

5-1-2006

# Wayward Nuns, Randy Priests, and Women's Autonomy: "Convent Abuse" and the Threat to Protestant Patriarchy in Victorian England

Cassandra N. Berman

Macalester College, [cberman@alumni.macalester.edu](mailto:cberman@alumni.macalester.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/reli\\_honors](http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/reli_honors)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Berman, Cassandra N., "Wayward Nuns, Randy Priests, and Women's Autonomy: "Convent Abuse" and the Threat to Protestant Patriarchy in Victorian England" (2006). *Religious Studies Honors Projects*. Paper 1.

[http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/reli\\_honors/1](http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/reli_honors/1)

This Honors Project - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Religious Studies Department at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

*Wayward Nuns, Randy Priests, and Women's Autonomy:  
"Convent Abuse" and the Threat to Protestant Patriarchy in Victorian  
England*

**Cassandra N. Berman  
Macalester College  
May 1, 2006**

**Advisers: Dr. Paula M. Coeey, Religious Studies  
and Dr. Paul D. Solon, History**

**Department: Religious Studies**

## CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	2
<b>A Note on Images</b> .....	2
<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Part I. The Rise of the Anti-Catholic Movement</b>	
<i>Victorian Anti-Catholicism</i> .....	11
<i>Convent Abuse in Victorian England</i> .....	21
<i>Convent Abuse, Victorian Prudery, and Family Life</i> .....	29
<b>Part II. Progress and Social Anxiety</b>	
<i>Social and Technological Changes in Victorian Society</i> .....	35
<i>Women's Changing Place in Society</i> .....	38
<b>Part III. The Victorian Woman Religious</b>	
<i>The Growing Appeal of Convent Life</i> .....	50
<i>Establishment of Protestant Sisterhoods</i> .....	59
<b>Part IV. Defiance of Protestantism</b>	
<i>Convents and the Threat to Protestant Patriarchy</i> .....	73
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	79
<b>Appendix</b> .....	85
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	94

## **Acknowledgments**

I conducted research for this project at the Newberry Library for the Humanities in Chicago, Illinois, and completed the project at Macalester College in April 2006. I would like to thank my Associated Colleges of the Midwest advisers at the Newberry, Dr. Robert Bennett and Dr. Glenn McNair, both of Kenyon College, for their help in conceiving, writing, and revising this project. I wish to thank the reference librarians at the Newberry Library, who assisted me in finding resources and oversaw my first foray into the exhilarating and somewhat daunting world of primary sources. I would also like to thank Dr. David Itzkowitz from the Macalester History Department, who graciously agreed to critique my paper and offer his expertise on the subject. My Macalester advisers, Dr. Paul Solon from the History Department and Dr. Paula Coeey from the Religious Studies Department, have been invaluable as professors and mentors, both on this project and throughout my time at Macalester. I especially wish to thank them for their insight, support, and patience.

## **A Note on Images**

The images found in the Appendix of this work come from the collections at the Newberry Library for the Humanities. Because they all date to the nineteenth century, they now fall under public domain and may legally be reproduced.

## **Abstract**

This paper examines anti-Catholicism in Victorian England in conjunction with the birth of modern feminism, the changing nature of women's roles, and the attendant phenomenon of "convent abuse" tales in popular literature. These tales are distinguished from other forms of anti-Catholicism by their focus on gender and sexual perversity. The convent provides a setting for the complete rejection of traditional Protestant gender roles and the stories betray fear of women's crossover into a male dominated world. Though I acknowledge these tales as anti-Catholic, I reanalyze them as expressions of Protestant unrest over the freedoms women were gaining in the mid-1800s.

*Woman is scarcely ever fitted to rule, so that there are ten chances to one in favour of a Mother Superior, who is caged for life with her own sex, becoming a capricious, little-minded tyrant.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

In the mid-1800s, the story of Miss Julia Gordon, a recent convert to Roman Catholicism, was recorded by one Reverend Dr. Coleridge and distributed throughout London. According to Coleridge's pamphlet, Julia began life as a Protestant in Exeter but, attracted to conventual life after the death of her parents, she decided to enter a Sisterhood of Mercy and from there became a nun in the Convent of the Holy Jesus. However, soon after taking her vows, Julia quickly realized that the convent in which she was to remain confined was really a prison, that the priests to whom she was to confess her sins were in actuality lecherous and greedy men, and that the Catholic Church to which she had devoted herself was nothing more than a superstitious institution whose thin veneer of Christianity did little to conceal the blasphemous acts of its followers. The confessional, Julia learned, and the Reverend Dr. Coleridge faithfully reported, was where priests could demand anything they wanted from innocent young nuns, a place where sins were exacerbated, not forgiven. After a forced trip to the Holy See, she saw that Rome, like her convent, was far from the contemplative and spiritual place she had expected. Instead of piety, she discovered carnage. Murdered babies were thrown haphazardly into a lime pit right outside of St. Peter's, decaying remnants of the union of priest and nun throughout Europe's convents. After unhappily discovering the charred

---

<sup>1</sup> "Malleus Ritualistarum," quoted in John Shelton Reed, "'A Female Movement': The Feminization of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Catholicism," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 57 no. 2 (March 1988): 235.

bodies of pious Protestants, Julia made another unhappy discovery: she, like so many of her fellow nuns, had become pregnant. Julia fled, finding refuge in the home of a kindly Protestant in Paris, where she died giving birth to her priest's child.<sup>2</sup>

The Reverend Dr. Coleridge's *Awful Disclosures of Miss Julia Gordon, the White Nun, or Female Spy!* was one of a slew of pamphlets distributed on the streets of Victorian London that claimed to expose truthfully the horrendous abuses of British convent life. Julia Gordon's story was not original; the title of the Reverend Dr. Coleridge's pamphlet was taken from an earlier Canadian convent exposé, the *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, first published in 1836. Stories of the Catholic Church's murder of its bastard children had been heard before—Maria, again, had reported a similar lime pit, supposedly used for the same purposes, in the cellar of her convent in Montreal.<sup>3</sup> Certainly the idea that priests encouraged or even demanded that their nuns engage in sexual acts with them was a common enough theme in popular pamphlet literature and Victorian pornography around the time of Miss Julia's death. Various pamphlets and magazine articles written during this time, such as *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns*, *The Most Frightful Disclosures of Diabolical Plots against Female Chastity by the Rev. Mr. Poole and Miss Joy*, and "The Convent Prison" all relate similar tales of abuse suffered in convents.

But why was Julia Gordon's story so similar to others published during the same time period? Why were Maria Monk, Julia Gordon, and the myriad other women who claimed to have suffered similar abuse in convents coming forth to tell their lurid tales in such great number in the mid-1800s? Tales of sexual exploits within the nunnery had

---

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Coleridge, *Awful Disclosures of Miss Julia Gordon, the White Nun, or Female Spy!* (London: G Abington, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures* (Manchester: Milner, 1836), 83.

existed for hundreds of years, with such established writers as Chaucer contributing to the canon. Was this Victorian explosion of convent abuse literature merely an intensification of an already established genre, or did it mirror abuse that actually existed within the seclusion of the convent? How did Julia Gordon's life get reported in such detail if she died before returning home to London, where the Reverend Dr. Coleridge lived and worked?

Historians and scholars of religion have traditionally regarded these voyeuristic, sensationalist, and often erotic tales of abuse suffered by innocent young nuns to be expressions of the larger anti-Catholic sentiment that pervaded religious and popular discourse in Victorian England. Little scholarship has been done regarding the veracity of these tales, and most serious scholars do not waste time investigating the credibility of women like Maria Monk. Though there certainly could be elements of truth in the stories of convent abuse, there are also many telltale signs of propaganda and religious prejudice on the part of the authors and the documented reactions of their intended audiences: unflattering and bigoted epithets were freely employed (Jesuit priests were dubbed "black serpents" in an 1858 pamphlet, just as Catholics in general were repeatedly referred to as "Papist" or "Romish," both derogatory terms). Authors often dwelt on sexual abuse and rushed through their descriptions of less erotic, and therefore less intriguing, torture.<sup>4</sup> In a speech on such abuse delivered to a room full of Protestant males, the audience was recorded both cursing the Catholic priests who mistreated their nuns and chuckling at the inventive ways in which these same priests sought to exploit their victims.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Rev. F. Baring, *Astounding Revelations of Puseyism in Belgravia* (London: J. Hatswell, 1858), 7-13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



Though there may be some truths expressed in these sensationalist tales, the clichéd and biased ways in which the majority of these stories were told have placed them within the frame of Victorian anti-Catholicism. The connection between anti-convent sentiment and anti-Catholicism in general has been thoroughly examined by a few scholars, including Frank H. Wallis and Walter L. Arnstein.<sup>6</sup> These historians are correct to look at England's fascination with convents as part of the growing prejudice against Catholics, but viewing it in only this way is to oversimplify a complex issue. Wallis writes in his *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain* that convents angered Protestants more than any other Catholic expression of faith.<sup>7</sup> Though Wallis' claim may not be entirely verifiable (after all, the Papal Aggression Bill and the war between Cardinal Newman and the Anglican Charles Kingsley certainly agitated Protestant Catholic relations), his work nevertheless illustrates the prominence of the convent question in Victorian anti-Catholic discourse.

What differentiates the anti-convent debate from other forms of anti-Catholic expression, however, is its preoccupation with gender. Because of this, it is apparent that there was an additional component to the convent question, something beyond Protestant contempt for a religious "other," something more than distaste for rituals and high church mysticism— something that profoundly and undeniably challenged the English way of life. Though Protestant contempt for Catholics and Catholic contempt for Protestants had been raging since the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, the anti-convent movement did not emerge strongly until the nineteenth century. Convents, of course, had

---

<sup>6</sup> For more on the ways in which these tales betrayed underlying prejudices, see Frank H. Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon, 1993) and Walter L. Arnstein, *Protestant vs. Catholic in Mid-Victorian Britain: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Wallis, 183.

been part of Catholicism for hundreds of years, yet the anti-convent movement solidified only in the Victorian period. This indicates that there was something unique to Victorian society that was profoundly at odds with the female religious life, not merely Catholicism in general.

As Julia Gordon's tale demonstrates, much of the anti-convent propaganda of this period took on a decidedly erotic tone, replete with innocent and slightly dim-witted women being forced into convent life by lewd, deceptive priests. In the secular and political realm, a growing number of articulate and educated Victorian women began to agitate earnestly for social change, securing important legal victories in Parliament and challenging the sanctity of family life that Protestant morality championed. In light of this movement, I will examine anti-convent propaganda as a manifestation of unrest over woman's changing place in society and especially within the family, not merely as one of many forms of anti-Catholic expression. Convents posed a threat to the Protestant conception of femininity and therefore came to symbolize fear of women's autonomy. As the predominant patriarchal and misogynistic social systems were beginning to be questioned by Victorian women, hatred of convents and their alternative roles for women became a veiled way for Protestants to voice their anxieties over women's place in society.

This study will focus on anti-convent literature and propaganda from mid-nineteenth century England, using contemporary pamphlets, magazine articles, and recorded speeches as primary sources. All of these primary sources may be found in the collections of the Newberry Library of the Humanities. Though the collections were outstanding, I nevertheless had occasional difficulty locating anti-convent tales. Because

of this, I have chosen to examine a few sources not originally published in England, including Barbara Ubryk's *The Convent Horror* and the *Awful Disclosures* of Maria Monk. Monk's work is included in this study because her tale was the most widely circulated of the time and established many of the conventions that later tales followed or directly copied. The *Awful Disclosures* was distributed throughout England and reprinted in English newspapers. Barbara Ubryk's tale is admittedly more obscure. She lived in Krakow and the tale was published in Philadelphia. However, I have included her story because it was one of the best examples of convent abuse literature that I could access at the Newberry. Though her story might not fit completely within the English tradition, I am confident that its inclusion will only add to this study and will not misinform readers.

My analysis of these documents will be based upon secondary sources chiefly drawn from the works of historians Walter L. Arnstein, Peter F. Anson, and Frank H. Wallis. Arnstein's *Protestant vs. Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* focuses on Member of Parliament Charles Newdegate's campaign to inspect Catholic convents throughout England in 1870. Hoping to expose abuse and undermine the Church, Newdegate's actions typified anti-Catholic sentiment in the nineteenth century. Arnstein's book connects the popular and lurid tales of convent abuse with the political campaign against Catholicism set forth by Newdegate and others. Anson's *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion*, the definitive work on Anglican religious orders, provides a history not only of the Anglican convent, but also of the presence of all religious orders in England after the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. Anson focuses on the establishment of Anglican sisterhoods and monasteries in England during the

Victorian period. Though he examines the controversy surrounding the creation of monasteries as well as sisterhoods, he concedes that monasteries were not as threatening to Protestantism as convents were, and neither were they as widespread. With this he explores the discomfort many Protestants felt with Anglican sisterhoods. Wallis' text provides an excellent background on the political debate surrounding Victorian anti-Catholicism, explaining why tensions between Protestants and Catholics escalated during this time period. He states that the most extreme aspect of this tension involved convents.

Next, I draw upon secondary sources dealing with women's issues and the rise of the women's movement in Victorian England. My sources include works by Duncan Crow, Deirdre David, Lee Holcombe, and Patricia Hollis, among others. Used in conjunction with the secondary sources detailed above, these sources allow me to connect the rise in anti-convent sentiment with the changing nature of women's roles in Victorian society.

Part I of my paper focuses on Victorian anti-Catholicism, explaining the general nature of the movement and then focusing on the anti-convent movement specifically. In Part II I discuss the rapid change, both social and technological, that challenged Victorian ideals, causing widespread anxiety and an intensification of Protestant mores. The most important of these changes, at least for the purposes of this study, relates to women's evolving role in society and within the home. I argue that one way this anxiety manifested itself was in anti-convent tales. Part III details the growing appeal of convent life for Victorian English women. Out of this, I argue, came the establishment of Protestant sisterhoods by leaders of the Oxford Movement. Because the appeal of

conventual life was so strong, some felt compelled to create a Protestant alternative for women. Though some were pleased, this worked to strengthen the overall anti-convent sentiment. Finally, Part IV concludes with an overview of the ways in which convents challenged Protestant patriarchal authority and how this related to the increase in women's autonomy.

## **I. The Rise of the Anti-Convent Movement**

### *Victorian Anti-Catholicism*

In order to understand the ways in which convent exposés betrayed prejudices beyond anti-Catholicism, it is first necessary to understand the rise and severity of Victorian anti-Catholicism itself. According to British historian Sir Robert Ensor, the mid-Victorian period in England was “one of the most religious that the world has known,” at least among the countries he considered civilized.<sup>8</sup> The official Church of England was Anglican, but numerous other Protestant denominations, such as Methodism and Quakerism, were gaining English followers during this time. Catholicism too was growing, partly because of increased emigration from Ireland to England, but also because an increasing number of Protestants were converting. These converts, while certainly not rivaling Church of England membership in numbers, were nevertheless quite outspoken about their newfound faith and represented a rejection of Anglican doctrine. As Walter L. Arnstein writes regarding the number of Protestant converts to

---

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in P.T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tate and the Church of England 1868-1882* (London: Routledge, 1969), 3.

Catholicism, “it was in the 1840s that a trickle became in the minds of many Englishmen a flood.”<sup>9</sup>

Many Protestants thought that conversions of this sort were actively encouraged by the Oxford Movement, which began in the early part of the century when a group of theologians at Oxford University became interested in the common roots of the Anglican Church and Catholicism. While nominally Protestant, the members of the Oxford Movement sought to reconcile the practices of these two Christian denominations. As a result, the religious services of the Oxford Movement began to resemble the Catholic mass in many ways: large crosses adorned the altar, Catholic rituals pervaded the service, communion and confession were required of its adherents. Many believed that the Oxford agitators were trying to win converts for Rome. But what the Oxford Movement accomplished on a national level, more than anything else, was to instill fear in traditional Protestants that their beloved Church of England was being infiltrated by Catholics, changed from within until it would no longer resemble the religion that in many ways defined the English way of life. Alternately and often derogatorily called “Romanism,” “Puseyism,” “Tractarianism,” and, by some modern scholars, “Anglo-Catholicism,” the religious sect that emerged from the Oxford Movement exacerbated anti-Catholic sentiment.<sup>10</sup> To those Protestants, Catholicism was no longer separate from the Church of England; instead, Catholicism was invading and threatening to change the fundamental nature of the Church of England.

The leaders of the Oxford Movement and, later, the religious figures who helped propagate its related Anglo-Catholic sect became targets of the mounting English anti-

---

<sup>9</sup> Arnstein, 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> Both contemporary and secondary sources refer to the religious sect that emerged from the Oxford Movement as “Anglo-Catholicism.” I will employ this term throughout my paper.

Catholicism. John Henry Newman, the Movement's best known leader, proved many Protestant fears regarding Anglo-Catholicism to be true—he left the Church of England in 1845 and converted to Catholicism. Eventually he was ordained a bishop, then a cardinal. Newman thus became a symbol of the threat posed by “Romanism,” and by extension the impending threat of all of Catholicism. Dr. E.B. Pusey, one of the most public and controversial of the Oxford Movement figures, became synonymous with Anglo-Catholicism itself—“Puseyism,” to traditional Protestants, was a questionably Protestant sect with an unnatural allegiance to its leader. Because anti-Catholicism often took on a gendered tone, and because the greatest manifestation of anti-Catholicism was in its tales of convent abuse, charismatic leaders like Pusey were seen as especially threatening to young Protestant women. A poem published in London illustrates the ways in which young female converts were seen as the “pets” of Reverend Pusey: “Come cheer up old England, don't be in the lurch,/ With the broom beat the pussey [sic] cats out of the church;/ Never mind the confessional, let us have hope/ We don't care for pussy cat, priestcraft, or Pope” (see Appendix, Figure 1).<sup>11</sup>

Newman and Pusey, to be sure, were charismatic leaders who did their part to exacerbate (intentionally or not) the fears and the increasing anti-Catholicism of the Protestant masses. However, Anglo-Catholicism and its eloquent propagators were not solely responsible for the rise in nineteenth century anti-Catholic prejudice. Important

---

<sup>11</sup> “The Flare up in the Confessional: The Pussey Cats are Coming” (London: n.d.), in *Tracts—Roman Catholic Doctrine and Practice*. The special role of confession, and its unique ability to incite prejudice, will be discussed in detail later in this paper.

The play on Dr. Pusey's name, here, should not be ignored. By the early seventeenth century, “pussy” referred to a woman or a homosexual, in addition to its alternative name for cats. The earliest recording of the term used in reference to female genitalia was in 1880, after this poem was written, though not by much. The sexual connotations were emerging around this same time period and should not be overlooked, especially in popular and often lewd pamphlet literature. *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), s.v. “pussy,” <http://0-dictionary.oed.com.clicnet4.clic.edu/> (accessed March 3, 2006).

legal rights were increasingly awarded to non-Protestant, and especially Catholic, citizens during the early and mid-Victorian period, and Catholics were agitating for even more legal rights. Three acts in particular aroused fear that the government was being taken over by Catholics: the Catholic Emancipation Act, the 1866 Oaths Act, and the Maynooth Grant. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 made more government positions available to Catholics, who had previously been severely restricted in the public service jobs they were allowed to hold. Though this act was a considerable victory for Catholics, it included an important corollary which was clearly intended to check the threat Catholicism purportedly posed to the supremacy of the English government: before assuming a government position, the Emancipation Act required all Catholics to declare that the pope had no “temporal power” over England.<sup>12</sup> Though the precise meaning of this declaration was unclear, it nevertheless required Catholics to confirm that their first loyalty belonged to the state, not to Rome. The 1866 Oaths Act, or the parliamentary oath of allegiance, sought to allow Catholics, among others, further rights within parliament and the professional realm. The Act changed the parliamentary oath of allegiance so that Catholics could more fully participate, but like the Emancipation Act, it faced strong opposition in Parliament and was eventually amended to exclude Catholics. Though this ultimately failed, it nevertheless frightened conservative Protestants and intensified anti-Catholic sentiment.<sup>13</sup>

The Parliamentary action that most aroused passionate Protestant objection, however, was the renewal and increase of the Maynooth Grant in 1845. Parliament voted to increase its current funding of Maynooth, a Catholic seminary in Ireland, and extend

---

<sup>12</sup> Arnstein, 75.

<sup>13</sup> Wallis, 165-66.



the temporal scope of the grant. Many were hoping that the vote would end England's funding of Maynooth; as such, this legislation proved incredibly divisive, with many Protestants convinced that England was being ruled from afar by the pope, figuring that otherwise the English government would not have made the decision to support the education of future monks and priests. Even though these acts granted Catholics little more power than they had before their passage, they symbolized an important ideological shift that many Protestants feared would threaten the Church of England. Fears were aggravated when the pope wrote a letter in 1851 declaring that England was "under the governance of the Roman Catholic Church," seeming to confirm that Catholicism had taken hold of what was considered a Protestant country.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, the Maynooth Grant was exceedingly controversial and sparked a fresh wave of anti-Catholic sentiment. As angry as Protestants were over this action, Wallis concludes significantly that "No symbol of Roman Catholicism agitated the ultra-Protestant mind—not even Maynooth—more than convents."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the putative legislative threat to Protestant dominance, the religious census of 1851 showed that a growing portion of the English population was identifying as Catholic.<sup>16</sup> It is impossible to know how many of these Catholics had converted from Protestantism as opposed to being born Catholic, but there was a popular theory that Protestants were increasingly "defecting," lured to Catholicism with false promises and the sacrilegious appeal of high church idolatry. Certainly Newman's own

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>16</sup> In 1847, there were 284,000 documented Catholics living in England; in 1851, there were 758,000. Though conversion to Catholicism certainly played a significant role in this increase, other factors such as Irish immigration and an overall increase in the English population must be taken into account. For more information, see Arnstein, 50, as well as the 1851 religious census.

public conversion reinforced the fears of many. To conservative Protestants, these turncoats were referred to not as converts, but as “perverts,” a significant appellation, for much of the anti-Catholic rhetoric, especially that dealing with women and convents, was cloaked in a peculiarly erotic tone.<sup>17</sup>

Anti-Catholics decried certain aspects of Catholicism more than others, and while conventual life did bear the brunt of this prejudice, other important aspects of Catholic worship, lifestyle, and even ethnicity created a climate in which hatred for all things “Romish” reached what was, for many, an obsessive level. “I should be very sorry to say anything from which it would be concluded that I wished the liberty which the Roman Catholics enjoy of exercising their religious faith to be interfered with,” declared a Protestant in a speech given at the Great Protestant Meeting in 1865, “but it is a very different thing wishing them, out of Christian charity, to enjoy that which has been conceded them, to allowing them to interfere with that which is our inheritance as Protestants.” This statement was met with applause.<sup>18</sup> The speaker seemed to be rationalizing in a way that was often done during this period: it is not that English Protestants are intolerant, he seems to be saying, but once Catholics interfere with the Protestant way of life, Catholicism becomes unacceptable. Indeed, the fear that Catholics were infiltrating the Church of England, made worse of course by the influence of the Oxford Movement, became a paranoia; the *Evangelical Magazine* reported that “agents of Rome” were seeping into Protestant England and acting as “secret agents” within the

---

<sup>17</sup> Wallis, 40. The Oxford English Dictionary confirms that the term “pervert” had decidedly sexual connotations by at least the 1850s. However, the term also referred to “a person who has forsaken a doctrine or system regarded as true for one thought false.” Surely this double meaning was not lost on pamphlet readers. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v.. “pervert,” <http://0-dictionary.oed.com.clicnet4.clic.edu/> (accessed March 3, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> *The Protestantism of the Church of England and Tractarian Devices Exposed* (London: W. Walbrook, 1865), 1.

Protestant family home. Interestingly, the fear was that these spies were posing as female domestic workers, which speaks to the general fear over women's changing place in society and of women's especial vulnerability to the allure of Catholicism.<sup>19</sup> Thus even nannies and governesses, workers whom any family would hope to trust, became suspected propagators of the false religion of Catholicism.

This suspicion of Catholic infiltration, as well as the theory that sexual abuse was rampant in convents, was based in part on the secrecy of the Catholic Church. The papacy was indeed powerful, but most people, Catholics as well as Protestants, were ignorant as to what really went on in the Vatican. The power hierarchy of the Catholic Church was to be accepted without dispute; this demand, however, led many to question what took place within the Catholic bureaucracy. When questions remained unanswered, Protestants began to make up their own highly speculative tales about the corrupt things that must be taking place within such a closemouthed institution. Secrecy was scary. But so were other aspects of Catholicism, including some that had worked their way into Protestantism via the Oxford Movement and leaders like Dr. Pusey. Confession, in which secrecy is essential, was perhaps the most reviled aspect of Catholic worship.<sup>20</sup> The reasons why are integral to understanding the fear that convents instilled in English society.

Victorian morality stressed the separation of the private sphere of life from the public. According to Victorian ideals, the family was to be hidden from the world at large, in part to protect it, but also because sexuality was considered taboo in the mid-

---

<sup>19</sup> *Evangelical Magazine*, 19 (1851): 202, quoted in Wallis.

<sup>20</sup> Reed, 216.

nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Because women were associated so strongly with procreation and considered intellectually inferior by many male leaders within the different Protestant traditions, they, along with sexual relationships, were relegated to the private sphere.<sup>22</sup> Confession was dangerous, then, precisely because it obscured the boundary separating these two spheres. In order to be a good Catholic (or a good Anglo-Catholic) an adherent must confess all of his or her sins to a priest. For women this meant they were to divulge the secrets of the Victorian bedroom, thus removing the all-important shroud of secrecy which cloaked the private sphere of home and relationships. Because priests would listen passively to their constituents' sexual thoughts and engagements, they were considered perverted voyeurs, capable of committing any number of licentious deeds with the confessing women in their care. Protestant men reacted strongly to lone women confessing to what they considered a sexually deviant authority figure in private. "It is remarkable how much of the anti-confession polemic," writes John Shelton Reed, "was directed to the male relatives of women, warning them to protect their wives, daughters, and sisters... again and again, preachers and pamphlet-writers told Englishmen of the dangers to their womenfolk and to themselves, should the women resort to confession. Many of the appeals amounted to candid warnings that male privilege was threatened...."<sup>23</sup>

The convent exposés are useful in understanding the strong antipathy Protestants had toward Catholic confession. Again, turning to Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures*,

---

<sup>21</sup> For more on the separation of spheres, see Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Duncan Crow, *The Victorian Woman* (London: George Allen and Ulwin Ltd., 1971), 50.

<sup>23</sup> Reed, 216-217.

which set the precedent for later anti-convent literature, it is clear that confession was particularly offensive to Anglican sensibilities:

I shall not tell what was transacted at such times, under the pretence of confession, and receiving absolution from sin: far more guilt was often incurred than pardoned; and crimes of a deep die were committed, while trifling irregularities, in childish ceremonies, were treated as serious offenses. I cannot persuade myself to speak plainly on such a subject, as I must offend the virtuous ear. I can only say, that suspicion cannot do any injustice to the priests, because their sins cannot be exaggerated.<sup>24</sup>

Maria told just enough in her *Disclosures* to whet the appetite of the prejudiced Protestant, but she never did *explicitly* accuse the clergy of sexually abusing her, during confession or any other time. Tales of other nuns echoed this rhetorical practice. Upper class Victorian culture considered it improper for women to discuss sex, which is exactly why confession was so repugnant. This meant that women were necessarily ambiguous about what occurred within the confines of the confessional when speaking to a broader audience. This is, of course, assuming that the exposés were first person narratives, which is unlikely, though in an effort to seem more authentic the tales' real authors assumed the gender conventions of the period. Regardless, Protestant men felt comfortable enough making the tacit leap, with testimonies such as Maria Monk's, from "suspicion cannot do any injustice to the priests, because their sins cannot be exaggerated," to molestation and rape. For example, in *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns!*, while "Lady Beaumont" never fully disclosed the actions of the priests, the title page read, "Satanic Sorcery of the BLACK MONKS.—Their Seductions, Adulteries, and Infamous Crimes, and the Torments they inflicted upon the Nuns."<sup>25</sup> It was clearly lewd sexual acts that Protestants feared; however, Protestant society

---

<sup>24</sup> Monk, 109.

<sup>25</sup> *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns!* (London: G. Abington, n.d.), title page.

*attempted* to be too polite to discuss sex in any more blatant terms than this. But as the illustrations of bare-breasted, unconscious nuns, dead babies, and lustful, cloven-footed priests indicate, forced sex was exactly what Protestant men thought of when reading suggestive convent abuse tales such as Maria Monk's.<sup>26</sup> I must stress that Victorian society had mastered the sexual innuendo and as such, it is difficult for the historian to find explicitly sexual statements in primary source material. Because of this, it is necessary to make inferences, just as Victorians did themselves, when confronted with suggestive statements such as Maria Monk's.

Conservative Protestants, both male and female, also railed against celibacy—to them it was unnatural, a renunciation of God's divine plan, a breeding ground (pardon the pun) for corruption and sexual perversion. According to Wallis, Protestants thought that celibacy led to "moral asceticism, cruelty, or mania" and posed a threat to the delicacy and sanctity of Protestant family life.<sup>27</sup> In addition, access to sex was a man's right; abstaining from intercourse, then, was tantamount to renouncing one's masculinity. Of course priests would be more likely to demand sexual favors from innocent and trusting young women if they had been suppressing their erotic impulses for too long, the avid readers of anti-Catholic literature figured.<sup>28</sup> "One of the chief grievances of Protestant militants on the conventual life was its superintendence by priests: their celibacy was suspected of wreaking havoc on the virtue of innocent females immured within the

---

<sup>26</sup> I will discuss Victorian sexual taboos more fully in, "Convent Abuse, Victorian Prudery, and Family Life," at the end of Part I.

<sup>27</sup> Wallis, 4.

<sup>28</sup> I will discuss women's celibacy and the even graver threats that it posed to Protestant morality and family life than men's celibacy did in detail later in this work. For the purposes of clarity, I have included this in a discussion of anti-convent literature rather than including it in a general discussion of anti-Catholicism. Of course, many of these themes overlap and certainly should not be considered completely separate phenomena.

cloisters.”<sup>29</sup> Even William Stone, the Protestant who was intent upon proving Maria Monk false and vindicating the nuns of the Hotel Dieu, wrote after his examination of the convent, “stronger than ever, if possible, is my belief, that the celibacy of the priesthood, and of the female recluses, is contrary to the laws of nature and of God.”<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the most extreme form of Victorian anti-Catholicism is found in the vast array of anti-convent pamphlets, such as *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns*, magazine articles, including “Six Months in a Convent,” religious tracts, parliamentary debates, and speeches that freely flowed throughout nineteenth century England. It is to this anti-convent sentiment that I will now turn my focus.

#### *Convent Abuse in Victorian England*

Between 1851 to 1854, three different bills advocating the inspection of convents were introduced in Parliament. Convent life tended to be isolated—mothers superior had the authority to cloister their convents to whatever degree they desired, and they considered Protestants unwelcome intruders. Several MPs thought that it was not only the government’s right to inspect what happened behind the closed doors of the convent, but indeed it was the government’s duty—there had been so many reports in pamphlets during this time of the untoward lives of nuns and the lecherous ways of priests that it seemed inspection was the only way to ensure the safety of the misguided women who had taken their religious vows. All three of these bills were defeated—many officials felt that to ratify them would be to admit that the government was losing control to the Catholics—but the subject of conventual life certainly did not disappear when these bills

---

<sup>29</sup> Wallis, 184.

<sup>30</sup> William L. Stone, *Maria Monk and the Hotel Dieu, Being an Account of a Visit to the Convents of Montreal and Refutation of the “Awful Disclosures”* (New York: Howe & Bates, 1836), 55.

were rejected. Charles Newdigate Newdegate, conservative MP from Warwickshire, became so obsessed with convents that the latter part of his career was focused on opening them up for examination. “For Charles Newdigate Newdegate,” his political biographer Walter L. Arnstein writes, “the least happy aspect of the revival of Roman Catholicism in mid-Victorian England was his belief that the agents of the pope were tempting an increasing number of innocent English maidens to chain their souls to irrevocable vows of obedience and to immure their bodies within red-brick convent walls.”<sup>31</sup>

This fixation on convents was not limited to Parliament. The Protestant clergy made up the conventual system’s harshest critics, and Protestant men in general also vehemently opposed convents. Most of the anti-convent pamphlets, even those claiming to be written by “a novice lately seceded” or an escaped nun, were most likely written by Protestant ministers.<sup>32</sup> It is clear in this literature that, for the most part, the intended audience was not women (and the literature was not produced to warn them of the horrors of convent life); rather, it was written for men. Though women probably read these pamphlets to some extent, they were primarily sold on the streets of commercial London, where respectable women, at least, were not supposed to be seen. Convent abuse pamphlets were designed to appeal to a sense of male chivalry—the young nuns were

---

<sup>31</sup> Arnstein, 62-63.

<sup>32</sup> Maria Monk’s, Julia Gordon’s, and Barbara Ubryk’s tales, all discussed in detail in this paper, may have been written by Protestant clergy, after the women had divulged their experiences to them, or after their stories had been fabricated. In William L. Stone’s investigation of the Nunnery of the Hotel Dieu, he claimed to know the Protestant clergyman who had actually written Maria’s exposé. Interestingly, Stone claimed to have interviewed Maria Monk, Jane Ray, and the male author of Maria’s tale. Though Stone was intent on proving the falsity of Maria’s story, and frequently condemned Maria’s integrity, he did not in the least blame the Protestant male ghost writer, nor did he seem upset that Maria had not written the story herself. This indicates that the practice of ghost writing may have been prevalent in Victorian society and convent abuse tales, and also demonstrates the ways in which women were manipulated by the Protestant patriarchal agenda. See Stone, 9, 42.



portrayed as beautiful; the priests, by contrast, were represented as brutish and full of lust. The pamphlets' goal was to persuade men that their women needed to be closely monitored lest they run off and join a convent, ignorant of what the Catholics would do to them once immured; or, in the Reverend Dr. Coleridge's words, "O Protestant fathers and brothers, be ye warned in time!"<sup>33</sup> But why was anti-convent sentiment so pervasive in Victorian England, and what distinguished it from other forms of anti-Catholicism? What deeper fears over women's place in society did debate over "the convent question" reveal?

In order to answer these questions, it is first necessary to understand the nature of the anti-convent movement itself: the propaganda, the formulaic and voyeuristic appeal of the stories, the factual ambiguity and the outrageous claims. Julia Gordon's story, in many respects, was typical of the anti-convent literature of the time, and very much in line with what Newdegate most feared: sexual depravity and corruption of Protestant women by Catholic men. Tales of convent abuse, for the most part, were lurid and hyper-sexualized. They depended on voyeuristic appeal to gain readers. The illustrations of abuse which adorned the covers of many pamphlets and religious tracts demonstrated the extent to which eroticism was associated with convents. The title page of *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns*, for example, showed a beautiful young nun leaning dreamily on the wall of her confessional, with a cloven-footed, tonsured priest listening lustfully while pressed up on the other side of the confessional wall. The priest clutched a devil's mask in one hand; rosary beads lay next to it, draped sloppily across his knees. Perhaps most graphic, however, was the dead baby in an open coffin at the priest's feet, the product of the priest's insatiable desire for the young nun. Various phrases were

---

<sup>33</sup> Coleridge, 16.

emphasized on the title page: “WHOLESALE MURDERING OF MOTHERS AND INFANTS,” “SHOCKING FATE OF THE BEAUTIFUL LADY BEAUMONT AND HER BABE, Whose Cradle was its Coffin—Its Bed the Grave” (see Appendix, Figure 2).<sup>34</sup> Miss Julia Gordon’s *Awful Disclosures* featured a topless nun, monks dangling dead babies from their hands, and an attractive woman lying unconscious at the feet of the men. The most prominent subtitle read, “The Shocking Fate of Female Protestant Converts!” (see Appendix, Figure 3).<sup>35</sup>

These two pamphlets illustrated several important themes in the convent abuse literature of Victorian England, the most obvious being sexual depravity and unbridled lust. Significantly, in these tales, the male religious figure in charge generally instigated sexual activity, rather than the young female nun.<sup>36</sup> Throughout much of Christianity, it was the woman who was viewed as temptress, unable to check her own lust and therefore responsible for bringing man into a life of sin. The Victorian concept of the female, however, departs significantly from this characterization: woman was the moral compass, and as such was expected to be chaste in all ways. Man, on the other hand, was acknowledged to be corrupt and perverse, especially in matters of the flesh. Though perhaps this seems like an important advancement in the Christian concept of the female, it enacted a dangerous double standard—quite often, men (that is, Protestant, married men) were excused for satisfying their “natural” sexual urges while women were taught to minimize theirs.<sup>37</sup> Celibacy seemed an impossible goal, and the anti-convent literature

---

<sup>34</sup> *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns!*, title page illustration.

<sup>35</sup> Coleridge, title page.

<sup>36</sup> Victorian gender theory will be discussed in greater detail later in this study.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public: The Women’s Movement 1850-1900* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 3. Though the victim of the abuse usually took no part in perpetuating it, many mothers superior did, according to the pamphlet literature. In one tale, Miss Sellon, mother superior of one of the first Sisterhoods of Mercy, regularly took priests as lovers, according to one escaped sister, and also inflicted a

presupposed that no woman would be able to preserve her chastity around a priest. According to middle class Victorian Protestant ideals, women were not supposed to acknowledge sexual desires, and as such, the young nun of the convent abuse story was not generally responsible for the sexual abuse inflicted upon her by the priest. Priests were depicted as unnatural, denying the sexual prowess that God had bestowed on man, and therefore they could not be trusted to remain chaste, especially when faced with numerous innocent young women confined in an institution protected from outside society by extreme seclusion. Celibacy was seen as unnatural, with the repression of sexual desires leading to sexual perversities. In addition to this, however, was the belief that priests in fact *lacked* celibacy and that their claims to sexual abstention were in reality just blatant lies. Both views of celibacy in relation to priests cast them as dangerous sexual deviants—both the lack of sex and the hidden nature of it made Protestants believe that sexuality was indeed central to the lives of Catholic priests.

With priests having sex with their pick of the cloistered community, nuns naturally became pregnant. What, then, happened to their babies? Surely they could not keep them in the convent, because an outsider would be bound to find out. Infanticide thus became a major issue in suspicions and pronouncements of convent abuse in Victorian England, so much so that, in some stories, even the papacy and Rome became synonymous with the murder of babies.<sup>38</sup> Maria Monk knew when she stumbled upon a bit of lime while on an errand in the cellar of her convent that infants were being killed there. She soon found an entire pit filled with lime (which supposedly helped the bodies

---

great deal of abuse on her charges. See Diana A.G. Campbell, *Miss Sellon and the Sisters of Mercy, Further Statement of the Rules, Constitution, and Working, of the Society Called "The Sisters of Mercy"* (London: T. Hatchard, 1852).

<sup>38</sup> Coleridge, 11.

of the innocent victims disintegrate more quickly). She reported in a newspaper rendition of her *Disclosures* that “this was the place where infants were buried, after being murdered, as the Superior had informed me.”<sup>39</sup>

Some alleged abuse, however, went beyond sexual. *The Convent Horror: Or the True Narrative of Barbara Ubryk* related perhaps one of the most graphic and sickening of the alleged convent abuse scandals. Slighted by a lover at sixteen, Barbara decided to renounce men forever and lead a quiet life of solitude and contemplation. She entered a convent in her native Krakow and became a very enthusiastic novice. As soon as she took her vows, however, Barbara’s life became worse than death: the priest in charge made advances, Barbara spurned them, and as punishment, the priest and mother superior locked her in a pitch black eight-foot by six-foot cellar prison for over twenty-one years. The conspiring priest and mother superior told the nuns at the convent that Barbara had tried to kill them, and was such a raving lunatic that she was a danger to them all.

When Barbara was finally released from her cell, she had metamorphosed from woman to animal: “Alas! Wretched victim! Then such a young, lovely girl, now a wild, frightful-appearing, semi-human beast; her body entirely nude, bristling with long, jagged hair, filth and vermin, her limbs shrunk and bent like withered sticks, her head and hair squalid and diseased, her thin, hollow cheeks nearly clapped together, and her great, wild eyes flashing and glaring out from their deep sockets!”<sup>40</sup> As with the other works discussed, illustrations accompanied *The Convent Horror*. In the first of three depictions,

---

<sup>39</sup> Maria Monk, *The Confessions of Maria Monk* (London: March-Cady, n.d.), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *The Convent Horror: Or True Narrative of Barbara Ubryk* (Philadelphia: C.W. Alexander, 1869), 24. Though this pamphlet was published in the United States and Barbara Ubryk was living in Poland, I am including her tale in my study because it was one of the best examples of anti-convent literature available to me. Though this may never have reached English readers, it nevertheless conformed to the same propagandistic themes and writing style as the English anti-convent literature did.

Barbara was pictured as a remarkably attractive young woman, seemingly full of health and vitality. The second picture was of a naked, emaciated, and hairy creature huddling in the corner of a cell as a policeman burst through the door. The last illustration was a “perfect likeness” of Barbara one month after her rescue. She appeared impossibly thin and haggard and looked much older than her thirty-seven years would suggest (see Appendix, Figures 4-6).<sup>41</sup>

Murder, imprisonment, rape, neglect, and starvation all permeated these tales, as did confiscated letters to nuns’ families, falsely diagnosed mania, enforced ignorance of the Bible, perverted priests, and vindictive mothers superior. For the Protestant audiences for whom this propaganda was intended, all these horrible abuses were made worse because they were inflicted on women who had been raised Protestant. As in Julia Gordon’s exposé, many of these abuse tales involved simple-minded women who had ignorantly converted to Catholicism from Protestantism, the national faith of England. In fact, in many of the contemporary publications refuting these tales (generally published by Catholics), the main argument against the “abused” nun’s validity was her simple-mindedness or even her alleged insanity. Protestants, on one level, believed that only obtuse women would renounce Protestantism. Catholics latched onto this and claimed that these women’s simple-mindedness meant that they were making up their tales of abuse. Whether Protestants thought stupidity was a characteristic of all women or just those who became involved with Catholicism is unclear.

Rebecca Theresa Reed, recently escaped from an Ursuline convent in the United States in 1865, was dismissed as unintelligible, incompetent, and of such a weak constitution that nothing she reported could have been the truth, according to the British

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., illustrations on 31, 41, 49.

Catholic who was refuting her tale in the *Dublin Review*.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Maria Monk was, according to her mother's affidavit, not fit to be trusted—as a little girl, she had somehow been pierced in the head with a piece of lead, and since then was prone to licentious behavior and elaborate lies.<sup>43</sup> Catholic rebuttals of the convent abuse tales often accused the nun in question of insanity, thereby discrediting her story and rendering the alleged abuse a figment of the woman's imagination. Anti-convent literature, on the other hand, accepted that women were so easily misled because they were inexperienced and less intelligent than men, who of course would never submit themselves to such atrocities. Both Catholicism and Protestantism, however, accepted that these women were somehow flawed, either because of mental illness or the simple fact that they were not men.

The increasing fear that Catholicism would rob Protestant men of their women followed the rise of the Oxford Movement. Protestant men seemed, for the most part, unconcerned with life-long Catholic women who may have also been suffering abuse in convents; instead, it was generally formerly Protestant women who were the subject of the literature. This apparent disregard for the wellbeing of women who were Catholic by birth is of great import; Catholicism made Protestant men fearful that their daughters and future wives would be taken away from their care and protection, not simply that women in general were being hurt. This more than anything else indicates that Protestant ideals were being challenged, and that the anti-convent movement was reacting to these changes rather than just the religious threat of Catholicism.

Fear of the Catholic confession, discussed earlier, was another manifestation of this fear. In *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns*, or “Elizabeth Bavent's

---

<sup>42</sup> “Six Months in a Convent,” *Dublin Review* (July 1836): 313-343.

<sup>43</sup> Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 216-218.

Sufferings in the Underground Dungeons of a Convent,” Elizabeth was supposedly forced to go to confession and take communion completely topless, as per the officiating priest’s orders.<sup>44</sup>

These lurid tales horrified their Protestant male readers, but they also intrigued them. Victorian morality disparaged eroticism and sought to relegate sex to the private sphere. It was exciting and somewhat liberating, then, to read these pamphlets—a suppressed urge could be indulged while defending the Church of England from invading Catholic and Anglo-Catholic forces. But if these tales of convent abuse were false, then what accounted for their prevalence?

#### *Convent Abuse, Victorian Prudery, and Family Life*

Before discussing the ways in which convent abuse literature circumvented Victorian attitudes towards sex, it is first necessary to establish exactly what those attitudes were, where they came from, and in what ways they shaped society’s moral standards and behavior. Anglican minister T.W. Allies, in his *Formation of Christendom*, articulated the Church of England views on gender and marriage:

Here, then, are two points in the original relation of woman to man: she was given that by means of her society might be formed, and she was given as a help to man, and that specially in the procreation of the race and all that is involved therein, companionship, sympathy, education of children. A third is, her subordination to man; for a state of innocence does not exclude equality.... God Himself is the author of human society, and establishes it upon a perfect law of marriage. As the first Man is the Father and Head of the race, so the first Woman is its Mother and Nurse. This will be the key to her position among all the nations, their descendants.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *The Death Book*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> T.W. Allies, *Formation of Christendom*, volume 3 (London: Burns, 1897), 227, 230.

The Victorian era marked a sharp departure from traditional Christian views of gender. Woman somehow changed from postlapsarian temptress, which she had been for much of Christianity, to the embodiment of Christian ethics. Because woman's place was in marriage and in the home, and she was supposed to be morally chaste, as Allies detailed, the private realm and family life became the center of Victorian morality. "The Victorian house became defined as a refuge, a place apart from the sordid aspects of commercial life, with different morals, different rules, different guidelines to protect the soul from being consumed by commerce," explains historian Judith Flanders in her work on the Victorian home and family.<sup>46</sup> Home life was supposed to embody Protestant values and do away with the baser aspects of life. Sex, of course, was an inescapable aspect of life for most people, but Protestant prudery dictated that it was not supposed to be acknowledged by polite society. How, then, did Victorian society reconcile these opposing aspects of Protestant life? How was the private sphere of the family both a refuge from "the sordid aspects of life" as well as an avenue to procreation?

Sex, for the Victorians, was necessary—God demanded it, men wanted it, women were told to submit to it. Yet any discussion of it was taboo. In order to render both men and women civil, sex was relegated to the private sphere, but it was never expected to go away completely.<sup>47</sup> Women, through the endurance of their husbands' carnal desires, became mothers, which was the epitome of moral Protestant femininity, for through motherhood women fulfilled God's command to procreate, to "be fruitful and multiply." Renouncing motherhood, as nuns did, shook the very foundation of Protestant conceptions of womanhood.

---

<sup>46</sup> Flanders 5.

<sup>47</sup> Crow, 25.



Victorian ideals stated that woman was the moral center of the home and was defined by her domesticity, yet the man of the house could move as he pleased between the public sphere of commerce, business, and politics and the private sphere of women, children, and Protestant values. He did not abdicate his power upon crossing the threshold of the home. Ideally, woman was not to wield ultimate power over anything, even the home and family that she was responsible for nurturing. Many men were rarely at home, because of the demands of their jobs and the allure of the public sphere of life, but they were nevertheless the heads of their households, rendering woman subservient in their presence.<sup>48</sup> Some recent historical scholarship, including Michael Mason's *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, has challenged this conception of the Victorian family, and while family dynamics did not always meet these standards, the fact that the patriarchal model was touted as the Victorian ideal demonstrates the power of such conceptions regarding gender roles, even if these roles were not regularly realized.<sup>49</sup>

In an 1884 sermon, Protestant minister J. Burgon articulated woman's relationship to man and highlighted the importance of her unending support for her husband's pursuits. He wrote, "Women's strength lies in her essential weakness. She is at this hour what 'in the beginning' the great Creator designed her to be—namely Man's help; not his rival but his help. Sheltered throughout her earlier years from all polluting influences: accustomed from the first to ministrations of domestic kindness and the sweet charities of home: removed from the stifling atmosphere in which perforce the battle of

---

<sup>48</sup> Flanders, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford University, 1994).

life has to be fought out by the rougher sex—she is, what she was intended to be, the one great solace of Man’s life, his chiefest earthly joy.”<sup>50</sup>

The ideal Protestant family, as Burgon indicated, was one in which the woman provided constant support to her husband, submitted to sex with him without enjoying it, and fulfilled her intended role as mother. What, by contrast, did a nun do? First and foremost, she was often required to sever ties with her own family, thereby placing heavenly relationships before earthly ones. For Protestants shirking the sacred family was equal to shirking God, for through family life God’s will was perpetuated. What then could Protestants possibly make of virgin vows and marriage to Christ? Celibacy, according to Protestant clergymen like Burgon, was as impossible as it was sacrilegious, and it seemed impertinent, to put it mildly, to consider oneself worthy of marrying Jesus Christ. For nuns motherhood could never be realized, and if women did not procreate it was unclear to Protestants what their purpose on earth was. “In a society that idolized the sanctity of the family and of motherhood,” writes historian Susan P. Casteras, “it was not readily conceded that holy celibacy could be a more honourable spiritual state than matrimony or maternity—or that women possessed any right to dedicate their bodies and souls to God instead of to a husband.”<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the biggest transgression of conventual life was the relative absence of patriarchal rule. Though male figures did play a significant role in anti-convent literature (mostly in the form of randy monks and priests), the reality was that convents were communities of women governed, for the most part, by other women. Tales of convent

---

<sup>50</sup> J. Burgon, *Sermon*, 1884, quoted in Hollis, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Susan P. Casteras, “Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists’ Portrayal of Nuns and Novices,” in *Religion and the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, ed. Gail Malmgreen (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 136.

abuse thus proved that life apart from absolute patriarchal rule would inevitably become corrupt. The licentious priest who lured innocent young Protestant women, usually the most devilish figure of anti-convent propaganda, almost always required a powerful female helper (proving Burgon correct, to Protestant readers, that woman was created to assist man). Behind every evil priest was an evil mother superior, less accountable for her sins only because she was created less perfectible than her male counterpart. In fact, in the tales of abuse in Protestant sisterhoods discussed below, it was the women in charge who were most vilified for the alleged cruelty and “popery.”<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, these “abusive” mothers superior were often chided for their masculinity. It is unclear if Protestant audiences felt that any woman with so much authority was, by default, more masculine, or if mothers superior were rendered masculine by the lay public so that they could be held more accountable for their wrongdoings. In any case, mothers superior were considered sexual deviants, first for renouncing marriage and motherhood and second for perpetuating a system that shunned patriarchy. Of course Dr. Pusey was behind everything, and he was ultimately responsible for the putative depravity of the Protestant sisterhood, but the women directly in charge were certainly torn apart in anti-convent and anti-sisterhood literature.

*The Convent Horror* was perhaps most severe in its indictment of powerful women religious.<sup>53</sup> In this story, it was the Catholic bishop, along with the Krakow police force, who freed the nun Barbara Ubryk from the female convent leaders. Though a priest also had a large role in perpetuating her abuse, it was the women who the bishop

---

<sup>52</sup> As we shall see, Miss Priscilla Lydia Sellon, one of the first superiors in the Protestant sisterhoods, was the focus of anti-convent and anti-Catholic sentiment of the 1840s and 50s.

<sup>53</sup> A “woman religious” refers to a woman who has taken vows and entered a religious order (similarly, a “man religious” is a monk and “a religious” refers to any member of a religious order, male or female). A “religious woman” may be marked for her piety but has not necessarily entered a convent.

chose to chastise: “Oh, wicked, wicked women! Is this your sisterly love? Is this the way you expect to come to Heaven? You are not women! You are not sisters! No! you are furies!”<sup>54</sup> I propose that this tale illustrates that allegations of convent abuse were motivated just as much by a fear of women taking on roles that society deemed inappropriate as they were a fear of Catholicism. The bishop, certainly quite Catholic, introduced patriarchy into the convent and thus saved Barbara from the powerful women who had corrupted the institution. Additionally, the bishop needed to masculinize the mother superior and her accomplices in order to make sense of the outrageous situation. Although the priest was Catholic and therefore not bound to Protestant notions of femininity, the pamphlet and perhaps even the story itself were products of Protestant activists and thus conformed to Protestant conceptions of gender, with the priest merely serving as a mouthpiece for the patriarchal cause. “You are not women!” perhaps voiced a popular attitude towards women in religious orders—they refused marriage, motherhood, and men, so how in any way were they feminine?

The rise of Victorian prudery, while drawing upon Protestant morality and doctrine, was nevertheless a unique product of mid- to late-nineteenth century England. Conceptions of gender, sexual intercourse, and patriarchy; the consecration of the family; and the peak in anti-Catholicism were all products of an ethos never before seen in Western Europe. This Victorian ideology had strictly defined woman’s place as within the private sphere, tending assiduously to the Protestant family and rarely interacting with the outside world. Duncan Crow, in analyzing the rise of Victorian prudery, states, “It is difficult to be sure why this happened. Presumably the basis of it was that male apprehensions, which had gradually become quiescent over the centuries, were somehow

---

<sup>54</sup> *The Convent Horror*, 24.

re-activated through the discontents of industrial society producing unbearable tensions.”<sup>55</sup> Rapid change in technology and development, then, led Victorians to cling to religious values and to establish strict normative behavior in order to regulate what little they could of their rapidly changing world. Allegations of convent abuse, strangely enough, were intimately connected to technological advancement and, as will be discussed at length, advancement in the area of women’s freedoms.

## **II. Progress and Social Anxiety**

### *Social and Technological Changes in Victorian Society*

The Victorian period began in 1837 and ended in 1901, with Queen Victoria’s death. In these sixty-four years, English society went through drastic changes brought on by the First and Second Industrial Revolutions, increased immigration, and a fracturing of Protestantism into numerous denominations, all of which were dubbed “dissent” sects by the Church of England. In reference to the rapid change in Victorian Britain, historian George Kitson Clark writes that the Victorian period “starts with gentlemen fighting duels; it ends with gentlemen playing golf.”<sup>56</sup> While Clark is specifically referring to leisure lifestyles, he nevertheless demonstrates the extent to which nineteenth century Englishmen and women were required to adapt to change. Sociologist Alvin Toffler’s concept of “future shock,” while coined in reference to twentieth century America’s rapid technological and communication revolutions, is of use in understanding the consequence of so much change in Victorian society. Toffler characterizes societies such as nineteenth century Britain and twentieth century America as having “too much change in too little

---

<sup>55</sup> Crow, 30.

<sup>56</sup> George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, quoted in Crow, 11.

time” which inevitably results in an “information overload.”<sup>57</sup> According to Toffler, so much drastic change and so little time for adjustments leads to a cultural crisis. In the case of nineteenth century England, this cultural crisis led to increased religious activity.

The rise of Victorian prudery, Christian evangelicalism, and anti-Catholicism, not to mention unrest over women’s status in society, all related to the extremely rapid changes taking place in England during this time. By the 1830s, the railroad, telegraph, and steam engine had all been developed. By 1872, the telegraph was transcontinental in scope.<sup>58</sup> The nineteenth century in England is today referred to as the “Age of the Railroad” because of the prevalence of train transportation and the transformation of the English countryside into a land of train tracks and bellowing steam. All in all, England was a turbulent area and the Victorian age was a turbulent time. The way English society coped with the effects of “future shock” was to strengthen the religious mores of those in power, thereby protecting what many felt to be the collective identity of England, ensuring that this one element of English culture seemed secure while the rest of the country was going through a technological and communication revolution. What came out of this spiritual revival was not only an intensification of Protestant values, but also a new system of morality which drew upon Protestant themes and applied them in a way that had not yet been done. For example, there was no biblical or Reformation-era precedent for the separation of the private sphere of life from the public; the English public, however, drew from pre-existing Protestant views on marriage, created the divide, and cloaked it in religious rhetoric, as T.W. Allies demonstrated in his work.

---

<sup>57</sup> Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1971). Though Alvin Toffler was writing for a popular, rather than an academic, audience, his theories are nevertheless useful in analyzing the rapidly changing nineteenth century.

<sup>58</sup> Crow, 12.

Part of England's efforts to protect its putatively Protestant identity in the face of rapid technological transformation included isolationism. By refusing to accept the customs of "foreigners," Englishmen and women figured they had a greater chance of maintaining their own. Ironically, the foreigners who were seen as the biggest threat to English cultural autonomy were part of the United Kingdom and under partial English jurisdiction. Prejudice against the Irish was certainly nothing new, but it intensified during the nineteenth century, partly due to divisive legislation like the renewal and increase of the Maynooth Grant, and also because of increased Irish immigration, which agitated isolationists and conservative Protestants to no end.<sup>59</sup> Catholicism became associated with all the negative Irish stereotypes and was very much seen as the antithesis of English religion. The Irish potato famine of 1845 forced huge numbers of Irish to emigrate, and as a result the Catholic population in England grew. The immigrant population particularly concentrated in London, where it generally lived in deplorable conditions. Due to the extreme poverty in Ireland that followed immigrants to England and because basic needs were often not met, there was a startling number of Irish orphans in London. Interestingly, these orphans helped foster anti-Catholic sentiment and added another dimension to the canon of convent abuse literature: English Protestants saw these parentless children in the streets of London and decided that they were the offspring of philandering Irish Catholic priests.<sup>60</sup> Why this was the conclusion that the English came to is unclear; however, it was used to support claims of convent abuse, particularly the

---

<sup>59</sup> The fear of Irish immigrants during this time is typical of isolationist fears in general. Similar trends can be seen throughout much of American history. During times of increased immigration, immigrants were and still are often blamed for a poor economy, with many arguing that immigrants take jobs that rightfully belong to Americans or use government services that they do not pay for. Immigrants, as well as the culture they bring with them, easily become scapegoats for larger problems. This happened with the Irish and, more specifically, with Catholicism in nineteenth century England.

<sup>60</sup> Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1964), 236.

rape of young nuns, and it fed rumors that the Catholic Church endorsed infanticide within the cloister.

The most significant change that threatened to influence the established Protestant English way of life, at least for the purposes of this study, was in the area of women's personal freedoms. Even though this change was social instead of technology-based, Toffler's theory of "future shock" should not be disregarded. As part of Victorian English society's efforts to preserve the aspects of Protestant religious culture that it could in the face of so much innovation and change, gender roles were more rigidly defined. At the same time, women began organizing a proto-feminist movement that won approval from certain respected male leaders, the most esteemed being the writer, philosopher, and politician John Stuart Mill.<sup>61</sup> The progressive and the reactionary collided over women's personal freedoms in the socially turbulent Victorian era, and convents were swept up in a debate over women's education, legal rights within marriage, and women's employment.

### *Women's Changing Place in Society*

"Women, as a class, cannot enjoy, at the same time, the immunities of weakness and the advantages of power," wrote the novelist T.H. Lister in an 1841 article from the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>62</sup> Lister perfectly captured the predicament women were facing in the mid-nineteenth century: many had the desire to change their status and widen their opportunities but did not have the power and, in some cases, the education to agitate for the improvement of women's conditions. Nevertheless, women had to appear capable

---

<sup>61</sup>Patricia Thomson, Patricia Thomson, *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-1873* (London: Oxford University, 1956), 89.

<sup>62</sup> T.H. Lister, "Rights and Conditions of Women," *Edinburgh Review* 73 (1841), quoted in Hollis, 8.



and strong before being able to acquire these things. A long history of suppression meant that many women did not have tools that were considered the necessary attributes of strong leadership, including education and experience. Perpetuating ignorance was one of the most effective ways of rendering women meek and, though it could not work forever, it was one reason that the first full-fledged feminist movement did not start until the 1850s.<sup>63</sup> Not surprisingly, infantilized women made up the majority of the “heroines” of escaped nun tales. These women were viewed as overgrown children, incapable of making wise, informed decisions without the help of well-intentioned men of the Protestant persuasion. For example, as can be seen in the tales already examined, the escaped nuns were generally depicted as nice young women who were lured into a horrible Catholic trap (the convent) by an evil male religious figure. Protestant men, in these works, were being both congratulated for having a positive influence on malleable women and warned that if they did not continue to assert their influence, their women would unwittingly stray from them.

Protestant men were unsure if their patriarchal influence over women would be able to withstand the changes of the nineteenth century. As we shall see, the convent abuse literature was at once used as propaganda to encourage Protestant men to keep firm in their patriarchal roles and also as a way to emphasize that Protestant gender roles were superior to Catholic ones. But what exactly were women doing during the nineteenth century that worried so many English men? In what ways were women beginning to challenge the patriarchal structure that Victorian Protestantism had done its best to intensify? Historian Martha Vicinus, in *A Widening Sphere: The Changing Roles of*

---

<sup>63</sup> Hollis, vii.

*Victorian Women*, writes that “women could not remain within a static role of domesticity” in an evolving world that was anything *but* static.<sup>64</sup>

One of the earliest and most publicized threats to Victorian patriarchy was Caroline Norton’s campaign for greater equality within marriage. In the 1830s, Norton, a wealthy society woman, sought to terminate her unhappy marriage to the MP George Chapple Norton. Unable to obtain a divorce under British law, she separated from George only to find that the property she owned before her marriage now legally belonged to her estranged husband. George refused to support Caroline, and as she no longer had any claim to property, she began writing for a living. Caroline found success in her career, as well as remuneration, but soon her husband was claiming all the money she had made since their separation in addition to the property she owned before their marriage. Caroline had virtually no way of supporting herself, despite her considerable talents, and no way out of her marriage. George also had legal rights to the couple’s children and, accordingly, he refused to let Caroline visit them, much less take them with her when she left him. Lastly, George incurred great debts, not under his name, but under his wife’s. Caroline was left with no livelihood, no children, and arrears she had no part in accumulating and no way to pay.<sup>65</sup>

According to English common law, women renounced all ownership of property upon marriage. Any property brought into the marriage by the woman legally became her husband’s. In her essay “Victorian Wives and Property,” Lee Holcombe writes of Victorian marriage, “As the saying went, in law ‘husband and wife are one person, and

---

<sup>64</sup> Martha Vicinus, ed., *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1977), x.

<sup>65</sup> Lee Holcombe, “Victorian Wives and Property” in Vicinus, 8.

the husband is that person.”<sup>66</sup> For Caroline Norton, this meant financial insecurity and the forfeiture of her children when she attempted to leave her husband. There were many cases like Norton’s in which women attempting to flee unhappy or abusive marriages ended their lives in destitution, still legally married to their husbands but unable to rely on them for support or claim the property they earned from their own work. Norton’s case was unique, however, because instead of giving up and returning to her husband for financial reasons, she began to write and distribute pamphlets on women’s rights within marriage, especially in relation to child custody issues. The publication of Norton’s *The Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Children as affected by the Common Law Rights of the Father* led, in part, to the Act of 1839, in which Parliament granted increased custody rights to women. However, given the patriarchal climate and the Protestant emphasis on married life, women’s rights in relation to men’s were still severely limited.<sup>67</sup>

Norton became an early leader in the Victorian women’s movement, which agitated for increased employment and educational opportunities for women, less restrictive and punitive divorce laws, and greater autonomy within marriage. Though Mary Wollstonecraft had published her incendiary proto-feminist work *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, it was not until the Victorian period that women began to petition for change within Parliament, striving first to change the law and then to change society’s expectations and perceptions of women. The women’s movement was “motivated by three main concerns: the concern with ‘surplus women’ and their need for

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 8. For example, though women were granted greater child custody rights, within marriage itself, both children and wife were legally under the jurisdiction of the husband. After 1857, though both men and women could file for divorce, it was consistently much easier for men to actually obtain the divorce.

work if they were to be self-dependent; a more particular concern with the plight of governesses, which led directly to the movement for women's education; and the increasing awareness of women's status at law, publicized by the case of Caroline Norton.”<sup>68</sup>

Many bills of reform regarding women's rights and freedoms were introduced from the 1830s on. Some, like the Married Women's Property Bill of 1857, were accepted in the first rounds of deliberation but were ultimately rejected because they would have granted women far too many rights to maintain a strictly patriarchal society. This particular bill, first introduced as a petition by a committee of women, stated that English common law was anachronistic, and that because women's roles were broadening, English law ought to be changed to reflect current social conditions. The 1857 bill was rejected, but was reintroduced to Parliament in the 1860s and passed, although modified, again, from its original state. In the meantime, budding activists Ursula Mellor Bright and Elizabeth Wolstenholme formed the Married Women's Property Committee, which won support in Parliament from the newly-elected champion of women's rights and social reformer John Stuart Mill.

The rise of the women's movement in the 1850s, and its strengthening in the decades to follow, was partly due to the nineteenth century growth of the middle class. As average English citizens became wealthier and more capable of meeting and exceeding basic needs, leisure time became a status marker for women. Men continued to work and were praised for their career accomplishments, but women were increasingly encouraged to abdicate their domestic duties to hired help if it could be afforded. An 1869 article from *Macmillan's Magazine*, written by a young, educated, upper-middle

---

<sup>68</sup> Hollis, vii.

class woman, captured the predicament and especially the ennui of the financially secure Victorian woman: “She reads in stilted phrases in many a ‘good’ book that woman’s work is home work and home influence, but this is scarcely applicable to herself. Her home is a luxurious one, and servants are at hand, often in unnecessary numbers, to perform every household duty.... She has a great deal of leisure, and all the more time to think.”<sup>69</sup> This surge in the population of idle women was certainly related to class; poor women, of course, continued to work for subsistence, out of necessity as they always had, but middle class women had little work available to them, inside the house or otherwise, except for charity work, which was by definition unpaid.<sup>70</sup>

This discontented idleness, as well as the security and comforts inherent in an upper class lifestyle, attracted British women in large numbers to this charity work, which was often organized by both Protestant and Catholic churches. In his article “‘A Female Movement’: The Feminization of Nineteenth Century Anglo-Catholicism,” sociologist John Shelton Reed connects the popularity Anglo-Catholicism had with women to its emphasis on charity work, among other things. According to Reed, Anglo-Catholic and Catholic churches offered more extensive charity work options to women than Protestant churches did, and within these charitable causes women were allowed to take on leadership and organizational roles. The Protestant charities, he says, did not

---

<sup>69</sup> “Two Girls of the Period: The Upper Side. Our Offence, Our Defense, and Our Petitions, by a Belgravian Young Lady,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 19 (April 1869), 324-35.

<sup>70</sup> Many analyses of women and work neglect the lower classes. Poor women continued to work for pay throughout the Victorian era, finding employment as servants, seamstresses, cooks, and in factories. Though the jobs open to them were rather limited, I believe this was more because of their social status and poor education than it was because of their gender. Lower class men had almost as many occupational barriers as their wives and daughters. It is also important to note that the feminist movements of both nineteenth century England and twentieth century America often concentrated only on the plights of middle and upper class women, who had few jobs open to them and an abundance of free time. Poor women, on the other hand, were assuming the household duties of the wealthy women who had apparently risen above such degrading work. For more, see Thomson, 14-15.

allow women to assume such leadership positions.<sup>71</sup> Though charity work drew upon and strengthened women's roles as society's moral exemplars, it was nevertheless dangerous because it enticed women to the Anglo-Catholic movement. Indeed, the establishment of the Anglo-Catholic (although nominally Protestant) sisterhoods was in part a reaction to women's desire to perform charity work. One Anglican woman, complaining about the lack of meaningful work available to Protestant women like herself, wrote in *Macmillan's Magazine* that there should be a "standing army of charity," or organized groups of women to work among the poor, akin to a Catholic religious order.<sup>72</sup>

To some extent, then, idleness was not the *only* option for financially secure women, but charity work could only whet the appetite of many women who desired full-fledged careers and recognition of their achievements that charity work alone could not provide. Much of women's charity work drew upon women's skills as caretakers (such as educating orphans, advocating for temperance based on moral ideals, and clothing the poor) and thus, according to historian Martha Vicinus, solidified their place in the domestic sphere instead of opening up doors to occupations formerly closed to them.<sup>73</sup>

By immersing themselves in charity work, Victorian women were asserting that they not only wanted careers to pursue and increased responsibilities outside of the private realm, but also that they were indeed capable of taking on such tasks. More than anything else, the invaluable services women provided as nurses in the Crimean War of

---

<sup>71</sup> Reed, 210. Reed cites census data and contemporary observations that support his claim that the majority of lay Anglo-Catholics were female. For more on the disproportionate gender balance in Anglo-Catholic congregations, see Reed, 202, 205 and 211. It should be additionally noted that Protestant women were fleeing patriarchal rule in other ways during this period. Though I do not discuss missionary movements in this paper, missions did provide an opportunity for Protestant women to take leadership roles within their churches' efforts abroad.

<sup>72</sup> "Two Girls of the Period," 330.

<sup>73</sup> Vicinus, x. This is of course a simplification of class issues, and though I have not chosen to focus on class in terms of women's employment, I should stress that working class women had long established themselves as diligent and necessary workers.

the 1850s proved this to be true. Florence Nightingale, along with an entourage of Catholic nuns and celibate women from the newly established Protestant sisterhoods (Pusey's Protestant version of convents), did somewhat improve Victorian society's estimation of women's abilities. Not surprisingly, outrage over convents also diminished during the war, as nuns were making valuable contributions to the well-being of English soldiers and, by extension, to English nationalism. Even Charles Newdigate Newdegate, perhaps the most ferociously anti-convent politician, dropped the issue in the 1850s in light of these positive works, and "at the parliamentary level, the issue lay dormant for almost a decade."<sup>74</sup> However, there were still "very few bishops in England or America who were prepared to give their whole-hearted support to religious communities."<sup>75</sup> Most English citizens forgot the contributions of the nuns, of course, soon after their return to England, conventual life, and putatively philandering priests. Though society's view of women momentarily improved, Protestant perceptions reverted to their antebellum state quite quickly.<sup>76</sup>

Though charity work and wartime service helped improve their situation, the only way for women truly to win emancipation from patriarchal oppression was to throw off the shroud of ignorance that had stifled them for so long. The best way to do this, of course, was through education. Higher education, in particular, was lacking for women, though grammar school education had long been provided, in particular by convent schools with nuns serving as teachers. Women's colleges were few and far between in

---

<sup>74</sup> Arnstein, 63.

<sup>75</sup> Anson, xiii.

<sup>76</sup> Arnstein, 63. A similar trend can be seen in England and the United States during World Wars I and II. As men went to fight abroad, women took over traditionally male occupations on the home front. Though society was generally pleased with women's performance, women were forced to return to the more traditionally feminine pursuits when their men returned. In post-World War II America, this led to the romanticizing of housewifery and gender roles that were more strictly defined than they had been since the Victorian period. For more, see Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Victorian England, though two female universities, Queen's College for Women and Bedford College, were founded in the late 1840s.<sup>77</sup> The establishment of these schools no doubt heightened the anxiety of those who wished to keep women in perpetual ignorance, especially because women's colleges were finally progressing from finishing schools to academic institutions. Even those who supported women's education often viewed higher education as merely a way to refine femininity. An 1868 *Punch* journalist ironically "supported" female education, writing, "I know that it is the fashion to run down the present system of female education, but has not my daughter learned to dance, to sing, to speak a little French, to dress her hair becomingly, to play croquet.... And is not this the acceptable curriculum of female education in this great country?"<sup>78</sup>

Although improvements in women's education were being made, the anonymous female writer of the 1869 *Macmillan's Magazine* article nevertheless found the pursuit of women's education to be a frustrating catch-22. Men argued that resources should not be wasted on women's education because they did not understand mathematics, political economy, art, history, or serious literature. "So we find ourselves on the horns of a terrible dilemma; on the one hand we are derided for being superficial, and on the other we are scoffed at if we show ignorance of any of the leading principles of all these branches of knowledge."<sup>79</sup> Women could not understand these subjects, according to our writer, because they were deliberately segregated from them. Ignorance, however, appeared the same as inability to those who wished to perpetuate the patriarchal system.

---

<sup>77</sup> Thomson, 38.

<sup>78</sup> *Punch*, 1868, 14, quoted in Edward W. Ellsworth, *Liberators of the Female Mind* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), 36.

<sup>79</sup> "Two Girls of the Period," 329.



Interestingly, the focus of this article was not only on education, but on religious orders as well. The writer agreed with her fellow Protestants that Catholicism was a false, morally perverted religion. However, she said that convents provided the only respectable lifestyle option for the middle class woman, as living in a patriarchal society led to nothing but “reckless dissipation.” Between a frivolous middle class English life and the convent life, “the latter is becoming oftener chosen year by year; but the many hindrances which English feeling throws in the way of it makes the world still the commonest choice for those whose eyes are open to the dangers and the evils of both.”<sup>80</sup> Sensible, intelligent Protestant women who sought refuge from lives of ignorance and superficiality in the Church of England only complicated matters, for “the contrast between the life of active charity and self-denial preached, and the useless self-indulgent one she is compelled to live, first startles the conscience and then kills it. What shall our heroine do? Some of her friends fly for refuge to the bosom of the Romish or extreme High Church, and recover from self-contempt behind the veil which marks their death to the world. Others—and these are by far the most numerous class—outlive their better feelings, or drown them in the flood of fashionable life.”<sup>81</sup> The author was not advocating conversion to Catholicism, but was instead chiding the Church of England for not providing options for women to put its teachings into practice. Though convent life was bad, living frivolously, as Protestant women were expected to do, was worse.

Women’s improving education only made activists within the women’s movement more determined to improve their situation. As educated and independent women were becoming more vocal in the nineteenth century, the ideological

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 325-26.

conservatism of those wishing to perpetuate patriarchy was bolstered. The writer George Eliot, for example, supported women who found domestic life a waste of time and talent and, by taking on a “male” profession (writing) and a man’s name to ensure that her work would be taken seriously, she publicly rejected many important aspects of Victorian femininity.<sup>82</sup> Caroline Norton was another outspoken woman who entered into public consciousness after questioning the established feminine norms of the time. By fighting against her estranged husband’s wishes, she challenged patriarchal rule and the sanctity of marriage. However, part of what made Norton successful was that she did both in the name of motherhood, and therefore she remained partly within the Protestant conception of femininity.

Unmarried women, popularly referred to as “redundants” or “old maids,” were growing in number and similarly threatening patriarchal rule by defying gender roles.<sup>83</sup> Though their career options were, of course, severely limited, such women began to find employment as teachers and governesses, provided that they had had the luxury of receiving an education themselves. Governesses were generally viewed as respectable, decent women, often filling a role that was more nurturing than professional; however, the fact that more than 21,000 women were registered as governesses in 1850 (indeed, far too many for them all to find employment) *was* alarming.<sup>84</sup> All governesses were required to be unmarried; indeed, there were far more unmarried women in England who

---

<sup>82</sup> Thomson, 109.

<sup>83</sup> Why more women were remaining unmarried is unclear, though some historians attribute this to the rise of the unmarried “dandy” lifestyle among upper class men. Though the reasons for the increase in unmarried women is unknown, Victorian society reacted to the perceived phenomenon in some interesting ways. Thomson reports that emigration from England to the United States was touted as a solution—that is, unmarried English women would move to America in order to find a husband. Anthony Trollope’s *Phineas Finn* contained a “Female Protestant Unmarried Women’s Emigration Society,” which made fun of the real and perceived threat of unmarried English Protestant women. Thomson, 115, 118.

<sup>84</sup> Alicia C. Percival, *The English Miss To-Day and Yesterday* (London: George G. Harrap, 1939), 99.

were not registered as governesses. According to historian Martha Vicinus, there were 2,765,000 single women in England in 1851 and 3,228,700 in 1871, “with a rise in the surplus of single women to single men of 72,500 to 125,000 (a 72.7 percent rise in twenty years).”<sup>85</sup> This high number of single women was a very real threat to the established Protestant norm of marriage and family life. Working as a governess did provide at least one option other than marriage or charity work for middle class Protestant women but, unfortunately, there was a dearth of governess positions and an excess of qualified, unmarried women.<sup>86</sup>

Governesses, bold writers, women agitating for divorce and property rights—all these women signaled change in nineteenth century English social hierarchies. In an article from *Macmillan’s Magazine* entitled “Two Views of the Convent Question,” the same educated, Protestant female author quoted earlier wrote, “... to my mind, the worst part of the convent system is that it sifts society, and leaves only the frivolous in the world.” To her, more would-be writers, activists, teachers, and governesses were choosing to take their vows and withdraw from society simply because society was leaving them with no other options. In her opinion, it was the intelligent, moral, and hard working women who were driven to conventual life because their alternative was so much worse.<sup>87</sup> Convents not only posed a threat to Protestant dominance, but they also hindered the success of the women’s movement since, according to this author, the only women left in English society were of such low intellectual and moral quality that they would prove prejudiced Protestant men correct in their opinions of women’s capabilities.

---

<sup>85</sup> Vicinus, xvi.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 37-41.

<sup>87</sup> “Two Views of the Convent Question, Part I: A Few More Words on Convents and English Girls,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 19 (April 1869), 537.

### III. The Victorian Woman Religious

#### *The Growing Appeal of Convent Life*

Unfortunately, the religious census of 1851 did not report the number of women in religious orders, so it is difficult to know by how much the conventual system grew in the nineteenth century. Because many Victorians perceived convents to be expanding, however, it is clear that the English saw convents as mounting threats to Protestantism. Statistics of questionable accuracy appeared in many places, demonstrating the prominence of convents in English cultural consciousness. In 1874, *Fraser's Magazine* reported that there was an “astonishing” number of convent schools in the United Kingdom—238 to be precise.<sup>88</sup> This would indicate that there were at least as many convents, and most likely many more which did not have schools associated with them. Arnstein writes that the number of convents in England rose from sixteen in 1841 to 187 in 1865, a huge increase in a very short period of time.<sup>89</sup>

Whatever the actual numbers were, Victorians knew that convents presented women with lifestyle choices that directly contradicted Protestant teachings on procreation and established gender roles. In the opinion of one young Catholic woman, there were things more holy than matrimony and motherhood, namely celibacy and prayerful contemplation.<sup>90</sup> The Church of England did not want its women to withdraw from society and renounce the sacred union of marriage because this would have contradicted basic Protestant doctrine. As one Protestant clergyman wrote, “What would be gained to woman’s comfort, respectability, or usefulness, or to the welfare of society,

---

<sup>88</sup> “Convent Boarding School for Young Ladies,” *Fraser's Magazine* 89 (June 1874), 778.

<sup>89</sup> Arnstein, 66.

<sup>90</sup> “Two Views of the Convent Question, Part II: Nature and the Convent,” *Macmillan's Magazine*, 541.

and how much would be lost to each, by withdrawing her from her own appropriate sphere, and introducing her to that for which she has no adaptation? Who, but a few wild visionaries, and rash speculatists, and mistaken advocates of woman's rights would take her from the home of her husband, of her children, and of her own heart...?"<sup>91</sup>

It was not merely the threat to Protestant doctrine that made men rail against convents. Was it worry over the immortal souls of women who had denied God's mandate to be fruitful and multiply that encouraged men's rabid scorn of convent life, or was it worry over something else, something decidedly of this world and a trifle more selfish? Though some people did perhaps have a more altruistic reason for detesting convent life, overwhelmingly, the anti-Anglo-Catholic and anti-convent rhetoric focused on the loss men had to bear when women turned to Catholicism, "Puseyism," or the religious life. In the pamphlet *Astounding Revelations of Puseyism in Belgravia*, a transcript of a speech given to "indignant husbands, fathers, and brothers" about women and confession directly spoke to this fear that Protestant men would no longer have women to marry them, bear their children, and care for them (see Appendix, Figure 4).<sup>92</sup> This is, of course, ironic given the apparently escalating number of redundant women in England. But fear of the convent robbing Protestants of their women was conflated with fear of women deciding not to live according to Protestant ideals. Both the women's movement and religious life were thought to lure women away from Protestant family life.

---

<sup>91</sup> John Angell James, *Female Piety; or, The Young Woman's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality*, reprinted in Dale A. Johnson, *Women in English Religion 1700-1925* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), 130.

<sup>92</sup> Baring, 6.

Many Protestant men believed that convent life equaled a profound loss for the Protestant religion, but what did women themselves believe? What did the women who were taking their vows hope to gain from the convent? Catholicism, as has been discussed, had always offered an option to women besides marriage and the cult of domesticity. This option required a vow of celibacy, the renunciation of many worldly ties, and often the adoption of a strictly ascetic lifestyle. Life as a nun was not supposed to be easy, but there were certain profound differences between a worldly life and a religious life that made the latter appealing for women wary of patriarchy and oppression. Even though most anti-convent literature depicted male leaders like priests as living within the convents themselves, one of the appeals of convents was a sorority that could not be found within the male-dominated single family homes of English society.

The growing number of “old maids” in England, while reflecting an imbalanced ratio of marriageable women to men, also proved that some women did not want to marry and become mothers, or, in the words of the young Catholic writing for *Macmillan's Magazine*:

...the little bit of poetry—and pretty poetry too—about its [the convent life's] crushing the finest instincts of nature, putting entirely to one side the holy joys of a wife and mother, scorning her angelic ministries, etc., warrants some criticism before it is allowed to pass as truth. We must not gather from its indignant tone that the convent is the only bar, and that a compulsory one, between a woman and these sweet experiences. There are women who are bounded by no convent walls, who are tied by no vows, who have freely dispensed with the indulgence of these maternal yearnings, and who have gone through life most cheerfully and happily with no opportunity of bringing their angelic ministry to bear on a husband's heart. Marriage and all its duties are most holy, and ought to be arbitrarily denied to none; yet still it is very evident, either that a large proportion of women were not intended to marry, or that, in some way or other, outside of convents we are contravening the order of Providence.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> “Two Views of the Convent Question, Part II: Nature and the Convent,” 541.

Marriage was clearly not what all women desired or could achieve, despite the Church of England's best efforts to make it seem like the only option a good woman could choose in life. Though this anonymous female writer acknowledged that the population of unattached lay women was growing, there was still no plethora of career options for redundant women. This lack of options only rendered the conventual life more attractive. Life in the convent also ensured relative economic security during a time in which women had little opportunity to support themselves. Although it is difficult to determine a direct correlation, there is evidence that England's population of nuns was increasing during this time; it only makes sense, then, that the religious life was growing, in part, because of women's desire for another option in life besides marriage and motherhood. As the authors of *The Convents of Great Britain* declared at the turn of the century, "the incredible growth and multiplication of congregations of religious women" was "the most striking of the religious history of the nineteenth century."<sup>94</sup> To Protestants, unmarried women were considered socially unacceptable, embarrassing, and almost irreligious. This Protestant antipathy to unattached women could certainly have motivated some women who wished to remain unmarried to renounce Protestantism and take their conventual vows.<sup>95</sup>

Another of the allures of the convent is perhaps the most obvious, but should certainly not be dismissed. For women who desired a vocation within the church, life as a nun, and after the 1840s, as an Anglican sister, was their only option. Protestant and Catholic women alike could not enter into the clergy at this time, so a religious calling

---

<sup>94</sup> Father Herbert Thurston, *The Convents of Great Britain*, quoted in Arnstein, 62. Though statistics are very hard to come by and are often contradictory, Arnstein himself said that the number of convents in England rose from 16 in 1841 to 187 in 1865. For more, see Arnstein, 66.

<sup>95</sup> Casteras, 129.

could really only be answered by entering a religious order. For those who sought to serve God instead of an earthly patriarchal figure, the religious life must have been very appealing indeed.

As the *Macmillan's Magazine* article declared, women could not find refuge in the Church of England because it offered no options for women to put its teachings into practice. Even more appalling, however, was when the religious teachings left women out altogether. An 1871 British pamphlet entitled *Christian Manliness* demonstrated the ways in which women were traditionally left out of Protestant religious rhetoric. The pamphlet stated that Christian manliness was the highest form of religious devotion, and that the Bible “elicits, educates, appeals to that which is highest in our nature; and it is, not the capacity of mechanical obedience to superior authority, but the capacity of spiritual discernment, the sense of truth and right, those infinite aspirations and inexhaustible hopes, which are the stamp of a spirit made in God’s image and capable of perfect restoration to it.”<sup>96</sup> This pamphlet, taken from a speech given by the Reverend John Caird, urged its audience not to misinterpret the Bible’s direction for Christians to be like children in their devotion to God.<sup>97</sup> To act *only* as children would be wrong, as there were many other qualities a good Christian needed to possess—and these qualities were all considered masculine by Caird. Because “feminine” qualities did not fit within this schema, was womanhood by default akin to childishness?

Protestant women struggled to interpret teachings like Caird’s, teachings that left them out of the frame of what a good Christian could be and thus out of the frame of Christian morality. This could have been yet another reason that Catholicism, with its

---

<sup>96</sup> Reverend John Caird, “*Christian Manliness*” (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1871), 23.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.



options for women striving to live in accordance with church teachings, was growing in popularity.<sup>98</sup> Convents and sisterhoods allowed women to apply Christian teachings in a feminine environment, thereby circumventing or even just ignoring those elements of Catholicism and Protestantism that sought to diminish or suppress women's role in Christianity.

One option that Protestant churches began to offer to their female members in the nineteenth century was charity work. Women eagerly immersed themselves in feeding and clothing the poor, educating orphans, and advocating for temperance, among other pursuits. Those women who sought to make such work a lifestyle rather than a hobby were welcomed by religious orders. Surprisingly, the canon of convent abuse literature made little to no mention of the charity work that consumed the lives of many nuns and sisters. Though there were orders that required their nuns to withdraw from society, cloistering themselves in convents far removed from the vices of the outside world, many non-cloistered convents instead had their nuns engage daily with society's pariahs, providing valuable services that others were not willing to provide themselves.<sup>99</sup> The goal of the convent abuse literature was to depict convents as prisons, so by omitting the valuable social services that many convents provided (which they did), it was easier to vilify Catholicism and depict women as unable to care for themselves outside of a world of patriarchy. Of course, all claims of convent abuse should not be dismissed, since it is impossible to ascertain their validity, but tales crafted to ignore this important element of religious life better suited the goals of Protestants wishing to bolster the appeals of the

---

<sup>98</sup> Again, statistics indicating religious affiliation are scarce and contradictory. Arnstein reports that between 1847 and 1851, the Catholic population in England grew from 284,000 to 758,000. Arnstein, 50.

<sup>99</sup> For Protestant sisterhoods and their association with charity work, see Casteras, 134 and Reed, 230. For more on convents and charity work, see Casteras, 133, 136.

patriarchal system and minimize the merits of religious orders. If the anti-convent literature depicted nuns performing altruistic services with aplomb, the public might think these communities of women were actually capable of caring for themselves in a dignified manner, free of corruption.

Charity work, however much it was ignored by anti-convent activists, was nevertheless an appealing aspect of the religious life to many women. Another perceived aspect of Victorian convent life, this one of a romantic nature, cannot be ignored when discussing the growing allure of religious orders. However misleading it may have been, there was a popular notion that convent life was a romantic one. This notion remained quite separate from the idea that convent life was one full of abuse. However, both schools of thought relied on similar perceptions of femininity—for example, both believed that women could not really enter into the convent for purely religious or charitable reasons and that women's real motivations usually had sexual or rebellious, rather than spiritual, undertones.

However much the perceived romantic element of convent life detracted from the motivations of those women who truly felt they were answering their vocational calling, it should not be ignored in a discussion of the growing allure of the female religious order. Art historian Susan P. Casteras, in her essay *Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices*, examines the artistic representations of romanticized nuns and concludes that “the majority of nuns depicted in this rather peculiar genre are quite pretty, being at the same time unattainable to all men except one ‘secret’ love (who could be mortal or even Christ himself.) Such a simplistic approach seems to belong to the ‘if only’ school of emotionality, one in which several complex

motives are reduced to one that seemed particularly congenial to male Protestantism.” She concludes that “this attitude simultaneously satisfied the fantasies of male artists and viewers on the subject and also reinforced the Protestant belief that no woman could possibly prefer the life of a nun to that of a wife and mother.”<sup>100</sup>

According to those who romanticized convent life, pretty young nuns often entered into the convent because of a failed love affair. The young woman usually had been jilted and, still in love, she would rather be imprisoned in perpetual virginity than suppress her feelings and move on to another man.<sup>101</sup> Obviously, this served to bolster the confidence of young men—it boosted their egos to know that they could cause a woman to swear off men forever merely by casting them aside in favor of someone new. It also allowed men to take control of the convent situation. If they had caused women to immure themselves in the first place, they could easily bring an end to convents by acting as better lovers. By taking this convoluted responsibility for a woman’s decision to enter the convent, woman’s agency in the matter and thus her evolving status on a broader scale could also be denied.

Despite the fact that many of these romantic explanations for the allure of the convent were propagated by men, not all of these explanations should be completely dismissed, although “romantic” here does not necessarily involve the erotic. Wallis and Reed both agree that many women “joined them [sisterhoods] out of a sense of rebellion against existing authority.”<sup>102</sup> One well-known example of this rebellion was the case of

---

<sup>100</sup> Casteras, 130.

<sup>101</sup> In *The Convent Horror*, Barbara Ubryk entered the convent because the man she loved rejected her. By entering a convent, she dedicated her virginity to this man.

<sup>102</sup> Wallis, 58. Also see Reed, 231. Both authors discuss this rebellion in relation to Anglo-Catholic sisterhoods, but it is important to note that the public often did not make the distinction between Catholic convent and Protestant sisterhood; both were bad and threatened existing Protestant patriarchy, and at times ‘sisterhood’ and ‘convent’ were used interchangeably in popular literature. While young Protestant women

Emily Scobell. Emily, the daughter of an evangelical minister, entered an Anglo-Catholic sisterhood against her father's will. She was quite young and religious life symbolized freedom from parental authority. Her father fought tirelessly to remove her from the sisterhood, but both Emily and the mother superior objected. The case agitated anti-Catholic as well as misogynistic sentiment throughout England. These sentiments were exacerbated when Emily died of scarlet fever only three months after running away. Reverend Scobell accused the mother superior of exposing Emily to disease in order to obtain her rather large inheritance to fund the sisterhood.<sup>103</sup>

Emily Scobell's case, extreme as it was, revealed certain elements which were undoubtedly appealing to nineteenth century women. By rejecting patriarchal society, women entering both Catholic and Anglo-Catholic orders were rebelling against the dominant nineteenth century English social structure, as well as their families who, like Scobell's, may not have approved of life in a religious order. To traditionally subjugated Victorian women, the ability to rebel against oppressive forces by entering the convent must have been empowering. Indeed, Scobell's last insult to Protestant patriarchy was that her inheritance went to support a system that her father and most "respectable" English Protestants were adamantly against. The inheritance and dowries of wealthy young women did, in fact, play a large part in convent abuse literature: Maria Monk reported that two women had been imprisoned for years in the cellar of her convent in Montreal. These women, whose cells were located right next to the lime pit full of dead

---

who entered Anglo-Catholic convents sometimes did so to rebel against their parents, who perceived Protestant sisterhoods as very Catholic in nature, women from Catholic families who entered convents were rebelling against something larger than parental authority—by entering a convent, they were symbolically rebelling against Protestantism, Protestant teachings on marriage and motherhood, and perhaps even the Anglican English state.

<sup>103</sup> Reed, 223.

babies, were heiresses who had been captured by the mother superior and forced to become nuns so that their wealth and land could fund the convent after their untimely deaths.<sup>104</sup>

Also important in Emily Scobell's story, at least for the purposes of this study, was what *type* of religious order she wanted to join, not just how much money that institution received upon her death. Emily's institution was a Protestant sisterhood. Much like the Catholic convent in function, these sisterhoods were associated with Anglo-Catholicism and were therefore nominally Anglican though they appeared more Catholic than anything else. The emergence of these orders in the 1840s was seen by many Protestants as yet another way in which Catholics were infiltrating the Protestant church and corrupting nubile young women, but for Anglo-Catholics, it was seen as a much-needed option for women who chose not to marry. Dr. Pusey and Newman, who later converted to Catholicism, agitated for Protestant female religious orders as early as the 1820s. These Oxford Movement leaders reasoned that if Anglican sisterhoods were not established soon, women would begin converting in greater numbers to Catholicism because the religious life had become so appealing to nineteenth century women.<sup>105</sup>

#### *Establishment of Protestant Sisterhoods*

In 1826, an anonymous "Country Clergyman" wrote a letter to the Anglican Bishop of London. In it was "a Plan for Improving the Arrangements at Present Existing for Administering Medical Advice and Visiting the Sick Poor."<sup>106</sup> The clergyman's plan

---

<sup>104</sup> Monk, *The Confessions of Maria Monk*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Anson, 222.

<sup>106</sup> "Protestant Sisters of Charity; a Letter Addressed to the Lord Bishop of London" (London: Charles Knight, 1826).

involved the establishment of Protestant sisterhoods, modeled on the Catholic *Les Sœurs de la Charité* with which he had become familiar while in France. This French religious order was not cloistered; rather, the sisters lived together in small groups throughout rural and urban France in areas that required the services of caring, trained women for the relief of the sick and the poor. In the words of the clergyman, “It is proposed that a Society of Females be formed, to be called THE PROTESTANT SISTERS OF CHARITY, (unless some fitter name should be selected for it); that they shall be placed in parishes where the particular exigencies most require them....”<sup>107</sup> He neglected to discuss such issues as celibacy or the vows the sisters would be required to take. However, the inspiration for these Sisters of Charity was a decidedly Catholic model, and a foreign one at that. This Protestant clergyman was not attacked for his admiration of the Catholic conventual system—he was writing nearly ten years before Maria Monk’s lurid tale of convent abuse was published and set the tone for the deluge of anti-convent literature the Victorian period would go on to produce. His pamphlet was distributed but did not cause much of a reaction from conservative Protestants, who dealt with the issue by ignoring it. This tactic was soon to be replaced by a flurry of anti-sisterhood activity.

Prominent members of the Oxford Movement also wanted to establish Protestant religious orders, particularly for women. Their motivations were, in many respects, similar to the “Country Clergyman’s;” that is, they saw a real need for active charity work among England’s most destitute citizens. Peter F. Anson, in his definitive work on Anglican female religious orders, adds that the movement to establish Protestant sisterhoods was also a product of the “Gothick” revival of the eighteenth century. “With this constant nostalgia for monastic methods of prayer and worship cropping up again

---

<sup>107</sup> “Protestant Sisters of Charity,” 25.

and again,” he writes, “there were also lingering regrets that the Church of England had no monasteries or convents.”<sup>108</sup> The Anglo-Catholics, certainly fascinated by the Catholicism of England’s past, started discussing plans for Protestant sisterhoods as early as the 1820s, and boasted such prominent supporters as Robert Southey, England’s poet laureate, Newman, and a smattering of Anglican clergymen.

Though much of the impetus for establishing Protestant sisterhoods stemmed from England’s real need for concerted charity work, Pusey and Newman also used another tactic to argue their cause: if Protestants did not establish religious orders soon, women would certainly be drawn to convert to Catholicism because Catholicism offered an appealing option that Protestantism did not—convent life.<sup>109</sup> To many traditional Protestants, however, it seemed as though Catholics were stepping up their campaign to infiltrate Protestantism from within.

Despite myriad objections, Dr. Pusey succeeded in establishing the first Anglican Sisterhood of Mercy in 1845. A prominent English vicar, Dr. Hook, urged Pusey to separate the sisterhoods from Catholic convents in as many ways as possible. Hook suggested that the sisters dress plainly, but not markedly different from lay people and certainly not in clothing that resembled a nun’s habit. He advised Pusey to choose Greek terms rather than Latin ones for the religious rhetoric of the sisterhood. Finally, he stressed that sisters should not have formal rules and irrevocable vows. Dr. Pusey

---

<sup>108</sup> Anson, 24. Lengthy discussion of the Gothick revival is, unfortunately, outside the scope of this study; however, it should be noted that this artistic and literary movement is related to many of the more romantic images of convent life that were floating around Victorian England. The revival, designated “Gothick” to distinguish it from the High Medieval architecture style it was seeking to emulate, was a movement of eighteenth century Britain that glorified the medieval and the macabre. Religious orders, asceticism, and, to some degree, Catholicism, were wrapped up in this revival. Though I have not come across references in my study of the Oxford Movement, it seems plausible that the renewed interest of the 1820s in the common heritage of Protestantism and Catholicism was in some ways related to the Gothick revival.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

ignored all of these suggestions: the dress of the sisters resembled the habits of the nuns, which caused some to “whisper that they were ‘disguised Roman Catholics;’” the same Latin terms used in the conventual system were adopted; and, perhaps most symbolically, the rules Pusey required the sisters to follow were the exact rules used by the mystic Catholic order of the Sisters of Mercy during the Counter-Reformation.<sup>110</sup> It is hard to imagine that the decision to use the conventual rules of the Counter-Reformation was made lightly—indeed, it made many Protestants fearful that Catholics were not only infiltrating but would, in fact, soon be openly hostile to and oppressive of English Protestantism.

English Protestants were confused as to why religious orders, which they equated so strongly with Catholicism, suddenly became an aspect of Protestant devotion in the 1840s. That Catholics were infiltrating and Rome was taking over England was perhaps an understandable, if not entirely plausible, conclusion. After all, monasteries and convents were dissolved in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, first by order of King Henry VIII and then by “Lord Protector of England” Oliver Cromwell. Approximately eight hundred canons, monks, friars, and nuns were affected by the actions of Cromwell and the king. It would seem, then, as though religious orders disappeared from England and were only reintroduced when Catholics were again allowed to openly practice their faith. However, the Act of 1536 which granted Henry the power to suppress monasteries also granted him another power, one that is little recognized in religious history texts. As Anson explains, the Act of 1536 “made provision for the King to re-found as well as suppress Religious Communities.” Seizing the opportunity, Henry VIII granted royal license to no fewer than forty-seven religious houses for both men and women,

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 223, 231.



reestablishing them “in perpetuity.”<sup>111</sup> Anson considers these religious orders to be the first Anglican “religious communities” because they were sanctioned by King Henry VIII, the self-proclaimed head of the Church of England, and not by the pope. Though the Anglican orders ceased to exist during Oliver Cromwell’s rule, Pusey was nevertheless looking to England’s Protestant past for historical precedent to support his cause.

Interestingly, some English clergy felt the need for religious community long before Pusey’s nineteenth century campaign. Much like the anonymous “Country Clergyman,” some religious figures advocated for the establishment of female religious orders for Protestant women. Clement Barksdale, an Anglican clergyman, wrote his 1675 *Letter touching a Colledge of Maids, or, a Virgin-Society* to express his dismay that convents had been abolished in the first place. He conceded that the conventual system before the Reformation was indeed corrupt and rife with abuse; however, such orders were important and England should have concentrated on *reforming* them to fit within the Protestant frame of morality instead of dissolving them. He explained, “As for the *Religious Orders of Virgins* in the *Roman Church*, though [in] some of those very great abuses have crept in; yet I think ‘twere to be wish’d that those who suppress them in this Nation, had confined themselves within the bounds of a *Reformation*, by choosing rather to rectifie and regulate than abolish them.”<sup>112</sup> What Barksdale meant by “some of those very great abuses” is unclear—he could merely have been referring to the Catholicism of

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>112</sup> *A Letter touching a Colledge of Maids, or, a Virgin-Society*, quoted in Anson, 16.

the convents in general or he may have been referring to abuses similar to the ones supposedly committed in nineteenth century English convents.<sup>113</sup>

As can be seen in the Victorian tales of abuse, convents were far from acceptable to many Protestants, and as the dissolution of the convents and monasteries in the sixteenth century shows, the religious life had been considered foreign to English sensibilities for nearly three hundred years. It is not surprising, then, that Pusey's Protestant sisterhoods met much of the same opposition as convents did. Tales of abuse within sisterhoods resembled the canon of convent abuse literature in striking ways: masculinized mothers superior tortured simple-minded young sisters, Anglo-Catholic ministers carried on sexual relations with the women in charge, and communication with the outside world was monitored to such a degree that it was nearly impossible. One significant difference in the anti-sisterhood literature, however, was that the perpetrators of abuse were not unnamed, anonymous priests and nuns like they were in the convent abuse tales of Maria Monk, Barbara Ubryk, and Julia Gordon. Instead, the abuse was fully blamed on two well-known individuals: Dr. Pusey and the infamous Miss Priscilla Lydia Sellon or, to her supporters, "The Restorer after Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the English Church."<sup>114</sup> As one of the first Protestant mothers superior, Miss Sellon became almost synonymous with the movement as a whole. Because the movement was abhorred by many Protestants, so too was Miss Sellon.

---

<sup>113</sup> Though this paper focuses on anti-convent literature in Victorian Britain, prejudice against conventual life does exist in literature prior to this period. Most of these earlier tales of abuse condemned the asceticism of medieval Christianity and were not so much expressions of anxiety over women's changing place in society but rather demonstrations of disgust with the ascetic lifestyle. Additionally, as Wallis discusses in his work, the degree to which convent abuse propaganda and literature dominated religious discourse in nineteenth century England was completely unprecedented and therefore can be safely studied as a distinct, if not completely separate, phenomenon.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Jay Williams, *Priscilla Lydia Sellon—The Restorer After Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the English Church* (London: SPCK, 1965).

Much of the anti-sisterhood literature focused on revealing Miss Sellon's "true" religion; that is, her opponents were intent on proving that her Protestantism was fake, a bad disguise for her true allegiance to the Catholic Church. Like Pusey, Sellon did little to allay the fears of worried Protestants. Among other visible signs of their emulation of Catholic nuns, the sisters under Sellon's rule wore "a black woolen dress, to which was attached a small ebony cross; a white cap, with long black strings, worn over closely cropped hair..."<sup>115</sup> The ebony cross, though small, was perhaps the most symbolically offensive aspect of the ensemble—idolatry was expressly forbidden within the Church of England and was frowned upon so much by some Protestant churches that even altars were replaced by plain wooden tables that could as easily have been used in a kitchen as in a place of worship.<sup>116</sup>

By demonstrating that Miss Sellon's true religion was Catholicism, it was relatively easy to accuse the sisterhoods of perpetrating the same shocking abuses that had been attributed to convents. The most widely read anti-sisterhood tale was, like the convent abuse tales, reputedly by an escaped inmate, only one sister among many to have suffered at the hands of the mother superior, yet shockingly the only one to have lived to tell her tale to the outside world. Diana A.G. Campbell, or "Sister Geraldine," as Miss Sellon and the Sisters of Mercy knew her, suffered such vitriolic treatment in her

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>116</sup> Anti-Catholic sentiment often focused on the aesthetic aspects of worship, and as such, Catholics were often accused of idolatry by Protestants from the Reformation onward. The debate over idolatry is biblical, with Protestants clinging to the Ten Commandments to denounce the use of crosses, images, and rosary beads. The specific passage that Protestants used to denounce Catholics is as follows: "... you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments." *Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), Exodus 20:3-6.

sisterhood that she tried to escape several times before her mother finally forced her daughter's removal in a dramatic defiance of Miss Sellon's authority. After returning to the outside world, Campbell decided to write her pamphlet "to expose those who shelter themselves under a Protestant Establishment, and who with a shell-work of Catholicity, do deeds dishonourable to any portion of God's Holy Church. The Mother Superior has been asked if she was a Catholic, and also if she were of the Society of Jesus, three times in private; it is, therefore, now my duty publicly to expose a house which is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but which saps, as it were, the trees of every plantation, and shelters itself under the foliage of the universal forest."<sup>117</sup> It was certainly important that Miss Sellon, the mother superior, appeared more Catholic than Protestant, but as Campbell's statement showed, Catholicism was not what frightened Protestants most about the sisterhoods. Just like convents, sisterhoods posed a significant threat to the established patriarchal rule of the day, and while a significant portion of Campbell's exposé was devoted to outing Mother Superior Sellon as a Catholic, a greater cause of concern was that "The whole system, arrangements, and rules of the Institution are masculine, and more suited to young men than to delicate English women."<sup>118</sup>

The fear that convents would masculinize their inmates is echoed in Campbell's pamphlet. Since there were few or no men present, women were required to take on traits that were considered "male" in order to effectively run the order. It is impossible to know whether or not Miss Sellon was really the perpetrator of the horrible abuses that Campbell and others claimed she was; nevertheless, by taking on a role that required leadership, disciplinarian, and administrative skills, Miss Sellon willingly renounced the

---

<sup>117</sup> Campbell, 26.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 2.

ideal of Victorian femininity that many Protestants were so intent on cultivating. Since these traits were viewed as outside the scope of feminine capabilities, of course Sellon would not be able to perform her duties well and the sisters under her care would suffer for it.

Though the stifled femininity of the sisters was of greater concern than the threat of Catholicism was, the dubious Protestantism found in the sisterhoods nevertheless comprised much of Diana Campbell's narrative. In addition to the obviously habit-like dress and the crosses worn around the sisters' necks, Miss Sellon's sisterhood apparently contained many blatant signs of Catholicism: large crosses, including one made of ash which was "*about seven feet high*," seemingly adorned nearly every room of the sisterhood. At the school for orphans attached to the convent, the Bible was considered a "dead letter" and kept from the young children desperately in need of religious training. Silence was almost always the rule, just as in some convents, and Campbell often received punishments requiring her to be silent for extended periods of time.<sup>119</sup> Enforced asceticism, too, screamed Catholicism and associated the sisterhoods with an antiquated and severe form of Christianity that defined the harsh practices of medieval devotees. Vows of silence, enclosure, and physical torture all made the order of the Sisters of Mercy, which was originally designed to provide much-needed charitable work to England's poor and ignorant, appear instead to be a hotbed of corruption, a dangerous place to send well-intentioned yet simple-minded young Protestant women.

Though Campbell's obsession with and condemnation of all things "Catholic" did play upon the fierce anti-Catholic sentiment of the period, associating Miss Sellon with Catholicism also became a way to remove her from the realm of Protestant morality.

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 6,11-12, 19.

Once this was successfully accomplished, Miss Sellon and her sisterhoods could be despised almost more than if they had officially been Catholic—instead of renouncing Protestantism, as Catholics had done, they were perverting and corrupting it from within. Miss Sellon was outside the scope of Protestant morality yet still defined herself, at least publicly, as within it.

Campbell's story is one worth relating because it established a connection with the convent abuse literature and was the most famous of the sisterhood tales. Campbell became Sister Geraldine sometime in the early 1850s, soon after England's first Sisterhood of Mercy opened in 1845. She wrote little of her motives for entering the sisterhood but did indicate that charity work and service to God, as well as the joviality of the sisters she met, influenced her decision to join. During her first meal with the sisters, she was encouraged by their kindness and their apparent delight over their station in life. From the very beginning, however, Campbell was struck by the degree to which the mother superior *appeared* Catholic—her dress and mannerisms, to this young girl, seemed out of place in a Protestant environment.<sup>120</sup> As soon as Campbell began her “charity work,” however, she realized that Sellon's sisterhood was not the place of good deeds and contemplative religion that she had anticipated. Campbell was sent to oversee the young orphan workers at the Sisters of Mercy Industrial School. The specific school she oversaw was a needlework house filled with seventy girls who, in exchange for housing, worked long hours and received no actual remuneration aside from food, crowded and dirty lodging, and very limited schooling. The conditions, according to the young Protestant woman, were appalling: the girls were not allowed to speak or to read books during their few short breaks, they were locked into the school to prevent escape,

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 2.

and no visitors were allowed entry to the work house. Even the children's clergymen were allowed admittance only one day each month, ostensibly to prevent the discovery of the abuse inflicted on the orphans.

Aside from the horror of forced child labor done under the auspices of Protestant charity, Campbell herself, as the children's teacher, also suffered greatly. The school was located far from the sisterhood and Campbell was forced to walk the distance several times each day, often in terrible weather, due to the mother superior's stringent rules and intentionally bad planning. Campbell's job was to read prayers to the children. One day, a young boy in her class became very ill and Campbell decided to accompany him home. The mother superior, always in favor of strict asceticism, punished Campbell for indulging the boy and required her to keep a vow of silence for a week. Other punishments for similar transgressions were bestowed quite liberally: Diana Campbell was forced to lie face down on the floor for twenty minutes every day with her arms stretched out as if on a cross. The superior would force the young woman's mouth open and stick her fingers in for long periods. Sister Geraldine was undressed by a nun and sent to bed "like a child" as punishment for an undisclosed "crime."<sup>121</sup>

The biggest abuse Diana Campbell suffered during her time as Sister Geraldine was related to her confinement. Due to the abuse described above, Campbell became very sick, falling prey to "brain fever and typhus." Hearing of her daughter's sickness, Mrs. Campbell traveled to the sisterhood, which was some distance from the woman's home, only to be refused entrance by Mother Superior Sellon, who doubtless had much corruption within the sisterhood to hide. Campbell again became sick after a long period of solitary confinement inflicted on her by her fellow sisters and Sellon. After suffering

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 8.

this abuse and recovering from her illness, Campbell decided to escape. Unfortunately, she sought lodging with an old family friend who promptly returned her to the sisterhood, incensed that the young woman would run away from a religious institution. To explain her actions to Mother Superior Sellon, Campbell explained that she was trying to get to Rome to investigate the connections between Anglican religious orders and the Catholic Church, connections which Campbell recognized in her exposé as quite overt.<sup>122</sup>

After her attempted escape, the situation became much worse for poor Sister Geraldine: “Seeing, as they undoubtedly did, my anxiety to get away—an anxiety I was afraid to express—they adopted a plan to detain me. Sister Catherine called me into her room one day, and told me abruptly that Dr. Yonge said my mind was affected and that, knowing their love for me, I must submit to anything they thought good for me. I was much astonished and not a little sickened by such a statement; but I knew the ground I was on....”<sup>123</sup> Just as in the convent abuse literature, charges of insanity were used as tools against women who claimed to be suffering abuse: Miss Sellon figured that if Sister Geraldine somehow managed to inform the outside world of the corruption within the sisterhood, Dr. Yonge’s diagnosis of insanity would discredit any accusations the young woman might make. Similar controversy surrounded Maria Monk’s case—her mother testified that “when at the age of about seven years, she [Maria] broke a slate pencil in her head; that since that time her mental faculties were deranged.”<sup>124</sup>

In her story, Campbell denied that she ever succumbed to insanity. Sellon and the Sisters of Mercy, however, convinced nearly everyone that Sister Geraldine was quite mentally deranged: when Campbell’s mother inquired after her daughter, Mother

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 8-9, 20-23.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>124</sup> Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 217.



Superior Sellon said that Sister Geraldine's brain suffered greatly under her last fever and that she had become almost completely mad. Campbell's mother responded to Sellon with surprise, as she had received not even one letter from her daughter relating her troubles. Of course, Campbell had sent numerous letters explaining the abuse inflicted upon her, but the mother superior had intercepted and destroyed all of them. Campbell's pamphlet ended with an epistolary correspondence between Mrs. Campbell and Miss Sellon regarding the young woman's health, in which Miss Sellon shrewdly informed Mrs. Campbell of Sister Geraldine's antipathy towards the sisterhood, presumably anticipating the horrifying stories of abuse that the young woman would tell when she got the chance. Sellon assured Mrs. Campbell, however, that Sister Geraldine was only saying such things due to her sickness and not out of genuine malice.<sup>125</sup> Miss Sellon was on the offensive, trying desperately to maintain the sisterhood's credibility and its ties to Protestantism before Sister Geraldine could make her story public. As such, Miss Sellon used the strong Victorian anti-Catholic sentiment, which would later help turn public opinion against the mother superior and her sisterhood, against Sister Geraldine herself: in a letter to Mrs. Campbell, Sellon wrote, "Some days she [Geraldine] declares to the Sisters, that she is a Roman Catholic, and mocks at what she thinks is their Protestantism, and that she is kept here against her will."<sup>126</sup> Any woman so foolish as to be misled by the Catholics would surely be prone to lies, especially those which were damaging to Protestant institutions of morality.

Sister Geraldine's story ended with her mother finally gaining entrance to the sisterhood and rescuing her daughter from the dangerous and curiously masculine Miss

---

<sup>125</sup> Campbell, 28-30.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 32.

Sellon.<sup>127</sup> The Sisterhood of Mercy that Diana E.G. Campbell described after her rescue was far from the charitable institution that the “Country Clergyman” advocated in his letter to the Bishop of London. His vision for the Anglican Sisterhoods was something that resembled the French Catholic Sisterhoods of Charity, for “The good that is done by them [the Sisters of Charity], is incalculable; and the misery which they relieve, by the affectionate sympathy of their attentions, is even greater than that which is removed by their plain sense in medicine, and their excellent nursing.”<sup>128</sup> Again, just as in the anti-convent literature, exposés on the sisterhoods conveniently overlooked the valuable social services that sisterhoods were designed to, and did, provide. According to one pro-Sellon pamphleteer, the sisterhoods were “for those who live in community, working amongst the poor, engaged in a laborious life.”<sup>129</sup> Sellon was not perceived as fitting into this description. Even though sisterhoods were designed, in part, to perform humanitarian work, it is clear that either this function was often overlooked by the lay public or it truly did get minimized by mothers superior like Miss Sellon.

Though Protestant sisters did perform many important charitable functions, most notably as nurses alongside Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War of the 1850s, they were nevertheless grouped, in the popular consciousness, with Catholic convents. Because of this, they intensified anti-Catholic sentiment, heightened the hysteria over convents and, most importantly for this study, revealed great unrest over women’s changing place in society. To the conservative Protestant, it seemed intentional that the Catholics were infiltrating through the weaker members of the Protestant community,

---

<sup>127</sup> Just as in some of the other convent abuse tales, the mother superior was presented as masculinized. I argue that this was done because the conservative Protestant community could not conceive of feminine women in positions of power.

<sup>128</sup> *Protestant Sisters of Charity*, 17.

<sup>129</sup> *Reply to a Tract by the Rev. J. Spurrell* (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), 7.

women. Pusey's Protestant sisterhoods profoundly threatened the tenets of Protestant morality and the accepted patriarchal rule of Victorian England: because of the sisterhoods, in the 1840s, it became possible for a Protestant woman to circumvent family life and reject the protection that men offered, all in the name of Protestant piety. Convents perverted the role of women and disrupted patriarchal society, certainly, but they could do little more than lure wayward women away from Protestantism and toward Catholicism (which certainly seemed dangerous enough). Sisterhoods, on the other hand, posed an even greater threat because they allowed women to officially remain within the Protestant system while rejecting some of the most important principles of Victorian Protestant morality. Sisterhoods confirmed that women's roles were indeed changing in important ways and that Protestantism itself could not help but reflect this.

#### **IV. Defiance of Protestantism**

##### *Convents and the Threat to Protestant Patriarchy*

It is clear that the Protestant disgust for conventual life was related to anti-Catholicism. Even the sisterhoods were viewed as pseudo-Protestant, more related to the Oxford Movement than to the Anglican tradition to which they officially belonged. Anti-Catholicism, of course, was rampant in Victorian England—dynamic Anglo-Catholic leaders like Dr. Pusey, increased Irish Catholic immigration, and legal victories for Catholics in Parliament all contributed to this prejudice. Yet the fact remains that anti-convent sentiment was the most extreme form of this anti-Catholicism, with tales of abuse circulating not just in the religious realm, but also in the political.<sup>130</sup> But why were women and convents in the center of this religious brawl? Neither Catholicism nor

---

<sup>130</sup> Wallis, 183.

Protestantism allowed them entrance to the clergy, so women were certainly not vilified for their role as the formal religious leaders of these opposing Christian sects. The Protestant woman was to be sheltered from the crudeness and corruption of the public realm, yet the convent question made women the subjects of a very public debate. It was precisely because women were, on their own, beginning to thrust themselves into the public realm and agitate for greater rights that the debate over convent life consumed a major portion of Victorian anti-Catholic discourse. The first feminist movement began in England in the 1850s, with women reacting to the strict gender roles solidified by Victorian Protestant moral codes.<sup>131</sup> Marriage, patriarchal rule, the nuclear family—all of these sacred institutions were threatened by the women's movement, which sought to open up career options and allow women greater autonomy. It is no accident, then, that convent life—which had allowed women for centuries to have a vocation, live relatively free from patriarchal authority, and sever themselves from familial responsibilities—became so objectionable just when women were agitating for greater freedoms in the lay Protestant world.

Were the lurid tales of convent abuse true? It is impossible to know exactly how convent life was conducted during this period. There probably was abuse within some convents, just as there was most likely abuse within some families who claimed to live according to Protestant principles. However, the types of abuse reported, and the propagandistic ways in which these abuses were related to the public, indicate that many of the claims of abuse were either embellished or fabricated entirely. Particular events and titles were used over and over again—in her *Awful Disclosures*, Julia Gordon reported a lime pit filled with the corpses of dead babies; in Maria Monk's own *Awful*

---

<sup>131</sup> Hollis, vii.

*Disclosures*, published years earlier, similar lime pits, also used to destroy the evidence of concupiscent encounters, were also described.<sup>132</sup> So many nuns were reported to be locked up in underground dungeons that nearly every narrative at least casually made reference to the convent's unfortunate prisoner, even if no one had actually seen her. More often than not, she was beautiful, young, and extremely rich.<sup>133</sup>

Convents, along with the early women's movement, represented an enormous threat to the patriarchal rule that defined the Victorian era. One Catholic woman, in an 1851 defense of conventual life, made the connection between the anti-convent movement and the Protestant desire to perpetuate woman's subservient status. In her letter to the editor of the *Catholic Standard*, Lady Teresa Arundell wrote:

To Catholic ladies, who, like myself, have sisters and relatives in convents, it is, indeed, humiliating and most painful, that, in England, hitherto considered the land of liberty, we should be forced to exert our influence to save those loved ones from the grossest insults, the most unmanly attempt now being made to deprive them of a security which even the meanest women slaves have insured to them. Can it be possible that, to the members of the House of Commons, heroic virtue is so hateful, that no insult is too great to offer those who dedicated themselves to its constant practice? Is Divine charity so distasteful to English Protestants, that ladies, by devoting their lives to its various duties, should become objects so contemptible that they are to be deprived, by law, of the liberty granted to the meanest of their sex, even to the most abandoned? Oh! that such a reproach on Englishmen should go forth to the world! Hatred of Catholicity is a poor plea for so cowardly, so wanton an insult to ladies.<sup>134</sup>

To Arundell, anti-Catholicism did not explain the Protestant man's antipathy towards convents. The real explanation for anti-convent sentiment, and by extension the lurid tales of convent abuse, was misogyny. Hatred of Catholicism was a "poor plea" for

---

<sup>132</sup> Coleridge, 11; Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 83.

<sup>133</sup> See *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns!*, *The Convent Horror*, *Awful Disclosures*, etc.

<sup>134</sup> Teresa Arundell, *Letter to the Editor of the Catholic Standard* in Lewis H.G. Tonna, *Nuns and Nunneries: Sketches Compiled Entirely from Romish Authorities* (London: Seeleys, 1852), 2.

literature accusing nuns of either perpetrating or suffering disgusting sexual abuses, an unsatisfactory explanation for propaganda condemning those who chose the cloister instead of the frivolities of the outside world. Lady Teresa Arundell, sure that even slaves possessed more rights and were treated with more dignity than English women, was one of only a few Victorians to speak plainly on the subject of convent abuse. She perceived the convent's threat to Protestant patriarchy; instead of refuting this threat, she condemned those "distasteful English Protestants" who were responsible for women's suppression in the first place.

Victorian prudery made open discussion of certain issues difficult and helps explain the convoluted ways in which anti-convent sentiment was on one level an expression of unrest over women's changing place in society. Convents represented everything that Protestant women living under patriarchal rule were not supposed to enjoy: celibacy, vocation, sorority, education, control over her own body, and work beyond the domestic realm. In discussing the appeal of convent life and of Protestant sisterhoods in particular, *Macmillan Magazine's* "Girl of the Period" reasoned that "the success of Church of England convents is to be found in the frivolity of the life which custom now enforces on most of us."<sup>135</sup> In other words, the life that traditional Protestantism set up for women was no match for the freedoms symbolized by religious orders, freedoms that would not allow the Victorian patriarchal system to continue unchecked. Due in part to an effort to minimize the appeal of these freedoms, tales of convent abuse began to circulate, warning men to keep their women away from such horrors and attempting to prove the superiority of Protestant patriarchy, family life, and strict gender roles.

---

<sup>135</sup> "Two Girls of the Period," 324.

Catholicism, viewed by Protestants as a perversion of Christianity, was a natural enemy of Protestantism; not surprisingly, to Victorian Protestants, it also gave women the ability to cast aside Protestant gender roles while dedicating themselves to God. Convents, however, were not the only aspect of Catholicism that betrayed Victorian Protestants' fear over women's vulnerable place in society. The sacrament of confession also agitated Protestants and was tied, peculiarly, to gender. Confession, of course, was not a new aspect of Catholicism, but fear of it was relatively unique to Victorian England and was very much related to the anti-convent movement. Confession allowed a woman to be alone with an unmarried man, revealing her most private sins. Most of these sins, Protestants figured, were somehow related to the private Victorian bedroom and were thus overwhelmingly sexual.<sup>136</sup> Of course, Victorian society prevented the frank discussion of such matters, yet to be a good Catholic woman, it was required that such niceties be divulged.

Protestants, most of them male and many of them clergymen, felt that "the practice of Confession tends to disunite families, and interferes with the family life."<sup>137</sup> This was also what convents were suspected of doing, but for different reasons: confession was dangerous because it involved men, while convents were dangerous precisely because they excluded them. Confession encouraged women to discuss their private sexual lives; convents prevented women from having sex all together. Both confession and convents, though, were thought to increase sexual deviance and thus threaten the sacred Protestant family: confession encouraged upfront discussion of sex, with priests supposedly asking detailed sexual questions and putting sinful ideas into their

---

<sup>136</sup> For more, see Father Chiniqy, *The Priest, the Woman, and the Confessional* (Montreal: F.E. Grafton, 1876).

<sup>137</sup> Rev. C.F. Lowder, *Sacramental Confession* (London: Rivingtons, 1874), 26.

confessors' heads. Convents, in their dubious efforts to repress sexuality, actually made those in charge *more* lustful and willing to prey on the immured women because they necessitated a very unnatural way of life.

The objections to convents and confession, however, were remarkably similar—both Catholic institutions seemed to profoundly threaten the sanctity and the pervasiveness of the ideal Protestant family because they required women to step out of their private roles as mothers and wives. Discomfort with confession and hatred of convents became most severe in the nineteenth century, with the anti-convent movement becoming the most intense form of anti-Catholicism precisely when the first organized feminist movement emerged, with women agitating for and winning important rights in Parliament.<sup>138</sup> Both the women's movement and the conventual system reserved relatively little room for men, and thus had no need for patriarchal rule. Instead of bearing children to an earthly husband, nuns were celibate and served a more ethereal spouse. Because their "husband," the son of God, represented complete perfection, English men were not only of no use but were in fact of such inferior quality that they were, according to some conventual doctrines, to be ignored all together. "To be faithful to her Spouse, a virgin must be immaculate in her tongue by the delicacy of her language, *and by the abstinence as much as possible from conversations with men...*" reported Lewis H.G. Tonna in his *Nuns and Nunneries: Sketches Compiled Entirely from Romish Authorities*, published in 1852.<sup>139</sup> Tonna, a rabid anti-Catholic, quoted St. Alphonsus M. Ligouri, whose document on the heavenly marriage of nun and Christ was, according to Tonna, still being followed in British convents. Whether Ligouri's tract was still being

---

<sup>138</sup> Hollis, xii.

<sup>139</sup> St. Alphonsus M. Ligouri, *The true Spouse of Christ, or the Nun Sanctified by the Virtues of her State*, quoted in Tonna, 74. Emphasis added by Tonna.



followed or not is unclear; however, Tonna's fear that young English women would be cut off from male society certainly resounded with patriarchal Protestants who were already unsure if their control over women would survive the tumultuous nineteenth century.

What Arundell did not understand was why the religious life should be considered so unsuitable for English women. She perceived that it was not merely the nuns' Catholicism which condemned them in the eyes of Protestant society but did not fully comprehend the profound ways in which convents worked to undermine Protestant patriarchal authority. As Protestant clergyman John Angell James wrote in his *Female Piety; or, The Young Woman's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality*, woman's "sphere is clearly assigned to her by Providence.... Whatever breaks down the modest reserve, the domestic virtues, the persuasive gentleness, of women, is an injury done to the community. Woman can be spared from the lecturer's chair, the platform of general convocation, and the scene of public business; but she cannot be spared from the hearth of her husband and the circle of her children."<sup>140</sup> In Angell's estimation, society would fall apart if woman was removed from her family. The nun renounced her temporal family to assume a position in a more spiritual and eternal one, leaving English society reeling in her absence and Protestant leaders unsure that their power and influence would be able to persist.

## **Conclusion**

Julia Gordon's *Awful Disclosures* was in many ways typical of the anti-convent literature of nineteenth century England. This study began with the telling of her tale to

---

<sup>140</sup> James, quoted in Johnson, 130.

demonstrate the nature of convent abuse propaganda. Anti-convent tales such as Gordon's were certainly anti-Catholic, but they were also an expression of fear over the nineteenth century challenge to Protestant patriarchal rule. With that in mind, Julia Gordon's story must be reanalyzed to highlight the ways in which it served as a warning to Protestant men that their dominance might not persist and a declaration that the Protestant social system, particularly in regard to gender roles, was far superior to the alternatives of Catholicism and female independence.

Julia Gordon was supposedly raised a Protestant in her native Exeter, but when her father died in 1843, both she and her mother were quickly won over by the allures of Puseyism or "half-way Catholicism."<sup>141</sup> Soon after, and still nominally a Protestant, Julia joined a Sisterhood of Mercy and worked to spread the philosophy of the Oxford Tractarians across England. In 1844 she formally converted to Catholicism and entered a Catholic convent. Pusey, of course, did not establish the Sisterhoods of Mercy until 1845, though the account of Julia's life claimed she entered the sisterhood two years before the first founding. While in the convent, Julia said she

...was often visited by the Superior accompanied by a Jesuit Father, and sometimes by several fathers in succession, alone, who would take me into a small stone cell used for sleeping in, and give me religious instruction mixed up with vehement denunciations of Protestants and their heretical Scriptures. I was assigned a Father Confessor, who used, when I was closeted with him at confession, to urge me to confess crimes I never before conceived, and interlarded with religious homilies pictured to my mind scenes of licentiousness I could never suppose were enacted. When I recall his language and his lewd actions vividly to my memory, I perceive now that he was then resorting to the accustomed tactics of those wily priests who delight in scenes of infamy, for breaking down every barrier of virtue planted in my bosom by my dear parents....<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Coleridge, 6.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

Julia's story very much fit the convention of the anti-convent tale: she was a Protestant convert, she was first lured to the religious life by Pusey's (yet-to-be-established) "Protestant" sisterhoods, and she suffered in her youth the death of her father and was therefore from a young age denied a strong patriarchal figure to influence and guide her. Julia experienced the suggestive lewdness of the confession and, while in Rome, viewed the mass death pits containing the children of nuns sexually abused by priests. In short, Julia Gordon experienced almost all of the conventional abuses of anti-convent literature and recorded none of them herself—Gordon's story was penned not by her own hand but by that of an English Protestant clergyman, the Reverend Dr. Coleridge. Julia died in France while giving birth to her priest's bastard child. How she related her harrowing tale to Coleridge, who was presumably in England while Gordon was giving birth and dying in France, was never divulged, rendering the veracity of her tale even more suspect.

Julia Gordon's story played upon several fundamental nineteenth century Protestant fears: Protestant conversion to Catholicism, the allure of the "half-way Catholic" Oxford Movement, confession and, most prominently, unsupervised and unbridled femininity. Even though the leaders of the Oxford Movement were male, it was women who conservative Protestants feared would convert. Once sufficiently dazzled by Anglo-Catholicism, women ensured that gender roles were immediately redefined: in Protestant sisterhoods, authoritative and powerful women such as Miss Sellon took the place of male leaders. In her involvement with the Puseyites, Julia Gordon circumvented patriarchal rule and badly suffered for it. After that, as a Catholic nun, she formalized her rejection of Protestant values, especially regarding her proper

role as a woman. In becoming a nun she forswore her duties to marry and procreate, just as women like Caroline Norton were challenging some of the fundamental tenets of English matrimony on a national level. In this way, then, the convent was a microcosm of what English society could become if patriarchal authority were to be completely rejected. Men would still be present, of course, but in their attempt to gain control over female society they would turn into sexual perverts, much like the priest who, in an effort to control his sexuality, committed carnal sin with the nuns under his charge instead of remaining chaste.

The convent question was one of religion, but it was also one of gender, as it challenged the gender roles which the Protestant tradition had so dogmatically tried to define since the very beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. To a tradition in which “be fruitful and multiply” was not a command but an inescapable fact of life, Catholic convents were as unnatural as they were irreligious. To a country whose power hierarchy relied as much on gender as it did on socioeconomic class, any reversion of the Protestant norm was immediately suspect. Convents and sisterhoods challenged traditional Protestant gender roles, to be sure, but convents preceded Protestantism by many hundreds of years and thus had posed a threat since the beginnings of the Reformation. What was new in the Victorian period, and what made convents infinitely more objectionable to the English in the nineteenth century than they had ever been before, was that women’s roles in English society were changing to resemble, in some ways, women’s roles in religious orders. More women were remaining single throughout their lives, more were seeking work with charitable causes and as professionals, higher education for women was strengthened, and marriage law was being challenged and

changed within Parliament. It was not surprising, then, that anti-convent sentiment in Victorian England became so severe just as women were demanding increased rights and greater freedoms. The intensity and pervasiveness of the sensationalistic convent abuse tales, as well as the outcry against female religious orders by politicians and the clergy, led historian Frank H. Wallis to declare, “No symbol of Roman Catholicism agitated the ultra-Protestant mind... more than convents.”<sup>143</sup>

Julia Gordon, in the abuse she suffered while in the convent and especially in her untimely end, dying as she gave birth to her priest’s sin, symbolized the demise of Protestant femininity and warned of the impending moral decline and sexual depravity of England’s women. Maria Monk, in the most famous of the nineteenth century’s convent abuse tales, described her mother superior as “bold and masculine... cruel and cold-blooded.”<sup>144</sup> Victorian Protestant femininity could not withstand female emancipation—with greater freedoms came masculinization and corruption, or so thought conservative Protestants like Reverend Coleridge and MP Charles Newdigate Newdegate. Even those women who did not gain power and freedom would be degraded in the process. Maria Monk, for example, was not in a position of authority, but she was tortured by those women who were. The same would be the case for lay women if the Caroline Nortons and George Eliots of England were allowed to continue their quests for autonomy—all of English womanhood would be injured, and Protestant morality would be forever destroyed.

Despite reactionary Protestants’ best efforts, religious orders persisted in England and continued to offer women an alternative to marriage, motherhood, and patriarchy.

---

<sup>143</sup> Wallis, 183.

<sup>144</sup> Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 183.

The feminist movement also grew, with women's suffrage intensifying with the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union at the turn of the century. The feminist movement also led to the reformation of divorce laws, with women gaining the same rights to divorce as men in 1923. The professional world became more accessible as the century progressed and higher education institutions were forced to listen to the growing demands of England's women, leading historian Deirdre David to conclude, "Regarded with amusement or ridicule as an anomalous blue-stocking at the end of the eighteenth century, the woman intellectual had gained a degree of professional independence by the end of the nineteenth."<sup>145</sup> As women's status continued to improve, the convent question became less important to the Protestant public and the harrowing tales of convent abuse began to be treated more as voyeuristic fiction and less as steadfast truth.

---

<sup>145</sup> Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1987), 10-11.

# THE FLARE UP IN THE CONFESSIONAL.

## THE PUSSEY CATS ARE COMING.

COME cheer up old England, don't be in  
With the broom beat the pussy cats out of  
Never mind the confessional, let us have hope  
We don't care for pussy cat, priestcraft, or  
Pope. [wait!]  
There's a good time boys, coming, a little time  
And listen awhile to the schoolmaster T. . . e;  
The Bishop of London, will make them all  
squal, [Paul's].  
And knock them from Oxford, right over St.  
The pussy cats coming, close windows and  
gates, T. . . e;  
It is very distressing, says the schoolmaster  
Jolly Westerton ocher'd a turooping oak stake  
And threatened to wallop them over the pate!  
They summon'd the priest, and they sent for  
the Pope, [to rope];  
And the Bishop of London, did make them  
He said, I will have you all banished I vow,  
When in popp'd the pussy cats, singing, moll  
Forgive me, oh, Father, said A. . . d P. . . e, [now  
I'll know better next time, when I go to school  
When in jump'd a Bishop from Oxford no  
conic, [ing out].  
With his breeches all tore, and his shirt hang-  
Oh! ladies, young ladies, of pussies beware!  
If you go to confession, you'll be caught in a  
snare, [your nose,  
You must tell all you do; and the length of  
How many nails you have got on your fin-  
gers and toes;  
How many times you have washed yourself  
under the pump, [rump];  
And how many times you have fell on your  
How many times you've been stroking your  
pipe, [your life].  
And how many times you've been drunk in  
How many times out at night you have  
stepped, [been wogged];  
By your husband, tell how many times you've  
How many glasses of gin you've drunk put,  
And how many times you have wallopped the  
cat.

Tell them how many times you have been  
[to play] [day!]  
And if you'll have ray pudding on Christmas  
Ladies, tell them about your tizzies & curls;  
Do you think your good husband goes after  
the girls?  
Well now, says the Bishop, you bad naughty  
boy, [and toys,  
Throw away all your Jew's sharps, your whistles  
Away with your hoops, your toys, and your  
rattles; [banjo].  
And you mister Oxford, must lead them to  
Fill all the pussy cats now with amaze,  
It was money made fire & faggots to blaze;  
Said London, all you naughty p. . . e boys,  
Shall be chopped up for sausages & aveloys.  
Oh, dear! how they stamp'd, while some turn-  
bled flat, [pussy cats];  
And they hollowed and swore, did the poor  
Cried clever mister London, I've made it a rule  
To sack him & whack him poor B. . . . s P. . . e  
The ladies no more shall go to him confessing  
Because I consider 'tis very distressing;  
Speak candid young ladies, would you any  
one like— [a night];  
To tell how many times you've been kiss'd in  
Here's success mister London, this night & day  
Oh, Westerton, drive all the pussies away;  
As for you mister Oxford you no comfort will  
find, [behind].  
When you've got a great hole in your breeches  
If the women confess they shall have no more  
gin, [sins];  
Now can they go telling the parson their  
There will soon be a stop to such doings we  
hope,  
Away with the pussy cats, laugh at the Pope  
Be courageous old England, of thorns clear  
the way,  
Hurrah for brave Westerton, jolly and gay,  
He will turn the confessionals all inside out,  
And then all the pussy cats, put to the rout.

London — Printed for the Vendors.

Figure 1—"The Flare Up in the Confessional: The Pussey Cats are Coming" (London: n.d.), in *Tracts—Roman Catholic Doctrine and Practice*.

THE DEATH BOOK OF THE  
**BLACK MONKS AND NUNS!**

Showing the Cloven Foot of Popery, and unmasking its Devilish Devices for the Destruction of Protestant Truth. The Immoralities of Maynooth College, and the Horrors arising therefrom in the Dark Chambers of the Romish Confessional, as denounced by FATHER GAVAZZI.

WHOLESALE MURDERING OF MOTHERS AND INFANTS  
SHOCKING FATE OF THE BEAUTIFUL



**LADY BEAUMONT AND HER BABE,**  
Whose Cradle was its Coffin—Its Bed the Grave.

The frightful Confessions of ELIZABETH BAYENT—relating her sufferings in the Underground Dungeons of a Convent. Satanic Sorcery of the BLACK MONKS.—Their Seductions, Adulteries, and Infamous Crimes, and the Torments they inflicted upon the Nuns. The Violation and Decapitation of a Married Woman, and the cutting up of her body—and the Poisoning of others, who were secretly Coffined and Buried. With a Thunderbolt for CARDINAL WISEMAN and his Jesuits, from Lectures by the REV. DR. CUMMING.

LONDON : G. ABINGTON, 4, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET.

ONE PENNY.

Figure 2—*The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns!* (London: G. Abington, n.d.), title page.



**AWFUL DISCLOSURES OF  
MISS JULIA GORDON,  
THE WHITE NUN, OR FEMALE SPY!  
HER VILE JESUIT PLOTS; SCENES OF INFAMY, TORTURE  
AND MURDER, IN CONVENTS! AND THE  
STRANGLING & BURNING OF NEW-BORN INFANTS,  
IN A LIME PIT,  
TO CONCEAL THE CRIMES OF THE PRIESTS WITH THE NUNS.**



**The Shocking Fate of Female Protestant Converts!  
GAGGING AND SMOTHERING OF THEIR VICTIMS BETWEEN  
MATTRESSES BY MONKS! AND THE INSTRUMENTS OF  
CRUELTY USED IN POPISH DUNGEONS!  
WITH A WARNING TO PROTESTANTS, BY REV. DR. COLERIDGE.**

**London: G. ABINGTON, 4, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street.**

**ONE PENNY.**

**Figure 3**—The Reverend Dr. Coleridge, *Awful Disclosures of Miss Julia Gordon, the White Nun, or Female Spy!* (London: G. Abington, n.d.), title page.



Correct likeness of Barbara Ubryk, from a painting in the possession of Dr. Bardolphski, of Hoboken, her Uncle, painted at the time she was to be married, and two years before she entered the Convent.

**Figure 4**—*The Convent Horror: Or True Narrative of Barbara Ubryk* (Philadelphia: C.W. Alexander, 1869), 31. This is a depiction of the young and beautiful Barbara Ubryk, two years before entering the convent.



**Figure 5**—Barbara Ubryk, discovered after twenty-one years of imprisonment. *The Convent Horror*, 41.



The Government Photographer taking a likeness of Barbara Ubryk one month after her release. This is a perfect likeness of her.

Figure 6—Barbara Ubryk, one month after her release. *The Convent Horror*, 49.

UNABRIDGED EDITION.—WITH ALL THE OMITTED PASSAGES.

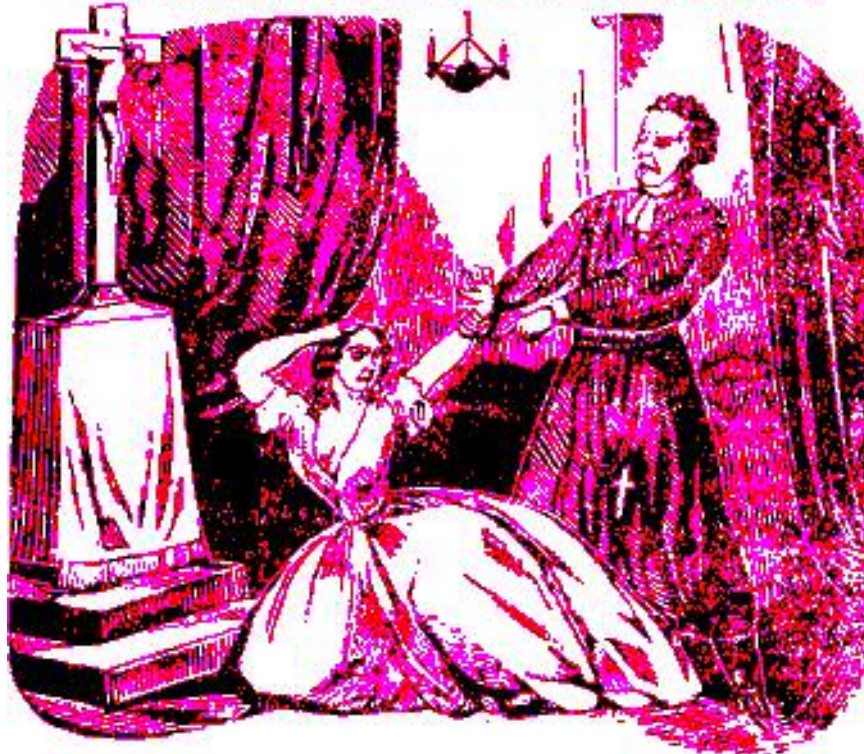
# ASTOUNDING REVELATIONS

OR  
PUSEYISM IN BELGRAVIA,

CONTAINING THE MOST FRIGHTFUL DISCLOSURES OF DIABOLICAL  
PLOTS AGAINST FEMALE CHASTITY BY THE

REV. MR. POOLE AND MISS JOY,

AT  
THE FASHIONABLE CHURCH OF ST. BARNABAS, PIMLICO.



Showing the temptations held out by the Confessional to entrap innocent Girls, virtuous Wives, and helpless Widows, to minister to the lascivious desires of Romish Priests in the guise of Protestant Clergymen; with Descriptive Particulars of the fearful Chamber of Private Inquisition, where the most disgusting and abominable practices were carried on, as detailed by the

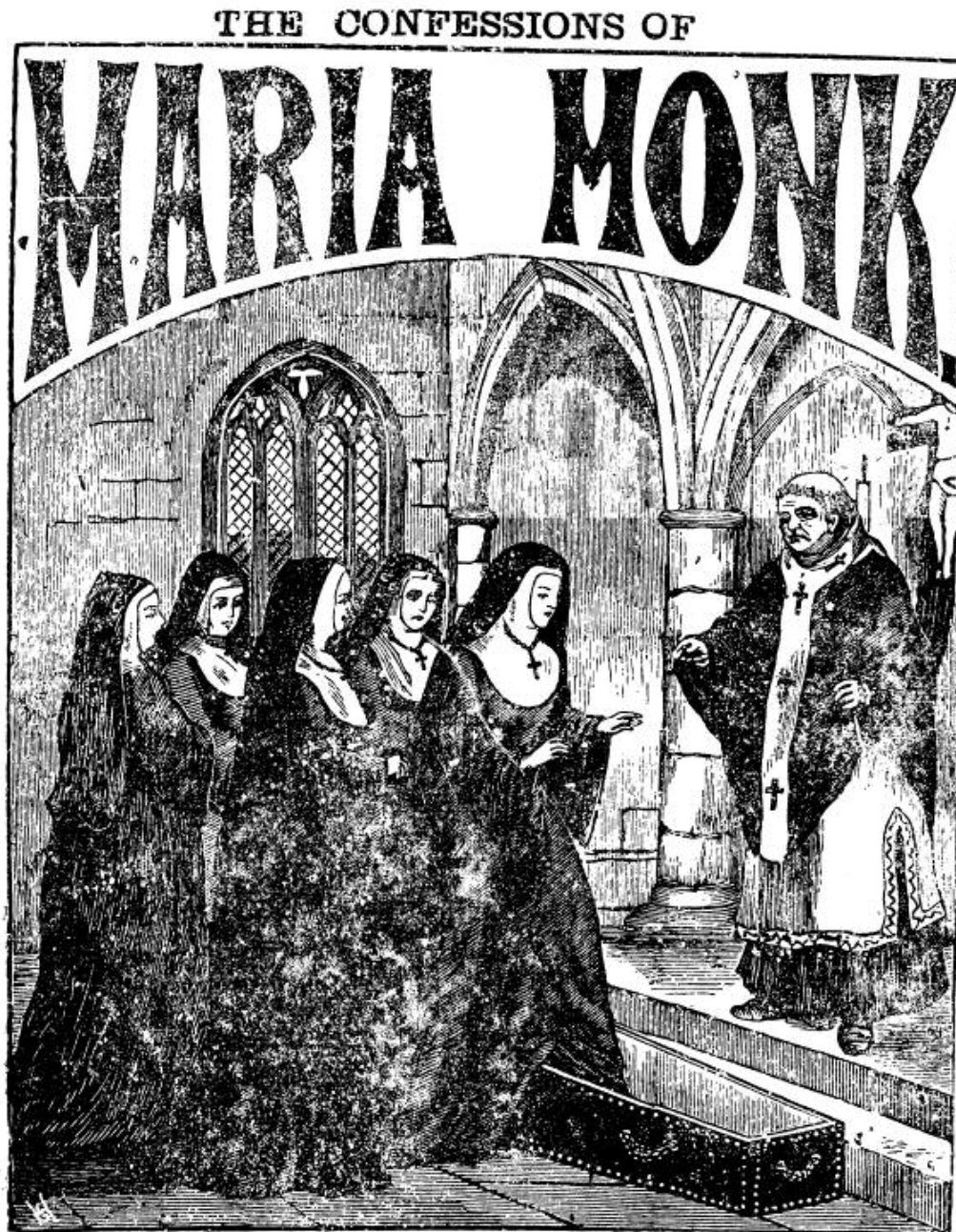
HON. AND REV. F. BARING,

At the Great Public Meeting held in St. James's Hall, Piccadilly, on Friday, June 11, 1858, together with the Bishop of London's Decision on the facts, all of which were revealed in the presence of a vast Assembly of Three Thousand Persons, among whom were Two Hundred and Fifty Members of Parliament and Peers.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

LONDON: J. HATSWELL, 8, BROADWAY, LUDGATE-HILL.

Figure 7—Reverend F. Baring, *Astounding Revelations of Puseyism in Belgravia, Containing the Most Frightful Disclosures of Diabolical Plots against Female Chastity by the Rev. Mr. Poole and Miss Joy* (London: J. Hatswell, 1858), title page.



SHEWING THE  
**CRUELITIES, PERSECUTIONS & INSULTS**

She endured during a Five Year's Residence in  
A NUNNERY.

---

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

---

**ONE PENNY.** MARCH-CADY PUBLISHING CO., London, E.C.

**Figure 8**—Maria Monk, *The Confessions of Maria Monk, Shewing the Cruelties, Persecutions, and Insults She Endured during a Five Year's Residence in a Nunnery* (London: March-Cady, n.d.), title page.

MISS SELLON, AND THE SISTERS OF MERCY.

---

FURTHER STATEMENT

OF THE

RULES, CONSTITUTION, AND WORKING,

OF THE SOCIETY CALLED

“THE SISTERS OF MERCY.”

TOGETHER WITH

An Exact Review of

MISS SELLON'S REPLY.

BY

DIANA A. G. CAMPBELL.

A NOVICE LATELY ORDED.

“Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.”

Fourth Thousand.

LONDON :

T. HATCHARD, 187, PICCADILLY ;

AND

J. B. ROWE, PLYMOUTH.

1852.

Figure 9—Diana A.G. Campbell, Miss Sellon, and the Sisters of Mercy, Further Statement of the Rules, Constitution, and Working, of the Society Called “The Sisters of Mercy” (London: T. Hatchard, 1852), title page.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

1. Allies, T.W. *Formation of Christendom*, vol. 3. London: Burns, 1897.
2. Baring, Rev. F. *Astounding Revelations of Puseyism in Belgravia, Containing the Most Frightful Disclosures of Diabolical Plots against Female Chastity by the Rev. Mr. Poole and Miss Joy*. London: J. Hatswell, 1858.
3. Caird, Rev. John. *Christian Manliness*. Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1871.
4. Campbell, Diana A.G. *Miss Sellon, and the Sisters of Mercy, Further Statement of the Rules, Constitution, and Working, of the Society Called "The Sisters of Mercy."* London: T. Hatchard, 1852.
5. Chiniquy, Father. *The Priest, the Woman, and the Confessional*. Montreal: F.E. Grafton, 1876.
6. Coleridge, Rev. *Awful Disclosures of Miss Julia Gordon, the White Nun, or Female Spy!* London: G. Abington, n.d.
7. "Convent Boarding School for Young Ladies." *Fraser's Magazine* 89 (June 1874): 778-786.
8. *The Convent Horror: Or True Narrative of Barbara Ubryk*. Philadelphia: C.W. Alexander, 1869.
9. *The Death Book of the Black Monks and Nuns!* London: G. Abington, n.d.
10. "The Flare up in the Confessional: The Pussey Cats are Coming." London: n.d., in *Tracts—Roman Catholic Doctrine and Practice*.
11. Lowder, C.F. *Sacramental Confession*. London: Rivingtons, 1874.
12. Monk, Maria. *Awful Disclosures*. Manchester: Milner, 1836.
13. ----- . *The Confessions of Maria Monk, Shewing the Cruelties, Persecutions, and Insults She Endured during a Five Year's Residence in a Nunnery*. London: March-Cady, n.d.
14. "Protestant Sisters of Charity; a Letter Addressed to the Lord Bishop of London, Developing a Plan for Improving the Arrangements at Present Existing for Administering Medical Advice and Visiting the Sick Poor." London: Charles Knight, 1826.



15. *The Protestantism of the Church of England and Tractarian Devices Exposed: Being the Report of A Great Protestant Meeting on Wednesday Evening, April 1865.* London: W. Walbrook, 1865.
16. *Reply to a Tract by the Rev. J. Spurrell.* London: Joseph Masters, 1852.
17. "Six Months in a Convent." *Dublin Review* 1 (July 1836): 313-343.
18. Stone, William L. *Maria Monk and the Nunnery of the Hotel Dieu, Being an Account of a Visit to the Convents of Montreal and Refutation of the "Awful Disclosures."* New York: Howe & Bates, 1836.
19. *Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version.* New York: Harper Collins, 1993.
20. Tonna, Lewis H.G. *Nuns and Nunneries: Sketches Compiled Entirely from Romish Authorities.* London: Seeleys, 1852.
21. "Two Girls of the Period: The Upper Side. Our Offence, Our Defence, and Our Petitions, by a Belgravian Young Lady." *MacMillan's Magazine* 19 (1869): 323-339.
22. "Two Views of the Convent Question." *Macmillan's Magazine* 19 (April 1869): 534-543.

### **Secondary Sources**

1. Anson, Peter F. *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion.* London: SPCK, 1964.
2. Arnstein, Walter L. *Protestant vs. Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns.* Columbia: University of Missouri, 1982.
3. Casteras, Susan P. "Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices." In *Religion and the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, edited by Gail Malmgreen. London: Croom Helm, 1986.
4. Crow, Duncan. *The Victorian Woman.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971.
5. David, Deirdre. *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1987.
6. Ellsworth, Edward W. *Liberators of the Female Mind: The Shirreff Sisters, Educational Reform, and the Women's Movement.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979.

7. Flanders, Judith. *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.
8. Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton, 1974.
8. Holcombe, Lee. "Victorian Wives and Property." In *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, edited by Martha Vicinus. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1977.
9. Hollis, Patricia. *Women in Public: The Victorian Women's Movement, 1850-1900*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979.
10. Johnson, Dale A. *Women in English Religion 1700-1925*. New York: Edwin Mellon, 1983.
11. Marsh, P.T. *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England 1868-1882*. London: Routledge, 1969.
12. Mason, Michael. *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1994.
13. *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2006.  
<http://0dictionary.oed.com.clicnet4.clic.edu/about/>
14. Percival, Alicia C. *The English Miss To-Day and Yesterday*. London: George G. Harrap, 1939.
15. Reed, John Shelton. "'A Female Movement': The Feminization of Nineteenth-Century Anglo Catholicism." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 57 no. 2 (March 1988): 199-238.
16. Thomson, Patricia. *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-1873*. London: Oxford University, 1956.
17. Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam, 1971.
18. Wallis, Frank H. *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellon, 1993
19. Williams, Thomas Jay. *Priscilla Lydia Sellon—The Restorer After Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the English Church*. London: SPCK, 1965.
20. Vicinus, Martha, ed. *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1977.