THE INTERLACINGS OF MARY MAGDALENE AND PROSTITUTION IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

"FORSOOK THE EVIL OF HER WAYS, LOVED MUCH, AND WAS FORGIVEN": THE INTERLACINGS OF MARY MAGDALENE AND PROSTITUTION IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

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Mary Magdalene's elusive identity has allowed her representations to be transmuted throughout history. Consequently, an examination of these representations in a particular culture can reveal the needs and concerns of that society. In the Victorian era, prostitution was a pressing social concern, and the prostitute was constructed in British culture as a deviant woman. Mary Magdalene became the figure most commonly associated with prostitution during the nineteenth-century, and her representations were used as a platform in British culture for the middle class to explore their assumptions and ideologies regarding female sexuality, Christian charity and institutional reform. By exploring her representation as a prostitute in Victorian art and literature, this thesis argues that Mary Magdalene's transformation from sinful woman to loyal disciple allowed her representations to be used simultaneously with representations of prostitution and the prostitute to help conventionalize prostitution as a topic of discussion, and the prostitute as a worthy object of charity.

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INTRODUCTION

Mary Magdalene has been one of the most intriguing biblical figures in Western Christianity. Her elusive identity has allowed her representations to be restyled in every era, revealing to modern historians the popular perceptions, concerns and attitudes of past societies[1]. In the Victorian era, prostitution was perceived as a pressing social problem in British society and discussion of the topic appeared in, but was not limited to, newspapers, medical books, periodicals and public lectures, and the prostitute became a popular subject in art and literature. Mary Magdalene was the figure that Victorians used to personify British prostitution, and as a result, she became the paradigm of the nineteenth-century prostitute in England and Scotland. Although she was often romantically portrayed in art and literature as sinful, sorrowful and penitent, Mary Magdalene's identity in Victorian Britain was not fixed. In 1891, this ambiguity was explained by nineteenth-century art historian Anna Jameson, who wrote:

> Of all the personages who figure in history, in poetry, in art, Mary Magdalene is at once the most unreal and the most real: —the most *unreal*, if we attempt to fix her identity, which has been the subject of dispute for ages; the most *real*, if we consider her as having been, for ages, recognised and accepted in every Christian heart as the impersonation of the penitent sinner absolved through faith and love.[2]

Jameson reveals that not only was Mary Magdalene connected with sin and prostitution in nineteenth-century Britain but she was also associated with repentance and redemption. The 'real' Mary Magdalene, which Jameson referred to, was a combination of several women from the Bible, including Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany and an unnamed woman mentioned in Luke's gospel. However, not every Victorian believed in

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[1] Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1993), ix.

[2] Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1891), 343.

the amalgamation of these three women into one woman, and thus Mary Magdalene had multiple identities in Victorian Britain. However, the Victorians did not invent the controversy over her identity, and were not the first society to associate Mary Magdalene with prostitution.

The Biblical and Legendary Identities of Mary Magdalene in Western Christianity

The majority of Christians in Victorian Britain viewed the Bible as "a primary source of divine knowledge"[3]. During this time period, the established churches of England and Scotland, and the other Protestant denominations which formed in these nations, used the Authorized King James Version of the Christian Bible in which Mary Magdalene is mentioned by full name in all four gospels[4]. In the gospel of Luke, she is described as the woman who "...had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils."[5] Matthew uses her full name in his gospel and refers to Mary Magdalene as being one of Christ's female followers: "And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him. Among which was Mary Magdalene..."[6] Mary Magdalene is also referred to by full name in John's gospel at Christ's Crucifixion: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary

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[3] Julie Melnyk, "Women, writing and the creation of theological culture," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (New York Routledge, 2010), 39

[4] For this thesis, a modern King James Version of the Christian Bible will be used Although the Bible used by the established churches of England and Scotland, as well as the other popular Protestant denominations, was revised in the Victorian era, the passages which refer to Mary Magdalene, and the meanings implied, are very similar to the King James Version used in the twenty-first century For more information on this, please see David Daniell's *The Bible in English* (2003), Chapter Thirty-Six and Chapter Thirty-Seven

[5] *Holy Bible King James Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan Zondervan Publishing, 2002), Luke 8 2

[6] *Holy Bible King James Version*, Matthew 27 55-56

Magdalene."[7] The last event which mentions her by her full name in the New Testament is at the Resurrection of Christ. Mary Magdalene is not only listed as witnessing the Resurrection, but is given the credit as being the first to see the risen Christ. As described in Mark's gospel: "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils."[8] According to the sacred texts of Christianity, Mary Magdalene is referred to by her full name as the woman from whom Christ cast out seven devils, one of the women who followed Christ and who witnessed His Crucifixion, and the first person to see the Resurrection and preach the news of salvation. These events make up Mary Magdalene's biblical identity in Western Christianity.

However, although these are the only events in the Christian Bible to mention Mary Magdalene by full name, prior to the Victorian period, she was associated with other biblical women, including Mary of Bethany and an unnamed woman from Luke's gospel. From the first century until the sixth century, many of the early Church writers and preachers debated the role, or roles, they believed Mary Magdalene played in Scripture. Since there were six women named 'Mary' in the New Testament and the name 'Magdalene' derived from the town Magdala, some Christian writers, such as Ambrose of Milan and Jerome of Stridonium, concluded that more than one Mary Magdalene must have existed, while other writers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian of Carthage, said that there was only one Mary Magdalene[9]. Furthermore, the life Mary Magdalene led before the Resurrection also became a contested topic, as the

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[7] *Holy Bible King James Version*, John 19:25.
[8] *Holy Bible King James Version*, Mark 16:9.
[9] Richard Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Christian Tradition* (New York Peter Lang Inc , 1993), 153-55, 167-70 and 174-77.

first witness to the Resurrection was described as a sinner. Some writers, such as Hilary of Poitiers, asserted that the sins of the person to first see the risen Christ, Mary Magdalene, were not personal sins but the sins every woman carries with her as being a sister of the first sinner, Eve[10]. However, other writers, such as Hippolytus of Rome, asserted that these sins were the personal sins of Mary Magdalene and because Christ chose her to first reveal Himself and to spread the news of salvation, she must have been a redeemed sinner[11]. During the early centuries of the Christian Church, the distinction between the 'Marys' and the 'Mary Magdalenes' of the New Testament, and whether the first witness to the Resurrection was a sinner, were only part of the debate over Mary Magdalene's character and role in Scripture.

Since there were several figures in the New Testament who were not named, the early Christian writers tried to clarify the events these figures were involved in. For example, the gospels of Mark, John and Luke each mention anointings of Christ's feet by women. However, only some of the women are named, causing a discussion over whether these anointings were one event or separate events. In Mark's gospel, an unnamed woman anoints Christ's feet in Bethany with ointment from an alabaster box[12]. In John's gospel, Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus and Martha, also anoints Christ's feet with ointment[13]. In Luke's gospel, an unnamed woman, who is only described as 'sinful', also anoints Christ's feet with ointment from an alabaster box at Simon the Pharisee's house[14]. It was assumed by some of the early writers, such as Origen Adamantius, that these anointings were one event, but other writers, such as John

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[10] Atwood, 167.
[11] Atwood, 155.
[12] *Holy Bible King James Version*, Mark 14:3-9
[13] *Holy Bible King James Version*, John 12:1-8.
[14] *Holy Bible King James Version*, Luke 7:36-59.

Chrysostom, argued that the anointings were separate events and carried out by different women[15]. Since some writers assumed that Mary Magdalene was a converted sinner, she was linked to the unnamed woman mentioned in Luke's gospel whose anointing was viewed as an act of penance for her sins. Therefore, by linking Mary Magdalene to Luke's unnamed woman, Mary Magdalene became associated with sin, and since the greatest sin a woman could commit during this time period was lechery, Mary Magdalene's sins were linked to her sexuality. Linking Mary Magdalene to the unnamed woman referred to in Luke's gospel also connected her to Mary of Bethany, because Mary of Bethany also anointed Christ's feet in John's Gospel[16], and Mary Magdalene became the sister of Lazarus and Martha of Bethany.

Although it was still being debated, Mary Magdalene's association with Luke's unnamed sinner and Mary of Bethany caused her to be linked to prostitution, sin and redemption. In 591, to end the controversy surrounding her identity and role in Scripture, Pope Gregory the Great delivered a homily concerning Mary Magdalene, which stated:

> When I think of Mary's repentance I am more than disposed to weep than to speak. Whose heart is so stony that this sinful woman's tears wouldn't soften it with her example of repentance?...This woman, whom Luke calls a sinner, John names Mary. I believe that she is the same Mary of whom Mark says that seven demons had been cast out.[17]

Gregory's homily linked Mary Magdalene to both Luke's unnamed woman and Mary of Bethany, but more importantly, it associated her with sin. This homily also marked her act of repentance as remarkable, and therefore, this event became an important aspect of

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[15] Atwood, 156 and 170

[16] *Holy Bible King James Version,* John 12 3

[17] Pope Gregory the Great, "Homily 33," found in *Forty Gospel Homilies Gregory the Great,* translated from Latin by Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI Cistercian Publications, 1990), 269

her life in Western Christian theology[18]. With these words, Gregory created the most consistent and arguably the most popular representation of Mary Magdalene in European history: the penitent sinner.

In the medieval era, Mary Magdalene was generally associated with sin, repentance and redemption in Europe, making her the patron saint of sinners, prostitutes and lepers, and the second most venerated saint after the Blessed Virgin Mary[19]. As a result of her popularity, many hagiographies were written about her life. In the tradition of medieval hagiographies, it was common for writers to over exaggerate the lives of saints and Mary Magdalene was no exception; she was depicted as the most sinful woman before her reformation and the most saintly woman after, which demonstrated to the laity the power of Christian forgiveness[20]. Although there were several examples of sinful saints in the medieval Christian tradition, the most famous story was that of Mary Magdalene The many hagiographies which detailed her life as a reformed prostitute turned her into a Christian legend. Mary Magdalene's connection to sin, repentance and redemption make up her legendary identity in Western Christianity, and the act of anointing Christ's feet at Simon the Pharisee's house was seen as Mary Magdalene's conversion story, where she was transformed from a sinful woman to a righteous woman.

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[18] It should be noted that only the Western Christian Church followed Gregory's amalgamation of the three Marys and the Eastern Christian Church always maintained the three woman as separate biblical figures This is demonstrated in the feast days celebrated in both the Eastern Church and the Western Church In the Eastern Church, the three women have different feast days Luke's unnamed sinner on 31 March, Mary of Bethany on 18 March, and Mary Magdalene on 22 July In the medieval era, the Western Church did not celebrate the feast day of Luke's sinner or Mary of Bethany but only Mary Magdalene on 22 July

[19] Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots Prostitution in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol 1, no 1 (July 1990) 17

[20] Helen Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in Mediaeval Literature* (Baltimore The Johns Hopkins Press, 1950), 60

As a result of her representation as a reformed prostitute, many twentieth-century writers have discussed the effect Gregory's homily had on Mary Magdalene's legacy within Christianity and European history. It has been argued by some, such as Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Carla Ricci and Rebecca Lea McCarthy, that by amalgamating these three biblical women, and associating her with sin and prostitution, Gregory reduced the importance of Mary Magdalene's role as the preacher of the salvation, thereby cheapening her importance within the Christian tradition. However, Gregory's amalgamation of the three women can also be seen as giving Mary Magdalene a more significant role in Christianity, as she was able to overcome her sinful life through repentance and become so loved and admired by Christ that he chose her to deliver the message of his Resurrection to the apostles. In this view, Mary Magdalene became Christianity's answer to Eve. Since Eve was responsible for humanity's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Mary Magdalene gave humanity another chance at paradise when she announced the news of salvation. Nevertheless, which ever way Gregory's homily is viewed in the twentieth and twenty-first century, what is made clear from history is that his amalgamation was rarely questioned in medieval Europe, and Mary Magdalene was commonly viewed as both a penitent sinner and the first witness to the Resurrection.

However, in the sixteenth century, after almost one thousand years after Gregory's homily, Mary Magdalene's identity once again was debated. During the European Reformation, Protestant theologians, such as Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, Josse van Clichtove and John Calvin, questioned the accuracy of Gregory's sixth-century amalgamation and argued that there was no evidence in Christian Scripture to relate Mary Magdalene with Luke's unnamed sinner or Mary of Bethany. The Catholic Bishop of

Rochester John Fisher and Augustinian Marc de Grandval disagreed with the Protestant theologians and argued that Gregory's interpretation of Mary Magdalene's identity was correct[21]. During the sixteenth century, Mary Magdalene became the true embodiment of the Counter-Reformation spirit as the debate over her identity formed a Catholic versus Protestant divide, as the Catholics refused to back down in fear that their admittance in her misidentification would open the door to further doctrinal questions[22] The debate over her identity in the sixteenth century can be used as an example of how Mary Magdalene has been employed in history as a coded way of discussing society's problems.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, under the influence of Protestantism, Mary Magdalene's popularity in English and Scottish culture dwindled. However, in the nineteenth century, as the middle class began to establish themselves in terms of respectability and morality, a great concern over what Beatrice Webb called "the consciousness of sin" began to sweep across Britain[23], and Mary Magdalene's representation as a reformed prostitute once again became popular in English and Scottish culture. This displeased many Protestant clergyman, including Reverend Osborne Gordon, who argued in a nineteenth-century sermon that "there is no event, nothing whatever beyond the sameness of the name"[24] to connect the three women together. Nevertheless, in the Victorian era, even though Protestant theology deemed otherwise, it was more common for Mary Magdalene to be portrayed by her legendary

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[21] Haskins, 250

[22] Haskins, 251

[23] Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London Routledge, 1990), 56

[24] Osborne Gordon, "Sermon XI, St Luke viii 2, 'Mary called Magdalene '," in *A Memoir with a selection of his writings,* edited by George Marshall (London, Parker and Co , 1885), 214

identity, the repentant prostitute, than her biblical identity, the first witness to the Resurrection, and as a result, several charitable institutions which rescued and reformed fallen women were established in her name. It is the revival of her legendary identity as a repentant prostitute in Victorian Britain which frames this thesis. By studying her representation as a prostitute, what can be learned about English and Scottish culture during the Victorian era? What caused her legendary identity to be revived? And what meanings and messages were encoded in her portrayal as a prostitute, and what purpose did they serve?

In previous studies of Mary Magdalene, most historians have focused on her influence and representations in the medieval period because this is when her popularity reached its highest in European history. Although she is referred to in several studies on Victorian prostitution and philanthropy, Mary Magdalene and her representations only play a minimal role in this research. The feminist research conducted on Mary Magdalene in the 1970s and 1980s primarily focused on reclaiming her first-century identity and did not necessarily focus on her representations throughout history and what role these representations played in a particular culture. Despite her immense popularity among artists and writers in the nineteenth century, a comprehensive work centering on the legendary identity of Mary Magdalene has yet to be written. This presents a void not only in the historical analysis of Mary Magdalene and her representations, but also in the historical inquiry of female sexuality and gender identity. By exploring the Victorian portrayal of the prostitute in the arts and social sciences, I wish to fill this lacuna by illuminating how representations of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute were used as a catalyst in British culture for middle-class Victorians to explore their own beliefs,

assumptions and attitudes regarding female sexuality, Christian charity and institutional rescue work. By establishing the close and often inseparable connection between Mary Magdalene and Victorian fallen women in British culture, this thesis argues that the representation of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute was used to help conventionalize prostitution for the middle class, and make rescuing and reforming fallen women a worthy Christian cause.

Religion, Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century History

Although gender and religion have been two popular subjects of analysis among modern historians, studying history from a gendered religious perspective is only a recent phenomenon, emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries's recent work, *Women, Gender, and Religious Culture in Britain,* attempts to demonstrate the important connection between religion and gender in nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain. Morgan and deVries discuss the historiography of gender in the twenty-first century and the 'religious turn' that has taken place in gender history since the mid 1980s[25]. This 'religious turn' refers to the way historians have started to include religion in their gender research, and has led the way for further studies to be conducted on the influence of religion in the shaping of gender identities in past societies. The lack of coherence between the two historical fields of religion and gender is discussed by Sarah Williams, who argues that until recently, the social history of religion and the history of gender developed into two distinct but inter-related fields because social historians of religion remained topically and methodologically focused on class while gender historians marginalized the role religion and spirituality played in the

[25] Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries, "Introduction," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (New York Routledge, 2010), 2

construction of gender identities[26]. Furthermore, Morgan and de Vries conclude that although gender historians have started to include religious and spiritual factors in their studies, social historians of religion have produced little research on women and gender[27]. Morgan and deVries therefore call for more research to be done on the intersection of religion and gender in the study of women in past societies.

Two decades earlier, Gail Malmgreen's *Religion in the Lives of English Women*, also called for more attention to be paid toward the interlacings of gender and religion. In her book, which was one of the first collections to acknowledge the absence of gender and identity in British church history, Malmgreen attempts to fill this chasm by demonstrating the importance religion played in shaping female identity in the Victorian era[28]. In her introduction, Malmgreen writes: "If feminist historians ignore, or confine themselves to the wilder fringes of female spirituality, we will have forfeited our understanding of the mental universe of the no doubt substantial majority of women who were believers."[29] Malmgreen also argues that it is necessary for any historian studying women's spirituality to remember the dominant paradox and "complex tension between religion as 'opiate' and as an embodiment of ideological and institutional sexism, and religion as transcendent and liberating force."[30] With these arguments in mind, Malmgreen reminds feminist historians not to forget that women first entered the public sphere through religious endeavours, such as philanthropy, long before they became

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[26] Sarah C. Williams, "Is there a Bible in the house? Gender, religion and family culture," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26.

[27] Morgan and deVries, 2.

[28] Williams, 26.

[29] Gail Malmgreen, "Introduction," in *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, edited by Gail Malmgreen (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 3.

[30] Malmgreen, 7.

involved in the suffrage movement and politics[31]. Malmgreen's book is effective in demonstrating the importance religion played not only in the lives of English women but also in the shaping of their identity and sexuality during this period.

More recently, Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain* also demonstrates the importance religion played in the formation of gender identity in the nineteenth-century Britain. Brown's main focus is to demonstrate that "woman, rather than cities or social class, emerge as the principle source of explanation for the patterns of religiosity that were observed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[32] Brown argues that the religiosity of Britain's Christianity changed at the end of the eighteenth century, and for the next 150 years: "femininity became sacred *and nothing but sacred.* The two became inextricably intertwined, creating a mutual enslavement in which each was the discursive 'space of exteriority' for the other."[33] Brown contends that because women became the more spiritual gender in the nineteenth century, religiosity, defined as religious devotion, became a feminine trait and as a result, women gained more agency and power in religious contexts, making masculinity the antithesis of religiosity[34]. This theory has been labeled the 'feminisation of religion' thesis and although his work has been acknowledged as an important stepping stone in the scholarship on gender and religion, Brown has been heavily critiqued for his use of this thesis.

Morgan and deVries challenge the 'feminisation of religion' thesis, and argue that Brown's one-dimensional approach misrepresents the multitude of conflicting gender roles which emerged among the heterogeneity of Britain's religious cultures. Morgan

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[31] Malmgreen, 5.

[32] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 9.

[33] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 59.

[34] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain,* 58-59.

and deVries question the validity of this thesis by asking, if women were thought to be the more spiritual gender, why were they excluded from most positions of authority in religious institutions?[35] Sarah Williams also challenges the 'feminisation of religion' thesis by stating: "to deploy one singular Christian discourse about gender as encompassing and typical is at best to simplify and at worst to gravely misrepresent the diverse spectrum of ideas about gender, many of which were locally, denominationally, theologically, even occupationally specific."[36] Also challenging Brown's argument, Joy Dixon asks: "have Brown and other proponents of the 'feminisation of religion' thesis simply taken what was a Victorian cultural construction and naturalized it as a historical reality?"[37] Although Brown is successful in demonstrating the significant effect religion had on middle-class culture and that the 'feminisation of religion' thesis can be applied to some Victorian women, Morgan, deVries, Williams and Dixon clearly prove that this thesis should not be applied to all nineteenth-century women because it overemphasizes the role religion played in the lives of women, assumes that all Christian churches and denominations viewed women the same way, and analyzes all Victorian women according to middle-class ideals.

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's book, *Family Fortunes*, also examines the influence of religion in the lives of women in Victorian Britain, and focuses specifically on the influence of religion on the middle class. The 'middling groups', according to Davidoff and Hall, began to take shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and as property owners who were not aristocracy or gentry, the middle classes

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[35] Morgan and deVries, "Introduction", 8.
[36] Williams, 17.
[37] Morgan and deVries, "Introduction", 8.

were anxious to break away and distinguish themselves from the upper class[38]. Hall and Davidoff argue that the middle class was not a cohesive group and define the lower middle class as including men who were educated in a small private day school or free grammar school, who ran a single person enterprise which had limited credit and spending capability and mainly used family labour to operate their business. In contrast, the upper middle class consisted of men educated at a private academy or a fee paid grammar school, who ran an enterprise comprised of a partnership or trust which had long-term credit from a bank and which employed an outside workforce rather than their own family[39]. Although the group was not unified, Davidoff and Hall demonstrate that religion was used to unite the bourgeois class, and that by the mid-nineteenth century evangelicalism "had made a religious idiom the cultural norm for the middle class."[40] However, although Davidoff and Hall regard religion as a contributing factor in the formation of middle-class identity and the construction of gender roles, the main emphasis of their book is to demonstrate how "gender and class always operate together, that consciousness of class always takes a gendered form."[41] By this, Davidoff and Hall convey that gendered identity is always particular to a specific class, and concepts of femininity and masculinity should be treated by historians as class specific and not all encompassing. Therefore, the feminine ideals of the middle class should not be applied to women from the upper or lower classes.

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[38] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 18

[39] Davidoff and Hall, 24

[40] Davidoff and Hall, 25

[41] Davidoff and Hall, 13

In *Myths of Sexuality*, Lynda Nead employs a very similar argument as Davidoff and Hall, and argues that religiosity became the defining characteristic of the Victorian middle class because:

> The middle class was composed of a diverse range of occupational groups and levels of income; what was important, therefore, was the creation of a coherent and distinct class identity which would set the middle class apart from the social and economic classes above and below it.[42]

Religion played an important role not only in the shaping of middle-class identity but also in creating class hegemony. Nead defines class hegemony in the nineteenth century as "the processes involved in creating a cohesive middle-class identity and maintaining a consensus amongst a number of competing tendencies "[43] Furthermore, Nead asserts that class coherence was established through shared beliefs of respectability and morality, which were heavily influenced by religion, and maintains that what gave the middle class their identity was their insistence on specific norms of sexual behaviour, separating themselves from the upper and lower classes[44].

However, although respectability was used to distinguish the middle class from the upper and lower classes, it did not mean the same thing for men and women. Respectability for women meant locating themselves within the private sphere, restricting most employment opportunities, therefore making many middle-class women economically dependent on the men in their lives, such as their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons[45]. This, according to Nead, created a dichotomy between the middle-class woman and the working-class woman because women in the lower ranks of society

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[42] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford Basil Blackwell Ltd , 1988), 5

[43] Nead, 5

[44] Nead, 156

[45] Nead, 29

were obligated to work in the public sphere as a result of the low levels of income among this class. Economic necessity made it nearly impossible for a working-class woman to be economically dependant on her husband (or the other men in her life) and therefore they were not seen by the middle class as 'respectable' women. As a result, working-class women were often characterized as deviant because they could not be defined in terms of middle-class respectability, as they worked in the public sphere, on the streets or in factories or shops. Nead demonstrates in her study on representations of Victorian women that the popular notions of middle-class and working-class women were societal constructs, and that the dichotomy between the two classes of women created a middle-class woman who was defined in contrast to her lower ranking, independent and 'deviant' sister. Nead's research demonstrates that the Victorians did not view middle-class women and working-class women in the same light, and therefore historians should not assume that the ideals which existed for middle-class women were the same as those which existed for working-class women.

Using the same framework of constructed gender identities, Linda Mahood explores how Scottish society, and in more detail how Glasgow, dealt with prostitution in the nineteenth century. In her introduction to *The Magdalenes*, Mahood states:

> This study differs from other studies of Victorian prostitution in so as the 'prostitute' is not treated as a valid observational or subject category with numbers to be counted, characteristics investigate, and history documented, but as an emerging label or censure...For purposes of this research the term 'prostitute' has been conceptually defined as a censure applied to women whose dress, behaviour, physical appearance, or vocation caused them to be labeled as 'prostitutes' within the framework of the discourse, as defined by middle-class observers.[46]

[46] Mahood, 13.

Mahood's treatment of the term prostitute as a constructed label or censor is supported through her analysis of how moral reform activities helped to not only construct the sexually delinquent female by middle-class standards of moral and sexual behaviour, but also assisted in the control and regulation of working-class sexuality through the use of lock hospitals and magdalene asylums[47]. By accepting that the Victorian prostitute was a social construct, it can then be understood that the term was neither uniform or concurrent and could be applied to any woman who was a "living violation of bourgeois notions of female sexual propriety"[48]. The construction of the term 'prostitute' as a negative label applied to 'deviant' women who strayed from middle-class ideals illuminates the strict dichotomy which existed between the 'respectable' woman and the 'other' Victorian woman.

In *Prostitution Prevention and Reform in England*, Paula Bartley argues that for the Victorian middle class, poverty was associated with immorality, and therefore immorality was often linked to the working class, who were the poorest members of British society[49]. During the nineteenth century, Bartley contends, working-class women became the face of deviancy and immorality as the majority of middle-class reformers believed that almost all prostitutes came from the lower classes because of the low level of wages available to women, and because of the corruption which spread rapidly in Britain's city slums. The middle class believed the very worst about the working class, whose homes and dwellings were viewed as breeding grounds of vice and sin because families often lived in a one bedroom house and shared beds, allowing children, and more

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[47] Mahood, 3
[48] Mahood, 53
[49] Paula Bartley, *Prostitution Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London Routledge, 2000), 10

particularly young females, to be exposed to sexual experiences at an early age, therefore causing these girls to be more inclined to develop deviant habits and indecencies than middle-class girls[50]. Bartley's work on prostitution, and her further analysis on its prevention and reform movements[51], further supports Mahood and Nead's claims that deviancy was constructed in Victorian Britain by the middle class in an attempt to separate the respectable and moral woman from the deviant and immoral woman.

In addition to the divide between females in the middle and working classes, women were also separated into two categories: the virgin and the whore, or the Madonna and the Magdalene. According to Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, the Virgin Mary, or the Madonna, was used to represent female sexual purity while Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, represented female sexual delinquency[52]. Sue Morgan argues that Victorian "discourses of sexuality and religion were deeply imbricated in the making of modern British culture."[53] Morgan states that Victorian sexual discourse was not cohesive in society and that gender, class and religion played an important role in the formation of sexual ideals. This argument was exemplified in an earlier work by Joan Perkin who demonstrates the double sexual standard which existed for Victorian men and women. Middle-class men and women did not share the same standards of sexual conduct in society and this created a double standard of sexual morality which allowed Victorian men to be sexually promiscuous before and after marriage without any social repercussions, while women were expected to remain virgins until marriage and to be

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[50] Bartley, 10

[51] Bartley, chapters 1-4

[52] Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Elliot* (Athens, Ohio Ohio University Press, 2001), 5

[53] Sue Morgan, " 'The Word made flesh' women, religion and sexual cultures," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (New York Routledge, 2010), 159

sexually faithful to their husbands throughout the union[54]. As a result of this double standard, the construction of female middle-class identity was heavily influenced by the Madonna/Magdalene paradigm in Victorian Britain and a woman's respectability was judged solely on her sexual demeanor and reputation. Interestingly, although a working-class woman who strayed from Victorian middle-class standards of femininity was labeled a 'prostitute', middle-class women who took part in sexual experiences outside of marriage were called 'fallen' women because, unlike working-class women, middle-class women had a pedestal of respectability from which to fall. The double standard of morality and the constructed terms 'prostitute' and 'fallen' woman further support the claim that gender and class are important aspects when studying religion and culture in Victorian Britain.

Culture, Religion and the Victorian Middle Class

According to theorist Stuart Hall, culture is a set of shared beliefs and language systems, and representation is what links meaning and language to a specific culture[55]. To represent, according to Hall, is to symbolize a wider set of meanings, and meanings are exchanged in culture through language which can be expressed through words or visual images[56]. "Cultural representations," argues Lynda Nead "are circulated and consumed in specific ways and the meanings which they construct are different from those produced at other levels of social practice."[57] Nead also contends that visual culture is produced for a certain audience and is used as a way to express social

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[54] Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 74.

[55] Stuart Hall, *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997), 21 and 15.

[56] Hall, 16 and18.

[57] Nead, 8.

meaning[58]. In the same way, Callum Brown notes that written culture was tremendously influential in the shaping of the middle class in Britain during the nineteenth century[59]. This study will examine material culture, such as paintings, drawings and stained glass windows, as well as written sources, such as novels, poetry, newspapers, periodicals and medical books, to explore how the language and meanings expressed in Mary Magdalene's cultural representations as a prostitute relate to Victorian middle-class narratives concerning prostitution.

Both institutional and denominational religion and Christian religiosity were highly influential over middle-class life and culture in Victorian England and Scotland. Religion can be defined, in secular terms, as an internal and external phenomenon made up of rituals, doctrines and codes of ethics[60], and Callum Brown describes Christian religiosity as: "the people's subscription to protocols [rituals or customs of behaviour] of personal identity which they derive from Christian expectations, or discourses, evident in their own time and place."[61] The majority of middle-class British citizens were Protestants who Reverend John Hunt described as Christian believers whose faith and cultural identity stood apart or in contrast to the Church of Rome[62]. In the nineteenth-century, the Anglican Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, both Protestant, were the established churches of each nation. In his book, *Church and State in Modern Britain,* Richard Brown defines the term 'church' as:

> a large, formal organization with a hierarchy of officials...[which] claims social exclusiveness in a given territorial area in relation to a given ethnic

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[58] Nead, 8.

[59] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain,* 18.

[60] Richard Brown, *Church and State in Modern Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1991), 92-93.

[61] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain,* 12.

[62] Rev John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Gibbings & Co., Limited, 1896), vi

> group. A church which identifies itself with the state becomes part of the 'Establishment' and is integrated into the socio-economic structure of society.[63]

Both the Church of England and the Church of Scotland meet Richard Brown's definition and were highly involved in Victorian society, both socially and politically.

The Church of England, established in the sixteenth century by Henry VIII, was considered Protestant, a branch of Christianity which distinguishes itself from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and its followers fell under two positions in nineteenth-century England: Calvinist and Arminian[64]. The distinction between the two positions was that Calvinists believed that salvation was predetermined while Arminians believed that salvation was determined through "justification by faith"[65]. The formal creed of Anglicanism was embodied in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, a doctrine which was established in the sixteenth century to distinguish the church from Roman Catholic and continental Protestant beliefs[66]. The Church of England was described by nineteenth-century Protestant crusader Charles Newdegate as a Christianity devoted to the reading of the Bible[67]. Additionally, the Victorian Church of England was considered a "practical" Christian church, involved both socially and politically in the community[68]. Socially, the Church was involved in the giving of alms within each parish[69], and politically, the Church was represented in the House of Lords by its twenty-six bishops and two archbishops[70]. The Church was also visible in English law, having two courts, the

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[63] Richard Brown, 95.
[64] Richard Brown, 99
[65] Richard Brown, 99.
[66] Hunt, 272-73.
[67] Walter L. Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* (London: University of Missouri, 1982), 165.
[68] Richard Brown, 100.
[69] Richard Brown, 100.
[70] Richard Brown, 97.

bishops' court and archdeacons' court, and was the local authority in matters relating to wills[71].

The Church of Scotland was also inaugurated in the sixteenth century and Presbyterianism was central to its theology[72]. The theology of the Scottish Established Church is based on the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1643, which states

> But that Churche which is visible, and sene to the eye, hathe three tokens, or markes, wherby it may be discerned. First, the Worde of God conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament, which as it is above the autoritie of the same churche, and onely sufficient to instruct us in all things concernynge salvation, so is it left for all degreed of men to reade and understand. For without this Worde, neither churche, concile, or decree can establishe any point touching salvation. The second is the holy Sacrements, to witt, of Baptisme and the Lordes Supper; which Sacramentes Christ hathe left unto us as holie signes and seales of God's promesses...The third marke of this Church is Ecclesiasticall discipline, which standeth in admonition and correction of fautes.[73]

This particular section of the Westminster Confession is valuable as it emphasizes important aspects of Presbyterian belief, such as the importance of the Bible, the establishment of only two sacraments, and the role of the Church in matters of discipline. The Church of Scotland was organized as a democratic hierarchy and similar to the Church of England, was involved in the community both socially and politically[74]. Socially, the Church was involved in providing aid and charity, and the congregation of each parish established a kirk session, which was the "congregational court in matters relating to discipline and religious provision."[75] During the nineteenth century, the Church of Scotland was highly influential in politics. The religious schism of 1843, also

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[71] Richard Brown, 97.

[72] *The St Giles' Lectures, First Series The Scottish Church from the Earliest Times to 1881,* edited by W Chalmers (Edinburgh and London: W & R Chalmers, 1881), 358.

[73] John Carswell, *The Book of Common Order*, edited by Thomas McLauchlan (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1873), 33-36.

[74] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 17-18.

[75] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707,* 18.

known as the Disruption, caused the established church to lose control of the general assembly, and over thirty-five percent of its clergyman and approximately forty percent of its adherents left to join the Free Church of Scotland[76]. Members of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland disagreed over the involvement of the state in church affairs. However, the schism did not last long, and the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland reunited in 1929.

Although the majority of middle-class citizens followed Protestantism, individual religious devotion was anything but cohesive in nineteenth-century England and Scotland, as many middle-class citizens followed Protestant denominations and not the established churches. In contrast to established churches, Richard Brown asserts that denominations are most often not supported by the majority of the population and are made up of "a hierarchy of officials and a bureaucratic structure, though there is a greater stress of the role of the laity than in churches."[77] Callum Brown argues that Scotland's multifarious terrain created significant regional differences in church life and although the Church of Scotland was the established church, it was common for other Christian denominations to thrive in some regions of the country[78]. Similarly, Richard Brown suggests that Anglicanism was only dominant in southern England, which was where the majority of the population lived and was the wealthiest section of the country[79].

Although religious devotion was diverse in Victorian England and Scotland, a popular movement emerged in the eighteenth century which dominated Christian religiosity in the nineteenth century: evangelicalism. Evangelicalism, popularized by

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[76] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, 21.
[77] Richard Brown, 95.
[78] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, 5.
[79] Richard Brown, 426.

George Whitefield in Britain during the mid eighteenth century, worked both with the established churches and Protestant denominations, and introduced new forms of beliefs and practices[80]. The main goal of evangelicalism was salvation through Christian education[81]. Although evangelicalism was aimed at all people who lived in Britain, its followers mainly engaged themselves with the reformation of those who were considered disreputable, such as prostitutes and thieves, and this movement became commonly associated with 'new birth'[82]. The growth of this movement in England hastened the erosion of the established church's influence and provided more opportunity for non-Anglican denominations to become popular[83]. The evangelical concept in Britain was neither a church nor a denomination but a movement within both, and as a result, was able to accommodate many different theological traditions and orientations to become a large, translocal, voluntary association fit for the new industrial age[84]. This thesis will not limit its sources to those produced by a particular church or denomination but will look collectively at the visual and written representations of Mary Magdalene produced by the Protestant middle classes, whose cultural beliefs were heavily influenced by evangelicalism.

By exploring who the Victorians thought Mary Magdalene was and the use of her representations as a prostitute to rescue and reform women, this study will challenge the

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[80] David Hempton, "Evangelicalism in English and Irish Society, 1780-1840," in *Evangelicalism Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1900,* edited by Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 156.

[81] Checkland, 62.

[82] Henry S. Stout, "George Whitefield in Three Countries," in *Evangelicalism Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1900,* edited by Mark A Noll, David W Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York· Oxford University Press, 1994), 68

[83] Hempton, 162.

[84] Stout, 68-69.

'feminisation of religion' thesis by demonstrating that although religiosity was considered a feminine trait by the middle class, it was a trait that was class specific, and lower-class women were not seen as having the same natural religiosity and respectability as their middle-class sisters. Also, by examining how she was portrayed in art and literature, this study will contribute to the overall research on religion, class and gender by demonstrating that the representation of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute was often produced for a middle-class audience, and therefore expressed the popular attitudes and concerns held by this class concerning the construction, treatment and reformation of prostitutes and fallen women in Victorian society.

This thesis will examine representations of prostitution, the prostitute, the fallen woman and Mary Magdalene found in art, fiction, poetry, sermons, newspapers, periodicals, journals and medical books from 1840 to 1903, and will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss Victorian representations of the prostitute and prostitution in the social sciences. Using non-fiction publications produced by the medical profession, religious moralists and feminist reformers, this chapter will analyze how the prostitute and the many different assumptions and narratives which surrounded her life and occupation were constructed in Victorian Britain. The second section will explore how the Victorian prostitute was portrayed outside of the social sciences, and will examine her popular representations in art, fiction and poetry. The last section of this thesis will look at representations of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute in British culture. It will discuss how Mary Magdalene was depicted in the social sciences, art and literature, and how these representations relate to the assumptions and popular narratives which

surrounded prostitution and the prostitute in British society. Was Mary Magdalene the Victorian prostitute, or was the Victorian prostitute Mary Magdalene?

CHAPTER ONE

'Sin in a satin dress':
Prostitution in the Victorian Social Sciences

In the Victorian era, prostitution was a popular topic of discussion and debate in British culture. It was discussed in newspapers, periodicals, medical books and public lectures. The topic of prostitution, and the many different depictions and opinions surrounding the prostitute, created a subject that was highly controversial. Medical doctors, religious moralists and feminist reformers all took part in the discussion of prostitution, as they attempted to define prostitution, as well as its causes, effects and future in British society. But why was prostitution such a popular topic of discussion? Who was the Victorian prostitute and how was she portrayed? Was it possible for prostitutes to be redeemed and for prostitution to stop? By looking at the answers to these questions produced in the social sciences, this chapter will explore the attitudes which surrounded prostitution, and examine how the prostitute and her polysemic identities were constructed in Victorian Britain. The first section of this chapter will look at prostitution as a social threat, and the construction of the prostitute as a 'deviant' female. The last two sections will look at the prostitute as a social victim in British society, and explore the role medical doctors, religious moralists and feminist reformers played in the creation and continuation of this representation.

Victorian Prostitution as a Social Threat

In the nineteenth century, the prostitute was often labeled under a variety of terms. For example, articles describing a prostitute in local newspapers could have referred to her by any of the following epithets: common prostitute, unfortunate, fallen

woman, woman of ill-repute, nymph of the pave, the frail sister, woman of the town, or abandoned female[1]. Regardless of the chosen name ascribed to her, it would have been clear to the Victorian reader what type of woman was being discussed. The prostitute was a broad and complex term which was applied to a range of female identities and behaviours which transgressed from middle-class ideals[2]. The term was constructed on the basis of gender and class, as the prostitute was almost universally associated with women of the working class. She was also characterized as 'deviant' and this deviance was constructed in terms of her difference from the ideal 'respectable' female[3]. 'Respectable' femininity in Victorian Britain was understood in terms of piety, dependence and delicacy, while 'deviant' femininity was understood in terms of immorality, independence and roughness. Furthermore, women during this time period were expected to uphold both public and private morality through their respectability, as they were often construed as the more spiritual sex in Victorian culture[4]. However, women working in prostitution contradicted the notion of the 'respectable' woman, and were seen as a danger to the British family, nation and empire because prostitutes were believed to spread immorality, sin and disease.

The cult of domesticity flourished in middle-class society during the mid-nineteenth century and prescribed the proper roles for a woman to be daughter, wife and mother. Sarah Ellis, a popular writer of domestic ideologues in the nineteenth century, described true womanhood in her book *The Women of England,* and wrote that: "The

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[1] Frances Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1979), 12

[2] Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London Routledge, 1990),72

[3] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford Basil Blackwell Ltd , 1988), 95

[4] Nead, 24

happiness of the whole human family, and especially of man, supplies them [women] with a never-ending motive. Nature and religion are both on their side- the one to prompt, the other to lure them on."[5] Similarly, in 1869, writing about the current state of the relationship between husband and wife, Lynn Linton wrote: "She is but a servant to him; an honoured servant if you will, but a servant all the same; and while she has not the means of self-support she can be nothing else, and must show herself obedient if she would be grateful." [6] As these examples demonstrate, within the cult of domesticity, the ideal middle-class woman was an obedient, pious and loving housewife, whose happiness came from her duties in the domestic sphere of the home, while the middle-class man's duty was to work outside the home, in the public sphere. In the Victorian era, the separation of work and home drastically shaped middle-class ideals, and helped construct the dichotomy between the 'respectable' and 'deviant' woman.

The act of prostitution constituted the regular exchange of sex for money, which meant that the prostitute could be both independent from the men in her life and that she worked in the public sphere, where most cash transactions took place[7]. The qualities of cash and independence, which were usually only associated with middle-class men, caused prostitution to not only challenge the perceived gender roles of this time period, but to also threaten them. In 1865, an article published in *The Magdalen's Friend*, a monthly periodical written for middle-class rescue workers, stated:

> It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of woman's influence. Beginning from birth, it ends only with death, during life evading the whole moral and social spheres, in its quality of light or darkness, with the blessing

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[5] Sarah Ellis, *The Women of England Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London Fisher, Sons & Co , 1839), 308-09

[6] E Lynn Linton, *Ourselves A Series of Essays on Women* (London G Routledge, 1869), 227-26

[7] Nead, 95

> of love or the curse of sin...The world's best teachers of what is good- if they offer evil in its stead but little hope is left to humanity.[8]

This passage demonstrates that morality was viewed as an essential component within the ideology of British society, and women were believed to play an important role in the formation and preservation of both public and private morality. The emphasis on the important role women held in both the 'moral and social spheres' of society explains why prostitution was seen as a threat to British society. When a woman deviated from her 'natural' role in society, not only as a wife and mother but as a moral leader, she endangered the whole society. Since the moral condition of society was believed to derive from the moral standards of its women, if a woman became immoral, she was seen as weakening not only her family and society, but also the British nation and its empire[9]. Since it was feared that more and more women were entering into prostitution during the Victorian era, the prostitute became a special object of scrutiny due to the important responsibility women were believed to hold in the morality of British society.

Middle-class respectability was adapted around a complex set of notions and representations which defined the ideal standards of behaviour and appearance for women, and prostitutes contradicted these standards[10]. Through her rough voice, garish dress, excessive drinking, vulgar language and sexual promiscuity, the prostitute jeopardized middle-class respectability since she exhibited unacceptable forms of behaviour and appearance[11]. Lynda Nead suggests that the obsession with an individual's physical appearance relates to the popular Victorian sciences of

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[8] "The Influence of Women," *The Magdalen's Friend: A Monthly Magazine*, vol. 5, edited by a clergyman (London: William Macintosh, 1864), 171-73.

[9] Nead, 92.

[10] Nead, 28.

[11] Mahood, 72.

physiognomy and phrenology. The science of physiognomy, originating in Britain during the seventeenth century but becoming increasingly popular during the Victorian period, proposed that a person's character was depicted in the manifestation of their face and the form of their body. The science of phrenology suggested that the fundamental aspects of someone's nature was located in particular areas of the brain, allowing their character to be assessed through the bumps on an individual's head[12]. Working together, physiognomy and phrenology allowed for further classification of respectability and deviancy, and a prostitute was defined as deviant by her physical appearance and behaviour[13].

In particular, the dress of the prostitute was often associated with her immoral tendencies and it is for this reason that the appearance of the prostitute was often scrutinized. Fashion, argues Sharon Marcus, not only identified who you were in the Victorian era but was particularly influenced by the female gaze[14]. As a result, women were clear in their distinction between two forms of fashion: 'finery' and 'honest dress'[15]. 'Finery', Mariana Valverde states, was commonly linked to the moral flaws of the wearer and to lack of virtue, while 'honest dress' was associated with respectable morals and with women of the middle class. The dichotomy between 'honest dress' and 'finery' often caused fashion not to be associated with the clothes, but with the socioeconomic and moral status of the wearer[16]. Since prostitutes were known for their 'love of dress' and 'finery' fashion, medical doctors William Tait and William Acton even list it as a

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[12] Nead, 170

[13] Nead, 171

[14] Sharon Marcus, "Reflections on Victorian Fashion Plates," *differences A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol 14, no 15 (2005) 16

[15] Mariana Valverde, "The Love of Finery Fashion and The Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-century Social Discourse," *Victorian Studies*, Vol 32, No 2 (Winter, 1989) 168

[16] Valverde, 168

cause of prostitution in their publications, the belief that one could always be spotted in public by her dress and appearance became a popular assumption[17]. To the Victorian middle class, prostitution stood for immorality and was seen as spreading moral corruption throughout British society by causing women to deviate from middle-class gender roles, modes of behaviour and standards of dress[18].

To sin was to commit an act that was "in opposition to God's law"[19] and since prostitution involved sex between unmarried couples, which was in opposition to the Christian sacrament of marriage, it was considered a sin. Although almost all writers and lecturers described the act of prostitution as a sin, the focus on prostitution as spreading physical diseases was more often discussed in the mid-Victorian period because venereal diseases were seen as a serious health hazard to the British population[20]. Venereal diseases, such as syphilis and gonorrhea, were passed on during sexual acts, and consequently, prostitutes were often blamed for infecting their male clients. These men included both middle-class husbands, and enlisted officers. Husbands who took part in extra-martial affairs often brought venereal diseases home to their wives, and, if she went untreated, to their unborn children. Military men who were infected with a venereal disease often became ill, and since prostitution was popular among armies, the more men infected with a disease, the weaker the British army became. Children were seen as Britain's future and the military was seen as Britain's strength, so both were necessary in order for the empire to remain strong and everlasting. Therefore, prostitution was seen as

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[17] Valverde, 178.

[18] Nead, 94.

[19] "The Disruption in the Church of Scotland," written in 1843 and cited in *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol III Sources*, edited by Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 142.

[20] Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 48.

a social threat not only because it caused women to deviate from their natural roles of daughter, wife, mother and moral leader, but also because it encouraged the spread of physical diseases, which weakened the British family, society and its empire. Conversely, although prostitution was viewed as a social threat, prostitutes themselves were often portrayed as social victims.

To Eliminate or Regulate, That is the Question

In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was common for prostitutes to be viewed in a sympathetic light so that money could be raised for charitable institutions, such as magdalene homes and asylums, where prostitutes received the moral and industrial education needed to reform and become useful and respectable members of society[21]. Prostitution was viewed as a social problem which could be defined and solved, and the discussion surrounding the topic was heavily influenced by religion, and more particularly, by evangelicalism[22]. In the 1840s, surveyors of prostitution, such as congregational minister Reverend Ralph Wardlaw, moral reformist William Logan and medical doctor William Tait, all exhibited what Linda Mahood has called the 'evangelical approach'[23]. Within this approach, it was common for prostitutes to be viewed as tragic victims rather than perpetrators of evil. In an *Exposure of Female Prostitution*, published in 1843, William Logan described the tragic life of a prostitute and her inevitable fate: "Girls soon come down from the first-class houses to the second, then to the third, then down to the situation of a servant in one of their houses, and,

[21] Mahood, 69.
[22] Nead, 100.
[23] Mahood, 63.

finally, to the grave!"[24] The tragic, downward progress of the prostitute is one of the greatest narratives which surrounded the prostitute in the Victorian era. Although the narrative of the doomed and suffering prostitute had been used since the middle of the eighteenth century, Lynda Nead argues that it's purpose changed in the mid-nineteenth century[25]. Since prostitution was now present and discussed in British society like it had never been before, sexual deviancy and infectious diseases now became the two main reasons for the discussion of prostitution, and writers attempted to use this narrative to demonstrate their arguments and to provoke sympathy among their readers.

Evangelical surveyors viewed prostitutes as tragic victims of male lust, as male sexual conduct was seen as the main reason prostitution was so prevalent in society[26]. In his study of prostitution in Edinburgh, originally published in 1840, Tait stated:

> The male sex are in most instances more deserving of blame than the poor females themselves. Nothing is more disgraceful to the honour or character of any person having the least pretensions to knowledge and morality, than to be daily exercising his mental powers and ingenuity to discover the best means of seducing some young and unsuspecting female.[27]

Unlike women, who were expected to maintain a strict standard of sexual behaviour, a male's sexual behaviour was less closely examined, which created different standards of sexual conduct for men and women. This caused many, such as Tait, to call for a single standard of sexual conduct in society. A single standard was necessary not only to protect young women, but also because a man who could not control his sexual urges,

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[24] William Logan, *An Exposure, from Personal Observation, of Female Prostitution in London, Leeds and Rochdale, and Especially in the City of Glasgow, with Remarks on the Cause, Extent, Results and Remedy of the Evil*, second edition (Glasgow: G. Gallie and R. Fleckfield, 1843), 27.

[25] Nead, 160.

[26] Walkowitz, 34.

[27] William Tait, *Magdalenism An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh,* second edition (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1842), 204.

Tait contended, was comparable to an animal[28]. Evangelical writers also condemned the overtly sexual male as a social threat because he encouraged prostitution, and therefore the spread of sin, immorality and disease. By controlling their sexual urges, it was argued, there would no longer be a need for prostitutes and for prostitution. Besides arguing for a single standard of sexual conduct, evangelical writers also recommended early marriages and an increase in both religious and secular education, and claimed that by following all of these suggestions, prostitution could be abolished rather than regulated[29]. The emphasis on male lust and sexual passions made the prostitute a victim of prostitution and the man the perpetrator of it.

Although the overtly sexual male was often considered a primary cause of prostitution by evangelical writers in the 1840s, the economic situation of working-class women was also viewed as a contributing factor. Poverty, unemployment and low wages were common among working-class women and the necessity for money often caused these women to resort to prostitution in order to feed their family or themselves. In this view, prostitutes were again portrayed as tragic victims. However, this time they were not victims of male lust but victims of industrial capitalism, which produced low wages and limited employment opportunities for women. Furthermore, in his 1843 publication, Reverend Ralph Wardlaw described prostitution as a 'sin' because it encouraged "the illicit intercourse of the sexes" and stated that if prostitution did not stop, it would cause the "deterioration of national character, and to the consequent exposure of the nations among whom it abounds weakness, decline, and fall."[30] By presenting the prostitute as a

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[28] Mahood, 63.

[29] Nead, 106.

[30] Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures of Magdalenism Its Nature, Extent, Effects, Guilt, Causes, and Remedy,* second edition (New York: J S. Redfield, 1843), 25-32, 80

tragic victim and prostitution as social threat, evangelical writers hoped to persuade the middle class to help eliminate prostitution by either donating money to charitable causes which worked to reform prostitutes, or by becoming active members of these charities themselves. Prostitutes needed to be reformed, it was asserted, because prostitution needed to be suppressed. Tait, Wardlaw and Logan all argued that prostitution should not be regulated but eradicated because, as Wardlaw stated: "To take vice under legal regulation, is to give it, in the public eye, a species of legal sanction. It can never be right to regulate what it is wrong to do, and wrong to tolerate."[31] By depicting the prostitute as a social victim of male lust and industrial capitalism, the evangelical writers of the 1840s drew attention away from the prostitute herself by placing the emphasize on the overtly sexual male as the main culprit of prostitution. Also, by arguing that it should be eradicated, these writers began the Victorian debate over how to deal with prostitution in British society.

Suggesting that prostitution be eliminated from society was just one approach to the management of sin, disease and morality in mid-Victorian society. While Tait, Logan and Wardlaw argued for prostitution to end, other commentators, such as W.R. Greg and medical doctor William Acton, asserted that prostitution was a necessary evil in society and that it was more advantageous for society to control and regulate it, rather than attempt to eliminate it. According to Judith Walkowitz, the writings of Greg and Acton were highly influential in generating a sympathetic climate to regulation within British society[32]. In 1850, Greg published an article in the *Westminster Review* and although he

[31] Wardlaw, 37.
[32] Walkowitz, 42.

depicted the prostitute as a tragic victim, his portrayal served a different purpose. In the article, Greg wrote:

> The world- the unknowing world- is apt to fancy her reveling in the *enjoyment* of licentious pleasures; lost and dead to all sense of remorse and shame; wallowing in mire because she loves it. Alas! there is no truth in *this* conception, or only in the most exceptional cases...The career of these women is a brief one; their downward path a marked and inevitable one; and they know this well...the last scene of all, when drink disease, and starvation have laid her on her death-bed...this poor daughter of humanity terminates a life, of which, if the sin has been grievous and the weakness lamentable, the expiation has been fearfully tremendous.[33]

For Greg, the purpose of illustrating the prostitute in this way was to provoke sympathy among his readers so that they would understand that the only way to save these tragic victims was through the regulation of prostitution, and not the elimination of it. Greg wanted society to understand that without regulation, these women would be left to fend for themselves and would therefore quickly reach their bitter end. But, if prostitution was regulated, Greg argued, then prostitutes could escape their inevitable fate as they were more likely to be reformed and reintegrated into society. Greg also asserted that within a system of state regulation, prostitution would be less of a threat to the family and society because the registration of prostitutes would allow only women who were free of venereal diseases to work the streets.

Another supporter in the state regulation of prostitution was William Acton, an English venereologist who, along with Tait, had first hand experience treating prostitutes infected with venereal disease. In his 1857 publication on prostitution, Action exhibited what Mahood has called the 'sanitary approach', as his main focus was to demonstrate the need for regulation in order to control the spread of venereal diseases within society[34].

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[33] W.R. Greg, "Prostitution," *The Westminster Review*, vol. 53 (July 1850), 240-41.
[34] Mahood, 64.

Just like Greg, Acton also argued that prostitution was inescapable in Victorian society, and wrote that: "I am one of those who look upon prostitution as an inevitable attendant upon civilized, and especially closely-packed, population."[35] Acton held a much harsher view of the prostitute than the evangelical writers, and when describing the causes of prostitution, although he does admit that some women did fall victim to it, Acton argued that some women were naturally inclined to it, and that they were the seducers[36]. Nevertheless, Acton did agree that men did played a role in the continuation and popularity of prostitution, and described the men who frequented prostitutes as either "the makers or victims of harlots"[37]. Acton disagreed with the evangelical writers that a single standard of sexual conduct could exist between men and women, and insisted that a single standard of sexual conduct was unnatural. Instead, Acton called for a balance between the reality of male sexual desires and the evangelical cause, and this balance was the regulation and control of prostitution by the state[38].

To demonstrate why prostitution should be regulated and controlled, Acton asserted that prostitution was a transitory state and that most women did not stay long in this profession if they could help it. He argued that only through state regulation, in which prostitutes would be frequently checked for venereal diseases, could a woman pass through this stage in her life with as little injury to herself and to society[39]. Acton also attempted to disprove the narrative of the prostitute's rapid decline, as he contended that syphilis was not usually a fatal disease for women, but only for infants and young

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[35] William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, & Sanitary Aspects, In London and other Large Cities, with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (London: John Churchill, 1857), 15.

[36] Acton, 31.

[37] Acton, 165

[38] Walkowitz, 42

[39] Walkowitz, 46

children[40]. By depicting venereal diseases as a threat not to the prostitute herself but to society, and more importantly, to society's future, Acton's 'sanitary approach' turned the prostitute into a carrier of venereal disease and he was able to demonstrate that only through state regulation could prostitution and the spread of venereal disease be controlled, and Britain's children and future be kept safe.

The Prostitute as a Worthy Object of Charity

Although Acton attempted to disprove the narrative of the prostitute as a tragic victim, the writings of John Ewing Ritchie and Lieutenant John Blackmore in 1850s and 1860s continued to depict the prostitute as a helpless and unhappy figure. In Ritchie's 1857 publication, *The Night Side of London*, he painted a similar, tragic picture of the life of a prostitute as the evangelicals:

> Up and down Catherine-street what wretchedness masked in smiles has walked- what sin in satin- what devilish craft and brutal lust, aye, and, what is worse than all, what unavailing repentance and regret! A very fleeting population is that of Catherine street. These women, commencing their life at eighteen, are few of them supposed to last more than eight years; and if you see them in the day-time, before they are painted and dressed up- with their red eyes and bloated faces, you will think few of them will last even that short time...[41]

Ritchie's brief account of prostitution in London was mainly descriptive and not analytical. However, he did depict the London prostitute as a tragic, unhappy figure whose life would unavoidably be cut short as a result of her profession, and he went so far as to describe London as the new "Sodom and Gomorrha"[42]. By describing the prostitute as young, miserable and regretful, Ritchie provoked sympathy among his

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[40] Action, 59.
[41] James Ewing Ritchie, *The Night Side of London* (London: n.p.,1857), 39.
[42] Ritchie, 41.

readers and promoted the idea that prostitutes did want to be saved, but needed assistance in their reformation.

Lieutenant Blackmore also contributed to the continuation of the tragic prostitute narrative by depicting her as a worthy object of rescue and charity. Blackmore's opinions on prostitution were heavily influenced by his evangelical beliefs and he was known to often include quotations from the Bible in his writings[43]. Blackmore obtained the evidence for his publication on prostitution through first hand encounters with prostitutes on his midnight cruises through London, and his volunteer work at the Female Temporary Home and the London Female Dormitory[44]. Blackmore helped establish both the Female Temporary Home and the London Female Dormitory, and the purpose of the Female Temporary Home was "not *exclusively* for *fallen* females; but also for the *prevention* of sin and suffering"[45]. By establishing a home which attempted to prevent prostitution, Blackmore demonstrated that he believed some women were more inclined to enter the profession, and he asserted that poverty or lack of employment were the dominant causes of prostitution. In *The London by Moonlight Mission*, Blackmore argued that the downward progress of a prostitute was unavoidable and that:

> Only those who have seen the misery endured by these unhappy objects, and who know their willingness, nay, their eagerness to be rescued, can have any adequate conception of the immense amount of good which an agency of this kind may, by the blessing of God, be the means of effecting.[46]

By characterizing her as an unhappy but eager to be rescued figure, Blackmore promoted the tragic prostitute as a worthy object of charity for philanthropists and reformers.

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[43] Nead, 159

[44] For more information on the life of Lieut Blackmore, see the opening chapter of *The London by Moonlight,* "Brief Memoir of Lieut John Blackmore" written by a friend , pages 4-28

[45] John Blackmore, *The London by Moonlight Mission Being an Account of Midnight Cruises on the Streets of London During the Last Thirteen Years* (London Edward Robson, 1861), 20

[46] Blackmore, 64-65

The Contagious Diseases Acts

In the mid-1860s, and for the next twenty years, writers on prostitution had a new reason for portraying the prostitute as a tragic victim of society. In 1864, the first Contagious Diseases Act was passed in England, and supporters of regulation, such as Greg and Acton, saw their agenda fulfilled. The CD Act, which was initially enacted only in English naval and garrison towns, was passed as an attempt to regulate and control prostitution, and the main features of the act were the registration and supervision of prostitutes[47]. Judith Walkowitz argues that the main reason why the CD Act was passed in naval and garrison towns was to control the spread of venereal diseases among the enlisted men in these towns[48]. Further acts were passed in 1866 and 1869, and by the 1870s, the acts were operating in eighteen districts throughout England[49]. If found to be infected with a venereal disease, female prostitutes were detained by a special police force and sent to a hospital, where they were required to stay for up to six months so that their disease could be treated and cured; women who resisted examination and treatment were imprisoned with hard labour[50]. The CD Acts demonstrate both a class and gender bias towards prostitution as only lower-class women were likely to be detained in hospitals and treated as 'in-patients', while the men who frequented these prostitutes, and who also suffered from venereal diseases, were considered 'out-patients' and were not required to stay in the hospital for their treatment, receiving their cure in pill form. In the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, reformers and feminists who mounted campaigns against the CD Acts represented the prostitute as a tragic victim to demonstrate the unfair treatment

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[47] Finnegan, 9.
[48] Walkowitz, 1.
[49] Walkowitz, 1.
[50] Finnegan, 9.

these women received from the state, and the prostitution surveys which had been published in the preceding decades were highly influential in shaping the beliefs and ideas of these reformers.

In 1871, William Logan published another book on prostitution, entitled *The Greatest Social Evil*, and described the CD Acts as "un-British" and a "disgrace to the nation"[51]. Although the CD Acts were never passed in Scotland, the implementation of the acts in Scottish towns, to regulate and control prostitution, was a popular topic of discussion for many philanthropic societies. In April 1870, Logan attended a meeting in Glasgow's city hall where the discussion was centred on the acts. At the meeting, Dr. Robert Buchanan, both a minister and teacher at the Free College Church, gave his opinion on the acts, and Logan paraphrased what Buchanan had to say in his 1871 publication:

> The Acts must be made specially to comprehend the male sex. One of the worst features of the Acts was, that they were not merely immoral but unmanly. If there was to be inspection, police espionage, and police arrestment- if there was to be public medical examination and exposure- if all this was to be done in the case of the women, why not also in the case of the men?...If measures must be justified against the woman, then much more could they be justified as against the man. He [Dr. Buchanan] stood there to say that in his judgment it was cowardly and unmanly to expose helpless women to all these outrages, and to leave out the men who often were more culpable than the women.[52]

In January 1871, Logan attended another meeting in Glasgow in which the acts were discussed, and quoted Member of Parliament Mr. Anderson, who stated:

> My obligations to the Acts are, that they confer powers so extreme and tyrannical, that while they attempt to shield the victims from the consequences of their vice, they put the very much larger virtuous female

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[51] William Logan, *The Great Social Evil Its Causes, Extent, Results, and Remedies* (London. Hodder and Stoughton, 1871), 211.

[52] Logan, 212-213

> population entirely at the mercy of police spies, malicious enemies or vindictive seducers. [53]

These two passages which Logan included in his discussion on the CD Acts clearly portrayed the prostitute as a victim. However, this time, rather than being a victim of male lust or industrial capitalism, the prostitute was now painted as a victim of the CD Acts and the British state.

Another influential crusader against the CD Acts was Josephine Butler, who also presented the prostitute as a victim of state regulation. In her article "The Double Standard of Morality", published in 1886, Butler argued against the acts and wrote that:

> It is a fact, that numbers even of moral and religious people have permitted themselves to accept and condone in man what is fiercely condemned in woman. And do you see the logical necessity involved in this? It is that a large section of female society has to be told off--set aside, so to speak, to minister to the irregularities of the excusable man. That section is doomed to death, hurled to despair; while another section of womanhood is kept strictly and almost forcibly guarded in domestic purity.[54]

Just like the evangelical writers before her, Butler asserted that prostitution existed only to serve male lust and that a certain class of women was set aside and turned into victims for the sexual pleasure of men. However, Butler, like Acton, did not solely blame men for the construction of this class of women and stated that: "Women are guilty also in this matter, for they unfortunately have imitated the tone and sentiments of men, instead of chastening and condemning them."[55] Although she blamed men and women for prostitution, Butler, unlike Acton, held a sympathetic view towards Victorian prostitutes, whom she described as the "poor outcast daughters"[56] of society and, like the

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[53] Logan, *The Great Social Evil*, 1871, 220.

[54] Josephine Butler, "The Double Standard of Morality," *The Philanthropist* (October, 1886). Found on *Attacking the Devil The W T. Stead Resource Site*, created by Yarm Webcraft. <http://www.attackingthedevil.co.uk/related/morality.php> (accessed on May 16, 2010), 1.

[55] Butler, 2-3.

[56] Butler, 2.

evangelicals of the 1840s, she also called for a single standard of sexual conduct among men and women. Thus, by portraying her as a victim of society, and by portraying men as the abusers, Butler also perpetuated the representation of the prostitute as a tragic victim of male lust, as well as a victim of state regulation.

However, although Butler's portrayal of the tragic prostitute was used to condemn male sexual license, she had a slightly different purpose than the evangelical writers of the 1840s. Helen Mathers argues that the reason Butler was so adamant in her beliefs towards prostitution was two-fold. Firstly, Butler was a deeply religious and spiritual person, and highly influenced by evangelicalism. Although she never described herself as an evangelical, only a Protestant, Butler and her Anglican clergyman husband, George, often exhibited the popular evangelical traits of conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism, as they were both deeply influenced by Scripture and the active experience of God[57]. In fact, many of Butler's publications also demonstrated these traits as she frequently used examples from the Bible in her arguments. Butler's campaign against the CD Acts was motivated by her religious beliefs as it was just not a fight against the state but a fight against the sanction of sin and vice, and therefore, a fight against the Antichrist[58]. Secondly, Butler was also strongly influenced by her feminist opinions, which differentiated her from Tait, Wardlaw and Logan. Her conviction that all women, no matter their class or profession, should have equal voting and educational rights demonstrated, according to Mathers, that she was a true 'Victorian feminist'[59]. Although Mathers argues that her influences were two-fold, she does remark that these influences

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[57] Helen Mathers, "The Evangelical Spirituality of a Victorian Feminist: Josephine Butler, 1828-1906," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (April 2001), 286.

[58] Mathers, 287.

[59] For an explanation on Mather's use of the word 'feminist', please see footnote 6, on page 283.

were often manifested together and were equal contributors to Butler's beliefs and actions, and her portrayal of the prostitute as a societal victim is an example of these beliefs coming together.

Similar to Butler, Ellice Hopkins also depicted the prostitute as a victim of male lust. In a 1883 pamphlet, *The Ride of Death,* Hopkins stated:

> And again I ask, with whom does the blame lie? With the bribed or the briber?...Ay, I know well that it is the woman who often tempts; these poor creatures must tempt or starve. But that does not touch the broad issue, that it is men who endow the degradation of women; it is men, making the demand, create the supply. Stop the money of men and the whole thing would be starved out in six weeks time.[60]

This passage almost perfectly mirrors the argument made by Butler and the earlier evangelical writers. Hopkins included poverty as a main reason for women entering prostitution and male lust as main reason for why prostitution still existed in society. Interestingly, although painting the women as the victim and the male as the perpetrator served a specific purpose in the preceding decades, Sue Morgan argues that feminists such as Butler and Hopkins may have promoted this view for a different reason[61]. Ever since Eve gave into temptation in the garden of Eden, women had always been viewed as the reason why immorality existed in society. However, by making men the reason why prostitution was so prevalent in society, and therefore why sin, immorality and disease spread so rapidly, feminists such as Butler and Hopkins relieved women of this blame.

Prostitution in Late Victorian Society

By the time the CD Acts were repealed in 1886, the discussion of prostitution had already started to change. As previously stated, in the 1840s, prostitution was considered

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[60] Ellice Hopkins, *The Ride of Death* (London Hatchards, 1883), 4

[61] Sue Morgan, "'The Word Made Flesh' Women, Religion and Sexual Culture," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (London Routledge, 2010), 169

a social problem which could be defined and solved, and many institutions were established to both prevent prostitution and to reform prostitutes. However, by the 1880s, prostitution was no longer seen as something which could be solved, and British society began to doubt the usefulness of preventative measures and reform institutions, causing a more 'hands on' approach to be undertaken in stemming prostitution[62]. In 1885, William Stead drew the middle class's attention to the vulnerability of children in British society, as he demonstrated how easily a young girl could be procured into prostitution. Stead's article, "A Tribute to Modern Babylon", was extremely popular, and made social purity a national issue[63]. During the 1880s and 1890s, when the social purity movement reached its peak, social purists, led by Ellice Hopkins, became heavily involved in addressing prostitution, and more particularly, in child prostitution[64]. The social purity movement, which Sue Morgan defines as an attempt to promote higher personal and social standards of sexual morality, argued that a single standard of sexual conduct was needed in society to help reduce prostitution[65]. For social purists, prostitution was seen as intolerable because many prostitutes worked openly on the streets, setting a bad example for respectable society, and as a result, those who were unwilling to be reformed were labeled as public nuisances[66].

Finally, by the end of the Victorian era, prostitution was beginning to be associated with what Paula Bartley calls 'feeble-mindedness'. In a time which saw provisions being made for mentally ill people and the development of eugenics, Bartley

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[62] Paula Bartley, *Prostitution Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London Routledge, 2000), 155

[63] Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Reform* (London Croom Helm Ltd, 1980), 263

[64] Morgan, "'The Word Made Flesh' Women, Religion and Sexual Culture", 167

[65] Morgan, "'The Word Made Flesh' Women, Religion and Sexual Culture", 167

[66] Bartley, 158

argues that prostitution was viewed in a similar framework and that many women were believed to enter into the profession because of a mental deficiency[67]. Although the discussion of sexual conduct among the genders remained a popular issue, the discussion over prostitution was beginning to change as the Victorian era ended, and the twentieth century would see new developments emerge in the debate surrounding prostitution.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the 'prostitute' was a socially constructed censure in Victorian Britain, used to condemn working-class women who strayed from the ideal conventions of 'respectable' middle-class femininity. Prostitution was seen as a threat in British society because it caused a woman to deviate from her 'natural' roles of daughter, wife and mother, and promoted the spread of sin, morality and disease, making it a threat to both the health of the home and the nation. Although they were sometimes viewed as a social threat themselves, it was more common for prostitutes to be portrayed as victims of male lust, industrial capitalism and the state. Portraying prostitution as a social threat and the prostitute as a social victim created narratives, such as her inevitable downfall, that help to construct the prostitute's identity in British society. These narratives, derived from the research and first-hand experience of medical doctors, religious moralists and feminist reformers, were highly influential on the attitudes and assumptions middle-class Victorians held towards prostitution and prostitutes. The influence of the social sciences on how the prostitute was represented in nineteenth-century art and literature will be the topic of the next chapter.

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[67] For more information on this, please see Bartley, chapters 5 & 6.

CHAPTER TWO

The Social Outcast: Representations of the Prostitute in Victorian Art, Poetry and Fiction

Propelled by society's concern over the moral and physical effects of prostitution, the prostitute became a popular figure in British art, poetry and fiction during the mid-nineteenth century. An image included in Charles Dickens' *The Personal History of David Copperfield* (figure 1) shows a young female character, Martha Endell, asking for forgiveness for her sexual actions outside of marriage, and 'falling' from respectability. The young woman's fallen state is indicated by several symbols in the illustration, including her dishevelled hair and appearance, downward posture, and most of all, the painting of Mary Magdalene anointing Christ's feet which hangs above the fireplace (figure 2). This example of intertextuality indicated to the Victorian reader not only Martha's fallen woman status, but also the possibility of her redemption. Intertextuality is a term used in literary and cultural studies to describe a text within a text that transmits a meaning to the reader or viewer[1]. Intertextuality can be used in art or literature but its meanings are often culturally specific, and this is the case with this particular image. Since Mary Magdalene's conversion story at Simon the Pharisee's house was so popular in British culture, the painting above the fireplace would have signified to the Victorian reader that Martha would also be reformed, just as Mary Magdalene had been.

Lynda Nead argues that high culture was intended for a specific audience and played an important role in the formation of middle-class identity in the nineteenth century. Art, which dominated high culture, provided the middle class with a "sense of shared aesthetic interest and moral values", and helped to construct the ideologies of

[1] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-6.

respectability and deviancy[2]. Likewise, Callum Brown asserts that both poetry and fictional literature, the dominant forms of popular culture in Victorian Britain, although produced for a wider audience, also assisted in the formation of middle-class culture[3]. Within these cultures, the prostitute was often used to represent the repercussions of industrial capitalism, and was portrayed once again as a social victim. This chapter will discuss the portrayal of the prostitute in British high and popular culture during the mid-nineteenth century. By examining works of art, poetry and fiction, it will explore the representation of the prostitute as a social victim, and the narratives which surrounded her life as a result of this portrayal.

Art , Poetry and Fiction in Victorian Culture

During the mid-nineteenth century, the prostitute became a figure of fascination for the middle-class audience and her portrayal in high and popular culture assisted in the construction of her identity, as well as in the creation and continuation of the many narratives which surrounded her life. Unlike her portrayal in the social sciences, the prostitute was often labeled as a 'fallen woman' in works of art, fiction and poetry in an effort to make the topic of prostitution and the appearance of the prostitute more acceptable and comfortable for the audience for which these works were produced. In many instances, the epithet 'fallen woman' was used in high and popular culture to represent any woman who was involved in sexual relations outside of marriage, whether these relations were the result of hire, pleasure, rape or seduction[4]. In order for the fallen

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[2] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 165.

[3] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London. Routledge, 2001), 18.

[4] Linda Nochlin, "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 60, No 1 (March, 1978). 139.

woman to be easily recognized, artists and writers depended on a shared set of knowledge in symbols and coded messages so that their message would be understood by the viewer. Art, in particular, relied on a mutual comprehension of iconography between the producer and the audience, and through the use of symbolic imagery, specific class meanings were produced. George Landow states that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of prominent Victorian artists and poets, was particularly interested in "reanimating painterly iconography and symbolic conventions" in their quest to produce works of art and poetry which would be endowed with "imaginative and moral power"[5]. This symbolic imagery was also used in works of fiction, which reveals how visual images and the written word worked together in order to create and maintain the narratives of the fallen woman which existed in British culture during the mid-nineteenth century.

Respectability and Fallenness in High and Popular Culture

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a woman's sexual morality (or immorality) could be measured by her physical appearance, as the sciences of physiognomy and phrenology argued that a person's moral status could be determined by their physical characteristics. Within this view, the physical deterioration of the prostitute's appearance, which resulted in the loss of her beauty, was often emphasized in the social sciences. For example, in William Tait's *Magdalenism*, he dramatically described the effects a short time in the profession would have on a female's appearance, and stated that prostitutes would "become so much altered in appearance, that no one who formerly knew them would be able to recognise them."[6] In contrast, Victorian high and popular

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[5] George Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (London Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 121

[6] William Tait, *Magdalenism An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh,* second edition (Edinburgh P Rickard, 1842), 97

culture often portrayed the fallen woman as beautiful and in the early days of her profession. Nead contends that the prostitute was portrayed in this way because it provided a more comfortable way of dealing with the issues of prostitution for the middle class because, in reality, the physical effects of prostitution were extremely unpleasant[7]. By focusing on the prostitute as a beautiful fallen woman instead of as an ugly contagion of disease, high and popular culture presented a sympathetic character who was acceptable, approachable, and in need of assistance.

In art, poetry and fiction, the prostitute's physical appearance made her easily recognizable to the viewer. During the nineteenth century, hair was of particular interest to the middle class and was an important indicator of a woman's stage in life, and of her personal character. Elisabeth Gitter asserts that the Victorians were so obsessed with every aspect of a woman's hair, from its length, texture, colour, and style, that there was hardly a woman portrayed in British fiction whose hair was not described[8]. The popularity of this physical feature caused a great detail of attention to be paid to how a woman wore her hair, especially in public. For a young female, having long flowing hair represented innocence and virginity, but once she reached the age of maturity, she was required to 'put it up'. This tightly bound hair style denoted respectability among middle-class women in the public sphere, while loose and flowing hair represented intimacy in the private sphere[9]. A woman past the age of maturity with long flowing and dishevelled hair in the public sphere represented a woman who deviated from the cultural norm, and fallen women were often depicted with this hair style in high and popular

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[7] Nead, 124-25

[8] Elisabeth Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA*, Vol 99, No 5 (October, 1984) 941

[9] Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Surrey Ashgate Publishing Ltd , 2009), 7-8

culture to demonstrate their deviancy. The use of a woman's hair to demonstrate fallen sexuality can be seen in Dickens' novel *The Personal History of David Copperfield.* The novel included several stories of fallen women, including that of Martha, who was previously discussed at the beginning of this chapter. To mark her fall from respectability, Martha's hair is described as "loose and scattered"[10]. The use of hair to denote a woman's level of respectability was popular in both fictional literature and art, and 'hair signs' were used to not only define the norms of femininity but to also describe them[11].

Hair iconography was commonly used by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to symbolize fallen sexuality[12]. The dichotomy between the hairstyles of the 'respectable' and the 'fallen' woman can be seen in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Gretchen and Mephistopheles in Church.* This drawing, completed in 1848, is based on the German story of *Faust*, and included an accompanying rubric, which stated: "Margaret, having abandoned her virtue and caused the deaths of her mother and brother, is tormented by the Evil Spirit at Mass, during the chanting of *Dies Irae.*"[13] Even without the rubric, the Victorian audience would be able to recognize Gretchen's loss of virtue by her dishevelled hair, torn clothes and the submissive position of her body. To emphasize this fallen state, Rossetti included another girl in the foreground of the drawing, who is depicted in sharp contrast to Gretchen, and whose respectability is represented by her ordered appearance, tightly bound hair and pious position.

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[10] Charles Dickens, *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, illustrations by H.K. Browne (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850), 238.

[11] Ofek, 69.

[12] Ofek, 66.

[13] Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity* (New York: Harmony Books, 1987), 78.

Another work by Rossetti which described the physical appearance of a prostitute, and used hair to represent her fallenness, is his poem "Jenny". In the poem, Jenny, the prostitute, is asleep, and without being able to communicate with her verbally, the speaker concentrates on her beauty, and describes her hair as "gold" and "loosened", and her appearance as "so fair"[14]. During this time period, loose golden hair was used in art and literature to represent the grand woman, and her sexual power and deviance[15]. Jenny's grandeur is further detailed by the speaker's description of her gown as "rich" and made of "silk"[16]. What is also interesting about this poem is the speaker's concentration on Jenny's profession, which he stated was a direct result of "the hatefulness of man":

> Whose acts are ill and his speech ill,
> Who, having used you at his will,
> Thrusts you aside, as when I dine
> I serve the dishes and the wine.[17]

Rossetti's "Jenny" is an example of a poem which intended to demonstrate that many fallen women reached their state not out of their own moral weakness but because of the double standard of sexuality which existed in middle-class ideology. The sexual double standard allowed males to be sexual promiscuous without repercussions, but condemned women who attempted to enjoy the same freedom. As a result of the strict ideologies which defined the respectable female through her sexuality, behaviour and appearance, a woman who did not meet these requirements was labeled deviant, and she was turned into a social outcast. However, many artists and writers strove to clear these

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[14] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Jenny," found in *The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), lines 13, 49, 173.

[15] Gitter, 936.

[16] Rossetti, "Jenny," lines 74, 50.

[17] Rossetti, "Jenny," lines 85-88.

misconceptions and place the blame on men by demonstrating that many women fell from grace not because they were deviant, but because of male seduction. The urge to clear this misconception made the tale of the seduced woman who became a social outcast a popular narrative in British high and popular culture during the mid-nineteenth century.

The Social Outcast and the Seduction Narrative

Similar to its use in the social sciences, the emphasis on the sexual double standard was used in high and popular culture to demonstrate the effects strict middle-class ideologies of femininity and respectability had on innocent women. During the mid-nineteenth century, many novels, including Dickens' *The Personal History of David Copperfield* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth,* attempted to illustrate that it was not the individual fallen woman who was morally corrupt but society's strict codes of respectability and behaviour. In order to highlight this point, many women were portrayed in art, poetry and fiction as innocent victims, who only fell from respectability after being wrongfully seduced by a man of a higher social class. Within this framework, the seduced woman was portrayed in a fallen state, where she became, or thought of becoming, a prostitute only after her initial fall and rejection from society. The characters of Dickens' Little Em'ly and Gaskell's Ruth exemplify the seduction narrative which was popular during this time period.

Both Dickens and Gaskell were involved in hands-on rescue work, and had first hand experience working with fallen women. From 1846 to 1858, Dickens managed Urania Cottage, which acted as a place of refuge for prostitutes and fallen women, and his novel *The Personal History of David Copperfield* was written while he managed this

home[18]. In an article published in his own edited journal, *Household Words*, Dickens wrote:

> Case number fourteen was an extremely pretty girl of twenty, whose mother was married to a second husband- a drunken man who ill-treated his step-daughter. She had been engaged to be married, but had been deceived and had run away from home in shame, and had been away for three years. Within that period, however, she had twice returned home; the first time for six months; the second time for a few days. She had also been in a London hospital.[19]

Although Dickens does not explicitly state this, it would have been understood by the Victorian reader by his language, that this young woman had been involved in pre-martial relations with her fiancé, who then left, leaving her a shamed and tainted woman. What also gives this away is Dickens mention of a hospital, as it is most likely that the fiancé had passed on a venereal disease to the young woman and she was forced to receive medical treatment. This young woman was a tenant of Urania Cottage, and like many other women who stayed there, eventually emigrated in order to complete her reformation. Emigration, Dickens asserted, was essential for a fallen woman's reformation because if she returned to the same streets from which she came, it was likely that she would fall into the same trap and resume her previous life of deviancy[20]. In *The Personal History of David Copperfield,* which is often described as an autobiographical novel, many of the same features of case fourteen are displayed, including the seduction of a young beautiful girl, and the use of emigration to reach redemption.

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[18] Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 68

[19] Charles Dickens, "Home for Homeless Women," *Household Words A Weekly Journal*, Vol. 7 (New York. McElrath and Barker, 1858), 174-175.

[20] Anderson, 70

The Personal History of David Copperfield was an instant best seller when it was published in serial form from 1849 to 1850[21]. In the novel, although there are a few examples of fallen women, the story of Little Em'ly best epitomizes the narrative of seduction, and Dickens' belief in emigration as an answer to this fall from grace. The character of Em'ly is David Copperfield's childhood friend, who becomes orphaned at a young age and is taken in by the Peggotty family, who served Copperfield's mother. As a young woman, Em'ly becomes engaged to Ham Peggotty, her cousin, who was also orphaned at a young age and taken in by the Peggotty family. However, James Steerforth, an upper-class childhood friend of Copperfield, becomes attracted to Em'ly and lures her away from Ham through promises of wealth, luxurious travel and social elevation. Steerforth seduces Em'ly and then abandons her. Out of shame, Em'ly runs away to London to work as a prostitute because she fears there is no other place left for her in the world. Eventually, Em'ly is saved by her uncle Mr. Peggotty and Copperfield, and the Peggotty family emigrates to Australia, where Em'ly is able to live a happy and respectable life.

Em'ly's fall from respectability was perhaps the most tragic part of *The Personal History of David Copperfield* for the Victorian reader, and Dickens' wrote in a letter to a friend that he wished the novel would provoke sympathy among the public for the sad subjects he worked with at Urania Cottage[22]. As Steerforth was blatantly blamed by Dickens for Em'ly's seduction, this novel emphasized the role upper- and middle-class men played in a woman's fall from respectability, and in their turn to prostitution. Dickens' portrayal of Em'ly as a victim of seduction allowed the audience to see that it

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[21] Nead, 126.
[22] Anderson, 95.

was not the woman's actions which caused her to fall from respectability, but society's sexual double standard and harsh convictions of femininity. Likewise, Em'ly's seduction and turn to prostitution demonstrated that many young women were made into social outcasts and forced into prostitution not because they were morally weak but because they believed there were no other options for them. Therefore, it was society's prejudice and strict ideologies that turned fallen women into deviants, social outcasts and prostitutes, and not the weakness of their own moral character.

Another popular Victorian tale of seduction in which a young, lower-class orphan is seduced by a wealthy man and then abandoned is Gaskell's *Ruth.* Published in 1853, the novel is described by Amanda Anderson as an 'industrial novel' because Gaskell's purpose was to illuminate the harsh conditions faced by the poor in Victorian Britain[23]. Through her examination of Ruth's life, Gaskell revealed the vulnerable situation of many working-class women, and the consequences they faced after engaging in pre-martial affairs. Working-class girls were often susceptible to male seducers because many young women worked in middle-class homes as domestic servants. Domestic servants were considered easy targets, as many lacked formal, religious and sexual education and, as the Glasgow Magdalene Institution's annual reports suggest, women who had previously be employed as domestic servants generally made up at least one quarter of the women who were incarcerated in the reform institutions (see table 1). In a newspaper article published in the *Caledonia Mercury* in 1858, this point was accentuated by the author, who stated:

> I have lately heard of cases occurring in Edinburgh, where young servant girls, coming, it may be, from a mother's roof, and seeking domestic employment here, have been engaged to families in West-end Crescents, and

[23] Anderson, 108.

> soon after being there found that they had been deceived, and had fallen into hotbeds of iniquity, and become the victims of female idolatry.[24]

Since middle-class society separated women into the categories of 'the virgin' and 'the whore', working-class girls were deemed appropriate prey for middle-class men because it was believed that the working class was morally weaker, and therefore, naturally deviant. The vulnerability of young, sexually ignorant, working-class girls was a great concern among middle-class reformers, feminists and philanthropists, and as a result, these women became popular characters in the narratives of seduction produced in high and popular culture, including Gaskell's *Ruth.*

The novel begins with sixteen year old Ruth, who, left orphaned at a young age, works as an apprentice to dressmaker Mrs. Mason. However, Ruth is fired from her apprenticeship when Mrs. Mason catches her speaking in public with a man. This man is Mr. Bellingham, who Ruth had previously met at a ball where she had been working as a seamstress. At the ball, Bellingham formed an instant attraction to Ruth and frequently sought her out. After she was fired by Mrs. Mason, Ruth was left with no money or shelter and became a travel companion of Bellingham. It is during their travels that Bellingham eventually seduces, impregnates and abandons Ruth. Left with nothing once again, Ruth contemplates suicide but is saved by Mr. Benson, a minister, who welcomes her into his family's home. When the Bensons discover Ruth is pregnant, they make up a story that she is a widow in order to save her reputation. Eventually, Ruth becomes employed by the Bradshaw family as a companion to their daughter, Jemima. However, when the Bradshaw family discovers Ruth is a fallen woman and that her son, Leonard, is a bastard, they fire her. Ruth and Leonard become social outcasts and are forced to live

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[24] "Prostitution in Edinburgh," *Caledonia Mercury*, Friday February 19, 1858 (Issue 21342).

on the perimeters of society. After this, the only work Ruth is able to find is as a nurse among the sick poor. While nursing the poor, Ruth catches cholera and dies.

Gaskell's *Ruth* exhibits many of the popular assumptions which were associated with the seduction narrative in the mid-nineteenth century, such as the woman's young age and lower social status. Like Dickens, Gaskell's motivation and influence for the novel came from her personal experience with a fallen woman. In a letter written to Dickens in 1850, Gaskell described the story of a young girl she attempted to help:

> She is the daughter of an Irish clergyman who died when she was two years old; but even before that her mother had shown most complete indifference to her...The girl's uncle had placed her at 6 years old in the Dublin school for orphan daughters of the clergy; and when she was about 14, she was apprenticed to an Irish dress-maker here, of very great reputation.[25]

Gaskell was writing to Dickens to ask him for assistance in this young woman's emigration. Similarly to case number fourteen and Em'ly, it appears that the character Ruth was loosely based on this young woman whom Gaskell attempted to save. Just like Ruth, the young woman Gaskell assisted was left orphaned and worked as an apprentice for a dressmaker. The description of the woman's age and her social situation were important characteristics of the mid-nineteenth century portrayal of the prostitute in the social sciences, and of the fallen woman in high and popular culture. In an 1867 article published on the Glasgow Magdalene Institution, the following was written: "Of the 111 cases admitted, 81 were either orphans or fatherless or motherless, and 37 were led astray under 16 of years of age!"[26] An examination of the statistics provided in the annual reports of the Glasgow Magdalene Institution from 1871 to 1881 confirm this, as table 2 reveals that the majority of females who entered reform institutions were either orphaned

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[25] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 98.

[26] "Glasgow Magdalene Institution," *Glasgow Herald*, Friday December 27, 1867 (Issue 8730).

and had one deceased parent[27]. It appears that these institutions were not only influential on the development of Ruth as a character, but also in the treatment Ruth received from society as a fallen woman. Further influence of the institutions in the novel is evident in a scene where the Benson's servant, Sally, urges Ruth to cut her hair in order to appear as a proper widow. This scene mirrors the conventions of magdalene homes during the mid-nineteenth century, as women were often required to cut their hair off in order to force humility in the fallen woman, and to give her a fresh start[28].

However, along with following many of the social conventions which existed during the mid-nineteenth century, Gaskell also challenged these conventions by demonstrating the possibilities of self-redemption in a prejudice free society[29]. In the novel, Ruth is able to redeem herself not through the usual ways of institutions or emigration but through motherhood and good deeds. At her funeral, the church is described as being filled with people who loved and respected Ruth, which makes Mr. Bradshaw realize that he made Ruth into a social outcast by firing her, and revealing to society that she was a fallen woman. Only through her purity and love is Ruth able to overcome her fallen woman status and become a respectable member of society. This challenged middle-class values and beliefs because Ruth's child was illegitimate, and therefore Ruth should have been a social outcast only until she was properly reformed by an institution. Furthermore, Gaskell's *Ruth* also mirrors the writing of reformists who argued that it was the woman's social position and circumstance which often led to her fall, and not her natural tendencies towards deviancy[30]. In *The Personal History of David*

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[27] Please see appendix, table 2.
[28] Ofek, 152-53.
[29] Anderson, 108.
[30] Anderson, 130.

Copperfield and *Ruth*, both Dickens and Gaskell are successful in demonstrating that behind every fallen woman is a man, and that it was not the woman's sexual act which caused these characters to fall, but society's unforgiving ideologies.

The Seduction to Suicide Narrative

In Victorian high and popular culture, being labeled 'fallen' caused a woman to become a social outcast, which left her with no choice but to turn to prostitution in order to survive. Once a prostitute, the woman was often described as being awakened into remorse at the thought of her past life, and as a result of this remorse, she exited her profession either through death or redemption[31]. Death usually came as a result of the woman's suicide, and redemption came in the form of Christian charity. In order to provoke a sympathetic climate among middle-class philanthropists, the act of suicide was often portrayed as the only way out for fallen women if they did not receive assistance from society. First published in *Hood's Magazine* in May 1844, Thomas Hood's poem "The Bridge of Sighs" set the foundations for the seduction to suicide narrative and was continually published throughout the nineteenth century

In the poem, a young woman's body is discovered near Westminster Bridge and the cause of death was determined to be suicide. The sympathy Hood felt for this fallen woman can be seen in the following verses:

> Alas! for the rarity
> Of Christian charity
> Under the sun!
> O, it was pitiful!
> Near a whole city full,
> Home she had none.[32]

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[31] Murray Roston, *Victorian Contexts Literature and the Visual Arts* (New York New York University Press, 1996), 41

[32] Thomas Hood, "The Bridge of Sighs," found in *Prose and Verse, Part Two*, edited by Thomas Hood (New York Geo P Putnam & Co , 1853), 203

The fallen woman in the poem is portrayed not as an agent of evil but as a victim of industrial capitalism, and she is defined economically, not morally[33]. The lines "Near a whole city full,- Home she had none" exemplified the great economic gap which existed between the upper and lower classes during this time period, and the effects this divide had on working-class females. This poem also introduced an important symbol for proponents of the suicide narrative, a cipher which would be used by many artists and writers for the rest of the century. Following Hood's poem, the bridge was often used in works of art and fiction dealing with fallen women to denote the act or the thought of suicide. The bridge fit perfectly with the imagery of the fallen woman: she first falls from respectability, and then, falls to her death.

Linda Nochlin argues that George Frederic Watts' *Found Drowned* (figure 3), completed in 1850, can be considered the visual equivalent to Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs"[34]. The painting depicts a young woman washed up on the shore under Waterloo Bridge after committing suicide. The young woman's physical appearance, mainly her beauty and brightly coloured dress, would have indicated to the Victorian viewer her fallen state. In the background of the painting, one bright star illuminates a factory chimney and the industrial tower below it, which were meant to represent the urban city, and exemplify the effect industrial capitalism had on working-class women[35]. However, what is most interesting about this painting is the position of the fallen woman's body. Her arms are stretched out in a Christ-like position, indicating to the Victorian audience that just as Christ sacrificed himself on the cross for humanity, this young woman too

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[33] Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon The Life of Victorian Myth* (London Harvard University Press, 1982), 158

[34] Nochlin, 143

[35] Roston, 61

became a sacrifice to society because of the double standard of sexuality, and the limited opportunities industrial capitalism provided for woman in mid-nineteenth-century Britain[36]. By using the suicide narrative and portraying his fallen woman as Christ-like, Watts attempted to arouse feelings of sympathy and compassion for this group of women, as he demonstrated that 'dead' was a better appellation for these women than 'fallen'[37].

Another popular work of art from the mid-nineteenth century which demonstrated the suicide narrative and the pessimistic conclusion of the life of a young prostitute is Rossetti's *Found*, started in 1854[38]. Rossetti never finished this painting, which has been described as the "the problem picture" of his career, because of the tragic subject it dealt with[39]. As a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group which attempted to produce works of art and poetry based on the social conditions and problems of their present society, Rossetti started *Found* to depict the harsh realities working-class women faced when coming to the city for work. However, the social conditions and problems which made up the subject of *Found* appear to have been too hard for Rossetti to deal with, and although he continually worked on the painting until his death in 1882, the painting was never completed. Alicia Faxon suggests that Rossetti was not able to complete the painting because he was uncertain of his own feelings towards the subject, and how the painting would be interpreted by society[40].

Nevertheless, the finished parts of the painting, and Rossetti's earlier drawing (figure 4), reveal many aspects of the suicide narrative. The painting depicts a drover coming into town for market day when he stumbles upon his old sweetheart. The

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[36] Auerbach, 162
[37] Nochlin, 143
[38] Marsh, 82
[39] Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York Cross River Press, 1989), 64
[40] Faxon, 66-67

woman, who went to the city to find work, was unable to support herself, has fallen from respectability and entered into prostitution. Her fallen status can be seen in her brightly coloured hair, elaborate dress and painted cheeks, all indicators of her profession, and her physical appearance is further emphasized in contrast to the drover's simple and humble attire. The white heifer in the background symbolizes the woman's lost innocence, and the net that tightly binds the heifer represents the prostitute's inescapable entanglement in her profession. The bleak brick wall in which the fallen woman turns to marks her conflict between the drover's offer of salvation and the harshness of the urban city to which she has become accustomed[41]. In the painting, the hopelessness of the prostitute's fate is demonstrated through her submissive posture, which indicated to the Victorian reader her refusal of the drover's offer of salvation, and also in the incomplete bridge, standing in the background, which reveals the woman's suicidal thoughts[42].

The suicide narrative was also popular in fictional literature during the mid-nineteenth century and can be found in both *Ruth* and *The Personal History of David Copperfield.* In Gaskell's *Ruth*, Mr. Benson finds Ruth just before she is able to commit suicide and by offering her a home and shelter, he is able to save her. In *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, the character of Martha also shares a similar storyline. As depicted in figure 1, after her fall, Martha begs to be sent to London and away from her country home so that she may have a fresh start, where people do not know her reputation. However, once in London, Martha becomes a prostitute and eventually contemplates suicide as a result of this decision. Martha goes to the Thames in order to commit the act but is stopped at the last minute by Copperfield and Peggotty, who have

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[41] J B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 63.

[42] Bullen, 63.

come to London to find Little Em'ly. Although there is no bridge present, figure 5 shows the scene of Copperfield and Peggotty finding Martha just before she jumps into the river to drown herself, and in this instance, the river becomes the equivalent to Hood's bridge. Martha is redeemed because of her assistance in finding Em'ly and as a result, she joins Em'ly and the Peggottys when they emigrate to Australia. Once in Australia, Martha starts a new life and eventually marries. What is interesting in both the rescue of Ruth and Martha is that although men were the seducers, they were also the ones who saved these women from death. However, what was most important about the seduction to suicide narrative was that the fallen woman's death could be prevented if she was given assistance and the chance to reform.

The Seduction to Redemption Narrative

In contrast to the seduction to suicide narrative, which portrayed the fallen woman as forsaken and left without any help from the outside community, is the seduction to redemption narrative, which portrayed the fallen woman as redeemable through the hands of Christian charity. Ruth demonstrated this narrative, as she was on the verge of suicide when she was rescued by the Christian minister Mr. Benson. The portrayal of the fallen woman as redeemable and awakened into remorse at the thought of her lost innocence was a popular narrative in high and popular British culture in the mid-nineteenth century, and is best represented by William Holman Hunt's painting *The Awakening Conscience* (figure 6). Completed in 1853, the painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1854 and was met with mixed reviews[43]. The painting was shocking to the Victorian middle-class audience and was considered pornographic by some viewers because, although the woman may appear to be fully clothed by twenty-first century

[43] Nead, 130.

standards, Hunt depicted the kept-mistress in her petticoats, which were her undergarments. When compared to Rossetti's *Found*, Nochlin contends that *The Awakening Conscience* represented Christian optimism, rather than crypto-Christian despair, and this optimism was shown through the woman's rising posture, which was a stark contrast when compared to Rossetti's woman's falling stance[44]. In the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood style of art, it was common for members to produce works of art which accompanied each other[45]. The companion piece to *The Awakening Conscience* was Hunt's *The Light of the World,* completed between 1851 and 1853, and continued the idea of Christian optimism.

In *The Light of the World* (figure 8), Christ is depicted knocking at the door of the soul, an act which represented the forgiving nature of Christianity, and Christ's sacrificial and everlasting love. In 1905, Hunt wrote of the painting:

> The closed door was the obstinately shut mind, the weeds the cumber of daily neglect, the accumulated hindrances of sloth; the orchard the garden of delectable fruit for the dainty feast of the soul. The music of the still small voice was the summons to the sluggard to awaken and become a zealous labourer under the Divine Master; the bat flitting about only in darkness was a natural symbol of ignorance; the kingly and priestly dress of Christ, the sign of His reign over the body and soul, to them who could give their allegiance to Him and acknowledge God's overrule.[46]

Filled with religious imagery, the painting portrayed Christ as the seeker of lost souls, and demonstrated a passage from the New Testament in which Christ stated: "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be unto you."[47] The painting, asserts Landow, reflected Hunt's own conversion experience which happened

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[44] Nochlin, 145.

[45] Roston, 62.

[46] William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Volume I* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), 350-51.

[47] George Landow, "Shadows Cast by The Light of the World," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (September, 1983), 474.

sometime in the late 1840s and early 1850s, and *The Light of the World* became Hunt's first successful religious painting[48]. In line with the typical evangelical conversion experience, the openness of Christ's heart to all, including sinners and fallen women, was an important belief and message, and helped incite many philanthropists and charity workers in their reclamation and relief movements. Just as Hunt's *The Light of the World* was filled with symbolic imagery, so was his *The Awakening Conscience*.

The Awakening Conscience depicts the exact moment the kept-mistress has been awakened into remorse at the thought of her fall from respectability, as the song being played on the piano was a favourite of hers as a child, and the oversized mirror in the background symbolizes her self-reflection. The carelessly thrown white glove on the floor, and the man's casual laid back position in the chair, would have indicated to the Victorian viewer that an afternoon of singing songs on the piano was more than the man had visited for. The distinction between the respectable and fallen woman, in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, is marked by the kept-mistress' long, flowing hair and decorative rings, which are on every finger but the marriage finger[49]. Likewise, the appearance of the room also makes the distinction between the respectable and the fallen. The cheap furniture, gaudy decorations and flashy carpet which fill the 'love nest' would have stood in sharp contrast to the elegance and refinement of a respectable middle-class home[50]. The scene under the table of the black cat playing with the defenseless bird represented what Hunt viewed prostitution as: men from the upper classes playing with the helpless women of the lower classes[51]. In fact, this is partly the reason why Hunt painted this

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[48] Landow, "Shadows Cast by The Light of the World", 473.
[49] Nochlin, 145.
[50] Roston, 63.
[51] Roston, 65.

scene, in hopes that the middle class would be awakened into realizing what was happening to the women of the lower classes[52].

The model for *The Awakening Conscience* was Annie Miller, a woman from the lower ranks of society who came from the slums of Chelsea, and who Hunt took it upon himself to rescue[53]. Jan Marsh argues that Hunt asked her to pose for this painting in order to show her what the future might have in store for an attractive working-class girl if she was not wise. The biblical verse which Hunt had inscribed on the frame of the painting (figure 7) also indicated the close connection Hunt saw between prostitution and industrial capitalism. The verse, taken from Proverbs, would have been known to the biblically educated middle-class viewer, and stated: "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart."[54] In the New Testament, this verse was written in relation to the prohibition of business affairs and by including this passage with *The Awakening Conscience*, Hunt revealed his association of loose morality with middle-class businessman, and his belief in their willingness to exploit the indigent[55]. In 1905, Hunt wrote of his strong desire to "make more tangible Jesus Christ's history and teaching", and both *The Awakening Conscience* and *The Light of the World* demonstrated, along with the redemption narrative, that all members of British society could and should be saved[56].

Conclusion

In the mid-nineteenth century, high and popular culture often used the prostitute to represent the effects of industrial capitalism and the moral corruption of British

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[52] Bullen, 58.
[53] Marsh, 82.
[54] Hunt, 347.
[55] Roston, 65.
[56] Hunt, 349.

society. As in the social sciences, the prostitute could easily be spotted in works of art, poetry and fiction by the characteristics of her physical appearance, such as her beauty, hair and dress. However, unlike in the social sciences, the prostitute was often portrayed under the epithet 'fallen woman', a female who was seduced and forced into prostitution as a result of this seduction. This allowed her to be portrayed in novels, poetry and art as a beautiful woman, turned into an outcast by society's relentless ideologies of female sexuality and respectability. Also similar to the social sciences, the emphasis on man's lust and his uncontrollable sexual passion were used to take the blame off of the woman in order to demonstrate that fallen women were not morally weak or naturally deviant, but tragic victims who needed assistance to get out of their hopeless state. The seduction to suicide narrative and the seduction to redemption narrative worked together in order to provoke sympathy for the fallen woman in British society. As a result of these narratives, many charitable societies and institutions emerged, like Dickens' Urania Cottage and the magdalene homes, with the main goal of restoring the fallen woman and prostitute to a 'normal' state of femininity[57]. One figure, Mary Magdalene, emerged to dominate the image of redeemable prostitute during this time period, and her representations in British culture will be the topic of the next chapter.

[57] Nead, 202.

CHAPTER THREE

And she wore her hair 'the harlot's way': Representations of Mary Magdalene as a Prostitute in British Culture

In the Victorian era, there was no consensus over Mary Magdalene's identity, character or history, and as a result, she was portrayed in British culture as both a sinner and the devoted follower of Christ who was the first to see and announce the Resurrection. Although her biblical identity was popular in church art, Mary Magdalene was more prevalently linked to the woman who anointed Christ's feet at Simon the Pharisee's house, and whose story is told in Luke's gospel:

> And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment...And he unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.[1]

In this passage, which became Mary Magdalene's conversion story, Luke's unnamed sinner acknowledged her sinful life as a prostitute, asked Christ for forgiveness, was redeemed through His love, and thereby reformed into a respectable and pious woman. For many Victorians, Luke's unnamed sinner was Mary Magdalene. However, as mentioned in the introduction, Mary Magdalene's association with fallen women was not a Victorian creation. Her link to prostitution was firmly established in Western Christianity after Pope Gregory the Great's sixth-century sermon, and the rescuing of prostitutes in her name was first sanctioned by Pope Gregory IX in 1227, with the establishment of the Order of St. Mary Magdalene and their several convents for former

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[1] *Holy Bible King James Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2002), Luke 7:37-38, 48.

harlots[2]. In addition to her association with prostitution being established in the medieval era, Mary Magdalene's legendary identity was also constructed during this time period.

In the late medieval period, Mary Magdalene was the second most worshipped saint, behind the Blessed Virgin Mary, and after her veneration by the monks of Vézelay in the tenth century, she became the patron saint of sinners, prostitutes and lepers in Western Christianity[3]. The first leper hospital dedicated to Mary Magdalene in Britain was located in Sprowston, and was founded by the Bishop of Norwich, Herbert de Losinga, in the twelfth century[4]. Other leper hospitals soon followed and were opened in Colchester, Pembroke, Wexford and Bath[5]. Mary Magdalene's affiliation with leprosy can be attributed to her connection with sin, because in the medieval era leprosy was often linked to prostitution, and living a sinful life[6]. It was assumed that the only cure for the disease was living a life of charity, penitence and contemplation, which made Mary Magdalene's conversion story a useful example for lepers to follow[7]. Judith Walkowitz suggests that prostitutes became the new social lepers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because syphilis, the main venereal disease Victorian prostitutes were said to have spread, replaced leprosy as a symbol of social contagion[8]. Therefore, Mary Magdalene's association with social outcasts and her representation as a sinner was not a

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[2] James A Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law," *Signs,* vol 1, no 4 (Summer, 1976), 840

[3] Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots Prostitution in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol 1, no 1 (July 1990) 17

[4] Victor Saxer, *Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident des origines a la fin du moyen âge,* 2 vols (Paris Librairie Clavreuil, 1959), 122

[5] Saxer, appendix

[6] Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk The Boydell Press, 2006), 122

[7] Rawcliffe, 123 & 151

[8] Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1980), 59

Victorian creation but a medieval revival, refashioned in the nineteenth century to meet the particular needs and concerns of British society.

Mary Magdalene's representation as a prostitute was not the only medieval convention to be revived in the nineteenth century as the Victorians viewed the medieval era as a time of social, political and religious stability, and therefore held nostalgic views towards traditions and customs that had originated during this time period. Anthony Harrison calls the revival of medieval traditions and customs in the nineteenth century 'Victorian medievalism'. More than just a cultural phenomenon in Britain, Victorian medievalism was a coded discourse used to transmit messages that were often class specific, and its influences can be seen in the politics, arts, literature and architecture produced by the middle and upper classes during the nineteenth century[9]. Harrison argues that Victorian medievalism "promulgated a belief in the spiritual power of love and in the positive moral influence of women"[10], which explains the revival and popularity of the homes for repentant prostitutes, originally established in the medieval era. Likewise, the concept of Victorian medievalism can also account for the revival and popularity of Mary Magdalene's representation as a reformed prostitute in Victorian culture, which derived from her legendary identity which was established in the medieval era. This chapter will examine representations of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute in British culture, and discuss the interlacings between these representations, and the popular assumptions and narratives which influenced the representations of prostitution and fallen women in Victorian social science, art and literature.

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[9] Anthony H Harrison, *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture Discourse and Ideology* (Virginia The University of Virginia Press, 1998), 18

[10] Harrison, 18

Mary Magdalene in Victorian Social Science

Rebecca Lea McCarthy defines the term 'magdalenism' as "the process of identity inversion for the sake of controlling a class of women in the name of moral righteousness and economic gain."[11] McCarthy uses magdalenism as an umbrella term which she applies to "not only those who sold their body in exchange for profit but the poor woman, the nonconformists, the single mothers, the young and poor truants, the abandoned wife, and any woman who was seen as a challenge to society's moral code" throughout history[12]. The Victorians also used the term magdalenism, but Reverend Ralph Wardlaw's definition varied:

> The evil, then, now to be the subject of our consideration, is, I repeat, *the illicit intercourses of the sexes* The female who submits to this is guilty of *magdalenism*. The very first offense is magdalenism. I am aware that the propriety of this use of the word may be questioned. *Fornication* and *magdalenism* have been distinguished; the former as meaning the act of illicit intercourse generally, the latter as including the idea of the act being committed *for hire*. And Johnson defines magdalenism "*the life of a public strumpet*." It is little worth our while to dispute about the precise shades of difference between different terms. I consider the word *magdalenism* as, equally with *fornication* and *whoredom*, applicable to the woman who, whether for hire or not, *voluntarily surrenders her virtue*.[13]

For Wardlaw, magdalenism was any sexual act, whether for pay or for pleasure, that went against middle-class standards of sexual morality and respectability. Holding a similar view, William Tait's 1840 publication on Scottish prostitution was called *Magdalenism*. However, Tait does not actually use the term magdalenism in his publication. Instead, Tait used the term prostitution, and this is because the word magdalenism was used as an

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[11] Rebecca Lea McCarthy, *Origins of the Magdalene Laundries* (London: McFarland & Company Inc , Publishers, 2010), 9

[12] McCarthy, 10

[13] Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures of Magdalenism Its Nature, Extent, Effects, Guilt, Causes, and Remedy,* second edition (New York: J S. Redfield, 1843), 32-33

euphemism for prostitution during this time period[14]. Mary Magdalene's name was also linked to prostitutes and fallen women themselves in British culture, and her conversion story was used as an example in the Victorian period for these women to follow, as well as a source of inspiration for philanthropists.

On December 29th 1848, Marianne George, who was known in her later life as Mary Magdalene, entered the Clewer House of Mercy and became the home's first penitent[15]. Marianne, who entered the house at the age of twenty-four, was from the slums of Clewer where she was born to an unwed mother. Nevertheless, Marianne's mother soon married, and it was this man who seduced Marianne and eventually became the father of her children[16]. The story of the first penitent of Clewer House is recalled by Valerie Bonham in *A Place in Life.* Bonham states that Marianne demonstrated her reformation to the woman who ran the home, Mariquita Tennant, as she exhibited a "moral and spiritual victory over temptation" when her stepfather came to visit her and she refused him[17]. As a result of this victory, Marianne became the head laundry woman, a task that required running errands outside of the home, and meant that only a truly reformed woman could hold this position. The Clewer House of Mercy believed that rescuing fallen women was a moral cause because if a soul could be saved and led away from sin, then a sinner could be reformed[18]. Marianne, or how the other penitents who

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[14] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 69.

[15] Valerie Bonham, *A Place in Life The Clewer House of Mercy, 1849-1883* (Windsor: Privately Published, 1992), 28.

[16] Bonham, 31.

[17] Bonham, 31.

[18] Bonham, 51.

entered the house started to refer to her as Mary Magdalene, exemplified the home's guiding mission and demonstrated to society the need for future rescue work[19].

Several female rescue and reform institutions named after Mary Magdalene were established in nineteenth-century England and Scotland, although the first British magdalene institution established was located in London, and opened in 1758[20]. The institution was situated in close proximity to Lambeth Asylum, which housed young orphaned girls in an attempt to prevent them from 'falling', while the magdalene charity reformed those who had already 'fallen'[21]. The founders of the charity believed that the institution should be a place to house these unfortunate women, as well as a place where these women could reform, through Christian education and industrial training[22]. While addressing the name of the new institution, Jonas Hanway, one of the men responsible for its establishment, wrote:

> It does not appear to me that Mary Magdalen was deficient in point of chastity, as is vulgarly understood, I rather imagine she was not. It is certain, she was lady of distinction, and of a great and noble mind...Your charity requires a zeal like hers: you are her disciples, and the dedication of your institution to her memory, is entirely consistent with the honor due to her character, and in this light, no name more proper could be given to it.[23]

In this statement, Hanway argued that the charity should be named after Mary Magdalene not because she was a reformed prostitute but because she was a strong and positive example for Christian women to follow. However, in the nineteenth century, Mary

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[19] Bonham notes that on June 15 1848, Harriet Smith entered the Clewer House of Mercy and referred to Marianne as 'Mary Magdalene'; Bonham, 40.

[20] Paula Bartley, *Prostitution Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 25.

[21] Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 119-120.

[22] Andrew, 122.

[23] Jonas Hanway, *Thoughts on the plan for a Magdalen-House for repentant prostitutes,* second edition (London J and R. Dodsley, 1759), 23.

Magdalene's portrayal as a reformed prostitute, her legendary identity, dominated her biblical identity, shown here by Hanway, allowing philanthropists and reformers to use her conversion story as a guide in their quest to rescue and reclaim the fallen[24].

Within their philanthropic endeavours, many middle-class woman volunteered with institutions which housed and reformed fallen women and prostitutes. Victorian women participated in philanthropy for two reasons. The first reason was to experience pleasure, adventure or rebellion, as philanthropy allowed a woman to leave the confines of the private sphere and exercise her talents and experiences in the public sphere[25]. In *Public Lives*, Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair assert that philanthropy not only allowed middle-class women to enter the public sphere, but they also contend that philanthropic endeavours allowed middle-class women to become self-reliant, independent and self-fulfilling[26]. In *Slumming Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, Seth Koven argues that the working poor were often viewed as objects of fascination for members of the middle class and that by entering into Britain's urban slums for charity work, many men and women were allowed to escape from their own highly controlled and structured lives to experience how the 'other' Victorians lived[27]. Since class cultures were often distinct and separate, many middle-class philanthropists were unaware of how the 'other' classes lived. In fact, although this ignorance often created unwanted charity as it was common for middle-class charity workers to view the working class as immoral and in need of reform, charitable work exposed philanthropists

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[24] Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London Routledge, 1990), 67

[25] Linda Mahood *Feminism and Voluntary Action Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876-1928* (New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6

[26] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven Yale University Press, 2003), 5-6

[27] Seth Koven, *Slumming Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 2004), introduction

to a different culture and a different way of life, and allowed women to enter the public sphere with a purpose.

The second reason many women entered philanthropy during the Victorian era was because of a strong religious conviction[28]. In nineteenth-century Britain, all Protestant denominations accentuated the importance of philanthropy, especially the evangelicals[29]. In her study of philanthropy in Victorian Scotland, Olive Checkland argues that the evangelical movement of the early nineteenth century was highly influential on philanthropists and Christian charity workers, and that piety was the backbone of these endeavours[30]. Although both men and women participated in philanthropy, it was generally viewed to be a natural 'mission' for women by middle-class Victorians because it allowed women to use the same caring and nurturing skills they used in their homes as wives and mother, and also because many middle-class women did not work in the public sphere, thus giving them enough spare time to volunteer for local charities. Whether involved in charitable organizations and institutions for personal or religious reasons, the main point is that many middle-class women were involved in philanthropy during the nineteenth century and as a result, thousands of charities and church societies fed, clothed and visited the poor daily, making charity work and philanthropy an important aspect of Victorian society and middle-class culture[31].

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[28] Mahood. *Feminism and Voluntary Action Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children,* 6.

[29] F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1 & 8.

[30] Olive Checkland, *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland Social Welfare and the Voluntary Principle* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1980), 30.

[31] Mahood. *Feminism and Voluntary Action Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children,* 6.

Christina Rossetti, Victorian poet and sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, was a Victorian middle-class woman who was involved in philanthropy. Rossetti volunteered at St. Mary Magdalene's in London from 1859 to 1870, and her experiences at this refuge for prostitutes was highly influential in her writing. She wrote about Mary Magdalene in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*, which included entries for each date of the year that made reference to a particular saint's feast and the lesson learned from that holy figure. Under the date July 22, this was written:

> Feast of St. Mary Magdalene; A record of this Saint is a record of love. She ministered to the Lord of her substance, she stood by the Cross, she sat over against the Sepulchre, she sought Christ in the empty grave, and found Him and was found of Him in the contiguous garden.[32]

Although this entry seems to reflect Mary Magdalene's biblical identity, the previous entry must also be read in order to see Rossetti's reference to the Magdalene's legendary identity. The July 21 entry acts as a prelude to the July 22 entry because it discusses sin and forgiveness, and Mary Magdalene became a saint known not only for her own love, but for the love that was shown toward her when she was forgiven by Christ[33]. Rossetti's views on love and forgiveness were influenced by her first hand experience working with recovering prostitutes at the London Diocesan Penitentiary of St. Mary Magdalene's on Highgate Hill[34]. As the name suggests, the penitentiary used Mary Magdalene as an inspiring role model for their penitents, and the image of a kneeling Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Christ appeared on the cover of the institution's annual reports[35]. This image, taken from her conversion story, was particularly important in her portrayal

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[32] Christina Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1902), 139.

[33] Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 115.

[34] D'Amico, 104.

[35] D'Amico, 115.

as a prostitute because it represented the eminent aspects of her reformation which Victorian prostitutes and fallen women were also expected to demonstrate: regret in choosing a sinful life, and acts of penance to overcome these sins.

In Victorian Britain, Mary Magdalene's conversion story and the Christian practices of repentance and penance were used to encourage fallen women and prostitutes to reform. Repentance was an important step in the reform process because as Elizabeth Charles, a popular Victorian religious writer, stated: "sin was a disease which could only be cured when confessed"[36]. Acknowledgement and abandonment of their sinful life was required in order for fallen women to enter most magdalene homes and other rescue institutions during the nineteenth century, and these women were expected to voluntarily incarcerate themselves in these institutions before they could start the reform process. Many institutions operated some kind of profitable domestic service operation where the penitents were expected to work while learning "lessons of industry" they could use in their lives outside of the institution[37]. The washing of linen was a dominant form of industry taught at many magdalene asylums, as laundry work could be used to financially support the institution. However, laundry work was also used for the social and moral reform of each penitent. Within these institutions, it was the combination of industrial and moral education that philanthropists believed could reform fallen women, and laundry work was used to:

> Wash off the taint of the past...to infuse in her new ideas of life, and of the way in which a happier life may be attained: to inspire willingness to work into the indolent, self-control into the emotional, self-respect into the passionate: to eradicate the deeply rooted evils habits of the past and to infuse

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[36] Elizabeth Charles, *Sketches of the Women of Christendom* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1880), 60.

[37] "Glasgow Magdalene Institution: New Home at Lochburn," *Glasgow Herald* (October 21, 1867).

> a spirit of order, virtue, propriety, submission: and above all things to bring her to the knowledge of God.[38]

As this passage from the *Birmingham Magdalen Asylum Annual Report* of 1898 demonstrates, Mary Magdalene's legendary identity was used as a source of inspiration for fallen women and prostitutes in magdalene institutions and rescue homes. The washing of linens was an appropriate job for a reforming prostitute because it washed away her sins in the same manner Mary Magdalene washed away her sins when she anointed Christ's feet during her reformation.

The women who became penitents in these institutions were referred to as 'magdalenes', and as a result, the trope 'magdalene' was used interchangeably with the epithets 'prostitute' and 'fallen woman' in Victorian Britain. This can be seen in the 1873 novel *The New Magdalen*, written by Wilkie Collins, which tells the story of a reformed prostitute struggling to find her place in society. The trope magdalene can also be seen in *The Magdalen's Friend*, a monthly periodical published from 1860 to 1864 that encouraged its readers to become involved in the fallen woman rescue movement[39]. In a 1864 article "Woman's Love" published in the periodical, Mary Magdalene and her conversion story were discussed:

> Mary Magdalen, the great sinner. As St. Luke tells her affecting history, she was evidently looked upon as an outcast, unfit for society into which she had intruded, as it appeared to Simon the Pharisee, who had bidden our Lord to a feast at his house...We read further that she was received into the society of the honourable women that ministered to the Saviour, and that she was to be found in His company and that of His disciples; this plainly teaching us that the repentant Magdalen, who turns from her sins with full purpose of heart, is

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[38] *Birmingham Magdalen Asylum Annual Report,* 1898 Found in Bartley, 54-55

[39] "Come over and help us A Letter from the Editor, Addressed to Every Reader of the 'Magdalen's Friend'," in *The Magdalen's Friend A Monthly Magazine*, vol 5, edited by a clergyman (London William Macintosh, 1864), 154-155 In this article, the editor wrote "We have long awaited to memorialize our Magdalene by raising in connexion with it a fund to be applied to strictly missionary purposes We desire, however, that every one of our readers should feel personally interested in sustaining this branch of our work, and, to some extent, individually responsible for its success "

> to be received, nothing doubting...Society, however, at the present day still continues in the frame of mind evinced by Simon the Pharisee, instead of that of Jesus and His apostles.[40]

In this article, Simon the Pharisee is described as judging Mary Magdalene because of her profession and social status, while Christ is depicted as showing sympathy, love and forgiveness towards her. The author of this article argued that Simon's treatment of Mary Magdalene as a social outcast reflected nineteenth-century British society's views regarding their own prostitutes and fallen women, and society needed to act more like Christ and His disciples than Simon the Pharisee. In Victorian Britain, Mary Magdalene's conversion from fallen woman to loyal disciple was used to illustrate that prostitutes and fallen women could be redeemed, and Elizabeth Charles wrote that Mary Magdalene was an important figure because she demonstrated "that the most sinful and most miserable may be forgiven and purified and then transfigured, so as to stand beside the holiest, and be amongst the most beloved and faithful disciples and servants to God"[41].

Mary Magdalene's moment of awakened conscience not only inspired inmates of magdalene asylums to reform but it also inspired philanthropists to rescue and reclaim these social outcasts. The image of the sympathetic, loving and forgiving Christ became popular amongst philanthropists, reformers and female theological writers in Victorian Britain. By promoting Christ's sympathy, love and forgiveness, which were considered female qualities in nineteenth-century England and Scotland, these women helped to construct the representation of the feminized Christ, a portrayal which allowed Victorian

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[40] "Woman's Love," in *The Magdalen's Friend A Monthly Magazine*, vol. 5, edited by a clergyman (London William Macintosh, 1864), 101-103.

[41] Charles, 49.

women to identity themselves with spiritual superiority and religious authority[42]. The paradigm of the feminized Christ not only influenced mainstream religious discourse, but it also caused evangelical Christian followers to begin imitating Christ's actions by rescuing and reforming the less fortunate in society[43]. In an attempt to exhibit Christ-like qualities, many female philanthropists entered brothels, handing out tracts and liberty cards to prostitutes which included information about local magdalene homes and midnight meetings[44]. Midnight meetings were organized to assist prostitutes in their reformation by bringing them in from the night, serving them free food and beverages, exposing them to religious sermons, and offering them a chance at salvation[45]. Although these meetings first started in London during the 1860s, they soon spread throughout the rest of Britain, and remained popular for the rest of the nineteenth century[46].

Josephine Butler, one of the Victorian era's most well-known philanthropists and moral reformers, often compared the suffering of women to the suffering of Christ and the mission of women to the mission of Christ, and urged the British middle class to follow in Christ's path of charity and love. In an essay published in *The Contemporary Review*, Butler stated:

> But how has it been in the matter of our Lord's treatment of fallen women? Was ever act of His more marked, or more prominent, or more designedly typical, than His conduct towards these? As if to enforce the duty of society towards them with a special recommendation, He is seen, not once, but again and again, by His

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[42] Julie Melnyk, "Women, writing and the creation of theological culture," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (New York Routledge, 2010), 42

[43] Melnyk, 42

[44] F K Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1992), 192

[45] Mahood, 62

[46] Prochaska, 195-96

> marked reception of these women, to give as it were to the world a key-note upon which to tune its voice to the Magdalene to the end of time.[47]

This passage used Mary Magdalene's conversion story to encourage middle- and upper-class Victorians to take part in the fallen woman rescue movement because Butler believed that it was every Christian's duty to follow in Christ's footsteps. Butler argued that if Christ saved fallen women again and again, than it should be every Victorian Christian's duty to save their own magdalenes again and again. Mary Magdalene's conversion story was used to inspire both fallen women and middle-class women during the nineteenth century. Her representation as a reformed prostitute demonstrated to society that salvation was still possible for Victorian prostitutes, and the forgiveness Christ exhibited in Mary Magdalene's moment of awakened conscience confirmed to philanthropists that their work was purposeful, which helped to fuel the fundraising work of the charities.

Mary Magdalene in Victorian Literature

Mary Magdalene's character and history in nineteenth-century British culture was heavily influenced by medieval literature. One of the most famous medieval hagiographies of Western Christianity to include Mary Magdalene was Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* of 1260. In this hagiography, Mary Magdalene is portrayed as the sister of Lazarus and Martha, as well as a rich noblewoman:

> ...born of right noble lineage and parents, which were descended of the lineage of kings...She with her brother Lazarus, and her sister Martha, possessed the castle of Magdalo, which is two miles from Nazareth, and Bethany, the castle which is nigh to Jerusalem, and also a great part of Jerusalem, which, all these things they departed among them.[48]

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[47] Josephine Butler, "The Lovers of the Lost," *Contemporary Review*, Vol 13 (January/March 1870), 18-19

[48] Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, volume 4, edited by F S Ellis (London n p , 1900), 36

However, if Mary Magdalene was from a wealthy and noble family, why did she choose prostitution as a profession? The English Digby play "Mary Magdalene" answers this question. In the play, Mary is distraught at the death of her father. As a result, the sin of lust, a character in the play, convinces her to go to Jerusalem to work as a prostitute[49]. For medieval writers, the fact that Mary Magdalene had money and still entered the profession of prostitution made her even more sinful than the regular prostitute, and her sinful representation was demonstrated in *The early South-English Legendary*[50]: "So more fairore þat heo bi-cam: þe more of hire was prys,/ þe more fol woman heo wax: and sunful and unwys:/ Hire riȝhte name maire: ouer-al heo less þare-fore,/ Sunfole wumman men cleopeden hire: bi-hinde hire and bi-fore."[51] This quotation exemplifies that Mary Magdalene's sins were not only linked to her sexuality, but that they were also plentiful, making her reformation and conversion to a righteous woman even more profound.

One of the last English saint legends to be written was Thomas Robinson's *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* in the sixteenth century. The poem included two parts. The first part described Mary Magdalene's life of sin and also portrayed her as a rich woman, who enjoyed the pleasures of fine fashion and extravagant banquets: "Prœuentinge all her pleasure with her haste:/ Parte of her time in idle languishement,/ Parte in attire, and gaudy ornament,/ And parte in frolicke feasts and banquetinge, shee

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[49] "Mary Magdalene," *The Digby Plays with an incomplete 'morality' of Wisdom, who is Christ,* reissued from the edited version by F J Furnivall, originally published in 1882 (London The Early English Text Society, 1896), pages 71-75, lines 454-546

[50] *The early South-English Legendary* was published by the Early English Text Society in its original Middle English during the Victoria era In Middle English, the letter thorn (þ) was pronounced "th" and the letter yogh (ȝ) was pronounced as a "g"

[51] *The early South-English Legendary Lives of Saints,* edited by Carl Horstmann (Milwood, NY Kraus Reprint, 1887), 1 303, lines 19-20

spent."[52] The second part of the poem focused on Mary Magdalene's life after her reformation, and included a recalling of her conversion story at Simon the Pharisee's house. *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* and *The Digby Plays* were published in the Victorian era by The Early English Text Society. The publishing of medieval manuscripts and hagiographies by The Early English Text Society, and other publishing houses, was popular in nineteenth-century Britain, and demonstrates the concept of Victorian medievalism. Furthermore, the reproduction of these works for a Victorian audience helped to revive Mary Magdalene's legendary identity in British culture.

The influence of her medieval representations can be seen in works produced by Victorian writers. In Edgar Saltus' *Mary Magdalene: A Chronicle*, Mary Magdalene is depicted as an heiress who lives in a castle at Magdala[53]. Another example is Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of the World*, which described Mary Magdalene as both a sinful woman and as Christ's closest disciple:

> This is the house is called 'Megaddela's,'
> Names, as some will, from Magdal, where we lie;
> And others from the braided locks she wore
> Who lives House-mistress here; -the long hair tressed
> The Harlot's way. They told us, in the town,
> This Dame,- much honored now for noble works-
> Was devil-gaunted, and the wildest wench
> Of Galilee, before the Nazarene
> Tamed her, and taught her; and she grew His Friend,
> Closest amid the faithful.[54]

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[52] Thomas Robinson, *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene A legendary poem in two parts*, edited by H. Oskar Sommer (London: The Early English Text Society, 1884), 23, lines 387-390.

[53] Patricia S. Kruppa, " 'More sweet and liquid than any other': Victorian Images of Mary Magdalene," in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society*, edited by R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter (London. Routledge, 1992), 119.

[54] Edwin Arnold, *The Light of the World or the Great Consummation* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), 85-86.

Following this passage, Mary Magdalene is described as "A Queen of Sin"[55] and when recalling her sinful life, Mary stated that she wore "her hair the harlot's way"[56]. Similar to the fallen woman, Mary Magdalene's hair was used as a symbol in Victorian art and literature to denote her fallen state. Arnold's poem included several references to Mary Magdalene's hair, as well as a recalling of her conversion story, with an accompanied illustration by William Holman Hunt (figure 9). As the illustration shows, Mary Magdalene's hair became a popular feature not only because it denoted her fallen sexuality but because she used it to wash Christ's feet, along with her alabaster jar, which was used to anoint Christ's feet. These two iconographical elements appeared in many of her written and visual representations because they represented her sorrow and penance, qualities that reforming prostitutes and fallen women were also expected to demonstrate in the nineteenth-century England and Scotland.

Christina Rossetti's 1846 poem *Mary Magdalene*, also exhibits her sorrow and penance as a prostitute:

> She came in deep repentance,
> And knelt down at His feet
> Who can change the sorrow into joy.
> The bitter into sweet.
>
> She had cast away her jewels
> And her rich attire,
> And her breast was filled with a holy shame,
> And her heart with a holy fire.
>
> Her tears were more precious
> Than her precious pearls –
> Her tears that fell upon His feet
> As she wiped them with her curls.
>
> Her youth and her beauty

[55] Arnold, 91.
[56] Arnold, 133.

Were budding to the prime;
But she wept for the great transgression,
The sin of other time.

Trembling betwixt hope and fear,
She sought the King of Heaven,
Forsook the evil of her ways,
Loved much, and was forgiven.[57]

The poem clearly depicts Mary Magdalene's conversion story, and also demonstrates the use of her popular iconographical traits, such as her youth, beauty, elaborate dress, hair and tears. These traits, originally established in the medieval era, were popular in Mary Magdalene's Victorian literary representations and resemble many of the prevalent representations of prostitutes and fallen women in British popular culture. These traits also could be found in her visual representations, most notably in the works of art produced by the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their associates.

Mary Magdalene, the Pre-Raphaelites and her Representations in Victorian Art

Between 1800 and 1896 there were almost 150 pieces of art produced on Mary Magdalene as the subject in Britain; ninety-one which depicted her legendary life and forty-four which portrayed her biblical identity[58]. These numbers demonstrate that overwhelmingly more works of art depicted Mary Magdalene's representation as a prostitute than as the first person to see the risen Lord, and this was due to the popularity of the fallen women in British culture. Similar to the fallen woman's portrayal in Victorian art, Patricia Kruppa argues that Mary Magdalene was always depicted as youthful and beautiful, and this made her transition from prostitute to penitent more

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[57] Christina Rossetti, "Mary Magdalene", 8 February 1846. Found in *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, with notes by William Rossetti (London: MacMillan and Co., 1911), 89.

[58] Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene Myth and Metaphor* (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 341

emotionally satisfying for the Victorians[59]. The obsession with fallen women in Victorian art reached the height of its popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, and this is when the majority of paintings and drawings which depicted Mary Magdalene as a prostitute were produced.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had a special interest in Mary Magdalene. This group of artists, poets and art critics, who formed in 1848, only existed formally for less than a decade, but remained influential amongst themselves and the British art world for the rest of the century. The works produced by the Pre-Raphaelites are often set apart from the rest of the art produced during this time period because the Brotherhood has been credited with revolutionizing English art production[60]. However, the group did not necessarily hold monolithic views in regards to religious art. Although many members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood produced works based on Scripture, their views and interpretations of the Bible differed. John Ruskin, an associate of the Pre-Raphaelites, described the difference between two of the founding member's views on religious art:

> To Rossetti, the Old and New Testament were only the greatest poems he knew; and he painted scenes from them with no actual belief in their relation to the present life and business of men than he have also to the 'Morte d'Arthur' and the 'Vita Nuova'. But to Holman Hunt, the story of the New Testament...became what it was to an old Puritan, or an old Catholic of true blood, - not merely a Reality, not merely the greatest of Realities, but the only Reality.[61]

For Hunt, religious art served a moral purpose, and he dedicated his career to making Scripture live as history through his creations[62]. For Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Bible was just a beautiful story and this can be seen in Hunt's description of Rossetti's views

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[59] Kruppa, 121.
[60] Nead, 128-29.
[61] Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 192.
[62] Giebelhausen, 193.

on religious art: "Rossetti treated the Gospel history as a storehouse of interesting situations and beautiful personages for the artist's pencil"[63]. Unlike Hunt, Rossetti chose to produce works of art and poetry based on Scripture not because he wanted to preserve Christ's lessons but because the Bible provided intriguing stories from which he could easily draw his subjects.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti produced two paintings as well as one drawing and one poem based on Mary Magdalene during his career. Each of these works used Mary Magdalene's legendary identity, and included the theme of escape. His first work on Mary Magdalene was a watercolour completed in 1857, and focused on Mary Magdalene following her anointing at Simon the Pharisee's house, after she had escaped her sinful life. In his 1859 drawing (figure 10) and poem, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*, Mary Magdalene is depicted moments before she committed the anointing that would allow her to escape that sinful life. And finally, in Rossetti's 1877 painting of Mary Magdalene, she is pictured as a prostitute, prior to her reformation, and this is evident in her sorrowful and regretful gaze which exemplified her hope of escape. Also included in these works is the iconography that was most commonly associated with Mary Magdalene during this period: her beauty, elaborate dress, hair and alabaster jar.

Rossetti's theme of escape in his Magdalene works was influenced by the portrayal of the fallen woman as a social victim in the social sciences, and in high and popular culture. The theme of escape reflects the redemption narrative described in chapter two, and can be seen in Tait's *Magdalenism*, where he described a prostitute as in a perpetual cycle of sin and regret:

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[63] William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Col., Limited, 1905), 172.

> Those who only observe their gay and flirting manner on the streets, would imagine them to be all happy and joyful, destitute of every feeling of shame and remorse for the past, and without one serious anticipation about the future; but let it be remembered that this is the temporary happiness of artificial excitement, and that, when left one moment to themselves, an insupportable gloom and terror surrounds them.[64]

The sorrow, regret and helplessness of the Victorian prostitute can be seen in Rossetti's 1877 painting *Mary Magdalene*. In this painting, Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a prostitute before her reformation, and this is confirmed through her appearance. Not only is her hair loose and dishevelled and flows erotically down her back, but Mary Magdalene's lush lips and flushed cheeks symbolized her wayward sexuality, as does her frontal pose[65]. However, the harmful effects of prostitution, which were prominent topics of discussion in the social sciences, are demonstrated through Mary Magdalene's vacant gaze, most likely caused by too much "artificial excitement", and the longing for another life. The theme of escape is further represented by the black hellebore and white Christmas roses that decorate the background of the painting. In Victorian floriography, black hellebore symbolized scandal and calumny[66], while white Christmas roses symbolized the phrase 'relieve my anxiety'[67].

In his drawing of Mary Magdalene during her moment of awakened conscience, which included an accompanying poem, Rossetti demonstrated the popular view that although prostitutes could be saved through Christian intervention, reformation had to be voluntary, and the choice of salvation had to be made by the fallen woman herself. In a

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[64] William Tait, *Magdalenism An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh,* second edition (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1842), 49-50.

[65] Ernest Fontana, "Mary Magdalene and The Pre-Raphaelites," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. 9 (Fall 2000), 92.

[66] Katie Greenaway, *The Language of Flowers*, revised edition (London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., n.d.), 21.

[67] Greenaway, 12.

letter to Mrs. Clabburn written in July 1865, Rossetti described the drawing *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (figure 10), which depicted a self-saving Mary Magdalene:

> The scene represents two houses opposite each other, one of which is that of Simon the Pharisee, where Christ and Simon, with other guests, are seated at the table. In the opposite house a great banquet is being held, and feasters are trooping to it dressed in cloth of gold and crowned with flowers...Mary Magdalene...has been in this procession, but has suddenly turned at the sight of Christ, and is pressing forward up the steps of Simon's house, and casting the roses from her hair. Her lover and a woman have followed her out of the procession and are laughingly trying to turn her back.[68]

The drawing depicts the reality and contradiction of the Victorian era, the choice between wealth and Christian selflessness[69], as Mary Magdalene is forced to choose between her life of sin, represented by the urgency of the street, and a life devoted to Christ, represented by the stillness of the house[70]. Mary Magdalene's dishevelled hair, elaborate dress and alabaster jar are also present in this drawing but what is most important is Mary Magdalene's upright, positive posture. Although she is being held back by the woman's arm and her lover's hand on her foot, Mary Magdalene fights through and continues in her ascent to Christ, and ultimately salvation. Although Rossetti's drawing does not show Mary Magdalene's actual act of repentance and redemption, it does demonstrate that Mary Magdalene's reformation was self-promoted, a theme also found in Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* (figure 6), and the positive posture shown in Hunt's kept-mistress is mirrored in the upright stance of Rossetti's Magdalene.

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[68] Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971), 62

[69] Murray Roston, *Victorian Contexts Literature and the Visual Arts* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 60.

[70] Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1989), 127.

The willingness of Mary Magdalene to reform on her own accord was also shown in the drawing's accompanying poem:

> 'Why wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair?
> Nay, be thou all a rose,—wreath, lips, and cheek.
> Nay, not this house,—that banquet-house we seek;
> See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.
> This delicate day of love we two will share
> Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.
> What, sweet one,—hold'st thou still the foolish freak?
> Nay, when I kiss thy feet they'll leave the stair.'
>
> 'Oh loose me! See'st thou not my Bridegroom's face
> That draws me to Him? For His feet my kiss,
> My hair, my tears He craves to-day:—and oh!
> What words can tell what other day and place
> Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?
> He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!'[71]

Rossetti's poem "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee" has two speakers. The first speaker is Mary Magdalene's lover, who is trying to hold her back, and the second speaker is Mary Magdalene, who has voluntarily decided to give her sexuality, her most valuable possession, to Christ and become His follower. The choice between salvation and death was a familiar subject for Rossetti, and this theme can also be seen in his unfinished painting *Found*, where the fallen woman refuses the drover's offer of salvation. However, in *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (figure 10), the offer of salvation is accepted, and this is why Alicia Faxon argues that the drawing can be read as a pendant to *Found*[72]. The emphasis on Mary Magdalene's voluntary reformation was an important aspect of her representation as a prostitute in British culture because Victorian prostitutes were expected to repent their sins before they could be

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[71] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee," found in *The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, vol 1 (Boston Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), 283

[72] Faxon, 127

redeemed. Just as Mary Magdalene was prompted to repent at the sight of Christ, Victorian philanthropists attempted to expose prostitutes to Christianity, by handing out liberty tracts and holding midnight meetings, in hopes that these unfortunate women would repent of their own free will and voluntarily incarcerate themselves in magdalene homes and other rescue institutions to reform.

Frederick Anthony Sandys was another associate of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who was fascinated with Mary Magdalene, and his two paintings of her were his only works derived from biblical Scripture. Sandys' first painting of Mary Magdalene was completed between 1858 and 1860, and represented Mary Magdalene as a beautiful but sinful prostitute (figure 11). Her fallen woman status is exemplified in the physical characteristics of her appearance, as her elaborate dress, flushed cheeks, pursed lips and open mouth all demonstrate her erotic allure. This painting was intended to suggest sexual intimacy, and this is evident by Mary Magdalene's hair, which was brightly coloured and dishevelled, and flowed "like molten metal across her shoulders and back"[73]. As previously discussed, 'love of dress'[74] was considered a reason many women entered prostitution, and the appearance of a woman's hair denoted her sexuality. However, Sandys' painting exhibits another popular indicator of fallen sexuality, teeth. David Sonstroem asserts that teeth in Victorian art could mean many things depending on

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[73] Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*, with contributions from Barbara Bryant, Christopher Newall, MaryAnne Stevens and Simon Wilson (New York Tate Gallery Publishing Limited, 1997), 104

[74] William Tait and William Acton both list 'love of dress' as a cause for prostitution in their publications

the character being portrayed[75]. However, in this case, Mary Magdalene's teeth, framed by her pursed lips and open mouth, revealed her wantonness to the Victorian audience[76].

Sandys completed another painting of Mary Magdalene in 1862 (figure 12) but unlike his first portrayal in 1859, Sandys second Magdalene painting represented her as a sorrowful prostitute. Again, Mary Magdalene's fallen state is demonstrated through her appearance, but the tear falling down her cheek becomes the primary focus of the painting. The tear represents Mary Magdalene's regret and the helplessness she feels in her profession, and the alabaster jar which she holds up to her heart foreshadows her moment of redemption. The alabaster jar, which Mary Magdalene is shown holding in Sandys' 1859 painting as well as in Rossetti's works, was an important element of Mary Magdalene's legendary identity because the ointment inside the jar was used during her life as a prostitute, during her moment of awakened conscience, and at Christ's Resurrection. During her life as a prostitute, Mary Magdalene used the ointment in the jar as perfume to lure her customers. During her moment of redemption, the ointment in the jar was used to anoint Christ's feet in an act of repentance. Lastly, after Christ's Crucifixion, Mary Magdalene went to the Sepulchre to prepare His body for burial and was holding the jar when she witnessed the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene's tear and alabaster jar, along with her hair, became popular iconographical elements during the Victorian era because they exemplified her conversion story, and that a happy ending was possible for fallen women and prostitutes. However, although art was popular among the upper and middle classes, high culture was not accessible to all, and Kruppa contends

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[75] David Sonstroem, "Teeth in Victorian Art," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2001), 351.

[76] Sonstroem, 359.

that some Victorians were exposed to representations of Mary Magdalene in church rather than at art exhibitions[77].

Stained glass windows had been a dominate form of communicating religious ideas since the medieval era, and the Victorian era saw a revival of this art[78]. Many new churches were built in nineteenth-century Britain which included stained glass windows, and although Mary Magdalene's portrayal as a reformed prostitute dominated popular culture, her representation as a loyal disciple, her biblical identity, was more heavily used in stained glass. However, there were stained glass windows in Protestant churches which depicted Mary Magdalene's legendary identity. One example is the east chancel window in St. Ladoca Church located in Ladock, in the county of Cornwall, which was designed by Edward Burne-Jones, a Pre-Raphaelite associate. This window depicted Mary Magdalene anointing Christ's feet at Simon the Pharisee's house (figure 13), and the cartoon (figure 14), also drawn by Burne-Jones, exhibits many of the same iconographical traits, such as her hair and alabaster jar, that were used in other paintings and drawings of Mary Magdalene in Victorian Britain. Similarly, a 1903 gesso figure (figure 15) by Robert Anning Bell, which stood behind the altar at Park Church in Glasgow, depicted Mary Magdalene kneeling humbly before Christ repenting her sins[79]. Even though this image was completed just after the end of the Victorian era, it includes many of the same symbols which were used by the Pre-Raphaelites in their works on Mary Magdalene, such as her elaborate dress, brightly coloured hair and upright

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[77] Kruppa, 124

[78] Kruppa, 124

[79] Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Images of Femininity* (New York Harmony Books, 1987), 90 Figure 15 was taken from Jan Marsh's book, who acquired reproduction rights from the Fischer Fine Art Gallery at the time of publication However, the Fischer Fine Art Gallery is now closed, and although an effort was made to locate the copyright holder, it was not found

posture[80]. Therefore, although Protestant theology dismissed Mary Magdalene's representation as a reformed prostitute during the sixteenth century, her association with prostitution in British culture was so prevalent and widely accepted that it was able to make its way into Anglican and Presbyterian churches, exposing her legendary identity to Victorians who lived outside of middle-class culture.

Conclusion

In Victorian Britain, Mary Magdalene became the figure most commonly associated with prostitution. Her relation to prostitution was so close that Mary Magdalene's name became synonymous with the epithets prostitute and fallen woman, and the term 'magdalenism' was used as an euphemism for prostitution by both the clergy and medical profession. Reverend Osborne Gordon stated that Mary Magdalene's popular representation as a prostitute prevailed in nineteenth-century British because "she teaches us that vile and common as woman may be, foul as the fairest may become, there is hope and pardon for the sisters of the streets..."[81] Mary Magdalene's representation as a reformed prostitute was revived and refashioned in Victorian Britain because her conversion story could be used as a model for prostitutes and fallen women to follow, and it promoted the image of the feminized Christ, which inspired middle-class women to engage in the fallen woman rescue movement. This demonstrates that the growing concern over the rates of prostitution in England and Scotland, and the resurgence in the popularity of Mary Magdalene's legendary identity in Victorian culture was not a coincidence. The suicide narrative, previously discussed in chapter two, was used in art and literature to provoke sympathy for the fallen woman in British society, and Mary

[80] Marsh, 90.
[81] Osborne Gordon, 218.

Magdalene's representation as a reformed prostitute, which promoted the redemption narrative, provided evidence to the middle class that fallen women could successfully be redeemed through the help of Christian charity.

CONCLUSION

Was the Victorian fallen woman Mary Magdalene or was Mary Magdalene the Victorian fallen woman?

> Prostitution remains unacceptable in most circles and, regardless of the rise of feminism, a collective ideology, a 'sexual revolution' and an awareness that prostitution involves at least two people, emphasis is still placed on persecuting prostitutes rather than examining – and eliminating – the underlying economic and social causes of its continuation.[1]

This passage, which compares Victorian and Edwardian prostitution to late twentieth-century prostitution, is from Paula Bartley's *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England.* Bartley argues that many of the debates which surround prostitution and many of the issues that are still being 'overlooked' today are the same debates and issues that were popular in Victorian Britain: incarceration versus regulation, female sexuality versus male sexuality, and necessity versus natural desire. However, in the twenty-first century there is not one figure associated with prostitution and not one woman who dominantly represents a prostitute in art and literature. Similarly, the Madonna/Magdalene dichotomy which surrounded Victorian women is no longer represented by the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene in popular culture. Although the virgin/whore paradigm still exists, it has new representation, in the form of film stars and celebrities. Prostitution has not changed drastically in the last one hundred years but the prostitute and her representations in British culture have.

In 1969 the Roman Catholic Church declared Mary Magdalene's association with prostitution incorrect, and ever since, her dominant representations in British culture have

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[1] Paula Bartley, *Prostitution Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 201.

changed[2]. However, her identity, character and history are still being debated in the twenty-first century. With the popularity of fictional literature attempting to reveal hidden church secrets, Mary Magdalene is now rumored to be the wife of Christ and the mother of His children, a notion which challenges many Christian theological beliefs, and demonstrates the refashioning of her representations once again to meet the needs and concerns of a particular time period. The continuation of her popularity into the twenty-first century also illustrates the ability of her legacy to change with the times, and the re-evaluation of her legendary identity has revealed the important place women held in Christ's inner circle. The reinterpretation of her identity has turned the most important aspect of Mary Magdalene's life from her moment of awakened conscience at Simon the Pharisee's house, to the announcing of Christ's Resurrection to the disciples on Easter Sunday, making her the Apostle to the Apostles in both Catholicism and Protestantism. Perhaps this refocus on her life, and the important role she played in Christ's final days on earth, assisted in the decision and vote to ordain women as ministers in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1969[3], and as priests in the Anglican Church of England in 1992[4].

Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries describe Christianity as a "liquid religion", which has been "transmuted" and "reinvented" throughout history in order to shape "itself to fit the society that contained it"[5]. In similar fashion, this thesis has shown how Mary Magdalene and her legacy have also been transmuted, reinvented and shaped

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[2] Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene Myth and Metaphor* (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 388.

[3] Lesley Orr Macdonald, *In Good Company Women in the Ministry* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1999), 33.

[4] Haskins, 400.

[5] Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries, "Afterword: Women, gender and the re-imagining of a 'post-Christian' Britain," in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940,* edited by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (New York: Routledge, 2010), 233.

throughout history to meet a society's particular needs. Mary Magdalene went from representing prostitutes and lepers in the medieval era, to representing prostitutes, fallen women and any other female who deviated from middle-class norms and ideologies of respectability in the nineteenth century. Mary Magdalene's representations as a prostitute in the Victorian era depicted many of the narratives which surrounded the fallen woman and prostitution, and this is because the legendary identity of Mary Magdalene was used in British culture as a platform from which the middle class could explore their beliefs and ideologies regarding female sexuality, Christian charity and institutional reform. The fallen woman in Victorian culture was a social construct, and her representations worked simultaneously alongside representations of Mary Magdalene in the social sciences, art and literature to help conventionalize prostitution as an acceptable topic of discussion and the prostitute as a worthy object of charity in nineteenth-century Britain.

During the Victorian era, although she was not considered a saint by the established Church of Scotland, Mary Magdalene was still considered a saint by the Anglican Church of England. Her feast day of July 22, which was established in the medieval era, was still celebrated in nineteenth-century England. On this day, it was common for clergymen to read sermons pertaining to Mary Magdalene at magdalene institutions and other female penitentiaries[6]. On such an occasion, Reverend Osborne Gordon delivered a sermon concerning Mary Magdalene, in which he discussed her popular Victorian representations: "When we see in painting and in sculpture the long flowing hair, the features that once invited men to sin, but are now turned in purity to heaven, the tearful

[6] Patricia S Kruppa, " 'More sweet and liquid than any other' Victorian Images of Mary Magdalene," in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society*, edited by R W Davis and R J Helmstadter (London Routledge, 1992), 117

eye, we ask no question we want no information, we know that it is a Magdalen."[7] Even though Reverend Gordon argued against the representation of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute, he could not deny that this is how she was commonly viewed in his culture. However, there was no consensus over Mary Magdalene's identity in the Victorian era, and this is made clear in a 1891 passage from Anna Jameson:

> It is difficult to treat of Mary Magdalene; and this difficulty would be increased infinitely if it were absolutely necessary to enter on the much-vexed question of her scriptural character and identity...The woman who, under the name Mary Magdalene,- whether that name be rightfully or wrongfully bestowed,- stands before us sanctioned in the imagination and in the faith of the people in her combined character of Sinner and of Saint, as the first-fruits of Christian penitence,- is a reality, and not a fiction.[8]

In this passage Jameson argued that although Mary Magdalene's legendary identity as a prostitute may not be based on Scriptural evidence and had been debated for centuries, it was still her real identity for many Victorians.

Although Mary Magdalene is still a prominent figure in twenty-first century culture, little has been written on the influence of her legendary and biblical identities on cultures in previous time periods, including the Victorian era, and in other cultures, including Canadian and American. Although this thesis has demonstrated how Mary Magdalene's representations as a prostitute were often intertwined with popular narratives on prostitution and philanthropy in Victorian Britain, a more thorough study is still needed on how her legendary *and* biblical identities influenced the formation of female sexuality and gender identity in the nineteenth century. However, what has been made clear from this study of her legendary identity is that the narratives which accompanied the representations of Mary Magdalene and fallen women in Victorian

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[7] Osborne Gordon, "Sermon XI, St Luke viii 2, 'Mary called Magdalene '," in *A Memoir with a selection of his writings,* edited by George Marshall (London, Parker and Co , 1885), 218

[8] Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (London Longmans, Green & Co , 1891), 344

Britain were so interwoven that it would be easy to confuse a Victorian painting of a fallen woman for Mary Magdalene, and vice versa. Therefore, in England and Scotland, Mary Magdalene was the Victorian fallen woman and the Victorian fallen woman was Mary Magdalene.

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APPENDIX: TABLES

TABLE 1: Percentage of Women who listed Domestic Service as their Previous Employment when entering the Glasgow Magdalene Institution, Lochburn Home

Year	Percent of Women
1871	31%
1873	29%
1875	22%
1877	27%
1879	38%
1881	31%

TABLE 2: Number of Penitents in the Glasgow Magdalene Institution (Lochburn Home) and their Reported Parentage

	1871	1873	1875	1877	1879	1881
Orphaned	76	58	70	104	86	79
Father Diseased	28	28	27	54	44	42
Mother Diseased	40	31	46	46	52	44
Both Parents Alive	34	25	24	47	39	35
Not Ascertained	11	4	6	0	0	9
Total Penitents	189	146	173	251	221	209

Sources for Table 1 and Table 2 "Appendix Previous Employment", *Twelfth Annual Report of the Magdalene Institution*, Glasgow, 1871, "Appendix Previous Employment", *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Magdalene Institution*, Glasgow, 1873, "Appendix Previous Employment", *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Magdalene Institution*, Glasgow, 1875, "Appendix A Previous Employment", *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Magdalene Institution*, Glasgow, 1877, "Appendix B Previous Employment", *Twentieth Annual Report of the Magdalene Institution*, Glasgow, 1879, "Appendix B Previous Employment", *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Magdalene Institution*, Glasgow, 1881

APPENDIX: FIGURES

FIGURE 1: "Martha" in
The Personal History of David Copperfield
by Charles Dickens (1850), illustration by H.K. Browne

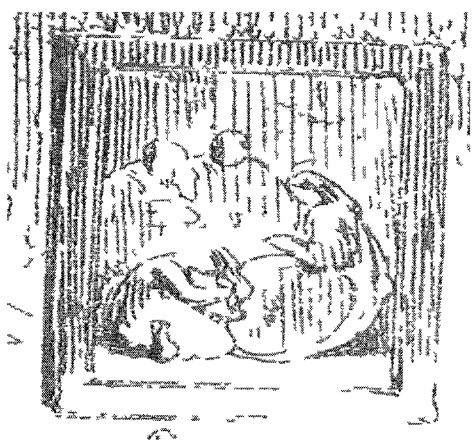

FIGURE 2: "Martha" (detail)

FIGURE 3: *Found Drowned* by George Frederick Watts (ca. 1848-1850)
Reproduced with permission from Watts Gallery

FIGURE 4: *Found (study)* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1853)
Reproduced with permission from ARTstor

FIGURE 5: "The River" in *The Personal History of David Copperfield*

by Charles Dickens (1850), illustration by H.K. Browne

FIGURE 6: ***The Awakening Conscience*** **by William Holman Hunt (1853)**
Reproduced with permission from ARTstor

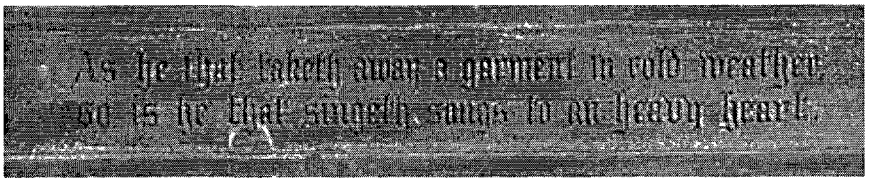

FIGURE 7: ***The Awakening Conscience*** **(frame detail)**

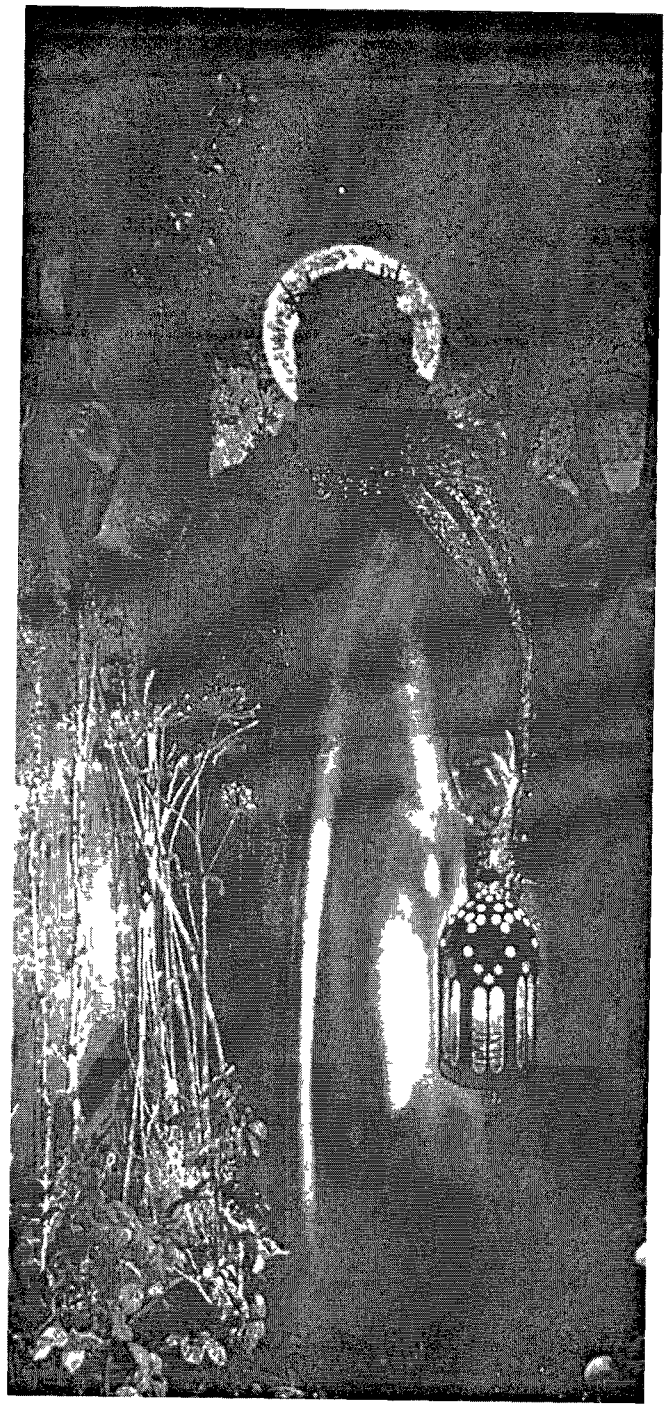

FIGURE 8: ***The Light of the World***
by William Holman Hunt (ca. 1851-1853)
Reproduced with permission from ARTstor

THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.

—And he said unto her, thy sins are forgiven.—LUKE VII: 48.

FIGURE 9: "The Woman who was a Sinner"
in *The Light of the World or the Great Consummation*
by Edwin Arnold, illustration by William Holman Hunt (1891)

FIGURE 10: ***Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee***
by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1858)
Reproduced with permission from ARTstor

FIGURE 11: ***Mary Magdalene***
by Anthony Frederick Sandys (ca. 1858-1860)
Reproduced with permission from ARTstor

FIGURE 12: ***Mary Magdalene***
by Anthony Frederick Sandys (1862)
Reproduced with permission from
Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service
(Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery)

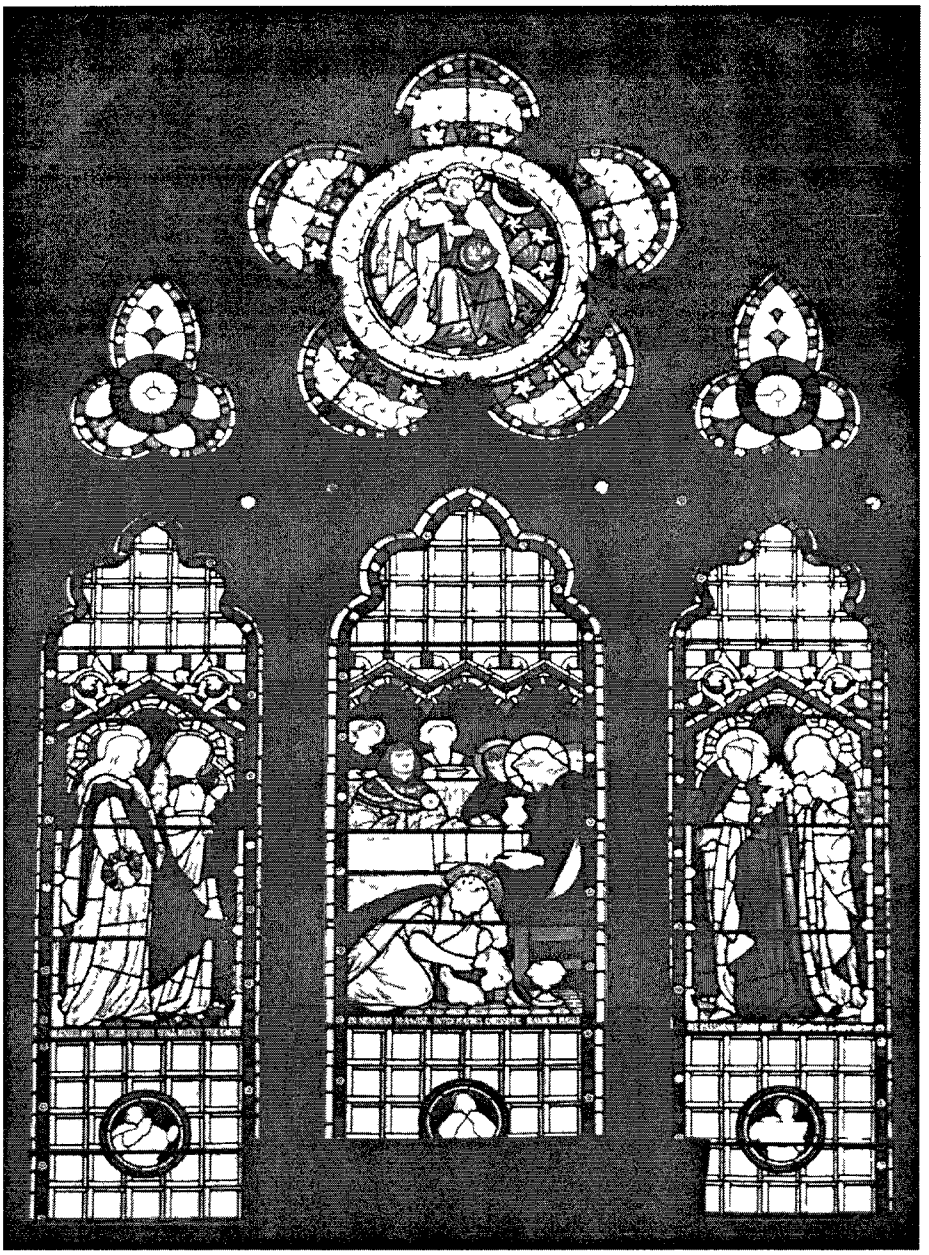

FIGURE 13: ***St. Mary Magdalene Anointing Christ's Feet***
by Edward Burne-Jones (1863)
Reproduced with permission from Gordon License

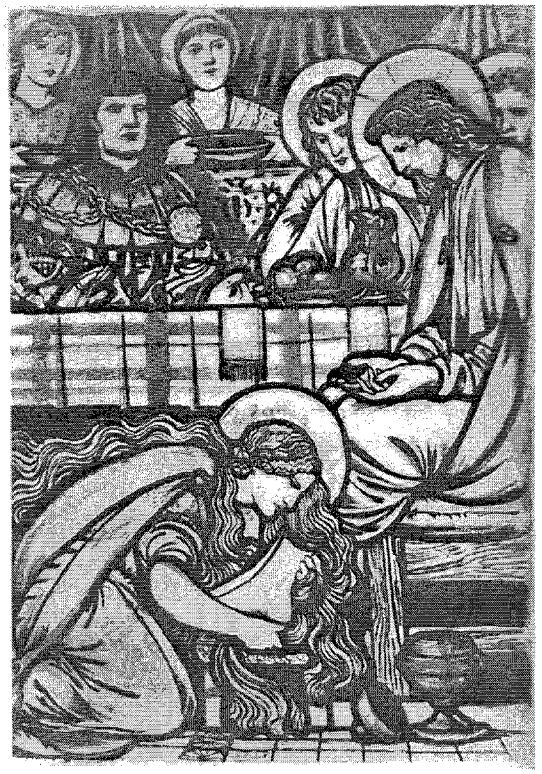

FIGURE 14: Cartoon for *St. Mary Magdalene Anointing Christ's Feet* by Edward Burne-Jones (1863)
Image taken from A. Charles Sewter's *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle* and reproduced with permission from Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

FIGURE 15: *Mary Magdalene* by Robert Anning Bell (1903)
Image taken from Jan Marsh's *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity*