederic Leighton and Lawrence Alma-Tadema were at the height of their popularity. Philhellenism was fashionable; there was a craze for Greek plays in girls’ school and colleges as well as boys.<sup>3</sup> Both Aesthetes and those new ‘New Women’ who advocated of dress reform, wore flowing ‘Grecian-style’ robes. The new dance recommended by François Delsarte, popularised in the internationally bestselling handbook *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1885), encouraged women to study Greek artworks in order to observe the relationship between bodily posture and emotional expression. Delsartism not only launched the career of Isadora Duncan, but was also an impetus behind middle-class feminism in both North America and Europe.<sup>4</sup> When the rich, largely self-educated Caird gave her narrative its Greek mythical resonance through its title, and peopled it with New Women discussing the ancient Greeks, she was reflecting a trend in contemporary middle-class culture. Some of her women discuss the historical contingency of their status, drawing overt parallels between classical Greece and Victorian Britain. These are far from atypical for feminists (and socialists, of whom Caird was not one) of the time. Such women recited the Euripidean Medea’s oration on the plight of women at their suffrage meetings.<sup>5</sup> They would have applauded when Caird used her knowledge of ancient history in order to identify ‘patriarchy as a historically contingent (rather than God-given) institution’.<sup>6</sup>

Amongst the more radical voices agitating for reform in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain were several belonging to women educated at university level in Classics who would certainly have agreed with Caird that women accepted a life appropriate only to cows. But they would

have said that the answer was to give everyone, of both sexes, the vote and economic security. This essay is about one of them, Katharine Bruce Glasier (formerly Conway, 1867-1950), but it glances at others, especially Enid Stacy (later Widdrington, 1868–1903), Mary Jane Bridges Adams (formerly Daltry, 1854-1939), and Mary Agnes Hamilton (formerly Adamson, 1882–1966). Two of them (Glasier and Hamilton) themselves published ‘New Women’ novels, but their fiction is not the focus here.<sup>7</sup> All four were committed feminists, socialists and above all active members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which was established in 1893, the year before the publication of *Daughters of Danaus*.

The need for a new, national working-class political party had become pressing. The concept was supported across a range of progressive organisations, from the gradual-reformists of the Fabian Society (represented by, amongst others, George Bernard Shaw) to the most revolutionary Trade Unionists. Led by Keir Hardie, the new party’s agreed main objective was informed by Marxist economics: ‘to secure the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange’.<sup>8</sup> The one hundred and twenty delegates met in Bradford in January 1893. The inauguration of the party was hailed as a landmark in both the socialist and the feminist press, including *Shafts* magazine, with its explicit imagery of the classical Amazon (figure 12.1) founded the year before by Scottish feminist Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp.<sup>9</sup>

One of the fifteen members elected to the ILP’s first National Administrative Council, and the only woman, was the former Classics teacher Katharine St John Conway. The tone and aspirations of the convention are conveyed in her rapturous description:

On January 13th, 1893, the Independent Labour Party sprang into being, and, as a child of the spirit of Liberty, claims every song that she has sung—in whatever land—as a glorious heritage. Life, love, liberty, and labour make liquid music. The Labour Party is in league with life, and works for liberty that man may live.

The Socialist creed of the 'One body' is a declaration that liberty grows with love, and that therefore life is love's child.<sup>10</sup>

Since the ILP was committed to universal adult suffrage, it was a natural home for women who wanted to live with men, and have children, but nevertheless felt keenly their exclusion from parliamentary politics both as voters and MPs. Bridges Adams, Glasier, Stacy and Hamilton were, however, all radicalized initially on behalf not of women *en masse* but on behalf of the poor.

No British women were enfranchised until the Representation of the People Act of 1918; women could not be elected to Parliament until the Eligibility of Women Act was passed in the same year. Women under thirty years old and those without either householder status or husbands of householder status could not vote until after the Representation of the People Act 1928. There is in one sense a 'happy ending' to the story of the women classicists in the ILP. The latest born of the women mentioned here, Mary Agnes Hamilton, was one of the five women MPs representing Labour to be elected to a parliamentary seat at the general election on 30 May 1929. We will never know whether Katharine Glasier (hereon referred to as 'Katharine') or any of her peers might have risen to such a prominent position had they been born under a more enlightened system. We may not be able to answer fully, either, the question of how their self-emancipation and socialism related to their classical education. But this question is still well worth asking, and it is the aim of this essay to do so.

Katharine Glasier has been chosen as the central figure in this investigation for four reasons. First, we know most about her as a private individual. Secondly, she was a prolific writer in several genres—journalism, pamphlets, novels and short stories. She wrote continuously for the socialist press, including the *Manchester Sunday Chronicle*, the *Clarion*, and *Woman Worker*,<sup>11</sup> and became Editor of the ILP's newspaper, *Labour Leader*, in 1916: sales reached their highest ever under her editorship, and for a time she was acclaimed in the role. Thirdly, she was acknowledged to be one of the 'gang of four' most influential women in the early days of the ILP, alongside Caroline Martyn, Margaret McMillan, and her own protégée Enid Stacy (of whom more later).<sup>12</sup> Fourthly, Katharine

collaborated on many projects with her husband, John Bruce Glasier, whom she met in 1892, several years after she had become a socialist activist. They were introduced in Glasgow by Cunninghame Graham, the radical MP for North Lanark, and married five months after the foundation of the ILP. John Bruce Glasier, born illegitimate and forced to work as a child shepherd in south Ayrshire, was one of the four most significant leaders of the party, and in 1900 succeeded Keir Hardie as its Chairman. He also served as Editor of *Labour Leader* between 1906 and 1909. Katharine's position as his wife meant that she could keep her ear closer than other women to the ground of what was, despite its espousal of the cause of women's equality, still a patriarchal organisation. Her mere presence on the committee reminded the men of the issue of women's suffrage. To put the sexual politics of the early ILP into perspective, it must be remembered that it was only women who offered to clean and decorate the hall for that inaugural conference.<sup>13</sup>

What was Katharine's own class background? How did it inform her interests in classics and her politics? On her father's side, she was only one generation away from abject poverty. He was a Congregationalist minister, Samuel Conway BA, Born into a low-class Plymouth home, he was befriended by a well-to-do non-conformist family on his paper round. They financed his schooling. He went on to New College, the Congregational college near Swiss Cottage, which he left in 1860 with a BA and a copy of Smith's *Classical Dictionary* presented to him by the Selwyn Book Fund. His first appointment was as Congregationalist minister at Ongar in Essex.<sup>14</sup> Samuel married 'up' the social scale, to Amy Curling, who came from a much more prosperous family in Stoke Newington.

Amy had been given the same education as her younger brother, who became an Oxford don, and she home-educated her own children until they were about ten years old. Katharine learned French, German, Latin and Greek from her mother.<sup>15</sup> Her intelligence was spotted early, and her destiny as a student of Classics was probably not in doubt thereafter; her older brother, Robert Seymour Conway, was also a classicist, who went on to achieve distinction as a specialist in Latin. He was Professor at Manchester from 1903 until 1929. He also shared his sister's bent for politics, although not her radicalism, which exasperated and embarrassed him: he even stood for Parliament (unsuccessfully) in 1929, on behalf of the Liberal Party. These talented children were raised in the

family home in Walthamstow, where their father, an overt sympathiser with socialism, had been appointed minister of Marsh Street Congregational Church.<sup>16</sup> While Robert attended the City of London School and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, Katharine enrolled at the new Girls' Public Day School Company school at Hackney Downs, where the Headmistress, Miss Pearse, was a public supporter of women's suffrage.<sup>17</sup>

The tendency of classically educated young women to espouse social and political reform did not spring from nowhere. Katharine was influenced by her reading of George Eliot—her twenty-first birthday present was Eliot's complete works. Eliot had studied her Greek at Bedford College for Ladies, which opened in Bloomsbury in 1849, and this establishment attracted other progressive women throughout the next few decades. The African American campaigner for the abolition of slavery in the USA, Sarah Parker Remond, for example, studied Latin there in the early 1860s. This was probably at the invitation of Edward Spenser Beesly, socialist and friend of Karl Marx, who was appointed Professor of Latin at the college in 1860.<sup>18</sup> But Katharine will probably have been most aware of Anna Swanwick, the famous translator of Aeschylus who was a campaigner for women's suffrage (indeed, she discovered her talent for public speaking as late as the age of sixty, in 1873, in order to speak in its favour).<sup>19</sup> Swanwick also supported the pioneering work of Josephine Butler, who campaigned on behalf of the lowest-class prostitutes.<sup>20</sup> Education, especially for women, but also for all children of all classes, was at the centre of Swanwick's life's work; she was involved in the foundation of Girton College, Cambridge, and Somerville Hall in Oxford, as well as the London colleges for women. She was president of Bedford for a time. But she also lectured at the Bethnal Green Free Library, the People's Concert Society and the Social Science Congress.<sup>21</sup> The sense that knowledge needed to be shared and blended with a philanthropic spirit came over in her speech on the dangers young students faced, which she delivered at Bedford College, 'in no Cassandra-like spirit... but rather like the watcher at the prow'. It was crucial, she urged each young lady of Bedford, that she cultivate 'a large and warm-hearted sympathy with her fellow-creatures. She must bear in mind that though she be conversant with the language of the Greeks or the Romans, and though she understand the mysteries of the higher mathematics, and have not charity, in the broadest sense, it will profit her

comparatively little.’<sup>22</sup> For the women of the ILP, it was campaigning for parity not charity—reform, even peaceful revolution—which they fused with their classical knowledge.

When Katharine was only fourteen her mother died, and she became independent and rebellious. This caused her problems when she arrived at Newnham College, Cambridge in 1886, on a Clothworker’s Scholarship, as the youngest student of her year. She detested the strict rules and especially being permanently chaperoned. She looked forward to the weekends, because on Sundays the Newnham students—inevitably chaperoned—ran classes on religion for working men, who had been brought to Cambridge for education under the University’s Extension scheme.<sup>23</sup> Katharine promptly struck up a romance with ‘a postman of intemperate habits’, but her older brother Seymour interfered and broke it up; he had been appointed to a lectureship at Newnham, much to Katharine’s irritation.<sup>24</sup> Her extra-curricular interests may have contributed to her appearing in the lower ranks of the second class in the College Tripos results in 1889, although women faced a disadvantage because few of them had been trained at school in the Latin prose and verse composition, which were compulsory elements of the university examinations. Women were not actually awarded degrees at Cambridge until 1925, but Katharine always defiantly put the letters BA after her name, whether on posters advertising her appearances at meetings or articles in the socialist press.

Along with many Newnham ladies, she entered the teaching profession, moving to Bristol to become Classics mistress at Redland High School for Girls. There she began to mix with the local Fabians and Christian Socialists. Under her tutelage, the schoolgirls’ results improved dramatically: she successfully prepared eleven girls for Latin matriculation within eighteen months of her arrival.<sup>25</sup> How she saw her role at this time is conveyed in her pen-portrait of the strongly autobiographical heroine of her ‘New Woman’ novel *Aimée Furniss, Scholar* (1896). Miss Furniss, the Classics mistress at the fictional Brightwell High School in a northern industrial city, has studied at Oxford, espouses progressive views, is extremely pretty and adored by the girls she teaches. She finds herself drawn into sympathy with the poor by helping a local Roman Catholic priest run his club for working boys. But she also forges an alliance with a working-class shop assistant who has lost her job, Annie Deardon. These two find freedom in the man’s world of their time by moving in together

(chastely), reading Shelley and William Morris, and committing their lives to spreading socialism: ‘Slowly a new hunger grew up within them and a new hope.’<sup>26</sup> The intensity of this friendship, although not its cross-class quality, may reflect the influence Katharine exerted on another classically educated socialist at her real-life school, Enid Stacy. Enid’s family were middle-class Christian socialists. The Bristol studio of Enid’s father Henry, an artist, was a meeting place for the British Socialist Society, and visited by such luminaries as William Morris and Eleanor Marx. After excelling in her senior Cambridge examination at the age of sixteen, Enid won a scholarship to University College, Bristol, from which, in 1890, she was able to pass the exams for a London BA in Arts (open to women since 1878).<sup>27</sup>

Enid took a tutoring position at Redland High School and came under Katharine’s influence. She joined the Gasworkers and General Labourers’ Union in 1889, which accepted workers from any trade or profession. Most teachers, however, joined the much less militant National Union of Teachers. She then helped the Bristol cotton workers’ strike of 1890, becoming Secretary of the Association for the Promotion of Trade Unionism among Women. This strike also changed her mentor Katharine’s life. She later recalled how inspired she had been when some of the striking women from the local cotton mills, dressed in white and soaked to their skins from the rain outside, conducted a silent demonstration in the fashionable church of All Saints, Clifton, in which she (and the factory owners) worshipped. Katharine joined the Bristol Socialist Party the next day.<sup>28</sup>

But neither woman stopped teaching at the privileged school for young ladies until the Redcliff Street strike of 1892, sparked off when the owner of Bristol Confectionary Works, J. A. Sanders, banned his workers (all women) from joining or forming a Trade Union. Enid became Honorary Secretary of the Strike Committee and tirelessly argued with Sanders in the *Letters* columns of the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (signing herself, as ever, Enid Stacy BA).<sup>29</sup> Katharine Glasier recalled later, in an obituary for Enid in the *Labour Leader* for 12 September 1903, that she often arrived home at midnight ‘with dragged skirt and swollen feet after hours of patient standing about in the effort to win laundrywomen to a trade union’. Enid frequently found herself in trouble with the police and was sacked from her job as schoolteacher. With Katharine, she then tried to found a co-



operative colony near Kendal in the Lake District, where work and food would be equally shared amongst the previously unemployed and homeless. But the project was sabotaged by the local vicar, and so Enid devoted herself to campaigning for socialism and the rights of women as a member of the Independent Labour Party.

She spoke at 122 meetings in 1894 alone. She became known as one of the most effective speakers on the tours of the ‘Clarion Van’, an itinerant campaigning vehicle which took the gospel of socialism to hundreds of towns and remote villages; its leading light, Julia Dawson, made a striking appearance along with the other female ‘vanners’ committed to feminist dress reform. They wore loose flowing dresses, without corsets, which they called ‘Greek gowns’.<sup>30</sup> Enid did not wear outlandish garments, but was an excellent communicator with working people, often addressing crowds for two hours continuously, in terrible weather and in the open air. She had physical strength and stamina; Sylvia Pankhurst recalled her as a ‘big, handsome woman with a very clear complexion’ whose voice could carry to the back of any room.<sup>31</sup> On one occasion, when the police tried to arrest her for organising a mass meeting of the unemployed in Liverpool, she climbed on top of a tramcar and continued her rousing harangue. She died—some said of exhaustion—at the age of thirty-five.<sup>32</sup>

Katharine, meanwhile, in 1892 resigned her post at Redland High School, and moved out of her genteel lodgings into the extended household of Dan Irving. He was a political activist who had lost one leg in a shunting accident while working on the railways in the Midlands. Leaving the safety of her genteel social circle to embrace the life of an agitator for the working class was a huge and risky step. There were also ambiguities surrounding her relationship with Irving and his invalided wife. But Katharine’s commitment to helping the poor was beyond question. She took a new post at an elementary school in the deprived district of St. Phillips, where her class, with seventy infants, was almost unmanageable. Her scholarly brother Seymour was outraged at his wild sister’s rejection of respectability and of her vocation as a teacher of classics. The siblings were estranged for years.

It was not long before Katharine’s gifts as a public orator were noticed by the prominent Fabians Sidney Webb and his soon-to-be wife Beatrice Potter. 1892 turned into an exciting and demanding time when Katharine discovered her full potential. Both she and her former protégée Enid

were therefore now working full-time for the socialist cause. Katharine delivered her debut speech at Nelson, Lancashire, in early 1892, and in April set out on her first tour, visiting Blackburn, Burnley, Keighley, Bradford, Wigton and South Shields. She was an enormous success; naturally eloquent and persuasive, her physical beauty, enthusiasm, refined manners and the authority she had acquired through her Cambridge education all helped to draw large crowds. Her reputation was briefly tarnished by rumours that she was having an affair with the prominent Fabian W. S. De Mattos. The scandal highlighted the problems faced by single women in radical politics, especially young ones.<sup>33</sup> She acquired an undeserved name for being a daring exponent of the 'New Morality' espoused by some of her contemporaries. But she refused to be discouraged, and campaigned hard in June 1892 for the election to parliament of the dockers' leader Ben Tillett, who came within six hundred votes of winning the seat for Bradford West as a candidate for Independent Labour. She also met the most prominent members of the labour movement, including the Scotsmen Keir Hardie and John Bruce Glasier. Just as important as her public speaking was her discovery that she could write fast and cogently. She began writing for Edward Hulton's radical *Sunday Chronicle*, and then, after contact with Robert Blatchford, the most widely read socialist journalist of the day under his pen-name *Nunquam* ('Never'), freelanced for his widely-read polemical *Clarion*.

When the next year the ILP came into being, as described towards the beginning of this article, Katharine was ecstatic, and married John a few months later. They both hurled themselves into the thick of the political action, speaking for a tiny pittance several nights every week. In an attempt to raise more income, Katharine published two novels, in 1894 and 1896, which were reviewed warmly by the socialist press. She was made very happy by her marriage to Glasier, although at first they pledged to remain childless in order to devote themselves, like missionaries, full-time to the cause. In 1898 they moved from Glasgow to a town on the Manchester side of the Peak District, Chapel-en-le-Frith, to make it easier to travel to both ends of the country. But in the event they had three children, in whom Katharine delighted. She always maintained that it was seeing the affection between her then friend Emmeline Pankhurst and her little boy Harry which changed her mind. But even after starting their family, the speaking programme was relentless. In 1900 alone, after having

her baby daughter Jeannie Isabelle, Katharine spoke at Long Eaton, Derby, Birmingham, Manchester, Ayre, Farsley, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Attercliffe, Pendlebury, Littleborough, St Helens, Hanley, Longport, Stockport, Liverpool, Rotherham, Leeds, Leicester, Kettering, Nottingham, Bradford, Oldham, Leek, Derby, Bolton, Middleton, Preston, Rochdale, Stalybridge, Ashton-Under-Lyne, Pudsey, Farnsworth and Dewsbury. Despite this hectic schedule, she became pregnant again and their son Malcolm was born in 1903. For a middle-class woman, Katharine suffered serious poverty—threadbare clothes and frugal meals—in order to keep her family fed while working for the cause.<sup>34</sup> She and John were helped by small handouts from the philanthropic chocolate magnate George Cadbury, although Katharine was too proud to accept a fully-paid holiday from him. But their lives were eventually turned around when a wealthy Boston widow and social reformer named Elizabeth Glendower Evans visited England, became converted to socialism, and bestowed upon Katharine (who had played a key role in her conversion) a life income from a trust fund of \$15,000. This meant that Katharine could have a third, longed-for baby, which she did in 1910.

Yet this energetic campaigner and devoted mother never forgot that she was a trained classicist. One of her most impressive pamphlets is *The Cry of the Children*, exposing the need for radical reform of the education system, abolition of child labour and state support for all children and mothers. It was published by the Labour Press in Manchester in 1895. It includes moving descriptions of the starving and neglected street children. Katharine accumulated shocking statistics on overcrowding and infant mortality: 55% of working classes died before they reach the age of five years, compared with 18% in the upper classes. In 1893 fewer than four million children were in school and 90% had left at 13 years old.<sup>35</sup> But she approaches this argument from a long historical perspective which adds both a sense of intellectual authority and—because she can show that attitudes have differed across cultures—the sense that the current predicament of children is a problem that can certainly be solved:

To those who have read the history of many nations and studied the rising and falling of various empires, it is clear that whatever else has passed away, the belief in the home has remained... Men feel instinctively that the child needs for its start in life the protection of its parents' love... Attempts have been made, both in theory and practice, to overcome this instinct. Sparta fought against it for a few centuries. Plato declared against it in his *Republic*. In our own day we have a philosopher or two appealing to aboriginal man, and endeavouring to destroy what they term 'the fetish of the family'. But the consensus of human experience is against them. Under the stress of a fierce competition, the severity and callousness of an outside world may develop [sic] an unwise spirit of indulgence and special pleading in the home. The false training of our girls may lead to much failure on the part of our mothers. Unnatural or brutal conditions may destroy the best instincts of our human nature...

After a revealing excursus on pauperism, the detention of children in reformatories and industrial schools, and the number of children growing up in acute poverty, she produces a killer argument: even in the brutal world of antiquity, she claims, child labour did not exist:

Have you thought of the significance of the fact that some 90 out of every 100 of the worker's children have begin to work for their living at thirteen years old, and many two years earlier? To begin with, it is a new thing—the old world knew it not. Search Greek and Roman literature as you will, and no trace of child labour will you find... Wherever chattel slavery existed masters knew the folly of spoiling their property by any such practice. In Greek and Rome [sic] the nursery was common to the children of slave and master alike; and the trainers worked to produce strong and beautiful bodes, careless of wealth or station.

There is, it must be admitted, little evidence to support her optimistic claims about the ancient Greek and Roman treatment of children, but it is fascinating to find her trawling her memory for details of ancient history which she can harness to her polemical socialist cause.

Like most members of the ILP, Katharine was opposed to the British treatment of the Boers in the Boer War, and became a harsh critic of British imperialism: amongst the titles of the lectures she gave regularly on the circuit in Lancashire and Yorkshire was one entitled ‘Roman imperialism and our own’. At home, as well, she encouraged her children to read widely, and at least one conversation revolved around the issue of whether ancient Greek women were more or less excluded from intellectual culture than women in early twentieth-century Britain. Her prolific private letters are always full of references to literature, especially to Plato and her favourite poet, Walt Whitman. Even her idealized short stories, *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills: Pastorals from the Peak District* (1907), mostly in dialogue form, feature virtuous, socialistically-minded daughters of vicars, similar to herself, who educate and help the farm labourers around them. The pen-name under which she wrote her woman’s column in *The Labour Leader* was ‘Iona’, probably inspired by Ione, the virtuous, educated and philanthropic Greek heroine of Bulwer’s famous novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). The columns examined problems facing ordinary women from philosophical and historical perspectives. In May and June 1906, for example, she discussed stoutness, arguing that in women it was a result not of gluttony but of many generations of oppression and confinement to the household.<sup>36</sup> In a pamphlet likewise aimed at women, *Socialism and the Home* (1909), she recommends thinking about love and marriage in a transhistorical and anthropological perspective, as Engels had done in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*: (1884); love-matches, as Engels had shown, ‘had been a hard-won privilege, after many other systems.’<sup>37</sup> Katharine, idealistically, believes that provided women were guaranteed financial support from the state, love was the correct basis for marriage, rather than economic advantage, with love confined to adulterous liaisons:

No students of sociology can deny that contract marriages have so failed to satisfy the human heart, that whether in ancient Rome or modern France the tendency has been to associate them with illicit “love” unions, more or less condoned by public opinion to the degradation of all concerned and the ruin of the “home” ideal.<sup>38</sup>

Another series of columns she wrote in 1919 for an ILP paper called *Birmingham Town Crier* featured a fictional young woman called Dolly, who lives with her elderly uncle, a Professor, and tries to convert everyone to socialism. Here Katharine allowed her classical training to be seen explicitly. When the Professor objects to someone of her class doing the cleaning, Dolly responds with a lecture on egalitarianism, but admits that ‘the Greeks were right in the main when they taught “strength for the man and beauty for the woman.” It hurts a woman’s self-respect to be dirty in a way it never does a man’s.’ Dolly also quotes Augustine and Plotinus, and contrasts religious ways of understanding the world in the Old Testament with the theories of Pythagoras.<sup>39</sup>

Katharine’s perceived authority on classical matters seems to have rubbed off on the men of the ILP. She was heavily influenced, in her relativist understanding of human history and different systems for regulating the relationships between classes and genders, by her close friend Edward Carpenter, also a founding member of the ILP. She cites his important *Civilization: its Cause and Cure* (1889) in her own visionary tract *The Religion of Socialism*, in which a white-haired old man, a fusion of Socrates, Aesop and the Christian god, converts her to socialism.<sup>40</sup> But it is likely that the influence went two ways. After a traditional education, including Classics, at Brighton College, Carpenter had studied mathematics at Cambridge, and lectured on astronomy for the University Extension Movement. But he became increasingly fascinated by the ancient Greeks, especially Plato, Sappho, and other authors who helped him to think cross-culturally about homoerotic relationships. Edward and Katharine were close friends (she always supported the rights of people who would today be called lesbian and gay). I suspect that he had discussed with her many of the ancient sources on same-sex relationships gathered in his much-reprinted *Iolaus: an Anthology of Friendship* (1902). It is

also interesting to find this father of British socialist-gay activism translating both Apuleius and the *Iliad* in 1900.

Katharine also discussed literature and culture constantly with her husband, who remained skeptical of the value of university education, believing that academic professionals always try to appoint right-wingers to top posts because they prefer ‘an uninformed political reactionary because... they want to set up as stiff a political guard as they can for the protection of their class privileges.’<sup>41</sup> But he seems to have picked up a good deal of interest and information about the ancient world from Katharine, as well as from his close friend and ally William Morris, whom he regarded as a profoundly important quasi-spiritual leader, invited regularly to lecture in Glasgow and even visited in his Hammersmith home, Kelmscott House.<sup>42</sup> When he came to write his autobiographical account of Morris and the early days of British socialism, Glasier introduced several learned references to antiquity. Morris’s wife, in her simple white tunics, looked ‘a veritable Astarte’. He used to discuss books with Morris including Charles Kingsley’s tale of the Chartist and self-taught classicist, *Alton Locke* (1850). He relished the memory of Morris’s response to a middle-class man who objected that the industrial workers of Coatbridge should have found a better place for their famous visitor to speak than the cinder heap underneath the iron works: ‘this is just the sort of place that Diogenes and Christ and, for all we know, Homer, and your own Blind Harry the minstrel used to get their audiences; so I am not so far out of the high literary conventions after all’. He also recalled Morris charming his own shy Highland mother, with whom he lived in one of Glasgow’s notorious tenement blocks: Morris was delighted to discover that she was a Gaelic speaker, and asked her about the west highland pronunciation of certain words that had a common Gaelic and Latin root. But it is probably to conversations with Katharine that John Bruce Glasier owed many of these retrospective classicisms. It was certainly to her that he owed his interest in ancient Greek oratory and Platonic aesthetics, and his belief that the ten great thinkers of the world included Aeschylus and Socrates as well as Shakespeare, Milton and Shelley.<sup>43</sup>

As editor of *The Labour Leader*, Katharine received considerable success, raising the circulation to 62,000 in early 1918. Things began to deteriorate after the Russian revolution, however,

as ILP members became split over the question of their support for the new Bolshevik government. Katharine bravely insisted on keeping *The Labour Leader* open to all shades of opinion—a decision which helped prevent a greater leakage than actually happened to the newly created Communist Party of Great Britain. But the conflict, after her husband's slow death from cancer in 1920, finished her off and she had a nervous breakdown. On recovery, amazingly, she once more took to the lecture circuit, addressing 78 meetings in three months in 1921. And she continued for the next eighteen years,<sup>44</sup> speaking tirelessly to the Labour Party's summer schools at Easton Lodge in Essex (which the socialist Lady Daisy Warwick, on whom more below, made available to Trade Unionist and ILP activities).

Katharine never stopped addressing anti-war demonstrations or the socialist faithful in endless village halls and provincial market towns. She was devastated in 1928 when her youngest child, Glen, died in a football accident, but even this tragedy did not stop her for long. She continued to campaign until her own death—for state nursery school provision (unsuccessfully) and for pit-head baths (successfully). Always a careful housewife, she was appalled that miners had to take their dirt home with them. The miners did not forget, and gave generously to her memorial fund, which acquired her Pennines house for the Youth Hostels Association and named it Katharine Bruce Glasier Hostel. It is still functioning. She was also behind the Margaret McMillan Memorial Fund after World War II, which raised enough to found the Margaret McMillan Training College at Bradford. She supported the Save the Children Fund enthusiastically. She was thrilled to meet Ghandi in 1931 when he visited London. She wrote more than a thousand words every day. Besides long letters to her family and her diary, she penned regular articles in these years for *Labour's Northern Voice* and other Labour and Cooperative newspapers. She was appalled by the rise of Nazism, and wrote in her diary for 14 September 1940, 'Germans practicing *swimming* ashore with all their kit. *Storms* in Channel. Salamis over again? God grant it.'<sup>45</sup> Ten years later she died peacefully in her sleep on 14 June 1950.

The major impact of Katharine on the movement, as a woman excluded even from voting in parliamentary elections, was through her own words as a lecturer and her writing. The other great classically-trained woman lecturer in the early ILP, Mary Bridges Adams, succeeded in carving out a



rather different role in reform through election to a non-parliamentary body, the School Board for London (LSB).<sup>46</sup> It had been created as one of many school boards by the Elementary Education Act 1870, which for the first time provided for the education of all children in England and Wales. The LSB was enormous, since it covered the whole of Metropolitan London and had forty-nine members (a number which grew later to 55). Crucially, women were allowed to vote for members and stand for election. The Board proved highly successful in provision of school places, building hundreds of schools, ensuring that 350,000 children were in education by 1890. Mary was elected to the Greenwich district seat in 1894, her campaigns supported by many other women including Enid Stacy.<sup>47</sup> Over the next six years Mary made a huge impact on the tone and direction of this body, campaigning indefatigably for reform, widening of educational opportunity and especially for the feeding of deprived schoolchildren.

An outstanding biography by Jane Martin, on which the next few paragraphs draw heavily, has clarified Mary's achievements (she had hitherto been scarcely noticed even by feminist historians). Her parents were from the Welsh working class. Her father was an engine fitter. They moved to the north-east when she was young, and she became a pupil teacher, which meant employment as a trainee in a local school during the day and studying in the evenings. Her own career opportunities were opened up by the 1870 Education Act, which produced a swift expansion of elementary education and promotion for competent teachers. Mary was academically talented and a brilliant communicator; she became a head teacher by her mid-twenties, teaching in elementary schools in Birmingham, London and Newcastle. Unusually for a working-class woman, she also taught older children at High School in Woolwich.

Like Enid Stacy, Mary studied towards an external degree at the University of London, and matriculated from the College of Science in Newcastle. In January 1882 she moved to London to enter Bedford College for Women, where she enrolled for two terms, focusing on subjects in which she felt she had been inadequately educated: History, Maths, English and French as well as Latin and Greek. In the summer she passed the Intermediate London BA examinations, in the second division but with Distinctions in Maths and in Greek.<sup>48</sup> She wanted to continue, and received encouragement

from the assistant Latin lecturer, Rachel Notcutt, a non-conformist who had a reputation for warm support of disadvantaged students and sat on the special committee appointed to offer them advice and support. She was affectionately known by her students as ‘Nottie’.<sup>49</sup> But the tuition was expensive. It cost Mary more than ten shillings for each term, and it proved impossible for her to continue.

As her biographer has remarked, Mary’s focus on the classics was remarkable, especially for a woman of her class background.<sup>50</sup> But her academic prowess, especially in such respected subjects, was to stand her in good stead: the gas workers who supported her election to the LSB in 1897 wrote a letter saying she deserved it ‘from her learning, great scholastic experience, lucidity of thought and expression’ as well as her ‘aptness of resource and charm of presence.’<sup>51</sup> Her academic record also gave her the intellectual authority to impress men in the top echelons of the socialist intelligentsia, which added lustre to her cultural initiatives in the radical Woolwich of the 1890s. She persuaded many eminent speakers to lecture, and raised funds from well-to-do women in London philanthropic societies to support her initiatives. She appealed to the Women’s Institute and the Grosvenor Club for Women; she wrote in the feminist magazine *Shafts* (see above) appealing for financial help to support good works amongst the labouring classes of Greenwich. In particular, in 1899 she organised an exhibition of loaned pictures called ‘Art for the Workers’ in Woolwich Polytechnic, opened by no less a figure in socialist art than the illustrator Walter Crane.

Mary, like Katharine, was also a polemical journalist. Many of her most acerbic articles appeared in the ultra-socialist *Cotton Factory Times*. Like Katharine, she was also a wife and a mother; in 1887 she married the socialist Walter Bridges Adams, a keen follower of William Morris. Mary and Walter soon had two sons, but this did not diminish her political activities. She was enthused by the strike of the match girls in 1888 and of the gas workers in 1889. Like Enid Stacy, despite being a teacher, it was the Gas Workers and General Labourers Union which Mary joined. Like Katharine Glasier, she formed an alliance with the charismatic one-legged firebrand Dan Irving, with whom she toured the mill towns of Lancashire in 1907/8.<sup>52</sup>

It was when her husband died in 1900 that Mary gave up teaching and membership of the LSB to become a full-time propagandist for socialism. In 1903-4 she became a political secretary for Lady Warwick, whom she recruited for the Socialist Democratic Federation. This enabled her to focus on the issue perhaps dearest to her heart—adult education. She believed that working-class adults needed a specific curriculum which would educate them politically and prepare them for class struggle. She therefore objected to the classical and liberal educational philosophy which underlay the foundation of both Ruskin College in Oxford (1899) and the Workers' Educational Association, under the aegis of Albert Mansbridge, in 1903. Mary was unimpressed. She was convinced that there was no alternative but for all the universities—Oxford and Cambridge included—to pass into state ownership and come under popular control. The endowed seats of learning, she argued, were 'the rightful inheritance of the people'.<sup>53</sup>

Mary was at the centre of the conflict between the Workers' Education Association (WEA) 'liberals' and the rebellious Marxist socialists who formed the revolutionary Plebs League and Central Labour College (CLC). Supported by the National Union of Railwaymen and the South Wales Miners' Federation, the CLC found its physical headquarters in Earls' Court, London. Mary immediately responded by opening an equivalent establishment for women close by, the Women's College and Socialist Education Centre in Bebel House, into which she moved as Principal. Along with the working-class Manchester novelist Ethel Carnie, she taught women workers literacy and numeracy, and, through the Bebel House Rebel Pen Club, how to write propaganda.<sup>54</sup> Mary thus used her brief university-level education to lend authority to her candidacy in elections and her campaigns for adult self-improvement. But she was conflicted about the place of classics in mass education. She was criticised for sending her son William to a private school, albeit a progressive one (Bedales), which had partly been founded on the principle of reaction *against* the exclusive classical curriculum of the old public schools.<sup>55</sup> William studied at Worcester College, Oxford and enjoyed a successful career as a theatre director. He even directed Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* at Covent Garden in 1936.

Because the great ILP orators rarely committed their speeches to writing, preferring to extemporise and interact with their audiences, it is difficult for us to recreate the effect of their public

performances. Katharine's style seems to have been more earnest and charismatic, with echoes of her non-conformist father's preaching. Mary had an acerbic wit and could reduce audiences to laughter as well as tears. Having cut herself in the kitchen, she declared that she had no intention of being told what to do by a sardine can; she explained that she had joined the Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers because she worked 'in gas on the platform' and was a General Labourer at home. But both Katharine and Mary saw their activism of several decades bear fruit in 1929, when one hundred and forty-seven members of the ILP, including a small group of women, were elected to seats at the general election.

We will never know how many individuals were inspired to join the socialist cause by their legendary oratory. One we do know about was Hannah Mitchell, the Bolton seamstress who was inspired by Katharine and became a famous suffragette, socialist, autodidact and Manchester City Councillor;<sup>56</sup> her autobiography, *The Hard Way Up* (1968), paints the most vivid portrait of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Another Glasier convert was one of the women who were elected Labour MPs in 1929, Ellen Wilkinson, 'Red Ellen', who had joined the ILP as a teenager after hearing Katharine give a speech. Wilkinson was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health. But Katharine will perhaps have been most delighted by the election of Mary Agnes Hamilton, a Newnham classicist, whose own mother, Margaret ('Daisy') Duncan, had been one of the earliest students at Newnham when they were taught at Norwich House in Cambridge back in 1877-8. Mary Agnes later dedicated her account of the early days of Newnham to her mother's memory, and no doubt most of it was based on anecdotes she had heard at her mother's knee.<sup>57</sup>

Mary Agnes was born in 1882. Her father was a professor of philosophical logic at Owens College (later to be incorporated into the University of Manchester). After education at girls' high schools, Mary Agnes arrived at Newnham College in 1901, to read Classics and History. She achieved first-class marks. She then took up a position as assistant to a history professor at the University College of South Wales in Cardiff, married, and separated soon afterwards (she was the only woman discussed in this article who did *not* embrace marriage and motherhood). Mary Agnes subsequently embarked on a new career as a writer and Journalist. But before her employment as

correspondent on women's suffrage and reform of the poor law at *The Economist* in 1913, she already earned a living from her pen, writing novels about the travails of the New Woman and high-end 'popular' books about ancient Greece and Rome for OUP's Clarendon Press. Her *Greek Legends* (1912) is an exceptionally well written prose retelling of the Hesiodic *Theogony* and the stories of Theseus, Thebes, Perseus, Heracles, the Argonauts, Meleager, Bellerophon and the Trojan War. It is intriguing, given Mary Agnes' feminism, that every single visual illustration is not of a hero but of a heroine or goddess (Demeter of Cnidus, Mourning Athena, Medusa, and the Venus of Melos), except for two which portray husbands and wives together (Zeus and Hera, Orpheus and Eurydice). Her *history of the ancient world* (1913) is accessible and accurate; with useful maps and timelines, it covers the entire history of the Greeks and Romans from Hissarlik to Julius Caesar. Both books were successful and reissued in new editions. In the 1920s she wrote two more books about the ancient world for a general audience, *Ancient Rome: the Lives of Great Men* (1922) and a new book about Greece (1926). Being an acknowledged expert in the history of the classical world lent authority to her stream of books on politics and political figures; these included biographies of Abraham Lincoln, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle and Ramsay MacDonald, as well as a lucid textbook, *The Principles of Socialism*, published 'with notes for lecturers and class leaders' as the second in the ILP's series of study courses.

In the 1923 general election, Mary Agnes was an unsuccessful candidate. Thereafter her grasp of history and her writing skills were put to the cause of Labour with *Fit to Govern!* (1924), her proud celebration of the first Labour government, containing brief biographies of the members of the Cabinet. It was designed as a retort to Winston Churchill's assertion that the people leading Labour were 'unfit to govern'.<sup>58</sup> Under the pseudonym of 'Iconoclast', Hamilton either celebrates their working-class backgrounds (for example, in the case of Arthur Henderson) or congratulates men educated at public school for coming to espouse socialism (such as Charles Philips Trevelyan, alumnus of Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge). Above all, she writes a powerful panegyric to Margaret Grace Bondfield, one of the earliest women to achieve executive power in the British democracy, as Under-Secretary for Labour. How gratifying it must have been when it was Mary

Agnes' own turn to be swept to victory in Blackburn in 1929, having won the trust of the Trade Unions there, and gaining more votes than any other woman Labour candidate. The patriarchal exclusion of women from parliament had indeed turned out, as Mona Caird's articulate feminist in *The Daughters of Danaus* had been so well aware, to have been historically contingent. Against so many odds, the ILP woman, classically educated or not, had finally taken up their rightful place in parliamentary politics.

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<sup>1</sup> Caird 1894, ch. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Bland 1987; Ardis 1990; on the new gender politics of the 1890s see especially Ruunstein 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Hall & Macintosh 2005, chapters 15-16; Hall 2012: 231-16.

<sup>4</sup> Ruyter 1988: 389-91; Hall 2012: 202-3. For the connection between Greek myth, especially Greek drama, with feminism in this period see also Hall 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hall & Macintosh 2005: 514-15.

<sup>6</sup> Surridge 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Glasier's fiction is well discussed in Waters 1993.

<sup>8</sup> This was the direct forerunner of 'Clause IV' of the manifesto of the Labour Party (removed under pressure from Tony Blair in 1995: 'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange...')

<sup>9</sup> Collette 1989: 16; Schuche 2001; Beaumont 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Katharine Glasier's diary, along with the forty-nine boxes of Glasier papers, remained for many years in the possession of the Glasier family, and were used and quoted from extensively by Thompson 1971. They can now be consulted in the Special Collections and Archives of the University of Liverpool.

<sup>11</sup> Nobert 1978: 59.

<sup>12</sup> Hannam & Hunt 2002: 34. See Glasier 1914 for her own account of women's role in the early days of the ILP.

<sup>13</sup> Collette 1989: 16.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson 1971: 58.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson 1971: 59-60

<sup>16</sup> See Binfleid 2002: 173-4.

<sup>17</sup> See NSWS 1879: 48, where Pearse writes, 'I cannot see why, if women desire the Franchise, they should not gave it, particularly as they are now eligible to vote for School Board candidates.'

<sup>18</sup> See the video talk by Justine McConnell and Henry Stead at

<http://www.classicsandclass.info/project/01/>.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce 1903: 159.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce 1903: 165.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce 1903: 172.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Bruce 1903: 167-9.

<sup>23</sup> Hamilton 1936: 140.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson 1971: 62-3.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson 1971: 64.

<sup>26</sup> Glasier 1896: 124.

<sup>27</sup> See *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* for Tuesday, November 25 1890 (issue 13272).

- <sup>28</sup> Thompson 1971: 65.
- <sup>29</sup> See e.g. two articles headed 'Redcliff Street Strike', in *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, for Saturday, November 12, 1892 (issue 13886) and Monday, November 14, 1892 (issue 13887) respectively.
- <sup>30</sup> Cowman 2004: 23 and n.26
- <sup>31</sup> Pankhurst 1931: 127.
- <sup>32</sup> See further Tuckett 1980-81 and Glasier 1924.
- <sup>33</sup> On which see Collette 1987.
- <sup>34</sup> Thompson 1971: 134-7.
- <sup>35</sup> Glasier 1895, 1: 5.
- <sup>36</sup> Collette 1989: 20.
- <sup>37</sup> Glasier 1909: 2.
- <sup>38</sup> Glasier 1909: 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Glasier 1926: 8, 32, 61, 50.
- <sup>40</sup> Glasier 1894: 1; Carpenter 1889.
- <sup>41</sup> Glasier, J. B. 1921: 102.
- <sup>42</sup> On the exceptional importance of Morris to the thought of the new socialists of the 1880s and 1890s, see especially Levy 1987: 92-3.
- <sup>43</sup> Glasier, J. B. 1921: 45, 67-8, 81, 99-100, 166.
- <sup>44</sup> Thompson 1971: 230-4.
- <sup>45</sup> Thompson 1971: 242.
- <sup>46</sup> For a wonderfully detailed account of women's involvement in local government before they became eligible to take part in parliamentary politics, see Hollis 1989, who (most unusually) is aware of the significance of Mary Bridges Adams (see 14, 66, 123, and 125, with the comments of Martin 2010a: 8).
- <sup>47</sup> Martin 2010a: 83.
- <sup>48</sup> Martin 2010b: 25 n. 13.
- <sup>49</sup> Martin 2010a: 27 and the letter from Notcutt to Mary quoted 45 n. 22. See also Tuke 1939: 131, 147, 151, 163, 308-9.
- <sup>50</sup> Martin 2010a: 27.
- <sup>51</sup> London Metropolitan Archive, London School Board Minutes, 2 May 1895, 1128, quoted in Martin 2010a: 83-4.
- <sup>52</sup> Martin 2010a: 59.
- <sup>53</sup> Martin 2010b: 13.
- <sup>54</sup> Martin 2010b: 14-15.
- <sup>55</sup> Martin 2010a: 95-7.
- <sup>56</sup> Rowbotham 1977: 92.
- <sup>57</sup> Hamilton 1936.
- <sup>58</sup> Hamilton 1924: 9.