To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Deborah Ann Scaperoth entitled "Not so Immaculately Conceived: Imagining the Protestant Madonna 1850-1910." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Mary E. Papke, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

David Goslee

Tom Haddox

Amy Neff

Accepted for the Council:

Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2006b
.S36

Not So Immaculately Conceived: Imagining the Protestant Madonna 1850-1910

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Deborah Ann Scaperoth
December 2006

Copyright © 2006 by Deborah Ann Scaperoth

All rights reserved

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my brother Gary and to all women who were inappropriately silenced at some point in their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly thankful to Dr. Mary E. Papke for all of her support and encouragement during this process. She knew exactly when to exert the proper amount of pressure to keep me going and when to back off when I was discouraged. I am also grateful for my patient dissertation committee members Dr. David Goslee, Dr. Thomas Haddox, and Dr.Amy Neff, who read more drafts than I care to remember, and who were always helpful and incisive.

I would also like to thank my friends and family who listened to my ideas, read drafts, made helpful suggestions, and inspired me to keep going.

Most of all, thank you Dan, David, Elizabeth, and Matt for supporting me throughout this process with your kind words and your belief that I could finish.

Abstract

Pius IX in the 1854 Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as the belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was from the moment of her conception free from the "stain of original sin." This idea was a part of ecclesiastical tradition, but prior to this time, the church had not officially defined Mary's sinless nature in writing. The publication of this definition, along with published accounts of Marian sightings, contributed to an already heightened awareness of her in a literate, culturally aware public. As a result, Protestant writers who sought to invoke her image interpreted a "new" Virgin Mary to a largely Protestant public that saw her mostly as an exotic Catholic "other." In my project, I explore the idea of the reconstructed Protestant Virgin Mary and examine how this type affected images of women in nineteenth century British/American literature and popular culture from 1850-1910. I establish precedence for this idea by first examining the image of the Virgin Mary in twelfth-century France, a culture which experienced economic and social upheavals similar to the ones that occurred during the nineteenth century. From there, my argument then focuses on a particular case of how Protestant male writers constructed the Virgin Mary and how a defining characteristic meant to glorify feminine divinity could be turned into a vehicle to support the "eternal needs of man's heart"—as the Victorian heroine evolved into a sentimental, sexless, disempowered rendition of the Virgin Mary. Why male writers? Primarily, male writers and publishers in both countries held a great amount of power in the literary world from 1850-1900, so they would have had a great deal of influence on the reading public. My work also explores the ways that religion, language, popular culture, and the media work together in determining consumer-driven images of women. In the first half of my dissertation, I discuss Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Charles Kingsley, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Robert Browning, John Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelites. In the second half, I examine the American writers Mark Twain, Henry James, and Henry Adams. My conclusion shows how the Protestant Madonna eventually evolved into a ludicrous type, no longer useful by the end of the century.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Not so Immaculately Conceived: Imagining the Protestant Madonna 1850-1910 1

Chapter 1: In the Beginning Was the Image and the Word: Dickens, Collins, and Kingsley 32

Chapter 2: Selling Images of the Sacred and Profane: Browning and Swinburne 90

Chapter 3: I Shall Try To Paint a Madonna, Someday, I Believe: Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites 148

Chapter 4: Preaching Against Culture with a Big C: Twain, James, and Adams 197

Conclusion: "All Generations Will Call Me Blessed" 285

Bibliography 300

Vita 329

Introduction: Not so Immaculately Conceived: Imagining the Protestant Madonna 1850-1910

> *God ineffable—whose ways are mercy and truth, whose will is omnipotence itself, and whose wisdom "reaches from end to end mightily, and orders all things Sweetly"—having foreseen from all eternity the lamentable wretchedness of the entire human race which would result from the sin of Adam, decreed, by a plan hidden from the centuries, to complete the first work of his goodness by a mystery yet more wondrously sublime through the Incarnation of the Word . . . .Therefore, far above all the angels and all the saints so wondrously did God endow her [Mary] with the abundance of all heavenly gifts poured from the treasury of his divinity that his mother, ever absolutely free of all stain of sin, all fair and perfect, would possess that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity that which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully.*
>
> *From the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854)*

In Henry James' 1872 short story "The Madonna of the Future," the protagonist says the following to an artist who is interested in painting a picture of a Madonna: "[A] demand for the blessed virgin, visible and adorable . . . I'm afraid there is no demand now" (23). The artist replies, "[T] here is always a demand . . . [,] that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; but pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame. Let it appear, and this faith grows brave. How should it appear in this corrupt generation?" (23). This passage describes the climate in which the dogma of the Immaculate Conception appeared in the mid-nineteenth century--a time of skepticism that longed for a redeemer. Partly, in response to this longing and the need for a culture-ordering symbol, Pope Pius IX in the 1854 bull *Ineffabilis Deus* formally defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as the belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was from the moment of her conception free from the "stain of original sin."

Mary as the Immaculate Conception was not a new idea and is, of course, a part of an ancient tradition of belief that had been extant before Saint Augustine. Prior to this time, however, the church had not officially defined Mary's sinless nature in writing. Certainly, Pius IX, who came into power in 1846, had a particular interest in the Virgin because he reported that she had healed him from epilepsy. But that is not to say that many people had not believed in the Immaculate Conception idea prior to its printed

broadcast in the nineteenth century. John Henry Newman argued that the Immaculate Conception was published precisely because people believed in Mary's absolute purity already, not so that people would come to believe it (Kendall 146).

Indeed, the world appeared ready for such a definition of purity in this century wherein science threatened faith, industrialization created new social roles, and, furthermore, revolution, if not on the horizon in England and America as it was in Italy and France, seemed poised to erupt at any point. To deal with these uncertainties, Victorians sought the definitive, unifying symbol or idea for the age. While some important nineteenth-century literary notables such as Charles Dickens and Mark Twain liked the idea of progress, others like John Ruskin, William Morris, and Henry Adams looked to the medieval past as a time when human ideals and the arts flourished. We see this yearning for past traditions especially in the way that Victorian culture was drawn to the symbol of the Virgin Mary. As Carol Marie Engelhardt points out, "[S]he was the only woman able to satisfy the angelic myth that woman be both virgin and mother," and "she reflected social and cultural as well as religious concerns" regarding women's roles ("The Paradigmatic Angel" 160, 159). That is not to say that Protestants fully embraced her image outright; many Victorians, in fact, expressed hostility toward "Mariolatry." To negotiate conflicting values, and, perhaps in a defensive move to create an equally attractive feminine image, Protestants promoted their own Madonna through literature and art. The appropriation of the Protestant Madonna from "Catholic" images of Mary is a central idea to this project. What my argument demonstrates is that Protestant British and American male writers appropriated the Virgin Mary and the definition of the Immaculate Conception to reinforce Victorian ideals of the "perfect woman," while also

supporting their own specific political agendas. By the end of the nineteenth century, this reconstructed Madonna had become a sentimental, asexual, disempowered version of the Virgin Mary.

The Victorian appropriation of the Virgin was not the first time in history that culture has responded to Mary through language and literature. In *Alone of All Her Sex*, Marina Warner argues that the Virgin Mary became an important figure in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries due to the influence of the courtly love tradition. While some scholars such as Rachel Fulton do not agree with her thesis, I find Warner's argument compelling.[1] Warner argues that in order to circumvent the spread of courtly love, the monks in twelfth-century France began writing love poems to Mary instead of the exalted "ladies" of the court system. As Warner writes, "The Virgin Mary became an establishment prop, acceptable because [. . .] as seen in the symbol of her Queenship [like the Queen of the court], she could be used to affirm the legitimacy of the status quo" (147) which, for the church, was comprised in part of chastity and marriage. On the positive side, by the church channeling the power of *eros* to the Virgin, Warner contends that such devotion inspired the making of world class cathedrals, poetry, mosaics, and art.

Surprisingly, the nineteenth century was not unlike the twelfth in its need for a culture-ordering symbol. In fact, both periods reflect similar changes in the way people worked, lived, and thought.. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, feudal systems were giving way to private enterprise. People who had always lived and worked on vassal-owned

---

[1] Fulton argues that particularly vivid devotional literature used by the clerics contributed to the Marian devotion of this period. Certainly, both theories could be correct. For more information on Fulton's perspective see From *Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 405-470.

land were often forced to look for employment in the cities. Likewise, in the nineteenth century, farming communities and cottage industries lost people to the industrialized cities. City life did not guarantee a stable existence either. The new arrivals often had to contend with, among other things, economic woes, loneliness, and contagious diseases that spread quickly in dense areas. In addition, the immigrants often found themselves surrounded by secular culture, including the popular courtly love songs of the twelfth century and the popular novels, public museums, plays, newspapers, and journals of the nineteenth.[2]

Bound up with literature and media influences were growing concerns about feminine power. On top of all the other problems that made people feel out of control, liberated women seemed especially threatening to patriarchal systems. Accordingly, to combat this "threat," those in power began regulating feminine ideals through media. When a culture is struggling to restore order, it often fixates on controllable factors, and, historically, women's roles have often been manipulated to fit the need. As noted earlier, twelfth-century monks seeking to restore the status quo constructed a very specific image of the Virgin Mary. Arguably, then, the cultural anxieties that produced the artificially constructed Madonna in the twelfth century produced another in the nineteenth. This second Madonna also became an "establishment prop," which reinforced the image of the chaste Virgin who was expected to marry and to become a good mother. Mary as mother, however, is not the only image being reinforced. Due to a number of factors, the

[2] For more information on life in the Middle Ages, see Brian Tierney's *Western Europe in the Middle Ages, 300-1475*. 5th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993). For more information about nineteenth-century culture, see Walter Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

Virgin archetype often evokes a taboo, erotic reaction too. Consequently, for the second time in history, a paradoxical Madonna, both erotic and immaculate, reigned over culture. She may not have inspired great cathedrals like her twelfth-century counterpart, but she captured the imagination of many writers and artists, as well as the Victorian audience.

The imagination to inspire is what James Russell Lowell and Matthew Arnold both claimed traditional religion lacked in both America and England in the nineteenth century. Lowell in *Fireside Travels* (1864) writes, "The Roman Catholic church is the only church that has been loyal to the heart and soul of man, that has clung to her faith in the imagination, and that would not give over her symbols and images and sacred vessels to the perilous keeping of the iconoclast Understanding" (293). Matthew Arnold reiterates this idea over twenty years later by saying that "[o]ur religion [of progress] has materialized itself in the fact, the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it," and he notes further that "[t]he strongest part of religion today is its unconscious poetry" (Intro. to "The Study of Poetry" 1888). In *The Disappearance of God*, J. Hillis Miller argues that Western society in the nineteenth century lost important connections to God through such losses as the migration from agrarian societies to the cities and the replacement of high church language, ritual, and symbolism with low church Protestantism. Miller also contends that some writers fought against this disappearance through their writing---in particular, the Romantic writers Gerard Manley Hopkins and Emily Bronte (1-16). Unlike Miller, however, I would like to argue that religion did not disappear in the nineteenth century, but that people (and writers) found secularized ways to worship through a new type of Madonna. Unlike the

Catholic faith which *honors* Mary, culture actually worshipped this Protestant Madonna.

Consciously or subconsciously, the nineteenth-century Protestant writers felt a need to fill the perceived imaginative void with a Madonna-like character who "could fill the eternal needs of man's heart" (James, "The Madonna of the Future" 23) as well as fill pages. In *The American Madonna,* John Gatta has suggested that Protestant writers "envisioned a reconstituted Protestantism" (8), and in *Swinburne and His Gods: The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry*, Margot K. Louis has stated that Swinburne created a literature of reconstituted theology. This reconstituted Protestantism centered on an equally reconstituted Madonna, a figure that was not without her critics. Later in the century, Henry Adams writes specifically against the nineteenth-century American Virgin in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), prefiguring *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) in which Leslie Fiedler blames the Protestant Madonna for inhibiting the way Americans have written about mature sexuality.

Nevertheless, overall, both genders were drawn to her. The nineteenth-century women writers were quite fascinated by the figure of the Madonna as evidenced by the works of Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*), Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Minister's Wooing, Agnes of Sorrento*), Mrs. Oliphant (*Madonna Mary*), and George Eliot (*The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch,* and *Romola*). Yet these works do not seem quite as preoccupied with the Immaculate Conception as are those by the male writers. Indeed, some women writers were reticent about using such an image. In *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism,* Kimberly VanEsveld Adams notes, for instance, that "Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Woman's Bible* . . . . contains only brief and desacralizing comments on the Virgin Mary . . . . Both Stanton and her collaborator reject the Virgin

Birth (which they sometimes confuse with the Immaculate Conception)" and argues further that "Stanton's hostility toward Marian doctrines extends to all aspects of Catholicism" ("The Madonna" 75). Adams explains this by saying that Stanton was a "freethinker who identified male-controlled religion as the root of female oppression" ("The Madonna" 74), and part of her distrust of Mary could also be attributed to her unfamiliarity with the Madonna of European culture (76).

Some women writers, however, did see the Madonna as a strong proto-feminist figure and believed that the Immaculate Conception emphasized the Virgin's independence. Anna Jameson, author of *Legends of the Madonna* (the third work published in 1852 in a four-part series on art), concludes that the Madonna is a powerful figure because "medieval societies, which reverently and appropriately honored the Madonna, also honored female nature and female accomplishments" (Adams, "The Madonna" 70). Adams notes that Jameson was quite taken with the depiction of The Immaculate Conception in art by painters such as Murillo and Guido, and Jameson in *Legends* writes that "the maternal character is set aside, and she stands alone, absolute in herself, and complete in her own perfections" in the figure of the Immaculate Conception (Jameson xxxvi).

The popular Victorian writer George Eliot also uses Madonna figures in her novels, but they are different from Jameson's. Eliot employs the figure to show the *negative* effects on real women who are made into Madonnas, as interpreted by Protestant males who want to use them for their own power and politics. For Eliot, "[T]he Madonna becomes almost wholly a limiting figure for women, an image no longer expressive of female self-

definition but instead proposed and interpreted by men" (Adams 184). For example, in *Middlemarch,* the independent Dorothea (Brooke) Casaubon, the character most linked to Madonna images, is expected to defer all of her ambitions to serve her bombastic, narcissistic husband.

The limited figure of the Madonna defined by males, which Eliot subtly rebels against in her writing, is precisely the image that concerns me most in this project. Since VanEsveld Adams has done such extensive research on Jameson (and on George Eliot and Margaret Fuller), I do not think that I can add more to the argument that the Virgin Mary has been a figure of strength in many centuries and to many people. My argument, instead, will focus on a more particular case of how Protestant male writers constructed the Virgin Mary and how a defining characteristic meant to glorify feminine divinity could be turned into a vehicle to support the "eternal needs of man's heart"—as the Victorian heroine evolved into a sentimental, sexless, disempowered rendition of the Virgin Mary. Why male writers? Primarily, male writers and publishers in both countries held a great amount of power in the literary world from 1850-1900, so they would have had a great deal of influence on the reading public. Also, I purposely selected male writers because, like Claire Colebrook, I wanted to write *through* "the voice of the male fantasy, exposing it as fantasy, and thereby create the feminine speaking position as that which relates to, plays with, and differs from the masculine other" (205).

This exploration of the Protestant Madonna reinforces the research that has been done in the past ten years in areas of theology, media images, and literature in the nineteenth century. Jenny Franchot's *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with*

Catholicism (1994) impressively details how Catholicism affected nineteenth-century American culture, ideas, and literature. John Gatta's work *The American Madonna* (1998) looks at the image of the Madonna in the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Adams, and Harold Frederic. *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Great Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers* (1998), edited by Julie Melnyk, offers a collection of essays that illustrate the variety of religious writing by nineteenth-century women in the areas of nonfiction prose, the novel, letters, social reform, mysticism and Eastern religion. And VanEsveld Adam's *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Works of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller and George Eliot* (2001), in which Adams thoroughly analyzes the influence of the Madonna on these nineteenth-century writers and argues that they established a type of essentialist feminism that expressed sexual equality and difference.

Other scholars have contributed notably to this field. Although an older work than the previously mentioned ones, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (1985) by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg is still an extremely useful book in interpreting religious and social trends in nineteenth-century America. Martha Banta's *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in American Culture* (1987) and *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (2003) are indispensable tools, giving invaluable insight into the images of women in literature, art, and popular culture in nineteenth-century America. I also found useful Sophia Andres's recent *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Gender Boundaries* (2005), especially her discussion of why artwork was so important to the Victorians. Two other texts, Susan Casteras's *Images of Victorian Womanhood in*

English Art (1987) and Colleen MacDannell's *Material Christianity* (1995), are fascinating studies into visual and commercial depictions of women and religion—especially in establishing how those images were "sold" to the public. Penny Howell Jolly's forthcoming article on art and the Magdalene is helpful in explaining the relationship of the Virgin Mary and Magdalene iconography of the medieval times, as well as providing bibliographic sources. Finally, *A Feminist Companion to Mariology* (2005), by Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins, presents various historical and critical essays on the study of Mary--essays which were especially helpful in delineating the role of the Virgin Mary through the ages as a spiritual and cultural figure.

To begin to see the way that Protestant male writers embraced the Madonna and Catholic doctrine in the nineteenth century, we need only to look at the Protestant Henry James in the earlier mentioned passage since he uses the word "ineffable" in describing his Madonna, the word the Catholic church uses both in the title of the Immaculate Conception dogma (*Ineffabilis*) and to describe God in the first sentence of the definition. While this term is not used to describe Mary explicitly, meant instead to modify God, the use of such a specialized word strongly suggests that James may have been familiar with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Indeed, James' familiarity with the dogma becomes quite apparent in *The American*, which was written at about the same time. As the novel opens, the American protagonist Christopher Newman is staring at the *Immaculate Conception* portrait by seventeenth-century painter Murillo. Newman's whole goal in the novel is to marry an unobtainable woman, who remains a modern version of the Immaculate Conception by joining a nunnery after her family has rejected Newman. In *The Ambassadors* (1903), one of

James' "Master" novels, he is still preoccupied with the idea of the Virgin, but by the time he writes this work, his philosophy of the ideal woman has markedly changed. In addition to James, two other American writers who reference the Virgin Mary in important ways include Mark Twain and Henry Adams, the latter of whom spends a major portion of *The Education of Henry Adams* contrasting the powerless "American Virgin" to the image of the thirteenth-century Virgin Mary

As we will see, British male writers were also equally interested in the Virgin Mary. By the early 1850s, Charles Dickens demonstrated a pronounced interest in the Virgin Mary through his depictions of Agnes Wickfield in *David Copperfield* and Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*. In these novels, Dickens clearly wants his readers to associate these particular two female characters with Marian purity since even their names hint at innocence. Agnes means "Lamb of God," and Esther is an Old Testament biblical character who, according to Victorian typology, prefigures Mary of the New Testament. Moreover, Dickens, the world-traveller, was probably also aware that the book of Esther in the Catholic Bible contains the verse that refers to Mary's "Exemption" from original sin.[3] Further, as *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* unfold, Agnes and Esther continue to exhibit the Marian qualities of humility, purity, and obedience, traits which were compatible Victorian feminine ideals. Unfortunately, power and autonomy are not among the traits Dickens gives his Madonnas. The powerful Virgin Mary made the Victorians uneasy; as Carol Marie Engelhardt notes: "The Virgin

---

[3] Esther 15:13 states "this law was not made for thee, but for all others," proclaiming Mary's exemption from original sin (*Oxford Study Bible*). This chapter is found in Bibles that contain the Apocrypha.

Mary was understood by Catholics and Protestants alike as a powerful figure, whereas the Angel in the House, for all the influence that was attributed to her, embodied a limited view of female capability" ("The Paradigmatic"163). Indeed, Dickens limits the power of Agnes and Esther by making them solely domestic goddesses, and he carefully describes women directly linked to the Virgin Mary as being flighty and/or somewhat suspect. In *Bleak House*, Dickens describes Hortense, who is French and possibly Catholic, as an untrustworthy "outsider." Also, according to Dickens, people associated with "Catholic" institutions should be mocked or villainized as well. For example, Dickens's honey-tongued Esther Summerson disparages the charitable work of the "Sisterhood of the Medieval Marys" in chapter eight of *Bleak House.* Obviously, Dickens disapproves of Anglican Sisterhoods and uses this opportunity to belittle their social action. Ultimately, Dickens's pattern of sanctification of the Protestant Virgin Mary plays out in the familiar form of the "pure" heroine who is obedient, domestic, pious, limited in her power but, certainly, not Catholic. While Dickens was an accomplished writer and storyteller, his focus on the "pure" Madonnas sets up a precedent for women to strive for unrealistic standards of perfect behavior, while at the same inviting sexual and denigrating male "inside" jokes about such standards.

Many women objected to such characterizations and envisioned more empowered futures for themselves. The label of New Woman was applied to those who sought higher education, autonomy, and careers. The New Woman, however, was no match for the popular Protestant Madonna, an image reinforced by culture, religion, and the media. In fact, The New Women were often discredited in popular magazines like *Punch,* as Beverly Taylor writes: "Late in the century, linking women's intellectual

aspirations to predatory sexuality increasingly became the strategy of trivializing cartoons" . . . (130). Such cartoons shamed women on two levels, for being educated and for being sexual. Medical texts also warned women that too much education would affect their reproductive abilities. In the 1867 *Principles of Biology*, Herbert Spenser remarks, "absolute or relative infertility is generally produced in women by mental labour carried to excess" (485-6). Moreover, in 1868, the medical journal *Lancet* states, "[A]ny woman who is logical, philosophical, [or] scientific departs from the normal woman in her physical as well as her mental characteristics" (vol. 2, 321). Given these cultural pressures, it is not surprising that the image of the passive, "pure," sentimental Madonna persisted.

Dickens led the way in writing about this particular type of Madonna, but others soon followed. In this project I will also focus on Marian images found in the works of Wilkie Collins, Charles Kingsley, Robert Browning, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Sometimes these authors vilify Mary through satire, as in the case of Swinburne, who discredits women's sexuality through poems such as "Dolores." Some of the other authors, like Kingsley, are openly hostile toward "Mariolatry." For the most part, the writers were quite serious about generating profit from their sentimental Madonnas and, as we will see, not just any Madonna, but Madonnas linked to the Immaculate Conception.

Unfortunately, the ideas associated with Mary's Immaculate Conception, which the male writers referred to directly or indirectly, were often misunderstood by many Protestants and those outside the Catholic Church (just as they still are today). As I mentioned earlier, the belief that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin had

been held by many Catholics for centuries. However, once the definition became a significant topic of public discourse in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the definition took on different shades of meanings to Protestant interpreters, who often associated the term the Immaculate Conception with the virgin birth of Jesus. This association was natural given that conception is a part of the birth process and "immaculate" implies that something is scrupulously clean, untouched, or virginal. At the most basic level, here is how the reasoning normally went: Since Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, the process was clean or immaculate (Mary's virginity was proof of this), and Jesus was the outcome of the conception. Also, to a lesser degree, since Christianity teaches that God and Jesus are sinless, perhaps Protestants also associated the word Immaculate with Jesus' birth.

Another area of confusion may have arisen from the phrase which describes the Virgin Mary as "free from the stain of sin." Since Protestants only thought of Jesus as sinless, they might have concluded that the "stain of sin" must mean "sexual sin," since a woman leaves a stain when she first has sex, and, as Henry Adams points out, everyone "knew that sex was sin" (*The Education* 1070). The false syllogism that might result from such thinking is "Mary was sinless, sex is sin, Mary never had sex." Here, the second premise is invalid because married sex is usually not considered sinful. Nevertheless, if a woman strongly identified with Mary, she might have believed that even sex in marriage was sinful or, at least, not the highest form of holiness.

Similar problems with language and sex might have also occurred in conjunction with the term Immaculate Conception—*even for those who understood that the terms referred to Mary*. Here is one more related example of such thinking: "Immaculate means

something is pure or 'not dirty'; something 'dirty" is sex'; a pure woman does not have sex." The second premise is invalid here because something "dirty" may not be sex at all, again, since married sex is generally not considered something "dirty." Also, the third premise is valid only if describing the Virgin Mary (at least the Catholic Virgin Mary who was Ever-Virgin) because no one is "pure" or sinless. Such reasoning, no doubt, led to unhealthy obsessions over women's bodies as both genders fixated on the importance of a woman's purity.

Understanding the idea of the Immaculate Conception was just one problem associated with the great influx of Catholics into England. By the 1850s close to a million Catholics lived in England (Paz 51). From 1845-1850, a large number of Irish and European Catholic people immigrated to Great Britain, in part due to the Irish famine but also to find work. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the staunchly independent English, threatened by the revolutions involving Italy and France, expressed hostility towards Catholicism. Protestants feared that the Pope would take over the British government and convert them to Catholicism, and, in the meantime, Catholics would take over their jobs (ideas which I detail later in this chapter). Such fears have predictable outcomes. Sociologists Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have found that when elite or high cultures want to expel or repulse a marginal culture, a new dynamic is set up in the form of the low-Other:

> The low-Other is a symbolic and cultural construct, involving the production of of a hierarchical order. Something is designated as base, gross, freakish, marginal, pushed down into a "low" place and pushed away as "Other." The result is normalizing and the elevation of whatever "it" is not.

> Powerful social conflicts are taken up in such representational practices, and often constructions of the low-Other are mobilized around gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and so on. Paradoxically, then[,] what is socially "peripheral" often assumes a symbolically central position. (Schulze, White, and Brown 16)

For instance, in the nineteenth century, the Catholic immigrant would have been a typical low-Other. We see a mild example of this "Othering" in Louisa May Alcott's book *Little Women* when the servant Esther gives Amy a rosary to pray for the dying Beth, and Amy finds solace in a portrait of the Madonna (chapter 19). Amy could safely pray to the Virgin Mary because Esther is the one who really believes in the power of the Virgin, and a servant could be humored by a child. As I mentioned before, however, this is a mild case of "Othering," but in the case of those who hated Catholics, according to Stallybrass and White, the more vociferous the anti-Catholics became, the greater their psychological dependence upon them: "The result [of low-Other hatred] is a mobile conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level" (Schulze et al 16). While one may argue that Stallybrass and White were not writing about the nineteenth century, a similar dynamic was also noted by those living in the nineteenth century. Long before these contemporary researchers developed their theories, nineteenth-century medical doctor David Reese attempted to define this idea in what he called the "attraction of the repulsion" (Franchot 216) in order to explain the ways that Protestants vilified and sanctified Catholicism as "other" (Franchot 199).

Women also assumed a type of low-Other position in the tumultuous religious hierarchy of the nineteenth century. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* notes that prior to this century, men and women were categorized by a class system which, while still subordinating women to men within their class, gave higher-class women power over lower-class men. This hierarchy, however, changed in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Smith-Rosenberg writes of the irony that women were doubly oppressed in a century full of rhetoric about freedom and equality: "As egalitarian rhetoric came increasingly to characterize the political world and educational principles of this era of the Common Man, women were transferred into inferiors not only of same class men, but of all white men" (159). This oppression was rooted in anxieties over the cultural shifts in the economy, science, and politics, which were then manifested in widespread panic in the religious world as people began to question the authority of the traditional church and "denigrated religious ritual" (Smith-Rosenberg 141).

This type of denigration of women was not as evident in the early part of the nineteenth-century. In both England and the United States, a Second Great Awakening took place at the beginning of the century, and sometimes this Great Awakening took on radical forms. In the United States, Smith-Rosenberg writes of how the eighteenth-century Congregationalist ideas of an all-powerful Father-God were challenged and "God became a loving brother—indeed a living and concerned Mother" (142). Further, during this time, women took more leadership roles in utopian societies such as in Brook Farm and others. In fact, because of the shake-up in the religious world, a number of egalitarian utopian sects with females as the spiritual leaders sprang up in Britain and the

United States: The Shakers, the Universal Friends, The Christian Scientists, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the Holiness churches. These new sects emphasized the new world order of Millennialism, a "repudiation of the nuclear bourgeois family," and laissez-faire capitalism (Smith-Rosenberg 141). Also, some of the new sects also worshipped the Woman Clothed in the Sun (who had been equated to Mary in other centuries) as the Mother of Wisdom while also still worshipping the male figure of the Father of Power. The interest in millennial theology gave women new opportunity to reinvent their lives. Robert Kachur remarks that in England, several women found expression in writing devotional texts on the Apocalypse [between 1845-1900]. He writes that these "women used apocalyptic allegory to envision new possibilities for themselves . . . . In addition to the freeplay of meaning afforded by its allegory, the Apocalypse provided women writers with a provocative glimpse of the utopic afterlife that loomed . . . large in the Victorian imagination" (6).

At first, the male religious rebels sought out women who could help them with their causes. Smith-Rosenberg argues that "women responded to the invitation with enthusiasm. Using religion to develop extra-domestic roles, they created powerful local and nation-wide single-sex organizations expressive of women's particular angers, anxieties, and demands" (142). VanEsveld Adams and others have noted the autonomy and freedom of these organizations (31), while Hilda Graef states in *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* that many of these newly created female religious orders were largely dedicated to the Virgin Mary (147).

Nevertheless, feminine freedom and leadership would not ultimately be tolerated by a largely paternalistic religious system, which slowly took away women's religious and

personal freedoms. Dorothy Mermin states in *Godiva's Ride* that by mid-century in Great Britain "[i]n most official ways the ferment of [religious] activity excluded women" (107). In a similar vein, Smith-Rosenberg writes,

> as religious leaders had used women's activism and public presence [in early nineteenth-century America] to symbolize their male revolt against an older Congregationalist world order, and the experience of a new and changing social order, women's silence became equally symbolic to male religious leaders who sought to restore order and ritual to the social and religious world. By the 1840's the Victorian woman, economically impotent and religiously demure, has emerged as the symbol and personification of male bourgeois hegemony. (144)

For those women described above who remained in more traditional religious roles, the Protestant Virgin Mary or the Catholic Virgin Mary (or a nonpartisan combination of the two) offered women the feminine archetype that they needed in their faith to cope with a world full of uncertainty. Moreover, it offered them a weak form of autonomy. As Smith-Rosenberg notes, "Pietism and ecstatic religion offered women one escape from this new definition of female inferiority, especially since religion posited a cosmological system that could still challenge the authority of science" (159).

Mermin, in turn, notes that while men (such as Tennyson and Arnold) were free to express their doubt about religious faith, women poets "rarely dealt with religious doubt at all [since] women could not afford to question the faith that gave them poetic authority" (115). Religiosity for women was encouraged, but only if women expressed their faith in a non-threatening way, and, most importantly, if they confined their religious activities to instructing children in the home (Casteras, *Images* 56). The Virgin

Mary proved to be a compatible symbol for the Victorian world of separate spheres for men and women, as middle-class men went off to work and women managed the home, since Mary herself had been a wife and mother. Moreover, the Mary of the Immaculate Conception fit in well with the Cult of True Womanhood perpetuated by preachers, teachers, and *Godey's Lady's Book* for women because they all supported the same values: purity, piety, domesticity and obedience. Even those women who worked in factories wished to identify with the "purity" standard of the late nineteenth-century middle-class "lady" as Michael Denning has pointed out in *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (191).

This "purity" standard for the "good girl" goes beyond a desire for religious piety. However, religious power, as we all know and as Marx has made famous, is often linked to economic manipulation and power. As Susan Casteras writes, "A bastard child or an adulterous wife could be catastrophic, and as one modern scholar has pointed out, 'The middle-class capitalist required the legitimacy of all his children not only to protect his possession from being enjoyed by the offspring of other men but to ensure the loyalty of his sons who might be business partners, and of his daughters who might be essential in marriage alliances'" (*Images* 32). Purity legitimized inheritors of patriarchal industry and profits. Therefore, male leaders had particularly strong motivations to support a feminized ideal that encouraged women to remain in the home as faithful wives and dutiful mothers.

Whatever the reasons, Mary seemed to have a galvanizing effect in establishing codified roles for women. Colleen MacDannell notes the following in *Material Christianity*:

> Barbara Corrado Pope postulates that 19th century secularism forced the Catholic hierarchy to identify with Mary's purity and power . . . . By ignoring her [Mary's] role as Queen of heaven, Victorian Protestants could easily adopt the biblical Mary who dutifully bore and reared the divine child into the cult of True Womanhood. Men and women were equally attracted to Mary's nonjudgmental and accepting nature. Protestants and Catholics both used Mary to articulate their belief in a central catholic world established for Catholics and Protestants. (137)

As MacDannell points out, as the Catholic hierarchy brought increased attention to Mary's purity and power through the definition of 1854, Victorian Protestants found the emerging vision of Mary appealing--but only as far as they could use her to reinforce women's roles as humble, obedient helpmates to their husbands. Mary's role as *Theotokos* (God Bearer), which has always been an important tenet of the Catholic faith, was ignored by Protestants who preferred a religion which promoted heroic male figures of the Bible. By diminishing Mary's power, both Protestant men and women could then enter into dialogue with Catholics about the appeal of a compassionate Mother who desired peace for all of her children.

But the figure of Mary could help only in limited ways to unify Protestants and Catholics in the face of the 1850's political upheavals and reforms accompanying the religious turmoil of the nineteenth century. Although the British Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 granted civil rights to Catholics, by mid-century, the Protestants joined together against what they saw as the "Papal Aggression"—the fear that the Roman Catholic Church sought to proselytize Protestants on foreign soil. These protests

worsened after 1850 when the Roman Catholic Church in a papal Bull appointed Cardinal Wiseman the first Bishop of Westminster and established twelve Bishoprics all over England. The newspapers decried this movement, and even politicians interpreted this act as something seditious to the British Empire because Catholics would be swearing their allegiance to Rome, not to the Queen. But not all the religio-political leaders were anti-Catholic or anti-Mary. For example, the sometimes loved and sometimes hated John Henry Newman, the very public leader of the Oxford Movement, was a great devotee of the Virgin Mary and preached the dogma of the Immaculate Conception five years prior to its publication (Graef 108). In fact, when he converted to Catholicism in 1848, he preached his first sermon on the Virgin Mary (Graef 127). In addition, Coventry Patmore, best known for his poem "The Angel in the House," was an Anglican who converted to Catholicism in 1864—and his poem written over eight years (1854-1862) enjoyed great commercial success. Some critics have argued, too, that "The Angel" of his poem is a Virgin Mary type since the angel of the poem is exceptionally good, a good mother and domestic (Engelhardt 159).

Nevertheless, in spite of the popularity and influences of such figures of Newman and Patmore, many Protestants were anti-Catholic and hostile toward "Mariolatry." Throughout the 1850s, many Protestants, usually of the working class (Paz 32), gathered at the Orange Lodges (named after William III of Orange) where they would listen to former Catholics talk about the licentious life of priests and the secret sexual practices that went on in convents and monasteries. Riots between Catholics and Protestants broke out in places like Birkenhead (1850), Stockport (1852), Wolverhampton (1858), and Hyde Park (1862) as a result of this. While these riots often primarily involved the

working-class, the more aristocratic and middle-class Tories also patronized anti-Catholic Anglican groups; notably, the Protestant Reformation Society and the Protestant Association. Splinter groups grew out of these Protestant organizations, which indicated the widespread anti-Catholicism of the time. Protestants grew more suspicious of their Catholic neighbors, whom they viewed as "worshipping icons" and participating in the "suspect" rite of confession, which particularly troubled Protestants, especially when it came to women confessing their sins to someone other than their husbands. However, as Stallybrass and White pointed out in the earlier discussion of the low-Other, fear and desire combine in this lurid interest, and as a result, the Catholic Other becomes a symbol of central importance, and even the high aesthetic writers like Dickens and Collins created Madonna-like characters who were a surprising mixture of eroticism and purity. Robert Polhemus in *Erotic Faith* states that "the eroticized Virgin can stand symbolically for the whole body of nineteenth-century fiction that conflates sexual and religious desire" (22).

The eroticized virgin titillated the imagination of the people in the United States as well. Convent education for young women in the early nineteenth century was of particular concern to Protestant Americans. In 1834, nativists who thought that young women were being kidnapped and being held against their wills burned the Ursuline convent in Boston. Shortly after the burning of the Ursuline convent, two sensationalized accounts of convent life were publicized: Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu* (1836) and Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* (1835).

While these particular displays of bigotry actually caused liberal Protestants to sympathize with the Catholics, American Protestants continued to be wary of Catholic

influences. As Franchot points out in *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*, the nativist movement had its greatest strength in the 1830s and then later in the 1850s after the Irish famine sent many Catholics into the United States. Franchot also notes that in the 1850s the "Catholic enemy" became complicated, and, in fact, Catholicism, then, sometimes became associated with the slavery issue: "New England nativists allied themselves with antislavery forces against Irish Catholic immigrants while siding with southern planters who attacked German Catholic immigrants in Kentucky. Such contradictory uses of anti-Catholicism illustrate its flexibility to antebellum politics and render problematic any one formulation of its position in the slavery crisis" (103).

But nativists were not the only ones who sometimes equated Catholicism with slave-owners. Northern liberals also made this association as is evidenced by Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-known work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Franchot remarks that in the novel, while the slave-holding St. Clare household is Catholic, Eva is made acceptable by the fact that she attends Methodist worship with the slave Tom (103). In addition, when Victorians read the novel, they would have associated Eva with the Virgin Mary. According to George Landow (*Victorian Types and Shadows*), when Victorians identified an Old Testament type in literature such as Eve, they would associate it with its New Testament redemptive type, Mary. The angel-like Eva clearly embodies the Madonna's purity, humility and piety, and even Eva's name is a symbolic palindrome on the "Ave" in the "Ave Maria" derived from the biblical passage in which the angel addresses Mary (Luke 1: 28).

In addition, because of Eva's adult-like wisdom and untimely death, she is emblematic of the prototype of the Madonna-like, desirable child-woman of Victorian painting and literature that mixed eroticism, purity, and pathos. As Casteras notes, "The lines of sexuality, both in real life and art, blurred between the child-woman and the woman-child. What was womanly about the girl thus had visual and sexual appeal, and conversely, what was girlish about the woman was both socially encouraged and enticing, especially her purity, vulnerability, ingenuousness, and devotion" (40). The elevation of the sexually provocative child is not surprising considering that females were legally adults at the age of twelve and able then to wed during much of the Victorian Age.

All of these factors played into the enormous popularity of the Eva character. Because of her and because of the interest in the slavery issue, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became one of the all-time best sellers of the nineteenth century in Great Britain and the United States. Richard Altick says that the sale of the book was a dramatic illustration of "the place of the American book in English life," and book sales in England and the United States totaled over 1.5 million copies in one year (*English* 300). This favorable acceptance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also brought favorable press to the Catholic faith since Eva was identified as a Catholic figure as was mentioned earlier (Franchot 103).

The press, in turn, did a great deal in promoting interest in the Virgin Mary, although it also had its share in contributing to the anti-Catholicism of the time. Published accounts of Mary sightings in LàSalette (1846) and Lourdes (1858) were mentioned in the popular press such as *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1854), *Household*

Words (1858), *Notes and Queries* (1864), *All the Year Around* (1877), *Cornhill* (1884), *The London Times* and others. Newspapers were much more readily available to the reading public after 1850 as well, which would give its interested readers ready access to a world outside their own. This was particularly true in England when the newspaper tax was repealed in 1855 and newspapers were published for the first time in Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, and other cites (Altick, *English* 356). According to Altick, Wilkie Collins in 1858 estimated over 3,000,000 readers of weekly newspapers and cheap miscellanies (357). In addition, Altick says that "of the 630 current magazines in 1873, 253 were published under religious auspices " and that "eight leading cheap religious weeklies circulated in the aggregate between 1,250,000 and 1,500,000 copies a week" (357). Also, texts that had never before been available to the reading public were now accessible. For example, people could read the writings of the fourteenth–century mystic Julian of Norwich who wrote of her visions of Mary (VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady* 224). Moreover, John Henry Newman based some of his theology of Mary on writings from the Church Fathers, who modeled Mary on the fourth-century church's consecrated virgin and depicted her as an extreme ascetic: she was too modest to open her eyes when she undressed, she ate sparingly since she was not interested in sensual pleasures, and she lived alone in her house served by her mother (VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady* 96 and Graef l: 50-51). This version of Mary strongly appealed to many Victorians.

Another factor that contributed to the interest in Mary was the increase in international travel as a result of ocean liners and improved railroad systems. Travelers like Henry James could see first-hand the power of the Virgin Mary through artwork found in

museums in cities such as Paris and Rome. According to MacDannell, in 1852, the Louvre Museum bought Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* painting at the highest price that had ever been paid for a painting. This purchase made the news, and according to MacDannell, prints of the painting were reproduced and became "standard decoration in both Protestant and Catholic households" (59). Moreover, as Franchot has noted, travelers often ended up bringing home a piece of "Catholic" art to remind them of their visit—and sometimes that work would be a painting by Raphael who, Franchot writes, "was universally admired by Americans for his spirituality, and in particular, his domestic, nurturing Madonnas. Raphael functioned as an imaginative aid to the beleaguered Protestant spectator, an excerpt as it were from the Catholic 'whole' that could be imported for domestic consumption" (235). She goes on to say that the "Protestant tourist who returned home to hang their Raphael engraving could observe or evade at will its absorbing view of spirit and flesh converging, its manipulation by new processes of mass production minimizing an otherwise objectionable iconographic power" (236). Moreover, in addition to the availability of portraits of the Madonna, any visitor to Rome after 1857 would have seen a newly constructed statue erected in the Spanish Square dedicated to Mary as the Immaculate Conception, and visitors to Rome arriving on December 8 would witness the Pope placing a garland on her head to commemorate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The Pre-Raphaelites also contributed in important ways to the art depicting the Virgin Mary. The Madonna was a popular subject for painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His painting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) was what he called "an example of the highest type of female excellence" (Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women* 31). This painting

was well-received and shown at the free exhibition in 1851 in London where it would have been seen by thousands of people. Along with the painting, Rossetti inscribed two sonnets in honor of Mary to accompany it in the exhibition catalogue. Rossetti also produced another painting in 1850--*Ecce Ancilla Domini*--in which the Madonna is depicted in all white to indicate her purity. What is interesting about this painting is that it is more sexual than the earlier one, depicting a young, red-haired Mary hovering on a bed while being confronted by the angel Gabriel who is holding out a lily to her (or pointing it at her womb). This painting was to be a part of a triptych Rossetti had envisioned after returning from a trip to the continent, and his model for the painting was his sister, Christina Rossetti. John Everett Millais also contributed to the interest in Mary with his painting of *Jesus in the House of His Parents* (1849) wherein a kneeling Mary examines a nail wound in the young Jesus' hand—which wounding foreshadows Christ's death. In "Framed and Hung: Collins and the Economic Beauty of the Manly Artist," Dennis Denisoff comments that Charles Dickens, in his famous anti-Pre-Raphaelite article "Old Lamps for New Ones" (1850), expressed outrage over the painting. Denisoff writes, "Dickens finds Mary so hideous as she kneels between 'Two almost naked carpenters'" (39). Undoubtedly, this critique added to public desire to see the painting.

Clearly the interest in Mary was more than a passing phase after 1850, as this extensive history indicates. After the definition's release, even Protestants could feel the pull of a perfect Mother who could fulfill all of their needs during a turbulent age. Yet, at the same time, Protestants had also been conditioned to hate "Mariolatry." Therefore, to resolve these tensions, the Protestant Madonna was born. If we accept the Lacanian premise that each gender defines the world in terms of its opposite gender, we

can understand why the male-projected image of the Protestant Madonna spread widely. First, males were in control of the culture, so, not surprisingly, their definitions of the female ideal would carry the most weight. Second, the idea of an ideal mother appeals to nearly everyone. The task for the writers, then, was to interpret the Protestant Madonna in ways that would make her winsome, somewhat "exotic," and, at the same time, non-threatening to the Victorian reading audience. Accordingly, the writers all had a different way of constructing their particular Madonnas.

In the following analysis, the development of the Victorian Protestant Madonna will be detailed in four chapters. The first chapter will cover the popular fiction writers: Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*), Wilkie Collins (*Hide and Seek*, *The Woman in White*), and Charles Kingsley (*Westward Ho! Hypatia*). The second chapter includes the poets Algernon Charles Swinburne and Robert Browning as I attempt to show how these two popular poets tied their Madonnas into popular cultural ideas of the sacred and profane. The third chapter looks at the influences of art on images of the Madonna in literature and art as seen through the lens of the art and social critic John Ruskin ("Of Queens' Gardens") and the Pre-Raphaelite artists. The fourth chapter then turns to the writers of the United States with Mark Twain (*Innocents Abroad)*, Henry James ("The Madonna of the Future," *The American*, *The Bostonians*, and *The Ambassadors*), and Henry Adams (*Mont St. Michel and Chartres*, and "The Virgin and the Dynamo" from *The Education of Henry Adams).*

As we will see, the Protestant Madonna of the nineteenth century became an obsolete figure over time. Thorstein Veblen has noted how society discards types once they lose their utility. This was certainly true of the Virgin Mary. In *Revolution and Repetition:*

Marx, Hugo, and Balzac, Jeffrey Mehlman shows the way that history and literature demonstrate a cycle of failed revolutions. This argument is largely based on an idea from Hegel that Marx refines. As Mehlman quotes Marx, "'Hegel remarks somewhere that all great events and historical personages occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: The first time as tragedy, the second as farce'" (9). In this case, the first instance of Mary being used to unite culture occurred in the twelfth century as Marina Warner has observed. This revolution ultimately resulted in tragedy as the reformers did away with Mary's power and, in fact, burned powerful women at the stake as witches (VanEsveld Adams, "The Madonna" 71). The second time that culture tried to use Mary to unite culture, she was removed from her former positions as *Theotokos* (God Bearer) or *Regina Caeli* (Queen of Heaven) to the farcical late nineteenth–century image of a sentimental, sexless, domestic Virgin Mary whom Henry Adams describes in 1907:

> When she [Mary] was a true force, she was ignorant of fig leaves, but the monthly-magazine-made American female had not a feature that would be recognized by Adam. . . . In any previous stage [of history] sex was strength . . . . An American Virgin would never command; an American Venus would never dare exist . . . . (1070)

Adams describes the gradual attitude shift of the late nineteenth-century in the way people interpreted "Virgins" after the publication of the Immaculate Conception definition in 1854. Popular culture began to associate the dogma's widely printed phrase "spotless and without stain" with sexual purity, which was only an implied part of the definition in describing Mary's sinless nature. When Mary became more laughable than useful, culture discarded her for other types that served popular culture more fully,

although Leslie Fiedler argues that her impact lasted well into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, for the time being, Woman as War Heroine was more useful to the early twentieth-century culture as the country geared up for war. And the New Woman was already usefully employed in factories and in businesses as men enlisted for World War I.

Most will agree, however, that no one wants to be considered a stereotype. Healthy people seek, among other things, autonomy, individuality, positive spiritual experiences, and creative work. I hope that this study may serve as a warning for future generations to be aware of how religion and popular culture become so conflated that the educational, professional, and personal goals that people value for themselves can be obscured by an artificially constructed image.

Chapter 1: In the Beginning Was the Image and the Word: Dickens, Collins, and Kingsley

On May 20, 1852, the London *Times* reported a three-day sale on Paris's Rue Sentier of the renowned Marshall Soult's exquisite collection of 157 paintings.[1] Although throughout the entire ten days of the exhibit, the gallery was packed with crowds eager to view the paintings, the first day of the auction generated particular interest and excitement. Bartolomé Estéban Murillo's masterpiece *The Immaculate Conception*--also known as *The Conception of the Virgin*--was to be sold during the first hour of the opening day.[2]

The doors opened at 1:30 in the afternoon, and within five minutes the rooms were so crowded with people jostling for seats that guards were summoned to restore order. By 2:00, the auction was underway, proceeding uneventfully until about 3:00, when the order of the day was called, and the four greatest pictures of the collection were presented for sale. First was Murillo's massive eight and a half feet in height by three feet wide *Immaculate Conception*. A reporter for the *Times* describes the painting:

> This almost divine picture represents the Virgin in the act of being carried up to heaven. Her golden hair floats on her shoulders, and her white robe gently swells in the breeze, a mantle of blue at the same time falling from her shoulders. Groups of angels and cherubim of extraordinary beauty sport around her in the most evident admiration, those below thronging closely together, while those above open their

---

[1] Field Marshall Soult was Napolean's general who was defeated by the Duke of Wellington at Toulouse (1769 -1851).

[2] Bartolome Esteban Murillo, Spanish painter 1617-1682.

> ranks, as if not in any way to conceal the glory shed around the ascending Virgin. All the writers of the Spanish school of painting agree in declaring this to be the *chef d'oeuvre* of Murillo; and never, perhaps, did that great master attain to such sublimity of expression and such magnificent colouring. ("Soult" 8)

What followed reflected the public's recognition of the value of this great work: bidding opened at 150,000 francs (around thirty thousand dollars) and soon surpassed 400,000. As agents of Spain's Queen began bidding against those of Russia's Czar, the price was driven above 530,000. When, finally, a gentleman directly in front of the auctioneer placed the winning bid of 586,000 francs (over one hundred thousand dollars), the crowd broke into applause. But the *Time's* reporter notes, "this applause became absolute enthusiasm when it was ascertained that the purchaser was Niuewekerke, the director of the national museums [director of the Louvre]. The crowd rushed forward, shaking him by the hand and cheering most heartily." The purchase price of the painting was the highest that the Louvre had ever paid (McDannell 59).

Additional Murillos were sold over the next three days, at respectable prices of 60,000 francs, but the *Immaculate Conception* remained the highlight of the three-day sale. What seems worth noting about this particular painting is that Mary is depicted as a fully grown woman, rather than as an infant, even though the Immaculate Conception refers to *her* conception and birth according to the dogma propounded in 1854 which states that Mary was born without spot or stain. A sort of slippage in language and shift of meaning of the definition of the Immaculate Conception seems to have occurred at this

point, expressed in and perhaps amplified by this eroticized image. That is, popular notions of the Immaculate Conception seem to have been influenced more by questions about Mary's sexual status—Virgin, Mother, Sex Symbol—than the dogma that she was conceived sinlessly and thus born without the usual stain of sin.[3] Why were nineteenth-century people so enamored with paintings of the Immaculate Conception by a seventeenth-century artist that most people do not even remember today? And what does this painting have to do with writers such as Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Kingsley?

For clarification, one might cast an eye over events that occurred even before the purchase of the painting by the Director of the Louvre. In 1851, Edward Bulwer–Lytton composed a play entitled *Not So Bad as We Seem*, which was performed for Queen Victoria on May 16. Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, John Forester, and other British literary notables acted in this play to help raise money for the Guild of Art and Literature in England which was to "endow 'chairs' outside universities for writers of distinction, who would thereby be financially and critically independent of reviewers and public opinion" (Mitchell 124). The play, a popular romance about politics, love, and power, eventually went on national tour. The tour's success in raising four thousand pounds led to the guild's being incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1854. In the play, Dickens took the role of Lord Wilmot, who was trying to win the hand of the daughter of a wealthy, powerful man, and Wilkie Collins played his assistant, Smart. In a subplot,

[3] This eroticized image of Mary was not unique to the seventeenth century since the Renaissance Madonnas were painted from the likenesses of famous women, in some cases notorious mistresses of famous men and artists such as Raphael.

Wilmot attempts to get a government position for his friend Mr. Hardman (played by John Forster) by bribing the Prime Minister. In the following passage from Act 1, Scene 1 between two characters, Hardman, who is looking to move up in Parliament, is talking with Lord Wilmot (Dickens):

> Hardman: A new picture, my Lord? I'm no very great judge—but it seems to me quite a masterpiece.
>
> Wilmot: I've a passion for art. Sold my stud to buy that picture. [Aside] And please my poor father. 'Tis a Murillo.
>
> Hardman: A Murillo! You know that Walpole, too, has a passion for pictures.—In despair at this moment that he can't find a Murillo to hang up in his Gallery. If ever you want to corrupt the Prime Minister's virtue, you have only got to say, "I've got a Murillo." (Bulwer Lytton 416)

Later in Act IV, Scene 3, Wilmot tells the story of Sir Robert Walpole's delight at receiving the Murillo, and Wilmot wryly comments, "He got the Murillo—Hardman the place. And here stand I, the only man in all England who can boast that he bought the Prime Minister" (Bulwer-Lytton 468). The implications are obvious. Dickens and Collins not only knew of Murillo paintings but also introduced his name to theater audiences throughout England. Bulwer-Lytton may have intended another subtler joke for those who were already familiar with Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* in this play of corruption against purity, the not-so-immaculate bribe set against the Immaculate Conception.

Interest in the Murillo does not stop here. About eight years later, the February 19, 1859, volume of *Household Words* ran a column about Murillo's paintings in an article

by George Thornbury entitled "Murillo and his Picture Children," which describes paintings Thornbury encountered in art galleries, convents, and churches throughout Spain. Thornbury makes it clear that nothing else Murillo had done was as popular as *The Immaculate Conception*, but not without merit. According to what may have been an apparent response to John Ruskin's disdain for Murillo's work (Ruskin is reported to have said of one of the Murillo peasant boy paintings at the Dulwich gallery near London, "Do not call this the painting of nature: it is mere delight in foulness"), Thornbury declares emphatically that "The only excuse for Mr. Ruskin's sneer at the low vice and dusty feet of Murillo's beggar boys, is, that he has never been to Spain and seen any Murillos worth seeing" (274). Thornbury then goes on to explain the excellence of Murillo's best-known work:

> I must not recapitulate all the charms of the picture of San Augustine [,] . . . Saint Joseph, or the Dead Christ, or I shall be thought a greater bore than Schwartzenlicht [an art critic from the National Gallery] who is bound in rule not to admire any painter till he is dead . . . . Else should I like to learnedly inflict on you the beauties of that best *Concepcion* (for Murillo is called par excellence, "the painter of conceptions"); the glory of that blue robe the singularity of the crescent moon the Virgin stands on; the rapture of that burst of saffron sunrise that brings out the pure, pitiful woman, with her arms meekly crossed upon her bosom, and her serene, adoring eyes turned exaltingly heavenward. It is the vision of a child-betrothed, dead, on the eve of marriage. (Thornbury 275)

The significance of this article can be explained in several ways. Thornbury clearly

describes the Madonna of the painting as being child-like, an already popular Victorian quality that will continue to be emphasized by writers such as Dickens and Collins, even as it incorporated suggestions about Mary's pitifulness and the beautiful corpse-like nature of the child/woman. The article also contributed enormously to Murillo's popularity, while the title of the painting no doubt contributed to interest in the Immaculate Conception, an idea which showed up in newspaper articles over 241 times between 1850-1900.[4] But even more strikingly, between 1854-1860, if we keep in mind that the Immaculate Conception definition first became dogma in 1854, 83 articles include that phrase (and six have it in their title). The presence of so many articles with even just the mention of this specific topic illustrates that Catholic dogma and images were very much a part of the Protestant culture—so much so, in fact, that Dickens published an article on Murillo and *The Immaculate Conception* painting in his own *Household Words,* for which journal Collins was also on staff.

The Madonna image, laden with many associations from the continent, Catholicism, and the middle ages, impinged on the Protestant consciousness in mid-century. Nevertheless, many art lovers, such as Dickens and Collins, and, to a lesser extent, Kingsley, found themselves attracted to certain aspects of Mary while denouncing the Catholic Church publicly and privately in favor of a more austere Protestantism. This "new" Mary was more a part of Catholic tradition in thought, art, and dogma as they invoke her with reference to portraits of the Madonna in traditionally viewed "Catholic"

[4] Digital Times Database

artwork (as is defined by the nineteenth-century Protestant fascination with Italian art in works such as Jenny Franchot's *Roads to Rome* 235-236). Alison Byerly in *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth Century Literature* argues that the visual arts were especially important to the realist Victorian literary figures because their allusions provided "an imaginative space where the fictional world and the real world came together" (121). In addition to evoking visual images of Mary, the Victorian novelists also used allusions from such works as Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which the Blessed Virgin Mary played a significant role as a morally and sexually pure, guiding influence. However, in the process of creating a Protestant Madonna, and by not really adopting the Catholic model of Mary, these writers loaded their new personal feminine ideal with a whole series of new but equally demeaning associations.

Admittedly, since the ideals of the cult of true womanhood made popular in the early nineteenth century through magazines and literature—obedience, piety, purity, and domesticity—were already a part of the Protestant Victorian culture during the time that Dickens, Collins, Kingsley and others were writing, one could argue that the Madonna image was already in place by 1850. But what happens from the 1850s until 1910 or so is an increasing tendency to eroticize and, at the same time, to infantilize the figure of the Madonna who had previously commanded great respect from and homage by millions of people. While purity, obedience, piety, and domesticity continue to be associated with Marian-like female characters in literature, she is also encumbered with an odd type of sex appeal that gains strength through forbidden desire to possess that which is

unavailable (a taboo heightened with the advent of the Immaculate Conception definition), pathos (of child-like figures), and the merging of some aspects of Catholic culture into the British culture. What happens in the process, however, is that the literary image of the Madonna weakens as the Virgin Mary's queenship, her exceptional status of being God's mother, and her independence become less important to these writers than a Madonna who is willing to efface her identity and give untiring aid to the male characters of these novels. While it is true that these Madonna characters are often shown to be "exceptions" to the rest of their gender, this quality is sometimes used to cast other female characters in the novels in a negative light, although it is often done for a humorous effect, and to criticize not just women but also social institutions—such as religion and law. Additionally, Marian qualities (of being pure, queenly, an object of veneration) will serve as objects of ridicule for such writers as Kingsley and, occasionally, Collins, as we will see in this chapter. By contrast, George Eliot, who rivaled these male writers in popularity, also included Marian imagery in her work, but she sought to show the *negative* effects of such imagery on women. As noted in the introduction, Kimberly VanEsveld Adams argues that in Eliot's *Middlemarch* the Madonna becomes a limited figure for women (184). And it is this limited figure of the Madonna promoted by such male writers as Dickens, Collins, and Kingsley that will also become a trademark of Victorian novels.

Dickens was the most popular and influential writer of the three. With his novels gaining widespread notice through their serializations, their publication as three-volume novel sets in England and the United States, the Mudie libraries, and his popular

magazine *Household Words*, Dickens became a spokesperson for Victorian England. R.L. Betts in his work *Faith and Doubt* states that Dickens was considered to be a Christian writer by an audience that was greatly influenced by his writing not so much for his mention of any specific doctrine but mainly because his themes encompass the struggle of good and evil (119). In the preface to *The World of Charles Dickens*, Angus Wilson strongly argues that Dickens was a "devout and practicing [sic] Christian, however much sectarians of all generations denominations raised and still raise their eyebrows at his kind of Christianity" and that in Dickens's later novels, "It is essentially a Christian New Testament world with transcendental overtones" (262). Janet Larson in *Dickens and the Broken Scriptures* further adds, that in addition to Wilson, "dozens" of other writers, including Steven Marcus, Harland Nelson, and even Dostoevsky, have described Dickens as a "Simple New Testament Christian" (Larson 12). However, not everyone agrees. Humphrey House in *The Dickens World* writes that Dickens' faith was that of the "practical humanist kind of what is called religious experience, and his work shows no indication of any powerful feeling connected with a genuinely religious subject" (131); furthermore, he argues, "[A] historian could hardly gather from his books that during the years in which they were written the English Church was revolutionized" (111). However, Betts has a different interpretation of the way that Dickens approached religion, noting that "Dickens's influence on theology would have been slight and indirect, of course, but his fiction popularized the changes in religious thought that were coming about" (124). Those changes in religious thought were often wrought through Dickens's use of biblical allusion, as Larson points out: "While rationalistic critics were treating scripture as a book of myths, Dickens was drawing upon some of its stories as

divine fairytales—the Book of Esther on the level of Cinderella" (12). She goes on to argue, "In a climate where the historical facticity of God's Word in all its parts is no longer assured, nor even deemed necessary . . . Biblical character types or paradigmatic plots do not have to be thought historical to have emotional resonance; for Dickens as for Matthew Arnold, such things are part of the 'poetry of religion'" (13). In regard to Larson's use of Arnold's phrase of the "poetry of religion,"[5] the Madonna was also clearly a part of that "poetry" and was thus a perfect addition to Dickens's array of characters that appealed to the public at deep emotional levels. In *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture,* Bram Dijkstra comments, "In the literature of England, the cult of woman as household nun was taken up far and wide, with Dickens doing much of the effective flag waving" (13). While nun and Madonna are not synonymous, Dijkstra nevertheless indicates that the Catholic model of the spiritual, perfect wife had captured the Victorian imagination.

Betts points out that since Dickens seldom "reveals his deepest beliefs in an authorial voice, we have to let his novels speak for him" (119). So, let us examine the novel that Dickens claimed was his favorite—*David Copperfield*, published in 1849-1850 in serialized form. This novel appeared the same year (1850) in which the Roman Catholic Church established Bishoprics in England, much to the chagrin of many Protestants, including Dickens. House comments, "In nothing was Dickens so much of an elementary John Bull as in his hatred of Roman Catholicism" (128). Privately in a letter

[5] In the introduction, I mention that Arnold said that "the strongest of religion today is its unconscious poetry," taken from his Introduction to "The Study of Poetry," 1888.

that he wrote in 1851 to Angela Burdett Coutts, he expresses this disdain for Catholicism in response to the first meeting of the Roman Catholic Defense Association. This controversial group's *raison d' être* was to demand the repeal of the Ecclesiastical Titles Assumption Act that forbade the use of diocesan titles by Catholic Bishops. Dickens writes as follows:

> I feel quite certain that but for the laisser-aller dealing with the Candlestick and Confessional matters, we never should have got to this pass—for the Pope was made, through that medium, to believe that there was a tendency towards him in England which does not exist—and presumed upon it—and went too far to retract. Now, a War between the Roman Catholic Religion—that curse upon the world—and Freedom, is inevitable. And numbers of people of the better order of sense and spirit are so indignant with the Protestant Church for its indolent temporizing and its miserable internal squabbles, that they have lost their natural interest in the struggle. (*Letters* August 22, 1851, 466)

His view that Catholicism is "that curse upon the world" is further demonstrated, as many critics have pointed out, in his *Child's History of England* (1852-54), which work, according to D.G. Paz's *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, is Dickens' "most sustained attack" on Catholicism and "molded the historical consciousness of several generations of young readers" (69). Betts further comments on Dickens's contempt for Catholicism (as well as Evangelicalism):

> He is equally hostile to what he considers the extremes of the other end of the religious spectrum. Evangelicalism was followed in the Victorian period first by the Oxford movement and then by the establishment of the Roman Catholic

> hierarchy in England. Dickens was in favor of Catholic emancipation and in *Barnaby Rudge* showed sympathy for persecuted Catholics, but for Roman Catholicism itself, he had nothing but the contempt of the xenophobic Protestant Englishman. When he visited Italy . . . he found little to admire and considered the liturgy of the Roman Church as mere superstition. He was disappointed in Rome and unmoved by the buildings and paintings he saw. (117)

Ironically, if we look at the Madonna-like character of Agnes Wickfield in *David Copperfield*, we would never dream that Dickens harbored any anti-Catholic sentiment at all.

Agnes is not the first of Dickens's Madonnas—for example, in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), one could argue that Little Nell was a type of Madonna, as perhaps was even Florence of *Dombey and Sons* (1848). However, Agnes appears a fuller, richer allusion to the Virgin Mary. Larson states that Dickens often employs "subtextual" allusion in his work through the use of biblical passages, whole books of the Bible or other popular religious texts, as well as biblical characters. These subtexts are allusive narratives that run parallel to the actual story—for example, themes from *Pilgrim's Progress* thread their way through *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Esther's narrative in *Bleak House* (17). The second type of subtextual allusion in *David Copperfield* works "to provide a medium of interpreting episodes or characters (the Sermon on the Mount for Amy Dorrit); or a biblical book or passage to which sets of allusions in the fiction can act as an analogical matrix for parts of a novel or for wider reaches of the imaginative vision" (17). In the case of *David Copperfield*, Agnes Wickfield, Copperfield's childhood friend and eventual wife, serves as a key Madonna

figure in the novel and represents the higher vision that David strives for, and ends up achieving, by the end of the novel. He says at last, "As you were then, my sister, I have often thought since, you have ever been to me. Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things" (774).

Agnes's name indicates her close association with St. Agnes, patron saint of Virgins. According to legend, St. Agnes was martyred in the fourth century after refusing to marry an undesirable suitor. Like St. Agnes of the legend, Agnes Wickfield refuses to marry the contemptible Uriah Heep. More important to my argument is the idea that Agnes is often portrayed in terms that resonate with the Virgin Mary. Copperfield, comparatively early on in the novel, describes how Agnes has influenced him for good while they were growing up:

> The influence for all good, which she came to exercise over me at a later time, begins already to descend upon my breast. I love little Em'ly, and I don't love Agnes—no, not at all in that way—but I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the coloured window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around. (220)

Copperfield's language makes clear his spiritual love for Agnes. He says that he loves little Em'ly, but that "love" is not the right descriptor for how he feels about Agnes. He seems to imply that veneration might be a more apt term than mere love. But then he takes his description further and says that he thinks of her as someone like a Madonna who is associated with stained glass windows, which were designed to bring actual and

spiritual light to those who viewed them.[6]

In Dickens' travels to Italy and Europe in the years preceding 1850, images of Mary in front of glass or in stained glass may have inspired some of his ideas about Agnes. While Protestant churches would have also had some stained glass windows, the most spectacular ones dedicated to the Virgin Mary (such as Notre Dame) were located in the cathedrals and churches in Florence, Venice, Milan, Rome and Paris, which Dickens mentions in his travel writings such as *Pictures of Italy* and in his correspondence to friends when he was living in Italy. In *Pictures of Italy*, he specifically comments on the painting of the Assumption of the Virgin in Venice in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frarei as well as on paintings by Raphael in the Vatican (Dickens, *Pictures* 11). These experiences no doubt affected his choice of symbols and allusions in his literary works.

Not only does Dickens suggest Agnes's purity by depicting her in the refracted light of stained glass, but Copperfield calls her his "angel" on several occasions—for instance, his "good angel" (342) and "angel face" (771). Like many Protestant writers, in order to avoid a direct Catholic reference, he uses the more acceptable term of angel. However, his Madonna-like character is more Virgin Mary than angel. Besides the obvious association of Agnes with Mary through the familiar image of the stained glass

[6] Besides the many stained glass windows in churches that depict the Virgin Mary, also in many of the old master paintings, Mary is often depicted in the light of stained glass, and, in fact, late gothic artists like Jan van Eyck who were great favorites of the Victorians, often show a ray of light coming in through windows (See Van Eyck's The *Annunciation* and *Madonna in a Church*) to illustrate how the Virgin Mary was impregnated by God while not causing a breaking of the hymen—a metaphor so popular in the middle ages that a song circulated that "light passeth through glass/but the glass will not break." Light has also been used to show the Immaculate Conception of Mary. For example, in an *Hours of the Virgin* (c. 1515), now housed in the Morgain Pierpont library, contains an illustration with a light penetrating the womb of St. Anne, Mary's mother (Warner 242-243). Also see Carol Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 31, 33, 121.

windows, Copperfield says that he is constantly inspired by her, and he also implies that she answers his "entreaties":

> But Agnes was too superior to me in character and purpose, as I know well now, whatever I might know or not know then, to be long in need of any entreaties. The beautiful, calm manner, which makes her so different in my resemblance from everybody else, came back again, as if a cloud had passed from a serene sky. (341)

Later, after Copperfield's "child wife" Dora dies, David turns to Agnes again for consolation, which has been a role for the Virgin Mary over the centuries as she became an ear and a tear for people who brought their "entreaties" and "grievances" to her. In the following passage, we see David's profound gratitude to Agnes for her comfort during his time of grief as well as for being a faithful friend throughout his life:

> She was so true, she was so beautiful, she was so good,--I owed her so much gratitude, she was so dear to me, that I could find no utterance for what I felt. I tried to bless her, tried to thank her, tried to tell her . . . what an influence she had upon me; but all my efforts were in vain. My love and joy were dumb. With her own sweet tranquility, she calmed my agitation. (771)

Agnes and Copperfield finally marry, so the Virgin Mary allusion must take a different turn at the end of the novel. But, unlike Dora, for whom David feels passion, Agnes's love is of a different quality. Indeed, Tim Dolin and Lucy Dougan argue that in *David Copperfield*, sexual passion seems "disruptive and threatening" (17). Similarly, Michael Slater comments, "All the intensity in the novel's last chapter . . . is directed not towards

the presentation of Agnes as wife and mother . . . but towards her as a sort of continuing spiritual presence . . . (101). In the novel, then, it is possible for Agnes to represent both Virgin and married woman. Betts writes, "In Dickens we encounter death and marriage frequently and they are invariably given a religious dimension" (117), even though Larson points out, with allusion always comes some "dissonance into literary work because the original text is never completely assimilated into its new environment" (17). Larson further notes that by "imagining these intertextual patterns, as Ziva Ben-Porat has put it, we 'reconstruct a fuller text'" (17). The novel has continued to be popular over the years, precisely in part because its textures are rich in allusion and character types. The image of Agnes as Madonna, despite the obvious fact that Agnes does not remain a virgin, seems to be Dickens' intention throughout the novel. Not surprisingly, as a real woman and main character, Agnes lacks development. Other than Agnes's motherless status and her devotion to her father and David, we know little of her hopes and dreams or even her personality. Her character is mostly described in terms of abstractions: so true, so beautiful, so good.

One of the most powerful examples of Agnes's serving as an image of the Madonna occurs in the last paragraphs of this very long novel:

> And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these faces fade away. But, one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And that remains.
>
> I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity beside me. My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence without which I were nothing, bears me company.

> O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward. (806)

Just as such medieval writers as Anselm of Canterbury, Honorius *Augustoduensis*, Bernard of Clairvaux and others who successfully use elaborate allusions in their writings, mixing *eros*, metaphor, and piety, to help spread the Marian devotion of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, so, too, does Dickens as he develops his character of Agnes as Madonna-Redemptrix, Copperfield's "savior." This novel, in turn, may have generated even greater interest in the Virgin Mary popular culture.

Another text that demonstrates well how much religion was on Dickens's mind during the early 1850's is his great work of 1852, *Bleak House*. In this text Dickens seems conflicted in his ideas about Catholicism. On the one hand, his satirical running commentary shows his antipathy towards the Catholic Church through characters like Mrs. Pardiggle, whom he associates with the Charitable Anglo-Catholic sisterhoods that sprang up with the Oxford movement.[7] On the other hand, despite such criticism, his

---

[7] Mrs. Pardiggle's offspring are described in great negative detail: her children are "dissatisfied," "weazened and shriveled," "ferocious with discontent"—which reflects badly on her "Catholic" mothering skills which the Victorians held in the highest esteem. In another instance of religious commentary, in chapter 8 of the novel, Dickens has Esther commenting on the different charitable organizations of England that "want everything" (92). She says: "They were going to raise new buildings, they were going to pay off debts on old buildings, they were going to establish in a picturesque building [,] . . . the Sisterhood of Medieval Marys..." (92). Here Dickens is referring to "The Oxford Movement and the associated Gothic revival in art and literature that fostered the establishment of religious communities for women modeled on Continental Catholic communities. The first sisterhood in the Church of England, the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, was founded in London by Dr. Pusey, and subsequent ones with similar names were founded in various cities during the next few years" (Anson, 1955, 220-30; Butt and Tillotson 180). Dickens considered such communities to be "in the practice of a perverted form of religion," an opinion expressed in 1849 in a letter to Miss Coutts about a pamphlet from the Church Penitentiary movement appealing for funds to establish "houses of Mercy" for penitent prostitutes (although, ironically, Dickens himself later established a charitable house of prostitution with Coutts). The narrator of *Bleak House* also comments on the Oxford movement, which according to D.G. Paz (in *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, Stanford University Press, 1992), Dickens characterizes as reflecting "womanly dilettantism" (69). Dickens's words follow:

female protagonist Esther strongly suggests the Virgin Mary as well as the biblical Queen Esther who, at first reading, would be the most likely allusion with whom to associate this Esther. One could argue, too, that Esther evokes Athena of Greek mythology or the figure of Mary as Wisdom or Sophia from the Book of Wisdom (Warner 199). However, given the religious political climate in England of the time, Esther of the Old Testament seems the figure that Dickens wants to evoke most clearly. In keeping with Victorian typology of prefiguring New Testament figures with Old Testament characters, Dickens's Esther resembles the Old Testament Jewish Esther—given by God "for such a time as this"—a strategic figure who, in turn, according to the Victorian figure typing, foreshadows the Jewish Virgin Mary also given by God to his people "in the fullness of time." In art, the biblical Esther has long served to prefigure Mary as James Hall in *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* notes: "Esther in the act of pleading with the king [Xerxes of Persia, fifth century B.C.] was regarded by the Church as a prefiguration of the Virgin in her role of intercessor on the day of judgment" (Hall 116). Additionally, in Christian iconography, Mary's Immaculate Conception is represented by a verse written on a scroll from Esther 15:13 which states "this law was not made for thee, but for all others," proclaiming Mary's exemption

---

> There are, at Chesney Wold this January week, some ladies and gentlemen, of the newest fashion, who have set up a Dandyism—in Religion, for instance. Who, in mere lackadaisical want of an emotion, have agreed upon a little dandy talk about the Vulgar wanting faith in things in general; meaning, in the things that have been tried and found wanting, as though a low fellow should unaccountably lose faith in a bad shilling, after finding it out. Who would make the Vulgar very picturesque and faithful, by putting back the hands upon the Clock of Time, and canceling a few hundred years of history. (145)

Susan Shatto in *The Companion to Bleak House* (London: Unwin, 1988) notes that Dickens here is satirizing those who sought to bring ritual back to the English Church: "Reacting against the contemporary trend promoted by the Protestants towards Individualism and liberalism in religion and politics, high-church Anglicans sought a return to the medieval times when the church, the monarch and nobility governed England" (123).

from original sin (*Oxford Study Bible*).

Like the biblical Esther, Dickens's Esther in *Bleak House* is also a rich allegorical Character. Harland S. Nelson in *Charles Dickens* has called her "Dickens's emblem of hope in a dark world" (177). Her birth is also reminiscent of the nativity; while she is born out of wedlock, she is declared as "innocent" as Jesus and Mary were (Dickens 162). Further, in chapter 43, Mr. Skimpole says that he is going to declare a "Saint Summerson Day" (524), Mr. Buckle in chapter 59 calls her a Queen (704) for being "mild" and "game" (obedient) like Mary, and she serves as a comforter to many people throughout *Bleak House* as "she moves from one end of the novel to the other dispensing benedictions" (Larson 24). She is also "betrothed" to an older man, Mr. Jarndyce, just as Mary was betrothed to Joseph. In addition, she is associated with several pietas in the novel although these pietas sometimes display the "dissonance" that Larson describes as an effect of typical intertextual allusion because Esther takes on different roles in them. Larson says that "the closing tableau of chapter 36 bears once again the irony of the New Testament allusion. Esther becomes 'like a child' in Madonna-Ada's arms" (170). The like-a-child descriptor implies Esther's innocence, and Betts says that although she has been born to an unwed mother, she is declared "innocent from inherited sexual fault" (Larson 170), which further links her to Christ but also again to the Mary of the Immaculate Conception. In the biblical account (*Oxford Study Bible*) of Luke 1:28ff, Mary is described as "greatly troubled" when the angel Gabriel announces that she is to give birth to a child without a husband; she at first wonders about this event, but later accepts and submits to the message after Gabriel tells her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God . . . . for God's promises can never fail" (1:37). Mary

responds by saying, "I am the Lord's servant . . . . May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Like Mary, who has been linked with an "illegitimate" pregnancy but comes to peace with her lot in life, Esther accepts her burden. She says in chapter 36, "I saw very well how many things had worked together . . . . I knew that I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers; and that before my Heavenly father I should not be punished for birth, nor a queen rewarded for it" (455). Andrew Sanders argues in *Charles Dickens Resurrectionist* that "Esther feels that her life has meaning, and that she has lived to some purpose; she both is, and now feels, innocent, and she is worthy of life and love," her discovery of illegitimacy acting as "a rebirth into innocence which is new in Dickens's work" (162). This rebirth is significant because *Bleak House* is so "embedded in a dying world populated with hollow men" (Sanders 162).

In another pieta, at the end of the novel, Esther is no longer the child of the one discussed earlier. Although Esther's role is that of the young Virgin Mary throughout most of *Bleak House*, at the end "Esther has become the mourning adult survivor in a pathetic pieta" (Larson 175). Unraveling the mystery of her birth in a dreary graveyard, she touches her hands to her dead mother's face causing Alan Woodcourt to say to Inspector Bucket who is with her, "Her hands should be the first to touch her. They have a higher right than ours" (714). At this point, Esther's mother Lady Dedlock, whom Larson arguably calls a strangely ambiguous Christ figure,[8] is in the classically depicted

[8] Janet Larson in *Dickens and The Broken Scripture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985) shows how Lady Dedlock uses some of Christ's speeches in Chapter 48 as Lady Dedlock is contrasted against an unambiguous figure of Tulkinghorn as antichrist or Judas. She calls Dickens' unusual allusion here a "muddle" in "an apparent eleventh-hour attempt to provide Lady Dedlock with a Passion story subtext" (22). Larson, for example, shows that Lady Dedlock uses Christ- like language that recalls the speech of the Garden of Gethsemane where Christ says "not my will, but thine, be done when she says to Rosa "what

position of Christ, while Esther has clearly taken on the role of Mary at the cross as she grieves over the death of a beloved member of her family. In reference to these strange death scenes that use religious imagery, House comments that "nearly all of Dickens' most embarrassing pathos is expressed in religious or semi-religious imagery and terms" (132), noting also that when he does use Christian imagery, "it is difficult not to feel that it is a mask to conceal some inability to control or express his emotion" (132) —or perhaps his ambivalence about a Madonna figure. Betts offers another reading of the death scenes which also suggests the comfort a Madonna figure gives to the lost: "His death scenes which offend or embarrass many modern readers are rarely tragic since death comes as a release from the sorrows of this world and brings the hope of happier life beyond" (117).

At the end of *Bleak House*, Esther has gone from being an independent virgin to a married woman, reflecting an image of Mary that was much more acceptable to the Victorian public (Engelhardt, "Paradigmatic Angel" 159-168). At the same time, Esther remains a type of Virgin because she does not have children. Instead, Ada Clare Carstone, ward of John Jarndyce and wife to the deceased Richard Carstone, becomes the Marian passive vessel giving birth to the miraculous child Richard, named after his father who is appropriately in heaven. Esther says of the redemptive baby: "Though to bless and restore the mother, not his father, was the errand of this baby, its power was mighty to do it. When I saw the strength of the weak hand, and how its touch could heal my darling's heart, and raise up hope within her, I felt a new sense of the

---

I do, I do for your sake, not my own." Larson cites several other compelling examples of how Dickens wants us to see Lady Dedlock as a Christ figure.

goodness and the tenderness of God" (767).

From these examples of Agnes and Esther from Dickens's work, we can see how Dickens uses the Madonna image with her rich metaphoric complexity to present what he sees as the ideals for the perfect Victorian woman. Unlike Collins and Kingsley, Dickens combines the qualities of the Catholic medieval Marys of being a queen, albeit a powerless one, as well as mild and obedient as he develops his character of Esther. To Dickens's credit, he goes on to write more complex portrayals of women in works such as *Great Expectations*. And, despite Dickens's own later love interest in a "child-bride" in the nineteen-year-old actress Ellen Ternan, Agnes and Esther are both emotionally mature, wise, honorable women who captured the interest of the Victorian public. Perhaps they did precisely because they also represent the self-effacing feminine model who spends her life in complete subordination to the needs of the males, family, and the community, a model that will continue well into the twenty-first century.

About the time that *Bleak House* was released, the young Wilkie Collins was just achieving some popular literary attention. Dickens befriended Collins in the early 1850's and hired him to be a salaried contributor to his journal *Household Words*. Collins, like Dickens, may have developed an interest in the Virgin Mary during his adolescent travels to Italy with his family as well as through the European tour that he took with Dickens in 1853. At that time, Dickens had just completed *Bleak House* (1852), and Collins was working on *Hide and Seek*, which was published in May 1854 and dedicated to Charles Dickens. Catherine Peters notes the following about Collins' novel:

Part of the book [*Hide and Seek*] was written on an extended visit to Dickens and

> his family in Boulogne during the summer of 1853, when Collins was given an ideal place to work, a pavilion in the ground of the Chateau des Moulineux, which Dickens had rented for the summer. Later in the same year the two writers, with the painter Augustus Egg, made a trip to Italy. They probably spent more time together during 1853 and 1854 than at any other period of their long and close relationship. In the early years of their relationship, Dickens' experience both as a writer and editor were freely and generously at the service of his younger friend, and his example of industry and orderliness was one the naturally chaotic Collins did his best to follow. (xi)

During his time in Italy, Collins' letters indicate conflicted feelings toward Catholicism. While in Rome, he speaks thus of visiting St. Peters: "the Interior of the Church looked more sublime and overwhelming than I ever remember to have seen it" (115); and he mentions the "Virgin [statue] in her niche" at the old house where his family had lived about ten years earlier (*Letters* 112). However, in a letter dated October 31, 1853, he mocks the coffin of Saint Borromeo, which he considers ostentatious: "the Roman Catholics don't mind trifling little inconsistencies of this sort—And the sacristan gets 5 francs for [showing] the place—and strangers always admire it—and so everybody is pleased which is a great thing to attain by the exhibition of any man's dead body in this world" (107). Nevertheless, in the next paragraph in his letter, he writes of the art galleries of Milan and gives highest praise to the painter Raphael:

> [the museums are] full of rubbish with here and there a good picture or two to keep the spectator from turning his back against the old masters in disgust. The best example of these glorious exceptions is Raphael's celebrated Sposalizio (the

> betrothal of the Virgin and [indecipherable word])—A picture that really deserves its reputation. Nothing to approach the divine beauty and refinement of some of the [erased words] in the composition has been painted since Raphael's time. Copies from this picture, and prints, give no idea of it in its highest aspect. (107)

This notation is significant because Collins returns to the painter Raphael numerous times in his novels *Hide and Seek* and *The Woman in White*. Indeed, Peters says that "Collins's enthusiasm for painting was rekindled in the art galleries of Florence, Rome, Naples, and Venice, and had its effect on *Hide and Seek*" (xiii). Collins' earliest interests in the Virgin Mary were no doubt fueled by the well-publicized sale of the Murillo painting, Bulwer-Lytton's play, his friendship and travels with Dickens during this period as well as by his own work in developing the character of Madonna Blyth in *Hide and Seek*. Madonna's character is based on religious writer John Kitto's experience of losing his hearing, related in his book *The Lost Senses* (1845). In Collins' novel, Madonna is imbued with idealism, not only because she is a type of Virgin Mary, but also because she is silent (deaf-mute). In her case, we can see underlying tensions of Collins' ambivalent feelings toward women here mentioned by Grinstein and others. While some like Martha Stoddard Holmes have credited Collins with giving attention to people who are disabled in novels like *Hide and Seek* and *The Moonstone*, one should also note that these women do not marry in the novels and so do not enter society's central core, and in *The Moonstone*, the lame Roseanna Spearman ends up committing suicide. Madonna Blyth, in turn, is attractively (though unrealistically) portrayed, but Collins does not allow her to marry. In fact, her love interest turns out to be her half-brother, which reiterates Dickens' motif in giving Copperfield's "foster" sister, Agnes,

Madonna-like qualities. Richard Collins offers this reading:

> A more suspicious reading, however, might propose that incest is brought in as an emergency measure to permit Collins to escape a real resolution of the situation between Madonna and Zack. Reluctant to back away from his attempts to create an innovative portrait of not only deafness but also disabled women's ability to play traditional feminine roles, he may have been unwilling at this time to go through with an actual marriage between a deaf woman and a hearing man . . . . With the unambiguous horror of brother-sister marriage filling the stage, Collins never has to resolve the thorny issue of whether or not Madonna should marry at all. (69)

In *Hide and Seek*, Madonna Blyth, who is really named Mary Grice, is the adopted daughter of a painter named Valentine Blyth and his invalid wife Lavinia Blyth. Significantly, Valentine, Madonna's adopted father, is a "painter man" (as Matt Grice calls him) just as Collins' own father was an artist, who had painted a portrait of a Madonna and child, exhibited at the Royal Academy, which art object also indicates Collins' early ties to the image of the Madonna. In the novel, Valentine Blyth upon seeing Madonna (Mary as she is known before he adopts her) in the circus for the first time is overcome with admiration for her:

> From the moment of the little girl's first appearance, ample recreation had been unconsciously provided . . . by a tall, stout, and florid stranger, who appeared suddenly to lose his senses the moment he set eyes of the deaf and dumb child.... Mad and mysterious . . . poured from his lips. "Devotional beauty," " Fra Angelico's Angels," "Giotto and the cherubs," "Enough to bring the divine Raphael

down from heaven to paint her." (60)

Later, at the doctor's office when Valentine seeks medical advice for Madonna, she inspires him to praise again: "he sang the child's praises, and compared her face to every angel's face that had ever been painted from the days of Giotto to the present time" (64). When Mrs. Peckover, Madonna's first adoptive mother, learns that Valentine in his devotion to Raphael has changed her Mary's name to Madonna, she is shocked. Collins writes: "The truth was, that this worthy creature [Mrs. Peckover] knew nothing whatever about Raphael; and, considering 'Madonna' to be an outlandish foreign word intimately connected with Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder plot, firmly believed that no respectable English woman ought to compromise her character by attempting to pronounce it" (159). Collins here mocks not only the "otherness" of Catholicism and "Catholic art" but also the English reaction to Catholicism. In fact, this novel is all about taboos and otherness from the religious extremes of the exotic Madonna to the hypocrisy of the evil religious Protestants embodied by Walter Thorpe and Joanna Grice.

In addition to Madonna's name and her associations with the Italian painters, the child's purity and goodness (61-62) are also emphasized. Her divine character is further established when Valentine Blyth swears to "take that injured, beautiful, patient little angel away from this villainous place" (69). Later, the narrator comments on her seemingly supernatural gifts: "It was one of Valentine's many eccentric fancies that she was not meditating only, at such times as these, but that, deaf and dumb as she was with the creatures of this world, she could talk with the angels, and could hear what the heavenly voices said to her in return" (143). Furthermore, like the spiritual Virgin

Mary, she is said to be "subjected to deep meditative stillness that often passed over her suddenly, even in the society of her adopted parents, and of friends who were talking around her" (143).

However, for all the comparisons to angels, it is clear that Collins does not want us to think of Madonna as possessing only virginal qualities. This novel is one of parody and satire—as one can tell just by looking at the two names already mentioned, Valentine and Madonna Blyth, in addition to the myriad other funny names such as Aaron Yollup, a minister in the novel, and Mrs. Peckover, a fussy, goodhearted, clown's wife. Beneath the surface of the humor, however, Collins means also to explore riddles of human nature, and when we look more closely at *Hide and Seek,* we find not only a superficial interest in the Virgin Mary but a complex array of emotions that accompany that portrayal.

Collins, for instance, may have made Madonna into a deaf-mute to parody further the figure of the Madonna as the perfect woman because she does not talk, and a form of this silent perfection suggests yet another interesting topic: hysterical mutism. According to Claire Kahane in *Passions of the Voice: Women in the Nineteenth Century*, hysterical mutism resulted from a woman's conflicted desires to possess the father's phallus and her identification and rivalry with her mother (Kahane 8-9). She writes, "[T]he hysterical woman of the nineteenth century kept silent her fantasmic rivalry, and in dissimulating by simulating femininity, spoke her divided desire in symptoms" (9). Kahane notes, "It was no mere coincidence that at the same time that the woman orator became an increasingly audible and visible figure in the pulpit and on the podium, female hysteria, with its characteristic symptoms of aphonia and paralysis, swept across Europe

and America in epidemic proportion" (7). An extensive body of work had been produced on hysteria in the nineteenth century, especially by the French, by the time Collins wrote this novel. Jann Matlock in *Scenes of Seduction* discusses the preoccupation of nineteenth-century physicians with prostitutes and pathology: "for more than a century, doctors' attempts to unravel the relation of hysteria and prostitution represented a key inquiry in the understanding of women's nature, sexuality, and predisposition to mental illness" (125). In the mind of the public, hysteria and sex (both repressed and excessive) were often linked. One of the popular cures for hysteria was for a woman to marry so that she would receive a "sexual fix" to the repression of desire that was believed to have precipitated the disease (Kahane 11). While nineteenth-century doctors such as Philippe Pinel made strides in severing the ties of psychological hysteria from biology, speculative studies abounded (Kahane 11-12). Evelyne Ender summarizes the widespread diagnosis of hysteria:

> Thus in the female body, sensations are immediately converted into symptoms, and hysteria is but an intensification of the experience of femininity. If woman is sensitive in the extreme and if hysteria is a form of extreme sensitivity, then hysteria is being a woman. It is a haunting thought that a sizable number of cases of hysteria may well have been diagnosed on no better evidence than that which is epitomized by such a syllogism. (47)

Kahane also comments that this diagnosis carried with it a certain amount of ambivalence. Since repression or passivity has been historically linked to hysteria, the Victorian ideal of the passive woman thus became in some ways the paradigmatic hysterical woman, which fit in well with the image of the Catholic Madonna because her

high status and position is founded on her passivity, obedience, and humility. Kahane writes, "Since passivity, and particularly sexual desire, came to define a normative and ideal femininity in the nineteenth century, the Victorian feminine ideal itself became a privileged site of hysterical ambivalence" (9).

This ambivalence can be further noted in the societal hostility towards women who chose to take up public speaking roles during this time. As women became more publicly voluble, the interest in hysteria, especially as it related to voice and agent, increased. Kahane writes that in the years following Seneca Falls (1848) and Rochester (1852) the press had a field day "portraying the feminist orator as an unsexed woman" (6). Furthermore, the British press also feared a woman's public voice, and *Punch* parodied women who "took the podium as masculine harridans" (6). In one 1851 caricature of a woman who sought political office, the figure says "My hair is dark chestnut; my mustachios are rather lighter" (6)—which remark eerily points toward Collins' Marian Halcombe of *The Woman in White* published eight years later.

However, before we get to *The Woman in White,* which I will discuss in the next section, we should note how popular theory on the hysterical woman plays out in *Hide and Seek* through Madonna Blyth. Is it possible that Collins would have been interested in a hysterical character for his novels? Janet Beizer notes in *Ventriloquized Bodies* that hysterical characters were popularized through nineteenth-century media: "From about the second third of the century onward, with gathering force in the 1860s, the disease figured prominently in literature, newspapers, journals, salons, and, eventually, the street. By the 1880s it had spread through the novel in near epidemic proportions" (8). Moreover, it seems highly probable that Collins had some knowledge of it as evidenced

by his library, which contained at least one French text on physiology and one on psychology as well as a popular novel by French author Frederic Soulie that features a hysterical female character (Matlock 252).[9] In addition, Collins' interest is not only manifested in his creation of the mute hysteric Madonna Blyth but also in his creation of the paralyzed hysteric Lavinia Blyth who suffers from an obscure spinal malady that confines her to a bed, a paralysis of a type described by Kahane in her chapter entitled "Invalids and Nurses: The Sisterhood of Rage" (34-63). Madonna, in turn, tends to Lavinia's needs. Valentine Blyth, the man who adopts Madonna and who is also married to Lavinia, is thus flanked by two women, whom Collins wants us to see as "oversexed" or "repressed" by nature, needing a "sexual fix," but who are passive and fully dependent. Madonna cannot talk/hear, and Lavinia cannot the action. What more could a figure like Valentine Blyth a painter, whose name evokes light (blithe-Blyth) and romance (Valentine's Day), want? Furthermore, this use of the hysterical woman will not be an isolated case, for as Collins' career progresses, he will continue to use this model of controlling the hysterical woman in other novels as well. Matlock comments thus on Collins' later novel: "It is no accident that one of the most powerful Victorian fantasies of putting women under restraint, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, shuts its female characters up in asylums and allows a male eye to penetrate the diary of the third" (287).

Not everyone agrees, however, that Collins had misogynistic intentions. As I

[9] The names of books as found in William Baker's *Wilkie Collins' Library* include *Recherchés Physiologiques* by Xavier Bichat, a classic work published in 1800 and reprinted numerous times, and Sir Benjamin Brodies's text *Psychological Inquiries: In a Series of Essays Intended to Illustrate the Mutual Relations of the Physical Organization and the Mental Faculties,* 1855. Baker suggests that Collins may have used this text in writing *The Woman in White* (65). The popular novel mentioned in the reference by Matlock is Frederic Soulie's novel *Les Memoires du diable,* 1837.

mentioned earlier, Martha Stoddard Holmes has argued that Collins has done much to promote the sexual normalization of disabled women in *Poor Miss Finch*, *The Moonstone,* and *Hide and Seek.* While she does present a convincing argument concerning the eroticism of the main characters of the novel, I would suggest that Collins is up to something rather less admirable as he presents his heroines in *Hide and Seek* and *The Woman in White.*

Some of the very same things that Holmes mentions in her critique to show that Madonna is "objectified primarily in erotic, not pathetic terms" (64) may just as easily be cited in support of the view that Collins intended her to be a hysterical mute. Holmes refers, for instance, to the groaning sound Madonna makes after her fall, which she describes as erotic (67), citing the passage mentioned earlier that describes Valentine Blyth's first glimpse of Madonna when he sees her in the circus, a place to which he had retreated to for "consolations" in light of his invalid wife (Holmes 64). Madonna's muteness signifies her hysteria because, according to a popular characterization of the first stages of hysteria as described by the nineteenth-century French psychologist Jean Charcot, hysterical attacks began with spasms of the pharynx (Kahane 11). In addition to the physical manifestations of mute hysteria, deafness itself suggested a specific character type, as Holmes notes. That is, Madonna's "deaf character" as described by popular literature "develops deafness as a state of physical responsiveness that can only be considered 'dangerous' in the context of Victorian ideologies that associated physical responsiveness with primitivity and immorality" (67). In the same way, the hysteric would also be considered dangerous because she, too, is associated with primitivism and immorality as evidenced by the common diagnosis that hysteria resulted from repressed

sexual desires. Ender has written that it was commonly believed that women who were exposed to too much excitement would be prone to hysteria, so prophylactic advice was given by physicians to avoid this state: "She must first be kept away from excessive stimulations: violent passions, too much excitement, or unseasonable emotions must be avoided at all costs" (47). However, Madonna does not avoid such passions. Indeed, Collins appears to want his reader to associate her with quivering sensitivity. He writes: "She would sit for hours, on fresh summer evenings, watching the mere waving of leaves; her face flushed, her whole nervous organization trembling with the sensations of deep and perfect happiness which that simple sight imparted to her" (120).

So, what is Collins doing here? While we cannot know the full significance of Madonna's deaf/muteness, what seems arguable is that the criteria for the "ideal" woman in this send-up of the Madonna includes being sexless, mute, and pure. Not surprisingly, we come away from the reading of this novel fairly discomfited by the portrayal of this young woman. And, of course, an important question to ask would be how a Victorian audience would view a disabled character who had always been previously marginalized as Other.

Before we turn to Collins' treatment of the Virgin Mary in *The Woman in White*, if skeptics remain who doubt Collins' interest in parody of the Catholic Madonna, one need only look to a letter he wrote in December 1854 upon the publication of the Immaculate Conception definition, which came out shortly before he began his work on *The Woman in White*. I include it here in its entirety:

> It seems to me that people who think this new Proclamation by the Pope of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, likely to damage the Papist Church,

take rather too hasty a view, and decide (as it appears to me) quite erroneously. Damage to the Papist Church can only come from the Papists themselves. If this new piece of Tom Foolery shakes the faith of individual Romanists, or disunites congregations, down the Church may go in good time certainly.—If it does neither, the Church stands firm. That seems clear enough to begin with.

Now what shakes a man's faith?—an outrage on his common sense or rather a flat official contradiction to whatever is purely the result of the exercise of his reasoning powers. Such a contradiction to the reasoning power of any man woman or child in this world (not absolutely an idiot) may most certainly be found in this new Proclamation.

But how can that affect individual Romanists—or Romanist congregations. Does any Papist make use of his reason when he lets his Church give him his religion? Does not his Church expressly tell him he must give up his reason, and accept mysteries which outrage it, implicitly as matters of faith. Does not every good Papist who will not let his butcher, baker, wife, or children, rob him of one particle of his good common sense if he can help it, voluntarily hand that common sense over altogether to the keeping of his Priest whenever his Priest asks him for it? If this be true—and can't see how it can otherwise be true—where is the common sense, where is the reasoning power, to be outraged and contradicted among Papist congregations by the Pope's new Proclamation?

What is there in the Immaculate Conception to outrage millions of people who believe (if one may abuse the word by using it in such a sense)—who believes in "The Real Presence"?—when Smith, a lay Papist, believes that if he gives money to

> Jones a clerical Papist to pray his soul out of Purgatory, Jones will succeed if Jones prays fairly up to his terms, what in Heaven's name is there in the Immaculate Conception to stagger Smith? For these reasons I think that the new Proclamation will rather be popular than otherwise inside the pale of the Papist Church.
>
> Outside it has outraged the independent thinkers (a minority) and the Protestant Party—another minority compared with Dunderheaded humanity when it fails to being religious, wants anything you please in a religion—except common sense. In an age where thousands of people join the Mormons, I cannot see, for one, why the Immaculate Conception should stand in the Papists' way in making new converts. If infinite weakness, eagerly swallows infinite nonsense at the hands of Joe Smith, why not at the hands of Pius the Ninth?—I am not at all sure that this consideration has not weighed privately with the Sacred College—and that the theological physicians of long standing have not slily dropped a fresh infusion of nonsense into their great dogmatic dose, with the wise purpose of not letting even the smallest quack in the same line of business go too far ahead before them. (*Letters* 131)

While the publication of this letter came after the publication of *Hide and Seek*, its derisive tone clearly demonstrates Collins' antipathy toward the Catholic Church; however, in the next five years as he composed *The Woman in White*, he seems to return to and to reconsider significant ideas about the Madonna. Grinstein comments, "This work, serialized between 1859-1860 in *All the World Around,* was considered a triumphant success, and, for a time, even eclipsing Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) in popularity. People lined up outside the publishing house waiting for the next

installment" (106). Collins liked this novel so much that he chose "Author of *The Woman in White* and other works of fiction" to be inscribed on his tombstone.

Because of his interest in cultural matters, Collins was likely aware in 1857 of the reports of a newly erected statue of the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception placed in the Spanish Square in Rome, as well as of the widely reported apparition of Lourdes the following year. Earlier with Dickens in 1856, Collins had visited Paris and there had gotten many of his ideas for this novel (Davis 167). Collins himself told his friend Wybert Reeve that he derived his ideas for *The Woman in White* from a Parisian bookstall where he and Dickens found dilapidated volumes of recordings of French crimes, and that from one actual trial account of the substitution and burial of a mad woman, he developed *The Woman in White*, as well as one of his most famous villains, Count Fosco (Ashley 67). Richard Collins posits that Dickens and Collins also might have visited the Louvre where, he mentions, to shore up his argument that the character of Marian Halcombe may have been based on Collins' interest in hermaphrodites, that they would have seen *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite* and *Venus de Milo* (151). It is just as likely that they would have seen Murillo's prominent painting of the Immaculate Conception, which would have attracted their interest.

Marian Halcombe, one of the most memorable characters in the novel, is generally the object of negative social commentary on women and positive commentary on her Virgin Mary-like qualities. The strong, assertive Marian, a favorite among the male readers of the time (Richard Collins 132), will mock women and their chatter: "We are such fools, we can't entertain each other at table. You see, I don't think much of my own sex; Mr. Hartright, no woman does think much of her own sex, although few of them

confess it as freely as I do" (26) and, again, "I answered him—more because my tongue is a woman's and must answer, than because I had anything convincing to say" (153). These types of self-deprecating remarks describing female agency, power, and voice can be seen throughout the novel (26, 171,173 and passim). Moreover, Marian's disdain for woman as speaker is also played out ironically *against her* by her own body. With her dark hair, mustache, and masculine jaw (Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, 24), she resembles the often parodied hermaphroditic female orator of the nineteenth century described earlier who has dark chestnut hair and whose "mustachios are lighter" (Kahane 6). Kahane writes that voluble women such as Marian were "portrayed not only as hermaphrodites, but also as prostitutes, acting out a vulgar and suspect exhibitionism, which offended womanly properties" (7). The idea that a strong woman "orator" like Marian has hermaphroditic qualities is also supported further by Richard Collins' similar claim in his essay "Marian's Moustache: Bearded Ladies, Hermaphrodites, and Intersexual Collagè in *The Woman in White*." While certainly not a prostitute, Marian's sex appeal and voluptuous body have been widely noted by critics, and she attracts the male gaze of quite a few characters in the novel including the villain Count Fosco, while still remaining a virgin.

Paradoxically, the character of Marian blends all of these images—feminist orator, virgin, potentially sexual (although never sexually realized) creature to produce a memorably eroticized, brave, sexually purè, and morally upright Virgin Mary figure. Collins drops Marian hints along the way in *The Woman in White* to help to explain the importance of her contribution to this novel. These details are not without significance. Phillip O'Neil, among others, points out in *Collins: Women, Property,*

and Propriety that "Collins is a very calculating writer and it will not do to disregard and ignore his remarks" (98). He then quotes a passage in which Collins says, "No small portion of this space is occupied by hundreds of little 'connecting links,' of trifling value in themselves, but of the utmost importance in maintaining the smoothness, the reality, and probability of the entire work" (*The Woman in White, Oxford ed.* xxx). One such detail that Collins uses to reveal the true heroine of the novel will be presented through his placement of Madonna figures three times near the beginning of the novel and three times at the end. The first three examples occur in conjunction with the mention of the painter Raphael in chapter 6 of the First Epoch where Hartright meets Mr. Fairlie for the first time. In the first instance, Collins writes, "On the opposite side stood two antique cabinets; and between them, and above them, hung a picture of the Virgin and Child, protected by glass, and bearing Raphael's name on the gilt tablet at the bottom of the frame" (31-32). In the second passage, Hartright seems to look to the Madonna for inspiration or in frustration: "As he wearily closed his eyes again, before I could answer, and as he did most assuredly bore me, I sat silent, and looked up at the Madonna and Child by Raphael" (33). The third time Raphael is mentioned, Mr. Fairlie is complimentary of his work:

> Surely, our delightful Rafaello's conception [a telling play on words?] is infinitely preferable.
>
> He pointed to the picture of the Madonna, the upper part of which represented the conventional cherubs of Italian Art, celestially provided with sitting accommodation for their chins, on balloons of buff-coloured air.
>
> "Quite a model family!" Said Mr. Fairlie, leering at the cherubs. "Such nice

round faces, and such nice soft wings, and—nothing else. No dirty little legs to run about on, and no noisy little lungs to scream with." (35)

This three-fold repetition will occur again with symmetry in the final chapters as a solution to the mystery of this whole novel. Before we get to the final scene, however, in the second section of this last bit of the novel Hartright narrates his visit to Notre Dame. There he discovers a clue to what has happened to Count Fosco as he hears people from the morgue describing Fosco's dead body. Once again in this instance, his search for the Virgin Mary (Notre Dame) as a key to the novel is seen. In the last scene of the novel, we are then given three more glimpses of the Madonna. In the first scene, Marian holds Hartright's son: "Marian was sitting now, with the child industriously sucking his coral upon her lap" (569), and then in the second portrait of Mary, "[Marian] rose, held up the child, kicking and crowing in her arms" (in contrast to Mr. Fairlie's legless cherubs) as she presents him to Walter as the "illustrious baby." In this instance, it is as if she were the Madonna presenting the Christ child to Walter. Significantly, the story ends with the statement that "Marian was the good angel of our lives—let Marian end our story" (570). Like Esther in *Bleak House*, Marian Halcomb is both Virgin and Mother in the last scenes of the novel, as she holds up the "illustrious" baby but has yet retained her virginity. Gloria-Jean Masciarotte notes that we are left a little uncomfortable by the conclusion of this novel: "[W]e are left emotionally dissatisfied, but engaged. We are left nervously trying to figure out how and where, she, he, they, it, and I all fit in. We are left asking the riddle 'where do babies come from?'" (122). This is a question that, according to Masciarotte, is one of the great anxiety-producing questions in Freudian psychology (109). However, if we accept that Collins wants us

to see Marian as the Virgin Mother since she is holding the baby, the novel's ending makes perfect sense.

Within the frame of the novel that establishes the importance of the Madonna and child, Collins uses other hints to indicate that he wants his reader to see Marian as the Virgin Mary. The title of the novel itself suggests a Madonna figure, and although the real woman in white in the novel is Anne Catherick, who wears white, readers throughout the novel ask themselves, Who is this mysterious woman in white? In a later chapter, I will examine the portrait of the red-haired Virgin Mary (1851) dressed all in white by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but for now, I would note that Collins wants us to associate the woman in white with both the Virgin Mary and Marian Halcombe, the novel's heroine.

Besides the fact that Marian's name is an obvious allusion to the Virgin Mary, it also becomes abundantly clear that Marian is simply not the typical, blonde British heroine:

> Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness; her waist perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural place; the lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. (24)

Masciarotte notes that it was not unusual for sensationalistic fiction to present a reader with such a character. As she writes, "Sensationalism centers its story around similarly overwhelming, engaging, but aesthetically troubling women. Sensationalism

accomplishes this by the simple gesture of taking as its determinative subject the disclosure of an identity whose boundaries were still under social debate" (97). Furthermore, she notes, "[T]he various spectators of these women punctuate their descriptions with words like 'ugly' and 'surprising.'" (97). It can be argued that what may be surprising about Marian is that her appearance suggests a stereotype of Italian women, with her dark coloring and mustache, as well as the fact that the Italian Count Fosco adores her and finds her extremely attractive (544). Italy, to many British Protestants, meant Roman Catholicism and "Mariolatry," which, of course, had overtones of purity, piety and eroticism at the same time. Richard Collins notes this paradoxical allure of Marian as sexy virgin: "Fosco knows that Marian's mustache is a decoy, the clever defense of a highly sexed virgin, anti-aesthetic camouflage to ward off unwanted sexual advances" (154). He also notes that "it is the dark lady who presents a far more disturbing puzzle about sexual identity" (156).

This paradoxical representation serves two purposes for Collins. First, since Marian is "so other" than the British heroine, the audience does not want to see her joined with Hartright. Second, while Collins must give her some level of appeal, he must also not appear too sympathetic to Catholic "frippery," so he must, in turn, imbue her with sexual qualities: "Far from the revelation of Marian's ugliness forming a shocking reversal that would deny the previous eroticization, it is precisely because she is ugly—and therefore not textually available as wife for Walter—that she can be seen as erotic spectacle" (Richard Collins 152). Sue Lonoff suggests that "[Wilkie] Collins shifts among conflicting implications. Marian is variously a masculine woman, a 'magnificent woman,' and a sexual neuter. Yet instead of detracting from her character,

these shifts enhance her appeal. If she were wholly bold and strong, or more decisively erotic, she would also have been more threatening, more likely to offend a Victorian public" (146). As she is, whatever her sexual orientation, she remains benign (146). Lonoff also sees as important her shift in roles from protector in the first part of the novel to dependent, and then to protector but subservient of the newly resurrected Walter (146). These steps also parallel the Virgin Mary's life as mother, then self-effaced under Christ's control during his ministry, and finally she takes a subservient but important role to the resurrected Christ (Luke 2:7ff, John 2:4, John 19:25, Mark 16:1 ff).

Not surprisingly, the Italian Fosco admits his attraction to her and admits hers to him. A.D. Huttter comments that although Fosco is supposed to be the villain of the story, "Marian herself sets the tone for the reader, finding Fosco irresistibly charming in spite of what she knows to be in sometimes odious morality" (202-203). Fosco is equally attracted to Marian and waxes eloquently on her desirability:

> Just Heaven! With what inconceivable rapidity I learnt to adore that woman. At sixty, I worshipped her with the volcanic ardour of eighteen. All the gold of my rich nature was poured hopelessly at her feet . . . . Oh, omnipotent Destiny, pull our strings gently! Dance us mercifully off our miserable little stage. (544)

Notice the use of language that imitates religious phrasing in words such as "Heaven," "omnipotent," "worshipped her." Surely these were not just random choices—instead, this passage is almost a prayer to Marian.

Further, she is obviously guiding Walter throughout the novel. Although Hartright also speaks of the guiding influence of and love for Laura Fairlie in glowing terms, Collins leaves us uncertain as to the identity of the unnamed good angel he describes at

the beginning of the novel who "has lived in all my thoughts, who possessed herself of all my energies, who has become the one guiding influence that now directs the purpose of my life" (5). While one might assume the woman he refers to in this passage might be Laura, the woman he eventually weds, it could just as well be his "good angel" Marian. As Hutter points out, Laura clearly does not lead Hartright in his pursuit for truth and justice: "Walter does grow more and more protective, parental, and, were the story one of a parent in actuality, he would only further infantilize Laura by lying to her, protecting her from the world's harsh reality. Walter uses Laura, who starts out with something notably lacking [in reasoning abilities] and grows worse, to rationalize his own questionable behavior" (210). Laura seems to become like the paradigmatic helpless hysterical women discussed earlier. In contrast, Marian demonstrates strength, protection, and guidance throughout the novel:

> [A]s Walter prepares for his final confrontation with Count Fosco, Marian, in turn acts like a good wife, who shares the responsibility of protecting a retarded child....Marian's most important task is to protect the child they both love; he asks her to sleep in her room that night . . . .
>
> Her role is precisely that of a beloved infant, adored by both Marian and Walter, inspiring them, and protected by them in all those ways parents will protect a child. (Hutter 209-210)

One could also argue that Laura certainly has the qualities of passivity and humility associated with the Virgin Mary, and that she has the child-like qualities that Thornbury attributes to the Immaculate Conception in his essay in *Household Words*. Laura's comparison to the Immaculate Conception is not too far-fetched since like the

Madonna in the painting Collins depicts her as a "child-betrothed, dead, on the eve of her marriage" for most of the novel in her marriages to both Sir Percival Glyde and later to Walter Hartright. Also, significantly, during the time Collins was writing his novel, he was on staff at *Household Words*, where Thornbury's article on the Murillo and *The Immaculate Conception* painting appeared in February 1859.

Marian, however, is the Madonna who "directs." Walter acknowledges her direction in another significant scene before he proposes to Laura: "'I was guided by your advice in those past days,' I said, 'and now, Marian, with your reliance tenfold greater I will be guided by it again'" (507). She becomes the Madonna to Laura and Walter, as well as to the eventual heir to Limmeredge.

Another reason that Marian could arguably be Walter's guiding light is that in part three of the First Epoch, Collins directs our attention to Dante's *Inferno*, the second book of the *Divine Comedy*, and the seventh circle of hell. This specific mention of the seventh circle of hell is significant because it is the hell of the usurers (like Mr. Fairlie and Sir Percival) who are identified by the coats of arms on the purses that hang around their necks. However, this mention is also significant because the heroine of *The Divine Comedy* is the Madonna. Jaroslav Pelikan comments that this epic work begins with the "Gentle Lady" and sets the "whole itinerary of Dante the pilgrim in motion" (*Mary* 140). He further remarks that the last section of the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradiso*, concludes with Mary as the "fulfillment of the promise of Paradise and the archetype of all who were saved" (140). Similarly, *The Woman in White* ends with the good angel Marian.

Through this allusion to Dante's *Inferno*, and the other examples, it seems clear that

Collins wants us to be mindful of Marian as the Virgin Mary. Indeed, the whole novel seems to be Hartright's and Laura's descent into hell, ever guided by the strong Marian. Hartright is clearly on a pilgrimage, as his allegorical name of having a "right heart" indicates, and this pilgrimage theme is clearly noted toward the end of the novel: "In the stern school of extremity [in central America], and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man should" (366). Besides the pilgrimage motif here, also note the idea that Hartright is in a hot place (South America) like the hell of the *Inferno*. One more thing seems worth mentioning now—that the villainous characters parallel the villains at the end of the *Inferno*. Fosco in *The Woman in White* is labeled as a traitor; in Canto 33 near the end of the journey, Dante encounters Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri who have both been assigned to Antenora for treason. Like Fosco who is associated with Italian revolution, Ugolino and Ruggieri were associated with treasonous uprising of Guelph factions of Pisa in 1288.

Clearly, then, Collins moves in a different direction than Dickens does in creating his Madonnas. Dickens was careful about not offending his middle-class readers (Bachman and Cox xviii), so his portrayals of Madonnas are not overtly Catholic or even overtly religious. Collins, on the other hand, had no such fear of the opprobrium of the middle class and takes risks with his novels and characters (Bachman and Cox xviii). He satirizes the Madonna in *Hide and Seek*, and in *The Woman in White,* he creates complex Madonna figures, mostly through Marian Halcombe but also through Laura Fairlie. But even with Marian's strength and potential to become a strong role model for women as a Madonna, she criticizes other women who are not like her.

In sharp contrast to Dickens and Collins, Charles Kingsley, remembered for his muscular Christianity (a term he hated), and despite his somewhat progressive attitude towards women (at least by Victorian standards) expresses outright hostility to the Virgin Mary in his writing. Yet while his anti-Catholicism was often public and deplorable, Kingsley was also capable of sympathy toward the Catholic Church, notably in the 1850s. Guy Kendall comments in *Charles Kingsley and His Ideas* that Kingsley "held that the service of art to divine worship was an ideal that Rome maintained and Protestantism has lost" (148). Moreover, Kendall asserts that Kingsley defended the Tractarians and men like Newman who had the courage to follow an "impossible" ideal (148). At the same time, however, Kingsley was "violently opposed to everything that savoured of 'popery' and above all to the Jesuits and what they stood for (or what he thought they stood for)" (Kendall 146), and eventually this hostility developed into something like "an irrational obsession" (146). Kingsley's anti-Catholicism came to full public notice in the great controversy with Dr. John Newman in *Macmillan's Magazine*. The controversy began in January 1864 with Kingsley's book review of J.A. Froude's *History of England*, with his comments that "Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole ought not to be . . . ." Understandably, Newman responded to this attack, and what ensued was a series of public letters between the two men. These letters eventually led to Kingsley's famous essay "What then does Dr. Newman Mean? A Reply to a Pamphlet lately published by Dr. Newman" and Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in which Newman states his reasons for converting to Catholicism. This debate for Kingsley became the "greatest disaster of his public life" (Kendall 146).

All of this background sets the stage for Kingsley's negative attitudes toward Catholicism and the Virgin Mary. These attitudes were tied up not only with his opinions on religion but also in his ideas on masculinity. Carol Marie Engelhardt in "Victorian Masculinity and the Virgin Mary" says that Kingsley wrote against the Virgin Mary "to define his masculinity" (45). She further claims that "[I]n describing the Virgin Mary, [he] was also describing an idealized image of himself as a man" (45) and that by "delineating the Virgin Mary's realm of action, a Victorian male such as Kingsley defended his masculine sphere" (44-45).

Interestingly, Engelhardt details Kingsley's early antipathies toward Mary and the Catholic church. She quotes a passage from *Yeast: A Problem* in which Kingsley unsympathetically portrays Luke, a new convert to the Catholic faith, as someone who wants a mother figure. According to Engelhardt:

> Luke admits to his cousin that the Virgin Mary satisfies his desire for a mother who will guide and protect him, even though he is an adult....The comfort Mary provides seems to have been the impetus for Luke's conversion, which further demonstrates Kingsley's conviction that the Roman Catholic Church offered only a corrupting effeminacy. Weakness manifested as love for the Virgin Mary leads Luke to disavow his manly duties and seek out a church that many Victorians almost reflexively believed was pagan. ("Victorian Masculinity" 46)

Ironically, or perhaps not so ironically since all of these professedly anti-Catholic writers show some affinity toward the religion, which they publicly denounced at times, Engelhardt points out that Kingsley had once been attracted to Roman Catholicism (47). She further notes that in a letter to an unknown correspondent in 1849

he "longed for Rome, and boldly faced the consequences of joining Rome" ("Victorian Masculinity" 47). Moreover, his ideals for women clearly express the popular vision of the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception (as understood by Protestants). According to John Maynard, "In his letters he insists that a major quality of the ideal Englishwoman, along with the earnest religious life, is 'virginal purity'" (128). However, as Adrienne Munich and Maynard point out, Kingsley was also known to use feminine myth in poems so as to show that women are given certain empowering roles. Nevertheless, he cannot accept the elevation of the feminine in the Catholic Church.

Neither could he accept religious celibacy. Maynard remarks that "Kingsley's excessive reaction to the threat/attractions of religious celibacy in Newman indicate the perils of Kingsley's entire sexual enterprise" (136). To Kingsley's credit, Maynard explains, "Kingsley does not merely transfer religious values to an animal realm, in effect moving away from Western dualism and toward religions that celebrate sex in the world" (94). To Kingsley, sexuality, married sexuality in particular, was an important part of being a wholesome Christian since he believed that in the institution of marriage "[g]uilt is staved off, sexual needs are rationalized as religious acts; and because sex is authorized by the highest religious and ethical values, there is no question, as there was in conservative Victorian thinking on sex, that it is a joy in which women indulge as fully and happily as men" (94). One of the gifts that Kingsley gave his wife Fanny before their marriage is his self-illustrated work on a female saint called *Elizabeth of Hungary* in which he had drawn sketches of (among other things) naked women ascending to heaven, a naked Elizabeth being flogged by another woman, a sleeping Elizabeth (naked, of course) as her husband looks on (Maynard figures 7-17). And while this work was not

intended for public perusal, it is interesting to note that the real St. Elizabeth of Hungary, after the death of her husband, devoted herself to a noble life of asceticism and charity which Kingsley then interpreted into a life of sado-masochism. On another occasion, Kingsley also drew a sketch of himself and Fanny tied up, making love on a cross that floats on ocean waves (Maynard Figure 1). Given Kingsley's obvious (and sometimes strange) interest in sexuality, critics such as Engelhardt, Maynard, Chadwick, and others have noted that one can understand Kingsley's opposition to clerical celibacy and that he equated it with untrustworthiness (Engelhardt, "Victorian" 48). In fact, some of the opposition may have stemmed from a sense of personal threat since Kingsley's own wife had considered joining a Tractarian convent before they were married. In addition, Kingsley would have been opposed to the Catholic views of the Virgin Mary based on the idea of her as eternal Virgin and as spotless and sinless as defined by the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Further, Engelhardt concludes, "[i]t was not merely the renouncing of physical pleasure and corporeal union, but the independence that virginity conferred that Kingsley found objectionable" ("Victorian" 48). Engelhardt maintains that Kingsley would have found Joseph's marriage to a perpetual virgin unacceptable. She writes:

> If Mary had remained a virgin, even after the birth of Jesus—as Christians had traditionally agreed, at least until the nineteenth century, that she did, and which Catholics continued to maintain---her husband would have been bound by her choice, willingly or not. (48)

Also, Kingsley feared Mary's power to usurp Christ's role as spiritual guide and comforter. During the Victorian period, as throughout much of history, women

and the feminine were considered "less than" the masculine ideal—so to attribute power to Mary, even if done only to portray her and her converts in a bad light as Kingsley did, meant admitting that Mary had the capability to be a "tenacious threat to the masculine preserve" (Engelhardt, "Victorian" 49).

In turn, Maynard notes that Kingsley often promoted his anti-Catholicism in his lectures as Regius Professor of Religion at Cambridge: "When he comes to the Renaissance, Kingsley naturally rewrites the Protestant Reformation as sexual positions [sic], in his anticipating the grounds of debate in later twentieth-century social history" (117-118). Kingsley saw Protestantism as a strong virile religion whereas Catholicism was an impure, feminized religion encouraging men to perform acts of atrocity such as rape (Maynard 120).

It is clear, then, that Kingsley had definite ideas about the correct roles for men and women. As a friend of John Stuart Mill, he advocated rights for women, and even though he saw that they would be useful in medicine; he believed that women's roles were most usefully fulfilled in the home. Further, reflecting his own preoccupations with sexuality, he saw women's main role as using their sexual powers "to civilize and Christianize men, to use and bring about the chivalry at least latent in English culture" (Maynard 120).

In looking at his 1853 work *Hypatia: or New Foes with an Old Face*, we can see some of the conflicts over femininity, sexuality, and asceticism with which Kingsley struggled. And struggle with them he did. He himself drew a picture of a naked, young husband prostrate beside his bed fasting and praying (Maynard figure 5). Maynard comments that "the tensions inherent in Kingsley's positions as he attempts to affirm a

strong ideal of sexuality in one circumstance while denying virtually its every other manifestation, sometimes emerge in his work as peculiarly troubled or disturbed moments" (130). *Hypatia,* which is set in fifth-century Alexandria, focuses on issues of sexuality and asceticism--two key issues, of course, for the Catholic church and for Mary herself. As Maynard notes, this novel cost Kingsley his honorary doctorate from Oxford because critics found the book too violent and sexual for Victorian standards. Nevertheless, in writing this book, Maynard comments that Kingsley "has the correct instinct both as historian and theologian, to return to this period in which the long ascetic development of Christianity was being confirmed in the crucible of public controversy and agitation" (106). In the novel, Hypatia, a young female philosopher, converts to Christianity and eventually decides to take up a celibate life, which choice seems to indicate a Marian path, but Kingsley's text does not truly support this decision. As Maynard notes, "Hypatia's initiation, as we shall see, is transferred from a directly sexual one to a scene of extreme violence and total violation. Kingsley seems more interested in showing the ill consequences of celibacy than in presenting sympathetically his own sexual ideal" (124). The violence that Maynard refers to occurs in a scene in the novel in which Hypatia has actually chosen Christianity but also a life of celibacy:

> The Christian mob, who identify her with [her earlier interest] with the pagan revival, wish to destroy, catch her up, rush her into the church, strip her and tear her to pieces, a kind of ultimate rape. Kingsley would obviously disown the apparent moral, put up or shut up, and ascribe the sexual element in the lynching to the violence of the hypocrite Christians in what was, after all, history. Yet the point does seem to be in the fiction's plot, a dire if somewhat disguised warning against

women who spurn sex and take up the cause of celibacy. (Maynard 132)

Furthermore, as would be expected, the males of the novel certainly do not choose the life of celibacy. Maynard points out that while the Jewish character Raphael Aben-Ezra, who owns a harem, eventually converts to Christianity and to asceticism by the end of the novel, he ends up marrying (106). Another character in the novel who advocates marriage is Aben-Ezra's mother, who Maynard describes as a "mother-earth" figure created to argue for the "earthy fruit of the womb against celibacy" and "to answer the ascetic revival of this day that he had long identified with Newman," as Kingsley attempted to show that "marriage and human relation were a central part of the Christian way" (Maynard 106).

In the novel *Westward Ho*! (1855), Kingsley's most remembered children's book aside from *Water Babies*, we see his fully articulated hostility toward the Virgin Mary—perhaps in response to the publication of the Immaculate Conception definition of 1854 since he mentions the dogma in this text and the novel was published shortly after the definition's appearance. Michael Schiefelbein notes that this novel is his "most sustained and vivid attack" on the Catholic Church. He goes on to observe, "More than any other work by Kingsley, this novel is packed with distorted characterizations of Catholics" (10).

Westward Ho! appears to be for males about males and was "intended as an instrument to rally patriotism during the Crimean War" (Schiefelbein 10). English women are not important in the novel, as Schiefeilbein makes clear: "For the most part, the role of the novel's English women is the fairly nominal one of 'angel in the house'—a Victorian conceptualization that both deifies women and renders them ineffectual in the

world" (13). Although the men take on stereotypical roles as well, the novel primarily focuses on masculine religious power and power struggles through contrasting a set of cousins—Amyas Leigh who is the "good" Protestant cousin against his "corrupt" Catholic cousin Eustace Leigh. Trying to be the "fair-minded narrator," Kingsley comments on the spiritual development of the two men: "I have tried to hint to you two opposite sorts of men. The one trying to be good with all his might and main, according to certain approved methods and rules, which he has got by heart; and like a weak oarsman, feeling and fingering his spiritual muscles over all day, to see if they are growing" (67). In other words, as Kingsley makes clear later, despite his appearances of fairness, he is describing a Catholic here. By contrast, consider how Kingsley describes the "good" Christian man: "The other, not even knowing whether he is good or not, but just doing the right thing without thinking about it, as simply as a little child, because the Spirit of God is with him" (67).

The novel develops by paralleling these young men in service to Queen Elizabeth who has set them on adventures with Sir Water Raleigh as they fight against Spanish dominion. Eustace's obvious spiritual depravity "corrupts" his sexuality and "weakens" his manhood as Maynard comments: "[S]exual license and adultery are associated with Catholicism and the Romance countries; a full-grown marital sexuality—married love—is the pride of the English, who seem, by a connection between the marital and martial not made clear, to be able to take on three or four times their number of Spaniards, whether soldiers or ships in the Armada" (141). Kingsley does not, in other words, use a subtle hand as he further develops the character of Eustace and why his bad habits began:

> Careful as the priests were over the practical morality of their pupils, this severe restraint had little effect in producing real habits of self-control. What little Eustace had learnt of women from them, was as base and vulgar as the rest of their teaching. What could it be else, if instilled by men educated in the schools of Italy and France, in the age which produced the foul novels of Cinthio and Bandello, and compelled Rabelais, in order to escape the rack and stake, to hide the light of his great wisdom, not beneath a bushel, but beneath a dunghill; the age in which the Romish church had made marriage a legalized tyranny, and the laity, by a natural and pardonable revulsion, had exalted adultery into a virtue and a science! That all love was lust; that all women had their price; that profligacy, though an ecclesiastical sin, was so pardonable, if not necessary, as to be hardly a moral sin, were notions which Eustace must needs have gathered from the hints of preceptors; for their written works bear to this day fullest and foulest testimony that such was their opinion; and that their conception of the relation of the sexes was really not a whit higher than that of the profligate laity who confessed them. (77)

In addition to the above plethora of Protestant fears associated with Catholicism, Amyas verbalizes the popular misconception that Catholics were out to convert Protestants, as seen here when Amyas complains to his brother: "[H]ere's Eustace trying to convert me; and telling me that I owe all my luck to the Blessed Virgin's prayers for me" (68). In addition to Eustace, the Catholic priest, Father Campian is, of course, corrupt as well, and Kingsley describes him as someone who wants to use Eustace for his own devices of obtaining wealth through Eustace's marrying Rose, a wealthy heiress. Kingsley does try

to show his equanimity by saying that he does not think all Catholics are bad, only the ones who were influenced by the Jesuits. In partial defense of the "bad" Eustace, he writes, "But in justice be it said, all this came upon Eustace, not because he was a Romanist, but because he was educated by the Jesuits. Had he been saved from them, he might have lived and died as simple and honest a gentleman as his brothers, who turned out like true Englishmen . . ." (67). But Eustace, precisely because he is so evil, cannot win the girl. Here is the comic exchange between Eustace and Rose, his "beloved":

> "Rose! Rose! Have you not blighted my life for me—broken my heart? And how have I repaid you? How but by sacrificing myself to seek you over land and sea, that I might complete your conversion to the bosom of that church where a Virgin Mother stands stretching forth soft arms to embrace her wandering daughter, and cries to you all day long, "Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" And this is my reward!"
>
> "Depart with your Virgin Mother, Sir, and tempt me no more! You have asked me what I dare; and I dare this, upon my own ground, and in my own garden, I, Donna Rosa de Soto, to bid you leave this place now and forever, after having insulted me by talking of your love, and tempted me to give up that faith which my husband promised me he would respect and protect. Go, Sir!" (377)

In this passage, Eustace appears unusually corrupt, not just because he wants to proselytize Rose and to steal her away from her husband, but also because he attributes Christ's words to the Virgin Mary (Matthew 11:28). By doing so, Eustace becomes Kingsley's mouthpiece, espousing the Protestant misconception that Catholics "worship" Mary, not Christ. Ironically, Rose, too, speaks Christ's words and rebukes

Eustace in the way that Christ rebukes Satan in the famous temptation scene (Matthew 4:10). In this case, by Rose talking to Eustace as if he were Satan, Kingsley makes his position perfectly clear that he considers Catholics to be in league with the devil.[10]

Contrast this assault on the Virgin and her followers with the description of the "good" Protestant Amyas (Emmaus) whose very name recalls the biblical scene wherein Christ's disciples encounter him after the resurrection (Luke 24:13 ff) , suggesting that Amyas is the embodiment of the resurrected Christ:

> And as he stands there with beating heart and kindling eye, the cool breeze whistling of brave young England longing to wing its way out of its island prison, to discover and to traffic, to colonize and to civilize, until no wind can sweep the earth which does not bear the echoes of an English voice. Patience young Amyas! (45)

Not only is Amyas good-looking, but he also speaks for England with a flush on his cheek, further emphasizing his fair northern European skin, his ethnocentric patriotism, and his entitlement to colonize. As would be expected, Amyas, unlike Eustace, is also more successful in sexual matters as he "tames" the wild native woman Ayacora.

Kingsley then heaps insult upon insult against the Catholic Church as the English sailors defend English soil from foreign domination and protect wholesome Protestant values. For example, when Sir Walter Raleigh finds the dead body of a traitorous

---

[10] Matthew 11: 28 reads, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Luke 4: 10 reads, "Away from me, Satan!" Notice here, too, feminine "Others" quote Christ so that Kingsley cannot be accused of advocating female preachers.

legate who is carrying "blasphemous" notes from the Pope, Raleigh kicks the corpse and remarks, "Yes, this is Saunders. Misguided fool, and this is the end! To this thou has come with thy plotting and thy conspiring, thy lying and thy boasting, consecrated banners and Pope's bulls, Agnus Deis and holy waters, the blessing of all saints and angels, and thy Lady of the Immaculate Conception! Thou hast called on the Heavens to judge between thee and us, and here is the answer!" (245). Again, Kingsley's social commentary is anything but subtle here as Raleigh kicks the dead body, which clearly symbolizes the Catholic Church. Note, too, the specific imprecations against the Lady of the Immaculate Conception. This scene also provides additional commentary on the sexual prowess of Roman clergy as Salvation Yeo, one of the sailors with Raleigh, comments on the priest's body: "The man has been starved, Sirs, as I am a sinful man. God help him, though he is a priest: and yet he seems full enough down there" (244). The "down there" seems to imply his genitals. After Raleigh, Yeo, and Amyas discover the "bulge," they see that it is a pouch full of official papers, including the above-mentioned letters. Eventually, it becomes clear here that anyone who has anything to do with the Virgin Mary and Catholicism is doomed in this novel and that the Protestants will survive well. Amyas, in fact, not only gets the girl, but he gets the wild, exotic woman of his dreams, although she is not portrayed as the typical English heroine, and Maynard comments that this marriage certainly does not represent the sexual intimacy that the pure, English woman is to have with her man: "The Amazon nature child, Ayacora falls in love with Amyas Leigh, the bold English captain, who yields to her love at the end of the novel. The final reconciliation is only hastily sketched in, with the exotic free woman now reduced to a proper English lady" (124). Kingsley's

consistent inconsistency in sexual matters in relation to religious faith seems to endure until the end of the novel.

We began the chapter with a glorified image of the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception that captured the imagination of many in the nineteenth century—including three of the most popular male British writers of the 1850's and 60's. While it is difficult at times to separate out images of the Madonna from the pervasive Victorian ideals for a woman to be Coventry Patmore's "angel of the house" (which, of course, has mystical resonance with the Virgin Mary), perhaps we can conclude that the concepts overlap and reinforce each other. While Dickens overlays the glorified image of the Madonna onto the heroines of his novels, Collins and Kingsley sometimes have darker purposes in developing their Marian-like characters. Collins, however, differs from Kingsley in that Collins' Madonnas are much more complex and in many ways likeable heroines. By contrast, it is very clear that Kingsley is writing against the Catholic Virgin Mary.

How would the nineteenth-century audiences have "read" these images of Mary Immaculate? While many other influences were at work at this time to establish women's roles, a type of secular transubstantiation seems to have taken place with the public broadcast and discussion of the Immaculate Conception definition (*as interpreted by Protestants through ideals for Victorian womanhood*) whereby the fictional "ordinary" females sometimes become distorted sacred images that are subservient creatures, without their own hopes and dreams, and who were occasionally eroticized as docile children. Female characters like Esther Summerson and Marian Halcombe, or even Madonna Blyth, who have the potential to be role models, are separated from the mass of real women by their estranging "orphan" backgrounds that do

not include the quotidian reality of jobs or families of mother, father, siblings, or even children except for Agnes whose children are not really present in the novel. Some might argue their independence further indicates ties to the medieval Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception, whom the popular Victorian art critic Anna Jameson contemporary to these writers) describes: "[T]he maternal character is set aside, and she stands alone, absolute in herself, and complete in her own perfections" (xxvi). And perhaps that is what the writers intended, but again, they usually take an attribute of the Madonna and tweak it to fit Victorian ideals so that their Madonnas rely heavily on the alpha males of the novels. Even worse, these Protestant Madonnas are juxtaposed against other women such as the religious Mrs. Pardiggle in *Bleak House*. Or, like the male-constructed Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*, they may speak contemptuously of their gender, which also supports the argument that they are women "set apart," yet they lack the mercy and compassion associated with the Catholic Virgin Mary.

Writers like Dickens, Collins, and Kingsley became the new apostles, unintentionally or not, as they spread their gospel in their writing. But, then, the concept took on a different twist, and perhaps we can say that the soaring image of the Immaculate Conception of 1852 had begun a slow decline into a Protestant Conception that could more easily be mocked as time progressed. If this is the case, one has to wonder how the women who identified with the principles of purity and piety, as established by these male authors, began to define themselves when such a model came under fire or, even worse, was parodied as ludicrous evil.

Chapter 2: Selling Images of the Sacred and Profane: Browning and Swinburne

At the height of both Robert Browning's and Algernon Charles Swinburne's popularity, a literary revolution took place in England among the younger readers of the 1860's, a revolution that made the two poets unlikely allies. As Donald Thomas notes, "[T]he men at Oxford and Cambridge who were increasing Browning's sales, linked arms on the pavement and chanted the sado-masochistic verses of Swinburne's 'Dolores' in the scandalized ears of their elders."[1] Browning, in turn, benefited from the new devotion to Swinburne. The reception of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866), in fact, buffered Browning from public censure for his more controversial works such as *The Ring and The Book* (1868) and *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873).[2] The kinship between Browning and Swinburne extended, however, beyond their male audience of Oxford and Cambridge students, and, surprisingly, included the figure of the Virgin Mary. Indeed, as U.C. Knoepflamacher argues, "[T]he innermost heart remained, for both poets, always essentially female."[3] From Swinburne's Hertha to Browning's Colombe, both men ostensibly shared an interest in female mythic characters and in giving these characters a type of agency, if not always a voice. It would seem natural, then, since Browning and Swinburne shared a keen interest in the mythic female, as well as history and literature, that they also would be captivated by the powerful image of the Virgin Mary, who had inspired art, literature, and music through the ages. While the

---

[1] Donald Thomas, *Robert Browning: A Life within a Life* (New York: Viking Press, 1982) 210.

[2] Thomas, *A Life* 211.

[3] U. C. Knoepflamacher in "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Monologue," *Critical Essays on Robert Browning*, ed. Mary Ellis Gibson (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992) 117-118.

poets' religious backgrounds differed—Browning had roots in the evangelical tradition; Swinburne was brought up in a high Anglican tradition —not surprisingly, both men wrote often about the Madonna. What is surprising, however, are the paradoxical dimensions that their poetry takes on in exploring common themes of the sacred and profane.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Dickens, Collins, and Kingsley created Madonnas who generally model proper behavior for Victorian women in their novels. In this chapter, I will show how Browning and Swinburne focus on the whore/Madonna archetypes found in history, art, and song. Along with these archetypes, the two poets also play with the image of the Immaculate Conception and subvert it through parody. At first glance, Browning and Swinburne appear to give power to their Madonnas by imbuing them with a type of eroticism, but I will argue that these later portraits of the Madonna (spanning 1855-1869) tend to mock and limit women's sexuality, defining their roles by the Madonna/whore polarities. At times using persuasive techniques familiar to late twentieth-century advertisers, Browning and Swinburne innovatively use media to sell their fallen Madonnas to the public.

Before we consider the two poets' influence on the public, we should examine some of the factors and influences that brought the two men into contact with each other, despite the disparity in their years and values. In *Swinburne: The Poet in his World,* Thomas notes that the young Swinburne read Browning's works at Oxford with enthusiasm (41). While the younger poet did not consider Browning a great lyric poet, Swinburne admired his dramatic monologues (*Swinburne Letters,* v. 1, 46-7), a form which Swinburne also incorporated into his poetry with works such as "Hymn to

Proserpine" (Shrimpton 67). Swinburne later became disillusioned with Browning and even, much to Browning's dismay, parodied his poem "James Lee's Wife" (Knoepflamacher 117-118). Swinburne, in fact, thought that Browning was not particularly skillful in describing female characters.[4] The two poets further distanced themselves after they had a final falling out when Browning took up the presidency of the New Shakespeare Society, whose founder, F.J. Furnivall, was Swinburne's hated enemy (Thomas, *Swinburne* 196-97). However, on the occasion of Browning's death in 1889, Swinburne put aside their differences and wrote "Sequence of Sonnets on the Death of Robert Browning."

Browning, in turn, discovered Swinburne in 1863 when he first heard Swinburne read his poetry. Browning had this to say of the experience: "I know next to nothing of Swinburne, and like him much . . . . [But] 'I thought [his poems] moral mistakes, redeemed by much intellectual ability'" (*New Letters* 150). Whatever one may think of Browning's ethical conservatism towards Swinburne's poetry in his comment, his assessment of Swinburne's intellectual ability was accurate as noted by scholars such as Cecil Y. Lang in his introduction to *The Swinburne Letters* (xiv). But Browning, too, read extensively, and while Swinburne may have had greater knowledge in literature, Browning's own reading across disciplines was probably broader than Swinburne's (Thomas, *Browning* 15).

Since Browning appeared on the literary scene prior to Swinburne, and served as a

---

[4] Knoepflamacher notes that "the 'Female Other" whom Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites represented in verse and on the canvas owed much to Browning--although Swinburne denounced Browning's portrayal of women in his unfinished essay "The Chaotic School," in which Swinburne "denies Browning the skill of impersonating a true woman" (117).

type of mentor to the younger poet, we will first examine his interpretation of the Virgin Mary. Throughout Browning's life, the Virgin Mary was a symbol fraught with complicated emotions that tied to, among other things, art, his familial and personal relationships, the politico-religious environment around him, and his own later grief.

Like Dickens and Collins, Browning had his own Murillos in his background. In a letter dated February 27, 1846, Browning tells Barrett of visiting the town of Dulwich near his home to see some paintings that were to be sold at the Greyhound Inn there:

> By the way, yesterday I went to Dulwich to see some pictures, "by old Teniers, Murillo, Gainsborough, Rafaelle" [apparently he is quoting a newspaper here about a sale of the paintings to take place at Greyhound Inn at Dulwich]—then twenty names about, and last but one, as if just thought of—"Corregio."—The whole collection, including a "divine picture by Murillo," and Titian's Daughter (hitherto supposed to be in the Louvre)—the whole I would, I think, have cheerfully given a pound or two for the privilege of not possessing—so execrable as sign-paintings even! Are there worse poets in their way than painters? [5]

We see from the above comments about paying *not* to possess his work that Browning seems not to think too highly of that particular Murillo. Barrett, misunderstanding, thinks that Browning has visited The Dulwich gallery, which opened in 1811 as London's first public art gallery. She responds with her assessment of Murillo:

> I never saw those pictures, but am astonished that the whole world should be

[5] Kelley, Philip and Scott Lewis, eds., *The Brownings' Correspondence* Vol. 11 (Winfield, Kansas: Wedgeston Press, 1994) 111.

> wrong in praising them—"Divine" is a bad word for Murillo in any case—because he is intensely human in his most supernatural subjects. His beautiful Trinity in the National Gallery, which I saw the last time I went out to look at pictures, has no Deity in it--& seem to see it now....But I always understood that Dulwich gallery was famous for great works! You surprise me! [6]

Browning then replies that he was not speaking of The Dulwich Gallery when he had mentioned the paintings in the earlier letter. In his defense, he tells her about visiting The Dulwich Gallery, which was a half hour walk from his boyhood home of Camberwell:

> It is just as if I had spoken contemptuously of that Gallery I so love and am so grateful to—having been used to go there when a child, far under the age allowed by regulations—those two Guidos, the wonderful Rembrandt of Jacob's vision, such a Watteau, the triumphant three Murillo pictures, a Giorgione music-lesson group, all the Poussins with the 'Armida' and 'Jupiter's Nursing'—and no end to 'ands'—I have sate [sic] before one, some one of those pictures I had determined to see, a good hour and then gone away....[7]

In this passage, we see that while Browning disparaged Murillo in the earlier letter, he is attempting to be conciliatory with Barrett and, perhaps, uses a hint of irony when he calls the Murillos "triumphant." Browning's memory was not reliable regarding the presence of the Rembrandt and the Giorgione in the gallery (Thomas, *Browning* 20), but

---

[6] Kelley, Vol. 11: 119.

[7] Kelley, Vol. 12: 128.

the Murillos were present at the time of Browning's childhood and included both *The Immaculate Conception* and *The Madonna and the Rosary*. *The Immaculate Conception* of this gallery depicts Mary looking down and not skyward like many of the Murillo portraits. In *The Madonna and the Rosary*, Christ is sitting on Mary's lap, and his right arm seems noticeably disproportionate to the rest of his body. In addition to Murillo's famous Madonnas, the gallery also contained his painting of two peasant boys. While we cannot know fully what Browning thought of all of the Murillos, Browning absorbed the images in the previously mentioned paintings, probably along with Magdalene images found in the gallery paintings by artists such as Carlo Cignani and Annibale Carracci.

In addition to these early visits to the art gallery, other influences played a role in creating Browning's interest in the Madonna. In *The Browning Handbook*, William Clyde DeVane reports that Browning's mother was key to his religious instruction: "[She] inculcated her doctrine in her son, and he became 'passionately religious,' as he described himself in his later years" (5). In addition, Browning's father, characterized as saintly and tenderhearted by Browning and others, encouraged religious tolerance in their home, as well as instilled in his son a great appreciation for art. In fact, as a young man, Browning's father had wanted to be an artist, but Browning's grandfather prevented him from doing so (Thomas, *Browning* 3-4).

Throughout his life, these early influences in religion and art carried over into Robert Browning's own personal acquisitions. According to an inventory of the Brownings' household goods, Browning owned two works by Murillo: one small oval portrait entitled *Mother and Child* and a watercolor of *Two Children, Our Saviour and St. John, with a Lamb* (Kelley and Colley 480). He also owned a small unidentified oil painting of

a Madonna "from the Italian school" listed in his personal inventory at his death (Kelly and Colley 472). This inventory lists as well a photograph of *La Madonna Aspettante* by the illustrious late nineteenth-century photographer Julia Cameron, who was most known for her work posing women and children in tableaus as Madonnas (489). These possessions argue for Browning's lasting interest in the Madonna.

Two family acquaintances also likely influenced Browning's thinking on the Virgin Mary—the American journalist and transcendental writer Margaret Fuller and the British art critic Anna Jameson. Fuller was most well-known for her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), a nonfiction work in which she praises solitary self-reliant goddess figures as a way to encourage women to live empowered lives. Kimberly VanEsveld Adams argues that Fuller contributed to an interest in a powerful Madonna figure in the nineteenth century because the goddesses she describes are really derivatives of the Madonna (145-146). Fuller became a friend of the Brownings when they met in Italy in 1849. By that time, she had been involved in the Italian revolution in Rome, devotedly following after the revolutionary leader Mazzini. In the last days of the revolution, Fuller and her lover Marchese Ossoli married and then fled to Florence with their child, where they established their friendship with the Brownings. Unfortunately, on a trip back to the United States in 1850, Fuller and her family perished at sea. Both Brownings were fond of Fuller and grieved over her death.

Another friend, Anna Jameson, a popular and prolific writer on art, travel, and literary criticism, actually composed her work *Legends of the Madonna* during the time she visited and befriended the Brownings in Italy. Jameson had been a friend of Barrett's since 1841 and had encouraged her marriage to Browning. Thomas writes, "Elizabeth

had . . . a friend, although not a confidante, in the art critic and essayist Anna Jameson. Mrs. Jameson, then years her elder, was later to be known affectionately to the Brownings as 'Aunt Nina.' It was she who was to be their companion and assistant in the difficult task of moving Elizabeth from Paris to Italy" (*Browning* 117). While always an admirer of Barrett's work, Jameson in 1854 also gave commendation to Robert Browning's *Paracelsus* (Hudson 348).[8]

Added to the above mentioned factors, Browning's interest in the Virgin Mary could have been part of his religious quest to find an authentic Christianity. His poetry often contains spiritual themes and traditional ideas of religion such as the resurrected Christ and "our human need for Christianity" (DeVane 297). But his belief systems were also often complex, as Robert Viscusi points out: "What great poet is more confusing, confused, and frustrating to the elucidator than Robert Browning? Was he Puritan or an atheist? Was he spiritual or worldly? Was he an atheist or a bourgeois?" (248). Viscusi raises these questions because it is apparent that Browning himself struggled with them. Browning clearly favored the Protestant Dissenter *ethos* to Catholic piety, and like many of the English people of the time, he fell into what DeVane suggests was the "prejudice of his class and nation against Rome" (199). DeVane comments further that Browning came to see through his own prejudice somewhat in *The Ring and the Book* and deals "more generously with the Catholics" in that work (201). Some of Browning's negative sentiment toward the Catholic Church stemmed from his disillusionment with the

[8] In Jameson's *A Commonplace Book of Thoughts, Memories and Fancies.*

charismatic and once liberal Pius IX, the pope who promoted the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of 1854 and the later Syllabus of Papal Infallibility of 1870 (Naish 95-177). Considering Browning's dislike of the Pope, one wonders whether Pius 1X's affections for the Virgin Mary, who reportedly healed him from epilepsy, colored Browning's negative attitude toward the Madonna and Catholicism in general.

Certainly, at times in his private life, Browning was often quite outspoken about his anti-Catholicism and in his nationalistic antipathy toward Italy. While he was courting Barrett, he states in an 1845 letter about the Oxford movement, "I don't think I shall let you hear, after all, the savage things about Popes and imaginative religions that I must say" (*The Correspondence,* Vol.11, 22). In April of the same year, in another letter to Barrett, he states "that Italy is stuff for the use of the North—and no more: Poetry there is none, nearly as possible none, in Dante even—materials for poetry in the pitifullest romancist of their thousands, on the contrary—strange that those great black eyes should stare nothing out of the earth that lies before them." [9]

A much later letter written by Browning in 1866 to a friend indicates that he remained conflicted over Italy and Catholicism all of his life:

> I agree with you and always did, as to the uninterestingness of the Italians individually, as thinking, originating souls: I never read a line in a modern Italian book that was of any use to me—never saw a flash of poetry come out of an Italian *word*; in art, in action, *yes*—not in the region of ideas: I always said, they

[9] Kelley, Vol. 11: 184

> *are* poetry, don't and can't *make* poetry . . . ; my liking for Italy was always a selfish one,--I felt alone with my soul there. [10]

Although Browning's ideas about Italy appear to be ethnocentric, Viscusi believes that Browning actually had two differing views of Italy. To Browning, the "Italian" or feminine aspects of Italy were inferior, but the "Roman" aspects of Italy were to be praised (243-266). Viscusi states that Browning was not particularly unusual in this dual perspective since "most of nineteenth-century writing agrees, Italy was a woman" (249). He further comments, "For Italian never ceased to signify *primitive* to Browning, while Roman sustained something as much more respectable as it was devoid, correspondingly, of energy and vision, so that one may descry neatly aligned in the frame of this opposition the whole display of contrarieties which turned him . . .round throughout his . . . life" (248). For Browning, things *Italian* (and feminine) include father, Catholic, atheist, artist, black, nakedness, solitude, Elizabeth, Penini. Things Roman include masculine, mother, Protestant, white, believer, dandyism, society, Edward Moulton-Barrett, and himself (249).

While Viscusi does not explain fully why Browning's father would be in the Italian (feminine) category, based upon observations by Browning's numerous biographers, Browning was closer to his mother, whom he perceived as being strongly Protestant and proactive. Browning's passive father, who had wanted to be an artist, was probably inextricably linked to the arts in Italy and could have been overshadowed by the power of his wife. Thomas notes that Robert's friend Alfred Domett described Browning Sr. as

---

[10] Dated May 19, 1866. See Edward C. McAleer, ed., *Dearest Isa* (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1951) 238-239.

small, reserved, and devoted chiefly to his books and engravings (*Browning* 8). Some critics have also noted that Browning seems to have had conflicted feelings toward Barrett in regard to her role as his wife. According to Betty Miller in her famous *Robert Browning: A Portrait*, he was sometimes threatened by Barrett's literary successes, which, combined with his childhood relationship with his parents, may have caused him to equate "wife and/or mother" with power. While other critics such as Donald Thomas have questioned Miller's analysis of the competitive-Browning-marriage relationship, these categories make the most sense if we accept that Browning found women by virtue of their gender somewhat imbued with power. While we do not want to make too much of biographical data, Browning married an older woman just as his father had done. Remarkably, both men married women who were thirty-nine on their wedding dates. However, because Browning was so fully enamored with Barrett as *lover*, and she herself was often physically dependent on Browning, Browning would not cast her as "Roman," the more masculine category. When we later look at Browning's images of the Madonna, we will see how the idea of the Madonna fits in well with Browning's dual belief system and his art because he could idealize a Madonna as Roman (mother) but at the same time limit her power since she was also Italian and, thus, inferior.

While Browning has been credited with giving voice to feminine characters such as Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book*, he has also been accused of denying power to women as he "continued the Victorian paradigm of denying to the female the position to which she first had been exalted" (Knoepflamacher105). With this denial of power came a denial of voice for women such as Porphyria and the Duchess. The Duchess, in fact, is

a perfect example of how Browning felt about his female characters. He idealizes the young Duchess as a Madonna figure, as evidenced by the Marian iconography such as the white mule and the cherries (Knoepflamacher 114), but she is also a victim whose reputation, only in the Duke's eyes, had been tarnished by some imagined sexual indiscretion.

At the same time, Browning is not without some self-awareness about the dangers of the male tendency to control and "flatten" women:

> And, whereas his early female speakers remained two-dimensional . . . it was in those monologues in which Browning parodied his own male desire to flatten women into the "fixed" and immoveable Andromedas of graphic art—in poems such as "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess," once again, but also in "Andrea del Sarto," "The Bishop Orders his Tomb," and even "Fra Lippo Lippi"—where his own art suddenly became powerfully and magically three-dimensional. (Knoepflamacher 103)

Knoepflamacher suggests that Browning modeled his theme of women completing male desire on his own relationship with Barrett: "Barrett thus furnished Browning with a further link to the Romantic idealization of a female complement that might restore an incomplete male self" (102). However, unlike some of Browning's flattened female characters, Barrett clearly had her own voice and her own strong identity apart from her husband's. Indeed, it was Barrett's own individuality and voice that Browning admittedly admired in her as evidenced by her February 27, 1847, letter to her sister Arabella Moulton-Barrett wherein Barrett tells of "quarreling" with her husband:

> We have great arguments about the Spanish marriages & M. Guizot, & Balzac,

& Rousseau & subjects not to be counted..& [sic] he who mounts an argument just like a battery, growing warmer & warmer, till he gets quite into extravagances (that's a tendency of his) makes me feel warm too...& then I take up a book & observe in a provoking way.. [sic]"I won't dispute a moment longer—you say things that you don't mean or that you ought'nt to mean. Only, I protest against all you have been saying...& there's my last world".

The other day, there was a silence after this, of at least ten minutes, & I confess, I thought to myself. . [sic] "now he is angry with me at last." Seriously, I was plotting how to be forgiven, & how to put my impertinent book down with sufficient dignity. . when lo, a voice said. . "Ba, do you know one of the reasons why I love you?"—"Hard to guess", I answered, in a resumption of good humour.. "you know very well that your reasons for loving me, I have always ranked among the mysteries". "Then I will tell you one of the many reasons. When I get into a petulant irritable humour . . ." (he!!) "& have the headache as I have now & say unreasonable & improper things, which my own reason would recoil at another time, you do not give up, & attempt to soothe me by agreeing with me or letting it pass, as so many good tempered women do to the eternal injury of foolish men, . . but you always tell me the truth plainly, Ba" . . . .[11]

Nevertheless, despite the reality of his own egalitarian marriage, described in the above letter, Browning often denied agency and voice to his fictional female characters.

---

[11] *Brownings' Correspondence*, Vol. 14: 132.

Perhaps his intention was to show the detrimental effects of silencing women, but the fact remains that many of his female characters do not speak or even have central roles in his works except to flesh out those of the males. Knoepflamacher comments on Browning's voiceless women:

> "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess"...feed on the every incompletion they depict. They still render the appropriation of a Female Other who is portrayed as elusive and silent: Removed as either lyricist or narrator, Browning now ironizes the act of projection by which a devouring male ego, reduces that Female Other into nothingness . . . .Though an ironist, the poet also acts as abettor and accomplice, for he too flattens a female anima into a mere image, a representation, an object of art. (103)

And as we have seen earlier, the Virgin Mary, or the Madonna, depicted as the Female Other in much of literature, was an image that had already been used by nineteenth-century writers and seventeenth-century artists such as Murillo to fulfill cultural needs as well as to complement the male ego. At times, Browning goes one step further than the previously discussed authors by creating palimpsestic images of women who are not just Madonnas, but who are also models for paintings of Madonnas and who are, most ironically, the "whores" of the poem. At other times, Browning invokes the image of the Virgin Mary to show some of the conflicts and resolutions between Catholics and Protestants during his time. Four poems which best illustrate how Browning interprets the image of the Virgin Mary to the largely Protestant British culture include "Bishop Blougram's Apology," "Andrea Del Sarto," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and *The Ring and the Book*.

"Bishop Blougram's Apology," released in *Men and Women* in 1855, is according to Thomas, "one of the most accomplished as well as one of the most astonishing of the entire Victorian period" (*Browning* 167). The Bishop in this poem, widely agreed upon by critics to be based on the character of Cardinal Wiseman, the first Catholic archbishop of England, offers his argument for his faith to the arrogant journalist Gigadibs, who assumes the Bishop to be an unintelligent charlatan. However, by the end of the poem, the Bishop's eloquent argument has convinced Gigadibs to renounce his career to pursue a study of the gospels in Australia, an idea that shows Browning's ironic attitude toward religion throughout the poem since Australia is considered a place of exile for most Britons. While Browning seems to be sympathetic to the character of the Catholic Bishop, he also shows his own Protestant predilections in this character's construction and, in particular, as he talks about the Virgin Mary.

Marian miracles are something that the Bishop neither rejects nor accepts. He mentions in the following lines that people will know him and respect him whether or not he believes in the latest miracle of a statue of the Virgin Mary that cries:

> That men will know me, whether I believe
> In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
> And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
> And am a knave,--approve in neither case. (376-379)

The Virgin Mary comes up again later in the poem when the Bishop describes how skeptical the age has become and concedes that there is some point at which those who claim faith must simply accept some of the teachings of the church. The Bishop says:

> Here we've got callous to the Virgin's winks

That used to puzzle people wholesomely;

Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.

What are the laws of nature, not to bend

If the Church bid them?—brother Newman

Asks. (699-703)

Browning argues in this work, according to Norton B. Crowell, "no man can be absolutely sure that the winking Virgin is or is not a crude imposture contrived to compel the faith of the credulous. No man can attain absolute truth, and the fraudulent miracle, for which Blougram has nothing but contempt, may possibly be true, at least in part . . . . Thus, he argues, since all is relative, what does it matter what one believes?" (119). Thomas adds, "Eager to hear Blougram denounce himself one way or another, Gigadibs is clearly shown that to believe in the Winking Virgin is, in truth, the only alternative to blind superstition. No part of belief can be dispensed with by the church" (*Browning* 169). As if to give an example of extreme leaps of faith, the Bishop then mentions the latest controversy, which appears to be the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Because of its proximity of thought to the implausible example of the Winking Virgin, the Bishop suggests that we need to accept the "rack of faith." With the use of this ironic allusion to an instrument of torture (the "rack"), which had often been used in history to torture people for heresy; Browning implies that while some tenets of faith will be difficult to accept, they will ultimately stretch souls (with the ominous overtone that the rack sometimes kills). The Bishop, then, urges on new dogma:

Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—

On to the rack with faith!—is my advice.

Will not they hurry us upon our knees,

Knocking our breasts, "It can't be—yet it

Shall!

Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?" (704-708)

In reading this section, we must keep in mind Browning's negative attitude toward Pius IX mentioned earlier which would add further irony to the Bishop's comments. While Browning may have intended this poem to be a charitable portrayal of Cardinal Wiseman and the Catholic Church, the likeable Bishop would probably reinforce Protestant stereotypes--that *surely* Church leaders half-heartedly give lip service to what they teach. Additionally, this poem somewhat mocks the role of Virgin Mary since the Bishop's few references to her disparage any real influence that she may have on Christians. But it is difficult to tell what the Bishop really believes, since at the end of his monologue, the narrator of the poem ironically notes that Blougram sometimes chose his words for "argumentary purposes" (line 982).

"Fra Lippo Lippi," another poem in the first volume of *Men and Women*, further illustrates Browning's ideas about the Virgin Mary. As DeVane states, "The poem owes its inception to Florence, where at the Academia delle belle Arti Browning saw *The Coronation of the Virgin*,[12] the picture described by Lippi in the poem as the one he will have finished in six months. The Pitti and Uffizi Galleries at Florence also had pictures by Lippi" (DeVane 216). Anna Jameson, the art critic and mentor to the Brownings,

---

[12] Helen Archibalde Clarke in *Browning's Italy* notes that "[t]he Coronation of the Virgin [sic], described at the end of the poem, was according to Vasari, the picture which made Lippo Lippi known to Cosimo de'Medici, but it has been shown on other authority that this picture was executed long after Cosimo first knew Lippo Lippi, so Browning is justified in imagining it a kind of penance picture for the escapade described" (247).

also mentions *The Coronation of the Virgin* in her work *Legends of the Madonna,* which suggests just how strongly these writers and friends may have influenced each other (DeVane 216).

Browning, in fact, identified with Lippo, whose passion for creating real scenes and characters often challenged the norms of the art world:

> Browning found in the Renaissance painter a very sympathetic character; like himself highly individualistic, suffering from the tyranny of artistic convention, and like himself energetic and instinctual with seemingly well-thought out aesthetic and religious opinions, which chimed with Browning's own. (DeVane 219)

Most critics agree that Lippo's main concern is to show the beauty and splendor of the natural world and people through his painting, although he is called upon to paint "holy" pictures. One of the true wonders of life and Beauty for Fra Lippo Lippi appears to be women. Lippo describes the Madonnas of his paintings as wearing "lilies," and "vestments," symbols of the Virgin Mary, but he also links them to sexual activity. What Browning has done here, as Robert Pohlemus has suggested in *Erotic Faith*, is to link the erotic with religion as many of the nineteenth-century writers do. Lippo, at first, proclaims his good intentions:

> ---I shall paint
> God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
> Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel brood,
> Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
> As puff on grated orris-root. (348-351)

But then thirty-two lines later in the poem, he associates the image of the lily and the Madonna to his sexual dalliances when he escapes the monastery at night in his fantasy of heaven:

> Thus I scuttle off
> To some safe bench behind, not letting go
> The palm of her, the little lily thing
> That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
> Like the Prior's niece . . . .
> And so all's saved for me, and for the church
> A pretty picture gained. (383-389) [13]

In the first passage quoted above, Lippo talks about a divine image but then moves into his description of his rendezvous with the married Prior's niece, "the little lily thing," who is linked to the earlier described Madonna, ringed by "Lilies and vestments." Browning further links the erotic to the sacred by hinting that Lippo had an erotic liaison with the Prior's sacred niece who saved him in the nick of time and who also served as his model for the sacred Saint Lucy. Knoepflamacher notes Browning's wry observation of the way the Holy and Eros merge: "Lippo knows that Ideal and flesh cannot be 'dissevered.' Accordingly, at the end of his monologue, he suddenly defers to the female voice of 'the sweet angelic slip of a thing' that he casts in the role of rescuer" (115).

While Browning here shows an appreciation and sympathy for artists like Fra Lippo

[13] The picture that Lippo refers to here is *The Coronation of the Virgin* mentioned earlier.

Lippi, who painted the Madonnas of the Renaissance, he cannot help reverting to his own Protestant theology that the artificial religious art created by a "monk out of bounds" (as Lippi calls himself in line 341) and commissioned by the Catholic Church was somehow tainted. One could certainly argue here that Browning is drawing attention to the hypocrisy of religious institutions. And Thomas suggests in Browning's defense that the poem is saved from "mere comic ribaldry" by "Lippi's astute observation of his brothers in the cloister, his mockery of their moral pretentiousness" that Lippi observes with "amused tolerance" as he notes the suggestive visits from the Prior's niece to care for his asthma (*Browning* 170). Nevertheless, I would argue that, for all of Fra Lippo Lippi's winsome qualities, Browning contributes to Victorian anti-Catholic stereotypes by depicting Catholic clergy as licentious.[14] Moreover, although Browning had already written about woman as a silent image in "My Last Duchess" in 1842, he does something quite distinctive and different in "Fra Lippo Lippi." He associates nearly voiceless, sexually active female characters with famous paintings of the Madonna--a technique that he will repeat in "Andrea Del Sarto."

"Andrea Del Sarto" appears in the second volume of *Men and Women.* The poem grew out of Browning's attempts to describe a self-portrait of Andrea Del Sarto and his wife to his friend John Kenyon. Del Sarto, also known as "The Faultless Painter," was an artist from the sixteenth century whose wife Lucrezia tormented him with her infidelity. At the time that Browning wrote this poem, he had been studying Georgio Vasari's *Le*

---

[14] See Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum American Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and D.G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Vitte de'Pittori, which describes the portraits in the Pitti Palace in Florence.[15] Just as Vasari compares Del Sarto to Michael Angelo, Leonardo, and Raphael in his text, Browning's Del Sarto compares himself to these great artists and tells Lucrezia of how he could have been as great as they if she had given him more support (lines 183-205). Ironically, unlike the traditional Catholic Virgin Mary who inspires her followers, Del Sarto's unfaithful Madonna dispirits him.

Andrea Del Sarto establishes his wife's character in the early lines "oh so sweet-- / my face, my moon, my everybody's moon, / which everybody looks on and calls his" (29-30), which description clearly indicates that Lucrezia shares her love with many men. He also ironically calls her "Madonna" in line 59. We as readers, however, are not given much insight into her character because she never speaks. Instead, we learn of Lucrezia's faults through her husband, who claims that he is willing to give up fame for his beloved, despite her many sins of gambling debts and selling out his talents (50), as well as his many allusions to her infidelity (4, 29, 220, 267). Furthermore, while he stubbornly associates her with the image of the Virgin, he is also not blind. He acknowledges that his lover has a dark side and calls Lucrezia "My serpentining beauty" (26). As Roma A. King in "Eve and the Virgin" argues convincingly, "The epithet 'serpentining beauty' is rich in connotations. It calls to mind the Garden of Eden story with its suggestions of feminine deception, loss of innocence, the curse of God, and spiritual death. In a sense, Lucrezia is his Eve; at the same time she is also his Virgin, the prototype of his technically faultless painting" (326). But despite the obvious destructive quality of his

[15] Since Vasari was one of Del Sarto's painting students, DeVane says that "Vasari's narrative about Del Sarto have double weight" (245) since he would have known the artist well.

relationship, and the obvious character flaws of his wife, his last desire is to paint the face of another Virgin who might bless his relationship with his unfaithful wife:

> How I could paint, were I but back in France
>
> One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face
>
> Not yours this time! I want you by my side. (230-232)

Here again we have the pairing of the erotic figure of Lucrezia with the Virgin, especially important since it is now obvious through an earlier line (23) and the words "this time" that Lucrezia had served as Del Sarto's Virgin in other paintings.

Another item that could possibly link this work with Browning's lifetime interest in the Madonna is Del Sarto's mention of the painting sent to him with a foreshortened arm of a character. He says, "That arm is wrongly put--and there again-- / A fault to pardon the drawings lines" (111-112). Although critics have not definitively established which painting Browning is referring to in the poem, it could be argued that Browning is remembering the Murillo painting from the Dulwich gallery of the *Madonna and the Rosary*. To support this idea further, fifteen lines earlier in the poem, Del Sarto refers to "Morello," the high peak of the Appenines, north of Florence, which could be a play on the word Murillo as he personifies the mountain with the following lines:

> .....Somebody remarks
>
> Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
>
> His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
>
> Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
>
> Speak as they please, what does the mountain care? (91-96)

This could be a jab at Murillo as an artist as well as his unmerited popular appeal.

The poem concludes with Andrea Del Sarto saying goodbye to his Madonna wife who is off to meet her lover. In lines 259-266, even as Del Sarto wistfully speaks of a new Heaven where he will be given new opportunities to paint, he admits that he will still want Lucrezia there beside him despite her personal deficiencies. Our final impression of this artist is that his eternal failure will largely be based on his adoration of a failed Madonna.

The real Fra Lippo Lippi and Del Sarto both painted some memorable, beautiful portraits of the Madonna later scattered in holdings throughout Florence and all of Italy. One cannot help thinking that when British travelers saw these paintings in a museum or saw them in books, they would associate the paintings with Browning's poetry and, possibly, his erotically-charged Madonnas. Certainly, many relationships have been drawn between paintings and poetry over the ages. For example, Simonides of Ceos (5th century B.C.E.) immortalized the phrase "painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture" in Plutarch's *De Gloria Atheniensium*. Closer to Browning's time, in the eighteenth century, Gotthholf Ephraim Lessing (1729-81) pointed out in his famous art essay *Laocoön* that poetry conveys a number of complex ideas and images, whereas a painting captures only a single moment, however complex it may be. He writes, "We may say that the poet alone possesses the craft of description by negative terms--and, by mixing together the negative and the positive, combining two appearances in one" (54). By Browning associating a tainted Lucrezia, then, with a Madonna by Del Sarto, suddenly the painting becomes more than it was, and Lucrezia becomes more than just a wife. The "more than it was" results from the way that we remember images, ideas and

archetypes. Mario Praz explains how archetypes tend to work in various types of and how we "memorize aesthetic facts":

> In the same way one may ask oneself whether, irrespective of the media in which works of art are realized, the same or similar structural tendencies are at work in a given period, in the manner in which people conceive or see or, better still, memorize facts aesthetically, and whether a basis for the parallels between the arts can be found here. The various media, then, would correspond to the variety of characters in fairytales: the proposition that the characters vary, while the function remains the same, would find a counterpart in another proposition: the media vary, the structure remains the same. (56)

Ostensibly, the Madonna archetype in a poem would serve the same function as a Madonna in a painting. To relate this idea to my argument and Browning's work, if nineteenth-century Protestant viewers first encountered only "bad" Madonnas such as the ones found in Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" or "Andrea Del Sarto," then their subsequent perceptions of the Madonna, arguably, would be shaped by their original understanding of the roles a Madonna plays and what she represents. Praz explains further the way in which our aesthetic memory is quite different from our practical memory of real events: "The difference between practical memory and aesthetic memory [is] that whereas in the former the corresponding actual sensation can substitute for the imagined sensation, aesthetic memory is instead always substantially memory, because no actual sensation nor any sum of actual sensations can substitute for the sensations it offers to consciousness" (58). This may explain why people take images to be true. Their aesthetic perceptions, which may have no basis in reality, are difficult to dislodge

because no real sensation or actual event can compete against a remembered idea. Furthermore, in *The Nature of Representation*, Richard Bernheimer explains the way sacred images, such as the Virgin Mary, move in meaning over time: "[T]he painting will not just represent the Madonna, referred to in the Gospels and the Apocrypha and venerated by members of the Orthodox and Catholic Church, but it will also belong to an iconographic type called 'the Madonna," which we put into quotes as to indicate that we are now concerned with a conventional type rather than realities" (Banta, *Imaging* 185). The observations by Praz and Bernheimer add credibility to my argument that Madonna/whore types proliferated through "remembered" media images associated with bad Madonnas made popular not only by writers like Browning but also by sensationalist writers such as Maria Monk and Rebecca Reed who wrote about alleged licentious practices of the Catholic clergy. With the understanding that we have now of advertisers, and even *MTV*, we know that a captivating image set to "music" (poetry, in this case), makes for a lasting image.

While the Virgin Mary-like Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book* is unlike the promiscuous women described in "Fra Lippo Lippi" and "Andrea Del Sarto," her death is caused by a man who mistrusts her fidelity, so once again Browning ties sexuality, albeit falsely interpreted sexuality, to the Madonna. In this poem, Pompilia is given a voice, although it is a voice that evokes pity rather than respect. Much has been written about how *The Ring and the Book* was inspired by Browning's purchase of an old manuscript, *The Old Yellow Book* (as he later named it), from a bookseller in Florence. This

manuscript, filled with legal documents, letters, and pamphlets relating to the murder trial of a young Roman nobleman who had killed his wife for adultery and its discovery is mentioned in the first book of the poem (Thomas, *Browning* 218). In the actual story, a possibly adulterous priest rescues a young pregnant woman from the husband who has brutalized her. According to Clyde de L. Ryals the issue that apparently most intrigued Browning was whether the husband of the young woman in love with the priest had the right to kill her without incurring the death penalty (158). Many critics have noted Barrett's distaste for this idea (Finlayson 556, Miller 231), but, after her death, Browning spent four years (1864-68) composing this story in twelve books using ten different narrators. Thomas notes that the work was a way, perhaps, to grieve for Barrett since the young, beautiful Pompilia dies a poignant death and that the poem may have been a "sustaining experience of Browning's interior life in the decade of bereavement" (*Browning* 219).

I would venture to add that part of the appeal of the poem also rests largely on its young heroine, Pompilia, whom Knoepflamacher calls a "full-blown version of the earthly Madonna" (115). She is reminiscent of the child-like women that we discussed in the first chapter, since she is only seventeen for much of the poem and remains a helpless victim. The story unfolds through the shifting narration of different characters, and we learn that Pompilia, at the age of thirteen, had married an older, abusive man who thought she was due to inherit some family money. When this turns out to be false, Guido, her husband, harasses her until she flees with the priest Caponsacchi. Guido finds her, accuses her of adultery, and she is sent to a convent where she gives birth to a son.

Two weeks later, Guido and others kidnap and murder her—but not without consequence. Guido is then prosecuted and sentenced to death by the Pope.

Before we look more closely at the figure of Pompilia, who resembles both Barrett and the Madonna, the other characters in the poem, such as the priest, the pope, and half-Rome, also establish Pompilia's purity of soul and innocence. The priest Caponsacchi clearly idealizes her as the Virgin Mary. On a number of occasions, he alludes to her as a Madonna (662, 678), "Our lady of Sorrows" (695), a Raphael Madonna (896), and idealizes her as a miracle: "Pompilia spoke, and I at once received, / Accepted my own fact, my miracle / Self-authorised and self-explained" (6.903-5). He also calls her "so sweet and true and pure and beautiful" (6.2034) and "a rose" (6.2065). Additionally, he associates her with the color white as is noted in the lines that describe his perception of her right before they flee Pompilia's abusive husband. He sees her as "whiteness in the distance" (1121), and as he draws closer to her presence, the whiteness of her soul overwhelms him:

> Whiter and Whiter, near grew and more near
> till it was she: there did Pompilia come
> the white I saw shine through her was her soul's
> Certainly, for the body was one black,
> Black from head down to foot. (6.1121-1125)

The priest, named by the Pope as Pompilia's "Warrior priest" (10.1091), is a type of bridegroom Christ whom the Pope commends with, "Well done! / be glad thou hast let light into the world" (10. 1200). In addition to the priest, the Pope and Half Rome also

note Pompilia's purity. The pope also calls her "perfect in whiteness" (10.1005) and calls her "My rose, I gather for the breast of God" (10.1046). According to Park Honan, Pompilia is also associated with silver by Other Half Rome (OHR 1305), which associates her with heaven because of silver's nearness to white (193).

Unlike the Duchess and Porphyria of Browning's early poems, Pompilia, although a victim like the female characters just mentioned, is allowed a voice by Browning, one that dramatizes her "in idealist discourse as the Madonna and her child as the infant Jesus . . . [and] she sees Caponsacchi as her angel, God's agent, the one who can read the signs of her saintliness" (Ryals 165) by seeing that she is "divine" (7. 1485). After describing her difficult marriage, Pompilia draws a direct comparison between her life and the events of the Virgin Mary's story. Pompilia notes that on the traditional day of Mary's Annunciation, she appeals to the authority and protection of her God—and finds it in the form of the priest/angel Caponsacchi. After the Ave Maria (Hail Mary) prayer one evening, Caponssachi tells her to wait for him to lead her like a star to safety--invoking Jesus' star in the East that led shepherds and the Wise Men to their savior (7.1434). She says of him, "So did the star rise, / soon to lead my step, / Lead on, / nor pause before it should stand still / Above the House o' the Babe—my babe to be" (7. 1434-1439). Later in the poem, Pompilia is associated with the Virgin Mary again by her giving birth in a convent near Christmas time (the actual event occurred December 18), so we have the familiar juxtaposition of the purity/holiness of the celibate nuns in the convent set against the waywardness of a runaway wife who is in love with a priest. Pompilia, nevertheless, insists upon comparing herself to the Virgin Mary after her baby is born in the convent:

I never realized God's birth before—

How he grew likest God in being born.

This time I felt like Mary, had my babe

Lying a little on my breast like hers. (7.1674-77)

She also indicates that the baby is like Jesus in that he is the child of one human parent: "Only his mother's, born of love, not hate!" (7. 1747-49). Some of Browning's most beautiful lines of poetry are associated with Pompilia, lines which indicate, perhaps, a softening of his heart and attitudes toward Catholicism.

What are we to make of Browning, then, and his treatment of the Madonna in his work? The roles that I have described in Browning's poetry, admittedly focusing solely on the Virgin Mary, portray Madonnas who are supposed to be "saintly and pure" but who turn out to be comic sexual teases or victims like Pompilia. One could argue that the Catholic tradition includes saintly women who are victims; however, most female Catholic saints are known for their heroic acts in dealing with adversity, and most do not have histories of being abused by their husbands, falling in love with their priests, and then giving birth in the same manner as the Virgin Mary. Indeed, female Catholic saints, such as Saint Catherine of Sienna, spent their lives helping the poor and the sick.[16] Again, Browning's women do not aspire to their own goals and are used, as noted before, to flesh out the failed dreams of the male characters. Unlike Browning, who was able to find a soul-mate who in real life could complement him, his work tells quite a different

[16] For more information, see *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. by John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 199.

story—of women who hinder their men from realizing their dreams. Even Pompilia fits in this hindrance category, since the Priest Caponsacchi is accused of adultery and becomes emotionally bereft after his association with her. However, Caponsacchi's actions are not totally condemned since the Pope praises him for fulfilling his role as a knight for Pompilia. Nevertheless, Browning's poems subtly imply that ambiguously saintly but nevertheless dangerous women are types that easily translate into caricatures to be parodied. Where Browning leaves off with these themes, Algernon Charles Swinburne picks them up and takes them to greater extremes than any other British writer before him, as we will see in the next section.

In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov,* Ivan Karamazov says, "There is nothing a free man is so anxious to do as find something to worship" (306). He then qualifies this assertion by saying that "But it must be something unquestionable, that all men can agree to worship communally" (306). In the 1860s, around the time Browning was gaining public notice for *The Ring and the Book*, Algernon Charles Swinburne founded a community of young worshippers who found his demonic goddesses worthy of worship. Swinburne was perfect to be the new high priest of this community because of his desire for worship and his interest in the eternal female.[17]

Swinburne often used the image of the Virgin Mary in such early works as "Dolores"

[17] Rikki Rooksby states in *A.C. Swinburne: A Poet's Life* (Cambridge: University Press, 1997) that Swinburne's "central emotional drive was the need to worship and to achieve an ecstatic loss of self" (5), and H. Nicholson in *Swinburne* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926) comments that the poet's "deep and persistent religion" was hero worship (69). All references to David G. Reide in this chapter refer to Swinburne: *A Study of Romantic Mythmaking* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978). Reide comments that the characters of Swinburne's poems and ballads are telling representatives of a type: "The poems that deal with them are dramatic, but they deal not with dramatic conflict and tension or with the mind and motivations of the speaker so much as with the thematic concerns embodied in the eternal female" (53).

and "Hymn to Proserpine," as well as in his later poems, which were sometimes lovely tributes to the Madonna, as a symbol of Italy and the revolution, or allusions to real women as in the case of his poem "Most Blessed Among Women." But despite his popularity, and his later moderation toward the feminine, Swinburne's work shocked many Victorians in the 1860s. As David G. Reide comments, "Swinburne's graphic portrayal of perverse eroticism is not presented as an alternative to Victorian prudery and complacency as has too often been supposed, but a ghastly parody of it" (59). And Swinburne's parodies of the Virgin Mary are among the most elaborate, often employing the Madonna/whore trope, which can be best seen in one of his most memorable works, "Dolores." Interestingly, the public loved these shocking parodies, which were often melodic, sexy, and visual. Consequently, Swinburne and his works quickly rose to celebrity status through the attention they drew.

Swinburne had not always been the shocking atheist, however. Margot K. Louis in *Swinburne and His Gods* cites the importance of his mother's influence on his early attitudes toward religion: "[h]is mother's letters express her unpretentious piety . . . , and Swinburne's intimate knowledge of the Bible was due to her training" (9). At Oxford, as T. Earle Welby notes, Swinburne's passions turned from religion to hero worship: "His general devotion to Italy, due to his mother, who had taught him Italian in early childhood, had been directed by republican rapture into a worship of Mazzini; of which the 'the Ode to Mazzini," composed early in 1857, is the earliest extant expression (111). Swinburne's interest in the Italian revolution, as well as his ability to speak Italian, and his appreciation for the relics and culture of Italy, instilled by his mother's early training, prepared the groundwork for his Marian devotion.

Most biographers also mention the influence of Swinburne's lovers as sources for some of his Marian poetry since two of the major loves in his life had some connection with a "Mary." Swinburne fell in love with his cousin Mary Gordon, also a writer who shared Swinburne's interest in sadistic flagellation.[18] Later, Gordon was to marry an older man, Colonel R.W. Disney Leith, a professional soldier with a distinguished record of active service in India.[19] Swinburne's second great love, Adah Issacs Menken, was an actress born in New Orleans with Semitic roots, like the Mary of the Bible. Swinburne and Menken met in London in 1864, and in 1867, she simply showed up at his door one night in Paris claiming that she loved his poetry and that she wanted to love the poet.[20] Although "Dolores" was written before the poet made love to her, Thomas reports that "Swinburne was widely thought to have taken her as his model for 'Dolores,' and by 1865 she was certainly using this name to sign some of her letters . . . . More to the point, Dolores was the name which she had been given at birth, whereas Adah Issacs Menken was a mixture of stage pseudonym and her first husband's name" (146).[21] In January 26, 1868, Swinburne calls Menken his "Dolores" in a letter to his friend George Powell: "I must send you in a day or two photograph of my present possessor [of his time, his money, his heart]—known to Britannia as Miss Menken, to me as Dolores (her

---

[18] Donald Thomas, *Swinburne: The Poet in this World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979) 98.

[19] Thomas, *Swinbure*, 105.

[20] Thomas, *Swinburne*, 147.

[21] Other critics such as Anne Walder in *Swinburne's Flowers of Evil* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell Press, 1976) have suggested that the poem is not based on Menken at all because he did not begin an affair with her until 1867-1868 and the poem was published in 1865 (117). It seems to me, however, that since Menken's name was Dolores, it is reasonable to assume she played a key role in inspiring the poem. Swinburne, after all, met her in 1864 and could have pined for her in the form of this poem, which expresses "hostility" toward a heartless woman who has the ability to destroy men.

real Christian name)—and myself taken together" (*Letters* 286). In addition to the biographical factors, the German writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) and his obsession with the eternal feminine probably contributed to Swinburnian images of the Madonna. Goethe, like many subsequent writers who are now considered Romantics, was drawn to the magic of religion,[22] lost during the Enlightenment, and, consequently, they found solace in medieval Catholicism and the Virgin Mary. The Divine Mother "came to glow with a halo that was in some respects no less resplendent than the one with which the unsophisticated piety of the people, the speculations of theologians, and the liturgy of the church had adorned her" (Pelikan, *Mary* 165). An example of this Marian piety can best be seen in Goethe's *Faust*. In the play, the sorrowing Gretchen, near death, invokes the "Mater Dolorosa" (Mother of Sorrow) from the Catholic litany:

> Incline thy countenance graciously to my need, thou who art abounding in pain. with the sword in thy heart and with a thousand pains thou dost look up at the death of thy Son. Thou dost look to the Father and send sighs upward for [thy Son's] trial and for thine own. (lines 3588-95)

Because of Gretchen's repentance and her desire to save Faust's soul, she moves from being a fallen woman to being a woman saved by grace through the Glorified Mother or the Mater Gloriosa. Gretchen, in turn, redeems Faust through her virtuous choices, which helps him to ascend to a higher spiritual plane (Pelikan 168-169).[23] In *Faust*, Goethe honors women by acknowledging their influence in shaping the values of others in the

---

[22] Gilya G. Schmidt, "German Romanticism and Frederich Schleiermacher in Relation to Martin Buber's Idea of Jewish Renewal" from *Schleimacher on Workings of the Knowing Mind*, ed. Ruth Drucilla Richardson (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998).

[23] This is only true in Part II since Faust is carried away by demons in Part III.

home and in culture, but, at the same time, by designating women as moral guides, he makes them responsible for men's actions. Consequently, if women must always consider how their actions affect men, and respond accordingly, then they lose their free will--a factor we must take into consideration in determining how much power Swinburne allows his female goddesses, in particular Dolores. Camille Paglia describes Dolores as being a "daemonic Cosmic woman, trampling male history beneath her feet" (463). While I find Paglia's claim arguable, Dolores does illustrate Swinburne's interest in the eternal feminine, which had its fullest expression in "Hertha" (1871), a later poem which Swinburne prized above all of his others.[24] The poem features a haughty, Germanic, fertility goddess who claims that her power precedes all other gods and creation: "I am that which began; / Out of me the years roll; / Out of me God and man!" (lines 1-3). She obviously does not need or seek the approval of men. While Swinburne liked this poem, it did not achieve the critical acclaim of "Dolores" written ten years earlier.

In the decade before "Hertha," Swinburne found inspiration in themes found in Sade and Baudelaire in the early 1860's and began writing bold, new poems that often depicted startling images of femininity and Christianity. *Atalanta in Calydon* (1864) reflects some of Sade's influence and the darker images of Christianity. Swinburne wrote the poem shortly after the death of his beloved sister and after returning from a trip to Italy, both of which may have inspired Swinburne in developing some Marian images in this

---

[24] Swinburne writes, "Of all I have done I rate Hertha highest as a single piece, finding in it the most of lyric force and music combined with the most of condensed and clarified thought" (*Letters*, February 21, 1875) from Cecil Lang, ed., *The Swinburne Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-62).

work. The poem focuses on three main characters: Althaea, queen of Calydon, her son Meleager, and the woman he loves, the virgin Atalanta, who is like the Virgin Mary. Although one could argue, of course, that the holy virgin is a type that has occurred in many myths in many places, note the purity and the holiness of this character:

> She is holier than all holy days or things,
> The sprinkled water or fume of perfect fire;
> Chaste, dedicated to pure prayers, and filled
> With higher thoughts than heaven; a maiden clean,
> Pure iron, fashioned for a sword; and man
> She loves not.... (The Chorus, lines 169-174)

While this poem draws more heavily on classical Greek myth rather than Christian myth, the Christian symbolism of the poem becomes apparent with its allusions to the Immaculate Conception, the holy trinity of Althaea, Meleager, and Atalanta, and the twisted cannibalistic sacraments between mother and son.[25]

While *Atalanta* may have shocked some Victorians, it proved to be respectable compared to Swinburne's later work. Two years after the publication of *Atalanta*, Swinburne's collection of sixty-two poems entitled *Poems and Ballads: The First Series* sent "ripples of sexual and religious rebellion far and wide" (Rooksby 135). The book's impact on England was enormous, its popularity resulting in part from the media attention it garnered. The critical reviews in papers and journals blasted Swinburne's

[25] In the poem, the chorus says that the son in utero "Eats thee and drinks thee as [he] who breaks bread and eats" (line 1679), and later, mother and son participate in another corrupted form of communion when Althaea feeds on his "flesh / Made of her body" (1870-1).

work as being, among other things, "immoral, insincere, effeminate, unmanly" (Rooksby 136). Within a few weeks of the book's release, Swinburne's publisher Edward Moxon withdrew the book from circulation for fear that the public would object to the scandalous content of the poetry. However, two months later, Swinburne simply found another publisher, John Camden Hotten, who was known for publishing more controversial literary pieces as well as supplying erotica to the wealthy.[26] Rooksby writes that soon men were back to chanting Dolores's praises and exchanging "indecent epigrams about Swinburne" over port in the gentlemen's clubs (141)—just as people today gather in bars to discuss the latest sports or celebrity scandal. Swinburne's biographer Edmund Gosse writes that at Oxford, the students felt an almost religious ecstasy upon reading *Poems and Ballads*, and "at Cambridge the young men joined hands and marched along shouting 'Dolores' or 'A Song of Revolution.' The volume was mixed up with other fire-crackers [Gosse appears to be speaking metaphorically as he talks about the Guy Fawke rowdiness] in the preparation for the fifth of November. It stood for passion and flame and revolt....[It] took the whole lettered youth of England by storm with its audacity and melody" (161). Even the less privileged enjoyed Swinburne's bold, new work. Thomas Hardy reported that he was so absorbed by *Poems and Ballads* that he walked down the street with book in hand, oblivious to all other distractions.[27] Swinburne relished this attention and gave public readings at which young women were reported to faint. Gosse writes thus of one particular salon scene:

---

[26] Thomas, *Swinburne*, 129.

[27] Thomas, *Swinburne*, 131.

> [T]here were remarkable scenes in the sixties; Swinburne in the studio of some painter-friend, quivering with passion as he recited "Stylus" or "Feline" or "Dolores" to a semicircle of worshippers, who were thrilled by the performance to the inmost fiber of their beings. It used to be told that at the close of one such recital the auditors were found to have slipped unconsciously to their knees. The Pre-Raphaelite ladies, in particular, were often excessively moved on these occasions, and once, at least, a crown of laurel, deftly thrown by a fair hand, lighted harmoniously upon the effulgent curls of the poet [Swinburne]. (133)

In addition to the salon scenes which fed the public fervor for *Poems and Ballads*, the Pre-Raphaelites Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti immortalized Swinburne's Laus Veneris and Proserpine in their art, which furthered Swinburne's sales and extended his popularity well into the 1870s.

Once we understand that Swinburne's work was a true cultural phenomenon which overturned Victorian mores, we can begin to understand the impact of Swinburne's powerful portrayals of the eternal female—especially in the form of the Virgin Mary—to readers who hung on his every word. Swinburne often purposely uses Marian imagery in *Poems and Ballads* as a way to point out the weaknesses of Christianity against the powers of the ancient pagan world. In the mildly anti-Christian "Hymn to Proserpine,"Swinburne disparages Mary as "pale and a maiden and sister / to sorrow" and "rejected," which characteristics are certainly a part of the Marian tradition. However, Swinburne's negative attitude toward Mary becomes most apparent as he contrasts her with the pagan goddess Proserpine, a Venus or Aphrodite type, who bursts into the world "flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial" (lines 80-85). While Swinburne

appears to prize the eternal goddesses like Proserpine, ironically, he emphasizes that a Christian goddess, as well as her pale son, are weak, sickly, and ineffectual.

Swinburne's anti-Christian and anti-Marian attitudes found in *Atalanta* burst forth in "Dolores," which fully illustrates Swinburne's scorn for traditional Christian beliefs and the Christian Madonna. Following Milton's example in *Paradise Lost*, Swinburne draws heavily on Christian doctrine with some pagan myth retained for flavor. But, as Reide observes, the poem is "genuinely blasphemous, erotic, perverse. Dolores is a satanically inverted Virgin Mary, the poem a parody of Christian litanies to the Virgin" (48). Similarly, Dorothea Barrett, addressing this Satanic inversion, comments that Swinburne's poem "completely reworks the idea of the Madonna, keeping only her stature and power, but reversing all her other attributes." Nevertheless, we have to question Barrett's assertion that his Madonna has stature and power, since she, like most of Swinburne's goddesses, remains in the object position, while male speakers evaluate her.

We see from the early lines that Dolores is no ordinary compassionate goddess as Swinburne writes in his first stanza:

> Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
> Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
> The heavy white limbs and the cruel
> Red mouth like a venomous flower;
> When these are gone by with their glories,
> What shall rest of thee then, what remain,
> O mystic and somber Dolores,

Our Lady of Pain?

She sounds like a monster in this stanza, but, at the same time, Swinburne's aligns Dolores with the Virgin Mary in his use of the refrain "Our Lady of Pain"—a line which is both evocative and humorous. Although Swinburne does not specifically state that he based his work on the Virgin Mary, he emphasizes Dolores' connection with the Virgin by stating what she is *not* in *Notes and Reviews*, cleverly employing a type of aphophatic theology that describes God in terms of what She is not. He writes that his Dolores is "no Virgin and unblessed of men; no mother of the Gods or God," and that she is not like the Virgin described in the *Litany of Loreto* (54).[28] Swinburne here is coyly "protesting too much," underscoring the importance of the Virgin Mary as his Dolores. Moreover, since Reide observes that the masochism of Christian asceticism is replaced by the sadism of paganism in Swinburne's work (50), it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Swinburne had the Immaculate Conception dogma in mind as he conflates ideas of sacred purity with profane sexual acts. Marilyn Woroner Fisch also comments on the conflicting paradigm played against the idea of the Immaculate Conception: "[T]he female figures who are taboo objects in Swinburne's poems exhibit the conflicting characteristics of uncleanness and sacredness, enabling him to identify Dolores as the archetypal whore....even as he equates her to the archetype of chastity (BVM)" (9). Just as the Immaculate Conception emphasizes the spiritual goodness and purity of Mary, Swinburne emphasizes the corruption of his Dolores. Reide notes, "'Dolores' is a purely

---

[28] A church in Loreto, Italy, reportedly contained the Virgin Mary's house—hence the title of the prayer. Swinburne obviously knew of this prayer and the associations with it. The prayer was composed in the mid-sixteenth century and published by St. Peter Canisius in 1558 in order to promote devotion to the Virgin Mary. For the *Notes and Reviews* quotation, see *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Clyde K. Hyder (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970) 54.

fleshly poem about lust that has nothing to do with the heart or soul: 'Ah beautiful passionate body / That has never ached with a heart!' [lines 81-82] . . . [and the] eroticism of 'Dolores' is particularly degrading because it consists entirely of lust" (51).

The first direct allusion to the Virgin Mary is in the very title of the poem "Dolores: Our Lady of Seven Sorrows," which appears to have its origins in two key Marian litanies: "The Litany of Loreto" and the "Mater Dolorosa." "The Litany of Loreto," also known as the "Litany of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows," throughout its text invokes a title for Mary (i.e. "Mother of Christ"), and then "Pray for us" follows in the refrain. The other litany, "*Mater Dolorosa*," also known as "The Consecration of Sorrows," is included below:

> In thy immaculate heart, pierced with so many swords of sorrow, I place today my poor soul forever. Receive me as a partaker in thy dolors, and never suffer that I should depart from that Cross on which thy only begotten Son expired for me. With thee, O Mary, I will endure all the sufferings, contradictions, infirmities, with which it will be pleased to visit me in this life. All of them I offer to thee, in memory of the Dolors which thou didst suffer so every thought of my mind, every beating of my heart, may henceforth be an act of compassion and of complacency for the glory thou now enjoyest in Heaven. Since then, O Dear Mother, I now compassionate thy Dolors, and rejoice in seeing thee glorified so have compassion on me, and reconcile me to thy Son Jesus, that I may become thy true son (or daughter); come on my last day and assist me in my last agony. Even as thou wert present at the Agony of Jesus, that from this painful exile I may go to Heaven, there to be made partaker of thy glory. Amen.

The seven sorrows that Swinburne's title refers to are the main sorrows that Mary experienced as mother of Jesus: the prophecy of Simeon, the flight into Egypt, the loss of Jesus in the Temple, her meeting Jesus as he carries the cross, the crucifixion, her receiving the dead body of her son, the burial of her son, and the closing of the tomb. Swinburne would have known of these for a variety of reasons including his Anglo-Catholic background, his passion for Italy, and his love for medieval literature that often included references to the seven sorrows. Andrew H. Harrison in *Swinburne's Medievalism* explains Swinburne's fascination with the medieval period:

> Over the years Swinburne gained what seems, especially for an avowed and iconoclastic atheist, to be more than a passing acquaintance with the church fathers and with medieval theology. His knowledge of the saints' lives is indicated not only in works such as St. Dorothy, but also in his correspondence . . . and history, especially French. (7)

Moreover, in addition to Swinburne's reading in the medieval period, he had likely read Browning's "Up at the Villa" (1855), which also mentions the seven sorrows. Browning's poem satirically describes the effigy of the Virgin Mary carried through a city with seven swords through her body. Browning is obviously satirizing Mary here:

> Our Lady borne smiling and smart
> With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and
> Seven swords stuck through her heart. (lines 51-53)

As we might expect, Browning's Madonna does not appear innocent, wearing pink instead of the more traditional Marian white gown and blue mantle. The pink symbolizes

a misperceived tainted purity such is found in Faith's ribbons in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." Both Browning and Swinburne would also have been familiar with the Feast-day processions of Italy and Spain that included rituals of the seven sorrows.

Another source for Swinburne's allusion to the seven sorrows may have originated from his interest in medieval hymns (Hutton 50). The twelfth-century poem "Mater Dolorosa: Stabat Mater Dolorsa" (19 stanzas or 57 lines), most likely Franciscan, would have been sung from its creation. It depicts Mary standing at the foot of the cross groaning, sorrowing, and grieving; her soul pierced by a sword:

At the cross her station keeping
Stood the mournful Mother weeping
Close to Jesus to the last
Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
At His bitter anguish bearing.
Now at length the sword has passed.

(Sixth Stanza)
Can the human heart refrain
From partaking in her pain
In that Mother's pain untold?

(Last stanza)
While my body here decays
May my soul Thy goodness praise,

Safe in Paradise with thee.

These stanzas clearly resonate with "Dolores: Our Lady of Pain," which talks about bodily suffering and pain associated with the eternal feminine—except that in Swinburne's poem, "Our Lady" inflicts the pain. By the time that Swinburne wrote "Dolores," he had undoubtedly developed an ear for melodic poetry through his own writing of medieval hymns and through his appreciation of different forms of Catholic music. In a letter dated September 28, 1866, to William Michael Rossetti, Swinburne mentions sending him an Old English Catholic hymn describing Paradise that he had found as being "very beautiful" (*Letters*, 1:188). So, it is not unlikely that "Dolores" may have been inspired by "The Mater Dolorosa," especially since Swinburne's refrain—"Our Lady of Pain"--reiterates the pain and sorrow of Mary in the song. Moreover, musical composers continued to be interested in the Mater Dolorosa throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Pelikan, *Mary* 126), further making it likely that Swinburne would have been familiar with the song.

Swinburne's interest in the medieval period extended beyond hymnology, however. Harrison notes that Swinburne's favorite authors were from the medieval period:

> [From] references and from allusions to medieval literature in his letters and essays, two facts emerge clearly: That Swinburne's favorite writers of the Middle Ages were Dante, Villon, Chaucer, and Boccaccio; and that throughout his career he read these authors while expanding his appreciation of other medieval texts, including history, poetry, and romance. (7)

Of the four medieval authors Harrison mentions, Dante most likely influenced Swinburne's use of Marian imagery. Through Swinburne's reading, he would have

become familiar with one of the speakers, Bernard of Clairvaux. The historical Bernard of Clairvaux was a twelfth-century Cistercian monk who delivered eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs, which, according to M. Basil Bennington in *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux,* "constitute one of the great classics of Christian spirituality" (101).[29] Rachel Fulton reports that the song was important because "as the song of love," it is "the song of the single greatest blessing of God, the descent of God into the blessed Virgin" (319). The idea of the Virgin with Mary as the Bride of the Song of Songs flourished in the Middle Ages as an exegetical metaphor to lead people to God (Fulton 292) and was taken up by Bernard of Clairvaux as well, who, then, became a central and important figure in Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

In "Dolores," Swinburne will parody "one of the most sublime moments in the history of devotion to Mary,"[30] one in which Dante's Bernard gives praise to the Virgin Mary by addressing her as "Virgin mother, daughter of your Son, / more humble and sublime than any creature."[31] These two lines contain the great paradox of the Immaculate Conception which asserts that while Mary was Jesus' mother, she was also his daughter because he had redeemed her from original sin (Pelikan, *Mary* 140). In "Dolores," Swinburne's persona becomes like Bernard, invoking lines from *The Divine Comedy* and the Song of Songs, as he addresses the impure Dolores as "O my sister, my spouse, and my mother"

---

[29] Bernard was following a tradition begun earlier by twelfth-century monks such as Rupert of Duetz who wrote commentary on the Song of Songs—believing that this song was special since it is the seventh song in the Old Testament, a number which is symbolic of perfection, and hence its title Song of Songs.

[30] Jaroslav Pelikan reports that Dante's lines are based on Bernard's many writings on Mary. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 139.

[31] *Paradiso,* Canto 33: 1-2.

(line 151), emphasizing the paradoxical idea of Mary as Christ's sister, wife, and mother, while at the same time hinting at the taboo of incest. Like the Song of Songs, "Dolores" becomes a complex exegetical metaphor, which draws heavily on church tradition and litany, to lead men toward a profane goddess.

As an overview to this poem, Walder gives a breakdown of the different stanzas in "Dolores":

> Stanzas 1-4 are an invocation to Dolores, our Lady of Pain; stanzas 5-13 contain the praise of Dolores' qualities and power; stanzas 14-16, the poet's prayer to Dolores; stanzas17-21, worship and praise of Dolores; stanzas 22-40, of the pagan world which Dolores ruled: decadent Rome, Cybele's mysteries and Priapus's cult; stanzas 41-45, Christian influence and Marian cult; in stanzas 46-55, The poet hopes that Dolores will be restored to her former dignity. (Walder 118)

Walder's comments and the poem itself show the deep ties between the Virgin Mary and the great mother archetypes through history. The poem, however, is framed around a litany for the Lady Dolores, but as we see from the above passage, it also contains three clear subsections. One focuses on Christian celebration (stanzas 1-17), and the second focuses on the scenes and people from the ancient world (28-45) to show the origins of Dolores' power, which had really begun in the pagan cults, and the third section (46-55) returns to interest in Dolores' power.[32] While I will refer to some of the later stanzas, most of my discussion will concern the earlier sections that focus on Marian worship. I

---

[32] According to most historians, Marian cults arose in the 4th century partly in response to the destruction of the shrines dedicated to the pagan goddesses. See Michael Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 85.

will direct my discussion of Swinburne's influences to three foci: phrases taken from the Catholic litany for Mary, ideas taken from Dante, and phrases taken from the Song of Songs.

As I mentioned earlier, it is evident from the poem's title that Swinburne means for us to associate "Dolores" with the Marian litany, but in contrast to the actual litany, Swinburne subverts the title's meaning:

> In the subtitle the word *douleurs* refers to the spiritual emotional suffering of the Blessed Virgin, but as the word takes on meaning in the context of the poem, it refers to the pain inflicted by Dolores, 'our lady of pain.' It is typical of Swinburne to make a major point with a pun, but the point is nevertheless serious. The passive suffering of the soul is replaced by the active infliction of pain to the flesh. (Reide 50)

Following the title's lead, we see early on that this goddess is very different from Mary. Beginning with stanza two, Swinburne alludes to Mary's seven sorrows in line 9: "Seven sorrows, the priests give their Virgins." But, then, he goes on to say that Dolores could never be forgiven because her sins are "seventy times seven," which according to Jesus is the perfect number of times one can sin and receive forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22). The speaker claims, however, that Dolores can never be forgiven even if she lived through the seven ages of life: "Seven ages would fail thee to purge in" (11). Here we see the corruption of Dolores's soul played against the pure soul of the Virgin Mary. The litany calls Mary "mystical rose"; Swinburne calls Dolores "mystical rose of the mire" (21). The litany describes Mary as "house of God"; Swinburne writes, "Oh house not of gold but of gain" (22), which implies that Dolores is not rich but a gold-digger.

Swinburne also invokes the earlier mentioned "Mater Dolorosa" prayer in which the penitent asks the Virgin Mary to fill him with suffering in phrases like *receive me as a partaker in thy dolors.* Swinburne's "supplicant," in contrast, says "feed me and fill me with pleasure" (l.31). Stanza 4 continues the parody of the "Mater Dolorosa" by indicating that Dolores, unlike the Virgin, has no sympathy for her followers. Instead of acknowledging that suffering will bring a follower to glory, the persona in this poem says that Dolores hates her followers and hurts them:

> There have been and there yet shall be sorrows
> That smite not and bite not in play.
> The life and the love thou despisest,
> These hurt us indeed, and in vain,
> O wise among women, and wisest,
> Our Lady of Pain. (33-40)

And yet, of course, the real irony in these lines is that the speaker, who notes Dolores's cruelty, seems to enjoy her sadism since he describes her as "wise among women, and wisest."

Another idea that Swinburne takes from the litany and Marian tradition is that she is a "haven of the shipwrecked," "calmer of tempests" (phrases from *Our Lady of Seven Sorrows*). Nicoloson notes that Swinburne has been called the "Laureate of the Sea" because of his fascination with water (10). It seems natural, then, that he would know of Mary's role as protector of sailors. In stanzas 30 and 31, Swinburne reveals how his Dolores is a "haven" for her "shipwrecked" followers:

> When the blood of thy foemen made fervent

A sand never moist from the main,

As one smote them, their lord and thy servant,

Our Lady of Pain.

On sands by the storm never shaken,

Nor wet from the washing of tides:

Nor by foam of the waves undertaken,

Nor winds that the thunder bestrides

Nothing keeps the men from Dolores.

In medieval times, Mary was also known as the Lodestar. Pelikan comments, "As Lodestar she was seen as continuing to overcome the enemies [see lines 229-230 above] and the storms [lines 233-236], and therefore as continuing to be a Woman of Valor who was the Handmaid of the Lord" (*Mary* 94). The derivation for her as a star is somewhat complex, as Pelikan explains in his elucidation of "Mary, the star of the sea" [Maria maris stella]:

> The name was thought to have been prophesied in the oracle, "A star shall come forth out of Jacob." Because "this class of [nautical] metaphor is extraordinarily widespread throughout the Middle Ages," the image of Mary as the star guiding the ship of faith was especially attractive, even though it depended at least on a trick of language. Its origins seem to lie in Jerome's etymology for the name of "Mary" as "drop of water from the sea [stilla maris]," which he preferred to other explanations. This etymology was taken over by Isidore of Seville, but in the process "drop [stilla]" had become "star [stella]." On that basis, apparently in the ninth century, an unknown poet composed an influential hymn, hailing Mary as the

> Star of the Sea, the nourishing Mother of God, the Ever-Virgin, the Gate of Heaven. Ave maris stella, / Dei mater alma, / Atque simper virgo, / Felix caeli porta. (*Mary* 93)

From the hymn, we see how Swinburne has incorporated the Latin of caeli porta (Gate of Heaven) into the poem with his wordplay: "We [humans] play with light loves in the portal [gate to earth, perhaps to a type of sexual heaven]" (53), and the speaker says that when he serves Dolores, his subversive journey takes him to an earthly paradise: "I have passed from the outermost portal/ to the shrine where a sin is a prayer; / What care though the service be mortal?" (129-131).

The understanding of Mary as a guide to people at sea also helps us to make sense of some of the sea imagery associated with the poem—for example, "foam" (88, 90, 142, 234, 431) is used in conjunction with imagery of the sea, serpents, and mortality, which in turn ties in with the Mary as Lodestar and the Garden of Eden story that includes Mary's crushing the serpent (Genesis 3:15). On the use of foam and serpents, Louis comments, "Dolores presides over a eucharist of wine made from the foam and froth of pleasure's serpents" (41), but she also says that "the new wine of desire is also the final wine of death, and the wine shed for me is in no way redemptive" (41), but it does save one temporarily from the bland existence of "marriage and death and division" (line 159). This sea imagery of serpents and foam also conjures up ideas of semen, as well as the Aphrodite myth in which the goddess of love rises out of the water after the semen of one of the Titans fell into it.

As I mentioned earlier, Swinburne may have derived some of the ideas in his poem from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. In the introductory section of "Dolores," she is

described as having "Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel" (1) and "heavy white limbs" (3), lines which both evoke the image of the marble statue of Mary described by Dante in *Purgatorio* (X: 34-45). Dante writes of a wall of pure white marble upon which the angel Gabriel is carved as well as the Virgin Mary who turns a key and opens "the highest love." While this image might also conjure up the Pygmalion myth, popular with Victorians and the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne has other details that point to Dante. Swinburne addresses Dolores as "O house of unquenchable fire" (23), which could refer to the crown of fire Mary wears in *Paradiso* (Canto 23: 94-96), which is described in lines 118-120: "Thus my eyes/ possessed no power to follow that crowned flame, / which mounted upward, following her Son --who is the 'greatest flame' (line 90). In addition, Mary is described as a "noonday torch of charity" in *Paradiso* (Canto 33:10). From these allusions, we see that Swinburne believes that his Madonna is emotionally cold, lustful, a type of monster / corpse with her "heavy white limbs"—an image which was also used by the Pre-Raphaelite painters.

The other allusions from the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* occur in several places and demonstrate again that Dolores functions as the antithesis of the Virgin Mary. For ample, Dolores is described in stanza eight as "a pallid / And poisonous queen" (lines 63-64). Similarly, in the *Purgatorio*, Venus is described as "poison lust" (25: 132). In "Dolores," lines 66-67 further draw out the analogy that Dolores will corrupt men, wherein Swinburne writes of how her kisses will cause men to trade "the lilies and languors of virtue / For the raptures and roses of vice." This description of Dolores is a subversive version of Dante's flower imagery of Christ and Mary in *Paradiso*: "The Rose in which the word of God became / Flesh grows within that garden; there the

lilies/whose fragrance let men find the righteous way" (Canto 23: 72-74). Later in Swinburne's poem, the speaker begs Dolores, "Intercede for us thou with thy father, / Our lady of Pain" (311-12)—lines that recall those in *Purgatorio* where Mary's disembodied voice "now pleads for you!" (Canto 22:144). However, in contrast to the Mary, who dispenses grace, Swinburne's Madonna destroys men's lives and shames them as they beg for mercy.

In addition to drawing upon Marian litanies and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Swinburne uses Song of Songs to create his strange bride. Louis notes this connection: "Dolores is a mockery of Christ and of his mother, and also of the church, the Bride of Christ" (41). Line seventeen in the poem begins the references: "O garment not golden but gilded, / O garden where all men may dwell," meaning, of course, that Dolores's soul (garment) is gilded and that she is sexually accessible to many men. In the actual verse in the Song of Songs, the bridegroom describes his bride as "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse" (4: 12) to show her purity. This image of the enclosed garden is also an iconographic image associated with the Immaculate Conception, which further illustrates that Dolores is *not* the Immaculate Conception since her garden is available to all. Swinburne also sometimes combines lines from Song to make a new line. In the biblical version (4: 4), the bridegroom describes the bride by saying, "Thy neck is like the tower David *builded*" (which is also an iconographic image associated with the Immaculate Conception), and in another place, the bridegroom reiterates this idea by saying "thy neck is a *tower of ivory*" (7: 4). Swinburne's version reads, "O *Tower* not *of ivory,* but *builded*" (19). Indeed, in line twenty in "Dolores," we see that she is a tower "*builded*" by "hands that reach heaven from hell" implying that Dolores has been created

by diabolical powers who try to reach heaven through her hell of passion. She is not ivory, indicating that her image has not been carved through a painstaking process that produces beautiful art.

With the references to heaven and hell in the above-mentioned line twenty, Swinburne could be playing with the claim of Milton's that "The mind is its own place, and in itself / can make heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" (254-255). This reference to *Paradise Lost* is particularly meaningful since in that text, the sensual Eve causes man to fall—and creates a Hell of the Heaven found in the Garden of Eden Heaven. Eve, of course, is the Old Testament type to precede Mary, so within Swinburne's text we have a double inversion of Eve/Mary/Dolores: Eve is the opposite of Mary, and Mary is the opposite of Dolores, making Eve and Dolores similar in character. But she is different also. While Dolores seems to be inflicting a form of hell on her followers, it is really a type of heaven for those who enjoy sadistic pleasure. Swinburne purposefully returns to Milton in the last stanza of the poem:

> We shall see whether hell be not heaven,
>
> Find out whether tares be not grain,
>
> And the joys of thee seventy times seven
>
> Our Lady of Pain.

The intentionality of this reference is plausible given Swinburne's interest in Milton. As Gosse notes, "As every development of character in Swinburne was fostered by literature, we may look with confidence to his early reading of such vehement writers as Milton, Landor, and Carlyle for the sources of his rebellious attitude toward society" (301).

In addition to mimicking phrases from the Song, Swinburne also co-opts its color imagery. For example, the bride there describes her bridegroom by saying "My beloved is white and ruddy / the chiefest among ten thousand" (5:10), and Swinburne says of his Dolores that she has a "white wealth of thy body made whiter / by the blushes of amorous blows" (267-268). In an even more telling allusion to the biblical text, Swinburne repeats the white and ruddy pattern: "She moves as a moon in the wane / White-robed, and thy raiment is ruddy / Our Lady of Pain" (358-360), indicating the duplicitous nature of Dolores through the fluctuating moon and her white robes which cover her "scarlet" nature. The bride of the Song boasts "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem" (1:5) because she is from a different country. In Swinburne's hands, this becomes "Thy skin changes country and color / and shrivels or swells to a snake's" (289-290). Swinburne's "bride" becomes not a dark-skinned beauty but the serpentine beauty that Browning had also described in "Andrea Del Sarto" or Keats' in *Lamia.*

In addition, Swinburne purposely associates biblical symbols connoting Marian purity and new life with Dolores' corruption and violence. In the following example, I have italicized the lines about new life that Swinburne will parody in his poem:

> *And the pomegranates bud forth*
>
> *There will I give thee my loves.*
>
> The mandrakes give a smell
>
> And at our gates are all manner of pleasant
>
> Fruits, new and old,
>
> Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

O That wert as my brother

That sucked the breasts of my mother! (7:16-8:1)

Swinburne mocks the italicized passages in his own inimitable way—using language similar to the biblical language but conveying a very different idea:

Wert thou pure and a maiden, Dolores,

When desire took thee first by the throat?

What bud was the shell of a blossom

That all men may smell to and pluck?

What milk fed thee first at what bosom?

What sins gave thee suck? (43-48)

The tender intimacy of the bride and bridegroom, conveyed by images of new life, has been replaced with images of violent desire that chokes and of promiscuous sex in which leaves are "plucked" to become empty shells. Even the allusion to milk is an inversion of the medieval belief that Mary's milk had special powers; and according to one legend, the Virgin Mary appeared to a dying twelfth-century monk, whose decaying flesh was healed after she sprinkled him with her milk (Warner 198-199). The milk in "Dolores," on the other hand, corrupts. Another important Marian inversion in this section occurs in the image of Dolores *as a suckling* since medieval art and literature gave special privilege to Mary suckling her son (Warner 192).

There is no question that "Dolores" is a stunningly complex, funny, and melodic poem with its startling images and hypnotic rhyme. Like modern-day advertisers who sell

familiar ideas by repackaging them with catchy music, sex, and new perspectives (Victoria's Secret's "Angels" underwear commercials come to mind), Swinburne repackaged his Madonna with sex and musical rhyme. Obviously, the poem lent itself well to the chanting Oxford and Cambridge students in the 1860s. Buckley and Woods note that the poem was "denounced by critics and avidly bought by the public" (1008). The power of the poem propelled Swinburne to celebrity status as shopkeepers displayed his picture in shop windows (Buckley and Woods 1008). Newspapers and journals also helped to stimulate interest in Swinburne's work through their scathing reviews.

However, one must wonder how Swinburne gained such widespread acclaim in a society that prided itself on its straitlaced values? Was it simply Swinburne's youthful audacity in writing about taboo subjects that appealed to the Victorians? Or was his work appealing because Swinburne mocked the Marian image that many Britons held in contempt anyway? Louis calls this poem a "black joke" (41) as Swinburne petitions for the return of the "Whore" who is a preferable goddess to Mary. However, Louis also notes that it is impossible to take Dolores seriously as a goddess because Swinburne himself parodies her (41). As I mentioned earlier, Barrett says that Dolores has the Virgin Mary's power without her virtue, but that does not seem to be entirely true. The person who seems to have the power in the poem is the speaker because he has a voice and the agency to mock Dolores—the power to take the poem where he wants it to go. Swinburne twists the image of the Immaculate Conception type into an evil dominatrix, and, surprisingly, most Britons tolerated this parody. But perhaps it was tolerated precisely because young, affluent Protestant males were parodying less powerful groups. Madeline Caviness remarks that humor is a type of dominance and "any analysis of

humor requires recognition not only of who laughs but also what or who is laughed at" (357). One wonders whether a group of young Catholic men or women would have been allowed to parade down the streets rapturously chanting a blasphemy of the *Book of Common Prayer* as the Oxford students did with this poem. Imagine how the women of England felt when the young men on the pavement raved about a "goddess" who was the very antithesis of everything that they had been taught about their roles, their sexuality, and marriage. Dolores starkly contrasts with images of the asexual Madonna, who also represents, paradoxically, the perfect mother and, through extrapolation, perfect wife, since motherhood and marriage were inextricably linked for the Victorians. In "Dolores," however, Swinburne mercilessly ridicules the sacred concept of marriage:

> Time turns the old days to derision,
> Our loves into corpses or wives;
> And marriage and death and division
> Make barren our lives. (156-159)

To Swinburne, and perhaps to many others, the Victorian ideals of "piety, purity, obedience, and domesticity" were not satisfactory values.

So, how to tie all of these disparate ideas together with Swinburne, Browning, and the Virgin Mary? Perhaps we can conclude that both men took an image of the Virgin Mary that had gone through various permutations since the 1850s and moved that image one step further by greatly increasing her erotic appeal while at the same time parodying many of the values that the traditional Catholic Virgin Mary represented. This is not to say that Browning and Swinburne were consciously trying to denigrate women or even

the Catholic religion, although it would seem that Swinburne did intend such a designation. But, clearly, their highly publicized poems helped to reinforce nineteenth-century Madonna images of women who appear to represent sexual purity but who, in reality, hide a dark sexuality, just as twenty-first century popular magazines and music reinforce stereotypes today. In Browning's case, specific references to artwork in his poetry create lasting impressions of characters in works such as "Fra Lippo Lippi" and "Andre Del Sarto." It would be difficult to think of Del Sarto's promiscuous wife without also conjuring up the portraits of the Madonnas that Browning describes (or vice versa) which would further reinforce the idea of the tainted Madonna in the Victorian reader's mind. Likewise, for those familiar with Marian litanies and prayers, it would be difficult to hear "Dolores" and not forever after associate her name with the Virgin Mary, even though the poem is so erotically charged.

While Browning and Swinburne have both been credited with giving voice to "The Other" in their work, the marginal Madonnas they create are often silent, like many of the models from chapter one, or, worse, victimized or objects of ridicule. Although writers such as Arthur Clement Hilton (who called Swinburne "Sin-burn" in his 1872 poem "Octopus") parodied Swinburne's work, women did not have the voice or power to respond effectively with similar parodies, although, of course, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti were two popular poets of the Victorian Age. While these women wrote parodies themselves, they remained within the respectable limits of Victorian mores. The problem with outrageous parody is that unless those who are being mocked have the same power to push back, they feel shame or anger at being the punch line in a joke that cannot be shared by all. But, then, Browning and Swinburne were

clearly not writing for—but most particularly about—that certain type of woman.

Chapter 3: I Shall Try To Paint a Madonna, Someday, I Believe: Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites

In Samuel Butler's semi-autobiographical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1884), a pregnant pastor's wife goes to the London Royal Academy to study paintings of feminine beauty because she feels certain that her baby will be a girl. Butler's narrator states, "Her sister-in-law Alethea [whose name means truth] warned her not to do this, but she persisted, and certainly the child turned out plain, but whether the pictures caused this or not, I cannot say" (93). The idea that what a pregnant woman sees affects the appearance and character of her child goes back at least to the Renaissance, so while Butler is being humorous here, he is also stating a principle that people would understand as a truism.[1] This truism also contains the most important elements of my argument: the intertwining of religion, art, and a Madonna to produce a diminished image. Through the wry observation of Butler's narrator, we get an idea of the significance of the feminine ideal as well as the importance of art in shaping real-life Victorian Madonnas. Art critic and historian Jan Marsh comments on this significant connection:

> Women were both elevated and constrained, worshipped and restricted to specific roles . . . . Framed images of idealized women, displayed on the walls of bourgeois homes and art galleries, were a kind of metaphor for the position ascribed to women in Victorian society . . . . The profound identification of art with woman occurred in both pictorial and personal

[1] For more information on the way outside influences supposedly affected women during pregnancy, see Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth, Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991) 53-58. For more information on how this idea was used in art, see Jacqueline M. Musacchio, "Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Greico (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 42-60.

contexts. ("Of *Sesame*" 10)

The idealization of women in art was not a new phenomenon, of course, but greater access by the general public was new—through travel, the print media, photography, and public museums, which displayed art from all countries and all genres. In response to this demand, as I will argue, the Pre-Raphaelite artists and the art critic John Ruskin, along with the developing media, consciously represented Protestant Madonnas in their prose, poetry, and paintings.

Before looking at Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, however, we should examine some of the dynamics behind the nineteenth-century interest in art. Sophie Andres explains why and how the Victorians found comfort in artwork that depicted traditional roles of men and women in separate spheres:

> Both Ruskin and Tennyson sought in the evocation of the past the confirmation of the vanishing ideal of the separate spheres, which advocated and maintained gender roles within rigidly conventional boundaries, by then daily threatened by social movements and legal measures slowly and gradually promoting gender equality and equity. The distinct boundaries between femininity and masculinity were also inscribed in contemporary domestic genre paintings. Images of women enclosed in the walls of domestic bliss proliferated each year in the Royal Academy exhibits; such images conspicuously resisted slow, contemporary advances toward gender equality. Even a brief overview of the domestic genre of sentimental paintings reveals that these pictures endorsed the patriarchal morality of the burgeoning middle classes and the new patrons of art, the rising industrial magnates, who

> preferred pictures, paintings readily intelligible, upholding their own values, as, for instance, that of separate spheres and the sanctity of the domestic sphere. (28)

To understand better what occurred during this time, we would do well to look at a period of history closer to our time. Perhaps we could compare the Victorian age to the 1950s following World War II when men rejoined the workforce, and, subsequently, some women found themselves relegated to the tasks of raising children and maintaining homes. Traditional gender roles, advocated through television advertisers who promoted clean homes, polite kids, and happy marriage, reinforced the image of the hardworking wife who bought the products sold by the advertisers. Granted, for the sake of argument, I have oversimplified two complex periods of history; however, I do find it intriguing that during both periods, the Virgin Mary was given special prominence, in the 1854 dogma of the Immaculate Conception as well as in the 1950 dogma of Mary's Assumption into Heaven. Ecclesiastical decisions did not create the gender roles, but they do seem to reflect some of the cumulative anxieties of these particular time periods and the desire to go to a "great mother" for comfort. These dogmas were not created out of thin air. In fact, they were established, in part, through a precept first observed by the fifth-century monk Prosper of Aquitaine, who noted that "the rule of prayer should lay down the rule of faith" (Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* 3:67). In other words, whatever the church (and, ultimately, popular piety) dictates in prayers will eventually become doctrine. Paradoxically, those same principles governing the development of church dogma also apply to one of the most secular areas of human experience--advertising. Since prayer and advertising often work in terms of comforting

repetition and images, by substituting a few words in Prosper's axiom, we can derive a new one: "the rule of comfort lays down the rule of advertising." Consequently, if we assume that certain images in human experience bring comfort to many, we might want and expect to see an image of someone in the role of a self-sacrificing, perfect being who could listen to our concerns and provide for all of our needs. Or, we might want to envision a protective image that would keep us from all harm.

Therefore, if we accept these premises, then perhaps we can draw a few conclusions about the times in which the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary appeared. Most significantly, both were created during times of perceived threats to the family in the forms of industrialization, scientific discoveries, changing laws for women, and, in the case of the 1950s, newly emerging horrors such as nuclear war and the Holocaust. Accordingly, during the Victorian times, images of the Madonna attracted viewers to museums, popular art, and literature, while cowboy literature and tales of masculine high adventure flourished. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Madonna and the perfect home appeared in TV shows like *The Nelsons*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *Father Knows Best*. On the flip side, "masculine" programs included *The Lone Ranger*, *Roy Rogers and Dale Evans*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman*, and *Have Gun Will Travel*, programs in which strong, independent male characters defeated the bad guys, and the good always won over the bad.

It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that visual art in the Victorian Age, like television in the 1950s, did more than just reinforce gender roles. Just as television eventually would be the glowing light that families gathered around in the second half of the twentieth century, art became a type of totem, increasingly taking on the

dimensions formerly found in sacred objects. As Alison Byerly observes, "[T]he Victorians . . . saw that art could be turned from a reflection of reality into a substitute for reality; it could act as either a powerful diagnostic tool or as a placebo. At the same time that they lauded the honest portrayal of ordinary life in art, the Victorians created museums and collections that segregated the objects of their aesthetic interest from the world of ordinary things" . . . (1-2). Tennyson's "Palace of Art" and the excitement generated by the Great Exhibition of 1850 illustrate well the Victorian preoccupation with art.[2] Indeed, in 1868, as art critic Francis Palgrave commented, "More money is probably spent on pictures in a year than was spent during the whole reign of George II."[3]

The media, which was just gaining momentum as we saw in the previous chapters, fueled the art craze. And just as the world was changed by the printing press, the radio, television, and the Internet, so, too, did the print media revolutionize the way the Victorians constructed their world. Visual images poured into popular culture through photography, engravings, accessible art museums at home and abroad, and through books and magazines. Further, as Andres notes, "Victorian novelists enabled their readers to see not just figuratively but literally as well. Even if their readers could not visit art exhibits, they could see widely circulated engravings of Pre-Raphaelite paintings either as separately sold copies or in illustrated papers such as the *London Illustrated News*, *The Athenaeum*, and even

---

[2] For discussion of art collections of the middle-class Victorian public, see Diane Sachko Macleod's, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (Oxford: Cambridge Press, 1996).

[3] Francis Palgrave, "How to Form Good Taste in Art," *Cornhill* 18 (1869): 171.

Punch" (42). She adds that when literature began to use art reproductions, the borders "between the fictional and the actual...blurred" [and] "at the site of these reconfigurations. . . readers were drawn not into merely hypothetical issues but also into questions confronting their quotidian lives" (xvii). Her observation, then, raises the question at the heart of my argument: Could Marian images in fiction and poetry, as they proliferated, influence the actual lives of many Victorians? We will try to answer that question as we look at the works of John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites.

A skilled and respected art critic, social critic, scholar and artist, Ruskin established a reputation for being a highly moral individual, despite leaving his conservative evangelical roots in 1858.[4] Although he did not claim an allegiance to a religious denomination or group, he retained a reverence for traditional Protestant religion and seemed to have a love/hate relationship with Catholicism (although he was one of the few writers mentioned who hated Murillo). As John D. Rosenberg notes, "Ruskin sought to Protestantize the Middle Ages . . . [yet] he was deeply disturbed to find himself so moved by the art and architecture of the Catholic Middle Ages [that this] disturbance acted as an irritant inflaming his anti-Catholic prejudices" (55). However, despite some of his anti-Catholic sentiments, Ruskin always found the Madonna in "Catholic" art appealing (59). We see evidence of this interest early in his career. In 1844, after visiting the Louve to

[4] Ruskin was raised in a conservative evangelical household. In *Praeteria* he writes of a day in 1858 when he parts ways with his evangelical beliefs after a visit to a chapel where a man preached the sermon on the elect. Ruskin says that the sermon left him neither "cheered nor greatly alarmed," but he ended up meandering back to the city to an art gallery where he felt transported by the beauty of the paintings and the music drifting in the windows. He writes, "Of course that hour's meditation in the gallery of Turin only concluded the courses of thought which had been leading me to such an end through many years" (402).

study the artwork of Raphael, he wrote in his journal, "I have been watching the twilight on the Tuileries, which was very grand and clear; and planning works. I shall try to paint a Madonna some day, I believe" (*Praeteria* 272). John Ruskin, like the other Protestants I have discussed thus far, had become smitten with the image of the Madonna, a love affair which continued on into the 1850s and '60s.

Part of his fascination with the Madonna may have arisen from his love of old manuscripts, which he collected. As Rosenberg notes, "He was a compulsive collector throughout his life and crowded his rooms with paintings, illuminated manuscripts, engravings, fragments of sculpture . . ." (114). Ruskin was interested in religious manuscripts in particular, and he praises his 1854 acquisition of St. Louis's Psalter as his "greatest treasure" (Rosenberg 114). Therefore, it is not surprising for us to learn that Ruskin could be enraptured by discovering an old copy of the *Hours of the Virgin*[5] :

> In 1850 or '51 I chanced, at a bookseller's in a back alley on a little fourteenth century "Hours of the Virgin," not of refined work, but extremely rich, grotesque, and full of pure color. The new worlds which every leaf of this book opened to me, and the joy I had, counting their letters and unraveling their arabesques as if they had all been of beaten gold,--as many of them indeed were,--cannot be told, any more than—everything else, of good, that I

[5] According to Marina Warner in *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York:Vintage Books, 1983), the private books of hours of the period were "sumptuously illustrated for noblemen's consumption and glory" and include prayers to the Virgin and to her mother (243). Warner continues, "In one *Hours of the Virgin*, painted in Bruges around 1515, and now in the Pierpont Morgan library in New York, St. Anne sits reading while in her womb the tiny Virgin glows like a firefly in a golden aureole . : . [;] in more imposing canvases of the same period the propaganda crystallizes around an image of a second trinity. Like the three ages of man, St. Anne looms, a towering matriarch, over both her daughter Mary and a smaller Christ child in Mary's lap. The triad asserts the sanctity of Christ's lineage, and by eliminating Joachim, implies the unsullied purity of Mary's conception" (243).

> wanted to tell. Not that the worlds thus opening were themselves new, but only the possession of any part in them. (*Praeteria* 398)

But, it was not just the artwork of the prayer book that caught Ruskin's eye. The overall beauty of the Catholic Church's language and rituals enchanted him: "And then followed, of course, the discovery that all beautiful prayers were Catholic,--all wise interpretations of the Bible Catholic;--and every manner of Protestant written services whatsoever either insolently altered corruptions, or washed-out and ground-down rags and debris of the great Catholic collects, litanies, and songs of praise" (399). In fact, during a time when it would have been safe for Ruskin to criticize Catholicism, in *Fors Clavigera*, a later work, he writes reverently of the Madonna:

> To the common Protestant mind the dignities ascribed to the Madonna have been always a violent offence; they are one of the parts of the Catholic faith which are openest to reasonable dispute, and least comprehensible by the average realistic and materialistic temper of the Reformation. But after the most careful examination, neither as adversary nor as friend, of the influences of Catholicism for good and evil, I am persuaded that the worship of the Madonna has been one of its noblest and most vital graces, and has never been otherwise than productive of true holiness of life and purity of character. I do not enter into any question as to the truth or fallacy of the idea; I no more wish to defend the historical or theological position of the Madonna than that of St. Michael or St. Christopher; but I am certain that to the habit of reverent belief in, and contemplation of, the character ascribed to the heavenly hierarchies,

we must ascribe the highest results yet achieved in human nature . . . . (156)

Ruskin's belief in the power of the Madonna as a redeeming force becomes central to his argument in *Sesame and Lilies,* published in 1865. On December 6 and December 14, 1864, Ruskin gave two speeches in Rusholme, near Manchester, in an effort to raise money for a library of the Rusholme Institute and one to establish schools in a poor section of the city (Peterson 85). The speeches entitled "Of Kings' Treasuries" and "Of Queens' Gardens" were published in a volume entitled *Sesame and Lilies* and "provoked much debate, in Ruskin's day as in ours about women's education and employment" (Peterson 86). Although this book of two essays was inspired by Ruskin's devotion to a young girl, it became dogma for many Victorian women. And, like many people who achieve great fame, Ruskin began to believe in his own mythology, eventually claiming that *Lilies* in particular contained "everything...I know of vital truth."[6] The public ostensibly agreed with him, since in 1865, he sold over 160,000 copies of "Of Queens' Gardens," the second part of *Sesame and Lilies.*

Before Ruskin wrote *Sesame and Lilies,* Adams has pointed out that Ruskin had supported Coventry Patmore's publication of the now infamous "The Angel in the House," in which Patmore celebrates a woman's role as pure, domestic angel. Patmore's poem was begun around the time the Immaculate Conception dogma was made official in 1854, and the poem was published in parts over the next eight years. Although Patmore was Anglican, he was "steeped in works of Catholic piety" (Adams 97) and eventually converted to Catholicism in 1864—shortly after the publication of his poem and the death

[6] *Fors Clavigera,* Letter 57, *Works* 18: xx.

of his wife. Patmore's poem was admired and endorsed by many of the celebrity figures of the day—including Tennyson, Carlyle, and Hopkins. Ruskin, in particular, was a fan of Patmore's, and in 1860, he declared the second part of Patmore's poem, "Victories of Love," to be "a singularly perfect piece of art." [7]

It would be difficult, then, to ignore Patmore's influence on the creation of Ruskin's Madonna in "Of Queens' Gardens" since she so closely resembles Patmore's "Angel in the House." But, he did not write the essay simply to imitate Patmore. Instead, in Ruskin's 1871 preface to *Sesame and Lilies*, he admits, "I wrote the *Lilies* to please one girl." That "one girl," according to Deborah Nord, was Rose La Touche: "[I]n a letter written just before the publication of the first two lectures, Ruskin says that he wrote them 'for a couple of schoolgirls'; the one to whom he here refers was no doubt the 'Rosie' of *Praeteria* . . . for whom also the last lecture, delivered subsequently in Dublin and near her home, were given" (21). Deborah Nord reports that the volume was reprinted for a second edition that same year and was reprinted in subsequent editions in 1866, 1867, 1871, and 1882. Most critics, then and now, acknowledge that the speeches generated much needed debate about social issues, although contemporary reviewers found some problems with his ideas. Early reviews in *Blackwoods Magazine* criticized it for its "unmitigated abuse" against males and its "sugared abuse and railing" against women.[8] Similarly, in 1970, Kate Millett would resurrect this criticism, describing "Of Queens' Gardens" as a classic antifeminist text in her famous work *Sexual*

---

[7] Ruskin, letter to *The Critic*, 27 October 1860. In *Works* 34: 488-90.

[8] Linda Peterson mentions this review in "The Feminist Origins of 'Of Queens' Gardens'" in *Ruskin and Gender*, ed. by Dinah Birch (Hampshire: Palgrave Press, 2002) 86. The review originally appeared in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, 98 (1865): 754.

Politics.[9]

Nevertheless, despite frequent negative press, *Sesame and Lilies* had a number of early fans from its beginning as evidenced by the many reprints; interestingly, the most recent Ruskin scholarship, while noting his condescension toward women in "Of Queens' Gardens," also cites his contributions to social reforms (Nord xvii).

Since I am mostly concerned with Madonna images for women, I will be looking only at "Of Queens' Gardens"—the essay that deals with gender roles for women. Marsh states that the real focus of this essay is to define "a heavenly image of [female] perfection" through persuasive rhetoric:

> Thus the opening passage of extended gallantry in praise of female virtue, wisdom, and nobility [paragraphs 56-62] draws from Western Literature's traditional idealization of woman, the aim being to gratify and flatter those readers, male and female, who shared such perspectives and were familiar with the invocation of such heroines in 'woman question' debates. ("Of *Sesame*" 158)

What this idealization produced, however, was a rather "unattractive saintly model" for women (Marsh, "Of *Sesame*" 159).

Moreover, within this model are contradictory ideas about what perfection might look like in a woman. For example, while Ruskin writes that women should be educated, his heavenly image of perfection should not be allowed to study theology:

> Thus far, I think, I have had your concurrence; perhaps you will not be with

[9] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).

> me in what I believe most needful to say. There is one dangerous science for women— one which they must indeed beware how they profanely touch—that of theology . . . . They will plunge headlong, and without one thought of incompetency, into that science in which the greatest men have trembled, and wisest erred. (Paragraph 79)

Marsh calls this pronouncement his "most radical and startling proposal," which has its basis in Ruskin's personal obsession with Rose La Touche whose religious mother discouraged the older Ruskin's amorous overtures towards her young daughter.[10] In the essay, Ruskin claims that religious women "turn the household Gods of Christianity into ugly idols of their own...from which their husbands must turn away in grieved contempt, lest they should be shrieked at for breaking them" (paragraph 73). But, even with the shrill and contradictory nature of some of the essay, the public bought thousands of copies.[11] Readers may have extracted parts of the essay, just as readers have always done, to support and empower their belief systems, or perhaps, they read it because the essay seemed unusually supportive of women: "[I]n comparison with the frequently

---

[10] Marsh says that this proposal "reflected Ruskin's current obsession with Rose La Touche, a girl upon whom he pressed his intensely subjective needs for some years and who, as it were in self-defense, had responded with equally intense piety, aiming to bring her suitor back to the Christian beliefs of his childhood and youth" ("Of *Sesame*" 158). At the time that Ruskin wrote *Sesame and Lilies*, Rose was in poor health, a condition which Ruskin blamed on her religious mother. In the 1860s Ruskin's *The Queen of the Air*, "snakes and lizards serve as tropes . . . . for Maria La Touche [Rose's mother]. They often figure as highly sexualized figures of feminine power whose presence impedes Ruskin's attempts to cleanse society and realize his pure love for Rose" (Koven 177). Sadly, Rose died in 1875, completely insane. John D. Rosenberg in *The Darkening Glass* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) also notes that Ruskin, never very stable, had attacks of crippling madness beginning about 1878. See page 113.

[11] Koven reports that Ruskin's greatest fans were women. While Ruskin had many devoted male readers, they "did not single out *Sesame and Lilies* for commentary" (192). Moreover, Koven points out that

negative commentary on female capability found throughout the Victorian age, the sympathetic gallantry of 'Of Queens' Gardens' must have been attractive, whatever its limits or contradictions" (Marsh "Of *Sesame*" 157). Most critics agree, however, that the general response was mixed, since because, as Seth Koven states, "*Sesame and Lilies* was a text shot through with unstable formulation of gender, some unambiguously conservative and others quite progressive, it should come as no surprise that its female readers could and did find in it both a source of inspiration and loathing" (191).

At the same time, feminist critics such as Dinah Birch and Linda Peterson assert that Ruskin's essay improved social conditions for women, since it emphasized education and meaningful work for them. Two often quoted phrases from Ruskin include Paragraph 74, in which he states, "I believe, then, with this exception, that a girl's education should be nearly in its course and material the same as a boy's; but quite differently directed" and "Let her loose in a library, I say, as you do a fawn in a field" (Paragraph 78). Peterson points out that *Victoria Magazine*, written and produced by leading feminists of the time, had one of the most favorable reviews of Ruskin's essay (86).[12] Sharon Aronfsky Weltman comments, "In this essay Ruskin urges women to take action against England's terrible social problems, than to remain absorbed in providing their husbands and families with a haven from their daily grind of business" (17). Mary Poovey likewise approves of the essay, arguing, "Ruskin's applause for women who act as mothers to the motherless helped create the cultural space for women to find professions in nursing . . . [,]

---

popular male writers such as Anthony Trollope and George Gissing criticized Ruskin for his oppressive ideas for women, his lack of control over his language and his weak evidence (165, 187).

[12] See "Mr. Ruskin on Books and Women." *The Victoria Magazine* 6 (November, 1865): 67-76 and 6 (December, 1865): 131-8.

philanthropy, social work, and social criticism—by defining those tasks as inherently feminine" (108).

Although the essay arguably can be read as a feminist text, Ruskin's greatest supporters during the Victorian age were the anti-feminists:

> He had a large following of anti-feminists such as Mary Ward, best-selling novelist and pioneer in women's higher education and social reform, along with her close friend, Louise Creighton, an accomplished scholar in her own right and wife of the bishop of London, who were the authors of the original Appeal Against Women Suffrage in 1889. In their Appeal, Ward and Creighton used Ruskin's arguments about women's moral purity to argue that the parliamentary suffrage would corrupt them and diminish their capacity to do good by forcing women to take a part in the violence of warfare and empire. (Koven 190)

In addition to the anti-feminists, unmarried women, with few career choices or chances for advanced degrees, found purpose in Ruskin's words, encouraging them to assist people in need. Koven comments that Ruskin "contributed powerfully to a redefinition of women's sphere which validated spinsterdom and women's benevolent and educational work" (188). One can see how this image of the compassionate, independent virgin could easily be extended to the image of the Virgin Mary--especially since, as Showalter and others have pointed out, many single women were also entering Anglican convents in great numbers to escape dependence on male relatives, prostitution, and madhouses. To reinforce further ideas that single women were Marian-like, Michael

Carroll points out that "virtually every one of the several dozen new religious orders for women founded during the nineteenth century was dedicated to the Virgin Mary" (319).

But, Ruskin's influence was not just limited to women who did charitable work. Critics often cite Ruskin's support of female artists such as Leigh Smith, Anna Mary Howitt, Bessie Rayner Parkes, Anna Jameson and Elizabeth Siddall in the 1850s (Peterson 87). Ruskin, in fact, praised the art of the Joanna Mary Boyce Elgiva in his series of best-selling pamphlets on the London exhibitions of 1855 (PretteJohn 67). In addition to the already mentioned artists, Ruskin himself mentored Octavia Hill, a young, single woman who received her art training with Margaret Guilles and then later helped her to establish "a housing project at Marylebone as a social experiment to improve slums" (Koven 87).

While Ruskin clearly had supporters as evidenced by the above discussion, many of Ruskin's contemporaries and readers over the years have found his essay offensive and "maddening," as Nord notes (xvii). For example, on education for women, Ruskin writes, "She should be educated but all such knowledge should be given her as may enable her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men: and yet it should be given, not as knowledge,--not as it were, or could be, for her an object to know; but only to feel, and to judge" (paragraph 72). In other words, she should be educated, but mostly to provide intellectual stimulation to her husband and to his friends. He urges women to learn a language or an aspect of science "only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends" (paragraph 74). However, Ruskin's most radical statements about gender roles lie in his assertions that woman's "intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and

decision"(paragraph 68) and that man is "eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender" (paragraph 68). We see evidence that Ruskin feels strongly about the importance of creative work for men in his introduction to his lecture series "The Pre-Raphaelites" on the supreme importance of creative work:

> It may be proved, with much certainty, that God intends no man to live in this world without working: But it seems to me no less evident that He intends every man to be happy in his work . . . . Now in order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: They must be fit for it: They must not do too much of it: and they must have a sense of success in it—not a doubtful sense, such as needs some testimony of other people for its confirmation, but a sure sense, or rather knowledge, that so much work has been done well, and fruitfully done, whatever the world may say or think about it. So that in order that a man may be happy, it is necessary that he should not only be capable of his work but a good judge of his work. (341)

While one may argue that Ruskin seems to be using the term "man" inclusively in the above passage, Ruskin's statements about women's roles in "Of Queens' Gardens" indicate otherwise. VanEsveld Adams raises the question which must be obvious to most: "If man acts, discovers, speculates, and creates, what worthwhile portion of the world's work is left for woman?" (64). Ruskin's answer would be that women are designed to help others in places outside their homes or in "outside spheres." While this idea has some merit, he immediately discredits such work because he assumes that charitable work does not require the"male qualities" of action, inquiry, and creativity.

Indeed, if Ruskin's discussion of "outside spheres" is read in the context of the whole essay, it has definite limits and impossible standards. Consider the following passage: "And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is . . ." (paragraph 68). Nord argues that this passage indicates that women are inextricably bound to building homes, but at the same time, the passage also gives women license to create "homes" or "places of peace" in their professions "as teachers, nurses, artists, reformers, tenement managers, and slum workers" (xvii). However, in the above quoted passage, Ruskin is actually warning women against allowing outside anxieties to penetrate the home. Thus, since the home is "always round her," a woman's outside interests should never interfere with her home duties. Ruskin, in fact, expressed a disdain for modern women who would trade their jobs as mothers to be engineers (Koven 190). [13] Neither does he intend for women's causes to take precedence over the concerns of the family. This is an idea that we saw earlier in Dickens' *Bleak House*, where Mrs. Pardiggle lets her household run amok while she works on missionary causes. But, Ruskin goes further with his argument. He contends that the woman must not only be in the home, she must be without need and incapable of error. Ruskin writes, "This [the home], then, I believe to be,--will you not admit it to be?—the woman's true place and power. But do not you see that, to fulfill this, she must—as far as one can use such terms of a human creature—be incapable of error? So far as she rules, all must be

[13] Ruskin first published this opinion in French in *L'Esperance, Journal Mensuel, organe de'l association des femmes*, on May 8, 1873. He republished it in *Arrows of the Chace*; see *Works* 345: 509.

right, or nothing is. She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation" (Paragraph 69). These qualities recall traditional roles associated with the Virgin Mary—Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Mary as Blessed Mother, Mary as Helper, Mary as a figure of Wisdom or Sophia, images which indicate his high standards for women.

At the same time he spends much of his argument in "Of Queens' Gardens" insisting that women are organically designed for these impossible goals. In his argument in "Of Kings' Treasuries," Ruskin emphasizes that experience *chisels* men into their roles (Nord xxi). A reader might conclude from these arguments that women who do not reach these lofty Marian goals are "unnatural," whereas if men do not grow into proper manhood, they simply have not taken full advantage of their extrinsic experiences and opportunities, an idea which implies that they have some choice in the matter or that they are shaped by outside forces, an idea which does not define their core beings.

In addition to Ruskin's desire to limit women's education and spheres of professional influence, his support for female writers and artists was also limited. We have many examples from his works in which Ruskin disparages women who write. For instance, Sheila Emerson comments on Ruskin's attitudes toward female writers, which she claims arise as a defense mechanism, as a male writing in a "feminized" field of sentimental, Gothic literature:

> He seems to have been aware as any twentieth-century feminist critic that women were entering the literary market place in unprecedented numbers . . . [,] that prominent male writers used their rivalries with women to cover or make clear their relations to each other; that they claimed new spaces for themselves by charging

> that the old ones were devalued—and by strewing them, in proof, with images of men and feminized women. (155)

He was reported to have said that women could not be "true" artists and was quick to dismiss his female artist friends such as Hill or Jameson when they disagreed with his politics (Koven 180). Diane Macleod observes, "Ruskin demonstrated a . . patriarchal attitude toward the women he mentored. After all, were not both artists and women as emotionally immature as children and thus in need of paternal guidance?" (169). Ironically, Van Esveld Adams and others argue that in shaping "Of Queens' Gardens," Ruskin, in fact, owed a great deal to the art historian Anna Jameson and her lecture series *Sisters of Charity* (63). This argument is not difficult to make considering that Jameson and Ruskin knew each other well. Indeed, Ruskin mentions Jameson several times in his complete works,[14] and he often cites her knowledge of artwork although "he more often although "he more often than not cites it disparagingly" (Adams 243).[15] For instance, in his autobiography *Praeteria,* he describes viewing the pictures in Venice in 1845 in the company of William Boxall and and Mrs. Jameson:

> Mrs. Jameson was absolutely *without knowledge* [my italics] or instinct of painting (and had no sharpness or insight even for anything else), but she was candid and industrious, with a pleasant disposition to make the best of all she saw, and to say,

---

[14] From *Works*: 18: 316, 24: 333, 33: 41, 44.

[15] From *Works* 18: 316, 24: 333, 33: 41, 44.

> compliantly, that a picture was good, if anybody had ever said so before. Her peace of mind was restored in a little while, by observing that the three of us, however, separate in our reasons for liking a picture, always fastened on the same pictures to like; and that she was safe, therefore, in saying that, for whatever other reason might be assigned, other people should like them also. [16]

Considering that Ruskin appears somewhat contemptuous of Jameson's intellect, lifts a great deal from Jameson's *Sisters* 1850 lecture series, in which she prescribes specific gender roles for men and women. Adams, however, points out that Ruskin and Jameson support very different positions: "The main difference between Jameson's feminist position and Ruskin's anti-feminist position is her assertion of male-female equality in the areas that really matter: rights and responsibilities; the right to education and employment; and legal protections, especially of women's property" (65).

From all the evidence discussed thus far, it seems reasonable to conclude, then, that Ruskin drew heavily on images of the Virgin Mary in constructing his ideals for women. But, the strongest evidence for this argument occurs near the end of the essay when Ruskin emphasizes the metaphor of woman as a queen in her garden. Some have suggested that Ruskin is referring to Queen Victoria in this metaphor, since he describes a woman much like her who combined domestic duties with duty to the state. Weltman is one such critic, although she also admits that "Ruskin makes remarkably few references to Queen Victoria in this vast *oeuvre*, especially given the significance of queens as icons in his thinking and writing" (105) and "the most extended reference to

---

[16] From *Works* 35:373-374.

Queen Victoria lasts only half a paragraph in a letter discussing how she instructed her daughter to darn a dress instead of buying a new one" (107). Further, Weltman finds the tone of the essay particularly troubling in light of her interpretation that the queen of the essay is Queen Victoria, noting that "Ruskin speaks of her [Queen Victoria] utterly without reference, invoking neither mythological nor even feudal paradigms in the kind of respect he offers his liege, which is surprising given his use of both models in so many other, less obviously applicable, circumstances" (105).

But, that is not the only troubling aspect of the essay for Weltman. She finds paragraph 87 near the end of the essay particularly baffling, noting that Ruskin brings in a Virgin Mary allusion. Here, Ruskin urges his Queen "to seek a throne that is founded on the rock of Justice, and descended from only by steps of Mercy." As Weltman comments, "This invocation of Christianity does not resolve what seems suddenly an anomalous female Christian God into that other Queen of Heaven, the Virgin Mary, whose intercessory influence comprises not both justice and mercy, but mercy alone" (note 27, 180). Focusing only on the Virgin's role as intercessor, Weltman misses Ruskin's allusion to the mystical union of the adult Christ and the Virgin Mary, which artists have illustrated by depicting the two adult figures of the Virgin Mary and Christ sharing adjacent thrones. Famous examples include the mosaic ceiling in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, in which Christ and Mary are shown ruling together and Van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* which displays an image of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist interceding with Christ. Such artwork would have been very familiar to Ruskin, the art critic. Therefore, in neat symmetry, Ruskin's essay dovetails with Marian

tradition in having his Queen of the essay sharing her glory with Christ, the Bridegroom and dispenser of Justice (105).

I would argue, then, that Ruskin does not mean to invoke Queen Victoria with this allusion, but is instead, referring to the Virgin Mary. The symbol of the lily, which is often Mary's symbol of the Immaculate Conception, is found in the title of *Sesame and Lilies* and then again as an extended metaphor in "Of the Queen's Gardens." Moreover, in the essay's conclusion, Ruskin repeatedly draws upon the Marian metaphors of the "garden enclosed" and the "gateway," and the ending only makes sense if one keeps in mind that Ruskin had always wanted to paint a Madonna.

As the essay closes, in the last paragraph, Ruskin clearly evokes the Virgin Mary and her counterpart, the Magdalene, who both have served, oddly enough, simultaneous roles at different points in history (Jolly 24). He begins this passage with a question: "Who is it, think you, who stands at the gate of this sweeter garden alone, waiting for you? Did you ever hear, not of a Maud, but a Madeline, who went down to her garden in the dawn, and found One waiting at the gate, whom she supposed to be the gardener?" This first question has several allusions, adding to the passage's meaning. The Maud here refers to Tennyson's "Maud," a woman who rejects her lover and, thereby, drives him mad. Instead of being like Maud, Ruskin instructs his readers, "Be more like the Magdalene who takes initiative and by greeting her Lover, achieves great reward." The Madeline, or its variant Magdalene, refers to the passage in John 20:15 when Mary Magdalene goes to anoint Christ's body and finds out that he has resurrected.

In addition to Ruskin's reference to Mary Magdalene, he also makes reference to the Virgin Mary when he uses the Song of Songs as a call to action for women. Ruskin co-

opts the biblical verse "Come, thou south, and breathe upon my garden, that the spices of it may flow out" (Song 4:16), urging women to extend their good deeds outside of their own homes and lives. Ruskin further persuades women to pursue good with an allusion from the Song in which the Bridegroom Lover Christ waits at the gate at dawn as the Bride seeks him. And, as I have mentioned earlier, during medieval times, this text was believed to be an allegory of the mystical union of Christ and the Virgin Mary—although Penny Howell Jolly points out that the Magdalene was also believed to be the bride in the Song of Songs during the same period (24). Interestingly, as we saw earlier, the scandalous Swinburne, also draws heavily on the Song in "Dolores" to create sexual imagery. Ironically, Ruskin, the "passionate moralist," similarly draws on such imagery, which seems to suggest that Swinburne is parodying Ruskin's sentimental model in "Dolores."[17]

In any case, Ruskin writes, "He is waiting always—waiting to take your hand—ready to go down to see the fruits of the valley, to see whether the vine has flourished and the pomegranate budded. There you shall see with Him the little tendrils of the vine his hand is tending." Ruskin lifts the symbols of the gate, the pomegranates, the buds, the tendrils, and vines from the Song, and directly quotes the lines "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for your vines have tender grapes" (7:12) to promote the idea of

[17] Swinburne and Ruskin shared a father-son type of relationship. When Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* came out, Ruskin wrote him a letter which expressed shock over the young man's work but approved of him as an artist and individual. Ruskin writes in an 1866 letter, " In response to Poems and Ballads I did not like to thank you for the Poems before I had read them, and their power is so great, and their influence so depressing, that I can read but very little at a time.... [But] I should as soon think of finding fault with you with a thundercloud or a nightshade blossom. All I can say of you, or them [the poems]—is that God made you, and that you are very wonderful and beautiful. There is assuredly something wrong with you—awful in proportion to the great power it affects . . . . So it was with Turner, so with Byron" (from *Swinburne Letters*, Sept. 9, 1866, Vol. 1, 186).

nineteenth-century woman's mystical union with Christ. But, at the same time, Ruskin's language is clearly erotic here, invoking images that suggest sexual foreplay, as well as invoking Magdalene, the "fallen" woman, in the last paragraph. By doing this, Ruskin distorts the biblical Song, which celebrates sexuality, imbuing his Queen with Magdalene's fallen sexuality. Also implicit within this comparison is the idea that women, by nature, are selfish creatures, who must redeem themselves from their "sinful" sexuality through their roles as wives, mothers, and community volunteers. Ruskin understood the power of specific language to persuade—especially as he prepared this speech for "one girl" brought up in a religious household.

However, despite Ruskin's limited vision in "Of Queens' Gardens," his overall genius as artist, writer, and social critic can be seen in many of his works—*Stones of Venice, Modern Painters*, and others. Moreover, his influence on the roles of women was similarly long-lasting. Certainly, Ruskin in his enthusiastic promotion of education for women undoubtedly improved conditions for women to move ahead in society. Also, Ruskin's proposal for women to move out of their "gardens" and into the community created opportunity for women to enter the public sphere. But as often proves to be the case with charismatic personalities, Ruskin's speech written for "one girl" became a manifesto taken seriously by countless women seeking affirmation and self-worth. As a ruling-culture male writer, Ruskin used the Madonna image as a standard for women, an idea which continues to engage readers into the twenty-first century as debate continues over his social reform contributions for women.

About the time Ruskin discovered the H*ours of the Virgin*, he entered into a relationship with the Pre-Raphaelites, an extraordinary group of young men (and some

women) who were set on changing the art world. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood formed in 1848 under the name of the Cyclographic Society, a sketching/cycling club based on the principle of mutual criticism. The group was composed of seven members: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, James Collinson, F.G. Stephens, the sculptor Thomas Woolner, and Rossetti's brother, William Michael, who was not an artist but acted as a secretary to the group. The second generation of the Brotherhood included Edward Burne Jones and William Morris, but they joined the group five years after the original members held their first meetings. In 1850, the group founded *The Germ*, a monthly magazine, which espoused their theories of poetry and art. The journal, though only publishing four issues, suggests that the group would use both poetry and images to establish their reputations. But, most important to my argument, the Pre-Raphaelites often combined verbal images with painterly images to create hauntingly complex Madonnas.

Ruskin indirectly entered their lives and became their champion when he defended the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in two letters to the *Times* after they exhibited works at the 1851 Royal Academy Exhibition. While his comments were not all positive, he concludes his comments by praising the Brotherhood's efforts to return to the type of realistic painting that had appeared before Raphael's time. Ruskin further shows his support for the Pre-Raphaelites later in a pamphlet entitled "Pre-Raphaelitism," writing a benediction for them stating that "[t]hey may as they gain experience, lay in our England the foundations of a school of art nobler than the world has seen for three hundred years." Rossetti and Ruskin met face to face in 1854, thereafter becoming friends and frequent correspondents. Also, as mentioned earlier, Ruskin became a mentor to Elizabeth

Siddall, an artist, model, and eventual wife of Rossetti. The Pre-Raphaelite letters include many of Ruskin's letters to Siddall expressing an interest in Siddall's work as well as in her physical and emotional health.

This unique group of talented people included other literary figures that I have discussed earlier. Wilkie Collins was indirectly a part of this group since his brother, Charles Collins, was at one time a peripheral member of the Brotherhood. Andres mentions that Wilkie Collins liked the qualities of realism and sensationalism in the Pre-Raphaelites's works and incorporated Pre-Raphaelite landscapes and gender constructions in *The Woman in White* (xxiv). Swinburne also became an invaluable member of this group in 1857 when the Pre-Raphaelites painted ten frescoes from *Morte d'Arthur* at Oxford. Swinburne was a student at Balliol College during the time, and Millais labeled him "Dear Little Carrots" because of his bright red hair (Cars 68). Reide posits that Swinburne "must have been greatly influenced in forming his critical precepts both by . . . conversation and by his admiration for Rossetti's painting, which he regarded as second to the work of no man living" (230). In addition to Collins and Swinburne, Robert Browning, too, must be included in this mix of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites. During the Brownings' 1855 hiatus away from Italy, Ruskin visited them in London and spoke well of the work of both poets (Finlayson 393, 398, 420). The Pre-Raphaelites were captivated by the "realistic precision of [Browning's] images and details, in his truthful, vehement conviction that love is the supreme thing in life . . .[giving] them in words a rich reflection of their own philosophies and mythologies, iconographies, pictures, and portraits" (Finlayson 411). And like Browning, the Pre-Raphaelite painters

often combined verbal images with painterly images to produce Victorian Madaonnas.

While several of the Pre-Raphaelites used Madonnas in their work, the leader of the Pre-Raphaelites and the one most remembered for his Marian poems and paintings was Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Bearing the name of his father Gabrielle Rossetti, an Italian patriot, and the name of the Italian literary giant Dante, Rossetti sought identity in names for much of his life. Before he labeled himself a Pre-Raphaelite, he called himself an "Art-Catholic," which Reide suggests was "a natural result of Rossetti's Italian heritage, his love of Dante and the *stilnovisti*, his poetic apprenticeship as a translator of the early Italians" (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Limits* 20). Rossetti's "Art-Catholic" ideas were inspired by A.F. Rio's *De la poesie de l'art Chrétien* (1836), which was widely popular and influenced many of writers of the time:

> [It] became the most widely read history of early art in Britain, and was the single most influential authority for Browning, Ruskin, Lord Lindsay, Anna Jameson, Francis Palgrave, Mary Shelley, and all those who made artistic pilgrimages to the sites of medieval Italy. But Rio was unequivocal in his stress on the importance of sanctity in art. The more pious the art, the greater it was; the more it promulgated the teaching of the Church the more it was deserving of admiration. (Bullen 22)

Rossetti's own attempt at self-definition through aligning himself with Catholic art suggests "a desire to escape the flux and uncertainty of nineteenth-century skepticism and relativism, to return to the certainties of dogma and simplicity of an earlier era" (Reide, *Limits* 19) However, Rossetti was eventually disappointed:

> He believed that he had found an original means to express his

> medievalism, his love of an ideal of woman, and his mixed inheritance as an Italian Englishman. The difficulty implicit in Rossetti's Art-Catholicism, however, was that the emphasis fell too heavily on the Art, to which he was genuinely devoted, and slighted the Catholicism, in which he seems never to have had any genuine faith. He could follow Dante and the *stilnovisti* just so far, but without the faith that inspired and sustained them, his own work would necessarily remain academic—exercises in galvanizing a dead art.
>
> (Reide, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Limits* 20)

Rossetti's Art-Catholic phase can be seen in his early interest in the Madonna in his unpublished poem "On Mary's Portrait Which I Painted Six Years Ago," revised in 1847 as the love poem "The Portrait."[18] This early poem contains many of the same themes found in the whole body of his work—the aloof, ideal woman and the transforming power of sexual love. James Swafford comments that "Mary seems rather mysterious and aloof, as Rossetti's women usually do, as if the poet is hinting at the typological connection with a heavenly reality" and that the later version evolves into a poem in which "[m]eaning has become embodied in the things of this world, made visible and palpable, as the Blessed Virgin's chief virtue of *caritas* becomes the sexual love that Mary gives the artist" (85). Swafford also notes the importance of looking at some of Rossetti's early versions of his work:

> [T]he poem is crucial to an understanding of Rossetti's poetry, for it illustrates two significant developments. First, it links the "Songs of the

[18] For more discussion of Rossetti's early poems, see James Swafford's "'The Fullness of the Time': The Early Marian Poems of D.G. Rossetti." *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2.2 (1982): 78-91.

> Art Catholic," in which the speaker prays for the presence of the Blessed Virgin, and the later love poems, which portray sexual relations as a religious act. The Virgin Mary, whom thus far we have seen as daughter and mother, here appears as wife, as a secular Mary granting a different kind of grace. (81)

Rossetti's progression of ideas in this poem reflects, then, the typical manner in which the nineteenth-century Virgin Mary transforms into wife or lover.

"Ave," Rossetti's most explicit Marian poem, written around 1847, details Mary's life from annunciation to assumption. He praises Mary as the perfect woman and includes her in the Trinity:

> Mother of the Fair Delight,
> Thou Handmaid perfect in God's sight,
> Now sitting fourth beside the Three,
> Thyself a woman-Trinity,--
> Being a daughter born to God,
> Mother of Christ from stall to rood,
> And wife unto the Holy Ghost:--

This stanza also includes the eventual 1950 dogma of Mary's assumption into Heaven as part of the triune God-head in the following lines: "Now sitting fourth beside the Three, / Thyself a woman-Trinity" which implies that Mary is actually seated equally in Heaven alongside Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God. In addition, "Ave" reflects many conventions of Catholic devotional poetry--the exaltation of Mary, the various forms of address to her, traditional details of her story. Ronnalie Roper Howard, for instance, notes that "[the poem] embodies the long sorrow of separation and

a glorious reunion" (1) which is the dominant theme of Christian theology in the death and resurrection of Christ and, at the same time, a theme of many of Rossetti's love poems. Although Reide admires the tone and religious fervor of this poem, he finds "Ave" to be flawed in the way it develops into an anachronistic "dramatic monologue without drama" (*Limits* 20).

"The Blessed Damozel," one of Rossetti's most famous works, reiterates the theme of separation and reunion, also including the Virgin Mary as a key character. The poem, which was revised at least four times in Rossetti's lifetime, describes the love of a woman in heaven for her earthly lover. The female speaker says that when her lover appears, she will take him to the lady Mary who will approve their love. Mary, in fact, will bring the couple to Christ, as is indicated by the following lines in which the damozel speaks:

> "Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
> To Him round whom all souls
> Kneel . . ."
>
> .....
>
> "There will I ask of Christ the Lord
> Thus much for him and me:--
> Only to live as once on earth
> With Love,--only to be,
> As then awhile, for ever now
> Together, I and he." (lines 127-132)

Here, Mary is the great, loving mediator who joins lovers, a theme which recalls

the Virgin Mary's intercession into the union of Dante and his beloved Beatrice at the end of *The Divine Comedy*. Rossetti clearly has a number of secular concerns in this work, however, despite the religious setting. Besides sexualizing heaven here with the Virgin Mary as the matchmaker of the two lovers, Mary, the Blessed Damozel, and Christ become vehicles to deify the male love object—personified in the word Love. As the above lines show, the female speaker's ultimate request is to live with Love forever in Heaven. One cannot doubt the impact of such an image on Victorian women as they sought a similar "blessed" fulfillment through a Lover who would satisfy all of their earthly and heavenly desires.

"The Blessed Damozel" becomes a signature piece for Rossetti, who also immortalizes it in a painting in the 1870s. Reide praises the poem for its "beautiful . . . metrical control, occasionally stunning descriptive imagery, and even for inspiring a kind of sentimental nostalgia for the ages of belief" (*Limits* 22). But he also finds the poem "strangely impersonal . . . . [and] its religious sentiment and symbolism can sometimes ring ludicrously false" (*Limits* 22). Reide attributes these problems to Rossetti's overemphasis on "Art-Catholic" detail and the damozel's speech which "dominates the poem," problems which seem to underscore Rossetti's reliance on superficial imagery and his "lack of real faith" (23). The poem, and Rossetti's subsequent painting, nevertheless, captured the interest, of the American painter Kenyon Cox, who later painted his own version of "The Blessed Damozel" in 1886.

About the time that Rossetti was composing "Ave" and "The Blessed Damozel," he and Holman Hunt made a often-mentioned trip to the continent in 1849 in which the young artists began to formulate and refine their ideas of art (Goldberg 229).

Rossetti, in particular, began to explore relationships between painting and poetry on this journey, returning with six "Sonnets for Pictures" based on paintings that he had seen while abroad. One of the sonnets composed on this trip was "Mary's Girlhood," which accompanied the painting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, shown at the Free Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner and at the Royal Academy in 1849. The painting shows a young Mary learning to sew from her mother Anne, and the poem which accompanies it is actually composed of two sonnets. The first includes a description of Mary's character and the details of the annunciation. The second relies heavily on Catholic Christian iconography and begins very simply with the words "These are the symbols." Within the poem, Rossetti explains that the red cloth with its three points contains an imperfection which indicates that Christ has not been born yet, that the lilies stand for the Virgin's innocence, and the seven-thorned briar and palm indicate her seven sorrows. He concludes the sonnet by noting that "[s]he soon shall have achieved / her perfect purity" as God gives His Son to be her Son. Rossetti, either in not understanding the Immaculate Conception definition or in critiquing the issue, concludes the poem by saying that Mary will be made perfect through the Christ.

A more controversial Marian painting appeared in 1850 entitled *Ecce Ancilla Domini* in which the Madonna (for whom Christina Rossetti was the model) wears an all white nightgown. The painting, the first to carry the PRB initials, was initially exhibited at the National Institution and then later at an exhibition to raise money for the North London School of Design. Marsh calls this Rossetti's "most audacious" painting primarily because it depicts a young red-haired Mary hovering on a bed while being

confronted by the angel Gabriel who holds out a lily (*Pre-Raphaelite* 236). Reide notes the sexual quality of the painting, "Even in the most ascetic of his early pictures, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, the viewer is more likely to be impressed by the huddled, almost sexually intimidated figure of the Virgin, and by her full mouth and entranced eyes than by the symbols: the haloed dove, the lilies, the flames around the angel Gabriel's feet" (*Limits* 17).

In addition to the controversial sexuality of the work, its frame also bore Latin mottoes that were considered to be "Popish" and offended some reviewers, as is seen in the following comment: "[it is] a work evidently thrust by the artist into the eye of the spectator more with the presumption of a teacher than in the modesty of a hopeful and true aspiration after excellence" (*The Athenaeum*, April 1850, 424). Grieve speculates that Rossetti inscribed the date of March in the left corner of the painting although the painting was not finished until April as a way to refer to the date of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (73). Although Rossetti had originally planned for this painting to be a part of a diptych, the critics' hostile responses apparently dampened his enthusiasm for the project.

However, Rossetti's interest in Marian tradition and theological issues continued during the next decade as he produced *The Passover in the Holy Family* (1855-56), *Mary Magdalene Leaving the House of Feasting* (1857), *Mary Nazarene* (1857), (*The Seed of David* (1858-64), *Mary in the House of St. John* (1858), *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (1858), and *The Annunciation* (1861). Reide notes that some of these had been commissioned as paintings for churches or for altarpieces (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited* 58). On the overall sentimental quality of the Marian

paintings, Reide again blames Rossetti's lack of real religious faith: "[I]n the Marian paintings, effective as they are in various ways, the expression of faith seems quaint rather than impassioned, and the viewer who chooses to take the religious symbolism seriously is relegated to a severe aesthetic distance to contemplate it" (*Limits* 21). In an age of scientific skepticism, Rossetti, like many others of the Victorian Age had a difficult time sustaining the type of passion and belief that might inspire a great work of religious art. Nevertheless, the paintings made an impact in his day and have remained among the ones that people most remember as Reide and others have noted (*Limits* 233). Ironically, the hostile responses from the press may have stirred up greater public interest in Rossetti's artwork while also heightening Marian awareness.

The hostile responses to these paintings disturbed Rossetti but were hardly surprising, given the climate of anti-Catholicism of the time. J.B. Bullen writes about this dynamic:

> In many of the hostile responses to Pre-Raphaelitism, the discourses of social reform and of pathology seem to have leached into the realm of art criticism, where they combined in a strange cocktail with the discourse of anti-Catholicism. This combination operated at a much less conscious level than the independent responses to 'Popery' on the one hand and to the degradation of the subject-on the other, since working just below the surface of the Protestant mind was a connection between dirt, disease, social degradation, and Catholicism. From the point of view of the progressive Protestant it was not difficult to see the art of the Catholic Middle Ages as the product of a

politically barbaric period which bred filth and disease. (44)

Added to the overall suspicion of Catholicism, Bullen states, "the most hated aspect of Catholic dogma was the status of the Virgin Mary" (33). We will see further evidence of this hatred when we look at paintings by Millais and Collins.

Despite the criticism, Rossetti continued to use Marian imagery for a few more years in such works as "Sister Helen" (1852), which invokes the Madonna with the refrain "O Mother, Mary Mother." Like a Greek chorus, the refrain rewords and rearranges slightly the line that immediately precedes it. But Mother Mary here does not save the young couple, and Rossetti links her with a voodoo-type of ritual through which Helen destroys her unfaithful lover by melting his waxen figure. When the lover dies, Helen loses her soul in the process, as the last stanza of the poem indicates in a dialogue between Helen and her brother:

"Ah! what white thing at the door has crossed,

Sister Helen?

"Ah! what is this that sighs in the frost?"

"A soul that's lost as mine is lost,

Little brother!"

(O Mother, Mary Mother,

Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven!)

The poem eerily prophesizes, too, the tragic fate of the profligate Rossetti and his wife, Elizabeth Siddall, although "Sister Helen" was written ten years before Rossetti and Siddall were married. After suffering from depression most of her life, Siddall, reportedly distressed by Rossetti's philandering, died of an overdose of laudanum two

years after their marriage. Her death continued to torture the bereft Rossetti, who threw his poetry into the grave with his dead wife. Through the years, Rossetti continued to paint her image and later exhumed her grave to retrieve his poetry, his actions clearly reflecting the emotions of a grieving, complex individual with much divided interests.

Rossetti was also interested in the counterpart to the Madonna—the Magdalene. We see Rossetti's interest in the fallen woman best in his poem "Mary Magdalene" (1869) and in his paintings of her in 1857 and 1858. We also see evidence of Rossetti's fascination with the Magdalene figure as a type of Madonna in his early poem "Jenny," which centers on a sleeping prostitute. Bullen explains the relationship of this character to the Madonna's image:

> Because the 'angel in the house' [sic] was seen as Mother, Saviour, Virgin, Intercessor and Madonna merged into one object of compulsory adoration, she was not a suitable object for sexual desire, neither was she a willing participant in any act of sexual pleasure. Therefore such feelings and desires had to be directed elsewhere if they could not be completely suppressed. The existence of the Magdalene was crucial, though her availability had to be tempered by the polite fiction that she was a nice girl who had fallen on hard times. Because she was destined inevitably for the proverbial fate worse than death, it was necessary to pretend that her downward slide had only just begun. If she had not fallen too far, then she, if suitably repentant, could be redeemed like Mary Magdalene before her. That the whole thesis sounds like a sentimental Victorian novel in operation is not coincidental. And so far as

> Gabriel was concerned, his poem "Jenny," with its sentimental view of a sleeping prostitute (though more compassionate than many), was first written long before he had any first-hand knowledge of his subject. (119)

The persona of the poem clearly takes on a paternal role toward Jenny, reducing her to a child who is easily understood. Beverly Taylor notes, "[H]e objectifies her as a book easily read and stresses her limited mental powers. From his position of superior education, affluence and social standing—power accentuated by her vulnerability in sleep—he presumes to read her thoughts and feelings, even her memories" (125). Rossetti identifies Jenny as a Magdalene with her loose, flowing blonde hair, which in iconic symbolism represents her fallen nature.

However, Rossetti clearly wants us to see Jenny also as a Madonna. Significantly, Rossetti describes Jenny's eyes being closed, a motif that foreshadows the later Marian paintings in which the Virgin Mary's eyes are averted. Rossetti's sleeping Jenny, and others like her, may have served as prototypes for the Aesthetic artists such as August Egg, Albert Moore, and Frederick Leighton in the late-nineteenth century to convey sexuality, often disguised as innocence (Casteras, *Images* 40). Certainly, we can see the origins of the Aesthetics' eroticized "innocents" in Rossetti's Jenny, since he clearly links Jenny's sexuality with the innocence of the Virgin Mary. The intentional merging of the Virgin Mary with the prostitute occurs when Rossetti parodies "Hail Mary" in the first stanza's line, "Poor shameful, Jenny, full of grace." He further ties Jenny to traditional Marian symbols by associating her with roses in May, which suggest the Immaculate Conception, and lilies, which are symbols of both the annunciation as well as the

Immaculate Conception. He mentions also that her face is worthy of a portrait done by masters such as Raphael or Da Vinci, who were known for their famous Madonnas. Moreover, like the paradoxical Virgin Mary as Mother and Virgin, Jenny herself is a paradox: "so pure—and so fall'n." Reide suggests that "[T]he allusion to the Virgin . . . introduces the religious point of view from which conventional judgments of Jenny are made . . . [,][but] Jenny remains a mystery" (*Revisited* 105). In this case, Mary tempers the judgment against the fallen woman, and yet, at the same time, Rossetti links the Madonna to eroticism once again.

Interestingly, in contrast to other painters who continued to favor the closed-eyes motif as the century progressed, Rossetti also often painted women with their eyes wide open in expressionless faces. Reide says that this lack of expression becomes "a symbol to convey emotional intensity, since expression could provide an interpretive handle, a means to 'read' or intellectualize a picture that ought to stir a passion, not thought" (*Limits* 240). "Intensity" to the Victorians implied sexuality as we saw in my earlier discussion of hysterical symptoms in conjunction with Collins' *Hide and Seek* and Madonna Blyth. Casteras points out that the expressionless portraits were designed for the pleasure of males during a time when women were vying for new rights and trying to be seen as something more than dolls ("Portraiture" 173), whereas McGann has argued that these female figures were dauntingly inscrutable reflections of culture (*The Game* 152). At a more basic level, however, Rossetti's expressionless faces illustrate how the popular stereotypes such as the Madonna and the Magdalene deny women the wide variety of emotions found in human nature—whether their eyes are open or shut.

Alongside Rossetti, other members of the Pre-Raphaelites also contributed to the

interest in Mary and her stereotypes. John Everett Millais's *Christ in the House of his Parents* (1849) shows a very ordinary looking Mary kissing the boy Jesus on the cheek in Joseph's carpenter shop. The painting caused a great deal of furor in 1850 as Dickens railed against it in his famous essay "Old Lamps for New Ones" of *Household Words.* He was outraged that Millais depicted Mary posing between two "almost naked" carpenters and commented that she would be seen as "Monster even in the vilest cabaret in France." According to Dennis Denisoff, "Dickens's rhetoric accords with the tendency among critics to define what they saw to be good art as masculine and what they saw to be bad art as feminine" (39). Denisoff also observes that Dickens, who was very much anti-Catholic at this time, sexualizes the painting in a defense mechanism "deployed as a form of self-affirmation" for political and societal control (39). Marsh agrees that the Victorian objection to this painting was based less on artistic evaluation than on anti-Catholic sentiment. She comments that "Poor Millais suffered an abusive press for 'The Carpenter's Shop,' arising partly from disappointment that so talented an artist...had adopted a 'foreign' style and a subject matter that smacked of Roman Catholicism" (*Pre-Raphaelite Women* 17). The painting, on exhibition at the Royal Academy, would have been seen by thousands, and while the painting generated negative press, scandal inadvertently often creates public interest and may have contributed to launching Millais's art career. According to Malcolm Warner, "Queen Victoria had the painting removed from the exhibition and brought to her for a special viewing" (78), and in a letter to Holman Hunt, Millais comments ironically, "I hope it will not have any bad

effects on her mind."[19]

A year after this incident, the Brotherhood, fortunately, gained Ruskin's approval, in part, through a peripheral member, Charles Allston Collins. Like Millais, Collins drew attention to sacred female figures. In 1851, the Pre-Raphaelites displayed a number of their paintings at the Royal Academy including Collins's most famous work *Convent Thoughts* (1850-51). Charles Dickens, not satisfied with his public attacks on Millais, wrote a letter to the press in May of 1851 again attacking the Pre-Raphaelites. He described the artists as "juvenile" and criticized them for what he saw as their "absolute contempt for perspective and the known laws of light and shade, an aversion to beauty in every shape, and singular accidents of their subjects....seeking out, every sharpness and deformity." Dickens also demanded that the Council of the Academy remove their paintings from the gallery. If this response were not bad enough, the press criticized Collins' painting in particular by asserting that his painting contained all that was wrong about Pre-Raphaelite artwork—including their vivid colors and their use of High Church subjects (Cars 35). In reply to the attacks, in letters mentioned earlier, Ruskin called Collins' *Convent Thoughts* "invaluable" for its precision and colors.

Collins' aforementioned painting focuses on a female postulant in white, surrounded by lilies and bushes with thorns, as she holds a flower and studies it. The theme of the painting, *hortus conclusus* (a garden enclosed), initiated a series of convent scenes by other artists, who portrayed young women as novices similarly contemplating their fates. In Casteras's analysis of Collins's *Convent Thoughts*, she comments that the postulant is

[19] Memoir of Frances Deverell and W.M. Rossetti, "The P.R.B. and Walter Howell Deverell," at the Huntington Library 12981-2.

a "Modern Mary . . . [who] also functions as a contemporary figure in a *hortus conclusus* or enclosed garden of feminine virtue. Surrounded by tall white lilies symbolizing purity and the Virgin on an island within the monastery garden, she interrupts her scriptural reading to contemplate a passion flower, a common symbol of religious superstition" (*Images* 82). Notice here again how the erotic imagery blends with the sacred since she is contemplating a "passion" flower, but she is surrounded by images of chastity. Using sources from medieval flower imagery and Marian iconography, Casteras observes, "The thorns growing on the nearby roses of this earthly garden contrast implicitly with the thornless Virgin and the Immaculate Conception, and the water lilies connote purity of heart. The laurel hedge behind also reinforces this notion of chastity, for the leaves of this plant never wilt and are sometimes emblematic of eternity" (*Images* 82). Another interpretation could be that the painting illustrates the conflict inherent in taking sacred orders, as the postulant contemplates the passion flower which represents the secular life against the backdrop of the rose bush, a reminder of Christ's crown of thorns. The ambiguity of the painting is further enhanced by the fact that Collins included these lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to accompany the painting: "Thrice Blessed they, that master so the blood, to press undergo such a maiden pilgrimage."[20] On the surface, these lines seem to praise a young woman's control over her passions, but actually, here a Duke is giving a young woman a choice between death and a living death in a nunnery. Along with the play's multivalent lines are sections from Psalm 113 including "Teach me to do thy will . . . [;] Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake," which recall the words

[20] See lines 74-74, Act 1, scene 1. Also, to corroborate Casteras's interpretation of the painting, see the discussion of Marian flower imagery in Mirella Levi D'Ancona's *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1957) 64.

of the Virgin Mary in the annunciation scene from Luke 1:26-38. While Collins eventually converted to Catholicism, we can see in *Convent Thoughts* and its accompanying texts his own doubts about the cloistered life and the Virgin Mary—as he pairs the painting with an ambiguous quotation. But, once again, we also see how public reaction, stirred by the anti-Marian sentiments of the time, inadvertently brought a great deal of attention to the Virgin Mary and to the Pre-Raphaelites.

Ford Maddox Brown's disturbing, uncompleted painting *Take Your Son, Sir* (1856) also depicts some of the ambiguities Victorians felt toward sex, motherhood, the Virgin Mary, and Catholic dogma. The painting depicts a Madonna with stars in the background over her head and around her body, a stylistic posing which appears to be in imitation of the seventeenth-century painter Francisco De Zurbaran (d. 1664) and his work *The Immaculate Conception*. Parrish has noted that Brown had studied the Spanish masters, which would include Murillo, Velasquez, and De Zurbaran, at the Louvre from 1840-43 (28). In the Zurbaran painting, the imagery suggests a passage from Revelation 12: 1, describing a woman clothed with the sun, with twelve stars over her head, and in the Brown painting, the numerous stars act as a backdrop to the woman's figure. A mirror is another important background symbol in each work. In Marian iconography, the mirror symbolizes Mary's reflecting the image of Christ / God (Hall 327). Warner adds further that the mirror can also be a symbol of the Immaculate Conception—an idea "taken from the Book of Wisdom in which Wisdom is described as the *specula sine macula*, the unspotted mirror of God" (248). In addition to the mirror and the stars, both paintings contain a temple-like image, off to one side, ostensibly representing Mary's body as the "garden enclosed" or as a "temple of the Lord," symbols with a long tradition of invoking

virginity as well as the Immaculate Conception.[21] Both women, too, have similarly draped mantels in front of their uteri. However, this is where the similarities end. The "temple" of the Brown painting holds a filmy cloth that drapes over a crib—perhaps as an ironic touch to the painting to show that this woman was not like a "garden enclosed." Also, in Brown's painting, the startled-looking mother, with outstretched arms, holds a newborn baby, grotesquely wrapped in the womblike folds of the mantel, its hem resembling a placenta. The inclusion of such an infant, dangled awkwardly in front of a Madonna's womb, was a Marian motif often used by medieval Germanic painters as a symbol, a way of "seeing through" Mary's womb.[22] In contrast, the chaste Zurbaran Virgin's hands are folded in prayer, and her head is bowed in reverence.

Casteras speculates that perhaps Brown meant to depict his wife Emma (who posed for the Madonna) as a "secular Madonna" (*Images* 32). She explains the reasoning behind this interpretation:

> The painting has been construed as a depiction of a mistress rather contemptuously offering her bastard child to its father. In this interpretation, some of the background details in particular may be significant: in the woman's hair is a wilting white rose, symbolic possibly of a withered purity, while two reddish

---

[21] See Mirella Levi D'Ancona's *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1957) 65.

[22] Penny Howell Jolly notes this "seeing through" idea of Christ in Mary womb's (page four) in a forthcoming article on the Magdalene entitled "Roger van der Weyden's 'Pregnant' Magdalene: On the Rhetoric of Dress in the Descent from the Cross." The article is scheduled to appear in *Studies in Iconography* 28 (2007).

> flowers under individual bell jars may be emblematic blossoms that—unlike their wearer--have been preserved from harm under glass. (32)

Andres offers a similar explanation and writes that the painting "juxtaposes and at the same time deconstructs opposing ideas—Madonna and the fallen woman" (35). This juxtaposition, however, is disturbing, as Cars notes: "The feeling of unease that emanates from the painting...and its incompleteness make it one of the most disturbing visions of motherhood in 19th century painting" (53). Part of the unsettling quality of the painting could be attributed to the size of the Madonna who dwarfs the image of the father in the mirror. Nina Auerbach believes this was done intentionally to show through her size how this mistress has gained power, thus "reducing the cur who impregnated her along with the viewer to a diminutive figure in the mirror" (163). Adding to Auerbach's interpretation, Bullen points out that in Pre-Raphaelite art symbology "[t]he glass can reflect back the image of the self, or it can show the other self; it can act as a device which positively reflects back male desire, or it can act as a means of satisfying self-enclosed female narcissism" (125). I would suggest something a little different however from both of these interpretations. Because of the unsettling quality of the painting, I suggest that the woman's size puts her in the role of monster, and the title *Take Your Son, Sir*! sounds unusually hostile coming from a new mother unless she is furious with the father of the baby. The painting's title suggests exasperation, as if the mother is saying "Take your son, Mister; I am tired of taking care of this baby." Perhaps the painting indicates a parody of the Madonna of the Immaculate Conception by representing the male as a diminished reflection in the mirror, threatened by the more powerful alter ego of the meek Madonna. As art historian Madeline Caviness notes, "Women have

repeatedly been the subject of male definitions of the grotesque and monstrous" (361), and, indeed, in this painting, the mother appears large and threatening—almost as if she were a castrating shrew. Plus, the cot in the living room indicates that she has angrily cast him out of their bedroom.

Not everyone sees the painting in a negative light, however. Mary Bennett suggests that the painting may be a positive portrayal of parenthood:

> The initial and most satisfactory interpretation of this picture must be that of the celebration of marriage and parenthood with the young mother in Madonna-like pose against a simulated starry background, the mirror, which has been deliberately moved higher up behind her head, acting as a halo and at the same time reflecting and enfolding both her home and her husband, to whom she offers their son. (150)

This painting, according to Bennett, also recalls the *Arnolfini* marriage portrait, which had been in the National Gallery since 1842 and a work familiar to most Victorians.[23] Bennett goes on to say that while Maddox Brown does not give an explanation for his painting, in his diary, he had revised the title to be *Lady and the Naked Baby* when he proposed a replica for this painting in 1863. Bennett observes the following:

> While the new title still bears out the prime interpretation, the use of "Lady" rather than "mother" may point to an alternative interpretation: that of the friend or helper, the eternal mother bringing down the new born baby to present to its proud father; but the child is in fact ten weeks old not new-born.

---

[23] It is highly likely that Maddox Brown could have been inspired by the *Arnolfini,* since a few weeks before the birth of his son Arthur; he had just been to the National Gallery. Virgins and children were, in fact, on his mind as he visited the museum because in his diary he comments on two "delicious" virgins and children and the Perugino which has both. Bennett notes as well that before the birth of his son and the visit to the museum, he had been working on religious and modern figures (Bennett 150).

and it would be odd to find a cot in the living room in such a case. (150)

Bennett concludes her commentary by noting the difficulties in unraveling the painting's meaning due to its various inconsistencies in imagery. She adds that "the artist may have found it ultimately too difficult either to resolve satisfactorily or, as suggested by the proposed 'replica' of the 1864, to combine in style and technique with his subsequent method of work" (151). Bennett writes convincingly of a positive, alternative interpretation; however, this seems less likely, given the initial title of the work and its negative imagery. Perhaps the later title was Brown's attempt to sell the painting to a class-conscious public.

While all of these arguments carry a degree of plausibility, it seems more probable to me that Brown had been influenced by anti-Catholic ideas linked with the Immaculate Conception since the painting was begun around the time of the publication of the dogma and because it contains such specific Marian imagery. Since the painting appears to be one of parody, and perhaps anger, Maddox Brown could be emphasizing the man's irritation with a woman who would "selfishly" present him with an unwanted child, conceived without any real memorable involvement on his part. His diminutive size in the mirror may also suggest that he feels that he is a lesser god in this conception, especially in light of Mary iconography in which a mirror symbolizes the divine child reflected in the father (God). Additionally, since Bennett links the Arnolfini painting to Maddox Brown's, it seems likely to me that the artist could also be imitating van Eyck's Marian paintings (from the late fifteenth century) such as *The Madonna in the Church*, which show Mary as a giantess standing in the interior archway of a church. To add further to the idea that Maddox Brown has Marian imagery in mind in this painting, Carol

Purtle argues that the Arnolfini painting contains similar images to the ones found in van Eyck's Marian paintings (114-115). In any case, the never-finished painting was not exhibited until 1897 and, therefore, would not have had influence on public opinion, but it gives us an idea of possible lines of thought of Victorian artists.

The creation of Madonnas and Magdalenes by Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites led to a more secular vision of passive, expressionless young women. The irony of these images lies in the fact that the idealistic young painters, praised earlier by Ruskin for their realistic portrayals of real people and scenes, succumbed to commercial pressure as Casteras points out in the following passage:

> Pre-Raphaelitism ultimately divested itself from the bondage of "truth" and embraced artifice and imagination in both its later stages and its second-generation stage. However, in the end, part of what the Pre-Raphaelites initially abhorred in academic art paradoxically reared its ugly head in their own: repetitive formulas, frivolous representations of women, reductive attitudes and a certain overall slickness. ("Portraiture" 145)

Bullen attributes these unrealistic images to the inability of Rossetti and his circle "to see women except through the distorting lens of Victorian moral and religious attitudes" (17), which, I might add, was probably all that they could do, given public censure and anxieties over sex. One particularly disturbing aspect of the Victorian censure, which inadvertently backfired and produced more deviance, was the linking of sexuality with innocence. While the motives behind this linking may have been to quell the power of the id, this trend resulted in idealizing child-like women through such figures as the young Virgin Mary. By the end of the century, young, innocent women were almost

deified; in the Royal Academy paintings *The Child Enthroned (1894)* and *The Dawn of Womanhood* (1900), Thomas Gotch depicts young females seated on thrones in poses reminiscent of the Virgin Mary (Casteras, *Images* 37). One could argue that young females were also eroticized due to the high mortality rates of women dying in childbirth and from widespread disease, so that women were encouraged to marry at younger ages. On the opposite side, however, one could also argue that by eroticizing and elevating young females in such portraits, more women died in childbirth because the age of consent for marriage was set at twelve (and some members of parliament wished for it to be set at ten) and women were susceptible to disease because they often had no money, property, or education to provide them with suitable homes, professions, safety, and, most importantly, dignity.

While Ruskin, Rossetti, and the other Pre-Raphaelites produced a number of lasting contributions to literature and art, without a doubt, they were heavily invested in creating perfect Madonna images, figurations of women who could reward men with ideal love and companionship. However, Bullen points out that "[T]his leads all too easily to the extreme idealization of Love itself, a Love that can only exist uncorrupted and unspoiled in some kind of dream world, meanwhile dangerously skirting the possibility of degenerating into narcissism with women cast in the distinctly subsidiary role of the Soul of Man" (145). Prettejohn warns against making too much of the Pre-Raphaelite patriarchal idealization of women, suggesting that when we do, we get a "complacent sense of our own superiority. Indeed the ease with which we find ourselves able to decode the misogynistic meanings of Pre-Raphaelite pictures seems to prove that misogyny is their problem, not ours" (209). While she may have a point, I suggest that,

unfortunately, we are not superior to the Pre-Raphaelites. Instead, as a media-driven culture which has generated countless images of "perfect women" since the advent of the television ads of the 1950s, we are more like the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin than we dare to imagine, too often mistaking artifice for the ideal.

Chapter 4: Preaching Against Culture with a Big C: Twain, James, and Adams

British writers were not the only ones fascinated with the Virgin. In fact, in 1846, Mary Immaculate was established as Patroness of the United States and, throughout the century, figured prominently in American culture as interest in Catholicism grew exponentially (McDannells 137). By 1860, despite open hostility against the Catholic Church, it had become the leading religious body in the United States with 3.1 million members (Franchot xxvi, 20). The heavy Irish and European immigration from 1845-55 explains part of its growth, but not all. The church also grew because it filled a spiritual void arising from an increasingly industrialized society:

> [The] 57,000 [Catholic] conversions from 1831 to 1860 were an indictment of and alternative to the economic and domestic pressures of middle-class life—pressures experienced as an emptiness within, an absence remedied by the redemptive "substance" of Catholic dogma . . . . Convert writing . . . [,] periodical essays, personal correspondences, fiction and poetry transcend to struggle to communicate with its surrounding 'heretical' culture. (Franchot 281)

Texts such as the ones mentioned above also appealed to Protestants since many of the newly converted Catholics wrote in the religious language derived from their Protestant or Transcendentalist roots. Although critics such as Ann Douglas and others claim that Puritanism and nineteenth-century evangelical discourse shaped nineteenth-century culture, Franchot argues that much of antebellum writing contains obvious Catholic concerns (218).

By contrast, Protestantism was suffering from "sectarian controversies [and] debilitating theologies of human depravity" (Franchot 304). Indeed, Calvinism, with its

intellectual reasoning and condemnatory theology, had left many Protestants indifferent to religion, as James Russell Lowell notes: "Protestantism reverses the poetical process [of religion] . . . . and gives not even the bread of life, but instead of it, the alcohol, or distilled intellectual result" (292). Conversely, the Catholic Church provided what Franchot calls "spectatorial" aspects of art and ritual which fascinated Protestants: "In contrast to increasingly sectarian 'invisible Protestantism' the 'visible' and unified spirituality of Roman Catholicism was, both for converts and for sympathetic Protestant literary artists, concretely available for personal and aesthetic inquiry" (198). Moreover, "Catholic art" by such artists as Raphael appealed to Protestants, whose aesthetic sensibilities had been starved. Congregationalist pastor Henry Ward Beecher called his first glimpse of Raphael's *Christ* a moment of "instant conversion" (Franchot 236). And, while most Protestants did not respond as enthusiastically as Beecher to "Catholic" influences, even those who did not admit their interest in Catholicism may have been attracted to it. David Reese, a nineteenth-century doctor, defined the odd relationship between Protestants as "the attraction of the repulsion," a term that he used to explain the sanctification/vilification process of Catholics by Protestants (Franchot 218). For example, in an 1855 letter, the Catholic convert Sophia Ripley reports to her cousin that one of their mutual, unconverted friends did not fully express his "sympathy" and "deeper feeling" toward Catholicism because he felt that "there is so much sentimentalism nowadays about Catholicism" (Franchot 198). For Protestant men to talk about their attraction to Catholicism was especially taboo and considered unmanly; thus, they had to find other ways to express their sympathies (Franchot 202).

Protestant women could more easily express their sympathies toward Catholicism and the Virgin Mary. We see literary evidence of this "sentimentalism" toward Catholicism and the Virgin Mary in some of the works by popular American women writers from the mid-to-latter parts of the nineteenth century. Louisa May Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe[1] often included Virgin Mary types in their fiction, and in the case of Alcott, Catholic ritual was sometimes incorporated into the text.[2] Although Emily Dickinson was writing in obscurity at this time and would not become famous until nearly a century later, she, too, wrote poetry about the Virgin Mary and Catholicism.[3]

Like the female writers, leading male writers also wrote about the Virgin Mary, though with one striking difference; they made direct commentary on Marian trends. We see this particularly in the works of Mark Twain, Henry James, and Henry Adams, who took up the discussion of the Madonna about the time John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites were relinquishing it. By 1870, the British literary image of the Protestant Madonna had become almost unbearably saccharine and easy to mock. As a result, she became a target for both Twain and James, who capitalized on opportunities to comment on various Marian trends, including the overpriced Murillo painting, the public awareness of the Immaculate Conception definition, and the bootleg Madonna. By contrast, their contemporary Henry Adams seemed more interested in writing about the power of the Virgin Mary of the twelfth century than in present-day Marian issues. However, as I will

---

[1] Eva, for example, is a type of Marian figure in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

[2] In *Little Women*, Alcott depicts Amy praying to a portrait of the Virgin Mary for the healing of her sister Beth.

[3] See Benjamin Goluboff's "'If Madonna Be': Emily Dickinson and Roman Catholicism," *The New England Quarterly*, 76.3 (2002) 355-385.

show in this chapter, the markedly different writers Twain, James, and Adams reject the image of the Protestant Madonna by the end of the century.

Mark Twain's focus on the Madonna is the least intense of the writers studied in this chapter. Nevertheless, Twain's travel book *The Innocents Abroad: The Modern Pilgrim's Progress* (1869) serves as a useful guide into how American writers engaged in the powerful cultural image of the Virgin Mary. Prior to Twain's writing of this work, other American writers had increased popular awareness of international travel and cultures. In *The Sketch-Book* (1819-1820), Washington Irving describes the travels of Geoffrey Crayon, who often represents Europe as a place of the past contrasted against the United States as a place of the future—a motif which will also be picked up by Twain. In 1860, Nathaniel Hawthorne, following Irving's lead, writes *The Marble Faun*, which centers upon young Americans living in Rome, Italy. In the novel, Hawthorne depicts his characters exploring Italian religion and culture, as they stumble through dark catacombs, encounter corrupt clergy, and discover the meaning of original sin.[4] While the readers of Hawthorne's day enjoyed the travelogue quality of the work, contemporary readers often find it tedious. Franchot comments that the novel is overall "a fascinating, painstaking instance of an ultimately failed Protestant effort to comprehend Catholicism" (351)—a fitting quotation also to describe the way that most Protestants understood Catholicism and the role of the Virgin Mary in the nineteenth century. Yet, not all

---

[4] Also, in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne demonstrates his interest in Catholicism by linking Hester and Pearl with sympathetic "papists" (*SL* 56) and "Catholic" imagery. For a more thorough discussion of this idea, see Franchot (262). She argues that Hawthorne demonstrates the love/hate Protestant American attitudes toward Catholicism in this novel. Also, Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1960) believes that Hawthorne was one of the few

American writers were as uninformed as Hawthorne, and, later in the century, other writers such as Edith Wharton and Henry James will show greater sensitivity toward European culture and Catholicism primarily because the two writers spent a large portion of their lives abroad. But of all the writers in the nineteenth century, no one approached international travel quite like Twain, with his blunt humor and frank observations of a typical American observing other cultures.

At the time that Twain wrote *The Innocents Abroad*, record numbers of Americans were cruising to Europe on steamships, and according to Jeffrey Allon Melton, "Americans were on the move, and Twain was caught up in their growing tide . . . . As the tide swelled, Twain, ever an astute and opportunistic writer, quickly recognized a way to capitalize on the movement. He thus gives us a record of the birth of the Tourist Age for which he was a creating, defining force and protypical participant" (5). In 1867, Twain boarded the steamship *Quaker City* with an assignment from prominent American newspapers to detail his travels in Europe and Asia. As he wrote his newspaper columns, Twain's reputation and popularity as a humorist grew, chiefly through his comic observations, which he ensconced in the sentimental language of most travel writers of that period. While some readers in Twain's newspaper audience would have appreciated his deliberate parody of the travel literature of the age, many would have also accepted the accounts at face value, allowing his quotable phrases to become their own. Twain's ability to shape popular opinion becomes a significant detail when we look at Twain's attitudes toward the Virgin Mary and Catholicism.

American writers to imbue sexuality into his work. But, as a note, he safely does so by associating Hester with Catholicism.

To show Twain's influence on his reading audience, we need only look at the sales figures for his travel books. We often think of Twain as the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), but, surprisingly, Melton notes that Twain was best-known for his travel writing in the 1870s as represented by *Innocents Abroad*, *Roughing It* (1872), and *A Tramp Abroad* (1880). The sales figures of the travel books contrast sharply against his early fiction: *The Innocents Abroad* (70,000 first year), *Roughing It* (76,000 first two years) versus *The Gilded Age* (56,000 over six years) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (barely 24,000 in the first year). *Life on the Mississippi* was the only one of the travel books to struggle—selling only 32,000 in its first year, but still surpassing the sales figures of *Tom Sawyer* (Melton 2).

The Innocents Abroad captures the essence of being a tourist, with all of its frustrations and pleasures. While it is true that Twain's travel commentary sometimes espouses bigoted and jingoistic ideas about other countries, he also pokes fun at the American traveler. For example, while reflecting on how Americans travel, Twain comments, "We wish to learn all the curious, outlandish ways of all the different countries, so that we can 'show off' and astonish people when we get home . . . .The gentle reader will never, never know what a consummate ass he can become until he goes abroad" (153). Melton explains, "[M]any Americans felt a contradiction between wanting to respect the accomplishments of its cultures and wanting to debunk them, and travel writers often accomplished a balancing act of these impulses" (54). To satisfy the accepted conventions, Twain brazenly diminishes foreign wonders such as the Alps and Saint

Peter's, comparing them against the "magnificence" of Lake Tahoe and the Capitol Building.

Often, we laugh along with some of his comments precisely because he is aware of his nationalistic "vituperation" (171). At other times, however, Twain seems to exhibit both xenophobia and anti-Catholicism as is evident here: "As far as I can see, Italy for fifteen hundred years has turned all of her energies, her finances, and all her industry to the building up of a vast array of wonderful church edifices, and starving half her citizens to accomplish it. She is today one vast museum of magnificence and misery" (170).

Given these attitudes, not surprisingly, Twain frequently criticizes the European homage to Mary and Her traditions throughout Europe. At the time Twain went abroad, Marian interest had been stimulated by several factors, perhaps, set off by the Marian sightings in Paris (1830) and La Salette (1846) earlier in the century.[5] Following Catherine Laboure's sighting of the Virgin in 1830, the Miraculous Medal commemorating Mary's Immaculate Conception became a popular commodity. In addition, statuettes of Mary first appeared in London churches in 1844, and within ten years they were to be found everywhere (Hoppen 441). The sales of statuettes and the

[5] The first major sighting occurred in Paris in 1830 to twenty-four-year-old Catherine Laboure, a novitiate in the Sister's of Charity of St. Paul. After a number of visits, the Virgin told Laboure that she wanted her Immaculate Conception to be commemorated with a medal. In 1832, the Catholic church minted the medal, which became known as the Miraculous Medal. According to Michael Carroll in *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), the great popularity of the medal in the 1830s and 1840s "undoubtedly influenced the decision to proclaim a belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception as official dogma of the church in 1854" (148). The second nineteenth-century Marian sighting occurred in La Salette, France, sixteen years after Laboure's visitation. Carroll says that although this sighting is not familiar to us today, it would have had an international reputation by the mid-nineteenth century. Carroll reports that in 1846, a crying woman appeared in a bright light to two children, Melanie Mathieu (15) and Maximum Giraud (11). It was later established by the parish priest that the lady was the Blessed Virgin Mary (Carroll 155).

accounts of Marian sightings filtered into the United States as a result of advances in advertising and shipping. Franchot remarks that, for many Americans, "romance" became associated with Catholicism, and they both became "disposable commodities available for buoyant gestures of consumption or repudiation" (202).

Further, the print media helped to disseminate information on the Virgin Mary. The account of the 1838 Marian sighting at La Salette appeared for the first time in English in an 1854 edition of the popular *Gentleman's Quarterly* several months before the broadcast of the Immaculate Conception definition. In 1855, shortly after the definition's release, John Bryant, an American Catholic, published "The Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary," a well-received treatise which explained the Immaculate Conception dogma to lay readers (Franchot 216). Also, in conjunction with the formal publicity associated with the definition, the words "Immaculate Conception" became familiar household terms after Bernadette Soubrious's well-publicized 1858 sighting of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes, France. In 1870, the miracles of Lourdes were recorded in Henri Lasserre's best-selling *Notre-Dame de Lourdes,* which sold 800,000 copies and went through 142 editions in the first seven years (Duffy 228, Kaufman 25).[6] In addition, accounts of Marian sightings appeared in popular British periodicals such as *All the Year Round* (1877) and *Cornhill* (1884), periodicals which were also available to Americans.

---

[6] See Suzanne K. Kaufman's *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). In case people think Lourdes was a nineteenth-century phenomenon, they need to think again. In her introduction, Kaufman writes, "The contemporary visitor to Lourdes encounters two remarkable sights: crowds of desperately sick pilgrims drinking, bathing, and praying at the Catholic shrine, and equally large numbers of customers shopping at hundreds of piety shops that line the two major boulevards leading to the pilgrimage site" (1). *Parade* magazine, included in many Sunday papers in the United States, today often contains advertisements offering religious artifacts containing water from Lourdes.

Thousands of people made pilgrimages to Europe during this time seeking healing and some, perhaps, just to satisfy their curiosity. While the church fathers promoted Lourdes's popularity as a type of Marian revival, its fame could be attributed to mass-marketing which used "a variety of advanced technologies and commercial exchanges" (Kaufman 18). Advances in transportation also made travel easier, and, accordingly, "[p]opular guidebooks, newspaper articles, and mass-produced postcards extolled the use of trains, electricity, and other modern marvels" (Kaufman 18). Therefore, taking in all of these factors which seemed to converge at once, Twain could not avoid discussing Marian issues although he never mentions Lourdes by name.

Twain witnesses frequent homage to Mary while in Italy, but as the cynical Protestant traveler, he is not impressed by it or by Catholicism in general. Twain's voice in *The Innocents Abroad* is that of the middle-class, democratic man who has little patience with the hierarchies and the "antiquated" traditions of other countries, and, therefore, speaks bluntly about what he sees as nonsense. Since Twain's humor depends on his "bad boy" antics, he often directs his attacks at the "sacred" image of women, especially in their roles as mother. As Alfred Habegger comments, "The mother often seems even more humorless and rigid than the aspiring woman and the genteel lady" (887). We see examples of this in Twain's character of Aunt Polly in *Tom Sawyer* and Aunt Sally in *Huckleberry Finn*. Predictably, then, since mothers are often the targets of his humor, Twain shows disdain for those honoring the Madonna, and, like Swinburne, delights in satirizing her. But, at the same time, through Twain's own creations of "pure,"

sentimental characters like Becky Thatcher and Joan of Arc, he shows that he also admires the "old [in the sense of Romantic], insipid, idealized heroine" who is portrayed in paintings like the *Immaculate Conception* (Habegger 885). Twain, in fact, indicates his fascination with this image as he mentions the Murillo painting by name in *The Innocents Abroad.* In Chapter 19, after Twain's narrator goes to Milan, Italy, to see Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, he ruminates about reading faces in paintings. Ever the skeptic, Twain doubts people's claims that they can tell "what a pictured face is intended to express" (126). He illustrates his scorn over such discussions in his mention of Murillo's *Immaculate Conception*:

> I have heard two intelligent critics speak of Murillo's "Immaculate Conception" (now in the museum at Seville)[7] within the past few days. One said:
>
> "Oh the Virgin's face is full of the ecstasy of a joy that completes—that leaves nothing more to be desired on earth!"
>
> The other said:
>
> "Ah, that wonderful face is so humble, so pleading—it says plainly as words could say it: 'I fear; I tremble; I am unworthy. But Thy will be done; sustain thy servant!'
>
> The reader can see the picture in any drawing room; it can be easily recognized: The Virgin (the only young and really beautiful Virgin that was ever painted by one of the old masters, some of us think) stands in the crescent of the new moon with a

[7] Twain is incorrect here. The most famous Immaculate Conception that bears the popular image of the Virgin was in the Louvre until 1941 when it was returned to the Prado in Madrid. Murillo was from Seville, however, so Twain may have assumed that the painting was there also. Or, another one of Murillo's *Immaculate Conceptions* may have been in Seville since he painted a number of them.

> multitude of cherubs hovering about her, and upon her uplifted countenance falls a glory out of the heavens. The reader may amuse himself, if he chooses, in trying to determine which of these gentlemen read the Virgin's "expression" aright or if either of them did it. (127)

In the above passage, Twain precisely pinpoints the problems and complexity in trying to establish the exact emotion that emanates from an image like the Immaculate Conception. Ironically, this is exactly what the Victorian culture *was trying to do* as they projected their own needs into the face and figure of the Virgin. At the same time, even while obviously admiring such paintings as the *Immaculate Conception*, the public ridiculed the concepts that they represented:

> The practical man [like Twain] worshipped the virgin no less than he made fun of her because she had charge of the idealism, purity, and refinement to which he felt he ought to devote his life, but didn't. And he couldn't help laughing at the unearthly virgin because it was she after all who inspired so many absurdities—the saccharine death poetry, the sentimental romances, the purification movements such as prohibition . . . . (Habegger 885)

Indeed, never a religious man, Twain had no qualms about making fun of those who esteemed Mary. In fact, he had no qualms making fun of any aspect of the Catholic tradition. At one point, he states that Catholics buy their salvation with masses (Wagenknecht 184), and he often confuses the Immaculate Conception with the Virgin Birth (Bastzhold and McCullough 327). For example, as Allison Ensor notes, "In Twain's 'Reflections on Religion,' he suggested that the virgin birth account was 'invented by Mary to conceal from Joseph her indiscretions. To top it all off, he

declared that 'you couldn't purify a tomcat by the Immaculate Conception process'" (76).

In *Innocents Abroad*, after visiting the Vatican in Rome, he satirizes the Virgin's importance:

> In all seriousness—without meaning to be frivolous—without meaning to be blasphemous—I state as my simple deduction from the things I have seen and the things I have heard that the Holy Personages rank thus in Rome:
>
> First: "The Mother of God"—otherwise the Virgin Mary.
>
> Second: The Deity.
>
> Third: Peter.
>
> Fourth: Some twelve or fifteen canonized popes and martyrs.
>
> Fifth: Jesus Christ the Saviour (but always as an infant in arms). (205)

Twain also comments on the number of churches in Rome that bear Mary's name instead of Christ's, noting, "There are some four hundred churches, but about a fourth of them seem to be named for the Madonna and St. Peter. There are so many named for Mary that they have to be distinguished by all sorts of affixes, if I understand the matter rightly" (205). The narrator seems naive here, but Twain must have been keenly aware of Catholic dogma because he mentions the significance of the Immaculate Conception definition. Twain writes that on the day of its publication, fifty thousand people crowded into St. Peter's to hear it read (180). But, after mentioning the enormous crowd gathered to hear the Proclamation, the narrator remarks, "It is estimated that the floor of the church affords standing room for—for a large number of people; I have forgotten the exact figures. But it is no matter—it is near enough" (180). Here, Twain's understated

comments about the fifty thousand make this account especially comical since he appears to be ridiculing the publicity that may have been disseminated for the event.

Although Twain did not always remain critical of the Catholic Church, he continued to ridicule certain aspects of Catholicism during his middle years. In *Life on the Mississippi*, he sneers at the women's gothic convents along the river--"female seminaries," as he calls them, "little sham castles" (332-333). And, when his daughter temporarily lived in a Catholic convent, he sarcastically remarked that he did not mind if she converted to Catholicism since given its history, it was "the most peace-giving and restful of all religion" (Wagenknecht 197). In his later years, Twain turned his sarcasm away from Catholicism and, instead, directed it toward the Protestant religion as evidenced by such essays as "The War Prayer," a dark satire on the way "pious" Protestant Americans endorsed the Spanish-American War. Indeed, Twain's overall disillusionment with religion, the ever-present racial problems in the United States, the death of a beloved daughter, and his financial worries contributed toward his increasing cynicism.

Near the turn of the century, Twain suspended some of his cynicism in the writing of his semi-fictitious biography *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896). Ironically, Twain, previously critical of Catholicism and sentimental romances, portrayed Catholicism in this text in a favorable light, at least as practiced by a woman devoted to "personal purity." Dixon Wecter reports that Twain published the work anonymously to distance himself from those who still saw him as a humorist (935). The two-volume set chronicles the historical account of Joan's life, and, as Leslie Fiedler notes in *Love and*

Death in the American Novel, Twain worked at this biography with greater dedication than he had ever shown before (296). To make his heroine larger than life, Twain depicts the virginal Joan as a true spiritual power "in conflict with materialism and the stupid cruelty of organized religion" (Wecter 935). Twain prized *Joan* and considered it to be his best text, but, in reality, it was probably one of his weakest; as Wecter notes: "The Maid was his favorite character in history. But as Twain's imagination is better than his knowledge of medieval life, the result at best is a *tour de force*" (935). Nevertheless, while the work may seem a *tour de force* to many, Twain, in all seriousness, wrote the biography as a first-person account in the voice of Joan of Arc, whose extreme piety is sentimental and almost unpalatable (Fiedler 296). Near the end of her life, Joan stands before her accusers when charged with heresy and claims that her salvation is based on Marian concepts of "personal purity," and after being sentenced to burn at the stake, she bravely faces her death. Thus, Twain elevates her status to Madonna and Savior--a surprising turnaround, considering that forty years earlier, he expressed such a comical appreciation of the ideal woman in the figure of the Immaculate Conception. This turnaround is admirable since Twain attributes his female character with courage, a trait often reserved for male literary characters. Another trait, Joan's purity, ties her more closely to the Immaculate Conception, and, at the same time, noticeably contrasts her moral integrity against corrupt religious and political systems. But, in addition to addressing social issues, Twain also appears to be making radical commentary on women's roles by using a heroine who takes an active role in politics, religion, and in her calling as a soldier (which may also explain why he published the text anonymously).

Certainly, in a bold move away from the Protestant Madonna, by 1896, Twain's ideal woman was not only pure and Catholic but also active and courageous.

In contrast to Twain whose appreciation of Marian issues appears late in his career, in the 1870s Henry James makes serious inquiry into the significance of the Virgin Mary for European and American culture. That is not to say that James does not include humor while writing about the Madonna—for he is well-known as a social satirist. But, unlike some of the other authors whom I discuss earlier, James uses multi-dimensional Marian images as a way to illustrate some cultural intricacies of late nineteenth-century American culture. James's interest in Catholicism has been noted by many critics such as Leon Edel and F.O. Matthiessen, but perhaps Robert Slabey's essay entitled "Henry James and 'The Most Impressive Convention in All History'" is one of the most complete sources in detailing James's early and continuing interest in Catholicism. The title of Slabey's essay comes from a passage from James's first novel, *Roderick Hudson*, in which its young protagonist arrives in Rome. He writes of the grandeur of Catholic traditions such as the papacy: "The stagnant Roman air is charged with convention; it colors the yellow sky and deepens the chilly shadows. And in that still recent day the most impressive convention in all history was visible to men's eyes, in the Roman streets, erect in a gilded coach drawn by four black horses" (227). Although James's negative imagery here (stagnant air, yellow sky, chilly shadows) indicates that James is not an unqualified supporter of Catholicism, Robert Slabey comments, "[W]henever James, wrote about the Church, he treated Catholic beliefs and practices with unqualified fairness—remarkable fairness when compared with other writers of the day who used their fiction and travel books as thinly veiled attacks on Catholicism, always emphasizing

corruption where they found it" (Slabey 101). His work, then, marks a different critical trajectory from that created by Twain.

James' travels to Europe during the 1860s greatly affected both his moral and artistic visions of religion as he began his writing career, both as a travel writer like Twain and as a writer of short stories and novels. As a traveler, James often uses the word "sublime" in his travel essays and letters to describe Italy, Rome, and Catholicism (*Traveling in Italy* 115,139). But, he could also use the word "sublime" as a way to slam Catholicism. Consider his comments about the relics of Saint Charles Borromeo, words which recall Wilkie Collins's comments on the same topic in 1853: "The Catholic Church never renounces a chance of the sublime for fear of a chance of the ridiculous—especially when the chance of the sublime may be the very excellent chance of five francs" (*Traveling in Italy* 309). Nevertheless, despite James's lapses into accepted American condescension, overall he finds Italy and its surrounding culture fascinating. Six out of the fourteen short stories from *A Passionate Pilgrim* (1874), his first collection of short stories, feature young Americans traveling or living in Italy (Slabey 90). And, while these short stories should not necessarily be considered autobiographical, Slabey writes, "[E]ach of them represents some phase of James's thoughts, feelings, or emotional or intellectual conflicts at the time. They are in many ways more revealing than his book of reminiscences in which he 'suggests' his early years in his complex later style" (91). The stories from this group share similar narrative and thematic structures as young Americans absorb the landscape, culture, and Catholicism of Italy (Slabey 90). Catholicism, in fact, plays an important role in these stories since Catholic churches become sources of comfort for many of the transplanted young people during times of distress. The idea of a Catholic

church as sanctuary will be a repeated motif in James's longer works such as *Roderick Hudson*, *The American,* and *The Ambassadors* (Greene 33). But, for James's characters, the appeal of Catholicism is more than just a sanctuary for peace. More than one character in James's fiction sees the Catholic Church as a "sublime and coherent form to which they can give their allegiance" (Slabey 92).

Adeline R. Tintner argues, however, that James was not without some criticism of Italian Catholicism—especially papal power. Tintner notes that James once called Pius the IX a "flaccid old woman" and a "poor, sexless old Pope" (*Museum* 66).[8] She also points out James's negative commentary on papal authority in *Daisy Miller* when he contrasts Daisy against Velasquez's crimson portrait of Innocent X in the Doria Pamphili Palace. Tintner posits that James does so to compare Daisy's guilt or innocence to the scandalous reputation of the Pope who had an incestuous relationship with his sister (*Museum* 66).

The comparison between Daisy Miller and Velasquez's portrait also serves another purpose, as Tintner remarks: "The convergence and confrontation of Daisy and Innocent X are an especially fine example of how James's experience as an art critic and viewer of pictures in the great museums of the world contributed to his technique as a storyteller" (Tintner, *Museum* 66). Indeed, Edel remarks that from childhood on, James was a "viewer of pictures, a visitor in studios, and in later years was on familiar terms with most of the great painters of his time" ("HJ as Art Critic" 6). Not surprisingly, then, the majority of James's earliest stories contain "art-making, art-watching, and art-collecting" (Tintner, "The Spoils of Henry James" 241). Certainly, the number of allusions to art in

[8] *Henry James Letters Volume 1*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 165.

James's fiction is astonishing, as Robert Gale reports: "The largest single category of similes and metaphors from his fiction is that of art. Of a total of more than sixteen thousand figures of speech, nearly two thousand derive from art in one or more of its forms" ("Art Imagery" 47). Thus, James's combined interests in art and religion would result in what Alwyn Berland calls the "consecration of culture," which acts as a type of "agency" for man's perfection or corruption (416).

James was not, however, influenced only in terms of his art. During his travels in Europe, he met a number of respected literary figures and artists such as Robert Browning, John Ruskin, Charles Swinburne, and the Pre-Raphaelite artists. And, in fact, James's encounters with these men were sometimes quite extensive. For example, James shared a lifetime friendship with the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones. In addition, Browning was James's neighbor in London, and, as Tintner notes, James often drew upon *Men and Women* for his writing in the 1870s (*Museum* 30). In addition, James had used Ruskin's *Modern Painters* as a guide to his travels in Italy (Edel, "HJ as Art Critic" 6).

Therefore, given James's interest in art, Catholicism, and his familiarity with men who wrote about or painted Madonnas, he could not avoid writing about the Virgin Mary. But, unlike many of the writers we have encountered thus far, as I noted earlier, James moves away from stereotypical treatments of the Madonna, often reaching into Catholic history, dogma, and culture to enrich his themes and his characters' motivations. The evolution of James's thought on the Madonna and culture can best be seen in "The Madonna of the Future," *The American*, the *Bostonians*, and *The Ambassadors,* although some of his other fiction also includes Marian images. Except for *The Bostonians,* all of

the above-mentioned works are international novels which reflect the Western interest in the Madonna.

"The Madonna of the Future" (1872) demonstrates well James's early and expressive interest in the Madonna. In this work set in Florence, an American narrator encounters an expatriate artist named Theobald. The narrator soon learns that Theobald desperately wants to paint a great Madonna like the one depicted in Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair*. At one point, the always practical narrator comments that since religion and aesthetics no longer exist in tandem, a new Raphael could not exist. In a passage cited earlier in my introduction, Theobald says, "[A] demand for the blessed virgin, visible and adorable. . . . I'm afraid there is no demand now." The artist replies, "[T] here is always a demand . . . [for] that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; but pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame. Let it appear, and this faith grows brave. How should it appear in this corrupt generation?" (27). To convince the narrator that a "real" Madonna exists, Theobald takes the narrator to meet Serafina, an unmarried, older, coarse woman. Theobald's "Madonna" claims that she goes to confession, yet she also maintains a sexual relationship with a commercial artist specializing in small statues of animals instead of sacred figures. As the story progresses, we learn from people like Mrs. Coventry, another American in Florence, that no one has ever seen Theobald's work. At the story's end, the narrator visits the sick Theobald in his apartment and sees that the portrait of the Madonna is just a blank, discolored canvas. While it is true that lax Catholics such as Serafina figure prominently in this story, James's intention does not appear to be to attack Catholicism. Instead his intention appears to be to show "the weaknesses of human nature rather than the failure of a religious system" (Slabey 98).

I would also add that the story's ending underscores the idea that people unrealistically seek a perfect woman—a Madonna—to solve their problems.

According to Tintner, this particular story is significant because it is "James's first tribute to a masterpiece by Raphael, and is the first story in which a specific masterpiece dominates the setting and provides the fictional input" (30). But the story is also important as an indicator of James's understanding of Catholic dogma through his specific word references to Raphael's Madonnas as being "spotless Madonnas" (27), "ineffable" types (27), and "fair form made perfect" (26). Moreover, the word "purity" is mentioned three times in two pages (26-27) as the two men discuss the ideal features of a Madonna.

Critics offer various ideas as to why the story ends with the blank canvas. Priscilla L. Walton, Lynne P. Shakelford, and Tintner suggest that Theobald has been paralyzed by his fear of measuring up to Raphael and that "an artist must, as Michelangelo did, energetically attack his medium and not be inhibited by fear of failure" (Shakelford 2). On the other hand, Edel argues that the blank canvas indicates that Theobald has "lived with an obsession and clung to a sterile past" (123). While both theories are plausible, I would like to draw a few more conclusions. Since James was concerned about expressing the inexpressible for most of his life, the blank canvas could symbolize as well the difficulty of capturing the ineffable in art because the narrator and Theobald both talk repeatedly about capturing truth, beauty, and purity in paintings. Theobald claims at one point that art "makes beauty more and more a force and purity more and more an example" (26). Nevertheless, that is Theobald's *ideal* of art, not his experience, because he lacks the ability to paint such a painting, just as real women could not live up to the

idea of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. Thus, the blank canvas may also indicate the impossibility of painting real women as Madonnas, especially in modern times, as Edel notes above in his comment about the dangers of people clinging to past ideals. While Shakelford argues that Michelangelo's work indicates the need for brave, artistic endeavor, I believe James's reference to the great artist's work indicates something else. First and foremost, James wants us to recognize that esoteric feminine ideals contrast sharply with Michelangelo's marble figures of David, Moses, and Lorenzo--statues that represent "courage, strength, and grandeur" (Shakelford 2). James emphasizes that while abstract "male" qualities can be represented in art, the more traditional feminine ideals of creativity, beauty, purity are more problematic, especially during a time when Madonnas and great faith no longer exist. My argument that this story is, in part, a story about gender and art is supported further by the fact that throughout his writing career, James continues to comment upon powerful masculine figures in art set against the ambiguous figurations of women. For instance, forty years later in *The American Scene*, James observes that Washington, D.C., is filled with "marble manikins" representing American heroes, but such statues of women do not exist (191).

In addition to all of the above readings of "The Madonna of the Future," the story also can be read as a dark satire on Marian trends. One obvious example of support for this theory is Theobald's pursuit of the aging, corpulent Serafina, who is anything but pure although her name suggests an angelic nature. In addition, like Coventry Patmore's insipid angel of the house, Mrs. Coventry "is guilty of an equally absurd confusion of

identities" (Tintner, *Museum* 29). Wearing a Madonna Della Seggiola brooch on her bosom, Mrs. Coventry collects as well Giotta's and Andrea Del Sarto's paintings, which, respectively, depict scenes from the life of the Virgin as well as false Madonnas. Serafina's lover, the commercial artist, also provides some comic relief as a modern Darwinist. In contrast to Theobald, who dies impoverished in his quest to become a great artist, the commercial artist endures, appearing at the end of the story with his statues, cynically claiming, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats—all human life is there" (51). The conclusion signifies that those with transcendent visions will perish in the modern age, while those who rely on materialism and Darwinism will survive.

A few years after the publication of "The Madonna of the Future," James takes up similar themes of consumerism, religion, and ideals in *The American*, James's first international novel. At the time that James wrote *The American*, he had been living and working in France and needed cash quickly. James told W.D. Howells that he had written the novel "prematurely." Edel explains, "What he meant by this was that he was uncomfortably close to his materials; this novel, of all James's works, is written, as might be said, 'off the top of his head'" (*Henry James* 195). Perhaps because James wrote the novel in such a rush, *The American* was James's most rewritten work, and readers have often objected to the ending since Claire and Newman do not marry (Edel, *HJ* 626, 197). However, when the work was dramatized in 1891, James changed the ending after realizing that, in real life, the Bellegarde family would have jumped at the chance for their daughter to marry a rich American. Critics have argued that *The American* is simple—thematically transparent as an American Romeo fights against the tyranny of an aristocratic family that desires to keep him from his Juliet. But the novel's simplicity is

deceiving. In fact, in a letter of advice to a young writer, James put *The American* on his list of the "advanced" books (Edel, *Selected Letters* 415). Moreover, he indicates in his 1907 Preface to the novel that he had placed clues in *The American* to be found by the reader for more "'intimate appreciations' of this particular work—just as a viewer of a painting when he recalls all the elements of the painting, he is delighted with the effect." James's hint here makes me think that he deliberately included references to the sale of the Immaculate Conception painting in this novel to enrich its themes of materialism and the conflict between old and new cultures. Indeed, it would in character for James to focus on such a painting because the overall pictorial quality of fiction was important to James, as is indicated in his essay "Guy de Maupassant" (1888) in which he states, "Every good story is of course both a picture and an idea, and the more they are interfused, the better the problem is solved" (269). Creating the "real" in fiction was James's goal as he notes in the introduction of *The American*: "The real represents to my perception the things that we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another."

The novel opens with Christopher Newman, a rich, thirty-five-year-old American staring at Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* painting in the Salon Carré of the Louvre. The first pages of the novel give us early clues into the character of Christopher Newman. As his name implies, he is "new" to European culture, and Tintner notes accordingly, "When he enters the Louvre, he enters Europe" (58). A self-made millionaire, Newman has essentially conquered the United States, and, now claiming manifest destiny, he seeks to conquer Europe. In the Louvre, Newman worships at the shrine of the *Immaculate Conception*, which, as I have discussed before, represents qualities that the Victorians

held sacred—female beauty and purity, ensconced in a religious-erotic image. Perhaps this scene is also James's mockery of those who made the consumer-driven pilgrimages to Lourdes, the shrine where Mary appeared calling herself the Immaculate Conception. Like Lourdes, the Louvre is a type of shrine to the Virgin, enhanced by the market value of the *Immaculate Conception* since it was the most expensive painting in the museum. While the painting itself did not have lasting artistic value, as is indicated by how quickly it was forgotten after World War I--its message captivated Europeans and Americans for nearly fifty years. Even Newman's name is linked to Murillo's painting since Dr. John Henry Newman was an advocate for the Immaculate Conception dogma.

Nevertheless, some critics have missed the importance of this work. Tintner identifies it as *The Assumption of Mary* in her 1986 work *The Museum World of Henry James*, perhaps basing her observation on Susan Ward's 1975 article "Painting and Europe in *The American*." Ward correctly identifies the painting as *The Immaculate Conception*, but, then, in a note, she shows that she does not understand its thematic content. Ward argues that Murillo's Madonna reflects Claire de Cintré's decision to enter a convent because the image is ascending. Ward writes the following in an attempt to justify her thesis:

> Although Murillo's Madonna is not iconographically ascending, the painting is so composed that she appears to be, and Claire's movement into the convent may be thought of as a kind of spiritual ascension. My thesis might have been helped if the painting historically placed in the Salon Carré had been *The Assumption of the Virgin*, one of the two Murillo Madonnas in the Louvre. (n.14, 571-572)

Ward wrongly assumes several things in the above passage. *The Assumption of the Virgin* by Murillo was not in the Louvre at this time, and, in fact, *seven*, not two, Murillos were in the Louvre in 1877. Moreover, the *Immaculate Conception* is precisely the right painting for James to use in this novel, as I will show later.[9]

Unlike the previously discussed critics, James W. Tuttleton correctly identifies this painting as the *Immaculate Conception* and understands its religious symbolism of purity, motherhood, and innocence. He argues that the painting symbolizes the type of wife Newman desires, while also serving as a contrast to the copyist M. Nioche, "who passes in the course of the action from the condition of coquette to that of a contemptible prostitute" (100). While his points are valid, albeit a little harsh, the *Immaculate Conception* has even further significance than Tuttleton or other critics have noted heretofore.

James is quite conscious of what he is doing by including the painting at the beginning of the novel and thus framing the whole work within it. Edel comments, "[James] was aware of the wall on which the painting was hung, as well as the museum in which he was seeing it; he was aware of what the painter was doing—that is, he was 'psychological,' and he was aware that he was bringing to bear on that painting the accumulated civilization of his being" ("HJ as Art Critic" 12). As I mentioned earlier in the chapter on Dickens, in 1852 the Louvre acquired Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* at an exorbitant price—the highest the museum had ever paid for a painting--and, as a

---

[9] The 1855 *Guide through the Galleries of Paintings of the Imperial Museum of the Louvre* lists seven Murillo paintings, none of which is *The Assumption of Mary*. The *Immaculate Conception* from the Soult collection was located in the Salon Carré according to La Fenestre's *The National Museum of the Louvre* (circa 1913), and the other Murillo painting in that gallery was *The Holy Family* (58, 46).

result, nearly every Louvre guidebook from that time on mentions its purchase price. James no doubt selected this painting because it was well-known and recognizable, two criteria that he went by in choosing the artwork for his fiction (Tintner 82). Therefore, we can conclude that James specifically selected this painting to underscore the theme of materialism that overshadows the art and relationships in this novel.

However, such voyeurism for James's protagonist does not come without a price: Newman has an "aesthetic headache" as he stares at the painting, emblematic of the headaches that will follow as he attempts to "purchase" an inaccessible bride from an old aristocratic family (Ward 571). Also, since James characteristically depicts Americans as having little aesthetic imagination, Newman's aesthetic headache indicates his more general difficulty in understanding art (Berland 411). Other paintings in the salon capture Newman's attention, paintings which also relate to his aesthetic search for the perfect wife. For example, Correggio's *The Marriage of St. Catherine* provides clues to the identity of Catherine Bread, Claire's real mother. Catherine Bread, who never marries, enters into a "mystical" union with a "royal" father just as St. Catherine enters into a mystical union with Christ. Moreover, Mrs. Bread's daughter, Claire, is also associated with St. Catherine through Urbain Bellegarde's statement that his mother would rather Claire become a Saint Catherine than Mrs. Newman (Tuttleton 101). The other paintings, Veronese's *Portrait of a Young Woman* and Reuben's *The Marriage of St. Maria Medici*, further foreshadow Newman's great desire to marry into nobility.

Despite Newman's questionable ambition to marry the perfect woman, critics generally agree that Newman is a likeable character, or, as Robert Gale comments, a

"Mark Twain-like character" (*Encyclopedia of HJ*, 683), an apt comparison considering that Twain had just published *Innocents Abroad*. Although Edel writes that Twain and James respected each other, he also notes, "No two American geniuses were more dissimilar" (520). In fact, Archibald Livingston and others mention that James reportedly said that Twain's work could be enjoyed by those with even the most "rudimentary" minds. While this comment seems uncommonly harsh, James also remarked that he found "sublimity" in Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (Edel 520). In any case, James was clearly aware of Twain's work, and, perhaps, in choosing the Immaculate Conception painting, James intentionally parodies Twain's narrator who is similar to Newman, especially as an American "innocent" abroad. We see evidence of Newman's innocence in the scene in which his friend Tristam raises the possibility that the Louvre's paintings are copies. Newman seems shocked by the idea that he could be purchasing copies of copies (14). But, like Twain's narrator, Newman is not without some self-awareness. James describes Newman as having an eye of "innocence and experience . . . singularly blended together" (3).

While Newman appears to be a typical innocent abroad, he also becomes significant on a metaphorical level as he is compared to the Immaculate Conception of the painting. Newman's desire not to "make mistakes" (34) and his mistaken belief that he is an "exception" able to enter the Bellegarde's noble line both link him to the Catholic dogma. Furthermore, Newman seeks solace from places where the Immaculate Conception resides—at the Louvre which is a type of temple to her and at Notre Dame.

On another level, James uses this comparison of Newman and the painting for social satire. Newman, who likes "bad" copies, is attracted to Murillo's portrait because it is

such a "bad" rendition of a Madonna in artistic terms, at least in comparison to all the great Madonnas with lasting fame. Newman, with his untrained eye, does not recognize a bad copy when he sees it, and the narrator notes, "if the truth must be told, he had often admired the copy much more than the original" (2). James, an astute art critic, surely found it appalling that this expensive Murillo had gotten so much press, and, perhaps, James is making a sly jab at the Louvre's outlandish purchase when Newman promises to pay M. Nioche a hefty sum of 2,000 francs for her painting of Murillo's Madonna (6). Later, when M. Nioche presents him with the completed painting of the Madonna, it is clearly hideous: "It had been endued with a layer of varnish an inch thick, and its frame, of an elaborate pattern, was at least a foot wide. It glittered and twinkled in the morning light, and looked, to Newman's eyes, wonderfully splendid and precious" (44). The painting, rather than horrifying him with its falseness, pleases Newman who feels "rich in the possession of it" (44).

Newman's unfortunate artistic misperception of copies and Madonnas will be his undoing as he searches for the perfect woman to marry him. Newman's standards are high, although love certainly does not seem to figure into the equation. One night over dinner, he tells Mr. and Mrs. Tristam that he has decided that he will marry soon and marry well. He says, "I want to do the thing in handsome style. I not only want to make no mistakes, but I want to make a big hit . . . . My wife must be a magnificent woman" (34). When Mrs. Tristam questions him about his seemingly "cold-blooded and calculating" standards for a wife, Newman explains further:

> "I want a great woman. I stick to that. That's one thing I can treat myself to, and if it is to be had, I mean to have it. What else have I toiled and struggled for all these

> years? I have succeeded, and now what am I to do with my success? To make it perfect, as I see it, there must be a beautiful woman perched on the pile, like a statue on a monument. She must be as good as she is beautiful, and as clever as she is good. I can give my wife a good deal, so I am not afraid to ask a good deal of myself. She shall have everything a woman can desire; I shall not even object to her being too good for me; she may be cleverer and wiser than I can understand, and I shall only be the better pleased. I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market . . . .
>
> . . . . I made up my mind tolerably early in life that a beautiful wife was the thing best worth having, here below. It is the greatest victory over circumstances. When I say beautiful, I mean beautiful in mind and manners, as well as in person. It is a thing that every man has an equal right to; he may get it if he can. He doesn't have to be born with certain faculties on purpose; he needs only to be a man." (34)

Newman's standards for a wife are appallingly unrealistic, indicating that he wants a statue "perched on a pile" and "the best of the market," not a real woman. Yet Newman feels that he has a "right" to a perfect woman, and it does not occur to him that women might have their own standards in choosing a mate. In Newman's listing all of the qualities he expects in his "perfect" wife, the text becomes an exposure of Victorian society's pretext that men are looking for godliness in a woman when, in actuality, they are really seeking a beautiful woman with high market value. Further, we get the feeling that even if Newman found the perfect woman, he would accept his good fortune with nonchalance. The narrator wryly comments on Newman's attitude toward women and religion: "If it is true that one must always have in one's work here below a religion, or at

least an ideal, of some sort, Newman found his metaphysical inspiration in a vague acceptance of final responsibility to some illumined feminine brow" (28). In other words, Newman has decided that in order for his life to have meaning, he must find an angel-like wife who will guide and inspire him throughout the rest of his life.

Yet, Newman's criteria for a good enough wife are anything but vague as he tells Valentin Bellegarde:

> "If I get hold of a woman that comes up to my standard, I shall think nothing too good for her. I have been a long time looking, and I find such women are rare. To combine the qualities I require seems to be difficult, but when the difficulty is vanquished it deserves a reward. My wife shall have a good position, and I am not afraid to say that I shall be a good husband."
>
> "And these qualities that you require—what are they?"
>
> "Goodness, beauty, intelligence, a fine education, personal elegance—everything, in a word, that makes a splendid woman." (112)

For someone who has such high standards for a wife, Newman's phrase "get hold of" makes him sound, ironically, like a ranch hand about to rope a calf—but, then, he is an American.

It soon becomes apparent in the novel that Claire de Cintré is the perfect woman, that is, at least, to Newman. When Newman first encounters Claire, he makes an effort to gather his wits about him, aware that she is supposed to be "the promised perfection, the proposed ideal" (40-41). Claire's first name indicates brightness or clearness and is evocative of the Latin phrase *clarum et venerabile nome*, "an illustrious and venerable name." Additionally, her last name, Cintré, hints at the way that she will become central

to *The American*, just as the Virgin Mary is central to the Catholic faith. Since the novel reads like a romance, George Knox has argued that Claire appears to be a "princess" who dresses in elegant white gowns and diamonds (72). In this same scene, however, a more compelling argument can be made for Claire as a Madonna: "She was dressed in white; but a long blue cloak, which hung almost to her feet, was fastened across her shoulders by a silver clasp. She had tossed it back, however, and her long white arms were uncovered. In her dense fair hair there glittered a dozen diamonds" (138). Her attire is an obvious allusion to the Virgin Mary's traditional white dress and the blue robe or sash over her shoulder. The diamonds are a clear reference to the crown of twelve stars that rest on the head of the woman in Revelation 12:1—a figure also identified throughout history with the Virgin Mary as well as the Immaculate Conception. And, perhaps, they are a Jamesian symbol signifying that Claire has already become a commodity, as had, in many ways, the Madonna herself by this time.

In another telling scene establishing Claire as the Immaculate Conception, Newman watches her as if she were a painting to be bought:

> Whether she rose or seated herself; whether she went with her departing friends to the door and lifted up the heavy curtain as they passed out, and stood an instant looking after them . . . [;] she gave Newman the feeling that he should like to
>
> > have her always before him, moving slowly to and fro along the whole scale of expressive hospitality . . . . She was so tall and yet so light, so active and yet so still, so elegant and yet so simple, so frank and yet so mysterious! It was the mystery that interested Newman most of all . . . . [I]f it had been his habit to express himself in poetic figures he might have said that in observing Madame

> de Cintré he seemed to see the vague circle which sometimes accompanies the partly filled disc of the moon. (102)

Not only is Claire identified with the moon imagery found in the painting, but she is also a "mystery," encompassed by a "vague circle" or halo, and, additionally, Claire's attributes of being "tall and yet so light . . . , so elegant . . . , so mysterious" sound as if they could be describing the Madonna in the tall eight-feet by three-feet-wide Murillo portrait. Furthermore, Newman imagines "that he would like to have her always before him," just like a painting which moves "slowly to and fro."

Despite Newman's imaginings that Claire is the perfect woman, others see her quite differently. We learn from Mr. Tristam that "she's plain as a pikestaff" (39), and we hear from his wife that she is "beautiful but is not a beauty" (38). Claire's ex-husband describes her as "plain as a copy book"—implying that Claire is like a chameleon, adapting to her environment but has no real beauty herself. Further, John Claire notes that she is a "copy" like all of the other bad copies found in the novel, but since Newman's judgment is often "obtuse," he cannot see Claire's flaws, which become more apparent as the story progresses (82) and as we see that Claire is subject to crying and submits repeatedly to the despotic power of her mother (76-77). But, perhaps, this blindness is less obtuseness on Newman's part and more related to the difficulty in reading people as images, also a problem for Twain, as I mentioned earlier.

Another difficulty that arises from seeing people as images has to do with the inevitable intrusion of reality, which must shatter the illusion. Baffled by both Claire and her family, Newman has a difficult time accepting the fact that Claire will enter a convent. Claire explains that she cannot go against family tradition:

"Mr. Newman, it's [family tradition] like a religion."

"You are a mystery to me; I don't see how such hardness can go with such loveliness."

"You believe I am hard, then?"

Newman answered her look, and then broke out: "You are a perfect faultless creature! Stay by me!"

"Of course I am hard," she went on. "Whenever we give pain we are hard." (284)

We see Newman's confusion here as he vacillates between belief in the image of perfection and the hard reality of the truth that people are complicated. The "hardness" Claire ascribes to herself becomes a significant detail later when Mrs. Bread, Claire's birth mother, describes the life in the convent and the Virgin Mary as a "hard mistress" (321). Claire's ethereal brightness at the beginning of the novel contrasts sharply with her hardness and her dark clothing at the end of the novel. The last time that Newman sees Claire "she is dressed in black and shows a 'monastic rigidity' as she walks across the 'dark oaken floor, polished like a mirror" (Knox 72). The floor reflects back Claire's dark, lonely future ahead in the Carmelite nunnery, an order known for its special devotion to the Immaculate Conception (Warner 243). Claire does not wish for this future, but she submits to it dutifully and seems emotionally powerless to do otherwise. Essentially, upon entering the convent, Claire has become an Immaculate Conception, an untouchable, divine "concept" instead of a real person. Ironically, then, and to Newman's dismay, she cannot be purchased like the painting.

But, the story of the Virgin would not be complete without her counterpart, the Magdalene, who is represented by M. Nioche, the copyist. M. Nioche, who is directly linked to "bad" copies of the Madonna, is clearly more sexual than the virginal Claire.[10] M. Nioche is actually one of the most complex, interesting characters of the novel. She is not only self-educated, like the self-made Newman, but she also desires to succeed no matter what it takes. Her lover Valentin recognizes her value and intelligence and comments to Newman, "'She has taken the measure of life, and she has determined to be something—to succeed at any cost'" (146). Further, her integrity and intelligence surpass Newman's, as well as Claire's. That is, unlike Newman, she recognizes true art and beauty when she sees it, and unlike Claire, M. Nioche has the backbone to stand up to her father when he neglects his duties (228).

A popular truism states that we tend to hate the bad qualities in others that are also in ourselves. Perhaps this is true of Newman and M. Nioche. However, Newman cannot see their resemblance, and his opinion of M. Nioche grows progressively worse over time. Although Newman ultimately will be defeated by class issues, his own elitism appalls us. In spite of his earlier promises to M. Nioche's father that he would find the young copyist a husband, Newman warns the wealthy Valentin away from her. He does so partly because he does not want Valentin "to use" her but also because Newman considers the copyist to be "a "vulgar little wretch" (228). Ironically, Newman is the real "user" in the novel since he wants to marry Claire in order to "penetrate" an aristocratic family (128). Indeed, Newman is worse than Valentin and M. Nioche because his materialism drives

[10] For further discussion of M. Nioche's symbolism, Magdalene-like qualities, and the doubling in *The American*, see James A. Tuttleton's "Rereading *The American*: A Century Since" from *Critical Essays on Henry James*, ed. James W. Gargano (Boston: G.K Hall and Co., 1987) 96-116.

all of his actions. Early in the novel, he tells M. Nioche that he must have a copy of Veronese's *Portrait of a Young Woman* although the copyist tells him that the woman looks stupid. Newman responds, "Decidedly, I must have her as large as life. And just as stupid as she is there" (56). These are chilling words, indicating that Newman does not care if his Madonnas are stupid just as long as they are beautiful. Newman will eventually pay, however, for his gross materialism and his shallow values. Like Valentin who dies in a duel for M. Nioche, Newman also experiences a type of death when Claire retreats to the convent—a fate which the artist Charles Collins compared to death in the commentary that accompanied his painting *Convent Thoughts*. Ward believes that Claire is ascending to a higher ideal by entering the convent. However, as I mentioned earlier, most readers find the ending hard to accept as positive.

The powerless Madonna, like Claire who is actually more realistic because she embodies both good and bad traits, will show up again in James's later novels *The Bostonians* (1888) and *The Ambassadors* (1903)—novels whose themes center on women modeled after the Virgin Mary. In sketching out notes for *The Bostonians*, James wrote that he "wished to write a very American tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions, and I asked myself what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life. The answer was: the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf" (*The Notebooks* 20). James's comments above can be read in two ways, as Irving Howe observes: "One of them would point to the problematic status of women in modern society, the other to the equally problematic relation between pleasure and civilization" (161). As Howe suggests, James may be commenting on the way that sexual roles, sanitized and politicized, had changed for the worse by the late

nineteenth century. The novel certainly is ambitious as it critiques spiritualism, feminism, and chauvinism. At times the novel succeeds. Howe praises the first 150 pages of this novel for being a brilliant critique of the feminist movement in the nineteenth century, but, overall, he writes that the novel suffers from "an undisciplined pictorial looseness" (158).

The key Marian figure in the novel is Verena Tarrant, a clairvoyantly talented young woman who works assiduously for women's rights. Interestingly, here, we see a link to *The American* in the wordplay of Verena's clairvoyance reflecting Claire's name, indicating perhaps that women such as Claire and Verena "foretell" the future of their lovers. However, Verena is unlike Claire in that she has a definite calling. As the love object of the cousins Olive and Basil Ransom, Verena sees her purpose in life as a guide to women and a judge of men:

> I only speak to women . . . ; I don't speak to men, for I don't expect them to like what I say. They pretend to admire us very much, but I should like them to admire us a little less and to trust us a little more. I don't know what we have done to them that they should keep us out of everything. We have trusted them too much, and I think the time has come for us to judge them . . . . (857)

Verena seems to be based partly upon James's encounter in 1863 with the female evangelist Mrs. Cora V.L. Hatch who underwent trancelike conditions before she preached her "arrant platitudes," which soon drove James out of her Temple, as he remarks in his letter (Edel, *Selected Letters* 8).

Painterly images permeate *The Bostonians* as they did in "The Madonna of the Future" and *The American.* James was a great fan of the Pre-Raphaelites, and Tintner observes

that he was one of the first to appreciate their art, although his interest waned as the years progressed (144). At one time, besides being a good friend, Edward Burne-Jones was one of James's favorite artists, and Tintner suggests that Basil Ransom in *The Bostonians* is based upon Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar*, whereas Verena resembles the women in Burne-Jones's trancelike pictures (*The Wine of Circe* and *The Beguiling of Merlin*) (144). However, I would like to suggest that Verena's flaming red hair and white skin more pointedly recall Rossetti's annunciation painting in which a young, red-haired Mary with a milky complexion hovers on her bed as she receives Gabriel's message that she will be the mother of God. Ransom, the hero and villain in this novel, often comments on how Verena's face reminds him of "unworldly places such as convent-cloisters or vales of Arcady" (1006). Moreover, she dresses in white, and James depicts her in tableaux in which she appears to be a goddess. For example, in Chapter 28, Ransom watches Verena "erect on her little platform, dressed in white, with flowers in her bosom. The red cloth beneath her feet looked rich in the light of lamps placed on high pedestals on either side of the stage; it gave her figure a setting of colour [sic] which made it more pure and salient" (1044). Although one could argue that she represents a generic type of female goddess, Verena becomes specifically more Madonna-like once James associates her with purity.

Furthering the identification of Verena and, perhaps, Olive with the Madonna, two photographs of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* hang on the wall in the house they share. James may have included these images to suggest that the two women are Madonnas since they work for the suffrage movement. This seems likely since the painting is also mentioned when Miss Birdseye, the leader of the feminist group, dies in her chair

(perhaps as a sly allusion to Raphael's *The Madonna of the Chair*). But James may have chosen this particular painting for another reason. Perhaps he did so because at the bottom of the painting, the Virgin, a female saint, and the Pope form a triangle, which would represent in interesting ways the love triangle of Verena, Olive, and Basil (Tintner 77-78). In addition, the two portraits could suggest the two separate "worshippers" in pursuit of the Virgin/Verena. Also, too, as Tintner points out, James may also have chosen this particular painting for its location in a Dresden art gallery, a detail which then ties the painting into the "German books" on the table in Olive's drawing room. Knowing that James admired Goethe, Tintner posits that James means for his sophisticated readers to associate the books with Goethe's lines dedicated to the *Sistine Madonna*:

> Of Mothers primal type
> of women Queen
> By magic brush portrayed for eye to see,
> A man in holy dread, a woman meek
> In quiet transport, to her bows the knee. (Tintner 78)

These lines seem to foretell the future for Verena and Basil. As Verena ascends into the limelight, Ransom bows his knee to her metaphorically, yet by the end of the novel, Verena is transported from her role as celebrity to that of wife.

But, the novel does not focus solely on the "pure" Madonna. Unlike many Victorian novelists, James daringly includes Olive, a lesbian, as a major character. Olive's complicated sensuality contrasts sharply with that of many of the female characters we have encountered before. Even the more sexually active Mrs. Luna does not fall into the

Victorian stereotype of the Magdalene. At first glance, Mrs. Luna, whose name suggests the chaste moon-goddess Diana, seems to be quite unlike Verena and Olive. As Howe notes, "her sexuality has turned rancid, it has been corrupted into a strategy for social acquisition" (163). While Howe has a point, Mrs. Luna's association with chastity suggests that she is not so different from the other two women portrayed as Madonnas. In fact, James indicates that all three women have motives for using their sexuality to achieve selfish ambitions, perhaps also indicating that the "desirable" image of the Madonna is packaged and sold like any other product.

Finally, at the end of the novel, Ransom succeeds in persuading Verena to marry him. In their stealthy flight from a Boston auditorium full of Verena's adoring fans, Ransom flings the hood of her cloak over her head so that no one will not see her escape. Verena is thus transformed into a veiled Madonna—or, perhaps, someone hooded for an execution. On the streets, Ransom sees tears on her face beneath her hood. James writes, "It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed" (1219). Unlike Claire de Cintré who becomes a defeated Madonna by her entering a convent and not marrying, Verena loses her power by consenting to a marriage.

In James's Master novel *The Ambassadors* (1903), marriage once again becomes a central issue for two Mary figures, who represent salvational types. As Pierre Walker comments, "The theme of salvation becomes a motif that runs throughout *The Ambassadors*; everybody in James's novel at some point seems to be either saving or being saved by someone else" (60). In this novel, the American Lambert Strether goes to Paris to "save" Chad Newsome, the wayward son of a patrician Boston family, from his

"immoral relationship" with Marie de Vionette. Ironically, the novel indicates that Chad is not the one in need of rescue. Instead, Chad's "savior" Strether will be saved by two Marys as he gains a new vision of life and its meaning for him.

The two Marys in the novel are the American Maria Gostrey and the French Marie de Vionette. According to Pierre Walker, Maria Gostrey represents Mary Stuart in her role as the sacrificed Queen Mary, and Marie de Vionette represents the Virgin Mary (63). However, I would like to suggest that the two women also represent in interesting ways "metaphysical polarities, the decision between one of two contraries," a phrase used by Tintner (*Museum* 66). On the one hand, Marie de Vionette is the Madonna, emblematic of the Mary of the old European culture, and, on the other hand, Marie Gostrey represents the Modern Madonna that James describes in his notebook as being a "'highly contemporary and quasi-cosmopolite' feminine type" (546). However, as Walker has noted, the two Marys serve as well as metaphorical doubles so that sometimes they play roles both as the savior and sometimes as the victim (63). They are also clearly foils for Strether and lead him into new truths about himself and the world, truths that are not always easy to articulate or accept.

Despite Marie de Vionette's "bad" reputation, James means for his readers to identify the Virgin Mary with her. Described as being perfect (127), she lives near Notre Dame where she first encounters Strether, who has entered the church for some relief from the stress of "saving" Chad (170). Walker says it is not coincidental that Strether meets Marie there and that "'the metaphor of salvation' in *The Ambassadors* is connected to the figure of the Virgin Mary" (61). For instance, Marie says she's "terrible . . . .for churches" (175), meaning that she loves churches and visits them frequently. At the time

that they meet, she is heavily veiled and wears a subdued grey, with a little tell-tale scarlet showing through (175). As the novel comes to its resolution, Strether meets with Marie in her home. Although Strether envisions her as a sacrificial figure from the French revolution ready for execution, she also evokes a Madonna-like quality as she moves through her house. Dressed all in white, her image reflects in the bare floor. She is the goddess at the center of a sanctuary with its subdued light, glass, gilt and parquet (319). When Strether surveys the possessions in her home, he realizes her "true" value: "Everything in fine made her immeasurably new, and nothing so new as the old house and the old objects" (319). She appears to be the "real thing" needed to provide salvation. However, even this "real thing" is illusory. When Marie breaks down crying over her lover, Strether is bothered and disillusioned that like a mortal woman she is "vulgarly troubled" (323). Nevertheless, this is a significant scene for James who writes in his notebook that Strether is fascinated by Marie and "treats himself" to a last view of her in all of her contradictions of being "wonderful and abysmal, strange and charming, beautiful and rather dreadful" (574).

In an odd reversal, Maria Gostrey appears to be the "good" Madonna of *The Ambassadors* since her fine qualities dominate the novel. Among other things, she is an unmarried woman, a selfless guide (26), omniscient (22), a blessing (80), someone who infuses everything she touches with good (346, 347). Early in the novel, Maria Gostrey appears to be Strether's savior since she keeps him company in Paris and provides him with information about Marie de Vionette and Chad. But, her "goodness" does have its flip side. That is, despite Maria's virtue, she has a "cheapness" of character. Tintner remarks that in many of James's later novels, art and "things" provide "clues to the

motives and drives of the people to whom they are addressed and for whose use they are disposed" ("The Spoils" 248). We see in James's *The American Scene*, written about the same time as *The Ambassadors*, his expressive disdain for the "thingness" of American culture at the turn of the century (196). While both Maria and Marie are collectors as Little Bilham notes, Strether sees that they approach life and art very differently through their aesthetic selections (123). We can see subtle differences between the two women in Chapter One, Book Two when Strether and Maria go to dinner. In contrast to Marie Vionette's later modest dress at Notre Dame, Maria's low-cut gown and a red ribbon at her throat indicate her sensuality or, perhaps, her desire to "acquire" a husband. Furthermore, Strether gets a glimpse of Maria's character when he visits her apartment:

> The life of the occupant struck him of a sudden as more charged with possession even than Chad's or than Miss Barrace's; wide as his glimpse lately become of the empire of "things," what was before him still enlarged it; the lust of his eyes and the pride of life had indeed thus their temple. It was the innermost nook of the shrine—as brown as a pirate's cave. (80)

This passage certainly could be read as a sexual allusion with its mention of the brown cave and its hidden treasures, and, especially, since it is also obvious from this passage that Maria pleases Strether. At the same time, James's ambiguous language discomfits us as Strether surveys the scene of the "empire of things." A little later in the same chapter, Strether seems uncomfortable at learning that Maria had purchased tickets for a play without consulting him. He observes that her relationships seem like transactions motivated by a reward: "[The fact that] she was always paying for something in advance

was always equaled on Strether's part only by the sense of how she was always being paid;all of which made for his consciousness, in the larger air, of a lively bustling traffic, the exchange of values as were not for him to handle" (85).

Strether's decision to return home at the end of the novel has puzzled critics for years. To most readers, Strether rather surprisingly turns down Maria Gostrey's marriage offer, and he returns to Woollett, Massachusetts, with his mission of rescuing Chad unfulfilled. James Gargano offers this interpretation of the ending: "Strether returns to America as an enlightened man, who for the first time, sees the efficacy of merging flesh and spirit when he finally understands the relationship between Chad and Marie" (*The Ambassadors and Lewis Lambert*, 213). However, others see Strether as fleeing his newly acquired sexual knowledge. Walker comments, "Strether's departure from Europe—like his refusal of Maria in the last chapter—signals that he is still unable to come fully to terms with sexuality. He flees Paris and sexuality as if he were fleeing temptation" (83). Both critics make valid points. Certainly, as Gargano points out, Strether is a more enlightened man at the end of the novel, and as Walker notes, he does appear to be fleeing Maria. I would like to suggest, however, that he is fleeing for reasons other than sexual temptation. Instead, it seems more likely that Strether refuses to marry Maria for the same reason he rejects Mrs. Newsome. They are copies of one another, and neither possesses his heart or his imagination. As the cheerful American Protestant Madonna, who collects Delft china, pewter, and "things," Maria does not satisfy Strether's aesthetic longings for she is just like every other female consumer found in "any drawing room" (Twain, *Innocents* 127) Strether *sees* Maria Gostrey at this point the way that he *sees* and understands his former fiancée Mrs. Newsome (346). He

chides himself at the end of the novel because he does not prize Maria's "things" or her marriage offer which all seem so pleasant. But, Strether cannot accept them because he knows that his "selection" of her would not be a beautiful choice. He decides against the "world" Maria offers, deciding not to "get" anything out of the trip (346). Maria, although "fine and honest" (347), does not possess or represent true art, and thus, unlike Marie, the complex European Madonna of the past, she does not have the power to save a man and to turn him out "wonderfully" (169). James concludes that Strether's former Puritan morality without imagination and passion is not transforming and yet he knows too much at the end to settle for less. But James also acknowledges that it is difficult and not always helpful to let go of "ideals":

> If we must distill the "theme" or "message" of *The Ambassadors* down to one phrase, it is that people can be and are saving, saved, and sacrificed, virtuous or virginal and sexual, old and young, bad and "bad" all at the same time; but while to see this is to "live," is to recognize better the complexity of human society and psychology, this awareness renders a person impotent. (Walker 188)

The message from *The Ambassadors* could be applied to the end of *The American* as well. Christopher Newman in his attempt to "buy" a Madonna realizes that he will never possess the "perfect" woman who would help him achieve all of his dreams. The message of *The American* and *The Ambassadors* thus shows that James recognized, unlike many of his contemporaries, the impossibilities of constructing real people as ideals—especially women as Madonnas. By doing so, we end up with what Christopher Newman feared most, a bad copy of a copy that can become as meaningless as Theobald's painting of nothingness in the "Madonna of the Future."

For most of his life, James had been posing the hard questions that any thoughtful person would ask: "Why do women have to be ideals?" "What part does art play in designating roles for people?" "Why are men in control?" James was sympathetic to women's plight, pointing out in *The American Scene* that American women were relegated to being types in society, in advertisements, art, and literature, while men continued to exclude them from the world of action and power (291-292).[11] As Martha Banta notes, when James traversed the East Coast in 1904 looking for monuments representing individuals of value, he found instead that monuments were being built to encourage consumerism with bigger and better edifices, even in universities, museums, and hospitals in cities like New York and Washington. Banta observes that James thought this was a bad sign since it "persuaded him that the occasion for 'things' was at hand; the occasion for 'individuals of value' was not" (*Imaging* 477). This was also a bad sign for women since they would be used as different types in advertising and literature to reinforce the "thingness" of society. At the close of the nineteenth century, Banta notes, "[t]he images by which ideas about the American female were being offered to the public between 1876 and 1918 were not only varied to the point of potential self-contradiction, they were all pervasive" (*Imaging* 32). Even genetic theorists joined the image colloquium and offered their theories complete with illustrations to delineate the "right type" of woman. As Banta notes, "The True Woman was prized for the fineness of

[11] As Banta points out, "type" is defined by Georg Lukács (and others) as a merging of traits from the extraordinary and the typical in a figure that has a historical context yet remains familiar to most (*Images* 328). Banta suggests looking at James Clifford's "'Hanging Up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners': Ethnobiographical Prospects," from *Studies in European Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) 52. Also, James sometimes begins his novel with an American girl type such as Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady,* but by the end of the novel, his heroines have become portraits, fleshed out by experience and age. However, these portraits are inadequate as well, since true human experience cannot be captured in the messiness of real life (Banta, *Imaging* 290).

her femininity and purity of her racial type, but her constitution was chancy when it came to mothering strong citizens. The New Woman was either suspect for the deviant virility of her mind and body or for the impurities of her genetic composition" (*Imaging* 139). Woman as individual was hardly anyone's concern, since she was more useful being typed as the Warrior Woman, the New Woman, the Gibson Girl, the Bitch Goddess Success, and, of course, the Madonna. Chad in *The Ambassadors* notes that the science of advertising was a "very great force" in the twentieth century. He even goes so far as to say that "It's an art form like another, and infinite like all the arts" (341). However, Chad, as we know, is a modern man, an opportunist. In my next section, the American author Henry Adams will argue that science and advertising which produce an image of the "Modern Madonna" are precisely the wrong forces to create a unified society.

Henry Adams, Henry James's friend, will be the one most remembered for his commentary on the Madonna during this period. An idealist like James, Adams believed that people needed higher truths to order their lives, certainly not just more money and power. Howe comments of Adams and James, "Both stand on the margin of American society, estranged from its dominant powers, helpless before the drift toward a world of industry and finance, money and impersonality" (160). In the 1870s, while James was busily constructing novels around the Madonna, Adams was teaching medieval history at Harvard, studying the history of "primitive women" and drawing conclusions about the impact of religion on the female gender. In 1879 the two writers met for the first time in London and thereafter came to be lifelong friends, often exchanging manuscripts, incorporating each other in their works, and meeting over meals. Clearly, as John Carlos

Rowe has pointed out, the two men influenced each other as writers and philosophers as they attempted to find unity in a modern society, which to them was fractured by civil war and political upheavals. Neither found it, of course, in the modern Madonna. As I have shown earlier in my discussion of James, and will show in this section, both men recognized that many ideals, including the ideal of the Madonna, had been thoroughly weakened through the vast changes sweeping the nineteenth century. Adams concludes in his famous *The Education of Henry Adams* that "the Sexless American Virgin of the weekly magazines could never command" respect and adoration.

Harvard-educated Henry Adams, born into a Protestant New England family with a famous Presidential heritage, seems an unlikely individual to have created a body of work devoted largely to the Virgin Mary. Robert A. Hume notes that Adams "came, of course, from a family traditionally Puritan and Calvinistic which by his own day had decided with most New Englanders to adhere to the liberal tenets of Unitarianism" (190). Instead of religion, Adams's early career was devoted to scholarly research that required meticulous scrutiny of historical facts and the use of original documentary sources, a technique that he learned while studying in Germany. However, after pursuing careers as a journalist, professor of history at Harvard, and editor of the *North American Review*, Adams seems to have become consumed with passion for the figure of the Virgin Mary. What caused this surprising turnaround? I believe that through his travel, research into history, and personal crisis, Adams became convinced that *eros* and maternality were two of the strongest powers on earth as evidenced by the power of the Virgin Mary in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Although Adams's interest in the Virgin Mary may not seem likely for a young man with New England roots, like many of the writers we have examined, his fascination with the Madonna began during early visits to museums. On a trip abroad in 1859 to Europe after his graduation from Harvard, he visited many of the famous art galleries of Europe, including the Louvre, as well as the major art museums in Germany. In 1858, he writes to his brother that he finds pleasure in the artwork in Berlin, often visiting the engraving galleries two mornings a week. He writes, "I would like nothing better than to go into the Picture Gallery and make the Art a study, and read up in it all the time for the next six months. Then do the same with the half-million or so, engravings. Lord! such engravings!...Here one is surrounded by Art, and I defy one but a fool to feel ennuyéed while he can look at the work of these old masters."[12] While in Berlin, Adams might also have visited the Gemaldegalerie art museum, which houses one of Jan Van Eyck's most stunning Madonnas, the *Madonna in a Church,* in which a disproportionately large Mary and baby Jesus stand in the sunlight of a Gothic cathedral. While this painting is not mentioned specifically in his letters, it may have been one of many paintings encountered in his impressionable youth which led to his later obsession with gothic cathedrals and the Virgin Mary. In 1858, he writes to his brother Charles that he is interested in obtaining an engraving of The Madonna di San Sisto by Frederich von Müller (1782-1816) at the Dresden Gallery.[13] Also at that same gallery were van Eyck's delicate

---

[12] November 3, 1858, from *The Letters of Henry Adams*, Vol. 1: 1858-1868 ed. by J.C. Levenson, et al. (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1982) 3.

[13] Müller was a popular engraver in Germany who had done an engraving of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* The first letter is dated May 15, 1858, and the second is July 3, 1859. *Letters*: 44.

Triptych of the *Enthroned Madonna*, as well as Raphael's painting *The Sistine Madonna.* However, Adams' favorite Madonna was Raphael's *The Sistine Madonna.* On a day he was to leave Dresden for a short period, Adams made a last stop at the Gallery. He writes, "I visited the Gallery for the last time and the Madonna, the most exquisite of all exquisiteness." Edward Chalfant comments that "Adams fell mildly in love with the painted image of . . .[the] Sistine Madonna. What there could be in the picture that could affect him was a conundrum he did not try to solve; but for him the imaged woman, holding her infant Son and walking with easy grace on the cloud, was ravishing to behold" (1:121). Adams's travels exposed him, in addition to the Madonnas in art, to the idea of the eternal feminine when he visited Weimar, the location of the homes of the writers and philosophers Goethe and Schiller. However, Adams does not seem too impressed with either philosopher and notes that the tour guides in Weimer "bore you to death with Goethe and Schiller."[14]

In the 1870s as Adams matured, his interest in ideas about the eternal feminine developed in profound ways. During this time, his world was radically changed by two women. Adams's favorite sister, Louisa, died in 1870 at the age of forty from tetanus. Adams stayed by her side fifteen hours a day and watched her die a torturous death. In response to Adams's account in *The Education of Henry Adams* of how his sister inspired him, Banta observes, "Louisa is one of the many muses (always designated as female) praised for inspiration by which they supply 'a score of men ideas'" (59). Louisa's death

[14] Letter to Charles Adams, April 22, 1859: Vol. 1: 36.

was to shape Adams's eventual agnosticism—as he writes in *The Education* nearly forty years later:

> the idea that any personal deity could find pleasure or profit in torturing a poor woman, by accident, with a fiendish cruelty known to man only in perverted and insane temperaments, could not be held for a moment. For pure blasphemy, it made pure atheism a comfort. God might be, as the Church said, a Substance, but He could not be a Person. (289)

While Adams never seemed to recover fully from the death of his sister, another woman did enter his life during this time. While teaching at Harvard in 1872 and acting as editor of the scholarly *North American Review*, Adams married Marian (Clover) Hooper, who had also been a friend of James. For a man enamored with the Virgin Mary, it seems especially fitting that his wife would be named Marian.[15] Marian was an intelligent, lively woman, who complemented Adams well, as Banta notes: "With her in his life, not just as his muse, but as her own creator [in her work as photographer, writer], there was no way he would take over-seriously the conventions that chided them both for not being what was expected of their sex or their class" ("Being a 'Begonia'" 76). While others have argued that Adams did not really love Marian, his most recent biographer Chalfant argues that their early years of marriage were happy.

In the 1870s, Adams worked on a number of projects while at Harvard, but one in particular seems to have shaped his later work on the Madonna. Joseph F. Byrnes comments that during Adams's research on Anglo-Saxon Law, he probably first

---

[15] Mary was the most popular female name in the nineteenth century and maintained its popularity until 1945.

encountered the 'Mother principle' in J.J. Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht*, eventually published as a long essay in 1876. Byrnes writes, "Bachofen had attempted to set down the principle of the matriarchal age, to give its proper place in relation to what he took to be lower and higher stages of culture" (140). Bachofen's work also linked the archaic maternal image to the Virgin Mary, an idea that Adams' appropriates later. We see further evidence of Adams' interest in women in his famous lecture he gave at the Lowell Institute in 1876 entitled "The Primitive Rights of Women." In this lecture, Adams argued that women were not in slave-like positions from the beginning of time and that their subjection was actually a progressive result of the patriarchy of the Christian church. He notes, "The rise of Christianity marked the diminution of women's social and legal rights both in the old imperial world and in the new Germanic race" (358). Nonetheless, the laity withstood this oppression through "the irresistible spread of Mariolatry, the worship of the Virgin Mother, [which] proved how strongly human nature revolted against the change" (343). Adams knew how controversial his opinions about religion and feminine power might have been to his New England audience, but he seemed impervious to criticism from others who disagreed with his ideas. Indeed, he has harsh words for those who claim to follow "culture." In an 1875 letter he writes, "Such a swarm of prigs as we are turning out, all formed by prigs and all suffering under a surfeit of useless information, is new to human experience" (vol. 2, 235). A few months later, in regard to his teaching, Adams writes that he is "ridiculing the idols of the University" and that he "was preaching against Culture with a big C. I hope to excite the hatred of my entire community, every soul of whom adores the big C."[16]

[16] Letter to Charles Milnes Gaskell, dated October 4, 1875: Vol. 2: 238.

Adams was not merely satisfied with limiting his writing on feminine power to academic texts. He also wrote two novels in the 1880's featuring female protagonists who do not resemble Madonnas but who were instrumental to Adams in eventually constructing his ideals for the "perfect" woman. As Earl N. Harbert comments, "Neither book proposed a solution to the practical problems of being a woman in nineteenth-century America, but both were sympathetic in recognizing how a lack of control over some circumstance handicapped women and reduced their effectiveness in human activities" (*Heath* 802). Adams's first novel, *Democracy* (1880), features a young woman, Madeline Lee, who circumnavigates the stormy waters of Washington social life, while trying to maintain her integrity. This work, written anonymously, was fairly well-received, in part because of the mystery surrounding it. Adams's second novel *Esther* was written sometime between 1879 and 1884, under the androgynous pseudonym of Frances Compton, while Adams was also working on a history of Thomas Jefferson. *Esther* has proved to be fodder for many biographers such as Edward Chalfant and Otto Friedrich who debate the inspiration for the main character Esther Dudley—specifically whether she was based on his wife Marian or was a composite of several women. Clearly, Esther shares some characteristics of Adams's wife Marian, so that argument is not difficult to make. Part of the debate that the novel raises, however, is whether Adams loved his wife, since he portrays Catherine Brooke, a young female character, in a much more favorable light than Esther. It was evident to most of Adams' circle that Henry had based Catherine Brooke on Elizabeth Cameron, a young woman who continued to be Adams's muse for most of his life. However, aside from the scandal associated with the novel, Duce van Oostrum offers another reason for the novel's reception:

> Adams's preoccupation with gender in his literary works interacts with the doctrine of separate spheres and models of female sentimental fiction. In *Esther*, he even pseudonymously impersonates a female author to write his own sentimental fiction. This novel, one of the least studied of Adams's works, dramatizes the plight of the female protagonist Esther Dudley as she attempts to preserve her individuality against absorption into a femininity defined by the men around her . . . . In this novel, Adams writes from the naked perspective of woman to delineate a woman's precarious position in male ideals. (23)

In a similar vein, Millicent Bell suggests that Adams attempts to imitate James's portrayals of women's struggles in society: "Adams' use of women to represent an intuitive virtue in human personality is very much like that of the greater fictionist Henry James. In Adams' two novels, as in many of James's, woman, with her uncorrupted moral sensibility, is trapped within a man-made civilization. James's moral measure was also, moreover, the American woman . . ." (112). Bell's interpretation makes sense in light of the friendship between the two writers, a friendship which probably greatly influenced both in the shaping of characters and themes.

However, as J.C. Levenson points out, Adams was also doing more than just discussing gender roles in *Esther:*

> The plot of *Esther* leads to an insoluble dilemma, and the novel dimly suggests a way around it other than distraction in science. The heroine with her nineteenth-century doubts can love but cannot marry the man of thirteenth-century ideas . . . . In his [Hazard's] view, the building he decorates is more a theater than a church, for without a Madonna at its heart, it has no heart . . . . (203)

Even in this early novel, then, we see evidence that Adams had already begun his journey into the past, searching for a Madonna who would "fill the eternal needs of man's heart," as James writes in "The Madonna of the Future."

Sadly, the book proved to be a curse for Adams, who later wished he had not revealed his identity as its author, since so many of his crowd identified Marian as Esther. Moreover, the death of Esther's father in the novel eerily foreshadowed the death of Marian's father the next spring, an event which left her grief-stricken. Six months after the death of her father, Marian committed suicide by swallowing potassium chloride from her photography chemicals.[17] Marian's sister Ellen Gurney recorded her memories of Marian's state of mind in the months leading up to her suicide: "When no human could do anything—sorry for every reckless word or act—wholly forgotten by all save her—the constant cry was 'Ellen I'm not real—Oh make me real—you are all of you real!'" (Kaledin 224). In the same letter, Ellen quotes Marian as saying that Adams had been tender, patient, and loving during this time. However, one gets the feeling that Marian's death and her feelings of being invisible somehow haunted Adams over the years, although he does not mention their marriage or her death in *The Education of Henry Adams*, as many critics have noted. Eugenia Kaledin, Marian's biographer, suggests that Adams took on Marian's values after her death and that these values show up in his writing (6-7). As the grieving Adams destroyed Marian's letters and his own diaries that mentioned her, Kaledin speculates that Adams "made a particular, and perhaps

[17] Both Henry and Marian were photographers. In fact, Marian had received some recognition for her work and an offer to print her work in a magazine. But, according to a somewhat playful note sent to John Hays, Adams says he wrote a refusal letter to the publisher indicating that "they" did not want to "flaunt" Marian's work in the magazine. Letter dated January 6, 1884. Vol.2:526.

unconscious, point of absorbing her 'femininity' into the system of values that embodied his real education" (6).

Certainly, in the years following Marian's death, Adams becomes almost obsessed with feminine power in both primitive and modern culture. Five years after the death of his wife, Adams embarked on a trip to the South Seas with the painter John LaFarge. He often wrote to his friends about the "primitive" women he encountered in Hawaii, Tahiti, and other places: "The position of women--or Woman, if you prefer,--in an archaic society, has always interested me, and I have lectured and talked about it until I am tired. I have caught it here alive . . . ."[18] After fourteen months in the South Seas, Adams and LaFarge sailed home. Once in Paris, Adams' attention returned once again to the Madonna in the figure of Elizabeth Cameron and her five-year-old daughter, Martha, who met him there. Although Adams was hoping for more intimacy, by all accounts, Cameron was evasive and always in the company of others. At that point, Arline Bocher Tehan writes that the beleaguered Adams realized the futility of his passion for Cameron:

> Since he recognized that he would never possess La Dona [the name Adams had given Cameron as a word play on her husband's name, Don, and "gift."] and since she would always haunt his imagination, he would gradually learn to sublimate his passion for her into the literary worship of the Virgin who dominated the Middle Ages, and this would in turn lead him to write his *Mont-St. Michel and Chartres*. (129)

As Tehan points out, Cameron served to inspire Adams in his later years, but whether his

---

[18] A letter to Lucy Baxter 4 Nov. 1890. Vol. 3: 324.

passion was always "sublimated" is arguable, considering that other critics suggest that Adams and Cameron consummated their physical relationship at some point. We may never know the physical details of their affair, but we do have epistolary evidence of Adams's passion for Cameron. In an 1884 letter to her, Adams writes, "I shall dedicate my next poem to you. I shall have you carved over the arch of my stone door-way. . . . I am miserable to think that none of these methods can fully express the extent to which I am . . . .Yours . . . . Henry Adams (559). This short letter contains some valuable insight into the way that Adams's passion will affect his creativity. Strangely, just as Adams predicts in his 1884 letter, he composes "The Prayer to the Virgin at Chartres" for Cameron seven years later. Even more strange, Adams's wild claim to carve her name in the archways of the house he and Marian were building becomes significant in light of what Adams will later describe in Mont St. Michel and Chartres--how adoring artists, driven by the power of *eros*, carved the Virgin Mary's deeds in the doorway of Chartres.

We see the extent of Adams's association of Cameron as Madonna in an 1891 letter he writes to her after she has "rejected" him in Paris:

> LaFarge sailed from Queenstown today into the teeth of the gale; at any rate I did for him what I was too low-spirited to do for you,--I both telegraphed and wrote farewell. We had been so long together [in the South Seas] and had intended to meet again in London, but had missed it! We have never had a quarrel . . . . If I could only give him a big window to do, like Chartres or Amiens! . . . . An atmosphere certainly lingers in these stones, and I have thought much of the life I should certainly have led here had I come with the same

> experiences five hundred years ago, to the same retreat. Progress has much to answer for in depriving weary and broken men and women of their natural end and happiness; but even now I can fancy myself contented in the cloister, and happy in the daily round of duties, if only I still knew a God to pray to, or better yet, a Goddess; for as I grow older I see that all the human interest and power that religion ever had was in the mother and child and I would have nothing to do with a church that did not offer both. There you are again! You see how the thought always turns back to you. [19]

Besides the evidence of his depth of affection for Cameron, who was also a devout Catholic, we see in this letter that Adams's creativity was already at work on *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* as he began to link stained glass windows, weary medieval crowds looking for solace, and the Madonna.

From the years 1891 to the completion of *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* in 1903, Adams often mentions the Virgin to Cameron and other friends. On an 1894 trip to Central America and the Bahamas, Adams arrives in Guadalajara, Mexico, on December 8, the date of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a festival that he describes in detail to Cameron. During the same time, Adams writes to John Hays that he adores the "nuestra senora de Guadalupe."[20]

These trips were important to Adams's formation of ideas on the Virgin, but he finally finds his voice for his passion for the Virgin after two visits to the cathedral of

---

[19] November 7, 1891. Vol. 3: 556.

[20] Dec. 12, 1894. Dec. 28 1894: 234, 241.

Chartres. In July of 1895, Adams goes abroad with the Cabot Lodges with whom he is to see Chartres for the first time. Overwhelmed by its beauty, he writes a letter to his niece:

> I thought I knew gothic. Caen, Bayeaux, and Coutances were a chapter I never opened before, and which pleased my jaded appetite. They are austere . . . and last f all, two long hours at Chartres on a lovely summer afternoon, with the sun Flaming behind St. Anne, David, Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar and the rest, in the great windows of the north transept. No austerity there, inside or out, except in the old south tower and spire which still protests against mere humanity . . . . On the whole, as a combination of high merits, religious and spiritual; artistic, as architecture; technical as engineering; for color, form and thought; for elevation of idea and successful subordination of detail; I suppose Chartres is the finest thing in the world.[21]

Nearly all of the above ideas will show up again in his descriptions in *Mont St. Michel and Chartres.* In 1899, he visits Chartres once again, and he writes the following to Cameron:

> My only vice is churches. Every fine day I go out of town to see a twelfth century church. That afternoon was not very bright, but the church impressed me more vividly than ever. There was the usual service, and singing, all simple enough, and with no display, but as I studied the windows and listened to the singing, I felt the charm as I never did before. Color counts for so much in idolatry. The glass window is as emotional as music.[22]

---

[21] Sept. 1, 1895. Vol. 3: 315.

[22] Oct. 30, 1899. Vol. 4: 54.

Hume writes of this epiphany that "Adams awakened as never before to beauty and worship in glass and stone. By the turn of the century he had essentially formulated his dynamic theory of history, which required first of all the establishing of two points of historical reference—one in the medieval past, the other in the twentieth-century present" (183).

By 1901, all of Adams's impressions gleaned from his relationships, travel, and emotions began to find expression in his writing. In 1901, he sent the "Prayer to Virgin at Chartres" to Cameron, eight years before he showed the poem to anyone else, telling her disingenuously that he had written it simply out of boredom.[23]

The earliest structure of the poem may have been suggested in Adams's 1895 letter to John Hay:

> Not for several days or more have I enjoyed happier moments than among my respectable Norman ancestors, looking over the fields they ploughed. . . . I was a vassal of the Church—I held farms . . . [,] but, the thing I did by a great majority of ancestors was to help in building the cathedral of Coutances, and my soul is built into it. I can almost remember the faith that gave me energy. . . .There the contrite sinner was welcomed with such tenderness as makes me still wish I were one . . . . Nearly eight hundred years have passed since I made the fatal mistake of going to England . . . .- (319) [24]

Here, showing his New England roots, Adams praises the Coutances Cathedral, which is

---

[23] February 25, 1901. Vol. 5: 203.

[24] Vol. 4: 320-321.

early gothic and, perhaps, appeals to him because its architecture is more austere than that of the later cathedrals. But, the relationship between this letter and "The Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres" is apparent in the details of Norman roots, life as a vassal, a dynamic faith dedicated to the Virgin, and a migration away from passion to rationality.

The poem is divided into three parts. In the first part, the speaker addresses his prayer directly to the Gracious Lady in quatrains of iambic pentameter. The poem is set up much like St. Bernard's hymn to the Virgin found in "The Virgin of Chartres." The speaker identifies himself as one who has loved her and "brought [her] all his cares" (line 18) over seven hundred years. The pilgrim in the poem could just as well be Adams, for he identifies a spiritual journey of a scholar who has lost his faith in God but seeks his faith in the feminine face of God. The speaker humbly petitions the Virgin to listen to him since "All children wander with the truant Time" (line 24). The speaker then acknowledges that humankind has turned away from traditional faith and now believes only in itself and, perhaps, in science to create a new world:

> And now we are the Father, with our brood,
> Ruling the Infinite, not Three but One;
> We made our world and saw that it was good;
> Ourselves we worship, and we have no Son.

However, in the last three stanzas, the speaker lists the existential problems that arise from an age of skepticism. He admits, "Strong as we are, our reckless courage shrinks / To look beyond the piece-work of our tasks" (lines 51-52)..

In the second section, the speaker addresses his prayer to the Dynamo. While the

dynamo is a machine displayed at the various scientific expositions, it is also symbolic of any impersonal force as contrasted against the personal force of the Virgin. The style of this section is quite different from that of the first part. While the poem is still divided into quatrains, here unlike his gracious speech to the Virgin, the speaker addresses the Dynamo in iambic and trochaic tetrameter and trimeter using copious exclamation points throughout. The speaker sounds terrified of life in the twentieth century which is controlled by a despotic master, a "Tireless force." The speaker once again addresses humankind's arrogance:

> We know not whether you are cruel or kind,
>
> Or cruel in your fiercer mood;
>
> But, be you Matter, be you Mind,
>
> We think we know that you are blind,
>
> And we alone are good.

Ultimately, the speaker asks, "are we atoms, whirled in space, / Shaped and controlled by you?" In the last stanza, the speaker realizes that no matter what he does to destroy the progress of science, the Dynamo will rule the twentieth century because humans are mortal. Even when humans think they have "won" the struggle with the machine, ironically, the oil of "his life-blood anoints / Me—the dead Atom—King."

The final lines of the poem are dedicated to people inspired by the Virgin, including the speaker who then closes his prayer with praise for the Madonna. In the last section of the prayer, the speaker again addresses the Virgin, saying that he is energized by his faith in her:

> So, while we slowly rack and torture death,

And wait for what the final void will show,

Waiting I feel the energy of faith

Not in the future science, but in you.

But years, or ages, or Eternity,

Will find me still in thought before your throne,

Pondering the mystery of Maternity,

Soul within Soul!—Mother and Child in One!

Hume rightly observes that the first part is "a tribute to the Mary's power at Chartres during the Middle Ages . . . . The concluding part is an assertion that this power must revive, after modern science has wrought its worst calamities and men have realized that there is no solace in machinery, even machinery of infinite force, but only in infinite love" (168). Yet this poem also reflects despair, since, as Hume writes, Adams "belonged to the twentieth century, not really to the twelfth, nor to that future moment when men in their self-disgust and weariness would fall down again and believe" (169).

Given Adams' fascination with history and the Virgin, the question then arises, Why did the Dynamo hold such allure for him? One plausible reason may be that part of his interest might be related to the cultural hype that promoted it, just as culture at that time was promoting the image of the Madonna. Banta offers a simpler reason: "Adams craved forms that directly join force with symbol" (476). Adams's interest in the Dynamo began gradually, however. In a letter of 1893, after visiting the Chicago Exposition, Adams briefly writes, "I labored solemnly through all the great buildings and looked like an owl

at the dynamos and steam-engines."[25] However, the second time he encounters the dynamo at the Paris exposition of 1900, he is captivated by its power. Near the closing date for the Exposition, he makes several observations about the dynamo which merge with his thoughts of the Virgin:

> It is a new century, and what we used to call electricity is its God....You are free to deride my sentimentality if you like, but I assure you that I,--a monk of St. Dominic, absorbed in the Beatitudes of the Virgin Mother—go down to the Champ de Mars and sit by the hour over the great dynamos, watching them run as noiselessly and as smoothly as the planets, and asked them—with infinite courtesy—where in Hell they are going. They are marvelous.[26]

Adams mentions the dynamo again in a 1901 letter to Cameron as he begins to compare the two forces: "I hope you have prayed to the Virgin for me at Monreale. I'm glad you have seen it. Perhaps you will attach the faint phosphorence of the Virgin's light and will feel why one wants to pray to her rather than the Dynamo."[27]

A month later, Adams began to write *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* and immersed himself in the twelfth century studies on the Virgin. In 1902, he wrote the following his former student Henry Osborn Taylor: "You respect the Church. I adore the Virgin."[28] Adams became so enraptured with his studies that he begins identifying himself as a twelfth-century monk in his letters during this time, and in June of 1902, we

---

[25] To John Hays. Oct. 18, 1893. Vol. 4: 134.

[26] November 7, 1900. Vol. 5: 167.

[27] April 1, 1901. Vol. 5: 226.

[28] May 1, 1901. Vol. 5: 247.

see a clear example of the twelfth-century man living in the twentieth century: "[M]y great ambition is to own one [a car], and live long enough to take some pretty new fresh nieces around to see 12th century glass in country churches. My idea of paradise is a perfect automobile going thirty miles an hour on a smooth road to a twelfth-century cathedral."[29]

In 1903, Adams completed *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*. Adams then decided to print privately fifty copies, but he agonized over the details. In a letter to Cameron, he jokes that "[m]y only hope of heaven is the Virgin. If I tried to vulgarize her, and make her as cheap as Cowboy literature, I should ask for eternal punishment as a favor."[30] Of all his works, Adams was especially fond of this one, claiming, "My real comfort in life has been my volume on Chartres."[31] Unlike many of the other authors we have looked at previously, Adams was less interested in "selling" his Madonna for a huge profit—his writing on the Virgin appeared to be a gift of the heart to Cameron.

Mont St. Michel and Chartres, first and foremost, asserts that "the Virgin still remained and remains the most intensely and the most widely and the most personally felt, of all characters, divine or imaginary, that ever existed among men" with the only exception perhaps being the Buddha (578). Adams attributes much of the Virgin's

---

[29] June 17 1902. Vol. 5: 386. The phrase is often incorrectly attributed to Henry James.

[30] Feb. 8, 1903. Vol 5: 452. What seems especially interesting about this statement is that Adams contrasts the hyper-masculine cowboy literature of the time with the hyper-feminine literature of his own work. This pattern, sans Adams, seems to re-emerge again in the 1950's with the publication of the dogma of Mary's Assumption into heaven—except this time the texts are movies of cowboys and hyper-feminine women like Marilyn Monroe.

[31] Charles Glaskell, April 12, 1912. Vol 2: 594.

popularity to her erotic appeal, as he comments, "The study of Our Lady . . .leads directly back to Eve, and lays bare the whole subject of sex" (523). The work contains sixteen chapters, each describing significant periods, people, places, symbols and ideas in medieval history and architecture. In this compendium of ideas, the two symbols that unify this work are the twelfth-century Cathedral of Chartres and the Virgin Mary. It seems natural that Adams would be fascinated with Chartres, which, Friedrich points out, had always been a site of feminine worship. First came the Druids, followed by the Romans, and, later on, Christians claimed this site for four other churches which preceded the building of the Cathedral (337).

In Adams's preface to *Chartres*, he informs the reader that he has written the text for the education of his "nieces" which could include his blood nieces as well as others such as Martha Cameron, Elizabeth's daughter. Chalfant also argues that Chartres was written for Marian Adams because at the time the Adamses were building their house in the 1880s, she became seriously interested in H.H. Richardson's architectural designs that were "rooted in Romanesque architecture of the middle ages . . ." (3: 96). Therefore, Chalfant argues that Adams wrote the book for Marian—in both senses of the words. In any case, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the Virgin of Chartres was an image inspired by just one woman, as Levenson argues:

> [T]he Virgin of Chartres was not simply a portrait of Marian and Elizabeth, but was an idealization of the qualities, great and little, that Henry could not perfect in his relationships with Marian and Elizabeth. Because both the values and deficiencies of these relationships are now explicit, and because these values are portrayed and the deficiencies compensated for in the Virgin of Chartres construct,

> one is led to conclude that Adams's response to the iconography of the Virgin in the cathedral of Chartres was both an artistically constructed poetic image based upon his interest in and research on medieval history and the laws of nature, and a projection of his own idealization of his female relationships. (161)

Aside from the personal circumstances that may have served to inspire Adams in the writing of *Chartres*, John Ruskin appears to be a key literary and artistic influence. Adams's library contained numerous volumes of Ruskin's works, although they were not annotated (Byrnes 139). Adams was clearly a fan of Ruskin, however, because he mentions reading him a number of times in his letters ranging in dates from March 27, 1871, to September 25, 1895. Moreover, Adams clearly shared Ruskin's enthusiasm for gothic architecture and art, which shows up in Adams' theories of art, as Byrnes notes: "Adams was following Ruskin when he asserted that faith animated the art, and the decline of the art was proportional to the decline of faith" (139).

In addition to Ruskin's theories on art, we can see parallels between both men's theories on gender roles since they focus on woman as earthly and heavenly queens. Ruskin lays the responsibility at women's feet to inspire and emotionally support men and their egos; likewise, Adams bestows a similar burden on women although it is often offered tongue-in-cheek. In *The Education of Henry Adams*, in describing his childhood, Adams writes that his mother was "the queen-bee of the hive, on whom nine-tenths of the burden fell, on whose strength they all depended, but whose children were much too self-willed and self-confident to take guidance from her, or from anyone else, unless in the direction they fancied" (37). But ironically, as Adams points out, despite the deficits in his family's homelife, he and all of his siblings turned out to be "decent citizens" (37),

which fact decidedly points to the benefits Adams received from the home. Actually, Adams felt that nature and history showed that women were the superior creatures (*Chartres* 523- 524).

In a more serious vein, Adams and Ruskin share in the gender proscription of the nineteenth century that limits certain subjects for women's study. In response to the death of Charles Gaskell's aunt, the young Adams writes, "[I]t is worse than useless for women to study philosophy. The result is to waste the best feminine material, and to make very poor philosophers. Your aunt's strong point continued to be sympathy, not science, . . . and her happiness would have consisted in a family and children, just as your mother's did." [32]

Additionally, like Ruskin in "Of Queens' Gardens," Adams implies that if women would realize their true power in the home, modern society would benefit. However, unlike Ruskin, Adams holds modern man responsible for the dissolution of families. He laments that modern women are forced to marry machines, and these machines do not recognize a woman's "primitive charm" (sexual power). As a result of being deprived of healthy relationship with a "real" man, women had lost control of their families:

> She had failed even to hold the family together, and her children ran away like chickens with their first feathers; the family was extinct like chivalry. She had failed not only to create a new society that satisfied her, but even to hold her own in the old society of Church or State; . . . Never had the world known a more

[32] March 27, 1871.Vol. 2: 107.

capable or devoted mother, but at forty her task was over, and she was left with no stage except that of her old duties [of entertaining]. (*Education* 1125)

Adams often claims the superiority of women here and elsewhere over the male "machines" they marry, noting that they are fearless and resilient: "The idea that she was weak revolted all history; it was a palaeontological falsehood that even an Eeocene female monkey would have laughed at . . ." (1127). At the same time, he backhandedly diminishes woman's role by assuming that women are responsible for whether a family succeeds or fails and that women would ultimately find fulfillment solely in their "primitive" roles. And, because Adams believes so strongly in women's biological predestination, the New Woman poses another problem for Adams. He claims that women who sought to imitate men in the workplace created a "tragic" situation for all and "the family had to pay for it" (1127). Adams says in a letter that the New Woman is a "portentous bore." [33]

Aside from Ruskin, other influences went into shaping *Chartres* including Frazer's *Golden Bough*, John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and Maurice Materlinck's "The Life of the Bee" (Byrnes 139-140). Adams also greatly admired Swinburne's work and was well-acquainted with the Pre-Raphaelites through his artist friend John LaFarge—which would mean that he probably knew their work on the Madonna as well. But, Levenson suggests that it was Adams's desire to examine analytically the universe —or the multiverse (*The Education* 1137), as he calls it--which truly influenced the writing of Chartres: "Adams's scholarly

---

[33] Letter to Anne Palmer Fell. Dec. 21, 1903. Vol. 5: 531.

conscientiousness was reinforced by his historical consciousness" (250). Adams yearned to discover a unity to bring the confusing modern multiverse back to the idea of a focused universe. Many of the chapters of *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* deal with medieval history, gothic architecture, and the idealization of women, but more than half of the chapters deal specifically with the Virgin Mary, also frequently referenced in the later chapters. Since this dissertation is limited in scope, I will focus here mostly on chapter six, the "Virgin of Chartres," which ostensibly explains the power of the Virgin Mary in the twelfth century, the time period that most captured Adams's imagination. In this chapter, Adams ponders both the science and capital it took to build the Cathedral of Chartres and the power of the Virgin Mary to inspire such construction. In a later chapter Adams writes, "The last and highest moment is seen at Chartres, where, in 1200, the charm depends on the constant doubt whether emotion or science is uppermost" ("The Mystics" 638).

Throughout his work, Adams depicts the Virgin of Chartres as demanding and larger than life—and sexy! Stephen Dunn's poem "From the Manifesto of the Selfish" begins with these words: "altruists are the least sexy / people on earth, unable / to say 'I want' without embarrassment . . . ." [34] Adams clearly understood how individuality and power are sexual forces, since his tantalizing Virgin blazes with an emotional vitality based upon wants and desires. Adams bases his descriptions of the Virgin upon the female

[34] Stephen Dunn. "Manifesto of the Selfish." *Good Poems*, ed. Garrison Keillor. (New York: Viking, 2002) 223.

characters of the *chansons de geste*, the literature of courtly love in the twelfth century, which idealized women. Adams concedes, "We do not, and never can, know the twelfth-century woman, or for that matter, any other woman, but we do know the literature she created; we know the art she lived in, and the religion she professed. We can take from them some idea why the Virgin Mary ruled, and what she was taken to be, by the world which worshipped her" (537). Like the women of earthly courts, Adams's Virgin of Chartres loves beauty. She requires "grace, beauty, ornament" in her attire and harmonized Space, Light, Convenience and "Colour Decoration" in her surroundings (433). Earlier in *Mont St. Michel*, Adams writes thus of Chartres's colored glass: " The mass of suppliants before the choir look up to the light, clear blues and reds of this great space, and feel there the celestial peace and beauty of Mary's nature and abode" (521).

Moreover, although Chartres was designed solely for the Virgin's pleasure, she invites ordinary worshippers to pay homage since she does not like being neglected. Mary has her favorites among the worshippers, and, as Adams notes, "She protected her friends and punished her enemies" (434). Further, the Virgin's ability to rise above the normal male hierarchy appealed to worshippers, as Adams indicates: "The Virgin even had the additional charm to the public that she was popularly supposed to have no very marked fancy for priests as such; she was a Queen, a Woman, and a Mother, functions, all, which priests could not perform" (435): She is of and for the people.

To endear her further to the laity, the Virgin does not tolerate the arcane symbols of religion and the intricacies of theology, which deal in the main with the Trinity and the Father. Instead, as Adams writes, "the whole church is given up to the Mother and the Son . . . . The Son represents the Trinity, which is thus absorbed in the Mother" (435). In

short, Adams builds a case for a Virgin who is accessible to the common people, who love her for her maternal role, her glamour, and her great power over the male-dominated church. Furthermore, Adams "continually speaks as if the Virgin had an independent existence, indeed an existence somehow prior to medieval faith" (Byrnes 157). Here, Adams seems to imply that he values her as a matriarchal principle that had different avatars in the ages before Christianity. Certainly, Adams underscores the Virgin's independence in his comment that "Man came to render her homage and ask favors. The Queen received him in her place, where she alone was at home, and alone gave commands" (433). Women in the early twentieth century must have found this idea compelling, given that they normally rendered homage to and asked favors from their property-owning husbands, who also gave the commands. In addition, instead of suffering an inadequate education, this queen was "intellectually gifted to the highest degree," as Adams observes in his "Towers and Portals" chapter. Indeed, Albert the Great, the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, held that the Virgin had mastery over the seven liberal arts (427). But, not only does she have perfect mastery of science; Adams writes that she also had a perfect mastery of economics (427), an arena from which nineteenth-century women were often excluded: "Naturally, she had perfect mastery over economics, and most of her great churches were built in economic centers. The guilds were, if possible, more devoted to her than the monks . . ." (427). In the twelfth century, the Virgin Mary was the CEO in the world of high finance: "According to Statistics, in the single century between 1170 and 1270, the French built eighty cathedrals and nearly five hundred churches of the cathedral class, which would have cost, according to an estimate made in 1840, more than five thousand millions to replace" (428). Adams

points out that the common people were more than happy to trust their money to the Queen of Heaven because their loyalty "expressed an intensity of conviction never again reached by any passion, whether of religion, of loyalty, of patriotism, or of wealth; perhaps never paralleled by any single economic effort, except in war." Adams notes, "Expenditure like this rests invariably on an economic idea" (428). The people who filled coffers to build the cathedrals did so with an understanding that as good investors they would get a return on their money in their afterlife by entrusting worldly goods to the Queen of Heaven. But Adams makes clear that the Church did not control the Virgin: "Had the church controlled her, the Virgin would perhaps have remained prostate at the foot of the cross" (429). Instead, because of popular demand and self-interest, by the thirteenth century, the Church accepted the idea of the throned and crowned Queen, eventually "making the Mother the church and Christ the symbol" (429). Adams observes that this devotion lasted through only three generations until the bourgeoisie began to doubt Mary's power and became mere consumers who wanted "real" results and sought to reclaim their property. According to Adams, this greed and disbelief prostrated France for three hundred years, for the people were no longer united in a great movement. The true miracles of the Virgin lay in uniting all classes to join in the building of Chartres, as Adams demonstrates through a letter from the Archibishop Hugo of Rouen:

> Who has ever heard tell, in times past, that powerful princes of the world, that men brought up in honour and in wealth, that nobles, men and women, have bent their proud and haughty necks to the harness of carts, and that, like beasts of burden, they have dragged to the abode of Christ these wagons, loaded with wines, grains, oil,

> stone, wood, and all that is necessary of the wants of life, or for the construction of the church? . . . When they halt on the road, nothing is heard but the confession of sins, and pure and suppliant prayer to God to obtain pardon. (432)

Here, Adams cites a text from the medieval times that seems to indicate that all classes of people worked peacefully together, united in one cause, something that has rarely happened since in the history of the Christian church. While this text may be suspect simply because its writer may have undisclosed motivations for writing, the idea of a loving, classless society united by the Virgin Mary has universal appeal, and, at the very least, makes us want to envision such a community.

As *Mont St. Michel* continues, Adams not only praises the Virgin, but he also argues for the general superiority of women over men at different periods of history. In chapter nine, Adams includes a twelfth-century French text which describes how gender roles were not as proscribed then as they were in the Victorian period:

> A trait peculiar to this epoch is the close relationship between the manners of men and women. The rule that such and such feelings or acts are permitted to one sex and forbidden to the other was not fairly settled. Men had the right to dissolve in tears, women that of talking without prudery . . . . If we look at their intellectual level, the women appear distinctly superior. (524)

This particular text then celebrates brilliant women such as Eleanor of Guienne and Blanche of Castille, who, respectively, inspired Richard the Lion-Hearted and Saint Louis. In response to Adams's enthusiasm for the medieval period, it could be argued that the twelfth-century limitations on women were just as oppressive, if not more so,

than those in modern times. Adams's point seems to be, however, that during a time when femininity was celebrated because of the Virgin Mary's role in religion, gender roles were not as rigid.

In chapter thirteen, "Les Miracles de Notre Dame," Adams describes the literature detailing the Virgin's miracles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Adams writes:

> The collection of the Virgin's miracles put in verse by Gaultier de coincy, monk, prior, and poet, between 1214 and 1233,--the precise moment of the Chartres sculpture and glass,--contains thirty thousand lines. Another great collection, narrating especially the miracles of the Virgin of Chartres, was made by a priest of Chartres Cathedral about 1240. (579)

However, according to Adams, if the Catholic Church had really cared about the Virgin, and not Thomas Aquinas, it would have dedicated more books to her life and works. But he seems perplexed as to why the Catholic Church would have ignored such a force especially in light of the disappearance of faith in modern times:

> Why was Chartres Cathedral in the thirteenth century—like Lourdes today—the expression of what is in substance a separate religion? Why did the gentle and gracious Virgin Mother so exasperate the Pilgrim Father? Why was the Woman struck out of the church and ignored in the State? These questions are not antiquarian or trifling in historical value; they tug at the very heart-strings of all that makes whatever order is in the cosmos. If a Unity exists, in which and toward which all energies center, it must explain and include Duality, Diversity, Infinity--Sex! (583)

Here, Adams makes a case for the feminine face of God and the vital relationship of

sex to religion. Rejecting the idea of the Mater Dolorosa, Adams praises the passionate, majestic Virgin Mary who understood desire and granted mercy to grateful sinners. Because of these qualities, Adams writes, "men loved and adored her with a passion such as no other deity has ever inspired" (596).

This passionate Virgin described throughout *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* contrasts sharply with Thomas Aquinas's God as Unity and Multiplicity discussed in the work's concluding chapter. Adams argues that Thomas's desire to prove logically the unity and multiplicity of God was the kiss of death for the church. By reducing God to a logical mechanism, Aquinas eliminates the necessity of mystery, passion, and unbridled creative force. Levenson notes, "The historian stopped with the chapter on Aquinas because he wanted to show the stage when reason began to preponderate in the work of the medieval imagination..." (285). But, this is not the end of Adams's discussion on the Virgin of Chartres. Adams concludes his thoughts on the machine and the Virgin in his later work *The Education of Henry Adams*.

Upon the publication of *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*, we might have expected female readers inspired by the Virgin Mary to stage revolts demanding independence and greater access to the masculine world of politics, economics, and science. In fact, Adams was ready to lead the movement, as Banta comments: "Adams felt qualified to lead women in revolt against a universe that misuse[d] [them]" ('Begonia' 77). But this revolution did not occur, perhaps because so few copies of these texts were printed originally and because Adams fails to persuade his readers that the Virgin Mary has relevance for the modern woman. Also, he often overwhelms his reader with detail and diffuses the power

of his Virgin Mary by turning her into a petulant child who will have her way. "The Virgin of Chartres" begins, in fact, with Adams' telling the reader that Chartres Cathedral is "a child's fancy; a toyhouse to please the Queen of Heaven—to please her so much that she would be happy in it" (424). On the same page, Adams tells the reader that Chartres was established in the same way "a little girl sets a doll-house for her favorite blonde doll." While the twentieth-century Adams may have been trying to suggest the animistic medieval mind here, his language often indicates that he associates women with childhood activities. For example, after citing St. Bernard's hymn to the Virgin as Queen, he apologizes thus: "To delight in the childish jingle of the medieval Latin is a sign of a futile mind, no doubt, and I beg pardon of you and of the Church for wasting your precious summer day on poetry . . . which now sounds like a nursery rhyme" (430). Since Adams is writing for his young nieces, we might expect some avuncular language. Nevertheless, if his nieces can absorb *Chartres's* often difficult text, they certainly do not need to be patronized. Ironically, at times here and other places, Adams regresses to his immature vision of women once expressed in an 1860 letter to his brother after a painful break-up. He writes there, "It changed me entirely in one respect for I used to go on the principle that all women were perfect until they'd proved themselves the contrary and now I believe that all women are fools and playthings until they've proved the contrary . . . . I let myself be led by that *doll* [my italics], who didn't have the brain or the heart to exercise her power."[35] Eerily, forty years later, Adams reiterates similar philosophies

[35] To Charles Adams. Feb. 10-13, 1860. Vol. 1: 88.

about Chartres, but this time he writes admiringly about a "doll" that has "the brain and heart to exercise her power" but only as a religious concept.

Adams returns to his beloved subject of the Virgin in 1907. A few years after the publication of *Chartres*, Adams writes *The Education of Henry Adams*, which was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer in 1919. The book describes the journey and education of a man seeking unity and meaning in modern life. In "The Virgin and the Dynamo," the famous chapter 14 of the work, Adams explores themes of feminine power, religion, and science. Acting as the dramatic speaker, Adams finds himself at the Paris exposition of 1900 studying the dynamo and contemplating the sexual power of the Virgin. In this chapter, frequently anthologized, Adams fixates on the dynamo as a symbol of infinity, staring at it for hours, just as Christopher Newman from *The American* stares at the painting of the *Immaculate Conception* at the Louvre. And the comparison is not far off. The dynamo to Adams is god-like in its power to run quietly (it would not wake the baby lying close to its frame) and, yet, at the same time, to possess "ultimate energy." However, as Adams ponders this miracle of modern science, his thoughts naturally turn to the Virgin, since the Dynamo's setting is in the miracle country of Lourdes, the country of cathedrals, and the country of love. The Virgin, too, is a symbol of the human struggle to "grasp the infinite," as Adams notes in *Chartres* (439). While Adams is aware of the power of the Virgin, he argues that modern societies, most particularly the United States, are blind to the power of a passionate goddess who could inspire people to build cathedrals or to produce great works of art. Adams writes, "The force of the Virgin was still felt at Lourdes, and seemed to be as potent as X-rays; but in America, neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force;--at most as sentiment. No American had ever

been truly afraid of either" (1070). Adams seems to be using the term "afraid" here in the sense that no American has ever been in awe of the Virgin or her power. Adams here hits upon a key concept that re-emerges in the way that male Victorian writers constructed their Protestant Madonnas. Basically, it is this: the image of the Virgin created between 1850 and 1900 relies heavily on sentiment and not on an acknowledgment of her power. Adams adds, "The Woman had once been supreme; in France she seemed potent, not merely as a sentiment, but as a force. Why was she unknown in America?" (1070). Here, Adams, perhaps, is thinking of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) when he makes the comment about French women being "potent" since Madame Bovary is depicted as a sexually active woman, who lives life on her own terms—at least for a while. Since Adams lived in Paris in various stages of his life, it is likely he would have likely been familiar with that novel. On the other hand, another possibility for the comment may have resulted from Adams's familiarity with the way that the French celebrated the "power" of the Madonna.[36]

In addition to the ideas I have just discussed, one other reason for Adams mentioning woman as a supreme force may be attributable to his reading of Alexis de Tocqueville's essays that assert the superiority of women to men. However, Adams appears to disagree with some of Tocqueville's ideas as well. In chapter twelve of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville observes that the women in the United States in 1831 were "freer" and

---

[36] Even so, Adams's idealistic perspective on feminine culture in France was not totally accurate either, for the French were no better than the British and Americans for creating feminine stereotypes. In *Evil by Design* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), Elizabeth K. Menon argues that just as women were gaining new rights in France, the equally limiting image of the "*femme fatale*" dominated the French visual and literature cultures beginning, curiously enough, in 1854 and lasting until 1910. It is interesting that the "bad" girl image in France first became popular the same year that the Immaculate Conception definition was published.

"happier" than European women, chiefly because Americans exhibited more sexual restraint. Tocqueville describes what he sees to be an idyllic existence for American women, contented in their "easy" domestic lives and submissive roles as wives and mothers. He indicates that he is witnessing true democracy at work in American families since the men do not see the women merely as sexual creatures, and, therefore, the women can be free to enjoy other roles, taking on household duties while their husbands work outside the home. While Tocqueville correctly observes that people can be enslaved by sexual needs, his conclusions seem specious. For one reason, women at that time had to deal with hard labor, children, disease, and obstetric problems, and, for another, as the essay progresses, his own language betrays him. Near the end of the essay, he writes that American women live in a state of "extreme dependence," hold "inferior" social positions, and do not expect compliments from their mate.
His unverifiable and unsupported claims of women's happiness remind me of W.H. Auden's poem "Unknown Citizen." The last lines ask, "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd. / If anything had been wrong, we certainly would have heard." James rightly questioned Tocqueville's observations since women have often been prevented from speaking about their unhappiness or their own sexuality.

Fortunately, in contrast to Tocqueville, Adams addresses the relatively powerless position of most American women and prefigures postmodern critics by observing that Americans have controlled women by shaming their bodies: "[E]vidently America was ashamed of her, and she was ashamed of herself, otherwise they would not have strewn fig-leaves so profusely all over her" (1070). He especially blames the media for its part

in emphasizing "modesty" to eradicate feminine power: "When she was a true force, she was ignorant of fig leaves, but the monthly-magazine-made American female had not a feature that would be recognized by Adam" (1070).Adams also reflects upon the asexual, sentimentalized images in American art and literature:

> Adams began to ponder, asking himself whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done; but he could only think of Walt Whitman; Bret Harte, as far the magazines would let him venture; and one or two painters for the fleshtones. All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force; to them, Eve was a tender flower . . . . American Art, like the American language and American education, was as far as possible sexless. Society regarded this victory over sex as its greatest triumph . . . . (1071)

Here, Adams anticipates *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) in which Leslie Fiedler argues that most American writers, other than James and Hawthorne, are incapable of dealing with mature sexuality in their fiction. Consequently, female characters become either sexless paragons of virtue or oppressive shrews, while male characters obsess about violence and death. Fiedler attributes this fear of sex to the bootleg Protestant Madonna found in the "Sentimental Love Religion" of novels. He describes this "religion" as the "inruption of the female principle into a patriarchal world, a revenge of the (officially rejected) Great Mother" (47). Also, Fiedler comments, "the reign of Sentimentalism in the American novel not only made it exceedingly difficult to portray sexual passion, but *prevented them as well from drawing convincing portraits of women*" [my italics] (291). Similarly, I have been arguing throughout this project that instead of complex female characters, the sentimental novels

often feature childlike Protestant Madonnas:

> Though the novel merely seemed to serve the thin, rigid Protestantism that threatened it, it paid allegiance in fact to that secret religion of the bourgeoisie, in which tears are considered a truer service of God than prayers, the Pure Young girl replaces Christ as the savior, marriage becomes the equivalent of bliss eternal, and the seducer is the only Devil. (Fiedler 45)

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the young girl proves to be an easy figure to eroticize since she does not question male authority or make her own sexual demands.

Another way that Americans demonstrate their fear of sex, according to Adams and Fiedler, is often through bawdy humor because sexuality is too "sinful" to acknowledge in any other way. Adams comments, "The trait was notorious, and often humorous, but any one brought up among Puritans knew that sex was sin" (Adams1070; also see, Fiedler 274-275). Indeed, we have seen these principles at work in previous chapters. This "triumph" of the sexless Madonna was clearly reinforced by literature and art in the late nineteenth century in its dismissal of the sexually powerful woman as something to be scorned or derided. Certainly, writers such as Browning and Rossetti keep their sexual Madonnas marginally socially acceptable by making them simultaneously fallen women. Other writers such as Collins and Swinburne sometimes use humor to weaken the power of the sexual Madonnas. Obviously, the Victorian male writers projected their own anxieties about sexually active women in their nearly exclusive depiction of their heroines as obedient and pure, traits that were then reinforced by the widespread interest in Murillo's painting and/or the widely discussed dogma of the Immaculate Conception. With these two cultural markers looming in the background,

male writers, then, began to equate the purity of the Virgin's *sinless nature* to the double standard of sexual purity for real women.

Sally Mitchell notes precisely how female sexuality and sin were linked in the following 1864 quotation from William Gayer Starbuck's *A Woman Against the World*: "When a woman falls from her purity there is no return for her—as well may one attempt to wash the stain from the sullied snow. Men sin and are forgiven; but the memory of a woman's guilt cannot be removed on earth" (x). Disturbingly, Starbuck notes that men can be forgiven for their sexual sin but that sexual activity for women is "the" unforgivable sin. This idea sounds theological, but it is not based on scripture. Where does such an idea begin? I would like to suggest that it may come in part from exposure to terms found in the Immaculate Conception dogma. By definition, Mary is the great exception, not inheriting original sin from Adam's Fall, so "she is free from the stain of sin." Sexually active women, on the other hand, are also great exceptions in that they are fallen, stained, and *eternally* sinful. The original definition designed to glorify Mary has been subtly transformed to denigrate sexually active women in language that sounds very much like theological truth. Mitchell also points out that in addition to harmful *written* propaganda, visual images of "good" and "bad" women kept shifting. Male writers, following literary trends or their own predilections, sometimes projected their own sexual anxieties onto many different female "types" in nineteenth-century literature. Perhaps not surprisingly, elegant, blonde females, often the heroines of fiction, are also characterized by their sexual misconduct and become the villains of the sensation novels of the 1860's (74),[37] which proves again that no one is safe from

[37] I wonder if the image of Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* somehow contributed to

such limitations.

Adams does not, however, impose such sexual limitations on women, believing instead that a true Madonna's beauty emanates from her sexuality:

> In any previous age, sex was strength. Neither art nor beauty was needed. Every one, even among Puritans knew that neither Diana of the Ephesians nor any of the Oriental goddesses was worshipped for her beauty. She was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction—the greatest and most mysterious of all energies; all she needed was to be fecund. (Adams 1070)

In the statement above, Adams assures women of their intrinsic sexual power regardless of standards of beauty prescribed in the pages of magazines. However, in such statements as "all she needed was to be fecund," Adams falls again into the paternalistic role and the language of dictating women's needs which he has been guilty of before. Further, that statement heralds back to oppressive biblical ideas about women being saved through having children. Keeping that in mind, perhaps Adams does not merely mean that women should have children to prove themselves "fecund." It is true, as we have seen in this chapter, that Adams admires the maternal archetype, which has inspired genius throughout history, but he returns time and again to the idea that the Virgin Mary

---

this characterization. As I mentioned in the section on Twain, in 1866, Twain comments in Innocents *Abroad* that the painting hangs in every drawing room in America. Regardless of the actual meaning of the theological term of the Immaculate Conception, people would automatically associate "conception" with sex. And, perhaps because the beautiful blonde woman in Murillo's painting conjures up associations with Catholicism, which some Protestants hated, perhaps such an image began to signify a villain predisposed to sexual misconduct. Perhaps this is giving too much credit to one painting, but it would not be the last time that a beautiful, blonde image would be used to symbolize a "bad" girl who violated sexual mores. Fiedler also thoroughly discusses the "fair girl, dark lady" images in *Love and Death*, Chapter 10.

has interests outside of her role as mother; her "fecundity," that is, is found in her creative life. For example, although he does list a number of the Marian maternal images on the lintels and porches of Chartres, once the reader enters the cathedral, Adams's descriptions focus primarily on the Virgin's majesty and her many qualities as scholar, diplomat, and goddess. She is, then, much more than mother.

Even if we can rationalize his statement about fecundity in a positive light, a few other points in his essay remain problematic, such as the troubling phrase, "she was reproduction." Does he mean that women are designed only for reproduction? We certainly hope not. Could we assume, then, that this was Adams's metaphor suggesting that women were often mere copies of what people imagine them to be? Perhaps, as an amateur photographer, Adams intends this word play, especially since he has just mentioned the American woman of the monthly magazines. Another troubling point arises as Adams passes judgment on the status of women in America; as van Ostroom comments, "The education moves from an attempt to speak for women to a denial of that possibility and even to final representation of femininity" (258). Indeed, we see what van Ostroom means when Adams makes seemingly limiting statements about women such as "An American Virgin would never dare command; an American Venus would never dare exist." Nevertheless, while such an idea arguably could be construed as a denial of women's agency, it seems to me instead, in light of Adams's lifelong sympathy to women's roles, a criticism of American culture and a "call to action" for people to deconstruct how they view female sexuality. Personally, I find Adams's voice

refreshingly buoyant in a sea of Victorian male voices denying female sexuality. I also find it refreshing that the young Adams writes of "preaching against Culture with a big C. I hope to excite the hatred of my entire community, every soul of whom adores the big C." While he sometimes stumbles on his radical new path, his is a striking take on the Virgin and all women.

Perhaps Adams arrogantly speaks for women throughout his writing career in his roles as historian at Harvard, husband, novelist, sociologist in the South Seas, and, at times, women's rights advocate. What were Adams's other options? Or, perhaps the right question to ask is, What were his motives? Banta and other critics have suggested that Adams wished to speak for women as a way to mourn the losses of his sister and his wife. Banta has also suggested that the "absurd" deaths of both women gave Adams an added advantage over most men because his intense grief contributed to his "prescience" and understanding of women ('Begonia'69). While some feminist critics have objected to Adams's appropriation of women's voices and his interpretation of what it means to be female, Banta concludes that "Through Adams we see what it was to be a woman 'known' by men; but even more vividly, 'known' as well by a man who carried within himself much of what it signifies to be a woman" ('Begonia' 79).

Adams is not without his flaws. Like many males of his time, his chauvinism shows through in his stereotypical attitudes toward the "primitive woman," "The New Woman," and even female scholars early on in his career when he grumbles over the inclusion of a woman in the American Historical Society.[38] Also, like the other male writers we have

[38] See Samuel's *Henry Adams the Middle Years*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 269. Adams was not happy that Lucy Salmon was on the American Historical Society's Program of 1885.

examined, Adams creates images of the "perfect" woman when he holds the Virgin Mary up as the perfect woman. Moreover, like Twain and James, Adams seems to conclude that modern American women are mere shadows of the more powerful women of the past, underestimating the complexity and the lack of strong role models for American women of the late nineteenth-century. Ironically, this lack of role models results, in part, from a patriarchal culture that had often denied women education and individuality; even Adams is not above blaming women for *their perceived inadequacies*, which may have begun with restrictive, male parameters in the first place.

Nevertheless, Adams does what few nineteenth-century men dared to do. In his work, he raises profound questions about religion and women's roles. Although some critics have objected to the way Adams personifies the Virgin Mary in his work as a muse rather than as a creator who acts and makes, he also provides the reading audience with a comprehensive understanding of the reception of the Virgin Mary in history (Banta, 'Begonia' 85). Moreover, Adams is different from many of the other writers I have discussed because he genuinely adores the Virgin and is not trying to "market" her for material gain or recognition. *Chartres* was never designed for mass consumption, and Adams received the Pulitzer posthumously for *The Education of Henry Adams.* Yes, Adams is paternalistic at times, and he also sets the bar rather high by pointing to the Virgin Mary as a role model for women--but at least his Virgin Mary is described as someone who has fun. His extensive knowledge of women's history and his passionate belief in the superiority of women compensates for many of his flaws.

Adams does not claim that his writing about women will ever be completely right. In *The Education*, in a chapter appropriately entitled "Silence," the insightful Adams

reflects upon his limitations as an author explaining women:

> The study of history is useful to the historian by teaching him his ignorance of women; and the mass of his ignorance crushes one who is familiar enough with what are called the historical sources to realize how few women have ever been known. The woman who is known only through a man is known wrong, and excepting one or two like Madame de Sévigné, no woman has pictured herself. The American woman of the nineteenth century will live only as a man saw her; probably she will be less known than the woman of the eighteenth; none of the female descendants of Abigail Adams can ever be nearly so familiar as her letters have made her; and all this is pure loss to history. (1043)

Adams laments the nineteenth-century trend for men to write women's history because, as he observes, "the American woman of the nineteenth century was much better company than the American man; she was probably much better company than her grandmothers" (1043). Fortunately for us, Adams's assumption that women from the nineteenth century would live again only through the interpretation of men proved to be inaccurate. Some women of the nineteenth century made themselves known through their diaries, their letters, their art and literature, especially through work discovered in Women's Studies programs that emerged in the late twentieth century. But, for the most part, what Adams says is true for his time, since the male ruling culture of the nineteenth century often dictated how women were portrayed. And, while Adams saw the inequity of this, he knew that it was also the sad reality.

Adams was not alone in his disillusionment with culture. Twain and James were equally dismayed over a culture which pretended to be morally, religiously, and

politically upright, when, in reality, it had been corrupted by a false piety which endorsed war, greed, power, and "the world of things." Nevertheless, the three undaunted authors, still seeking beauty and truth late in their lives, each take refuge in writing about a strong female figure from the past: Joan of Arc, Marie de Vionette (a figure who lived in the present but who also represented Old Europe), and the Virgin Mary. All three female characters exhibit intelligence, independence, courage, and imagination. Certainly, Twain's Joan also has characteristics of the sentimentalized "pure" virgin of the nineteenth century, but, significantly, she takes on an active role as a soldier, a rare vocation for a woman even until recently.

Leslie Fiedler writes, "The failure of the Sentimental Love Religion and the rejection of the Protestant Virgin are the two most critical and baffling facts of the history of the novel" (337). He then suggests that her demise came about because she was expected to be both sweet virgin-bride and capable mother to rowdy American boys. While this double-consciousness may have played a part in her deconstruction, the works of James and Adams (and Twain to a lesser extent) provide some answers to this baffling development. For them, the Protestant Madonna became increasingly asexual and so far removed from the social, educational, and economic problems facing real people that she was no longer, if ever, a feasible model. One last point worth noting: Joan of Arc, Marie Di Vionette, and the Virgin Mary are all Catholic figures, indicating that their mature creators still found some inspiration and comfort in a compassionate Great Mother, a timeless universal archetype. But, at the same time, these writers had clearly rejected the more limited Protestant Madonna.

Conclusion: All Generations Will Call Me Blessed

"The quest which has distinguished our fiction from Brockden Brown and Cooper, through Poe and Melville and Twain, to Faulkner and Hemingway, is the search for an innocent substitute for adulterous passion and marriage alike. Is there not, our writers ask over and over, a sentimental relationship at once erotic and immaculate, a union which commits its participants neither to society nor sin—and yet one which is able to symbolize the union of the ego with the id, the thinking self with its rejected impulses?" (339).

Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*

How is it, then, that in spite of so many new images of women in the late nineteenth-century, the Protestant Madonna continued to fascinate the public and writers for over fifty years? Banta makes a rather astute statement about images and religion which also applies well to my thesis:

> Wings in particular enrage those with animosity to burn about everything that went wrong in turn-of-the-century America. But wings are of the utmost importance in societies where traditional religious doctrines have been undercut and where people want the feelings, if not the meaning, of those doctrines. (418)

If we substitute "wings" with the terms Immaculate Conception or Madonna, perhaps we gain some understanding as to why these ideas were so important to the Victorian public. As Darwinism unsettled religious authority and the society of "things" dominated culture, people needed transformative concepts to lift their souls above the factories and quotidian tasks. Not surprisingly, then, and despite the appearance of The New Woman in the later part of the nineteenth century, the Madonna of the Immaculate Conception remained still popular, and not just any Madonna but the childlike sentimentalized Madonna of Murillo's painting.

Let me offer just one final example from *Angel of Clay* (1900), a novel by obscure writer/sculptor William Ordway Partridge whom Banta describes as being a "frustrated participant in modern times" (*Images* 164). In Partridge's novel, the sculptor Ellerton Lawrence struggles with his ideas of the "real" and the ideal, which conflict means trouble, of course, for the women in his life. Banta writes, "As a practicing artist . . . Ellerton is painfully aware that the sculptor's work involves the shaping of a clay prototype. His immaculate conceptions of heaven's virtue have to pass through the world's muck" (164). Pitted against Ellerton's New England Puritanism, his wife Julia is "unable to remove the taints inherited from her Italian mother and her past life" and ultimately commits suicide, a suicide which directly reflects my topic (Banta 165). Note here, too, that Partridge marks the sensual Julia as Other by her Italian heritage.

In the work, after finding out that Ellerton has fallen in love with a childlike, flawless woman, Julia falls into despair and prays to Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* that she will become perfect. Her prayers are answered because, shortly afterwards, Ellerton finds her outside his studio "cold as marble" in the snow. He brings her inside to warm her body, and he then makes this odd comparison: "Often he had worked on some marble figure long past midnight, with a candle in one hand and a rasp in the other. How different, he thought, was this *working* [my italics] over a human body, with all its strange history now *half* [my italics] revealed to him!" (211). The proper affect for a concerned husband at this point would seemingly be grief, not analytical curiosity. Also, the word "half" is strange. Does he mean that he has never seen her unclothed?

Following this scene, the attention in part, then, goes back to his wife, who reportedly whispers to her husband the reasons for her actions:

> [S]he had suddenly realised [sic], while kneeling before the picture, that something in the Madonna made *holiness possible for all womankind* [my italics]. And as she looked up into the soft brown eyes, this possibility had fallen, down upon the untutored and untamed nature of the model. Then she awoke from this dreaming, and a revulsion passed over her like a wave. The realization of life she had been born to came back, and with it a new appreciation of what she might have been to her husband had fate ordered her life in other lines. With one impulse she rushed madly out into the snow—where, she did not know, did not care. Finally she fell under the pine-tree with her bosom close to the white holiness that she was longing for, and forgot everything. This much the terrified husband made out from the dying woman. (212)

Significant to note, Julia does not describe her own tragic epiphany. Ellerton even interprets her dying words for the readers. (At least Ellerton is "terrified" at this point, which does indicate some emotional attachment to his wife.) The dying Julia then reaches up her arms to bestow a type of blessing on her husband. Partridge remarks that her gesture is very different than her first "acquisitive" sexual demand in which "her purely physical affection and abandon had led her to demand that his life be given up to her. This new demand was one, not of acquiring, but of giving. Upon her, as upon her husband, had fallen the blessed realization of renunciation" (213). As she dies, she glances towards the Madonna of the painting, which she had requested. In the closing paragraphs of the novel, Ellerton can finally forgive his wife's past transgressions because she has been "frozen into purity" (Banta, *Images* 167):

> Come when it may, this awakening of the soul to its new and true possessions

> brings with it a benediction upon all who may be near the one whom it blesses; and what unspeakable joy to the mortal upon whom it settles, as it had upon this life, that had gone out as a candle in the grey morning. (213)

Indeed, in a sad commentary on gender roles, Ellerton can think of his wife's death with joy because she has been "transformed into his ideal" (Banta 166)--not to mention that he is now free to marry the younger woman without guilt since he has demonized his dead wife's "acquisitive" sexual nature.

I include this sad example to show just how deeply the image of the sentimental Madonna, as well as Murillo's *Immaculate Conception*, impacted culture. However, as I have noted many times before, and as Henry Adams lamented, the Protestant Madonna of the late nineteenth century was no longer the great force it had been in earlier times. I began this dissertation describing the sale of an overpriced painting in 1852, and I end it with a sad story featuring the same bad painting, all of which demonstrates precisely just how the Protestant Madonna had become a ludicrous type over time. And, of course, Murillo's painting conveyed much more than words. The painting itself, like much of Victorian popular culture, presented women with especially difficult dilemmas. Is a woman supposed to be sexually provocative like the child-woman in the painting, or is she supposed to be sexually pure and perfect as the *Immaculate Conception* implies? Further, how was she to be both virgin and mother? Gilbert, Gubar, Showalter and a number of other feminist critics have pointed out long before me that many Victorian women were paralyzed (or frozen) physically and mentally by such restrictions as indicated by the number of reported cases of hysteria and psychosomatic paralysis during the last half of the nineteenth century.

Ultimately, by the end of the nineteenth century, the image of the perfect woman had flattened into an easy-to-define stereotype, easier to characterize on paper and in magazines than a real human being with individual needs. Thankfully, by this point, the image had become so exaggerated that reasonable people found the sentimentalized version of the Madonna cloying and useless. However, as the opening quotation of this chapter indicates, Fiedler claims that her literary impact could be felt for several more decades as American writers continued to seek an Immaculate Conception. In any case, one must admit that the Protestant Madonna was quite useful to a masculine society for a long time in the way she satisfied the "yearnings of men's hearts" and the way she sold their conception of "art." Nevertheless, unlike the Madonna of the medieval period, who reportedly inspired unity among the laity and the building of great cathedrals, the Protestant Madonna failed abysmally to unify culture over the course of fifty years.

The British and American Protestant Madonnas were not just defined, however, by an image in a painting and literature. She was also created by a definition which came into written existence in 1854. Once the Immaculate Conception definition was written down and broadcast, it became a significant topic of public discourse in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. However, perfection is subjective and hard to describe, and, according to Derridean theory, the simple act of writing about an idea distances the author and reader from the actual metaphysical concept. That may explain why many of the writers defined their Protestant Madonnas by their physical features. Although physical descriptions can also be ambiguous, traits such as eye and hair color, the size of bodies, and height are more quantifiable than ideals.

Language is powerful, as we all know. Psychologists warn parents that a careless

phrase can shape a child's emotional health forever. Therefore, to argue that the *widely discussed* Immaculate Conception dogma profoundly affected culture and images of women seems hardly a stretch. As I pointed out in the introduction, Mary's overall sinless state may have set up impossible standards of perfection for young women and may have inadvertently contributed to already unhealthy obsessions with women's bodies and sexual purity. The aforementioned cases of hysteria and psychosomatic paralysis indicate that powerful psychological censors inhibited women from acting and responding in appropriately adult ways. At this point, one may wonder why young women, especially Protestant women, would identify so strongly with the Virgin Mary? Willa Appel, author of *Cults of America: Programmed for Paradise,* notes that when marginal people experience a sudden change in expectations, they become disoriented and, therefore, try to 're-create' reality in new personal identities when the "old world view has lost meaning" (113 ff.). The shift from an agrarian to industrialized culture in the nineteenth century made women particularly vulnerable to the Cult of True Womanhood that began early in the century. In mid-century, the Immaculate Conception definition simply reinforced and heightened women's strivings for perfection. Naomi Wolf, basing her observations on texts by Harriet Martineau and nineteenth-century female diarists, observes that Victorian standards of female piety reinforced educated, middle-class women's submission as they used their moral, intellectual, and physical gifts to pursue religion which gave meaning to "their economically unproductive lives" (92). Moreover, when writers like Collins and others used the term "Madonna" in naming a character in their works, women closely identified with such figures. Some may argue that the Madonna does not necessarily mean "woman," but if

asked, many people would readily signify "mother" (extrapolated into "my mother") as an idea associated with a Madonna, and nearly everyone has a mother (or some mothering figure) who is also a woman. There is, then, no denying the fact of the importance of Madonna images to women, even after the images are deconstructed.

Because I was looking at the leading high-culture male authors of the long nineteenth century in both England and the United States, I found it logical to begin with Dickens, who was one of England's most popular writers, and to end with the Henry Adams, who was awarded a Pulitzer for his work. It turned out that the most influential British male writers of the Victorian period published their major works before 1880. On the other hand, the most famous nineteenth-century American writers (excluding Hawthorne, whose best work appeared in 1850-51) published their greatest work from 1870 to 1910. I chose these particular American and British writers because I wanted to focus on writers who used Madonna figures and who were aware of the Immaculate Conception definition. Unintentionally, the American writers seem to end up in a more favorable light at the end of the project in their rejection of the Protestant Madonna, but that is not really the case, especially considering that James is almost as much British as he is American. To defend the British, one could argue, in fact, that the English literary culture discarded the Protestant Madonna more quickly, although such works as Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894) revisit some themes of the "perfect" disempowered female. In the broader scheme of things, by 1870, one could argue that the British preoccupation with "Catholic" concerns had lessened somewhat since the Italian revolution was winding down. One could also argue that, perhaps, the construction of the

Protestant Madonna at times had been a defensive move on the part of British male writers to create a Protestant Madonna who was as equally winsome to the Catholic Madonna. Such defensiveness was no longer necessary as the threat of the "Papal Aggression" dissipated. Also, by 1870, Dickens was dead, Collins's female characters were becoming more complex and realistic, and George Eliot, arguably the finest writer of the nineteenth century, did not create sentimental Madonnas. In fact, she was more like James in approaching the idea of the Madonna in her use of Marian art and tradition, as well as satire, to create realistic, strong female characters. In addition to the other reasons listed, publishing practices may have affected the English disenchantment with the Madonna. The British had greater access to more realistic female characters in continental novels such as *Madame Bovary* (1856) and *Anna Karenina* (1876), which entered England more quickly than they did in the United States, which had more conservative publishing laws. These novels set a high standard for the level of realism that readers expected. Therefore, not surprisingly, we do not find a high-culture British Henry Adams at the end of the century deconstructing an image that had already been dismantled.

Someone asked me recently if I thought that the nineteenth-century trend to see women as Madonnas was a necessary evil so that women would ultimately revolt against such limitations. It is quite true that the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman arose from nineteenth-century women's objections to the sentimental Madonna. But the above question seems tantamount to asking if slavery in the nineteenth century was a necessary evil so that people would eventually revolt against it. Certainly, we have to applaud the courageous nineteenth-century women who sought to leave the Madonna image

behind, but the New Woman proved to be no panacea against the male-controlled media:

> Ultimately, the swooning female aesthete and the confident New Woman were both attacked in the pages of *Punch* for their peculiarity and aberration from the norm of ladylike conduct. They were visual jokes and sometimes even punchlines, and fine art paid them little heed, preferring to lavish pictorial attention on their retardataire, virtuous counterpart (or, ironically, on their wayward—yet potentially rescuable—moral opposite, the fallen woman). (Casteras, "The Female in Victorian Art" 206)

The New Woman served as yet another stereotype to be "exploited by journalistic hyperbole" (Casteras, "The Female" 201). Concurring with this idea, Taylor notes, "As women in the second half of the century pressed for greater education and the professions, representations of women associated with mental activity acquired a heavy ideological charge. Images accentuated women's deserting maternal studies for bookish Pursuits . . . (123). While the idea of the New Woman as a self-directed woman was admirable, she could not exist as an "aberration" and still garner the respect that she needed from her male peers as she sought equal positions of power and status. Arguably, some of the stereotyping of nineteenth-century women as Madonnas was no doubt well-intentioned, and, perhaps, resulted in benign treatment of women in many homes. At the same time, because of it creative, talented women were denied education, civil rights, safety, jobs, and dignity. Perhaps the best thing that can be said about the unattractive, sentimental image of the American Madonna was that she incited American women to get an equal vote eight years earlier than the British.

Women have made great strides beyond such stereotypes, but, unfortunately, the media still affects the way we perceive women and men. Some may believe that we are more sophisticated than the Victorians in understanding how advertising and the media work. But, if this is the case, then why are we so shocked when we learn that Reality TV is actually scripted, as has recently come out? Are our standards of beauty based in reality or on the images that we see on TV? Why are so many women (and some say men, too) opting for elective plastic surgery in staggering numbers when "[s]urgery hurts," as Naomi Wolf writes in *The Beauty Myth* (64)? Even though we can intellectually deconstruct media messages and how we are being manipulated, images are powerful and work on the subconscious as I have shown throughout this project. On January 8, 2006, *The New York Times Magazine* noted that the fastest growing area of plastic surgery for women in the United States is labial reconstruction. Undeniably, plastic surgery can be empowering and necessary (especially in the cases of disease and disfiguring accidents), but widespread discontentment of healthy female bodies is surely an unhealthy sign. Ironically, the United States sends missionaries to Africa to tell women such rituals as clitoridectomies are barbaric, but American obsessions with physical "perfection" are worse. The cutting of women in this country is not even about ritual, and sadly, women are willing to trade their sexual responsiveness for how their breasts and genitals look (and feel) to others. Is this a regressive move back to the "pure" Victorian Madonna who endured sex but who did not enjoy it herself?

How does physical perfection, then, tie in with culture, religion, and Madonnas? Basically, throughout history, women have been defined by unrealistic ideals often begun by a patriarchal religious system that values women as commodities who look good, who

take care of the next generation without recompense, and who are expected to suppress their opinions and personal goals. The Madonna image has often been used to reinforce these expectations, but the concept of the Madonna is less about Mary and more about consumerism. First of all, in order to be a "Madonna" or "the ideal woman" today, the woman has to be marketable and, hence, the search for physical perfection. Second, along with having to contend with body-image problems created by slick advertising and easy access to plastic surgery, some women of the twenty-first century are still afraid to voice their opinions and assert their individuality because their religion or certain social circles tell them that in order to be a "Madonna," they need to submit to their husbands, to be quiet, to be perfect, to look perfect. But whose idea of perfect is being referenced here? While we in academic circles sometimes think that all people know the basic truths about gender equality, some women still live out their lives in quiet desperation seeking meaning as others define their lives for them. No one dreams of growing up to be a stereotype. The waste of a human life is a tragedy, and, to paraphrase John Donne, the actual or metaphorical death of anyone diminishes me. In the United States, people are shocked when we hear about restrictions for women in the Middle East, but as most informed people know, some western countries became even *more* oppressive toward women in the 1980s as we saw in the Bosnia conflict. This should not surprise us, since British and American women who enjoyed some religious freedom at the beginning of the nineteenth century slowly lost such rights within fifty years. Plus, even now, in affluent American communities, religiously conservative men and women continue to believe that a woman's highest calling is to care for their mates and their children. Certainly, children need excellent care and, certainly, a marriage requires work, but that

does not mean that women should have to give up their lives and talents to fulfill roles that they may not want or that do not allow them to express their particular gifts.

To be fair, the Christian religion has not always been oppressive to women. In fact, while the Bible is often used as proof text against women, Jesus included women as among his closest friends and made friends with women who were outcasts. The gospel of John describes Mary Magdalene as the first apostle (John 20:18). Even Paul, who writes in several places that women should not speak in church and that they should remain submissive to their husbands, remarks in Galatians 3: 28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, for you all are free in Christ Jesus." Moreover, throughout history, many women learned to read through reading their Bibles. Also, Convents and Sisterhoods provided women with education and, not to mention, some autonomy, and a way to purposefully serve others in the community. In fact, in the nineteenth century, Frederick S. Roden comments that Anglican sisterhoods "truly paved the way for the *fin-de-siècle* 'liberated' New Woman" (64). But, for much of history, culture, often masquerading as religion, has dictated subordinate, and often times, oppressive roles for women.

Do I think that we will see another Protestant Madonna? Yes. But this time I hope she will be studied, written and talked about as a significant religious figure and not as a derivative from popular culture. *Time* magazine in 2005 ran an issue devoted to the ways in which Protestant churches are embracing certain aspects of Marian theology. Certainly, this could be a good thing because it brings together two traditions that once were very far apart. As I have shown in this dissertation, even while people denied the power of the Virgin Mary publicly, weak versions of her abound in nineteenth-century

literature as powerful gender constructs. Her role in Christian history will continue to inspire and, no doubt, bring controversy.

Protestant Christianity still approaches the topic of Mary with some trepidation, and, as I have pointed out before, Protestants has been appallingly silent about Mary's significant role as mother of God. As Beverly Roberts Gaventa remarks, "[I]f there is one thing Protestants agree on—across the theological spectrum, women and men, whether in local churches or in seminary classrooms—it is that *we* do not talk about Mary" (121). But, many feminists believe that this paradigm is ready for a change. Jorunn Økland addresses the issue of new ways of thinking of Mary:

> [C]ontinuity is fundamental to a culture. More often than not, what we believe to be new is not so new after all . . . . It is constantly proven that we have no other symbols and metaphors than those handed down to us by tradition. Even if we feel uncomfortable with them, they are the ones that we still have to address. We must be able to form a relationship with a tradition that is actually somewhat intolerable for some of us. . . . [But] we must only reject depictions of Mary that simply emphasize her exemplary way of being the weaker sex, or that 'dress up' the tough conditions facing an abandoned young woman in Roman Galilee. Instead the symbolic value of the literary figure of Mary can be transformed. For as other symbols she is ambiguous: her symbolic value is not static; it always relates to a society. It happens all the time that old symbols survive by incorporating a new, inverted interpretation. Basic symbols in a culture particularly display this ability to undergo transformation, and it is possible that their ambiguity is a precondition for their ability to retain continuity, even in times of significant cultural

change. (161)

While Økland gives hope to the reinvention of positive feminine images in religion, we cannot ignore the fact that conservative Christianity, now a multi-billion dollar industry fueling politics, movies, and bookstores, continues to endorse a strict biblical literalism in which women are told to be silent in churches and to remain submissive to male authority. Ironically, while submissiveness, piety, and obedience have often been reinforced ideals for women, there has never been a widespread movement in history in which upper-middle-class men are pressured into *literally* living to become Christ-like, instead of striving to become President, General, CEO, or Nobel Prize winner. Ironically, Jimmy Carter, the only Christ-driven President, was roundly rejected as weak. I always find it stunning that some evangelical churches will literally interpret Bible verses for women's roles and then ignore verses instructing Christians to give up all that they have and to live in community. Indeed, as my study shows, religious ideals are themselves warped by social expectations having little to do with morality and the original Christian virtues of humility, charity, and concern for others. Perhaps as a backlash against social expectations for women, in the past thirty years, we have seen the rise of a "new" Madonna—an entertainer who mimics crucifixion in order to titillate her audience. But, perhaps, one day an image of a powerful Madonna will emerge, and not just in parody of the traditional male symbols of Christianity. Just as H.D. appropriated a disempowered image and made it new in the early twentieth century, a woman today will do the same. Yet history is often simply a re-presentation and rewriting of old stories, and Valerie

Abrahamsen reminds us that even modern interpretations of the Virgin Mary have not always told the whole story:

> Despite the ultimate fate of the Virgin Mary as goddess and Mary Magdalene as premier apostle, the evidence shows that Christianity in the first several centuries was vibrant and diverse, with no one creed, iconography or mythology predominant. In the end, the success of the Jesus movement was impossible without these diverse presentations of the Marys and their interpretations of the gospel. Women and female images, then, were not marginal to the early Christian movement; they were essential. (181)

As this passage shows, real women often have been unrecognized agents in religion, events, and changes throughout time. Women know this fact because many still work quietly behind the scenes. A comprehensive human history demonstrates that women have repeatedly exhibited enormous strength, wisdom, and courage—even while being denied their individuality and their voices. Why should we, then, settle for a feminine ideal defined by less?

Bibliography

Primary

Adams, Henry. *The Letters of Henry Adams.* 5 vols. Ed. J.C. Levenson, et al. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1988.

Adams, Henry. *Novels, Mont Saint Michel, The Education; Democracy: An American Novel; Esther: A Novel; Mont Saint Michel and Chartres; The Education of Henry Adams; Poems.* New York: Literature Classics of New York, 1983.

Adams, Marian Hooper. *The Letters of Mrs. Henry Adams.* Ed.Ward Thoron. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1936.

Alcott, Louis May. *Little Women.* 1868. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Arnold, Matthew. Preface to "The Study of Poetry." 1888. *The Norton Anthology English Literature.* 7th ed. Vol. 2. Ed M.H. Abrams. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000: 1534.

Browning, Robert. "Bishop Blougram's Apology"; "Fra Lippo Lippi." 1855. "Pompilia" from *The Ring and the Book.* 1868-69. *from Poetry of the Victorian Period.* 3rd ed. Eds. Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods. New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1965.

---. "Christmas Eve and Easter Day." 1850. *Complete Works of Robert Browning with Variant Readings.* Volume 5 [University of Tennessee library electronic source]. Ed. Roma A. King. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998.

Browning, Elizabeth and Robert. *The Brownings' Correspondence.* Vol. 11-14 Ed. Kelley, Philip & Scott Lewis. Winfield, Kansas: Wedgeston Press, 1994.

Bulwer-Lytton, Edward. *Not So Bad As We Seem. The Dramatic Works of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton.* London: George Routledge and Sons, 1870.

Bull Ineffabilis Deus. Immaculate Conception definition. Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913.

Butler, Samuel. *The Way of All Flesh.* 1884. New York: Doubleday, 1944.

Collins, Wilkie. *Hide and Seek.* 1854. Ed. Dorothy Godman. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1993.

---. *The Letters of Wilkie Collins.* Vol. 1. Eds. William Baker and William M. Clare New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

---. *Woman in White.* 1860. New York: Modern Library, 1937.

Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House. Norton Critical Edition.* 1853. Eds. George Ford and Sylvere Monod. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977.

---. *A Child's History of England.* 1854. From *Complete Works.* Centennial Edition. Vol. 15. Oxford University Press, rept. 1989.

---. *The Letters of Charles Dickens.* Vol. 6-7. Eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield.* 1850. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Donne, John. "For Whom the Bell Tolls." *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions 1623.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1923: 20.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Faust.* London: Nick Hern Books, 1995.

James, Henry. *The Ambassadors: Norton Critical Edition.* 3rd ed. 1903. Ed. S.P. Rosenbaum. New York: Norton and Co., 1994.

---. *The American.* 1877. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and Matthew J. Bruccoli. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962.

---. *The Bostonians.* From *Henry James: Novels 1881-1886: Library of America.* Ed. William Stafford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984: 801-1219.

---. *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*. Eds. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

---. *Henry James, Selected Letters*. Ed. Leon Edel. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1987.

---."The Madonna of the Future." *Stories of Writers and Artists*. 4th ed. New York: Harper & Co., 1966.

---. *Roderick Hudson. Henry James: Novels 1871-1880*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983: 163-511.

---. *Traveling in Italy with Henry James: Essays*. Ed. Fred Kaplan. NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994.

Jameson, Anna. *A Commonplace Book of Memories, Thoughts, and Fancies*. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1854.

---. *Legends of the Madonna*. 1852. 4th ed. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Co., 1867.

---. *Sisters of Charity: Catholic and Protestant*. Boston: Ticknor and Field, 1857.

Julian of Norwich. *Revelation of Divine Love*. Circa 1400. Trans. Clifton Wolters. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1966.

Kingsley, Charles. *Hypatia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1945.

---. *Westward Ho!* 1855. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1945.

---. *Yeast: A Problem*. 1851. London: Macmillan and Co., 1981.

Lang, Cecil Y. "Introduction." *Swinburne Letters*. Vol. 1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

Lowell, James Russell. *Fireside Travels*. 1866. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876.

Monteiro, George, ed. *The Correspondence of Henry James and Henry Adams, 1877-1914.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.

Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with Apocrypha. Eds. M. Jack Suggs et al. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Partridge, William Ordway. *Angel of Clay.* New York: Putnam, 1900.

Patmore, Coventry. *The Poems of Coventry Patmore.* 1854-62. Ed. Frederick Page. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Poems and Translations: Poetry and the Drama.* Ed. Ernest Rhys. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1915.

Ruskin, John. *Sesame and Lilies: With Essays by Elizabeth Helsinger, Seth Koven, Jan Marsh.* Ed. and Intro. by Deborah Epstein Nord. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

---. *Complete Works of John Ruskin.* Eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. 39 Vols. London: George Allen; NY: Longmans, Green, 1903-12.

Spenser, Herbert. *Principles of Biology.* Vol. 2. London: Williams and Norgate, 1867: 485-86.

Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *Atalanta of Calydon. Poetry of the Victorian Period.* 3rd ed. Eds. Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1965.

---. "Dolores: Our Lady of Seven Sorrows," "Hymn to Proserpine," "Laus Veneris." 1866. From *Poems and Ballads: First Series.* New York: Harper, 1904.

---. "Hertha." *Poetry of the Victorian Period.* 3rd ed. Eds. Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1965.

---. "Swinburne Letters." Ed. Cecil Lang. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America.* New York: Library of America, 2004.

Twain, Mark. *The Innocents Abroad: Or, the New Pilgrim's Progress with an Intro. by Mordecai Richler; and an Afterward by David E.E. Sloane.* 1869. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

---. *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc.* 1896. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.

Warner, Malcolm. From *Memoir of Frances Deverell and W.M. Rosetti,* "The P.R.B. and Walter Howell Deverell," at the Huntington Library 12981-2.

Secondary: Theory and Cultural Studies

Altick, Richard D. *The English Common Reader.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Anderson, Amanda. *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallen-ness in Victorian Culture.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Banta, Martha. *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

---. *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in American Culture.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Barret-Ducrocq, F. *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London.* New York: Verso, 1991.

Bradstock, Andrew, ed. *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Colebrook, Claire. *Gender*. New York: Palgrave, 2004.

Crosby, Christina. *The Ends of History: Victorians and "The Woman Question."* New York: Routledge, 1991.

Degler, Carl N. "What Ought to Be and What Was Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century." *The American Family in Social Historical Perspective.* Ed. Michael Gordon. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978: 403-421.

Denning, Michael. *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America.* London: Verso, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. "*Exergue.*" *Of Grammatology. Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Eds. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001:1822-1830.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

Fink, Steven and Susan Williams. *Reciprocal Influences: Literature Production, Distributing, and Consumption in America.* Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1999.

Gélis, Jacques. *History of Childbirth, Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe.* Trans. Rosemary Morris. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction.* New York: Routledge, 1989.

Hall, Donald, ed. *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Hoppen, Theodore. *Mid-Victorian Generation: 1846-1886.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Houghton, Walter. *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Eds. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001: 1285-1290.

---. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001: 1290-1302.

Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody's Angels: Middle Class Women and Domestic Ideology.* Reading Women Writing Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

MacLeod, D.S. *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1966.

Mehlman, Jeffrey. *Revolution and Repetition: Marx, Hugo, Balzac.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Mitchell, Sally. *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class, and Women's Reading (1835-1880).* Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1981.

Promindes, Kathy. *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism.* Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1995.

Rosenberg, Carroll Smith. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian*

America. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985.

Schulze, Anne, Barton White, and Jane D. Brown. "'A Sacred Monster in Her Prime': Audience Construction of Madonna as Low-Other." *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Sub cultural Identities, and Cultural Theory.* Ed. Cathy Schwichtenberg. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993: 15-37.

Schwichtenberg, Cathy, ed. *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Sub cultural Identities and Cultural Theory.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady.* New York: Pantheon Press, 1985.

Stowe, William. *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth Century American Culture.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Van Buren Silverman, Jane. *The Modernist Madonna: Semiotics of the Maternal Metaphor.* London: Carnac Books, 1989 and Columbus: Ohio State University Press,

Wagnleitner, Reinhold and Elaine Tyler May, eds. *Here, There, and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture.* Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline.* Ed. Lucy Maddox. Baltimore, MD: Johns' Hopkins University, 1999: 43-70.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images Are Used Against Women.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991.

History/Religion/Art

Abrahamsen, Valerie. "Human and Divine: The Marys in Christian Tradition."

A Feminist Companion to Mariology. Ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins. London: T&T Clark International, 2005: 147-163.

Bury, J. B. *History of Papacy in the 19th Century: Liberty and Authority in the Roman Catholic* Church. New York: Schocken Books, 1964.

Carroll, Michael. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Casteras, Susan. *Images of Victorian Women in English Art*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987.

Duffy, Eamon. *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Ebertshauser, Caroline, Herbert Hagg, Joe H. Kirchenberger, Dorothee Sollee. *Mary, Art, Culture, and Religion through the Ages*. Trans. By Peter Heinegg. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998.

Fulton, Rachel. *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. "'All Generations Will Call Me Blessed': Mary in Ecumenical Perspective." *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*. Eds. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins. London: T&T Clark International, 2005: 147-163.

Graef, Hilda. *Mary: History of Doctrine and Devotion*. Reprint. 2 vols. in 1. London; Westminister Press, 1963.

Grieve, Alastair. "Rossetti." From *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Ed. Leslie Parrish. Millbank, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1984.

Guide through the Galleries of Paintings of the Imperial Museum of the Louvre.

Paris: De Soy and Bouchet, 1855.

LaFenestre, Georges. *The National Museum of the Louvre.* Paris: Ancienne Maison Quantain, 1912.

MacDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Machin, G.I.T. *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832 to 1868.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

---. *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1869 to 1921.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Marsh, Jan. *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.

Mass, Jeremy. *Victorian Painters.* New York: Abbeville Press, 1984.

Melnyk, Julie. *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1998.

Musacchio, Jacqueline M. "Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy." *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy.* Ed. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Greico. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 42-60.

Øklund, Jorunn. "'The Historical Mary' and Dea Creatix: A Historical-Critical Contribution to Feminist Theological Reflection." *A Feminist Companion to Mariology.* Ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins. London: T&T Clark International, 2005: 147-163.

Parrish, Leslie, ed. *The Pre-Raphaelites.* Millbank, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1984.

Paz, D.G. *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

---. *The Christian Tradition: Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700).* Vol. 5. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

---. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300).* Vol. 3. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Pope, Barbara. "Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century." *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality.* Eds. C. W. Atchinson, C.H. Buchannan and M.R. Miles. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985: 173-200.

Praz, Mario. *Mnemosyne: the Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Purtle, Carol. *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Stallybrass, P. and A. White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986: 4-5.

Reynolds, G. *Victorian Painting.* London: Herbert, 1987.

Vassilaki, Maria, ed. *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium.* Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. New York: Knopf, 1976.

Wheeler, Marion. *Mary: Images of the Virgin in Art*. New York: BCL Press, 1998.

Literary Criticism

Abse, Joan. *John Ruskin: The Passionate Moralist*. London: Quartet Books, 1980.

Adams, Kimberly VanEsveld. "The Madonna and Anna Jameson." *Women's Theology in Nineteenth Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers*. Ed. Julie Melnyk. New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1998: 59-82.

---. *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001.

Altick, Richard D. *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel*. Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1991.

Andres, Sophie. *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries*. Columbus, Ohio: OSU Press, 2005.

Ashley, Robert. *Wilkie Collins*. Brooklyn: Haskell House Publishers, 1976.

Baetzhold, Howard G. and Joseph B. McCullough. *The Bible According to Mark Twain*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995.

Baker, William and William C. Clarke, eds. *The Letters of Wilkie Collins. Vol 1. 1838-1865*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Banta, Martha. "Being a 'Begonia' in a Man's World." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 49-86.

---, ed. *New Essays on The American*. New York: Cambridge University

Press, 1987.

Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America 1820-70. Ithaca*: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Beidler, Paul G. *Frames in James: The Tragic Muse, The Turn of the Screw, What Maisie Knew, and The Ambassadors.* Victoria, B.C.: English Literature Studies University of Victoria Press, 1993.

Beizer, Janet. *Ventriloquized Bodies; Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth Century France.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Bell, Millicent. "Adams' *Esther*: The Morality of Taste." *Critical Essays on Henry Adams.* Ed. Earl N. Harbert. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1981.

Berdoe, Edward. *Browning's Message to His Time: Religion, Philosophy, and Science.* New York: Haskell House, 1973.

Birch, Dinah and Francis O'Gorman, eds. *Ruskin and Gender.* New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Brett, R.L. *Faith and Doubt: Religion and Secularization in Literature from Wordsworth to Larkin.* Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997.

Bullen, John.B. *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Butt, John and Tillotson, Kathleen. *Dickens at Work* (1957). Reprinted London: Methuen Press, 1968.

Byerly, Alison. *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Byrnes, Joseph. *Virgin of Chartres: An Intellectual and Psychological History*

of the Work of Henry Adams. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1981.

Cars, Laurence des. *The Pre-Raphaelites: Romance and Realism*. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 2000.

Casteras, Susan. "Pre-Raphaelite Portraiture: A Strangely Disordered Vision." *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites*: *The Anglo-American Enchantment*. Ed. Margaretta Frederick Watson. Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1997: 140-173.

---. "The Victorian Lady's Domestic Threat: The Good, the Bad and the Indifferent Female." *Women of Faith in the Victorian Culture: Assessing the Angel in the House*. Eds. Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998: 186-208.

Chalfant, Edward. *Better in Darkness: A Biography of Henry James: His Second Life 1862-1891*. Vol. 1. Hamden, CT.: Archon Books, 1994.

---. *Both Sides of the Ocean: A Biography of Henry Adams: His First Life:1838-1862*. Vol. 2. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1994.

---. *Improvement of the World: A Biography of Henry Adams: His Last Life:1891-1918*. Vol. 3. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1994.

Collins, Richard. "Marian's Moustache. Bearded Ladies, Hermaphrodites, and Intersexual Collage in *The Woman in White*." *Reality's Dark Light*: *The Sensational Wilkie Collins*. Eds. Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003.

Cerutti, Toni. "The Lay World of Dickens." *Athena's Shuttle: Myth, Religion, Ideology from Romanticism to Modernism*. Milan, Italy: Cisalpino Press, 2000: 45-67.

Clair, John A. "*The American*: A Reinterpretation." *The Merrill Studies in The American.* Ed. William T. Stafford. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Co., 1971: 80-94.

Clark, Helen Archibald. *Browning and His Century: 1812-1912.* New York: Haskell University Press, 1974.

Clifford, James. "'Hanging Up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners': Ethnobiographical Prospects." *Studies in European Realism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978: 52.

Cook, A.K. *A Commentary Upon Browning's The Ring and the Book.* Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966.

Cundiff, Paul A. *Robert Browning: A Shelley Promethean.* St. Petersburg, FL: Valkyrie Press, 1977.

Davis, Lloyd. *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.

Denisoff, Dennis. "Framed and Hung: Collins and the Economic Beauty of the Manly Artist." *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins.* Eds. Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003: 34-58.

Devane, William Clyde. *A Browning Handbook.* New York: Appleton Century Crafts, Inc. 1955.

Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Dyson, A.E. ed. *Dickens and Modern Judgments.* Albuquerque: Aurora Publishing, 1970.

Edel, Leon. *Henry James: A Life.* New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

Ender, Evelyne. *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Engelhardt, Carol Marie. "The Paradigmatic Angel in the House: The Virgin Mary and Victorian Anglicans." *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture.* Eds. Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998: 159-172.

---. "Victorian Masculinity and the Virgin Mary." In *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture.*" Eds. Andrew Bradstock, et al. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000: 44-57.

Ensor, Allison. *Mark Twain and the Bible.* Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1969.

Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel.* 1960. New York: Stein and Day: 1973.

Finlayson, Iain. *Browning a Private Life.* New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

Fleming, Gordon. *Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.* London: Hart Davies, 1967.

Franchot, Jenny. *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum American Encounter with Catholicism.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Freedman, J., ed. *Cambridge Companion to Henry James.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Freedman, Jonathan. *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and*

Commodity Culture. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Friedrich, Otto. *Clover: A Love Story.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Fussell, Edwin Sill. *The French Side of Henry James.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Gale, Robert L. *Encyclopedia of Henry James.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.

Gargano, James W. *Critical Essays on Henry James: The Early Novels.* Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1987.

Gatta, John. *The American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Gosse, Edmund C.B. *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne.* London: Macmillan & Co., 1917.

Greene, Graham. *The Lost Childhood: and Other Essays.* London: Eyre & Spottswoode, 1951.

Grinstein, Alexander, M.D. *Wilkie Collins: Man of Mystery and Imagination.* Connecticut: International Universities Press, 2003.

Harbert, Earl N. ed. *Critical Essays on Henry Adams.* Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co. 1981.

---. "Introduction to Henry Adams." *The Heath Anthology of Literature.* 3rd ed. Vol. 2. Ed. Paul Lauter. NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998: 802-803.

Harrison, Antony H. *Swinburne's Medievalism: A Study in Victorian Love Poetry,* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988.

Hogan, Anne and Andrew Bradstock. *Women in Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing The Angel in the House.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Holmes, Martha Stoddard. "'Bolder with her Lover in the Dark': Collins and Disabled Women's Sexuality." *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins.* Eds. Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003: 59-93.

Honan, Park. *Browning's Characters.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.

House, Humphrey. *The Dickens World.* 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.

Hume, Robert A. *Runaway Star: An Appreciation of Henry Adams.* Ithaca, New York: 1951. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973.

Hutter, A.D. "Fosco Lives!" *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins.* Eds. Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003: 195-238.

Irvine, William and Park Honan. *The Book, the Ring, and the Poet: A Biography of Robert Browning.* New York: McGraw Hill, 1974.

Jacobson, Marcia. *Henry James and the Mass Market.* Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1983.

Kachur, Robert M. "Envisioning Equality, Asserting Authority: Women's Devotional Writings on the Apocalypse, 1845-1900." *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain.* Ed. Julie Melnyk. New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1998: 3-36.

Kaledin, Eugenia. *The Education of Mrs. Henry Adams.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.

Kahane, Claire. *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the*

Speaking Woman, 1850-1915. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1995.

Kelley, Philip and Betty A. Coley. *The Browning Collections: A Reconstruction With Other Memorabilia*. Waco, Texas: Mansell Publishing Limited, Wedgestone Press, Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor University, 1984.

Kelley, Philip and Scott Lewis, eds. *The Brownings' Correspondence*. Vols. 11-14 Winfield, Kansas: Wedgestone Press, 1994.

Kendall, Guy. *Charles Kingsley and His Ideas*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1946.

King, Roma A. "Eve and the Virgin." *The Browning Critics*. Ed. Boyd Litzinger and K.L. Knickerbocker. London: U.K. Press, 1965: 310-328.

Knoepflmacher, U.C. "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue." *Critical Essays on Robert Browning*. Ed. Mary Ellis Gibson. New York: G.K. Hall, 1992: 100-119.

Knox, George. "Romance and Fable in James's *The American*." *The Merrill Studies in The American*. Ed. William T. Stafford, Columbus: Merrill Publishing Co., 1971: 65-79.

Korg, Jacob. *Browning and Italy*. Athens: Ohio State University Press, 1983.

Koven, Seth. "How the Victorians Read *Sesame and Lilies*." From Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies: With Essays by Elizabeth Helsinger, Seth Koven, Jan Marsh*. Ed. Deborah Nord. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Landow, George. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows:Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

Larson, Janet L. *Dickens and the Broken Scripture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press Press, 1985.

Levenson, J.C. *The Mind and Art of Henry Adams*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.

Lonoff, Sue. *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship*. New York: AMS Press, 1982.

Lootens, Tricia. *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization. Victorian Literature and Culture Series.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Louis, Margot. K. *Swinburne and his Gods: The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1990.

Mane, Robert. *Henry Adams on the Road to Chartres*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971.

Marsh, Jan. "Of *Sesame and Lilies*: Education in a Humane Society." From Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies: With Essays by Elizabeth Helsinger, Seth Koven, Jan Marsh*. Ed. Deborah Nord. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002: 142-164.

Masciarotte, Gloria Jean. "The Madonna with Child, and Another Child, and Still Another Child: Sensationalism and Dysfunction of Emotions." *Discourse*: *Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 14. 1 (1991-92): 88-125.

Matlock, Janet. *Scenes of Seduction: Nineteenth-Century France: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Maynard, John. *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Mayne, Ethel Colburn. *Browning's Heroines*. London: Chatto Press, 1943.

McAleer, Edward C., ed. *Dearest Isa*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951: 238-39.

McGann, Jerome. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Melton, Jeffrey. *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism: The Tide of a Great Popular Movement*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002.

Menon, Elizabeth K. *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Mermin, Dorothy. *Godiva's Ride: Women of Letters in England 1830-1880*. Women of Letters Series. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Miller, Betty. *Robert Browning: A Portrait*. London: Lewis Reprints Ltd., 1972.

Miller, J. Hillis. *The Disappearance of God*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975.

Mitchell, Leslie. *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. London: Hambledon and London, 2003.

Munich, Adrienne. *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Newey, Vincent. *Scriptures of Charles Dickens: Novels of Ideology, Novels of Self*. Aldershot England, Burlington VT: Ashgate Press, 2004.

Nicolson, Harold. *Swinburne*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926.

Nord, Deborah Epstein, ed. "Introduction to *Sesame and Lilies*." *Sesame and Lilies: With Essays by Elizabeth Helsinger, Seth Koven, Jan Marsh*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

O'Neill, Philip. *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property and Propriety.* London: Macmillan Press, 1988.

Oostrum, Duco van. *Male Authors, Female Subjects: The Woman Within/Beyond the Borders of Henry Adams, Henry James and Others.* Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994.

O'Toole, Patricia. *The Five of Hearts: An Intimate Portrait of Henry Adams and His Friends: 1880-1918.* New York: Clarkson Potter, 1990.

Peters, Catherine. "Introduction to *Hide and Seek.*" *Hide and Seek* by Wilkie Collins, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993: vii-xxiii.

Peterson, Linda H. "The Feminist Origins of 'Of Queens' Gardens.' *Ruskin and Gender.* Eds. Dinah Birch and Frances O'Gorman. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Phelps, William Lyon. *Swinburne.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

Polhemus, Robert M. *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian Literature.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Reide, David G. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of the Victorian Vision.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

---. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

---. *Swinburne: A Study of Romantic Mythmaking.* University Press of Virginia: Charlotttesville, 1978.

Robinson, Kenneth. *Wilkie Collins: A Biography.* London: The Bodley Head, 1951.

Rooksby, Rikky. *A.C. Swinburne: A Poet's Life.* Aldershot, England: Scolar Press; Brookfield VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1997.

Rooksby Rikky and Nicholas Shrimpton. *The Whole Music of Passion: New Essays On Swinburne*. Cambridge: Scolar Press, 1993.

Rowe, John Carlos. *Henry Adams and Henry James: The Emergence of a Modern Consciousness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976.

---, ed. *New Essays on The Education of Henry Adams*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996.

Ryals, Clyde de L. *The Life of Robert Browning: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1993.

Samuels, Ernest. *Henry Adams*. 3 Vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1958.

Sanders, Andrew. *Charles Dickens Resurrectionist*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Shatto, Susan. *The Companion to Bleak House*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

Slater, Michael. *Dickens and Women*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983.

Sloane, David E.E. *Student Companion to Mark Twain*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, Press, 2001.

The Soult Gallery. *The Times*, Saturday May 22, 1852, Issue 2112 Col. A: 8.

Stafford, William T. *Merrill Studies in The American*. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1971.

Storey, Graham, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis, eds. *Letters of Charles Dickens. Volume VI: 1850-1852*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Stubbs, William. *The Letters of William Stubbs*. London: W.H. Hutton 1904: 50.

Sussman, Herbert L. *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

---. *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.* Columbus: Ohio State University, 1979.

Taylor, Beverly. "Female Savants and the Erotics of Knowledge in Pre-Raphaelite Art." *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment.* Ed. Margretta Frederick Watson. Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1997: 121-148.

Tehan, Arline Boucher. *Henry Adams in Love: The Pursuit of Elizabeth Sherman Cameron*. New York: Universe Books, 1983.

Thomas, Donald. *Robert Browning: A Life Within a Life.* New York: Viking Press, 1983.

---.*Swinburne. A Poet in his World.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979.

Tintner, Adeline R. *The Museum World of Henry James.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986.

Tuttleton, James. "Rereading *The American*: A Century Since." *Critical Essays on James: The Early Novels.* Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1987: 96-115.

Viscusi, Robert. "'The Englishman in Italy': Free Trade as a Principle of Aesthetics." *Critical Essays on Robert Browning.* Ed. Mary Ellis Gibson. New York: G.K. Hall, 1992: 243-266.

Wagenknecht, Edward. *Mark Twain: The Man and His Work.* Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935.

Walder, Anne. *Swinburne's Flowers of Evil: Baudelaire's Influence on Poems and Ballads, First Series.* Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell International, 1976.

Walder, Dennis. *Dickens and Religion.* London: Allen and Unwin, 1981.

Walker, Franklin. *Irreverent Pilgrims: Melville, Browne, and Mark Twain in the Holy Land*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974.

Walker, Pierre A. *Reading James in French Cultural Contexts*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1995.

Walton, Priscilla. *The Disruption of the Feminine in Henry James*. Toronto: Toronto Press, 1992.

Watson, Margaretta Frederick. *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*. Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 1997.

Wecter, Dixon. "Mark Twain." *Literary History of the United States: History*. 3rd ed. Ed. Robert E. Spiller et al. New York: Macmillan Co., 1969.

Weltman Sharon Aronofsky. *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture*. Athens: Ohio State University, 1998.

Wilson, Angus. *World of Charles Dickens*. New York: Viking Press, 1958.

Journal Articles

Bellman, Samuel I. "Henry James' 'The Madonna of the Future' and Two Modern Parallels." *English Journal* 1.3 (1965): 47-53.

Berland, Alwyn. "Henry James and the Aesthetic Tradition." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23.3 (1962): 407-419.

Caviness, Madeline. "Patron or Matron: A Capetian Bride and a Vade Mecum for her Marriage Bed. *Speculum* 68.2 (1993): 333-362.

Danto, Arthur. "The Future of the Madonna." *Henry James Review* 19.2 (1998): 113-115.

Edel, Leon. "Henry James as Art Critic." *The American Art Journal* 6.2 (1974): 4-14.

Gale, Robert L. "Art Imagery in Henry James's Fiction." *American Literature* 29. 1 (March 1957): 47-63.

Gargano, James W. "*The Ambassadors* and *Louis Lambert*." *Modern Language Notes* 75 (1975): 211-213.

Goldberg, Gail Lynn. "Rossetti's Sonnet on 'A Virgin and Child by Hans Memmeling': Considering a Counterpart." *Victorian Poetry* 24.3 (1986): 229-243.

Habegger, Alfred. "Nineteenth-Century American Humor: Easygoing Males, Anxious Ladies, and Penelope Lapham." *PMLA* 91.5 (1976): 884-899.

James, Swafford. "'The Fullness of the Time': The Early Marian Poems of D.G. Rossetti." *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2.2 (1982): 78-91.

Jolly, Penny Howell. "Roger van der Weyden's 'Pregnant' Magdalene: On the Rhetoric of Dress in the Descent from the Cross." *Studies in Iconography* 28 (2007): forthcoming.

The Lancet. 2 (1868): 321.

Masciarotte, Gloria Jean. "The Madonna with Child, and Another Child, and Still Another Child: Sensationalism and Dysfunction of Emotions." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 14. 1 (1991-92): 88-125.

McKerrell, Alasdair. "Certainty of Experience. Dickens, with Reference to Browning 1853-1864." Browning *Society Notes* 12.1 (1982): 2-12.

Musacchio, Jacqueline M. "Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy." *Picturing*

Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy. Ed. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Greico, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 42-60.

Nelson, Harland. "Dickens, Religion, and Nubile Girls." *Dickens Quarterly* 14 .1 (1997): 33-38.

Oulton, Carolyn. "'The Good Angel of Our Lives': Subversive Religion and *The Woman in White*." *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction* 30 (2001): 309-20.

Pearlman, E. "Two Notes on Religion in *David Copperfield*." *Victorian Newsletter* 41 (1972): 18-20.

Ross, Michael. "Henry James' 'Half Man': The Legacy of Browning in 'The Madonna of the Future.'" *Browning Institute Studies: An Annual of Victorian Literary and Cultural History* 2 (1974): 25-42.

Schiefelbein, Michael. "'Blighted' by a 'Upas-Shadow': Catholicism's Function for Kingsley in *Westward Ho*!" *Victorian Newsletter* 94 (1998): 10-17.

---."Little Nell, Catholicism, and Dickens's Investigation of Death." *Dickens Quarterly* 9.3 (1992): 115-25.

Shackelford, Lynne P. "Michelangelo, Henry James's Artistic Hero in 'The Madonna of the Future.'" *A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 3.3 (1990): 110-13.

---. "The Significance of the Raphael References in Henry James's 'Madonna of the Future.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 27.1 (1990): 101-104.

Slabey, Robert M. "Henry James and 'The Most Impressive Convention in all History.'" *American Literature* 30.1 (1958): 89-102.

Thornbury, George Walter. "Murillo and his Picture Children." *Household Words* 19 (February 19, 1859): 271-275.

Tintner, Adeline R. "The Spoils of Henry James." *PMLA* 61.1 (1946): 239-251.

Ward, Susan P. "Painting and Europe in *The American*." *American Literature* 46.4 (1975): 566-573.

Zablotny, Elaine. "Henry James and the Demonic Vampire and Madonna." *Psych-cultural Review: Interpretations in the Psychology of Art, Literature and Society* 3 (1979): 203-24.

Vita

Deborah Scaperoth was born in Burlington, North Carolina. She attended schools in North Carolina, Massachusetts, California, and Illinois, where she graduated from high school. After attending the University of Oregon for two years, she transferred to Wheaton College where she received a Bachelor's of Arts in Psychology. For two years, she worked as an editorial assistant for *National Forum: Journal of Phi Kappa Phi* and then pursued her Master's degree in English at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee. While her husband completed his degrees, she taught English for over ten years at various institutions, including a small private high school in Memphis, The University of Memphis, Columbus State Community College, Maryville College, and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In the fall of 2000, she entered the Ph.D. program in English at the University of Tennessee and continued to teach. In 2004, she won the Excellence in Teaching Award from the English Department. The doctoral degree was received on December, 2006.

5874 8922 3
94/94/97 US
HGroup