Sarah Piatt's Critical Language of the Poetess and Exploring the Feminine Tradition

"It is less easy to be assured of the genuineness of literary ability in women than in men."

- *Rufus Griswold*, Female Poets of America (1849)

Introduction

The nineteenth century was a critical turning point for women poets to emerge and succeed in literary society; however, there were still several obstacles of societal expectations for them to surpass. In the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century, women poets themselves struggled to break away from the feminine tradition in American poetry due to the strong cultural influences of literature in the past. In Margaret Homans' book, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, Homans goes on to say that the "literary images available to women all demonstrate to women their unfitness for poetry" (Homans 29), which establishes a link to the feminist tradition in poetry despite the late nineteenth century socially evolving past antebellum ideals in literature—that is, although women's poetry in particular is becoming more modernized, there are still elements of the feminine tradition that effected women writers well into the 1870s and 1880s that were carried mostly by a nostalgia towards tradition and a strong upholding from critics at the time. Despite being so exposed to the feminine tradition in literature, pre-modernist female poets like Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Dorothy Wordsworth showed great resilience in making their poetry their own in independence by separating themselves from upholding the feminine tradition in poetry. This inspired female poets in the later nineteenth century to continue this resilience despite criticism from the literary society surrounding them, and Homans notes that they illustrated this sort of rebellion by "cast[ing] off their image of themselves as objects, as the other, in the manner of daughters refusing to become what their mothers have been" (Homans 1). By performing this resilience, these antebellum

female poets stood as influencers to later nineteenth century feminist poets such as Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt.

Throughout her poetry, Sarah Piatt is exemplary in using both language and metaphor to contest misogynistic views of women in poetry. She utilizes language specifically in her poems in order to stress the thoughts of a dramatic dialogue—not only is the reader observing directly what the character in the poem is lamenting, but Piatt also allows for double meanings to be present in the kinds of language that she uses, which permits the poem to be interpreted in a multitude of ways. Piatt uses metaphor similarly in her poetry, but instead, this tool is used in a more illustrative way—if the language that she uses is the paint and paintbrush, the metaphor is the blending of colors in the portrait of the poem. Metaphor is used to convey the entire picture; to give the reader a grasp of the bigger situation that pertains to the poem.

The misogyny that Piatt addresses in her poetry is latent in the concepts of feminine tradition that remain in the late nineteenth century—the figure of "the Poetess", for example, is still a popular genre of poetry for readers of both sexes during this time, and Piatt contests this by breaking away from the Poetess style of writing in her poetry, which will be examined later in this essay. Piatt does not attach herself exclusively to "womanly" writing subjects; she writes about domestic conflicts and the struggles of courtship and marriage, and by doing this, she serves as an example to other women poets to encourage them to denounce the feminine tradition in future writing endeavors. In this essay, I will examine in close readings how Sarah Piatt challenges the feminine tradition in women's poetry. I will analyze stanzas from "A Wall Between" and "We Women" in order to consider how Piatt uses language and metaphor in dramatic monologue and double quatrains to contest the misogyny of the feminine tradition in poetry.

Setting the Stage

Before analyzing any of Sarah Piatt's work, I believe that it is first important to consider the situation surrounding women poets in the nineteenth century that Piatt found herself in at the time. Although there were some women poets like Piatt that wanted to detach themselves from the figure of the Poetess, which was especially famous in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, there were still many women poets, critics, and readers alike that preferred the genre, and this preference upheld the idea of the feminine tradition in late nineteenth century poetry as well.

Alexandra Socarides provides a helpful illustration of the Poetess figure in her article "The Poetess at Work". She begins by describing the Poetess as a submissive figure—the Poetess holds "a portfolio on her lap" that "contain[s] the papers on which she may have written her verses, but the reader of either poem is led not to look at that material reality, but at the faraway look in her eyes" (Socarides 132). In this beginning, Socarides makes a point to reference the physical evidence of the poetry that the Poetess has written. It is both obvious and present that the poetry is close to the Poetess—it even rests in her lap—so the reader can establish that there was indeed physical work that went into creating this poetry. However, Socarides is suggesting that it is not this physical work that the reader needs to focus on, but rather "the faraway look" in the Poetess' eyes, which diverts the attention from the work that the Poetess wrote to the whimsical features that adorns her womanly appearance. Already, this interpretation that the reader draws from the Poetess figure implies misogyny because it discounts the work that goes into her writing and instead delivers the entirety of the credit to her beauty and "faraway" mind. Socarides expands on the figure by saying that the "faraway look" is "a look that conjures up the idea that her mind resides elsewhere, apart from the world in which poems get written down, revised, circulated and published". This interpretation of the Poetess

portrayed the nineteenth century female poet as one that wrote poetry as a form of fanciful interest rather than hard, passionate work, and thus separated women poets from the devising of what I refer to as "beauty-centric" poetry. This type of poetry—the type that is written by a Poetess figure—is poetry that consists mostly of images of nature and feelings of happiness or content in the domestic sphere rather than indifference, skepticism, or criticism. It separates the Poetess from the "actual work" that publishing poetry entails because the act of publishing does not follow the feminine tradition: it is, by overwhelmingly large opinion, a "man's job" to concern himself with the publishing process, and not the job of the female poet.

It is also evident that the Poetess figure is similar to the famous "Angel in the House" figure, which stood as a representation of the expectations of women at this point in the century, wherein women are satisfied with their respective duties as mother and homemaker and have no interest in pursuing careers or interests that produce financial income of their own. Like the Poetess figure, although the "Angel in the House" was still a concept that lingered among the social structures of the late nineteenth century, and although contests against it indeed arose, there were several still that embraced the image. Poets like Sarah Piatt that threatened this image of the Poetess or the "Angel in the House" were typically met with harsh criticism by those that thought themselves idealists, or those that appreciated and supported the feminine tradition in poetry and believed that a serious profession in poetry was only reserved for men. Rufus Griswold, an idealist in literature, is one such critic of the woman poet. In *The Female Poets of America*, he mentions that there are strong, undeniable differences between male poets and female poets, stating that in men, "we recognise his nature as the most thoroughly artist-like, whose most abstract thoughts still retain a most sensuous cast, whose mind is the most completely transfused and incorporated into his feelings" (Griswold 7). This opens up the

conversation between the sexes by describing male poets as artistic by default due to their nature, and because they are "completely transfused", they are instinctively inclined to be proficient at writing poetry.

For female poets, Griswold argues, it is in fact that "the reverse should be the test of true art in woman, and we should deem her the truest poet, whose emotions are most refined by reason, whose force of passion is most expanded and controlled into lofty and impersonal forms of imagination". The "lofty and impersonal forms of imagination", it seems, is a mirror image of the way that the Poetess figure is depicted with her "faraway look"—again, the female poet is not focused on the raw, profitable elements of writing poetry, but instead the dreamlike realm in which beauty-centric poetry resides. Female-written poetry, Griswold goes on to say, is not "devoted to business and politics" like the focus of male poetry, but rather "pursuits which adorn but do not profit, and which beautify existence but do not consolidate power". His implications that women's poetry is less-than-noteworthy compared to men's poetry is due to the fact that women at this time were not occupied with "real" work such as "business and politics", so they certainly had time to write poetry—and, because of such circumstances that "freed up their time", women did not work as hard at it because they were "less busy" than their male counterparts. There is no authority in women's poetry; it only worked to make life and literature more beautiful.

In response to this, Socarides also offers the information that women poets "were all too familiar with having their work not be considered 'work', but within their poems they had a chance to challenge the image of themselves as idle and passive" (Socarides 138). She suggests in this instance that poets like Piatt had to adhere to the socially encouraged idea that women's poetry was not "legitimate" work, but it also offered the opportunity to establish individuality in

expression and perhaps even voice critical opinions of the social situation that surrounded nineteenth-century women poets and their creations. This point feeds into the more general criticism—which typically aligned with Griswold's—that women poets received during this time period, and how these criticisms "work to reinforce the idea that women's poetry is produced without the kind of sustained attention and rigor to which they devote themselves to other work" (Socarides 133). This "other work" that Socarides speaks of refers to efforts that women made in the domestic sphere, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their children. Shockingly, however, it was not only men that chose this critical side over women's poetry. In her article "hear the bird: Sarah Piatt and the Dramatic Monologue", Jess Roberts writes that "[even] at the end of the nineteenth century, one half century after Rufus Griswold's *Female Poets of America* (1849), readers continued to imagine and value women's poetry not as the product of intellect and skill, but as a manifestation of spirit and effusion" (Roberts 352-353). Based on Roberts' claim, it can be drawn that although this opinion was slightly antiquated by the late nineteenth century, there was still a strong enough presence for the idea to take effect in published literature: there was still a need for women poets to express the mental labor that went into their poetry rather than staying tied to subjects that were considered natural or spiritual.

One of these female critics that question women's intellect in poetry includes a woman named Caroline May, who wrote her own *Female Poets of America* before Griswold's in 1848. In the preface, May acknowledges the jobs that women perform in the domestic sphere, and "pointedly pits that domestic work against the state of 'leisure' in which a woman might write poetry, even when it was done 'as a means of living'" (Socarides 133). The criticism enforces the figure of the Poetess by suggesting that, while poetry can be a fine "hobby", it should never compare to the efforts put forward to jobs that women are expected to perform in the domestic

sphere. In short, "women's work" is supposed to take priority over poetry for women poets no matter how much income they might gain from their poetic endeavors. The most profound reason that this way of thinking was still allowed in Piatt's time, I argue, is due to the fact that members of both sexes still supported the feminine tradition in poetry—it is not only members of the patriarchy that is upholding said tradition, but members of the targeted sex as well.

Fortunately, there were some outstanding figures that supported women poets' independence in writing for their own financial gain, and as a primary effort rather than a secondary one. Among these figures was R.H. Stoddard, who "abandons Griswold's practice of prefacing each poet with an extended biography, a move that had emphasized the embodiment and consumability of the Poetess, and instead lets the verse stand for itself without any suggestion of the author's origins or dates of birth and death" (Vogelius 304). This way, instead of first drawing attention to the poet's life and gender, the attention is drawn towards the poem itself—in Stoddard's eyes, the most important and deserving part of the entire publication.

As the reader can analyze from points in her poetry, Sarah Piatt was one of these poets that Stoddard referenced. Piatt recognized the restrictive nature of the Poetess and how it still limited the honest, heartfelt expressions of women poets even in the later nineteenth century. Because the popularity of the genre and the remaining criticism that women poets withstood, Piatt uses her artistic inclinations to speak to other women poets through her poetry in a type of rebellion against the surviving views of the feminine tradition in American poetry. As a result, she implemented separate elements throughout her poems that challenged the image of the Poetess, and by doing so, her poetry encouraged other women poets to "express their independent identities in the gaps or differences between original and imitation" (Vogelius 305). Specifically, Sarah Piatt uses this imitation in the form of sarcasm, and in the following section, I

will examine Sarah Piatt's poetry in a close lens that displays this use of sarcasm, along with other elements like dramatic monologue, language, and metaphor.

Poetry in Motion

Sarah Piatt is most famous for her repetitive use of the dramatic dialogue, in which she uses veiled lines with intentional double meanings to illustrate a separate narrative or argumentative point. It is first important to directly define the dramatic monologue in order to understand its use in Piatt's poetry. Britannica Academic provides this definition succinctly by describing dramatic monologue as "a poem written in the form of a speech of an individual character; it compresses into a single vivid scene a narrative sense of the speaker's history and psychological insight into his character". It seems that a majority of Piatt's contests towards feminine conventions comes from a place of "humor"—through the irony, ambiguity, and general snark in her poetry, she is making a statement about how the image of the Poetess is not the sole representation of women poets.

Roberts further speaks to Piatt's rebellious use of the dramatic monologue by saying that "[what] emerges [from Piatt's poetry] is a clear picture of how Piatt manipulated the particular conventions of the dramatic monologue in order to anatomize the way women maintained and disrupted the very conventions that restricted their range of experience and expression in their roles as mothers and daughters, readers and writers" (Roberts 345-346). It is my opinion that Sarah Piatt intentionally uses the dramatic monologue in order to mimic masculine traditions in poetry—that is, by taking the style of the dramatic monologue from popular male poets, such as Robert Browning, she is illustrating the idea that poetry written by women is equally as substantial as poetry written by men. The stark comparison of the two styles is a depiction of equality to all readers of American poetry in the nineteenth century, and it is one of the key

elements of how Piatt is specifically addressing other women writers to encourage them to break away from feminine conventions.

There were some that were expectedly offended by Piatt's suggestiveness in her dramatic monologues, however. In "Sarah Piatt's Realism in 1870s Print Culture" by Elizabeth Renker, the author mentions a member of a literary club known as "The Echo Club", who discourages Piatt's provocative implications and "describes her poems as 'dreams' and faults them for lacking what he notably calls 'a distinct reality'" (Renker 371). To put it in different terms, "Galahad"—the pseudonym that the member of The Echo Club gives himself—believes that Piatt thinks that the things she writes are too profound, and that the ideas she embeds into her poetry are less abstruse than she herself considers them to be. This parallels with the figure of the Poetess—instead of being rooted in reality, her work is instead in a lofty, distant space, and so by writing this criticism, Galahad is promoting the idea of the Poetess figure in Piatt's time. Galahad also writes that Piatt's work "shows 'indications of a struggle between thought and language", implying that it is impossible for Piatt to correctly get the ideas in her head down onto a page in the form of poetry, so they instead come across as nonplussed or inconceivable. This, he further critiques, is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to Sarah Piatt, but instead is true for all women poets, and that they "generally stand in too much awe of their own conceptions'". With this dismissal of Piatt's work and women poets similar to her, Galahad is invalidating the revolutionary independence that Piatt displays in her poetry and rejects the possibility that such independence is influential to other women poets who read her work.

Another critic of Piatt in particular is Katharine Tynan, a fellow female author who wrote "Poets in Exile" in 1849 and included Piatt as one of these "poets in exile". Roberts writes that in this book, Tynan "fuses Piatt's person and her poems", "stresses Piatt's 'extreme womanliness'",

and "characterizes Piatt's husband as the 'methodical' one who takes 'most tender care of his wife's poetry'" (Roberts 353). In other words, Tynan refuses to distinguish the dramatic monologue in Piatt's poems from the poet herself and insists that the character—or characters—in Piatt's poems are all representative of herself rather than acting as a separate character for the sake of the dramatic monologue. The "extreme womanliness" that Tynan refers to is no doubt the same over-emotional, frivolous caricature of woman that critics like Griswold describe, which discredits any legitimate message that Piatt is attempting to portray in her poems. Tynan also credits Piatt's husband for her publishing success, further emphasizing the previous idea that the "hard work" of writing and publishing poetry is inherently masculine. Lastly, Tynan insists that Piatt is 'a living contradiction of inked fingers and slipshod disarray that used to be the common idea of the woman poet'". This "common idea of the woman poet" is a direct reference to the Poetess figure, and in this statement, Tynan is comparing Piatt to the Poetess itself by describing her as a "contradiction" to the figure. It would appear that Tynan's disappointment stems from the fact that Piatt is indeed not a good representation of the Poetess—something that Piatt wanted to distance herself from in her poetry to begin with, which signifies the success of her desired detachment from feminine conventions. Additionally, the fact that this criticism is coming from another woman supports the idea that women in the nineteenth century were heavily influenced by literature with oppressive and religious overtones that stem from patriarchal scholarship.

Throughout her poetry, Piatt has managed to use the concept of a dramatic monologue to display a clear revelation that "shows itself…as a genre to expose how women—as mothers, daughters, lovers, and *poets*—might maintain and, perhaps more importantly, how they might disrupt the conventions and expectations that restrict them" (Roberts 348). In the following two

poems, I will be analyzing the dramatic monologues and the ways that they criticize the expectations of female poets and women as an entire gender in nineteenth-century society.

I will begin my analysis with the poem "A Wall Between", which is one of Piatt's lengthier poems that discusses the female speaker's relationship with a man—presumably, her husband—and the many problems that come with being married to this man. Although the poem is too long to examine here in full, I would like to look at three stanzas in particular that I believe are the most effective when questioning typical romantic courtships of the nineteenth century and, alternatively, the expectations of wives and their duties in the domestic sphere. Part of Piatt's criticism of romantic relationships can be seen in the second stanza of the poem, written below:

> "…He who could leave her heart,
> Spite of youth's passionate promises, to break
> (While through their children's home he walked, apart,
> Dumb as the dead), must, for her soul's sweet sake,
> Come, at the last, in priest-disguise
> To help her to the skies !"

The first two lines suggest a betrayal by fault of the man mentioned in the poem. Presumably, this man is the speaker's husband, which can be inferred by the use of "their children's home" in this stanza. The husband promised her several things in their youth, likely before their marriage, and then slighted her later in life even in spite of having children together. Roberts notes that this is a common theme in Piatt's works—she writes that the women in the poems, typically the speakers (though not always), "are either girls who believe in the myths and promises that…leave women unprepared for the lives they find themselves trapped within later, or they are

the men who perpetuate and rely on those myths and promises" (Roberts 347). In the nineteenth century, it can be reasonably stated that it was typical for young women to believe that matrimony, homemaking, and child-rearing were jobs that were not only honorable, but also fulfilling, and that if a woman accomplished these duties successfully, then she would live a happy life with a healthy marriage. In this stanza, the reader can see that this is not the case, and by suggesting such a thing, Piatt is spurring the idea of womanhood into a more independent, feminist perspective. Likewise, the phrase "Dumb as the dead" in the fourth line of the stanza does not mean "unintelligent", in this case, but rather "silent", and it implies that the husband does not speak to his wife about these betrayals, which ends up harming her more—or so the phrase "her soul's sweet sake" might signify. Piatt, then, is also drawing attention to the idea that men often betray their wives and leave them unhappy—a topic that would not be generally well-received by critics in the late nineteenth century even still, as we have already noted, but one that is of the utmost importance because it specifically addresses the struggles that women go through in a marriage rather than sugarcoat it like a Poetess would.

Examining this poem from a different lens, the twenty-third stanza focuses almost entirely on women's duties in the domestic sphere and how the speaker interprets her actions surrounding them. As the speaker continues to lament about her relationship and reminisces about the past, she describes the following:

"Ask him if I forgot
One household care. If I, in such poor ways
As I could know, through piteous things have not
Tried still to please him, lo, these many days ; —
Ah, bitter task, self-set and vain.

1 hear the wind and rain."

The first two lines specifically address the speaker's "womanly duties" and describes the fact that she was diligent in fulfilling her husband's expectations around the house. In the following three lines, she mentions that she had tried to "please" her husband "in poor ways", and yet the sense of betrayal is still relevant despite the speaker's attempts to make her husband happy. Perhaps the most important part of this stanza, however, is the line "Ah, bitter task, self-set and vain"—it implies that the objective of pleasing her husband was not placed on her by her husband, but by the speaker herself. In this instance, Piatt is using this line in the form of a dramatic monologue to draw attention to the toxic ways that society during the nineteenth century taught women that it is their duty—likely their *first* duty—to make their husbands happy, and then worry about their own happiness as a secondary task. The speaker mentions that the task is "vain", which I believe is purposefully vague, because the vanity here can be observed in different ways—is it vain because her attempts at pleasing her husband will still not convince him to be a devoted spouse? Or is she calling herself vain for assuming that her husband would only pay attention to her and her needs rather than his own pleasures?

Roberts comments on this "pattern" of blame and doubt by saying that husbands and wives "alike, it seems, abide by particular and predictable patterns: the former makes promises they cannot keep; the latter, by turns, both believe those promises and cease to believe those promises and, in both cases, find themselves trapped" (Roberts 347). As youths, women believe the promises—likely of everlasting love, or something similar—that men give them, but as the relationship continues and the couple grows older, the promise is no longer fulfilled. The "trapped" feeling is felt differently by the man and the woman, although "trapped" is the correct word to use in both cases. The man feels "trapped" because he is aware that he cannot keep the

promises he made to the woman when they were young, and thus feels that he made a mistake in marrying her. The woman feels "trapped" because society says that she is supposed to be happy regardless of what wrongdoings occur in her marriage, as it is a privilege to be a wife, mother, and homemaker instead of a "spinster". On another note, both of those involved in the relationship feel trapped due to divorce being seen as an unacceptable consequence of a crumbling marriage during the nineteenth century. Piatt is intentionally describing a scenario here that is neither lofty nor dreamy, and certainly not beauty-centric, and by doing so, she is renouncing the figure of the Poetess—although it is possible that this situation does not apply directly to Piatt's personal life, the nature of the dramatic monologue makes it personal for the character being represented in the poem, which rebukes Griswold's previous criticism of women's poetry being "impersonal".

The eighth stanza of the poem refers to the expectations of women in an emotional sense rather than in a sense of duties. The dramatic monologue also plays a part in constructing the back-and-forth that is essential for Piatt to get her point across, which can be seen in many instances here:

"(Oh, call it what you will !)

Light, hollow, brief, and bitter ? Yes, I know.

With cruel seas and sands ? Yes, yes, and still •

And fire and famine following where we go ?

And still I leave it at my feet,

Moaning, 'The world is sweet.'"

I would first like to address the way that this stanza is working in the poem as a whole. The speaker uses a variety of words with negative connotations, such as "bitter", "cruel", and

"famine", in order to portray her unhappiness. Additionally, the action of "moaning" the words in the last line of the stanza depicts a very specific sense of dread—rather than using a neutral word like "exclaiming" or "saying", Piatt specifically decided to incorporate a style of speaking that would clearly portray the speaker's misery—a direct clash with the happiness phrase that is actually used, "The world is sweet". There is a clear double meaning here: the world is indeed sweet, because it is the only way a woman's world is allowed to be perceived. By using this style of the double meaning through the dramatic monologue, Piatt is informing the reader of how women were not allowed to discuss the negative emotions that they felt in a marriage, because marriage was supposed to be the most important thing that occurred to them. The speaker is putting on a verbal "mask" of happiness, like many women did during this time, but were in fact miserable and unable to show it.

In the previous section, I discussed the figure of the Poetess and how the Poetess would write about the beauty of nature, as beauty and nature are both "womanly" subjects. However, in this stanza, Piatt is openly mocking this aspect of the Poetess by including nature in the poem but deliberately making nature "ugly"—the seas are "cruel" rather than "blue" or "mighty"; the sands are "cruel" rather than "soft" or "white"; and the fire is destructive rather than "warm" or "inviting". Like nature, Piatt insists in this metaphor, marriage is not always beautiful—sometimes it is catastrophic.

While we have established that Piatt's dramatic monologues are arguably the most influential device that she offered to feminist literature in her poetry, I believe that it is also important to include her lesser-known works: most notably, her double quatrains. The most influential of these double quatrains, in my opinion, is titled "'We Women'", and I include it here in full:

"HEART-ACHE and heart-break — always that or this.

Sometimes it rains just when the sun should shine ;

Sometimes a glove or ribbon goes amiss ;

Sometimes, in youth, your lover should be mine.

Still madam frets at life, through pearls and lace

(A breath can break her pale heart's measured beat),

And still demands the maid who paints her face

Shall find the world forever smooth and sweet."

The first stanza describes the "problems" that women face in the nineteenth century, and as one might reason, all of the problems listed are trivial—it starts to rain on a sunny day, an accessory goes missing, someone that the speaker has romantic interest in is actually interested in someone else—but none of these problems are considered to be very "heavy" problems in the grand scheme of things. Piatt is including these as "problems" that women face solely to emphasize how ridiculous it seems that these are the only things that go wrong in the lives of women. She is showing that society does not take the actual problems of women seriously, and instead invalidates their anger or misery into trifling things that have no ultimate meaning.

The second stanza comes closer to describing how Piatt actually feels. She mentions that "madam frets at life, through pearls and lace", which implies that although "madam" has worries about her situation, she is still required to look beautiful while she worries. The sarcasm in the second line mocks the idea that women are frail—that just "a breath" can break "madam's" heart because of how overly emotional women tend to be.

In the third line of the poem, the phrase "paints her face" applies to two viewpoints. The first is in the more literal sense; that women are expected to appease a patriarchal standard of beauty by wearing makeup rather than showing any flawed skin. The second is more metaphorical: it repeats the idea of the "mask" that seems to appear and reappear throughout Piatt's poetry, and here, it leaves the implications that women always have to wear a mask of happiness regardless of how they truly feel.

In the last line of the double quatrain, Piatt directly reiterates how society expects women to view their lives—to "find the world forever smooth and sweet". The world for women, society tries to convince, has no bumps or rough edges, no bitterness or sorrow—it is just an endless source of happiness and satisfaction. Obviously, this is not the case, and Piatt's dry humor in using this line as the final statement of the poem determines how obtuse she finds those falsehoods.

Conclusion

Sarah Piatt's use of dramatic monologue and double quatrain made her poetry exceptional in the eyes of those she influenced. Her applications of metaphor, irony, ambiguity, and sarcasm each contributed to exhibiting her true thoughts while still conforming to the poetic and literary presumptions required of her.

This leaves the reader to consider: how have modern women poets drawn from Sarah Piatt, both in the use of dramatic monologue and in the sense of female independence? Does the figure of the Poetess still influence poetic movements, or have poets like Sarah Piatt diminished the figure in literary society completely? What about the masculine tradition—is it still influencing poetry in the modern day, or has feminine tradition taken over?

Through examining Sarah Piatt's poetry, the reader can understand societal expectations of women in the nineteenth century and how female poets challenged these expectations by using creative, poetic methods and advanced feminist thinking in society as a whole.

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