

O CLEMENS, O PIA, O DULCIS MARIA: A COMPARISON OF MARIOLOGY
IN MEDIEVAL AND VICTORIAN PERIODS

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DEDICATION

To our Blessed Mother. *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCING MARIOLOGY	1
2. MARY AS <i>THEOTOKOS</i>	15
3. MARY AS <i>MATER DOLOROSA</i>	31
4. MARY AS <i>MEDIATRIX</i>	49
5. MARY AS <i>REGINA COELI</i>	68
WORKS CITED.....	84

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING MARIOLOGY

During the Middle Ages, England was the focal point of such a great Marian devotion that England was referred to as “Mary’s dowry” (De Flon 311). The trend began with a “tidal wave of devotion to Mary, which swept the West between 1050 and 1150” and continued full-force in England until the Protestant Reformation (Mayr-Harting 99).

Surges in Marian devotion are usually tied to great developments in Marian theology that bring the doctrine widespread attention. During the Middle Ages, two areas of Mariology were under discussion: the Immaculate Conception—the idea that Mary was born free from Original Sin—and the Assumption—the idea that upon her death Mary was assumed, soul and body, into Heaven. These two aspects were not defined as doctrine until the mid 1800s, but both clergy and laypeople celebrated these concepts and “it was in England that the feast of the Immaculate Conception was most vigorously championed” by the royal family during the early Middle Ages (Vincent 128).

In all aspects of Marian devotion, England stood at the forefront (Vincent 128). Though stories of the Virgin's miracles were commonplace all across Europe, England produced some of the earliest compilations (Vincent 128). Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Wynkyn de Worde put together *The Myracles of Oure Lady*, a devotional work telling of Mary's intercession. It was unique in that it was the only printed Middle English collection, drawing on tales otherwise unrecorded in Middle English, but also appeared in Latin, Italian, and French books. *Myracles* showed Mary's intercession on behalf of aristocrats—often knights or queens—but also on behalf of peasants (Whiteford 7–8). *Myracles* had standard plots often imitated in other pieces of literature, and characters such as Robin Hood, who appeared in stories that often borrowed from miracle stories in their basic plots, reinforced devotion to Mary instead of the established church (Knight 8).

These stories so effectively told of Mary's power that a danger arose, especially among peasants, of Mariology becoming Mariolatry. Because of this problem, Mariology was one of the first aspects of the church to undergo persecution during the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation denounced Mariology as evil, and enthusiastic Protestants did their best to cleanse Europe of the Virgin's influence. However, this extreme reaction was temporary. Martin Luther tried to reestablish Mary in her Biblical persona, and

after his death, Mary became mildly valuable for her scriptural role (MacCulloch 215). For Catholics, Mariology did not change drastically after the Protestant Reformation. More was written about the Virgin, devotions became more standardized, more Marian prayers were published, but the content and theology of Marian devotion remained relatively stable. For Protestants, on the other hand, Mariology all but disappeared until Queen Victoria took the throne.

Just as medieval England was called "Mary's dowry," the period from 1854 to 1950 in Continental Europe has been called the "Age of Mary" because of a second surge in devotion. In 1854, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption were declared official Catholic doctrine (Adams 21). Around this same time in England, penal laws were removed, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed, and the Catholic hierarchy was reestablished, allowing Catholics to freely worship and reestablish English Marian devotion. In England, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was tied to the belief that England would someday return to Catholicism and the country's historic devotion to Mary (De Flon 309). All of this brought renewed attention to Catholics.

The appearance of the Virgin Mary in Catholic Victorian literature is not remarkable, especially since Victorian Catholics had centuries of Marian writing and art for inspiration and devotion. Mary never left Catholic attention. However, Mary's appearance in Protestant literature is more unusual. Beverly

Roberts Gaventa notes a deficiency in contemporary Protestants' understandings of the Virgin:

Indeed, if 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. . . . We are unprepared to hear and appropriate such terminology.

(Gaventa 121)

Gaventa continues with how Protestants define their relationship with Mary as “the people who do *not* honor her” (Gaventa 122). This position is perhaps too modern to apply to Victorians at face value, but it demonstrates the pattern of thought: Mariology was something belonging to the Catholics, not the Protestants.

Much justification for Mariology is based on the translation of a single line of scripture: “Hail, full of grace. . . .” In the original Greek, Mary is called *kecharitōmenē*. *The Anchor Bible*¹ translates this as “favored woman,” but it also has this to say on the word’s translation:

[H]ere it rather designates Mary as the recipient of divine favor; it means “favored by God. . . .” She is favored by God to be the mother of the descendant of David and the Son of the Most High. Even though the [perfect participle] might express a state or

condition of divine favor, that favor is to be understood of the unique role that she is to perform in conceiving God's messiah. In later scholastic theological tradition that favor would be classified as a charism, a *gratia gratis data*, "a grace freely given. . . ." This translation . . . in the Latin Vulgate as *gratia plena* heavily influenced the Western theological tradition about the fullness of Mary's grace and was mainly responsible for the understanding of the word in terms of *gratia gratum faciens*, or sanctifying grace. (Fitzmyer 346–47)

Latin has no words to match *kecharitōmenē*, so, to equivocate the meaning, Vulgate translators had to use "gratia plena," which translates into English as "full of grace." This phrase is still used in modern Biblical translations approved by the Catholic Church.

This "Hail, full of grace . . ." caused problems for Protestants because that sanctifying grace which allowed Mary to bear Christ made her *immaculata*, preserved from Original Sin, and a powerful mediator even after her death because of her "constant union with the sanctifying Spirit" ("Immaculate Conception"). To lessen the recognition of this powerful grace, some translators chose an interpretation of *kecharitōmenē* that damaged Mary's reputation. The influence of Calvinism, which saw Mariology as an idolatrous "obstacle to the

worship of God,” led the Geneva Bible translators to “supplant the phrase ‘full of grace’” with “thou that art freely beloved” (MacCulloch 204). The 1611 Authorized Version, or the King James Version, “did not return to the older phrase . . . opting instead for ‘thou that art highly favored’” (MacCulloch 204). This discrepancy is an important point for Mariology. “*Ave, gratia plena*” shows that Mary has received honors that no other human being has received—her Immaculate Conception. God has filled her with a special grace that allowed her to be worthy of bearing His son. Mariology that springs from this translation celebrates Mary’s active part in Christ’s conception, which in turn makes her other powers possible.

“Thou that art freely beloved” does not express this honor. Taken in this context, it is understood to mean that, since Mary has been favored, Christ is allowed to pass through her body. She is given a gift, not a theological position. It gives her a passive role, which has led some modern scholars to see her as a rape victim, not an active participant in her own fate. If Mary is passive, then Mariology is not possible.

Mariology came to Protestant attention through the energy of the Oxford Movement, especially through John Henry Newman, the first Englishman who advocated that Catholics should stop being attacked for ages-old rumors and instead should be attacked for what they actually believed (Church 46). Newman

was searching for a catholic² church; not a Roman church, but “catholic” meaning “universal.” Newman and the other Oxford Movement leaders thought that the Church of England could not be Christ’s universal church since it was also a national church and therefore inaccessible to non-Englishmen. Newman wanted to develop an English Christianity that could truly be a part of the catholic church (Church 47), so he looked to the medieval church for the roots of this revival. He also studied the Book of Common Prayer and the Latin Mass, both of which have their origins in the pre-Reformation church (Church 41). Newman first came to the conclusion that the Roman Church and the Anglican Church were the same in that they both had honorable elements, but both had some severe flaws. After years of study, Newman eventually found Rome’s claims stronger and more theologically catholic than the Anglican, so with much distress, he quietly converted (Church 201–202).

Not everyone in the Oxford Movement agreed with Newman’s drastic measures. Many did not convert, but the Oxford Movement was labeled as Anglo-Catholic because the catholic elements they wanted to re-integrate had never been lost by Rome (Church 211). They wanted to keep what was good about Rome, rejecting what was bad. Whether Catholic or Anglo-Catholic, the Oxford Movement demanded several points of doctrine, items which coincided

with Roman law but were contradictory to the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican church that defined Anglicanism's differences from Rome.

Tractarians were split on Mariology. Some rejected it altogether as one of the evils associated with Rome. However, studies of early Church history and Catholic recognition of the sacraments allowed some Oxford Movement participants access to medieval Mariology and greatly furthered the revival of Marian devotion. With access to more than the King James Version, Anglo-Catholics were able to see Mary as "full of grace," allowing her the powerful roles assigned to her in the Catholic Church.

This looking back to the medieval had its influences not just on church history, but also on literature. Some people today long for earlier eras when "things were better" and society had not started falling to ruin. Many Victorians also saw the world as going to ruin and looked back to their medieval history for a time when England was green and pure and the world was in harmony. They began a search for a national identity. Two legends in particular spurred this national identity while reviving memories of the "good old days," King Arthur and Robin Hood.

Arthurian legends were widely read by Victorians: chivalric rules provided the perfect example of how English gentlemen should behave. Arthur was a perfect king—not only victorious in his battles, but a kind ruler whose just

decisions brought peaceful prosperity to his people. *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Sir Thomas Malory's writing, came to be the main canonical source for Arthurian legend after 1850 (Barczewski 94). *Le Morte D'Arthur* was widely available to Victorians, both in glossed texts and translated versions. However, *Le Morte D'Arthur* has only a few casual Marian references. Another work of Arthurian legend, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, provides a much better example. Sir Gawain openly petitions the Virgin in his prayers and his pure behavior reflects devotion to her. During the first half of the nineteenth century, *Sir Gawain* was available only in an expensive scholarly edition. In the second half, the book was mass printed in a one-shilling edition (Barczewski 90).

Robin Hood also became a popular national hero when, in 1847, copies of the medieval Robin Hood ballads became widely available. (Barczewski 88). Like Sir Gawain, Robin Hood expresses a strong devotion to Mary contrary to Protestant theology, yet Robin Hood ballads were widely read by Victorians. The specific influence of these openly Marian works on Victorian writing is difficult to trace, but they would not have been mass-printed without a market willing to buy and read them. They allowed readers to see characters who were both Marian devotees and highly honorable.

Regardless of whether readers were associated with Tractarianism, this medieval revival allowed many Victorians access to the Virgin Mary. Reading of

Mary as a powerful *mediatrix*, whether or not the reader agreed, still gave writers a model for a woman who played an active role in her family without losing her essential womanhood. Likewise, even if Protestants did not accept Mary's powerful roles, they still had renewed attention to her Biblical role as a mother.

For medieval readers, apart from courtly romances, a great amount of reading material was devotional in nature. Rossell Hope Robbins examines the amount of secular versus devotional literature in the Middle Ages:

Less than one quarter of the whole vernacular production of the Middle Ages in England was 'secular'; and furthermore, many of those items which have been classified as secular may well have appealed to their contemporary readers as chiefly valuable for religious or didactic qualities. (qtd. in Brown x)

Even works such as *The Canterbury Tales* have religious tales alongside tales of secular entertainment, demonstrating how the Virgin Mary could appear anywhere. A great many medieval poems and hymns, including Marian poems, were made available by the Early English Text Society, and studies of Middle English literature increased during the 1800s. Though Victorian Protestants did not honor the Virgin, they could still read about her in the guises in which their medieval predecessors had fashioned her.

Christina Rossetti would appear to be a perfect candidate to form the core of this thesis. Part of the Oxford Movement, Rossetti wrote hundreds of devotional poems that many thought should have earned her the laureate. So nun-like was Rossetti in her life that it is surprising she did not follow John Henry Newman in converting to Catholicism. Mariology, rather than being an inspiration to Rossetti, may have been the one thing that kept her from becoming Catholic—she thought it Rome’s greatest fault. Rossetti wrote several Marian poems, but all are careful to examine Mary only as Christ’s mother. Typical of Anglo-Catholics who feared Rome, Rossetti could honor Mary for her motherhood, but could not see her as a powerful intermediary. Rossetti’s strong women in works such as “Goblin Market” are feminizations of Christ, not Marian symbols. Rossetti perfectly demonstrates the shaky ground Tractarians walked with Rome.

Few Victorians enjoyed the image of a powerful Mary as she was celebrated by Catholics, but Mary received renewed interest in her carefully-defined Biblical role. Many women’s magazines emphasized Mary as the most perfect mother who ever lived—not worthy of worship, but the best human example. Mothers were urged to imitate her loving devotion, to reflect upon her sorrow at seeing Christ killed, and admire her leadership in her family, a role

that was confined to a set of expectations for women, but also the definition of how a mother can perform those roles to their full potential.

Mary and other female saints had such an influence on the definition of a woman's role that, though many writers were not influenced by Mary directly, they certainly expressed a woman's worldview that the model of the Virgin helped to create. Countless Protestant periodicals featured articles that both denounced Catholic Mariology and bid readers admire Mary in her Biblical role, so it is likely that any literate woman would have been to some extent exposed to Marian ideas. Tractarian writers such as Charlotte Yonge were likely to have read works of Marian praise. Non-Tractarians like Dinah Maria Mulock and Ellen Wood did not seek to represent Mary in their writings, but they still strongly identified themselves as Christians and worked with a popular worldview that demanded Mary-like perfection for women.

The main difference between medieval and Victorian representations of Mary is that medieval writers tend to represent her literally while Victorian writers represent her figuratively. Many medieval Catholics appreciated a personal devotion to the Virgin, so they were unafraid to allow characters to express that same devotion, or even to allow Mary to answer their prayers herself. Victorians, who were more concerned with Mary as a model than as an active figure of attention, preferred to show exemplary characters with Mary-like

traits. Not all writers consciously intended their women to reflect the Virgin, but the Virgin had a huge role in shaping the worldview of the ideal woman that most writers certainly did intend to engage in their writing. Most Victorians preferred Mary's Biblical motherly role, but when the medieval revival influenced Victorian writers, representations of her became more closely aligned with her powerful roles favored by Catholics.

Medieval and Victorian writings had different focuses for understanding the Virgin, but she has several prominent roles that appear to greater or lesser degrees in each period. Mary was, for Catholics, the *theotokos* (mother of God), and for Protestants, the best example of a loving, submissive wife and mother. Mary could be the *mater dolorosa*, the sorrowful mother at the foot of the cross; the *mediatrix*, a powerful intercessor on behalf of mankind; and the *regina coeli*, the Queen of Heaven. In the medieval period, it is difficult to say which image was the strongest. Mary as *mediatrix* can be said to appear most often, since many songs and poems were petitions for her aid, yet those same works often honored her in her other roles. Prayers to the Virgin certainly call upon her as *mediatrix*. For Victorian Protestants, Mary's motherhood was her most valuable role. It was the only role that all Protestants could accept, and, though many could find meaning in Mary's further roles, this was their starting point for understanding the Virgin.

NOTES

¹ The introduction to The Anchor Bible states: "The Anchor Bible is a project of international and interfaith scope: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish scholars from many countries contribute individual volumes. This project is not sponsored by any ecclesiastical organization and is not intended to reflect any particular theological doctrine. Prepared under our joint supervision, The Anchor Bible is an effort to make available all the significant historical and linguistic knowledge which bears on the interpretation of the biblical record."

² "Catholic" with a lower-case "c" is a Greek word meaning "universal." Here, as in much of the Oxford Movement's writings, it is used to mean a universal church accessible to all people. The Roman Catholic church is distinguished by capitalizing the "c" or by referring to it with "Rome" and "Roman."

CHAPTER 2

MARY AS *THEOTOKOS* AND LOVING MOTHER

In medieval and Victorian literature, the Virgin Mary gave readers the highest example of perfect motherhood. For medieval English men and women, Mary was viewed not just as a model but as literally a mother to all Christians. She was defended as the *theotokos*,¹ the God-Bearer, at the Council of Ephesus in 431, but her Greek title was gradually replaced with the term “Mother of God” (“Mother of God”). Mary’s spiritual motherhood gave even childless women a model for their lives. For Victorians, Mary’s purity was likewise an example for women’s behavior. Though the *theotokos* is not universally accepted in Protestant theology, treatment of women in Victorian novels can still reflect this role. However, for medieval Christians, spiritual motherhood was equal to or higher than physical motherhood, while a Victorian mother’s primary role was to her own children. Many Victorians took Mary as the perfect model for an earthly mother’s behavior, but, unlike medieval Catholics, most refused to accept her as the Mother of God.

Mary as Mother of God should not be confused with Mary as the mother of Jesus. Mary gave birth to Jesus—a fact rarely disputed—but the theology of the *theotokos*, the Mother of God, says that Mary should also be seen as the mother of all Christians. *The Dictionary of Mary*² defines this role, saying “Mary is Mother of God because from her own flesh she gives to the Word a human nature like hers” (“Mother of God”). An opposing view would state that Mary had no active role, that Jesus was a spiritual being who merely passed through Mary to enter this world. Much *theotokos* theology is based on the Biblical passage in which Jesus entrusts Mary to John’s care:

When Jesus saw his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, his close friend, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” In turn he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his care. (*The Anchor Bible*, John 19:26–27)

The *Dictionary of Mary* explains the implications of a relationship with Mary, saying “the perfection with which Mary dedicates herself to her maternal mission surpasses that of the best mothers on earth, plus the fact that Mary’s maternal vocation is universal and calls for her forming a personal bond with each one of us” (“Motherhood, Spiritual”). This personal bond with Mary is what allows for her active motherhood in Catholic imagination, leading to intercession

through her other roles. Catholics were called to be as devoted to the Virgin as they were to their own mothers. If a man's natural mother left him, he could call upon Mary, the perfect mother, to fulfill this role as a spiritual mother.

The Virgin Mary gave medieval and Victorian women the image of perfect womanhood (Reed 1). She was invoked in prayer by both men and women, while pilgrims frequently petitioned her for women's issues, especially those dealing with pregnancy. In Marian pilgrimages, "familial concerns were an overwhelmingly crucial motivation for heading to a shrine. Fertility, childbirth, and the health of surviving children constitute a dominant feature in women pilgrims' recorded motivations . . ." (Morrison 16). Motherhood was not the only role for medieval women, but it was certainly a major focus, the main alternative being the nunnery.

Since the Virgin was invoked for so many women's issues, meditation upon Mary's pregnancy and Christ's infancy was a common practice among medieval Catholics. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, an autobiographical work written around the early fifteenth century, Margery Kempe constantly has visions involving these devotions. When Kempe prepares herself to meditate by asking "Thesu, what schal I thynke?"³ Jesus answers her by saying "Dowtyr, thynke on my Modyr, for sche is cause of alle þe grace þat þow hast"⁴ (Meech 18). In Kempe's following meditations, she imagines that she first serves St. Anne as

a midwife at the Virgin Mary's birth, next that she serves as Mary's midwife at the Nativity, tending to the infant Jesus (Meech 18–19). Kempe learns about motherhood by observing Mary's perfect example.

Kempe's experience with pregnancy does not come solely from meditating on the Virgin Mary. Kempe has borne fourteen children (Meech 115), but though she spends so much time meditating on Mary's motherhood, she discusses her own children only twice in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The first time, she relates how an unconfessed sin nearly drove her insane at the birth of her first child (Meech 6). The birth of the child is not to blame for the event, but is rather the trigger: "what for labowr sche had in chyldyng & for sekenesse goyng befor, sche dyspered of hyr lyfe, wenyng sche mygth not leuyn"⁵ (Meech 6). Kempe's first mention of her biological children is a terrifying story, not a loving one; her loving stories are reserved for her spiritual children.

Since Kempe is fourteen times a mother, it is surprising that her spiritual children are more significant to her, but according to E. G. Atkinson,

In almost all early medieval lives of female saints, monastic authors presented "real" or significant motherhood as spiritual rather than a biological relationship. . . . A woman could emulate Mary by remaining a virgin and acquiring spiritual offspring. (qtd. in Morrison 29)

Kempe is by no means a virgin, but she has been commanded by God to wear white clothes as a virgin does, vowing celibacy to live an ascetic life (Meech 124).

Kempe notes several occasions on which she takes on spiritual children, recalling a priest who traveled from England to Rome where she was on pilgrimage:

“Pan . . . he cam in-to þe place wher þat sche was, & ful humbely & meekly he clepyd hir modyr, preying hir for charite to receyuen hym as hir sone. Sche seyde þat he was wolcom . . . to hir as to hys owyn modyr”⁶ (Meech 96).

Another young man who has heard of Kempe asks her,

Modir, yf it lyke 3ow, I pray 3ow to schewyn me þe occasion of 3owr wepyng . . . & modir, þow I be 3ong, my desir is to plesyn my Lord Ihesu Crist . . . & þerfor I prey 3ow beth not strawnge vn-to me. Schewith modirly & goodly 3owr conceit vn-to me as I trust vn-to 3ow.⁷ (Meech 246)

Just as John took Mary for his mother in the Bible, so do these men approach Kempe asking for her spiritual motherhood, an act requiring great trust. Kempe mentions no such relationship with her biological children, nor does she even note a lack of such a relationship, showing her spiritual children worthier of record.

Only at the end of *The Book of Margery Kempe* does a second biological child appear. Kempe feels no need to mention if the son in this second

appearance is her first or her fourteenth but relates the story of how he had fallen into dishonest mercantile dealings and lechery. When the son disobeys Kempe's warnings about his sins, he catches leprosy, presumably as a punishment for his misdeeds. At first, the son blames Kempe as if she had cursed him for disobeying her. Eventually, the son repents of his sins:

whan he sey non oþer bote, he cam to hys modyr, telling hir of hys
mysgouernawns, promittyng he xulde . . . a-mende hys defawte
throw þe help of God. . . . He preyid hys modyr of hir blissyng, &
specialy he preyd hir to prey for hym þat owr Lord of hys hy mercy
wolde forzeuyn hym. . . .⁸ (Meech 222)

Kempe's son approaches her with the same language used in penitential poems to the Virgin: "Mi bon thu her, / Levedi der, / That hic aske wit reuful cher; / Thu len me her / Wil hic am fer. / Do penanz in my praier . . ."⁹ ("Hayl Mari" 11–16). Though illiterate, Kempe's "retentive memory" enabled her to recall Scripture and a variety of other spiritual works read to her by priests (Windeatt 16), so it is probable that the story of Kempe and her son would have reflected the relationship between the Virgin Mary and her spiritual children shown in hymns and poems.

Just as Kempe writes more about her spiritual children than her biological children, so do Marian poems reflect Mary's spiritual motherhood more than her

maternity. In *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, Karen Saupe has compiled a thorough collection of medieval Marian hymns and poems. Of those marked as relating to the Annunciation of Christ's birth or the Nativity, most give Mary lofty praise for her motherhood that enacted salvation:

Thou sterre of se, rer op the volk
 That rising haveht in munde.
 In thee thou bere thyn holy Vader,
 That mayden were after and rather,
 Wharof so wondreth kunde.¹⁰ ("Holy moder" 5–9)

Only a few poems reflect Mary in simple human terms, such as one written as a lullaby from Mary's point of view:

Lullay, my fader, lullay, my brother,
 Myn own dyre son, lullay.
 Ye ben my fader by creacion; My brother ye ben by nativité;
 Of Adam we come both al and sum;
 My owyn dyre sone, lullay.¹¹ ("Lullay, my fader" 1–6)

Mary's physical motherhood was not entirely ignored in poetry, but since a great amount of literature honored Mary's spiritual role, Kempe likely reflected more on Mary's spiritual than her physical motherhood.

Kempe may have been a great spiritual mother, but had *The Book of Margery Kempe* been rediscovered before 1934 (Windeatt 9), Victorian readers would have found her role difficult to accept. Catholics honored the life of vowed celibates, but since nunneries had long ago been dissolved in England, the Anglican Church had no such institutions to instill a respect for single life until the middle of the nineteenth century, nor was the appearance of Anglican nunneries celebrated by all. The view of motherhood as the sole vocation of all women is expressed in extreme form by W.R. Greg in his 1869 book *Why Are Women Redundant?* Greg writes that some single women

seek in the excessive development of the religious affections a pale ideal substitute for the denied human ones,—a substitute of which God forbid that we should speak slightingly, but which is seldom wholly satisfactory or wholly safe. (Greg 6)

He notes later that God does call a small number of women to vocational celibacy, but also that most women who choose celibacy choose in error (Greg 9). Greg hints that a woman who chooses celibacy makes a dangerous choice, for she has almost certainly chosen wrong.

Greg's book was countered by "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" by Frances Power Cobbe, who argues that single women can lead successful, fulfilled lives. However, despite this argument, Cobbe states that marriage is the

“crown of life” for men and women suited to this vocation, their highest achievement (Cobbe 66). She recognizes that Protestants do not share the “Romish thought that a life of asceticism, of preaching, of prayer, of charity, is altogether on a different plane of being from a life devoted to other tasks” (Cobb 78). Cobb does not recognize celibacy as a higher spiritual state than married life but focuses her attention on successful single women. How would Greg and Cobbe have understood Margery Kempe, who left her husband and fourteen children to pursue the ascetic life? They would likely not have honored her.

Greg’s and Cobb’s writings express differing opinions, but both discuss the claim that women were destined for motherhood in the physical sense. Sally Mitchell notes that though Cobb argues “there *are* purposes in the order of Providence for the lives of single women,” Cobbe’s ideology is “not popularized in girls’ culture” (Mitchell, *The New Girl* 66). Assertions that motherhood was every woman’s destiny were widespread in Victorian writing. A piece in *The Ladies’ Cabinet* titled “Hints on Matrimony” claims that “no woman will be likely to dispute with us, when we assert that marriage is her destiny” (qtd. in Auerbach 125). It is unlikely that many women expected their marriages to produce no children.

Carol Marie Engelhardt notes that “One of the defining characteristics of Victorian culture was its insistence that women were naturally maternal.

Marriage and motherhood were assumed to be the twin goals of every young woman" (298). Engelhardt further notes that the Victorian Protestants had a more appreciative attitude of Mary than Protestants had in the past, so they more readily accepted Mary as a model for this perfect womanhood. An article in *The Christian Lady's Magazine* says, "Christians in our own days, and particularly Christian mothers, may derive much instruction" from Bible passages describing Mary's obedient acceptance of God's will that she bear his son ("Chapters" 21). A later piece exalts motherhood when it explains the Biblical relationship between Mary and Eve, lauding God's generosity in that the sins of Eve were negated through women, that "the woman's seed is the world's Saviour" ("Sabbath" 430).

The perfect Victorian woman is often referred to by scholars as the "angel in the house," a name popularized by Coventry Patmore's poem of the same title. The "angel in the house" was gentle, kind, delicate, obedient to her husband, strong in her spirituality, mild-mannered, and of course, a mother. This mother was expected to dedicate her life to the upbringing of her children, and the Angel could possibly "expand into a semisecular Virgin Mary" (qtd. in Engelhardt 299). Writings on the Holy Family emphasize Mary as a "pattern mother, quietly performing her daily labours at her good husband's side, and each day . . . admiring more and more the perfect character of her sinless Son" (Hatchard 129). Familial representations present an ideal maternal image, a position in which a

reader may hope to find herself if she is blessed with an obedient child. Many women in novels reflect this role.

In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Dinah Maria Mulock shows the importance of motherhood by contrasting Lady Caroline Brithwood, a fallen Catholic woman, with the angelic Ursula Halifax. Ursula's husband, John Halifax, does not subscribe to a particular denomination, but he is a devoted Christian. Ursula gracefully abandons her family inheritance withheld by her guardians in order to marry the poor but respectable Halifax. She bears him several children, obediently following him through the joys and trials of his life.

Once Halifax marries Ursula, the story's narrator, Phineas Fletcher, says that her "Christian name . . . had been gradually dropped or merged into the universal title of 'mother.' My name for her was always emphatically 'The Mother'—the truest type of motherhood I ever knew" (Mulock 210). Fletcher is the same age as Halifax, so Ursula's maternal relationship with him is limited—she is not in a position to be motherly to him by age or status—yet her position as a mother is so prominent that Fletcher comes to call her "The Mother," even referring to Ursula's title as "universal." The language used here reflects Mary's title, "Our Mother," for Fletcher recognizes Ursula as the mother of more than her biological children just as Jesus's disciple John recognizes Mary as the *theotokos*, more than just Jesus's mother.

Later in the book, Fletcher honors Ursula in terms that echo Elizabeth's Biblical greeting to Mary. Elizabeth says "You are favored by God above all other women, and your child is destined for God's mightiest praise" (*King James Version*, Luke 1:42). A footnote includes an additional line found in most manuscripts: "Blessed are you among women." In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Phineas describes Ursula as: "Happy, too—most blessed among women—the woman who gave her children such a father!" (Mulock 228). Both women are praised in relation to their male counterparts. Mary is blessed for her relationship with Jesus, while Ursula is blessed for her relationship with John Halifax.

Ursula's cousin, Lady Caroline Brithwood, presents a contrast to Ursula's blessed motherhood in her failure at her own maternal role. Lady Caroline is Catholic but cares nothing for the Catholic upbringing, probably her only redeeming quality for Catholic-fearing Victorian readers. Lady Caroline is the opposite of the ideal woman, playing Eve to Ursula's Mary. She is married to Mr. Brithwood, but the couple only produced one child that died at birth. Instead of lamenting the role of mother which was lost to her, Lady Caroline blames her child's death for driving her to a life of adultery in absence of a family: "It was cruel—cruel! You should not have spoken about my baby. I might have lived innocent if I had kept my little baby" (Mulock 233). Lady Caroline's crime here is not that her baby died, but the fact that she allowed her childless state to drive

her to adultery, thus ruining her chances of bearing future children or even having an honorable relationship with her husband.

Lady Caroline has rejected her ability to be a wife and mother, so her life degenerates. By the end of the novel, she has divorced her husband to run away with Gerard Vermilye, who does not marry her, leaving her an adulteress with no chance of regaining even a small amount of her honor. In Lady Caroline's final appearance, Fletcher describes her as a "wreck of womanhood" (Mulock 398). The Halifaxes last find her wandering in the streets flamboyantly dressed, "withered . . . almost to deathliness, with a bright rouge-spot on each cheek, a broad smile on the ghastly mouth" (Mulock 895). They take her in for a three-year infantile existence in her insanity, a "bedridden . . . second childhood," then she dies with her sins, unredeemed (Mulock 398–99). Ursula Halifax, in contrast, lives to a fine old age, dying within hours of her husband so the two will not be separated even by death (Mulock 423).

Ursula Halifax was spared the life of widowhood, but widowhood was not as condemned a state as single life was. A widow could still fulfill her role as a mother. The Virgin Mary could even be seen as a single mother, for her husband Joseph is not seen in the Bible after Christ's childhood. A Victorian protagonist could still fulfill the role of an ideal mother even if her husband soon left the story.

In *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), Charlotte Yonge presents the reader with Amabel (Amy) Edmonstone, who in her widowhood reflects the Virgin's role as paradoxical maiden and mother. Amy's innocence is expressed through her age. Throughout *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Amy is the pure, gentle daughter who begins the book at scarcely seventeen years of age, then is married only a year or two later. When she marries Sir Guy Morville, her speech and behavior make her seem too young to be married: "I have been silly little Amy always . . . and I don't think I could ever be a clever, strong-minded woman . . ." (Yonge 340). Even once she is engaged, the text still refers to her as "Little Amy," emphasizing her innocence (Yonge 337). Though Amy is young, there is nothing unsuitable about her marriage—it is a textbook example of happiness. Amy's marriage is wonderful but short-lived. Morville falls ill during their honeymoon, catching a disease while the couple tends to their sick cousin, Phillip, who had previously slandered Morville. Morville soon dies, leaving Amy a widow after only a month of marriage, but this hardly seems to hinder Amy in fulfilling her wifely and maternal roles. Rather, she becomes maiden and mother at the same time.

Amy attends Morville's funeral in her wedding dress, which at first shocks her family. Since Morville dies abroad and Amy has only colored dresses to wear on her honeymoon, the only funeral option is her wedding dress. Its whiteness emphasizes the purity and innocence she still holds, for she seems far

more a girl than a widow. Yet, her “glossy hair was hidden away, and her face was placid as ever,” this modesty showing the restraint proper to a married woman (Yonge 474). Nine months after Morville’s death, Amy gives birth to a daughter (Yonge 512). Though Amy is now a mother, she has not been married long enough to become a matron in behavior—she spends the rest of the book with her same innocent “Little Amy” air. She still seems more a girl than a widow, paradoxically both maiden and mother.

Amy Morville has become the angel in the house despite her husband’s absence, but she did not leave Morville by choice. Rarely in a Victorian novel could a mother justify leaving her family the way Margery Kempe leaves hers. Once a Victorian woman had a family, her life’s path was set. Ursula Halifax fulfills her motherly role so well that even Phineas Fletcher, who is her friend and not her relative, feels called to refer to her as “the mother.” Margery Kempe’s life as a medieval mother imitated the Virgin more with her spiritual motherhood than her physical motherhood. For Victorians, the Virgin Mary’s primary (some would argue only) role was that of a mother. For medieval writers, whether in personal meditation, devotional writing, or Marian hymns and prayers, Mary’s joyful motherhood was seldom contemplated alone, but was seen in reflection of another role, often her sorrowful motherhood.

NOTES

¹ The texts that I address in this chapter do not use the Greek term *theotokos*, but instead use its English equivalents. However, since modern theology often uses the term, I have retained it here.

² The *Dictionary of Mary* bears the nihil obstat and imprimatur declaring that the Catholic Church approves the book to be free of doctrinal or moral error. The definitions in this book are good starting places for any Mariological study because non-Catholic Mariology is usually an acceptance or rejection of Catholic Mariology.

³ "Jesus, what shall I think? (meditate on)."

⁴ "Daughter, think on my Mother, for she is the cause of all the grace that you have."

⁵ "what for the labor she had in childbirth and for the sickness that had gone before, she despaired of her life, thinking she might not live."

⁶ "Then . . . he came into the place where she was, and humbly and meekly he called her "mother," asking her to receive him as her son. She said that he was as welcome . . . to her as to his own mother."

⁷ "Mother, if it pleases you, I pray you to show me why you weep . . . and mother, though I be young, my desire is to please my Lord Jesus Christ . . . and therefore I beg you not to be a stranger unto me. Tell me your motherly and goodly thoughts about me, as I trust you."

⁸ "When he saw no other choice, he came to his mother, telling her of his misgovernances, promising he should . . . amend his faults through the help of God. . . . He begged his mother for her blessing, and he especially begged her to pray for him that our Lord of his mercy would forgive him. . . ."

⁹ "My prayer you hear, / Lady dear, / What I ask with rueful heart; / You support me here / While I am far away. / Cause penance in my prayer. . . ."

¹⁰ "You sea-star, raise up the people / that rising have in mind. / Yourself you bore your Holy Father, / That maiden were after and before, / At which wonders nature."

¹¹ "Lullay, my father, lullay, my brother, / My own dear son, lullay. / You are my father by creation; My brother you are by birth; / Of Adam we come both all and some; / My own dear son, lullay."

CHAPTER 3

MARY AS *MATER DOLOROSA*

Mariology often focuses on Mary's joys when it celebrates her role in Christianity, but Mary's sorrows offer just as deep a realm for contemplation. Meditation on Christ's agony has long been a practice for Christians, but to meditate on Mary's sorrows—eternally connected with Christ's—offers a different comfort since Jesus suffered with knowledge of his destiny, while it is unclear whether or not Mary knew of the Resurrection.

Mary's sorrows include many events in her life, but the most common image is Mary as the *mater dolorosa*, the sorrowful mother standing at the foot of the cross. Abbot Poemen, who lived during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, is recorded as saying "My mind was there with Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who was weeping over the Cross of the Savior. I too would like to weep with her always" (qtd. in "Sorrows of Mary"). In saying this, Poemen emphasizes that though he is a man, identification with her sorrows offers him spiritual enlightenment.

Mary as the *mater dolorosa*, as the suffering mother at the foot of the cross, was a common image in the late medieval period (MacCulloch 195). Devotions to the sorrows of Mary appear toward the beginning of the fourteenth century (“Sorrows of Mary”). To accompany the popular devotion to Mary’s five joys, a list of Mary’s five sorrows during Christ’s Passion (later expanded to seven sorrows) was created:

1. Jesus is arrested and struck.
2. Jesus is led to Pilate to be judged.
3. Jesus is condemned to death.
4. Jesus is nailed to the Cross.
5. Jesus is gives up His spirit and dies on the Cross.
6. Jesus is taken down from the Cross.
7. Jesus is wrapped and laid in the tomb. (“Sorrows of Mary”)

Though this list appears with some variation, changes are minor. A devotee would meditate on either five or seven sorrows, depending on whether he or she wished the meditation to correspond with Mary’s five joys or the seven Hours of the daily Office (“Sorrows of Mary”).

Mary’s name does not appear in the list, but, though none of these events directly happened to her, Mary’s life is so inextricably connected to Jesus’s that whenever he suffers, Mary’s suffering is as great as his. Beverly Roberts Gaventa

notes that in Matthew's infancy narratives, every reference to Mary includes the infant Christ, while nearly every reference to Christ includes Mary, such as "the child and his mother." Gaventa says that through repetition of this phrase, the two figures are linked: "Whoever threatens the child also threatens his mother. Whoever protects the child also protects his mother" (Gaventa 126). Whoever harms the child also harms his mother.

Not only does Mary suffer, but she presents the highest example of suffering. She recognizes that Christ's death must occur for man's salvation, so though portrayals of her sorrow range from quiet acceptance to swooning and weeping, the importance is that Mary never allowed her suffering to shake her faith in God. She does not condemn God for the pain he has inflicted on her son, but rather accepts that God will bring good from this suffering, even if she cannot foresee it. During the mass destruction of Marian images that accompanied the Protestant Reformation, the battered icons that survived were seen as prime representations of Mary's suffering (MacCulloch 199). Mary's faithful suffering is the example that others must follow in their trials.

In literature, women may suffer as a result of crimes they did not commit. If a son commits murder, his mother will suffer in fear for her child's life, even though he deserves his punishment. If the son is falsely accused of murder, he

and his mother are both innocent, so their suffering becomes even more admirable.

In *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, the table of contents offers eighteen poems under the heading “Mary at the foot of the cross,” more poems than any other section (Saupe vi). Many offer a description of the Crucifixion and Mary’s questioning:

Suete sone, thi faire face droppet al on blode,
 And thi bodi dounward is bounden to the rode;
 Hou may thi modrirs herte tholen so suete a fode,
 That blessed was of alle born, and best of alle gode?¹

(“Suete sone” 5–8)

Another poem is a narrative written about a man too hard-hearted to cry at anything until he beholds a vision of Mary holding Christ’s bloody body in her arms:

“Now breke, hert, I thee pray; this cors lith so rulye,
 So betyn, so wowndid, entreted so Jewlye.
 What wight may me behold and wepe nat? Noon truly,
 To see my dere soone lygh bleeding, lo, this newlye.”
 Ever stil she sobbid,
 So hire soon was bobbid

And of his lif robbid,

Newyng the wordis as I say thee:

“Who cannot wepe com lerne at me.”² (“Sodenly afraide” 21–29)

Mary’s sorrows are so great as to make even the hardest heart sorrowful upon contemplation, but her suffering is also so great that all other suffering pales in comparison.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the author links Gawain to Mary’s sorrows. Gawain cannot experience a mother’s suffering, but Mary’s suffering is still valuable to him. In a long passage detailing Gawain’s armor, the author describes his shield as having a five-pointed pentangle upon it. Countless scholars have attempted to discern the meaning of this pentangle, but the passage uses the number “five” in several different ways. It mentions that Gawain is “faultless in his five senses.” It recalls Christ’s five wounds as well as Mary’s “fyue ioyez, / Pat þe hende heuen queen had of hir chylde; / At þis cause þe knyzt comlyche hade / In þe inore half of his schelde hir ymage depaynted . . .”³ (Sir Gawain 640–49). Meditations on Mary’s five sorrows were meant to correspond with meditations on her five joys, while Christ’s five wounds are the cause of Mary’s sorrows, so the pentangle’s five points could be easily extrapolated to represent Mary’s five sorrows. Since Gawain has Mary’s image painted in his shield, her joys and sorrows are constantly present for his

meditation. Though the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows was not established on the Roman calendar until 1814 (“Feasts of Mary”), its liturgy expresses this long-standing awareness: “As we honor the compassionate love of the Virgin Mary, may we make up in our own lives whatever is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the good of the Church” (“Sorrows of Mary”). Gawain’s revelation comes at the end of the poem when he discovers where he “lakked a lyttel”⁴ (Sir Gawain 764) in his loyalty.

During Gawain’s third temptation by Bercilak’s wife, he calls upon Mary for help: “Gret perile bi-twene hem stode, / Nif of Maré of hir knyȝt mynne”⁵ (Sir Gawain 1768–9). Later in that temptation, he utters an oath to Saint John. Ronald Tamplin suggests that these references invoke a triad common in medieval iconography: Mary and John at the foot of the cross. Both Mary and John are symbols of chastity, a quality which Gawain desperately desires to protect, but they also set the temptation “against the backdrop of crucifixion,” reminding Gawain of Christ’s sacrifice for his sins, the judgment that will face him if he sins as the result of this temptation (Tamplin 411–15). Gawain succeeds in preserving his chastity through Mary’s help, but his relationship to Mary’s sorrows is different from other examples in that Gawain’s suffering does not parallel hers; rather, it gives him a background for maintaining religious faithfulness.

Just as Gawain reminds himself of Christ's and Mary's sorrows, Margery Kempe spent most of her life in constant reminder of Mary's sorrows. Much of Kempe's religious devotion revolves around her constant weeping: God tells Kempe that when she weeps for Christ's pain, she is a "very modyr to haue compassion of hyr chyld"⁶ (Meech 31); when she weeps for other people's sins, she is a "very syster"⁷ (Meech 31). She sometimes weeps for joy, but much of her weeping comes from sorrow for Christ's passion. She cries so often that she becomes a distraction to others at Mass, though her crying is "for þe plentyuows grace þat owr Lord wrowt in hir"⁸ (Meech 163). Many are annoyed by Kempe's crying. She records that "sum men slawndyrd hir for sche cryed, & sum seyden to hir þat owr Lady cried neuyr, 'Why crye 3e on þis maner?' And sche seyde for sche myth non otherwise do"⁹ (Meech 164). This depiction of Mary is not limited to Kempe's accusers, for a hundred years later Desiderius Erasmus still insisted that "by force of character [Mary] restrained the human feelings of her heart, she smothered her sighs, she held back her flowing tears . . ." (qtd. in MacCulloch 195). Erasmus makes Mary a stoic figure.

Kempe flees from her accusers, but has another vision of the Passion that makes her cry even harder. She is astonished how "owr Lady myth suffyr er dur to see hys precyows body ben scorgyd & hangyd on þe Crosse"¹⁰ (Meech 164), still amazed that others have told her Mary did not cry. Later, Kempe is granted

a vision to answer this question. She sees Jesus being scourged, then sees Mary ask to help carry the cross:

& sche was so weyke þat sche myth not but fel down & swownyd
 & lay stille as it had ben a ded woman. Pan þe creatur say owr Lord
 fallyn down by hys Moder & comfortyn hir. . . . Whan sche . . . sey
 þe compassion þat þe Modyr had of þe Sone & þe Sone of hys
 Modyr, þan sche wept, sobbyd, & cried as þow sche xulde a
 deyid. . . .¹¹ (Meech 191)

Several more times, Kempe sees Mary swoon when she watches his crucifixion, holds his dead body, then sees him buried in the tomb. She sees Mary weeping so much that her tears wash all the blood from Jesus's face (Meech 193). Kempe tells Mary that she must stop sorrowing, but Mary says, "I telle þe certeyn was þer neuyr woman in erth had so gret cawse to sorwyn as I haue . . ." ¹² (Meech 195). Kempe's vision of Mary's sorrows breaks down the traditional image of Mary as serene. Mary does not gaze calmly—she cries torrents and faints several times, illustrating that though Mary has complete trust in God, she still feels immense pain. Whether Mary is stoic or hysterical, the important part of her suffering is her perpetual faith in God.

For Protestants, meditating on Mary's sorrows is not a common practice, but these sentiments saw a revival during the Victorian period. In an 1838 issue of *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, an article titled "The Three Maries" begins

The three Maries most readily suggested to the minds of my readers, probably are those of the holy women of old, who, while "all His disciples forsook him and fled," attended our blessed Savior in his dying agonies. These were indeed great women. . . .

("The Three Maries" 204)

The writer of this article expects readers to easily recognize the three Maries as the Virgin Mary, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. Readers should also recognize that, despite their agony with Christ during his Passion, they stayed by the cross when all of the Apostles but John had fled. The article is actually about Mary Tudor, Mary Stuart, and Mary of Orange, but the writer first makes the comparison with the other Maries, choosing to remind the reader of their roles only in terms of their honorable suffering.

Julie Melnyk claims that women's suffering and self-denial makes them more Christ-like than men. She quotes an 1842 article from *The Christian Lady's Magazine*:

"In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female": both are accountable creatures . . . and both, if they enter heaven at all, must

enter "through much tribulation." But if it be so, that natural sorrow, when sanctified by divine grace, becomes instrumental in perfecting the heirs of glory; then we may reasonably look for the most frequent exemplification of Christian character in that sex which has to bear the largest burden of natural grief . . . the sorrows of the woman are "greatly multiplied" . . . and by so much the more . . . do they tend to produce that true spirit of self-denial: that daily martyrdom for duty's sake; whose conflicts are all unseen, unheard of; and whose praise is not of men but of God. (qtd. in Melnyk 124)

It is interesting that this article uses the phrase "sanctified by divine grace." "Full of grace" from her Immaculate Conception, Mary was sanctified by divine grace in a way that no other human has been, so her suffering can be nothing but model suffering.

Suffering also defined the Victorian woman. Lynda Nead notes the Victorian belief that "respectable women were inherently weak and delicate, and were in a perpetual state of sickness" (qtd. in Beller 223). Jeanne B. Elliott also confirms that "the ideal of the Lady included a degree of physical frailty" (qtd. in Beller 224). While this ideal reinforces traditional gender roles by assuring that

women are dependant on their men, it also shows that ladies were expected to be perpetually suffering.

Mary's most powerful role for the Victorians was her motherhood, and Victorians also recognized that motherhood itself causes women to suffer.

Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, in its chapter on children, notes that nursing is a penance for mothers:

The nine or twelve months a woman usually suckles must be . . . to most mothers, a period of privation and penance, and unless she is deaf to the cries of her baby . . . she will avoid every article that can remotely affect the little being who draws its sustenance from her.

(Beeton par. 2475)

Nursing causes the mother to suffer, not just because her own diet and schedule must carefully coincide with the infant's feeding schedule, but because it causes her physical pain: the book gives instructions for preventing chapped skin in sensitive areas, while the damage that can be done by a child with a "set of twenty teeth" need not be detailed (Beeton par. 2486).

Weaning a child certainly does not end the unavoidable sorrows of motherhood. Whether by husbands or children, women are constantly made to suffer through the actions of their families, often unintentionally. Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes that at the Nativity, according to the Gospel of Luke, Mary hears

the shepherd's words about Jesus and "treasures" them in her heart (Gaventa 127). Gaventa notes Luke using the same words when Mary and Joseph find the child Jesus in the Temple and that "The entire Lukan infancy narrative concludes with the words: 'His mother treasured all these things in her heart . . .'" (Gaventa 127). Gaventa says that "treasure" is not the best translation of the Greek word used; instead, she offers "worry" (127). Mary does not know what Christ's future will be, so like any mother, she worries for her child's safety. Mrs. Beeton spends many paragraphs giving detailed instructions for women to assure their infants are comfortable, but if an infant's stomachache causes a mother to worry, how much more sorrowful would she be to witness her son's death?

In the *Christian Lady's Magazine*, to begin a series of essays for mothers' reading, a writer reflects on Mary's suffering during Christ's passion, saying that it was foretold that "a sword should pierce through [Christ's] mother's soul, while she should behold his sufferings . . ." ("Chapters" 20). It continues,

What but the . . . assured hope that Jesus would rise from the dead triumphant and immortal . . . could have supported the *mother* as she stood by the cross on Calvary? What but the view of the same cross . . . can support *thee*, reader, or *me*. . . ("Chapters" 21)

This passage contemplates Mary's intense pain, but claims that Mary had foreknowledge of the resurrection, saying that the promise of Christ's

resurrection is the only thing that could have allowed Mary to endure the Passion. It asks the reader to put herself in Mary's place, to endure one's own sufferings with that same promise. It emphasizes a mother's suffering: only the words "mother," "thee," and "me" are italicized. Mrs. Goodwin Hatchard tells her readers directly,

Picture, you Christian mothers, [Mary's] agony of soul at the cruel scourgings, the crown of thorns placed upon that lovely brow, the mocking, the insult, the shame! And then to hear . . . that awful cry, "Crucify him! crucify him!" Few words, but full of helpless sorrow . . . are these: "And there stood by the Cross of Jesus his Mother." Yes, his beloved, gentle, tender, best of mothers . . . stood by His cross and witnessed His Passion. "Was there ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?" might she well have asked! (Hatchard 132–33)

In women's literature, mothers' trials take on similar forms.

Despite the fact that Ellen Wood's son spoke of her as having a "devout religious nature," critics dubbed her a sensation novelist, and Elizabeth Jay concludes that "her writing suggests no spiritual depths" (Jay xix). However, though Wood is not didactic, she is not devoid of religious sentiment. Her religious ideas manifest themselves in less prominent forms. Martha Vicinius

calls *East Lynne* a melodrama, a genre that she says usually requires self-sacrifice from the female characters, a genre popular among female writers because it “speak[s] to a recurrent underlying emotional tension in women’s lives” (133). The heroine is weaker than the hero, but she suffers even more persecution than he, making this genre effective for transmitting morality because it is “making the moral visible” through the “passive suffering of virtuous characters” (Vicinius 137). Wood uses Mrs. Hare’s suffering to reflect a proper relationship with God.

In *East Lynne*, Mrs. Hare reflects Mary’s suffering when her son, Richard Hare, has been falsely accused of murder. He is forced to flee East Lynne, sneaking back to see his family only with elaborate disguises and Mr. Carlyle to help assure his safety. While Mrs. Hare still believes Richard is guilty, mere mention of his name sends her into anguish:

Mrs. Hare sank back in her chair, and hid her face in her hands, shivering visibly. The words evidently awoke some poignant source of deep sorrow. “Oh, my boy! my boy!” she wailed: “my boy! my unhappy boy! . . . there lies the source of all my misery, mental and bodily. Oh, Richard! Richard!” (Wood 27)

Even when Mrs. Hare learns that Richard is innocent and safely hidden, she still has nightmares about the murder (Wood 230). Mrs. Hare must hide all talk of

Richard from her husband; she cries in secret with her daughter, Barbara, sometimes going into hysterics. Yet, her sorrows are not decadent or misdirected. When Mrs. Hare begins grieving that it has been seven years since Richard sneaked in to see them, she asks “Was any mother ever tried as I am tried?” (Wood 233). This echoes the verse from the Book of Lamentations, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me . . .” (*King James Version*, Lamentations 1:12). The Book of Lamentations is an Old Testament book, but as both Margery Kempe and Mrs. Goodwin Hatchard have shown, Mary’s sorrow is well-expressed by reflecting this passage.

Barbara tells Mrs. Hare not to despair, to which she responds, “Child! I do not despair. Despondency I cannot help at times feeling, but it has not reached despair. I believe . . . that God will some time bring the right to light; how can I despair, then, while I trust in Him?” (Wood 233). Mrs. Hare’s response is virtuous—it shows that she has not lost her faith in God. Both Mary and Mrs. Hare suffer, worrying for their wrongly accused children, yet both find strength in God’s promises. Both women are rewarded—Mary by Christ’s Resurrection, Mrs. Hare when the real murderer is captured, clearing Richard’s name.

Unlike Wood, Dinah Maria Mulock did write didactic novels. Mulock uses an archetypal character that Sally Mitchell calls the holy invalid, a “feminized

Christ figure, who enforced virtue by the influence of her pain" (Mitchell, "The Woman"). In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Ursula Halifax's suffering is related to Mary through the use of this archetype: her blind daughter Muriel. Muriel suffers for being blind, but when she is knocked down by Luxmore's horse, an event that was not an accident but that was caused by no fault of Muriel's, her health takes a downward turn that soon leads to her death. Mitchell notes that "both women and men learn through suffering to recognize that humans are unable to stand alone, that they need one another and need both to give and to receive gentleness, compassion, and help" (Mitchell, "The Woman"). Ursula's example of virtuous suffering solidifies her family through this crisis.

At Muriel's death, Ursula bursts into "uncontrollable weeping" (Mulock 294). Halifax comforts her, and they sit together, "neither speaking, but gazing, as it were, into the face of this their great sorrow, and from thence up to the face of God. They felt that He could help them to bear it; ay, or anything else that it was His will to send—if they might thus bear it, together" (Mulock 295). Ursula has spent a long time worrying for her frail, blind daughter. Halifax and Fletcher do not even want to tell Ursula that Muriel is sick for fear that the suffering would harm her too much (Mulock 286). All want to protect the mother. Even Halifax reflects Mary's trustful sorrowing when he says "Thanks be to God if he puts into our hearts such love towards him, that even while he slays us we can

trust him still" (Mulock 287). Halifax's metaphor reflects both the slaying of Christ and the "sword" that would pierce Mary's soul. If Muriel, as the holy invalid, reflects a feminine Christ, then Ursula, as her sorrowful mother, reflects the Virgin Mary.

In Mary's suffering, she provides a model for perfect trust in God. During Christ's Passion she is forced to be a passive figure, but after her Assumption, she is allowed to be an active, powerful figure. Devotion to Mary's sorrows teaches the faithful the Marian dedication that will allow them to ask Mary's mediation through their own sorrows.

NOTES

¹ "Sweet son, thy fair face drips blood, / And thy body downward is bound to the cross; / How may thy mother's heart suffer so sweet a child, / That blessed was of all born, and best of all good?"

² "Now break, heart, I pray thee, this corpse lies so pitifully, / So beaten, so wounded, treated so by Jews. / What person may behold me and weep not? None truly, / To see my dear son lie bleeding, lo, this newly." / Ever still she sobbed, / So her son was beaten / And of his life robbed, / Renewing the words as I say to you: / "He who cannot weep, come learn from me."

³ "Five joys, / That the gracious heaven's queen had of her child; / For this cause the knight fittingly had / In the inner half of his shield her image painted. . . ."

⁴ "lacked a little."

⁵ "Great peril was between them / If Mary should not take care of her knight."

⁶ "true mother to have compassion on her child."

⁷ "true sister."

⁸ "because of the plentiful grace that our Lord wrought in her."

⁹ "some men slandered her because she cried, and some said to her that our Lady never cried, 'Why do you cry in this manner?' And she said that she might not do otherwise."

¹⁰ "our Lady might suffer to see his precious body being scourged and hanged on the Cross."

¹¹ "and she was so weak that she might not but fell down and swooned and lay still as if she had been a dead woman. Then the creature saw our Lord fall down by his Mother and comfort her. . . . When she . . . saw the compassion that the Mother had of the Son and the Son of his Mother, then she wept, sobbed, and cried as though she would have died. . . ."

¹² "I tell you, there has certainly been no woman on earth with so great a cause to sorrow as I have. . . ."

CHAPTER 4

MARY AS *MEDIATRIX*

Mary's role as *mediatrix*, a mediator or intercessor on behalf of mankind, is perhaps her most disputed role. Many of her other roles can be supported Biblically, but other means must be taken to justify Mary's having power even after her death. In the West, Mary's title of *mediatrix* dates back to the ninth century and has been widely used since the seventeenth, though the image was popular during the Middle Ages. The Catholic Church justifies Mary's role as *mediatrix* with three reasons: her sanctified grace gives her a position between man and God, she "cooperated in the reconciliation of God and humankind while she was still on earth," and she "distributes the graces that God bestows on His children" ("Mediatrix").

Just as all Mariology is inextricably connected to Christology, so is Mary's role as a *mediatrix* secondary to Christ's. Similar to Mary's title of *mediatrix* is her title *Co-Redemptrix*, meaning that she aids in man's redemption, but Christ is the primary source, while she is an assisting source to the primary. Theology has always placed Mary's power below Christ's, but "popular belief cheerfully

blurred the distinction" (Whiteford 17). The Church has never approved of Mary's intercession superseding Christ's, but the uneducated masses have not always been clear on this distinction.

During the Middle Ages, the idea developed that one who feared to approach Christ with a petition should first approach his mother:

An appeal to Mary was a sign of sincere remorse, for, once the idea of a hierarchy of appeal has been accepted, a direct and immediate invocation of Christ might suggest a presumptuous unawareness of one's own sinfulness rather than a theologically correct recourse to the only and ultimate source of forgiveness. (qtd in Saupe 26)

Mary has the power to be a mediator because it is believed that Christ loves his mother so deeply that he can deny no request of hers. This promise is not unjustified, however, because Mary's sinless nature leads to the understanding that she will not present her son with a petition undeserving of fulfillment.

Marian miracle stories are the result of this mediation, all showing how she intercedes on behalf of a sinner. Many of the tales have clergy as the main characters, but the stories also feature noblemen and peasants, reflecting the "comprehensiveness of the genre as a whole" (Whiteford 8), but also how Mary's mediation is accessible to all classes of people. These miracle stories have also become archetypes for the way the Virgin appears in literature.

Miracle stories were a model for other popular works, such as the early ballads of Robin Hood. In the poem *Robin Hood and the Monk*, the author uses the miracle type known as “the knight and the virgin,” depicting a knight’s release from prison through Mary’s intercession (Knight, *Robin Hood: Introduction* 32). In this ballad, Robin Hood laments that he has not heard Mass in a fortnight because of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Little John offers to have men accompany Hood on his journey to St. Mary’s Church so that the sheriff’s men will not accost him, but Hood refuses, saying that Mary’s protection is enough. Nevertheless, at the church, a monk brings the sheriff’s men to arrest him. When news of the arrest reaches Little John, he trusts that since Hood has served Mary well, she will not let him die a wicked death: “He has servyd Oure Lady many a day, / And yet will, securely; / Therefor I trust in hir specialy / No wyckud deth shal he dye” (Knight, *Robin Hood* 133–36). Through the aid of his men (and presumably the Virgin’s protection), Hood escapes the sheriff. This tale is not the only one to feature the Virgin’s protection in the face of corrupt clergymen.

A Gest of Robyn Hode is a lengthy Robin Hood ballad that was partly drawn from *Robin Hood and the Monk* (Knight, *A Gest: Introduction* 82). Scholars dispute the sources of the *Gest*, particularly concerning its ending. William Clawson claims,

the *Gest* poet drew his ending from an *exemplum* in which “the person [Robin] to whom the money is due takes it from a monk [the high cellarer of St. Mary’s abbey] whom he regards as the earthly representative of the saint . . . and as the instrument of the return of the loan.” (qtd. in Knight, *A Gest: Introduction* 83)

An unknown exemplum is a questionable source, but the poem definitely matches popular Marian miracle stories. Sir Richard of the Lee’s cycle shows elements of Wynkyn de Worde’s eighth miracle in *The Miracles of Oure Lady* in which a knight falls to poverty but is restored when Mary turns the devil away from him. The author of the *Gest* was also likely familiar with the twenty-seventh miracle, which opens: “In a wood was a certain theef that robbed men & kyllled them that came by” (Knight, *A Gest: Introduction* 83). Marian miracle stories often dealt with common people, and Robin Hood ballads were entertainment for the common people.

In *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, Sir Richard has borrowed four hundred pounds from St. Mary’s Abbey to pay off the debts of his son, who “slewe a knight of Lancaster” (Knight, *A Gest* 209). Hood offers to lend him the money, but Sir Richard needs someone to be his security. Sir Richard vows he has no better security than the Virgin, who has never failed him. Hood, a long devotee of the Virgin, responds that “To seche all Englonde throwe, / Yet fonde I never to my

pay / A moche better borowe"¹ (Knight, *A Gest* 258–60). In a year, Hood expects Sir Richard to return in order to pay the debt.

Sir Richard is late in repaying his debt after stopping to rescue a yeoman. In the meantime, Little John finds two monks from St. Mary's abbey riding through Barnesdale, and Hood tells the monks that he fears Mary is angry, for she has not sent him his pay, but Little John insists that the monks have it because they come from her abbey (Knight, *A Gest* 939–44). Hood makes the same bargain with the monks that he did with Sir Richard. The monks must tell him how much money they have with them, but if they lie, he will take everything. When the monks lie, Little John discovers eight hundred pounds between them. He declares that "the monke is trewe ynowe, / Our Lady hath doubled your cast"² (Knight, *A Gest* 991–92). They declare Mary the truest woman who ever lived; the reader may interpret whether Mary truly sent the monks, or if this is merely an entertaining turn of events.

Robin Hood ballads often deal with corrupt clergy, which in no way shakes Hood's faith in Mary. Rather than seeing the monks from St. Mary's abbey as proof of a fault in Marian devotion, Hood recognizes the corrupt monks as bad examples of faith, trusting that Mary will reward him for his own devotion, an action which never seems to fall short.

The Virgin's presence in Robin Hood ballads is clear, but her position in Arthurian legend poses some problems. *Le Morte D'Arthur* was printed around the same time as De Worde's *Myracles of Oure Lady*, but has few prominent Marian references, apart from the occasional exclamation such as "Mary, fie on that craft!" (Malory 509) and "Saint Mary, succor your maid!" (Malory 697). Arthur's knights make exclamatory references to Mary that call upon her as a witness, which, like a modern exclamation of "oh my God," expresses no prominent expectation of intercession or action on the part of God or Mary.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, written at the high point of Marian devotion, presents Mary in a more active role. Gawain continuously expresses Marian devotion, praying to her for his safety as he travels with her image on the inside of his shield, so that when he looks at it, "his belde neuer payred" (*Sir Gawain* 650). This line is often translated as "his courage never failed," but "belde" can cover a range of meanings: power, support, comfort, protection, all of which imply Mary's active participation to aid her knight (Hardaman 255) It may be called into question why Gawain has Mary's image painted there instead of another saint, since for a knight, it would be logical to display a figure such as Michael the Archangel, the warrior of Heaven, on the shield.

Many Marian prayers require veneration of a picture of the Virgin, so Gawain must "derive benefit directly from contemplating the actual painted

image . . ." (Hardman 255). He carries Mary's image with him everywhere, just as modern devotees may wear holy medals. A shield "has the double function of declaring the bearer's identity and warding off attack" (Hardman 247). While Mary's picture does not identify Gawain, it pairs his physical protection with the spiritual. The Virgin's influence is more spiritual than physical, which is fitting, considering that her help is needed in the bedroom, not on the battlefield (Hardman 255). Gawain faced the Green Knight in the Green Chapel, but his real trials took place beforehand. Thus, the Virgin Mary has an active role in Gawain's prosperity. Since Gawain remains chaste, he can anticipate that if he meets his death, Mary will fulfill the promises usually attributed to Marian devotees: assurance of Mary's comfort and help, especially at the hour of death, and her accompanying the soul to Heaven (Hardman 255).

Considering Gawain's obvious devotion to the Virgin, it is remarkable that at the end of *Sir Gawain*, he seems to forget about her. Why does he not thank her for her protection when he is saved from death? (Valdés Miyares 186). Anne Wilson suggests that Gawain conflates Mary and Morgan le Fay, the witch who instigated the beheading game (qtd. in Valdés Miyares 187). Both Mary and Morgan embody "that instinctual level of psyche guiding the warrior-hero's fate. For Gawain faces his adventures fully decked with talismans . . . the image of the

Virgin on the other side of his shield, and later the girdle tied around his waist” (Valdés Miyares 191).

Bercilak’s wife may also replace the Virgin for representing the “Life-preserving aspect of the Goddess” (Valdés Miyares 196). The magic girdle that Bercilak’s wife gives Gawain may have been inspired by a popular legend in which the Virgin cures St. Thomas of his doubts about Mary’s Assumption when she “leans down from heaven to give him her girdle” — an item even depicted in a window at Beckley, Oxfordshire as being green (Hardaman 256). *Sir Gawain* is in itself a work that continually combines pagan and Christian imagery, the pentangle and the Virgin both appearing on Gawain’s shield, a combination of supernatural and Christian imagery. It is possible that the Gawain poet conflated the two images at the end, though it seems more likely that the poet simply forgot to continue the Marian theme through the end of the piece.

Sir Gawain drew upon the popularly accepted theology of its period, but as with most theological justification for Mary’s roles, the Church of England has no formal place for Mary as a powerful *mediatrix*. Since the Twenty-Ninth Article of the Anglican Church deems transubstantiation “repugnant to the plain words of Scripture,” (Melnyk, “Appendix 1” 164), it denies the importance of Christ’s earthly role that required Mary. Mary “gave birth and brought up the body of Christ that could be seen on the altar” (McCleery 151), but if the Eucharist on the

altar is not truly Christ's body, then the Marian connection is lost. By reducing her earthly power, her heavenly power is eliminated. Some Anglo-Catholic writers such as Christina Rossetti refused to convert in part because of disputes over Mariology. Rossetti saw Mary as a woman who "lived a perfect life *in imitatio Christi*" (Ready 151), but never appealed to Mary for intercession. In her work *Called to be Saints*, Rossetti says,

[Mary] is a shut gate, not a gate of access: Christ is our open door. She is Christ's gate through which He once came to seek and save us: He is to us that only door, by which . . . we may with boldness enter into the Holiest; here into communion with our God. (qtd. in Ready 164)

However, though the vast amount of anti-Catholic literature would likely make any hesitant to hint at Mariology, writers still urge readers that Mary's Biblical role makes her a "pattern mother" whom Jesus obeyed (Hatchard 129). In the Victorian family, the woman played an important role as the spiritual head.

A woman's Christian piety gave her authority, making her the "center of the domestic circle" (Corbett 17). Women were not recognized as powerful in roles traditionally assigned to men, but their influence in womanly roles could be just as powerful. Mary was not called upon for her mediating powers by Victorians, but her example and the examples of other "saintly" women helped

create the framework by which many Victorian mothers identified themselves. Just as Mary must be recognized as having a powerful influence in Christ's life, though that influence may end after her death, so did Victorian women recognize the powerful spiritual role they had in their children's lives. Even criticisms of Mariology praise Mary's responsibility for guiding the child Christ's growth, emphasizing that the Bible states Jesus was "subject unto [his parents]" (Walker 33–34).

Lady Morgan Sydney Owenson reminds her readers that God has made woman a "'mate and a help to man' . . . the foundress of nations, the embellisher of races . . ." (Owenson 27). None can deny the influence of women on their families; Sarah Ellis tells her readers,

How often has man returned to his home with a mind confused by the many voices, which in the . . . public assembly, have addressed themselves to his inborn selfishness, or his worldly pride; and while his integrity was shaken . . . he has stood corrected before the clear eye of woman, as it looked directly to the naked truth and detected the lurking evil of this specious act he was about to commit. (Ellis 31)

The woman drives out the evil creeping into the man's soul. Ellis claims that when the man is reminded of the "humble monitress" guarding his fire at home,

his mind is cleared and he becomes a “wiser and better man” (Ellis 31). Just as in medieval miracle stories where just the thought of Mary may keep a knight from sinning, the thought of a man’s good wife (or perhaps even mother) may keep him living a just life. Medieval writing held that Mary was greeted with the word “ave,” which spelled backwards is “eva,” another name for Eve. Mary negated Eve’s sins; just as Eve bestowed Original Sin on her descendants, so Mary bestows on her descendents—women—the negation of sin (Berschin 124).

An article in *The Christian Lady’s Magazine* titled “Mother and Babe” urges mothers to spiritually guide their children:

There are not . . . very many mothers who duly reflect how much even the earthly and temporal advancement and prosperity of their little ones depend upon the maternal training bestowed upon them; but there are fewer still who reflect upon the bearing of that training upon their eternal condition. (Ignota 558–59)

Spiritual upbringing bestows a huge responsibility upon mothers, for their guidance is responsible for their children’s prosperity on Earth and in Heaven. The article bids mothers to reflect upon their joy when they see that their guidance brings their children to Heaven. It asks “What thinkest thou of this glorious future for the babe upon thy bosom?” (Ignota 559), reflecting the Gospel of Luke in which Mary wonders and worries about Christ’s future. The article

stresses that a mother must “train” her child before he reaches manhood, leading him, seeing to his spiritual welfare (Ignota 559). A father’s role is never mentioned here, nor is this leading limited to a mother’s duties to her daughter—a mother must lead all of her children.

The Christian Lady’s Magazine periodically intersperses its longer articles with short articles or poems for the reader’s meditation. The magazine is openly anti-Catholic, so the following passage is a curiosity:

The following form of absolution, used by monks in the Romish church, is a specimen of the grounds on which they teach a sinner to build his hope for eternity:—“God forgive thee, my brother. The merit of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the blessed St. Mary, always a virgin, and of the saints . . . be unto thee available for the remission of thy sins, the increase of desert and grace, and the reward of everlasting life.” (“Note”)

This example of Mary’s intercession is offered with no criticisms or guides for interpretation. It is remarkable that this passage should appear for the reader’s meditation when in the next three months, the same magazine states that all Protestants “fully and entirely object to” absolution (“Plain Reasons” 267), that mediators are a corruption of true revelation (X.Q. 367–68), and that a book review quoting Marian prayers requires an apology to readers of *The Christian*

Lady's Magazine (Rev. of *Essays* 468–69). Either the editors of the magazine expect readers to recognize how abhorrent this practice is, or perhaps they are allowing the readers to draw some inspiration from this passage.

Sometimes, a woman is even pictured as boldly mediating just as Mary is pictured. In *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Mrs. Edmonstone is the “dominant figure at Hollywell who controls the whole community there, and is its acknowledged focal point (her dressing-room is the centre of the house . . .)” (Dennis xxi). Mrs. Edmonstone is not domineering, but rather, in fulfilling her roles as a wife and mother, becomes the family’s heart. Her dressing room, an intimate setting, becomes a confessional; whenever any member of the family has a problem, be it a daughter or Morville, the afflicted never hesitates to come to her room for counseling, even though the woman is not the highest authority to be consulted. When Morville receives word that his grandfather is dead, he hesitantly asks Mrs. Edmonstone, “Will you take me in hand—let me talk to you—and tell me if I am wrong, as freely as if I were Charles?” (Yonge 27). Morville has asked the woman of the house, not the man, to be his mentor, has asked Mrs. Edmonstone to treat him as he does her son. Catherine Sandbach-Dahlström asserts that early in the novel, Yonge establishes Morville as a Christ figure (qtd. in Budge 208). Mrs. Edmonstone is clearly a mother to this Christ figure, but she is not valuable to him chiefly for maternal love—she is valuable for her guidance.

Repeatedly Morville comes to Mrs. Edmonstone's dressing room and confesses his sins to her, speaking to her as his mother, asking her to help him calm his temper (Yonge 51). Charles considers that his mother is "pretty well used to doing him good against his will," meaning that her recognition of what is good for him is higher than his own (Yonge 24). Mrs. Edmonstone describes Morville's restlessness as "a sign that he had no one to tell him of the tricks which mothers generally nip in the bud" (Yonge 83), showing that perhaps Mrs. Edmonstone's mentoring role is not limited to her, but is universal to all women.

Never does Mrs. Edmonstone oppose her husband, but rather, exercises her power within her expected limitations. When Mr. Edmonstone is away on a trip to Ireland, Morville declares his love for Amy to Mrs. Edmonstone. Mrs. Edmonstone exults in this confession, but speaks carefully: "It is very bold and presumptuous in me to say anything at all in papa's absence . . . but I am sure he will think in the same way . . . that it is our duty not to allow you to be, or to feel, otherwise than entirely at liberty" (Yonge 191). While the family is not certain of Mr. Edmonstone's response, they are sure he will agree with his wife (Yonge 194).

As rumors of Morville's gambling thicken, Mr. Edmonstone tells his wife to command Amy to bid farewell to Morville, claiming that "this is what comes of settling matters in my absence" (Yonge 235). He lets his wife handle the matter, rather than doing so himself. Mrs. Edmonstone, still not believing the rumors,

waits patiently despite her husband's repeated orders that Amy must quit Morville. Mr. Edmonstone praises Amy during her strife, but he is "too much afraid of women's tears to talk to her about Guy . . ." (Yonge 243), suggesting that there is power in a woman's suffering. Morville's name is finally cleared, proving that Mrs. Edmonstone was correct in allowing the engagement, and it is Mrs. Edmonstone, not Mr. Edmonstone, who oversees Amy's reunion with Morville. Mrs. Edmonstone acts as confessor and intercessor on behalf of her family, but, like the Virgin, she does not overstep her boundaries as a woman.

The Heir of Redclyffe treats women's intercession in a symbolic manner, but in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Mulock makes a direct reference to Marian intercession. She shows a Marian petition, but the reference is not approving of Mariology. The Catholic Lord Ravenel tells Halifax that his father hates him because he wishes to leave the world as a monk. When Halifax asks him why he wants to leave the world, Ravenel responds, "There never was but one in it I cared for, or who cared for me—and now—Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis" (Mulock xxvi). Fletcher's interpretation of this prayer is disturbing:

His lips moved in a paroxysm of prayer—helpless, parrot-learnt, Latin prayer; yet, being in earnest, it seemed to do him good. The mother, as if she heard in fancy that pitiful cry, which rose to my memory too—"Poor William!—don't tell William!"—turned and

spoke to him kindly, asking him if he would go home with us.

(Mulock xxvi)

Fletcher's response shows an ignorance of Catholicism typical in his and Mulock's times. *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*—Saint Mary, pray for us, is the most basic request for Mary's intercession. To call Ravenel's prayer a paroxysm, to call Ravenel helpless, is acceptable, for Ravenel is anguished, calling to Mary in desperation.

However, calling Ravenel's prayer "parrot-learnt Latin" misrepresents Catholicism—it is unlikely that Ravenel recites this prayer without full knowledge of its meaning, even in Latin. "Ora pro nobis" appears in many Catholic prayers, including the Ave Maria ("Ave Maria"), which even uneducated Catholics often learned to recite. It appears in the Salve Regina ("Hail Holy Queen"), twice in the Litanies of the Saints ("Litanies of the Saints"), and twice in the Litanies of the Virgin Mary ("Litanies of the Virgin Mary"). A related word, *oremus*, meaning "let us pray," appears many times in the Tridentine Mass, always as the priest's instructions to the congregation. Even Protestant writers use the phrase without translating it for their non-Papist readers (Walker 39). Moreover, studies of Latin grammar dominated the curriculum in public schools, and even when Greek studies became more popular, the grammar books were often written in Latin (Howsam et al. 264).

Ravenel is a lord who can afford an education and is religiously dedicated enough to enter ordained life. It is unlikely that he uses “ora pro nobis” without understanding its meaning, though it is difficult to say whether this perception is Fletcher’s or Craik’s. During the nineteenth century, Catholics saw themselves as being “in siege” against the modern world, a sentiment not unfamiliar to Ravenel, so Catholics commonly turned to Mary as a symbol that promised them comfort (De Flon 308). Mary’s various titles reflect the needs and trials of “poor suffering humanity” (Adams 59). Marian prayers were popular—it is unlikely that Ravenel would recite one without understanding.

Yet, despite Fletcher’s assertion that Ravenel does not understand his prayer, it would seem that the prayer is answered, for Ursula offers to take Ravenel into her house to receive the care he needs from a loving family. Ursula does not contradict her husband’s will by making this offer, but it she who initiates the offer, momentarily overstepping Halifax’s place as leader in the family. Though Halifax is usually the guiding figure, here Ursula is the first to offer guidance. Ravenel’s request for the Virgin’s aid is answered—one could argue either through the guidance of the Blessed Mother working through the Halifaxes, or simply by “the mother,” as Ursula has come to be known.

Though Victorians did not ask Mary for her intercession the way men did in the Middle Ages, the powerful influence of the Virgin and the possibility of

female intercession still informed the Victorian way of life. The possibility of Mary and women as spiritual leaders gave rise to Mary's position as the Queen of Heaven, a powerful place that makes mediation fully possible and glorifies a woman's role.

NOTES

¹ "To search through all of England, / Yet found I never to my pleasure / A much better security."

² "The monk is true enough / Our Lady has doubled your cast."

CHAPTER 5

MARY AS REGINA COELI

Mary's role as *regina coeli*, the Queen of Heaven, was the favored perception of Mary during the "tidal wave" of Marian devotion of 1050 to 1150, a theme which continued after this span (Mayr-Harting 99–100). Here, Mary became the "refuge of the left-behind and marginalized, and even of the immoral, the refuge of those who did not always deserve help," and this perception was a "driving force in the genre of Marian Miracles" (Mayr-Harting 100). Mary's mediating powers developed alongside her role as queen with the understanding that her queenship gives authority to her mediation. Pope Pius XII defined this centuries-old awareness when he taught that Christ alone is king in the "full, proper, and strict sense of the word," but that Mary's royalty participates in Christ's in a "limited and analogical way" ("Queen"), a secondary power to Christ's primary power. Mary's queenship has three aspects: a preeminence that surpasses all creation in its dignity, a royal power which allows her to distribute God's blessings, and an "inexhaustible efficacy of intercession with her Son and the Father" ("Queen"). Mary is queen because her son is the king, but this

position is more than just symbolic—her humble servitude and participation in God’s plan give her a real presence.

Mary’s queenship is reflected in her title of “Our Lady” —any reference to “Our Lady of —” is always a reference to Mary. This title is drawn from chivalric tradition (Adams 100); a knight was dedicated to “his lady,” who was often either his queen or his patron’s wife. In the early Robin Hood ballads, the only lady to whom Hood shows consistent loyalty is the Virgin Mary. Maid Marian does not appear until the mid-seventeenth century, while the few other women entering the ballads usually have Hood’s protection because of his loyalty to the Virgin. Hood rejects the king-appointed authority of his lands, which is usually the Sheriff of Nottingham, but though Hood may rebel against state authority, he never rebels against his *regina coeli*, showing loyalty to her even when she punishes him or her mediation is not requested.

Robin Hood and the Potter, an early ballad, begins with two 4-line stanzas of general introduction, then one more to name and characterize Robin Hood:

“Roben Hood was the yemans name, / That was boyt corteys and fre; / For the loffe of owre ladey, / All weman wershepyd he”¹ (Knight, *Potter* 9–12). Such a short characterization stated in summary rather than shown through plot development suggests that the listener is expected to recognize Robin Hood, so the author notes several of Hood’s most prominent features: courtesy, generosity,

and honest devotion to Mary. Elevation of women was a prominent feature of courtly love poems (Bogin 10). Though the Robin Hood was a character of commoner's ballads, not courtly ballads, the word "courtesy" means "courtly elegance" ("Courtesy"), and Hood has always been portrayed as "noble in spirit" (Pierce Egan qtd. in Barczewski 91), if not noble by birth or lifestyle. He is dedicated to Mary as a knight to his chosen lady. Hood's dedicated Marian devotion is consistent in the medieval Robin Hood poems, but it fades away after the Reformation as Hood's character is refined into the gentleman recognized in modern Robin Hood depictions.

A Gest of Robyn Hode depicts Hood's Marian devotion in the clearest manner, giving a long description of Hood's religious observances and methods of treating travelers. Every day, Hood would hear three Masses:

The one in the worship of the Fader,

And another of the Holy Gost,

The thirde of Our dere Lady,

That he loved allther moste.

Robyn loved Oure dere Lady:

For dout of dydly synne,

Wolde he never do compani harme

That any woman was in.² (Knight, *A Gest* 33–40)

The reader likely expects to see the Trinity represented here with the Father, Holy Ghost, and the Son, but Hood makes it the Father, the Holy Ghost, and Mary. Later, when Sir Richard is late in repaying Hood after swearing Mary as his security, Hood refuses to eat because he fears Mary is angry with him (Knight, *A Gest* 821–24). He never doubts Mary's faithfulness, but he fears that he has done something to anger his queen. When Hood takes the money from the dishonest monks of St. Mary's Abbey, they swear that they never heard of the security Hood mentions, but Hood insists that "God is holde a ryghtwys man, / And so is His dame"³ (Knight, *A Gest* 959–60), setting up a recognizable pair: God and Mary, King and Queen. These references characterize Mary not for her motherhood, but for her position as God's wife. Mary's title of *regina coeli* requires recognition of the paradox that Mary is both mother and wife to God.

The poem *Pearl*, likely written by the same poet who authored *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, shows a maiden who represents several paradoxical forms, just as Mary is paradoxically the "bride of her son, mother of her father, and sister and mother to all humanity" (Reed 106). *Pearl* immediately gives the reader several interpretations of the text: the speaker searches for a pearl that he has dropped in the ground, but it is possible to read the pearl as a girl, perhaps his daughter, who has recently been buried (*Pearl* 5–6). The speaker falls asleep after exhausting himself in his search, dreaming that he is carried away to a forest

where he sees a beautiful pearl-white city across a river and converses with a maiden dressed in pearls. The poem gives several representations of the pearl—the lost stone, the lost daughter, the maiden, and the city representing the kingdom of Heaven.

The *Pearl* maiden tells the speaker that she is a queen in Heaven, leading to a number of references to align her with the Virgin Mary. The “eponymous...‘perle wythoutene spot’ . . . begins the tale allied with the *specula sine macula* image of Mary” (Reed 188), both the lost pearl and Mary being immaculate, without blemish. The poem sets itself in August “in a hy3 seysoun, / Quen corne is coruen with crokez kene,”⁴ (*Pearl* 39–40). This reference, along with other references to herbs growing during the season, lead scholars to believe that the poem takes place on August fifteenth, on the Feast of the Assumption (Reed 118), the event directly preceding Mary’s coronation. Immediately, the Pearl poet sets his audience up for Marian references. When the narrator, having made his way to the kingdom, sees the Pearl maiden, he sees her wearing “a wonder perle with-uten wemme,”⁵ reminding the reader again of Mary *immaculata*.

In explaining Heavenly life to the poem’s speaker, the *Pearl* maiden tells him that she is a queen in Heaven, as are all who dwell there, but the speaker wonders how she can be a queen when Mary is supposed to be Queen of Heaven.

The maiden “attempts to explain to the narrator her relation as *a* queen of heaven to Mary, whom the narrator understands to be *the* Queen . . .” (Reed 114). She explains: “Sir, fele here porchasez and fongez pray / Bot supplantorez none withinne þys place; / Pat emperise all heuenez hatz / And vrþe and helle in her bayly; / Of erytage 3et non wyl ho chace, / For ho is quen of cortaysye”⁶ (*Pearl* 439–44). “Courtesy” here is used both in a courtly sense and meaning “grace” in a spiritual sense, blurring the distinction between the courtly and the religious (*Pearl* 733).

The large pearl that the *Pearl* maiden wears represents her, and she represents the heavenly paradise of which she is queen (Reed 122).

Representations are changed with other representations,

pearls are substituted for pearls and each variation becomes the focal point for a new context . . . the ideal is being *articulated*, not transparently *represented*. In the same way that Mary articulated the Word . . . this poem attempts to make the transcendent intelligible through the physicality of form and sound. (Reed 23)

The Pearl maiden wishes the speaker to understand that life in Heaven is the highest form of existence imaginable. For the speaker, the highest form of living is kingship, but earthly kings are sinful humans, not perfect models. The Virgin, however, is a perfect queen, so Heavenly life is demonstrated in a Heavenly

queenship that is like the Virgin's, but not in competition with the Virgin's. Mary "physiologically manifests the interdependence between flesh and salvation," while the pearl's changing meaning "is a figure that metonymically marks the contiguity between divine and human" (Reed 107). Mary's intercession connects man to God, human to divine.

Mary's coronation directly follows her Assumption. Mary was assumed into heaven body and soul, so her body did not remain to rot in the earth. Likewise, "the *Pearl* maiden seems not to be rotting either since she is in the physical presence of the narrator" (Reed 126). The narrator has his doubts about this at the beginning—he knows that his pearl has been lost to the ground—but the *Pearl* maiden is several times described as spotless; her "'wemlez', or spotless, body in all its glory seems anything but dirty and rotted" (Reed 126). The *Pearl* maiden is the perfect model of Mary as queen, the best idea of Heavenly life.

Mary's queenship, though theologically disputed, has been taken to the point where Mary is seen as a goddess (Adams 52), particularly by non-Christian writers. Devotion to Queen Elizabeth is often assumed to have replaced Marian devotion after the Protestant Reformation, but Diarmaid MacCulloch suggests that this practice was "peripheral, gradual, and lacking in official encouragement" (MacCulloch 216), and Queen Elizabeth is not always depicted as having a demeanor to match the Virgin's. Marian language was often used to

describe Mary Tudor, England's Catholic queen preceding Elizabeth, with parallels drawn in Bishop John Christopherson's description of her as a "humble handmayde of God, elected and chosen by him to rule and reforme this realme" (qtd. in Wizeman 245). This associated Mary Tudor with both the Virgin and returning England to Catholicism, a short-lived escapade. This three-part association could have contributed to the Victorian fear of Mariolatry, since Catholics were also feared.

Queen Victoria is better suited as a comparison for the Virgin Mary than Queen Elizabeth. Mary is

fragile, meek, retiring, appropriately deferential to her Son, and never seeking power for herself (unlike that harpy Queen Elizabeth or nineteenth-century feminists), but instead winning her way through her quiet influence and example. (Adams 96)

Mary is a powerful figure as the *regina coeli*, but she never sought to make herself powerful—her power was granted for her other attributes. Likewise Victoria, though she was queen, exuded an image of middle-class domesticity.

Queen Victoria resembles the Virgin more than Elizabeth. John Henry Newman, one of the Oxford Movement's leaders, emphasizes Mary's gentle modesty that she retained even as she ascended her throne, comparing Mary's humility at her coronation to Victoria's:

I recall the strange emotion which took by surprise men and women . . . when at the Coronation of our present Queen, they gazed on the figure of one so like a child, so small, so tender, so shrinking, who had been exalted to so great an inheritance and so vast a rule, who was such a contrast in her own person to the solemn pageant which centered in her. . . . And did not the All-wise know the human heart when He took to Himself a mother? did He not anticipate our emotion at the sight of such an exaltation in one so simple and so lowly? (qtd. in Adams 96)

Newman connects Mary and Victoria in that they are both queens possessing great power, but they take for themselves modest exteriors, images calling to mind mothers more than monarchs. Victorian women were seen as the queens of their households, and the home was a microcosm of the British state—if one was functioning properly so would the other (Barczewski 171). This concept connected Victorians to Mary's queenship.

Though Rev. Norman L. Walker's *The Ritualistic Movement*, a collection of essays explaining the nature and errors of Tractarianism, is a criticism of Catholic revivals in the Anglican Church, it demonstrates Mary as a leader in her family. In the Bible, when Mary and Joseph lose the child Jesus in the Temple, it is Mary—not Joseph—who leads the search for him, questioning him once they

find him (Walker 32–33). Mary is a woman with an “unusual amount of wisdom and good sense”; she takes a greater part of the burden in raising the Christ child than Joseph does (Walker 34). Walker even suggests that Mary is mentioned so little in the Bible because she is a “superior Christian woman,” so little must be recorded about her to prevent idolatry (Walker 37). This suggests not that Mary should actually be honored in a high position, but that she possesses honorable qualities that draw people to her, an aspect that makes Catholics celebrate and Anglicans wary. Victorians recognized that Mary was “raised far above all women in any age,” but not that she is worthy of direct honor (Hatchard 122).

Christina Rossetti rejected Mary’s mediating powers, but she “never loses confidence in Mary as evidence that humanity could achieve direct access to God’s Word . . .” (Ready 163), taking her as an example of high human capability. In her poem “The Purification of St. Mary,” Rossetti capitalizes pronoun references to Mary, hinting that she is a figure “on par with the Trinity” (Ready 163). This outlook resists any request for action on Mary’s part, yet still honors her.

As Mary is Queen of Heaven, so is a woman the queen of her household, and just as Mary was exulted because she bore Christ, so has Christianity exulted women because “God sent forth his Son into the world, *made of a woman*”

("Sabbath" 430). Isabella Beeton prefaces the first chapter of her *Book of Household Management* with a quote from the Book of Proverbs:

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household; and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. (qtd. in Beeton par. 1)

The first sentence is language belonging to a queen—her words are not just guidance for her family, but law. The last sentence implies that a woman is blessed and praised for her queenship over her household. Beeton begins the chapter by telling women that they must lead their households "as with the commander of an army," with intelligent and thorough decisions for the family's well-being (Beeton par. 1). She also notes that a woman should not lead in the manner of a "virago queen," but "virago" is likely the key term here—a woman should be a gentle but competent queen, not an overbearing one. Ideal wives and husbands are kings and queens of their households, each performing proper duties, but with fulfillment in the fullness of their roles.

In *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Charlotte Yonge frequently addresses women's issues, but the women in *The Heir* "seem to exist less for themselves than to complete the lesson offered by the men with whom they are linked" (Dennis xx).

This sentiment could not more perfectly be applied to Mary, for though she is powerful in her own rights, her status relies on her relationship with other figures. She is a queen because her son is a king; she is a queen because her son's father is a king. Mrs. Edmonstone is certainly a stronger figure than her husband, appearing in the story more frequently, directing her family more, and Mr. Edmonstone is even presented as "weak and incompetent, dependent for his authority on the unobserved manipulations of his wife" (Dennis xxi). Mr. Edmonstone demands that his wife break Amy and Morville's engagement, but rather than obey him, Mrs. Edmonstone quietly trusts in her own judgment and triumphs.

Morville, an imperfect but honorable man, recognizes that Amabel's love will redeem him: "he deemed her rather a guide and guard whose love might arm him, soothe him, and encourage him" (qtd. in Dennis xxiv). Amy, not Morville or Phillip or even Charles, will someday replace Mrs. Edmonstone as the monarch, the "nucleus of Hollywell" (Dennis xxi). Yonge, likely more comfortable with Catholic depictions of Mary, feels free to give a depiction of women that tends toward solitary queenship.

John Ruskin, in his essay "Lilies of Queens' Gardens," addresses the need for better education for women, emphasizing that a husband and wife are a king and queen, both vital, irremovable parts of a pair. He bids women,

And whether consciously or not, you must be, in many a heart, enthroned: there is no putting by that crown; queens you must always be: queens to your lovers; queens to your husbands and your sons; queens of higher mystery to the world beyond. . . .

(Ruskin)

He emphasizes that women and men's roles are different, but equally important.

Ursula Halifax does not enjoy the same type of queenship that Mrs. Edmonstone does; rather, she and John Halifax exemplify that a king and queen are a pair.

Halifax is the dominant of the two, but seldom treats his wife as a subject of his, and there are instances in which Ursula shows herself capable in her own right.

When Lady Caroline asks Ursula if she would invite her over for dinner, Ursula agrees, though Fletcher fancies that it "weighed upon her mind, probably from the doubt whether or no John would like it. But in little things as in great, she had always this safe trust in him—that . . . to do what she felt to be right was the surest way to be right in her husband's eyes" (Mulock 226). Ursula is concerned with whether Halifax will agree with her, but what is right is what Ursula deems best, not what Ursula deems John will think best. Halifax acknowledges that "Any welcome that Mrs. Halifax has given is also mine" (Mulock 226), but he is upset to see Lady Caroline.

Later Halifax tries to reprimand his wife for letting Lady Caroline taint their home, but she bids him remember that Lady Caroline could not be entirely wicked if she is laughing with their children—she has no children of her own. Halifax replies “We will wait . . . before we judge. Love, you are a better Christian than I” (Mulock 230). Ursula has demonstrated a spiritual authority over her husband; surprising, for Halifax is normally the one who reads from the Bible and takes charge of his family’s spirituality, yet not beyond the idea that the woman was usually the spiritual head of a Victorian family. Ursula’s queenship here is not one strongly presented throughout the book, for Halifax still believes a wife “bound to the very last to obey in all things not absolutely wrong her husband’s will” (Mulock 232).

Halifax makes the decision for the family to move from Longfield, but only after “much consultation” with Ursula (Mulock 304). When Halifax is distressed by monetary problems, he bids Ursula not to worry about him, but tells her ““Only my head aches so; let me lay it here, as the children do.’ His wife made a place for it on her shoulder; there it rested . . . until gradually the hard and painful expression of the features relaxed . . .” (Mulock 221). Here Halifax is the weaker of the pair, Ursula the stronger; Halifax requires her assistance for his support. The emotional support is enough, but not even a page later, Ursula solves the family’s financial troubles when the Brithwoods finally hand over her

dowry. Halifax and Ursula's king and queenship works because Halifax and Ursula are both upstanding moral figures. If Halifax had been a negligent husband, Ursula would have likely been given more opportunities to reprimand him. Because he is a good husband, Ursula is not repressed in obeying him, for the commands he issues to his family are just.

Ursula is not a single dominant figure in her household, but she is a strong figure, queen of a just pair of monarchs ruling over her household. Just as medieval theologians stressed that a man fearing to confess himself to God should first come to Mary, so do Lord Ravenel and Lady Caroline come to the Halifax family for refuge, finding welcome first from Ursula, then from Halifax. Craik would denounce anything in her writing that hinted at Mariolatry, but the Marian influence on Victorian women as the spiritual heads of their households influenced Craik's writing.

For medieval writers, Mary's queenship was easily honored in writing—chivalric codes demanded that knights be both loyal and holy, so there could be no more perfect devotion than Marian devotion. For Victorians, though Mary was not honored as a Heavenly queen, her maternal leadership was the prime example of how a woman should be queen of her household, a powerful leader of her family. When taken in her proper context, she provides a perfect example of womanhood inspiring in any age.

NOTES

¹ "Robin Hood was the yeoman's name, / That was both courteous and generous; / For the love of Our Lady, / He honored all women."

² "The one in the worship of the Father, / And another of the Holy Ghost, / The third of Our dear Lady, / That he loved the most of all. / Robin loved Our dear Lady: / For fear of deadly sin, / He would never do a company harm / That any woman was in."

³ "For God is a gracious and righteous man / And so is His dame."

⁴ "In a festival season, / When corn is cut with sickles sharp."

⁵ "A wondrous pearl without flaw."

⁶ "Sir, many here seek and receive prizes / But there are no defrauders within this place; / That empress all heaven has / And earth and hell in her domain; / Of heritage yet none will drive her out / For she is queen of courtesy."

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